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## Critical eye on the various genres of Defoe's Moll Flanders

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**Abstract :** other writer of the eighteen century had a life as full of adventures as did Defoe. He was born in 1660, the year of the Restoration. His father was a dissenting tallow-chandler of London named James Foe. Daniel added the genteel "De" to the family name when he was forty year old, making it Defoe. Daniel Defoe rebelled with The Duke of Manmouth in 1685, but escaped without punishment. He had married in 1684, and had prospered for some years by trading in hosiery. His export was ruined by war in 1692. He was haunted by the prospect of prison for defaulting in debts. He learned the trick of quiet disappearance and practiced it often whenever the legal danger threatened. After his profession as merchant was ruined with no prospect of recovery, he adopted the profession of writing. Practically all of his writing was done after he was thirty-five years of age. It was only in his sixtieth year that he got fame with the publication of Robinson Crusoe. Any career as political writer is fraught with dangers. Defoe, as a dissenter, a writer for hire, and an ironist, seems usually to have been in danger. He began as a satirical political poet. When he first collected his works in 1703, he had composed several poems on political themes in satirical mode. His best known and popular poem was True-Born Englishman(1701). It defended William III against the prejudices of such subjects as disliked the King's Dutch origin or Dutch advisers.

**Keywords:** shackled, hazard, contradictory, social, implicated.

**THEME:** One of the major themes of Moll Flanders is the confusion of morals; which, in fact, reflects the confusion of the age of Defoe. As Juliet Mitchell has put it, "The first decades after the removal of king James in 1688 were in certain senses the most revolutionary in English history. This was the period of bourgeois revolution transcendent, of individualism and capitalism let loose, of the transition from the religion based ethics of feudalism to the secular ethics of capitalism, of traditional controls removed, of the enclosure movement run rampant. Right and wrong were to be negotiated. The Divine Right of Kings became the Divine Right of Providence. Property became King." Thus, the period was of utter moral confusion. It was also a period of unusual social, economic and moral mobility. It became a time of great uncertainty when different legal and moral codes clashed each claiming universal validity. Even the values in this period were up for garbbing; they were not self evident. All this confusion of values in the early eighteenth century England gets reflected in Defoe's Moll Flanders. A major theme in the novel is, undoubtedly, the juxta-position of contradictory moral values. For instance, Moll is both heroine and villain, fair and foul, business woman and thief, wife and prostitute. As Arnold Kettle has aptly observed, ... Moll speaks as though she were not implicated in the common lot of criminals. She doesn't think of herself as a criminal. When she learns what other criminals in Newgate think of her she is morally outraged. Occasionally, for a moment, like Joyce Cary's Sara, she catches sight of herself in some mirror and sees herself, surprised. And she does think of herself as ... a gentlewoman .... The underlying tension which gives Moll Flanders its vitality as a work of art can be expressed by a contradiction which is at once simple and complicated. Moll is

immoral, shallow, hypocritical, heartless, a bad woman: yet Moll is marvelous. Defoe might almost (though he wouldn't have dreamt of it) have subtitled his book 'A Pure Woman.' Moll's splendour—her resilience and courage and generosity—is inseparable from her badness. The fair and the foul are not isolable qualities to be abstracted and totted up in a reckoning balancing one against the other. The relationship is far more interesting. Defoe's novel, *Moll Flanders*, has its own share of greatness; it displays contradictory social and psychic elements which, when perceived in terms of deep structure, achieve a unity. What remains highly interesting about the novel, however, is its historical aspect. It reflects, as emphasized earlier, the moral confusion of its age. We see here, as we see in the age, that the clear-cut oppositions of crime and conduct, morality and immorality have not yet separated themselves out. As E.P. Thompson, discussing this period, has observed, "property and privileged status of the propertied were assuming, every year, a greater weight in the scales of justice until justice itself was seen as no more than outworks and defences of property and of its attendant status." In his socially significant novel, *Moll Flanders*, Defoe presents the early eighteenth century England as a society without traditional God and without traditional law. Moll, in this society, represents the new woman of capitalism. She has a mother and is good at discovering surrogate mothers. Significantly, her paternity is never mentioned. The moral confusion of the novel informs all its aspects; plot, character, and point of view are all marked by a certain lack of serious order or design. The purported moral does not quite tally with the plot of the novel. Defoe says in his preface to the novel that "there is not a wicked action in any part of it, but is first or last rendered unhappy." But this is not borne out by the facts of the fiction stated in the novel. Moll, for instance, does not have to disgorge her ill-gotten gains, and they are the basis of her final prosperity. Such seemingly contradictory elements in the novel may be more than many. But that is precisely the matter of the novel, and the message, which squarely concern the age, not the individual. Moll not only represents the age, she is actually the age. She squarely and wholly reflects the capitalist order of crass material pursuit where nothing succeeds like success, and all your crimes can be deposited in a corner provided you have managed to become, somehow, anyhow, a man (or a woman) of means. Property brings you all the privileges, including moral as well as social status, in a society where tradition stands shaken and the values no longer flow from religion. What is all important is that you should be (or become) a gentleman or a gentlewoman. Moll is always saying that she doesn't mind marrying a tradesman but he must be able to cut the figure of a gentleman. The conception of a gentleman in Defoe's time was meant to be a man of dash, bravado and infinite leisure. The concept was a reformulation by a new middle-class society of the person it conceived to be its ancestor in the dominant class of the previous feudal epoch. In fact, the contemporary reality of the dominant middleclass was very different from that of the feudal times. Jemmy, Moll's Lancashire husband, sums up the predicament of this shift. Too much of a gentleman to turn his hand to a day's work, he likes to spend his time hunting in the forest of America.: The case was plain; he was bred a gentleman, and by consequences was not only unacquainted, but indolent, and when he did settle, would much rather go out into the woods with his gun, which they call there hunting, and which is the ordinary work of the Indians .... As with the "madam" (Moll) who is both lady and prostitute, the irony is that Jemmy's gentlemanly habits are likewise those of the lowest possible social group – the American Indians. Thus, top and bottom meet in a society which is still trying to find its way to make its "middle" group seem uppermost. The 19 actual life of the new dominant middle-class man is best embodied in Moll's reflections on the father of her first lover and her first husband. This man leaves the family affair of his son's unsuitable marriage to his wife because he is too busy: "... as to the father, he was a man in a hurry of public affairs and getting money, seldom at home, thoughtful of the main chance, but left all these things to his wife." The new gentleman-tradesman that was to represent the dominant social class of this stage of capitalism, Defoe call an "amphibians creature, a land-water thing." The ideological concept of the gentleman is inherited from the watery feudal past, but it has to adapt to the totally new social conditions of middle-class land. Prostitution and theft, which Moll has to adopt as professions, in this new society are what you do if you cannot get successfully married in one case, and have no capital in the other. Wife and prostitute, thief and capitalist can be one and the same person at different points of time. It is this lack of separation, this easy oscillation that is distinctive of Defoe's society. Prostitution and theft stand to marriage and investment as their necessary other side. Moll shares thieving or investment with the men of her society; The need for marriage and prostitution for immediate economic reasons are particularly hers as a woman. Here, Defoe, like other writers of his age, offers in *Moll Flanders* a treatise on the meaning of new forms of contractual marriage. For both men and woman of his age, love and looks may be considered, but marriage essentially remains an economic undertaking.

Moll is a heroine because, unlike the majority of her sex, she does not let men get the better of her at a bargain: The case was altered with me: I had money in my pocket .... I had been tricked once by that cheat called love, but the game was over; I was resolved now to be married or nothing, and to be well married or not at all. Defoe believed that woman should be educated and allowed to carry on business as men did. In this respect he was a liberal spokesman for the claims for sexual equality that were being made from the middle of seventeenth century until his own day. But he was also correct in perceiving that for woman marriage was the passage to the desired state of middle-class security. Moll is an expression of Defoe's particular type of feminism. His view is that whoever had the energy to fight for it had a right to an equal bargain. Defoe presents Moll as a woman who is like a man in her economic ambitions and hence her independence. But Defoe's realism means that Moll knows that her economic aspiration as a woman can only be achieved through marriage. Moll shows a keen sense of the gender difference when she says, ... I had no adviser ... and above all, I had nobody to whom I could in confidence commit the secret of my circumstances to, and could depend upon for their secrecy and fidelity: and I found by experience, that to be friendless is the worst condition, next to being in want, that a woman can be reduced to: I say a 20 woman, because 'tis evident men can be their own directors, and know how to work themselves and of difficulties and into business better than woman. Thus, the novel gives a keen representation to the key issues of its time. The major themes of the changing social values, including the change from feudalism to capitalism and the status of woman, are woven into the single story of Moll. As such, it is a novel of great social significance.

**MOLL FLANDERS AS A SOCIAL DOCUMENT** Reacting to the general critical approach to the novel in terms of its various aspects, such as plot and character, form and content, etc., Henry James remarked, "A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of the other parts." This is, of course, well said. Not even the critics who split apart the body of the novel in their critical dissections would disagree with the great American novelist. At the same time, it is impossible to evaluate literature in the abstract, or merely in terms of its "wholeness". A book, as Arnold Kettle says, "is neither produced nor read in vacuum and the very word 'value' involves right away criteria which are not just literary; Literature is a part of life and can be judged only in its relevance to life. Life is not static but moving and changing. Thus we have to see both literature and ourselves in history, not as abstract entities." Thus, a novel, more than a poem, conveys contemporary life, and on a larger scale, and conveys it not simply as reflection, but as an organized or patterned piece, making sense of what life is about. More than any other novelist of his age, Defoe shows a sense of solidity in his novels. Fiction was never nearer truth than in his novels. No other novelist ever took greater pains than him to convince the reader of this truth. His novels are marked by an anti-romantic and anti-feudal realism, which show his deep commitment to the reality around him, the reality of social life as it existed in the early eighteenth century. Strictly adhering to the surface reality seen and observed by him during his long career as a journalist, Defoe wrote novels which give us a comprehensive view of English society of his age. And in that sense, they can legitimately be called social documents. Some of these novels, in fact, most of them, are based on actual personages and their actual experiences known to the novelist in person. He had seen and known, read and heard, these prototypes and their life histories. This lends greater authenticity to his novels as social documents. Of all Defoe's novels, Moll Flanders decidedly gives representation to much wider scale of contemporary social reality than any other. The novelist uses Moll as a medium or a mirror for expressing and reflecting or dramatizing of the conflicts and confusions over values that took place in the England of Defoe's days. As Juliet Mitchell has observed, the novel "endures as a profound consideration of the creation of social values and of the relationship of the individual to society. When Defoe took up writing of this novel, he had gathered a very wide knowledge and experience of the society of his time. As a convinced dissenter, he had written widely about the politics, practice and spiritual meaning of religion. He had been editing his own magazine, *The Review*, in which he had been debating and discussing such subjects as marital problems, elections, stock-jobbing, bankruptcy, bribery, atheism, free-thinking, astrology, thieves, pick-pockets, comets, indecent literature, education, dreams and aspirations, sea-monsters, quack-doctors, the rights of women and journalism itself. Also, Defoe was not merely an observer but also a tradesman and speculator. He was deeply involved in the practical issues of his day. Some of his enterprises brought him to bankruptcy and imprisonment – very much the same experiences we find reflected in Moll Flanders. In fighting for property and the spoils of power, the society Defoe has presented in the novel has not yet submitted to a stable code of rules. We can recognize it as a familiar period of commercial capitalism when the system of justice itself is struggling to establish. Perhaps at this level, the poise and serenity of Augustan prose

and poetry, the search for order in Dr. Johnson's dictionary, were more the aspirations than the reality for men who otherwise felt rootless and unsure. Defoe portrays Moll as a woman of ebullience with the determination to look only to her future. Moll is the new small-time capitalist in the making. She is the pilgrim progressing to what, as sharp-witted child and clear-headed woman, she rightly takes to be the capitalist definition of a gentlewoman – the wife of a prosperous businessman or a self-made woman in her own right. More than any other aspect of eighteenth century English society Defoe focuses in the forefront the criminal side of that. *Moll Flanders*, for sure, is a novel about criminal subcultures. One very pertinent question the novel raises is: Is Moll really a criminal, or is she, through ill luck and the conditions in which she is born and brought up, caught up in circumstances which compel her to become a criminal? The question of Moll's criminality is surrounded by the confusion of values in the society of the time itself. It is a topsy-turvy society in which the punishment was often conspicuously more brutal than the offence. It is creditable for Defoe that even while creating in *Moll Flanders* an actual picture of contemporary society he is able to make it a novel with a larger universal message. There is enough evidence to prove that Defoe based his portrait of Moll on an actual person or persons whom he had known and encountered first hand in real life. Both personally and in his capacity as a journalist, Defoe was familiar with Newgate prison and its inmates. During larger part of 1721 he regularly was visiting a close friend of his. In the same prison during the same period there was a woman prisoner named Moll King. She was one of the aliases of Mary Godson, who was a notorious thief and convict. Defoe used to meet Moll, who must have recounted the adventures of her friend 'Callico Sarah', a thief and a whore with a varied life-history of her own. As Gerald Howson says, "It seems likely that Defoe sought [Moll King] out when she was under sentence of death, as a suitable subject for a criminal pamphlet.... After her reprieve, the pamphlet grew into the novel, the first of its kind in English." However, even though Defoe picks up his heroine from an actual figure of his time, his interest is not an individual. He converts her into a type. Not only that. He relates her to the social milieu. He given the conditions obtaining at the time in English society, so many Molls would emerge, and so would emerge other criminals and crimes which are so realistically and convincingly drawn up in Defoe's novel. Hence, the emphasis in his novel is the social scene, not the individual case study of a female criminal. Defoe in *Moll Flanders* is writing from a time in which Moll as wife and Moll as prostitute, Moll as small capitalist and Moll as thief are quite logically the same person. In a society that valued a person's life less than a teaspoon, the worth of the unborn foetus came into its own. A woman such as Moll's mother could escape hanging if she pleaded pregnancy. In a society in which many of its most powerful members wanted a rising working population, obviously the only possible relationship that could be considered sacrosanct was between the mother and her unborn child for adoption. A woman saved from hanging on account of pregnancy would be executed when her child was six months old. One can see here clearly how the needs of the rich determined the fate of the poor. And how the economic structure of the society determined the structure of morality. We cannot overlook the fact that the English society of the time was one that was sexually lax, and that placed small value on life, certainly the life of the poor. In these circumstances, before the new moral codes about property had become sufficiently established to seem wholly natural, writers, thinkers and intellectuals, such as Defoe, whether consciously or otherwise, had to fall back for some sure ground onto those social crimes that are so basic to all societies that they are always felt to be sins against nature. For instance, a certain type of murder and incest have always been viewed unnatural. As E. P. Thompson has remarked, "Political life in England in the 1720's had something of the sick quality of a 'banana republic'." But even in this society marked by energetic corruption certain things had to be viewed too much. For instance, it is decidedly a measure of human desperation that, confronted with mob lynchings and the Newgate hangings, abortion came to seem the only unnatural murder. Also, it is again a measure of human desperation that faced with what was in all probability a new level in the exploitation of sexuality, incest with a half-brother seemed the only utterly impossible sexual offence. Moll then is a criminal and plebian heroine. The two seem much the same thing in the society in which she is born and brought up, exploited and empowered. She is a heroine because she has the courage to be successful. She has the ability to know what she wants and the necessary courage to go and get it. In the context of her social milieu, for any woman success must have meant to become bourgeois and prosperous. As Juliet Mitchell has said, "Capitalism in England had developed at this stage into a situation where there was an urban middle class and a growing urban plebian class -- it had not yet developed an industrial working class with a consciousness of itself as a class. Anyone in their right mind who did not want to remain a plebian, which might easily mean being hanged as a criminal, can only have aspired to be bourgeois." No wonder then Moll, and her alike,

Jemmy and his like, all are engaged in making money by hook or by crook so that they can be accepted as respectable members, or gentlemen and gentlewomen, in the society which does not fix premium on any other ability or effort except the one to acquire property. Defoe's strength as a novelist lies in giving us in *Moll Flanders* a realistic document of its times and yet make it an atemporal narrative of universal appeal. No doubt, its realism is so solid and specific that the universal appeal remains buried under the concrete layer of contingent details, like the spirit inside the body. The beauty of his art is that despite the concrete surface, the spirit comes through the moment one interacts with the surface. Rousseau considered Defoe's hero, Robinson Crusoe, a man in his essence. Colridge elaborated the feelings of the Romantics when he remarked, "He who makes me forget my specific class, character and circumstances, raises me into universal man. Now that is Defoe's excellence. You become a man while you read." Virginia Woolf became a woman, or rather, in her feminism, a person, when she was re-reading *Moll Flanders* and saw the streets of London through Defoe's eyes. Here again, Juliet Mitchell makes a remarkable observation on the English society and how Moll is really a representative of that society and is hence universal in her appeal: If, as seems to be the case, Moll, in her courage and determination, speaks to the type of urge to do well for ourselves that has been at the heart of the ideology of our society for three hundred years, there she will appear universal to us. Moll is an incarnation of capitalist woman at that moment when the society's ideologists are torn between an awareness that all is new and an effort to make all permanent and changeless. The treatment of marriage and prostitution illustrates this. In terms of Marxist sociology, then, Moll's universality lies in her being a product as well as a representative of the spirit of a society whose only, and principal, value is understood to be to do well as an individual in terms of making money and acquiring property therewith. Another level of universality which we should not lose sight of is that in the various situations which she encounters, her response to most of these situations also speaks of her humanity. She may have been debased and corrupted as a human, but her humanity is not dead altogether. She shows her feelings and thoughts appropriate to a normal well-meaning human in any society at any time. One of the revolutionary ideologies of Puritanism that went hand in hand with capitalism was that all people were equal in the eyes of the Lord, which also included the equality of man and woman. *Moll Flanders* illustrates this ideology. But it also shows the social reality which was already very different. As the historian Christopher Hill reflects the doctrine had it that all men were equal but some were more equal than others. In the spirit of this doctrine, men were certainly more equal than women: "he for the market only, she for the market through him." Moll, too, is capitalist woman at this heroic moment, just as Crusoe is a capitalist man in Marx's view, at its heroic moment. Of course, this is not the only reason, as asserted earlier, which makes the novel seem to be about something more generally human than early eighteenth century England. In his novel, *Moll Flanders*, Defoe dramatizes the problem that a new type of society is faced with in establishing its continuity with the old and how it has to be done. In order that the particular aspects of this new society depicted or dramatized in the novel may seem universal the novelist has to show, as Defoe does, the spirit of the age that drives in general populace and also as to how that spirit transcends this particular society to embrace a larger phenomenon of which this particular society is only a stage. It is easier for a historian to draw such general inferences and study such larger currents. But for a novelist to achieve the same feat is a much more complex and difficult task. He has to do it through particular characters and incidents by involving them in a common story of the central character. He achieves it, as does Defoe very successfully in *Moll Flanders*, by showing an urge or emotion common to various character of different age groups and by showing them in people at very different and distant places (located as far apart as London and Virginia). The particular genius of Defoe is that he clearly faces the fact that the conditions of his time are specific. It also shows up in his struggle to make them universal in a peculiarly appropriate manner. He does not struggle for it, for sure, in the manner in which, say, Swift, does, by transferring his contemporary responses to a timeless realm of allegory. What Defoe does is to locate his story in an earlier time, implying thereby that his own times are only, in fact, what the previous times have been. He makes an assertion in this dramatic fashion, just as Shakespeare did in his plays by dramatizing stories of earlier historical periods, that human nature is immutable. But, ironically, it is a mark of Defoe's ability that he only partially succeeds, decidedly deliberately, in this distancing of the story. It seems not many people realize that *Moll Flanders*, published in 1722, is in this sense an historical novel with its very last words reading "written in the year 1683." The reason for this back dating of his novel's story must have also been to disguise the identity of his characters and events. This also, for sure, alerts us to something else. The author must also be trying to protect himself against any adverse reaction or response from any

individual or an institution or a section of society in which he was living. Whatever be the case, the fact remains that the pre-dating does not delude the reader about the time the novel depicts in the life of the society in England. He may technically evade responsibility about the identity of his characters and their actions, their thoughts and feelings, the reader without any misgiving, responds to them as a picture of the eighteenth century England. If we match Defoe's dating of his novel, and hence of the story narrated in it, with the portrayal of its protagonist, Moll Flanders, it comes to have a different, if unintentional meaning. It suggests a notion of development. Unlike the Pilgrim in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress*, where Christian is a full-grown man, Moll grows in the novel from her childhood, where she was only six months old, to her old age, when she is past sixty years. Incidentally, the tradition of the growing hero or heroine, first laid down by Defoe, becomes a major tradition in the English novel. In this sense, *Moll Flanders* is structured around the growth of Moll, what happens to her as a mature woman; in fact, who she is as a woman depends on the conditions of her infancy, her childhood, and her adolescence. The child, thus, becomes mother to the woman. As with a concept of social history, an idea of development is a sine qua non of a concept of the history of the individual. Both individuals and societies, in this concept, develop in accordance with the conditions surrounding them. Of course, conditions are always created by nature as well as man. Hence, the development of an individual or a society cannot be separated from the conditions which govern or determine that development. Defoe's partial and emergent sense of history does not, then, locate his fiction in any timeless void. Even *Robinson Crusoe* on his lonely island is not like Swift's *Houyhnhnms* on theirs: he has come over from a specific place on a specific date and is going back to a specific place at a specific time. Even more so is this the case with *Moll Flanders*, Defoe's historical sense of time and character looks forward, relating character to time past, and time past to time present. It is, for sure, a notion of development. And in being this it was peculiarly at one with a notion, which is central to capitalist ideology itself. "Capitalism sees its own universal features," as observed by Juliet Mitchell, "in this very quality of growth and development. It is not a type of society that finds, as some do, its rationale in stability, but in expansion and growth." Defoe had a keen sense of change, which decidedly helped him in creating a new and appropriate universal myth. Defoe's realism, for which he is famous, is a very special type of realism, which explains how the novelist is able to create balance between the specific or particular historical character of his work and his ability to universalize it. His realism is analogous to the social realism that came out of the socialist world of Eastern Europe in the 1920's. In brief, the socialist realism was an attempt in art to portray man as new, socialist man who is simultaneously the image of the truth of all men. *Moll* and *Crusoe* are to bourgeois capitalism what paintings of workers in socialism were to the immediate post-revolutionary Soviet Union. This, too, was the case of the historically specific struggling to be universal. In the context of Defoe's realism, responsible for his concern with contemporary social reality, we should not forget the role played by the picaresque tradition. Even though the tradition made for a lack of pattern or design it did demonstrate that the novel must draw in vitality from a concern with the actual life of the people. It made impossible any serious attempt to move back to the pastoral and courtly traditions of the early romances. And here lies the significance of novels like *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*, which constitute the foundation of the English novel and its realism. After the modernist movement in the 1920's we have come to look in a novel for a controlling intelligence, which Defoe's novels cannot lay claim to. The English criticism of the novel after James has come to distrust an undifferentiated 'vitality' as criterion enough of a novel's worth. It has come to see the amorphous, sprawling tendencies of the earlier English novels as an unfortunate influence on later novelists. We must stand on guard against this too narrow an approach to the novel, which by its very definition is known for its vast canvas rather than narrow focus. The strength of the novel form has been its innate realism. If it does not address contemporary reality, directly or indirectly, magically or fabulously, inwardly or outwardly, socially or spiritually, it does not really qualify to be called by that name. Whatever be the later developments and whatever be the subsequent innovations in the technique of the novel, its foundation, as it was laid down by novels like *Moll Flanders* can never be ignored. Novels of this type give a more satisfying, and certainly more interesting, account of the age than do the historical or journalistic reporting of the same life. Defoe's novel, though seemingly the story of an individual, embraces within its fold the entire domestic and social life of the early eighteenth century England. The five husbands that Moll takes, the several affairs she gets involved into, the numerous individuals and families she encounters, the various social and religious, judicial and political institutions she has to deal with, all create cumulatively a whole panorama of the society of Defoe's time, and the whole comes alive as Defoe deflects not from the graphic details of persons and events related to Moll's life. Undoubtedly, *Moll Flanders* is

a social document of the early eighteenth century English life & much more reliable at that than any history, precisely because it is not meant to be a history, and is meant instead to be an account of an individual's life, who narrates it herself. DEFOE'S REALISM The fact that the titles of most eighteenth-century novels carry the word history, or history-like mention of the title-character's destiny – such as *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* – shows how eager the novelists of the age were to convince the reader that their "fictions" were "true" stories. Not only that they insisted on making novels "histories" of the lives of their main characters, they gave extended or detailed titles as a sort of lifesketch of the protagonist. S in NEWGATE, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twee how the title of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* reads: **The FORTUNES and MISFORTUNES of the FAMOUS MOLL FLANDERS, & C.** Who was Bornelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums. This show Defoe's keenness to convince the reader that Moll life story is of a real person, who lived at a known place, during a known period, did known things, and ended as expected. He is compelled to be so keen because the new genre of the novel was readily associated then with entertainment, amusement, and escape, rather than with serious art. But Defoe's insistence on its being a true history of Moll Flanders is fraught with an opposite danger. We tend to take the novel seriously in the wrong way, that is, as a document or case history, as a confession, a true story, a history of a life and its times. We have to stay away from both these dangers of taking novel or fiction as either mere entertainment or true history. As a matter of fact, the novel is neither, and yet it is both. As Aristotle described, poetry (by which is meant literature) combines within its fold both history as well as philosophy. Thus, novel is history since it narrates specific actions and utterances of specific characters giving details of time and place of those actions and utterances. Since the characters drawn and the actions described are similar to those we come across in real life, it is but natural that we tend to believe them not as a made-up tale but as true story of a historical personage. Novel is also philosophy because it gives us general truths about men and women and all that happens to them. Of course, the truths given are specific; they are described in a manner that both characters and incidents seem true to entire humanity. In other words, the novel gives general or universal truths through particular and specific characters. Daniel Defoe, our present concern, excels in surface or social realism. As Wilson Follett has observed in the context of Defoe's novel, "everything in the story is true except the whole of it. And mark how difficult Defoe makes it to question even that whole." Let us first be clear about what realism means in literature, and then see how far Defoe measures upto the accepted standards of realism. Further, we shall see which type of the various realisms he practiced in his novels, Fundamentally, realism in literature is the portrayal of life with fidelity. Thus, it does not idealize life. It does not render it as beautiful when it is not, or present it in any other guise than its own. Nor does realism, as a rule, represent the supranormal or transcendental; it restricts itself to what can be seen and felt, not reaching out for the unknown or unseen. Hence the writings of the mystic and 28 the visionary belong to a rather special category which might be called "superreality." We tend to think of realism, on the whole, in terms of the everyday, the normal, the pragmatic. More plainly, it suggests jackets off, sleeves rolled up, a "no nonsense" approach. Defoe's novels belong to this category, being down to earth, close to everyday life, very well within the experience of the common man. The use of the term real or realistic implies that there are things unreal or unrealistic. These things are, that is, fantastic, improbable, fanciful, belonging, not to the world we experience in everyday life, but to the world we imagine, or dream, or believe. In the ultimate analysis, realism, as a literary term, is only about as clear and bendable a word as its opposite, romanticism. In the last are hundred years or so there have emerged a large number of theories about realism, and about what is to be regarded as realistic. We wish to suggest that a work of literature is marked by verisimilitude, or that in some way it possesses that kind of authenticity which we generally take to be an essential quality in a work of literature, however fantastic or improbable (in some cases) it might be, or seems to be. The issue of realism has been especially confused by the fact that in the nineteenth century there came up a conscious movement in literature and literary theory which was subsequently labeled "realism." A set of French writers were responsible for this movement. It started sometime in the 1830's and had gathered momentum by 1850's. During the latter part of the nineteenth century realism became a dominant trend in European literature, including the English, as well as the American. One of the earliest instances of the use of the term le reabsine is found in the *Mercure francais du XIXe siccle* (1826). In this reference, it points to a view or doctrine which states that realism is a copy of nature. It reveals to us the literature of truth. Realism rejects Classicism,

because it depicts types, not real individuals. It also rejects Romanticism, because it represents not reality but things unreal, fantastic, unusual, improbable, etc. As is commonly distinguished, while the literature of realism is the literature of "daylight," that of romanticism is the literature of "twilight". From the doctrine of realism, it is clear that the realist writer is expected to concern himself with the here and now, the everyday events, with his own surroundings, and with the social and political issues and problems of contemporary life. The anti-Romantic movements in Germany, for instance, focussed their attention on the lot of the common people and the need to present life with all its wants. The realist attitude to the subject-matter of life can be clearly seen in the works of French novelists like Flaubert, Zola, and Balzac, the American novelists like Howells, Norris, Dreiser and London, or in the English novelists like Dickens and Thackeray, Hardy and George Eliot. The realist novelists paid particular attention to precise documentation, to getting the facts right. They continued in the later nineteenth century, in many ways, and in a more intensive and conscious fashion, what Balzac had initiated 29 years before in his *La Comedie Humaine* (The Human Comedy). Balzac treated man (and analysed character) as a zoologist might. He expressed the intention of following Buffon's work on zoology in order to write a natural history of man. His approach to his characters was quite scientific, where each individual was to be treated as a case for close examination in terms of growth, taking into consideration the factors of heredity and environment. Zola and Maupassant also expounded and practiced scientific realism. Further development of realism took a turn towards inward reality and came to be called "psychological realism." Henry James is considered one of the best examples of this form of realism. However, Defoe came much before these developments took place. He was, in fact, the first novelist in English. Perhaps he became a novelist in spite of himself. His intention was to write reports of criminals and the like, of the cases that interested him. Even when he chose to invent, he tried to narrate events very much like a reporter, a journalist. But he had certain advantages which went into making of him a novelist. For instance, he had a keen eye for details. He also had great fascination with material things and with the social behaviour of people. He was also deeply rooted in the English middle class. All these advantages, or virtues, combined to make his fiction historically significant and intrinsically interesting. His limitation was that his imaginative understanding of human nature and behaviour was rather weak. For example, Moll Flanders talks with an authentic liveliness. She tells her story with an exactitude that compels acceptance. But she lives only as a figure in a social scene. She does not emerge as a fully-developed, doing-and-suffering human being. Similarly, even Robinson Crusoe does not really absorb his frightening experiences. His long years of living alone on a remote island does not bring about any social, moral, or psychological change in him. In Defoe, the character of Crusoe is used only as a vehicle for the persuasive recording of an attempt to impose on the alien world of nature the familiar world of English middle-class civilization. No doubt, we respond with excitement to such a scene as Crusoe's first discovery of the naked human footprint on the supposedly uninhabited island, it is the nature of the situation, not its meaning in terms of the action as a whole, that interests us. We need to remember here that Defoe was highly deficient both in his creative imagination as well as in his sense of structure. At the same time, it cannot be denied that he did have his own kind of imagination, the ability to lie like the truth. Defoe's fiction shows with great clarity the way in which the rising English novel was connected with the habits of mind and literary needs of the rising middle classes. His depiction of the middle-class mentality is decidedly remarkable. It is photographic. The camera eye of the narrator, Crusoe or Flauders, moves from place to place, person to person, event to event, utterance to utterance. But also like the camera eye, the narrator does not move behind the surface, inside the mind of the character, into the regions where the how and why of events and utterances can be answered. No wonder then that Defoe produced the hard-surfaced narratives, never leaving any scope for other layers behind them. Hence no symbol or allegory finds any place to reside under the surface. Only the sights and sounds are captured, but captured in their true colours and notes. The characters and events, too, are everyday sort of persons and their everyday sort of pursuits. Nothing unusual or uncommon comes to our notice, either about the men and women we meet in the factorial world of Defoe's novels, or about the affairs these men and women are involved in. Everybody and everything is found as we come across in everyday life. The sense of the familiar, the feeling of facing things and persons in the manner of "what often was thought but never so well expressed" is an important part of realism. And this sense or feeling is the strongest in the novels of Defoe. Moll and her husbands, those who come into contact with her, for reasons fair or foul, for sharing her vices or for catching her for those very vices, all sound such a familiar stuff that one forgets whether one is reading through a fictional narrative or is moving through the actual world in which one is living. The obliteration of the line between reality and its representation,



between life and literature, fact and fiction, only confirms the masterly hold of Defoe on the mechanics of realism. Verisimilitude or details of people and places, events and utterances, is said to be the soul of the realistic fiction. And of this Defoe is a great master, fact by fact, piece by piece, minute by minute, like laying a brick upon brick, he builds up the fictional structure, the house of fiction, as James calls it. Nothing is allowed to deflect or detract the camera eye, the narrator's focus on concrete reality. We do not have time to do reflect upon the fast moving narrative, nor does the narrator himself look for such a luxury. See for example, the following passage from *Moll Flanders*: I went off from the shop, as if driven along by the throng, and mingling myself with the crowd, went out at the other door of the exchange, so got away before they missed their lace, and because I would not be followed, I called a coach and shut myself up in it. I had scarce shut the coach doors up, but I saw the milliner's maid and five or six more come running out into the street, and crying out as if they were frightened. They did not cry 'stop thief!' because nobody ran away, but I could hear the word 'robbed', and 'lace', two or three times and saw the wench wringing her hands, and run staring to and again, like one scared. The coachman that had taken me up was getting up into the box, but was not quite up so that the horses had not begun to move; so that I was terrible uneasy, and I took the packet of lace and laid it ready to have dropped it out at the flap of the coach, which opens before, just behind the coachman; but to my great satisfaction, in less than a minute the coach began to move, that is to say, as soon as the coachman had got up and spoken to his horses; so he 31 drove away without any interruption, and I brought off my purchase, which was worth near twenty pounds. Here is a whole passage having nothing but sights and sounds. Moll steals laces, moves through the throng, catches a coach, watches the women and men moving, some of them crying, taking precaution in case caught or likely to be caught. Finally, feeling secure in the speeding coach, calls her thefts purchases and calculates their value to be twenty pounds. In the hands of a different writer, such as James, it could be a tempting occasion for what passes in the mind and heart of the character, what fears and apprehensions, what motivations and manipulations, what aspirations and hopes, visit her at such a time, in such a situation. Speculation could have gone on unending, removing us far away from the actual scene of action, taking us into the realm of conscience and consciousness, converting actions into issues of moral and values, confronting us with difficult choices of judging the conduct of the character in question. So forth and so on. But no such abstractions and speculations are allowed to have any entry into the concrete world of happenings, where the only freedom granted to us is to see and hear the sights and sounds brought under the focus of the camera eye. If eye and ear are the strengths of Depoe's narrative, his realism, they are also his weaknesses. The psychological defects of *Moll Flanders* are less obvious to the eye. The chief character in the novel is not seen objectively by Defoe as a character in the round. Like other characters, she is at times indistinguishable from her author. It is actually the autobiographical form of the novel which makes it difficult for him not to identify himself with the heroine. It also makes it difficult for his picture of her to have any depth. We are never given the benefit of knowing what other characters think of her. We are allowed to see her only through her own eyes. We also tend to feel suspicious of Defoe's manner with which nearly all other characters are shown treating her with adoration, whereas she is shown to be less than completely honest with one and all. If we try to look into this aspect, and ask whether she or her author is aware of her duplicity, we discover that Defoe has not told us enough of the relevant facts for an opinion to be formed. It seems that Defoe did not ask such questions himself, or imagined that readers would raise them. Moll's moral and emotional life, it seems, were not within his terms of reference. He does, of course, keep us informed, as no other novelist does, of Moll's holdings in cash and personal effects. He does not seem mindful of her emotional development, or of her real character. As is apparent from the narrative, Defoe does not seem to consider of much consequence Moll's personal relationships. For example, we are told very little about most of her children or her lovers. Perhaps, she has a dozen or so of each, but it is difficult to be certain, because such matters are treated cursorily. She is shown suitably motherly when united with her son, Humphry, in Virginia. But how about the remaining seven children who are not reported dead 32 either? The only possible answer seems to be that all these items get mentioned merely for the sake of realism. Beyond this Defoe does not give them any thought. Nor does he require us to give them any more thought. We are certainly not required to draw an uncomfortable conclusion about Moll's motherhood. We are required to conveniently forget them after their mention; their being there has served the purpose of making the story look realistic. We must forget them as she, the mother, does, or their creator, the author, does. No doubt, everything that we are told sounds real, but none has any existence thereafter. For convincing the reader of the reality of the story is for Defoe not only the means, but the end. There is no developing

personality in Moll to be observed, no moral or psychological pattern to be pursued. Defoe is only too intent on getting away with reality of his characters, but not intent at all on getting into them.

**PLOT OF MOLL FLANDERS** As has just been discussed, Defoe's forte (strong point) is his ability to brilliantly describe an episode. He creates events and characters and sets them firmly in their backgrounds. In this particular respect, his narrative is much in advance of anything that fiction had seen. In fact, in many ways, it has not been surpassed by any one after him. But in the larger units of composition, his shaping imagination is much less in evidence. The novel as a literary form could be considered established only when realistic narrative was organized into a plot. It came to have unity only when, retaining Defoe's life-likeness, it also evolved a genuine unity of development; when the novelist's eye came to be focused on characters and their relationships as essential elements of the continuity of the novel, considering them not just incidental in furthering the verisimilitude of the actions described; and when all these things were related to a unifying theme, a controlling intention. With all this added to the stark narrative of Defoe was born the plot of the novel, which comes into being with Fielding. Defoe had only begun the process, it was completed by Richardson and Fielding. Plot in a literary work, especially the novel, has been variously defined as plan, design, scheme or pattern of events. It means the organization of incidents and characters in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense in the reader. The earliest, and perhaps the best, definition of plot was given by Aristotle, who calls it "an imitation of an action", as well as an arrangement of incidents, having a beginning, a middle, and an end, with each part linked with the other, constituting, finally, an organic whole. He calls episodic plot the worst, because in it the incidents follow one another "without probable or necessary sequence." He also distinguishes between simple and complex plots. In the plot called simple, the change of fortune occurs without peripeteia (reversal of fortune) and without anagnorisis (recognition), whereas in the plot called complex the change takes place through one or the other or the both of these devices. A 33 novel, whatever else it is or is not, is at any rate a story. Two questions automatically arise while reading a novel: (i) Is the story, as story, fresh, interesting, and worth the telling; (ii) And this being settled, is it effectively and artistically told? In other words, with the common reader, it is demanded that the story in its own way will be interesting; with the critical reader, it is demanded that the story is skillfully put together. The second requirement relates to plot. On careful examination of all the details of a novel it should not reveal any gaps or inconsistencies, that its parts should not lack balance and proportion, that its incidents should not appear to evolve from one another or from its data without a feeling of inevitability. In dealing with plot-structure of a novel or narrative fiction, we may roughly distinguish between two kinds of work; namely, the novel of loose plot and the novel of organic plot; or the novel of episodic plot and the wellmade novel. In the first case, the story would generally consist of a number of detached episodes or incidents, having hardly any necessary or logical connection with one another. In this case, the unity of the narrative would depend, not on the mechanics of the action, but upon the person of the protagonist who, as the central figure or the nucleus, binds together the otherwise scattered incidents and characters. Such a novel is, in fact, "rather a history of the miscellaneous adventures which befall an individual in the course of life than the plot of a regular and connected epopoeia, where every step brings us a point nearer to the final catastrophe." Thus, even when a work of this type may be full of interesting individual episodes, it can be said to have little in the nature of a comprehensive general design, in the evolution of which each detail plays a part, quite distinct and vital. Defoe's Moll Flanders, as well as Robinson Crusoe, belongs to this category. Other novels of the type would include Fielding's Joseph Andrews, Thackeray's Vanity Fair, and Dickens's The Pickwick Papers. All these works have loose and incoherent plots, lacking the organic wholeness. Ever since E.M Forster and Virginia Woolf praised it. Moll Flanders has been generally accepted as the best of Defoe's novels. It is decidedly richer in feeling than Robinson Crusoe. It is full of Defoe's best-written episodes. Its heroine is perhaps Defoe's most successful piece of portraiture. The theme of Moll Flanders is also more interesting than that of Robinson Crusoe. A woman's struggle against the social and gender injustice, against economic and legal odds, is decidedly more interesting than a man's survival on a lonely island. Even though rambling and, at times, even confused, the novel's plot is based on a pattern of personal relationships which is finally rounded out with a degree of unity by the restoration of Moll to her husband and her son, and a final curtain closing on a peaceful old age of penitence and prosperity. Compared to Defoe's other novels, Moll Flanders shows more conscious craftsmanship. Also, its orientation to the social and emotional world brings it much closer to the novel form. Its account of Moll's first seduction and the several subsequent episodes with the Lancashire husband combine vivid reporting with a command of character and emotion which foreshadow the later

triumphs of the novel form. Defoe's central defect is a lack of serious order or design. We can see it manifested, not only in the development of the story, but also in the moral and psychological aspect of *Moll Flanders*. Whatever narrative unity there emerges comes from the fact that it is Moll Flanders herself who is the chief character throughout. But even this gets lost by a somewhat indiscriminating attempt to tell all that happened in a busy and eventful life, so that the movement of the novel remains very episodic. The moral disunity of the novel is perhaps even more striking. The purported moral does not seem to tally with the plot. Defoe declares in his preface to the novel, "there is not a wicked action in any part of it, but is first or last rendered unhappy." But in actuality, Moll does not have to disgorge her ill-gotten gains, which becomes the basis of her final prosperity. Even if Defoe had avoided this contradiction, the quality of his moral would mean little more than telling the reader that he should look to his silver and be on his guard against pickpockets. The actual moral which emerges is even worse: If honesty, the story seems to suggest, will not maintain you genteely without your being driven to ply your needle, then crime may prove more rewarding. As for the spiritual accounts, you can always settle them later on. This crassly material nature of Defoe's outlook on life is well demonstrated by the moral reformation scene, which occurs when Moll brings home to her husband all the wealth from the mother's plantation. The book is indeed an example of mercantile morality that Defoe has apparently neglected to measure. This has encouraged several critics to regard the whole moral aspect of the book ironically. But that one does, for sure, against Defoe's own intention.

**CHARACTER OF MOLL FLANDERS** Even though we tend naturally to read *Moll Flanders* as a novel of social realism, as a picture of the early eighteenth century England, or as a sociological novel dealing with the making of a criminal as the emphasis throughout seems to fall on the effect of environment on character, an equally important aspect of the novel is the central character on whom the entire spectrum is unfolded. It cannot be denied that the novel's principal interest is the character of its protagonist, Moll Flanders, who is also the narrator of the novel's story, which is her own life story from childhood to old age. The novel reads like a long confession by a woman who during her own life has gone through all the dark streets of her society and has experienced the worst-kinds of human specimen. Moll exists completely in the round. Defoe's conception of her character is so perfect that her personality is completely brought before the reader. Moll Flanders is, for sure, the first instance, not merely in the English novel, but in the English literature as a whole, when an individual character is so thoroughly delineated with hardly any aspect, even the most intimate or private, left out of the portrait. Despite Henry James's title, *The Portrait of a Lady*, the novel reveals largely one side of Isabel's personality, although the novel's volume is much larger than that of *Moll Flanders*. Also, even in terms of social content, Defoe's novel gives the reader much more about the eighteenth century England (and its American colony) than does James's novel about the nineteenth century America (and Europe). In fact, James's speculative style takes us far away from the social milieu, whereas Defoe's practical prose keeps us grounded in society. One reason why *Moll Flanders* is a much more convincing character in fiction than any other is her being drawn upon an actual woman Defoe had intimately known and heard about in real life. During the period Defoe wrote his novel, there is evidence to show that he was visiting the Newgate prison rather regularly where, besides a friend of his, he used to meet one Moll King, a notorious thief and convict. Apart from acquainting Defoe with her own story she may have recounted the adventures of her friend "Callico Sarah", a thief and whore with a full and varied life-history of her own. "Callico" was contraband silk and may have suggested to Defoe the name Flanders. The name Flanders refers to a Flemish lace which, too, was usually a contraband. At one time or another, both Moll King and Callico Sarah worked for and were finally impeached by the notorious gangster, Jonathan Wild. This gangster was not an ordinary member of plebian England, but a professional criminal and leader of a genuine subculture. Moll King may have worked for Jonathan Wild and thus been part of a gang. However, even though Defoe used her as a model for his *Moll Flanders*, he did not do it to document criminality. On the contrary, he did it to document Moll's humble background. No doubt, at times, Moll Flanders, like her original Moll King, is a professional thief, working, despite her disliking, with other thieves. And yet Defoe does not lay any emphasis on any professional aspect of her work. Moll does steal, and even prostitutes her body. But she does it for one reason, and one only; she is poor, and is forced to seek her subsistence through whatever means available to her. We cannot ignore the fact that as a single woman, orphan from childhood, daughter of a mother imprisoned for stealing, Moll, in the society in which she is living, has no other options available to us. Wheresoever she may get work, the male members of the family as well as others living around, view her only as an easy target for sex, for use and throw. Moll herself cries for economic

security for a safe and noble life: "Give me not poverty, lest I steal." But no such securities are available in the society in which she is living. It is grim poverty which drives her to her criminal life: "the prospect of my own starving... hardened my heart." She always wanted to live a respectable life, a settled life, a life of virtue and dignity. But it was always denied her by the hypocritical and callous capitalist society: "I wanted to be placed in a settled state of living, and had I happened to meet with a sober, good husband, I should have been as true a wife to him as virtue itself could have formed. If I had been otherwise, the vice came in always at the door of 36 necessity, not at the door of inclination." Granted that Defoe took his model for Moll's character lives of two or more women working for Jonathan Wild, he did not at the same time develop his story into a portrait of a genuine criminal underworld. As E. P. Thompson's work, *Whigs and Hunters*, illustrates, for most people in Defoe's time the line between a criminal class and all plebian England was a hard one to draw. Moll Flanders is both criminal and plebian heroine. It is not so much that the combination is plausible as that the distinction is not. Defoe wrote at a time when Moll as wife and Moll as prostitute, Moll as small capitalist and Moll as thief are quite logically the same person. In all probability, Moll is essentially an average good woman, but she is caught up in the web of necessity in relatively "bad" acts. In fact, she is damned by her birth, by the circumstances of being a child whose father is not known, and whose mother is in prison where the child is born, and whom the mother leaves when the child is only six month old. Had she born in different circumstances, in the family of a married couple well settled and prospering in society, she would not have been what she is forced to become. In a decade that introduced death penalty for the theft of a handkerchief or a sapling, good and bad, fair and foul, are not contradictions whose ultimate unity it takes a genius to perceive, but bedfellows whose proximity only subsequent historians have managed to miss. This proximity can be clearly seen illustrated as it is played out in Moll's life in the novel. When she is only eight year old, Moll tells her foster mother that she does not want to go out in service (a clear case of child labour). A large number of wealthy visitors stand by as, in reply to her foster mother's teasing, Moll insists that what she wants to be in this life is a "gentlewoman". In friendly mockery she becomes known as "the little gentlewoman": Now all this while my good nurse, Mrs. Mayoress, and all the rest of them did not understand me at all, for they meant one sort of thing by the word gentlewoman, and I meant quite another; for, alas! all I understand by being a gentlewoman was to be able to work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible bugbear going to service, whereas they meant to live great, rich and high, and I know not what. Well, after Mrs. Mayoress was gone, her two daughters came in and they called for the gentlewoman too, and they talked a long while to me, and I answered them in my innocent way; but always, of they asked me whether I resolved to be a gentlewoman. I answered Yes. At last one of them asked me what a gentlewoman was? That puzzled me much; but, however, I explained myself negatively, that it was one that did not go to service, to do housework. They were pleased to be familiar with me, and liked my little prattle to them, which, it seems, was agreeable enough to them, and they gave me money too. As for my money, I gave it all to my mistress-nurse, as I called her, and told her she should have all I got for myself when I was a gentlewoman, as well as now. By this and some other of my talk, my old tutoress began to understand me about what I meant by being a gentlewoman, and that I understand by it no more than to be able to get my bread by my own work: and at last she asked me whether it was not so. I told her, Yes, and insisted on it, that to do so was to be a gentlewoman: for, says I, 'there is such a one,' naming a woman that mended lace and washed the ladies' laced heads: 'she', says I, 'is a gentlewoman, and they call her madam.' 'Poor child', says my good old nurse, 'you may soon be such a gentlewoman as that, for she is a person of ill fame, and has had two or three bastards.' Obviously, "in Moll's tumultuous society, a gentlewoman is a member of the leisured gentry, or a prostitute: both ends of the social scale meet and are still, today, exemplified by the title 'madam'." Juliet Mitchell's observation here is undoubtedly very perceptive. Both are indeed called 'madam'. Later, in the mid-nineteenth century, the kind of crimes Moll commits came to be considered eternally sinful and her penitence as a state of grace. Despite his best intentions perhaps Defoe, in *Moll Flanders*, could not make Moll's crimes sinful, or her repentance more full of grace than that produced by a full belly. Moll has to steal because she is poor, and leads a moral life because she is prosperous. Her social crimes against property have not yet been, at this stage of capitalism, internalized by men to have become so much a part of their unconscious thinking that they seem equivalent to religious sin. This point can perhaps be better grasped if we look at those situations in the novel in which Moll's actions look contemptuous to us. Obviously, Defoe meant those scenes to convey that feeling to us, his own feeling for Moll's actions, which is that of contempt. At least, incest and murder seem to be the instances which arouse the emotion of contempt for the doer. Moll's incestuous

marriage with her half-brother is one such instance. Its seriousness can be understood in Moll's reaction to the proposed marriage with Robin, which incident foresees the incestuous marriage to follow. Robin is the younger brother of her first lover. She is taken ill at the prospect of what seems to her quite an unnatural marriage. After she has recovered from illness and has consented to marry Robin and has, in fact, been married for some years, she shows her guilt conscience in having entered into an unnatural or incestuous marriage: "... I never was in bed with my husband, but I wished my self in the arms of his brothers... in short, I committed adultery and incest with him every day in my desires, which without doubt was... effectually criminal." Later in Virginia, when she finds she has unknowingly married her own half-brother, her revulsion to the act is total. Her brother husband, after mad rages, declines into a state of presenile dementia which is, in some sense, Defoe's unconscious metaphor for the man's corrupt and unnatural marital state. On the other hand, Moll cannot even entertain the idea of concealment: I was now the most unhappy of all women in the world. Oh! Had the story never been told me, all had been well; it had been no crime to have lain with my husband since... I had known nothing of it.... [However] I was but too sure of the fact, I lived therefore in open avowed incest and whoredom, and all under the appearance of an honest wife; and though I was not much touched with the crime of it, yet the action had something in it shocking to nature, and made my husband as he thought himself, even nauseous to me.... .. indeed I mortally hated him as a husband, and it was impossible to remove that reveted aversion I had to him. At the same time, it being an unlawful, incestuous living, added to that aversion, and... everything added to make cohabiting with him the most nauseous thing to me in the world: and I think verily it was came to such a height, that I could almost as willingly have embraced a dog as have let him offer anything of that kind to me, for which reason I could not bear the thoughts of coming between the sheets with him. All this coming from Moll shows how she has inherited in toto all the values of the society, or more precisely, the families, for whom she has been working. It may be her ambition to become a gentlewoman, to have a small business of her own, to have a husband of her own, and, above all, to be called a 'madam'. All these ideas have come to her in the form of ruling passions of the society of which she is a part, and any defiance of which would amount to committing a crime, even a sin. Her sense of crime and sin at the very idea of incest, and her abhorrence at the action she has committed of that nature, both are imbibed from the social milieu in which she has been living as a disgraced or discredited member. Despite the fact that she has been a victim of that society right from the start, demeaning her humanity, compelling her to what she, along with them, considers crimes, Moll does not seem to develop the consciousness of a rebel. On the contrary, she is still carrying her puritan conscience intact, which keeps making her regret and repent the "wrong" actions she thinks she has committed. Her scale of value judgment is the same as theirs. The strength of Moll's character lies in the fact that thrown as she is all alone into a world of men, quite a few of them are no less than sharks, she keeps struggling to survive on the terms that have been dictated by men. She does not commit suicide. She does not remain content with the servant's life. She keeps trying to find a suitable husband, although repeatedly she hits upon a wrong one. She also keeps trying to make money enough to survive in the society in which money is the God that all worship. Strangely though, she knows that money both secures life and at the same time endangers it, and yet money alone is the goal all work to achieve. Here is a key passage in the novel which depicts the dilemma of a person like Moll in a society where money and property determine all value to live by: And now I found myself in great distress; what little I had in the world was all in money, except as before, a little plate, some linen, and my cloths; and for my household stuff, I had little or none, for I had lived always in lodgings; but I had not one friend in the world with whom to trust that little I had, or to direct me how to dispose of it, and this perplexed me night and day. I thought of the bank and of the other companies in London, but I had no friend to commit the management of it to, and to keep and carry about with me bank bills, tallies, orders, and such things, I looked upon it as unsafe; they if they were lost, my money was lost, and then I was undone; and, on the other hand, I might be robbed and perhaps murdered in a strange place for them. This perplexed me strangely, and what to do I knew not. Thus, here in combined is a subtle narrative technique an exposition of Moll's foreground character as well as a reflection of the background social milieu, the two coming out simultaneously through the monologue of Moll Flanders. Reading Moll Flanders, one is automatically reminded of Pamela. Both the novels belong to the same age. Defoe's comes first, Richardson's later. The latter may be in response to the former. But it is strange that while Richardson's gives to his novel the subtitle Virtue Rewarded, Defoe's, without giving any such subtitle, shows how vice is rewarded. As in the last paragraph of the novel, Moll the character – narrator tells us, "Thus all these difficulties were made easy, and we lived together with 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... we are both of us in good heart and health." In Richardson, the reward is marriage to Pamela's master. Here, in Defoe, it is in terms of marital joy of togetherness in a house and estate of their own. The true picture of the age, including its morality, lies somewhere between the two. Another reminder about Moll is Chaucer's Wife of Bath. It cannot be a coincidence that Defoe also shows Moll having five husbands, just as the Wife of Bath has in Chaucer, and both are not averse to the prospect of the sixth. Also, it is again not a coincidence that Defoe makes Bath one of the places of residence for Moll where also she finds a husband, and the two live together. These literary affinities one need to be aware of, and of such connections which show the factor of intertextuality illustrated – as to how texts are dependent upon each other, or are drawn upon each other. Moll Flanders is a complex character, not a flat one. She has many sides to her personality. She can be compassionate as well as callous, naïve as well as cunning, intrigued as well as intriguer. She becomes mistress as well as wife, pauper as well as propertied, friend as well as foe, jailbird as well as free holder. Thus, she goes through a wide variety of experience, encounters large number of people, stumbles on all kinds of misfortunes, finally gets to taste the fortunes of a comfortable life. Mother of legitimate and illegitimate children mistress of legitimate and illegitimate goods, wedded to legitimate and illegitimate husbands, Moll has such a variety of experience that one could consider her representing in large part the entire society of her time. In terms of experience, she becomes large; she contains multitudes. Besides, Moll is also a growing character. She grows from a child of six months into a woman of seventy. But that is only biological growth. She grows morally and spiritually, intellectually and psychologically. She begins as an innocent child. She grows into a woman of experience. She leads a criminal life, undergoes punishments and finally grows into a moderate person. She also leads a sinful life and finally ends up as a repenting puritan. She goes from man to man like an ever changing chameleon. But at the end she settles with an understanding husband who gives her joy of life. Her growth as a fictional character is phenomenal. No other character experiences so much, and assimilates so much, and changes so much, as does Moll Flanders. Besides being the heroine, or the central and chief character in the novel Moll is also the narrator of her own life, which is the story of the novel. In fact, she is the author of her own life, writing in all earnest the entire span of her life. Defoe poses to be only an editor, doing some agreeable changes in the author's text. What he has done, in his own words, "is to put it into a dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak language fit to be read." He claims to have improved the language of the female criminal from her "slang" idiom to standard English idiom. But he has also done another thing, as he claims in the "Preface" to the novel: "There is an agreeable turn artfully given them [abundance of delightful incidents] in the relating, that naturally instructs the reader, either one way or other." Defoe's homage to the age of sentimentality, in any case the age of instruction, is to make the story of Moll an example of a bad woman from whose life people must draw a lesson. In this attempt the editor Defoe has done the editing of leaving out certain incidents of Moll's life, and choosing only those for inclusion which would not do much offence to the reader's morality: "What is left 'tis hoped will not offend the chastest reader or the modest hearer; and as the best use made even of the worst story, the moral 'tis hoped will keep the reader serious even where the story might incline him to be otherwise". Labeling Moll wicked, changing her to a repenting or penitent puritan would obviously distort the true story of Moll Flanders. At the same time, Defoe makes Moll claim that she is making abreast of all her secret sins and crimes, withholding nothing. The two positions do not really agree with each other. The latter is perhaps more credible. The former Defoe has to say only to please the contemporary taste, even if it was highly hypocritical. Whatever be the case, one thing is certain: Moll will remain a memorable figure in fiction.

**DEFOE'S PROSE STYLE** Style can be defined as the characteristic manner of expression in prose or poetry; in other words, how a certain writer says things is his style of writing. An evaluation as well as description of a writer's style involves an examination of his choice of words, his figures of speech, the rhetorical devices, the syntax, etc. Style defies complete analysis because it is the tone and voice of the writer himself; as peculiar to himself as his laugh, his walk, his handwriting, his expressions on face, etc. As the French writer, Buffon, put it, style is the man. However, styles have been roughly classified according to literary periods, literary movements, literary purposes, etc., and these classifications have been useful. For instance, according to periods, we characterize style as Metaphysical, Augustan, Georgian, etc; according to movements, we characterize style as, Renaissance, neo-classical, romantic, Victorian, etc; according to purpose, we characterize style as emotional, expository, decorative, ornamental, scientific, etc; according to individual authors, we characterize style as Chaucerian, Miltonic, Spenserian, Jamesian, etc; according to level or decorum, we characterize style

as high, middle, and low. So, there are various ways to approach the subject of style, and all have been useful approaches. Defoe inherited his prose style from the seventeenth-century prose writers, such as Bunyan, who in turn had followed the prose of the Bible. This style of prose writing is called homely or plain. In Defoe's Augustan age, there was also in vogue the elegant style, practiced by writers like Addison, in which the attempt is to write like a gentleman, to improve, refine, and elevate the common usage. On the other hand, a simple, homely, direct style continued to be practiced by writers like Defoe, who were far removed from the court, the world of the gentlemen. A problem with high or elegant style is that it soon becomes artificial. In its attempt to refine what is common, it gets removed from the very spring of language and becomes ultimately, a dry diction sprung from books rather than streets and shops. Court by itself is the place where artificially imposed mannerism of life travels into the world of letters also. The plain and homely style was the gift of the Puritans, who came to power during the middle years of the seventeenth century. The influence of the Prayer books, which they imposed, was in keeping with the Puritan tradition, which was opposed to an ornate and fanciful style, like that of the Elizabethans called euphuistic, and preferred the unaffected plainness and simplicity of the Apostle's speech. Strong support to the plain style came from the scientists during the seventeenth century. This century saw a marked growth in the scientific curiosity and the scientific attitude of mind. The Royal Society, founded in 1660, aimed at encouraging plain and simple and clear style of writing. Its main instruction to the members was, "In all reports of experiments to be brought into the Society, the matter of fact shall be barely stated, without any prefaces, apologies or rhetorical flourishes ...." As Thomas Spratt, the historian of the Royal Society, explained, "There has been constant resolution to reject all amplifications, digressions and swellings of style, to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men delivered so many things almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants before that of wits and scholars." At the end of the seventeenth century a plain, easy style had become normal in English writing. The various influences we have noted combined to produce this effect. The tradition of plain, natural English continued in the eighteenth century with the work of the essayists, Addison and Steele, who were the authors of *The Spectator*, and in the writings of Defoe and Swift. But while the essayists aimed at elegance, the novelists went after the vigour of the spoken language. Defoe, who was a prolific journalist and wrote many other books in addition to his famous *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*, came near to writing that language of the artisan and the merchant that the Royal Society wished to see. Addison was rather more refined and genteel. Though his writing is natural and easy, there is always a touch of the scholar in it. Defoe, along with Swift, remains a powerful exponent of the plain style. Note how this style works: My true name is so well known in the records or registers at Newgate, and in the Old Bailey, 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 though a general pardon should be issued, even without exceptions and reserve of persons or crimes. 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. I have been told that in one of our neighbour nation, whether it be in France or where else I know not, they have an order from the king, that when any criminal is condemned, either to die, or to the galleys, or to be transported, if they leave any children, as such are generally unprovided for, by the poverty or forfeiture of their parents, so they are immediately taken into the care of the Government, and put into an hospital called the House of Orphans, where they are bred up, clothed, fed, taught, and when fit to go out, are placed out to trades or to services, so as to be well able to provide for themselves by an honest, industrious behaviour. 43 No doubt, here the language is plain, but not so the syntax. Like a Miltonic sentence, or Johnsonian, the sentence and the paragraph end together; they are the same length. Nor is the character-narrator an unselfconscious speaker; Moll as narrator speaks with a certain measure of self-consciousness and with a certain measure of authority. In other words, she is more literary, in her own way, than Robinson Crusoe, who does not show any sign of speaking as a self-conscious narrator. Defoe's style, thus, is not free from the influence of his age. The sentence tends to be periodic, although not carrying the conscious, or too much articulated, see-saw balancing typical of Johnson's prose. However, the narrative of *Moll Flanders* is, decidedly, in the plain style of early eighteenth-

century expository prose with continuous colloquial overtones. As David Daiches has remarked, "A keen look at homo sapiens in the Augustan Age, especially when the look was directed by a disappointed or frustrated man, was not likely to yield a vision of disinterested rationality producing an ideal civilization. And if the man who looked was also a master of irony [such as Swift or Defoe was], a political pamphleteer of genius, ... possessor of an imagination both brilliant and better, and of a narrative and expository style characterized by clarity, cogency, and an eloquent plainness, then something new ... could be expected." Putting together Swift and Defoe poses a problem: whereas in Swift bitterness uses brilliance as its tool, in Defoe bitterness is subdued to brilliance of imagination. Defoe's style obeys, more fully than ever before, the purpose of language redefined by Locke: "to convey knowledge of things." He concentrates his description on the primary qualities of objects as Locke saw them: especially solidity, extension, and number. Defoe gives them in the Anglo-Saxon origin than that of any other writer of his age. No doubt, his sentences are often very long and rambling. But somehow he succeeds in making this a part of his air of authenticity. The lack of strong pauses within the sentence gives his style an urgent, immediate, and breathless quality. At the same time, his units of meaning remain small. Also, their relatedness is made so clear by frequent repetition and recapitulation, that he nevertheless gives the impression of perfectly simple lucidity. Note, for instance, the following: I had another adventure, which puts this matter out of doubt, and which may be an instruction for posterity in the case of a pickpocket. My good old governess, to give a short touch at her history, though she had left off the trade, was, as I may say, born a pickpocket, and, as I understood afterwards, had never been taken but once, when she was so grossly detected, that she was convicted and ordered to be transported; but being a woman of a rare tongue, and withal having money in her pocket, she found means, the ship putting into Ireland for provisions, to get on shore there, where she lived and practiced her old trade for some years; when falling into another sort of bad company, she turned midwife and procuress, and played a hundred pranks there, which she gave me a little history of in confidence between us as we grew more intimate; and it was to this wicked creature that I owed all the art and dexterity I arrived to, in which there were few that ever went beyond me, or that practiced so long without any misfortune. No doubt, the sentences are long, but not loose; they are full of qualifiers, but are not cumbersome. The diction remains simple, and so remains the syntax, despite the qualifiers. The tone is authentic, the voice familiar, the irony mild. All in all, it reads homely and plain. Defoe was one of those eighteenth century writers who, exposed to various influences of the age, were making prose more prosaic. This had been going on, as stated earlier, since the seventeenth century, especially since Dryden. Some of these influences included, the Lockian conception of language, the Royal Society's wish for a language which would help it scientific and technological objectives by keeping close to the speech of the "artisans, countrymen, and merchants," the plain unadorned style of later seventeenth century preaching which obtained its effects by repetition rather than by imagery or structural elaboration. Most important of all was Defoe's twenty year long period of journalism which taught him the lesson that it was not possible to be too explicit for the audience of "honest meaning ignorant persons," which he kept continually in mind. As a result, Defoe's natural prose style became not only an admirable vehicle of narrative, but also came much closer to the vernacular of the common person than that of any other writer of his times. Thus, it admirably adapted itself to the tongue of Moll Flanders, Robinson Crusoe, and other character-narrators. We cannot, of course, call Defoe a stylist in the sense we call Addison or Johnson, but we have to consider him a conscious artist who knew what he was aiming at, who had the necessary tools at his command to achieve his target, and who made his prose a furnished product, capable of conveying with a great degree of effectiveness, the meaning of the matter as well as the manner of the narrator. Both tone and voice come clear through the vernacular of the speaker.

**References: Moll Flanders, Defoe; Recess Edition; publishing 2018**

**Moll Flanders, Rukhia edition, publishing 2014**