



Moll Flanders by Daniel Defoe

About the author:

Daniel Defoe was born Daniel Foe in London in 1660. It was perhaps, inevitable that Defoe, an outspoken man, would become a political journalist. As a Puritan he believed God had given him a mission to print the truth, that is, to proselytize on religion and politics, and in fact, he became a prolific pamphleteer satirizing the hypocrisies of both Church and State. Defoe admired William III, and his poem *The True-Born Englishman* (1701) won him the King's friendship. But an ill-timed satire on High Church extremists, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, published during Queen Anne's reign, resulted in his being pilloried and imprisoned for seditious libel in 1703.

At fifty-nine Defoe turned to fiction, completing *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), partly based on the saga of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor; *Moll Flanders* (1722); *Colonel Jack* (1722); *A Journal of the Plague Years* (1722); and *Roxana or the Fortunate Mistress* (1724).

Source: <http://penquinrandomhouse.ca/>

About this book:

As *Moll Flanders* struggles for survival amid the harsh social realities of seventeenth-century England, there is but one thing she is determined to avoid: the deadly snare of poverty. On the twisting path that leads from her birth in Newgate Prison to her final prosperous respectability, love is regarded as worth no more than its weight in gold; and such matters as bigamy, incest, theft, and prostitution occasion but a brief blush before they are reckoned in terms of profit and loss. Yet so pure is her candor, so healthy her animal appetites, so

July 2016



indomitable her resiliency through every vicissitude of fortune, that this extraordinary woman emerges as one of the most appealing heroines in English literature.

Source: <http://penquinrandomhouse.ca/>

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Defoe choose a woman to be his main character? Do you think she is a believable character? Is Defoe commenting on the female gender in this novel, or humankind in general?
2. Defoe seemingly contradicts himself when speaking of the Church. How is the Church represented in this novel? Consider Moll's early life as a warden of the Church through to her redemption.
3. Study the many men that pass through Moll's life. Are any of them good men? Do any of them respect Moll more than others? Do their social positions and wealth effect the way they view Moll and women in general?
4. Modern day critics have debated over Defoe's exact intent. Some argue Moll Flanders is a picturesque novel, others say a fictionalized Puritan spiritual work, still others claim it is a bourgeois romance. Some critics liken this novel to a work of irony much like Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels. Which analysis makes the most sense?
5. Some critics argue that Moll's wit and independence prove Defoe's respect for women while other critics argue Moll's sinfulness and self-acknowledged depravity show Defoe's anti-women's rights view. Which do you agree with?



6. Consider the men Moll steals from, both husbands and victims. Is this a comment on class or gender?

7. After reading of Moll's spiritual reawakening, do you feel Defoe is a supporter or criticizer of religion? Is he a supporter of any divine providence?

8. Compare and contrast Moll's marriages before her life and crime and after. What are Defoe's views on marriage?

9. If you were to consider this a work of irony, what exactly is Defoe criticizing? Is his irony even consistent throughout the novel?

Source: <http://www.litlovers.com/>

Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:

- Audiobook (as digital download)
- eBook