

INDIVIDUALISM AND THE RUINED WOMAN IN PRINT AND FILM: SOCIAL  
STANDARDS, STRATIFICATION AND FEMININE INDEPENDENCE IN DANIEL  
DEFOE'S MOLL FLANDERS, DAVID ATTWOOD'S *THE FORTUNES AND  
MISFORTUNES OF MOLL FLANDERS*, AND PEN DENSHAM'S *MOLL FLANDERS*

by

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Abstract:

The 18<sup>th</sup> Century is undeniably rife with social and political unrest. The highly capitalist nature of society created highly striated social groups ranging from the financially elite to the abjectly poor and morally weak. Minority groups always suffer in these environments and in England the women were truly subject to the depravity of the era. Women as a social group were set up to and expected to fail. Without money and status a woman could amount to nothing more than a wet nurse or a prostitute. Yet, in these stations women were labeled “ruined” and they were ostracized by those in power. This semester I hope to research the social station of women in 18<sup>th</sup> Century women by examining culture, history, and literature. Specifically, I hope to target Defoe as a major author who sympathizes his ruined women characters in order to show the flaws in 18<sup>th</sup> Century society. He examines Moll Flanders as the pitiable prostitute, and manages to showcase the struggles of womanhood despite his role as a male author. Daniel Defoe’s Moll Flanders introduces a liberated female character who defies the standards of society in order to reach a measure of personal individualism. I will also examine other literary characters who enter into prostitution in order to exist within society and the way in which other authors present these women. Are these fictionalized characters representations of reality? Are they accurate? Regardless, they comment on and represent standard stereotypes of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and its capitalist flaws. What does this say about the authors, the 18<sup>th</sup> Century population, the place of women, and England’s economic stratification.

The social and political landscape of 18<sup>th</sup> Century England was rife with ideological debate and disagreement. Much of the era centered on the new emerging trend of capitalism and personal advancement within society. However, this capitalist regime served to both placate and enrage various voices of the age. Literary history mimics this tumultuous period as authors experimented with the novel and complex messages within their texts (Brown 27-28). Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders introduces a liberated female character who defies the standards of society in order to reach a measure of personal individualism. Her strides toward independence only serve to damage her place in English society as she shuns the stereotypical roles of a good Christian and a respectable, moral woman (Richetti 99). Because she denies her societal obligations as a woman she is eventually forced from England to the more independent American colonies (Krier 403). Defoe's greatest achievement in the novel is in his expert discussion of the character of Moll Flanders. She has become an iconic image of the "ruined woman" and film adaptations have centered on her character development as well as the tumultuous events of Defoe's novel. In recent years, two film adaptations have emerged taking the story of Moll and reinventing it for modern audiences. One version, directed by David Attwood, follows the events of the novel very closely and offers a faithful visual representation of Defoe's original work. A more liberal interpretation can be found in Pen Densham's version of Moll Flanders, where the novel and its

characters are reinterpreted to appeal to a modern audience. All three versions present the iconic “ruined woman” to audiences that range from Defoe’s audience to the modern viewer.

Defoe’s novel features a preface which outlines the intention of the narrative that follows. Defoe was writing at a time when the novel was only just emerging as an art form and thus, his novel was subject to much scrutiny from reader and critics. To validate his work Defoe describes the intent he had to present a true story of immorality in an effort to promote morality in its audience (Mowry 103). His aim was to expose Moll honestly as an immoral sinner who is reformed ultimately by her faith in God and his forgiveness of her indiscretions, perpetuating the Christian message. Defoe showcases the honesty of his novel through the reality of Moll’s character (Richetti 96). He wants the audience to understand the moral message within the text despite the immoral actions of his heroine. Defoe’s style in the preface is very intentionally un-romantic as he sees the overwhelming popularity of the style as damaging to the historical style (Baines 27). He writes, “The World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances, that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine” (Defoe 3). What is most significant is his insistence that the following text is true historically. Defoe goes on to discuss his censorship of her story excluding any compromising ideas or immoral actions: “All possible Care however has been taken to give no leud Ideas, no immodest Turns in the new dressing up this Story, no not to the Worst parts of her Expression; to this Purpose some of the

vicious part of her Life, which cou'd not be modestly told, is quite left out... 'tis hop'd will not offend the chastest Reader" (Defoe 4).

Censorship was strict in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and Defoe had certain standards as an author to uphold. However, his intention is to tell a truthful story. He also promises to exclude excessive details and offensive remarks to protect the modest reader and allow for a larger audience. This is apparently false as the reader progresses into the text because Moll's depiction of her experience is quite detailed. Moll's narrative almost seems to criticize the audience Defoe was looking to protect in his preface. These clashing styles show Defoe as an author who understood his place as a novelist in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and removed himself from the responsibility for the potentially controversial text that he produces by allowing his protagonist to narrate (Byrd 63-9).

There is no distinct preface in Attwood's version. Moll Flanders is early established as the sole narrator. The absence of Defoe's voice does remove a measure of his concern for morality. Moll's opinion is the only one presented to the audience and Defoe's reliance on morality is removed entirely. Attwood attempts to draw his audience by placing Moll in a position of depravity. Her actions seem to be that of necessity and therefore the audience is immediately expected to trust her story and her motives. Essentially, Moll's immorality is required to escape her low social status and her decisions, though immoral, are made to advance beyond her hardships. Because of this, the audience has a sense of pity for her. Additionally, her ultimate confession and repentance of her sins

to God resolve her guilt. Attwood follows the original novel very closely and Moll's actions in the film are very similar to the "sins" of Moll in Defoe's novel. At the start of the film, Moll sits positioned in the dirty corner of Newgate Prison and she makes a short speech, a sort of preface to her own story. She says, "You want to know how I came to this place of horrors? How I fell from pride and pomp? I was not always this, I was made this by the world around me...for me, the wheel of fortune came full circle." Without Defoe's preface indicating the morality of the story the audience is forced to evaluate Moll's life in terms of her own interpretations of her actions (Parke 59-60). Moll apparently blames the economic state of London and her inability to move upward within it for the decisions she has been forced to make and she offers no other excuse for her actions. Attwood's audience is given the freedom to watch Moll's story and determine if her sins are in equal response to her social situation. The role of Defoe is removed from Densham's version, but he also removes Moll as the sole narrator of her story. Instead, he adds another character and creates another level of removal from the actual events of Moll's life. The character of Hibble, played by Morgan Freeman, reads Moll's story to her estranged daughter on the way to America. Hibble can be seen as another version of Defoe. He interjects his own commentary on Moll's story and comments on her environment as well as her morality in much the same way Defoe does in his novel. Just as Defoe attempts to remove himself from his own text, Hibble seems to do the same for Moll within the film. Moll's story is told through a close friend, and although he is connected

to the events of her life he is given the authority to tell Moll's story without her being present. The journal then becomes the story within the story (Phillips 17-19). Moll's own words provide the bulk of the story, yet the events framing the story are centered on Moll's daughter and Hibble. Being physically absent as her story is told is Densham's way of again displaying Moll's strong sense of individuality. Having left behind a daughter when fleeing to America, Moll records the events of her life but is prevented from returning to England to tell her story to her daughter in person. Her pursuit of individuality is the subject of the text and also the reason for her absence. Her "crimes" keep her from her daughter, yet her past is what carries the story back to England with her friend, Hibble. Essentially, the relationship between Hibble and Moll's daughter creates the connection between Moll as an individual in America and Moll as a convict in England. The dualities of the film and its characters are united in the frame narration and Densham works through Hibble to remove Moll from her own story, further perpetuating her independence. However, Densham's film does not discuss morality in any context. Judgement of Moll and her actions is specifically reserved for the viewer (Phillips 21). Therefore, the moral judgement of the original preface is transferred to the viewer and Moll's guilt is individually determined. Densham's removal from the film as the moral adjudicator appeals to a modern audience because he avoids forcing his opinion and allows the viewer to draw their own conclusions about the actions of his heroine in much the same way Attwood does.

Defoe comments on the individualist movement as well as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century society that forces its women to accept a preordained role or remove themselves from the nation (Watt 235). Unless afforded wealth and privilege, the capitalist ideals of the era force a woman to abandon innocence and become aware of the flaws of society in order to succeed within it. Defoe's Moll Flanders defies any trace of her role as a moral woman. Flanders is a frustrated poverty stricken woman and in order to make her way through the pitfalls of 18<sup>th</sup> Century London she must conform to the standards of a highly capitalist society (Watt 81). She markets herself as a prostitute, abandons her role as a mother, and marries multiple men to advance her social role. This lifelong battle against social constraints leads Flanders away from society into a role of an individualist, a highly uncommon role for a woman to accept (Richetti 57-58). And this movement leads her out of England and to the New World of independent people in America. The novel serves to contrast the overindulgent world of high-class England to the depraved and impoverished underbelly of the country (Koonce 379-380). At the same time these authors make distinct commentary on the struggle between the growing capitalist society and the individuals who abandon it in search of personal happiness.

Attwood's Moll moves towards independence slowly, gaining personal strength from each of her experiences and gaining upward mobility with each husband. Her dependence on others shrinks as the film progresses and like Defoe's Moll her individualism is the result of the injustices she experiences as an

18<sup>th</sup> Century woman. She first expresses her desire for independence after the death of her first husband. She spends five years “married to a man who could not please her” (Attwood). She describes him as a “very dull husband” and seems to be liberated after this death. She determines she will head to London after his death to make a new life that more suited her personal desires. She says, “I was bound for London where I was determined to marry well and live well. And this time on my terms and nobody else’s” (Attwood). When in London she is selective about her new husband and ultimately decides the best option for her is a “wealthy gentleman with a large inheritance we were both anxious to spend” (Attwood). However, their expenditures are far greater than his accounts can support and he eventually leaves Moll in a confused state. Moll says, “I was without the fortunes of my husband, and actually I was without my husband. I was unsure of my status as a married woman, a widow, or an abandoned wife and so I had to move on to other prospects quickly as to find stability in London” (Attwood). Moll is again thrust into individuality and forced to find adequate means of financial independence.

Densham’s Moll is depicted as irresistible to men and her individuality seems to captivate those around her. Densham contrasts his Moll Flanders to the societal stereotypes of 18<sup>th</sup> Century women in one of her early homes. She boards in the Mazzawatti home where they look to adopt “stray” women and provide a classical education. Ultimately, the family hopes to educate, socialize, and moralize Moll so she can acclimate as a functional member of society. However,

her individualism can not be subdued and she continuously acts out against the Mazzawatti sisters. In one such scene, Moll and the other houseguests are listening to some after dinner music in silence. The Mazzawatti sisters, having been well trained in classical arts and music, entertain the crowd with a harp and a violin. Densham exposes Moll's undying sense of individuality as she stands almost as if possessed by the music and begins to dance in front of the guests (Brown 92-4). Her eyes remain closed and she appears to be unaware that everyone has turned their attention to her. She also remains unaware of their opinions of her, whether positive or negative, because she is unconcerned with them and entirely absorbed in her own self. The Mazzawattis are a religious family and many religions opposed the expression and suggestion of dance. Moll's dancing would largely have been seen as offensive and sinful. Moll is unconcerned as her individualism compels her to express herself freely, without concern for strict religion (Watt 121). The Mazzawatti sisters, who are dressed in ruffled dresses with tight curls in their hair, stare in disgust as Moll dances. Moll's hair is in loose curls that hang to her mid-back and her dress is dark in color and lacks the expensive frills and lace the Mazzawatti sisters have afforded in their dress. She is clearly in a lower social station than those around her, yet they are captivated nonetheless. Densham includes an inner monologue while Moll is dancing as she describes a silent war between the sisters and herself. She says: "The Mazzawatti sisters planned acts of war against me. Their weapons were to be their superior culture. I returned their assaults. My arsenal was

something feral that nature had provided me: a sense of self that these women would never understand, let alone possess" (Densham). Densham proves that Moll's individuality is more important to her than her public perception. She doesn't long to fulfill a preordained role as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century housewife, instead she seeks to fulfill a sense of personal happiness. Much like the Moll Flanders of Defoe's novel, the film version seeks to succeed in the strict world of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century while still maintaining her own self perception, regardless of the social repercussions.

Densham introduces another strong character that is absent from Defoe's original text, Moll's daughter, and her individualism is apparent throughout the entire film. The presence of this character allows Densham to tell Moll's story as if it were a memoir left to detail her legacy to her daughter. Early in the film, Mr. Hibble (played by Morgan Freeman), appears at an English orphanage to take Moll Flanders' daughter into his care. The first scene of the movie, titled "Little Vixen" introduces the audience to the feisty and uncontrollable Flora. She is vocally aggressive with not only the religious entities who are issuing her punishment, but with her new benefactor as well (Phillips 14). However, Densham's script shows a great understanding of her role as a poor orphan in an unforgiving environment. She says "I'll respond to anybody who treats me like I got a soul as good as theirs" (Densham). Because the orphanage had been so brutal and Flora was treated with disrespect for her place in society she appreciates Hibble's kindness as he speaks to her with respect and compassion.

After agreeing to leave the orphanage with her new benefactor she attempts to sneak away from him. She claims she has to use the bathroom and her benefactor leaves her alone in the carriage to use “the pot.” Flora runs from the other side of the carriage attempting to outwit her guardian. When captured by a local stagecoach driver, she kicks her feet and shouts against her recapture. She is described as “a clever little whippit” and a “predictable sneak like her mother.” The character invented by Densham serves to showcase the feminine independence initiated by her mother.

Moll’s lessons begin early on in Defoe’s text and she must learn how to acclimate to the role of a woman in 18<sup>th</sup> Century society. Moll Flanders is taken under the care of a motherly figure who tries to educate Moll and warn her of the dangers that lurk within the treacherous atmosphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Moll’s mentor and care giver offers the last semblance of compassion Moll finds in the atmosphere of her poverty stricken life. Much of what this woman teaches Moll relies on the satisfactory mannerisms of the well trained lady. Defoe writes: “she bred them up very Religiously...So that in a Word, excepting a plain diet, course Lodging, and mean Clothes, we were brought up as Mannerly and Genteely, as if we had been in the Dancing School” (Defoe 11). Even in her childhood, Moll is given care from this peasant who understands the importance of manners in the advancement of women in her position. Moll is taught the correct decorum for her role as a young woman emerging from child to adult in the highly judgmental environment within England. As Moll manages to find her various

positions in life she becomes a character who increasingly shuns these standards and becomes a social outcast as a result (Hammond 37-8). It is however significant that the caregiver who replaces Moll's absentee mother places such a high importance on learning social mores of as it is the only way to emerge from poverty and depression.

Strangely, Attwood underemphasizes the "motherly figure" in Defoe's text. Moll mentions briefly that her childhood was spent with gypsies and it was not until she was settled in her first "civilized home that she began to understand the obligations of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century woman" (Attwood). She stays with this family until her "eighteenth year, never fully understanding if I was daughter or servant, or some strange mix of both" (Attwood). Regardless of Moll's place in the household, the figure of the mother is hardly present in the film. Her physical presence is more prevalent, but her speaking lines are highly infrequent. The few lines she speaks are simply to agree with her husband. Moll's mentoring comes primarily from her two "sisters" who teach her their lessons when their teacher has gone. Moll's maturation is not the result of a mothering mentor figure, but instead the result of her peer's instruction.

Densham's adaptation perverts this "mentor" character by introducing Mrs. Allworthy (played by Stockard Channing) who educates Moll in the business of prostitution. Defoe's original figure of the mother/nurse of Moll's childhood is merged with the mentor woman who teaches her to steal as an adult. Mrs. Allworthy then becomes an amplified hybrid of both characters. The

strength of Moll's morality is truly tested in the scenes she shares with Mrs. Allworthy. She becomes consumed with money and her goals of financial security and independence come at the expense of her body. Mrs. Allworthy convinces Moll that her exchanges with male customers are simply business exchanges. Having the upper hand, men were always in better financial standing and handled a couple's finances entirely, leaving women highly dependent (Phillips 21). Women are expected to depend on their male benefactor, whether a husband or fiscal sponsor, and Mrs. Allworthy attempts the work against these societal normalities. Through this, Moll is encouraged to violate the order of things. When Moll agrees to join her brothel Mrs. Allworthy explains this concept to Moll in detail. She says, "Money is a faithful dog, it never asks nothing and comforts like a friend. You just have to keep it close...Man is nothing but a bull, a beast of lust, say anything, do anything to ease his urges. God's not made a man fit to be woven up with yet. But there's precious few women who learn to lead them by the nose. (She exposes her corseted cleavage) These are the most awesome weapons you have, girl. Prop them up and a man won't be able to raise his eyes to your face...Give yourself some pleasure...Tease them down there with your eyes. When a man's part goes hard, his brain goes soft. That's when they'll say or do anything to possess you, girl, that's when you feel the power" (Densham). The film's mentor actively introduces Moll to the underbelly of 18<sup>th</sup> Century society. Densham attempts to show his Moll as a virtuous character who is corrupted by those around her even though the novel

represents her differently. Defoe's Moll commits her crimes as a means of moving up in society, ultimately as a way of surviving in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century world (Parke 55). Densham's Moll, while still looking to "survive," is not entirely responsible independently for her corruption.

Defoe's Moll is thrust into the world without the guidance of parental figures, virtually orphaned. Moll's mother is a very small facet of the story and her story is never fully explained in detail at the start of the text. Defoe writes that Moll's mother was "Transported to the Plantations, and left me about half a year old; and in bad Hands you may be sure" (Defoe 10). The removal of her mother is less a physical loss and more directly abandonment. Moll is left in "bad Hands" to mature without her mother's guidance. Defoe never reveals what the true nature of Moll's mother's crime really is, and if it warranted the punishment she received. Defoe writes, "my Mother was convicted of Felony for certain petty Theft, scarce worth naming...I can scarce be certain, which is the right Account" (Defoe 10). The lack of importance Moll places on the facts of her mother's crimes is strange. It seems that these short few paragraphs are the only thought Moll gives to her mother, forcing the absence in the text to mimic the absence of her mother in Moll's life. Moll's mother was not a woman of great standing within the 18<sup>th</sup> Century climate (Zimmerman 88-90). Essentially, her "petty Theft" forced her out of the society as an outcast as much as an outlaw, perpetuating the legacy of the Flanders women.

Perhaps more significant than this absentee mother and Moll's orphaned status is the condition she was forced to abandon her child in. The injustices of Moll's existence expose her at an early age to a place of continuous dangers and constant criticisms. Defoe works to show his reader the destructive nature of this world on Moll as a woman born into depression. As an infant Moll has no knowledge of how she was cared for and nurtured. Defoe writes, "nor can I give the least Account how I was kept alive; other, than that I have been told, some Relation of my Mothers took me away for a while as a Nurse, but at whose Expense, or by whose Direction I know nothing at all of it" (Defoe 10). Defoe notes the importance of money in order to be cared for. Moll's survival without a mother or benefactor condemns her to a life of depravity as a member of the lowest echelon of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century public. She is born into nothing and society demands that she remains in that position so long as she has no means of financial and social up reaching (Hammond 45).

Defoe brings the social injustices of the lower classes to light as he discusses Moll's movement into her toddler years. He writes:

" I Was now in a Way to be provided for; for tho' I was not a Parish Charge upon this, or that part of the Town by Law; yet as my Case became known, and that I was too young to do any Work, being not above three Years old, Compassion mov'd the Magistrates of the Town to order some Care to be taken of me, and I became one of their own, as much as if I had been born in the Palace (Defoe 11).

In this discussion Defoe directly attacks the stratification of society and the governing bodies of the state who allow it. It becomes clear to the reader that this

kind offering to “provide” for Moll in her desperation is not an act of kindness as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century prospect for the poor is bleak. He promotes the idea that the upper class has no concern for the condition of the poor short of their ability to work. Because Moll had not yet reached the age of three she is unable to produce work and must therefore be taken on as a ward of the state (Brown 101). Their obligation to her, as she is not old enough to work, is to provide for her in her youth. She is sent to study with a poor woman who will release her at eight years old to “get their own Bread” (Defoe 11). This reprieve from work until the age of eight is much later than most poor children are given as they begin working much sooner (Byrd 87). However, even given this consideration, Moll is sent into the work force at a young age. It is here, when in the atmosphere of reality and out of the protective sphere of her Nurse, that she begins to understand the misfortunes that await her as a poor woman (Baines 39). Moll enters the world in a state of relative innocence with great ambitions and hope for her future. However the true nature of society demands she accepts certain qualities in order to fulfill her intended roles as a woman.

Perhaps a more significant detail emerges from the brief section in the beginning of the novel that details Moll’s mother’s struggles at the time of Moll’s birth, when Moll determines her life can offer little more than a similar fate. Moll’s mother was being held at Newgate Prison for a “petty theft” (Defoe 10) and the details of that felony had been reported to Moll so many times she is unable to report on them accurately. Moll discusses the crimes of her mother

only briefly; however her discussion of the conviction denotes that it is “scarce worth naming” but still a capital offense. The important portion of the story centers on the imprisonment and impending death of her mother because of the crime she committed (Flynn 18-25). She is marked for death at Newgate until she “pleads her Belly” (Defoe 10) and is granted another seven months to bear the child. Moll’s mother is eventually sent to America leaving the child at “about Half a Year old” (Defoe 10). Moll reflects that her mother’s crimes condemn her to accept the same type of fate. Defoe writes:

“...the Custom in our Country, I had not been left a poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World, as was my Fate; and by which I was not only expos’d to very great Distress, even before I was capable, either of Understanding my Case, or how to Amend it, nor brought into a Course of Life, which was not only scandalous in itself, but which in its ordinary Course, tended to the swift Destruction both of Soul and Body” (Defoe 10).

Moll explains that her beginnings and the circumstances of her mother and birth condemn her to accept a similar fate. The failure of her mother in 18<sup>th</sup> Century society is an unavoidable destiny for her child.

Densham does create a similar legacy in the beginning of his film adaptation; however, he adds an additional element missing from the original text in the character of Flora. Moll’s daughter adds a third layer to this preordained legacy of corruption. Early in the film Moll’s journal records her as “body being female, station in life, bastard” (Densham). The scene opens at twilight on a cold, snowy, wintry London scene and the camera pans through the streets into the barred window of the prison where Moll is being born. Moll

describes the condition of her mother stating, "My mother lost her virtue to a prison guard. In the Age of Reason even the English were too genteel to execute a pregnant woman. So my mother received nine precious extra months of life and then was hanged as a thief that night" (Densham). The death of her mother conflicts with Defoe's version in which the mother is sent to America as a kind of reduced sentence. This change offers no chance of reconciliation with Moll's mother (as in Defoe's novel and Attwood's adaptation) and weakens the overarching theme of motherhood. Instead, Densham's version shows Moll's mother hanged immediately without the opportunity to start a new life in America or the chance to meet with her daughter as an adult. However, Moll is afforded the chance to escape England and experience America and ultimately she sends for her daughter, finally independent and secure enough to provide for her. When Flora finally reaches America and Hibble finishes the story of Moll's life the child is emotionally drained. She cries out "No more stories, no more big lessons" (Densham) and runs through the sprawling greenery of the courtyard away from Hibble. After tripping at the base of a flight of stairs Moll Flanders emerges from the shadows to finally meet her daughter who is in tears, confused and out of breath at the sight of Moll. Flora points at her chest and screams "Her soul is still in me until the day I die!" (Densham). Moll's surroundings show she has made a life for herself in America and as Hibble explains "she has everything the physical body could need, except her soul"

(Densham). Finally, Moll approaches her daughter kneeling beside her and explains her intentions:

“I wanted you to hear my story. I wanted nothing but truth between us. I never knew my own mother, never felt her, or smelled her hair. I swore that terrible fate would not befall my baby. But I failed you. And despite my deepest fear that my own flesh and blood might reject me we have enough to send you anywhere in the world, the choice is yours, Flora” (Densham).

Flora pauses a moment, appearing to study her mother and manages to say, “Oh, mother” (Densham) before embracing Moll. After much crying and celebrating the three main characters in the film begin a life together comforted by their independence, their great wealth, and their reunion. Essentially, by the end of the film Moll has managed to end the cycle Densham initially introduced. The failures of Moll’s mother are corrected by Moll and a new world of opportunity is open to Flora in America.

Densham introduces an important symbol into his film adaptation which is absent from Defoe’s original text. At the beginning of the novel Moll kisses a large gold cross and says, “My mother sold the only things of any value to her, her hair. And I tried to remember her in the crucifix she left to me” (Densham). The cross she wears around her neck becomes the link between the film’s three women. Moll’s mother purchases the cross for her child and immediately abandons her. Moll can not remember her mother because she was so young when she was hanged, but the crucifix serves as a memento of the woman. Additionally, it serves to remind Moll as well as the audience of the crimes of her

mother and her ultimate fate. The cross becomes the subject of many scenes in the film and much of Moll's character development. When Moll discusses joining Mrs. Allworthy's business she holds up the cross and says, "I'm Catholic" meaning she can not associate in prostitution because it opposed her faith. Mrs. Allworthy scoffs and returns, "So was Mary, and don't tell me she wasn't doing it." Moll accuses her of blasphemy and puts the cross back inside her shirt. When Moll is separated from her daughter she leaves the cross with Flora, just as her mother did for her. When Hibble arrives at the orphanage to take Flora he identifies her by the cross. On the ship taking Flora and Hibble to America she claims her mother has been absent for nine years and she has adapted to life as an orphan. Hibble then tells her to throw away the cross if it has no importance to her and she doesn't care to see her mother. She touches it defensively and says, "It's all I have of her" (Densham) proving the cross and her mother are still significant to her. Later in the film, Flora claims the crucifix is the keeper of her mother's soul as she removes crucifix from her neck. She is upset assuming her mother has died and she cries, "I hate you all...her soul is still in me until the day I die" (Densham). Densham seems to use the cross as a way of connecting the three women, even after death. The souls of the women are connected to the cross, and in this connection the three souls are connected to one another.

Defoe does not place significance on the trinity of women as Densham does, he instead relies on discussing society and its inherent flaws (Flynn 73-5). Moll's introduction into society in which she becomes a house maid to wealthy

families is equally enticing and threatening. Moll matures to resent the life of servitude she has acquired. Instead she proclaims that she wants to become a “gentlewoman” which causes much amusement among her wealthy employers. She is accepted into a wealthy family during the time of her physical and emotional maturation. She becomes quite attractive and begins to see that beauty can give her a measure of power in her normally powerless servant role. As Moll experiences this change she begins to be noticed for her appearance by the men and her vanity becomes her weakness. Defoe writes, “But that which I was too vain of, was my Ruin, or rather my vanity was the cause of it” (Defoe 19). In her encounters with her two first love interests she assumes she is quite in control of the men because she is so attractive they can not control themselves. In reality, their sexual desires overwhelm any appreciation they may have for her beauty. Moll falls victim to their charms expecting that no harm could come to her only because her vanity swelled her ego too large to see any danger (Armstrong 44-45). This lack of knowledge of the nature of society, and the men within it, plagues Moll for the remainder of the novel. Her understanding of the methodology required to navigate the social hierarchy becomes clearer through experience but her rebellion against standards detach her expected female role even further.

Moll’s realization of her beauty comes as the result of her only major relationship in Densham’s film adaptation. The absence of the bulk of Moll’s lovers in the film allows Densham to show Moll’s tumultuous relationship with a

character named only "The Artist" who develops an obsession with Moll's beauty. He initially pays for one night with her while she is employed by Mrs. Allworthy. But rather than using Moll sexually, he asks her to model for his paintings and drawings. She accuses him of being a poor artist standing behind him as he draws her in charcoal. She says, "You're not very good, are you? It doesn't look like much" (Densham). The same criticism is returned to her as he tells her she looks like a "drowned clown" (Densham) and asks her not to wear "the mask" when she visits with him. The Artist is the first man who appreciates Moll as a person rather than a prostitute and the pair shares a relationship based on love as opposed to sex. Moll serves as a muse to his work and The Artist fills a void in Moll's life as he accepts her for who she is rather than what she can give him (Parke 66). When The Artist meets Moll she is an alcoholic prostitute with little upward mobility but The Artist offers her financial support in exchange for her modeling.

Densham develops the relationship between Moll and the Artist and they do reach true happiness with each other, but Densham does show that their relationship is realistically flawed. They argue over Moll's worth and she claims "I am nothing, feel this, I will do nothing but disappoint you, don't you feel that?" (Densham). Their relationship is composed of extreme highs and lows but they do achieve a measure of happiness when they were together. Flora is ultimately revealed as the daughter of the pair and at the conclusion of the film Moll reveals a painting of The Artist and herself close to the end of her

pregnancy saying, "I love that his strong spirit is in you" (Densham). The Artist contracts smallpox towards the end of her pregnancy and eventually dies, leaving Moll and their infant child alone. She spends their savings on an individual grave site for The Artist and reflects on their time together. She says: "We experienced a delirious, timeless peace...We were a uniting force pushing away the darkness in each others lives. Maybe there was some chance for that to save us, but it was ended all too soon" (Densham).

Densham's Moll experiences a complete emotional breakdown after the death of The Artist and it is the only time in the film that Moll exposes so much personal weakness. The funerary affiliates come into Moll's apartment the day after he passes determined to take away the body. Moll feels possessive over the corpse and she wants no one else to touch it so she tells the funerary staff to leave shouting, "If any man touches this body they will not leave this place to tell of it" (Densham). They leave allowing her to deal with her grief alone. Moll then sits by the body for two days, "protecting" it from any other entities that might harm it. The apartment is dark and Moll is dressed in a dark brown dress without any additional adornments. She sits in silence, poised in a chair at the foot of the bed looking at the body of her lover covered by a white sheet. She says, "I trusted no one to take him. I wanted him to have a safe journey so I took our savings and had him buried next to a doctor" (Densham). The next scene is that of his burial where Moll looks on as the gravediggers finish filling his plot. She is visibly saddened, but does not audibly cry. Instead she leaves the site and prepares to

deliver their child without the assistance of any medical staff. Still feeling as though she could trust no one and facing the threat of his wealthy family taking the child, she delivers Flora alone. She prepares for the delivery by moving the bed to the center of their room and filling the space with the paintings of her husband. She says, "I wanted you to be born surrounded by the spirit of your father, no one else" (Densham). Again, Densham allows his Moll to experience great tragedy and her natural response is to maintain isolation. Her strength is found in her independence, rather than in the company of other characters.

Attwood's Moll is depicted as much more self-reliant and emotionally stable at the loss of her "one true love," Jemy. The two share a brief and romantic courtship which results in their marriage which they later find out was based primarily on financial misunderstandings between the two. Despite their misrepresented fortunes, the pair is still in love with one another. However, their feelings are insignificant compared to their inability to prosper in London. Jemy determines he will embark alone on a venture to secure a measure of wealth to support them and he will then return for her. Moll is abandoned in her sleep and when she awakes to find Jemy has already left she is frantic. She reads a brief note he left stating he has "left for wealth, hoping for best luck elsewhere. When I am sufficiently a man I will return for your hand" (Attwood). Moll does have a strong reaction to his departure and she is visibly emotional when she sees he is gone. She explains, "He was the love of my life and he was gone. There was nothing I could do about it" (Attwood). Moll calls his name from their lodgings

and Jemy does turn his horse around as if he heard her, but ultimately continues on in search of wealth. Moll is only heartbroken for a few moments and quickly realizes she needs to get out of the lodge before the owner comes looking for payment. Her sadness is not the complete emotional breakdown that Densham's Moll experiences and her desire to support herself independently allows her to move past the loss of her "one true love" much more quickly (Attwood).

In Defoe's novel and in Attwood's adaptation, Moll's maturation and development revolve around her strained relationships with the opposite sex early on. Her first lover, known as the elder brother, accepts Moll's company to exploit her sexually. He pays her large sums of money for her companionship, yet wants nothing more than her body. Moll's relationship with the elder brother was intended to lead her to a comfortable marriage when he receives his inheritance. Her motives were that of love and adoration, however, the elder brother seems none too offended when his younger sibling asks for Moll's hand in marriage. The elder brother is quick to support this proposal, breaking Moll's heart as she realizes their fling was based on lust, rather than love (Hammond 27). Moll immediately feels a loss of her virtue and assumes the role of a jilted mistress to the elder brother. She accepts the younger brother's marriage proposal reluctantly and out of necessity rather than love. Defoe writes the elder brother "had the Thanks of a faithful Friend for shifting off his Whore into his Brother Arms for a Wife" (Defoe 48). Her dealings with the two brothers cause her to begin to understand her role as a woman. Due to her lack of social

etiquette she is thrust into the role of a sexual vessel to satisfy the older brother, and when his affections for her have ended she is discarded as a whore. Moll's first marriage, to the younger of the two brothers, is founded on the urgency of the older brother to end their affair as Moll has no amorous feelings towards her first husband.

Charity is not presented positively in Densham's film adaptation as Moll's charity causes tension between the Mazzawatti sisters and their mother who admires Moll's selflessness. Densham's Moll receives charity throughout the film from various characters but more apparent is her own charity towards others less fortunate. In an early scene Moll goes to the local prison to give food and aid to the prisoners, regardless of the fact that she is only a servant herself. One such prisoner is stricken with small pox and although she is cautioned against it by a prison guard and Mrs. Mazzawatti, she still offers food and drink to the contagious woman. Later that day when back at the Mazzawatti home the two Mazzawatti sisters accuse Moll of "having the pox" and they taunt her with the chant "a tissue, a tissue, we all fall down" (Densham). Moll defends her charity and challenges the girls to kill her if they fear infection. She picks up a knife and says, "You want me dead, do it for me yourself then, go on" (Densham) giving the girls the opportunity to remove her from the home and regain their mothers attention. They respond cruelly by saying, "We let the butcher slaughter our pigs" (Densham). Mrs. Mazzawatti maintains her support of Moll's charity and her disappointment grows as she witnesses the exchange between the three girls.

She defends Moll by saying, "You shame me! If you want to see the sort of charity I expect from a daughter, tonight Moll is a living lesson" (Densham) and she sends the girls away to prepare for the party. Moll's desire to be charitable to everyone in need is admirable and although there are some citizens considered outside the realm of charity, Moll sees no boundaries. Although she is met with much opposition against her desire to help, she stands her ground and her morals are uncompromising throughout the beginning of the film.

Attwood's adaptation seems to avoid charity on Moll's part entirely. Moll is never shown providing charity to any other character. Her entire life is spent looking to improve her own standings. She is reliant on many men, but able to offer them nothing financially. She is placed in dire circumstances and attempts to rise above them through theft, prostitution, and debauchery. Towards the end of the film she is living as a prostitute in London and barely making means to support her meals. She meets a child in an alley looking for her mother. Moll pretends to befriend the girl only to steal her pearl necklace (Parke 67).

Attwood's Moll is completely uncharitable throughout the film and she explains that it is necessary in order to survive. She says, "Don't fault me for the things I'm forced to do. The child has a mother to care for her needs, I am a lone woman with no one to care for me. Charity is more suited for a woman of my likes than a girl of hers" (Attwood). The scene shows her inability to see beyond her own station and her unwavering desire to move above it, no matter the cost morally.

Moll becomes increasingly aware of the corrupted morals and intentions of the men around her as the novel progresses. Courtship and gentlemanly values are not necessary on a woman of Moll's social standing and she is thus thrust into a position that transforms her into a sexual object and not a marketable candidate for marriage (Armstrong 38-43). Moll's broken heart at the start of the narrative really shatters her ideals and understanding of love between a man and a woman. She comments, "the loss of his Person, whom indeed I Lov'd to Distraction; and the loss of all the Expectation I had, and which I always had built my Hopes upon, of having him one Day for my Husband: These things oppress'd my Mind so much" (Defoe 36). Moll admits she genuinely loved the man now passing her off to his own brother. Her unrequited love is a sad reminder to her that there is no room for women of lower classes to become wives to men of a high standing. This insulting fact damages Moll's relationships with men for most of her life. In fact, it is much later in her life that Moll manages to find a man that she genuinely loves again. Moll's final husband is affectionately labeled "the Lancashire husband" and is the only spouse in Moll's life who seems to accept Moll for her mistakes and avoids passing judgment on her. His understanding of her past is likely due to his own faults which land him in prison where the pair rekindle their old love affair. At the conclusion of the novel Moll reveals all of her secrets, including the origin of her son and her ex-husband/brother as the father (Baines 78-88). In response to the story Defoe writes: "it was no Fault of yours, nor of his; it was a Mistake

impossible to be prevented" (Defoe 267). His own flaws allow him to be humble enough to see beyond the mistakes in Moll's life. She, just as he, is a victim more of society and its flawed nature than of her own virtuous faults.

Society's flaws are presented in a graphic montage in Densham's adaptation in which Moll's sexual exploits as a prostitute are detailed. She speaks over the scenes of her sexual encounters with a string of unattractive suitors in an attempt to explain her decision to enter prostitution. She says, "I was the sparrow of hope looking for a nest: Clergymen, scientists, home repairmen, insurance salesmen and even an eager schoolboy. My life became a whirligig of sweating mens bodies and fairy tale hopes. I kept kissing frogs looking for a prince and finding only cold green flesh. The science of life developed the other half of my female intuition. Men feel least obligated to those they can buy" (Densham). In this collection of scenes Moll searches for a way to escape poverty and achieve the financial freedom she desires by finding a suitable husband to rescue her from a life of sin. However, as the scenes progress and Moll becomes aware that men are interested in nothing more than her body and the chances of her finding a gentleman in her line of work is slim. Like Defoe's Moll Flanders, Densham allows his heroine to discover the dangers of 18<sup>th</sup> Century society through experience.

Defoe's Moll is introduced as a poverty stricken toddler orphaned by a criminal mother and without a father. She is barely cared for until she reaches the age of three when she becomes the property of her town and is given to "a

Nurse...to a Woman who was indeed Poor, but had been in better Circumstances" (Defoe 11). Even in the company of this generous caregiver Moll is still little more than a young orphan to be conditioned for child labor at the appropriate age. The industrial atmosphere within England during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century showed little concern for children before they could work and with the additional pressures of existing in this world without parents Moll is simply a child with no room for social advancement. It is this fate that plagues Moll as she matures into a servant, prostitute, and criminal. Moll does not allow this bitter reality to come to fruition. Instead, she defies the standards of her world and manages to gain what English society stole from her (Krier 408). By the conclusion of the narrative, having battled through much adversity, Moll receives financial assistance from her deceased mother, forgiveness from her estranged son, and happiness with her final husband. Defoe works to describe Moll as a woman reacting to her environment and attempting to improve her station throughout the novel.

Moll finds comfort distancing herself from London in traveling to America where Moll flees to escape punishment for her crimes. Defoe's narrative turns from the hellish English location of Moll's debauchery to the more tranquil and forgiving land of the newly colonized America (Krier 401). Moll works to settle the mistakes and misfortunes of her previous years. She locates her ex husband and brother living with their son in Virginia and pursues her inheritance from her deceased mother. What is most significant about this section

is the fact that rather than receiving ridicule from her abandoned son, she is given pity. Her life is finally viewed as a tragedy and not a self-inflicted misfortune. Moll's reunion with her son is described as highly emotional for both of the characters. After Moll divulges the details of her shameful situation Defoe writes: "Mother, says he, you shall be as near me as you can" (Defoe 262). In the following pages Moll describes the financial rewards her son offers and she manages to find a great deal of happiness in knowing his heart is great enough to forgive her. Defoe writes: "things I had not been us'd to; and really my Heart began to look up more seriously, than I think it ever did before, and to look with great Thankfulness to the Hand of Providence, which had done such wonders for me" (Defoe 263). Her reaction to this unexpected kindness leaves her with gratitude for the sudden change in her fortune. Her "monstrous, abominable" life is transformed by one single act of kindness from the child she abandoned in her youth, regardless of the secrets and lies that surround her.

Densham's Moll reaches a similar place of financial and emotional stability; however it is unclear how she manages to attain it. By the conclusion of the film, Moll is presented wearing a plain blue dress and for the first time in the entire film she has a lacy collar and frills at each sleeve. Her home is large and at the edge of the ocean and Densham films most of the action in a large, verdant garden. Clearly, Moll is no longer struggling for finances in America and she has created a comfortable life for herself. As she makes her final speech to Flora asking her to stay she says "we have the means to send you anywhere in the

world" (Densham) again showing that money is no longer of any consideration to Moll or Hibble. The pair, although through a great deal of adversity, manages to achieve success and comfort in America (Phillips 19). Like Defoe's Moll, there is reconciliation with her child. Instead of an estranged son, Densham's Moll locates her lost daughter and begins to repair their damaged relationship.

Similarly, Moll Flanders meets and settles issues with her son at the conclusion of the novel. Both Defoe's novel and Densham's film version end in America where freedom is a core value and the heroine is able to experience independence, and ultimately happiness as a result of their individualism. Densham's Moll is certainly in a much more comfortable place financially than Defoe's, yet both versions present a contented and worldly woman who emerges from her journey a stronger, more independent person.

Defoe and Attwood allow their heroines to understand that a woman must find a husband for financial support. Moll Flanders meets and marries a banker late in the text and the film adaptation. This banker is a great match for Moll, not because they love one another, but instead because he is fairly wealthy. Defoe describes her whirlwind marriage and instantaneous acquisition of wealth: "I made no scruple of going directly home with him, and there I took Possession at once of a House well Furnish'd, and a Husband in very good Circumstances, so that I had a prospect of a very happy Life, if I knew how to manage it" (Defoe 148). Moll's successful husband affords her a very desirable position in London. With the support of a husband who has the financial stability of "the banker"

Moll is temporarily given the comfortable lifestyle of the upper class. Defoe makes an interesting commentary on the nature of this corrupted society, noting Moll must know how “to manage” her new position (Zimmerman 36). Moll, as a woman, is always at the whim of her husband and she must learn the acceptable social standards of this high society in order to achieve a “happy life.” This beneficial husband is only able to sustain Moll’s happiness for a short period. Soon after their marriage he passes away leaving Moll as a poverty stricken widow again. Moll adopts her familiar lifestyle as a thief and criminal which seems to be the only alternative for a woman in London at this time. It becomes apparent as this section of the text unfolds that Moll’s freedom and ability to succeed within London relies almost totally on her husband and his social position. Moll virtually transforms back to her “ruined woman” position as her financial security diminishes with the death of her husband. Defoe works for a great portion of the novel to describe the desperate position of the impoverished woman and he demonstrates the impossibility of feminine independence through this short relationship with “the banker” (Armstrong 61-5). Attwood uses the relationship to show Moll’s insatiable desire for wealth, even at the expense of personal happiness. She says, “The banker was a good husband, and a good man. He was not Jemy, and I knew he never would be. I had learned that love was no substitute for freedom” (Attwood). Ultimately, she is left in the same position as Defoe’s Moll after his death and she must again begin her search for stability.

Interestingly, Densham's Moll takes no husband and is financially independent in America without the assistance of a male beneficiary. She leaves for America with Mrs. Allworthy and her staff as she plans to escape the criminal punishment system in England. Ultimately, the ship capsizes and sinks while at sea. Hibble explains the events of that evening when he tells his story to Flora:

“The name of Moll Flanders was lost forever beneath the waters of that storm. I learned about the courage of living from your mother. It never set well in my body. It was on a beach much like this one when I landed in America. And the Lord spared only one other from that night. I think it was a test of me.

This scene serves as the transition between Moll's life as a dependent, relying on another person, and her life as an individualist woman. While in the ocean after the ship sinks Mrs. Allworthy demands Moll save her and clings to Moll screaming “Save me, girl. Help me!” (Densham). In this pivotal scene Moll pulls away from her condemning her to death (Phillips 16). Moll asserts her complete independence at the end of this scene as she replies: “It can not be owned anymore. Not this hand, not this body, ever again” (Densham). She becomes completely independent for the first time in the entire film and her entrance to America marks this transition.

Defoe's Moll shares the same type of transitional journey that Densham's Moll experiences in the novel in her journey to America. What becomes increasingly clear in the novel is Moll's struggle to survive not only as a woman, but as a human in the abrasive culture of 18<sup>th</sup> Century London is an issue that affects her until she leaves for America (Brown 99). The battle for survival is

Defoe's own criticism of the declining state of an over-capitalized England. Moll is never able to escape poverty within England and only during her venture to America at the conclusion of the novel is she able to attain financial freedom. However, Defoe's Moll does not find complete independence in America. Her financial independence is her own through an inheritance from her son but her relationship with Jemy shows that she is not emotionally independent and still requires companionship from a husband (Watt 73-76). Regardless, both Molls achieve a measure of independence when they leave England and settle in America.

Defoe's survivalist theme is best demonstrated when Moll reaches a point of total desperation after the death of her wealthy husband "the banker." Her life without the financial support of this husband is once again plunged into poverty. In order to release herself from this position she adopts a life of crime just as her mother before her. Moll acknowledges the fact that her choice to be a thief and con is morally wrong, but she has no other option as she knows no trade or skill. Moll mentions that her choice to be a criminal damns her to a life of infinite disgrace and unhappiness but she adopts the criminal lifestyle out of necessity. Defoe writes: "Being hardened by a long Race of Crime, and Success unparallel'd, at least in the reach of my own Knowledge, I had, as I have said, no thoughts of laying down a Trade, which if I was to judge by the Example of others, must however End at last in Misery and Sorrow" (Defoe 211). Defoe's heroine admits that her choice to adopt a life of crime will invariably lead to

regret on her part but she is given no choice. Her lack of desire to explore a trade leaves her in a desperate position: a poor woman with no capability of social climbing (Armstrong 119-121). Trapped by circumstances beyond her control she is forced into the same life her mother was forced to follow not because of her self worth but because of the economic and social stratification within England. Her battle to survive in London forces her to either convert to a criminal or a beggar in order to provide for herself. This societal flaw is the subject of Defoe's great criticism throughout the novel. He questions the effectiveness of a society that condemns its poor to commit criminal acts in order to survive and then imprisons the criminals for attempting to forge a comfortable existence (Koonce 390).

Densham's Moll places less significance on her financial hardships and more significance on her emotions at the death of The Artist. This portion of the film details the absolute lowest point of desperation in Moll's journey. The fact that Densham eliminates the majority of Moll's partners and replaces them all with the single character of The Artist allows him to explore highly developed emotions. Moll had invested her entire existence in their relationship. As a result, Moll's entire life is altered by his death. Additionally, the birth of their child serves as an additional financial responsibility after her financial supporter is gone. Defoe's Moll achieves a comparable bond with her "Lancashire husband." However, Densham takes his Moll a step beyond the contented bond in Defoe's novel. He separates the lovers and exposes Moll's emotional breakdown in the

face of her severe loss. The scene of The Artist's death is very dramatic. Moll sits beside him on the bed as he speaks to her, seeming delusional with illness. There is a fire in the background poorly lighting the scene. Moll looks healthy and very far along in the pregnancy (Parke 69). The Artist is pale, sweating, and covered with red pox. He holds her hand and says: "Give Flora my life. God, it's love, Moll. Love is good" (Densham). Moll, now crying, holds him in the bed and whispers, "I love you so much" while linking their hands. He finally succumbs to his illness and the fire that light the scene dies. The room goes dark and Moll begins to cry uncontrollably asking, "Why him, why not take me?" (Densham). The scene is highly emotional and the mutual love between the couple is similar to that of Defoe's Moll and Jemy. By using only one lover and ultimately by inserting the death of him, Densham is able to show Moll's highly developed emotions and her undying love for The Artist making the film's version seem even more sympathetic.

Attwood maintains a much less emotional characterization. After the sudden death of her husband, the Banker, she momentarily mourns the loss. However, she seems to be more concerned with the loss of his finances than the actual loss of her husband. She places coins on his eyelids so he can pass into the afterlife and spends a moment at his side. A knock at the door disturbs the moment and she asks her servants to inform her if it is the bailiff looking to collect on her late husband's debts. She immediately commissions her servants to collect the valuable items in the home and delay in answering the door. She

shouts, "Collect up the silverware, the coins, and the valuables. Pack it up for travel. Quickly now, and hold off the bailiff as long as you can," she then turns to the camera and removes the coins from her husband's eyes saying, "one never knows how quickly the riches will go. I must make a safe trip from here" (Attwood). Her sadness over the death of her husband is brief and her desire to gather up their valuables becomes the immediate priority. Unlike Densham's Moll, she does not spend days mourning the loss, and she certainly has no intention of spending their savings on a large tomb or memorial. The most important thing is to provide some kind of financial stability before she leaves the home to escape her husband's debtors.

Moll Flanders is a woman who is forced into a life of debauchery and she makes no excuse for her choices. Defoe's preface introduces Moll as a woman who is decidedly immoral, yet his editorial revisions have created a text that is to be non-offensive to the audience. However, there is great debate as to whether or not this intent to remove the immorality has actually been achieved by Defoe. Moll is speaking of her past and at the point of her narration she is quite repentant for her "wicked ways." Perhaps Moll's greatest flaw is her inability to control her passions and desires. Her struggle to maintain a measure of wealth to support a comfortable lifestyle forces her to compromise morally. Defoe's major objective is to teach a moral lesson from the point of view of a reformed sinner, but one has to wonder how reformed she truly is at the conclusion (Krier 401-402). Moll's own retrospective is quite corrupted by her experiences throughout

her life making her narration very questionable. Her distance from social and moral obligation increasingly grows as her poor decisions shape her criminality. Her sexual escapades begin when very young as she enters into a sexual relationship with a member of the wealthy family she is employed by. Her scorned love is then the impetus for her convoluted views on men. She continues on to marry many times only to have each marriage end growing far less convinced that men are capable of good deeds (Mowry 111). Her final observation seems to be inclusive of the fact that “sex for money is less shameful than sex for pleasure” (Zimmerman 86). With a narrator whose morality is flawed by her opinions due to her “wicked life” and equally questionable due to her resentment of her situation, Defoe’s intentions of conveying morality are skewed.

Densham’s Moll attempts to explain away her actions as a prostitute early in the film. Her inability to move ahead financially in England “forces” her to find a suitable husband who will care for her. Additionally, the career move secures her lodging and income until such a suitor is found among her clientele. Before her first sexual encounter, Mrs. Allworthy arranges an auction for her purity. Moll narrates over the scene, “I had decided that this wasn’t prostitution. That happened in back alleys and on street corners. This was making friends with eligible gentlemen. Noble, rich prospective husbands” (Densham). Her morality is certainly questionable at this point in the film. However, like Defoe’s Moll, she manages to reason away her concerns and see only the promise of

security in her unstable social position. Both versions show Moll as a woman trying to succeed in the cruel society of their era. However, both women also seem to compromise their morals in order to achieve that aim.

Perhaps Defoe's greatest failure in his novel is the misleading way in which he decided to age Moll's character. He is convinced, as he describes in his preface, that Moll's tale of maturation is a moral story due to her desire for repentance at its conclusion. The question lies in whether or not Moll is truly a mature and responsible adult figure and where in the story the moral is conveyed (Richetti 113). Moll still has all the resentment towards the society that shunned her as she described in the beginning of the novel. In addition to this she never resolves her hatred of her half-brother and her personal wealth is not earned but instead an inheritance from her criminal mother. Moll's ultimate moral revelation is never truly achieved. She is contented living on her deceased mother's finances; her half-brother is easily avoided until his death; and she never formally apologizes for her criminal life, she instead blames her misfortunes on the circumstances of her role as a woman in London. After revealing her sins to her husband Defoe writes of his reaction: "it was no Fault of yours, nor of his; it was a Mistake impossible to be prevented" (Defoe 267). This inability to prevent the mistakes absolves Moll of her guilt. Moll goes on to discuss the relative happiness they experience until their old age. After a discussion of their lives in "the greatest Kindness and Comfort imaginable" (Defoe 267) Moll explains that they "spent the Remainder of our Years in sincere

Penitence, for the wicked Lives we have lived" (Defoe 267). Moll experiences her greatest measure of financial freedom and familial happiness during these later years and Defoe makes no mention of their repentant acts making it difficult to understand how exactly they lived "in sincere Penitence."

Densham avoids the idea of penitence in his film adaptation. Moll never seems to regret any of her action throughout the film. Instead, she appears to see her torturous life in England as a means to reaching her enjoyable life in America. Densham's Moll never mentions regretting her actions or wanting to reconcile her life with God. Instead, her only concern is whether or not her child will accept her after hearing the story of her life. When Flora sees her mother for the first time she tosses the cross onto the ground, where Moll immediately retrieves it and approaches her daughter. The Christian symbolism of the cross is completely lost at this point as Moll's penitence is directed to Flora. At the end of the film she says, "I want nothing but the truth between us" (Densham) alluding to a kind of confession. Densham's version uses the events of the film as a kind of manifesto of sin which Moll needed to express before beginning a relationship with her daughter. Therefore, Densham's Moll answers only to herself and her daughter, whereas Defoe's Moll still feels an obligation to the Christian faith.

The question then becomes whether or not Defoe's Moll Flanders was given an opportunity to remedy her situation. Was she truly a victim of circumstance or was a portion of her debauchery the result of her own actions? In much the same way, the audience must ask if Attwood's Moll is deserving of

forgiveness. Moll's language and her direct speech with the audience implores the audience to see her sins as the result of her dire station in life. Moll constantly removes herself from her responsibilities and awareness of her actions. Defoe writes: "I saw the Cloud, tho' I did not foresee the Storm" (Defoe 27). In this statement Moll admits that she was able to grasp the dangers of her position, yet she could not foresee the future misfortunes in the events of her life. Defoe's style almost makes Moll out to be an innocent woman who is swept up in trouble and eventually it overtakes her self-control and forces her to sink deeper into despair. Similarly, Attwood's Moll says, "I could never have forseen the tragedies that were to befall me, nor could I have surpassed them in another, more noble way" (Attwood). In addition to her unwilling fall from grace and the lack of responsibility she places on herself, Defoe's Moll is perpetually requesting pity. She describes her experiences in a way that demands the reader see her as a very emotionally weak person. Her femininity and innocence is always clear when she discusses moments of great distress in her life. Defoe writes, "I gave him a look full of Horror at these Words...it was a good while before I fully recover'd my Senses, and was not able to speak for several Minutes more" (Defoe 33). Moll's apparent horror at her lover's suggestion to marry his brother is very much the reaction of a naïve and emotionally weak woman. This character draws much pity from Defoe's audience as a woman was almost always considered incapable of surviving too much adversity. Her strong feminine energy and resilience emerge throughout the novel, yet her emotional reaction to trauma in

her life seems very innocent. This characterization demands a measure of sorrow and pity for Moll and her role in society.

Attwood's Moll never has a moment of absolute sorrow and she never directly asks for pity. Instead her periods of sadness are brief and her need to succeed is always prevalent. In one such exchange, Moll is propositioned by an overweight, unattractive gentle man who "had the coins, but not the clout" (Attwood). She admits to the audience that the man completely repulses her but with the loss of her most recent husband and benefactor, "the banker," she had no option but to "have his money buy her pride" (Attwood). Attwood capitalizes on the survivor mentality Defoe reflected in creating his version of Moll. She is driven by ideals and desires, yet she is grounded by her understanding of the necessary. An unmarried woman without any financial means had no upward mobility and Moll was determined to survive (Brown 209). Regardless of this historical fact, Attwood's depiction of Moll makes it difficult for a modern audience to sympathize with the character. As a result, the highly sympathetic Moll in Densham's version is able to impact the modern viewer more effectively (Phillips 14).

In Densham's version, the question is not whether or not Moll could remedy her situation. Instead the viewer must ask if the actions of her life, which she seems to have no inclination to repent for, are forgivable by the conclusion. Densham's Moll, like Defoe's Moll, is certainly a sinner. By Christian standards, Defoe's Moll is forgivable because she is willing to accept the error of her ways

and plans to spend the remainder of her life repenting for her actions. In viewing both versions, the greatest difference between the two characters is that Densham's Moll is not apologetic to God (Parke 66). Additionally, her Christian faith, which was mentioned once in the beginning of the film, seems to have lost its importance in her life. Densham's Moll is concerned with how her daughter will accept her after she has led a life filled with sin. She never once mentions her intention to rectify her sins with God. This decision to remove the Christian element is a conscious one. Densham's modern audience is not dedicated to faith as heavily as Defoe's audience. And keeping this in mind, he does not place a great significance of her penitence with her faith. Instead, the mother-daughter relationship that was the central connection between the cross and the three Flanders generations is more a symbol of feminine unity than Christianity.

The greatest question in the case of all three versions of Moll is what Defoe, Attwood and Densham intended to show with their version of the story. By the conclusion of each medium, Moll is happy and financially secure in America. All three women seem to focus on their feminine weakness and poor social standing as an excuse for their mistakes. Defoe and Attwood's Moll Flanders manage to win the love of their final husbands, respectively, the relationship they always wanted with her estranged children, and the financial freedom they had spent their lives sinning for. Both Molls achieve the measure of personal and professional freedom they had been striving for with very few consequences for the life of sin they had led. Similarly, Densham's Moll is

independent, financially secure, and beginning a relationship with her estranged daughter by the conclusion of the film. Each Moll exemplifies the ruined woman of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and manages to overcome their station. Through their weaknesses and poor morality they manage to achieve their life goals and attain true happiness. Densham, Attwood and Defoe see their characters as pitiable victims of circumstance with pitiable stories that allow an audience to understand their struggle and appreciate their ability to overcome it.. Their actions and sins throughout the book/film are forgivable because all three characters are emotionally developed and the audience sees their struggle as one that is parallel to their "sins." Their wrongs were the result of society wrongs, and because of that the blame on them is diminished.

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