Moll Flanders Essay, Research Paper

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ClassicNote on Moll Flanders

Moll Flanders In Its Time:

Moll Flanders, published in 1722, was one of the earliest English novels. Like

many early novels, it is told in the first person as a narrative, and is presented as a

truthful account; at the time the idea of a long, realistic work of fiction was still new.

It is not only an entertaining and captivating story, it also gives a valuable

and lively picture of 17th century society. Defoe?s ability to give us an insight into

the drab and unprivilaged lives of women during the 17th century, sets this novel

appart from many. Although Moll is an exceptional character, based on her ingenuity

and extraordinary life, the problems that Moll faces are firmly rooted in her society.

As the daughter of a transported convict, she begins life at a great disadvantage:

she lacks the support system of family and friends, which were particularly necessary

for women, since their access to employment was limited. Moll herself was very

lucky to be taken in: the parish were under no obligation to take care of penniless

children, or had no other particular claim to charity: ?I was not a parish charge upon

this or that part of the town by law, (Defoe 23).? Moll, as a young girl, is forced to go

into service as a maid. Maids were paid very little, but at least they were fed and

clothed. The fact that women were not able to support themselves legally ( under the

assumption that their husbands or fathers would contribute to their support from

their higher wages) always underlied Moll’s decisions: marriage was the key to

survival.

In the 17th century, crime (mainly theft) really paid, labor was very cheap and

things were very expensive. Theft was not the only illegal occupation open to

women. In the 17th and 18th centuries, prostitution was widespread in London.

Women could hardly make an honest living, and completely lost their reputations if

they were seduced, thus making it almost impossible to get an honest job. A “fallen

woman” had little choice but to remain on the ground. Also, men could not engage in

extramarital sex with respectable women, and commonly married late.

Probably the most visible, and thorough point in the entire novel was: life for

women during the 17th century depended on men and money. Moll?s entire focus in

the first half portion of the novel was who to marry. The entire dependence on men

and their income portrayed exactly how little freedome women were given. Since

women could also be branded for life because of one mistake, most of them turned to

prostitution or theft.

Despite all these difficulties and dangers, the picture Defoe gives of 17th century

England is not altogether black. Its inhabitants seem to enjoy themselves quite a bit

whenever they have a little money. Although the gaiety is rather frenetic, and

pleasure is rarely without attendant dangers, there seems to be no doubt in Moll’s

mind that life is well worth living. Perhaps the spice of danger is what gives Moll

Flanders, and the society it represents, such a vivid and intensely alive quality.

DANIEL DEFOE?S

MOLL FLANDERS

Maria Simeonova

Mr. Faulkner, AP English

4th hour

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