The Circle of the Seven Deadly Sins

In Daniel Defoe’s Moll Flanders

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Abstract

In this essay, I explore how Daniel Defoe in his novel *Moll Flanders* makes Moll Flanders represent the seven deadly sins. As I argue, the circle of the *seven deadly sins* is a concept in Defoe’s novel. Defoe represents Moll as a symbolic and embodied version to represent the *seven deadly sins*. Defoe does this through Moll life-journey, in which each of the seven sins, envy, greed, pride, lust, gluttony, anger and sloth are represented. Thus, Defoe’s puritan background is apparent in the harsh manner he treats Moll, and the way in which he makes her repent at the end.
I. Introduction

In 1722, Daniel Defoe’s novel *Moll Flanders* was published, the story of a woman who finally makes the right decision, as she repents from her former wickedness. She is rewarded a happier life and can expect heaven instead of hell. Moll Flanders begins her life-journey in prison, being born by a criminal mother in prison. Her life turns into a display of criminal actions. Moll is a whore, a thief and a liar. Defoe depicts her in many episodes of terrifying sinning. In the later part of the novel, she ends up in Newgate once again, but this time a criminal herself. She is horrified and thinks she does not belong there. Her life thus turns into a circle of sins, which finally make her feel remorse and repent. She asks to speak and confess to a priest at Newgate. Her repentance begins, and no matter how insincere this might appear to the modern reader, her repentance is honest, Moll reunites with her former husband, Lemy, and they travel to America and live the rest of their life there. In this way, her repentance in prison is very rewarding, as she recommences moving to America in the last episodes of the novel; this is also what David Blewett claims in the introduction to Defoe’s novel. (19)

Moreover, Defoe is able to take it for granted that his readers will understand what is happening to Moll; when she gradually entangles into wickedness, blind to her sinful position. (12) Thus, as I will argue in this essay, the circle of the seven deadly sins is a concept in Defoe’s novel, through Moll Flanders; Defoe represents her as a symbolic and embodied version to represent the seven deadly sins. Stanford M. Lyman claims that the seven deadly sins is a group of soul-destroying voyages which recognize evil and has Satan as their constant provider. (4-5) This, being very applicable to Moll’s fate, provides an explanation to why Defoe has chosen to represent the seven deadly sins as an ongoing theme throughout Moll’s life journey.
The realistic character of *Moll Flanders* is stressed by Paula Backscheider; Defoe comprises a new type of realism in his written pieces. (364) Also, as Backscheider continues to argue, one of Defoe's greater talents as an author was to explain human emotions and experiences, to display symbolism and to embody them in the various characters. This is something he did to be more specific and persuasive towards his audience. He worked through themes such as religion, financial and social issues. Defoe also went through a personal bankruptcy and was very aware of this particular situation. (534-535)

The religious concept of the *Seven Deadly Sins* can be defined as a group of strategies not to possess as an ambition to live by. According to Lennart Hauschildt, one of the authors in Carlzon's *De Sju Dödssynderna*, they are not sins in themselves; rather, they are more likely to be called qualities in one's character. Moll Flanders can be defined as a character with a lack of moral and sense of consequence; in this ways, she is a type of embodiment of these sins. It is relevant due to the fact that Moll goes through different episodes of questionable actions in her life. As Lyman claims, each time man desires this release from themselves they lose more of themselves, always desiring what they do not have. (271) Also, Lyman means that "evil is hiding, and sin lurks behind a benign persona". (270) There is no guilt in the relationship to sin and evil, but this is a missing component in the core of man's responsibility toward each other and towards society, Lyman concludes. (269)

The modern reader might think that Defoe is ironical regarding Moll, her sins and her repentance, but as Ian Watt argues, it is definitely not irony that is implied in *Moll Flanders*. This because irony explains an awareness of contradiction and utter absurdness, which is not displayed in *Moll Flanders*. (126) Thus, even though there exist ironic segments in *Moll Flanders*, these are merely due to unresolved and especially unconscious battles in Defoe's personal outlook, according to Watt. This particular battle or conflict is typical of "late Puritan disengagement of economic matters from religious and moral sanctions". (127)
Several critics show that *Moll Flanders*, through Defoe, is a product of her time. Defoe was influenced by that time in England, the early 1700s. Maximillian Novak claims that *Moll Flanders* should solely be read as an autobiographical novel where Defoe places himself in the main character, Moll. (599) This is so because Moll Flanders begun her life at Newgate and almost ended it there, and Defoe was a man who knew what it meant to be imprisoned, and therefore used this institution. (600) Defoe’s writing was produced within a time in England when crime was very frequent. Novak argues that this is why Defoe deals with this theme in his works’. (640) Ann Louise Kibbie sees Moll as an “embodiment of a purer” symbol for capitalism. She reasons that this is the cause why Defoe treats Moll’s character very harshly. (1026) What threatens Moll Flanders the most is to be back at Newgate, since this institution would have restricted her in her being and living, as Backscheider argues. (538) Also, Defoe presents this novel as a true story; he stages it as the memoirs of one person, Moll. However, it is impossible for one person to experience all that Moll experiences. Backscheider continues arguing that Defoe also understood “social alienation” very well, much thanks to his failure to conform to society. (537) This feeling is something found in Moll’s life, with her unfortunate family circumstances for example, born being by a criminal mother and abandoned. Similarly, Ian A. Bell claims that Defoe’s “sense of belonging” to a haunted minority, was something that never abandoned his mind. (15) Bell thus suggests that Defoe’s life experiences and Puritan background provided him with material to write his works. (29)

Several scholars have also pointed out that Defoe was a religious man. According to Steven Engler he belonged to the Puritans’, a very strict and cult-like group of Protestants. This group was very hard on the poor and wanted to change their “errant ways” due to their sin of inactivity, a form of sloth Engler continues. (304) It was purely God that set their moral rules, a domain where God had the sole answer. (305) Social rules were constructed, by using
God to make people obey. (306) Defoe’s puritan background is apparent through the harsh manner Defoe treats Moll. Her journey of sins is the crucial tool to show Defoe’s religiosity.

In what follows, I will discuss the seven different deadly sins and how Defoe embodies and represents them through Moll Flanders. I have chosen to present them in the chronological order that they appear in the novel. The sins are as follows: envy, greed, pride, lust, gluttony, anger and sloth. In what follows, I will present each sin in a separate paragraph with an explanation from scholars of what that particular sin represents.
2. The Circle of the Seven Deadly Sins

The first sin, Envy, is found during the early stages of the novel when Moll is abandoned by her mother and left alone without anyone to care for her. She is taken in by a gentlewoman who treats her well and teaches her the trades of the house. When Moll’s gentlewoman suddenly passes away, she is devastated; from having lived the good life with all the security one needs, she is now alone. The gentlewoman’s daughters treat Moll badly and deny her any heritage that was promised to Moll. Moll moves in with a family, neighbor of the gentlewoman. In this family Moll recognizes a feeling of being disadvantaged: “By this Means I had, as I have said above, all the Advantages of Education that I could have had, if I had been as much a Gentlewoman as they were with whom I liv’d, and in some things, I had the Advantage of my Ladies, tho’ they were my Superiors”...(56) Even though Moll is somewhat grateful for not being abandoned once again and becoming a reject of society, she cannot entirely enjoy the fact that she is not a proper gentlewoman as these daughters are. Concerning the first sin, Envy, Lyman refers to Kant who regard it as a sin aroused from a hatred of human kind. Also, it is jealousy of one’s own possessions, and spitefulness of the less fortunate. (191) Moll obviously feels envy toward the ladies she lives with, as they possess a social and economic status, she only can borrow for a little while.

The second sin, Greed, provides the reader with an episode in the early stages of Moll’s thievery, after one of her husbands’ has died. Moll reasons with herself wondering why she begun this path of sinning:

“Let ’em remember that a time of Distress is a time of dreadful Temptation, and all the Strength to resist is taken away; Poverty presses, the Soul is made Desperate by Distress, and what can be done?… but as the Devil carried me out and laid his Bait for me, so he brought me to be sure to the place, for I knew not
whither I was going or what I did… This was the Bait; and the Devil who I said laid the Snare, a readily prompted me, as if he had spoke, for I remember, and shall never forget it, ‘twas like a Voice spoken to me over my Shoulder, take the bundle; be quick; do it this Moment…” (254-255)

Her next thievery, still blaming” a snare of the devil", however still having some conscience about her sinning, is presented in the next quotation. Moll struggles with herself due to her blaming the “devil clutches”, a reoccurring theme in the novel:

“Had I gone on here I had perhaps been a true Penitent; but I had an evil Counsellor within, and he was continually prompting me to relieve my self by the worst means; so one Evening he tempted me again by the same wicked Impulse that had said, take that Bundle, to go out again and seek for what might happen. I went out now by Day-light, and wandered about I knew not whither, and in search of I knew not what, when the Devil put a Snare in my way of a dreadful Nature indeed…” (257)

In the beginning of the novel, Moll lives with a family after the death of her former benefactor. She falls in love with the son in the family and he spoils and showers her with gold coins, compliments and promises to marry her when he inherits the estates of his father. Also, he promises to support and never abandon her, a promise he does not keep very long. According to Melissa J. Gantz, it can easily be recognized that Moll falls in love with him due to his visible fortune; she is too weak to resist the temptation of wealth and prosperity. (164) This is also stated by Kibbie who argues that this transaction of gold coins to Moll, is a combination of a desire for both money and sex, which is something that continues throughout the novel. (1026). It is of great interest, according to Backscheider, that Moll herself does not view herself as a criminal. She wishes to view herself as a prominent lady.
Moll believes there are different sorts of people, even in this line of criminal activity. She likes to define herself as a better and more prominent thief, which is highly interesting considering her repentance later in the novel. A definition of greed is offered by Hauschildt who means that it is not only the question of owning and beholding, but it is also the sin of keeping it all to you. It is more important keeping it to yourself, rather than sharing with someone less fortunate. Furthermore, in a divine concept, greed is a deadly sin because it shuts humanity from any connection with God. Rather than focusing on God, your focus is on your properties and physical belongings. Another definition of greed is provided by Lyman, who means that it is a desire, a longing for the possession of something such as wealth and money. Greed is a shift of worship from God to money, which is a major reason why it is especially sinful being greedy. A longing for wealth and prosperity is a common theme in the novel; not only Moll but characters in her surroundings deal with a constant desire for this.

The third and next sin, Pride, is expressed in the novel, as Moll in her youth, expresses self-awareness. She compares herself to the gentlewoman’s daughters whom she lives with, and thinks of herself as more “handsomer than any of them….better shap’d…and sung better”. Moll defines herself as a vain woman, with some help from her surroundings:

“I had with all these the common Vanity of my sex (viz.) That being really taken for very Handsome, or if you please for a great Beauty, I very well knew it, and had as good an Opinion of myself as any body else could have of me; and particularly I lov’d to hear any body speak of it, which could not but happen to me sometimes, and was a great Satisfaction to me.”

What can be more obvious than this; Moll does not even try to hide or masque the fact that she adores herself at this stage. The moral aspect of it is more or less that she is provided with
all the confirmation a young woman can need to bear. Again, Moll discusses with herself regarding this vanity:

“From this time my Head run upon strange Things, and I may truly say, I was not myself; to have such a Gentleman talk to me of being in Love with me, and of my being such a charming Creature, as he told me I was, these were things I knew not how to bear; my vanity was elevated to the last Degree: It is true, I had my Head full of Pride, but knowing nothing of the Wickedness of the times, I had not one Thought of my own safety or of my Virtue about me; and had my young Master offer’d it at first sight, he might have taken any liberty he thought fit with me; but he did not see his Advantage, which was my happiness for that time.” (60-61)

According to Ian Watt, Moll does not even view herself as the criminal she is; her pride conquers her sanity. She discriminates criminals into two sorts, the first where the criminals are accursed and evil and the second sort is the one where she puts herself; a class of deserving people who do not deserve being treated as the first layer. Appearance is very important and she boldly expects better treatment than others. (113-114) Hauschildt means that Pride is found in someone who does not possess the ability to realize her own errors of character. (8) Lyman on the other side, means that pride can be categorized with synonyms such as “self-respect, self-esteem, self-confidence, arrogance, conceit, haughtiness, dignity…egotism and vanity”. (135) These are all characteristics found in Moll’s character. Lyman continues by focusing on the Puritan view of this sin. He argues that a follower of this religious variety had to “be on guard against the pride in his heart or in his head that might be a token of Satan’s subtle subversion”. Moll certainly suffers from grave pride in her younger years, blind to her own self-love. (166)
Lust, the fourth sin, was according to the Puritans especially agonizing, as men of this religious group were tormented by this sin. Lyman refers to Michael Wigglesworth, a role model and “snob of Puritan virtue.” As Lyman states, Wigglesworth wrote texts about Lust and was gravely concerned that God would not love him, whereas he wanted help from divine powers to relieve him from sinful thoughts of lust. (74) The Puritans viewed human affection as a rival to God, and ministers of this church warned their followers to love each other too much, since the greatest love was the love for God himself. (75) One of Moll’s men, the Bath husband, was indeed married but not with Moll. He treated her with great respect and did not force himself on her or craved a sexual relation, even though they were engaged in a romantic affair. In what follows it is the day after Moll and he have been drinking and finally engaged in a sexual relation. She gravely questions herself what she has done. She moralizes this quite normal action for two people in love; there is much of shame involved for her:

“Thus the Government of our Virtue was broken, and I exchang’d the Place of Friend for that unmusical harshsounding Title of Whore. In the morning we were both at our Penitentials; I cried very heartily, he express’d himself very sorry; but that was all either of us could do at that time; and the way being thus clear’d, and the bars of Virtue and conscience thus removed, we had the less difficulty afterwards to struggle with.” (168)

Another episode is when Moll has just met with a man who has paid for Moll. The client also refers to the Devil as the one to accuse for their actions. This is a theme throughout the novel; the Devil is used as a scapegoat, blamed for human sinning:

“He seem’d to reflect upon himself that he should be the first Person to lead me into that, which he assur’d me he never intended to do himself; and it touch’d
him a little, *he said*, that he should be the Cause of his own Sin, and mine too: He would often make just Reflections also upon the Crime itself, and upon the particular Circumstances of it, with respect to himself; how Wine introduc’d the Inclinations, how the Devil led him to the Place, and found out an Object to tempt him, and he made the Moral always himself". (307)

Lust, is the sin that seems to be the longest recognized, and therefore the sin that is most well known. Lyman argues that this particular sin should be defined as an “overmastering appetite” or craving for something. It can also be portrayed as a sin associated with an uncontrollable craving for sex. (53) Usually this craving comes at the worst possible time, an impulse which is not at all requested. In a Christian context, “maintenance of sexual purity was of paramount importance”. (59) In the episodes above, Moll both lies with a married man and with a random customer during her prostitute days. A shame of Lust is represented in both episodes, however in different manners. In the first, we can suppose that the craving for a bodily relation is too strong to resist. In the second one, they blame nothing but themselves for their actions.

The next sin is Gluttony, which is the fifth one. In the following passage, Moll displays a naive world perception; she is stealing at every possibility given. She reasons with herself and the reader, trying to make her actions more acceptable and legitimate. Moll’s friend has just been sentenced of thievery and Moll feels quite worried and distracted about this:

“In this condition, harden’d by Success, and resolving to go on, I fell into the Snare in which I was appointed to meet with my last Reward for this kind of Life: But even this was not yet, for I met with several successful Adventures more in this way of being undone. I remain with my Governess, who was for a
while really concern'd for the Misfortune of my Comrade that had been hang'd....” (273)

At another point, Moll meets with a gentleman and later robs him in his coach. Moll resents him, his character and moral, all this in order to make her sin less awful. Once again, projecting her own guilt in the thievery, she laughs at him being so stupid as to pick her up:

“There is nothing so absurd, so surfeiting, so ridiculous as a Man heated by Wine in his head, and a wicked Gust in his Inclination together; he is in the possession of two Devils at once, and can more govern himself... his very Sense is blinded by its own Rage, and he acts he is Drunk already; picking up a common Woman, without regard to what she is, or who she is; whether Sound or rotten, Clean or Unclean; whether Ugly or Handsome, wheter Old or Young, and so blinded, as not really to distinguish; such a Man is worse than Lunatick; prompted by his vicious corrupted Head he no more knows what he is doing than this Wretch of mine knew when I pick’d his Pocket of his Watch and his Purse of Gold. (294)... would have been glad to have gotten him Home, and have taken care of him till he was restor’d to himself; and then with what Shame and Regret would he look back upon himself? how would he reproach himself with associating himself with a Whore? pick’d up in the worst of all Holes, he Cloister, among the Dirt and Filth...” (295)

After some time being a thief, and also merely surviving a court trial, being charged of thievery, Moll recognizes her sudden welfare and boasts about it. However, she continues her illegal trade and takes every opportunity to steal, being quite bold:

“I was now in good Circumstances indeed, if I could have known my time for leaving off, and my Governess often said I was the richest of the Trade in
England, and so I believe I was; for I had 700 l. by me in Money, besides
Cloaths, Rings, some Plate, and two gold Watches, and all of them stol’n, for I
had innumerable Jobbs besides these I have mention’d... I was not long after the
Affair with the Mercer was made up, that I went out in an Equipage quite
different from any I had ever appear’d in before; I dress’d myself like a Beggar
Woman, in the coarsest and most despicable Rags I could get, and I walk’d
about peering, and peeping into every Door and Window...” (325)

Gluttony leads to moral ambiguity and it can be put under the condition of a sense of free
choice, as other sins can as well. Moll actually blames the man she robs, for her stealing from
him. She is incapable of taking any responsibility for her actions. She lacks any sense of self
criticism and displays cruelty. Lyman continues this argument with claiming that gluttony can
depend on biological urges; however if it is due to political, social, economic or personal
choice, it is to be defined purely as a sin. Someone accused of this sin can argue that it is
because of “lack of control, enslavement to natural or social directives”. (212-213) Lyman
portrays a very clear example of a person who on his way to confession is lured into a pub on
the way, becomes intoxicated, dips into a two-day hangover, and absolves when he finally
drags himself to Repentance. (214) This example by Lyman shows quite vividly how one
easily can relieve oneself from sin, just by repentance. The sinning part is secondary; as long
as you confess you can be free of guilt, something Moll later on will

The sixth sin, Wrath also called Anger, is most clearly represented when one of
Moll’s female acquaintances has a relationship with a man who does not treat her very well.
Moll gives her advice how to revenge his bad behavior towards her:

“However, she lissened very willingly to my offer of Advice; so I told her that
the first thing she ought to do, was a piece of Justice to herself; namely, that
whereas she had been told by several People, that he had reported among the Ladies that he had left her, and pretended to give the Advantage of the Negative to himself; she should take care to have it well spread among the Women, which she could not fail of an Opportunity to do in a Neighborhood, so addicted to Family News, as that she liv’d in was, that she had enquired into his Circumstances, and found he was not the Man as to Estate he pretended to be:

Let them be told Madam, said I, that you expected, and that you thought it was not safe to meddle with him, that you heard he was of an ill Temper...for telling her Story in general to a Couple of Gossips in the neighborhood, it was the Chat of the Tea Table all over that part of the Town, and I met with it where ever I visited: Also, as it was known that I was Acquainted with the young Lady herself, my Opinion was ask’d very often, and I confirm’d it with all the necessary Aggravations, and set out his Character in the blackest Colours...

(114-115)

The consequences of Moll’s advice are rather powerful; the Captain is made a laughingstock on several social occasions. This leads to him feeling unwanted and dissatisfied in his former social standard, and he merely wants to vanish, escaping from the shame he feels as a consequence of Moll’s revenge. After all this has passed, he writes Moll’s friend many loving and dear letters, which give her the satisfaction of being able to deny him. This sin, called Wrath or Anger, is according to Lyman, a response to humiliation, (111) and also a loss of status. (115). Moll takes away the Captain’s status in society and forces him to face his wrong behavior toward Moll’s friend. This sin can also lead inward, which can lead to other feelings such as “grief, sorrow, and bitterness,” as Lyman claims. (116) The emotional state of jealousy is an angry reaction to a lost self-esteem, something the Captain most certainly experienced.
The last sin, Sloth, which also concludes the circle of sins, is most easily explained through an episode when Moll is taken back to the prison Newgate for thievery. Here, Moll has a hard time considering her own responsibility for this consequence of imprisonment, and the circle of sins begins to close. She realizes her own sensitivity for this particular location; it is her biggest fear due to several reasons, such as her birth there and her lack of awareness of her actions as a criminal:

“I was carried to Newgate, that horrid Place! my very Blood chills at the mention of its Name; the Place, where so many of my Comrades had been lock’d up, and from whence they went to the fatal Tree, the Place where my Mother suffered so deeply, where I was brought into the World, and from (348) whence I expected no Redemption, but by an infamous Death: To conclude, the Place that had so long expected me…. The place seem an Emblem of Hell itself… I repented heartily of all my Life past, but that Repentance yielded me no Satisfaction, no Peace, no not in the least, because, as I said to myself; it was repenting after the Power of farther Sinning was taken away…” (349)

Moll continues moaning, and she afterwards turns to greater powers, a divine request, feeling sorry for herself being imprisoned again. She is in utter despair and blames her sinning on the Devil’s clutches. Moll worries that God will not forgive her; after all, she realizes some failure on her behalf. The repentance begins and Moll reflects on her former mischief:

“O! if I had but been sent to any Place in the world, and not to Newgate, I should have thought myself happy”…“They thought the Devil had help’d me they said, that I had reign’d so long, they expected me there many Years ago, and was I come at last? then they flouted me with my Dejections, welcom’d me to the Place, wish’d me Joy…” (350)
When the repentance begins, there is a prison minister who helps her to reach this point. They meet several times and discuss her former, very sinful, life. She is desperate and cries out to God:

“...Confessing my Sins to God, and begging Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ; I was overwhelm’d with the Sense of my Condition, being try’d for my Life, and being sure to be Condemn’d, and then I was as sure to be Executed, and on this Account, I cry’d out all Night, Lord! what will become of me? Lord! what shall I do? Lord! I shall be hang’d, Lord have mercy upon me, and the like.” (360)

Moll’s lack of awareness and responsibility for her crimes is thus an example of the sin Sloth. The term itself according to Lyman, has its origin in the Latin term acedia which means “without care”. The term was used to refer to the suffering within religious and spiritual people, especially monks, when they became apathetic to their duties and obligations to God. As Lyman continues to point out, sloth has a number of distinctive components among which we can find the following characteristics: “affectlessness, a lack of any feeling about self or other, a mind-state that gives rise to boredom, rancor, apathy, and a passive inert or sluggish mentation”. (5) These are all characteristics that can be found in Moll and her life journey. (8) According to Engler, sloth opens up for the devil to do his evil job (314), which is a recurrent theme in the novel; the devil’s work is visible in Moll’s sinning.
3. Conclusion

As I have argued in this essay, Moll Flander’s life is represented by Defoe through the seven deadly sins. She is born at Newgate by her criminal mother, and ends up a criminal herself in the end. Moll is an embodiment of the seven deadly sins. It is possible to recognize how Moll Flanders represents Defoe’s image of these sins. Each sin is displayed and represented throughout Moll’s life. The circle is closed through Moll’s journey through each of the seven sins, first born in Newgate, and later ending up there herself, fearful of her own life almost being sentenced to death. Due to her repentance, she avoids this fate and can go back to America and get a better life with her former husband, Jemy.

In the early part of the novel, Moll lived with a good family and observing the daughters she envied them. Her circle of sinning begins here and continues throughout the novel. Moll’s greed is shown through her reflecting about her thievery; she believes she is a thief due to the Devil and not because of herself. She becomes pride and this due to compliments from others and her self-love blossoms. Moll also believes she is a better criminal; or rather, she regards herself as a deserving criminal. Lust, as the next sin, is the sin most difficult to the Puritans. Moll, who is a prostitute for a while, meets a man who also blames the Devil for their actions. What occurs next is the sin of Gluttony, where Moll is picked up by a gentleman in a coach; she robs him and blames him for being naïve enough to randomly pick up a strange woman. Moll’s actions here are rather selfish and have reached a point where she does not take into account others’ feelings and perspectives. The next sin, Anger or Wrath, is displayed through an episode where Moll help a friend to revenge a man who has treated her badly. The final sin, Sloth, is the sin that concludes the circle of sins. Here Moll is imprisoned at Newgate, the place where her life journey begin; she is charged of thievery and can expect a death sentence. Moll’s worst nightmare has come true. What happens next is that she begins to speak and repent with a minister in the prison. Thus, the circle is closed.

As I have shown, Defoe was a product of his time; his personal religious beliefs were of great importance and influenced him to write this novel. Defoe’s Puritan background no doubt also causes some better understanding to why he makes Moll suffer and sin. Moll’s biggest fear, being imprisoned, is something very well experienced by Defoe. He can also understand social alienation quite well, as Backscheider argues. Obviously, one person cannot experience all the situations Moll did in her life, but nonetheless some of her experiences can be valued as realistic. One of the reasons why Defoe chose to portray Moll through various criminal
acts, is due to the climate in England in the early 1700s. As Novak claims, crime was very frequent during this time. This might be one reason why Defoe chose to write about this specific theme; however, Moll does not merely experience criminality. She can also be viewed as a victim of certain harsh circumstances, which she cannot influence, especially in her younger years. According to Engler, Defoe with his Puritan background thought it was sufficient to control people with social rules and to demand them to obey only God.
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