

STYLE AND CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF *MOLL FLANDERS* BY DANIEL DEFOE

*Moll Flanders* is a novel about a woman written by a man at the beginning of the 18th century, when women's inner lives were not so openly displayed and discussed as they are today, in mass media and books as well as privately. And Moll is not especially womanly - she could just as well have been a man (and when middle-aged she for a while disguises herself as a man). In my opinion, it shines through that the author is a man, because of the almost total lack of emotion in the novel.

The style in the book is very matter-of-fact with no passionate feelings, the content does not evoke any tears or laughs, and the reader is not moved in any way. Moll even admits this herself several times, e.g.: "He spoke this in so much more moving terms than it is possible for me to express" (p. 58), "It is impossible to express the horror of my soul all the while I did it" (181). And even when she speaks in moving terms herself, she only tells us that she does so, not what she says: "I spoke with more courage than I thought I could have done, and in such moving tone (...) that I could see it moved other to tears that heard me" (268). But since we do not know what she actually said, it leaves us cold.

The story is told simply by what people say and do. There is no inner monologue, few thoughts, many "I told him", "he told me", and only hints to what people may feel inside, e.g. "He looked a little disturbed" (138). Thus we cannot follow any development in Moll's personality, and we would not even know that she grows from a little girl to an old woman if we were not at intervals told about her age, or how many years something lasts. She goes through a great many changes in her life: she was brought up in the mayor's house, her mother having been deported to the USA soon after Moll's birth. She is seduced by one of the sons in the family, marries the other, and leads a respectable life for some years, re-marries several times after her first husband's death, turns poor, becomes a

pickpocket, thief and whore, is deported to the USA, sets up as planter, and spends her remaining years in penitence and prosperity. But we are told all of this, there is nothing for us to read between the lines, no conclusions for us to make.

There are no descriptions of surroundings, the reader does not get any explanatory depictions of towns, houses etc. And the characters' looks are not described at all. These few words are all we get to know at the beginning of the story about how Moll herself looks: "...being really taken for very handsome, or if you please for a great beauty" (24). Later we are informed a couple of times that she has not lost her beauty, and that she has charms. After 202 pages we are told that she is tall. We do not even know if she is blond or dark! The two young men that she first went to bed with are introduced with: "The lady in the house where I was, had two sons, young gentlemen of extraordinary parts and behaviour" (24-25). Not a word about their looks, or about how anybody in the book looks. I think a female writer would have described the protagonist's first lover in detail.

The lack of characteristics of the individuals, both in appearance and personality, makes it almost impossible to make a character analysis.

Furthermore, the text is not divided in any way - no chapters or even any space or stars between paragraphs to show that something new begins, the whole book is just one long text from beginning to end. I cannot think of any satisfactory explanation for this. The sentences are also very long, the longest consisting of 277 words (!) (283-84). Maybe Defoe considered this flow of words to be a female characteristic.

One expression that is used repeatedly throughout the book is "as above", to refer to something already mentioned. Not "as mentioned above" or "as I have related above", simply "as above". This stylistic device, together with the a little dry, prosaic tone, helps create a feeling of an objective autobiography and not the (in the 1720s at least, surely) erotic novel that it is.

To sum up, *Moll Flanders* is a dispassionate, matter-of-fact novel that lacks emotions and thoughts as well as descriptions

of both surroundings and people, and the story is taken forward only with the help of people's speech and actions. This does not make it a bad novel, on the contrary, but if, as it is often said, logic is a male characteristic and passion a female one, *Moll Flanders* cannot delude any reader into thinking that she is a woman.

LITERATURE: Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders*. London: Bestseller Library, 1959.