***Ending of the Novel***

In T*he Fortunes and Misfortunes of the famous Moll Flande*rs author Daniel Defoe takes pains to have Moll give a rigorous inventory of her net worth following each of her many marriages or affairs. This obsession with capital worth is certainly not coincidental considering that England was in the midst of transforming into a nation dominated by the rights of property, and that marriage was the only property transaction available to a woman interested in keeping herself one step away from poverty or debtors prison. Understanding the mushrooming attachment to property's increasing value during Defoe's time is vital for anyone attempting to fully understand the novel's preoccupation with capitalistic trade, and especially its association of trade with the convention of marriage.

Consider that at the time Daniel Defoe wrote Moll Flanders there existed in England essentially no difference in the punishment received by those who committed theft and those who committed murder. All the while, of course, a woman's rights to property were for all practical purposes null and void. A woman's opportunity for marrying into money was greatly dependent upon how much wealth she could bring to the marriage. Moll Flanders takes precious little time to grasp and embrace this relationship. Like many of her real-life contemporaries, Moll Flanders quickly comprehends that money is the thing, and the mere possession of money is really the one thing that makes a woman agreeable to a man when marriage is up for consideration.

As anyone who has seen any of the recent Jane Austen movie adaptations has probably grasped, marriage was indeed little more than just another financial transaction in the world in which Moll Flanders inhabited. In fact, all of the women, and most of the men, are nothing short of obsessed with increasing their fortunes by virtue of the sacred institution. *Moll Flanders*-the novel-appears to be sanctioning this practice as an honest method of keeping a woman financially stable. Consider that Moll is reduced to committing crime to stay solvent only after she has begun to lose her sexual attractiveness. The implicit prediction here is that if Moll had only been able to enact a transaction with a man who was able to live long enough, or not run away, or make bad business decisions that she might never have fallen into her life of wickedness. When Moll Flanders takes those painstaking inventories after each of her [relationships](http://voices.yahoo.com/theme/1394/relationships.html) fail, she I is proving herself keenly aware of the fact that adding whatever wealth she can to her greatest possession-her attractiveness and sexual desirability-is of the utmost importance in ensuring that she can continue to do the one thing that will prevent her from falling into abject poverty: landing another husband.

Moll Flanders' attitude at the end of the novel appears to be in perfect accord with her attitude throughout the book; while seeming to be in complete juxtaposition to the promises made in the preface that hers is a story from which the moral is more important than the fable. The apparent lack of a moral, however, seems to be one more case of Defoe's ironic indictment of capitalism and consumerism, most specifically how they relate to women in England. For a cogent critical analysis of this novel, it's important to understand how Defoe's interest is in the morality of capitalism as it serves women in England at the time.

By novel's end Moll Flanders has all but forgotten her embrace of Christianity and her desire to do penance for her past crimes as she almost immediately accepts bribery as her way of getting out of Newgate and getting to America in the finest class possible. She also apparently has no compunction about using the gains she got through her life of crime to further her career as an American plantation owner. Nor does she seem to mind lying to her son about her state of matrimony. Not only is she still continuing her questionable moral code of living, but by the end of the novel, Moll Flanders is living in good heart and health, which seems to be a direct contradiction of Daniel Defoe's claim that no villain exists in the novel that does not meet either an unhappy end or is redeemed through penitence.

A contradiction, that is, unless one assumes that the real moral lesson Daniel Defoe is providing here is that there exists no moral component to capitalism when applied to any British woman not to the manor born. By having Moll Flanders end up successful, happy and, most importantly, alive at a story which has seen her earn money as a bride willingly engaged in a loveless marriage, as a whore, as a mistress, as a thief-in every way except as an honest worker-the moral of the story doesn't seem to rest on Moll's penitence, as was promised, but rather on the fact that the only means available to Moll of producing enough capital to assure herself of living the kind life she aspired to was a series of financial transactions which were demeaning to her.

It is significant that it is only when Moll Flanders reaches America that she achieves long-lasting financial stability without having to resort to whoredom or thievery. In America, she can live out the dream of being a property owner, something which would be forever denied her in England because of the accident of her birth. Daniel Defoe seems relatively unconcerned with Moll's personal morality, choosing instead to relate it to the larger concern of the immorality inherent in the rising English system of capitalism and consumerism which clearly seemed determine to leave women with very little choice in terms of morality if they aspired to live better than their circumstances of birth proscribed.