



Performativity in *Moll Flanders*: Autonomy and Relationship

June Young Oh* · Hye-Soo Lee**

I. Introduction

While Moll Flanders, a spunky heroine of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, is usually called a typical modern individual in that "she owes it to herself to achieve the highest economic and social rewards, and in using every method to carry out her resolve" (Watt, *The Rise* 105), she recalls not only positive values but also negative aspects of an individual who is zealously faithful to the promises of individualism. For Moll Flanders' weakness lies in the same spot that makes the text so enchanting, that is, the heroine's childlike energy that propels her to what she wants without hesitation. She does not contemplate what the consequence of her actions will be and runs headlong toward her target. If this proves to be an effective manner in meeting her desires, however, it also inimically affects the others around her. After all, Moll "grew Rich, liv'd Honest,

* First author

** Corresponding author

and died a Penitent”¹⁾ mostly by heaping stolen goods and deceiving other people. Thus if her delightful prosperity is fundamentally based on immorality and illegality, the total value of Moll Flanders’s individualism is almost always double-sided.

Critics have bifurcated on Defoe’s attitude toward the negative facets of Moll’s individualism, which constitutes what is called an “irony debate.” This debate is pivotal in understanding both Defoe and *Moll Flanders* since Defoe’s distance toward Moll serves an index of his idea of individualism. On one hand, there are critics who argue that Moll’s imperfection does not bother Defoe. For instance, when Mark Schorer claims that Defoe “is not telling *about* Moll Flanders, he *is* Moll Flanders” (xi), he describes Moll as a character who devotedly takes over her author’s value system. According to him, the collateral damages caused by Moll’s mercantile spirit might be a limit of individualism yet it is not Defoe’s point. Ian Watt’s view of *Moll Flanders* is in a similar vein to Schorer’s while it may be more subtle and probably more persuasive than the former. Watt contends that even if Defoe occasionally distances himself from Moll, he does not try to make *Moll Flanders* a work of irony (“Critical Fortunes” 120). Moll’s shortcomings are *revealed* but not exactly *portrayed* (*The Rise* 146, italics added). Defoe certainly presents a character who is motivated by possessive individualism but he does not seem to be aware of its limit as much as to be ironic about it.

On the other hand, critics who assert Defoe’s ironic distance from Moll suggest that the disturbing aspects of her are an indication of Defoe’s

1) This description is part of the complete title of what we now usually call *Moll Flanders*: *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c. Who was Born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu’d Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv’d Honest, and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums.*

consciousness about the limitation of modern individualism. Maximilian E. Novak, one of the influential critics who represent this camp, writes that Moll works as an “Indifferent Monitor,” a criminal after all despite the extent of her sincerity and morality (360). According to him, Moll’s ambiguous judgment of her own action is itself a technique Defoe deliberately uses to dissociate himself from Moll’s values. Overall, “pro-ironists” take issue with Moll’s lack of certain “proper” emotions and her inconsistency. Though they try to be wary not to call her “insensibility” immorality and her “inconsistency” abnormality, these aspects of Moll are still the objects of chastisement, the indelibly erring features that the author cannot dispense with for a reproachable character like Moll. As this paper will show, however, Defoe does not let Moll’s “insensibility” and “inconsistency” exhaust her charming vivacity or cancel her energetic individuality out. Moll’s insensibility and inconsistency are actually at the core of her individualism: her compelling attraction as well as her surviving technique.

This paper explores how the irony debate on Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* is intricately tied to two distinct takes of Moll’s “performativity”, and how “performativity” could work as a crucial frame through which we understand Moll, *Moll Flanders*, and even Defoe. Unlike Shorer, we can say that Defoe is *not* exactly Moll, and we would also assert that Defoe might have an ironic distance from Moll more than what Watt suggests. Having said that, however, pro-ironist’s position that Moll does not feel a proper and consistent emotion and that Defoe presents her as a negative figure needs to be reconsidered when we see Moll’s lack of consistency and psychological depth not so much as a failing of a novelistic character but as a characteristic of a new type of modern performing individual. For the absence of “true” emotions or coherent behaviors, which pro-ironists indicate as a decisive failing of Moll, is a critical feature of performativity in the end.

My account of performativity here is largely indebted to two influential

scholars, Stephen Greenblatt and Judith Butler. Greenblatt's discussion of "self-fashioning" helps explain the relationship of performance and individualism. Greenblatt calls a process in which a person creates his social persona or theatrical identity "self-fashioning" and argues that this is an essential source and feature of the rise of individualism. According to him, the nobility constructed itself mostly through social decorum in the period of the Renaissance, and this act of fashioning oneself constituted a genesis of the notion of an individual. The foundation of selfhood lies in one's performance fit to her/his specific status since the way s/he presents her/himself to the audience decides whether s/he is a true and beautiful aristocrat.

Judith Butler revisits the idea of performativity as a way to account for gender identity. According to her, the presumed "natural" gender is actually "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts*" (179). Butler suggests that there is no authentic gender identity beyond performativity; since gender is just a seemingly coherent quality constructed by continuous role-playings, there is no distinction between originals and imitations. Butler's argumentation carries conventional and subversive ramifications at once. While the "stylized repetition of acts" is a sediment of social norms that make one's gender performativity "ritual social dramas" on the one hand (178), it can also open up a new and subversive possibility through parodying, deforming, or quitting on the other hand (179). If one can "institute" an identity by performance, one also has power to deviate from conventional social norms and to create a new gender identity.

While Butler focuses on gender identity mostly, the implication of the idea that one's ontologically fixed identity is variable by virtue of performances can go as far as to challenge the very concept of identity. Here performativity works as a signature of the possibility of a changing identity, which sets one free from a god-given and inflexible self. Or, to put it in a crude way, one can be the person

s/he is performing by e.g. wearing a mask or putting on different clothes. Moll is an embodiment of (the possibility of) performativity from her childhood to the end of the story. She appropriates a variety of disguises which become her “true” identity at the very moment. Performativity works as an authority, survival, or liberation for Moll many times. To look at Moll with a frame of performativity is particularly crucial since performativity is the most important and cardinal resource she turns to in order to be an autonomous individual. Fashioning up an identity, or a series of identities, Moll learns a way to be an individual.

There are several critics who have noticed the importance of Moll’s performativity as a significant possibility for a new female identity. For instance, John Richetti finds a defiant energy in a portrait of a character out of categorization like Moll. He explains that Defoe is challenging the limit of patriarchal society through a portrayal of a woman who has been cut loose of the social restriction, “[the] binding finality of marriage and the family” (23), which “turn[s] into a pure opportunity for free-floating selfhood” (33). Although Richetti does not directly refer to the concept of performativity here, he captures a crucial feature of Moll’s performative identity and its significance by capturing the subversive meanings behind Moll’s deviation.

David Marshall may be the most important critic that brings up the issue of Moll’s performativity. In *The Figure of Theatre*, Marshall suggests that Defoe’s characters’ various impersonations through disguises are actually the author’s strategy to sustain himself in the middle of anxieties as a puritan novelist. In a puritan tradition where fabrications were generally considered profane and sacrilegious, writing a novel must have been a severe strain on a dissenter like Defoe. What Defoe did was to portray his shifting characters in terms that are conventionally used to criticize the scene of the theater. For theatre has long been regarded as a symbol of impious fabrications in the puritan tradition. Marshall points out that the unattractive identities usually associated with actresses, such as

whore, thief, gypsy, or mistress, come together to make the identity of Moll Flanders (109). Interestingly, however, he finds Defoe's fascination with theatricality in the latter's representation of theatrical characteristics. Moll is described as a living person who embodies a liberating energy of theatricality rather than an ordinary criminal from whom the reader should learn moral lessons. Moll's performativity feels rather charming than threatening; it looks rather attractive than repulsive, according to Marshall.

While Marshall's discussion is based on the relationship between the construction of Moll's identity and theatricality, my analysis of *Moll Flanders* aims to grasp Moll's performativity as a core of her individualism. *Moll Flanders* illustrates Defoe's understanding of what it is to be an individual in a modern society particularly through the eponymous heroine's performativity. Moll's quixotic individualism and the episodic structure of the text are more than the product of Defoe's "casual attitude" toward his work, as Watt claims (*The Rise* 111). Defoe's text carefully maneuvers to celebrate the exuberant vigor of individualism. Even if an individual who performs continuously and stands alone in the world should meet some repercussions, the price she needs to pay for her individualism does not mar or exhaust the heroine's vitality in *Moll Flanders*.

I will explore two points in the main part. First, I examine Moll's performativity as her will to autonomy, a core ideology of individualism, and attempt to rethink her supposedly shallow disguises and masks. Then I take a look at the consequence of her performativity particularly in terms of relationships, and also examine how Moll's seemingly contradictory desire of hiding and revealing her identity propels her forward endlessly. In the concluding part, I briefly discuss what it means to play a "conqueror" role in the context of America and the happy ending.

II. An “Artist” of Identity: Autonomy and Performativity

Despite a wide range of definition of individualism, a great respect for the right of defining oneself lies at the heart of individualism, and Moll’s performativity is a theatrical celebration of this right. For Moll, a variety of disguises and masks mean more than tools by which she hides her “real” identity or to escape from blames. If a person becomes an individual by fashioning up a persona that speaks to the world, as Greenblatt suggests, Moll invites many personas as for her identity not only to confirm but also to acclaim her individualism.

The full and long description of Moll’s childhood, particularly in comparison with Roxana’s passing counterpart, implies that Moll’s performativity launches as a way to ensure her autonomy against outer forces. As an orphan, young Moll is at the mercy of external circumstances; it is not in her power to decide whether she is adored or deserted, at home or on streets, or a beggar or a gentlewoman. Facing the destiny of a servant, which she interprets as a life of “frightful” misery, Moll refuses to take her bound identity but instead declares that she would be a “gentlewoman” (*Moll Flanders* 10).²⁾ This is a critical moment in which Moll succeeds in deviating from the external oppressive forces by choosing who she is. To young Moll, this act seems to allow her to possess an authority to decide her own value, making her an autonomous being who lets no external influence step on her inalienable rights.

Of course, to regard Moll’s choice of identity as a real exhibition of her autonomy is anything but persuasive when we know that Moll is irresistibly pushed into the situation and that whatever identity she chooses, she actually runs into being “a victim of circumstances” (Watt, *The Rise* 106). Interestingly,

2) Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011). All references to the text hereafter are to this edition.

however, when Moll embraces the unfavorable given conditions, what was once oppressive seems to cease to be so threatening but become a locus of opportunities. At the same time, however, Defoe shrewdly posits a need for relationship in the symbolic moment of her burgeoning individualism, which demonstrates his keen insight into individualism. If we do not presuppose that Moll's manipulative shrewdness is not unreliable altogether, we can see that her wish to be a gentlewoman is neither a sign of her dogged hunger for wealth nor of a lucid irony that comically foreshadows her becoming a mistress. Rather her wish to be a gentlewoman is not exactly a yearning for bourgeois comfort or respectability, as Dorothy Van Ghent notes (42). For what Moll means by gentlewoman is not only a person who is "able to get [her] bread by [her] own work" (12) but also a woman who is able to make her own decision like, in Moll's case, to be with the person she loves: she pleads to her "Nurse," her first mother figure, "let me but live with you" (11). Here, Moll is a little girl scared to death about the situation she is put into. Moll's wish to be a gentlewoman has more to do with her need for love than with her desire to go upward in class mobility.

Moll's desire for love explains why she falls so weakly at the seduction of the elder brother in Colchester. When he gives money to her with a scheme to win her body over, Moll interprets it as a symbol and promise of love. Here again her infatuation with money implies not so much that she easily succumbs to glaring wealth but that she is as naïve as to jump into loving this kind of man. At first Moll was "[C]onfounded" at the sight of money he has given to her but she soon "began to be so elevated," and even "told the Guineas over and over a thousand times a Day" (20-22). Likewise, his parting gift of money moves Moll to tears not because she is irredeemably corrupted but because this gesture means love to her. As Juliet McMaster mentions in her study of Moll's notion of love and money, Moll's equation of love and money reflects Defoe's ironic attitude towards

mercenary values that take over the place of spiritual and moral considerations (141). In a confusion of love and money, Moll heads toward a doomed disappointment.

Sick of risking her life to uncertain human relationships now, Moll pulls herself out of the illusion of love and begins to conceive her life as a survival game: "I had been trick'd once by *that Cheat* call'd LOVE, but the Game was over" (51). Without hope for love, what she now counts as a weapon for her survival are two things. One is money that will never betray her; the other is the possibility to forge up a new identity.

For if the commissioners were to have been inform'd where I was, I should have been fetch'd up, and examin'd upon Oath, and all I had sav'd be taken away from me.

Upon these Apprehensions the first thing I did, was to go quite out of my Knowledge, and go by another Name: . . . drest me up in the Habit of a Widow, and call'd myself Mrs. *Flanders*. (54)

In short, the Widow, they said, had no Money.

I resolv'd therefore, as to the State of my present Circumstances; that it was absolutely Necessary to change my Station, and make a new Appearance in some other Place where I was not known, and even to pass by another Name if I found Occasion. (64)

Whenever she is on the verge of being swayed by external forces, Moll makes a list of her whole properties in detail, from plates and clothes to gold and guineas, and then decides to go by another name in another place. Indeed, Moll Flanders is a collection of miscellaneous identities. She becomes a duchess with well-dressed servants and flashy carriages, a humble and honest widow in black plain clothes, a noble lady, a male, a beggar, a maid, or a whore throughout the narrative. And Moll's every identity is her survival tactic through which she escapes from impending threats or makes use of any passing chances.

Interestingly, Moll's performativity is gradually transformed into liberation rather than survival since she seems to enjoy the situation and even seeks for a chance to exert her performativity. Critics like Koonce say that Moll's assertion to the "necessity" to continue her thieving and whoring even when she is "the richest of the Trade, in England" (211) is a clear indication of Defoe's ironic attitude toward Moll (388). Yet here her need lies not so much in finance or good reputation but in the thrill of performativity itself. Pleasure that comes from knowing that she is the authority of her identity and that she is a sole director of her selfhood seems to enrapture her more than anything else. Thus by the time she reaches the highest skills of a thief, Moll plays with the notion of an identity, sometimes taking the once abhorred roles of a servant or a whore, sometimes bragging her own self-control in taking various identities; she becomes "the greatest Artist" of her own fate (179). Contradictions and disparities between identities that she chooses only nourish her performativity. All in all, her performativity stands as a celebration of the freedom she achieves from the social restriction and oppression, which forced her to be a "poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World, as was my Fate" (8).

To say that Moll's individualism takes the form of performativity does not wholly mean, however, that she is self-conscious about her drive for autonomy. Rather, Moll seems to be only vaguely aware of her motives, conceiving them usually as "inclinations" or "impulses." She constantly calls her desire to steal or disguise "Wickedness" designed by the "devil" because it is a power she cannot understand (Zimmerman 99). There is no "authentic" Moll who instructs herself which mask to put on day by day. She learns by experience and is "surprised by herself with herself," as Price mentions (3). Moll adapts herself to the environment presented before her like a chameleon of instincts. Moreover, there is no ultimate goal in Moll's performativity. For Moll, every performance is

authentic and authoritative. Every performance is not negligible for Moll, even in the comic episode of stealing a large horse and floundering afterwards not knowing what to do with it.³⁾

As the narrative proceeds, however, this stimulating game of survival intoxicates Moll. Ironically Moll faces the danger of losing the wheel of herself in her exaggerated exaltation of self-authority. Even when she knows she has to quit stealing, she finds herself still hunting down the streets venturing for another opportunity: “as to the Arguments which my Reason dictated for perswading me to lay down, Avarice stept in and said, go on, go on” (170). Performativity now preempts her will and overwhelms her. In dizzy shifts of roles, the energy of performance only survives while the actor fades into its dazzling impression.

Gary Hentzi borrows the idea of repetition compulsion from Sigmund Freud to explain that death instinct, “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier stage of things”, is behind Moll’s irrational behaviors (30). According to him, Moll being in the Newgate prison is her symbolic death since it is the place of “an earlier stage,” the birth place, of Moll. While Hentzi restricts the concept of repetition compulsion just to an analysis of Moll’s career as a thief, a psychoanalytic perspective could be more helpful in our understanding of the relation of Moll’s performativity and her aspiration for autonomy. As Freud persuasively explains, repetition compulsion can be traced back to a child’s behavior with a purpose to become an active agent of a helpless situation (11). Freud finds that a child is trying to master the dreadful sensation of losing his mother in a play of *fort-da*, a repetitive action of throwing and reeling a toy. In

3) When Moll lists proudly her many episodes of thieving, she does not seem to have a screen process in order to make her narrative more audacious and terrific. The point of Moll’s story is not in the development of her ability but in reporting every performance with equal emphasis. There is no performance too insignificant to be omitted, and the episode of stealing a horse shows that even a small and shameful identity is as authentic as grandeur one.

a sense, a series of Moll's stealing seem to work with the similar machination of repetition compulsion. Once a passive victim of circumstances, she now looks for a chance to take pleasure by taking a charge into a dangerous situation, just as the child is fascinated with his control over his toy. In other words, she is playing a game of *fort-da* with herself; by re-living the situation over and over again, Moll psychologically transforms the appalling world into a conquered place.

Repetition compulsion is not the only backfire of Moll's performativity. Her performativity has side effects, some of which she passes by nonchalantly and some of which she accept with an exceptionally willing attitude. In the next chapter, I investigate the other side of Moll's performativity and examine the meaning of this in relation to Defoe's individualism.

III. Performativity and Relationship

Alongside with performativity, narrating is another way through which Moll takes charge of her life. Autobiography seems to be a most appropriate form in which Moll can take an initiative for her identity because its first-person point of view makes her the controller of the narrative. By taking a role of the narrator, Moll grasps the critical power of an individual's right to define oneself. Since she is the narrator who gives information, the reader or other characters cannot rashly judge or assess her. As Marshall mentions, the whole text of *Moll Flanders* is like a long monologue as a whole (93).

With an interesting twist, however, this action for self-authority intimidates her authority in turn. Or, a narrative form which tries to reveal Moll's interiority works in the opposite direction of self-ruling because her autonomy is founded on her disguises. A kernel mechanism that makes autobiography *auto-biography* lies in that each episode is connected with each other and given a meaning in an

overarching frame by a mature narrator who looks back on his/her doings. Likewise, although spiritual autobiography is kind of a superficial shell that Moll uses to cover her desultory life, it still affects her narration in a meaningful way. George Starr is right in pointing that *Moll Flanders* has a routine template of spiritual autobiography, and that this genre, despite its eventually failed attempt, tries to reveal Moll as a helpless human being naked in front of the eye of God; it demands “utterly mundane activities” to be “drawn upon to illustrate and enforce religious duties” (11).

However, to call *Moll Flanders* a spiritual autobiography is a bit far-fetching in the end. Moll cannot embrace the revelation and connection of the spiritual autobiography since secret and discontinuity are crucial to her. If anything, she is an exemplary deviation from the standards of a naked and true self in the plot of providence because what she does is to multiply herself and to enjoy every disjointed identity as it is. Each of Moll’s performances carries a meaning by itself. In the crack of the rock-hard identities she thrives and relishes the liberating energy of discontinuity and duplicity.

As long as Moll moves on and lives in disguise, keeping secrets about her past identities is very crucial for her safety. When she gets caught in a shop for stealing, Moll plays a role of an innocent rich widow so well that she manages to escape from being punished and even makes huge profits out of it. Moll’s life is an example of how well a woman can keep secrets as she brags at the end of the narrative (270-71). She never reveals herself to anybody, always hiding her second nature away. Thus revelation and exposure almost always imply death to Moll since she cannot run the risk of being “found out,” “known,” “exposed,” or “discovered.” It is not only because she would be put to death by revelation literally but also any attempt to strip her down and fix her “true” identity is like death to her symbolically. She never lets the reader know her “real” name but only says that she is known by the name of Moll Flanders, which has “no more

Affinity with my real Name, or with any of the Names I had ever gone by, than black is of Kin to white” (179). Moll guards herself throughout the novel saying she would not be safe if her secrets were let out. In other words, she defies the force of an autobiography to reveal herself.

Interestingly, however, the pressure of revealing and hiding serves in fact the drives that propel Moll in the moment of her desire for relationships in particular. It is a bit ironic that her individualism which is initiated out of a desire for loving relationship is now driven by a principle of avoiding relationships. Moll stands as a lonely director of her actions even when she is surrounded by companions since sharing the moment of performativity is like sharing her autonomy. As Moll learns that she cannot depend on mutable stocks like love for her autonomy, emotions become the place of hazard which has power to destabilize her autonomy.

After her distressing experience with the Colchester brother and her decision not to be naked in front of the danger of relationships, Moll gradually learns to capitalize on relationships. She learns not to be vulnerable and reveals herself to others only to the amount that proves to be lucrative. Uncontrollable feelings are quantified in order to be controlled and made sense. For instance, when Jemy, one of the husbands for whom she has genuine feelings, leaves—they are married with an assumption of great wealth for each other when they are really close to being broke—Moll falls into a fit of crying while wishing he were back again. At this moment, Moll perceives money that Jemy leaves to her as symbol of love as she did before, but now she is not so frantically hypnotized with it. Disturbing effects of relationship are something Moll can deal with now by switching it into numerical measures.

Nevertheless, in the middle of shifting identities, Moll feels alone and wishes for something of continuity and revelation. Whenever Moll finishes up one disguise and devises another one, she gets conscious of the backfire her performativity has caused.

With this stock I had the world to begin again. . . .

I cast about innumerable ways for my future State of Life and began to consider very seriously what I should do, but nothing offere'd; . . . I had no Acquaintance, which was one of my worst Misfortunes, and the Consequence of that was, I had no adviser, at least who cou'd advise and assist together; and above all, I had no Body to whom I could in confidence commit the Secret of my Circumstances to, and could depend upon for their Secresie and Fidelity; (107)

At a moment of discontinuity, she realizes that she has no confidant to whom she can open herself up. Though this feeling is not as conspicuous as her craving for the material, it still works as an important force that shapes Moll. Carl R. Lovitt gives attention to Moll's interest in relationship, which is mainly expressed through her love for Jemy, and reads *Moll Flanders* as a text that shows a yearning not only for wealth but also for human relationships. Terence Martin also sees a "natural psychological process" (115) that unites Moll's story and contends that to call *Moll Flanders* a work of coherence is reasonable because it is structured in the frame of "Moll's hopes and fears" (123). Although there are critics like Helen Moglen who sees Moll as a character totally devoid of depth, whose emotions are only superficial, her lack of self-consciousness is not necessarily the lack of her ability to love (40).

When Moll thrives in disjointed identities, she cannot have a lasting relationship. Her acquaintances are to know her for only a small period. Even "the governess," with whom Moll has the longest and closest relationship is not allowed to "know" Moll. In this lack of intimacy, a need for relationship begins to disturb Moll's bubbly and egocentric narrative. More often than not, her need for emotional connection abruptly shows its existence: "I had not one Friend to advise with, in the Condition I was in, at least not one I durst Trust the Secret of my Circumstances to" (54); "I was entirely without Friends, nay even so much as without Acquaintance" (89); "but I had not one Friend in the World with whom

to trust that little I had” (109); “I had no Assistant, no Friend to comfort or advise me” (159); “and as I had no Friend in the World to communicate my distress’d Thought to, it lay so heavy upon me, that it threw me into Fits, and Swoonings several times a-Day” (235), and so on. Throughout the narrative, Moll calls for relationship so regularly that it is hard to consider her observations only as a euphemism. Though we still doubt some selfishness in this wish, we still cannot ignore the genuine pull of this need.

Moll fulfills this wish of revealing and connecting in the Newgate. Her conversion is one of the most critical moments of her life; even critics who consider Moll unreliable believe her genuine in this scene. In the place of her “real” birth, Moll is brought back to the very beginning of her story where all of her disguises are impotent. Moll “degenerated into Stone” (232) because she is deprived of her performativity which is in itself vitality for her. Moll who has drifted through many possible alternatives is now indeed “fix’d” (228) and coalesced into a single identity (Marshall 120): “[W]hat! Mrs. *Flanders* come to *Newgate* at last? What Mrs. *Mary*, Mrs. *Molly*, and after that plain *Moll Flanders*?” (229)

Here Moll also achieves a fully naked relationship with the minister. She opens her heart and tells him every part of herself.

This honest friendly way of treating me, unlock’d all the *Sluces* of my Passions: He broke into my very Soul by it; and I unravell’d all the Wickedness of my Life to him: In a word, I gave him an Abridgement of this whole History; I gave him the Picture of my Conduct for 50 Years in Miniature.

I hid nothing from him, and he in return exhorted me to a sincere Repentance, explain’d to me what he meant by Repentance, and then drew out such a Scheme of infinite Mercy, . . .

. . . ’tis all that I am able to do to say, that he reviv’d my Heart, and brought me into such a Condition, that I never knew any thing of in my Life

before: I was cover'd with Shame and Tears for things past, and yet had at the same time a secret surprizing Joy at the Prospect of being a true Penitent, and obtaining the Comfort of a Penitent, I mean the hope of being forgiven; (241)

It is no coincidence that the action of the minister, who reveals and integrates Moll(s) in the name of providence is paralleled to undressing. Defoe portrays Moll's penitence as a process of stripping down the layers of her disguises, through which Moll becomes a naked and vulnerable woman with nothing to guard herself from. Putting her life under the scheme of providence, she is now "perfectly chang'd and bec[a]me another body" (234).

However, Moll's life does not end here and the Newgate is not the final destination of her narrative. It is only one of many stations she stops at, and so is her identity as a sincere penitent. Because the role of a penitent carries only as much weight as any other her masks Moll does not hold on to the disguise of a penitent for long. This is not to say that her repentance is hypocritical, or "an absurd, preposterous logical triumph," as Koonce argues (384). Though he argues that Moll's life is a series of episodic variations, not a development of plot or character, Koonce emphasizes the moment of Moll's conversion, branding it as an "apparent movement" that sticks out of the static narrative. Moll works out a resolution out of two contradictory desires for economic success and moral value here (384). She repents because the occasion calls for it, and she has no more ulterior motive than that. Strictly speaking, Moll does not reconcile her identity of a penitent with the one of a thief into one identity. What she does is to interpret her past as sinful and to arrange her life as a penitent would do. With usual resilience, Moll absorbs the "necessity" to be a penitent and embraces this role as her identity. By making the "Hell" a scene of performativity, Moll avoids total destruction and survives out of the Newgate, being "Chearful and Merry in their Misery" (230).

With Jemy's reappearance, Moll's narrative undergoes a change of wishfulfilment. Putting over a hood and counterfeiting her voice, Moll once again welcomes the opportunity to exert her performativity (257). A person "cover'd with Shame and Tears for the things past" quickly fades away, and a woman of abundant resources for a life of variety comes to life again. Actually, Jemy is more than another chance for performativity. He is Defoe's answer to Moll's contradictory desires for autonomy and relationship. With Jemy at her side, Moll arises as an individual who "has it all"; she is a woman of will and, at the same time, a loving wife; she is an individual in a relationship. She loves Jemy just to the extent that it may not endanger her autonomy and reveals herself just to the extent that she still holds on to her authority. Moll can say she "began secretly now to wish that I had not brought my *Lancashire* husband from *England* at all" on the one hand and she "love'd my *Lancashire* Husband entirely" (279) on the other hand at once.

Defoe foregrounds Jemy's story as something extraordinary. Unlike other passing men, Jemy reappears and plays his yet remaining role in Moll's grand theater. Also, the unusual love scene between Moll and Jemy clearly indicates Defoe's intention to emphasize their relationship, which is different from Moll's other ones. Moll recounts that she was "amaz'd and surpriz'd, and indeed frighted" that Jemy heard her screaming wish for him to come back to her, and decided that "[she]'ll go all over the world with you rather" (129). This is an unnatural moment for Moll who never looks back but simply moves in almost every occasion. When Jemy comes back to her, Moll's normal pattern of relationship is broken, which also disrupts the significance of it (Lovitt 4). Jemy is more than a "Game," a "Trout" she has caught (118) or a "safe Card" (119) Moll jests with for money. He is a partner who cares her enough to come back, and assist Moll against adversity. Considering that Moll treats the other based on his/her usefulness, the fact that she brings poor Jemy to America demonstrates his

worth not in terms of finance but as a company. He can give Moll a comfort of relationship, which has been lacked in her merry performances in the past.

Thus when she cries out that she would starve rather than be away from Jemy, we are reminded of a little girl, who was afraid to be apart from her nurse, but this grown Moll is not a person for whom relationship is critical anymore. Or, relationship for Moll is not powerful enough to break or shake her. At some point, Moll says how burdensome it is to keep secrets from Jemy and confesses her darkest secret to him, her history of incest in America, as if she wants to reveal her sincere feelings for him. However, it is not a total revelation like the one she did to the minister. Since her secrets about money and identity were the key elements of her autonomy and performativity, she cannot just let herself be in an open field and vulnerable with no armory of disguises. Although Moll says that she “gave him a long particular of things that had befallen me” before the Newgate, this observation is ensued by “since I saw him” (249), which indicates she did not fully reveal herself. Likewise, she never lets Jemy know how much money she has or who she really is: “I have him an Account of my Stock as faithfully, *that is to say of what I had taken to carry with me*” (259 italics added). She is faithful to the extent to her disguise and does not take a chance to jeopardize her autonomy.

Nonetheless, Moll manages to achieve a relationship based on sincere cares and feelings. Though it is not exactly romantic, this relationship is enough for her. In this way, Moll remains as an individual but can still be in a relationship. She says near the end of her story that “Here we had a supply of all sorts of Cloaths, as well for my Husband, as for myself” (283). There is no reason for Moll to explain to the reader that who comprises “we.” In fact, she adds this explanation because it is Moll herself who needs to be reminded that Jemy is now one part of her life. Thus unlike Zimmerman’s conclusion that Moll’s narrative is “loosening of social ties” (85), Moll seems to construct a tie based on her own terms.

IV. Conclusion

To say Moll's individualism thrives out of performativity and to see her insensibility and inconsistency as aspects of her performativity are not to justify the methods she uses to achieve her individualism. What is disguise and performance to Moll could be deceit and lie to others; the possibility of her disjointed identity frequently works as a way to manipulate others. Moll's discontinuous identities are both inimical and subversive because "their metamorphosis and counterfeiting threaten to destabilize the world of human relationships" (Marshall 111). In order to make her performance work, others must remain just as props to support her or survival kits to be used. Moll ignores with gaiety the fact that her liberation from a restraining identity is only supported by undercutting the others' autonomy. For instance, out of Moll's many children, Humphry is the only child left *for* her because he is rich and useful. As far as other people exist as Moll's extension, *Moll Flanders* cannot avoid being called a text of colonialism.

Indeed, the fact that America is not a new place to Moll aggravates the problem. Moll talks of America as if it were a land of promise where she can earn another chance for performativity, and presses Jemy, who prefers the Newgate than Transportation, to reconsider his idea:

I thought our mutual Misfortunes had been such, as were sufficient to Reconcile us both to quitting this part of the World, and living where no Body could upbraid us with what was past, or we be in any dread of a Prison; and without the Agonies of a condemn'd Hole to drive us to it, where we should look back on all our past Disasters with infinite Satisfaction, when we should consider that our Enemies should entirely forget us, and that we should live as new People in a new World, no Body having any thing to say to us, or we to them. (253)

Moll portrays America as a “new World” where no one knows her wrongdoings in the past. The words she uses to describe America, such as “no Body,” “what was past,” and “forget,” demonstrate that America primarily means a place of disconnection to her where she is not restricted into a single identity. America’s most enrapturing appeal for Moll is that it is a “new Foundation” of her performativity (253).

Moll is right in assuming America as a place one “cou’d not fail of Success” since there all threats that once pressed her into fixation are gone. The first thing Moll did after she landed was “to enquire after [her] Mother, and after [her] Brother,” whom she once had in America (267), and measure if they are still a threat to her performativity, while she is not able to let herself known to her original family or, in turn, her history in America to Jemy. Yet surprisingly “[n]ews too good for [Moll] to make light of” (269) welcomes her: her mother is already dead leaving her money and plantation; her husband/brother is not dead but “almost Blind, and capable of nothing” (278); her son is “dutiful and obliging Creature as ever” (284). Every person who can endanger her performativity loses his/her power. Moll does not have to try to turn the situation around to meet her agendas. Gabriel Cervantes argues that we should not neglect that *Moll Flanders* is a product of a period in which everything that is not “I” existed for the expansion of the “empire” (330). Moll’s prosperity in America is the climax of this colonialism where “the other” gets powerless and obedient to the will of “the self.”

That said, Defoe does not seem to focus on this “postcolonial” aspect. He is rather interested in the fascinating energy of performativity while repressing the dark side of it. Despite some ambiguities, *Moll Flanders* celebrates the power of performativity eventually since Moll remains enchanting and captivating and that her disguises and masks make herself a rich penitent in the end. When Moll confesses to Jemy that Humphry is her son from the unfortunate match and acquires forgiveness from him, Defoe is making Moll “pay the price” of her performativity

through which she can move forward again unhaunted by the past: “who says I was deceiv’d, when I married a Wife in *Lancashire*? I think I have married a Fortune, and a very good Fortune too” (284). The possible problems of performativity do not castigate Moll’s vitality to the extent of her destruction. She still stands as an individual with self-control, and no one unmasks Moll Flanders. If one can agree with Peter Brooks in that “only the end can finally determine meaning” (22), s/he can also say that Moll rejects to be finalized and fixated to the end of her narrative.

<Konkuk University>

Works Cited

- Bloom, Harold. ed. *Modern Critical Interpretations: Moll Flanders*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Cervantes, Gabriel. “Convict Transportation and Penitence in *Moll Flanders*.” *ELH* 78.2 (2011): 315-36.
- Defoe, Daniel. *Moll Flanders*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1961.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Henzi, Gary. “Holes in the Heart: *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and “Agreeable Crime.”” *Boundary 2* (1991): 174-200.

- Koonce, Howard L. "Moll's Muddle: Defoe's Use of Irony in *Moll Flanders*." *ELH* 30.4 (1963): 377-94.
- Lovitt, Carl R. "Defoe's "Almost Invisible Hand": Narrative Logic as a Structuring Principle in *Moll Flanders*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 6.1 (1993): 1-28.
- Marshall, David. *The Figure of Theatre: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.
- Martin, Terence. "The Unity of *Moll Flanders*." *Modern Language Quarterly* 22.2 (1961): 115-24.
- Moglen, Helen. *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- McMaster, Juliet. "The Equation of Love and Money in *Moll Flanders*." *Studies in the Novel* 2.2 (1970): 131-44.
- Novak, Maximillian E. "Defoe's "Indifferent Monitor": The Complexity of *Moll Flanders*." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3.3 (1970): 351-65.
- Price, Martin. "The Divided Heart." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Moll Flanders*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. 7-18.
- Richetti, John. "The Family, Sex, and Marriage in Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 15.2 (1982): 19-35.
- Schorer, Mark. "Introduction." *Moll Flanders*. New York: Modern Library College Edition, 1950.
- Starr, George. *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*. New York: Gordian Press, 1979.
- Van Ghent, Dorothy. *The English Novel: Form and Function*. New York: Holt, 1953.
- Watt, Ian. "The Recent Critical Fortunes of *Moll Flanders*." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1.1 (1967): 109-26.
- _____. *The Rise of the Novel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957.
- Zimmerman, Everett. *Defoe and the Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

Performativity in *Moll Flanders*: Autonomy and Relationship

Abstract

June Young Oh · Hye-Soo Lee

This paper reads Moll Flanders' performativity as a way by which she displays her self-imposed authority while regarding her lack of coherence and sensibility as the repercussions of her performativity as well. Moll's disguises have been the object of critical castigation for their inconsistency and insensibility. Yet creating a role to play and taking various identities mean more than just a survival tactic to Moll. Moll affirms her authority over her own identity and becomes autonomous through performativity, shifting through diverse identities she were not allowed to have. As she survives and thrives out of secrets, however, Moll has a problem of being disconnected from any meaningful relationships. In the end, Daniel Defoe has Moll go back to America and empowers her as much as to escape from the dark side of her performativity in her working relationship with Jemy. By delineating Moll as a vivacious character who enjoys her autonomy, which is hard earned by performativity and with a little bit of cost, Defoe celebrates the power of performativity in individualism while still being ambiguous to its dark side.

► Key Words: Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, Performativity, Disguise, Individualism, Relationship

Received: 2014. 07. 31.

Revised: 2014. 08. 15.

Accepted: 2014. 08. 16.