

More Than Just Wicked: The Tales of Female Criminals in 17th- Century London

Savannah Resendes

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in English

Bridgewater State University

May 4, 2020

Dr. Elizabeth Veisz, Thesis Advisor
Dr. Halina Adams, Committee Member
Dr. Kathleen Vejvoda, Committee Member

In 17th-century London, where women were bound to strict social rules and regulations, those who break free from these strict rules are often viewed with suspicion. Some may even call these women wicked as they stray away from what is expected of them. There was also surge of women committing crimes in this time period, which inspired literature to follow the same trend. Female criminals were often represented as sinful and wicked monsters of the time, showing people exactly what not to do if they want to fit in. However, in several specific literary texts set in 17th-century England these women are portrayed as victims of their circumstances who want to be freed from the shackles of gender norms placed on women everywhere. Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl* (1611) is criminalized for her gender bending actions, but she is more than the monstrous creature the public claim her to be as she is entertaining, smart, and helpful to those who are kind to her. Moll Flanders in *Moll Flanders* (1722) vilifies herself as she tells her story through the lens of a repentant criminal, but upon further inspection, readers can see she is a victim of circumstance and is doing the best to survive her financial struggles. Barbara Skelton in *The Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton* (1944), a historical novel set in seventeenth-century Britain, is tired of doing what everyone expects from her and breaks away as an undercover highway woman who expresses her true self through her newfound hobby. All of these women are seen at times as monsters and villains in their 17th-century contexts, but we can also see these women as victims of their circumstances and more than wicked archetypes.

Historical Background

Before diving into the literary criminal world, it is important to contextualize what was happening in the real world of seventeenth-century London that helped shape these female criminal stereotypes. Women were targeted by the authorities more than ever before in London in the 17th century, especially women who were seen as independent. At the time of publication

of *Moll Flanders*, for example, a large influx of women was being arrested, as many men had been off to war and a large number of women were immigrating towards London from all over England for economic opportunities. According to Shoemaker, “Between 1690 and 1735, women accounted for 40 per cent of all the defendants tried at the Old Bailey, compared to 27 per cent in the previous sixteen years” (Shoemaker 75), which shows the rise in targeting these new, “independent” women in London. These single women were often targeted because in this time period, women could not be considered independent of a man. A man was the source of a women’s financial stability in society, so when single women started arriving in London, officials became suspicious. In an article titled “Print and the Female Voice,” Robert B. Shoemaker states, “...deviant independent women were particularly likely to be arrested and prosecuted at this time. Stimulated by prevailing images of women as prone to sexual immorality and disorder, single women were targeted by extra policing” (Shoemaker 76). These women were thought to be making their money criminally since they did not have a man to financially rely on. This generally meant that they were thieves or prostitutes, both criminal offenses at the time, with severe punishment, including death. In criminal biographies about women, one tends to find similarities among the women and this creates an archetype for female criminals in literature. Some of the common traits you will find are that their criminal lifestyle does not coincide with seventeenth-century ideas of femininity. They are witty, sinful and wicked, they lack self-control, they use sex and “love” to get what they want, and they are the outsiders of society.

One of the common stereotypes that you can find is that these characters are constantly contradicting their femininity with their criminal ways. Criminals in general seemed to be mostly men, as they fit the violent and aggressive nature that criminals usually have. In “The

Criminality of Women in Eighteenth Century England,” J.M. Beattie shows that women not only committed fewer crimes than men but committed less violent and aggressive crimes than their counterparts (Table 1, 81). It comes naturally to think of a man as being a possible criminal in this time period rather than a woman. Women were the people in society thought to be warm, soft and gentle creatures, quite the opposite of what it takes to be a successful criminal mastermind in the 17th century. As stated in Shoemaker’s “Print and the Female Voice”, “Crime generally, and theft in particular, was construed as an essentially male phenomenon” (Shoemaker 78). Real criminals such as Moll Cutpurse were often described as being manly in her features and demeanor, which would make sense with her successful career of being a criminal. But literary figures often seem as though they are battling between their feminine, soft personas that are often associated with women, and their violent and aggressive actions, as associated with their criminal side.

Another common trait these women have is using their wit, passivity, and beauty to obtain what they want in life. Authors who write about female criminals rely on these traits to make their female protagonists stand out in their stories. Doing this so often, though has the opposite effect; if every author is making a story about a woman who becomes a criminal using her wit, passivity and beauty, then the stories begin to mesh together and the originality of the storyline begins to fade and become predictable, as stated in an article by John Reitz titled “Criminal Ms-Representation”: “In part, the representation of female criminals in these biographies is somewhat predictable, relying on conventional means of portraying women. The Constellation of basic traits that these women bring to their criminal activities are very much traits of traditional womanhood: wit, passivity, beauty” (Rietz 184). Depending on how these women use their wits and beauty makes them stand out, such as Moll Flanders and Barbara Skelton.

A very common theme used in criminal biographies about women is using their sexuality to get to where they want to be in life. The woman using her looks to reel men in and get money through prostitution or tricking them and stealing their belongings was common in 17th century representations of these women criminals. As stated in “Criminal Ms-Representation” by Reitz, “...her sexual desire has been perverted into cupidity... relationships with men are more often pursued for financial gain than for love, either by baiting their traps with the promise of sex or by the more legitimate (but still predatory) practice of gold digging” (Reitz 186). We can see Moll Flanders using this technique quite often as she ends her novel with seven different husbands. We also see Lady Skelton pursuing different men, all while being married to Sir Ralph Skelton.

The final, stereotypical aspect of a female criminal in British literature was the idea of being an outsider in society. Society was very patriarchal in the fictional world of Moll Flanders and also in reality. As a woman, your finances and class were tied to your father and then to your husband once you get married. You could not make it on your own in society as a woman would do today in modern times. Rietz states that, “... female criminality is portrayed as a perversion of— or, in more extreme cases, a substitute for— female sexuality. Their crimes seem specifically tied to a breach in the social order as they break ties with men, either preying on them or establishing independence from them” (Rietz 186). Moll Cutpurse can be seen as an “outsider” as she was not seen as a typical female in London. She was manly, rugged and did what she pleased, which was shocking for a woman. Lady Skelton can be seen as an outsider because she disagreed with the societal norms for her gender at the time of her marriage.

After a long period of time, authors began to move away from these common stereotypes that are seen in criminal biographies written in the 16th and 17th century. Before this change women were often portrayed as being cold and sinful as stated in “Print and the Female Voice”: “In the

ensuing decades, printed representations of female criminals, particularly thieves, for the first time began regularly to depart from the conventional stereotypes of female unruliness and sinfulness to provide sympathetic, first-person accounts of the complex circumstances, motivations, and self-deceptions which led women to commit such crimes” (Shoemaker 75). The context of the characters we are dealing with makes all the difference, such as for Moll Flanders. If we had not known Moll in this personal aspect, then we would believe she had received what she had deserved for constant stealing, and adultery, but because we know she had no other choice, we feel for her as a character.

Historical Background on Moll Cutpurse

One of the most well-known female criminals of this time period was a woman by the name of Mary Frith, also known as Moll Cutpurse. She was born in 1584 and became one of the most famous women of her age. She is described to have a “Boisterous and masculine spirit” by the East End Women’s Museum and as described in her autobiography and in The Newgate Calendar:

She was above all breeding and instruction. She was a very tomrig or hoyden, and delighted only in boys' play and pastime, not minding or companying with the girls. Many a bang and blow this hoyting procured her, but she was not so to be tamed, or taken off from her rude inclinations. She could not endure that sedentary life of sewing or stitching; a sampler was as grievous to her as a winding sheet; and on her needle, bodkin and thimble she could not think quietly, wishing them changed into sword and dagger for a bout at cudgels. (Jackson)

She was not your typical woman in the seventeenth century, as one could imagine. This passage implies that women are supposed to act in contrast to the way that Moll Cutpurse did. They were not supposed to play with the boys but be around other women. They are meant to be tamed and tied into the domestic duties of sewing and stitching. They are not supposed to be desiring to fight with daggers as Moll did. All of these traits that Moll possessed, not only show that she was a tomboy of her time and enjoyed masculine activities but equates them to being criminal only because she was a woman who enjoyed “manly” activities. This gender-crossing was unthinkable at Moll Cutpurse’s time and this is what caused people to think of her as unwomanly, monstrous, and eventually, criminal.

Moll Cutpurse was known, as her name suggests, for stealing purses. An accomplice would distract the target while Mary would cut the strings of their purse and take it. By the time she was 16 she had almost been sent to America for her crimes. Over time, she was constantly going back and forth to prison and was punished and branded on the hand four times, as a way to mark her for her crimes. One of her lesser known crimes was her role as a pimp. She would find young women to be mistresses for men and men to be lovers for married women. She has worked herself quite the criminal reputation for a lady in the seventeenth century. She even went as far as cross dressing and appearing in town drinking in the taverns with men, smoking a pipe and wearing men’s clothing. Sarah Jackson describes her as “She was a great libertine, she lived too much in common to be enclosed in the limits of a private domestic life”. This behavior marks her as an outsider in society as she breaks all domestic and societal rules for women of this time period. Libertinism is strongly associated with men, and aristocratic men especially. It is when men live for their own pleasures and do as they please. They thrive off of sex, drinking, smoking, partying, and anything besides their responsibilities. Moll enjoys these as well, though not so

much with sex, she is often seen drinking with the men, smoking tobacco in bars, partying in the theaters, etc. Not only is she crossing gender norms, but she is crossing class boundaries as criminals are seen as lower class, yet she is described as a libertine, a term used exclusively for upper class men at the time.

Moll Cutpurse's legacy is immortalized in the literature dedicated to her life. There are two plays about her, *The Madde Pranckes of Mery Mal of the Bankside* by John Day (1610), and the play focused on here, *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker (1611). There is also a 1662 autobiography, and plenty written about her in *The Newgate Calendar*. There is debate in the scholarly world on whether the fictionalized version of Moll Cutpurse remotely resembled the real-life Mary Frith. Popular literature that is based on the lives of real-life criminals tend to exaggerate to capitalize these stories as the article "Mary Frith, Alias Moll Cutpurse, in Life and Literature" states: "William Gilbertson and George Horton engaged a team of male writers to piece together a biography and a chapterbook in order to capitalize on the sensational career of a woman who, despite her illiteracy, worked up her way from cutpurse to cross-dressed entertainer and to licensed broker thus breaking into the male-dominated business world of the entertainment industry and early capitalism" (Ungerer 46). Elizabeth Spearing, the modern editor of the famous biography of the criminal mastermind herself states that the only piece of literature that gives readers a realistic perception of Moll is the biography as she states, "[the text] is certainly the only one that gives anything like an account of the actual woman rather than a mythical figure, or that could derive from information given by the original 'Moll,' Mary Frith herself" (Ungerer 44). This literary figure is still being discussed four centuries past her time and marks her as a legend in seventeenth century British literature, especially among the criminals of the time as she broke societal and gender norms.

Eventually, Mary was incarcerated in Bethlem Hospital and released in 1644, cured of her apparent “insanity”. Sarah Jackson quotes *The Newgate Calendar*, which state, at 74 years old, “ Moll being grown crazy in her body, and discontented in mind, she yielded to the next distemper that approached her, which was the dropsy; a disease which had such strange and terrible symptoms that she thought she was possessed, and that the devil had got within her doublet”. She died in 1659 and was buried in St. Bride’s churchyard. John Milton allegedly wrote an epitaph which was engraved “For no communion she had, / Nor sorted with the good or bad;/ That when the world shall be calcin'd,/ And the mixd' mass of human kind/ Shall sep'rate by that melting fire,/ She'll stand alone, and none come nigh her.” This speaks volumes about the uniqueness of Mary Frith. Even while everyone else is forced to become a uniform society that sticks to the rules, Moll will always be a standout as she is unapologetically herself in a society that chastised her for doing so. To this day scholars are still intrigued by the mysterious figure that was Moll Cutpurse

The Roaring Girl

In the *Roaring Girl* by Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, we have a man, Sebastian, who wants to marry a lower-class woman, Mary Fitzgerald. His father, Sir Alexander, disapproves of the marriage. In order to change his father’s mind, he pretends to be in love with the Roaring Girl herself, Moll Cutpurse, to prove to his father that the first relationship is the better of the two. Moll Cutpurse has the reputation of a criminal in town and the thought of his son courting this well-known criminal is unthinkable to him. He spends the entirety of the play trying to get rid of Moll by his servant named Trapdoor. He even sets her up multiple to times to

expose her so-called monstrous ways. to the audience. Moll agrees to help out Sebastian and, in the end, his plan is successful, and Sir Alexander approves of the original intended marriage.

This is one of the first pieces of literature that gave a female criminal a personality, rather than being a devious monster as other texts had done in the past. The text was written in a time where Moll was still around, as she had performed this play in the theatre herself a few times. We can see the public view of female criminals in the character of Sir Alexander. This play opens up with the birth of this plan to pretend to court Moll by Sebastian and talking to his father about it before Moll even appears in the play. We get a sense of her reputation when Sir Alexander describes Moll in Act 1, Scene 2 when he states,

A scurvy women, on whom the passionate old man swore he doated; A creature, saith he, nature hath brought forth To mock the sex of women. It is a thing one knows not how to name; her birth began ere she was all made: 'tis woman more than man, Man more than woman; and, which to none can hap. (Dekker and Middleton 1426-27)

We, as the reader, have already been planted with the ideas of Moll being a mockery to the sex of women and manly, and a “thing”, dehumanizing her further, before we are even introduced to her as a character. We do not see Moll commit any actions of criminal offences in this play, however we get the sense of her representation in town through the interpretation that Sir Alexander gives us. He represents the reality of the public letting Moll Cutpurse’s reputation proceed her and making judgements before we even know who this character really is. He is more horrified by her gender queerness than anything else having to do with Moll Cutpurse’s identity.

Moll's reputation continues to be portrayed through Sir Alexander throughout the entire play through the amount of times that he calls her "whore", "creature", "monster", "thing" etc. The thought of his son's possible relationship with this criminal and disgrace to the female sex is unbearable to him. We can see this in Act 2, Scene 2, when Sir Alexander is trying to convince his son to end his relations with Moll Cutpurse. Sir Alexander states: "What has bewitched thee, son? What devil or drug hath wrought upon weakness of thy blood, and betrayed all her hopes to ruinous folly? O, wake from drowsy and enchanted shame, wherein thy soul sits, with a golden dream flattered and poisoned!" (Dekker and Middleton 1441). He makes it seem as though it is impossible for anyone to see any good in Moll because she is a criminal. You would have to be "bewitched" or "drugged" in order to believe that Moll is a good person. This is what the public view of Moll was, that she was no good, a whore, inhumane, and evil and in order to believe she wasn't, you would have to be under the influence or enchanted.

Though her reputation proceeds her, when Moll first appears in the play, she is not the devilish whore she is described to be. We do not see Moll performing any crimes in the novel, but readers get a sense of her attitude in the play. Moll finds entertainment in the criminal life. She uses her image of being a criminal and has some fun with it, such as a scene in the play where she is helping Sebastian. Sir Alexander has left out jewelry in plain sight, hoping to catch Moll in the act of stealing it, proving how terrible she really is according to her reputation. But she discovers this strategy and teases it: "What! A loose chain and a dangling diamond? Here were a brave booty for an evening thief now: There's many a younger brother would be glad to look twice in at a window for't and wriggle in and out, like an eel in a sand-bag" (Middleton 1462). She uses her wit to figure out the ploy that Sir Alexander is trying to use against her and

has some fun with it. She teases the father for thinking so poorly of her and leaves the jewelry right where he has placed it, defying her stereotype as a thief lacking self-control.

The idea of her being a criminal in this play in particular, is solely based around the fact that she breaks social gender norms. It seems that her crimes were centered more around the idea of her breaking gender norms rather than actually committing a crime in the context of this play. Shoemaker writes that independence in women caused them to be targeted more by the police, and Moll was the definition of female independence. She does this by cross dressing and her attitudes throughout the play. Act 3, Scene 1 portrays Moll as a man when she goes to meet a man named Laxton, someone who is trying to seduce her as he thinks she has money and he wants to take it. When she is dressed up as a man, she is treated as a man and she wants to sword fight with Laxton for trying to trick her. She is sticking up for herself as she states “To teach thy base thoughts manners: thou’rt one of those that thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore...How many of our sex, by such as thou, Have their good thoughts paid with a blasted name that never deserved loosely, or did trip in path of whoredom beyond cup and lip” (Dekker and Middleton 1444). Laxton is a symbol for men who want to take advantage of Moll, and thus, her statement here is defending not only herself, but other women as well. These ideas of gender were beyond their time and Moll is saying that women are not just meant to please men and then have their reputation ruined by them, such as hers has. She is more than that, and will fight for the women that cannot, even if that means she has to act like a man and ruin her reputation in order to get the respect that she wants.

As stated previously, Moll in real life was described to be a libertine. She dressed as a man, she smoked tobacco, she preferred her libertine lifestyle to the domestic norms of settling down and getting married. The term libertine itself is often associated with aristocratic men, and

Moll in this play, is acting the part. She has no interest in marriage as she states: “I have no humor to marry; I love to lie a’ both sides a’ th’ bed myself: and again, a’ th’ other side, a wife, you know, ought to be obedient, but I fear me I am too headstrong to obey; therefore I’ll ne’er go about it... I have the head now of myself, and am man enough for a woman: marriage is but a chopping and changing, where a maiden loses one head, and has a worse I’ th’ place” (Dekker and Middleton 1439). These fears of losing independence and becoming obedient to a man are the very things that were expected of women when they become married and Moll is very much aware of it. She avoids this as she enjoys her freedom and being a libertine, not having to worry about what people may think of her. She knows she is too headstrong for marriage, as a tomboy, and she likes her life exactly how it is, even though it gives her a negative reputation and often correlates her to criminality.

We cannot get around discussing Moll without addressing the stereotypes of female criminality that do play a part in her characterization in *The Roaring Girl*. She is unique in her attitudes towards gender norms and her gender bending behavior places her further and further from the ideal women of the seventeenth century. In “A Painter’s Eye: Gender and Middleton and Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl*,” Hendricks writes, “She is perceived as a woman whose masculine garments and independent behavior appear to represent an open challenge to existing structures of social power that demand men and women adhere to rigid codes of differentiation” (Hendricks 191). Her cross-dressing and gender bending actions contributes to her criminal reputation and her persona as people are afraid of those who differ from themselves and what society tells them to be, such as Moll does in her time. She is challenging the ideas that everyone has blindly accepted from the past about what it means to be a man or a woman in society. She

creates her own ideas, and for this she is marked as a criminal because she does not adhere to these rigid gender rules.

The play of *The Roaring Girl* shows the audiences that Moll Cutpurse is more than just a monster as Sir Alexander sees her. There are many different ways that Moll presents herself to be the opposite of her public reputation. In this text, we have Moll who does a favor for a stranger as an act of kindness. Sebastian approaches Moll with this plan, and she could have easily said no and turned him away as a criminal monster would so, but she does not. She takes the time to help out Sebastian and make his father approve of his marriage with Mary Fitzgerald. If Moll Cutpurse were actually sinful and monstrous, than why would she be doing someone else a favor with no expectations of payment back? She is doing this as an act of kindness towards Sebastian and a way to prove that she is more than what her criminal reputation paints her own to be. She acts as a middle-(wo)man to a heterosexual marriage, because of this she is able to have this gender crossing identity because she was the agent of their communion. She is also witty on many different occasions throughout this text with sabotaging Trapdoor and his attempts to get rid of Moll, she tricks Laxton and knows that he wants her money, she outsmarts Sir Alexander with his many attempts to make her out to be the bad guy to Sebastian. There are countless moments where Moll is portrayed to be smart to the audience. She is funny as she plays these tricks and even entertains and sings songs in Act 5, Scene 1. She is an entertainer to the audience, and this proves to be true in real life as well as she has performed as herself in the presentation of *The Roaring Girl* a few times. All of these characteristics make her out to be more than her criminal reputation that many people judge her on before they even get a chance to know her personally.

The Epilogue of *The Roaring Girl* has a lot to say about Moll Cutpurse and her criminal persona. The Epilogue is an added monologue that Moll Cutpurse had performed, unscripted, to an audience after each performance: “Mary Frith mounted the boards of the Fortune Theatre with the consent of the two authors and that, after the scripted play was over, the company of players conceded to her the freedom of the stage for her nonscripted performance” (Ungerer 59). This epilogue speaks of judgement and how you cannot please everyone at once, so you should just please yourself in life. She knows that women are constantly judged, and she does not want to deal with pleasing anybody but herself. It states:

Some for the person will revile the scene, and wonder that a creature of her being should be the subject of a poet, seeing in the world's eye none weighs so light: others look for all those base tricks, published in a book foul as his brains they flowed from, of cutpurses, of nips, and foists nasty, obscene discourses, as full of lies as empty of worth or wit, for any honest ear or eye unfit. (Middleton 1488)

Moll is saying that people, as in the public, will wonder why Dekker and Middleton would even think of writing a play about a person as “evil” and “monstrous” as her reputation makes her out to be, but the people who do look at her as a monster and evil say foul things about her and other criminals of her nature (cutpurses, nips, foists, etc.) and they lie about them, making them out to be worse than they actually are. Dekker and Middleton included this originally- unscripted epilogue Moll performed in their copy of the play because they know people are coming in with certain stereotypes and opinions of Moll, and the epilogue addresses it in a matter of fact way. They say that you should leave these stereotypes and opinions about her behind, and focus on her as a person instead, and this is exactly what *The Roaring Girl* does for Moll, not focus on her criminal lifestyle, but as her as a person.

Moll Flanders

In *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe, we follow the life story of Moll Flanders, the alias of a woman who is trying to make it through financial struggles, and escape from poverty, all while treading the line of legality because of her ways of overcoming her adversities. She participates in various different illegal activities, including theft, bigamy and adultery, by marrying seven different men throughout her life and becoming a pickpocket later on. We are told this story through Moll, who is looking back on her life and has become a penitent towards her criminal lifestyle.

In this novel, Moll sees herself as a sinful monster, because she is recounting this story as a penitent of her criminal lifestyle in the past, but as a reader, we do not feel the same. Readers have a unique perspective in this novel because it is told through first person narrative and given immense details about the circumstances of each situation Moll finds herself to be in. Therefore, we are aware of Moll's thoughts and the reason behind her actions, therefore creating a sense of sympathy in the readers. She was born into poverty and she has many different adversities to face before she achieves financial stability. She faces obstacles that force her to make tough decisions, but they are done out of necessity, not out of being an evil person.

Society was very patriarchal in the fictional world of Moll Flanders and also in reality. As a woman, finances and class were tied to a father and then later to a husband once married. Unlike nowadays, there were no viable and legal ways for women to survive independently in seventeenth-century English society. Moll is no exception and her actions make her an outsider in society. Moll Flanders was born in Newgate prison. Her mother was a criminal, saved from hanging by pleading the belly. This shows that right off the bat, from the moment she was born, she was thrust into the world of criminality. Even through childhood, she proves she is not the

norm with her definition of what gentlewomen were. Generally, it was thought that gentlewomen are born, and not made. But little Moll had believed she could become a gentlewoman through hard work and making a way for herself in the world, proving that she was different from the norm. We can see this early on in her childhood in a scene with the mayoress and her daughters who come to visit Moll to see if they wanted to take her in, as she was an orphan. When Moll explains her definition of a gentlewoman to the mayoress, she is mocked:

I did not understand any thing of that; but I answer'd, I am sure they call her Madam, and she does not go to Service, nor do House-Work, and therefore I insisted that she was a Gentlewoman, and I would be such a Gentlewoman as that.

The Ladies were told all this again to be sure, and they made themselves Merry with it, and every now and then the young Ladies, Mr. *Mayor's* Daughters would come and see me, and ask where the little Gentlewoman was, which made me not a little Proud of myself. (Defoe 13)

Even from a young age, poor Moll is always left to be outsider in society for her independent beliefs and ways of her version of a gentlewoman.

She carries this philosophy throughout her life, even as a criminal as she does whatever she needs to be able to provide for herself, as her definition of what a gentlewomen would do. In Rietz's, "Criminal Ms-Representation", he states that, "... female criminality is portrayed as a perversion of- or, in more extreme cases, a substitute for- female sexuality. Their crimes seem specifically tied to a breach in the social order as they break ties with men, either preying on them or establishing independence from them"(Rietz 186). Moll breaks many rules in her life, gender rules and laws alike. Moll Cutpurse can also be seen as an "outsider" as she was not seen

as a typical female in London. She was manly, rugged and did what she pleased, which was shocking to think for woman.

Throughout the entirety of the novel, we see Moll slowly become engulfed in the criminal lifestyle, each crime getting more dangerous as she becomes more and more desperate in her life. The first crimes that she commits are bigamy and adultery which go hand-in-hand for Moll. In *Moll Flanders*, Moll evolves her idea of love very early on in the novel after her first heartbreak. She falls in love with the elder brother of the first family she stays with and is then rejected because she is not marriage material to him. She realizes that in London people will not marry for love but marry for financial gain. In 17th century society, women are connected very strongly to their husband or father. They are the source of their income and the head of their patriarchal family. Moll is originally naïve to the concept of marriage and she realizes quickly that this will not work out for her circumstance if she wants to be financially stable. Moll realizes that marriage is actually a game of “politicks” as she states:

This knowledge I soon learnt by Experience, That the State of things was altered as to Matrimony, and that I was not to expect at London, what I had found in the Country; that Marriages were here the Consequences of politick Schemes for forming Interests, and carrying on Business, and that L O V E had no Share, or but very little in the Matter. (Defoe 57)

She uses this love philosophy to drive the rest of her criminal life as she is constantly marrying and remarrying men in order to make a gain from them. She uses marriage as a way to prey on men and use them for financial stability, while keeping her goal of independence in sight as a gentlewoman and she did whatever she had to do to get there. She ends the novel with seven different husbands that help her out of a situation that she could be jailed for, such as her

Husband at Bath who helps her financially, and Jemey, whom she thought it would profit her to marry. If Moll had not adapted this philosophy, she would have not made it as far as she had done, criminality-wise, in the novel in the history of her lifetime. However, bigamy is considered a sexual offence in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and punishable by branding, so Moll is avoiding severe crimes while committing other crimes. While considering her stance on marriage, it brings Moll to be more closely aligned to men who used marriage to unite business and family interests. She is using masculine marriage ideas to her own advantage as a woman and to reach her goal of financial stability.

Love really is a game for Moll as she cautiously steps through the minefield of marrying multiple men. Committing adultery and bigamy are criminal offenses that could lead to jail for Moll if she is not careful. She uses these men as pawn in her game of life to advance forward in ways she never could should she be alone in life. If Moll had been alone in her life, she would be a poor woman that probably would have ended up in jail anyways as many independent women were suspected to be criminals at the time this piece was written. As a reader, we do not see what Moll is doing as criminal because we are given a back story and perspective on why she is doing it. She is given sympathy and empathy for the way she has to go about her life, which was a huge game changer for women in literature who commit crimes as they were seen before as cold, heartless and emotionless monsters who murder and steal.

It is significant that Moll is a repentant first-person narrator who is telling her history because, even though this is a novel, its form is inspired by the tradition of spiritual autobiography. In this popular genre, women were allowed to tell their life stories only because they were telling stories of religious conversion, as it was the only way they could get to write about themselves. She sees herself as being sinful and criminal in her actions of committing

bigamy and adultery. Given the intense details of the circumstances by Moll herself, the readers can interpret her story through two different lenses. We can see her as the sinful creature she is trying to paint herself to be, and what would be widely accepted by audiences reading Defoe's novel, and we can see Moll as a product of her circumstances. Moll had been put in some serious, financial difficulty all throughout her life, and this was her only way to stay afloat and survive in the world. Even if she did break the law, this was the route her life had to take in order to get by when times were rough.

One example of her using deception by getting men to marry her is when she accidentally marries her brother. Moll initially pretends to be wealthy to reel men in, at least in this case, and then "worries" that he will only want her for her (fake) fortune. She hides her lack of money and uses her wits to get him to agree that he does not want to marry her for money and will marry her no matter what she has. Another example of her using deception in order to commit bigamy and have a financial advantage in life was when she meets and marries Jemy. Moll uses deception in order to make Jemey believe that she is richer than she actually is, in order to attract him to her, which worked. But lo and behold, the deceiver becomes the deceived when Moll realizes that Jemey is also giving her false pretenses as he had been lying about his fortune as well. We can see the horrible consequences this has for Moll when she states: "But my case was indeed Deplorable, for I was left perfectly Friendless and Helpless, and the Loss my Husband had sustain'd had reduc'd his Circumstances so low, that tho indeed I was not in Debt, yet I could easily foresee that what was left would not support me long" (Defoe 159). Moll's use of deception and bigamy has backfired on her and she realizes that this has led her deeper into her financial rut than ever before. She has no control over her situation, but she was simply doing what she

had to do in order to survive. She has to deceive Jemy and commit bigamy in order to keep herself financially afloat.

Shortly after she realizes that bigamy will only take her so far in life, and Moll becomes more desperate. At this point in her life, she needs to switch strategies to survive as she is no longer a young and beautiful woman. Her practice of marrying for money no longer becomes an option for her and she turns to theft and pickpocketing like our friend Moll Cutpurse. Moll Flanders turns to theft when she meets her Governess, who helps her learn the art and master it. Her first account of stealing is stealing a bundle full of valuables from an Apothecary shop. She recounts this event as such:

This was the Bait: and the Devil who I said laid the Snare, as readily prompted me, as if he had spoke, for I remember, and I shall never forget it, 'twas like a Voice spoken to me over my Shoulder, take the Bundle; be quick; do it this Moment; it was no sooner said but I step'd into the Shop, and with my Back to the Wench, as if I had stood up for a Cart that was going by, I put my Hand behind me and took the Bundle, and went off with it, the Maid or the Fellow not perceiving me, or any one else. (Defoe 160)

At this point in the novel, Moll is getting very desperate with her financial situation and her crimes become more severe. As she describes here, she felt as though the Devil himself had whispered into her ear and told her to do it. This give the illusion of the sinful criminal archetype that is typically found in seventeenth century novels of this time period, but as the readers are given context to the situations surrounding the event, we can deduce that this was not an act of sinning, but an act of desperation as Moll is trying to get by and she sees an opportunity arise.

One of the standout moments in her time as a thief is when she steals a golden necklace off the neck of a child. Here she gives a moment of reflection on the hardships of poverty and how they have affected her thoughts and actions. She states: “The thoughts of this Booty put out all the thoughts of the first, and the Reflections I had made wore quickly off; Poverty, as I have said, harden’d my Heart, and my own Necessities made me regardless of any thing: the last Affair left no great Concern upon me, for as I did the poor Child no harm...” (Defoe 163). At first, Moll is hesitant to steal from a child as her first thoughts tell her that the Devil has taken control and has told her she must steal from the child. She gives the exact reason why readers should be looking at her as a product of her circumstances rather than the sinful creature that she elsewhere makes herself out to be. Moll is put into some very difficult financial situations in her lifetime and forced to make difficult decision about how she is going to get out of them. This is just one of the many difficult decisions Moll had to make in order for her to survive in life, and as she falls deeper and deeper into Poverty, her actions become more desperate and her crimes become more severe.

As this novel was written in the eighteenth century, there are some ways in which she conforms to the stereotypes that fall upon female criminals in literature. A very common theme used in criminal biographies about women is using their sexuality to get to where they want to be in life. The women using her looks to reel men in and get money through prostitution or tricking them and stealing their belongings was common in the 17th century to portray these women criminals. We see this theme occurring a numerous amount of times in *Moll Flanders*. Rietz argues, “...her sexual desire has been perverted into cupidity, and we see a similar pattern in ... Moll, whose relationships with men are more often pursued for financial gain than for love, either by baiting their traps with the promise of sex or by the more legitimate (but still predatory)

practice of gold digging”(Rietz 186). Moll often uses this tactic to sidestep the effects of being a poor independent woman living in London. She had lured men in with her looks and sexuality from the very first job she had worked as serving as a gentlewoman in a house. She does this about seven different times to seven different men in the hopes of getting out of a financial rut, and most of the time it worked out, but having multiple husbands and adultery was a criminal offense so Moll had to be cautious in her practice. However, with this being said she conforms to the stereotype that are already in existence so that it is familiar to the readers of the time. This story proves to be way more complex than the regular female criminal accounts of the time.

With all this being said, after a long period of time, authors began to move away from these common stereotypes that are seen in criminal biographies written in the 16th and 17th century. Before this change women were often portrayed as being cold and sinful as stated in “Print and the Female Voice”: “In the ensuing decades, printed representations of female criminals, particularly thieves, for the first time began regularly to depart from the conventional stereotypes of female unruliness and sinfulness to provide sympathetic, first-person accounts of the complex circumstances, motivations, and self-deceptions which led women to commit such crimes”(Shoemaker 75). Moll is a perfect example of this. She is not seen as cold and heartless in her narrative. Defoe has provided the readers with context and information about Moll that makes it seem as we have a personal connection to Moll, as if we are becoming her friend that she spills all her secrets, as in a diary. When we hear about all the horrible and criminal things she had to do to get by, we do not think that she is a bad person. Instead, the opposite effect happens, and we feel sympathy for her. We feel bad for Moll when she has to abandon her children because her husbands have no more use for her, even though she has no emotional attachment to any of them. We feel bad when Moll begins to steal but she admits she cannot stop doing it even

though she is confessing to her criminal ways. We even feel as though the heroine of our story is in trouble when she is brought into Newgate prison for all her crimes, even though she knew she would eventually end up there for doing all she has done in her life. The context of the characters we are dealing with makes all the difference. If we had not known Moll in this personal aspect, then we would believe she had received what she had deserved for constant stealing, and adultery, but because we know she had no other choice, we feel for her as a character.

This is the reason authors had started to turn away from the archetype of what the past had created for the female criminals. They wanted to start turning away from the harsh stereotypes and give their female characters a voice and reason as to why they were doing it. From that point on they were written far better and given more individuality to their character, making them more memorable and more popular.

Historical Background on Katherine Ferrers

One of the lesser known criminals of the seventeenth century was Katherine Ferrers. There is less scholarly work on Ferrers when compared to Moll Cutpurse, but nonetheless, she is still as mysterious and interesting as her criminal peer. She was born on May 4, 1634 into difficult times as her father, grandfather and brother had died within a year and she was appointed the sole heir of her grandfather's estates. Katherine Ferrers was married, against her will, at age fourteen to Thomas Fanshawe. She hated the domestic housewife duties of the married life and she had an absent husband. With all this boredom and hatred in her domestic life, she turns to highway robbery as an escape from her monotone reality, along with Ralph Chaplin. She was eventually wounded one night and died outside her home at Markyate Cell at the entrance of a secret passageway to her stolen treasures. Her body was discovered by a servant and buried in St. Mary's Church. Legend says her ghost still haunts the local neighborhood as

“Wicked Lady Ferrers” according to the article “ The Wicked Lady - a Revision of the Life of Katherine Ferrers”. She inspired the text of *The Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton* which follows a similar plot to the life of Katherine Ferrers and many believe this story to be based off the real-life figure.

It was certainly an unusual thought for a woman who was thought of to be well off financially to be sneaking off into the night to dress up as a man, rob travelers on highways and have an affair, but Ferrers was bored with her life. We can see a depiction of the inner monologue in the book of *The Life and Death of Wicked Lady Skelton*, as it is loosely based on Katherine’s history. As she is a lesser known figure and her crimes were kept secret, most scholars do not know much about this mystical legend. The extent of her criminal tendencies and her love affair could be fictionalized to sell to the masses and those were just décor for the life of Lady Barbara Skelton in the novel, but the real-life encounters of Katherine Ferrers remain a mystery to the scholarly world. Most of the information about Katherine Ferrers can be found in blog posts as she still remains a point of interest in the literary world.

The Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton

In *Life and Death of The Wicked Lady Skelton* by Magdalen King-Hall we follow the life of Barbara Skelton, a women who is extremely against the social norms for upper-class women in the 17th century. She looks for an artistic output as a distraction to her normal everyday life as a wife to Sir. Ralph, and it just so happens that this hobby she picks up in highway robbery. Lady Skelton creates a double life and keeps them very separated from each other. She even has an affair with Jerry Jackson, a notorious highway man. By day she is a normal wife, but by night she is an emotionless and free highway woman alongside her lover.

This book is slightly different from the others as it was written much later, the 20th century, but is still set in the same time period as the others. This creates a different sense of purpose for the novel as a whole. While *The Roaring Girl*, and *Moll Flanders* have a sort of redemption journey that these women take, *Lady Skelton* is more of an entertaining story rather than one of redemption. The first two were written to show that women who committed crimes needed to have a redeeming story to make their transgressions okay, but for this novel it does not have those same features. There is also very little to no scholarship done on this novel, so it is a new type of setting that we are dealing with when talking about female criminals in a 17th century literary setting, rather than being written in the same time period.

The tale of Barbara's life begins for the reader with her arranged marriage. Barbara is already being forced into domestic life, and we can tell from many descriptions from the third-person narration, that this is not the type of life that Barbara aspires to live. Readers can assume this when the narrator states: "The match had been arranged between the respective parents when Barbara was six years old. But she had never been one for girlish confidences, being of a naturally secretive nature. She was certainly not going to betray herself to these silly girls at this late hour" (King-Hall 90). Right off the bat, we can tell that Barbara is the type of woman who will try not to conform to these gender standards that are expected of her because she will not "betray herself". She knows that she does not have a place among these others girls that are happy in their marriages, but she knew she had to go through with it because it was the only way to have financial stability and the same opportunities that a young woman will have, as the narrator states: "Marriage, as she regarded it, was a means of escape from the trammels of maidenhood- the only means open to a young woman of quality" (King-Hall 90). Marriage is the ticket out of the constraints of maidenhood and into womanhood, but it comes with its own set of

constraints, as Barbara will soon realize. Barbara has class and financial advantages when compared to Moll Cutpurse and Moll Flanders but still feels constrained by her role as a woman. Moll Cutpurse felt constrained by traditional gender roles and Moll Flanders was constrained by her financial status.

Readers can already get a sense of how Barbara feels towards marriage right from the very start, but her wedding scene takes this to a whole other level. The language of the chapter suggests that Barbara feels as though this were a death sentence to her. A wedding is supposed to be one of the happiest moments in a woman's life, but with Barbara it is the complete opposite. Even before the ceremony itself, we get this sense of dread when the narrator shows: "Her father's steward, staff in hand, announced in much the same tones that he would have used at a funeral: 'Mistress Barbara, your honoured father bids me say that he awaits you below'" (King-Hall 91). Even after Barbara and Sir Ralph had been married, as her bridesmaids are preparing her for her honeymoon, she feels the dread of her marriage when she thinks: "As though they prepared me for my execution" (King-Hall 100). From the very beginning of our acquaintance with the life of Barbara, readers can tell that she is not happy with the way her life is starting.

As could be expected, Barbara is annoyed with the duties that are included in being a wife to Sir Ralph. These domestic duties include housekeeping, caring for those in the household who fall ill, small talk with other women, painting, etc. but Barbara wants more out of her life. She thinks of herself as more than this boring lifestyle. She thinks she is different from other women, much as Moll Cutpurse did as they both do not want to fit into the gender roles that are forced onto them by society's standards. Time passes five years after her wedding and it has had a negative effect on Barbara as she becomes more and more annoyed with her lifestyle: "These women with their puerile chatter of physics and ailments, of housekeeping and servants'

misdemeanours, of local births and funerals – was it possible that she had lived five years among them and preserved her reason?” (King-Hall 105). She thinks that this lifestyle will drive her to insanity and this small talk is below her. It even makes her angry as stated: “There was no end of their supply of small talk’ it flowed on as incessant and as senseless as the river below the house, bearing away on its surface, so Barbara had sometimes felt in a spasm of helpless fury, little fragments of her own youth and vitality” (King-Hall 105). These small fragments of domestic life have eaten away at Lady Skelton for five very long years, and she comes to a point where she has had enough and will not do it any longer, and this leads to her idea of highway robbery.

In a night of gambling with Sir Ralph’s sister, Henrietta, Barbara finally feels some excitement in her life. Barbara is winning for a majority of the gambling, but they up their final game in a high stakes bet. Barbara has bet her mother’s gold chain with a ruby pendant and in a moment of gambler’s rush and she ends up losing it to Henrietta. She is not very fond of her sister-in-law and after she leaves, she comes up with the plan to rob her on Fenny Stratford road. For this crime she is cross dressed as a man, which will be discussed later on and she is very successful with her mission of retrieving her stolen necklace. Surprisingly Barbara quite enjoys her experience as an incognito highwayman. She sums up her experience when the author states: “It had been enjoyable in the extreme to hoodwink these stupid, complacent folk” (King-Hall 120). This first experience had woken up a secret desire for adventure and risk in her life, the thing that she has been missing for the last five years of her boring domestic life. She exults in the details of her account with Henrietta as shown:

The abject cowardice of Henrietta’s attendants had not enabled Barbara to do justice to her own courage and resources. It flattered her to remember how nimbly she had worked. She believed that she could attempt a more difficult robbery with success. No doubt she

had much to learn, but she had all the qualifications for a successful highwayman, daring, good horsemanship, a quick eye and hand, coolness, and a firm disregard of other people's feelings. (King-Hall 121)

This is the gateway into her criminal life, as she rather enjoys her experiences, in contrast to Moll Flanders who feels bad when she has to commit crimes out of necessity. This spontaneous mission to recover her lost pendant has completely changed the life of Lady Barbara Skelton.

Barbara Skelton is not your typical vision of what a highway robber should be. This was an aggressive and violent type of crime that was seen in the sphere of men. Women did not commit highway robbery. The more typical crimes women would be committing in this time period align more with the petty thievery of Moll Cutpurse and Moll Flanders, so that makes Barbara a standout in her literary time period, this could be due to the time this novel was written. She is aware that she cannot pull off this task with the appearance of a woman as it would disgrace her reputation and people would not take her seriously. She would also be recognized by her sister-in-law if she were to go as herself, so she decides that she needs to dress as a man in order to complete her mission:

Why not? It was being done most days and most nights on all the roads of England.

Nothing was needed but a horse, a pistol and a bold heart. And in this case, a suit of man's attire. But in this large household that would be easy to procure. She was tall for a woman, slender but well-built. Her hand? They could be hidden in gloves. Her voice? It was naturally low-pitched. She could disguise it sufficiently. Her thoughts raced on, wildly elated. At the best it would be a novel experience, a delicious, secret triumph – would that pink and white jelly scream, weep or faint in a crisis? (King-Hall 116)

Here we see Barbara contemplating how easy it would be to pull off this crime and even if she is not successful, it would be a “novel experience”. It would be something that she could experience, just to say to herself that she did it. These thoughts excite her as she imagines her sister-in-law crying or fainting in the midst of her robbery. Here there is a sense of resentment and revenge when it comes to Barbara’s jumpstart into the criminal world, whereas the other women do not have this same sense of revenge.

In her experiences with highway robbery she comes across the notorious highwayman Jerry Jackson, and Barbara sees this as an opportunity to choose who she loves, as her own marriage was arranged, and as an escape to a passionate life. Right from their very first encounter, when Jerry uncovers Barbara’s disguise, the two are instantly flirting and Barbara is ready to give him her all: “His impudence made Barbara laugh. She had already decided to give herself to him. This was better than gambling, better than highway robbery, to yield recklessly, impudently, in an impulse of sheer animal passion to this handsome scoundrel” (King-Hall 138). Jerry is such a stark difference to her actual husband Sir Ralph that it excites her. It did not matter that Jerry is a notorious criminal, and that in fact made him even more appealing to Barbara. We can see Barbara’s attraction come to life when the narrator states:

Yet it did not hurt her pride to know that her lover was a man of base birth and rascally character. On the contrary, she derived a perverse satisfaction from feeling that in breaking thus, secretly and violently, from the traditions of her class and upbringing, she was revenging herself on Sir Ralph, on her in-laws, on fate itself for these five long, never-to-be-recalled years of her frustrated youth. (King-Hall 145)

This affair is the revenge on her domestic life for all that she has had to endure for the past five years in her relationship with Sir Ralph. There is no financial incentive in this relationship, as

there was for Moll Flanders, because Barbara comes from a wealthy background. This means that this relationship is specifically sparked by passion and not for any financial motives. This thrill that Barbara feels when crossing the traditions of her class can also be seen in parallel to Moll Cutpurse as she crosses gender boundaries.

Through the journey of her criminal life, Barbara had never had to become violent, but all this changes when Jerry asks her to accompany him in robbing a house that Barbara is familiar with, the Cotterell's. Barbara is forced into action when they awaken the family in the house and are forced to flee the scene. However, the pair do not get off easy as the eldest son of the family, Ned, begins to chase Barbara, without knowing it is her. Forced to decide, Barbara shoots and murders Ned in cold blood in order to protect herself and her reputation. If she were to be caught, it would be the worst possible thing to be caught in the middle of her double life. Barbara's decision to be committed to her life of crime becomes clear when the author states: "If she admitted remorse into her heart she must renounce the dark, secret pleasure of her highway life, the night maraudings, the savage rapture of the attack, the hot embraces of her rogue lover. She must return for ever to the dragging tedium of life as Lady Skelton, wife of Sir Ralph Skelton of Mariyot Cells. God had no right to ask this of her, she thought with fury" (King-Hall 156). What is interesting about this moment is that Barbara knows that she cannot have both her criminal life and her domestic life touch, and Ned was a threat to her guilty pleasure. There is not room in her heart to feel bad for what she has done, and if she admits that she is doing something wrong, then she has to stop this life forever and Barbara is just not willing to let this part of herself go. Another interesting piece in this moment is the mention of God. As mentioned previously, this novel is not a spiritual one, but she mentions God on several occasion when she is faced with

serious situations, such as murder, and blames it on him putting her into them, rather than herself.

A serious threat is posed to Barbara's double life when her butler, Hogarth has discovered the nightly shenanigans that Barbara has been participating in when a purse is discovered at the Cotterell residence that belongs to Barbara the night after the attempted robbery. Hogarth is a representation of the spiritual redemption arc that is present in most novels about female criminals. He wants her to repent as he tells her, "I must believe you. It is unthinkable that a delicately nurtured lady, and one who knew the poor lad from boyhood, could have committed such a foul crime. This means, then, that you are guilty of adultery and robbery. Terrible enough in all conscience, but Scripture teaches us that even adulteresses and robbers may find mercy through repentance" (King-Hall 164). This shows that he believes all can be redeemed through religion and repentance, even the criminal. Moll Flanders would have to agree with this philosophy as her whole arc is being a repentant criminal, however Barbara is not the same. She does not want to give up the lifestyle that fills her with joy and gives her purpose, so she tricks Hogarth into thinking she has repented by "changing" her ways and attending church. The third person narration of this novel shows Barbara going through the motions of a penitent criminal, but the readers never get a sense of her internal dialogue and how she was actually feeling throughout her experience as a "repentant criminal".

It seems as though Barbara may never get another taste of her criminal guilty pleasure again, as long as Hogarth is alive and knows her secret, but he eventually becomes sick. He believes that she has actually changed her ways and given up her evil pastime, but he is proved wrong. While she serves him while he is sick, he notices something: "But there was something that troubled him – young Lady Skelton and her reclaimed soul. Even when she was not actually

bending over his bedside holding a cup to his lips, he could see her green eyes regarding him pleadingly – with meekness – with mockery? No! God forbid – with true remorse and penitence” (King-Hall 182). He has second thoughts of Barbara’s reformed life and later, “... the mists of his pains and weakness cleared, and he *knew*” (King-Hall 183). Hogarth knew that the whole time Barbara was pretending to have renounced her evil ways, but upon his death bed, the truth is shown. She is not one to show mercy, and with an act that forecloses possibility of a repentance narrative, Barbara smothers him with a pillow to kill him so that the knowledge of her secret life could die with him. She is so desperate to return to her past life, that she is willing to kill in order to resume her old life and experience joy again. This shows that the criminal lifestyle is crucial to Barbara’s happiness, as she cannot find it in her domestic life, and she will stop at nothing to continue on with her happiness and her art form.

Throughout the novel, we can see Barbara as the emotionless and sharp individual that she is, but the execution of her former lover, Jerry Jackson, brings a different side of Barbara to the reader’s attention. Up until this very point, when she is stuck in traffic and witnessing Jerry’s death, Barbara has done an exceptional job at keeping her two lives separated, killing twice in order to maintain the firm separation. We can see her confidence in her mission to keep the two apart when the narrator states: “Talented actress that she was. She played two roles with equal success – Lady Skelton, gracious lady of the manor. Elegant woman of fashion; Barbara of no surname – daring highway woman who rode, robbed, and killed as well as any man and would endure no interference nor betrayal” (King-Hall 193). However, this clash of witnessing Jerry’s hanging while having to play her domestic role of Lady Skelton proves to be an emotional one. She is filled with anger and confusion when her worlds collide: “Her thoughts were in confusion. An angry pity, a kind of shuddering physical horror at the thought of the violence that was to be

done within the hour to her lover's body, struggled against her deep selfishness, the callousness which she had cultivated like a grace. Suddenly, crushing down every other feeling, came a terrifying apprehension for her own safety" (King-Hall 199). In this moments she realizes just how emotionally attached she has become to the criminal world, even while the coach and servants she travels to the execution with underscore her social and economic distance from it. This is more than just a hobby to her; she has made an emotional connection to this side of her life. Though she may have done some horrible things, she is desperate for expression and happiness in her life, and she found it with Jerry and the highway, but now a part of her has been destroyed with the execution of Jerry Jackson.

With the destruction of her criminal life, her domestic one offers a new source of happiness in the form of a new affair with Kit Locksby. She steals her cousin's suitor and she has finally found a sources of happiness in her everyday life, though it still has to be somewhat secret since she is still married to Sir Ralph. The thrill of a secret is what keep Barbara going in life with her secret lovers and her double life. She expresses her newfound joy when she states: "More than this, she was ready to transform her whole nature, discarding like outworn garments her craving for excitement and callous egotism. She would teach herself to be warm-hearted, clinging, sensitive, because this was how Kit Locksby imagined her to be" (King-Hall 223). This warm-hearted, clingy and sensitive person is a stark difference to the way she has led her life in the past, but it just proves the extent that she will go for her new love Kit. She wants to be the happy lover of Kit and even craves it. When Barbara choses her lover, she is willing to go to the ends of the earth for them, as she has for Jerry in the past and now Kit, but not for Sir Ralph. Her sense of choice directs her actions and feelings throughout the course of the novel. When Barbara has no say in her circumstances, she is dreadful and agitated, such as her marriage and

her gender expectations. However, when she chooses how to live her life, whether it be a highway woman or a new love with Kit, Barbara is much happier and more willing to succumb to a role rather than defy it.

The end of Barbara's story comes with one last experience as a highway robbery as she wants to put that lifestyle to rest and focus on her new life with Kit. The emotional attachment to her double life is now reversed as before she was satisfied with her criminal activity, but now Kit gives her the satisfaction that she needs. However, this satisfaction is fatal as it turns out she is stabbed by an undercover Kit who is also an undercover highway man who mistakes Barbara for a man who is intruding on his stomping grounds of the road. We see the last reflections of Barbara's life as the narrator states:

Something wet and warm trickled from her lips, her mouth was full of the acrid taste of blood. At the foot of the secret staircase she collapsed. In a last despairing effort she tried to drag herself up, clutching at the lower steps. But the blood was gushing from her mouth. She was choking, groaning. Life was ebbing from her in profound moaning sighs.

She knew that she was dying, killed by her beloved's hand. In her last conscious moments she thought in agony and also in triumph: "He will never see me grow old."
(King-Hall 229)

Barbara was killed by the two things that she loves most in her life, highway robbing and Kit. Even in her last moments, she is not thinking of redemption or feeling bad for everything she has done in the past, which speaks to the lack of a spiritual arc in this novel. She instead is focused on Kit, and on how she appears to him, which shows where Barbara's priorities lie.

This novel, interestingly enough, does not start with the marriage of Barbara and Sir Ralph, but instead starts with the estate of the Mariyot Cells and the ghost of Barbara lurking around the descendants of the estate. The legends of the wicked Lady Skelton have been passed down through generations and remain connected to the estate that Sir Ralph and Barbara shared. This arc in the novel connects back to the real-life account of Katherine Ferrers, who Barbara is loosely based on. The power of this legacy is shown when the ancestors of the Skelton's are trying to renovate the Mariyot estate and no one will oblige to their requests:

What could give clearer evidence, my dear husband, of the enduring influence of bad deeds, for while the virtues of your many honourable and discreet ancestresses have been forgotten the crimes of a profligate woman who has mouldered in her tomb these ninety odd years, are still so well remembered in the neighbourhood that grown men (in this age of reason) dare not lift a pickaxe against the house that she inhabited for fear of displeasing her shade?" (King-Hall 72)

This, seemingly out of place narrative at the beginning of the text begs the question of the function of Barbara's ghost. This shows that her spirit is unquiet and forever roaming and looking for her sources of happiness. Throughout her life, she has neglected her domestic duties as the wife of Sir Ralph and looked elsewhere for satisfaction. She found that in Jerry, highway robbery, and Kit. In her afterlife, she is punished by forever being attached to the home that she neglected while looking for a source of expression.

The story of Barbara is quite a stark difference to that of the Roaring Girl and Moll Flanders. Barbara does not perform these crimes out of necessity, as she has the financial means that Moll Flanders and Moll Cutpurse wish to achieve. Instead, Lady Skelton is motivated by her emotions. She is looking for an outlet to escape the dreadful experience she has with her boring

domestic life that people expect her to live. She finds artistry in the criminal lifestyle as she states: “There must be some art in all this; highway robbery surely had its rules as much as any other science. She wished to perfect herself in her chosen career. To match daring with a nice kill was her aim” (King-Hall 130). This career she has picked up is equivalent to needlework to other women. It is an art form and even a science that she has honed and loved in her life and gave her happiness. Her chosen craft is the demise of her redemption in comparison to her female criminal counterparts.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Moll Cutpurse, Moll Flanders and Barbara Skelton prove they are more than their wicked archetypes make them out to be. Moll Cutpurse broke gender rules, and for this she was branded a criminal. She took this brand and ran with it as she enjoyed her life as a libertine woman. Moll Flanders, though she makes herself out to be a sinful creature at times, can be seen as a victim of her circumstances committing crimes out of necessity, rather than an evil woman who cannot control herself. Barbara Skelton was tired of living in a world where she could not be her true self and sought revenge on her womanly duties by becoming a highway woman to express herself and feel alive. These women show that there is more to a female criminal than their archetypes imply, and they have all become a product of their circumstances rather than inherently evil. These stories present them as complex human beings rather than the mould of their character archetypes in the past.

Works Cited

- “EBook - The Wicked Lady - a Revision of the Life of Katherine Ferrers.” *John Barber, Author*, 28 Apr. 2020, www.johnbarber.com/katherine-ferrers-the-wicked-lady/.
- “The Proceedings of the Old Bailey.” *Historical Background - Gender in the Proceedings – Central Criminal Court*, www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Gender.jsp.
- Beattie, J. M. “The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England.” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 8, no. 4, Summer 1975. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1353/jsh/8.4.80.
- Defoe, Daniel. *Moll Flanders*. Oxford World’s Classics, 2011.
- Dekker, Thomas and Thomas Middleton. “The Roaring Girl.” *The Longman Anthology, British Literature*, edited by David Damrosch and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Pearson Education, 2006, 1417 – 1489.
- Fearn, Esther. “Moll Cutpurse.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 22 July 2019, www.britannica.com/biography/Moll-Cutpurse.
- Hendricks, Margo. “A Painter’s Eye: Gender and Middleton and Dekker’s The Roaring Girl.” *Women’s Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2/3, Nov. 1990, p. 191. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/00497878.1990.9978830
- Jackson, Sarah. “Mary Frith, or Moll Cutpurse, the Roaring Girl.” *East End Women's Museum*, East End Women's Museum, 20 Nov. 2016, eastendwomensmuseum.org/blog/mary-frith.
- King-Hall, Magdalen. *Life and Death of the Wicked Skelton*. iPad ibooks, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2016.
- Rietz, John. “Criminal Ms-Representation: Moll Flanders and Female Criminal Biography.” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1991, pp. 183–195. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1991070591&site=ehost-live.
- Shoemaker, Robert B. “Print and the Female Voice: Representations of Women’s Crime in London, 1690–1735.” *Gender & History*, vol. 22, no. 1, Apr. 2010, pp. 75–91. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0424.2009.01579.x.

Ungerer, Gustav. "Mary Frith, Alias Moll Cutpurse, in Life and Literature." *Shakespeare*

Studies, vol. 28, 2000, pp. 42–84. *EBSCOhost*,

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2001581132&site=ehost-live.

White, Barbara. "Jenny Voss: The Fantasy of Female Criminality." *Writing and Fantasy*, edited

by Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White, Longman Publishers, 1999, pp. 166–

181. *EBSCOhost*,

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2008296369&site=ehost-live.