

## The Other Sides of Greed through The Character of Moll in *Moll Flanders* By Daniel Defoe: A Life Lesson For All

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### ABSTRACT

Greediness is one of the human imperfections that can lead to total self-destruction. The strong desire of accumulating the maximum of material and the daily willing of getting easy profit from any activity or action is very remarkable through each step of age particularly from young men and specifically young girls. If one don't t²ake care, it can lead to a no-return door and to inhumanity. This has been well illustrated through the protagonist Moll's life in *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe. This research aims at drawing the attention of young men on the significance of hard work, love and brotherhood for an accomplished and peaceful life.

**Key words:** Greed, Moll, Moll Flanders, Daniel Defoe.

### INTRODUCTION

Greed is known as an intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power, or food. According to the American Business Dictionary, Greed describes a desire to have or acquire something that is not necessary for their own survival but which is also to the detriment of another. In addition, greed usually describes someone that cannot have enough. The more he or she attains, the more he or she wants and is never satisfied. Potential consequences of unchecked greed include bankruptcy, destitution and even criminal punishment.

Perhaps the most infamous example of greed is Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme, which was the biggest fraudulent scheme in U.S. history. Bernie Madoff, financial advisor of his own firm named Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities LLC, was also the past chairman of NASDAQ. He used his position as a financial advisor and chairman of his own firm to convince investors that he would earn large gains. Instead of investing the money, he deposited the money into a bank account. Statements to investors would show gains that were, in actuality, money procured from new investors. The plan worked as long as new investors came on board and existing investors did not want to cash out.

In fact, no gains were earned at all, and eventually, the scheme collapsed, only after Madoff had cheated investors out of \$65 billion. Madoff was very greedy according to his own words, "I lived very extravagantly. In the end, I bought a plane with another person. I had a boat [and four homes]. You're talking about someone who had a billion dollars." Madoff's greed resulted in a prison sentence of 150 years, where he claims to be helping his victims recover their money. His wife is estranged, and his son, who worked with his father, committed suicide. According to Madoff, he regrets his mistakes. "The thing that was important to me was family, but that's all gone. That's more punishment than being incarcerated."<sup>1</sup>

The main protagonist Moll in *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe is not far from being Madoff. The main difference between the two is that Moll was not judged and condemned human judicial instance but the divine justice. She lives like witch with a strong will to accumulate the maximum of wealth as possible. She did move back in front of obstacles, she was ready to everything even to sleep with the young brother of her husband just to keep being rich. The main purpose of the paper is highlight how greed can destroy people. It also stresses on the necessity for young men to deserve their time on hard work.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My research paper is fundamentally based on documentary research with *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe as my primary source of information. I also went through other literary works and some scientific

<sup>1</sup>[www.businessdictionary.com/definition/greed.html](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/greed.html)

articles dealing with the issue of greed. For me to measure and have the perception of young men about cupidity I have elaborated a questionnaire that I have distributed randomly to four hundred students in Parakou. The analysis and interpretation of the results from the obtained data is included in this research paper. I end the work with a general call for hard work.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### *Literature review*

This research is not the first and would not certainly be the last to have dealt with the issue of greed. Many writers and scholars have already made the concept of greed their main research topic directly or indirectly.

In the famous Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, the protagonist Odili is a young teacher in an unnamed African country run by greedy and corrupt politicians (Achebe 1966). Chief Nanga, Odili's former teacher who is an elected official and Minister of culture of the country shows his great greed. He declared in the novel:

*For I was not being so naïve as to imagine that loving Edna was enough to wrench her from a minister. True, I had other advantages like youth and education but those were nothing beside wealth and position and authority of a greedy father". (Achebe, p108)*

This illustrates how greedy Edna's father is, capable of ignoring the importance of education and school certificates for a brighter future of his daughter getting married with an educated man. He prefers

chief Nanga as a Minister to marry his daughter because he knows that chief Nanga has money and can give him money as much as she needs. Edna, however, feels

In famous African novel *Sous l'Orage* (1957) written by Seydou Badian, for example father Benfa one of the main protagonists decided to offer his unique daughter Kany to an old man having already two wives. Omitting the desire of Kany to choose her own husband is believes that giving her to Famagan would honor his family and he can get profit from their union. Famagan is rich and he can help us in our multiple daily problems he confessed in the novel. This is a good example of cupidity and self-ambitions over the interests of all.

Another good illustration of greed is the behaviour of Frank Shepherd in the *Double bass Mystery* by Jeremie Harmer. He is so greed that what the band would earn after the different concerts they planned was not enough for him. He meticulously planned the theft of valuable picture from a museum to have the maximum of money after the tour. Frank's behaviour not only has reduced the performance of the band with one missing double bass but it has led to insecurity, fear, mistrust among the member of the symphony orchestra but it has also led to death. This further confirmed what was saying "*He who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have*" and Mahatma Gandhi enriches the above saying by declaring that: "*Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed*". That is may be the case of most the greed.

obligated to marry the Chief because he has given her family money and her father is pressuring her.

### ***Greed through the character of Moll in Moll Flanders by Daniel Defoe***

Daniel Defoe is one of the best and prolific English writers. Most his works from *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) up to *Roxana: The fortunate Mistress* (1724) and *Moll Flanders* are intensive life experiences. Through his works he used to draw readers attention on the daily problem proposing himself in a fictional autobiography as the main protagonist. The literary works he let back to the young generation is invaluable. Most of his works dealt with life lessons and the selected novel of this paper is not an exception.

*Moll Flanders*" is written and published in 1722. It is one of his easiest literary works thus it is easy to read and the language level is deserved for all. I decided to work on the issue of greed through the character of Moll also called Betty in the novel. As I say in my introduction the main aim behind the selection of this topic is highlight how greed can destroy people and encourage the young generation to hard work for sustainable life success.

Moll is a particular character in *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe. Moll, the heroine of the book, was born in Newgate Prison and abandoned at about a year-and-a-half. She was a forceful, persistent, resolute young girl who obtained her way in most things. She was attractive and so vain about her appearance that she was easily convinced men were in love with her. Moll often moralized about her fear of poverty, her greed, her increasing hardness

of heart, her criminal activities, her numerous husbands and lovers. Her evolving theory was that if England had provided properly for orphans she would not have fallen into bad hands and thus needed to fend for herself before she could be trained to make her way honestly in the world. According to her theory, a young girl in poor circumstances had the right to find support as best she could. Moll, vain and fearful of poverty, pursued her goal of obtaining security in life.<sup>2</sup> She would like to get everything in life without any effort everything should come to her as she breaths. "I believed I could get my living without going to service"<sup>3</sup>

A second aspect was her ruthless pursuit of money. The result of the acts she performed to achieve these goals was the transformation of a beautiful innocent young girl into a hardened middle-aged criminal who was finally captured and sent to Newgate Prison. Her resourcefulness and conniving brought her release from prison and her transportation to Virginia. There, with Jemmy, her favorite husband, she was able to become, in a year's time, a wealthy plantation-owner. Throughout the novel we see Moll's dual nature a penitent woman reproaching herself for her misdeeds, and a ruthless pursuer of ill-gotten wealth.<sup>4</sup> This is well illustrated by the following statement.

*upon these apprehensions, the first thing I did was to go quite out of my knowledge, and go by another name this I did effectually, for I went into the mint too,*

<sup>2</sup> [www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/m/moll-flanders/character-analysis/moll-flanders](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/m/moll-flanders/character-analysis/moll-flanders)

<sup>3</sup> Moll Flanders, chap 2 p10

<sup>4</sup> [www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/m/moll-flanders/character-analysis/moll-flanders](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/m/moll-flanders/character-analysis/moll-flanders)

*took lodgings in a very private place, dressed up in the habit of a widow, and called myself Mr. Flanders (Moll Flanders p76)*

For money and in order to keep living a wealthy life, she was able to get married to her late husband younger brother.

*Indeed I have preserved the elder brother's bonds to me, to pay #500, which he offered me for my consent marry his brother, and his with what I had saved of the money he formerly gave me, about as much more by my husband, left me about as much more by my husband; left me a widow with about #1200 in my pocket (Moll Flanders p70)*

By so doing Moll practiced incest without taking into account her dignity and the dignity of her family as well as the moral code of the society she belongs to. She has become a persona non grata in the society because of immorality. To escape criticisms she started moving from place to places. She has even decided to change name to keep on carrying on her dirty activities. *Upon these apprehensions, the first thing I did was to go quite out of my knowledge, and go by another name this I did effectually, for I went into the mint too, took lodgings in a very private place, dressed up in the habit of a widow, and called myself Mr. Flanders ( Moll Flanders p70)*

Moll is not even able to take care of her own kid. Happy to know that her grandparents are taking care of them.

*"My two children were, indeed, taken happily off of my hands by my husband's father and mother, she chooses husbands on the basis of their affluence or social class. When the first one dies she muses, "I*

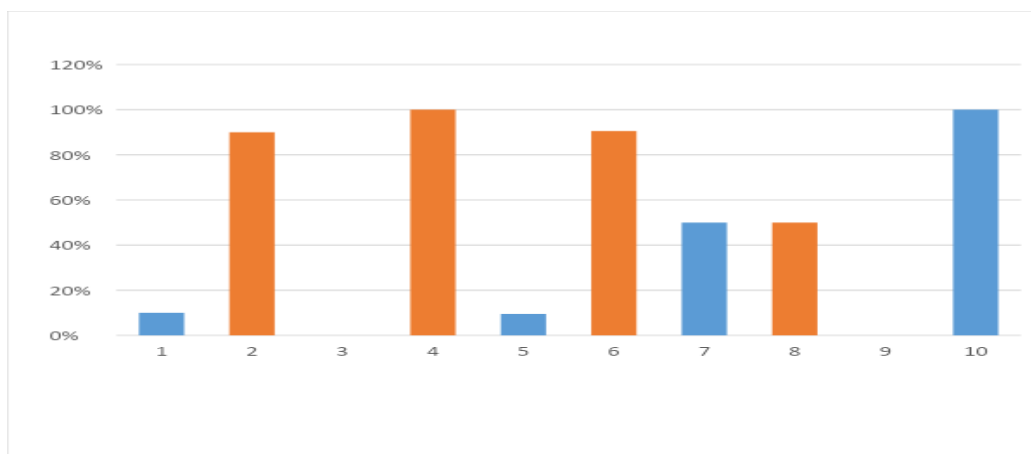
*had preserved the elder brother's bonds to he offered me for my consent to marry his brother; and this, with what I saved of the money he formerly gave me and about as much more by my husband, left me a widow with about £1200 in my pocket."* (Moll Flanders p70- 71)

Daniel Defoe has depicted Moll as a covetous character. For some reader is

*me to pay me £500, which would be a great shock to be dealing with such a woman. The main of the author being to draw attention for behaviour changing. To have people perception of the topic I randomly have distributed a questionnaire to about two hundred citizens in Parakou. I just ask five questions and he below table sum up the answers I obtained.*

N°	QUESTIONS	ANSWERS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
1	Is greed a good thing?	Yes	20	10%
		No	180	90%
2	Do you like greedy people?	Yes	00	0%
		No	200	100%
3	Is greediness useful in life?	Yes	19	09,5%
		No	181	90,5%
4	Is being greed willingness?	Yes	100	50%
		No	100	50%
5	Would you choose between greed and generosity?	Greed	200	0%
		Generosity	00	100%

Source: summary of answers from distributed questionnaires



**Graph 1: Summary of the obtained results**

### ***Analysis and interpretation of the obtained results***

To the question is *greed a good thing*, only 20 of the people I interviewed said yes while the remaining 80 condemned the phenomenon. When tried to know if they like greedy people, they all confirmed they disenchantment for greediness. For them being greed is useless in life. We need to share all we have with other neighbors to reinforce the social tissue commented others. Greed is then a matter of will, a matter of heart. It then impossible to force someone to be greed. At the same time, almost half of the interviewees declared that being cupid is a willingness arguing that have a free choice of life. The last question I ask my interviewees is about their preference between greed and generosity. They unanimously have rejected the idea of greed and prefer from far generosity. They are hundred out of hundred to have chosen generosity instead of greed.

From a closer analysis of the above graph I come to the following conclusion. The observation of the figure indicates that 90% of respondents believe that greed is a bad thing against 10% who think the opposite. The figure also indicates that no respondent likes greedy people. Less than 10% think that greed is useful in life. Half of the respondents think that greed is voluntary and the other half think it is involuntary. All respondents prefer generosity to greed.

### **CONCLUSION**

*Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe is a very instructive and teaching novel. Through the character of Moll one can learn more

lessons about life. Through Moll Defoe would like shock the reader and let him to see life otherwise. There is nothing educative from the behaviour of the main protagonist of Moll Flanders. Moll spent her whole life in fortunes to day and misfortunes tomorrow. Her strong desire for money and material whatever the price lead her to her total decline. She has refused to work to build her life. She has even refuse to deserve her time to the noble duty of all women, taking care of her own children. Moll is a character of all the extreme behaviour, immoral, lazy, and cruel. Her extreme beauty has been fatal to her. She refuses to be a servant; her dream is to become a gentlewoman, totally independent. Fortunately she got time for repentance. He finally regretted all her deeds and this would be my message to all. Life is so short that we all need to maximize good deeds and always have in mind Shakespeare's *all is well that ends well*.

### **REFERENCES**

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- 1- Daniel Defoe (1719) *Moll Flanders*, London
- 2- Seydou Badian (1957) *Sous l'Orage*