Noble, Francis. Introduction. The History of Lætitia Atkins, Vulgarly called Moll Flanders. Published by Mr. Daniel Defoe. And from Papers found since his decease, it appears greatly altered by himself. London, 1776. iii-viii.

The world is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances, generally spun from the brains of needy authors, and often very improbably related, that it will be difficult for a real history, tho’ founded upon facts, to be taken for genuine.

Laetitia Atkins, though vulgarly called Moll Flanders, the heroine of the following history, was as beautiful a woman, and as fine a figure, as any would desire to behold; and from her conversation, at the time she produced me her manuscript, I imagined she would want but little of my assistance: but, in that particular, I found my error; for though she had received what is called a liberal education, I mean for a woman, yet, when she came to express her thoughts upon paper, they were delivered not with half that propriety, which she held in conversation.

She told me that it was not only written in her own hand, but that there was not a single incident would be found in her whole story, but was really and literally true; and indeed there are abundance, and all of them usefully applied: there is also an agreeable turn given them in the relating, that naturally instructs, and diverts the reader; yet, upon my giving the book another reading, several years after the publication; I was astonished to find I had suffered many circumstances to appear in print, which, though they were true, upon a more cool reflection, my judgment could not by any means approve.

I therefore, still keeping truth in view, by never suffering her to escape my sight, altered many parts of it, to give it the better reading, as I some little time before had done by Roxana; or, the Fortunate Mistress; in the doing of which as I pleased myself, I have the less doubt of pleasing my readers also.

That part of her life with her young master, at Colchester, has so many happy turns given it to expose the crime, and warn all, whose circumstances are adapted to it, of the ruinous end of such indiscretions, and the thoughtless and abhorred conduct of both the parties, that it abundantly atones for the description she gives of her folly.

The repentance of her lover at the Bath, and how brought by the just alarm of his fit of sickness to abandon her; the caution given against even the lawful intimacies of the dearest friends, and how unable they are to preserve the most solemn resolutions of virtue without divine assistance; are parts, which, to a just discernment, will appear to have more real beauty in them, than all the amorous romances that have ever been published.

Her application, and industrious management at last in Virginia, with her transported husband, is a story fruitful of instruction, to all who are obliged to seek their re-establishment abroad; whether by the misery of transportation, or other disaster; letting them know, that diligence and application have their due encouragement, even in the remotest parts of the world; that no case can be so low, so despicable, or so empty of prospect, but that an unwearied industry will go a great way to deliver us from it, will in time raise the meanest creature to appear again in the world, and give him a new prospect for his life.
These are a few of the serious inferences which we are led by the hand to in this book, and these are fully sufficient to justify me in recommending it to the world, and much more to justify the publication of it.

Islington,
December 20, 1730.

Daniel Defoe.

My father was an intimate acquaintance of Mr Daniel Defoe. I had frequently heard him speak of his friend, highly to his advantage as a moral writer, in many of his publications, and wondered much, after my reading his *Robinson Crusoe*, to find both in his *Roxana*, and in his *Moll Flanders*, expressions so much beneath him; but, upon a perusal, when I came in possession of the manuscripts of his alteration of both those histories, I acquiesced in the opinion of my father, and in that opinion, have thought it proper, in their new dress, to introduce them for the entertainment of those who are admirers of nature:

The Editor.