

Defoe's *Daydream*: Becoming *Moll Flanders*

Susanna Bartmann

Donning the layman's cloak of naiveté, Freud sets out to characterize the "stuff" of which literature is made in his 1908 essay "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming." He traces the connection between the act of daydreaming and the act of writing: writing is the formal transformation of the wish into the text, the work of art. The materiality of language gives the literary text a hide-and-seek quality. It is possible that one might look into the text just as the analyst might decipher the text of the dream, for writing is daydreaming on paper. The proper moment for pinpointing Daniel Defoe's wish as he wrote *Moll Flanders* has arrived, heralded by Geoffrey Hartman's directive that there is a name (a "specular name") hidden within the folds of the text which calls out to be read. This piece seeks to illustrate the transformation of wish into writing by way of the specular name; to deconstruct by staging a brief unveiling of *Moll Flanders*, text of lace,—of desire.



Figure 1: "The text, while it is being produced, is like a piece of Valenciennes lace created before us under the Lacemaker's fingers. . . ." — Barthes

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Nearing sixty, Defoe began to write pseudo-autobiographical narratives. Within a period of six years, the following works, usually referred to as "novels," were published:

The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe and The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719), *The Life, Adventures, and Pyracies, of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720), *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722), *The History and Remarkable Life of the truly Honourable Col. Jacque, Commonly Call'd Col. Jack* (1722) and *The Fortunate Mistress [Roxana]* (1724).

These are now recognized as Defoe's greatest works.

Moll Flanders, in particular, has enjoyed quite a resurgence in the twentieth century, and has received a continued variety of readings from critics such as:

Denis Donoghue
E.M. Forster
Mark Schorer
James Sutherland
Dorothy Van Ghent
Ian Watt
Virginia Woolf

(Roland S/Z) [Inset]

“A text only exists, resists,
 consists, represses, lets it-
 self be read or written if it
 is

elaborated [*travaillé*]
 by the
 unreadability [*illisibilité*]
 of a proper name.¹”

It is the subject
 of names:
 their visibility/invisibility
 I wish to investigate here.
 Taking my cue from Defoe's
 Preface and in the interest of
 operating with fashionable gear,
 I will lace this article with
 sewing notions.
 The title page of the first edition of
Moll Flanders read like this:

*The Fortunes and Misfortunes of
 the Famous Moll Flanders, & c. Who
 was Born in Newgate, and during a
 Life of continu'd Variety for
 Threescore Years, besides her
 Childhood, was Twelve Year a
 Whore, five times a Wife (where-
 of once to her own Brother)
 Twelve year a Thief, Eight Year
 a Transported Felon in Virginia,
 at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest,
 and died a Penitent. Written from
 her own Memorandums.*²

[Inset]

Barthes,

and others. Much of the critical investigation which has been carried out seeks to expose the contradictions of the novel, of Moll herself, and of her "author." In the Preface, Moll Flanders the "author" writes:

"The Pen employ'd in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak Language fit to be read . . . an Author must be hard put to it to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vitious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage."³

[Fig. 5]

of

The writer requires imagination for the fashioning of the disguise/text. [Figure 1]

Defoe was well-suited to the task.

It is Freud who invites us to consider the connection between the imaginative writer (the poet) and the act of day-dreaming.

He tells us that just as nocturnal dreams are fulfillments of desires, so too are day-dreams, "those phantasies with which we are all so familiar."⁷

of gradual

The name of the
"author," Defoe,
is notably absent
from the title
page. I will re-
turn to this ab-
sence later.

Defoe was, from personal experience, well acquainted with prisons and criminals for much of his life. He had, in fact, spent eighteen months at Newgate Prison, shortly before writing *Moll Flanders*.

"[I]t is not to be expected I [Moll] should set my Name, or the Account of my Family to this Work; perhaps, after my Death it may be better known, at present it would not be proper, no, not tho' a general Pardon should be issued, even without Exceptions and reserve of Persons or Crimes."⁴

In finishing Moll's story the "author" employs Defoe's distinctive pattern of irony ("a form of mockery by means of deception and trickery"⁵) and personal experience to create an acceptable disguise (veil) for the "real" Moll.

*"We laymen have always wondered greatly – like the cardinal who put the question to Ariosto – how that strange being, the poet, comes by his material."*⁶

invasion meaning.

a

course

“Writing upon Trade was the Whore I really doated upon.”

Her world is, after all, a mercantile one, and is, as Denis Donoghue has pointed out “utterly faithful to its own terms.” On the surface of a looking-glass Moll writes to a lover: *[But] Money’s Vertue; Gold is Fate.* Moll is nearly always figuring.

Defoe was a master illusionist and a careful dreamer.

He skillfully threaded his desire to be Moll Flanders into the work, into *Moll Flanders*, the imprint of her name on every page.

As the “author” of *Moll Flanders* cautions in the “Preface”: “An Author must be hard put to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vitious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage.”

is
progress each
out,
is
and the
the
brings back

it to frame; as pattern filled of thread marked the

foe. Thus Defoe, already in the habit of writing and armed with the materials of experience and imagination (a wish clearly had designs on suiting himself in writing this novel. "Language," writes Freud, "in its unrivalled wisdom, long ago decided the question of the essential nature of dreams by giving the name of 'day-dreams' to the airy creations of phantasy" (p. 49).

The string of the wish is loosely tied in *Moll Flanders*.

Like lace. [Figure 2]

"[T]he day-dreamer hid his phantasies carefully from other people because he had reason to be ashamed of them. I may now add that even if he were to communicate them to us, he would give us no pleasure by his disclosures. When we hear such phantasies they repel us, or at least leave us cold.

But when a man of literary talent presents his plays, or relates what we take to be his personal day-dreams, we experience great pleasure. . . . How the writer accomplishes this is his innermost secret; the essential ars poetica lies in the technique. . . . We can guess at two methods used in this technique.

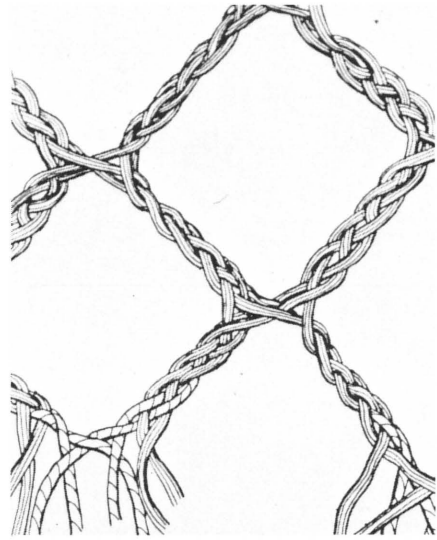


Figure 2: The string of the wish is loosely tied in *Moll Flanders*. Like lace.

“The Author is here suppos’d to be writing her own History, and in the very beginning of her Account, she gives the Reasons why she thinks fit to conceal her true Name, after which there is no Occasion to say any more about that.”

again,

the

Virginia Woolf, praising Defoe, makes the following suggestion:

“On any monument worthy of the name of monument, the names of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, at least, should be carved as deeply as the name of Defoe.”¹⁰

takes

It is an interesting notion.

But *Moll Flanders* is just a trade name . . .

“They all knew me by the Name of *Moll Flanders*, tho’ even some of them rather believ’d I was she, than knew me to be so; my Name was publick among them indeed,” says Moll of those in the criminal circle in which she moved, “but how to find me out they knew not, nor so much as how to guess at my Quarters, whether they were at the East-End of the Town, or the West. . . .”¹¹

the

turn

“I had dress’d myself up in a very mean Habit, for as I had several Shapes to appear in I was now in an ordinary Stuff-Gown, a blue Apron and a Straw-Hat. . . .”¹³

when

The writer softens the egotistical character of the daydream by changes and disguises, and he bribes us by the offer of a purely formal, that is, aesthetic, pleasure in the presentation of his phantasies.

I am of the opinion that all the aesthetic pleasure we gain from the works of imaginative writers is [a] type [of] fore-pleasure, and that the true enjoyment of literature proceeds from the release of tensions in our minds. . . . Here we reach a path leading into novel, interesting re-searches. . . .”⁹

Elements of disguise figure noticeably in her account of the “Scenes of Life” she engages in.

“I had taken up the Disguise of a Widow’s Dress; it was without any real design in view, but only waiting to any thing that might offer, as I often did . . .”¹²

These are the moments in which the ‘forepleasure’ Freud speaks of is experienced by the reader.

It is the pleasure of deception.

It is the pleasure of a cleverly
maneuvered exchange.

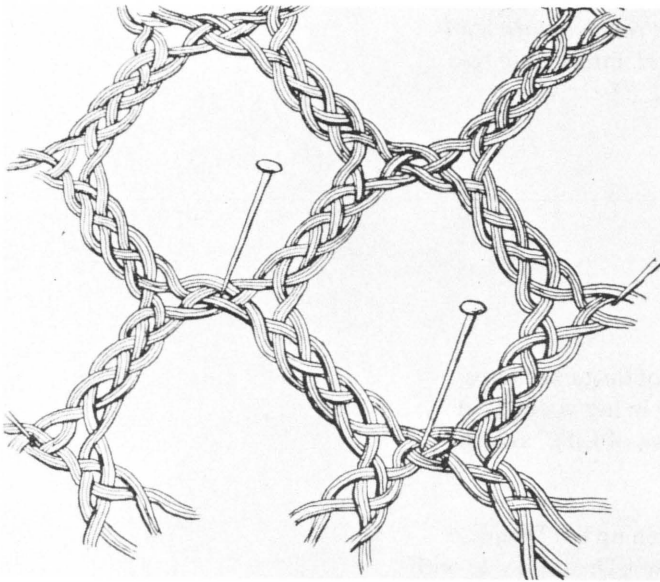
then,

Playing with her name she mocks
herself:
“What! Mrs. *Flanders* come to *New-*
gate at last? what Mrs. *Mary*, Mrs.
Molly, and after that plain *Moll*
Flanders?”¹⁴

by changes and disguises . . .

bor

[Figure 3]



neigh-

while

Figure 3: A paper of lace.

Who is Moll Flanders?

What does she represent?

(Moll, to a lover):

works;

Among her recollections of criminal life is the account of her partnership with another "man" in committing crimes. "For about three Weeks we did very well together. . . . And as we kept always together, so we grew very intimate, yet he never knew that I was not a Man; nay, tho' several times I went with him to his Lodgings, according as our business directed, and four or five times lay with him all Night: But our Design lay another way, and it was absolutely necessary to me to conceal my Sex from him . . . and as it was I effectually conceal'd my self."¹⁵

its

Moll Flanders then, is a double-agent.

She is the undercover agent of Defoe's desire.

“I gave him a Direction how to write me, tho’ still I reserv’d the grand *Secret*, and never broke my Resolution, which was not to let him ever know *my true Name*.”¹⁶

bobbin

Under the cover of her name, his wish to be *her* is hidden.

temporarily

The wish, previously invisible, can be read, illuminated by Freud’s musings.

She ^{seems} to be Other.
seams

Moll/L. *mollis* / to soften

like

“[I]n a Word, I grew more hardn’d and audacious then ever, and the Success I had, made my Name as famous as any Thief of my sort had ever been at *Newgate*, and in the *Old-Bayly*.”¹⁹

m

taken

Moll was a common nick-name for female underworld characters.

Moll Flanders, however, signifies more than one or two glances at her name might suggest.

As dream-girl, she is (essentially) faceless.

waiting

But she has a voice . . .

As readers we share the peculiar intimacies of the transactions of her life, yet we never learn the color of Moll's hair.

inactive

But she has form . . .

"[T]he text generated by the name is bound to enlase and so to bury it."¹⁷

the

This is the mission of *Moll Flanders*.

She is hard to figure out.

hangs

f Flanders/a comprehensive term covering several varieties of lace.¹⁸

"I found means to slip a Paper of Lace into my Pocket, and come clear off with it. . . ."²⁰

Moll Flanders.
Not simply a suitable pair of names for a whore's tale,²¹ but a name embodying a wish.

The account of her gains and losses is told in a voice so distinctive that it is clear that Defoe has created, as Donaghue noted, "a world which bears his [Defoe's] sole patent.

Moll Flanders.
Born in Newgate Prison of a criminal mother.
Father unknown.

It is her sister criminals, "those hardn'd Wretches," "that gave me the Name of *Moll Flanders*: For it was no more of Affinity with my real Name, or with any of the Names I had ever gone by, than black is of Kin to white, except that once, as before, I call'd my self Mrs. *Flanders*, when I sheltered myself in the *Mint*; But that these Rogues never knew, nor could I ever learn how they came to give me the Name, or what the Occasion of it was."²³

It is this sort of name-game which characterizes *Moll Flanders*.

Our subject, Moll Flanders, is not simply the woman she appears to be.

under-

each

lacemakers

under

The specular
name is a
name more gen-
uinely one's
own than a
signature or
a proper name,
according to
Hartman; it
is the hidden
name of the
text. The
name of Moll

Flanders is the authenticating
seal of the text, which bears
the same name.

sequence

Daniel Defoe.
Son of James and Alice Foe.
Born in London in 1660.
James Foe was a butcher.

Daniel Defoe was a name, in
fact, not really his own.

fingers;

"[H]e could not leave even
his adopted name alone; he seems
to have been about forty when he
first changed his signature
"D. Foe" into the surname of
"Defoe;" . . . it is a character-
istic circumstance that his name
is not his own, except in the
sense that it was assumed by
himself."²²

the

It is a circum-
stance of her
character, *Moll*
Flanders, that her
name is an assumed

name. It is a name intimately
connected with Defoe
and I wish to pursue the connec-
tion.

us

She is an/other as well, as a gentle pull at the string of the text will reveal.

before

“Every literary narrative contains another narrative: however continuous or full the one seems to be, the other is discontinuous and lacunary.”²⁵

Moll Flanders is a day-dream.

“[I]f there is a key, the author has locked the text and, as it were, thrown the key away – into the text.”²⁶

lace

Placing the name of Moll Flanders next to that of Daniel Defoe, the specular name of the text comes into focus.

of

piece

The exceptional case is the letter “i”, which, in light of the first person narration of the “novel” can be nominated to the upper case (I).

like

I will reproduce the anagram here, inserting numbers which signify the order of reading the letters.

produced,

is

Admittedly less-than-perfect (one “I” of Daniel must cancel three of Moll’s) the anagram appears as a notable sign.

while

"[T]he proper name affixed to a text . . . is its authenticating seal."²⁴

[Figure 4]

created

How the writer accomplishes this is his innermost secret.

Literature: gold mine of wishes gilded by
Language: treasury of signifiers.

Valenciennes

"The repetition of a specular name gives rise to texts that seem to be anagrammatic or to conceal an unknown – unknowable key, a "pure" signifier, writes Hartman. These texts are called literature."²⁷

a

It is the watermark of the text, this name.

is

For *Moll Flanders* is an anagram, the letters of which can be arranged in such a way that they contain all the letters of the name of the "author"

being

D A N I E L	D E F O E	
	I	
M O L L	F L A N D E R S	(4)
6 6	9 6 2 3 1 5	
10	7 8	
	11	

it

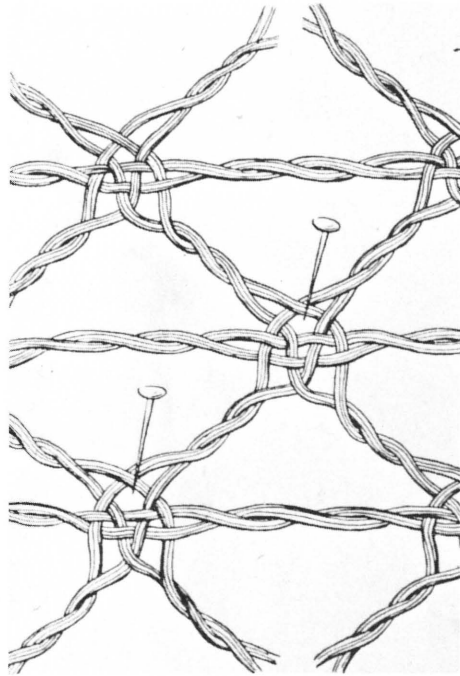


Figure 4

The common letters of their names constitute the key which Defoe threw into the text (into the body) of *Moll Flanders*. They spell his previously unreadable secret identity.

Just as the recounting of a dream may produce readable material, so too does the text of the day-dream when it is dressed up in the garb of literature.

In considering her name, the reader need not look any further than the lacy associations Flanders draws to mind.

But there is another name, buried within itself, enshrouded in the text, obscured by the lace connection.

Lifting the veil which connotation holds fast we read the wish and arrive at the scene of recognition.

*'day-dreams' / the airy creations
of fantasy*

displaced from right to left. . . ."³⁰

text

Mrs. is the way the reader should use the three letters which remain; this was the manner of addressing both married and single women in Defoe's time.

[Inset]

"[K]now me by the Name of *Moll Flanders*; so you may give me leave to speak of myself, under that Name till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am."²⁸

Behind the hints
of the "author"
and between the slips in her
"memorandums" the string of
the wish is visible.

*"called an 'incitement premium'
or technically, 'fore-pleasure.'"*

"I could fill a larger History than this, with the Evidences of this Truth, and but that I doubt that part of the Story will not be equally diverting as the wicked Part I have had thoughts of making a Volume of it by itself."²⁹

Moll Flanders / Other

"[T]he 'scene of writing' never takes place in one place: its locus (corpus) is always also 'ein anderer Schauplatz,' as Freud put it:

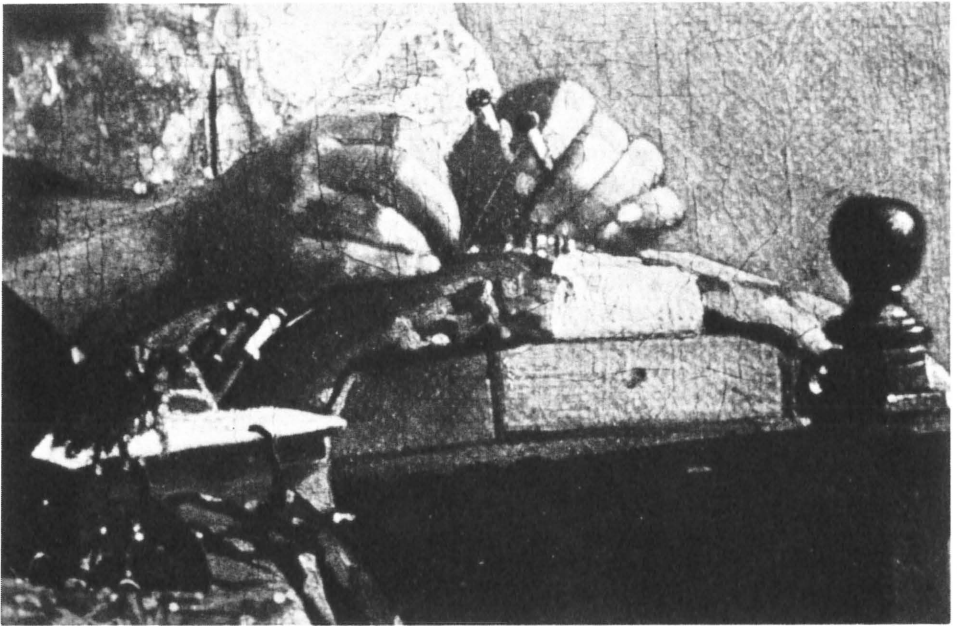


Figure 5: "The progress of each thread is marked with a pin. . . ." – Barthes

1. Jacques Derrida, quoted by Geoffrey Hartman, "Psychoanalysis: The French Connection," in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978), p. 95.
2. Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, Inc., 1970), xvi. All quotations from the novel, unless otherwise noted, are taken from this edition. I will retain the capitalizations and spellings of the 1722 edition.
3. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 4.
4. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 9.
5. Defoe used irony in a particular sense. He quotes from rhetorician Gerardus Vollius, who defined it as a form of mockery by means of deception and trickery.
6. Sigmund Freud, "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming (1908)" in *On Creativity and the Unconscious* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 44.
7. Freud, "Poet and Day-Dreaming," p. 50.
8. Freud, "Poet and Day-Dreaming," p. 48-9.
9. Freud, "Poet and Day-Dreaming," p. 53-4.
10. Virginia Woolf, "Defoe" in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Moll Flanders*, ed. Robert C. Elliott (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 12.
11. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 174.
12. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 189.
13. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 187.
14. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 215.

15. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 169-70.
16. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 127.
17. Hartman, "The French Connection," p. 95.
18. See Thomas Wright, *The Romance of the Lace Pillow*, 2nd ed. (Olney, Bucks: H.H. Armstrong, 1924), p. 14, which gives this account of Flanders lace: "The oldest Flemish laces seem to have had as foundation a braid or tape, whence the name Pillow Guipure, but a 'Trolly,' or heavy *cordonnnet*, sometimes took the place of tape. . . . The principal later laces of Flanders are Brussels (of which there were two leading kinds; Point à Aiguille or Needle-made Lace, and Point Plat or Bobbin-made, though the needle-work and the bobbin-work were often mingled), Mechlin and Antwerp, which were pillow laces."
19. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 205.
20. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 201.
21. See, for example, the commentary of Kenneth Rexroth in his Afterword to the Signet edition of *Moll Flanders* where he notes: "we seem to see Defoe's characters through the crystal-clear medium of his style with perfect verisimilitude, as real as if we saw them in a mirror that was invisible. *Moll Flanders* is considered the most authentic portrait of a prostitute in English literature." It has been called "the truest realism in English Literature" and, on a more sensational level, "red-blooded realism," "the tale of a hot, earthy wench . . . the book is full of things, material things" (p. 305).
22. According to biographer William Minto, *English Men of Letters: Daniel Defoe* (London: Macmillan, Pocket edn., 1909), pp. 2-3.
23. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 169.
24. Hartman, "The French Connection," p. 95.
25. Hartman, p. 102.
26. Hartman, p. 99.
27. Hartman, p. 94.
28. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 9.
29. Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 264.
30. Hartman, "The French Connection," p. 98.

Figure 1: Vermeer, "The Lacemaker," (about 1665). Reproduced in Lawrence Gowing, *Vermeer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952, 1970).

Figure 2: Valenciennes, Square Mesh. Illustration appearing in Margaret L. Brooke, *Lace in the Making* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1923) p. 89.

Figure 3: Valenciennes, Round Mesh. Brooke, *Lace in the Making*, p. 88.

Figure 4: Boule de Neige. Brooke, *Lace in the Making*, p. 98. The ground of this net should look like minute cobwebs. It is also known as "fausse Valenciennes," a most valuable lace.

Figure 5: Vermeer, "The Lacemaker," (detail). Reproduced in Pierre Descargues, *Vermeer* (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1966).

Frank O'Hara

STANDING STILL
AND WALKING
IN NEW YORK

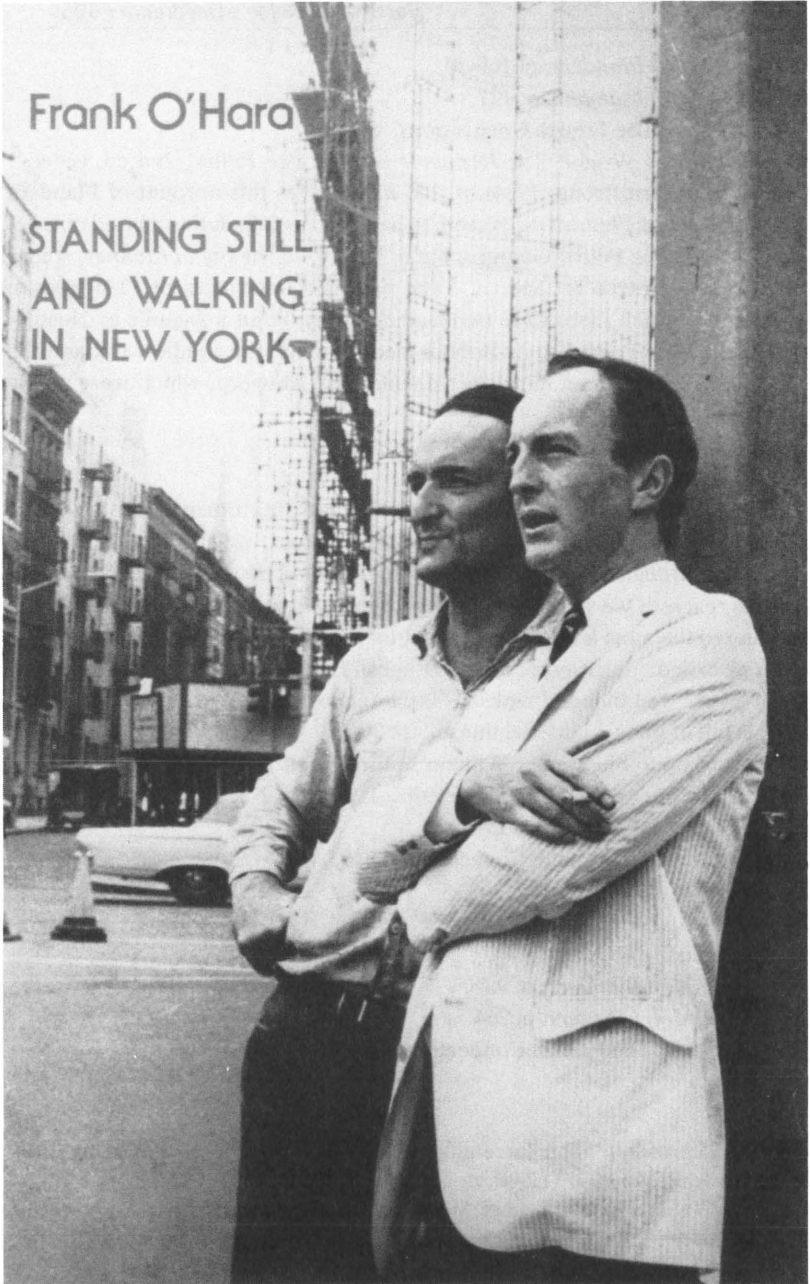


Figure 1: "By nature (he) was a city-dweller. . . ."