IDEAS: JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES
2023, VOL. 3, NO. 1, 18–30

English Language and Literature
Research Association of Turkey

Matriarchal Space and Formation of Identity in *Moll Flanders*

Berkem SAĞLAM

Çankaya University, Türkiye

Abstract: Despite the apparent disadvantages of women in the eighteenth century, Moll in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* encounters and learns from many women who have established a place for themselves. Although she never legitimately owns a home of her own until the end of the novel, Moll's adventures feature her movement from establishment to establishment where a matriarch governs—"Nurse," who schools her as a child, the gentlewoman she works for, her landlady in Bath, "Mother Midnight" throughout her years of thievery, and indeed her own mother in America. Each of these arguably strong women inhabits what Gillian Rose in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* has termed a paradoxical space, "a space imagined in order to articulate a troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculinism" (159). Despite the indisputable dominancy of men in both the external and internal sphere at this time, the women in this text seem to enjoy spaces in which they can establish their own authority, although these may not be as easily identifiable as the well-established patriarchal norms. This paper aims to discuss the public and private spaces governed by women in *Moll Flanders* and to analyse how this use of space and place contributes to Moll's formation of identity as a strong and liberated woman.

Keywords:

Daniel Defoe,
Eighteenth-century novel,
Space,
Women's space,
Women's identity

Article History:

Received:
08 Feb. 2023

Accepted:
29 Mar. 2023

Moll Flanders Romanında Anaerkil Alanlar ve Moll'un Kimlik Kazanımında Etkileri

Öz: On sekizinci yüzyıl İngiltere'sindeki kadınların inkar edilemez dezavantajlarına rağmen, Daniel Defoe'nun *Moll Flanders* romanındaki Moll karakteri, roman boyunca kendilerine yer edinmiş olan kadınlar sayesinde kimlik oluşumunu tamamlar. Geleneksel olmayan evlerde yaşamını sürdüren Moll, maceraları süresince karşılaştığı kadın karakterlerin sahip olduğu ve hüküm sürdüğü evlerde bulunur. Bunların bazıları; çocukken ona bakan ve eğiten Hemşire karakteri, evinde çalıştığı soylu hanımefendi, Bath'daki ev sahibesi, hırsızlık döneminde ona yol gösteren 'Geceyarısı Annesi' karakteri, ve hatta Amerika'daki kendi annesidir. Romandaki bu güçlü kadın karakterler, Gillian Rose'un *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* kitabında tartıştığı "erkeklerin hegemonik söylemleriyle sorunlu bir ilişkiyi dile getirmek için düşünülmüş bir alan" (159) olan paradoksal alanlara sahiptirler. Bu dönemdeki kadınların yadsınamayacak ölçüde ne evin içinde ne de evin dışında herhangi bir toplumsal güce sahip olmamalarına rağmen Moll Flanders'ın karşılaştığı bu kadınlar, kendi güçlü alanlarını yaratmışlardır. Bu yazının amacı, *Moll Flanders* romanındaki kadınların sahip oldukları umumi ve özel alanların Moll karakterinin kimlik arayışındaki olumlu etkilerini tartışmaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Daniel Defoe,
On sekizinci yüzyıl romanı,
Alan çalışmaları,
Kadın alanı,
Kadın kimliği

Makale Geçmişi:

Geliş Tarihi:
08 Şubat 2023

Kabul Tarihi:
29 Mart 2023

CONTACT: Berkem Sağlam, Assist. Prof. Dr. (https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4734-9341)
Çankaya University, Türkiye, bgurenci13@gmail.com

How to Cite: Sağlam, Berkem. "Matriarchal Space and Formation of Identity in Moll Flanders." *IDEAS: Journal of English Literary Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2023, pp. 18–30.

Thought of as one of the first examples of eighteenth-century fiction and helping to establish the novel as a legitimate literary genre, Daniel Defoe's (c. 1660–1731) *Moll Flanders* (1722) attempts to tell the "authentic" story of Moll, a notorious thief. The protagonist as a first-person narrator helps the reader to understand the motivations behind her actions, some of which are quite scandalous. Moll meets many men and women throughout the journey of the life that she is remembering, and, although she sometimes omits her personal feelings towards them, it is clear that it is the women rather than the men that have more of an impact on her life. Moll's relationships with the many men in her life obfuscate the equally formative (if not dominant) relationships she has with the women she is exposed to or seeks out during her adventures. Despite the pronounced disadvantageous situation of women in eighteenth-century society, Moll encounters and learns from many women who have established a place for themselves despite the apparent hardships in doing so. Never legitimately or fully owning a home of her own until the end of the novel, Moll's adventures feature her movement from establishment to establishment where a matriarch governs. For instance, there is "Nurse," who schools her as a child, the gentlewoman she works for, her landlady in Bath, the governess who guides her movements roughly from the middle of the novel on, and even her own mother in America. Each of these women is responsible for their own household (or establishment) and is a powerful role model for the protagonist.

These arguably strong women inhabit what Gillian Rose in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* has termed a paradoxical space, "a space imagined in order to articulate a troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculinism" (159). Although the time that the novel is set in is known to be a dominantly patriarchal one, the lack of male presence other than possible sexual partnerships is clearly felt. Moll's narrative of her life strays outside stereotypical dichotomies of public and private spaces. Instead, spaces presented are not only the domestic parlour and kitchen but where women are the ones who govern the entire household. These households can be seen as paradoxical spaces as they are often on the fringes of acceptable society, or masquerading as such. This paper aims, then, to discuss the public and private spaces governed by women in *Moll Flanders* and to analyse how this use of

space and place[1] contributes to Moll's formation of identity as a strong and liberated woman.

An early conflict in the novel comes about as a result of a misunderstanding of what a gentlewoman is. Moll's desire is to become a gentlewoman; she envisions a job with which she can live an independent life by providing for herself without depending on others. The irony of the situation prompts the ladies to laugh at her because the woman she shows as an example for this is a prostitute. Yet Moll is not interested in nobility or class (or lack of it); it is the independence that charms her, regardless of the job itself. It is surprising that the many women she meets in the novel are indeed "gentlewomen" in Moll's understanding of the word: they are able to appropriate spaces in which they are able to make a living. As Sirividhya Swaminathan also suggests, these women characters in the novel have "been ignored largely because twentieth-century critics privilege interiority and psychology, and discount stock or 'flat' characters" (185). Critical focus regarding *Moll Flanders* since its publication has partly concentrated on the quantity and quality of Moll's relationships with men, and mostly on Moll's individualism as a representative of eighteenth-century ideology. However, these women seemingly on the sidelines, I argue, have a formative influence on Moll both in their capacity to give advice and set an example. Reading the novel with an interest in the "variety" promised by the lengthy subtitle and its effect on the readers of the time, Kate Loveman highlights that

> In *Moll Flanders*, what the preface terms 'the infinite variety of this Book' comes about because Moll occupies multiple roles—servant, fake aristocrat, tradesman's wife, bankrupt, gentlewoman, prostitute, thief, colonist, condemned prisoner, transportee, and planter—and because she visits assorted locations including Colchester, London, Lancashire, Suffolk, and Virginia. (7)

Much of Moll's drifting from one place to another is opportunistic rather than carefully planned, and she simply moves from place to place based on what she can materially accomplish. However, each of these roles and places is defined through the women who own/operate them, and they are the stable or static means through which Moll navigates her own unpredictable existence.

By all accounts, the eighteenth century was not only a time in which gender roles, particularly in relation to habitation and place, were being re-defined, but also when these were yet not as rigid as they would become by the next century. Soile Ylivuori, for example, refers to how the eighteenth century "witnessed a massive but gradual paradigm

[1] The concepts of place and space have been discussed by geographers, philosophers, environmental psychologists and sociologists extensively. The concern here is not a geographical study. Although both terms are used in relation to Moll's movements, the aim here is not to theorise them, but to emphasize the role of the women inhabiting them. Place, in this essay, refers to a physical entity that has some sort of organisational basis related to ownership —a house, school, shop, and so on, and has meaning for an individual, while space has more to do with open areas, cities, streets, and the environment. For further exploration of these concepts, see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, and Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*.

change in conceptualisations of gender and body, manifesting both ideas of the old and the new" (43). She adds that there was an increase in public opportunities accorded to women despite "a deterioration of women's social position and opportunities, as well as narrowing of acceptable feminine identity positions" (45). The women the reader witnesses as being formative in the formation of Moll's identity enjoy that space within the changing social norms of this era. The novel presents a society in flux (accentuated by Moll's constant movement), and the struggle of individuals trying to attain a viable social position amidst a rapidly changing social structure. The dramatic shift towards materialism and capitalism, which would gain full momentum in the following decades is keenly felt. Irene Cieraad explains how "[t]he exclusion of women from the domain of production started within the class of better-off merchants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and gave rise to a spatial segregation of the secluded female home place in opposition to the public male work place" (1–2). In *Moll Flanders*, though, it can be seen that this is yet a process. Most of the establishments and public places that Moll utilises are in fact run by women and not men—the Nurse that runs the orphanage, the Bath landlady who seems to run a motel which, however, becomes little more than a brothel, and Mother Midnight whose business ranges from a maternity/abortion clinic to an institute for the teaching of crime. These spaces, as well as the homes of the Lady and Moll's mother, have a tenuous position in the social structure, and it is difficult to situate them firmly within public/private or even legal/illegal dichotomies.

The places occupied by these supporting women can be seen as paradoxical spaces, which are further defined by Rose as places "in which someone is liminally positioned within a clash of two or more cultures or belief systems," as well as "spaces that would be mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map – inside and outside – are occupied simultaneously" (140). The spaces presented in the novel that Moll frequently inhabits can be seen as both inside and outside of a dominant system, as well as liminal, or at a threshold. The idea of becoming a gentlewoman, for example, can be read in this way, as Moll both does and does not become one. She does become her own definition of a gentlewoman in the sense that she works to make money, which makes her independent as opposed to going into service,[2] which would make her dependent on her employers. Throughout the novel, it is possible to observe her efforts to gain entry into desirable places, and an equal effort to stay away from the less desirable. She is of course trapped by her class as well as her gender, and it is possible to discern many instances when she does not have legal options. Any unparadoxical physical space she inhabits is not given much narrative space; the financially secure instances, few and far between, in the novel, are written off quickly and not dwelt on as constructive in the formation of her identity.

[2] It is suggested throughout the novel that there are only two options open to unmarried women of the lower classes. They could either go into service, i.e., become a servant for an upper class family, or, to leave respectable society and become a thief or prostitute. Moll navigates her way in and out of both these options, but mostly remains on the margins of both.

Shirley Ardener claims in "Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women," that in some "'real' or 'social' spaces femaleness may be the dominant determinant, but in others . . . gender may be irrelevant, or insignificant" (4). The sections of the novel situating Moll into Nurse's, the Lady's, her mother's, the Bath landlady's and the governess' diverse establishments constitute these matriarchal spaces, which are paradoxically functional in the otherwise male-dominated society of the 18th century. Moll describes the Nurse, the first woman with whom she stays as "a woman who was indeed Poor, but had been in better circumstances, and who got a little livelihood by taking such as I was suppos'd to be; and keeping them with all Necessaries, till they were at a certain Age, in which it might be suppos'd they might go to service, or get their own Bread" (3). By all accounts a perfectly effective school and sanctuary for orphans, this is a space in which the young Moll feels secure, even if her future is not. The paradoxical quality of this seemingly functional institution is that the proprietor is a woman in spite of the patriarchal system outside of it. The only proprietor of the premises is mentioned to be this Nurse, and upon her death, her daughter comes to claim what is left, suggesting that property can be passed down, at least in this instance, matrilineally. The nurse is someone who has lost her social privilege but not her skills, and teaches Moll the values of ambition and hard work. The "good, kind woman" (3) as described by Moll is sorely missed, and she departs bestowing all necessary skills that might become handy to Moll[3].

While staying at Nurse's establishment (roughly between the ages of three to fourteen), Moll is protected not only by this woman's goodwill but also that of other women. Rather than enjoying any sort of conservation from the social system, it is this group of women, primarily the mayor's wife and daughters, who support Moll's desire to become independent. While the magistrates declare that she should go into service when she is eight years old, it is these women who save her until the Nurse's demise. The whole incident of the Nurse telling the mayor of Moll's misunderstanding of the term "gentlewoman" and the ladies' visit to her is told in a humorous tone, underlining Moll's childish naiveté (to be contrasted with the world-weary Moll later on), but it does reveal the concern of the women around her. Besides her patronage, Mrs. Mayoress also encourages the development of Moll's work ethic, as Moll relates early on: "Mrs. Mayoress . . . giving me my Work again, she put her Hand in her Pocket, gave me a Shilling, and bid me mind my Work, and learn to Work well, and I might be a Gentlewoman for ought she knew" (5). Moll's repetition of how this assistance is related to her growth in the following pages shows that this is not only a donation of money to ease the conscience. Additionally, her relation underlines that it is not only Mrs. Mayoress and her daughters that take it upon themselves to help her:

> the kindness of the ladies of the Town did not End here, for when they came to understand that I was no more maintain'd by the publick Allowance, as

[3] Moll also claims to remember a time before she was three, living with nomadic gypsies, who carried her around with them (2). This episode clearly accounts for her general restlessness and inability to stay in a place for very long, as well as her longing for a life of freedom and mobility.

> before, they gave me Money oftner than formerly . . . they brought me Work to do for them; such as Linnen to Make, and Laces to Mend, and Heads to Dress up, and not only paid me for doing them, but even taught me how to do them; so that now I was a Gentlewoman indeed. . . . I not only found myself Cloaths, and paid my Nurse for my keeping, but got Money in my Pocket too before-hand. (7)

It should be noted here that "the publick Allowance," the payment given by the state for orphans such as Moll, does not prove to be helpful at all, thus the social "system" does not aid her. Instead, it is this unnamed group of women who help Moll finance herself, as well as teach her the skills that enable her to do so. The women that undertake the necessary aid are not members of a specific place or organization, but, signalling what is to come, deliver their help from a space on the margins since they are not legally sanctioned to do so. They neither take full responsibility for Moll by completely removing her from her situation nor do they use their own status to provide Moll or others like her with more. They stay in a paradoxical space by appropriating the task of the state without having any legal obligations to do so and provide Moll with what they can get away with without endangering their own position.

The next place that Moll moves to following the Nurse's death is the Lady's house where she has already spent some time getting used to upper-class life. In her encounter with another woman lacking a name (no woman except Moll is named in the novel, and even hers is an alias), Moll feels that this lady "exceed[ed] the good woman I was with before, in every Thing, as well as in the matter of Estate" (8). This house is another place defined through a woman's symbolic ownership, and it seems that it is completely controlled by the Lady. The presumed Master is largely absent from the narrative and is only occasionally referred to as the "Father," mostly to comment on his said absenteeism. In one instance, for example, Moll mentions, "they happen'd to be all at Table, but the Father" (27). Similarly, while a "Mother's Room," "[Moll's] chamber," and a "Sisters' room" are mentioned, no space is mentioned as belonging to any male member of the family. The first room that the elder brother accosts Moll in is "the Room where his Sisters us'd to sit and work" (12), and the second she mentions as being his "younger Sisters chamber" (13), where she herself also frequently works. It is in fact a house full of women, among those spoken briefly of are the mother, the two daughters, a Cook, a maid and herself. As Ardener further discusses, "the fact that women do not control physical or social space directly does not necessarily preclude them from being determinants of, or mediators in, the allocation of space, even the occupation of political space" (9–10). This is certainly the case in what is referred to as the "Lady's house," where most of the spaces are occupied by the women of the household, and the supposed "Master" is absent, both physically and emotionally. Ultimately, it is the Lady that Moll needs to prove her honour to, in order not to be regarded as a social climber in marrying Robin, the younger son. It is the mother who allows the union and permits Moll to enter her matriarchal domain. It was also the mother who hired Moll in the first place. So, although considered socially inferior to her

husband by law, who most certainly owns the physical house in which they live, it is the Lady that governs the space within.

There is no mention of property ownership here, but it is safe to assume that the Lady's husband owns it. In her absorbing chapter "Gendered Politeness and Power," Ylivuori discusses this curious delegation of power and mentions that male power at this time was "frequently insecure, threatened and contradictory, while women held authority within the system over their children, servants and those of lower social class" (37). Further on, Ylivuori questions "whether the small-scale autonomy women were able to achieve within the framework of polite society constituted a subversion of patriarchal power" (38). There is no evidence to suggest that the Lady's authority challenges that of her husband's in any way, yet it is clearly stressed that the spaces in the household have been claimed by the women in it, and that she is the one who has the final word, at least over them. John Tosh, in *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, reveals how in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was not much "separation between work and home" (16) and that there was often an economic partnership among spouses of the middle class "in the productive work of the household" (19). Although the Lady and the Master seem to be members of the gentry, his physical absence is suggestive of the idea that he does indeed work for a living, which would place them as members of an affluent middle class. Taking into consideration the lack of boundaries suggested by Tosh, the Master's non-appearance throughout this section of the novel once again evokes the Lady's superiority. This unclear position of power attests to its being a paradoxical space.

Throughout the novel, Moll is not able to stay in a particular place for very long. She is forced to move fairly often, looking for partners and opportunities, and it is this displacement that adds to her strength. As mentioned before, it is interesting to note that most of the places she finds herself in are owned by women. Although in many feminist geographical discussions, "gender relations are . . . of central concern . . . because of the way in which a spatial division—that between the public and the private, between inside and outside—plays such a central role in the construction of gender divisions," (12) as Linda McDowell points out, it is not really possible to observe these dichotomies in *Moll Flanders* as being influential on Moll's development. Drawing upon the function and development of domestic spaces in history, Cieraad explains that it was largely after the 1970s that domestic space began to be "interpreted . . . as a secluded female domain in which women took care of children and the household, while men spent much time in public space earning a living and socializing with other men" (1). Thereafter often condemned as entrapping women inside the kitchen or house, the domestic space or home just does not seem to be relevant in Moll's narrative as she never describes any of the places as private or domestic. As Cieraad further argues, "this concept of domestic space did not exist in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries" (2). Accordingly, what little domestic space Moll inhabits is defined neither as a home nor as a trap. Moll hardly ever has a familial home of her own where comfort (or confinement) in this sense can be found.

Of course, some of the spaces she inhabits when she is "taken in" by some women she meets are private spaces, but Moll herself is transitory throughout the novel. Thus there is no understanding here that the private/domestic space can be oppressive. The reader may assume that her homes with Robin, her draper husband, the banker husband, and finally with Jemy at the end of the novel are gendered domestic spaces, but these are barely discussed in any significant narrative length, and do not suggest a desire on Moll's part to escape them in favour of a public or outside space. In fact, she does not, in any of these instances, even mention these as either negative or positive, although she does mention being frequently bored in her first unions. It is the spaces in between, the paradoxical ones governed by strong women that have much more of an effect on her and worth glossing over in her account.

Another such place is her mother's house in America, to which she travels with her brother/husband. Moll insists on having her mother-in-law/mother live with them, and this space quickly becomes both public and private when she shares the secret of the illegitimacy of her marriage with her. This is evidence of what Swaminathan suggests is a "support network formed by women" (200) abundant throughout the novel. While living in this site of her incestuous relationship, Moll does not detail the physical qualities of her surroundings. However, an important scene is when she finally decides to tell her husband what she has deduced, and she describes it thus: "One Evening . . . we were sitting and talking very friendly together under a little Auning, which serv'd as an Arbour at the entrance from our House into the Garden" (Defoe 70). It is significant that this is the place where she chooses to have this most important conversation, a place that can be seen as neither inside nor outside, a paradoxical space where both the interior and exterior of which belong more to her mother than anyone else. Even there, the home that she details the most, Moll does not position herself inside the home, nor does she mention any domestic duties or features. This exchange takes place just outside the house, preventing it from being interpreted as inside or outside. This is perhaps the most conventional family home in the novel that she ever lives in, yet it is also the one that Moll feels most deeply uncomfortable in and feels homesick for the more public spaces of London. Often placed on a metaphorical threshold, as John Rietz also suggests "she is gradually placing herself farther and farther outside the law and outside of accepted categories" (192). Leaving the threshold and renouncing familial connections, she departs America after eight years there, and says, "my Mind was restless too, and uneasie; I hanker'd after coming to England, and nothing would satisfie me without it" (12). Among the spaces she shares with her spouses, this is the only house she goes into detail about. However, it cannot be seen as a home since when she describes her homesickness, it is England that she is referring to.

What awaits Moll in England is a slow descent into the world of crime which she simultaneously abhors and embraces. A "new friend," (75) before this descent is the landlady in Bath, a precursor to the midwife she will, later on, call "governess" and "mother" in London, and through whom she will acquire a sense of her body as a

commodity. She has already capitalized on it in previous entanglements, but not in such a calculated manner. Of the landlady, she reveals she is "on good Terms with," and that "tho' she did not keep an ill House, *as we call it*, yet had none of the best principles in herself," (74–75; italics in the original) insinuating ulterior motives in the running of the house. Moll believes that her landlady deliberately sets her up with the gentleman who is also renting rooms at the house. Finally, it is also the landlady who shapes the relationship into what it becomes. Moll explains this as follows:

> I frequently took notice to my landlady of his exceeding modesty, and she again used to tell me, she believ'd it was so from the beginning; however she used to tell me that she thought I ought to expect some Gratification from him for my Company, for indeed he did, as it were, engross me, and I was seldom from him; *I told her* I had not given him the least occassion to think I wanted it, or that I would accept of it from him; *she told me* she would take that part upon her, and she did so, and manag'd it so dextrously, that the first time we were together alone, after she had talk'd with him, he began to enquire a little into my Circumstances, as how I had subsisted my self since I came on shore? and whether I did not want money? (76; italics in the original)

The repetitive nature of this account reveals that the landlady's actions here are very purposeful, and she is able to manipulate both Moll and the gentleman into entering a relationship on her own terms rather than theirs. The man does not approach Moll sexually until she proposes it of her own accord. The landlady in all probability does this for her own benefit of keeping the man on as a resident, and perhaps asking for a little extra payment in time for her discretion while running an outwardly respectable house. In appearance a landlady renting out private rooms, she does not seem to view them as private at all. She is able to command what is, in essence, a public commercial space, and to control the events and people in it.

Moll becomes nomadic in a greater sense in the aftermath of this relationship, finding herself in a triad between the banker and Jemy, as well as in the establishment she is compelled to visit to deal with her unexpected and unwanted pregnancy. To begin with the banker, Moll's only attraction to him is that he is attracted to her, which is secondary to the allure of his house. Although she has also approached most previous relationships with a material concern, it becomes more obvious at the beginning of this one. Entering the banker's house for the first time, Moll's observations are as follows: "I found, *and was not a little pleas'd with it*, that he had provided a Supper for me: I found also he liv'd very handsomely, and had a House very handsomely furnis'd, all which I was rejoyc'd at indeed, for I look'd upon it as all my own" (98; italics in the original). Having little to no possessions of her own, this instance shows Moll at a vulnerable moment, wanting to settle down at the slightest possibility. Eventually she does, and she describes their marriage, saying that they "lived . . . in the utmost Tranquility" (135) for a grand total of five years (but only worth two paragraphs), ending with his death. Incidentally, this is

almost the same amount of time as her marriage with Robin, also lasting for five years, but meriting only one paragraph in her account.

Much more interesting and formative for Moll and meriting longer narrative presence in her subjective account of her life is her association with the woman she first calls the "midwife," then "my Governess," and finally "mother," often referred to as "Mother Midnight" in criticism. This woman's establishment is most certainly a paradoxical space. Her business is not legitimate, but she is a master manipulator in that she is able to transform a woman who comes to her for delivery or abortion into a professional thief. Interestingly, and as Mona Scheuermann has also suggested, "although we often think of Moll as criminal, Defoe devotes three quarters of the book to other aspects of [Moll's] life" (312). Mother Midnight is the influential character whose work on Moll is unassailable in the further development of her identity. From her pregnancy with Jemy's child through Newgate and until her days in America towards the end of the novel, it is this woman who arranges practically everything for Moll's emotional as well as financial security. At the beginning of her attachment, Moll describes her own position as: "I would gladly have turn'd my Hand to any honest Employment if I could have got it; but here she was deficient; honest Business did not come within her reach" (Defoe 142). This is a description curiously reminiscent of the landlady in Bath. Apart from her own apparent talent and dexterity, it seems to be largely due to this woman that Moll becomes such a notoriously successful thief. Mother Midnight's shelter and guidance help Moll in her quest for security at this point in her life, and paves the way for further success. Parting with her when getting on the ship to America, Moll says, "I was never so sorrowful at parting with my own mother as I was at parting with her" (231). Indeed, despite her inability to provide Moll with a legitimate job, she enables her a fairly gender-neutral environment in which to thrive. In terms of homeless spaces to which insecure or "temporary accommodation" should be included, Susan Watson has argued that they are "not confined to the domestic sphere nor expected to undertake domestic duties any more than the boys" (qtd. in McDowell 91). The surroundings of the governess' establishment suggest a place in between, where gender becomes blurred and even irrelevant, as class issues are more dominant. Moll easily adopts a man's disguise, under the governess's care, and no additional consideration is necessary. Whether she impersonates a beggar or a man, her feelings seem to be identical. Upon a close call when one of her associates is in danger of revealing her identity, she says this "was indeed partly the Occasion of my Governess proposing to Dress me up in Mens Cloths, that I might go about unobserv'd, as indeed I did; but was soon tir'd of that Disguise" (Defoe 160). Much has been made of Moll's use of disguise in this section of the novel,[4] yet, based on Moll's superfluous account of her escapades in this fashion, it seems to be simply another example of her embracing a liminal space.

[4] See, for example, John Rietz "Criminal Ms-Representation : *Moll Flanders* and Criminal Biography," and Yao-hsi Shih "Impersonation in Daniel Defoe's Feminocentric Novels."

In discussing the relationships Moll has with the women in the novel, further mention of how the issue of class affects the relationships is requisite. Excepting the lady of the house who provided Moll with her first husband by employing her, the other women are of the working classes, regardless of whether they enjoyed better situations earlier in their lives or not. In citing another study by Elizabeth Roberts, McDowell posits, "for many working-class households gender relations were largely based on cooperation rather than antagonism. Both men and women were fully aware of the inequalities and injustices which produced their poverty and were anxious to find a way to 'get by'" (79). This can be said to be true of some of the places that Moll inhabits throughout the novel and is particularly true for the establishment of Mother Midnight, where the issue of gender is not considered very relevant, and all manner of disguise is encouraged. In the eighteenth century, as Rietz points out, "the roles of woman and criminal were perceived as mutually exclusive, and . . . a figure who straddled these two categories gave rise to considerable confusion" (183). While this may be true from an outsider's perspective on the criminal world, in the novel it is suggested that this is quite organic, a fate shared by men and women alike. It is quite telling that despite the abundance of male lovers Moll has, hardly any other men are mentioned in the novel, so it is quite difficult to see any interaction between the genders apart from sensual ones, that would illuminate the complex relationship of gender and class as given in the novel. However, it can be argued that this is certainly a narrative which women dominate; it is women that Moll recounts as being formative in her life. Although Mother Midnight initially provides a gendered feminine space for Moll—a place where she can lie in and deliver her baby— the nature of this space quickly changes. After Moll has her baby taken care of, Mother Midnight's establishment starts accommodating both female and male criminals. Evidently abandoning her job as midwife/abortionist/adoption agent, she starts schooling both women and men in crime.

In her discussion of female friendships and networking in *Moll Flanders*, Swaminathan firstly claims, "middle-class morals mean [little] to lower-class women" (203) and argues that "women seek out other women, and their actions reveal a consciousness of the benefits of networking. The women pushing the boundaries are largely lower-class and marginalized women who operate on the fringes of polite society" (205). Mother Midnight clearly creates a matriarchal space that liberates Moll by helping her claim the streets of London as her domain, as well as aiding her fortune. This is in fact the longest relationship that Moll has with anyone in the novel, and theirs is a true friendship, as Swaminathan also underlines, saying that they "work together to ensure each other's personal well-being" (204). This is the sort of relationship that Moll has built after those she had with the nurse, the lady, her mother, and her landlady in Bath. At this point in her life, Moll is unable to capitalize on her beauty any more (Rietz 186) and must turn to downright theft rather than coercion. It is only in Mother Midnight's establishment that she is able to find emotional and material comfort, which she could not find even in her mother's home.

Moll's success, despite enormous odds throughout her life, is a result of a formation of character moulded by the strong women she encounters. Whatever class they belong to, each of these women have obtained enough power to rule over the spaces they have appropriated. These are paradoxical and matriarchal spaces because they are negotiated spaces carved in the niches of a hegemonic patriarchal culture and society. While the patriarchal society in the next century would place women solely in the private sphere, namely in the "home," forcing them to be content with their lot, in this novel, there is not yet a firm boundary between the public and the private. They are neither accepted nor denied, thus not seen as completely secret or marginal. Glimpses of more traditional domestic spaces in the novel are rare and practically ignored by the narrator, while the spaces discussed above are given more narrative space, suggesting that they have a more formative role in the protagonist's controversial outcome.

Works Cited

Ardener, Shirley. "Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women: An Introduction." *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, edited by Shirley Ardener. Berg, 1993, pp. 1–21.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Beacon, 1994.

Cieraad, Irene. "Domestic Spaces." *The International Encyclopedia of Geography*, edited by Doudlas Richardson et al., Wiley, 2017, pp. 1–3.

Defoe, Daniel. *Moll Flanders*. Dover, 1996.

Loveman, Kate. "'A Life of Continu'd Variety': Crime, Readers, and the Structure of Defoe's *Moll Flanders*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* vol. 26, no.1, 2013, pp. 1–32. doi:10.3138/ecf.26.1.1.

McDowell, Linda. *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Minnesota University Press, 1999.

Rietz, John. "Criminal Ms-Representation: *Moll Flanders* and Female Criminal Biography." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1991, pp. 183–195.

Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minnesota University Press, 1993.

Scheuermann, Mona. "Women and Money in Eighteenth-Century Fiction." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 19, no.3, 1987, pp. 311–322.

Shih, Yao-hsi. "Impersonation in Daniel Defoe's Feminocentric Novels." *Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2011, pp. 155–176.

Swaminathan, Srividhya. "Defoe's Alternative Conduct Manual: Survival Strategies and Female Networks in *Moll Flanders*." *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2003, pp. 185–206. doi:10.1353/ecf.2003.0032.

Tosh, John. *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England.* Yale University Press, 2007.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

Ylivuori, Soile. "Gendered Politeness and Power." *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power*. Routledge, 2019, pp. 37–66.

Disclosure Statements

- The author of this article confirms that this research does not require a research ethics committee approval.
- The author of this article confirms that their work complies with the principles of research and publication ethics.
- No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.
- This article was screened for potential plagiarism using a plagiarism screening program.
- Contribution rate: 1st author=100%.