

Daniel Defoe'nun *Moll Flanders* Romanının Jeokritik Tahlili

Dilek İNAN* 

ÖZ

Bu çalışma Daniel Defoe'nun picaresque romanı (mizahi manzum destan) *Moll Flanders* (1722) romanında kullanılan zengin mekânsal referansları, flâneur figürü ve jeokritik eleştiri yöntemi ile incelemektedir. Roman çeşitli mekânlar arasında seyahat ve hareketlilik eylemlerini anlatırken, Moll'ün mekânsal tecrübelerinin hayatta kalma mücadelesinde ve ruhsal olgunlaşmasındaki etkisini vurgular. Edward Soja, Fredric Jameson ve David Harvey gibi kuramcılar mekânın somut anlamından öte söylemsel ve sembolik anlamı olduğunu gözlemler. Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Yi-Fu Tuan, Marc Augé ve Edward Relph'in mekân kavramı ile ilgili oluşturduğu terimler ve açıklamaları bu çalışmada Defoe'nun mekânı anlaması, temsil etmesi ve karakterlerinin mekân ile ilişkisini tanımlamada yeni bir bakış açısı sağlamıştır. Onsekizinci yüzyıl keşmekeşliğinde yer, yersizlik, mekanlar arası hareketlilik konularını inceleyen çalışma, mekân ve yaşanılmış tecrübeler bağlamında Defoe çalışmalarına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, Mekansallık, Jeokritik Eleştiri

A Geocritical Reading of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the rich spatial and platial references in Daniel Defoe's picaresque novel *Moll Flanders* (1722) by using the prospect provided by the figure of the flâneur and geocritical criticism. The novel portrays a world of mobility and travel amongst places and Moll's spatial experiences determine her survival and spiritual refinement. Theorists such as Edward Soja, Fredric Jameson and David Harvey have observed that place has a discursive/symbolic meaning beyond that of mere location. Spatial thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Yi-Fu Tuan, Marc Augé, and Edward Relph have defined a set of vocabulary related to space which will be helpful to explore the ways in which Defoe's characters have depicted the human condition and its relation to space. While the notions of locality, displacement, mobility, and placelessness are explored in a setting of eighteenth-century chaos, the paper helps to further studies in Defoe studies especially in evaluating spatiality and lived experience.

Keywords: Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, Spatiality, Geocriticism

1. *Moll Flanders*: Text and Context

This study analyzes the rich spatial and platial references in Daniel Defoe's picaresque novel *Moll Flanders* (1722)¹ by using the prospect and vocabulary provided by the figure of the flâneur and geocritical criticism. The novel portrays a world of mobility and travel amongst places and Moll's spatial experiences certainly determine her survival and spiritual refinement. Theorists such as Edward Soja and Fredric Jameson have observed that place has a discursive/symbolic meaning well beyond that of mere location. Additionally, writings of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Yi-Fu Tuan, Marc Augé, and Edward Relph have elaborated a growing discourse of space which will be helpful to explore the ways in which Defoe has understood and represented the human condition and its relation to space.

Moll, the adventurous female wanderer, interacts in public and private places. She both shapes and is shaped by places which appears to be urging a topo-poetic mode of reading of her circumstances in the novel. Defoe prioritizes the setting in his imagination by portraying the female protagonist as a revolutionary character who breaks the norms and definitions of the masculine public places. *Moll Flanders* can be interpreted as a travel tale in which readers are led amongst a range of places. Moll does not have a sense of belonging to a certain place. She is a displaced figure, persevering and adaptable to many places she travels. She justifies her illicit acts by informing the readers of the dire circumstances of her environment. Spatiality is a useful perspective to anatomise and appreciate *Moll Flanders* in a new light provided by geocriticism. While the notions of locality, displacement, mobility, and placelessness are explored in a setting of eighteenth-century chaos, the paper helps to further studies in Defoe especially in evaluating spatiality and lived experience.

* Prof. Dr., İzmir Demokrasi Üniversitesi, dilek.inan@idu.edu.tr

Makalenin Gönderim Tarihi: 17.03.2021; Makalenin Kabul Tarihi: 18.04.2021

Moll Flanders is a picaresque novel depicting the adventures of a rogue heroine who wanders from place to place and encounters criminals. Picaresque novel can be defined as satire, comedy, social criticism as well and in writing the novel Defoe depicts the contemporary condition of England in the eighteenth-century and intends that the readers make just and religious inferences. In an episodic structure the reader is exposed to Moll's survival story from childhood to old age and her adjustment to various places as she tries hard in order to exist in a world of power, wealth, and success. In the eighteenth-century England she did not have any options other than working as a maid, getting married, committing crimes of theft and prostitution. She followed her mother's footsteps as a thief and earned her life from stealing. She got caught and sent to Newgate prison after which she was transported to Virginia as punishment. However, Moll's fortune did not flourish in London but in Virginia (the new world). As a Puritan, Defoe proposes that the "new" world offered a "new" chance. For the first fifty years of her life Moll lived as an adulteress, a bigamist, a pickpocket, a liar, a cheat, and a whore. She is finally arrested and put into Newgate prison. After being transported rather than being executed, Moll does not return to her life of crime. With her Lancashire husband (geographic identification is interesting here) they become prosperous and reform after the years in Virginia returning home rich and respectable. She becomes a plantation owner in America. Moll's success is once more related with place, her owning a plantation in America, the new world and her returning to her home country emphasize a sense of belonging to place. After many foreign routes she returns to her roots.

Daniel Defoe divided the English society into seven major groups: "the great, the rich, the middle sort, labourers, farmers, the poor and the miserable" (Defoe, 1709, p. 142). Moll represents the life of the miserable in a realistic setting where she "is made to tell her own tale in modester words" (Defoe, 1993, p. 7). She details her terrifying misery and her miserable circumstances (Defoe, 1993, p. 222). Her life is divided into "penitent part" and "criminal part" (Defoe, 1993, p. 8). Driven into the wicked trade of whoredom and thievery, she becomes a transported thief (Defoe, 1993, p. 200). From the beginning of the novel she is destined to be shaped by place. Moll begins life as the daughter of a transported convict without any state system to protect her. She describes the case in France where the unprovided children of criminals are "taken into the care of the government and put into the House of Orphans" (Defoe, 1993, p. 13). However, in England she had been left a poor desolate girl. She was born in "such an unhappy place" (Defoe, 1993, p. 14). She was abused and victimized by men. She describes her unfortunate condition by referring to place: She feels "left alone in the world, left loose to the world" (Defoe, 1993, p. 68). She defines her surroundings as a world of wild company (Defoe, 1993, p. 69), and "tired with the place" (Defoe, 1993, p. 75), she is "filled with horror at the place I (she) was in" (Defoe, 1993, p. 75). She continues to refer to descriptions of place in order to detail her feelings. When she is put into Newgate prison, she explains it as a dreadful place, cursed and horrid place, "an emblem of hell itself, and a kind of entrance into it" (Defoe, 1993, p. 298). She was sentenced to death, but her midwife friend helped her and sent to transportation to Virginia. She chronicles long and unpleasant voyages between places in England and in America - the new world.

The novel is autobiographical in style and it is written as a whole without any chapter divisions. The series of actions in the plot that chronicle Moll's several marriages, her children, her travels to Virginia, her encounter with her mother and the discovery of her incestuous life proceed swiftly within the first hundred pages of the novel. Interestingly, only her first husband has been associated with a place name: "My Lancashire husband". Additionally, Defoe provides full details of the places Moll lives in using names of the real cities such as Bristol, Reading, Hammersmith, Lancashire, Liverpool, Warrington, Dublin, Chester, thus giving readers a true picture of the times. The novel describes criminal practices in the eighteenth-century England, giving his work a journal entry writing style. In this realistic picture of a woman in the underworld of eighteenth-century London, Moll needs to be anonymous; she adopts a pseudonym Moll Flanders. She lives in a hostile urban world in which social position and wealth are necessary for survival.

2. Geocriticism

Robert T. Tally's *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* observes a comprehensive and model approach towards geocritical practices in literary and cultural studies. Prieto distinguishes between theoretical geographers and imaginative/fictional literary production of space. Yet more importantly, Prieto underlines the fact that instead of establishing a distinct border between the social scientists' factual spatial definitions and the authors' literary/artistic/fictional creations, there is a tendency to accept literature's indefinite re/presentations of mapable geographical places blended and enriched with mindscapes of the characters. Impressed by literature's use of imagination and metaphorical language, Prieto grants a more powerful status to the infinite spatial possibilities provided by fictional narratives than the spatial descriptions of social sciences. (Prieto, 2011).

The writings of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Soja have created the necessary spatial vocabulary and established the fundamental foreground towards 'geocriticism'. Spatial terminology and vocabulary can be used to understand, imagine, and reflect on the ways in which place plays an important role in literary texts. Since the 1980s a variety of scholarly research has been conducted which defines the scope of geocriticism, underlying the fact that it is mainly interested in the aesthetic re/presentations of space and places.

Michel Foucault's much celebrated lecture *Of Other Spaces (Heterotopias)* in 1967 has been a turning point in spatial studies (Foucault, 1986). *Heterotopia* is a complicated and multifaceted term. For example, in medical sciences, *heterotopia* is used as a term which means displacement of an organ or other body part to an abnormal location (medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com). Foucault's notion of *crisis of heterotopia* or a *heterotopia of deviation* (Foucault, 1986, p. 22) can be applied in interpreting Moll's understanding and adaptation to different places. Moll has been aware of the fact that in order to survive and reach her aims in life, she has to be adaptable to places: "I resolved, therefore, as to the state of my present circumstances, that it was absolutely necessary to change my station, and make a new appearance in some other place where I was not known, and even to pass by another name if I found occasion" (Defoe, 1993, p. 34). Foucault explores the characteristics of the uncanny and disturbing effect of a heterotopic place. Indeed the places Moll resides in are mostly heterotopic disturbing places which put her under the pressure of being in crisis with the masculine public places in society. The heterotopias of crisis and divergence refer to the minority and the groups or individuals who do not conform to the mainstream in the society. Moll as an outcast experiences such notion of place in which she herself becomes the "other" as an orphan and a displaced figure in the society she lives in. The society is also an "other space" for her in Foucauldian terms. However, Moll proves to be rather practical and pragmatic to adapt to new places and she becomes successful to own land and comes back to her home country in a comfortable condition.

Yi-Fu Tuan is another influential human geographer studying on the phenomenology of space. He examines the relationship between space and place descriptively in his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977). Tuan makes a certain distinction between space and place. He defines the space as openness, action, movement, suggesting future, vast, and freedom. However, the place is associated with stasis, resting, involvement, calm feelings, experience, shelter, and attachment. He states that "Enclosed and humanized space is place" (Tuan, 1977, p. 54). In the introduction part of *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan explains that "Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). Indeed, Moll leaves the security of her hometown, and as a displaced figure she travels to spaces for her freedom which she longs for gravely. The distinction between space and place in Tuan's sense is graphically depicted in Moll's experience of location. Hers is a success story in turning space into place and makes her at home to meet the needs of shelter and attachment. She is practical enough to make sense of the foreign places. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that emotions and lived experience transform space into place (Tuan, 1977). Moll articulates her emotions powerfully in relation to place. Edward Relph's identification of place resembles to Tuan's. Relph underlines the importance of how people experience space. Indeed, Moll's relation to different places and her experiences illustrate her feelings about the identity of those places. The identity *with* place refers to a direct attachment to place "as an insider or as an outsider" (Relph, 1976, p. 45). Initially Moll has been an outsider and a foreigner in many of the spaces

she lives in. Eventually she turns them into place and becomes an insider as to the point of owning place which is described in her possessing a plantation in America.

Defoe uses a series of mappable places in Moll's narrations that are easy to trace, perhaps to underline the place-bound nature of Moll's character. Place suggests status, identity, and rootedness. When Moll is dispossessed of a place, she depicts traumatic experiences. When she needs to hide, she prefers to be surrounded by the crowd in the city so that she can escape from trouble: "Away I went to London" (Defoe, 1993, p. 93). "I had now a new scene of life upon my hands" (Defoe, 1993, p. 83), "...make a new appearance in some other place where I was not known" (Defoe, 1993, p. 61). As Moll's descriptions of her feelings suggest, she feels lost, dislocated, isolated in the big anonymous cities. As a female wanderer, Moll is displaced in London: "I had lived always in lodgings" (Defoe, 1993, p. 145). She goes to Colchester, Bristol and Bath and creates her own space. Moll Flanders' engagement in a series of different cities and places gives the novel a taste of a travel story. The novel is indeed a "travel tale" that transports readers through a range of cities, towns, villages, and countries. The novel portrays a world of mobility and travel amongst places. When Moll is transported to Virginia for theft, she becomes an exile and has to struggle new ways for adaptation to new places in order to turn space to place in Yi Fu Tuan's term.

3. A Flâneuse of the Eighteenth-Century

Moll Flanders can also be observed as a flâneuse of the working and miserable classes of the British class society system of the times. She struggles to climb up the social ladder to belong to the middle class and at some point in her life, she achieves her aim by becoming the wife of a landowner's wife in America, yet she remains a woman of the working class. She is engaged in the acts of a flâneuse by wandering the streets of London. She visits the pleasure gardens, and her aimless walk as a flâneuse is misunderstood by men as an act of immorality. She visits Bartholomew Fair which is famous for its "covered walks or arcades that were notorious as places to engage in otherwise less respectable behaviour" (Defoe, 1993, p. 177). She encounters a gentleman with whom she goes to Knight's Bridge, a pleasure garden and then to an inn. Mistaking Moll for a prostitute, the gentleman makes advances at Moll. The flâneuse watches and observes the city, her descriptions are valuable for the reader, however, when her gender becomes obvious, she becomes passive and takes the role of the object of the gaze. Defoe tries to give Moll, as the female wanderer and a stroller, the powerful voice of the observer of the city. Moll challenges and reviews Baudelaire's image of the silenced and powerless female walker. With the development of the flâneuse, characters like Moll, become more articulate in delivering their criticisms of the society. They act more freely in their interactions with the crowds in the urban landscape. Indeed, there are instances in the novel where Moll has a power of observing and manipulating place.

Three notable names are considered to outline the notion of the flâneur: Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* was the first work to present the main character's prior engagement in walking aimlessly and observing the urban streets. However, Charles Baudelaire was the leading thinker who defined the concept of the flâneur to the humanities. Subsequently, Walter Benjamin's writings on the flâneur elaborated the concept as a central figure of modernity. The power of the crowd for Moll is important, the urban crowd helps her to avoid punishment for her crimes. As she is lost in the streets of the city, she continues to observe and present narratives of her immediate surroundings through which the reader sympathizes with Moll: "I cross'd the Street indeed, and went down the first turning I came to, and I think it was a street that went thro' into Fenchurch-street, from then I cross'd and turn'd so many ways and turnings that I could never tell which way it was, nor where I went, for I felt not the ground, I stept on, and the farther I was out of danger, the faster I went, till tyr'd and out of breath, I was forc'd to sit down on a little bench at a door, and then I began to recover, and found I was got into Thames-street near Billingsgate" (Defoe, 1993, p. 152). She goes from one place to another, and she reaches to the south part of the city. The London streets become the places for her crimes, at the same time they function as a refuge to escape from danger: "I went through into Bartholomew Close, and then turned round to another passage that goes into St Joan Street; then crossing into Smithfield, went down Chick Lane and into Field Lanet on Holborn Bridge, when mixing with the crowd of people usually passing there, it was not possible to have been found out; and thus I enterpris'd my second sally into the world" (Defoe, 1993, p. 213). Moll's

interaction with the crowds and her wanderings among the streets of the city give her a sense of freedom which is strictly forbidden for the women of the time. A flâneuse does not possess the freedom of a flâneur. In reality, women are not allowed to wander around the streets casually, they are not entitled to observe the crowd. Baudelaire's flâneur figure has some distinctive characteristics such as "a familiarity with and an attraction to the crowd paired with a desire for anonymity and detachment from the crowd. He has to remain inaccessible and invisible in the crowd; he needs to be able —to explore, stare at, and observe everything within the city" (Brand, 1991, p. 199). However, in Moll's situation, a lonely young woman strolling the busy streets means humiliation and shame. She could only exist in public sphere as a fallen woman, widow, or murder victim, in Wolff's interpretation she could only take "illegitimate or eccentric routes" (Wolff, 1985, p. 45). Moll represents the woman of the working class who desires to move to the middle class. In order to reach her aim, instead of the typical passive and domestic woman type, Moll actively interacts with her physical environment, observes the places and people around her and she wittily makes judgements. While the anonymous male stroller - the flâneur - has all the advantages and entitlement to enjoy the busy crowds, public places are not accessible to women. Therefore, Moll Flanders can be accepted as one of the very first female strollers who achieves to have a place in the male-dominant public sphere of the eighteenth-century urban life.

Moll does not have a sense of belonging to a certain place, she is a displaced figure and adaptive to any environment she resides in. She justifies her illicit acts by informing the readers of the dire circumstances of her environment: "Let them remember that a time of distress is a time of dreadful temptations" (Defoe, 1993, p. 151). After her crimes she escapes and loses herself in places in London, English Countryside, and Virginia. She is a stroller, a watcher and an observer. Moll is a representative flâneuse figure. She can contribute to the notion of the traditional male flâneur figure and create an opportunity to revolutionize the notion of the flâneuse in the eighteenth century. It is also important to witness how she challenges the patriarchal commodified public space. Like the *flâneur*, Moll seeks her home in the crowd; there are times when she cherishes the city, yet most of the time the city appears as a place of disturbance, terror, isolation where the protagonist is led to an unpleasant series of events. Defoe's female protagonist - the flâneuse Moll - gets into trouble as a result of her deeds as a pick-pocket and thief. Indeed, Defoe extends the imaginable outlook of the urban flâneur. In general sense, the geographical depictions, Moll's engagement and movement in social spaces and her survival in the competitive and combative outside world, chiefly sketches the developing economic habits of eighteenth-century Britain.

4. Conclusion

On the surface, the plotline in *Moll Flanders* is similar to the structure of its author's other novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Lady Roxana* and *Colonel Jack* in which Defoe is mostly fantasized by a hero or a heroine who climbs up the social ladder, changes his/her status from poverty to riches. The protagonist manages to survive in his/her pursuit of economic and social security. This paper also highlights the increasing concern in the hardships of women roaming from one place to another at a time of aggressive commercialism. Moll represents the female flâneur figure - namely the flâneuse, which was first introduced by Baudelaire and Benjamin in order to observe the spaces of the modern city. She mixes with the crowds of the street-life, observes the urban dwellers and tries to adapt to new cities. As a flâneuse figure, the readers are exposed to Moll's social disgrace, her hardships and struggles as a solitary woman trying to survive in the streets of modern cities.

Lefebvre uses social space as a tool for the analysis of society, indeed Defoe's obvious concern is with social spaces of the city in the early eighteenth centuries. The author's spatial interest demonstrates that he has not been writing in a vacuum. Moreover, Moll can be observed as the novelist's mouthpiece in her descriptions of the English urban society as she accounts through the eyes of the social critic and the flâneuse. In this picaresque novel, the protagonist is torn among a variety of places. Moll's spatial adventures include a series of interactions with public and private places. The references to real cities are enriched by Moll's imagination in her mindscape. Foucault underlines the uncanny and disturbing effect of a heterotopic place. Moll Flanders engages in tackling with a series of heterotopic threatening places in a male urban world. As an orphan and a displaced figure, she becomes an outcast and a victim. Eventually,

she overcomes the difficulties by turning space into place. To remember Tuan and Relph, Moll achieves to be comfortable in foreign places. Through experience and her wit, she is able find shelter and attachment to different places. Her transformation from an outsider and a foreigner to an insider and an owner of place is indeed an admirable story.

References

- Augè, M. (1995). *Non-Places – Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. (Trans. J. Howe). London: Verso. (First published in 1992).
- Baudelaire, Charles. (1964). *The painter of modern life: The painter of modern Life and other essays*. (Trans. & ed. J. Essays). London: Phaidon.
- Baudelaire, Charles. (1964). *The painter of modern life, and other essays*. (Trans. J. Mayne). London: Phaidon.
- Benjamin, W. (1973). "The Flâneur", Charles Baudelaire: A lyric poet in the era of high capitalism, (Trans. H. Zohn). London: Verso, 35-66. (First published in 1997).
- Brand, D. (1991). *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Defoe, D. (1993). *Moll Flanders: The fortunes and misfortunes of the famous Moll Flanders*. London: Everyman.
- Defoe, D. (2003). Defoe's review. J. McVeagh (Ed). 9 two-part vols. London: Pickering & Chatto, Original: Defoe, Daniel. (1709). *A Review of the state of the British Nation*, vol 6, no 36, 25.
- Foucault, M. (1986). *Of other spaces*. (Trans. J. Miskowiec). *Diacritics*, John Hopkins University Press, Vol. 16, No. 1, 22-27.
- Jameson, F. (1998). *The cultural turn – Selected writings on the postmodern 1983-1998*. London, New York: Verso.
- Jameson, F. (2005). *Archaeologies of the future, the desire called utopia and other science fictions*. USA: Verso.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*, (Trans. D. N. Smith) Oxford: Blackwell. (First published in 1974).
- Poe, Edgar Allan. (1979). *Selected writings*. London: Penguin.
- Prieto E. (2011). Geocriticism, geopoetics, geophilosophy, and beyond. R. Tally Jr. (Ed.), *Geocritic Explorations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230337930_2
- Read, A. (Ed.). (2000). *Thirdspace: Expanding the scope of the geographical imagination, Architecturally speaking: Practices of art, architecture and the everyday*. London: Routledge, 13-31
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. A. J. Scott (Ed.). London: Pion Limited.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace – Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. USA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Tally Jr, R. T. (Ed.). (2011). *Geocritical explorations – Space, place, and mapping in literary and cultural studies USA*: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-10.
- Tally, Jr. R. T. (2013). *Spatiality (The new critical idiom)*. USA: Routledge.
- Tuan, Y. F. (2001). *Space and place the perspective of experience*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wolff, J. (1985). *The Invisible Flâneuse. Women and the literature of modernity*. *Theory, culture & society*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 37–46.