

Gómez Reus, Teresa and Aránzazu Usandizaga, eds. 2008: *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi. 364 pp. ISBN 978-90-420-2441-0

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There is no doubt that spatial criticism has recently become one of the most productive fields in contemporary theory. The topographical turn from the 1970s onwards, inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre, among others, prompted the publication of several studies on spaces and places. The 'New Geographers' radically challenged former versions of space, and "stress[ed] interaction and exchange, thus exposing space as a site of complex social, historical, and economic struggles" (Mergenthal 2002: 131). In the light of this, gender studies made a foray into the gender-specific separation-of-spheres discourse to argue that it was possible to see beyond the limitations of this traditional dichotomy, according to which women were invisible in the public area. *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space* comprises the outcome of the seminar Teresa Gómez Reus co-organised with Deborah Parsons, 'Women and Public Space: Practice and Representation', at the 2004 ESSE Conference held in Zaragoza, plus the roundtable conducted in AEDEAN (Jaén, 2005) and other invited contributions. Clearly enough, the result is an excellent contribution to the field of spatial studies, as well as to that of gender studies.

This timely volume interrogates the standard ideology of *separate spheres*, by means of which public and private spaces are immutable and gender-specific, in multiple ways, preceded by a foreword by Janet Wolff. Her seminal essay on the *flâneuse* in the 1980s, 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', paved the way for the ongoing interest in the female counterpart of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*. For those who are familiar with Janet Wolff's work, it is fascinating to re-encounter her vibrant prose in the foreword to this collection twenty years after she published her often-cited essay. She most tellingly points out one of the remarkable achievements of this collection: "[the essays in this book] remove us from what has increasingly seemed to be the cul-de-sac of complaints about women's absence from (or invisibility in) the public sphere" (15). In fact, in their co-authored introduction, Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga trace the evolution of the relationship between women and the space from the 1980s onwards, and most interestingly, underline the "need to revise the standard ideology of separate spheres" (22). They give full credit to Janet Wolff's pioneering essay in providing the theoretical backbone of *Inside Out*, as it seeks to problematise the neat distinction between the public and the private spheres. Bearing in mind the restrictions women have had in the access to the public sphere, the co-editors strive to call attention to the ways in which women writers negotiate the blurred lines between the domestic and the public.

The volume is divided into six sections of three chapters each, with the exception of the last two, 'Transformations in Nature' and 'Negotiating the City', which consist of two

chapters each. In addition, the collection finishes with Janet Floyd's concluding remarks and an index. The sections aim to give order and a chronological (and thematic) sequence to the negotiation of the public and the private in the work of women writers, and as a consequence, their headings point out the link between the chapters of each section. This structure is particularly praiseworthy, as it gives coherence and unity to a multifaceted and complex topic. Moreover, the essays complement one another very well, and when put together, they reveal unexpected aspects of the authors and works under consideration.

'Early Escapes into Public Spaces', the first of the six sections, encompasses three essays dealing with incipient attempts at escaping from the suffocating private room into the public realm, thus suggesting the porosity of the boundaries between the two spheres. Lucy Bending undertakes an examination of Harriet Martineau's fight for her freedom through the re-configuration of the sick-room as a double space: "a physically-realised space with firmly demarcated, yet strangely elastic, walls that both imprison the patient, and yet allow a wider freedom, however mediated, through the windows, pictures ..." (42). Eferpi Mitsi, in turn, explores the Turkish bath, the *hammam*, and considers it a liminal space, as full of potentialities as the modern Parisian arcade. Mitsi equates the figure of the nineteenth-century woman traveller with that of the invisible *flâneuse*, who "writing [her] impressions of different cultures often strove to attain the aesthetic distance associated with the *flâneur*" (48). Mitsi's essay suggests that the *hammam* represents a (feminised) space of power relations, and most importantly, points out the link between the space itself and the body of 'the other'. This is a particularly fascinating chapter as it incorporates orientalism in a subject matter usually deprived of references to racial differences. Whereas class issues are often invoked when dealing with the blurring of boundaries between the public and private spheres in the Victorian period, especially in relation to nineteenth-century women strollers as noted by Judith Walkowitz in *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992) and Lynda Nead in *Victorian Babylon* (2000), references to ethnicity are lacking in spatial studies on the Victorian age. The last essay in this first section, 'Ladies on the Tramp: The Philanthropic *Flâneuse* and Appropriations of Victorian London's Impoverished Domesticity', by Cathleen J. Hamann, precisely calls the reader's attention to class issues as it delves into the philanthropic work carried out by upper- and middle-class women in the poor and working-class homes of Victorian London. Notwithstanding the new social roles available for women in late Victorian England, such as theatre-goer, shopper and friendly visitor, Hamann argues, one should not forget the dangers of women's mobility in the Victorian street, as Janet Wolff posited in her aforementioned essay. However, Hamann indicates the relevance of the 'double condition' of the modern city that "made the private space of the poor a vital element of public discourse" (81). Recent criticism has shown that women philanthropists enjoyed a certain degree of mobility in Victorian England as seen in Dorice Williams Elliott's *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (2002). It is possible to argue that philanthropy and gender have found a niche in contemporary historical fiction set in Victorian times, what is now known as neo-Victorian fiction, for example in Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999), where one of the protagonists is an upper-middle-class woman philanthropist, Margaret Prior.

'Women on Display' proves to be one of the most enticing sections of the whole book as its main concern is the question of women on display in the work of well- and lesser-known women writers such as George Eliot or Edith Wharton, on the one hand, and Gertrude Atherton and F. Tennyson Jesse, on the other. Very innovative and suggestive, these three essays tackle the spectacularisation of female characters to varying degrees, in both the domestic and public spheres. Anna Despotopoulou draws on Jürgen Habermas' analysis of the thin line dividing private and public domains to argue that in Victorian times the private domain came to be governed by the rules of the marketplace. The author of this essay proves how "[c]oncern about the effect of the market is abundant in the Victorian novel" (91). Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) illustrates the ways in which a woman's domestic position is defined by the market, and how she can possibly challenge received notions of female subjectivity, torn between visibility and invisibility, in a novel concerned with spectacle and performance. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) Henry James adopts theatrical gestures and enactments to highlight the performative nature of human interaction. The private sphere, she argues, gives the false impression of freedom to women when they gain visibility through theatrical exposure. Anne-Marie Evans's essay on Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) mobilises theories about the drawing-room as theatrical spectacle to describe the relationship maintained between Lily and Selden. The author compellingly contends that Wharton "utilises the popular contemporary pastime of the *tableaux vivant* as a metaphor for the urban, sophisticated woman as spectacle" (117). Lastly, Janet Stobbs' 'Tracing the Female Triptych of Space: Private, Public, and Power Strongholds in Gertrude Atherton's *Patience Sparhawk and Her Times* (1897), and F. Tennyson Jesse's *A Pin to See the Peepshow* (1934)' examines two lesser-known novels from the point of view of the murderess, and the challenges this figure poses to the public and domestic spaces. Both novels feature a courtroom scene in which "the trials that take place in these novels are emblematic of the debate on women's position in society, mirroring deeply-entrenched fears that women's independence was conducive to criminal behaviour" (128). Extremely well-researched and documented, this essay shares with the previous ones the relevance of the theatrical metaphor, since the courtroom is regarded as a stage. This would appear to have mileage for future analyses of other narrative texts in which the trial occupies a central position.

The third section, entitled 'Approaching the City', comprises three chapters which offer valuable insights into women's intervention into the city. It is true that there are already a number of studies on the literary treatment of the Victorian and/or the modern city in women's writing such as Deborah Epstein Nord's *Walking the Victorian Streets* (1995), Christine Wick Sizemore's *A Female Vision of the City* (1989) and Deborah Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000), and the aforementioned Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* and Nead's *Victorian Babylon*, alluded to in the editors' joint introduction. These essays, however, explore uncharted territory as far as women and the city are concerned. For example, Valerie Fehlbaum's chapter on Eliza Lynn Linton and Ella Hepworth Dixon successfully demonstrates that late-nineteenth-century women writers found the way to challenge sanctioned codes of behaviour in the modern city of London, a few decades before Virginia Woolf wrote *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and 'Street Haunting: A Public Adventure' (1930). This essay is highly informative and it will prove to

be substantial for other critics to deal with late-nineteenth-century female strollers. The second chapter, by Melinda Harvey, discusses Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915-1967), an often-neglected novel, key to any discussion of women and space. Miriam Henderson, the *flâneuse par excellence*, breaks down the distinction between public and private, and enjoys a certain freedom in the interstitial in-between spaces where the porosity of public and private is patent – the “live space” (168), a borrowed term from Richard Sennett. Again ethnicity comes to the fore, as happened in the first section, in the author's analysis of the relation Miriam holds with Mendizabal, the Jewish character Miriam does have an affinity with. Mendizabal is instrumental in introducing Miriam to the continental café, and in incorporating the strangeness of the ‘other’ into the fabric of the city. M^a Lourdes López Roperó's essay on the London life-writing of Janet Frame and Doris Lessing convincingly compares two writers whose background, education and life apparently have nothing in common. However, the author's argument reveals unexpected links between these two writers as “white colonial writers pursuing writing careers in the metropolis, and both of them documented their urban experiences in their life-writing” (191). From the standpoint of the colonial observer and *flâneuse*, Frame and Lessing are able to read the city of London and to turn the public spaces of the metropolis inside out to affirm their presence. On a marginal note, one cannot help but comment on the author's opinion about *The Golden Notebook*, “[Lessing's] longest and most ambitious novel” (192; italics mine): this one is not the longest by far, since *The Four-Gated City* (1969), a novel which maintains some parallelisms with *The Golden Notebook*, is acknowledged as the longest of Lessing's novels.

‘Conquering the Spaces of War’, the fourth section of the volume, is devoted to the exploration of women's presence in the sphere of war. Teresa Gómez Reus and Peter Lauber's chapter examines Edith Wharton's *Fighting France* (11), her personal account of World War I. Their main aim is to claim the relevance of Edith Wharton's eyewitness testimony in war literature through a study of the spatial images: “[they] help to convey Wharton's reverence for French civilization and its resilience in the face of ‘troubled times’” (209). One such image is “the house on fire” (210), which functions as a motif that runs through Wharton's account, or “houses in ruins” (211), a metaphor of utmost importance to Wharton's depiction of wartime France. Wharton portrays the houses (and other spaces) as victimised beings, since she took pains not to show the French people as helpless, but according to the authors, *Fighting France* is simultaneously “a homage to the creative force of human life” (217), clearly shown in her depiction of gardens, hospitals and markets. This fascinating essay underlines key issues in Wharton's text that have previously received scant attention. Laurel Forster's essay, entitled ‘Women and War Zones: May Sinclair's Personal Negotiations with the First World War’, concentrates on May Sinclair's autobiographical text, *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915), a record of her short experience on the Belgian front line. This chapter offers a useful introduction to women's role in World War I, and then proceeds to the analysis of Sinclair's personal account of her war experience. Forster makes it clear that Sinclair held an ambiguous, in-between, position in war areas, as both an insider and an outsider, and that this is reflected in her *Journal*: “Sinclair's war writings ... start to investigate whether war zones could also be understood and imagined as female spaces” (231). The author of this essay explores the ways in which Sinclair's highly personal account markedly connects psychical

and physical places to the extent that the internal and the external approaches to war conflate and fuse together. Therefore, “[p]lace becomes a catalyst for stating the truth of her experience” (243), not only in her *Journal* but also in her war novels, as Forster develops in the final pages of her essay.

The last chapter of this section, by Aránzazu Usandizaga, delves into the complexities of Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* (1933), an autobiographical text that explores war spaces. Brittain’s work is particularly relevant to war literature, the author argues, because it became “very influential in the writing of later autobiographical texts and war texts by women” (252). The personal and the political cannot be divorced, and thus the stress is placed on the blurred lines between the private and the public spheres. Usandizaga explores the autobiographical text’s key issues such as the relevance of “[Brittain’s] literary persona” (255), “her daring invasion of narrative space both physical and metaphorical” (256), and “the gradual destruction of her own pre-war self as well as of that of her lover’s, her brother’s and her friends during the war” (260). Particularly fascinating is the author’s account of Brittain’s intervention into three post-war spaces: the spaces of the past, issues of class (related to her move away from literature), and the discourse of feminism and pacifism (262). In her concluding remarks, Usandizaga underlines the difficulties Brittain encountered to translate her war experiences, and those of her generation.

‘Transformations in Nature’, as the co-editors state in the introduction to the collection, represents an innovative approach to women and nature from the perspective of ecocriticism. The first of these essays, Stephen E. Hunt’s ‘Friends of our Captivity: Nature, Terror and Refugia in Romantic Women’s Literature’, provides an insight into the different ways in which four women writers of the Romantic period – Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft – saw their relationship with nature as nurturing and comforting. To varying degrees, these Romantic writers found in the natural landscape solace and a potential source of inspiration and creativity, but their approach to nature was manifestly different from that of the male Romantic poets. For example, in Hunt’s view, Smith and Robinson portray “a relational self in contrast to the individualized unitary self” to be found in Wordsworth’s ‘The Daffodils’ (278). The second chapter, by Lilace Mellin Guignard, focuses on women and wilderness, and the difficulties women face when engaging in outdoor activities, especially in the American wilderness. Her essay offers coping strategies for women to access those restricted spaces, and interestingly, sets out to study a woman’s performative abilities in outdoor activities in texts by Gretchen Legler, written within the tradition of the pastoral essay. Prompted by the analysis of these texts, Guignard poses the following question: “What could women achieve if they had access to the self-knowledge acquired through wandering that is associated with great male thinkers and artists?” (309). She provides answers to this question, and affirms that outdoors a woman achieves freedom and liberation from cultural inhibitions (210).

The last section of the volume, ‘Negotiating the City’, consists of two essays, each dealing with the negotiation between public and private. Kirsten Bartholomew Ortega’s ‘Adrienne Rich’s City Poetry: Locating a *Flâneuse*’ heavily draws on Charles Baudelaire’s nineteenth-century figure of the *flâneur* to explore the particular perspective conceded by a twentieth-century *flâneur* in Rich’s work. The influence of the French poet can be perceived in city poets such as Walt Whitman and T.S. Eliot, and Rich bases her urban

poetics on their findings: “Rich looks to her poetic forefathers to provide methods for translating the complexities of city life into poetry” (322). It is interesting to note that the recurrence of words like *map* and *atlas* in Rich’s work underlines the importance of reading the city for Rich’s poetics, a subject which has been so far neglected, according to Ortega. Some poems like ‘Frame’ (1980) emphasise the emotional response to the act of streetwalking. At times, however, this tendency clashes with her own commitment to reflect race, class, gender and sexuality. The author of this essay concludes that Rich attempts to appropriate and revise the figure of the *flâneur*, but “the restrictions of the form consistently disappoint the poems’ speakers” (333). The last chapter of the volume, by Sara Sullivan, engages in a comparison between the domestic spaces in Eavan Boland’s poetry and the public sphere of the nation. Boland sees the suburb as an in-between space, “a hybrid zone well-suited to the complexities of her poetry” (338), a positive area that nurtures her creativity as seen in *Object Lessons* (1995). In dissolving the boundaries of domestic and public spaces, Boland connects the personal and the political, as well as succeeds in circumventing the idealisation and objectification of women, clearly perceived in the Irish lyric mode. In other words, “Boland believes her political and historical engagement with Ireland is absolutely connected to her attempts to create poetry about a suburban woman’s life” (345). This chapter nicely links up with the previous one since Sullivan comments on the influence Adrienne Rich exerted on Boland, and how both share the belief in the transformative power of the written word (349). It is to the editors’ credit that these essays have been placed consecutively in the last section.

Inside/Out closes with the Concluding Remarks, by Janet Floyd, who aptly rounds up the subject of space and gender by referring to the highlights of this collection. Floyd poses several questions that, in her view, remain unexplored, proving that the dynamics established between inside and outside should be considered of utmost relevance to spatial and gender studies, and to contemporary criticism as a whole. Floyd sustains the notion that the title provides the reader with the key to understanding the complex ambiguities of the porous area demarcating public and private spheres, using a tactic: “to turn the terms inside and outside ‘inside-out’, thus giving ourselves the opportunity to expose and know thoroughly the invisible workings of both terms” (354).

This extremely well-structured and well-written collection is flawless. Perhaps one misses a reference to Marc Augé and the application of his concept of *non-place* to some chapters i.e. Mitsi’s essay on the Turkish bath or Evans’s chapter on consumerism in Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*. Augé’s definition of this notion would perfectly fit in the topics developed in those essays: “the word ‘non-place’ designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces” (Augé 1995: 94). Despite the fact that some chapters’ bibliographies are divided into primary and secondary texts/sources/references (chapters 10, 13), and others are not, the style and format of the collection are impeccable. *Inside Out* is, undoubtedly, a turning point in contemporary criticism about gender and social space. Useful and amenable, this collection reads as the most thorough examination of women’s writing and the concept of social space, which will be of future reference to anyone interested in gender, space and the (contested) dichotomy of the separate spheres.

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