Sonia Villegas-López and Beatriz Domínguez-García, eds. 2004: *Literature, Gender, Space.* Huelva: Universidad de Huelva.

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Why discuss space and gender together? For Villegas-López and Dominguez-García, the two subjects are intricately related: space is shaped by the people who live within it, and will thus reflect in some way our beliefs about and our ways of "doing" gender; at the same time, spaces may be said to "shape" our gender identities, producing different experiences of our bodies, different possibilities for movement and stasis, different relationships to home and world. The significance of space for women's lives in particular, has long been a concern of feminist thought: from Virginia Woolf's demands for "a room of one's own" to Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*, feminists have commented upon the close imbrication of space and power, and the effects of both on women's bodies. For feminist *literary* critics, space may take on a special significance, given the importance of fictional spaces in women's writing (as well as Woolf and French, we could think of Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" or Lynne Reid Banks' *The L-Shaped Room*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* or Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*); and indeed two early classics of feminist criticism (Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* [1979] and Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" [1986]) both make use of spatial metaphors in their attempts to offer new theories of female identity and literary fiction.

Perhaps space (metaphorical, physical, emotional, or psychological) has been such a rich source of interest for women writers and feminist critics alike, because of its complex and contradictory meanings for women: spaces such as the domestic sphere may signal frustration and confinement for women at particular historical moments and in certain cultural locations (the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres, for example); but the domestic as a "woman's space" may also be a source of identity for women, a site of meaning and value in many women's lives, which has been trivialised or underestimated in the literary tradition. This point may be reinforced further by looking to the experience of women from subaltern and marginalized groups: bell hooks reminds us that for black people in the United States, home is an ideal which cannot be taken for granted. Equally, while women at particular historical moments may experience space in terms of barriers and obstacles (Woolf describes her visit to "Oxbridge" in these terms: she is chased off the grass by a Beadle and denied access to the library), it is also through re-imagining space, often in fictional form, that feminist writers and thinkers have sought to push past the barriers of "what is" in order to imagine what "might yet be." Thus the rich tradition of utopian fiction by women writers, from Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, as well as the nomadic fictions and repudiations of the domestic in more recent novels such as Nicole Brossard's *Mauve Desert* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*. For such writers, rethinking gender, desire and female subjectivity is only possible through a reconceptualisation of space and its relationship to women's bodies.

Since the nineteen-nineties the question of gender and space has been foregrounded in the work of feminist cultural geographers (Gillian Rose, Doreen Massey), anthropologists (Shirley Ardener, Henrietta Moore) and in the spheres of architecture

(Jane Rendell, Beatriz Colomina), the visual arts (Griselda Pollock), and cultural studies (Janet Wolff, Elizabeth Wilson), as feminist scholarship coincided with a more general "spatial turn" in the humanities and the social sciences. While feminist literary scholars have certainly contributed to this research (Higgonet and Templeton's *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space* [1994] is one example cited as a precursor by the editors of this volume), literary critics have not had the prominence we might expect in this debate. Essay collections such as Beatriz Colomina's *Sexuality and Space* (1992) have tended to prioritise the visual arts and popular culture, while Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose's *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (1994) veers more towards cultural geography and ethnography. For this reason, the current volume, which discusses gender and space within the context of literature, is especially welcome, offering a new and timely contribution to a consistently fascinating field.

Literature, Gender, Space is a diverse collection, comprising essays on literatures from a variety of geographical locations including Spain, Britain, Ireland, the United States, Latin America, Canada, India, and New Zealand. While the majority of contributions focus on twentieth-century and contemporary literature, the volume also offers a longer historical perspective, with essays on Chaucer, Pre-Restoration theatre, eighteenth-century sentimental fiction and nineteenth-century Canadian fiction and religious writings. The editors have also succeeded in including discussions of a range of different genres: drama and poetry as well as fiction, and popular genres including chick-lit, romance, and sentimental fiction as well as "high" literature. As well as different genres, the editors have made room for different "genders": not surprisingly in this era of gender-trouble, a number of the contributors address themselves to rethinking masculinities. Pilar Cuder-Dominguez's essay offers an especially original "take" on the unexpected ways in which the "rhetoric of domesticity" shaped concepts of masculinity in the nineteenth century. Having said this, the majority of the essays focus on women's writing, and address themselves to the ways in which women writers across a variety of genres and locations have addressed the problematic of women and space.

The diversity of topics and genres explored in the collection makes for a stimulating, if sometimes overwhelming, read; and, for this reason, the section headings and short introductions provided by the editors are especially helpful, serving as they do to group essays under relevant topics such as "geographies of gender," "domestic cartographies," "city and landscape" and so on. One category that does not emerge—perhaps surprisingly, given its importance in recent cultural criticism—is that of the body. I was reminded of this as a potential trope when reading Teresa Caneda-Cabrera's intriguing essay on Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss," where she quotes Mansfield's central character, Bertha, reflecting "How idiotic civilisation is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case, like a rare fiddle?" and goes on to quote the narrator's comment that "although Bertha Young was thirty, she still had moments like this when she wanted to run instead of walk, to take dancing steps on and off the pavement, to bowl a hoop, to throw something up in the air and catch it again, or to stand still and laugh at—nothing—at nothing simply" (Mansfield 1981; qtd. 244).

Here, the body's experience of space is shaped by gender expectations in the same manner that Iris Marion Young has described in her classic essay "Throwing Like a Girl": it is not simply that the body is *placed* in particular spaces (domestic interiors versus public spaces), but rather that the very sensations of how the body *occupies* space—how we move,

how much space we take up, and so on—are affected by gendered norms and values. Mansfield's delineation of the active, desiring body and the manner in which it is "shut up" is a powerful one, the story also touching upon important themes of unacknowledged lesbian sexual desire in the image of two women gazing together at a flowering pear tree, but separated from it by the window through which they look.

The question of how desiring bodies live within and are shaped by the spaces they occupy is an important one that could be foregrounded more clearly in the collection as a whole. Nonetheless, the tropes that *do* recur across the variety of texts and approaches presented, are powerful and always provocative ones: the question of whether domestic spaces are restrictive or liberating for women; the need to reclaim public space but also to occupy it differently; the desire to imagine alternative, utopian or no-places, while at the same time acknowledging the need for concrete spaces to which subjectivity may be anchored; and finally, the suggestion that literature, or other forms of creative writing, may offer a new space for subjectivity: in Cinta Ramblado-Minero's words, "a space for the self" beyond patriarchal structures.

The collection is especially strong in its focus on postcolonial, diasporic and multicultural literatures, with essays on African-American, Black British, Indo-Canadian, Latin-American and Irish literatures. Here, the volume shows affinities with Blunt and Rose's *Writing Women and Space* (1994), which signalled early on the close relationship between cultural theories of space and postcolonialism's preoccupation with spaces of the map, the territory, and the nation. These spatial tropes, with their underlying gendered assumptions regarding woman and/as space, offer a rich ground for feminist analysis. A number of feminist critics (Nash, McClintock) have commented upon the ways in which both women's bodies and the "new world"' were constructed in colonial discourse as "virgin territories" to be explored, charted, and controlled.

At the same time, as Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides and Luz Mar González-Arias point out, the use of woman as symbol of the nation has been an important aspect of nationalist discourse in emerging postcolonial nations, including Ireland. González-Arias quotes Ailbhe Smyth: "[I]t is not true, of course, that woman has no place in Ireland. The truth is that Irish Woman is place itself" (Smyth 1989; qtd. 175), and the complicated relationship of Irish women to the nation-space is explored in the two essays here on Eavan Boland's poetry, as well as in Pérez-Vides's fascinating exploration of fictional representations of the Magdalen Laundries. The Laundries—convent-run penitential institutions in which women were incarcerated as punishment for perceived sexual transgressions (such as conceiving a child out of wedlock)—are a frightening, very recent example of the ways in which "metaphorical" associations of gender and space have actual effects: as Pérez-Vides points out, the women were punished because they were deemed to have transgressed the symbolic woman-home association by their public display of sexuality; their punishment for this was enforced incarceration and hence invisibility.

The focus on postcolonial and multi-cultural literature also enables contributors to signal the importance of positionality when considering questions of gender and space. As Darias-Beautell reminds us, quoting Nira Yuval-Davis, "not all women are oppressed and/or subjugated in the same way or to the same extent, even within the same society at any specific moments" (Yuval-Davis 1997; qtd. 159). Immaculada Pineda-Hernández's discussion of the kitchen as a trope in African-American women's writing provides a salutary example of this point. Pineda-Hernández shows how, for the domestic servants

or former slaves depicted in texts like *Our Nig* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave-Girl*, the kitchen does not (as for many middle-class white women) equate to the "private sphere" of family life, but is rather a workplace—and in the case of Frado, the protagonist of *Our Nig*, it is a place where the black female servant is subject to torment and abuse from the white mistress of the house. In later texts, such as Ann Petry's *The Street*, the black protagonist's relationship to the white woman's kitchen is equally negative: in this case, it is an occasion for resentment and envy, as Petry's protagonist gazes upon the luxurious commodities that she knows she can never own. Pineda-Hernández concludes by comparing two representations of the kitchen in the work of Gloria Naylor: in the first novel, *Linden Hills*, it is a morgue-like space, symbolising the emptiness of the protagonist's life and values; in the second, *Mama Day*, it is recuperated as the place of "African-American values of support, strength and sisterhood," and as a place of agency, creativity, and magic (148). Pineda-Hernández's subtle and nuanced exploration of her theme suggests the very different meanings of gendered spaces such as the home and the kitchen for white and black women, and indeed for different black women depending on their class position and their relationship to the wider black community.

Finally, the focus on diasporic spaces in the collection offers new ways of understanding the relationship of gender and space in relation to recent "travelling theory." James Clifford has taken the lead in rethinking ideas of home and dwelling-place in the context of an increasingly globalised world, where many of us (whether by choice or by force) are more and more often on the move. Clifford argues that we need to rethink our binary oppositions between stasis and movement, home and elsewhere, and uses the term "dwelling-in-motion" to try to account for the persistent dis/re/locations characteristic of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Clearly, such dislocations also have implications for concepts of femininity and masculinity, and the ways in which they are assumed to map onto public and private spaces; and some of the consequences of this have been explored in recent feminist and postcolonial work (Chandra Mohanty and Biddy Martin, Caren Kaplan) as well as in literary criticism (Rosemary Marangoly George).

In the present volume, the re-signification of home and location is explored via two essays on women's diasporic fictions: Eva Darias-Beautell's discussion of the Indo-Canadian novel, *Tamarind Mem*, and Susanne Pichler's analysis of the Nigerian/British novel, *Kehinde*. Both critics trace the ways in which diasporic journeys disrupt conventional assumptions regarding patterns of gendered occupancy of space. In *Kehinde*, Pichler shows how the female protagonist's move from Nigeria to London is for her a liberating one: the urban spaces of the capital allowing her to renegotiate her gendered and national identity, in much the same way that Elizabeth Wilson argues that cities have historically enabled women to escape traditional gender roles. By contrast, the male protagonist of *Kehinde*, in Pichler's reading, finds in London only "limited possibilities and circumscribed spaces" and it is he, rather than his wife, who feels the need to return "home."

In Darias-Beautell's reading of *Tamarind Mem*, on the other hand, the narrative of the metropolis as a liberating space for the postcolonial female subject is refused, as the equation between the move west and "progress" is viewed as a problematic legacy of colonial myth-making. Instead, in this mother-daughter narrative, the daughter, located in Canada, is represented as immobilized, while her mother, who has returned to India to travel on the railways telling stories to all she meets, is seen as "travelling light," losing the

constricting identity of *memsahib* as she encounters all castes and classes on her journey. The mother's move into public space is read as a parodic retracing of her husband's earlier life, when he travelled across India in his work with the railway company. However, whereas the husband's aim was to conquer space—covering the map with red ink to denote the territory he has charted—his wife, Saroja, refuses the logic of territory: "she moves around leaving no trace . . . the point of origin lost, the destination uncertain" (159). Saroja even succeeds in bringing the domestic sphere into public space, "making herself at home" in her train compartment, in a striking example of Clifford's "dwelling-in-travel" that problematises any easy distinction between movement and stasis, public and private, local and global.

It is this image of the woman in motion, travelling light across a continent, that remains with me having read *Literature, Gender, Space*. This image, and a dozen more, of women occupying different spaces, differently: incarcerated in institutions, listening to the footfall of their jailers; standing cooking in kitchens, conjuring up miracles or serving up quotidian meals; finding their way by touch and smell through a city filled with fog, or looking up at the statues of male patriots who gaze blankly past them; "camping in waiting rooms" and making tea on trains; transgressing the boundaries of male territories, despite all the warnings to keep off the grass; looking through a window at a pear tree in blossom. Villegas-López and Dominguez-García, along with their contributors, succeed in reminding us why space matters for feminism, and for feminist literary critics in particular; they have also left us with a rich array of images, motifs and methodologies that will surely inspire further work on this important topic.

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