

language with which literary criticism and comparative studies are threatened, but also with the hope of a revival of the inner man reflected in literature.

Monica Coca³

Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu, *A Topography Plagued by Marginality in Victorian Novels*, Konstanz, Hartung-Gorre Verlag, Germany, 2022, 214 p.

The book is a survey of well-known Victorian novels from the perspective of space and gender. From the very first lines of her book, Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu suggests concepts like ‘marginality’ and ‘the Other’ are regularly used in the 19th-century novels and her survey intended to present the diverse strategies used by marginalized individuals to climb the social ladder or to preserve the already acquired social position. The book does not intend to focus only on women/female characters, despite the recurrent examples which the author gives in order to emphasize the enclosure into marginality. To avoid being categorized as a gendered analysis of spaces, the book presents marginality and individuals from different social classes, races or genders. Nevertheless, the author of this survey distinguishes between male and female Victorian authors to show readers how gender roles and gendered stereotypes were illustrated in different novels, and how these were transmitted to readers in order for them to believe in a certain set of values and to conform to conventional norms.

For her analysis, Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu used only English texts published in the Victorian times, her main goal being to re-interpret the traditional roles, values and norms: the analyses of different novels are chronologically presented, as if the author tried to reflect the evolution in time and history of the concepts mentioned in the title of the book: *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy are the Victorian novels analysed in terms of space and social context. Each chapter of the book deals with the protagonists' marginality, but also with the position in society of different characters from these Victorian novels. Nevertheless, before the analysis of spaces, Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu offers some general considerations about the main Victorian principles and about the binary oppositions so frequently used by most Victorian writers. These principles and oppositions lie at the core of any discussion about space, about gender and about social position in the 19th century novels: private vs. public, margin vs. centre, nature vs. culture, surface vs. depth, man vs. woman, master vs. servant, appearance vs. reality, free vs. confined, hunters vs. hunted, possessors vs. possessed. All these concepts are thoroughly explained with examples from different novels and they are meant to help the author of this survey in her analysis of the space.

The first chapter (“Marginality Embedded in Opposite Spaces”) deals with some binary opposition specific to the Victorian times, which also trigger a specific

³ Universitatea „Ștefan cel Mare” din Suceava.

representation of certain characters and spaces in *Wuthering Heights*. For instance, the opposition between nature and culture helps the readers understand the difference between Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, and between the inhabitants of these two spaces: the Lintons vs. the Earnshaws. At the core of this analysis lies Heathcliff who is often defined as the prototype of the marginalized individuals based on their social position, education and origin. Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu offers plenty examples from Emily Brontë's novel which demonstrate the cultivated character of Thrushcross Grange, as well as the wilderness of Wuthering Heights and of its inhabitants. The chapter further analyses the role of the patriarch in the two spaces and how power (sometimes expressed through violence) can alter spaces and the characters' personality or path in life. Here, Friedrich Hegel's concepts (mastery vs. servitude) are reinforced to illustrate the master's rights to control and impose order, as well as the slave's attempts at subverting the master and at stealing his position in society. Among the rightful masters we mention: old Mr. Earnshaw, Mr. Linton and Edgar Linton, whereas the prototype of the slave is Heathcliff who usurps his former masters and abuses the rightful heirs, trying to transgress his marginality and impose his position into the core of the social system. Heathcliff's frustration ever since he was a child results in the transformation of all spaces and in the oppression of all those who made him suffer in the past.

The second chapter of this book ("Can Governesses Break Marginality without Being Punished?") analyses Jane Eyre's repeated attempts at finding a home, at belonging to a place or to a family. Charlotte Brontë's protagonist is from the start marginalized due to her being an orphan, so, Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu offers us an analysis of Jane's marginalisation in different stages of her life and of her rebellion against the abuses she suffered from other socially superior characters in the novel. All subchapters dealing with *Jane Eyre* refer individually to each space mentioned in the novel and to each place which influenced the female protagonist's life, consequently each space defines a stage in Jane's life: Gateshead (being defined by Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu as the beginning of Jane's marginality), Lowood School (in which Jane transits from a very private existence to a more public life), Thornfield (where Jane is further marginalised, but also trapped in a web of lies), Marsh End (which marks the end of her enclosure and marginalisation), and Ferndean (where Jane finds a balance between reason and passion, and between social classes). The whole analysis of Jane's marginality is impregnated with different acts of oppression, of (physical and verbal) abuse, of humiliation which she had to endure first as an orphan, then as a governess – as 'the Other'. Jane's rebellion throughout the novel is seen as Charlotte Brontë's questioning of gender roles and stereotypes; however, after declaring the women's frustration and dissatisfaction regarding the restrictions and traditional conventions, the female Victorian author succeeds in reconciling the Victorian order with a woman's desire to love and be loved.

The last chapter dealing with a novel written by a female Victorian writer is "Overcoming Marginality in *North and South* and the Transgression of Borders" which depicts the relation between the industrial North and the idyllic South, between the urban and the rural landscape in the 19th century England. Elizabeth Gaskell offered in her novel an insight into the effects of the industrial revolution, as well as into the female protagonist's forced transgression from a superior social class to an inferior one, and vice versa. Margaret Hale's discourse in the novel is not a feminist manifesto, but it is the manifestation of a woman's voice capable of solving social

problems. Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu presents how in *North and South* the public space invaded the private home, how Elizabeth Gaskell lets social aspects intrude into Thornton's domestic space and lets social problems influence the personality of characters and the identity of space. The industrial North seems to be dark and menacing, but it gradually comes to be loved and appreciated even by the more sentimental people. All throughout the novel, the South is idealised, hence the characters' intense feeling of nostalgia for the passivity and beauty of the space. Margaret's position at the core of the social system in the South rapidly changes into a humbling marginalization in the North where other cultural values are promoted. However, the female protagonist succeeds in overcoming her marginality through education, kindness and generosity, after she has acquired the necessary lessons.

The next chapter dealing with topography is "Forever Marginal despite Transgressing the Childhood Rural Boundaries" which refers to Pip's (the protagonist of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*) constant marginalization in different stages of his life or in different spaces he goes through. Even from his childhood, Pip has been 'the Other' because of his orphanhood and his belonging to the lower-class. Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu resorts again to the Victorian binary oppositions when she classifies the spaces depicted by Dickens into: rural and urban, infinite and finite, uncivilized and civilized, outer and interior spaces. Being a Bildungsroman, the novel presents Pip's evolution from an innocent child to a fully developed young man, as well as his continual attempts of transgressing his marginality which would mean his departure from a rural environment to different locations in London, passing also through 'sub-spaces' like the hulks (the prison-ships), the river Thames, the sea, etc. – all these are peripheral spaces marked by ambiguity because Charles Dickens offers very few details about them, which emphasize the fact that the water marks the border between criminality and culture/or Victorian society. No matter the character of the space he might live or activate in, Pip faces all kinds of traps (like the secrecy of his benefactor) which further send him into a marginal position and which reveal the dehumanization of the individual in a corrupt society. Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu also focuses on other characters' positions in the Victorian society and on the roles they take on: she distinguishes between manipulators and manipulated, between hunters and hunted, as well as between possessor and possessed. We notice a difference between the novels written by female authors and that of Charles Dickens: the Brontë Sisters' and Gaskell's protagonists ultimately overcome their marginality only after they have acquired the necessary lessons of domesticity, whereas Dickens' hero accepts his marginality with humbleness, after he acknowledges the rightful Victorian order.

Chapter five ("When Time and Space become Strange: Does the Wonderworld Help Alice Overcome her Marginality?") presents another female protagonist's position in society, but Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu chose to analyse this novel because she intended to observe how a male author depicts a female character, how he describes her rebellion against the Victorian restrictions and how he deals with her marginality. We reckon this novel is a step forward from other Victorian narratives, since a male author allows his heroine to rejoice the sense of adventure, of experiencing a fantasy world. Again, the child is seen as 'the Other', hence Alice's marginalization and rejection from both the Victorian reality and from Wonderland. Spaces will be discussed in this chapter following the order mentioned by Lewis Carroll in his book, going from the rabbit hole (which is presented as the

intermediary passage between Victorian reality and Wonderland) to the Queen's garden (seen at first like a temptation and a glimpse into the Garden of Eden). We witness how elements from the Victorian reality are gradually neutralized and replaced with those specific to a fantastic world; Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu defines this transgression as a conflict between horizontality (the Victorian society) and verticality (Wonderland), between past and present. Besides the topography of Alice's marginality in Wonderland, Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu brings forth a discussion about the girl's bodily borders which are constantly transgressed throughout her adventures in Wonderland and creates confusion when Alice tries to define her identity. The fantasy world also provokes the reversal of hierarchical relations (specific to the Victorian society) and a subversion of domesticity and stability when female characters like the Duchess or the Queen of Hearts are involved. The conclusion of Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu's analysis of spaces in Lewis Carroll's book is that anarchy or the challenge of gender roles does not represent a solution to the Victorian limitations, the male author manipulates the little female protagonist into believing that any world she would want to evade to, might later turn out to be a dystopia ruled by a totalitarian dictator.

The final chapter of this book ("Mapping Tess of the D'Urbervilles' Marginality") emphasizes the challenge of the Victorian values and of the traditional morality, and spaces no longer present the characters' marginality, but they reflect their state of mind, their mood. Although she is not orphan – she has a family who love her –, Tess embodies the Hardyian Other, the outsider who is often marginalized by others for being different. Throughout the novel, Tess mingles between the centre and the margins of the social system: she is poor, but with a noble ancestry; she has her family's love, but not their protection and help; she is beautiful, but not pure; she has good intentions, but her actions often have negative effects/results. Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu observes how Thomas Hardy incorporates in his novel the well-known Victorian oppositions (private-public, master-slave, nature-culture), but he re-defines the public and the private, and lays emphasis on nature, on prehistoric and medieval elements, in this way combining space with temporal coordinates.

The whole book having as main focus spaces in the 19th century novels allows Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu to express her own thoughts about marginality, about gender roles, about the Victorian principles – as these are illustrated in the six novels analysed. Despite the subversive representations of different critics who have already discussed spaces in Victorian novels, Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu's book manages to offer an objective look on the Victorian restrictions, trying to emphasize the importance of power, of order and of stability in a period of time when the society was undergoing huge changes from a political, scientific and social point of view. The conclusion of the book is that marginality and Otherness came to be accepted or at least tolerated and even overcome once the Victorian society progressed and evolved.

Veronica Grecu Balan⁴

⁴ Universitatea „Vasile Alecsandri” din Bacău.