

“YOU GRANT ME SPACE, YOU GRANT MY SPACE:” THE GENDER OF WOMEN’S OWN ROOMS

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You grant me space, you grant my space. But in so doing you have already taken me away from my expanding place. What you intend for me is the place which is appropriate for the need you have of me. What you reveal to me is the place where you have positioned me, so that I remain available for your needs. Even if you should evict me, I have to stay there so that you can continue to be settled in your universe. (Irigaray 47)

The cited fragment comes from Luce Irigaray’s philosophical study *Elemental Passions*, published in Britain in 1992. In brief, it captures a number of arguments connected with how women tend to perceive space. In the quoted passage, space is viewed as the territory of gender control, and, as such, it can be allowed to be inhabited solely under the specified conditions. The access to this space is “granted,” therefore, it can be also regulated, constrained, partially or temporally denied. In the use of the bolted pronouns: “**you** grant **my** space,” one can clearly perceive a conflict in gendered standpoints. The statement refers to the context when masculine “you” issues permission to the female dwelling in “her own space.” According to Young, “to own the space is to have autonomy over admission to the space and its contents” where “a person should have control over access to her living space, her meaningful things, and information about herself” (74). Consequently, the question arises how one can argue that the space is “her own” when the regulations to its access and management are controlled by somebody else. Bearing it in mind, instead of recognising the space as hers, the female speaker in *Elemental Passions* identifies it as assigned to her, and, for that reason, appropriated. In other words, this qualified space can be occupied by the female persona as long as she meets the conditions of her “settlement.” Inasmuch, Irigaray’s text renders the discourse of manipulation and loss (“you have already taken me away from”), of the debilitating enclosure (“away from my expanding place”), the sense of being taken advantage of (“the place which is appropriate for the need you have of me”), the feeling of being objectified (“you have positioned me, so that I remain

available for your needs”), the lack of security resulting from the potential withdrawal from the tenancy of the place (“if you should evict me”).

Taking all into account, the overall image of the space inferred from that passage is that of the men-controlled territory which women might inhabit as long as they fulfil men’s expectations. In view of that, the speaker asks rhetorically: “What then becomes of space? An attribution of places, of sites in the universe of your being as a subject?” (Irigaray 71). Hence, it comes to be conspicuous that the female voice does not feel “at home” in her allocated area. Lexically, the notion of space is close to expansion, openness, freedom, nonetheless, the implied concepts in the analysed percept indicate the opposite. In other words, women who wish to inhabit this area have to challenge the alleged neutrality of space’s gender. The female voice in *Elemental Passions* conveys the problem as follows:

And you meet me only in the space that you have opened up for yourself. You never meet me except as your creature – within the horizon of your world. Within the circle of your becoming. That protective shell which shelters you from an outside of you might question the matter with which you built your house. (Irigaray 47)

As demonstrated, the speaker feels that to encounter textually her addressee, she has to abandon her own discourse and do it on his terms. The inter-gender communication cannot take place on “her territory;” she can be heard or seen only as a complement to “the horizon of **his** world.” The autonomy of women’s identity is qualified, which finds its expression in a multiplicity of the second person pronouns: “the space that **you** have,” “Within the circle of **your** becoming,” “shell which shelters **you** from an outside,” “opened up for **yourself**.” The sole expression of the female subjectivity is weakened by the preceding negation “You **never** meet **me**.” As a result, the female voice feels self-effacing, as if she were textually imprisoned in the circular phallogocentric discourse from which she cannot escape.

The phenomenon that women have to function on the territory that is not “their own” has been noticed not only by feminist critics but also by sociologists. Scott writes of women “invading the space” with regard to how they perceive themselves in relation to being “out of place in the elite social space that is run by and for men” (41). In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf relates her similar, real-life experience of “audaciously trespassing” the male Oxbridge world of academia, when literally and metaphorically diverting from a non-scholarly, woman’s path:

It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man’s figure rose to intercept me....Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away

coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation.... I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. (6-7)

In the cited passage, the gendered encroaching on the male professional space is related by Woolf with irony and distance. It demonstrates, however, a forbidding case of the space separation where (female) intruders are punished with ostracised contempt. For centuries, the turf trail of the formal, higher education was not allowed to women. They had to satisfy themselves with the gravel path of the informal, hardly ever existent, home tuition. Mill in his canonical 1869 publication *The Subjection of Women* explains that the restrained access to, and men's control over the space of women's education were meant to condition women into “meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man” (149). Bearing it in mind, Mill advocates the need for women “to be educated as solidly, and in the same branches of knowledge as men,” promoting “their admission into professions and occupations hitherto closed against them”(146-147). He maintains that men shaped the artificial concept of *women's nature* according to their own needs and demands (Mill 155), thus, appropriating women's space. According to Mill, it is education, or rather the lack of thereof, and the myth of femininity that enabled men to dislodge women from their spaces of autonomy. Since “the subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural” (Mill 146).

The idea that women are culturally constructed to be men's space of Otherness is elaborated on by Irigaray in *Elemental Passions*. In the referred to book, the metaphor of the house represents the spatial, gendered representation of the female identity and the female body contained within a restricted, discursive enclosure. Claiming that “I was your house...this dwelling place, I do not know what to do with these walls of mine. Have I ever had a body other than the one which you constructed according to your idea of it?” (49), the speaker in *Elemental Passions* argues that in men's discourse, she feels de-materialised in her carnality, reduced to an abstract, bodiless, binary oppositional construct, an empty, self-less abode.

Following this line of thinking, critics frequently draw attention to the fact that the division of space reflects the division of the gendered-grounded influence. For instance, within a confined, living space under the shared roof, a woman's private study might indicate that her professional work is regarded to be of a considerable (economic) importance. Virginia Woolf's idea of the room of her own signifies women's access to the safe, physical space where they could, undisturbed, put pen to paper to produce fiction, or any other literary works. In the past, as noted by Mrs Honeychurch, a character in Forster's *A Room with a View*, “women who (instead of minding their houses

and their children) seek notoriety by print" (169-170) were held in derision and observed with suspicion. As a narrator in Forster's novel ironically remarks women's "mission was to inspire others to achievement rather than to achieve themselves" (52). In contrast to that assumption, the room of their own becomes the women's imaginative space whose "very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics" (Woolf 114). Applying Woolf's concept, Boiling stresses that for women, it has always been fundamental to be able to claim the space as their protective refuge where they could "nurse the wounds of the ego, and to lend depth of feeling," develop ideas for the future and cultivate their current aptitudes (77-78). For Woolf, "a room of her own" stands for much more than simply a private comfort of the four walls, it means the personal space where women can devote themselves to their own artistic commitments, pursue their own literary interests, or do what they consider significant for their self-realisation:

The rooms differ so completely; they are calm or thunderous; open on to the sea, or, on the contrary, give on to a prison yard; are hung with washing; or alive with opals and silks; are hard as horsehair or soft as feathers—one has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one's face. (Woolf 114)

In the cited passage, Woolf does not essentialise women, and she is perfectly aware of differences within and among women. She admits: "The rooms differ so completely," denoting dissimilar interests, objectives and aspirations that women might have. She advises them to transform the suppressed energy of years' subdual into art. The common misconception regarding Woolf's thought is reading the examined metaphor as women's exclusion from the outer reality, and being separated from the world in a "room of her own." Contrary to those assumptions, Woolf appeals: "So that when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not" (144). For that reason, the writer does not encourage women to be locked inside their homes, but to enter much more extensive space of a world of their own, not purely fictitious but related to the experiential reality:

I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals....if we the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality;...our relation is to the world of reality.... (Woolf 148-149)

As demonstrated, Woolf inspires women to have courage to make the outer world – a room of their own. Such understanding would also correspond to Irigaray’s philosophical thought in which the critic states that women, trapped in men’s cultural, conceptual limitations, should leave this discursive space in search of their own infinite territory. In Forster’s *A Room with a View*, female characters are accustomed into appreciating a view from their rooms and being satisfied with a “window,” male-mediated vision of the reality rather than exploring the outdoor space individually. One of the characters, Mr Emerson sums this gendered difference as follows “Women like looking at a view, men don’t” (Forster 11). In Forster’s novel, men treat the whole surrounding as their own space, therefore, the room, with, or without a view, seems to be nothing more than a confinement hindering their expansion.

Unlike in men’s case, rooms have been places where women of the past would spend most of their lives, hardly ever leaving the house unaccompanied, or without a crucial reason. As Woolf puts it, “For women have sat indoors all these millions of years” (114). Women as the goddesses of Home and Hearth were the prisoners of the convention which would expect them to stay indoors, away from the looks of other men and temptations of the open space. Their duties were also connected with domestic and household chores. Unpaid and underappreciated household routine was supposed to become the “true” destiny of each woman and the female one and only “fulfilment.” In the course of time, the lady of the house might turn into a “mad woman in the attic,” frustrated, agitated, lonely, soon abandoned and replaced with its more docile successor. The paradox of the gendered-based territorialisation results from the fact instead of being a safe haven, a place women defined as their “home” could become the very space where their autonomy was most severely restricted.

As outlined briefly, the notion that space has a gendered dimension is neither new nor a contemporary phenomenon. It goes back to the division into the public and private spheres, the indoor realm and its outer, communal dimension. The articles included in this collection refer to the contexts where the gendered concept of space gets interrogated and where it is put under the scrutiny. The authors who contributed to this collection are young scholars, researchers, Ph.D. students, university graduates and future candidates for doctoral programmes. They graduated from different universities; they specialise in different academic fields and represent different academic approaches. Apart from a literary and cultural perspective, they would examine the concept of space from geographical, sociological and psychological standpoints, applying new and old methodologies that have been re-interpreted by them.

The following book is divided into three sections. The opening part, entitled THE GENDERED SPACE OF LITERATURE, is devoted to the interpretations of fiction. The section commences with the essay by Jędrzej Tazbir "A descent into departure and an exploration of absence – Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* as a portrayal of the space of literature." The article examines Danielewski's experimental novel *House of Leaves*, applying Maurice Blanchot's notion of "space of literature," shared by all the participants in the reading/writing process (including the characters from the novel), which forces them to confront the "textual dislodgment from the household" of the unequivocal or comforting textual reassurance of the stable meaning. Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska, the author of "A White Room in a Gothic Manor. Spaces of the Heroine in *Adelheid* by Vladimír Körner" examines the spatial construction of the novel *Adelheid* (1967), written by the Czech novelist Körner. Depicting German-speaking inhabitants of Czechoslovakia *Adelheid* is analysed comparatively with regard to socialist realist *Nástup* (1951) by Václav Řezáč. The spatial point of the reference constitutes the Gothic "white" room, formerly occupied by a daughter of the Heidenmanns. The last essay in this section is entitled "Defying genre stereotypes in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess*." Its author, Karolina Marzec, looks at the political and social space of children's literature, analysing two canonical books by Burnett. Applying the postcolonial and feminist methodology, the author reads the examined novels "against the grain," disclosing many contexts hidden from view. The feminist interpretation of *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* proves that regardless of the morality and standards of the times in which both these novels were written, their heroines could become positive role-models for young women.

The section two SPACE, VISION AND A GENDERED PLACE commences with an essay by Marta Olasik, entitled "Towards Lesbian Studies in Poland." The article challenges stereotypes and fallacies concerning the teaching of Lesbian Studies in Poland. Olasik outlines an innovative approach to the subject; she offers a new methodology and clarifies a number of misconceptions, regarding the long-standing terminology and its range. From that perspective, her pioneering research might be regarded as opening new spaces in that area. The article by Magdalena Banasiewicz and Jan Rusek entitled "Gender Stereotypes and the Place Identity" offers an insightful analysis of the two case studies of gendered places in Poland: women-centred café Babie Lato in Częstochowa and men-oriented hairdresser's salon in Gdańsk, called The Barbers. The authors of the article examine the importance of gender and its impact on the social and cultural construction of the public space. Searching for the

characteristics of a gendered place, they critically re-interpret the notion of the place identity with regard to a gender variable. In her article “From the Kitchen to the World – Changes of Women’s Status and Attitudes on the Example of the Mexican Indian Villages in the La Huasteca Hidalguense Region” Zofia Piotrowska-Kretkiewicz examines a geographically specific region in Mexico, and she studies how the outlook on life and the social status of women coming from Nahua Indians have changed over the recent years. The author has conducted long-termed research in this area, and its results, published in the article, are based on her own findings as well as on the theoretical works concerning the subject matter. The third article in this section by Katarzyna Wojtanik explores “Space, Shape, and Movement in Signing and the Gendering of Visual Languages.” Having in mind the indicated in the title categories, the author focuses on the visual dimension of the sign language, not overlooking its gendered aspect. Her article offers a comprehensive, linguistic reading of the space in the context of the sign language.

The concluding section of the collection, THE GENDERING OF SPACE AND CULTURE, comprises the articles from the film, media and cultural studies. The final part of the book commences with an article by Agnieszka Kurzawa, entitled “Transgressing the Spaces in Film Adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham’s *The Painted Veil*.” The paper probes the separate and shared gendered spaces of the two main protagonists in *The Painted Veil* film to study the critical moments of their divergence, overlapping and intersecting. The author decodes the visual and spatial contexts in which the interactions between Kitty and Walter Fane take place. Antonina Kuras, the author of “Witches Now and Then: The Image of a Witch and Differences in the Perception of Female Witches During Sixteenth, Seventeenth Centuries and Nowadays” compares stereotypes and beliefs about witches in the past and at present. In canonical, historical texts, the author examines the roots of prejudice against women during the period of the witch-hunting, to establish which of these biased opinions have remained till now, and how they have evolved. Then, she relates to the cultural representations of witches in contemporary mainstream films and traces the attempts to reclaim the concept by the feminist activists in the 1960s. The collection terminates with a text by Joanna Trojak, entitled “Jackie, Marilyn or Someone Different – Male Constructed Myths of 1960’s Women in TV Series *Mad Men*.” Referring to seminal feminist publications, the author analyses three female characters from the titular TV series (Betty Draper, Joan and Peggy) to find the correlation between them and corresponding archetypal female icons.

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