

Teresa Gómez Reus and Terry Gifford, eds. 2013. *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 197 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-33046-8.

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Spatial studies and gender have enjoyed a fruitful relationship in the last years as seen in the works of critics like Christine Sizemore, Deborah Parsons and Janet Floyd, among others. One apt example was Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga's edited collection *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space* (2008), which was reviewed in *Atlantis* (Arias 2011). Gómez Reus and Usandizaga's volume entered the critical debate of the ideology of *separate spheres*, which has been contested in the last few decades. Their collection took its cue from Janet Wolff's pivotal work on the (in)visibility of women in the public sphere, published in 1985 and entitled "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity." It offered an innovative approach to gender and social space, and it set out to establish the challenges to the ideology of separate spheres, thus proving to be an indispensable text for those interested in gender, space and the porosity of the public and private spheres from the nineteenth century onwards.

Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces, edited by Teresa Gómez Reus and Terry Gifford, explores women's negotiations with spaces in transit in the work of women writers between the Victorian age and the 1950s, and begins where *Inside Out* leaves off: it lays bare the inherent potentiality in women's crossing of social and gender boundaries. Therefore, the trope of being *in transit*, as the editors state in their excellent introduction, provides the overall principle for the collection. Each individual author contributes to the exploration of the multiple *liminal* spaces and their literary representations, since Gómez Reus and Gifford underline that they "use liminality (in Latin *limen*—threshold) both in its spatial and its temporal sense; that is, as a tangible transitional terrain and as a state of transition" (3). The editors acknowledge the importance in the development of liminality of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner studies, who worked within the frame of cultural anthropology, but mention is also made of contemporary critics who are now finding new uses of liminality, such as Bjørn Thomassen. His article alerts us to the applicability of liminality to other fields and areas of study, which began in Victor Turner's "ethnographic accounts ... in

which he realized that “liminality’ served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences” (Thomassen 2009, 14). The editors’ discussion of liminality in relation to social space and gender is particularly relevant, and one of the most positive aspects of the volume. However, they could have referred to other critics such as Nancy Bredendick, editor of *Mapping the Threshold: Essays in Liminal Analysis* (2004), or Maria Mälksoo, who, along these same lines and in a range of disciplinary fields, have delved into the myriad possibilities offered by liminality: “as a threshold, liminality is also a vital moment of creativity, a potential platform for renewing the societal make-up” (Mälksoo 2012, 481). It is clear that liminality is an apt critical-theoretical tool, and that it lends itself to new readings into women’s negotiations with spaces in transit in the work of women writers between the Victorian age and the 1950s.

The authors featured in this collection give emphasis to a wide range of gendered negotiations of spaces *in transit*. In their joint introduction Gómez Reus and Gifford consider the tripartite structure of their collection, indebted to Arnold Van Gennep’s stages of rites of passage, which functions “as a structuring device” (7), and which I find particularly successful for the thematic organisation of the book. Most of the chapters convincingly examine the double-edged nature of women’s use of spaces of transit: they offer freedom and boundary crossing, but also ambivalence and anxiety. Part I is entitled “New Women, Old Patterns,” and consists of four chapters dealing with Victorian women’s fluid spaces or women *in transit*. The opening chapter, by Shannon Russell, is important as it underlines some of the ideas about women’s mobility later explored by the authors of subsequent chapters: the railway (by Anna Despotopoulou), the family representing the nation (by Rebecca D’Monté) and stage performance (by Frances Piper), to name a few. Janet Stobbs Wright’s chapter on the courtroom as a space of transit deserves particular attention as it analyses the courtroom as a liminal stage where the public and the private are blurred, “thus raising questions about women’s independence, in terms of their duty to men, their freedom of movement, and their reputation” (33). Chapter three explores the fascinating liminal position occupied by the railway and the circulation of people in women’s experience of and response to modernity. Even though Valerie Fehlbaum’s essay does not seem to deal with liminality and space in recounting the experiences of Ella Hepworth Dixon and Elizabeth Banks as journalists, this chapter succeeds in showing how these women could move and *travel* from domesticity to the world outside.

Part II, “The Call of the Wilde,” comprises the efforts of women’s pioneering acts into “three traditionally male-dominated realms: ethnographic exploration, mountain climbing and the battlefield,” as stated in the introduction (9). Terry Gifford’s chapter, suggestively entitled “Early Women Mountaineers Achieve Both Summits and Publication in Britain and America,” opens up the discussion of spaces in transit to the physical space of the summit of a mountain, and regards it as a conceptual space as well. The theoretical tenets are well integrated into the

discussion of the texts on the women climbers' achievements. This chapter includes some photos that illustrate the liminal journeys undertaken by these women, who struggled to gain visibility. Interestingly, Teresa Gómez Reus's chapter also contains photos of ambulance women drivers during World War I, showing how these women *in transit* "circumvented the obstacles placed in their way by the military hierarchy and found a means to exchange the role of bystander for the prospect of mobility, adventure and heroism" (108). These two chapters clearly work very well together, as proved by the use of cross-references.

"Redrawing the Boundaries", Part III, seeks to explore home as a transitional space whereby the body and space engage in a mutual relationship of interdependence, particularly in chapter eight. Emma Short analyses Elizabeth Bowen's interwar novels, and in so doing, urges the reader to question the role of thresholds, barriers and rooms in relation to our body. The last two chapters are engaged in the theatricalisation of space by, in the first, by Rebecca D'Monté, having a look at plays written by women between the years 1938-1945; and in the following chapter by examining in two novels what its author Frances Piper calls "the third sphere", taken as "a space of transit precisely because the women within those spaces define the spaces, as opposed to being defined by them" (152) (chapter ten). Lastly, Niamh Downing deals with the English country house garden through the work of garden and travel writer Clara Coltman Vyvyan, whose Cornish estate garden provides the backbone of this essay. The garden proves to be a mobile space, subject to change and transformation, and "its very existence depends on the separation, liminal transformation and reassimilation of people, botanical specimens and gendered experience across continents and centuries" (178). Downing's chapter nicely closes the collection, and, like the other chapters, is well-written and exceedingly well-researched. The bibliographies provided by the contributors are up-to-date, and the index at the end of the collection is particularly useful. Comprehensive and wide-ranging, the collection will be extremely relevant to readers who have an interest in the uses of liminality, as well as to those who examine space and women's writing from the nineteenth century onwards. Undoubtedly, then, this book adds a valuable contribution to the existing scholarship on space and gender studies, as well as on liminality studies.

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Received 8 September 2014

Revised version accepted 26 October 2014

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