

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

MAPPING THE TERRITORIES OF THE HIDDEN VICTORIAN FEMALE SELF

SIMONA CATRINEL AVARVAREI

In “A Room of One’s Own”, Virginia Woolf argued that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”; nevertheless, between a room in the house forced upon her by the patriarchal figure and a room of her own as expression of personal choice and will – there is a vast geography of undulating horizons, winding paths and deep precipices which took millennia to trail and generations of women to explore. In an approach of double feminine rhetoric – literary perspective / author – this doctoral paper intends to explore and sketch a geography of (re)discovery. The aegis of this research is to analyse the ways in which feminine voices of the time, some belonging to the notorious Brontë sisters - Charlotte and Emily-, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, while others represent the less famous Isabella Bird Bishop, Mary Kingsley or Lady Florence Douglas Dixie, have discovered and articulated their own utterance in times when the voice of the Patriarch reigned supreme. Symbolically cartographic, the nature of this study defines a parcours of expression that describes a reversed geometry of exploration from outflows to springs and beyond, upstream, attempting to approach the core as much as possible, for the assessment of self, the survey of feminine identity constitute the objects of research. This paper’s concern lies with the individuality that longs for a certain loosening from the suffocating grasp of passivity, resignation, self-abandonment and lack of commitment and audacity, while endeavouring, at the same time, to affirm a strong belief in the articulateness of individual voice. A complementary perspective of discovery, symbolized by the will and need to explore new horizons, captures in a nutshell the strategy of analysis responsible for approaching the delicate topic of scrutinizing the feminist geography of the 19th century. If the will to discover projects itself onto the outer, exterior dimension of the world, voicing women’s ambitions to explore the realms of a physically forbidden geography, the need to discover further enlarges the dimensions of discovery, by sinking deep into the dormant, yet likewise unmapped territory of the psyche. Id and superego chart one the most audacious and pioneering expeditions women have ever embarked upon. The hidden self comes to constitute the very map this paper aims to outline defined through a double key of interpretation. We depart, therefore, from what Mikhail Bakhtin would refer to as marginal chronotope, considering the time-space ambivalence, as well as from the concept of marginalia, in itself the bearer of a double semantics – one that echoes the idea of unimportant facts and details and another one that refers to notes written and embellishments printed in the margins of a book. For centuries this has been the dominant note that encapsulated the story of the feminine self, beyond temporal and spatial horizons – resembling simply marginal, purely decorative signs within the context of a book that has the signature of the Patriarch engraved upon it. Embracing Spengler’s idea, according to whom every epoch has its own spirit, I argue that the spirit of the Victorian era would not be complete had it not interwoven the other voice as well in its canvas, a voice that has begun to abandon its assigned, peripheral part, and who dared to imagine itself in the position of the Patriarch himself, as story maker, and not mere story teller. A painstaking archaeology, operating with sensitive techniques of introspection and bipolar reference, defines the nature of this study, though it does not account for any of its weaknesses. A double perspective opens itself, inwards and outwards, plunging deep into the abysses of the self while also breathing the strong air of the heights and thus I will approach the quest of feminine self through archetypal criticism, in a symbolic (re)dimensioning of the Lacanian double perspective of *stade du miroir*, in an attempt to compose and recompose images, by means of replacing the idea of fragmentation with that of unity and completeness. This allegoric mirror is the one that subtly, though irreversibly, opens dramatic perspectives upon women’s uniqueness and it is the feminine authorial voice who discovers herself both beyond and within the reflection in the mirror. It is a symbolic dualism between the I,

emaciated and almost socially annihilated, and the self, the inner voice of any woman's identity that thrives to articulate its first metamorphoses. Rita Felski devotes the fourth chapter of her book *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* to the problem of the nineteenth-century female protagonist's existential trajectory arguing that it "remains limited to the journey from the parental to the marital home" whereas her entire destiny remains heavily and "permanently linked to that of her male companion". Nevertheless, this is not the angle of approach I will embrace in my dissertation, for in fact I intend to point out that beyond the commonplace trajectory of becoming, doubled by a crippled, fragmented geometry of movement there lie territories that will definitely map a geography of (self) discovery. I depart from the assumption that *écriture féminine* escapes Harold Bloom's patriarchal pattern based on the anxiety of influence, due to the voyage-in perspective of self-discovery it intimately and deeply relies upon. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar place in a symbolic equation this dichotomous paradigm which opposes the voice of the patriarch – the son of too many fathers – to the feminine voice – the daughter of few women: "The son of many fathers, today's male writer feels hopelessly belated; the daughter of too few mothers, today's female writer feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively emerging". It is the dramatic balance between voyage in and voyage out that I intend to explore from the literary perspective of different feminine sensitivities which marked with their personal life story and artistic creations a time of great change and challenge. This is the story of the Victorian individual who seeks some freedom from the common prison of self-abandonment and resignation, a story about the belief in the individual self and voice. The whole paper offers a double key of interpretation that will only account for the 'secret self' it intends to search and define. On the one hand, there is the concept of marginalia, on the other, similarly to an insufficiently explored territory, of none or too little importance for the explorer, is the realm of the other side. The first key of interpretation has to be read in socio-historic terms that have constantly (re)dimensioned the architecture of power and representation of the world in such a way that peripheral areas, through a dynamic and adjustable geometry of articulation, could access the centre, the very heart of the system. The second key of the metaphor of marginalia approaches the silent voices of those women who dared to echo their thoughts in the agora of the citadel. This is where the concept of marginality of marginalia itself permeates the analysis, since women were defined as peripheral entities, ascribed to what Mikhail Bakhtin would refer to as marginalia chronotope. The insight I will be exploring embraces the double semantics of Bakhtin's coinage chronotope – time and space – and the concept of marginalia, at the same time characterised by a twofold perspective of meaning – on the one hand, notes or embellishments as in a book, on the other, nonessential items. The marginalia concept also echoes what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar identified as the anxiety of authorship: "a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a "precursor" the act of writing will isolate and destroy her". Women have been, for ages, simple notes written in the margin of pages that made up a book that was to finally bear the signature of the patriarch, peripheral entities that conjugated the status of nonessential items. Women have lived outside time and space, excluded as they have been from the architecture of a male dominated world that has only placed them on orbital paths, dwindling their character, blurring their individuality. The ambivalence of the marginalia concept brings us closer to some core issues of the present study – discovery-persona –self – writing. Entrusting their thoughts to the white of the paper is an act of discovery, of self-discovery, marking the beginning of the journey that would offer them the seas of the world to sail. Once again the double perspective of voyage gains contour, and I argue, had it not been for the voyage out, the inward reflexion of it might not have occurred. Through the voyage in I come to identify three types of identities – the linear identity, the travelling/shifting identity and the multiple identity - that will symbolically engrave themselves onto the intertextuality of the *écriture féminine* this paper aims to interpret. A linear identity comes in thick lines that tell the story of submissive, resigned confinement to the domestic horizon, in a total rhetoric of depersonalization and mask-assuming exercise. Crossing the line of conventionalism trails a journey only a few women dared to assume, evermore since it implied passing through three different stages: the first of them is stepping away from the sacred temple of

the family; deriving from it surfaces the second stage of articulating a creative intertextuality, whereas the third stage refers to the identification of a canonically fractured identity through its refusal of fitting into the rigid, social pattern of the time. Women stop being priestesses of the temple, they cease weaving the story of ordinary Penelopes, the moment they dare become Ulysses. When such heights are being reached, the linear identity may metamorphose itself into an arrow-shaped identity, that defines itself as an allegoric reflection of the myth of the creator, destined to be known for the fruit of his mind, and seldom for who he/she really was, more for the arrow that sprang from the bow rather than for the archer who skilfully pulled the string. The amorphous, diluted nocturnal self dims its contours in front of a diurnal, creative self. The second type of identity is the one I suggest referring to as the travelling/shifting identity that discovers to discover itself, while discovering other lands of the world and also defying canonicity and social norms, at a time when abiding by the rules spelled the only sense of belonging to a rigorous system of representation women were entitled to. Multiple identities complete the triptych of perspectives upon the concept of self I analyse in my paper, and with this term I would like to refer to the authorial identity that permeates the very text, either through the voice of the narrator, or that of a character. Thus, identity may be interpreted as a multidimensional space that brings different écriture outlooks together. Identity in itself is not self-sufficient and depends in its completeness on the existence of a hidden, secretive dimension; in fact, it is the story about the discovery of the way in which this unknown dimension is explored and articulated. I will be approaching such arguments as the ones brought by the anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner in her study “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” where she argues that women conjugate the verb ‘to create’ from the inward perspective of perpetuating life, time in which men live the creative perspective externally, metaphorically. Men build eternally, challenging the line of horizons with spire-like masts, architecturing cathedrals, populating the libraries of the world with their papers, whereas women capture only the ephemeral in their creative genesis. Simone de Beauvoir’s clear delimitation: “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other”.

The first chapter - *Sisters of Scheherazade – Voices in the Realm of Patriarchal Discourses* - opens axiomatic perspectives upon the articulation of another utterance within the large framework of patriarchal discourses, throughout a special age in the history of time, a real moment of Sturm und Drang, marked by much uncertainty and confusion, a period of growth and change, of discovery and self-discovery, of abandoning the tranquillity of shallow waters and courageously setting sail to conquer and explore. In a dichotomous approach that embraces subjects vs. objects, core vs. periphery, verticality vs. horizontality, voice vs. silence I will explore the journey of discovery and self-discovery of the female self through myths and archetypes in an attempt to define what I refer to as the epiphany of the female self that brings about the chance to live in identity with the verb to be, that has long surpassed its mere ontologic dimension, and has stepped into another stage, one that stays under the sign of voicing, intellectually uttering the sign of being. And this is what echoes women’s encounter with their true self, beyond name, false assumed identities and appearances.

The second chapter - *The Question of Women – Building the Female Self* - concerns the construction of Victorian femininities, dramatically articulating a state of in-betweenness, or ‘intermediacy’, as Sherry B. Ortner would refer to women’s alienation in the world of the Patriarch’s logos and action. I approach the issue of the Woman Question from a series of angles that will follow the landmarks of a most intimate geography of the self itself. The forge of a new identity against the background of a ‘new realism’ will be explored in the pages of this section of my dissertation. Cutting deep into their flesh, dipping their pen-sword in their ‘blood’, these amazons had their own moments of doubt, of hesitation, when horizons seem to fade away, with blurred edges and confused minds. Denial, suppression of female individuality, renouncement enclose a series of key tones to be analysed, as stations along the road that will eventually lead to what Simone de Beauvoir supported, namely that women have to become a Subject in the same way as man is the Subject. (emphasis mine)

The third chapter - *‘The Unbeaten Tracks’ of Terra Nullius* - will examine the way in which three women travellers, Isabella Bird Bishop, Mary Kingsley and Lady Florence Douglas Dixie,

transcend the gender based stereotypes of weak, frail woman, reshaping the conceptions of womanhood through their writings which are “as much about themselves” as the places they visited. Having Sara Mills’s assertion according to which British women travel writers’ texts are about colonial situations, “just as men’s texts are”, I will argue that although the road towards articulating a robust female self has started winding its paths, masculinity still remains the pillar around which women’s entire life-story revolved most dramatically. Women ‘assumed’ this dilemma of duality, not only in their capacity of explorers, but also in that of representatives of their gender, since their own lives conjugated this very ambiguity; women recommend themselves as participants and insiders in their culture, yet they failed to be part of the mechanisms of power, mere outsiders as they were. This multiple identity ‘opens up’ towards discovering and being discovered; this happens when the explorer becomes the explored, when exploring the other finishes with exploring oneself. My focus will fall on the act of travelling which brought about some paradigmatic shifts regarding conceptions of identity. David Stoddard makes an interesting radiography of itineraries, describing what I suggest referring to as a gender-oriented approach, since it seems that while men would sketch their routes in fairly direct lines, conquering summits or mapping meandering streams, women would describe rather circular routes. The tensions between being the daughters of the patriarch and being explorers revealed themselves in many ways, including the choice of language, literary perspective, dress code. Symptomatic is the double shift of gender perspective that juxtaposes Isabella Bird Bishop’s “I am the third Englishman to ascend the Peak” to the edition of New York Times, dated 19 March 1883, that reported an attack on Lady Florence Douglas Dixie by two men disguised as women. Neither the New Women nor the Angels in the House venturesome women travel writers had provided British ladies, confined to the domestic sphere, with new possibilities—new ways of conjugating womanhood.

The fourth chapter - *Self-Reflection and the Reflected Self - Animus and Anima or the Brontë Sisters* will focus on a special Yorkshire-born femininity, wrapped in special pages of literature that bear the signature of Charlotte Brontës - *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontës - *Wuthering Heights*. My angle of analysis departs from Carl Gustav Jung’s school of analytical psychology, more exactly from what he referred to as animus and anima, in a complementarity of opposites, where the former is balanced by the feminine principle. Having Jung’s quaternity of perfection as a starting point, departing from the four-fold perspective on feminine archetype – Mother, Queen, Wise Woman and Lover – I will approach an equally four-fold perspective upon female archetype as imagined by Toni Woolf, one of the greatest minds of her time, shaped at Jung’s school of psychiatry – Mother, Amazon, Hetaira and the Medial Woman. The first two types define themselves through the relationships that offer consistency to their profile, as Mother will always exist through her offsprings, just as much as Hetaira will decline herself in intimate relationships with the masculine, whereas the Amazon and the Medial Woman place their energies in manifestations of collective life, or amid the general public. I argue that, through a plenary assertion of her true, inner self “Speak I must”, the Amazon archetype gains contour in *Jane Eyre* as an indomitable, unstoppable energy. The Medial Woman is the most difficult to fix into a matrix archetype, defined as she is against a projection of duality. She is best presented as a bridge between two realms, the world of the unconsciousness, the Es, and the world of the outer, morally and ethically imposed laws of the Uber-Ich. Within this matrix falls Bertha Mason, the one I will refer to as the Voiceless Echo, who may be regarded thorough the double lens of refraction, inwardly reflecting and allegorically projecting the metaphor of the doubles, the game of mirroring. I will present her as a medial character, standing in between two most distinctive geographies, not only of the self, but also of territorial background, from the equally double perspective of centre-periphery. Highly symbolic for a marginal representative of the geography of power, Bertha speaks a language whose code dims as it approaches the core of representation, accounting for her almost absent, articulated voice. Bertha is reduced to the language of action, but lacks the articulateness of logos, which will only stress on the ‘rough’ dimension of masculinity, and her gesture of setting fire of the House of the Patriarch, between whose walls his words are sheltered and deeds envisaged, equals an act of demolition of canons and symbols of masculine autocracy. With the complementing archetypes of Hetaira and

Mother I approach the character of Catherine Earnshaw, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Applying Jung's theory to Catherine, for whom Heathcliff is the animus, while also applying it to Heathcliff, for whom Catherine is the anima, opens a most sensitive perspective on selfhood – offering the real dimension of Catherine's self-definition: "I am Heathcliff" and of Heathcliff's anguishing testimony about her being his soul and life. Round is the overlapping of the two souls that it seems to epitomise absolute psychological entrophy. In Freudian analysis, the Ego must be male in order to deal successfully with the world, while in order to survive, a female ego would have to live through males. Emily Brontë sketches the profile of a genuine Hetaira, more so in her relationship to Edgar, while both Hetaira and Mother in her attitude towards Heathcliff. I argue that both Catherine and Heathcliff failed to individualize themselves as round, whole psyches, defined as they were through the other's self, for ever halved, never complete. This section of the dissertation is a survey of what I suggest labelling as the wandering self, the one forged to long for a symmetrical architecture of identity.

The fifth chapter - 'The Other Side of Silence' - will cover, in a most intricate play of chiaroscuro and lights, a likewise multifaceted perspective upon the self and work of George Eliot, probably the most fascinating and histrionic Victorian lady writer of all. I intend to approach and establish a relationship of allegorical reflection of this dual self that weaves a most dynamic tension between the authorial self and the other self of her heroines; I defend this outlook as an almost resurrecting and redeeming projection of the deepest shades of the self, in a healing exercise that transcends alterity. In order to discover its self-identity, within the horizons of its own becoming, George Eliot's self communicates with the alterum self of her heroines. Alterity is thus internalized, once it is revealed as image of its own self-projection onto another, an alter ego that tries to communicate with its own being, allegorically discovered in the otherness of the same self. The great hiatus that separates the destinies of George Eliot and those of her characters, which made Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar speak about her 'feminine antifeminism', may be interpreted from the perspective of what Carl Keppler referred to as the 'sauvuer' – the rescuer, the healer - the one dimension that gives power and consistency not just to literary creations, but also heals the authorial self. Her écriture is nothing but the strange, fascinating and alluring music of 'that roar which lies on the other side of silence' (*Middlemarch*) that wraps the characters in its magic web and draws them inexplicably towards it, in an almost symbolic attempt to introduce them to their true self. I will argue that with the mirrored image of the authorial self, which I identify as a sort of cathartically, allegorically redeeming self, George Eliot marks the rigid borders of gender-biased conventions, as she confronts her alter-ego with the burden of dogmas and norms. I advocate the idea that Mary Ann Evans is not at all an ontological feminist, she seems to deny the sheer attributes of womanhood (beauty, coquetry) placing, instead, a huge emphasis on the sharp reflections of wit and intelligence. She continues to carry the reflecting mirror all throughout her literary creations, bestowing women the possibility to forge their becoming not through flirty embroidery of trivial, common behaviour, but through a dramatic, inner drive to know and understand, to grasp and master the hidden secrets of wisdom and science.

The sixth chapter - *The Geography of Identity, or North and South* - will consider the ways in which Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell imagines the territories of womanhood, under the sign of the musical technique of punctus contra punctum – reflected not only in a constant juxtaposition of multiple-angled gendered perspectives, but also by the personal profile of the least controversial of all Victorian female writers, outstanding for its undisguised "femininity" and acknowledged for being not so much a transgressor of accepted gender norms, thus, a counterpoint in itself. Mrs. Gaskell heightens the sense of exclusion and powerlessness of marginalia identities which, under an écriture féminine, end up translating their weakness somatically, for it is the tear which comes first and only after that the will to 'speak out' as epitome for the desire to "persuade and transform". This delicate interplay defines North and South, the novel I will analyse from the perspective of (re)defining gender identity by constant comparison and contrast to the other sphere, be it central or peripheral, masculine or feminine, middle-class or working class. although at the end of our scrutiny we are not going to proclaim Elizabeth Gaskell as a feminist writer, we will for certain acknowledge how,

permanently vacillating between these polarities throughout her entire life, this Victorian lady writer dwelled in none of them; for her, as for all the other special ladies of her time, it was the journey that mattered, for who could ever reach such a destination as the profiling of one's self?