

AGNIESZKA ŁOWCZANIN

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF CONFINEMENT IN *JANE EYRE* AND “THE LADY OF SHALOTT”

A b s t r a c t. This paper is based on the assumption that it is possible to overcome generic boundaries and discern a shared language in the literary and visual arts. Its purpose is to demonstrate how literature and art rupture the Victorian ideal of angelic woman at home and allow us to enter intimate territories of female minds where free will goes against the sanctioned expectations. I will demonstrate this on the basis of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, where a pilgrimage to maturity and emotional fulfilment is embodied as space. This text will be juxtaposed with Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott,” read as a representation of defiance of gender-ascribed confinement. One of this poem’s most potent pictorial images, Hunt’s engraving of 1857 (a basis for his later painting of 1905), capturing the Lady in the moment of fateful decision-making is compared with *Jane Eyre*’s other silent home-ridden character, Bertha Rochester. All three images, of Jane, Bertha and the Lady, realise in their own way a territorial relocation seen as necessary for an untrapping of femininity.

In the early stages of the development of the novel as a literary genre, in Gothic fiction, massive labyrinthine architectural specimens were very much a male domain, and the weight of this fact was reflected in the titles of its most representative novels, for example, *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The massive Otranto, linked to a nearby monastery through subterranean passages, epitomizes its master, Manfred, with his convoluted morality. The final destruction of the edifice symbolises his final downfall and the end of unlawful rule. Udolpho too, hidden among the precipices and endlessly mounting Apennine peaks, is Montoni incarnate, with a well-guarded mystery shrouding his dubious right to possession of the place after the disappearance of its rightful owner, Signora Laurentini. In 18th-century Gothic fiction men excelled at territorial dominance and the extent of their mansions visibly validated their patriarchal governance.

Whereas the Gothic writer Ann Radcliffe, depicted imagined territories of open Italian vistas, castles, monasteries and French chateaux, for she never travelled and “lived a reclusive life” (PUNTER, BYRON 158), subsequent female writers of the 19th century seemed to restrict themselves to the worlds familiar to them, drawing solely on their experience and opportunities. These were scarce, as in the early decades of the 19th century and in the later Victorian period space was demarcated by gender belonging. Women were father-bound, and, in the next stage of their lives, husband-bound angels in the house, which was often not their own. Territorial identification was enforced by culture, custom and law. That is why what characterises the fictional reality of female novelists of the early 19th century is a restricted motion and a threatened sense of belonging. Jane Austen did not stretch the setting of her novels beyond the country manors of her trademark South-West, in her only novel Emily Brontë was content with her beloved Yorkshire, and the humble Anne Brontë identified her female character with the place of her refuge, Wildfell Hall.

In the early 20th century Virginia Woolf made a comparison between the two most popular and prolific writers of the first decade of the 19th century, Jane Austen and one of the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, in the following way:

If Jane Austen suffered in any way from her circumstances it was in the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her. It was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself. But perhaps it was in the nature of Jane Austen not to want what she had not. Her gift and her circumstances matched each other completely. But I doubt whether that was true of Charlotte Brontë, I said, opening *Jane Eyre*, and laying it beside *Pride and Prejudice*. (WOOLF 57)

In her seminal essay on women and writing, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf seeks an explanation for the conspicuous lack of female names among thousands of volumes on the rows of the British Library. To do so, she compares the conditions of the life of women, and consequently of female writers, with their fellow men, ascribing female literary nonexistence till the offshoot of the novel in late 18th century, and their subsequent thematic limitation, to the above-mentioned “narrowness of life that was imposed upon” them. This narrowness of life is the product of restriction of female experience to a domestic sphere, a limitation of professional choice and the resultant financial dependence on men.

In the oeuvre of Charlotte Brontë this narrowness takes the form of spatial constraint. What surfaces in all her novels is the interrelation between space and identity, the definition and redefinition of which always takes place in relation to

spatial restructuring. Written from a feminine perspective, her novels adopt the culturally ordered domestic sphere as an obligatory female territory. Especially in *Jane Eyre* (1847), the dichotomy between domestic, internal territory versus non-domestic, external territory becomes the metonymy for and the expression of the substance of the self. Space in this novel is more than architectural design or attributes of landscape, it becomes the necessary reference point in the delineation of all the phases of character evolution, an outward expression of social positioning and of a more elusive personal, emotional belonging, a barometer of self-fulfilment. However, whereas for Jane Austen, to extend Woolf's comparison, domesticity as the female realm is never questioned, Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* offers a perplexed and equivocal tension between character and territory. Driven by what Woolf defined as "rage," Brontë probes deeper than Austen, discarding the crust of propriety and decorum, using this tension in character Bildung of Jane, pushing her into an emotionally and socially troublesome triangle with Rochester and Bertha.

Jane Eyre has often been analysed in terms of its relation to the Gothic tradition. In the initial stage of the development of the genre, Gothicism is associated with experiencing a state of anxiety and uncertainty, always related to otherness and often epitomised by the architectural unknown. In Victorian fiction the unknown is shifted to the recognisable domestic sphere whereby external sources of anxiety are repeatedly transmuted into horrors of the mind and horrors lurking within reach of one's hand. If *Jane Eyre* bears Gothic affiliation then it is certainly manifested in this post-Gothic Victorian sense – the anxiety and fear the main character experiences being home-grown. At the beginning of the novel, during Jane Eyre's childhood, fear and anxiety do not result from the intrusion of the Other into domestic felicity, but from the fact that the main heroine is the Other, the unwanted non-belonger. Jane Eyre is brought up in Gateshead Hall, the household of her aunt, as the orphaned niece of her late husband. From early childhood she occupies an ambivalent territory between family member and servant, a role she will later duplicate in her professional life as a governess in Thornfield, suspended between a mother-like figure to Adèle and a servant figure, the humiliation of which she rawly experiences when exposed to the company of fine ladies at Rochester's parties. Not being related by blood to her aunt Mrs Reed, Jane Eyre attains no security within the remaining kinship structure. As a child she already knows what it feels like to be "disconnected, poor, and plain" (BRONTË, chapter XI). Orphanhood means homelessness and dependence, physical experiences shaping her unorthodox attitudes to domesticity in the future.

Jane's non-conformity to the ideal of grateful dependant and submissive girl spoils congenial relationships in her surrogate household. She is outspoken and remains in unceasing conflict with injustice. Her acts of disobedience and her forthright nature are territorially punished; she is locked up in the nursery for nearly three months; even at Christmas she is not allowed to partake with the rest of her family in celebration. By territorial seclusion her aunt executes a dominant construction of ideal femininity and hushes Jane into a figure of silence. After her husband's death it is Mrs Reed who takes control of the whole household. Jane then remains for her the only link with the past, with the times when she had to accept the inferior role of a wife and conform to the decisions of the head of the family, her husband, which included taking on Jane, the daughter of his late sister, as a ward. Separating Jane can thus be seen not only as an act of punishment for her disobedience; by pretending she is not there, aunt Reed attempts to reconstruct a closely-knit family unit, an undisturbed matriarchal structure of a mother and her own offspring.

Jane's position in this surrogate family and her sense of non-belonging are defined by means of what Yi-Fu Tuan calls "spatial feelings" (387). These reveal themselves in her mental formation of the territories she dreads and a creation of her own mental map of Gateshead Hall. Firstly, hounded by her cousins, disciplined by the aunt and her servants, Jane begins to fear forbidden territories associated with the executioners of punishment. She is restricted so long to the nursery that "the breakfast, dining, and drawing-rooms" become for her "awful regions, on which it dismayed [her] to intrude" (BRONTË, chapter IV). As a consequence, she succumbs to lapses of paralysis and immobility when confronted with certain places in this household. She refers to herself as "a miserable little poltroon" who, once summoned by her aunt, fears to return to the nursery, fears to go forward to the parlour, and instead spends ten minutes "in agitated hesitation" (BRONTË, chapter IV). Secondly, these "spatial feelings" are realised by her striving to define a niche territory she can call her own in this hostile household. At the very beginning of the novel, character introduction is actually performed by means of spatial orientation. In the drawing-room Jane's cousins are "clustered round their mama," who regrets to be "under the necessity of keeping [Jane] at a distance." So the girl mounts the window seat, draws a red moreen curtain, to be "shrined in double retirement" (BRONTË, chapter I) and thus forms one of the first territorial images of the mind: shielded from domestic exclusion, she instinctively emotionally transports herself away from Gateshead Hall. From early childhood Jane cannot find fulfilment in the place she inhabits. "Domestic" territory is always tinged with the alien therefore she begins to long for exteriors. Her imagination is fed by images from Bewick's

History of British Birds, "of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone . . . Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive." Frozen vastness is a mental territory of escape. "With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way" (BRONTË, chapter I). Happiness and fulfilment are territorially defined antonyms of the domestic oppression Jane experiences at the hands of her relatives. It seems symptomatic that she chooses northern Arctic zones, where vastness is synonymous with freedom but where hearts seem frozen in the biting struggle for survival. The experience of cold will always be associated for her with insecurity and homelessness.

The apogee of Jane's childhood psychological and physical torment is the "red-room" incident. On the way to this punishment and instruction she is made to tumble down the domestic scale—"you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep," she hears from a servant—to be then locked in the least-visited chamber, where the late Mr Reed "breathed his last" and lay in state (BRONTË, chapter I). "Alas," she concludes, "no jail was ever more secure." The image she thus creates, one of inescapability and imposition, goes beyond the literal confinement of a child in a spooky chamber and symbolically extends to Jane's status in society. "Disconnected, poor and plain," she will remain wedged into its margins, from which only a miracle could save her. Jane then examines the room and herself in a mirror and sees that everything is "colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit" (BRONTË, chapter I). This visual representation of reality as a hostile void cannot but contribute to the moulding of Jane's perception of herself, the world and her position in it. In her own eyes she will remain that scared anxious little figure, involuntarily tossed from place to place, her anxiety resulting from homeless orphanhood and the world's indifference to the causes of her distressed and rebellious nature. She will nourish the belief that the world, well-nurtured and provided for, "still" in its security and self-assurance, has every right to treat her as an anomaly, awkward to harness and accommodate, because from the very beginning she perceives herself "a discord" (BRONTË, chapter I). Her disquiet will make her long for the promise of the unknown and thus act out the pattern of escape from the bondage of "drawing rooms and patriarchal mansions" (GILBERT, GUBAR 338). As Gilbert and Gubar point out, the red-room incident functions throughout the novel as "the central . . . motif of enclosure and escape" (341).

Seclusion and confinement also serve as metonymy for oppression during Jane Eyre's stay in Lowood. It is in Lowood that space is confirmed as a psychological domain, a fact that has taken seed already in Gateshead Hall in the form of childish daydreaming. And, interestingly, the first sentence of the novel refers to the movement out of the house: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day." Since the school in Lowood epitomises mind-numbing drill, starvation, prayer on an empty stomach, injustice, freezing cold, and consequently, typhus and decimation by death, it is a dreaded territory. Even the "convent-like garden" is "a wide inclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect" (BRONTË, chapter V). By contrast, the world beyond the walls again promises the unknown and the chance of change. However, as long as Miss Temple offers Jane companionship and emotional support, the stay can be abided. As Gilbert and Gubar notice, the teacher's name is significant: "with her marble pallor, [she] is a shrine of ladylike virtues" (344). She is depicted as the one offering comforting shelter in the moral wasteland created by Mr Brocklehurst, a counter to Victorian mortification of "the worldly sentiment of pride" he advocates. Miss Temple contributes to Jane's new spatial and, as a consequence, emotional perception of the place. When she leaves to get married, Lowood is "no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me" (BRONTË, chapter X).

Jane's childhood experiences teach her to reach beyond the attainable domestic for emotional refuge and to harbour hopes for change in exterior territories. In Lowood, after Miss Temple's departure creates an emotional void, that exterior epitomises the urge for a change: "now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse." The world outside is no longer merely an imagined territory, a fiction-fed speculation meant as a temporal shelter from reality, but a captivating opportunity.

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out. . . . My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks; it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of one mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two; how I longed to follow it farther! . . . an age seemed to have elapsed since the day which brought me first to Lowood, and I had never quitted it since. (BRONTË, chapter X)

For Jane, a narrowness of life results from a narrowness of choice dictated by her social liminality, so her only viable option is to subject herself to another post

involving the position of a dependant, that of a governess in yet another unfamiliar location. In this case too her perception of space is psychologically determined. Drawing on her own dramatic experiences as teacher and governess, professions which the Brontë sisters practised but dreaded, Charlotte Brontë makes Jane filter Thornfield through the level of her professional satisfaction. What features in the early stage of her stay there is the reliving of the feeling of confinement. Jane realizes she does not find fulfilment in educating Adèle, who "had no great talents, no marked traits of character, no peculiar development of feeling or taste which raised her one inch above the ordinary level of childhood mediocrity" (BRONTË, chapter XII). Again Jane describes moments of extreme tedium but, having defined her state of dissatisfaction, she expresses it by reaching for the landscape outside, which in its unattainability stands for the limits of her existence:

Anybody may blame me who likes, when I add further, that, now and then, when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and looked through them along the road; or when, while Adèle played with her nurse, and Mrs Fairfax made jellies in the storeroom, I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen... (BRONTË, chapter XII)

At this stage in her life the house is by no means angelic territory and she vigorously expresses those very un-Austen-like sentiments:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë, chapter XII)

This unfeminine, un-Victorian, independence of mind—read in her childhood as rebelliousness earning her condemnation and confinement in the red room—gains her recognition and affection from the master of Thornfield. It is symptomatic, however, that Jane is never verbally as vehement as in the passage quoted above, and never expresses such views openly. Only first person narration allows the reader to enter the private enclosure of her mind and hear such radicalism.

Contestation of her social standing inscribes her behaviour, but politicising on female emancipation, which she understands as always territorially channelled, is deposited in the intimate storeroom of her thought.

Initially, Thornfield remains for all its main inhabitants a field of emotional thorns. As a psychological domain of torment for Rochester and Bertha, and, as has been demonstrated, yet another stop in the throng of confining dwelling places precluding agency for Jane, the manor is an unwelcoming Gothic territory. For Rochester it is synonymous with his mad wife, and its dreaded darkness reminds him of the secret part of his life he has buried there and lives to annul. In a Shakespearian manner he refers to Thornfield as “this accursed place — this tent of Achan — this insolent vault, offering the ghastliness of living death to the light of the open sky — this narrow stone hell” (BRONTË, chapter XII). Though incomparably more worldly than Jane, and financially independent, Rochester, like her, defines his entrapment with pungent terminology related to the horrors of the afterlife. This feeling of immobility anchored to the manor aligns him with Jane. Firstly, as long as Bertha is alive he can say of his marriage bonds that “no jail was ever more secure.” Correspondingly, as long as Jane has no financial means of her own, Thornfield and other places of the kind will remain for her nothing more than such dreaded jails. Secondly, Rochester’s position in the patriarchal family he was born into, as a second son who inherits nothing under the English law of primogeniture, made him a maid-like puppet forced to submit to the will of his father and brother to marry a woman of their choice. As an orphan, Jane similarly had no alternative but to submit to the will of her aunt — who got her out of the way under the veil of character perfection in the red room and moral advancement in Lockwood — and then to the dictum of circumstance when she advertised for a job in Thornfield, to finally end up on the doorstep of Marsh End. That is probably why there is a thread of understanding between Rochester and Jane: they both feel out of place. They meet in Thornfield which epitomises their existential deadlock, a territorial reminder of the lives directed for them by the others.

The packed coffers, ready for her honeymoon, which Jane is expected to take with her to the world she longs for, and the exotic inscription on them, Jane Rochester, symbolise her status as a married woman. But before her supposed nuptials and the subsequent journey to the world as a respectable Victorian female traveller, a married woman can take place, Rochester must hurt her in order to awake her to her own and his feelings. Then, along with the news of his intended marriage to Lady Ingram, he gives Jane the news of his recommendation to send her to a country house in alien and distant Ireland, where she would have to look after the education of five wards. Rochester knows that to hurt Jane all he has to

do is threaten her with a vision of another secure jail, a reminder of her being a mere a pawn of her own fate.

It is also in this sense of imposed exclusion that Jane and Bertha, the mad-woman in the attic, can be seen as doubles. Bertha's piercing yells and animal growls express the same dissatisfaction and hopelessness as Jane's more refined gazes out of the window. In the sense of the objectification and annulment of their social and legal existence both women occupy the same territory. Bertha is a "bodily living though socially dead wife" (BRONFEN 219). Jane, too is made a "nominally dead woman" when her aunt announces her death by typhus in Lowood to exclude her long-lost uncle's protection and inheritance (BRONFEN 221). Jane's only way to recognition and full social acceptance is by marriage, Bertha's by getting out of it, and that is why her desire to defeat a social nullity and emotional void is directed at the mastermind of her confinement—her husband, Rochester. The final fire-setting endeavour is Bertha's refusal to social and marital non-existence, a suicidal act of agency; for Jane, Berta's death is a bridge towards Rochester.

The motif of emancipation of female characters through death seems to have a secure position in the history of English literature, the most notorious example being the one-volume-dying of Richardson's eponymous *Clarissa* (1741). The only available way for this character to take control over her life and regain the respect of her family is by yielding to death and staging her own funeral. The final part of the novel becomes the hopeless yet graceful cry of a woman who can become her own person only by celebrating the lengthy eve of her demise, a woman who can secure earthly recognition only when on the catafalque. *Clarissa's* coffin turns into a true room of her own, a symbolic representation of her self-assessment and self-affirmation. Its territorial compactness is expanded by means of inscriptions from the Bible, ornaments, emblems and plates. For a woman who chooses to disown her body, the coffin ceases to be a frightful and unwelcome symbol of dreaded mortality, but becomes "her palace" (RICHARDSON, IV, 257).

Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1833; revised 1842), interpreted from a gendered perspective, offers a similar unorthodox take on the Victorian understanding of territorial belonging and liberation through an autonomous single-handed journey into the world, which ends in death. The poem may be read as a story of female immobility, symbolically represented as spatial corseting, which, as in Richardson's novel, terminates in a flight from such conventional gender expectation. Tellingly, the Lady's name reveals that her social identity and existence have been tied to her dwelling place. Forging a new identity in the act of renaming is a stamp of control, seizure of the socially inferior, as evidenced by

the literary examples of Robinson Crusoe in a master-slave relation to man Friday, or, in Jean Rhys's prequel to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Rochester's dubbing of Antoinette as Bertha, who, in turn has been identified in literary criticism through the place of her confinement: a madwoman in the attic. It seems that unlike their male counterparts, such as the aforementioned Manfred of Otranto or Montoni of Udolpho, female characters' identification with a place is not synonymous with authority or agency. The Lady of Shalott, the madwoman in the attic or the anonymous fugitive in hiding, the tenant of Wildfell Hall, all rupture the Victorian ideal of an angelic woman contented in the house. They are unhappy dwellers because the houses they inhabit and are identified with signify subjugation rather than self-control.

Tennyson's poem opens with a vibrant image of the animated world outside Shalott. The proliferation of movement, the abundance of colour, and the irregularity of the noise outside are contrasted with the greyness and geometrical repetitive order of "four gray walls, and four gray towers" of Shalott (TENNYSON 15). Tucked on a silent island, this descriptively life-denying edifice is the home of the Lady, embowered in immobility, nameless and invisible to the world. There, in seclusion, she weaves by replicating the image of the world she sees reflected in the mirror, where "shadows of the world appear" (TENNYSON 48) and the number of frames the view passes through before it meets her eye distances her from its origin, the world. What she feeds on is a mere replica of reality, which, when transformed into a piece of art is a mere shadow of authenticity. The images she weaves have nothing in common with her, she is a mere medium, a transformer of life she doesn't know into art nobody appreciates. Her framed separation from life and second-hand knowledge of it can be compared to the young Jane Eyre's imaginary journeys to polar regions, reliving someone else's accounts of his experience.

In line with Tennyson's claim, the poem has been read as articulating "the dilemma of art, caught between reflection and reality" and consequently the dilemma of an artist's dedication to art or/and life (MARSH 150). However, the Lady is a peculiar artist captured performing a particular form of art: she is a female weaver. Weaving, embroidery and drawing were the conventionally accepted forms of feminine expression in the Victorian era. It is hard not to read this choice of artistic activity as an account of restrictions on femininity. Poovey indicates that the governess and the needlewoman were "two of the three figures that symbolized working women for the early and mid-Victorian public; the third was the factory girl" (198). Professionally, as demonstrated by Brontë, tutoring was all that was available for Jane and other impoverished unmarried middle-

class daughters. Though, unlike Jane Eyre's tutoring, the Lady's weaving does not earn her a living, her occupation belongs to the same category of limitation, be it professional or artistic.

Interestingly, Jane Eyre is also depicted as an artist, but like many ladies of her era, she creates for the bottom drawer. The essential difference between her drawings and the Lady's weaving is that Jane's serve as a thread to her soul. With meticulous precision the Lady weaves what she sees; Jane depicts images she has not seen before but has imagined, images that are expressive of her dreams and anxieties, a fact that Rochester – "the only critic of her art and soul" (GILBERT, GUBAR 352) – sums up saying "I daresay you did exist in a kind of artist's dream-land while you blent and arranged these strange tints" (BRONTË, chapter XIII). And if either of these two characters directly verbalises one of the dilemmas of art, a frustration at the discrepancy between intention and realisation, it is Jane, who is a self-conscious but also an emotionally involved artist; for example, when she says: "I was tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork: in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realise" (BRONTË, chapter XIII). The Lady weaves the territories she sees and the world she cannot partake in, Jane imagines and longs for the possible yet unknown reality that is denied even as a reflection to her sight. But both ladies experience moments of creative joy. It is said of the Lady: "But in her web she still delights" (TENNYSON 64); for Jane, painting affords "one of the keenest pleasures [she has] ever known" (BRONTË, chapter XIII).

Yet, despite temporary delight, the Lady's confinement to an activity comparable in its imposed constraint "to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" does not give her complete satisfaction. Separated from full, direct involvement in life, in the end she decides to gain agency by making a desperate move to experience the world outside the four grey walls. Dazzled by the image of Sir Lancelot, she follows what this image represents for her: liberty of action, exercise in the accursed emotionality and release of repressed sexuality. Her famous pronouncement "I am half sick of shadows" (TENNYSON 71) may express a self-doubting anxiety to experience the longed-for yet unfamiliar territories beyond Shalott, her humane reluctance to face the unknown symbolically represented by the curse. The vehicle to freedom is a boat, her coffin, which, like Clarissa, she personalises with the inscription of her name. Having boldly made the ill-fated step, the Lady dies before she reaches the doorstep of Sir Lancelot, in a finale that poetically captures the Victorian reality of such iconoclastic challenges. The artistic wisdom of the conclusion of Tennyson's poem is much more authentic than the fairy-tale ending of *Jane Eyre*.

If literature and the visual arts have ever enjoyed a thematic connection, and have joined in the expression of a shared cultural imagination, it can be most tangibly recognised on British soil in the artistic activities of the Pre-Raphaelites, who lived and breathed their art, integrating the private and the artistic, drawing inspiration equally from literature, nature, myth and the surrounding reality of the Victorian environment. The suggestive story of the Lady of Shalott was certainly among their favourites; judging by its number of depictions, it was an obsessional theme for them (MARSH 9). The stark decision-making moment, with its ambiguous consequences, fed the artistic imagination, yielding fertile symbolism and interpretation. One of the most vibrant and energy-charged depictions is Holman Hunt's, existing first as an illustration in 1850, then as a detailed image for an engraving in 1857, and finally as a full-size painting, considered "his last and greatest," *The Lady of Shalott* of 1905 (MARSH 150). Hunt captured an intimate moment of great emotional intensity and determination, seen almost as a trance, where convention is ruptured, and propriety is now subservient to an individual scheme. We, the viewers, become voyeurs as we enter the tower, this private territory no one has seen before, as it transforms from a sanctioned Victorian feminine space into a land of devastation as the web flies out, the mirror cracks from side to side, and the Lady, ready to accept the curse, becomes so engrossed in the fulfilment of her plan that she appears a madwoman. Spatial composition of the painting is split into two domains: in the lower part, the Lady releases herself from the entanglement of the thread with which she has been weaving, its upper part is dominated by an unorthodox representation of her fluid hair, caught in the moment of being let loose so that it flows horizontally and parallels the threads below. If releasing from the threads stands for shedding constraints of the concentrated occupation she has performed within the four walls, the disorder of her hair may represent the Lady's emotional anguish, but also determination to sever herself from conventionality and cultural limitation, to make a defiant move towards an uncertain future. There is an interesting symmetry between this pictorial spatial element and the descriptive passage in Brontë's final fire-setting accident, which Jane Eyre hears about from the late Rochester's butler. During Bertha's last moments her hair, in a similar un-Victorian manner, is untied and is seen "streaming against the flames" (BRONTË, chapter XXXVI). The symbolism of the Lady and Bertha's unruly hair yields ambiguities. Its visual subversion represents their road to liberation but at the same time, like the thread lower down in Hunt's painting, the hair entangles the Lady, so that it may very well symbolise the realities of the entrapment of womanhood un-trapped. This unruly femininity which dares oppose convention brings them death.

For *Jane Eyre*, territories acquire new qualities with the advent of emotional repletion. Once the road to happiness is cleared – when Bertha sets fire to the oppressive attic and chooses to smash herself on the pavement – and additionally becomes glittered with her uncle's money, Jane can attain fulfilment and enjoy a room she can truly call her own, unlike her creator, Charlotte Brontë, who symbolically and literally, never enjoyed a truly private realm of uninhibited choices, and therefore remained what Woolf called a "cramped and thwarted" artist, writing "in a rage where she should write calmly" (WOOLF 58). The emotionally thorny manor of Thornfield is replaced in the end with Ferndean, a provocatively "ineligible and insalubrious" site. Natural darkness and "sylvan dusk" dominate there and, as Jane approaches it for the first time and searches for a path, she finds there is none, all is "interwoven stem, columnar trunk, dense summer foliage—no opening anywhere." "Can there be life here?" she asks herself (BRONTË, chapter XXXVII). The dimness of Ferndean seems to preclude the need for social acceptance of the consummation of the two outcasts' union. Ferndean remains an enclosed, inaccessible private territory of the mind, its darkness symbolically corresponding to the interiority, intimacy and social oblivion inscribed in Rochester's union with Jane, with externality annulled by his blindness.

Victorians recognised the importance of female characters' interaction with space, its psychological topography and intimations of belonging, and these features became crucial devices in literature and visual art. In numerous Victorian texts they can be read as a social commentary on gender positioning and the anguished intimate territories beneath the crust of Victorian propriety evidenced by spatial allotment. By unorthodox representation of Rochester's troubled male agency, by depicting his willingness to enter the invisible territories of Jane's, then his dependant's, mind (for example in the eccentric guise of a Gypsy), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* seems to additionally offer a glimpse into a private male domain. In a powerful way she demonstrates that in a reality where, as Tennyson envisioned, a woman trespassing over social boundaries can only be represented as a dead woman, and social acceptance is afforded by the superficiality of her "lovely face," truthfulness is to be found only under the veneer of the visible, huddled in the secluded territories of the mind.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BRONFEN, E. *Over Her Dead Body. Death, femininity and the aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.
- BRONTË, Ch. *Jane Eyre*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm> n. pag (Web. 20.12.2012).

- GILBERT, S., GUBAR, S. *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*. New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, Yale University Press, 2000.
- MARSH, J. *Pre-Raphaelite Women, Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995.
- POOVEY, M. "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and *Jane Eyre*." In: S. REGAN (ed.). *The Nineteenth Century Novel. A Critical Reader*. London: Routledge, 2005. 194-212.
- PUNTER, D., BYRON, G. *The Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- RICHARDSON, S.: *Clarissa or, the History of a Young Lady*. London: Dent, Everyman's Library, 1962.
- TENNYSON, A. "The Lady of Shalott." <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/los1.html> n. pag. (Web. 20.12.2012).
- TUAN, Y.F. "Space and place: humanistic perspective." In: C. GALE, G. OLSSON (eds.). *Philosophy in Geography*. 387-427. http://apcg.uoregon.edu/amarcus/geog620/Readings/Tuan_1979_space-place.pdf (Web. 21.12.2012)
- WOOLF, V. *A Room of One's Own*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945.

TOPOGRAFIA OGRANICZENIA
W *JANE EYRE* I *THE LADY OF SHALOTT*

Streszczenie

Na podstawie wybranych utworów literackich, *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë i *Pani na Shalott* Alfreda Tennysona, oraz obrazu *Prerafaelity* Williama Hunta artykuł ukazuje sposoby kwestionowania przez ich autorów wiktoriańskiego ideału kobiety-aniola, strażniczki domowego ogniska. Omawiane prace pokazują jednocześnie, że wspólna tematyka umożliwia przekroczenie barier gatunkowych, a przez to ukazanie podobnej intensywności uczuć, dotarcie do intymnych przestrzeni świadomości i ukrytych przed światem pragnień i przemyśleń bohaterek, które nie wahają się kwestionować usankcjonowanych konwencji społecznych. We wszystkich omawianych pracach kluczowym elementem definiującym przynależność społeczną jest przestrzeń i to w odniesieniu do niej bohaterki Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* i Bertha Rochester, oraz *Pani na Shalott* Tennysona i Hunta definiują swoją tożsamość. Artykuł ukazuje, że to właśnie w odniesieniu do na nowo zdefiniowanego własnego terytorium odnajdują one drogę do swoiście pojmowanej wolności i uwolnienia kobiecości.

Streściła Agnieszka Łowczanin

Key words: Charlotte Brontë, Alfred Tennyson, William Hunt, space, confinement, liberation, death.

Słowa kluczowe: Charlotte Brontë, Alfred Tennyson, William Hunt, przestrzeń, ograniczenia społeczne, wyzwolenie, śmierć.