

WOMEN CREATORS: REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE AND PLACE IN WOMEN'S WRITING

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In 1985, *Ilha do Desterro* published its first issue exclusively dedicated to women writers.¹ Bilingually titled *Women Writers/Mulheres Escritoras*, the issue was edited by Professor Susana Bornéo Funck, one of the pioneers in women studies at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, and the pioneer lecturer in women's writing at UFSC's Modern Languages department (Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras). With this special issue, we pay tribute to Funck's trailblazing work that has fostered the promotion and the study of women writers, more specifically, English-speaking women writers, in Brazil. This celebratory issue then proudly commemorates the fortieth anniversary of *Ilha's* first issue dedicated to women writers.²

Funck's 1985 issue features five articles and three book reviews. The articles' topics range from discussions about Simone de Beauvoir, Emily Dickinson, Zora Neale Houston, Anais Nin, and various feminist utopian novels. The reviews provide critical glances at the major feminist scholarly publication of the time, nowadays classics of feminist criticism, such as *On Gender and Writing*, edited by Michelene Wandor (1983), *The New Feminist Criticism*, edited by Elaine Showalter (1985), and last but not least the very *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*,

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coedited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1985). All those works spoke of the need for more *space* for women's writing and feminist criticism in academia.

One of the things that the 2025 issue reveals is that not only has more space been conquered in literature and academia by women writers' works and feminist criticism, but also that this space is plural and diversified. When our call for papers on representations of space and place in women's writing was released, we received nearly forty article proposals. As some of them fell out of the scope of *Ilha* as well as of our issue, they had to be left out. After going through the peer-review process, we publish this year's full issue with thirteen articles, nine of them written in English and four in Portuguese. The authors, genres, and works analysed attest to the excitement towards women's creations as well as towards the vibrancy of their works. We were interested in gathering representations of space and place in women's writing in the Anglophone context, writers working with other languages but in comparison with works by Anglophone writers or works translated into English or from English. The contributions interrogate and examine how women writers have reframed place and reshaped space, whether internal, remembered or imagined in the writing of plays, novels, short stories, poems, and non-fictional texts. The contributors featured in the present issue also attest to the enthusiasm for women's writing across the globe, with articles from Brazil, Greece, Iran, Ireland, India, and Spain.

Our understanding of "space" and "place" derives from anthropologist Denise Lawrence-Zuniga (2017). While, for Lawrence-Zuniga, "space" refers to a location, or physical geography, "place" refers to space with meaning, or personality. That is to say that spaces become places when there is cultural meaning attached to them. With this in mind, our contributors were asked to address the following questions: How do women-identifying writers question or subvert traditional narratives of space and place? How do they envision the future or new readings of the past? How are places reframed and spaces reshaped by means of those interpretations and memories?

Important reflections on space and place are present in Gaston Bachelard's canonical *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard pays special attention to the ways we experience intimate places, in particular the house, especially that remembered from our childhood, which bears "maternal features" (1964, 7). Houses, as inhabited spaces, supposedly provide us with shelter. This notion, however, needs to be problematised as the house can also highlight issues of psychological and physical violence. During the pandemic, for example, violence against women soared all around the globe, reaching an increase "to record levels" becoming in itself a "shadow pandemic" (Mineo & Yang 2022).

On a complementary note, Verena Conley, in *Spatial Ecologies* (2012), speaks of the "spatial turn", concerned with the "ethics of living and working collectively on a planet whose habitability seems to be problematic" (1). This expands our scope of analysis as Conley invites us to think over not only how we relate affectively to public and domestic places, to landscapes of childhood and memory, as internal projections onto place and ideological construction

of places, and those that have been gentrified, but also to natural ones. Equally important is to think of the roles of geography to the construction of gender and gender relations, as Doreen Massey put forth in the introduction to her 1994 edited collection *Space, Place, and Gender*.

The essays in this special edition of *Ilha do Desterro* on space and place in women's writing consider how literal and figurative locations are powerful emotional terrains of consciousness and being. While places are physical sites, they transform into spaces of psychic significance when infused with memory, identity and the myriad encodings of women's lived experiences. The essays each reveal diversities of meaning within multiple women's spaces and places in a diverse range of literature to consider how sites of resistance, expression and agency manifest.

In our US-based women writers' section, Vasiliki Misiou analyses Carmen Maria Machado's lyric memoir *In the Dream House* (2019) and its translation into Greek with a focus on queer domestic violence. In "Speaking into 'Archival Silence': Translating Trauma and Abuse Nestled within the Dream House", Misiou shows how subjectivity and space are mutually constructed in a narrative that reveals how an otherwise intimate location becomes a place of trauma and abuse by dint of Machado's narrative style. In Misiou's words, "[the] fragmented state of their shattered relationship is reflected into dozens of short chapters that enable Machado to challenge beliefs about queer love for women". In her analysis, Misiou highlights how lesbian and queer relationships can be as "anxious, problematic, harrowing and abusive as heterosexual love."

In our selection, two articles feature Xicana writing. In "(Un)safe Space in the Borderlands: Writing Queen Women of Color into History", Thayse Madella considers the literature of Xicana women, who are often queer, and in search of safe physical locations and emotional spaces. In so doing, this essay looks at the historical novel *Forgetting the Alamo* (2009) by Emma Perez. This novel considers the presence of Xicanas in history after the Battle of the Alamo and looks at the function of (un)safe spaces in relation to forces of colonialism and fractured loci. Many Xicana women live on the margins, and Madella reveals how Xicana literature "clearly portrays the dangers and pleasures of living in the borderlands" where it can be seen how Xicanas navigate precarious spaces in which safety is continuously contested. Perez's novel writes queer Xicanas into history, creating a dynamic space of expression and resistance. The essay draws on Decolonial Studies to emphasize how "the pervasiveness of coloniality has reached societies in such a deep way that it is difficult to find spheres of daily life in which its presence does not exist." As such, queer women of colour need to locate and inhabit spaces of refuge, sanctuary and possibility outside of colonial and patriarchal oppression. The concept of bridge-building is central to this narrative in a literal and figurative manner. As bridges are built to connect and mobilise, they are vulnerable and subject to motion, fracture and impermanence. Bridges challenge colonial separation and division and are employed by Xicana women as structural pathways to self-determination.

In “A reescrita de mitos femininos em Borderlands/La frontera, The new mestiza, de Gloria Anzaldúa” (“The rewriting of female myths in Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza, by Gloria Anzaldúa”), Camila Coutinho da Silva explores the rewriting of female myths in Anzaldúa’s seminal work. In her analysis, da Silva argues that one’s journey towards a new *mestiço* consciousness starts off at a specific physical point: the imposed political boundary between the United States and Mexico. Da Silva’s essay argues for moving beyond Western binarism in order to survive as a non-white, non-Western, and non-heterosexual human being. For this, she calls for “a third way”, in which the new *mestiça* lives within and amongst contradictions, ambiguities and various cultures.

In “Fogo e recursos cinematográficos como elementos socialmente simbólicos em *The Flamethrowers*, de Rachel Kushner” (“Fire and cinematic resources as socially symbolic elements in Rachel Kushner’s *The Flamethrowers*”), Luana Barossi investigates the filmic elements used in the making of Rachel Kushner’s novel *The Flamethrowers*. The cinematic techniques employed in the novel playfully interact with its leitmotif: the fire. Barossi argues that the novel’s narrative elements and style are responsible both for the historical anchorage and for the representation of late capitalism’s pervasive presence in all spheres of life.

“A casa ou o túmulo: (des)encontros com as ‘mães literárias’ em Patti Smith e Sylvia Plath” (“The house or the grave: (mis)encounters with the ‘literary mothers’ in Patti Smith and Sylvia Plath”), Erica Martinelli Munhoz and Vanessa Cezarin Bertacini examine Patti Smith’s essay “Tempest Air Demons” (2015) and Sylvia Plath’s poem “Wuthering Heights” (1961) in the light of matrilineage. Munhoz and Bertacini strive to demonstrate how Smith and Plath work with the figures of their literary mothers in a non-idealised manner in their representations of the grave and the house. According to the authors, the notion of matrilineage derives from 1970s Anglophone feminist literary criticism, in which the encounter of women writers with their “literary mothers” represents a source of nurturing which allows them to write.

In “Falando com as paredes: espaços de solidão e clausura em Júlia Lopes de Almeida e Charlotte Perkins Gilman” (“Talking to a brick wall: spaces of solitude and cloister in Júlia Lopes de Almeida and Charlotte Perkins Gilman”), Milena Ribeiro Martins closely analyses the influence of US writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The yellow wallpaper” in Brazilian writer Júlia Lopes de Almeida’s novel *Cruel amor* (*Cruel love*) and short story “O muro” (“The wall”). Martins’s fresh comparative analysis of the two contemporaries delves into the loneliness and madness experienced by the protagonists.

Beatriz Hermida Ramos, in “Topographies of Gendered Violence: (Trans) Forming Hospitality in Ryka Aoki’s *Light from Uncommon Stars*”, analyses aspects of social and spatial violence against trans* women in a North American context in Ryka Aoki’s science fiction novel *Light from Uncommon Stars* (2021). Ramos argues that Aoki’s novel illustrates what Derrida describes as “hostipitality” (Derrida 2000), a combination of hospitality and hostility. Through speculative fiction, Aoki denounces the extreme vulnerability of trans* racialized women in

the United States, and the way in which patterns of exclusion and abjection can be (re)produced in queer spaces. Ramos suggests that Aoki's portrayal of spatiality and failed hospitality serves to bring to the fore the various forms of violence experienced by trans* racialized women while metaphorically resorting to science fiction elements.

Virginia Woolf features strongly in our selection and Gabriela Zetehaku Araujo and Maria Rita Drumond Viana's essay on Woolf's 1939 autobiographical essay "A Sketch of the Past" from *Moments of Being* interweaves ghostly presences and sensuous memories in the haunted site of her childhood summer home Talland House at St. Ives in Cornwall. In this example of Life Writing, which traverses the limen of auto/biography, we see how Woolf's personal memories are active elements of her writing in which fragments are sensory, like memory itself. Employing tropes of ghostly presences, this haunted site, for Woolf, is always more than a physical structure, becoming a channel to the past and a receptacle of emotional resonance. The house of Woolf's fragmented recollections – her "most important memory", resonates with her mother's presence as both a material and emotional palimpsestic enclosure of past and present. This essay explores the relationship of the house and/as memory, employing Derrida's concept of hauntology. The site of spectral memory is here enlivened with the enduring ghost of Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, to consider how memoir-writing itself is a visceral and haunted site of matriarchal memory and being.

In "The Garden as a Place of Rapture in Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Clarice Lispector", Marcela Filizola identifies four moments in Modernist literature in which female characters encounter natural, non-human spaces. These experiences of enrapturement through nature mobilise transformative moments of creative potential and authenticity for the characters and the reader. The author situates these encounters as a feminist reimagining of the patriarchal narrative of origin in The Book of Genesis. The four works considered here bring us to Virginia Woolf once again – and her novels *A Room with a View* and *Between the Acts* as well as Katherine Mansfield's short story "Bliss" and Clarice Lispector's short story "Love". Filizola considers the relationship of sight and light to understanding and enlightenment in each of the encounters – three of which feature a pear tree. The pear, unlike the apple in the Biblical origin-text, signifies here womanhood and female desire. In each of these literary moments, gendered vision and awareness operates with nature to offer alternative ways of seeing.

In the essay "Spatial Constructs and Subject Formation in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*", we once again return to Virginia Woolf, one of the key voices of twentieth-century modernism, this time to consider the relationship between spatiality and female subjectivity. Authors Everton Rocha Vecchi, Humberto Fois Braga and Guilherme Augusto Pereira Malta examine how space – both material and symbolic – shapes agency, autonomy and visibility within gendered constraints. The authors acknowledge how, in the 1980s, the spatial turn identified space as actively shaped by, and shaping, power-relations and social practices to engage dynamic sites of meaning making. Here we see how

such sites of signification relate to female subjectivity in Woolf's seminal 1929 essay. For Woolf, gendered places of limitation and possibility constantly unfurl where locations such as libraries, the university, lawns and gardens, streets and rooms actively shape, constrain and/or liberate the dynamic potential of women's agency and visibility. The authors point out that female subjectivity is formed through spatial relations that reflect broader cultural conditions. This is the case in Woolf's essay where the walls of interior spaces are permeated by women's "creative force" for millennia, thus asserting that space is both historically gendered and symbolically charged. The essay charts how Woolf's narrative structure mimics the very act of wandering, reflecting the limitations and power of female mobility through myriad time, place and space.

We then turn to representations of womanhood in India, in "Gulabi, Gulabo, Gulabiya", which centres upon a literal journey through the meandering lanes of India's vibrant city Varanasi to "unfurl the place's shrouded mysteries." The authors, Kuntalika Jharimune and Bidisha Chakraborty, wander through streets and shops where the sensual aroma of incense mixes with the wafting scent of the Ganges as "the city seemed to lead us rather than the other way around." Enchanted by the aura of Varanasi, the authors take us on an inner journey of selfhood relating to women's histories, identities and performances. Vividly evoking their pathways within and beyond Varanasi, the authors relay a chance encounter with an elderly woman who changes the course of their lives. Dressed in a white sari, unhurriedly brushing her hair with years of quiet routine, the old woman is striking in her presence. Upon learning that the ninety-year-old woman's name is Gulab, which means "rose", they discover an idea that anchors this essay and their path ahead in which the transformative power of names is central. The old woman tells them gradually, over a number of days, how she relinquished her birth-name, re-naming herself "Gulabi". According to the authors, this act of self-naming highlights a greater self-reclamation in which the power of names is a metaphor for the performance of identity. The essay considers how (re)naming powerfully enables women to digress from the confines of social expectations and simply be who they want to be, on their own terms. The authors explore social structures, power dynamics and the ways that names function within and as cultural spaces of production. Naming here is inextricable from gendered autonomy where the local story of old Gulabi connects to macro-histories of women's self-determinations of identity and empowerment. Such reclaimed names allow women to challenge their traditional confinement within private spheres and patriarchal systems of signification. In naming themselves, women take ownership of their identity and place in the world. This essay considers a number of diverse women's performance traditions such as female characters named Gulabi in Bollywood films, and older dance traditions, to interrogate the production of female stereotypes such as associations with flowers, nature and ideal beauty.

In "Rhythms of Iran, Echoes of Ireland; Silences Voices of Sedigheh Dowlatbadi and Patricia Burke Brogan", Tuba Mozafari, Esmaeil Najari and John

Cunningham powerfully juxtaposes two distinct geographical places and times to highlight how women's voices and identities can be similarly oppressed and silenced. In two key plays, the authors investigate how the female characters break and refuse the physical and emotional spaces which confine and subjugate them. In order to challenge patriarchal images of women, Iranian playwright Dowlatbadi (1882-1961) and Irish playwright Burke Brogan (1926-2022) re-envision oppressive patriarchal narratives to present new sites for female identity. From this innovative comparative approach, the authors consider women's rights, activism and suffrage within the 2022 Iranian "Women, Freedom, Life" uprisings and the Second Wave Feminist movement of the 1960s. The two plays under analysis – Dowlatbadi's *The Source of Motherhood* or *The Dark Life* and Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed* portray the resilience, suffering and agency of the women characters against harsh social backdrops of injustice and violence. The two plays reveal the severe abuse endemic to religious and social regimes which sought to restrict and control women in both cases. In Ireland, Burke Brogan shines light on the "Magdalen Laundries" – homes for "fallen" women and girls who became pregnant outside of marriage. Such state and religious-run institutions were sites of incarceration and forced labour, where unpaid pregnant women and girls were often illegally coerced into giving up their babies for adoption. The pregnant women were imprisoned, given numbers instead of names, had their heads shaven to atone for their moral sins and were forced to clean dirty laundry all day for no pay. They gave birth with no pain-relief and were typically not allowed to bond with their babies. The Religious Orders trafficked the babies mainly to the United States in exchange for money and birth records were often destroyed. In the earlier Iranian play, the severe restrictions upon women are opened up to lay bare the lack of options for women beyond the roles of wife and mother. The plays usefully illuminate one another to reveal how institutional violences are perpetrated upon women and girls in the name of morality, social expectations and the biopolitical control of women by patriarchy.

In the final essay in our collection, Nora Grimes considers the history-plays of Irish playwright Lady Augusta Gregory as a dramaturgical intervention which mobilizes a new feminist historiography. As playwright, folklorist and co-founder of the Irish National Theatre, the Abbey, Gregory's history plays situate female characters as central to the plot and, in so doing, relocate women as central to Irish history. Grimes reveals how Gregory's female protagonists offer a macro-feminist historiography through the lens of imaginative interpretations of historical events, myths and characters. In these plays Gregory places women as the subjects of an Irish national drama so that women's voices become foundational to mythologies of the Irish cultural nationalist movement. Grimes illuminates how Gregory enables the emergence of key women from the margins, just like Gregory's voice herself, and all Irish women playwrights. In identifying how Gregory re-situates women characters as central to the drama, Grimes further centralizes Irish women to history, nationalism and theatre. The essay focuses on how women are subjective agents in Gregory's plays and looks at how notions of "colliding

spaces” of history, language and character activate a feminist historiography. The three plays under investigation span a temporal frame of around one-thousand years, challenging the oppressive consolidation of Irish history as masculine in form and content.

We wish our readers a most joyful reading!

Notes

1. To access Ilha's first issue dedicated to women's writing see: <https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/desterro/issue/view/618>.
2. Our most sincere thanks go to Júlia Zen Dariva, Ilha's secretary, whose proactivity and sense of organisation has been vital to the editorial work involved in the making of this special issue.

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