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Private and Public Spaces in Heinrich Mann's In the Land of Cockaigne

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The 19th century literature displays a specific image of power relations between man and woman: we are dealing with two distinctive spaces where the personality of the man and of the woman develops, we draw a distinctive borderline between the public character of a man's life and the private one of a woman's existence. Women were restricted to domestic roles (taking care of house and children) and to a biological function whereas men were allowed to lead an independent and public existence. Contrast was the essence of the social and even of the matrimonial relations: feminine self-devotion contrasted with masculine egotism; feminine weakness with masculine strength; feminine private life with masculine public existence. This contrast is illustrated through the image of the woman as an "angel in the house" [1] which represented the discourse on female dignity, her duty as a housewife, wife and as a mother, her role as a defender of morals, culture and religion. At the beginning of the 19th century the woman was viewed a "lesser man", but by the end of the century she was no longer considered inferior to man, just "different" from him from a social, cultural and biological point of view (Bock 2002: 111). Due to the new social and political changes the society felt the need to underline the separation between genders and between cultural roles. The 19th century society saw marriage as an institution that was based on the economic dependence of the wife and as a restriction of the freedom of women in particular; the ideal woman should, in her turn, be the companion and the lover of a man, and the mistress of the home.

The female character we have chosen for analysis, that displays best the private role of the woman, is Mrs. Türkheimer from the novel *In the Land of Cockaigne*. The book consists of satirical scenes insisting on the social and cultural representations of Berlin society around 1893. The social and cultural image of Germany in the symbolic context of a period of deep and sudden changes is rendered through sarcasm and irony as vital elements in the composition of fiction, as real engine of the plot or the understanding of the conflict between appearance and reality, as the actual source of dynamism of the novel. The novel can be read as a parable about the alienation within an industrialised system, suggested by Heinrich Mann. It seems to be influenced by the 19th century industrialised mentality, since it opposes two binary principles *Herrschaft* and *Knechtschaft*. Metaphorically, the novel focuses on the social clash between margin and centre inside a competitive universe.

The 19th century fiction develops in an industrial culture where money is the element that governs everybody's life. Thus we can talk about the marketing not only of things but of human beings, too and about the setting up of institutions, such as marriage, enforce all kind of transactions.

Having as source his personal experience (Heinrich Mann worked as a young man in Berlin in a publishing house and in this way he managed to have contacts with both the literary élite and the members of the high society of that time), the

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author presents us a poor young man Andreas Zumsee whose only prospect is to become a teacher in his hometown, but, instead, he chooses to have a career in journalism in Berlin. He is concerned with the idea of success, this being the reason why he tries to have connections to all kind of people who will lead him to celebrity. Introduced in the house of the Türkheimers, the "heart" of the land of Cockaigne, this ambitious young man gets to know different representatives of the élite; he first analyses them with wonder and fear, but his desire of succeeding in life makes him learn quickly the cynicism and the manners needed in the high society. Andreas finds his way into this world by seducing Mrs. Türkheimer, whose husband is one of the most important businessmen of the period. The woman is no longer young and has just been deserted by her latest lover, so she is available and eager to have a new love-affair. If in the beginning he is only a shy admirer, soon Andreas turns into a tyrant for the aged mistress and into a close friend of her husband. Although Andreas Zumsee is admired and envied for his success in the house of the Türkheimers, he feels that a really refined, distinguished man should also learn the higher stage of corruption: he seduces the mistress of Mr. Türkheimer although he finds her repulsive, but he wants to satisfy his pervert desire of cheating both Mrs. and Mr. Türkheimer. In this satirical novel the author focuses not on the main hero, but on the space where he develops his personality and on the immoral and shallow representatives of Berlin bourgeoisie during the reign of Wilhelm II. The sharp critic of the author reveals the seeds of decay in the capital of an ascending empire.

As a wife, Mrs. Türkheimer is no longer for her husband an object of desire, but the mother of his child. Deprived of her erotic power and sexual mystery (a wife is no longer a mysterious mistress to her husband), Mrs. Türkheimer being socially and economically submitted to her husband, represents one of the most valuable assets of Mr. Türkheimer, she bears his name, she takes care of his house and child; the man boast about his wife in the same manner as he proudly displays his house, his lands, his riches; she displays in fact his power to the whole world. His power and wealth show the woman as a caged human being in a private space or as a mere item displayed on the counter of the social conventions.

In the bourgeois society one of the roles of the woman is that of *displaying*: her beauty, charm, intelligence, elegance, all these attributes being only exterior elements that in fact represent her husband's power, all these being the qualities of an object. If the man is wealthy, then the wife shows off his furs and jewels, if he is poor, then she is praised for her moral values and qualities (of being a good housewife, wife and mother); so in this way even the poorest man believes that he is the possessor of something, that he is being served by somebody. The woman satisfies not only the husband's social vanity, but also his most intimate and personal ego, because he is pleased with his domination over her. Erotically, socially and culturally the man succeeds through his power in 'shaping' his wife: in a way he educates her, he influences her existence and imposes his own rules. The woman, restricted to a private character, still renders the house the warmth and the intimacy a real home needs. She can be regarded as a guardian of all values that reside in a house/home: memories of the past and hopes of the future; she takes care her husband (the present) and children (the future). If the energy of the man is wasted/ consumed in the public sphere, her whole energy is sacrificed on domestic activities. The wife is responsible for the stability and respectability of the home; the man needs all these when he returns home after he faces all kind of challenges of the public activities and the woman has to guarantee for the repetition of a specific comfort. The attributes of the private space annihilate the exhaustion and stress of

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the public activities. In spite of his power and ambition in his public space the man needs the soothing strength of the woman in the domestic sphere.

Women considered marriage as the only way to integrate into society. From an economical point of view Mr. Türkheimer is a 'pillar' of the society from Berlin, his wife takes up his name, she is integrated into his social class. She is part of his family, she is the 'second-half' of his power and wealth. Socially, happiness emerges under the sign of a house, because it represents their permanent status and at the same time their isolation from the rest of the people. The roles that both Mr. and Mrs. Türkheimer take up in their house are different from one another. For Mrs. Türkheimer the house is a prison, but she is clever and shrewd enough to transform this prison into her own private 'kingdom'. Mr. Türkheimer is a banker, he is one of the most influential businessmen of the period, thus he has a lot of contacts with the outer world, but Mrs. Türkheimer runs their house; in her turn, too she controls a world, reduced to (the size of) their residence: she dominates the private life of the society. Their home stands as a 'proof' of their social status. Her home expresses her social value, she imposes her rules and wishes in domestic issues in the same manner as her husband does in the financial world. Somehow Mrs. Türkheimer, as a woman, justifies her important in the society learning from her husband ('imitates') the rules of administrating the others: the servants or even the wives of other businessmen. All throughout the novel we notice that Mr. Türkheimer is like a mentor for the women in his life. As his wife, Mrs. Türkheimer, finds a more successful substitute to love, that her safe moral, material and social position. Having achieved this she strives to keep up to the standards of their social status by receiving guests, by dressing herself elegantly, by giving Mr. Türkheimer good advice and by imposing her influence on dismissing (banishing) his mistresses. Mrs. Türkheimer, as a woman, knows when and how to make concessions, she knows how to ignore her husband's infidelities. She sees her marriage as a 'career', her life as the wife of an important man submits her to repetition of events, parties, infidelities and also to routine.

At first the novel seems to develop itself only around one figure that of Andreas Zumsee, a masculine figure. Being written by a man, the book seems to fit the pattern of patriarchal novels, where all major characters are men and women are restricted to secondary domestic roles. An author has the tendency to 'imprison' his fictive female characters, he silences them by depriving them of anatomy, of freedom. "The pen, therefore, is not only mightier than the sword, it is also *like* the sword in its power-its need, even- to kill." (Gilbert& Gubar 2000: 14). Men, either characters or authors, want figuratively to 'kill' women. Almost all 19th century women were to a certain extent imprisoned or 'tortured' in men's houses. Gradually, the attention of the author turns to the female characters that influence both social and personal relationships. In spite of their general private character the heroines of the novel end up undermining the authority of men through their sexuality. Spaces and places in the book are closely linked to the themes of the novel. Ambition and improvement of social status is the main theme around which the action spins and the axis around which spaces, private or public, are laid out in front of Andreas Zumsee for him to discover them and to develop with each experience. Andreas longs to become a member of Mrs. Türkheimer's social class and encouraged by his journalist fellows he entertains fantasies of becoming a rich man. The working out of this fantasy forms the basic plot of the novel; it provides Heinrich Mann the opportunity to satirize sharply the class system of his age and to emphasize its capricious nature. The woman's desires are also connected to their social ambition

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and longing to become the wife or mistress of a rich man: a public display of their sexuality is the requirement of being a mistress.

In this novel, Heinrich Mann depicts men and women as existing in different social places. All female characters move, work and live within the private space of the house. Men, on the other hand, have a social existence, which their female counterpart lacks. Only wealthy women or the women who are the mistresses of rich men are allowed to move between the private space of the home and the public space of Berlin. For all these women theatre is the only bridge between private and public life. The attending of theatrical performances does not show Mrs. Türkheimer's wish for a rich cultural life, it highlights her wish of flirting with Andreas and in this way she succeeds in establishing a real private date with him. Going to the theatre is only a way of meeting Andreas again. So in this way we may consider the public space a threat for the women's fidelity and morals.

The theatrical representation may incite women to dissipation, the show having a bad influence only on women, who are not used to the temptations of the public existence. Women that find ways of escaping their domestic lives, are in fact those responsible for the corruption of good manners, for bringing into their homes the idea of fornication, disorder and scandalous life. In public spaces (although the theatre box is not large, still it allows the woman a contact with other people) women are tempted to seduce other men and to forget about their good manners. In the theatre box women seek for men's attention, display publicly their charm and sexuality; and this public side of their life seems to accentuate their lack of shame. Their desire of getting the men's attention leads to their decline: in striving for social recognition women imitate men and their duplicity leads to alienation. The imitation of men is dangerous for good manners if women copy the vices of the public life, the disorder of actors' life. Showing yourself in public is not a mistake and it does not bring about a scandal unless women neglect the private character of their existence, in other words they should not forget their position and role in the society. The excessive freedom causes the women's intemperance. In the theatre men are lured not only by the performance on the stage, but also by the public displays of female sexuality.

Women want to attend a theatrical performance, on the one hand, for the public character of the whole gathering, which gives them the freedom they lack at home and on the other hand they want to see (other men) and to be seen, they want to be admired, they want to rival for clothes, jewels, partners. Women feel the need in a public space to satisfy their own vanity. But in this game of crossing the borderline between private and public, women play the same role, that of being displayed and of displaying the luxury and wealth of their husbands or lovers. Even if we referred to the house (a private place) or a theatre (a public place), we underline the same exhibition of women by men, as mere products on the counter of the industrialised society; everybody can admire, ogle or buy them. Practically women are submitted to the lascivious gaze of men, this objectifies women's bodies, this public display of women represents their portrayal as sexual playthings and servants. To be present in a public space does not necessarily mean a social recognition; for a lonely woman this means to be vulnerable to the male glances and intimidation. The exposure of a woman publicly means the sexual recognition in the eyes of men, because they look at women with a sexual gaze, disdaining to recognize women's accomplishments or attributes. Struggling against this biological/ physical side of their existence, the female characters reveal the idea that society is presented in terms of objects that can be manipulated as their possessors want.

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If we refer to the social and cultural background of the book, whenever we try to establish the characters' place and their freedom in this world full of social constraints, we cannot ignore the position of the woman in a patriarchal society or the woman's dissimulation as a means of survival in such a world. If we take into consideration Hegel's notions from his *Phenomenology of Spirit* we speak about a two-layered novel where all relations are based on the binary opposition between *Knechtschaft* (servitude) and *Herrschaft* (mastery) and all characters move between the margin and the centre according to the relations and roles they develop. The servant (the female character) is cunning and tries to feign her identity and intentions in order to submit or even eliminate the master (the male character) from the centre. In fact the servants and masters substitute each other all the time (this substitution depends on the public/ private character of the space they dwell in) and this makes the evolution go on. As we have already established the whole conflict between man and woman can be reduced to the issue of recognition. All throughout the novel we see the woman's (the servant's) need for recognition, the woman constantly moves between the margin and centre. We can place Mrs. Türkheimer in the centre of a private place, in her house because this is the space where she can impose her own rules, where she dominates her family and guests. Due to the important social position of her husband she gets shortly to the centre of the system, proving once again that connections and financial support can provide chances of success. Still, in a public space, the woman moves from the centre to the periphery because she must accept the phallocentric order of the society.

If they want to preserve their respectability, the women depend on their partners, they live under high social pressures and have to pretend that they are patient or subdued, otherwise they would not be allowed any contact to a public place. In this world, based on margin and centre, the major roles are played by a 'hunter' (woman) and a 'possessor' (a man) of freedom in society. Servants or women generally struggle for social recognition in order to avoid being treated as objects. This struggle for autonomy is in fact a complex quest of identity and this oscillation between personal relationships and social gatherings depicts the evolution of a character and the shaping of his/her identity.

Notes

[1] The concept has its origins in the poem *The Angel in the House* by Coventry Patmore (1855), which praised the woman's duty as housewife, mother and wife, her role of maintaining the moral and religious values in a family or in a community.

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