Stanka Radović

Locating the Destitute: Space and Identity in Caribbean Fiction. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014. xi + 215 pp. (Paper US\$ 24.50)

The recent explosion of interest in the geohumanities reminds us that Caribbean literature provides a particularly rich treasure trove for scholars of literary spatiality. From Eugenio María de Hostos to Aimé Césaire to Derek Walcott or Wilson Harris, evocations of the homeland, its landscape, and its social geography are as closely observed and emotionally charged as they are symbolically potent. This is no doubt due, at least in part, to the tropical ecology, physical beauty, and colonial despoliation of the islands, which have made it an excellent topic for ecocritical explorations of the kind conducted by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley. It is also linked to the region's strategic position at the crossroads of the trans-Atlantic economy and the slave trade, which has given rise to critical traditions emphasizing the economic and diasporic flows that have shaped the region (cf. Fernando Ortiz and Paul Gilroy).

Locating the Destitute enters into this conversation from a different direction, one inspired by Henri Lefebvre's theory of spatial production and the radical-geography tradition it inaugurated. Lefebvre's theory of spatiality famously proposed that space itself is socially produced, in what Edward Soja referred to as a "trialectical" process involving the interplay between direct experience, institutionalized representations, and the self-made (or lived) representations of individuals. Following Lefebvre, Stanka Radović reads the literary texts that make up her corpus as attempts to overcome the social and psychological deformations that capitalism and colonial domination have wrought upon the social landscape of the islands.

Chapter 1 offers a brief overview of contemporary spatial theory, considered in relation to postcolonial studies, before zeroing in on the notion of the house, which provides the central focus of each subsequent chapter. The house is understood by Radović in its most immediately available sense, as a dwelling place, and, by extension, as the symbolic locus of the individual's struggle to construct a sense of personal identity and agency. Emblematic of this struggle is V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, examined in Chapter 3, which Radović uses to show that the assumed advantages of home ownership might be nothing more than an illusion, part of a bait-and-switch strategy foisted on humbly resourceful people like Biswas by the agents of postcolonial capitalist ideology. This insight is at the heart of Radović's study, and dictates its argument. Chapter 2 examines the Trinidadian barrack-yard novel, which celebrates the crucial role played by the shared communal space of the *yard* in forging a community out of the individuals housed in the barracks. Similarly, Radović's reading of

Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* shows how the novel's treatment of shanty towns illustrates the need for a renewed sense of community based on values derived from traditional Creole culture. And in a chapter on *Frangipani House*, she shows how Beryl Gilroy extolls the virtues of life on the outside, which, however marginal and precarious, is richer than life in the comfortable but restrictive confines of the retirement home named in the novel's title.

Put together, these individual analyses suggest that there is a kind of wisdom of the spatially dispossessed that has been lost to those who have grown accustomed to the mercenary values of late capitalism. This gives rise to Radović's central point: that novels such as these can point the way to a healthier relationship with the world around us, a necessary step in the transition from a neocolonial to a truly postcolonial mindset.

The book's greatest strength is its patient, attentive readings of the literary works, with each chapter adding an interesting new facet to the central argument. As for the Lefebvrian framework, it is useful and well explained, though at times it feels a bit doctrinaire and mechanically applied. And despite her frank recognition of the limits of literature as a mode of social praxis, Radović seems at times to be disappointed by the inability of her texts to somehow solve on their own the social problems they describe. ("In the context of postcolonial displacement, is it possible to build a house within a novel, or to treat the novel as a substitute house?" [p. 20]. Radović never hits on a satisfying answer to this question.) Nonetheless, by focusing attention on the spatial dimension of these texts while resisting the temptation to engage in facile survival triumphalism, she sheds light on a quintessentially Caribbean mode of literature, which manages to document the often dire material conditions of economically marginalized populations while also paying tribute to the cultural vitality and transformative potential of the communities they have formed.

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