

Marina Premoli's edition, though perhaps of fairly limited interest among Spanish readers in general, is a true gem for all Edith Wharton enthusiasts. In these pages, carefully selected and meticulously translated, we can appreciate the startling erotic and emotional awakening of the writer, the sudden transition from "the narrow acquiescence in conventional limitations" to a world transformed into beauty and light. To borrow one of her familiar images of the house as an emblem for a character's inner life, this was an experience which, above all, illuminated "the empty rooms full of dust" which her life had been with a light that could never thenceforth be extinguished.

Teresa Gómez Reus

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth. *The English Novel in History: 1840-1895*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's *The English Novel in History: 1840-1895* is the third volume in the series generically entitled "The Novel in History" edited for Routledge by Prof. Gillian Beer (Cambridge). The series, which will consist of six volumes, takes an interdisciplinary approach to literary fiction and is informed by recent critical theory. The other two volumes which have as yet been published are David Trotter's *The English Novel in History: 1895-1920*, and Steven Connor's *The English Novel in History: 1950 to the Present*.

Prof. Ermarth's book has four chapters. Chapter One, "Narrative and Nature," explains new formations in narrative during the period under study by trying to locate the so-called "pressure points" at which such formations emerged. It focuses on the changes in the view of nature resulting from the secularization of knowledge. According to Ermarth, before mid-century nature is seen as "something hospitable to human aspiration," whereas fifty years later it appears, if at all, as inhospitable to human meaning. "In short," Ermarth says, "Victorian novel more from one to the other of the two constructions of nature that Thomas Carlyle announces in *Sartor Resartus*: one a nature that is the 'living garment of God', and the other, a nature that is, morally speaking, a 'dead mechanism'" (3). This evolution is explored by reference to literature, science, art, and various other disciplines.

In Chapter Two, "The Idea of History," Ermarth discusses what she calls "the construction of history as a common denominator", a convention describable as the version of the humanist (Kantian, Newtonian) conception of time which underlies Victorian narrative, whether literary, artistic or scientific. Similarly, the humanistic, egalitarian construction of society is dealt with in Chapter Three, "Society as an Entity," and its traces in Victorian narrative located and discussed. This notion of society, which originated in the Enlightenment, is made possible, Ermarth argues, by the convention of historical time explored in the previous chapter.

Ermarth has long been reflecting on the problem of temporality. In her *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992) Princeton UP, 1992) she addressed the postmodern replacement of the convention of historical time for a conception which she then referred to as "rhythmic

time." Historical time allows for project: it is a neutral and homogeneous temporal medium in which things exist and events take place as if on a road stretching to infinity. This belief, which has dominated Western thought since the Renaissance, is still at the heart of Victorian narrative. Rhythmic time, on the contrary, is an "exploratory repetition" coextensive with the event and which the subject cannot distance itself from, and therefore "any 'I' or ego or *cogito* exists only for the same duration and then disappears [...] or undergoes transformation into some new state of being" (*Sequel* 53). This postmodern view of temporality is, according to the author, analogous to medieval conceptions. In between, Ermarth says, there is the humanist historical temporality, still latent in nineteenth-century narrative, which she cleverly analyzes in *The English Novel in History: 1840-1895*.

It is in the latter book's Chapter Four, "Dilemmas of Difference," that Ermarth's feminist standpoint becomes most visible. Here the author treats issues such as class, gender, and other varieties of cultural difference, and the problems they posited in the nineteenth century to the democratic agendas of some realms of English cultural discourse such as narrative fiction and philosophy. This last chapter assumes the concepts of nature, time, and society explained in the other three, and in this sense culminates the argument expounded all along the book and conveys the ideological outlook that dominates Ermarth's approach, which is, as has been anticipated, that of postmodern feminist critical theory.

The way the book is structured—with all four chapters developing an argument, and all of them also firstly stating general ideas which are in turn illustrated—does not favour browsing for particular points, as we are warned in the Preface. This, along with the difficulty of some of the matters discussed, will not contribute to making the book popular among students. It is a book written for the specialist and asks to be read from the beginning to the end, if the reader is to grasp the main argumentative lines.

Those of us who do not possess Prof. Ermarth's erudition cannot help but being impressed by the wealth of sources and information that she utilizes, and even more by the intelligent, original, and insightful way in which this conceptual apparatus is combined to produce a book which is a strong personal statement, both critically and politically. As such, it invites discussion and is bound to generate fruitful controversy if it receives the scholarly attention that, as a doubtless major study of the period in question, it clearly deserves.

Ángel Pérez Vázquez

Román Álvarez & M. Carmen África Vidal, eds. *Translation Power Subversion. Topics in Translation Series*, Clevedon, Philadelphia, Adelaide: Multilingual Matters, 1996, vi + 157 pp.

Translation studies represent one of the most attractive fields of research at the moment. It has the advantage of being a relatively new area. Everybody knows that translation dates from thousands of years and has been an essential character in lots of