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A Geocritical Perspective on the Female Fantastic: Rethinking the Domestic

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Patricia García,

"A Geocritical Perspective on the Female Fantastic: Rethinking the Domestic"

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Abstract: Patricia García's article, "A Geocritical Perspective on the Female Fantastic: Rethinking the Domestic" approaches the question of the "female fantastic" from a spatial angle. Proponents of the female fantastic (for example E. Moers, S. Gilbert and S. Gubar and A. Richter) often coincide in a leitmotif that characterises this tradition: the haunted house. This leads to a great deal of studies centred on how female authors employ domestic spaces as a means to give voice to the lives of women invisibilised by patriarchy and, through the irruption of the supernatural, as a way to subvert domestic ideology. Whereas these studies have done much to give visibility to the work of female authors, they have also generated, as this article will argue, a limited understanding of the female fantastic. The first section of this article is of a theoretical nature and reflects on the methodological and conceptual limitations of such approaches to the female fantastic centred on domestic space. Instead of asking what the spaces of the female fantastic are, this section shifts the focus to: "which spaces are overlooked by placing such emphasis on the domestic?" The second part offers an alternative reading of the trope of the haunted house in female-authored fantastic fictions. Haunted urban apartments by Rhoda Broughton and Charlotte Riddell, and well-known haunted houses by Shirley Jackson, Ann Rivers and Patricia Esteban Erlés are employed as case studies to develop a feminist geocritical method that goes beyond domestic interiors and engages with a critical reflection on other spatial elements, such as external frames, scale, location and movement.

Patricia GARCÍA

A Geocritical Perspective on the Female Fantastic: Rethinking the Domestic

Feminist literary criticism (Carbonell and Torras 7-24) has repeatedly claimed that there is no neutral way of reading a text; there are only constructed reading positions (or reading positions yet to be constructed). Likewise, since the 1970s feminist geographers and literary scholars have argued that there is no gender-neutral manner of understanding and experiencing space and place (Massey; Wolff; Parkins; Wells). However, this intersection between gender and the spatial is not without its contradictions. This article explores the particular form of the "female fantastic" from the point of view of spatial criticism, in order to unmask the inherent frictions with some aspects of feminist thought.

My approach to the female fantastic deliberately avoids the question of whether literary writings have a sexual mark (whether women write differently than men). Instead, this article examines the spatial discourses present in studies that have claimed the existence of a *female* fantastic. These studies have argued that the female fantastic is a tradition that can be traced in, among other things, the selection and representation of spaces by its authors self-identified as women. Part of this selection of literary spaces is the domestic dimension of the haunted house. This argument is present in a great deal of the scholarship centred on identifying trends in how female authors use interior spaces as a means of giving voice to the lives of women made invisible by patriarchy. The interruption of the supernatural, it is commonly argued, is a way of subverting gender roles in domestic ideologies. Whereas these studies have led to a reappraisal of fantastic fictions by female authors, they have also, as this article exposes, resulted in a repetitive and limiting understanding of the female fantastic.

By analysing from a feminist perspective how the spatial is theorised by scholars of the female fantastic, the first part of this article reflects on the methodological and conceptual limitations of such approaches. Instead of asking what the spaces of the female fantastic are, the question that drives the second section is "which spaces are overlooked by placing an ongoing emphasis on the domestic?". The touchstone is provided by the narratological concept of "spatial frames" (Ryan), which allows for alternative readings of the trope of the haunted house in female-authored fantastic fictions. The haunted urban apartments of Rhoda Broughton and Charlotte Riddell and the well-known evil mansions of Daphne du Maurier and Shirley Jackson, together with the less famous dwellings created by Ann Rivers and Patricia Esteban Erlés, are employed as foundations for my central contribution: a feminist geocritical method of reading that transcends domestic interiors and engages with other spatial elements, such as character movement, architectural thresholds and physical surroundings.

1. The Domestic and the Female Fantastic

1.1. A Central Leitmotif

The works of Elaine Showalter, Ellen Moers, Patricia Meyer Spacks, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar represented a line of thinking that converged with that of French second-wave feminism in claiming a form of female literary expression distinct from the male counterpart equivalent: a "female imagination" (Meyer Spacks)*, écriture féminine* or *parler-femme* not subjected to the constraints of patriarchal phallogocentrism, which traditionally privileged male creators and silenced female counterparts. Meyer Spacks's opening sections in *The Female Imagination* is representative of this approach: "Women writing directly about their own lives in letters, journals, autobiographies, or indirectly in that concealed form of autobiography we call fiction, demonstrate that the experience of women has long been the same, that female likenesses are more fundamental than female differences" (5); "The differences between traditional female preoccupations and roles and male ones make a difference in female writing" (7).

In this context in which feminism was becoming consolidated as a much-needed theoretical lens in literary studies, the term "female fantastic" arose out of a need to identify a particularly "female" manner of writing the supernatural. Due to its potential to subvert and liberate, the fantastic—these writers argued—has been a particularly suitable mode of voicing otherness and marginality and of subverting gender constraints. Ellen Moers's "Female Gothic" category in *Literary Women* (1976), Ann Richter in *Le fantastique féminin* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) grounded their argument in the fact that there are differential aspects between the female and male experiences, namely the oppression by patriarchy to which women have been subject throughout history. This has in turn generated different ways of imagining and writing that present a historical continuity. The work of these scholars was thus dedicated to identifying intercultural and cross-generational "ways of female feeling, the modes of responding, that persist despite social change" (Spacks 3) within narratives of the fantastic.

This body of scholarship has repeatedly highlighted the domestic as one of the central unifying threads of the female fantastic. Metaphors of female oppression indoors can be traced in haunted house narratives across traditions and cultures as giving voice to those female lives rendered invisible by patriarchy. Through their use of the supernatural, narratives of household haunting are also a way of subverting gender roles associated with domestic ideology (for example, the transgression of the 'angel in the house' character-type).

Ann Richter, in the introduction to her anthology *Le fantastique féminin,* presented an essentialist, binary perspective on gender ("Nous croyons, quant à nous, qu'il existe un mode de vivre et de penser typiquement féminin" 10) and outlined the difference between a male and a female way of writing the fantastic. In contrast with the *fantastique masculin*, in which rational order predominates, she argued, the *fantastique féminin* is instead concerned with the irrational and the intimate. "La *terra incognita* des réalités intérieures" (Richter 5) predominates in female-authored fantastic texts, according to Richer, and such introspection gives prominence to interior spaces and literary symbols derived from these.

One of the central arguments of the famous study by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar on female authorship during the nineteenth century referred to a Gothic tradition with imaginaries related to the domestic. Gilbert and Gubar pointed out that while this trope also features frequently in the work of male writers, in its portrayal amongst female authors an undeniable common denominator emerges. In contrast with the many aesthetic and philosophical meanings with which the haunted house has been imbued in texts authored by male writers, in the female Gothic the fear of being confined to the home has historically represented a physical and literal threat for women:

> Literally, women like Dickinson, Brönte, and Rossetti were imprisoned in their homes, their father's houses; indeed almost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in men's houses. Figuratively, such women were, as we have seen, locked into male texts, texts from which they could escape only through ingenuity and indirection. It is not surprising, then, that spatial imagery of enclosure and escape, elaborated with what frequently becomes obsessive intensity, characterizes much of their writing. (Gilbert and Gubar 83)

Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar, in their annotated bibliography of American and British ghost stories authored by women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, also highlighted the domestic as one of the greatest tropes of the female fantastic tradition. Carpenter and Kolmar observed that the predilection of female writers for the domestic and for variations on its themes and motifs[1] arises out of a need on the part of women to document the lives of mothers, daughters and maids indoors: bored, abandoned, imprisoned, enslaved, and powerless in the domestic sphere: "women's ghost stories borrow and develop from the Gothic both its critique of domestic ideology and its exploration of the dangers women face in the private sphere of home and the family as well as its subversive potential" (Carpenter and Kolmar xxv). The haunting of the domestic functions as a unifying thread, frequently revisited in the haunted house motif, in this context of women confined to the patriarchal home and subject to the patriarchal law that renders them invisible.

In terms of spatial criticism, these approaches to the female fantastic offer a pointed critique of purportedly gender-neutral (but in reality male-centred) theorisations of the domestic. Consider for example the following passages by spatial anthropologist Otto Friedrich Bollnow:

> [The house] is the area of rest and peace, in which man can relax his constant alert attention to possible threats, a space to which man can retire and where he can relax. To give this peace to man is the supreme task of the house. And in this way the space of security is distinguished from the space of threat. […]
> The primeval sense of life transmitted by the house to man is, according to Bachelard, that of feeling at ease in a state of security.
> […] the anthropological function of the house, its achievement in the general context of human life: in order to survive in the world and be able to fulfil his tasks there, man needs a space providing security and peace, to which he can retreat, in which he can unwind and become his normal self again, when he has worn himself out in battle with the outside world. (Bollnow 125-130)

These excerpts portray the classic phenomenological understanding, led by referential scholars such as Bachelard and Bollnow, of home as a safe, reassuring, protective, intimate place. The aforementioned feminist studies have exposed the limitations of these approaches by outlining that, far from providing comfort and shelter, the motif of the haunted house in the female Gothic frequently recurs as a portrayal

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[1] In Carpenter and Kolmar's extensive list of themes and motifs featuring in female-authored ghost stories, many items are related to the category of the domestic, such as: "haunted houses", "domestic violence", "relationships between women ghosts and women residents", "women's property" and "wills, inheritance, legacy."

of tormented and oppressive domestic environments, echoing the female condition "enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society" (Gilbert and Gubar xi).

By identifying transcultural and intergenerational continuities in spatial tropes and settings, these scholars have made an outstanding contribution in foregrounding the writing of women who published stories and novels in the Gothic and fantastic mode. They have broadened the canon of the fantastic beyond the androcentric matrix and have demonstrated that domesticity is a complex and rich theme and is one that is traditionally undervalued in literary scholarship. This critical reappraisal of domesticity in the fantastic has also contributed to a much-needed problematisation of the supposedly natural role of the housewife and the mother.

It is of course legitimate to pay attention to the social and political role of women in these spaces traditionally codified as feminine. The worth of such an approach is evident when understood in the context of the historical development of Western feminist thought and of the influential role that studies in this vein have played in the past three decades. The domestic is still often treated as one of the unifying threads of the female fantastic in contemporary scholarship (see Armitt and Hutton). The basis for this argumentation is consistent throughout: the domestic is the preferred domain for the representation of gender conflicts in the female fantastic and female Gothic. Andrew Hock Soon Ng in *Women and Domestic Space in Contemporary Gothic Narratives: The House as Subject* exemplifies this critical approach, insisting on the "traditional link between the female subject and domestic space […]": "women, in general, tend to spend more time at home than men do, and are thus more intimately connected, for better or worse, to its interiority" (10).[2] Without seeking to invalidate the category of the domestic as an important unit of analysis, in the next paragraphs I draw attention to some theoretical problems with approaching the "female fantastic" from this geocritical angle.

1.2. The Pitfalls of the Domestic

Firstly, as has been noted in the by-now substantial body of feminist scholarship, this approach to male/female writing of the supernatural is anchored to a binary conception of gender and thus excludes other non-binary gendered identities. The aforementioned approaches to the female fantastic also tend to rely on a use of the categories of "female", "feminine" and "female issues" (the domestic, the maternal, the irrational) that is de-contextualised from material, cultural and ethnic specificities. Is every text written by a woman necessarily a "female" or "feminine" text? Furthermore, very little consideration is given to the scholarly method employed to identify these allegedly universal "female" traits. How can we determine a "female gaze" or a "female imagination" (Moers 107) as opposed to a male one through a study of the writings of the fantastic? In this respect the claim by Rebecca Soares, Jennifer Mitchell and Lizzie Harris McCormick is justified: "there is no *female* fantastic. That is to say, both terms—the gender and the genre—are slippery for different reasons" (xviii). The volume produced by these scholars is one of the few existing works to consider both "female and gender-queer subjectivity" (xx) in relation to the supernatural. Hence, they define this form as "female-identified authors […] explored from intersectional feminist lenses across decades" (xviii).

The second problematic element of regarding the female fantastic as a tradition engaged primarily with the domestic concerns a gender-biased theorisation of space. The idea of the female fantastic being primarily substantiated by the domestic implicitly generates the asymmetrical binomials of the public/universal versus the domestic, and of the rational/masculine/logos versus the feminine/irrational/eros. Doreen Massey warns of the dangers of such polarised theorisations between the private and interior and the public, exterior domain, in which the first is codified as feminine. In her study *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), Massey identifies a recurrent polarisation in spatial scholarship between man/woman, space/place, exterior/interior. She argues that the category of place (a specific and defined location) has been often assigned female attributes, whereas space is defined in masculine terms (the general, the universal). Massey explains how this way of thinking of space and place reflects gender constructions, in particular the masculine inclination, need or desire to fix the female figure in a stable and stabilising category: the home.

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[2] This approach is also found outside academic scholarship. *The Guardian*, for example, published a review in 2008 of the women-authored ghost stories compilation, *Virago Book of Ghost Stories*. The reviewer foregrounds the domestic sphere as setting of "dramas of social exclusion" and abuse: "Ghosts just won't lie still; their function is to disturb. Small wonder, perhaps, that women writers have proved especially interested in exploring how ill-used lives might reappear at domestic thresholds to register their grievances long after they have been supposedly laid to rest" (Ross).

> In the pair space/place it is place which represents Being, and to it are attached a range of epithets and connotations: local, specific, concrete, descriptive. [...] The contrary to these classically designated characteristics of place are terms such as: general, universal, theoretical/abstract/conceptual. […] It is interesting in that context to ponder the gender connotations of these pairings. The universal, the theoretical, the conceptual are, in current western ways of thinking, coded masculine. (Massey 9)

Finally, by recurrently placing the focus on the domestic in female-authored narratives of the supernatural, we as critics might be excluding other spaces that are socially and aesthetically relevant and that tend to remain in the background of such theorisations. We run the risk of (unintentionally)limiting the impact of those female writers by giving priority to the domestic in our way of reading and constructing a critical discourse. In other words, while undoubtedly highlighting women's contributions to the history of the fantastic we are also assigning those contributions to the margins (albeit proud, reappraised margins). The centre remains masculine. In texts authored by male writers, the use of motifs is often read and praised for its transcendence (thus representing *universal* experience, beyond the gendered experience of the (male) writers). Margaret Atwood expresses this acerbically as: "When a man writes about things like doing the dishes, it's realism; when a woman does, it's an unfortunate feminine genetic limitation" (quoted in Riley and Pearce 49). Very often, studies on the haunted house that approach this motif beyond its domesticity—for example from Marxist or psychoanalytical perspectives—draw from an exclusively male corpus. This is the case, for example, of Anthony Vidler's famous study on *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992). Vidler offers a brilliant application of the Freudian uncanny to architectural form. His chapter on haunted houses is centred on male-authored narratives by E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Nodier. Another more recent example is Víctor Pueyo's article (2017) on the rise in the use of the horror trope of the haunted house in contemporary Spanish cinema. Pueyo reads this phenomenon as a consequence of neoliberal policies, of the real estate bubble and of the surge of evictions and squatting initiatives in Spain. His interesting argument is substantiated by more than twenty films, all by male directors.

2. Transcending the Domestic

In order to confront the problematic limitations in the treatment of the trope of "the haunted house" as framed within "domestic fiction" in the female fantastic, in the second part of this article I propose a shift away from the emphasis on domesticity. The following sections thus offer *trans-domestic* strategies for reading and interpreting the recurrent trope of the haunted house in fiction by women-identified authors. The basis of this method is provided by the concept of spatial frames, as defined by narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan. These are:

> the immediate surroundings of actual events, the various locations shown by the narrative discourse or by the image (cf. Ronen's [1986] "settings"; Zoran's [1984] "fields of vision"). Spatial frames are shifting scenes of action, and they may flow into each other: e.g. a "salon" frame can turn into a "bedroom" frame as the characters move within a house. They are hierarchically organized by relations of containment (a room is a subspace of a house), and their boundaries may be either clear-cut (the bedroom is separated from the salon by a hallway) or fuzzy (e.g. a landscape may slowly change as a character moves through it). (paragraph 6)

Ryan's understanding of spatial frames facilitates the drafting of a model of analysis that displaces the focus from place (understood as location) to space (understood as connections between locations). In the analyses of haunted house narratives that follow, the narrative tension is concentrated for the most part in the haunted house. Instead of regarding the house as a place in which action is centred in the interior, domestic sphere, I propose treating this trope as a spatial frame. This opens up a web of spatial relations in the narrative, with three central aspects: a) the location of the house and its significance with peripheral surrounding areas, b) vectors indicating characters' movements inside and outside, and c) thresholds, their associated gate-keepers and related entry rituals.

2.1. The Urban Frame: Victorian haunted apartments

The female Victorian ghost story is typically assumed to be set in rural environments and in isolated, haunted interiors. However, a considerable number of short stories and novellas written during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century by Charlotte Riddell, Rhoda Broughton and Margery Lawrence among others break with this tradition and situate their fictions in the city.[3] This corpus is representative

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[3] The argument is also valid for urban ghost stories written by their male peers (Dickens, Le Fanu). In this case, I want to emphasise the urban character of those tales written by women, in order to refute the idea of the female fantastic as a tradition of domestic interiors.

of an urban fantastic in which the haunted house engages actively with its framing context: modern London and the challenges that this period of rapid industrialisation poses.

If the focus is displaced from the place of action (the haunted house) to the spatial frame in which it is situated (the city), it becomes clear that these texts illuminate themes related to the urban, socio-political context in which they were written. These themes include the disintegration of the domestic ideal in an advancing society and a criticism of the invisibility of women with regards to property inheritance and property rights (it is worth noting that Charlotte Riddell published her *Weird Stories* in 1882, the same year in which the second Married Women Property Act entered into law). Texts such as "The Old House in Vauxhall Walk", "Walnut-tree House", "Old Mrs. Jones" (all included in *Weird Stories*, 1882) and *The Uninhabited House* (1874) by Charlotte Riddell, "The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth" by Rhoda Broughton (1873) and "The Haunted Saucepan" by Margery Lawrence (1922) reflect on the transformative processes of the modern city and feature haunted houses with protagonists who often rent these properties out of desperation in an overcrowded London. The source of disorder is located neither in a distant past nor in an exotic place but at the doorsteps of ordinary urban houses. To paraphrase Robert Mighall's claim concerning the urban Gothic, "it is not just a [fantastic] in the city, it is a [fantastic] of the city. Its terrors derive from situations peculiar to, and firmly located within, the urban experience" (30).

Urban haunted-house fictions are similar in structure and theme. To emphasise the familiarity concerning the location of the haunted house, identifiable urban coordinates are provided at the beginning of the tale. For example, the lodging in "The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth" by Broughton is on "No. 32 – Street, May Fair" (2). The location of Riddell's haunted house is specified in the story's title, "The Old House in Vauxhall Walk", and "Walnut-Tree House", also by Riddell, is "at the corner of a street leading out of Upper Kennington Lane" (2).

The first part of these narratives usually describes how the characters embark on a house-hunting venture, often prompted by economic reasons and involving lengthy and exhausting viewings around the city. One of the clearest examples is in "The Old House in Vauxhall Walk", which establishes a rupture with the traditional rural idyll at the start. "'Houseless – homeless – hopeless!'" (99) is the opening line uttered by the protagonist, desperate to find shelter in a hostile London:

> It was a bad night to be about with such a feeling in one's heart. The rain was cold, pitiless and increasing. A damp, keen wind blew down the cross streets leading from the river. The fumes of the gas works seemed to fall with the rain. The roadway was muddy; the pavement greasy; the lamps burned dimly; and that dreary district of London looked its very gloomiest and worst. (99)

The stresses of finding accommodation in the British capital are also emphasised at the start of Rhoda Broughton's "The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth". This haunted house story is told in the form of an epistolary exchange between Elizabeth and Cecilia. The first letter describes the difficulties of Elizabeth's house-hunt around London:

> Well, my friend, I had no idea till yesterday how closely we were packed in this great smoky beehive, as tightly as herrings in a barrel. […] After having looked over, I verily believe, every undesirable residence in West London; after having seen nothing intermediate between what was suited to the means of a duke, and what was suited to the needs of a chimney-sweep; after having felt bed-ticking, and explored kitchen-ranges till my brain reeled under my accumulated experience, I arrived at about half-past five yesterday afternoon at 32,—Street, May Fair. (2)

This opening brings to the fore issues related to the density of the city ("as tightly as herrings in a barrel") and rising rental prices ("nothing intermediate between what was suited to the means of a duke, and what was suited to the needs of a chimney-sweep"). Elizabeth's consuming property search is expressed with humorous hyperboles: "fifty to one hundred house agents", "Failure No. 253, I don't doubt. […] Once inside, I thought I had got into a small compartment of Heaven by mistake" (2).

Urban haunted house narratives converge in one motif: their characters choose their lodgings on account of their extraordinary cheapness. The pressure of finding accommodation in hostile, overpriced London leads to another recurrent trope that draws from the Gothic tradition and overlaps with the detective genre: a mystery to be solved. The solution to the mystery will involve either demonstrating that the house in question is not haunted (which is the case of the explained supernatural, as in Riddell's *The Uninhabited*) or deciphering why the house is haunted. The mystery is initially sparked by the relationship between price and location of the property. Why would such a cheap, centrally-located house find it so difficult to obtain tenants? In "The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth" Elizabeth refers to this mystery trope in a conversation with the agent upon viewing the house:

"Apropos, I asked, in fear and trembling, what the rent might be – 'Three hundred pounds a year.' A feather would have knocked me down. I could hardly believe my ears, and made the woman repeat it several times, that there might be no mistake. To this hour it is a mystery to me" (3).

Already settled in 32, – Street, May Fair, in her letter of response, Cecilia tells Elizabeth that she is still puzzled by "[t]he mystery of the rent" (4): "Here were are installed in our Paradise, and have searched high and low, in every hole and corner, for the serpent, without succeeding in catching a glimpse of his spotted tail." (4), "a palace at the cost of a hovel" (3), "to let it for a mere song" (7).

The suspicious disjunction between price, property type and urban location reoccurs in a very similar formula in *The Uninhabited House* ("If this place were in Russell Square […] I should not mind taking a twenty-one years' lease of it at forty pounds a year, even if ghosts were included in the fixtures," 83); in "The Haunted Saucepan" ("A flat in St James's – for a flea-bite rental? Are you sure you're not being done somehow, old man?" 230) and in "Old Mrs. Jones" ("for a mere song in the way of rent," 130).

In her illuminating research on the relationships between the urban and the domestic, Sharon Marcus provides an in-depth study on Victorian domesticity and draws attention to the discrepancy between the Victorian architectural ideal and its realisation. Pointing to the incompatibility between the preconceptions of what a domestic idyll should be and the fact that "home" is located in an urban setting, Marcus explores how the "essentially rural ideal of home generated by domestic ideology" (90) conflicted with the urban conditions and constraints arising from industrialised London in the second half of the nineteenth century. A system of architectural frames that would allow one home to be differentiated from another was crucial in enabling this ideal: "the separation of different households into non-communicating buildings, and the separation of different household members and functions into distinct rooms" (Marcus 84). The figure of the ghost in the aforementioned haunted house narratives transgresses those architectural frames by penetrating into the house and violating the protective insulation of the domestic idyll.

In her study of Charlotte Riddell's haunted house narratives, Melissa Edmundson highlights that the (mis)use of capital is one of the central themes embodied in the haunted house. Edmunson's argument leads to a conclusion similar to that reached by Marcus: the haunting in narrative of the private, domestic sphere is in fact a recounting of the vices of the public sphere (renting, lending, bribing, and other perversities of the capital). Despite its formulaic anatomy, the Victorian haunted house story, in particular in its urban variant, is a response to the voracious growth of industrial capitalism in European capitals and to the social and economic transformation of the modern city. When displacing the focus from interior spaces to the urban frame in the reading of these urban ghost stories, it becomes clear that these texts offer interpretations that reach beyond a problematisation of the domestic.

2.1 Movement and Peripheral Spaces: Manderley and its successors

Manderley, the protagonist space of Daphne de Maurier's famous novel *Rebecca* (1938), is a Gothic building with notable influence on later female fantastic texts, such as those by Shirley Jackson and Patricia Esteban Erlés discussed in the last part of this article.[4] The mansion famously personifies the dominance still exercised by de Winter's deceased former wife. However, there are other spaces that are also relevant to the story, in particular the surrounding domains of action.

Rebecca features spaces that subvert the appearances and social hypocrisy to which the mansion is backdrop. For example, protected by the anonymity of the big city and a fake name, Rebecca visits her doctor in London. To escape the dullness of her unsatisfactory marriage, she clandestinely meets her lover in the cabin of the forest. These areas of escape counteract the oppression within the confines of Manderley, both as a place and as institution.

Also of relevance are the passages dedicated to movement within and to (restricted) access to the house. The omnipresence of Rebecca de Winter prevents the unnamed narrator from developing her own identity. This is reflected as early as the second sentence of the novel, with the evocation of the impassability of its thresholds: "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while I could not enter, for the way was barred to me" (1). The spatial oppression of the narrator is symbolically reflected in the twisting road that leads to the house. This road is saturated with trees intertwined in a menacing way: "They crowded, dark and

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[4] Although there are temporal and aesthetic convergences, the fantastic is understood here as a narrative form distinct from the Gothic. While they both developed by the end of the eighteenth century, the fantastic presents a breach of the mimetic effect by a supernatural element, perceived and presented as impossible within the fictional world. In contrast to the all-inclusive paradigm, I follow here the narrow approach on the fantastic developed by scholars such as Tzvetan Todorov (1970), Irène Bessière (1974), Rosalba Campra (2008), Roger Bozzetto (2005) and David Roas (2018).

uncontrolled, to the borders of the drive" (1). The narrator's road trip into Manderley also symbolises a journey into a different social status. During this trip by car, the narrator identifies the irreconcilable clash between her desire for freedom and the burden of the social pressures in her new marriage: "I wanted to be a traveller on the road, a bride in love with her husband. Not myself coming to Manderley for the first time, the wife of Maxim de Winter" (69). The density and darkness of this spatial domain leading to Manderley replicates the situation of the narrator: "there was no clearing, no space to hold a house" (72). The persistent negation of space indicates that narrator is entering a sphere in which Rebecca still reigns.

A similar analysis driven by spatial frames can be applied to further haunted house narratives inspired by *Rebecca*, such as Shirley Jackson's acclaimed novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). The domestic sphere is without doubt a central element in the narrative. The place in which most of the action is concentrated, Hill House, is "not sane" (243), "vile" (264) and "diseased" (264). The many descriptions of the twisted architectural features and mental power of Hill House are central to the narrative. Indeed, the house is the grammatical subject in many utterances: "Hill House has a reputation for insistent hospitality; it seemingly dislikes letting its guests get away" (288). Not surprisingly, a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the house and to its effect upon its inhabitants. However, different dimensions of this novel emerge when the focus is displaced from the interior to the surroundings.

Jackson's novel is as much a narrative about the placeless as it is a tale about a place (Hill House). This comes to the fore in the scenes set on the road and the fields, in which the theme of errant wandering emerges through the character of Eleanor. An example features in Chapter 4, with Eleanor's road trip to Hill House. This scene focuses on that which Eleanor is leaving behind and that from which she is running away. The journey on the road towards Hill House is also, as conveyed by several passages in this chapter, a move towards Eleanor finding her own identity: "Yet this morning, driving the little car which she and her sister owned together, [...] thought, I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step." (251); "[…] the car belonged entirely to her, a little contained world all her own" (251); "Everything is different, I am a new person, very far from home" (260). Her first time driving alone allows Eleanor to detach herself from the constraints of her life: "she might never leave the road at all, but just hurry on and on until the wheels of the car were worn to nothing and she had come to the end of the world" (253). The road trip is described in detail and in juxtaposition to the different emotions the character experiences along the way:

> The journey itself was her positive action, her destination vague, unimagined, perhaps nonexistent. She meant to savor each turn of her traveling, loving the road and the trees and the houses and the small ugly towns.
> […]
> The road, her intimate friend now, turned and dipped, going around turns where surprises waited – once a cow, regarding her over a fence, once an incurious dog – down into hollows where small towns lay, past fields and orchards". (252-253)

Her arrival is repeatedly postponed, "knowing that Hill House always waited for her at the end of her day" (255). The "tall, ominous and heavy" door of Hill House (260) interrupts her happy wandering: "Why am I here? she thought helplessly and at once; why am I here?" (260). While the road continues, her journey does not. The entrance to Hill House is guarded by a threshold (the gate) "so clearly locked – locked and double-locked and chained and barred" (261) and a gatekeeper (Mr. Dudley, the caretaker):

> "What you want?" His voice was sharp, mean.
> "I want to come in, please. Please unlock the gate."
> "Who say?"
> "Why-" She faltered. "I'm supposed to come in," she said at last.
> "What for?" (261)
> "I am expected." Or am I? she wondered suddenly; is this as far as I go?"
> And later on, Mr Dudley proclaims: "You won't like it," he said, "You'll be sorry I ever opened that gate." (263).

Spaces other than the road scene further illustrate Eleanor's errant journey. Eleanor's is a journey of escape rather than arrival, as one of the villagers touches upon in his description of Hillsdale: ""People *leave* this town," he said. "They don't *come* here."" (emphasis in original, 259). Eleanor's walks in the hills further emphasise this aspect: "Eleanor went alone into the hills above Hill House, not really intending to arrive at any place in particular, not even caring where or how she went, wanting only to be secret and out from under the heavy dark wood of the house" (369). The final paragraph in the novel reveals the fate of all the other characters after their experiences in Hill House, describing how these had returned to family or friends. However, Eleanor had nowhere to which she could return and no place to live out her life until death. She draws attention to her homeless condition on several occasions towards the end of the novel, when she is urged to leave the house due to her mental instability: "I haven't any apartment [...] I sleep on a cot at my sister's, in the baby's room. I haven't any home, no place at all.", and reiterates "I haven't any home", she said again, and regarded them hopefully. "No home. [...] So there is no place you can send me" (412). The motifs of meandering, running away from and leaving behind without any clear destination or point of arrival are repeated throughout the narrative. Representing itinerancy and homelessness, these motifs provide a contrast to the gravitas and centrality that Hill House embodies as a place of action.

The novel *The House Next Door* (1978) by Anne Rivers Siddons, a lesser-known haunted house novel, depicts the protagonist house in a similar fashion to Hill House. It deals with an evil building that causes misfortune for its inhabitants and that is capable of perverting those who move into it. In this sense, this building is consistent with the typical characteristics of the evil house trope. Less conventional are the surroundings in which this house is situated: a modern suburban neighbourhood. In this tranquil community, the house represents a disturbing exception. It functions as a morally scandalous presence within this normalised community. This conflictive relationship between the location and its spatial frame brings to the fore the tormented relationships between neighbours and the double standards that are in operation within the confines of this hypocritical and poisonous model of urban segregation.

A final useful example of the potential of spatial frame analysis is found in another contemporary haunted apartment, as featured in "Habitante" ("Inhabitant"), a short story by Patricia Esteban Erlés. This author, one of the most acclaimed young voices of the fantastic in Spain, published in 2008 a collection of stories entitled *Manderley en venta* [Manderley for Sale], a reference to the novel by Daphne du Maurier. Defined by the author herself as "a book of interior spaces" (Esteban Erlés, back jacket), this volume is an early example of the author's obsession with domestic spaces: "the house, life indoors, plays a primary role, it is one of the characters, a silent but constant presence" (back jacket).[5] "Habitante" tells of the strange and irresistible attraction that the unnamed female protagonist experiences towards a rental apartment in an unidentified city. It is later revealed that the apartment's previous tenant, Virginia, drowned in the communal swimming pool. The first-person narrator recounts how it is that she comes to rent the apartment and how in turn she comes to sense Virginia's lingering presence in the house. In the final scene the doorbell rings and an anonymous voice asks for Virginia. Without hesitation, the narrator puts on the previous tenant's black swimming costume and heads down to the swimming-pool. In this final narrative twist, the identification of the protagonist with Virginia becomes complete and we are led to believe that the narrator will meet the same tragic fate as the previous inhabitant. As with the narrative in *Rebecca*, this short story portrays the power of a past that lurks in a building and manipulates its inhabitants.

Although the apartment is the central space in "Habitante," other physical spaces (in particular those of the doorway and the swimming-pool) are representative of the manner in which spatial frames hold tension in narrative. The protagonist's movements in and out of the apartment correspond with different stages of her process of symbiosis with the previous tenant. Her first departure is to buy wall paint in a shade called *blue Klein*, in order to give a personal touch to the walls of the apartment. Then she exits again to return the paint in order to revert to the original white tones. This reversal of her original choice foreshadows that the house has its own identity that is being asserted. The effectiveness of the final scene relies on the speed and compliancy with which the narrator assumes her new identity as she crosses the door for the last time: "In my room I put the black swimming suit on under my nightdress, take the keys and head down" (57).[6]

The protagonist's need to occupy the apartment dominates the narrative in the first part of the story: she needs to possess this house that will later possess her. Once again, this follows the classic schema of a doomed house passing its malediction onto the successive tenants. However, the supernatural exchange of identities is not the only theme of this particular short story. As she herself articulates, the protagonist believes that renting the house will liberate her from social impositions associated with her age and help her project the impression of a wealthier status:

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[5] "Manderley en venta es un libro de interiores"/"En casi todos ellos la casa, la vida de puertas para adentro, tiene un papel destacado en la narración, es un personaje más, silencioso, pero constante." This translation, as well as those of the short story "Habitante", are mine. For an extensive analysis on how domesticity features in the fiction of Patricia Esteban Erlés, see Natalia Álvarez Méndez.

[6] "En mi habitación me pongo el bañador negro debajo de la camisola, cojo las llaves y bajo" (57).

> I can suddenly imagine being definitively free of those recently-separated friends, rid of the transient boyfriends who always neglect to close the bathroom door [....] In the certainty that this is the apartment I have been looking for, I give an envelope containing all my savings to Manuel. I am already thinking about applying to the obsequious bank director for credit. (54-55)[7]

"This is the only building with a swimming pool in the entire block," the protagonist proclaims proudly, before going on to reference the glamorous condominiums of North American television: "if I lived in this building I would go for a swim before work every day, like an actress in an American TV movie" (54).[8]

Conclusion

In an interview with Truffaut in 1962, Alfred Hitchcock characterised *Rebecca* as "the story of the house" (131), stating that its Cinderella-type of romanticism placed the "novelette" in the genre of "feminine literature" (127). This conversation between these two acclaimed film directors offers yet another example of the stereotypical association of the female fantastic, the feminine and the domestic. Through my counterproposal in this article I have sought to transcend the presumed domesticity of female-authored fictions, which have traditionally been assigned—and confined—to categories such as "domestic fictions of the fantastic," "domestic horror" or "household stories". As noted, there are several pitfalls associated with repeatedly employing women's contributions to the fantastic in analyses of domesticity; while the label of "domestic ghost stories" is often attached to the work of female authors, the male corpus in contrast is generally considered in terms of a general or universal ghost story.

While it is not my intention here to invalidate the complexity of the domestic, it is worth recalling Virginia Woolf's famous quote: "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in" (24). My goal has been to provide *trans-domestic* strategies of reading the haunted house beyond its interiority. Rita Felski argues that the meaning and status of home is usually viewed in opposition to a modernity that "celebrates mobility, movement, exile, boundary crossing" (23). However, as I have aimed to show here, "home" can be read precisely as an articulation of those categories of movement and boundary crossing. By focusing on the relationships between spaces, facilitated by the relevant spatial frames (thresholds, surroundings, vectors of movement and peripheral spaces), wider aesthetic and symbolic layers of the haunted house trope emerge such as the recurrent theme of a feminist stance on socio-economic pressures from Victorian London to contemporary Spain.

In the hope that this critical reframing will allow for further re-readings of canonical texts, the analysis of the short stories and novels discussed in this article shows that the female fantastic, often considered a marginal narrative form, is a rich arena for reflection on gendered approaches to spatiality. This may urge us to reconstruct the literary canon, so that fantastic fiction written by self-identified women is given a much more central, formative place.

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[7] "De pronto me imagino libre para siempre de amigas recién separadas, de novios fugaces que no cierran la puerta del baño"/"yo le entrego a Manuel un sobre que contiene todos mis ahorros en cuanto confirmo que es el apartamento que realmente busco. Ya estoy pensando en pedir el crédito al baboso de mi director de banco" (54-55).

[8] "Es el único edificio con piscina en toda la manzana"/"si yo viviera en ese edificio nadaría un rato cada mañana, antes de ir al trabajo, como una actriz de telefilm americano" (54).

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