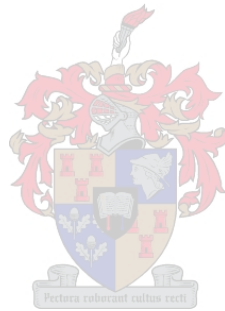


# **Fearful Spheres and Domestic Rebellion: Reading the Female Gothic in Selected Twentieth Century Literary Texts**



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## Declaration

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## Abstract

Due to the nature of the separate spheres of Western society during the mid-Nineteenth to mid-Twentieth centuries, men were put into the public sphere to learn and contribute to knowledge, create and pass laws, and lead society. Women were forced into the private sphere, taught to stay within the domestic, and to conform to the oppressive expectations of gender norms. This thesis will explore the troubled relationship between women and the domestic, where the literature devoted to this study comments on popular fictional tropes for women in selected Gothic texts, where seemingly the only way to avoid being denied agency is through madness and death. This study aims to pursue such troubled legacies by looking at selected female-authored texts within the genre of the Female Gothic and Magical Realism.

By aligning myself with critics like Diana Wallace, I explore texts such as Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" by examining the Foucauldian power struggle within medical discourse in the Western late Nineteenth Century, access to knowledge, and gendered ways of reading. By comparing Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Angela Carter's short story "The Bloody Chamber", I aim to show the construction of an imagined version of a place through shards of conversation, which slightly intersects with Walter Benjamin's theory of the auratic when showing the difference between engaging with something authentically, or engaging with an imagined version of reality.

I discuss the palimpsesting nature of rewriting familiar stories, drawing attention to how the texts, written many decades apart, point to the voicelessness of women within even modern revisited texts. I then discuss Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, exploring the allure of the domestic for those who seek a home, and showing how Jackson reveals that for her, madness and death were written as the only escape from domestic imprisonment. Finally I approach a postmodern Mexican novel, Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, examining the palimpsesting nature of parody based on the Nineteenth Century tradition of monthly instalment magazines for housewives in Mexico. Here I also explore the intersection of the Female Gothic within the practice of Magical Realism in literature, where the domestic realm is both a prison and a space of empowerment for the main character.

I aim to draw attention to the ways in which the selected texts show how inherited female traditions root women within prescribed gender roles and a rigid domesticity, of which authors from the Nineteenth Century until contemporary times still seem to comment on the outworn conclusion that the only escape for women characters in Gothic texts of domestic imprisonment is through madness and death.

## Opsomming

As gevolg van die aard van die afsonderlike sferes van die Westerse samelewing gedurende die middel van die 19de tot die middel 20ste eeu, was die mens in die publieke sfeer geplaas om te leer, by te dra tot kennis, wette te maak en te laat aanneem as ook om die samelewing te lei. Vroue was gedwing in die private sfeer, geleer om huishoudelik te bly en te konformeer en om aan te pas by die onderdrukkende verwagtinge van geslagsnormes. Hierdie verhandeling sal die onrusbarende verhouding tussen vroue en die huiswerker, waar literatuur met betrekking tot hierdie studie, meld van populere fiktiewe wending vir vroue in uitgesoekte Gotiese tekste waar dit blyk dat die enigste manier om weiering van werkzaamheid te vermy, deur kranksinnigheid en die dood is. Die doel van hierdie studie is om diesulke sorgwekende nalatenskap na te volg deur te kyk na gekose vroulik-geskrewe tekste binne die genre van die Vroulike Gotiese en Magiese Realisme.

Deur myself te verbind met kritici soos Diana Wallace, ondersoek ek tekste soos Charlotte Perkins-Gilman se "The Yellow Wallpaper" deur die Foucauldian magstryd binne die mediese redevoering gedurende die Westerse laat 19de eeu, toegang tot kennis en geslagte se wyse van lees. Deur middel van Daphne du Maurier se *Rebecca* en Angela Carter se kortverhaal "The Bloody Chamber" streef ek om die konstruksie van 'n verbeelde weergawe van 'n plek deur middel van brokkies gesprekke wat effens kruis met Walter Benjamin se teorie van die essensie wanneer gekyk word na die verskil tussen verbintenis met 'n denkbeeldige weergawe van die realiteit.

Ek bespreek die palimpsestiese aard van die oorskryf van bekende stories wat die aandag vestig oor hoe die tekste wat dekades uitmekaar geskryf was, dui op die stemloosheid van vroue, selfs binne modern hersiene tekste. Ook bespreek ek Shirley Jackson se *The Haunting of Hill House*, ondersoek die aanloklikheid vir die huiswerker wat 'n tuiste soek en sien hoe Jackson openbaar dat vir haar, kranksinnigheid en dood geskryf was as die enigste ontsnapping vanuit die lewe van gevangenis waarin die huiswerker haar bevind. Laastens benader ek 'n post-moderne Meksikaanse roman, Laura Esquivel se *Like Water for Chocolate* met ondersoek na die palimpsestiese aard van parodie gebaseer op die 19de eeu se tradisie van maandelike artikels en stories vir tydskrifte vir vroue in Mexiko. Hier ondersoek ek ook die kruising van die Vroulike Goties binne die praktyk van die Magiese Realisme in literatuur waar die kombuis-realm beide 'n gevangenis en 'n ruimte van mag is vir die hoofkarakter.

Ek poog om die aandag te vestig op die wyse waarin die gekose tekste toon hoe oorgewerfde vroulike tradisies wortel geskiet het in vroue binne voorgeskrewe geslagsrolle waarvan skrywers van die neentiende eeu tot kontemporere tye nog steeds blyk om kommentaar te lewer oor die uitgediende gevolgtrekking dat die enigste ontvlugting vir vroulike karakters in Gotiese tekste, van die gevangenskap van huiswerkers, deur kranksinnigheid en dood is.

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## Introduction

Throughout history, men and women have occupied different roles in different societies. Due to the mostly patriarchal tendencies of many societies, women have been pushed aside and forced to make themselves smaller and meeker in order for men to take the roles of leadership and law-making. There were separate spheres for men and women by the Nineteenth Century in England and parts of Europe, with the first political statements reactionary to this emerging in the 1820s by the socialist William Thompson and his partner Ana Wheeler, when they argued for the limitations on women's rights to be removed in England (Mary Wollstonecraft's pre-emptive *Vindication* was written in 1792 but ironically banned from entering 'decent' homes until almost a Century after it was written). As discussed by Amanda Vickery, the Industrial Revolution in England spread, the public and private spheres became increasingly separate and gendered:

With the publication of Nancy Cott's influential study of early industrial New England, the history of woman's sphere became even more closely fused to a narrative of economic change. Cott related the formation of separate gender spheres: the private sphere of female domesticity and the public sphere of male work, association and politics to the emergence of modern industrial work patterns between 1780 and 1835 and, by implication, to the dominance of the middle class and its ideals. (384)

The public sphere in Western societies, by which I refer to the European, British, and American societies, was dominated by men, who were involved in the creation of wealth, law, and politics. Women were left to dwell in the private sphere, focusing on running the domestic aspects of the household, raising children, and were generally not given power outside of the domestic sphere. As Amanda Vickery explores in *Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronologies of English Women's History*, the idea that the woman's place was in the home was greatly emphasised in the Victorian Era:

A particularly crippling ideology of virtuous femininity was identified as newly-constructed in the early to mid-Nineteenth Century. What Barbara Welter dubbed the 'cult of true womanhood' prescribed the attributes of the proper American female between 1820 and 1860. She was to be pious, pure, and submissive and domesticated,

for the true woman turned her home into a haven for all that was civilized and spiritual in a materialistic world. (384)

These ideals were reinforced by the legal status of women at the time: women were considered dependants on their father until they were married, and after this event they were considered to be legally joined to the husband as one entity. The woman took her husband's name, and lost her legal status as an individual in the process. Her diminished legal status meant she could not assert her individual right towards property, inheritance, or custody. This gendered society was idealised as natural: a man's place was by nature in the world, as a woman's place was in the home. As Vickery states: "This glorification of domestic womanhood became associated with the deterioration of women's public power, which was itself presented as a function of industrialisation" (384). For a woman to try assert herself in the male, public sphere, was to be perceived as unfeminine, and unnatural. Her own experience of her femininity would be determined by men, who would decide what was natural for a woman to think and feel. As Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis state:

The home also became idealised as the place of morality... John Ruskin wrote: 'The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial: -to him, therefore, the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued, often misled, *always* hardened. But, he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence'. Men, by their nature and occupation, are always compromised by exposure to the world, whereas women, because of their distance from the rough public arena, remain sources of moral and spiritual comfort. In Ruskin's description though, is a telling phrase: 'unless she herself has sought it' and this is one of the paradoxes of gender, that the greater purity of women is always threatened by her association with the body (as opposed to the 'mind' of men) and her weakness. Thus she is in greater danger of moral 'fall'. In the circular logic often deployed in thinking of gender, it then becomes crucial to protect women from temptation by further restriction of their activities and knowledge. The right to knowledge becomes key: the kind and amount of knowledge women should be allowed to have forms debates on, for example, education, marriage, medicine, sexuality, and prostitution. (Warwick and Willis 151)



The woman lost both her legal status and her authority over her own body. Her status within the society in Nineteenth Century Western society would always be rooted back to the home and the domestic, and any power she might be able to use within this sphere would come second to that of the man. The author of the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, was very conscious of the role of women expected by Western society, and how it could force women to repress parts of themselves in order to fit into the patriarchal society, which prescribed roles for women that were always linked back to men: as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. Although “The Yellow Wallpaper” is probably the most notable of her works, she continued writing on feminism and women’s issues, publishing texts such as *The Home* (1903) and *The Man-made World* (1911) where she spoke openly about wanting equal opportunities for women. Her writing brought her international attention:

As a result of her prolific writing and lecturing on her theory of the evolution of gender relations and women’s need to become socially useful in the larger world of production, she became known worldwide as a feminist theorist and iconoclastic social critic (Vertinsky, 55).

She authored texts such as and *Human Work* in 1904. Her texts approached how women were put into confining roles, and unable to express certain parts of themselves, which robbed society of their contributions. Although she was a relatively well-known writer during her life, she garnered a great posthumous following. Janice Haney-Peritz writes:

In 1973, The Feminist Press bought forth a single volume edition of Charlotte Perkins-Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”, a short story that had previously appeared in the May 1892 issue of *New England Magazine*. Since William Dean Howells included Perkins-Gilman’s story in his 1920 collection of *Great Modern American Stories*, it cannot be said that between 1892 and 1973 “The Yellow Wallpaper” was completely ignored. What can be said, however, is that until 1973, the story’s feminist thrust had gone unremarked: even Howells, who was well aware not only of Perkins-Gilman’s involvement in the women’s movement but also for her preference of writing “with a purpose”, had nothing to say about the provocative feminism of Perkins-Gilman’s text. In the introduction to his 1920 collection, Howell notes the story’s chilling horror and then falls silent (Haney-Peritz, 261).

The text became popular after Perkins-Gilman's death as a feminist text dealing explicitly with the role of women in domestic life, and delivered scathing commentary on the medical practices of the time, as detailed from Perkins-Gilman's own experiences: "'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" then, became a feminist text that indicted the men who were responsible for the narrator's physical confinement and subsequent mental demise" (Bak, 1).

## The Gothic and Female Gothic

Although critics do not always agree on the trends that lead to the Gothic genre, and the dates of its inception, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) was one of the first traditionally Gothic novels. Gothic literature emerged as a sub-genre of Romanticism within both the historical period and literary genre, and enabled writers to infuse Romantic storylines with horror and the supernatural. Perceived as a response to the logical Enlightenment period and its rigid structures, notable works include Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and writers such as Edgar Allan Poe. In more recent times, the Gothic genre has continued and developed into sub-genres such as Steampunk Gothica. Carol Margaret Davison lists some of the characteristics of Gothic literature as: "confinement and rebellion, forbidden desire and 'irrational fear... the distraught heroine, the forbidding mansion, and the powerfully repressive male antagonist" (Davidson 47). An iconic Gothic work such as *Dracula* by Bram Stoker has the eerie setting of Dracula's castle; the supernatural villain of Dracula himself and the three vampire sisters; and the character of Mina as the romantic heroine, who displays autonomy and bravery in the novel while also succumbing to the role of damsel in need of rescuing towards the end of the novel.

Traditional Gothic fiction was generally dominated by more male authors than female authors, but this is probably indicative of the attitudes towards women authors at the time of the 1800s rather than a gendered interest. Authors such as Edgar Allan Poe ('The Fall in the House of Usher', 1839) were proclaimed to be leaders of the field in the 1830s. His female characters can be read as experiencing the Gothic traits of fear and unease more acutely, due to their powerless position as women. "The fear of power embodied in a Gothic romance is a fear not only of supernatural powers but also of social forces so vast and impersonal that they seem to have supernatural strength" (Davison 48). Gothic fiction as a genre allowed for a new type of literary heroine: by departing from realism, Gothic writers (particularly women writers) were able to write female characters who left the domestic sphere completely, and

were shown to portray traits typically reserved for male characters, such as bravery, decisiveness, and the ability to change their situation, sometimes through violence and outward rebellion. This eventually developed into the Female Gothic sub-genre, which allowed female writers to express their fears and displacements about femininity and the role of women within society at the time by veiling it within the Gothic traditions and tropes.

The Gothic not only allows for female characters to move away from typically submissive roles within literature, but also displays typically feminine plots such as a traditional romance or marriage plot as containing a horrifying, imprisoning aspect. Gothic fiction is able to explore how the domestic space, previously lauded as the ideal women should strive for, can be read as a prison, and plays with the idea of exercising limited freedoms within it, and escaping these confining roles and spaces completely. Davison introduces the Female Gothic by saying that it “centres its lens on a young woman’s rite of passage into womanhood and her ambivalent relationship to contemporary domestic ideology, especially the joint institutions of marriage and motherhood” (48).

If one is to examine the text as a Gothic text, then one must explore what makes a text ‘Gothic’: “a Gothic fiction is a fiction that primarily represents fear, the fearful, and the abject” (Cooper 6). In my understandings and writing on the Gothic, particularly the Female Gothic, I align myself with critic Diana Wallace. When trying to formulate what constitutes a Gothic text, Diana Wallace says:

One of the most helpful formulations of the conventions of the Female Gothic is Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman’s identification of the elements which link the Radcliffean mode to the modern Gothic of the 1960s: ‘The image of woman-plus-habitation and the plot of mysterious sexual and supernatural threats in an atmosphere of dynastic mysteries within the habitation has changed little since the eighteenth Century. (16)

Wallace also writes about how the Female Gothic gave women writers a chance to express fears and power struggles that they were not able to write into realist texts, focusing on the correlation between women and hauntings in the home:

‘Vanessa Dickerson’s *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (1996) suggests that women were drawn to the form because ‘the ghost corresponded more particularly to the Victorian woman’s visibility and invisibility, her power and powerlessness, the contradictions and extremes that shaped female culture.’ She argues: ‘It was finally not men’s but women’s ghost stories that truly treated the return of the repressed and the dispossessed; ghost stories could provide a fitting medium for eruptions of female libidinal energy, of thwarted ambitions, of cramped egos.’ 56 (Wallace, 14)

Wallace also writes that the Female Gothic is constantly in a relationship with the past, of memories and hauntings:

The past of the Gothic is closer to that of psychoanalysis: aggressively mobile, prone to return, to irruptions into the present. The past in the Gothic never quite stays dead, and is therefore never fully knowable. This is why Gothic fiction so often seems to demand psychoanalytic interpretations as a way of disinterring the repressed secrets of the past. (Wallace, 4)

Writing on the Female Gothic, however, has its own challenges: critics are not in agreement as to whether the Female Gothic is a genre in its own right, completely separate from the Gothic genre. In *The Female Gothic: Then and Now* Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace discuss the challenges of the genre, stating that initially the term was introduced by Ellen Moers and applied to female-authored Gothic texts. Smith and Wallace explain this by stating:

Moers’ analysis of Female Gothic texts as a coded expression of women’s fears of entrapment within the domestic and within the female body, most terrifyingly experienced in childbirth, was extremely influential. It not only engendered a body of critical work which focused on the ways in which the Female Gothic articulated women’s dissatisfactions with patriarchal society and addressed the problematic position of the maternal within that society, but placed the Gothic at the centre of the female tradition. By the 1990s, however, partly as a result of poststructuralism’s destabilising of the categories of gender, the term was increasingly being qualified

and there has been an ongoing debate as to whether the Female Gothic constitutes a separate literary genre. (Smith and Wallace, 1)

Naturally the contemporary approach towards the Female Gothic, and the approach used within this thesis, is that the Female Gothic negotiates the troubled relationship between women and the domestic, an emerging feminine agency or sexuality, and supernatural or horrifying elements that tie it back into the Gothic tradition.

The texts that will be explored were chosen to be read through the lens of the Female Gothic, while also showing varying representations of domesticity; this way we are able to examine texts spanning from the Nineteenth Century up until 1989, noting that women writers are still producing texts that show the domestic to be imprisoning, and stifling to personal growth and independence. The aim of this thesis is to build upon previous studies of the Female Gothic, incorporating discussion on Magical Realism, the house, parody, and women haunted by their imaginings of other women.

One of the most fertile areas of critical investigation post-1990, however, has been the exploration of the Gothic in twentieth-Century texts by women and, extending the work of Tania Modleski and Joanna Russ on the modern Gothic romance in the 1980s, in popular culture. *Modern Gothic: A Reader* (1996), edited by Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, for instance, included essays on Isak Dinesen, Toni Morrison, Angela Carter and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. (Smith and Wallace, 2)

The texts are connected by their statements that the domestic sphere is unsafe for women, and this fearful sphere shows how the main characters, all women, find that their troubled relationship with the domestic and private spheres leads to a denied fulfilment through madness, death, or repression of agency. This will be explored in four chapters, titled “Chapter One – Medical Authority and Feminine Madness in “The Yellow Wallpaper”” in Chapter One; “Death and Domestic (dis)-Obedience in Rebecca and “The Bloody Chamber”” in Chapter Two, “The Haunting of Hill House: Shirley Jackson’s 1950s Female Gothic” in Chapter Three, and finally “*Like Water for Chocolate*: Infusing Traditional Domestic Imprisonment with Magic Realism and Postmodern Parody” in Chapter Four. In Chapter One, I shall discuss Charlotte Perkins-Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” by examining it through a Foucauldian lens, focusing on the power relationships established

through medical knowledge and discourse that denied women agency over their own bodies. I shall also discuss the possible magical realist aspects of the text where the women in the wallpaper are seen as a supernatural manifestation of emotion; I shall discuss magical realism in detail in Chapter Four. In Chapter Two, I shall discuss the concepts of palimpsesting and the auratic by discussing Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Angela Carter's story, "The Bloody Chamber". In Chapter Three, I shall take Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, taking Hill House as an example of how the Female Gothic constructs fear within the supposed safe space of the house. To end, I will discuss Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, looking at how the domestic is both imprisonment and self-expression for the main character Tita, while discussing the history of magical realism, and the nature of the novel as a parody.

## Chapter One – Medical Authority and Feminine Madness in “The Yellow Wallpaper”

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is the story of a nameless narrator, who tells little about herself before she arrived at the house where the short story is set for her rest-cure. Her husband, a doctor, brings her to the house to ostensibly cure her, although the barred windows, gated passageways, nailed-down bed, and possible restraints in the wall suggest a more sinister purpose. During her time in the house, the narrator is not allowed to partake in any intellectually stimulating activities, and starts to believe that the wallpaper in her room has a woman trapped inside the pattern. She becomes obsessed with freeing this woman, and starts to confuse herself with the woman inside the wallpaper, until the story ends with her freeing the woman and creeping around the room, over the body of her unconscious husband.

She describes herself and her husband John to be “mere ordinary people” (Perkins-Gilman 3) who have managed to rent the house for the summer. She is uneasy about the house from the beginning, saying:

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity – but that would be asking too much of fate! Still, I will proudly declare it has something queer about it. (Perkins-Gilman 3)

J. Lockwood notes:

Because Perkins-Gilman’s women are caught repeating the experiences of their foremothers in complex acts of self-haunting, in her own time these readings may have encouraged female spectators and readers to recognise that they themselves had not entered, to borrow Julia Kristeva’s terminology, linear time, or “the time of history”. (88)

The fact that the house is a “colonial mansion” refers back to a history of oppression that the narrator is still facing during the time of writing, literally haunted by versions of herself in the wallpaper. Within the first few lines of the text, the narrator shows the unequal status of her relationship with John, and how he represses her thoughts and experiences with the dual authority of doctor and husband, both when she expresses an uneasiness about the house-

“John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in a marriage” (Perkins-Gilman 3) – and when speaking about her illness: “John is a physician, and perhaps- (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind-) perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster. You see, he does not believe I am sick!” (Perkins-Gilman 3).

As her husband and doctor, John has the knowledge that gives him the complete authority over his wife’s body, and her own experiences are invalid when he voices his opinions:

“If a physician of high standing, and one’s own husband, assures friends and relatives that there really is nothing wrong the matter with one but a temporary nervous depression - a slight hysterical tendency - then what is one to do?” (3).

Despite not believing that her illness is legitimate, John has prescribed that his wife take a rest cure, a popular solution during the Nineteenth Century for illnesses perceived by the medical community as “women’s illnesses”. She has to hide her struggles with the rest cure from John, for his decisions are absolute because he possesses the medical knowledge that gives him power, and puts her at a disadvantage. As a patient, the narrator has no chance to protest against her treatment because she lacks the knowledge that allows the doctor to be in power; as wife, society has taught her that her voice is less important than that of her husband, and she must submit to his wishes. The narrator struggles against the confinements of the rest cure, and finds that its restricting nature makes her feel worse, as she is denied both expression and agency:

So I take phosphates or phosphites- whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to ‘work’ until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. (Perkins-Gilman 3)

The narrator becomes fascinated by the yellow wallpaper in her room:

...it is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little



distance, they constantly commit suicide- plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions. (Perkins-Gilman 5)

The longer the narrator stays in the room, the more obsessed she becomes with the wallpaper. She begins to read the wallpaper as one reads a text, finding subtleties and oddities within it:

This wallpaper has a kind of subpattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then. But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just so- I can see a strange, provoking formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design. (Perkins-Gilman 8)

The narrator feels she is the only one able to decode the text, saying: "There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will" (Perkins-Gilman 11). She begins to watch the wallpaper at all times of day, looking out for the changes in the pattern as the light changes:

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be" (Perkins-Gilman 13).

"The Yellow Wallpaper" lends itself to many interpretations, as well as through the polarising ideas that the narrator's experiences could be either a Gothic narrative of madness, or a magical realist text. "The Yellow Wallpaper" can be read as a haunting of both the house and the narrator, as well as a gradual erasure of identity that the narrator experiences through her role as both wife and patient, being treated by the rest-cure. The text shows the narrator's - and Perkins-Gilman's - struggle with her own powerlessness under the patriarchal medical system, and her attempt to free the women in the wallpaper is also an attempt to free herself from the physical prison of the house, and her confining roles within it. "The Yellow Wallpaper" confronts fears of imprisonment and of losing control, and contains the disconcerting figure of the house, particularly the nursery with its wallpaper, as a fear-inducing figure within the story.

The text also contains both warden and lover in the form of John. The narrator confides to the reader through her diary— a first-person confiding narration being one of the hallmarks of a

Gothic text— at the risk of being read as a depiction of her descent into madness, where the reader thus aligns their reading of the narrator with her husband-doctor's views.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is an iconic text that draws attention to gender roles within society that were prevalent at the time of its writing, such as the dominant medical discourse and how treatment of illnesses was gendered, and opens itself up as a text to multiple ways of reading. Through the exploration of the expectations for women within the Nineteenth Century, it is possible to see how women were confined by their roles, given limited spaces, and were ultimately robbed of their authority and autonomy by the patriarchal society within England, North America and Europe at the time. Using “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a textual lens, it is possible to see how the gendered treatment of illnesses denied women the expression of their own illnesses, and how detrimental the rest cure was as a treatment.

In the Western Nineteenth Century, women were not given access to the same education that was available for men, and they were not permitted to enter into the public sphere as freely, and without rebuke. Drawing upon “Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’”, Paula Treichler informs the reader about the gender power play within the medical community and body of knowledge. Their limited access to acquiring knowledge, as well as their exclusion from the public sphere, meant that women were not able to partake in the acquisition of knowledge. This meant they were always less powerful than men, who benefited from a patriarchal society that favoured them, creating a bias in the knowledge that was acquired, as it was always positioned from the male point of view. As well as continuing to keep women powerless by denying them a part in the knowledge and power acquisition process, women found that their voices were not heard even in discussions pertaining only to the female experience and understanding of the world (Treichler). This can clearly be seen in the medical discourse of the time, which denied women agency in their own treatments, and invalidating their opinions on these treatments, because they were not seen to be of authority due to their lack of knowledge. “The Yellow Wallpaper” is an interesting text to examine through the Foucauldian lens, as the story explores how a supposedly mentally ill woman was oppressed by her husband and doctor, John, and how this denying of her own voice and experiences leads to the rebellion associated with authoring the text, reading the wallpaper, and her experiences of freeing the women in the wallpaper; her act of freeing the women can be read as madness, or a supernatural event incited by her rebellion, as in magical realism.

When looking at the medical discourse of the Western Nineteenth Century, particularly that involving discussions on women and the female body, it is clear to see how Foucault can be used to understand the power relations between doctor and patient, man and woman:

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. (Foucault 1980)

According to Foucault, access and contribution towards knowledge is based on one's position of power in society. The doctor is given power because of his knowledge, while the patient's own analysis of their illness and body is rejected if it does not conform to the doctor's knowledge. Power is intrinsically linked to knowledge, and the uneducated can never claim the same type of power that is exerted over them. In a situation such as in Western society where men have power over women, there could be more knowledge produced about women, as men have the power imbalance in their favour that allows women to be their subjects, as opposed to focusing mainly on other men, who the researcher may not have power over. Thus people of lesser power, such as women and people of colour are often made the subjects of knowledge production by their male researchers.

The confining nature of the domestic sphere meant women were not only barred from certain areas of society, such as in the creation of art, but also had to deny these impulses within themselves. Actively discouraged from expressing themselves creatively, women's art remained rooted to the domestic space: sewing and embroidery skills were developed, but so that the woman might be able to mend and make clothes for her family; a woman might be encouraged to take up sketching or painting, but the focus would be on still-life and the world she could see around her, and her works might be displayed on the walls of her own home rather than in art galleries. Treichler expands on this, pointing out feminine powerlessness within the patriarchal Western society of the Nineteenth Century: "woman is represented as childlike and dysfunctional. Her complaints are wholly circular, merely confirming the already-spoken patriarchal diagnosis. She is constituted and defined within the patriarchal order of language and destined... to repeat her father's discourse 'without much understanding'" (203). Discouraged from critical and analytical thinking, which was the realm of men, women had to repress these creative yearnings within themselves to fit within

the role of wife and mother, or adapt these skills to the domestic sphere and the morality she was supposed to provide for the home:

[The woman] was to be pious, pure, submissive, and domesticated, for the true woman turned her home into a haven for all that was civilised and spiritual in a materialistic world. The assumption that capitalist men needed a hostage in the home was endorsed by subsequent historians who linked the true cult of womanhood to a shrinkage of political, professional, and business opportunities for women... in this way, the glorification of domestic womanhood became associated with the deterioration of women's public power. (Vickery 384)

The patriarchal nature of Western society in the Nineteenth Century meant that knowledge was produced about women rather than by them. Their own experiences were invalidated by the male researchers who held authority through their knowledge. In this way, the female experience of her own body was shaped by the information she was given by male researchers and doctors. Given authority over the understanding of the female experiences, the men in power who contributed to this knowledge of women were able to define the limits of femininity, thus deciding what was considered normal and abnormal. Treichler discusses diagnosis, stating: "diagnosis is powerful and public... it is a male voice that privileges the rational, the practical, and the observable. It is the voice of male logic and male judgement which dismisses superstition and refuses to see... the narrator's condition as serious" (196). Women were held captive to a form of femininity that made sure they were always below men in power, and pushed them out of the realms of knowledge creation, meaning that the chances of them being able to acquire and contribute towards a body of knowledge was almost impossible. In this way, the Western Nineteenth Century understanding of women, in both biology and society, was determined by men.

Although Nineteenth Century Western society did allow (upper class) women to read and therefore acquire knowledge, their reading was strongly guided by societal norms at the time. Reading for escape was heavily discouraged. Western society, particularly that of Britain and America, thought that if one read for escape, one would lose touch with their daily reality and neglect their physical life due to identification with the characters in the story.

The novel reading habit in particular was identified with a loss of control. Associated with lower appetites, temperance, and corruption, it was seen to foster delusions, indiscriminate

desire, and possible breaking of social boundaries. Carried away by impossible visions represented in “glaring colours”, a reader might lose his or her sense of place, or even self. (Hochman 93)

In contrast to this form of reading, however, is a critical mode of reading, generally applied to non-fiction texts. Reading itself was not prohibited, and was in fact actively encouraged, provided the subject matter was perceived as suitable. Hochman states that “educators, writers, and reviewers, repeatedly differentiated between passive and frivolous reading, and reading that was serious, active, and conducive to self-development” (Hochman, 93). The reader, in this context, was not deemed able to actively read and benefit from reading fiction, generally perceived as escapist, and could rather only apply this critical approach to reading to acceptable texts. “The Yellow Wallpaper” satirises the public depiction of female reading in the Nineteenth Century, toying with the fear that it would ‘corrupt’ women:

“‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” is informed by two contrasting and historically specific images of women reading: isolated, “addicted,” and identifying with a phantom on the one hand; and capable, on the other, of ‘creative appropriations which become the ground of far-reaching ambition (but, at least in Perkins-Gilman’s case, also of keen emotional stress)’ (Hochman 103).

As well as restricting a critical approach to reading to non-fiction books, the practice of reading was strongly engendered. Literary journals of the period repeatedly distinguished the valuable habit of consuming books for “pleasure and improvement” from the kind of reading habit associated with inferior reading material and an inferior reader (often, though not always, a woman)” (Hochman 91). Reading, in this time in North America and Britain, was harshly divided between “superior” and “inferior” texts, generally distinguished by being non-fiction and fiction. When reading, a critical approach was encouraged, and reading for simple enjoyment of a story, or escapism, was discouraged and considered problematic, as the reader might lose their sense of self, and neglect their duties in their actual life. Women, considered less logical and more prone to flights of fancy, as such, were considered more prone to this escapist reading, which could result in their forgetting their place within a heavily patriarchal society.

## Medical- rest cure/suppression of women through medicine

With the context of the time period firmly established, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's depictions of the rest cure fall into sharp relief when read through the lens of her illness and subsequent treatment. In 1886, Perkins-Gilman suffered from severe depression. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is based on Perkins-Gilman's own experiences, including her testimony of both the rest cure and Dr Mitchell. Perkins-Gilman wrote in her diary: "I could not read nor write nor paint nor sew nor talk nor listen to talking nor anything. I lay on that lounge and wept all day" (quoted in Treichler, 199). After coming to the conclusion that the rest cure was worsening her condition, "she left her husband and with her baby went to California to be a writer and a feminist activist" (Treichler 199). Her experiences of the rest cure were so debilitating that she wrote her own doctor into her story; for her, the rest cure was a punishment under the guise of well-meaning. Patricia Vertinsky wrote of Perkins-Gilman's personal experience under Dr Mitchell, who prescribed her the rest cure:

[Dr Mitchell's] immediate diagnosis of Perkins-Gilman's problem was neurasthenia, a disorder first articulated by neurologist George Beard as one 'characterized by attacks of absolute exhaustion, often accompanied by the feeling that the exhaustion is so extreme that one experiences a going-to-die feeling.' (Vertinsky 61)

During this time, she was prescribed the "rest cure", a treatment popular in America, as well as Britain and Europe, created by the renowned Dr Mitchell:

As a physician in Philadelphia [Dr S. Weir Mitchell] conformed to the mores of a highly conservative community, authoritarian in his approach to his patients, and dogmatic in his views about limiting the place and role of women in society... In mapping out his cure for Perkins-Gilman's nervous condition, Dr Mitchell closely reflected the attitudes of establishment male physicians of his era toward emancipating women. (Vertinsky 61)

The rest cure dominated all aspects of daily life, and one could only be released from it by following it exactly. Showing one's unhappiness or frustration with the treatment would be seen as the patient's symptoms acting out. One had to prove themselves meek and submissive, willing to comply with their doctor's every command, in order to re-enter society as a healthy person. And yet, any flare up of strong emotions or ailments could cause the rest

cure to be administered again. However, this treatment was only administered to those of upper society, who could afford to spend months without occupation or distraction. It is also interesting that this treatment was generally given at the home instead of the hospital, allowing those with wealth to keep their medical care within the private sector. According to Foucault, the approach to mental illness has historically sought to cure not only the symptoms and illness, but also stop the patient from repeating behavioural patterns that might allow for future illness:

The therapeutics of madness did not function in the hospital, whose chief concern was to sever or to "correct." And yet in the nonhospital domain, treatment continued to develop throughout the classical period: long cures for madness were elaborated whose aim was not so much to care for the soul as to cure the entire individual, his nervous fiber as well as the course of his imagination. The madman's body was regarded as the visible and solid presence of his disease: whence those physical cures whose meaning was borrowed from a moral perception and a moral therapeutics of the body. (Foucault 158)

Intended to treat women suffering from illnesses labelled under the blanket term of hysteria, this cure involved placing the patient in an environment lacking all stimulation, feeding them a steady diet, making sure they got exercise and lots of rest, and ultimately hiding them away from anything that might trigger strong emotions, both positive and negative. As John Bak writes:

Included in Mitchell's Rest Cure treatment were locking Perkins-Gilman away in his Philadelphia sanitarium for a month, enforcing strict isolation, limiting intellectual stimulation to two hours a day, and forbidding her to touch pen, pencil, or paintbrush ever again. (Bak 1)

Perkins-Gilman's experience of this treatment was distressing, and her status as patient caused her doctors to treat her like a child, dismissing her own observations about her health and body.

Mitchell treated Perkins-Gilman as a dominating and manipulative woman in need of a therapy which might return her to a state of compliance and acceptance with her marital and mothering obligations. (Vertinsky 61)

Perkins-Gilman's experience of the rest cure was highly traumatic, and worsened her depression until she had a nervous break-down:

She was in fact driven to near madness and later claimed to have written "The Yellow Wallpaper" to protest this treatment of women like herself and specifically to address Dr. Weir Mitchell with a "propaganda piece." A copy of the story was actually sent to Mitchell, and although he never replied to Perkins-Gilman personally, he is said to have confessed to a friend that he had changed his treatment of hysterics after reading the story. (Crowder 1)

She only began to recover when she stopped the prescribed treatment of the rest cure, and began to adapt back into a regular routine. Similarly, within "The Yellow Wallpaper", the rest cure worsens the narrator's condition; due to a sheer lack of mental activity that comes from being denied intellectual engagement and expression, the narrator is forced to turn her mind inwards and create her own stimulating world. It is clear when reading "The Yellow Wallpaper" that Perkins-Gilman's own experiences contributed towards her depiction of the narrator in the story, who struggles with the pressures of her roles as wife and mother, as well as the severity of the rest cure.

Women who were perceived as having overactive imaginations and unwomanly traits were classified as "hysterical" within the medical system, which served as a term that covered everything from headaches to depression. As women's minds were suppressed in order to make them fit into a patriarchal society, so too was their experience of their own bodies.

Foucault stresses the idea that power is inextricably linked with truth and knowledge, and due to the nature of the separate spheres of Western society within the Nineteenth Century, this meant that many groups were excluded from the acquisition and strengthening of knowledge. This means that those able to contribute to medical knowledge within this time had the most power within this field:



There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault 93)

Although knowledge may be produced by researchers and scholars, it is refined and made an object of discourse in certain institutions, such as universities, where access is limited to its members. In a society where not everybody could access information easily, and one generally had to have power and wealth to gain access, those who have power are kept in power by limiting the sharing of knowledge to only those they consider their peers. In this way, knowledge and power are kept within the ruling classes, which in the Nineteenth Century Western societies would be the white, upper class men, as women were restricted from studying at university during that time. So not only is knowledge and power kept circulating between those who already have power, but the actual production of knowledge is guided by their interests.

The term “hysteria” was used to classify almost any female ailment, and almost any behaviour could be classified as “hysterical”, and therefore needing treatment that would suppress the patient until the undesired behaviour was altered. In Heather Meek’s writing, she shows how hysteria has been both celebrated and condemned, applied in sacred, secular, and scientific practices:

Throughout its long career, the disorder has been viewed as a manifestation of everything from divine poetic inspiration and satanic possession to female unreason, racial degeneration, and unconscious psychosexual conflict. It has inspired gynecological, humoral, neurological, psychological and sociological formulations, and it has been situated in the womb, the abdomen, the nerves, the ovaries, the mind, the brain, the psyche, and the soul. It has been construed as a physical disease, a mental disorder, a spiritual malady, a behavioral maladjustment, a sociological communication, and as no illness at all ... As Gerard Wajeman has observed, “There doesn’t seem to be anything that medicine hasn’t said about hysteria.” (Meek 2)

Unable to enter the medical field as doctors, Western women in the Nineteenth Century, specifically North American, British, and European women, were limited to positions as

nurses and midwives, and were not given an authoritative voice in medical discourse of the time:

At that time, arguments about women's limited physical and mental capacity and the centrality of the reproductive process for understanding women's bodies increasingly defined medical views of women's health and the productive boundaries of their lives. Ostensibly basing their views on new scientific evidence, influential medical practitioners, many of whom were men, utilized pseudo-scientific theories about the effects of the reproductive life cycle upon women's physical capabilities in order to rationalize the life choices of middle-class women and define limits on their activities. (Vertinsky 62)

The knowledge of women's bodies used by the medical community was, therefore, written on the authority of men. Women were not allowed to contribute towards the academic understanding of their own bodies. They were denied access to knowledge about their experiences of the medical practices of the times, and their opinions of these treatments, even when they were personal accounts, were not taken seriously, and were not allowed to enter into the patriarchal medical discourse at the time. The consequences of that is that any time a woman tried to interrupt the power dynamics of the discourse available, she would be ignored and turned away, in favour of the knowledge base that drew upon the power structure of society at the time. Birgit Spengler's view on the female body is that it has been consistently Othered in science and medical research, which has allowed for male-authored research on the female body, and generalised understandings of sex and gender:

Gender functions as a basic classification to structure the social world of Nineteenth-Century America, and it was particularly women's physical differences that were used to naturalise and perpetuate essentialist concepts of gender. Due its supposed Otherness, the female body became a site of close observation, a place on which differences were supposedly inscribed and allegedly corroborated. Nineteenth-Century discourses about women's health and appropriate cures and treatments clearly demonstrates the consequences of essentialising notions of gender... To note the signs of 'difference' and female 'disease', medical discourses were accompanied by close observation, be it that of a doctor, a husband, or of society at large. (Spengler 39)

Furthermore, because women were seen to be prone to fanciful imaginings, any experience of illness that the women voiced could be overridden by the authority of the male doctor, who could decide whether her experiences were valid or not, according to what he believed about the illness the patient was suffering from, and how he perceived the patient's tendency towards "feminine" traits such as hysteria.

There was a strong increase in social interest in science, biology, and medical discourse in the Nineteenth Century. As Charles Rosenberg writes in *Medicine and Community in Victorian Britain*: "there [was] something of a modest explosion of interest in medicine and health (not always, of course, the same thing) in nineteenth Century England" (Rosenberg 677). As men had more access to learning in academic institutions- and the chance to use their knowledge in careers, law, and politics- medical and scientific progress became more exclusively masculine. "The Yellow Wallpaper" confronts the gender bias of medical discourse at the time. Perkins-Gilman's own experiences are reflected in the story, showing how denying women any intellectual stimulation is detrimental instead of healing. The rest cure seeks to put women in their place, restricting any creative outlet, and restraining them back into the domestic sphere.

Despite the narrator's own longing for intellectual engagement— "[I] am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good" (Perkins-Gilman 3)— which mirrored Perkins-Gilman's own during her prescribed rest period, she is stifled by her husband, John, a doctor, who believes that this longing is symptomatic of her illness, and not a natural intellectual yearning. The medical discourse of the time often reflected the idea that doctors, almost all men, had better insight into women's bodies than women themselves. She is not allowed a voice or an opinion in the matters of her own body, and her own experience of her illness is ruled out in favour of the male doctor. The consequences of this are that women were denied any kind of self-diagnosis, and if their own recollections about their symptoms are considered invalid, then only the male voice, given power through the knowledge of medicine, is the only voice within this discourse:

The diagnosis of hysteria, depression, conventional women's diseases of the Nineteenth Century, sets in motion a therapeutic regimen that involves language in several ways. (Treichler 191)

Perceived as fanciful creatures, unable to control their own emotions and thoughts without the guidance of men, women were assumed to be vulnerable to certain illnesses, and the treatment involved restricting and limiting their engagement with language, and the world around them. Within “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the narrator “suggests that the diagnosis itself, by undermining her own conviction that her “condition” is serious and real, may indeed be one reason why she does not get well” (Treichler 191). Denied a voice within her own diagnosis and experience of her illness, and forced to endure a cure that continues to deny her a voice, as well as pushing her firmly back into the realm of the domestic, the narrator struggles against a medical discourse that will only consider her cured once she conforms to the ideals of a patriarchal society. The focus on the male voice within historical medical records mirrors that of the (English) language used in daily life; due to the power imbalance of the genders, language has been structured to favour the masculine and the masculine voice, and this coded language both excludes and exceptionalises women. This is seen in how language sets up men and masculinity as the norm, making female involvement something labelled and therefore remarkable; alternatively, women are not labelled at all and rendered invisible even in language.

### The Unstable House

The uncertainty of the narrator’s position, the very uncertainty of who is actually narrating the story after a while, the uneasy setting and the tension in the marriage (as well as the distant figure of the baby) are all unsettling, and all in keeping with features of Gothic literature that include space, place, personal space, interior dialogue and questioning perception or point of view.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” contains all of these trademarks. The house itself is ancient, filled with out-of-date fashions, such as the no-longer-fashionable pattern on the wallpaper, which does not fit into the contemporary décor of the narrator’s time. The narrator’s first description of the house mentions its age, and its possible hauntings, although she dismisses these immediately: “Still, I will proudly declare that there is something queer about [the house]. Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?” (Perkins-Gilman 3). The house is linked to the narrator’s relationship with husband and doctor, John, who has power over her and puts her in the nursery, despite her misgivings. Although the house was normally a site where the woman is able to exercise (limited) power for people living in Nineteenth Century Western societies, because the narrator is deemed ill and unable

to perform her duties as wife and mother, John's power extends to the realm of the house. Although the narrator strips the wallpaper off the walls due to seeing the women, it is also a reclaiming of territory— and with it, power— that should belong to her, according to the allocations of the separate spheres, although this in itself unequal.

The narrator is imprisoned within the house, giving the realm of the domestic an ominous feel that enables us to read the text as Female Gothic. Although she believes herself to be a guest, the very architecture of the house alludes to how she could be physically imprisoned, should it be decided that she has crossed the line. John Bak writes:

But this is also a room not unlike that described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), patterned after Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century Panopticon. Originally designed to replace the dark and dank "houses of security" so common throughout England with the bright and salubrious "house of certainty" (Foucault 202), the Panopticon developed into an unscrupulous method of inquisition that perpetuated fear and bred paranoia. Like the room that confines Perkins-Gilman's narrator, the Panopticon proved to be not a utopia for prisoners, mental patients, and schoolboys, but "a cruel, ingenious cage" (Foucault 205) that misjudged human reaction to unabated surveillance. (Bak 1)

If the nursery is to be read as a Panopticon, then the narrator's eventual madness can be understood. One of the advantages for the warden, and disadvantages for the prisoner, within a Panopticon, is that the prisoner never knows if he or she is being observed or not, but understands that the warden could be observing at any time. The eyes that the narrator sees in the wallpaper could be the actual eyes of her wardens, husband John and, to a lesser extent as she is not as directly involved with the narrator's rest cure, Jennie.

During the entire journey, we are reminded of Foucault's description of panopticism's "faceless gaze" with "thousands of eyes posted everywhere" (214). By placing her in this room, John, the narrator's husband, resembles the penal officers of the eighteenth-century psychiatric wards or penitentiaries (Bak 3)

The barred windows, rings on the walls, gated stairs, and nailed-down bed with a chewed woodwork suggests that she is not the first prisoner of the house itself; and the women she

sees trapped inside the wallpaper echo this. The narrator's obsession, however, is with the wallpaper, and not the "rings and things" that allude to physical restraints for the inhabitants of the nursery:

Among all of these external devices of restraint, however, only the yellow wallpaper, the object of surveillance with its "bulbous eyes," has an adverse effect upon her. She can stand the barred windows, as she can look out them and see the arbor or the bay; she is bothered by the immovable bed but gnaws on its leg to free it; and she even remains curiously dispassionate about being shackled with the rings. What she cannot stand, though, is the wallpaper and the panoptic eyes that she imagines are watching her unceasingly. (Bak 3)

Just as she is trapped within the walls of the house, so they (the women) are trapped inside the walls themselves. The narrator does not seem to fear the women inside the wallpaper, and is immediately fascinated by them. She starts to think of freeing them almost as soon as she recognises them to be women, showing sympathy and commiseration for their imprisoned status. John Bak constructs the narrator herself as both prison and prisoner, stating that the woman in the wallpaper is "invariably the narrator herself, trapped inside a Panopticon", and it is only in viewing this woman as imprisoned that she is able to try for her own escape "from the external prison her husband places her in" (Bak 4).

The act of freeing the women in the wallpaper shows how similar she is to them, creeping around the room repeatedly, just as the women did inside the wallpaper. She has become one of these women, or perhaps her status as prisoner has simply been revealed, instead of being hidden by the roles of wife, and mother to a curiously absent baby. Unable to take on the usual responsibilities of wife and mother due to her perceived illness, the narrator's chances to exercise power are far and few between, and she is able to recognise herself in the women in the wallpaper when she understands that she has no control of her situation. Beth Sneider-Rhinegold writes about how the room can be shown not only as a prison, but the narrator's interior, stating that the bedroom is "internalised" and "consciously constructed as interior" as the "absolute antinomy" of everything else" (Sneider-Rhinegold 1).

This bedroom is not only a physical prison, but then also reflects the narrator's interiority, which could account for the events with the wallpaper, which are a manifestation of her

desire to be freed from the rest cure and the domestic sphere, shown physically in the walls of the nursery: her interior.

## An Unequal Marriage

The narrator's relationship with her husband is one which denies her of her own agency and autonomy, especially because of her status as 'sick', and John's role as doctor. Sarah Crowder writes:

He is the natural complement to the narrator's madness and uncontrolled fancy: the character of John is control and "sanity" as defined by Victorian culture and is therefore the narrator's opposite. (1)

It is interesting that the narrator never names herself, although if the text was found it would be obvious to John or Jennie who authored it. This omission is telling: the narrator as wife, patient, and prisoner, does not feel the need to name herself. The only hint at her name is towards the end, when she seems to have become truly mad and when she confronts John, she says "in spite of you and Jane". The narrator's identity, up until the time of her illness, has always been determined according to Western society's views of women, who took on roles that always related back to the man. During her rest cure, she is not able to perform as wife or mother, and her identity flounders: she is a wife, but she is not acting as a wife; she is a mother, but her baby is not with her. Her femininity, always built in contrast to patriarchal views of masculinity, is in question because she is unable to fulfil these roles. Unable to exert these small powers bequeathed to her, unable to identify with the roles of wife and mother, able to only take on the role of patient, the narrator's identity does not seem important to even her. Yet in this way she is also able to access a type of freedom that she never has before, as she is freed from her roles: she bursts out of the restraints of the wallpaper into a wilder form that does not correlate with any part of Victorian society.

John controls her every waking moment, from what she eats and when she sleeps, to what activities she is allowed to partake in, and what she must avoid in order to stop herself thinking certain thoughts. "He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction. I have a schedule prescription for each hour of the day; he takes all care from me, so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more" (Perkins-Gilman 4). In his role as a

doctor and husband, he takes complete control over her, just as she would take control over her infant child if she was not separated from him:

Perhaps because secrecy implies a preoccupation with sexuality, John relegates the narrator to the helplessness and apparent sexlessness of a child, exhausting her of any identity not associated with the bedroom and John's desire for complete mastery and possession of his wife. Secreted away and silenced, the narrator is situated in the juvenile state of the bedroom where John "takes away her ability to communicate. (Sneider-Rhinegold 6)

As other critics have noted, he reduces her to an infant in the way he talks to her, further denying her autonomy and power in the way he addresses her and talks down to her:

John refers to the narrator as his "little girl" and repeatedly coos such phrases as "blessed little goose" or "bless her little heart" when speaking to her, as if these alleged terms of endearment could return his wife to a pre-Oedipal, perhaps even pre-linguistic stage of early childhood development. (Sneider-Rhinegold 7)

This infantilising way of speech shows his complete control over her, just as a parent can control a young child: as doctor, he is able to prescribe lifestyle decisions, and as husband, he enforces it. Just like a child, the narrator has lost the ability to protest or refuse, because her role of patient has rendered her powerless and her voice unimportant: something to be indulged, just like a spoiled child.

As her husband, the narrator is supposed to obey John in all personal decisions; as her doctor, she must obey him in all decisions relating to her own body and mind. She is forced to take on the isolating lifestyle of the rest cure, and she is not given respite from it due to how her doctor even sleeps in the same room as her. The bedroom is no longer a place for her to exert privacy and retreat to for respite, and the walls – and wallpaper- of this room symbolise how she is always trapped within John's commands. Although she may have slight power in her position as mother, and therefore considered to be naturally predisposed to raising a child, their baby is not with them in the house, and thus their shared authority in the joint role of 'parents' is irrelevant.



## Text and Power

As mentioned previously, the first-person narration of the text, and its confiding tone when discussing fearful and supernatural events, is a Gothic trait. Writing her story brings the narrator into a strange dynamic concerning the Foucauldian knowledge and power relations: the narrator writes about herself as a subject of her text, but in doing so makes herself an object that can be claimed through discourse by those benefitting from the knowledge and power dynamic:

There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault, 781)

Denied access to knowledge, or a voice within her own diagnosis and treatment, the narrator is given the power by the creation of her text. The act of authoring her story is the narrator's act of pure rebellion against the rest cure, and the diminished role that the patriarchal society forces upon her as wife, mother, and patient. Her writing is a form of rebellion, although she is not brave enough to risk flouting it in front of her captors, for fear of what would happen if they realised she was not as pliant as they believed. Sneider-Rhinegold argues that in writing, the narrator brings another consciousness into the prison-nursery, which defies the dead status of the paper she is writing on (4). Unable to engage in any other intellectual activity because of the rest cure, even though she feels that returning to her work would be good for her, she resorts to writing secretly within the prison of the nursery. In this sense, the act of writing is not only an act of rebellion, but also an attempt at creating an audience that actually listens to her, instead of indulging her. The narrator is constantly being attended to, but her views are dismissed and her desires written off as whims. She is aware of having to avoid the gaze of her husband and Jennie, and to keep the record of her interior mind hidden from them. The story is punctuated by the arrival of her wardens, John and Jennie. She has to hide her writing when they arrive hide all evidence of her "dead paper" so they do not know that she is rebelling against the rest-cure.

The text is interesting in that the readers do not know when the narrator is writing the story: in the beginning, she describes how she writes at times when she is alone and hidden, but as

the story progresses, this falls away. At the end of the text, she describes how she creeps around the room over the body of her husband, but she does not mention if she is pausing during each rotation to write down her actions, or how the text is being written. It is also possible that the original narrator is not writing the story at all, and that the text could have been picked up and finished by another, unknown writer, perhaps John or one of the women freed from the wallpaper. This makes the reader lose trust in the narrator, not knowing her true identity, and places suspicion on the validity of the account depicted within the narration, situating the text firmly within that of the Gothic and pre-empting Twentieth Century modern writing.

If one reads “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a first-hand account of the narrator’s descent into madness, then one takes John’s beliefs over the narrator’s, and follows the tradition of the male voice taking authority over the female, even in a female-authored text. John would read her experiences with the wallpaper as hallucinations and signs of madness, and if the reader chooses to view the account as a depiction of madness, then the reader is rejecting the narrator’s version of reality and invalidating her experiences in favour of the patriarchal medical approach that John would take. This reading of the text as an account of madness is hinted at in the story, especially when noting the narrator’s environment. The room with the wallpaper is labelled as a nursery, but is ominous from the beginning: the narrator describes how the “windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls” (Perkins-Gilman 5). The barred windows and rings in the wall imply that the previous occupants of the room would want to escape, and could perhaps have been chained to the rings in the walls to prevent them doing harm, or running away. The wallpaper “is stripped off... in great patches all around the head of the bed, as far as I can reach” (Perkins-Gilman 5). While this suggests that the previous occupants may have also been troubled by the wallpaper, the fact that it is stripped off as far as the narrator can reach could mean that the previous occupant was unable to get out of the bed for some reason, perhaps restrained there, and the only attack they could make against the wallpaper was within that narrow reach. The bed itself is “nailed down” (Perkins-Gilman 17), and the narrator cannot shift it- “I tried to lift and push it until I was lame” (18). The previous occupant has made their mark on it: “the bedstead was fairly gnawed!” (17). The room seems to have been attacked: “the floor was scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there” (8). The room the narrator finds herself in seems to have been somewhere where people were locked in, and restrained. It is reasonable to assume that an “ancestral home in the country” (1) was

not used as a prison, but it is likely that the room could have been used as some sort of asylum, and John is taking the narrator to that house, and using that room, in anticipation of her condition worsening. “The ‘rings and things’, although reminiscent of children’s gymnastic equipment, are really the paraphernalia of confinement, like the gate at the head of the stairs, instruments that definitively indicate her imprisonment” (Gilbert and Gubar 146).

If the narrator is going mad, it seems that the rest cure did not help her, but may have delayed the onset of her madness by denying her anything too stimulating and provoking that she could get lost in, as she does the wallpaper. At first her examination of the wallpaper seems the desperate attempt of somebody denied any other stimulation to find some distraction, but slowly her interest in the wallpaper increases, and so her behaviour changes to become alarming, and perhaps indicative of somebody falling into madness. Initially she seems to be suffering from depression, and lies down all the time and cries often. As she becomes more and more absorbed by the wallpaper, she stops sleeping at night so she can watch for any changes, and even entertains violent thoughts about getting rid of it: “I thought seriously of burning the house” (Perkins-Gilman 15). The narrator even claims to have seen the woman in the wallpaper escape when she looks in the windows, although it is likely she is seeing her own reflection. The fact that the narrator only sees this woman out of the windows implies that she is seeing her reflection in the windows, and identifying it as the woman from the wallpaper. She even admits to doing her own ‘creeping’, confiding to the reader that she does her creeping during the day, behind locked doors, when she knows she can be alone. The narrator’s behaviour needs to be hidden from her husband, also her doctor, and she knows that it is not considered normal or healthy. Even so, John seems to suspect something is wrong: “I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me” (Perkins-Gilman, 16). When the narrator starts to peel off the wallpaper, she believes that the woman in the wallpaper is helping her: “I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled” (17). In this statement, the narrator seems to be confusing herself with the woman she believes is in the wallpaper, identifying her actions first as the one out of the wallpaper, and then the woman inside the wallpaper. “No person touches this wallpaper but me- not *alive*” (17) the narrator declares, and lies to Jennie in order to be alone with the wallpaper and the woman she believes is inside it.

The narrator shows herself to be deceptive and manipulative where the wallpaper is concerned, lying to Jennie and locking herself inside the room with rope intended to restrain

the woman inside the wallpaper. She seems to be brimming with violent emotions, appearing angry and manic, and even thinking of suicide. She still perceives her reflection as a creeping woman: “I don’t like to *look* out of the windows even- there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of the wallpaper as I did?” (Perkins-Gilman 18). The narrator not only falsely identifies her reflection as a separate person, but also believes that she was once a part of the wallpaper.

She seems to inhabit two identities: the previous prisoner of the wallpaper, and the liberator of the woman inside the wallpaper, and she seems unable to separate her past and experiences as not rooted to the wallpaper. She has tied herself up with rope: “I am securely fastened now with my well-hidden rope- you don’t get *me* out in the road there!” (Perkins-Gilman 18). Again, she believes that she is the woman who came out of the wallpaper: “I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it is dark, and that is hard! It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!” (18). The narrator’s seamless switch from identifying as the woman outside the wallpaper, to one who was previously trapped behind it, is uncanny and disturbing, especially considering that the writing of the story is unspecified, and the reader already has doubts about whether the woman in the wallpaper has taken over the writing of the text. The narrator continues this creeping behaviour repeatedly, creeping round and round the room: “I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way” (18). In fact, along with the question of which human is writing the story, there is also a suggestion, in the creeping movements, of the animalesque:

This may be an identification with animal behavior or a way to explain that both characters have lost touch with civilization or the patriarchy. However, as King and Morris add, it may simply be an expression of the narrator’s “self-suppression,” a suppression carried to the point of regression: the narrator ends the story sleeping most of the day and creeping around a nursery room like an infant. (Crowder 3)

The narrator implies disorientation, as if she believes that if she were to stop creeping, something bad would happen. It is alarming that the wallpaper has that “long smooch”, as it implies that the creeping behaviour has worn the wallpaper down in that one area after many rotations around the room, as if the narrator had been creeping around the room in her delusions for hours and hours. The climax of the story, and the narrator’s madness, is when she chooses to no longer hide her behaviour from her husband-doctor John. When he finally

gets into the locked room, she continues to creep around the room in the same way, saying to him: "I've got out at last," said I, 'in spite of you and Jane? And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!'" (Perkins-Gilman 19). The sight of his wife creeping around the room, latched against the wallpaper, and presumably anchored in some way to the bed with the rope, as well as declaring her persona of the woman within the wallpaper, and forgetting Jennie's name, causes her husband to faint. Alarming, the narrator continues to creep over his body. It is a spectacular, disorienting image at the end of the story, worthy of critical attention devoted to its multiple possible meanings, as discussed by Beverly Hume:

When John is finally made aware of the severity of his wife's "disorder," he reacts by "fainting," altering his conventional role as a soothing, masculine figure to that of a stereotypically weak Nineteenth-Century female. To intensify the irony of his transformation, Perkins-Gilman has her narrator aggressively express her annoyance that John has fainted since she now has to run "right over him." He is now in the way of her "creeping," an activity she earlier attributed to the woman in the wallpaper, an activity that seems not only subversive, but also undefined, repetitive, and comical--or to use Henri Bergson's words, like "something mechanical encrusted onto the living". (Hume 477)

John's original decision to house his wife in the room seems to suggest that he believes her to be more ill than he lets on, considering the room could have previously been an asylum for mentally ill patients, although she labels it the nursery. It is interesting to note that her child is not with her, and not often mentioned except in vague references such as: "it is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby! And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous" (Perkins-Gilman 6), and "there's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper" (10). It can be assumed that the narrator is perhaps suffering from a form of postnatal depression, hence her removal from the baby, and the trip to the countryside is part of her treatment. The narrator herself occupies the nursery, notably due to John's infantilising treatment of her in his authority over her eating and sleeping patterns, and he indulges her like a spoiled child with dismissals like "she shall be as sick as she wants!" (15) and calling her "my silly goose" (12).

Wolter places importance on the nursery as the setting for the conclusion, stating: "she behaves like the child her husband has always seen in her: she crawls around like an infant, firmly controlled by an umbilical cord that keeps her in place" (Wolter 205). The narrator's

sanity deteriorates throughout the story, when she becomes obsessed with reading the wallpaper, and then believing that there is a woman behind it that she needs to set free, and finally believing that she is both the woman outside the wallpaper and within it.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” can be read as an account of madness, where the rest cure fails dramatically, and the narrator’s true madness is revealed to her husband at the end of the story, where she rejects her identity and truly believes she is a part of the wallpaper. The narrator, imprisoned within the domestic space of the home, specifically in a room labelled the nursery, although her child is not with her, and denied all distraction through the rest cure, believes herself to actually be a part of the house itself. Because of the nature of a woman’s confinement to the private sphere, the house itself became the primary setting of her life. Although she was given power within the home in order to keep it running, and maybe authority over children, or servants if she was of the upper-classes and able to afford it, the home was ultimately a prison made comfortable, as she was not given the luxury of being able to come and go as she pleased, if she was lucky enough not to have to work for a living. Gloria Duran writes:

...the human unconscious is strongly attracted to dwelling places that both mystical tradition and modern psychology compare to the womb. The house replaces the mother as refuge and sanctuary. Castles and mansions, however, are often false sanctuaries, particularly in Gothic novels. (Duran 10)

The house in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is definitely a false sanctuary, and the narrator does not even have the delusion of authority within her own home, as she is denied the opportunity to redecorate, and remove the wallpaper as she wishes. Constrained to the private sphere by attitudes towards gender at the time, the narrator is not even able to fully consider the house within the text a home, even though she mostly ignores the architecture of imprisonment within the house. This sense of un-belonging is inherited, speaking to centuries of women who were repressed and denied autonomy and influence even within their own home and family. This interruption of agency is part of the Female Gothic, and it seeps into the troubled relationship of women and houses when they are forced into the domestic sphere and taught that they are objects owned by men— the house cannot be a refuge if it is simultaneously a prison.

## Reading Magic: madness and/or un-reality

If “The Yellow Wallpaper” is to be read as a magical realist text, then the narrator’s account of her experiences are real, and not a descent into madness. By examining the text through the lens of magical realism, I challenge Sarah Crowder’s claim that “the story cannot be viewed in purely supernatural terms, with a real phantom behind the wallpaper; thus the narrator’s madness is undeniable” (Crowder 3). Magical realism obfuscates the lines between what the reader perceives as real and un-real— events could be interpreted as supernatural, or just the imagination of the character. In “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the narrator’s experience of the woman in the wallpaper is often read as madness, although I argue that it can be construed as magical realism, which could explain John’s fainting when he opens the door in the conclusion of the story. Jeanne Delbaere-Garant describes a form of magical realism that she labels “psychic realism”, which she says is “a physical manifestation of what takes place inside the psyche” (255). This is useful when examining “The Yellow Wallpaper”, because the events that occur to the narrator could be read as supernatural events triggered by her rebellion against her rest cure; her act of *writing* the story is explained as a rebellious act from the beginning, and the simple act of recording her story shows that even though the narrator eats what she is told to, and takes air when she is advised to, she is rebelling against the rest cure, which seeks to erase her autonomy and intellectual desires, until she fits safely back into the female domestic sphere. The trapped women in the wallpaper become physical manifestations of her feelings of entrapment and oppression, and try to escape the wallpaper just as she longs to escape the rest-cure, and the oppressive patriarchal system that has her bound so fiercely. Similar examples of this are within the genre of magical realism, which shall be explored in detail later, where emotional events can trigger moments of absolute power over others, such as in Lauren Esquivel’s *Like Water For Chocolate*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. The obsession with the wallpaper (and her recording of these events) is the only outlet available to her, and interestingly she does not try to run away from the nursery or the house, but rather invites John inside to witness the manifestations of the prison he has created for her. These women freed from the wallpaper do not try run away into the countryside, but seem to yearn instead for acknowledgement from the captor. Crowder writes on the women in the wallpaper, noting how they are without purpose after their freedom is achieved:

Since the narrator had seen the pattern as bars with the creeping figure behind them, perhaps this statement may allude to an eventual return to a societal norm of behavior—Jane, the narrator, may get back behind the bars of Victorian womanhood, but ‘that is hard!’”

Once they are free, the freed women do not seem to have an idea of what to do next, and remain inside the nursery, still surrounded by the wallpaper. (9)

“The Yellow Wallpaper” plays with the societal expectations for women’s reading and domestic activities, combining the two so that the narrator reads the walls of her prison. “The narrator does transform what she refers to as “dead paper” into a powerful narrative that engages the symbolic significance of the wallpaper” (Sneider-Rhinegold 3). The narrator’s reading of the wallpaper challenges the idea of what constitutes a text, and the idea that a woman will be ‘safe’ if she reads a text pertaining to the domestic sphere. The wallpaper, although part of domestic life, is not a ‘safe’ text, and the narrator is able to lose herself within it. The story actively rejects the idea that denying one a creative outlet will lead from madness to sanity, as it is the sheer lack of mental stimulation that causes the wallpaper to become such an absorbing text within the story. In “The Yellow Wallpaper: the Ambivalence of Changing Discourses”, Jürgen Wolter explores multiple sources that claimed that the Nineteenth Century interior fashion of using wallpaper could actually be detrimental to the mental state, as well as the physical healing process:

A 1904 article asserted that “in hundreds and hundreds of cases the sufferings of the sick are aggravated by the surroundings which they themselves have unwittingly chosen for the altogether opposite purpose of decoration (Vallance, 225). In 1883, Robert W. Edis found the “endless multiplications and monotony of strongly marked patterns” to be “a source of infinite torture [...] in times of sickness and sleeplessness” (qtd in Lutz 230). Marty Roth quotes Susan Carter, who in 1893 declared that wallpaper “to many a nervous invalid renders his hours intolerable as he counts and combines over and over again the meaningless recurrence of a marked angle or curve, or the ever-repeated tiresome convolvulus” (149). Moreover, critics of wallpaper pointed out that the colour of wallpaper could also affect the mental health of people; according to Jan Jennings, interior designer Candace Wheeler suggested that “if totally disregarded or ignorantly dealt with, [colour] is able to introduce an element of unrest, to refuse healing to tired nerves or overtasked energies, to stir up



anger and malice, and all unseen enemies that lie in wait for victims of weakness and fatigue” (256).

Within “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the rest cure worsens the narrator’s condition; due to a sheer lack of mental activity, she is forced to turn her mind inwards and create her own stimulating world. However, the story does echo the idea that certain forms of reading can have devastating consequences. ““The Yellow Wallpaper” reflects the destructive consequences of solitary reading for purposes of escape and for the vicarious satisfactions of identification and merger. (Hochman, 103)

The narrator’s obsessive reading of the wallpaper rejects the idea of women being safe when engaging with the domestic sphere. The narrator’s writing of her own experiences is her only way to authenticate them, as John and Jennie would laugh at her, and make her doubt herself. She knows that this act of writing is forbidden by John, and could be detrimental to her recovery, but she persists.

By self-consciously defining her narrative as a rebellious work that is unified by a central grotesque image, the narrator not only reveals her unconscious awareness of her fictive design, but also leads her readers toward an understanding both of the terror and dark amusement she feels as she confronts herself--a prisoner inside the yellow wallpaper, an unsavoury social text created and sustained not only by men like John, but by women like Jennie, and, most horribly, herself. (Hume 478)

Hume raises an interesting point: how much was the narrator responsible for her own disposition? If the women in the wallpaper are figures of her own imagination, then did her rebellious writing trigger this episode? This writing of the text becomes strange when the narrator no longer mentions how she is writing during a specific time of day, as she previously mentioned she was writing in her diary, but at some point this falls away, and the story continues to be told even after she becomes one of the women in the wallpaper, creeping around the room. The continuation of the text then becomes something sinister, for just as the narrator perceives herself to be both inside and outside the wallpaper, she is dually writing her actions, and living them. In her act of reading the wallpaper, the narrator becomes absorbed into the story: ““Readers have to be considered producers, not just receivers, of the text” (Thiem 241). In this, the textualisation of the reader is more than just a metaphor: the

reader of the wallpaper loses herself within the text, believing she was always trapped within the wallpaper, and lamenting the fact that she will eventually have to return: “and that is hard!”. The reader of the wallpaper loses her sense of self and her ‘duties’ as both a wife and a patient, so obsessed is she with this strange text that only she seems to be able to read, although both John and Jennie seem to be curious about it. Jon Thiem writes:

But the textualisation of the ludic or naïve reader is paradoxical. For it is as much the reader’s detachment from, as his or her involvement in, the world of the text that enables the feeling of pleasure. Not being literally in the text permits the reader to enjoy the exciting and dangerous fictional world without having to suffer the consequences of living in this world. Upon this delicate balance between detachment and identification rests the tradition apologia for fiction reading: through it we gain experience without having to undergo the suffering and anxiety that actual experience in the extratextual world entails. In textualisation this balance is upset. The world of the text loses its literal impenetrability. The reader loses that minimal detachment that keeps him or her out of the world of the text. The reader, in short, ceases to be reader, ceases to be invulnerable, comfortable in his or her armchair, and safely detached, and becomes instead an actor, an agent in the fictional world. (239)

In her act of rebellion against the rest-cure, the narrator searches desperately for something to occupy her mind. She focuses on the wallpaper, and reads it as a text. This desperation and rebellion can be seen as an incitement of magical realist events, where the act of reading the wallpaper causes the literal textualisation of the narrator into the wallpaper itself:

Textualisation fables tend to make readers more conscious of the act of reading itself. Thus a textualisation is a magical realist topos which includes a pronounced metafictional dimension. As such, textualisation explicitly raises in the reader’s mind the following questions: what is the ontological basis, if any, of a fictional world? What is the fictional basis of the extratextual world? What is the reader’s role in constituting both worlds? (Thiem 240)

The reader of “The Yellow Wallpaper” becomes conscious of reading a text about reading when the narrator begins to view the wallpaper as a text to be read, instead of viewing it as an annoying décor item. Just as the reader of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is drawn into the story,

the narrator is drawn into the text of the wallpaper. The possibility of magic or the surreal is again inferred by Thiem:

A textualisation is, in a sense, a magical literalization of a common metaphor used to describe one effect of reading, that is, “total absorption” in the story. (240)

The strange events points to another manifestation of the narrator’s emotions, and if viewed through a magical realist lens, the text allows for the allure and power of the wallpaper to become something supernatural triggered by the narrator’s excessive emotion during the time of her rest cure, and her inability to express them due to the restrictions of the rest cure. As the narrator is reading the text, she is giving it meaning, which in turn gives the power for it to become real. Because of the ambiguous nature of the ending where the reader does not know whether John fainted, an action usually reserved to show feminine weakness, especially within Gothic texts, at the sight of his wife or at the sight of the woman from the wallpaper. It raises the question of who is authoring the text at the point where the narrator is not narrating herself writing and reflecting, but rather crawling around the room, a magical realist reading is enticing in that it fits within the tradition of magic responding to oppressed women within the literary canon.

It is interesting, then, to think of how readers of “The Yellow Wallpaper” itself also become absorbed in her story. Just as the narrator pours over her own text, seeing women trapped inside, so is the reader (and critic) of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, if they read it as a feminist text alluding to the oppression of women within Nineteenth Century western society. Already suspicious of a narrator that could either be going mad, or a false narration actually written by an unknown author under the guise of the narrator, the reader finds that the text and the narrator are separated due to the narrator’s unreliable status.

It is possible to read “The Yellow Wallpaper” as an act of rebellion, as it is written in secret up until the last moments of the story. This is the narrator’s way of rebelling against her role as the meek wife, the new mother, and the patient. Unable to find peace when confined to the domestic space, and left with no distractions other than her own mind, the narrator begins to examine the space she is confined within, reading the wallpaper as a text, as she is unable to access anything else. In this moment, she starts actively examining her prison, both the walls around her and the roles she inhabits as wife and patient. The coming-to-life of the wallpaper,

then, could be read as a type of magical realism, invoked by her rebellion against the spaces and roles she is confined within. The wallpaper's activities are noticed by John and Jennie, too: "I have watched John when he didn't know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times looking at the paper! And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once" (Perkins-Gilman 13). This shows that the narrator is not the only person able to see the changing pattern of the wallpaper, and perhaps the woman behind it, although the reader is only able to access the narrator's point of view. If the wallpaper does indeed come to life, then it is understandable that John faints at the end: perhaps he is able to see the woman who was in the wallpaper, as well as his wife.

## Chapter Two – Death and Domestic (dis)-Obedience in *Rebecca* and “The Bloody Chamber”

In Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, an unnamed narrator falls in love with a rich man while she works as a professional companion for a rich older woman. The romance frees her from her work and social status as her new husband is Maxim de Winter, heir to the Manderley Estate; the narrator was obsessed with the house as a child, and her dreams seem to be coming full circle. It is only when she is within Manderley that she begins to understand the legacy that came before her in the form of Maxim’s previous wife Rebecca, who gives the novel its title. She begins to obsess about Rebecca, convinced that she is not as worthy of her position within Manderley, or Maxim’s love, in comparison to Rebecca. When Rebecca’s body is found, a court case begins to investigate her cause of death, and the narrator chooses to remain with Maxim after finding out he killed Rebecca. In Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber”, a poor girl arrives at her new husband’s castle, only to be left alone within it while he is on business. She explores the castle and discovers the bodies of his previous wives, and it seems that he has murdered them to satisfy a dark desire. Her husband returns unexpectedly and makes an attempt on her life, and with the help of the piano-tuner and the narrator’s mother, the narrator survives and the Marquis is killed.

Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* and Angela Carter’s short story “The Bloody Chamber” bear similar characteristics: both feature sprawling ancestral homes, murderous husbands and young new wives battling to establish an identity that can transcend the shadow cast by the dead previous wives, especially in fictional representations of a world where women are not granted much power as they are subject to the separate spheres of society. The power allocated to them through the system of separate spheres of control for men and women is power over the private sphere, which is the running of the household. However, these women find their power diminished and disrupted by their husbands’ pasts. The pattern of constant engagement with their imaginings of the past disrupts their feeling of homeliness within the home and, as a result, their safe spaces are compromised. This prevents them from asserting themselves over their new roles and environments as new wives in advantageous marriages.

The spectres of the past further alienate the women characters in these two specific texts and suppress their autonomy and identity within their new roles of wife and mistress of the house. The Marquis’ castle and the Manderley estate are scenes of both disrupted belonging and

trauma. The nameless narrators take up their own hauntings of the houses, as they are unable to step into their new roles, although these hauntings are not as persistent and prominent as those of the previous wives. The two texts allow an examination of how the upper-class woman's identity is linked to the house she resides in, especially in situations where the new wives are also new to such opulent wealth and inheritance. Interrupted and troubled are their emergences into these new due to their murderous or suspect husbands. It is also interesting to note how the houses invade the narratives, foreshadowing sinister events and characters.

In both texts the main female characters are ghosted by the women who came before them, summoning them in their own imaginings of these 'successful' wives, as well as assembling mental pictures of them according to scraps of conversation gathered from whoever would drop clues. Diana Wallace's discussions on the Female Gothic functions likens the form to a ghost story where women are erased from a masculine-authored history, and the Female Gothic presents the anxieties women face within patriarchal structures:

The ghost story as a form has allowed women writers special kinds of freedom, not merely to include the fantastic and the supernatural, but also to offer critiques of male power and sexuality which are often more radical than those in more realist genres... The Female Gothic is perhaps par excellence the mode within which women writers have been able to explore deep-rooted female fears about women's powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy, and the *déréliction* (to borrow Luce Irigaray's term) which is the result of their exclusion or abandonment outside the symbolic order. This state of *déréliction* renders women ghost-like: they are 'nowhere . . . never in touch with each other, lost in the air like ghosts. (57)

In the two texts focused on in this chapter, *Rebecca* and "The Bloody Chamber", two young women marry into ancestral homes as young brides of rich, powerful men. Both stories toy with typically Gothic elements of the house, the wives' hauntings, and the threat of the husband's secrets. The husbands – Maxim de Winter and the Marquis – bear the privilege that accompanies extreme wealth; both are able to commit murder and avoid legal persecution. Their dead wives have more of a voice than their living ones, both within their households and often within the new wives' narratives, and the nameless narrators of both stories are constantly contrasting and comparing themselves against the previous wives, whom the narrators classify as more in control, more sexual, more loved. In all aspects, the

narrators declare that the previous wives are “more”, constantly casting doubt on their own position as wife and mistress. These women are attacked by a sense of being “less”, as they do not feel able to step into the authority figure of the mistress of the house. The separate spheres, means they have very little power over anything in their lives at all, as a result of their husbands’ legal authority over them. Such authority is constantly reinforced by a patriarchal society that reduces women to objects and acquisitions as wives and mothers. Continuing with a description of how women both read and read themselves *into* the Gothic, Diana Wallace writes:

The Gothic works as a ‘mode of history’ that has had particular attractions and importance for women writers. Women writers have used Gothic historical fiction with its obsession with inheritance, lost heirs and illegitimate offspring, to explore the way in which the ‘female line’ has been erased in ‘History’. The very literariness of the Gothic, its repetition of, and play with, obviously stylised generic conventions, draws attention to its own constructedness, makes it, indeed, a kind of metafiction. (5)

Daphne du Maurier and Angela Carter tell stories that we, as readers, are familiar with. The Bluebeard tale that “The Bloody Chamber” is based on is a frame that many other texts are based on; these texts allow the familiar archetypes to be reinvigorated through the lens of the feminine. The Bluebeard tale, made famous by Charles Perrault, tells the story of a powerful man looking for a new bride, as his many previous wives have mysteriously disappeared. When his new bride arrives at the castle, she is given a set of keys, and instructions not to enter one particular room. Her husband tells her he has to leave on business, and when he leaves, she enters the forbidden room, which holds the corpses of the previous wives. Horrified, she drops the keys in the blood on the floor and runs out of the room. She tells her sisters about the dead wives. Her husband sees the keys on his return and confronts her. Just as he is about to kill her, her family arrives and kills Bluebeard, leaving her safe and rich with her husband’s estate. In fact, both *Rebecca* and “The Bloody Chamber” can be read as Bluebeard-esque tales: Carter’s reworked text stays close to the original tale while pointing towards its feminist retelling, changing just the ending in accordance with that framework, while *Rebecca* deviates from the original in that the unnamed narrator stays in love with her husband after finding out about his murder of his previous wife, and that the dead wife in this version is given more agency and power, eclipsing the narrator even in her own imagination. Bonicci identifies Carter’s penchant for re-writing canonical folk and fairy tales:

Carter is perhaps right when she says that there are affinities between her work and Gabriel García Márquez's magic realism. In some of her works, as in the short stories under analysis, Carter's reality itself is magical and actually brings into effect the subversion of the fairy-tales' original themes. (9)

Carter's rewriting of the familiar tales allows for a modern story that still holds the perils belonging to fairy tales: there are heroes and villains, and all while the world is navigated by a strange moral compass that dictates who will survive according to who is telling the story. Angela Carter's short stories often take the form of rewritten fairy tales: in her short story collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, she has adapted familiar stories such as Beauty and the Beast, Puss in Boots, the story of the Erl-king, the Snow Child, and Little Red Riding Hood. The use of established tropes allows the characters' interiority to become the area of focus as opposed to the setting or villain, and this brings the depiction of the heroine's mind into the forefront of these texts so that the reader is engaging intimately with characters that have been written off as love interests or damsels in distress in the previous familiar stories that these texts build upon.

In both *Rebecca* and "The Bloody Chamber", the current wives can lay claim to massive wealth and estates through their marriages, and theoretically can command the respective households that accompany their new houses: this is the power granted to them by their status as wife. The two texts are more than simply similar Gothic stories that read well together, which is why it is worth examining them as a unit. Both of these texts examine the idea of female inheritance through marriage, particularly the inheritance of the young almost-child bride, focusing on how the women inherit an estate, servants, and a legacy they were not born into. While this would have happened often within the Nineteenth Century, these twentieth-century texts are interesting because they show how the narrators come into their own, stepping out of their cocoons to become wives, women who are growing sexually, forced to confront the violence and horror of their husbands' pasts. While other texts such as *Jane Eyre* also deal with similar ideas of previous wives, *Rebecca* and "The Bloody Chamber" find that their protagonists' assimilations into their husbands' households are constantly disrupted by the previous wives, and thus their feeling of homeliness is repeatedly interrupted. In *Rebecca* it is a psychological interruption, and in "The Bloody Chamber" it is a very literal interruption of the space of the home.



In fact, in *Rebecca*, there is a possible case of questioning what exactly the nameless narrator inherits. Her predecessor was the first *wedded* inheritor and, along with the legacy of Manderley and having to be the “woman of the house”, the narrator also has to make do with the more challenging heirlooms left behind by Rebecca, namely Rebecca’s supposed legacy of being a sophisticated mistress of the house and also the other side to that identity, the home-wrecker. At one point, it bears considering that Manderley itself, the keystone of Maxim’s paternal inheritance and family lineage, would have been taken from Maxim’s control by Rebecca’s affair with Favell:

The first secret revealed at Manderley, then, is that Maxim murdered his first wife not because her infidelity broke his heart, but because it threatened the integrity of the paternal line: had she really been pregnant by Favell, both Manderley and the de Winter name would have passed to someone else's child, not his own. (Horner and Zlosnik 106)

These texts allow the figure of the home to become a central character within the story and examines the process of *becoming* at home within a strange place, exposing how we read a house in a normal context when all is well, and how our reading of the same house changes when the element of fear and traditionally Gothic elements are introduced. By understanding how one reads the home, we can then apply this to the texts and understand how one reads the Gothic house— for the Gothic house is not a place one can label as a ‘home’ as one is not truly at ease— and understands the feeling of homeliness in the face of fear and unsettlement. By using *Rebecca* and “The Bloody Chamber” as examples, it is possible to delve into two notable literary explorations of female inheritance through marriage in Western society in the twentieth century, and focus on how this is represented as a form of coming of age for the young wives who evolve from girls to women through exploring their new wealth, property, and sexuality. All they are rewarded with is the futility of feeling at home in a house that challenges their long-held notions of homeliness.

In both *Rebecca* and “The Bloody Chamber”, the nameless main characters inherit the memory of their husbands’ past wives and struggle to step into their new domestic role because of their intrusive perceptions of the previous wives. The new Mrs de Winter has to find a way to assert her own identity over the overwhelming echo of Rebecca, who is

regularly raised from the grave by the second Mrs de Winter's imaginings, as well as in conversations with family, friends, and the household servants. The narrator of "The Bloody Chamber" encounters the previous wives in a far more physical sense when she finds their bodies in the locked room of the house and becomes aware that her husband plans for her to join his collection of corpses.

Both these narrators find themselves battling with the histories and traditions of the houses they occupy. While the house and estates were generally inherited by male heirs in the Nineteenth Century, their wives inherited the legacy of the family and the traditions that accompany it:

... [women] could not, among other things, vote, own property, enter into legal contracts, gain custody of their children, study for a degree, or qualify for any profession... While women gradually gained more rights and freedoms towards the end of the Nineteenth Century, "the appearance of what was known as the New Woman was still controversial and, at worst, she was regarded as a sign of the imminent collapse of society. (Warwick 152)

The second Mrs de Winter regularly battles to assert her own authority as a wife, which technically gives her power over the running of the household. Instead, she hands this authority over to Mrs Danvers, the housekeeper, who runs the house in the exact way that Rebecca did before her death. Insecure in her position, the second Mrs de Winter is too afraid to challenge the traditions that have dominated the household, and only really begins to find her voice when she learns that Maxim did not love Rebecca, and murdered her. Secure in her position as Maxim's only love, she is able to shed her feelings of insecurity and doubt.

Although the texts focus on the past wives' story, especially in *Rebecca*, these women are voiceless within the text. Their stories are told by the new wives; Rebecca is represented through her murderer and his new wife, who knows only what he tells her of his dead wife. The depictions of Rebecca by Mrs Danvers and other characters depicting Rebecca as a charismatic and bright person are overshadowed by Maxim's later insistence that Rebecca was cruel and cold. The depiction of Rebecca may not be accurate, stemming as it does from the biased information given to the second Mrs de Winter by Rebecca's murderer, and the reader is not sure if Rebecca is represented fairly. The narrator in "The Bloody Chamber" is

also nameless, although Carter depicts the characters by their descriptors ‘the Marquis’, ‘my mother’, ‘the piano-tuner’, whereas in *Rebecca* the second Mrs de Winter is the only main character unnamed. In “The Bloody Chamber”, the past wives are generally voiceless, with only rumour available to give information about them, and their bodies to provide proof of their final moments. They, like Rebecca, are voiceless in their own stories.

### The House as Part of the Marriage Transaction

Above all things, a house is supposed to be a place of shelter. The inhabitants should be safe from the outside world, able to move from the public sphere into the private when crossing the threshold of the house. To be clear, the type of house discussed here is, as Joe Moran writes, “a particular kind of Euro-American settlement, made of brick or stone, with a rectangular structure which allows it to be divided into separate rooms connected by stairs and hallways” (Moran 29). In Western societies during the Nineteenth Century, a woman’s status would shift from being a secondary citizen with lesser rights and power than her husband, father, and male relatives to being able to exert power and authority over the spaces within the house when she entered her own front door. In *Psychology of the House*, Olivier Marc writes that “[to] build a house is to create an area of peace, calm and security, a replica of our mother’s womb, where we can leave the world and listen to our own rhythm; it is to create a place of our very own, safe from danger” (Marc 14).

Within the house, the physical needs for shelter, warmth and hunger should be addressed. In the Nineteenth Century, the house was not necessarily a place for work, unlike the home offices that proliferate in modern times. In the early-to-mid twentieth Century, in which *Rebecca* and “The Bloody Chamber” are set, the house is still part of the Nineteenth-Century tradition where the house is synonymous with the upper-class family’s wealth and position in society. In these situations, the house served not only as a place of private residence but also as a showpiece for the family’s wealth: where extravagant parties would be thrown with many expensive guests and facilitated networking within the home. In *Rebecca*, Manderley is considered so grand and such a landmark that it is regularly open to the public: “[The room] is used still on great occasions, such as a big dinner, or a ball. And the public are admitted here, you know, once a week” (du Maurier, 78). The nameless narrator also remembers buying a postcard with a picture of the house when she was younger: “I thought of a picture

postcard I had bought once at a village shop, when on holiday as a child in the West Country. It was the painting of a house... Manderley” (du Maurier 24).

In a sense, the narrator enters into the postcard of her youth but considers herself a pale facsimile of the kind of woman needed to run the house, or what she imagines such a person ought to be. The novel’s famous opening line, “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again”, posits the house as a dream-space, which is what it is at this point in the narrator’s story. But the dream-space also pre-empts the almost surreal nature of the space itself later in the text. Manderley is auratic, existing within the private and public imagination by word of mouth, much the same way Rebecca exists to the narrator. It is a place marriage is the gateway to yet it is divorced from reality:

In *Rebecca*, the approach to the house is constantly linked with entrance into a dark world of forests such that Manderley itself comes to be associated with magic, remoteness and, metaphorically, with entry into the unconscious [...] Further references in the novel to myth and fairy tale continue to dislocate expectations of realism that the text seems to set up elsewhere. For example, the valley of salmon, white and gold rhododendrons and azaleas, which leads down to the beach is known as the “Happy Valley;” this spot, which casts its 'spell' over the narrator and which is perceived by her as 'the core of Manderley... Manderley figures as both a 'real' house and the stuff of dreams: 'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again'. 'Cornwall', too, functions both as a 'real' place and as a romanticised, Gothic space, the location of Manderley echoing the peripheral siting of Cornwall itself as a potentially wild and ungovernable area. (Horner and Zlosnik 101)

In “The Bloody Chamber”, the narrator is awed by the Marquis’ castle, describing it in glowing terms:

And, ah! his castle. The faery solitude of the place; with its turrets of misty blue, its courtyard, its spiked gate, his castle that lay on the very bosom of the sea with seabirds mewing about its attics, the casements opening on to the green and purple, evanescent departures of the ocean, cut off by the tide from land for half a day [...] that castle, at home neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious, amphibious place, contravening the materiality of both earth and the waves, with the melancholy

of a mermaiden who perches on her rock and waits, endlessly, for a lover who had drowned far away, long ago. That lovely, sad, sea-siren of a place! (Carter 117)

Caught up in the fantasy of becoming someone who marries the Marquis and lives in a castle, the narrator fixates on the romantic aspect of his courtship and the marriage which lead her to the castle on the shore, even as she speaks about “the everyday world from which I, with my stunning marriage, had exiled myself” (Carter, 115). Just as in *Rebecca*, the narrator is not only romanticising her new home but her new role within it, picturing herself in a generic happy ending, such as in a fairy tale, according to the social expectations for women at the time. Both narrators have been taught through societal preoccupations that a story ends happily in marriage, and they do not think further than the house and husband; although written almost fifty years apart, the texts still express the same ideas of women and domesticity.

As well as providing safety and comfort to the residents, a house takes on an interesting psychological aspect in that memory is housed within the home. The home becomes a token that grounds memories into a particular location, and for the members of the upper class in the Nineteenth Century, the home might have been occupied by the same family for generations, becoming the silent backdrop to births, comings of age, and deaths. Dan Bivona writes that although the house is supposed to be separate from the person, it “structure[s] the psychological interior, helping to figure middle-class attitudes to the body, to those lower-class “others” who inhabit it as servants, and to children, childhood, and sexuality in general. (Bivona 110). Few other spaces hold the capacity to be the location of these intimate rituals. The daily rituals that the occupants follow within the house are dictated by the architecture of the house, determining where they will eat, sleep, play. This is what causes the home to become a threat for the new second wives in both *Rebecca* and “The Bloody Chamber”: while their new homes are a blank slate for the second wives, they house memories that constantly force the past to be aware of the present. Both characters are strongly aware that they are not the first woman to occupy the house and the role of wife. The second Mrs de Winter especially struggles to feel at home, as she is constantly reminded of her role as the *second* wife by the house itself:

I was sitting in Rebecca's chair, I was leaning against Rebecca's cushion, and the dog had come to me and laid his head upon my knee because that had been his custom, and he remembered, in the past, she had given sugar to him there. (du Maurier 87)

The second Mrs de Winter is so consumed with the thoughts of Rebecca that it distances her from her real self as she tries to become what she imagines Rebecca once was. The dog's acceptance of her is unsettling as it shows how she is becoming like Rebecca through the daily patterns that she emulates, and also shows how her own identity is being erased by her imitation of the imagined Rebecca. She is confronted with Rebecca's influence with the décor of the house itself, as well as the times she wears Rebecca's coat:

I must have been the first person to put on that mackintosh since the handkerchief was used...there was a pink mark upon the handkerchief. The mark of lip-stick. She had rubbed her lips with the handkerchief, and then rolled it in a ball, and left it in the pocket. (du Maurier 133)

The second Mrs de Winter follows Rebecca's exact movements throughout the day, wearing the same raincoat when it rains, and being called by the same name. Ultimately, the house of Manderley itself is constantly reminding her that there was a woman who came before her. The second Mrs de Winter is only fully able to occupy a room that was not previously decorated by Rebecca's wishes or occupied by Rebecca herself, in her own bedroom. Previously a guest room and not the main bedroom, the decoration was done by Mrs Danvers. Although this means Rebecca's mark is not in the design of the room, it also means that the second Mrs de Winter exerts no personal stamp in any area of the house, but rather accepts the decisions of others when it comes to the house she inhabits, and theoretically has control over. The meals are determined by Rebecca's habits and so the second Mrs de Winter follows her routines and the decisions she made about the household, ghosting the already-dead woman.

In vying with Rebecca's memory for Maxim's love, the second Mrs de Winter is also competing with Manderley itself since it is the manifestation of Maxim's family and his social standing. Perceived throughout the first half of the novel to have been madly in love with Rebecca, Maxim's feelings about Rebecca is not defined by his knowledge of her betrayal or "true" personality, but through his attachment to his ancestral home. Horner and

Zlosnik explore this at length, finding substantial clues as to Maxim's loyalties and love for Manderley:

... he married Rebecca because it seemed she would make a good mistress of Manderley: 'I thought about Manderley too much [...] I put Manderley first, before anything else' (du Maurier, 286). He was, he acknowledges to the narrator, even prepared to accept a sham marriage when, five days after the ceremony, Rebecca struck a bargain with him, promising to run Manderley in an exemplary fashion so long as she was allowed sexual liberty. (106)

In "The Bloody Chamber", the castle the Marquis lives in comes with an assortment of heirlooms that speaks to his attachment to his inherited legacy and the castle itself:

Here were the clumsy and archaic keys for the dungeons, for dungeons we had in plenty although they had been converted to cellars for his wines; the dusty bottles inhabited in racks all those deep holes of pain in the rock on which the castle was built. These are the keys to the kitchens, this is the key to the picture gallery, a treasure house filled by five centuries of avid collectors--ah! he foresaw I would spend hours there. He had amply indulged his taste for the Symbolists, he told me with a glint of greed. (Carter 123)

The items in the house show his family's wealth and legacy, collections that span generations and are instantly recognisable, such as the opal wedding ring or the ruby choker that the Marquis forces his bride to wear in plain view, to show to herself and other observers who she belongs to, even when walking the corridors of a house she should consider hers. The inherited traditions for men were far more advantageous in the Nineteenth Century, as they were the ones to inherit wealth, titles, and power; the castle is literally the Marquis' space to play god, able to murder and torture as he saw fit, and so the male attachment to inherited space differs from that of female inherited space in that the Marquis has power over it.

The house is symptomatic of tradition, and so too is the society in which these traditions are housed. Just as a house or estate might be passed down, the values and expectations of the people within the house are inherited, and the family member takes ownership of the family's norms and reputation. For families and estates within the public eye, these traditions remain

rigid and uncompromising in an effort to meet with public approval. The very objects within the house become props for the continuation or dissolution of tradition. In “The Bloody Chamber”, there is mention of the symbolic ritual of showing stained bedsheets after the consummation of the wedding:

‘The maid will have changed our sheets already,’ he said. ‘We do not hang the bloody sheets out of the window to prove to the whole of Brittany that you are a virgin, not in these civilised times.’ (Carter 122)

In *Rebecca*, the second Mrs de Winter finds that the very living habits of the members of the household, as well as the servants, were determined by the dead Rebecca: “The fire in the library is not usually lit until the afternoon, Madam,’ [Frith] said. ‘Mrs de Winter always used the morning-room... Mrs de Winter always did all her correspondence and telephoning in the morning-room after breakfast.’” (du Maurier 91). The daily routine of the servants was dictated by the previous Mrs de Winter, still referred to as ‘Mrs de Winter’ to the second Mrs de Winter by Frith the butler, and so the narrator feels obliged to follow the daily movements of Rebecca’s routine, as she does not want to disrupt the way the house is run and exert her own will; her daily routine becomes a subconscious enacting of a supposed palimpsest. Although the narrator perceives that, with Rebecca, there was greatness, sophistication and light associated with Rebecca’s presence in the house, this is false and, ironically, the narrator’s despairing state of mind (always prevalent in most Gothic fiction) at her supposed inferiority to Rebecca helps to create the dark mood of the text and simultaneously re-enacts the truth of Rebecca’s darkness:

Thus, on the one hand, the text sets up Manderley as a dream space wherein fantasies can be fulfilled and the object of desire achieved; it thereby constructs the reader as that of women's romantic fiction. On the other hand, the novel simultaneously presents itself as a nightmare space, with the house and the narrator's marriage to Maximilian de Winter full of dark secrets and threatening scenarios. (Horner and Zlosnik 101)

The Gothic house is a paradoxical space: it is simultaneously a place of refuge, where one should feel safe, as well as a site of fear. It is, at both times, a space where the inhabitant can be at peace, yet is also vulnerable to acts of violence. The place where one lies in the most



vulnerable state of sleep is also a site of trauma and unsettledness. The threat towards the person can be both an external and internal threat: an external threat would be someone from outside the house who threatens the inhabitants, such as Jack Favell in *Rebecca*, who comes from outside the house to accuse Maxim de Winter of murder. An internal threat would be the physical house itself, such as a falling brick, or a person living in the household, such as the Marquis in “The Bloody Chamber” when he murders his wives, or Mrs Danvers in *Rebecca*, who urges the second Mrs de Winter to commit suicide. Dale Bailey shows that the house is more than just the setting, but also the amplifier of the psyche:

The gothic setting continues to serve as a microcosm for the clash of good and evil, that clash is increasingly dramatised on a personal, narcissistic level. And the gothic house, the haunted house, becomes in the end a distorted mirror of the self, reflecting the danger of self-absorption. (Bailey 34)

For a character such as the second Mrs de Winter, who does not walk within Manderley but rather within her understanding of Manderley, which rejects her as an occupant, this projection of the self within the walls of her house causes her distress as she judges herself to be unworthy, soon to be found out and sent away, or worse, driven to suicide by Mrs Danvers. It is the anticipation of this threat which transforms a home into a space dominated by fear. The homeliness of the home and the very feeling of being “at home” in a space is then disrupted. Denied a feeling of sanctuary within the home, the individual is then at odds because there are few spaces within the public sphere that allow for the same feelings of safety and intimacy that pervade the private sphere. An individual unable to relax within their own home is forced to be on constant alert, which would have psychological implications as the individual is forced into a constant state of adrenaline within a fight-or-flight phase. Daily routine habits such as sleep could be interrupted due to being in a state of fear.

In typical Gothic fashion, although the narrator fears the spectre of Rebecca, the readers may note that her own transformation in the house and after the revelation of Rebecca’s murder, suggests that she may be in tension with her own wish fulfilment of replacing Rebecca. Rather than entering a vexing period of self-questioning as to why she should remain married to a murderer, she is mostly relieved that her rival, already dead, *dies again* with the revelation of the murder. On one hand, she is emotional because it strengthens her position as Maxim’s wife who no longer has to compete with Rebecca’s memory dominating him, but

her detachment from the very fact of murder, of Rebecca's murder, likens her *to* Rebecca, a person who was, in Maxim's retelling, quite capable of showing indifference to anyone and anything. The narrator is growing more assertive but, morally, the growth is questionable. The narrator feels the need to be Rebecca and, in rejoicing her *final* death and her lone occupation of Maxim, she indeed does become so, conveniently fine with her husband being a murderer, as long as he was her rival's murderer. Treated like a child by Maxim earlier in the text (not unlike the more perverse adult-child interaction later shown in "The Bloody Chamber") because of her innocent nature, the narrator enters the familiar territory in literature (and life) of adulthood signalling the loss of innocence, and in *Rebecca* the narrator comes to share in Maxim's guilt as part of her growth, both signalling an extreme example of a wife's expected loyalty (courts in Britain at the time forbid wives to testify damningly against husbands in murder cases) and the metaphorical transformation of a woman who was seen as a girl bride earlier:

In one sense, however, the book is opened and the secret revealed when Maxim tells his young wife about Rebecca and his murder of her - and the change in the narrator is irrevocable: 'I've grown up, Maxim, in twenty-four hours. I'll never be a child again' (Rebecca, p. 276). Their marriage is immediately transformed: they suddenly relate to each other as adult sexual beings (they kiss passionately for the first time) and, in a strange reversal of their former roles, Maxim develops a child-like dependency on the narrator. Furthermore, the narrator finds a new confidence which enables her to run Manderley with the authority she had, till now, lacked: in effect, she becomes more like Rebecca... (Horner and Zlosnik 106)

No sooner does the narrator assert this power than Rebecca's accomplices, Mrs Danvers and Favell, succeed in fulfilling what Rebecca had planned while alive: taking Manderley away from Maxim and, in effect, crippling him and leaving the narrator with a more subdued, solipsistic husband than the one she thought she had married.

## The Palimpsest

In Sarah Dillon's article "Palimpsesting: Reading and Writing Lives in H. D.'s 'Murex: War and Postwar London'", she describes the phenomenon of a palimpsest within the monasteries of the seventh to the fifteenth centuries, where "Palimpsests were created by a process of

layering whereby the existing text was erased using various chemical methods, and the new text was written over the old one” (Dillon 29). This concept is interesting because it can be applied to so many facets of our world, from texts that were erased and then a new one was transcribed on top, to archaeological remains, where ancient cities lie beneath the foundations of the modern ones. The new text, whether it is a city or a text, is inextricably linked to the old one. Dillon describes the phenomenon of palimpsests in literature by saying: “A palimpsest is thus a surface phenomenon where, in an illusion of layered depth, otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other”. (29)

This layering of new life onto old forces the reader of the text to constantly engage with the old text, noticing where the new one has had to be built around the old, and where it has been able to create something completely new. Shane Graham sees the novel as “a metaphorical stand-in for urban palimpsests and the palimpsests of landscapes” (85). Certain texts become palimpsests because the author is building on an old text: it is not just what has been used as a foundation that is important, but also what has been erased or ignored, and why, in favour of building on something more tangible and useful.

It seems almost impossible to escape a palimpsestic writing because the author follows familiar formulas and archetypes. By writing a text that fulfils the criteria to fit into a certain genre, one is building their text on the palimpsestic foundations of the genre itself. The author, of course, creates a story that they find unique, but it is balanced on the conventions of genre. The author would struggle to write something that steers completely away from palimpsests, as even location is something the author must build on: a text set in 1920s Paris is nestled alongside other texts in the same period. The palimpsestic habit is not one to be condoned, as the texts created in the tradition of old ones are constantly changing our notion of storytelling and genre conventions, and this, in turn, changes how an audience will receive an older text within a new age; this can be seen in how Shakespeare plays are still taught at schools across the world, and teachers are having to create new ways to teach and apply the texts in order for them to remain relevant to the modern-day learner. Dillon writes:

The history of the palimpsest is best defined by its own nature and structure - it is a complex network of superimposed and otherwise unrelated texts in which various

usages and definitions of the palimpsest have been inscribed, erased and reinscribed, and persist. (30)

Within literature, the palimpsestic habit allows for developing of ideas, adapting old texts into new frames of thinking and giving both author and reader a familiar approach to a text.

In “Female Desire in Angela Carter’s Fairy Stories”, Bonnici writes that “It may be a characteristic of literature written in English that a canonical text is appropriated and adapted with postmodern methodology to subvert the original traditional text” (9). Carter’s rewriting of the popular fairy tales can parody the conventional happy ending of the marriage plot, and this self-conscious approach to the postmodern fairy tales simultaneously builds upon a palimpsest and re-asserts the story into modern reading tradition. In the case of Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber”, the original story of *Bluebeard* is taken and changed, bringing a fresh understanding to a familiar story, and integrating new ideas that have seeped into the collective consciousness. Arguably, Carter’s narrator, with her sexual desire and empowered mother, neither of whom rely on the piano tuner for saving, would not have existed in previous times. Thus palimpsesting a story such as the Bluebeard tale allows for the folklore to become relevant to a new audience.

If one approaches a house the same way one reads a text, one can find the same tradition of palimpsests within the way modern society builds houses. Some houses will be built on the actual remains of old houses and civilisations, and these fit into a very physical understanding of the palimpsest, where the building is forced to physically adapt to the previous remains, or to demolish them completely in order to make way for the new. However, it is possible to approach the fashions and techniques of building houses as a type of palimpsest where the new styles are constantly toying with older styles, acknowledging previous designs by either imitating them with improved methods and design or breaking away completely, using the old tradition as a point of departure. The designs of houses are based upon older traditions and the understanding of what constitutes a house or place to live is all based on the evolution of different shelters from ancient ancestors. The very way we read and understand houses is based on previous understandings, and even when the idea of what makes a house changes, these changes are made to depart from previous “dated” understandings, and so also build onto the sprawling palimpsest of ideas. The house is more than shelter and privacy: Jo Croft and Gerry Smyth state that it serves as an insight into both “the identity of the builder or

owner or occupier, as well as something of the culture of the society in which it was built” (13).

The house does not simply function as somewhere to lie safely, but also to interact with others, to work on what interests the inhabitant separate from any employment – in short, the doorway of the house is where the public sphere falls away and the refuge of the private space begins. In *Rebecca*, however, the second Mrs de Winter is unable to strip off the feeling that she is being observed, noted, and judged, while in the private sphere of her own marital house.

It is not just the physical building of the house that can become a palimpsest: the occupants of the house form their own routines and habits that are housed within. It would be up to the new inhabitants to decide how they would interact with these traditions: they might discard some completely while adapting others to suit their modern lifestyles. These traditions become palimpsests because they are repeated, sometimes modified, and sometimes erased to make way for newer traditions. The interior lives of the inhabitants of the house are what dictate the physical architecture of the house, and what allows for the erasure of the old text and the writing of the new.

Palimpsests occur in two ways within both “The Bloody Chamber” and *Rebecca*. *Rebecca* contains similar traits to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in that the woman is taken from poverty into the house, which comes across as a Gothic house due to the element of fear contained within, and discovers a secret about the previous wife. Secondly, the texts contain palimpsests as within both “The Bloody Chamber” and *Rebecca* within the house the young women marry into, but also within their new marriages themselves: these new marriages are building on the disastrous foundations of the previous ones, and the new wives have to learn to navigate the marriages differently to the previous wives in order to escape the fate and building something completely new.

Carter’s writing is situated towards the end of the second-wave feminism and popularised sexual revolution of the 1970s: her postmodern, inter-textual approach to revisiting and subverting the fairy tales is itself speaking to inheriting tradition, as the subject of her text does. Reading within a palimpsest of the reader’s expectations of the genre, memories of the original story as they know it, and the reworking of the text; the jarring effect of subverting

the genre comes as a result of the reader encountering a change from their auratic memory of the story, especially when the text raises topics such as female sexual desire, initially coded or absent from the fairy tales as was symptomatic of the traditions of the time.

Both narrators in “The Bloody Chamber” and *Rebecca* find their new lives constantly interrupted by the past wives, both through their own imaginings and comparisons and with the physical presence of their bodies when they are discovered. The Gothic is inextricably linked to the past, and much of the narrative of conventional Gothic texts involves the past repeating and resurfacing; Diana Wallace links this to the psychoanalytical approach many readers and critics use when reading a Gothic text:

The past of the Gothic is closer to that of psychoanalysis: aggressively mobile, prone to return, to irruptions into the present. The past in the Gothic never quite stays dead, and is therefore never fully knowable. This is why Gothic fiction so often seems to demand psychoanalytic interpretations as a way of disinterring the repressed secrets of the past. (4)

In both texts, this recent past is unresolved, and as the new wives come into womanhood through sex and explore the house and their husbands, they also are initiated into the secrets of their husbands’ pasts. Within “The Bloody Chamber”, the main character is forced to confront the corpses of the previous brides, and battle against the very corporeal threat of her murderous husband. She is not ghosted by the previous wives, but rather interacts with them physically, even becoming branded with their blood. In contrast, in *Rebecca*, the second Mrs de Winter is ghosted by Rebecca’s memory. It is only in the second part of the text, after discovering Maxim’s role in Rebecca’s death and the remains of the body, that the second Mrs de Winter is able to start asserting herself and coming into her role as head of the household and stops competing with her imagined version of Rebecca, even as she deals with the truth that her husband is a murderer, and the legal investigations. The corporeality of the discovery of the corpse allows her to conquer her fear of not matching up to Rebecca: she cannot reconcile the vast image she had conjured of Rebecca, full of life and always, intimidatingly, in power, with the physical remains of the body that have been underwater for so long. Rebecca is reduced to a corpse, and becomes an object of scandal and pity for the community, and thus the second Mrs de Winter is able to rise above it into a position where she can cast pity on Rebecca herself. The second Mrs de Winter finds the false Rebecca that

she imagined more frightening than a murderous husband, and finding out that he didn't actually love Rebeca is what allows her to find peace within her new marriage. Although she may not be the great entertainer or seductress that Rebecca was, the second Mrs de Winter is content to be loved by her husband in a way that Rebecca never was, and this allows her to feel more powerful than the dead woman, and to cast her down mentality as someone who is no longer a threat, but something to pity.

The concept of Manderley is very important to the second Mrs de Winter. She has no family, and when she met Maxim de Winter she was working as a companion to Mrs van Hopper. Her new husband and his house are the only chance she has at the goals of family and home. Manderley is also a chance for her to enter into a history, and claim a physical representation of legacy and ancestry that she was previously unable to access. Her state as an unnamed, orphaned young woman who marries into the family leaves her with little actual ownership of Manderley or the estate, as she is entering into a family that follows patriarchal inheritance, but she also enters the house as a woman, and she becomes vital to continuing the tradition of families that inhabit houses like Manderley because she is able to produce heirs, and continue the family legacy. When she was newly arrived at Manderley, she found herself unable to write to anybody apart from Mrs van Hopper:

There was something foolish, rather ironical, in the realisation that here I was sitting at my own desk in my own home with nothing better to do than to write a letter to Mrs Van Hopper, a woman I disliked, whom I should never see again. (du Maurier 97)

In her new position as wife, she is now rooted, able to begin building a future for herself, which she does through daydreaming and fantasies. Manderley itself is important to her because, to repeat an earlier observation, she remembers buying a postcard of it when she was younger, and so the events that led her to call the great estate home seem fortuitous: "I knew now why I had bought that picture postcard as a child; it was a premonition; a blank step into the future" (du Maurier 59).

Her first interaction with Manderley is the concept she interacts with in the postcard, the artistic rendering of the house itself, and later she is able to actually step inside the house and call it home, although she is always aware of the house as being *Manderley*, associated with the legacy of the family and the awe she initially felt. In line with Walter Benjamin's theory

of the auratic, she is interacting with the aura of Manderley, and this separates her from the reality of it. Because of her absorption in her imagining of Manderley, the authenticity and authority of Manderley as her home is compromised: “The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible from its origin on [...] [its] historical testimony [...] And what is really jeopardised when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object” (Benjamin 253).

As the aura of Manderley is fixed in her memory, she perceives Manderley according to her auratic impression of it and rejects herself as being a likely resident of the house. She is trying to recreate the splendour, glamour, and passionate love that she imagines existed in Manderley according to the aura she has constructed, a reality that never was, and she summons a form of Rebecca, beautiful and dazzlingly competent, buoyed up by Maxim’s love, that never existed. She still inhabits her youthful idea of Manderley itself, even as an adult, and her imaginings of parties and people are all housed within the young girl’s idea of Manderley.

### Desire and Death in “The Bloody Chamber”

In “The Bloody Chamber”, the nameless narrator arrives at the house as a virgin. Like the narrator in *Rebecca*, she comes from a poor background and is initiated into an extravagant lifestyle through her new husband. The narrator is a virgin before her marriage, but is honest about her own sexual desire for her husband: “And, as at the opera, when I had first seen my flesh in his eyes, I was aghast to feel myself stirring” (Carter 7). Carter defies the trope of hidden sexual desire within her heroines and rather presents a very real, independent sexual desire that guides and leads her heroines throughout their stories. When the narrator in “The Bloody Chamber” is introduced to the room in which she will have sex for the first time, she is confronted with mirrors:

Our bed. And surrounded by so many mirrors! Mirrors on all the walls, in stately frames of contorted gold that reflected more white lilies than I'd ever seen in my life before. He'd filled the room with them, to greet the bride, the young bride. The young bride, who had become that multitude of girls I saw in the mirrors, identical. (Carter 7)



Reflected dozens of times within the mirror, the narrator loses her sense of individuality, becoming an object for her new husband to consume. By seeing herself reflected in multitudes, the narrator is able to be both participant and audience to her story, and she is able to use these reflections to realise herself as able to deviate from the Marquis' plans, even as he is preparing her for the part he has written for her in his own story. However, Kathleen Manley writes:

The mirrors, allow the protagonist to begin to have a more complete sense of herself as subject. They also reinforce her wish to see herself as innocent and yet capable of recognising the Marquis's wish to dictate her story. (73)

He makes her wear the ruby choker that all brides in his house have worn, and she wears it during her first experience of sex. She is unknowingly taking place in the same sequence of events that the previous wives had been tricked into before her: wearing the choker, having sex with their new husband, soon to be murdered. The multitude of reflections symbolises her joining the other wives in his violent habit: "A dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides while the mewing gulls swung on invisible trapezes in the empty air outside" (Carter 9).

The mirrored bedroom becomes a space of transition for the narrator, where she leaves having experienced sex for the first time, but also importantly, having experienced erotic desire for her husband, and having this returned. Bonicci writes about another of Carter's tales, mentioning female desire in the story "The Erl-King", but it also applies to female desire in "The Bloody Chamber": "In fact, "male subjectivity creates its Other precisely to designate itself as its superior, its creator-spectator-owner-judge" (Finn 12). Carter seems to advance the theory that by means of his already-imbedded power, the male takes advantage of the victim's almost sadomasochist desire and causes its existence as the Other so that entrapment and seduction turn out to be "natural". It may be argued, however, that Carter inverts this theme, insists on the female gaze, and makes woman's desire victorious in the final female subjectification brought about by the "murder" of the Erl-King. (Finn 11) In Katherine Manley's "The Woman in Process in Angela Carter", the mirror allows the narrator to see herself in her new role as a married woman, as both a woman with sexual agency and as an object of her husband's desire, there to satisfy him. The multiple reflections point to the transitional space between these versions of the narrator, while she begins to admit to and own her desire as she discovers her own body and her partner's response to it (4). Bonnici's

argument is that Carter's writing allows for female desire to become autonomous, and that moments of sex within the texts are not necessarily to be read as the male taking pleasure and the female submitting (according to patriarchal power systems present during the time period the texts were both written during and set in), but rather that female desire drives and shapes these texts; however it is sometimes not accessible as the characters are taught to stifle and repress the desires awoken within them. In "The Erl-King", the female narrator murders the Erl-King when she discovers he is intending to trap her inside a cage, like the other lovers he had before her, who are now living as birds in cages in his home; her murder of the Erl-King is contested due to the narrative shift that occurs at the end of the story, when the narrator shifts from first to third person and the reader is not sure who is authoring the text. In "The Bloody Chamber", the narrator realises her lover's intentions for her as the narrator in "The Erl-King" does and acts as he expects by entering the forbidden chamber, but ultimately her mother triumphs over him, saves her daughter's life and her daughter shifts from victim to victor.

In the narrator's mind, losing her virginity is an important process as it not only brings her from girl to woman, but it also consummates her marriage. Her own awakened sexuality causes her to become more joined to her new husband, as she is now further dependant on him to nurture this new side of herself. This is a bond that she must struggle against, shelving sexual desire for the desire for survival, rebelling against her new role as wife, baulking against the misogynist role models such as Desdemona. Ultimately, this space holds a coming of age transition for the narrator, and it is important to note that she is not fully comfortable or at home during this experience:

In the course of that one-sided struggle, I had seen his deathly composure shatter like a porcelain vase flung against a wall; I had heard him shriek and blaspheme at the orgasm; I had bled. And perhaps I had seen his face without its mask, and perhaps I had not. I had been infinitely dishevelled by the loss of my virginity. (Carter 9)

She is also aware of a change in their relationship after their first experience of sex together: "Then I realised, with a shock of surprise, how it must have been my innocence that captivated him—the silent music, he said, of my unknowingness" (Carter 10). In fact, between the loss of her virginity and the death sentence imposed upon her when she enters the bloody chamber, the narrator exudes a sense of playful, typically youthful authority in her

new surroundings while her husband is away: she begins to realize she is both mistress of the manor and beginning to realize the potential of her body in terms of its meaning as an object to her husband:

This glimpse of herself provides not only the beginnings of subjectivity but also some honesty; she admits she previously might not have acknowledged her fiancé's lust, though she has already as much as admitted to her mother that she does not love the Marquis. At the same time, however, the mirrors at the opera encourage her acquiescence in the story the Marquis wishes to write of her, for the dichotomy Carter sets up and that the Marquis favours is a dichotomy between innocence and debauchery, not innocence and experience. (Manley 73)

The narrator realises that her innocence was what had drawn him to her, but now this has been taken away by her erotic desire and their sexual act. She resolves to continue to play the part, but ultimately the coming of age within the space of the bedroom changes both her and their relationship.

With the loss of her virginity, the narrator of “The Bloody Chamber” is seen as ready to fulfil the darker side of her new husband’s desires, and so he sets up an opportunity to allow her to enter the bloody chamber itself. This is a careful manipulation on the part of the Marquis, who sets up a situation that plays directly into the young narrator’s curiosity. Preceded by figures such as Eve and Pandora, the young narrator is placed in a position which provides her with no other alternative other than to open the forbidden room. Cheryl Renfroe shows how the test of the keys can be seen in another light:

If the ‘Forbidden Chamber’ rather than the ‘Bloody Key’ is treated as the tale’s central motif, then ‘Bluebeard’ is no longer primarily about the consequences of failing a test- will the heroine be able to control her curiosity?- but about a process of initiation which *requires* entering the forbidden chamber. (88)

If the narrator had been obedient to her new husband’s wishes and had not entered the bloody chamber, then it is not certain whether he would have forced her into the room, set up another excuse to try get her into the chamber willingly, or if he would have rewarded her by keeping her alive. Dan Bivona writes that “the house also functioned as a policed space with locked

doors that separate what can be seen from what one desires to see. Through its many separate rooms, the house enabled the staging of private theatricals on multiple stages. It became implicated in exciting desire in the same process as it defined its aim, infusing drudgery with an aura of sanctity and the closed room with the air of scopophilic mystery” (109). The narrator is unknowingly playing into her husband’s desire by entering the bloody chamber, but also by rushing out and pretending to be unperturbed when she meets him back from his ‘trip’, marked by the blood of the dead wife.

The Marquis reinforces a link between the spilling of virginal blood and life blood by having her wear the same ruby choker during the sex act and his planned murder of his new wife. This room is undoubtedly a place of trauma for her, the previous wives who had died there, her mother, and the blind piano tuner, who all experience the husband’s violence and blood lust together. Arguably it is also a space of transition, where she is exposed to the violent and traumatic event of seeing the corpses of the previous wives; here she is attacked by her new husband, and her entire future has to change after the event. She comes face to face with the previous wives, (which the narrator in *Rebecca* is unable to do) when she enters the bloody chamber itself:

The opera singer lay, quite naked, under a thin sheet of very rare and precious linen, such as the princes of Italy used to shroud those whom they had poisoned. I touched her, very gently, on the white breast; she was cool, he had embalmed her. On her throat I could see the blue imprint of his strangler's fingers. The cool, sad flame of the candles flickered on her white, closed eyelids. The worst thing was, the dead lips smiled. (Carter 16)

Just as blood was spilled in the bedroom during the sex act, the blood of her husband’s past wives is spilled within the chamber. Her act of touching the dead woman’s breast is both sexual and vulnerable, as she is echoing the touch of their shared husband on her breast, but is also reaching out as a child would to the mother’s breast. She drops the key in the pool of blood left by one of the previous wives, and this blood then marks her visibly, signalling her experience in this space of trauma, which was only made available to her after they had consummated their marriage:

I knelt before him and he pressed the key lightly to my forehead, held it there for a moment. I felt a faint tingling of the skin and when I involuntarily glanced at myself in the mirror, I saw the heart-shaped stain had transferred itself to my forehead, to the space between the eyebrows, like the caste mark of a Brahmin woman. (Carter, 22)

The two spaces within the house are linked: access to the bloody chamber would not have been given if she had not first had sex with her husband. The comparison of the woman's body to a house, where children are expected of it, is obvious when seeing how the bloody chamber is opened by a loss of female virginity.

### Chapter 3: *The Haunting of Hill House*: Shirley Jackson's 1950s Female Gothic

Shirley Jackson's body of creative writing is paradoxical: her creative writing is often caught up with a fear of domestic life, as it was perceived in the 1940s onwards, and yet she often wrote articles that promoted the domestic as a worthy occupation for women. She had an ability to write both articles for housewives in magazines and produce Gothic fiction in novels and short stories that were, for the most part and with the exception of the short story "The Lottery" and the novels *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, overlooked by literary historians until recently (Hague 73). Crucial to many of Jackson's fictions were young female characters often at odds or in tension with prescribed roles of suburban wives and in many ways her work initially pre-empts and then runs parallel to studies of nervous breakdowns experienced by white North American suburban housewives in the 1950s:

By focusing on her female characters' isolation, loneliness, and fragmenting identities, their simultaneous inability to relate to the world outside themselves or to function autonomously, and their confrontation with an inner emptiness that often results in mental illness, Jackson displays in pathological terms the position of many women in the 1950s. (Hague 74)

Some common themes and motifs occur throughout Jackson's work: she often looks at women in peril in their domestic situation but does not necessarily show empathy for them, she often concentrates on younger or older women characters and regularly offers shifting views on the institution of marriage. The relationship between her young female characters and the houses they occupy sees a steady build-up to an overt Gothic climax in her output. There is the young housewife on the verge of a nervous breakdown after the (implied) death of her husband in "The Beautiful Stranger" (1946); the frustrated wife who leaves her husband and life in the suburbs but returns after a harrowing day spent in the city in "A Day in the Jungle" (1950); a schoolgirl trapped forever in a magical house in "A Visit" (1950); the wife kept hostage for years on end by her husband in "The Good Wife" (unpublished until 1997) and a young woman who inherits her late aunt's home and finds her elderly neighbours putting her ill at ease with her new surroundings in "The Little House" (1951). Jackson's final two novels, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) emphasize her mastery of the Female Gothic: there is the precarious relationship between a young woman and a legendary house in *The Haunting of Hill House* and,

ultimately, ghost characters, sisters, in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, underscoring the metaphorical practice of erasure of women from patriarchal society and turning them into ghosts that Wallace identifies as central to the Female Gothic. Usually connected to families but alienated from them, Jackson's characters are either wandering loners or women in houses feeling intensely alone:

Jackson's characters possess neither gyroscope nor radar; lacking a core of identity forces them to seek meaning and direction in the world outside themselves, but their inability to relate to and communicate with others and their fear of unfamiliar environments create the panic and paranoia that descend upon them when they venture beyond the dubious safety of their domestic environment. (Hague 76)

Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) falls into the Female Gothic tradition, where the safety of the home is subverted, and the women who inhabit the domestic sphere are forced to invert their association of home being safe and the outside world dangerous, due to the threats coming from within the house itself. The novel toys with the idea of a "safe" house, showing the house as ominous and horrifying to the main character, Eleanor, then making it seem to be a safe haven where she can find her sought-after sense of belonging, and inverting that once again. The book is, in the words of Jackson scholar Darryl Hattenhauer, her most Gothic work (155).

Eleanor Vance lives with her sister and her family in the 1950s. Due to a seemingly supernatural event when she was a child, she receives an invitation from Dr Montague to stay for the summer in Hill House. Dr Montague is investigating the possibility that the house might be haunted, due to its grim history, and Eleanor and two others stay in Hill House. During their stay, strange events start occurring, such as writing appearing on the wall, unseen noises, phantom hands, and the house itself seemingly responding to them by slamming doors and causing the inhabitants to see figures such as a wild dog. Eleanor is sometimes the only one experiencing certain events that the others sleep through, and seems to be targeted by the house itself. She becomes more and more attached to the house until she even begins to forget her past before the house, and when she is forced to leave after the house seems to get her to attempt suicide, she crashes her car deliberately into a tree before she leaves the property, dying in order to stay in the house.

In order to understand the power that Hill House has over Eleanor, it is worth situating the novel within the social period of the 1950s in order to understand how Eleanor's sense of

homelessness makes her an easy target for the supernatural elements of Hill House, and why her gender makes her even more vulnerable than Luke Sanders, who is in the house with Eleanor and feels a similar sense of un-belonging. From there, I will be examining the trope of the haunted house, and how it plays with the ideal of home and homeliness, creating a Gothic-style double that incites fear and madness.

According to Hague, Jackson's most prolific writing work—both as an expert on good homemaking and her fiction that usually counteracted notions of good homemaking—occurred in the 1950s, when numerous academic studies paid attention to the role of the suburban housewife and contributed to enduring images of these perceived “nuclear” wives. Key discussion points in such studies, such as the work of Betty Friedan, revolved around the psychological states of housewives marooned in the home, or imprisoned (74). Hague's study finds certain repeated terms and descriptions all pertinent to the figure of the white suburban housewife of the North American 1950s in works such as Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) (to name but two): “trapped and isolated”, “isolation of the nuclear family”, “isolated in a world of other mothers, children, and station wagons”, with the spectre of the home containing “enormous discontent, especially for women” (Hague, 74). Houses were shelters but also places of psychological discontent and Jackson's own work pre-empted this with the ending of “The Beautiful Stranger” (1946) where the protagonist, most likely owing to a breakdown, is unable to find her house among rows and rows of houses.

While I have considered houses when discussing *Rebecca* and *The Bloody Chamber*, what is interesting about the house within Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is that the main character Eleanor is entering Hill House as a stranger, and then throughout the events of the novel, begins to think of the house as her *home*, despite having no claim to it, nor any prior experience within the house. A person stepping across the threshold of a house that is not their own does cross into the private sphere when entering, but they are not at home. Because houses within every culture will follow a set of norms dictated both by societal and environmental factors, it is a familiar structure to step into. The familiarity of the function of each room becomes unsettled and uncanny within the context of the Gothic, as the house becomes a double of every other house. The guest will be able to navigate the house easily, and knows that they will find similar rooms with similar functions, despite the different layout and appearance of the house in comparison to their own. However, as it is not their own home, the guest may not fully relax as they would in their own house. To a certain



extent, the guest in a house is still within the public and the private sphere; out of the public eye and into a familiar structure, but also feeling that one must be respectful of the house and its inhabitants, stepping into a polite, performative role in order to not offend the inhabitants of the house.

Within *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor enters as not just a guest, but also a participant in an academic study. This means that due to the expectation of professional conduct, she should be functioning more as if she is in the public sphere, aware of the scholarly nature of Dr Montague's work, and wanting to be considered professional and polite by the other participants within the study, which builds on the slightly unsettled nature of living, eating, and sleeping within someone else's home. However, Eleanor is a character who has always lived more in her own imagined world than in the real world, and Hill House may be less a place in the public sphere to her than it is the eventual location of what she will call "home":

Eleanor lives in her childhood world of fairy tales, imagining enchanted gardens as she drives through the country. She also lives in adolescent romances, imagining handsome males rescuing her from homelessness. But more importantly, she recuperates the victimized heroines of eighteenth-century sentimental novels. Jackson says in her notes, Eleanor is the "voice of honor." As Elizabeth MacAndrew and David H. Richter argue, the sentimental heroine is not the simplistic stereotype that scholars such as Leslie Fiedler make her out to be, and she is central to the development of Gothic fiction. (Hattenhauer 157)

As a concept, the house functions as more than a safe space: it constructs its inhabitants' identity. The house can be read as a text, indicating certain factors about those who live inside: it points to socio-economic status, wealth within that group, aesthetic tastes, and even personal relationships. Bedrooms within the house are expressions of the individual who resides there, and so the furnishings and décor inform the viewer of the owner's personality and preferences. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the house's abnormal and disconcerting architecture comes as a result of its architect's view of the world, and the house becomes a physical manifestation of fears, dark desires, and hatred. It is described as "a masterpiece of architectural misdirection" (Jackson 106), and is specifically designed to make the people inside feel unsettled, disrupting the natural homeliness that should exist within a family house. A house cannot be separated from the identity of its inhabitant, and as such remains vital for the individual to construct a sense of belonging within the world; there needs to be a

place one considers the private sphere to retreat to from the public sphere, and without it the person becomes nomadic, unable to attach themselves to a place until there is a settled home or safe space. In the case of Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House*, she has never been able to claim a house as fully her own, and as such, her identity is not anchored, allowing for her to become vulnerable to the pull of Hill House.

## Eleanor's Entry to Hill House

The opening lines of *The Haunting of Hill House* immediately unsettle the reader, indicating that Hill House has an awareness, as well as desires:

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (Jackson 2)

The novel explores the events of Dr Montague's paranormal study, as well as exposing the grim story of the house's architect and his family, and the fate of the different owners of the house as it changed hands through time. The very architecture of the house is designed to unsettle and confuse, and the house's inhabitants have suffered tragic losses almost from the moment they entered the property:

Hill House was built some eighty-odd years ago... as a home for his family by a man named Hugh Crain... Unfortunately, Hill House was a sad house almost from the beginning; Hugh Crain's young wife died minutes before she first was to set eyes on the house, when the carriage bringing her here overturned in the driveway and the lady was brought – ah, *lifeless* is the phrase I believe they use – into the house her husband had built for her. (Jackson 70)

The story begins with Eleanor making preparations to leave her sister's home in order to join Dr Montague's study at Hill House. The novel says of Dr Montague: "He had been looking for an honestly haunted house all his life" (Jackson, 3). At the time Eleanor does not know what the study is about, or why she was chosen as a participant, but she is happy to have a chance to leave her sister's house and family behind, and sees the journey as a chance of

finding a true home, constantly repeating the phrase “journeys end in lovers’ meeting” (Jackson, 4). The reason for Eleanor’s longing for a true home is that she has not felt at home since she was a child- interestingly, this childhood home and Hill House are the only places she feels truly at home, but also the only places she experiences supernatural events; it is her experience of this supernatural event in her childhood home that makes her eligible for Dr Montague’s study in the first place. Eleanor spent eleven years of her life caring for her ill mother, and after her death she moved to live with her sister and her family, who hold her in contempt. Now in her thirties, Eleanor acutely feels her longing for a home; as the novel was written in 1959, women were expected to be married and have started a family by her age, and Eleanor no doubt internalised this as a life goal:

Nothing is ever really wasted, she believed sensibly, even one’s childhood, and then each year, one summer morning, the warm wind would come down the city street where she walked and she would be touched with the little cold thought: I have let more time go by. (Jackson 15)

When Eleanor has completed her journey to Hill House, she is introduced to the House itself, as well as the other participants of the study, Luke Sanders, Theodora, and Dr Montague. Her first impression of the house is not favourable: “The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once” (Jackson 32). Their explorations of the House show how its very architecture works against them, constantly challenging and subverting their expectations of what a house should be. The more time they spend there, the more Eleanor starts to slowly attach herself to the house, feeling a sense of belonging in the House itself, as well as with the other participants within the study. Because this is the only time she has truly felt at home, she is vulnerable to the house, and struggles to resist it as the others do: “I can’t picture any world but Hill House,’ Eleanor said” (Jackson 151). The house seems to latch onto this, calling Eleanor and writing her name on the walls “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” (Jackson, 146). As the supernatural events become more frequent and intense, the history of the house itself is revealed, which will be explained later. Exposed to regular fear, Eleanor becomes very close with Theo, even sleeping in the same room as her, and considering the group included in the study almost like a family, with Dr Montague becoming like a father, Theo like a sister, and Luke shifting between being someone Eleanor thinks she could love, and someone she seems to perceive with the same distaste as her brother-in-law. Ultimately Eleanor feels that she was always destined to be in Hill House. This initially manifests as an

internal horror: “It was an act of moral strength to lift her foot and set it on the bottom step, and she thought that her deep unwillingness to touch Hill House for the first time came directly from the vivid feeling that it was waiting for her, evil, but patient” (Jackson 36). However, as Eleanor spends more and more time within the House itself, she finds herself drawn into the fantasy that this was always meant to be her home, and that she and the others were always meant to be in the house together, and she seems to fall into a madness. She climbs to the top of the library tower, as if to commit suicide, but the others persuade her to come down. As they are forcing her to leave, however, she drives her car straight into a large tree, killing herself instantly before she even leaves the gates of Hill House.

I shall focus on Eleanor’s desire for a home and how this manifests in multiple day dreams, just as the nameless narrator in *Rebecca* imagines her own warm welcome, and how Eleanor’s gender makes this desire for a true home stronger than Luke Sanders’. By using the lens of the Female Gothic, the house becomes both destination and threat for Eleanor, and I shall look at her descent into madness and subsequent suicide as a result of internalising the 1950s domesticity and her own sense of un-belonging.

### Eleanor’s background, desire for a home, and imaginings

Throughout the novel, Hill House toys with Eleanor’s longing for a home. She is a product of her environment, and her wishes and desires are hinged around the expectations for women within the domestic sphere within the 1950s:

The Cult of True Womanhood, which flourished in an age of servants and among people wealthy enough to afford them, associated the woman mainly with the lady's salon, emphasizing her social function as an impeccably arrayed icon of her husband's success. The June Cleaver ideology flourished in the two decades following World War II, when domesticity experienced a resurgence as soldiers returned home, displacing women from the work force. Endemic to a time of general affluence when technology did the heavy lifting once required of servants, the June Cleaver ideology placed the woman in the kitchen, highlighting her role as a domestic life-support system for family members who functioned largely outside the home. This feminine ideal of homemaker and mother so permeates the psychology of Eleanor Vance in ‘The Haunting of Hill House.’ (Bailey 34)

Alone and friendless, Eleanor is the perfect victim for Hill House to latch on to. Even before she has set eyes upon Hill House, she spends her time during her journey there imagining herself within a great home. Just as the second Mrs de Winter is constantly imagining her life as the confident and successful hostess, so Eleanor imagines herself living in, and caring for, many of the houses she sees during her journey. She takes details from one part of her journey: “She laughed and turned to smile good-by at the magic oleanders. Another day, she told them, another day I’ll come back and break your spell” (Jackson 20). She fixates on a pair of stone lions she sees outside of another house, weaving them into a fairy tale where she is the heroine and firmly destined for a happily ever after: “I will walk up low stone steps past stone lions guarding and into a courtyard where a fountain plays and the queen waits, weeping, for the princess to return... and we shall live happily ever after” (Jackson 20). And then later on, unable to relinquish the beautiful day dream involving the oleanders, she weaves them into day dream:

She nearly stopped forever just outside Ashton, because she came to a tiny cottage buried in a garden. I could live there all alone, she thought, slowing the car to look down the winding garden path to the small blue front door with, perfectly, a white cat on the step. No one would ever find me there, either, behind all those roses, and just to make sure I would plant oleanders by the road. (Jackson 22)

Just as the second Mrs de Winter constructs an idea of Rebecca based on piecing together bits of conversation, so Eleanor is piecing together her ultimate fantasy, incorporating anything and everything that strikes her fancy:

In a restaurant, she sees a child who will not drink her milk because it is not served in her usual cup, which has stars on the bottom so that she can see them as she finishes drinking. Eleanor identifies with the child and silently urges her to resist.  
(Hattenhauer 156)

When Dr Montague explains the story of Hill House to Eleanor and the others, he mentions various items of the house’s history, and Eleanor latches on again: “‘I would have stolen those gold-rimmed dishes,’ Eleanor said, laughing” (Jackson 88). Later on, these gold-rimmed dishes feature again in her alarming descent into madness, as she constructs a future with Theodora, who has clearly stated that she is not interested in living with Eleanor:

Smiling, Eleanor went on ahead, kicking her feet comfortably along the path. Now I know where I am going, she thought I told her about my mother so *that’s* all right; I

will find a little house, or maybe an apartment like hers. I will see her every day, and we will go searching together for lovely things- gold-trimmed dishes, and a white cat, and a sugar Easter egg and a cup of stars. I will not be frightened or alone any more. (Jackson 212)

Eleanor's first reaction to Hill House is that of horror and repulsion. Whether it is intuition or something more sinister, she enters the house feeling afraid of it, instead of at home. The house rejects all attempts to be a safe home, inverting the idea that outside is dangerous and inside is secure; those who see Hill House want to leave immediately. Eleanor's first few impressions of the house show it to have an almost sentience, one that she interprets as being aimed at doing her harm:

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice... It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope. Exorcism cannot alter the countenance of a house; Hill House would stay as it was until it was destroyed. (Jackson 34)

All who see the house feel the same; this is more than another one of Eleanor's fantasies. The house is designed to throw the viewer off, to unsettle and disturb. The first time Eleanor is left alone in her room, she acts as if she is inside the mouth of a volatile monster:

She discovered that she had been trying to put her suitcase down without making a sound and then realised that while she unpacked she had been in her stocking feet, trying to move as silently as possible, as though stillness were vital in Hill House; she remembered that Mrs Dudley had also walked without a sound... Somewhere down there was her little car, which could take her away again. Journeys end in lovers meeting, she thought; it was my own choice to come. Then she realised that she was afraid to go back across the room. (Jackson 42)

The house disrupts the idea of safety, challenging the picturesque domesticity that Eleanor is so driven by, and yet she is still able to overcome any previous fear or apprehension towards the house the more time she spends inside, lulled by her first experience of belonging to a group. Her experience of a true home is so fractured that she misconstrues a terrifying,

haunted space as the house she was always meant to find, filled with the people she was always meant to spend her time with. The house distorts emotions and relationships, and the only people who are able to safely navigate it are the gatekeeper, Mr Dudley, and his wife, the housekeeper. Although they have worked at the house for years, they have very strict rules about their conduct within the house, which presumably keeps them safe.

Dr Montague has spent time studying the house, and works to try understand why the house incites such strong reactions:

“You will recall,” the doctor began, “the houses described in Leviticus as ‘leprous’, *tsaraas*, or Homer’s phrase for the underworld: *aidao domos*, the house of Hades; I need not remind you, I think, that the concept of certain houses as unclean or forbidden- perhaps sacred- is as old as the mind of man. Certainly there are spots which inevitably attach to themselves an atmosphere of holiness and goodness; it might not then be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad. Hill House, whatever the cause, has been unfit for human habitation for upwards of twenty years. What it was like before then, whether its personality was moulded by the people who lived here, or the things they did, or whether it was evil from its start are all questions I cannot answer. Naturally I hope that we will all know a good deal more about Hill House before we leave. No one knows, even, why some houses are called haunted.”

“What else *could* you call Hill House?” Luke demanded.

“Well- disturbed, perhaps. Leprous. Sick. Any of the popular euphemisms for insanity; a deranged house is a pretty conceit.” (Jackson 70)

He is able to say that the house is ‘deranged’, as if all houses are sentient to a certain extent, and that Hill House is one that suffers, and does not behave like the others. The very structure of the house rejects homeliness, designed to unsettle. Hill House is not a home, and as a structure it does not seem to invite any person to live inside. Architecturally, the House was designed to unsettle:

Every angle is slightly wrong. Hugh Crain must have detested other people and their sensible squared-away houses, because he made his house to suit his mind. (Jackson 106)

Hill House, of course, is linked to Eleanor and the novel increasingly becomes a psychological exploration of how Eleanor gives in to the house and begins to identify with it:

Although the house estranges her, it gives Eleanor an uncanny shock of recognition because it is a figuration of her. Jackson wrote in her notes, as if she discovered this point while rereading her drafts, “Eleanor IS house.” Likewise, Jackson wrote in her notes that Eleanor is “ALL DISTORTED LIKE HOUSE.” By the end of the novel, the identification Eleanor and the house are clear. It turns out that the house’s foundation and construction allegorize Eleanor’s psychological foundation.

(Hattenhauer 159)

“ELEANOR IS HOUSE” is as easily “MARGARET IS HOUSE” in Jackson’s “The Beautiful Stranger” or “MARGARET IS PART OF THE HOUSE FOREVER” in “A Visit”. The psychosomatic bonding between women and houses reaches the point of death in *The Haunting of Hill House* and goes beyond that in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Jackson’s stories speak to our engagement with our homes that has a significant influence on our identities, or sense of identity:

Our perceptions of our own bodies, and of the spaces in our homes, are fraught with anxieties that emerge most vividly when the tactile practices of embodiment become misaligned with the material structures of domesticity. Grief, memory loss, psychological disorders, and disease all reveal the tactile aspects of our intimate, embodied relations with our loved ones, caregivers, pets, and prized objects. Physical and psychological dysfunction threatens the graceful motion of the body through the home, reorganizing the boundaries and valuations of its spaces, to threaten both body and domestic order... identity is deeply enmeshed in the habitual corporeal dynamics of the home. Attachment to the home is based on our physical engagement with it, and its spaces become interwoven with emotion and memory. This attachment can imperil the homeowner, as it does for the elderly, or intensify the pain of loss. (Smyth and Croft 7)

The evil within the novel is the House, and arguably anything that happens within the House happened because the House manipulated the inhabitants. Eleanor’s journey is a quest for freedom from her sister and her family, and this culminates in her mind in finding her own home. Eleanor does not immediately fall under Hill House’s spell, and her aversion to it is eventually weakened.

Living in the 1950s as a woman, this aversion could be read as repressed anxiety, even fear, about the house and family life that Eleanor has been taught to want so desperately, even



though she has not found either of those satisfactory during her life. Just as in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the narrator projects her fears and frustrations with the domestic sphere onto her environment, the house, and this invokes the woman in the wallpaper. Similarly, Eleanor’s own misapprehensions about the house and family that she so fervently desires may be tainted with fear and doubts about the authenticity of that happiness, and so the House responds. Although Eleanor eventually accepts Hill House as “home”, the context of the American 1950s, “home” carried ominous meanings for many women:

Home is a disturbing signifier throughout Jackson's fiction, a fact that reflects the ambiguous role of home and domesticity in the 1950s. Although Skolnick argues that the fifties were a "throwback to the Victorian cult of domesticity with its polarized sex roles and almost religious reverence for home and hearth," and May speculates that "home" represented a protective and containing force because "within its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed," it is also the case that the explosive growth of the suburbs during the fifties triggered profound suspicions about what constituted the idea of home. (Hague 83)

The reader is unsettled by the text of *The Haunting of Hill House*, beginning to find every description of the house as malicious and alarming. As the reader reads, the very schema of the house is disrupted, and the familiar becomes uncanny. Raising their eyes from their books, any reader within any architectural structure will be forced to re-evaluate the building they are within. Initially the reader feels the same as Eleanor, horrified by what she sees and describes, reminding us that “horror fiction demands that the emotions expressed by the characters are the same as the emotions experienced by the audience” (Carroll 17).

As Eleanor spends more time in the house, however, she slowly becomes lulled by her dream of belonging, seduced into madness, and finally committing suicide. This section of the novel is alarming for the reader, as Eleanor embraces what she previously found so frightening, and the reader still thinks of it as dangerous. Her final descent into madness shows her becoming one with the house, achieving a sort of awareness that reaches beyond human limitations that somewhat refers back to “The Yellow Wallpaper”: “‘They’re coming,’ Eleanor said. ‘I can hear them on the stairs.’ I can hear everything, all over the house, she wanted to tell them” (Jackson 206). She is able to exert the same effect on the inhabitants of the house as the house itself: “She touched a kitchen door as she passed, and six miles away Mrs Dudley shuddered in her sleep” (231). She is given a brief moment of clarity before her death: “In the

unending, crashing second before the car hurled into the tree she thought clearly, *Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me?*" (245). She is unable to escape the domestic, dying before she can leave the grounds of Hill House.

As previously discussed, Eleanor is made vulnerable to Hill House due to her strong desire for belonging. To contrast, I shall discuss the House's effect on the characters that are less vulnerable due to having a sense of home and belonging, and the group as a whole, particularly the relationship between Eleanor and Theo, as well as the difference in the House's effect between Mrs Montague and Eleanor.

Not much is known about Theodora: she owns a shop, is alluded to having a lesbian partner, and appeared at Hill House due to a study where it seemed she could be psychic:

Theodora's world was one of delight and soft colours; she had come onto Dr Montague's list because... she had somehow been able, amused and excited over her own incredible skill, to identify correctly eighteen cards out of twenty... held by an assistant out of sight and hearing... the name of Theodora shone in the records of the laboratory and so came inevitably to Dr Montague's attention. (Jackson 8)

Almost as soon as Eleanor and Theo have met, they fall into a quick intimacy: they construct elaborate imaginary scenarios as humour and stress relief, and remain close to each other physically:

Perhaps she shivered, because Theodora turned with a quick smile and touched her shoulder gently, reassuringly; she is charming, Eleanor thought, smiling back, not at all the sort of person who belongs in this dreary, dark place... I am not the sort of person for Hill house but I can't think of anybody who would be. (Jackson 43)

However, as Theodora and Eleanor do spend significant amounts of time together in Hill House, it cannot be missed that she gets to know Eleanor well—and Eleanor based her interaction with the world before coming to Hill House on the idea that she is an unknown. To Hattenhauer, Theodora is a reflection of Eleanor:

Theodora is her double. As Jackson wrote in her notes, "theo is eleanor." When they are about to share not only a room but also clothes, Theodora says, 'We're going to be practically twins'. She wears Eleanor's clothes. When Mrs. Montague arrives, she thinks Theodora is Eleanor. More importantly, Theo knows what Eleanor is thinking, as if Theo is inside Eleanor's mind, which, allegorically, she is... (162)

To Hattenhauer, Theodora as Eleanor's double allows for one person to act out what another represses (163); theoretically, this then also suggest that the double is able to articulate what the other thinks and to move when the other one is stationary. A famous moment in the novel further toys with the idea of Theodora being Eleanor's double as well as the idea that Theodora is *not* there, that there is *only* Eleanor:

Theodora's room connects with Eleanor's through their bathroom. They are at their closest figuratively when they are at their closest literally, sleeping in the same room in adjoining beds. When Eleanor dreams she is holding Theodora's hand but then awakes alone and too far from Theo to have been holding Theo's hand, Eleanor asks, 'Whose hand was I holding?' The answer is that if she was actually holding someone's hand, it had to be her own. In her notes, Jackson deemed this line the most important one in the novel. And it is, for it allows us to follow the connection of her right hand (traditionally the side associated with rationality, consciousness, and light) across to the left hand of darkness. (163)

The double is a regular motif in Gothic and Victorian literature and in *The Haunting of Hill House*, it allows for dual perspectives on both Eleanor and Theodora while keeping constant the idea that only one of the two characters, as they appear, is de-centered—which is Hattenhauer's own term for the majority of women characters in Jackson's fiction. However, whereas men do feature prominently to Jackson's other characters, either as lost or manipulative husbands or trickster figures, the trickster figure in *The Haunting of Hill House* may be Theodora, who is both Eleanor's enabler and disabler:

Thus Theodora is the projection of Eleanor's denied self. As Eleanor's alter ego, she embodies Eleanor's repressed eroticism and assertiveness. Eleanor is very uncomfortable with Theo's bright clothing. She recoils when Theodora tries to paint her toenails. And she apparently smears menstrual blood on Theodora's clothing and then blocks out any memory of doing so. Theodora is also a projection of Eleanor's denied assertiveness. Knowing Eleanor's disempowering unconsciousness of Eleanor's agency, Theo says, 'We never know where our courage is coming from' (50). Like many of Jackson's decentered subjects, she experiences motivation as arising from without. What little courage Eleanor has comes from Theodora. (163)

As Eleanor settles into the House, the four inhabitants bond quite fast. Just as Eleanor and Theodora have become friends, so Dr Montague and Luke entertain each other, often playing

chess together. Even on the first night, Eleanor feels that she is sitting where she was always meant to end up: “They were all silent, looking into the fire, lazy after their several journeys, and Eleanor thought, I am the fourth person in this room; I am one of them; I belong” (Jackson 60).

The others are not under the same spell that Eleanor is under, and yet Eleanor is beginning to give in to the house. As this continues, her close relationship with Theodora disintegrates:

I am going to get fat and lazy in Hill House,’ Theodora went on. Her insistence on naming Hill House troubled Eleanor. It’s as though she were saying it deliberately, Eleanor thought, telling the house she knows its name, calling the house to tell it where we are; is it bravado? ‘Hill House, Hill House, Hill House,’ Theodora said softly, and smiled across at Eleanor. (Jackson 123)

Eleanor begins to think that Theodora is behaving maliciously towards her, interpreting all her behaviour as designed to irritate her. She adopts a violent attitude, as if the House’s dark thoughts are entering her own mind: “I hate her, Eleanor thought, she sickens me; she is all washed and clean and wearing my red sweater... I would like to watch her dying, Eleanor thought” (Jackson 158).

Just as Eleanor’s relationship with Theo deteriorates, so does her relationship with Luke. Described as: “Luke Sanderson was a liar...also a thief” (Jackson 9), Luke is only present at Hill House as he is a member of the family that owns Hill House: “the family lawyer was prevailed upon to persuade Dr Montague that the house could on no account be rented to him for his purposes without the confining presence of a member of family during his stay” (9). His relationship with Eleanor and Theodora is playful and often flirtatious, but as Eleanor falls further under the House’s spell, Luke’s attitude to her changes. When Eleanor goes to the library during the middle of the night, presumably to commit suicide, he helps her down from the precarious staircase, but is furious with her: “‘Perhaps I will just push you over the edge,’ Luke said. ‘Let you smash down there on the floor. Now behave yourself and move slowly; get past me and start down the stairs. And just hope,’ he added furiously. ‘That I can resist the temptation to give you a shove?’” (235).

Eleanor’s relationship with Dr Montague remains constant, although he becomes more concerned about her as time goes on. He is arguably distracted from Eleanor during the time when she becomes fully entranced by the House, as his wife is visiting in order to assist in the

supernatural study with her assistant Arthur. She believes firmly in ghosts and hauntings, and is not afraid of them at all, rather viewing it as an opportunity to help any lost souls: “I am to be in your most haunted room, of course” (181) she says. Although when she is exposed to the supernatural events such as the banging on the walls and doors that break the glass of the pictures in the corridor, she is unable to hear it, and does not believe that the others are experiencing what they describe, choosing instead to continue her own methods: “I deplore fear in these matters” (185). When she does use her planchette to communicate with the spirits in the House, it seems to indicate Eleanor’s name: “There is also a name, spelled variously as Helen, or Helene, or Elena” (188). Although she believes fully in the hauntings, the House does not seem to have an effect on her like it does the others, and this is perhaps due to her strong sense of home, belonging, and purpose, which the others lack. Eleanor wishes strongly to escape her home; Theodora needs space and so welcomes a diversion; Dr Montague has a home and family, but prefers investigating by himself; Luke feels the pull of Hill House and often mentions taking it over according to his familial claim, but ultimately he does not have the same desire for home and family as Eleanor does, rooted so firmly as she is to the domestic sphere by the expectations for women at the time.

Eleanor’s madness manifests most often in her inner thoughts, and an awareness of what is happening in and around the House at all times. During the periods when the banging on the walls and doors begins, she starts to feel that the cause of the noise is related to her:

It is so cold, Eleanor thought childishly; I will never be able to sleep again with all this noise coming from inside my head; how can these others hear the noise when it is coming from inside my head? I am disappearing inch by inch into this house, I am going apart a little bit at a time because all this noise is breaking me; why are the *others* frightened? [...] (Jackson, 202)

As Hattenhauer notes, Jackson’s characters are usually “disunified” (14) and decentered, and her narrators are usually unreliable. The settings are often illogical (15) and conflated with the characters. The prismatic points of view of Hill House are as infinitive as they are when applied to “A Visit”, Jackson’s short story where a house seemingly has no limits and stretches into eternity. Jackson’s characters often have already lost something, and will lose even more at the void between imagination and memory while simultaneously existing in a world of ordered extremes. As Hagues notes:

Her indictment of the 1950s nuclear family and suburban lifestyles is an important interpretative rendering of the era, and her work insistently destabilizes the 1950s paradigm of containment and security in a variety of ways. Cold War fears of invasion, silent and invisible enemies, and a physical environment instantly vulnerable to nuclear destruction all find their correlatives in Jackson's novels and short stories. (89)

Suicide, parental control, loss, perceived gain (“The Beautiful Stranger”, “The Little House”) and reckless fantasy (“A Day in the Jungle”, “Louisa, Please Come Home”) recur in Jackson narratives. They assimilate into a consistent view into the Female Gothic, especially when we consider that Hill House and “The Castle” (the Blackwood family home in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*) are, most likely, literary manifestations of the average house-on-the-corner of 1950s American suburbia. What is inside the house, and often inside the thoughts of the women occupying these houses, is the substance of Jackson’s Female Gothic fiction.

## Chapter Four: *Like Water for Chocolate*: Infusing Traditional Domestic Imprisonment with Magic Realism and Postmodern Parody

First used as a term by Franz Roh, magical realism in literature combines the seemingly paradoxical genres of realism and the fantastic, and executes it so smoothly that the reader barely registers the shift from familiar reality to the impossible. The texts celebrate the mundane, immersing readers in a world not very far removed from their own, while weaving fabulous events and people into the structure of the known and familiar. This shift to the magical and uncanny becomes unremarkable for readers the more they read. Emotions and thoughts can change the world, but this world is always situated within the pressures of everyday routine and the need for food and sleep. In his essay ‘Magical Realism: Post Expressionism’, Franz Roh states:

... [the artist] repeatedly insists that the landscape be definitively, rigorously, a real landscape that could be confused with an existing one. He wants it to be “real”, to impress us as something ordinary and familiar and, nevertheless, to be magic by virtue of that isolation in the room, even the last little blade of grass can refer to the spirit.  
(25)

Popularised in Latin America by writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, magical realism as a genre has extended across the world, with notable authors being Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and Haruki Murakami. However, the term “magical realism” is often applied to texts that do not necessarily fit the expectations of the genre, but use many of the same postmodern writing styles and techniques often associated with magical realism. More serious works of fantasy, for example, may be branded as “magical realism” in order to attract readers who do not normally read within the fantasy genre. These works may include people and events that are actually magical or supernatural, instead of being part of the different interpretation of reality that the characters in magical realism experience.

What we now call “magical realism” has a significant history of development, traditionally rooted in Latin American writers. For most of the twentieth century “magical realism” was challenging to define in terms of what it stood for and its identity as was a genre, cultural shadow, technique or style in literature:

Despite the fact that the term has been mainly associated with the literature and the way of writing of Latin American authors, it was first used in the art world in Europe.

German art critic Franz Roh introduced the term *Magischer Realismus* in 1925 to refer to a new form of post-expressionist painting as revealing the mysterious elements hidden in everyday reality. In 1927 Roh's essay was translated into Spanish and published by influential magazine 'Revista de Occidente', which was widely circulated amongst writers in Latin America, in this way the term *el realismo mágico* arrived there. (Bowers 9, 14; Reeds 43-44, 50)

However only in 1948 it did become a Latin-American phenomenon, when the Venezuelan Arturo Uslar Pietri used the term "el realismo mágico" it in his book *Letras y hombres de Venezuela*. Soon in 1949, the Cuban Alejo Carpentier presented the similar concept *lo real maravilloso*, in his famous prologue to *El reino de este mundo* Carpentier emphasised the importance of the American cultural experience and history. (Bowers 15, Reeds 52-54)

In 1955 the critic Ángel Flores brought the term "magical realism" into the broad usage and started the phase of critical theories and polemics around the term. Flores defined the term as "amalgamation of realism and fantasy" (112) and "an authentic expression" of Latin America (116). In 1967 Luis Leal criticized Flores and returned to Roh's original conception: "In magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts" (Leal 121)." – (Volkova, 2015)

Loosely defined, magical realism makes the ordinary remarkable and makes the extraordinary unremarkable. Blurring the lines between what the reader perceives as magic and non-magic, these events could be read as magical or just the imagination of the character. Often, female characters appear to be more central in celebrated magical realistic texts. The female characters' experiences of events are then remarkably different from those of the male characters who have the freedom to leave the home that is sometimes at the centre of magical realistic texts. Therefore, these texts explore the day-to-day existence of the female characters within the domestic sphere, for that is what they are anchored to. When magical events occur, they occur within the known and familiar. Magic transforms the strangeness of the events into something that can be understood and managed within the realist aspect of the moral universe within the text, as one moves within familiar spaces and routines:

The copresence of oddities, the interaction of the bizarre with the entirely ordinary, the doubleness of conceptual codes, the irreducibly hybrid nature of experience strikes the mind's eye... think of it as copresence, as duality and mutual tolerance, as different geometries at work constructing a double space. Magical realism focuses the



problem of fictional space. It does this by suggesting a model of how different geometries, inscribing boundaries that fold and refold like quicksilver, can superimpose themselves upon one another. (Wilson 210)

Magic transforms the strangeness of the events into something that can be understood and managed within the realist aspect of the moral universe within the text, as one moves within familiar spaces and routines. The connections between women characters and magic realism have been explored in various studies, with some agreement that Woman-as-Other becomes a focal point, (It is tempting, from a postcolonial point of view, to consider the fact that certain Latin American countries could themselves have been considered marginalized in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.) Women have provided some of the more prominent characters in magical realistic fiction works, such as Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993) and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982). British author Jeanette Winterson offers a similar investment in the female characters in *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) in which, like Angela Carter, she offers substantial revisionism of fairy tales and focuses the reworked texts through magic realism. Magical powers, or the suggestion thereof, attributed to women in these texts often delineate the female exclusion from and resistance to patriarchal power structures.

The prevalence of women in magical realistic literature and magical realism's confluences with developments in postmodern theory is alluded to by Rita Felski in her book *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), where she looks at popular women's writing through the early to middle parts of the Twentieth Century. She identifies a "cluster of themes" (117) including escapism, fantasy, melodrama and sentimentality that form part of what she describes as "popular sublime" women's literature. This so-called "women's literature" is dismissed by modernism's charge of such fiction belonging to both mass cultural production and realism; therefore, the opposite of high art (Naremore, 58). Felski points out that such literature belonged to neither mass cultural production nor realism and focused, instead, on "quasi-transcendental aspirations, as exemplified in a gesturing toward an ineffable domain beyond the constraints of a mundane material reality" (117).

Moving on from modernism's masculinist rejections of much women's literature<sup>1</sup>, postmodernism merged better with the growth of magical realism and more readily worked with the "kitsch" of the "popular sublime" alluded to in Felski's study. The "kitsch" such

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<sup>1</sup> See James Naremore's essay "Blood Melodrama" in *More Than Night* (Berkeley, 1998)

literature allegedly belonged to does, in a minor way, correspond to early (known and inferred) forms of magic realist literature in art between the 1920s and 1950s before the recognised literary form:

They excite in the ordinary person an emotional activity for which there is no scope in... life. These novels will all be found to make play with the key words of the emotional vocabulary which provoke the vague warm surges of feeling associated with religion and religion substitutes—e.g. life, death, love, good, evil, sin, home, mother, noble, gallant, purity, honour. (Leavis, in Felski 117)

Other times this rebellion against domestic ideals and roles will have more obvious, physical consequences, such as in the story of Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate*, where her emotions cause a kind of ‘kitchen magic’. Forced into the role of cook and caretaker for her mother by her own family, Tita is not allowed to consider an independent future away from these roles. Because she is not given a voice for her opinions and thoughts, her only outlet is through the domestic sphere she is imprisoned in. When she is experiencing very strong emotions, her food has the power to create lust or sadness that overpowers those who eat it. Just as the narrator, in some readings, finds magic within her prison in the wallpaper she reads in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Tita finds magic within the chores she is forced to do for her family.

*Like Water for Chocolate* is a suitable example of postmodernism’s enjoyment of magic realism: among other things, the novel uses parody as a form of story-telling and the deployment of Tita’s kitchen magic is central to the success of this. At least two forms of popular romantic narrative find themselves relentlessly parodied in the overblown narration of Tita’s life-long love affair with Pedro, initially her intended suitor but then her sister’s husband. First, the chivalrous action and spectacle of the popular paperback form of romance that novel readers of Barbara Cartland and Mills and Boon would have been accustomed to is employed. The chivalrous action and spectacle are deflated in moments such as Gertrude’s spectacular eloping on horseback with a Mexican revolutionary. The elopement is a watershed moment in the novel, especially as it is immediately followed by the infinitely more humble and less impressive sight of Pedro, the supposed male romantic lead character, exiting the same scene on a squeaking bicycle.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Esquivel’s novel parodies the very narrative form it uses as vital to its fabric: the Nineteenth Century “women’s writing” prevalent in Mexican society from the 1860s to the 1890s:

The study of verbal and visual imagery must begin with the understanding that both the novel and, to a lesser extent, the film work as a parody of a genre. The genre in question is the Mexican version of women's fiction published in monthly instalments together with recipes, home remedies, dressmaking patterns, short poems, moral exhortations, ideas on home decoration, and the calendar of church observances. In brief, this genre is the Nineteenth-Century forerunner of what is known throughout Europe and America as a "woman's magazine". Around 1850 these publications in Mexico were called "calendars for young ladies." Since home and church were the private and public sites of all educated young ladies, these publications represented the written counterpart to women's socialization, and as such, they are documents that conserve and transmit a Mexican female culture in which the social context and cultural space are particularly for women by women.

...By 1860 the instalment novel grew out of the monthly recipe or recommended excursion. More elaborate love stories by women began to appear regularly by the 1880s. The genre was never considered literature by the literary establishment because of its episodic plots, overt sentimentality, and highly stylized characterization. Nevertheless, by the turn of the century every literate woman in Mexico was or had been an avid reader of the genre. (Maria Elena De Valdes)

De Valdes's rich study of the history of the instalment novel in Mexico opens up a number of ways to explore Esquivel's novel that link ideas of imprisonment by tradition to escape through magic (in other words, using fiction to escape a social superstructure). The study in turn corresponds to the same time period of the separate spheres in Western culture that is responded to by 'The Yellow Wallpaper' in 1892.

In Kathleen Glenn's study, "Latino Americana Postmodern Parody and Culinary-Narrative Art in Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate*", reference is made to Bakhtin's idea that:

Two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis, two speaking subjects (Bakhtin, 76). In *Como agua para chocolate* "serious" language is used for humorous effect, "high" style is mocked, and tongue-in-cheek irreverence prevails over solemn straightforwardness. Emotions and the language in which they are expressed are hyperbolic. (Glenn 42)

In the editor's introduction to the 1981 translated edition of Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist, in reference to Bakhtin's essay, "Epic and Novel", surmises that "the novel can include, ingest, devour other genres", pointing to the novel's capacity for genre inclusiveness and liberal imagination. *Like Water for Chocolate*'s magical realism parodies the Mexican instalment novel, the war/revolution novel and the paperback romance, enabling a varied narrative pathway and a veritable dialogue between different genres and different forms.

In M. Ruth Noriega Sánchez's *Challenging Realities: Magic Realism in Contemporary American Women's Fiction* (2002), further application for Bakhtin is found:

The magic realist text can then be read as reflecting in its language of narration real conditions of speech and cognition within the social relations of a postcolonial culture. This dialectic between fictional worlds and within language leads us to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the novel as dialogical discourse.

In magic realist fiction, the two separate narrative modes never manage to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy. Both narrative modes, magical and real, are held in suspension without one dominating the other. (27)

Furthermore, Sánchez draws parallels between Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque and the carnivalesque when discussing *Like Water for Chocolate*'s use of magical realism. This approach is not unfamiliar to literary critics and Bakhtin scholars, as pointed to by the text Sánchez references in this regard; namely, D.K. Danow's *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque*. The carnivalesque is a reference to "carnival" (now more commonly known as "mardi gras"), a Christian festival celebrated in the West just before Lent, at a point of seasonal change and with allusions to the changing of seasonal light. Winter light cedes to the light of spring and the two seasons come with their own connotations of death and life. However, as a transitional moment, lines and boundaries blur and the carnival, a public event, is typically exemplified by costumes and feasts that can at the same time be celebratory and excessive. This excessiveness has to be seen against the inhibitions Lent brings. An underscored emphasis exists on observing religious, moral law but not necessarily by abiding to the social and civil laws of the time. In this, Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque speaks to literature's ability to use modes that contradict the dominant/dominating styles/tropes prevalent in writing at the time with a playful or mischievous abandon that is public by the very nature of published writing itself, as well as

verging on chaos were it not for the liberal context of the carnival. Added to the carnivalesque, through the distorted imagery provided by costumes and masks (at times, the intertwining of angels and demons), is the concept of the grotesque, where the body is exaggerated, selectively, as symbolism and presented, usually, as monstrous or repulsive. Both the carnivalesque and the grotesque, for Sánchez, can be explored in Esquivel's novel:

*Like Water for Chocolate* explores manifestations of popular culture that show a world upside down in order to abolish social hierarchies and the established order. In line with the features that Bakhtin examined in Rabelais' work and medieval folk culture, great importance is given to perception through the senses (especially, smell and taste). The figure of the banquet as social event, the close links between food and sex, and between life and death are manifestations of perception through the senses. These elements approximate Esquivel's novel to Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism. Bakhtin situates grotesque realism, with its chief characteristics of exaggeration and degradation, at a crucial point in time, when the folk culture of humour and the oral tradition on which it is based began to decline (175).

The decline of humour and oral tradition in *Like Water for Chocolate* is paradoxically rendered through the novel's deliberately tragi-comic narrative, with magical realism serving to keep humour—albeit dark and sometimes cruel—constant throughout the narrative. Tita's great-niece, the narrator of the book living in the late twentieth century, has no living woman relative (in the first chapter, this is alluded to by "Mama used to say") able to orally convey the recipes and legends to her; she has them only in written form. However, the decline of folk culture and tradition also has the ever-present nemesis of modernity, usually exemplified, in Perry Anderson's assertion (1984, 104), by war or revolution. In the case of *Like Water for Chocolate*, the backdrop for the decline of humour and tradition is the Mexican Revolution (1910—1920). Against this real, documented historic event with its obvious gender casting, Esquivel's novel and its magical realism dare to find both humour and a reclaiming of militant space for women, in that Gertrudis joining the revolutionaries (albeit through an act of culinary magic from Tita) is a reference to real-life women who actively took part in the Mexican Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Gertrudis is able to enact many of Tita's desires: as a consequence of the food, she has sex outside of marriage and runs away from

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<sup>2</sup> See Susan Lucas Dobrian. 'Romancing the Cook: Parodic Consumption of Popular Romance Myths in "Como agua para chocolate"' *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. 24, No. 48 (Jul. - Dec., 1996), pp. 56-66.

home. She is able to be with the one she loves and simultaneously free herself from the rigid domestic space of Mama Elena's ranch. She rejects the feminine domestic sphere and moves into the masculine by becoming a general in the revolution's armies.

The grotesque body, in the novel, belongs to Tita's rival and the second villain of the narrative – her sister Rosaura. After the primary antagonist, Mama Elena, is reduced to a spectre of disembodiment (she returns as a ghost to chastise Tita), Tita's kitchen magic becomes her way of exacting revenge on Rosaura for refusing to give up Pedro. In fact, female bodies are highly symbolic in the text, often suggesting the carnivalesque. At various points in the novel, Rosaura's body is contrasted to Tita's (whose body is deliberately likened to food in the novel's parodic exaggerations of romance novels), with Gertrudis, ironically thanks to Tita's magic, being the only one of the central female characters to find sexual enjoyment with her body (Chencha is raped, Mama Elena is crippled, Tita has to wait to the end of the novel to have a guilt-free consummation of her relationship with Pedro, and Rosaura is associated with Pedro's lack of enjoyment of sex). Tita's body, like the food she prepares, is brought to boil when she incinerates herself and Pedro at the end of the novel, while Rosaura dies of indigestion, leaving a grotesque corpse. For Sánchez:

According to the melodramatic dichotomy of good and evil, the heroine's positive attributes shine more brightly when compared to the negative characteristics of her enemy. The magic realist characterisation of Rosaura must then include aesthetic elements of the grotesque to emphasise such contrast. (176)

Through magical realism, the carnivalesque also allows for the absurd, defined as that which is “out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical” (Esslin, 23) and, in its literary deployment of the Theatre of the Absurd in the late 1940s and the 1950s, indicative of the end of modernism and the beginning of postmodernism, with magical realism on the verge of its own popular entry to the literary canon by the 1960s. Female bodies, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, facilitate the deeper fusion of magic realism and the absurd, specifically when fire and heat are discussed in the text:

While traditional romantic rhetoric describes a woman's discovery of sexual desire by resorting to similes and metaphors that depict her body in various degrees of heat, Esquivel shows us what happens when the cliché is rendered literal. Although comical, the image of Gertrudis radiating so much heat that the shower that is supposed to cool her down catches fire is also absurd... Tita's “explosive” death at

the end of the novel reveals an identical tactic. While Pedro's death of stroke from a sudden release of long deferred desire is merely comic (unless one insists on reading the ending in a seriously romantic way), Tita's suicide exaggerates another staple of melodrama and (tragic or tragicomic) romance. Rendering as "real" the metaphorical fireworks of romantic comedies and melodrama, *Como agua para chocolate* ends with enough sparks to set to rest any doubts about the carnivalized appropriation of a stereotypical romantic ending. Since the sexual consummation (which does not take place in the end) occurs after the big banquet at her niece's wedding (the novel's other, and happier, ending), Tita's body, as a body flamé, becomes the novel's last rite as well as its last meal, but this does not obscure the fact that her exaggerated death, which could also be read as another death by poisoning in the novel, is indeed hyperbolic enough to suggest a parodic take on the melodramatic ritual of dying for love. (Niebylski 40)

To Danow, the carnival allows for the fluid crossing of borders, allowing for one set of extremes (the official) to meet another, opposed set of extremes (the unofficial). The carnival brings both light (gaiety, celebration) and dark (the grotesque and death) and is a noteworthy presence in Latin American literature. In agreement with Danow, Sánchez's findings in the novel are particularly significant and indicative of the novel's postmodernism. When discussing the large quilt that Tita spends most of the novel knitting, Sánchez concludes:

At the end of the novel, the quilt covers three hectares, the totality of the ranch. It represents an artistic manifestation of women's imagination, creativity and craftsmanship, and functions as a symbol for women's lives and culture. The quilt also becomes a metaphor for the making of fiction and for the novel itself, a recurrent image that pieces together magic and realism (175).

### Playing with Food: *Like Water for Chocolate* as Parody

Esquivel toys with genre in *Like Water for Chocolate* and, much like Angela Carter, her writing is palimpsestic in nature, with the obvious nods to the female-oriented instalment novels from the Nineteenth Century. The layering of texts speaks to the inherited traditions of female domesticity, repackaging recipes and tips that were passed down from mother to daughter, just as Tita inherits both her rigid role as the youngest daughter from her mother, and domestic knowledge and skills from the family domestic servant who is more her

mother-figure, Nacha. This parodying acknowledges the dual languages, styles, and points of view that Bakhtin raises, pointing not only to the women's instalment novel or magazine and the way the novel imitates it, but also to the modern equivalent of glamour magazines that present similar domestic advice on house, home, beauty, and other so-called "womanly concerns", which are still prevalent and normalised in modern society. Glenn writes:

Although the characterization of Pedro's love for Tita as "inconmensurable" (26) might thrill Liala or Barbara Cartland's readers, the adjective is an example of double voicing, in that Esquivel inserts "a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own" (Morson and Emerson 150). Language that it may once have been possible to employ unselfconsciously, naively, is now parodied. (42)

In this way, not only is it the monthly instalment texts that are parodied and duplicated within Esquivel's novel, but also the sweeping gestures and language of romance novels. The story arcs are expected precisely because of the parodying aspect, and Tita and Pedro's love becomes inevitable simply due to the genre it is housed within, whereas other aspects of the story are housed within other genres. Just as the narrators in *The Bloody Chamber* and *Rebecca* shoulder the burden of inherited female traditions, so too does Tita and, consequentially, the narrator of the story, who tells Tita's story generations after her death. The clichés that Esquivel employs are themselves traditions, becoming clichéd through layers and layers of repetitions, imitations, and even parodies:

Behind the purportedly simple episodic plots there was an infra-history of life as it was lived, with all its multiple restrictions for women of this social class. The characterization followed the forms of life of these women rather than their unique individuality; thus, the heroines were the survivors, those who were able to live out a full life in spite of the institution of marriage which, in theory if not in practice, was a form of indentured slavery for life in which a woman served father and brothers then moved on to serve husband and sons together with her daughters and, of course, the women from the servant class. The women's fiction of this woman's world concentrated on one overwhelming fact of life: how to transcend the conditions of existence and express oneself in love and in creativity. (de Valdes 78)

To approach a text such as this is to approach an entire genre, with all the nuances and complexities it might hold, just as Tita's birthright is to be born into generations of traditions.



The postmodern imitation of the instalment genre allows for huge clichés and romantic endings, but Esquivel's novel concentrates on these clichés until they are no longer believable even within the realm of fiction: the text challenges the reader's suspension of belief, even within the parodic style of writing. The magazines that the text parodies sought to educate women on what was expected of them, a written guide for domestic activities and conduct. De Valdes writes:

The genre was never considered literature by the literary establishment because of its episodic plots, overt sentimentality, and highly stylized characterization.

Nevertheless, by the turn of the Century every literate woman in Mexico was or had been an avid reader of the genre. But what has been completely overlooked by the male-dominated literary culture of Mexico is that these novels were highly coded in an authentic women's language of inference and reference to the commonplaces of the kitchen and the home which were completely unknown by any man. (78)

Inherited female traditions and domestic spaces must have been experienced by readers in order for them to render full meaning of the text. As such, these texts are able to speak privately to their readers within a public text, just as Tita infuses her own meanings in the food she cooks. The meals prepared and eaten within the fictional work mirror the recipes presented in the chapter headings. Such mirroring speaks again to the inherited practices and knowledge that women created and maintained within the domestic sphere:

The appearance of cookbooks marks a shift from informally (often orally) transmitted practices to the codification of selected recipes (and, of these, usually only one version) into a fixed form. (Baderoon 108)

The parody and coding of knowledge is not simply within the genre but also within the visual layout of the novel itself, able to be recognised with a brief glance for what it imitates.

Esquivel creates the duality in several ways. First, she begins with the title of the novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, a locution which translates as "water at the boiling point" used as a simile in Mexico to describe any event or relationship that is so tense, hot, and extraordinary that it can only be compared to scalding water on the verge of boiling, as called for in the preparation of that most Mexican of all beverages, dating from at least the thirteenth century: hot chocolate (Soustelle, 153-61). Second, the subtitle is taken directly from the model: "A Novel in Monthly Installments, with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies." Together the

title and subtitle cover both the parody and the model. Third, the reader finds upon opening the book, in place of an epigraph, a traditional Mexican proverb: "A la mesa y a la cama / Una sola vez se llama" (To the table or to bed / You must come when you are bid). The woodcut that decorates the page is the typical Nineteenth-Century cooking stove. The fourth and most explicit dualistic technique is Esquivel's reproduction of the format of her model. (de Valdes 79).

The text speaks both to female domesticity and entrapment, but also of female power. The domestic sphere is used for evoking expression and, at times, liberation. As the youngest daughter in the family, Tita is required by tradition to remain at home, unmarried, in order to look after her mother. She is firmly rooted to the domestic sphere, spending most of her childhood in the kitchen, and eventually coming to have control over it as she grows up.

Even as an infant, Tita's emotions are linked to the kitchen and food and, as she grows, the effects her emotions will have on the food, and the people who consume it increase. As she grows, she is able to start preparing food for the family, and she learns how to run a kitchen and cook meals over the carefree childhoods of her sisters.

Food, in the words of Gabeba Baderoon, makes for: "a supple and complex human activity, characterized by both material and symbolic dimensions. In the disciplines of history, anthropology and sociology the subject has been studied for the insights it offers into social relations, notions of self, and matters of power" (98). In Esquivel's postmodern hands, traditional recipes become chapter markers in the book, and insights into traditional Mexican food. The legacies attached to these markers of tradition are shown.

The kitchen becomes a place where Tita can express emotion: she is able to confide in Nacha when she experiences very strong emotions while cooking. She imbues the food with these emotions so that those who eat the food will feel the same as she does. This is not a conscious act, and it seems that because she was born, raised, and came to power in the kitchen, the kitchen itself becomes an extension of her, amplifying her emotions through the act of eating. These strong emotions that so influence the food she makes are usually tied to romantic love, whether it is joy or heartbreak, jealousy or lust. The food she cooks while in thrall to emotion causes the consumers to mirror the emotions she is feeling with magnified intensity, however these broadcasted emotions are tied to romantic love, traditionally associated with feminine desires and concerns. As such the magic that Tita works stays firmly within the domestic and feminine spheres. The magazine-style chapter recipes break up the novel, but the text itself is

filled with culinary advice, forcing the reader to engage with the practicality of the text, reading parts of it as less fictional than the distilled story. Interspersed with sweeping romantic feelings and heartbreaks, reader does not settle, unable to read the text through the same lens when it distorts into recipes and practical advice and back to the grand story. Flung between historical fiction, domestic advice, and magical realism, the text denies the reader a traditional reading experience, even though the text is constructed from multiple intertextualities and engagements with traditional forms:

We are even offered a tip on how to keep from crying while doing the chopping: place a small piece of onion on your head. (Personally, I find that holding a bit of bread between your teeth is more effective.) It would be tempting to say that we have gone from the supposedly sublime (undying love) to the ridiculous (pork sausage and onions) were it not for the fact that for Tita and Esquivel there is nothing ridiculous about cooking. The juxtaposition, nevertheless, is jarring. The same technique is used in the next chapter when the narrator relates how the wedding cake produces strange effects upon the guests, causing all of them to yearn for the love of their life but also making them violently ill. (Glenn 42)

Tita is initially not able to employ this power at will or use it to influence people when convenient. This culinary magic seems to be the only way she is able to express her emotions, as her position as the youngest daughter renders her voiceless about her concerns or objections within her household. Restricted by the social conventions of living as a woman within revolutionary Mexico, the magical occurrences are the only way Tita is able to acknowledge and share her emotions, and she has to use the codex of the kitchen in order to do so. Gabeba Baderoon comments on the kitchen:

Precisely because it is the location of everyday exchanges, the kitchen is also the space of overheard information, of a supply of food, of secret knowledge (such as healing potions) among slaves – the site of small resistances encoded into tastes, sound, touch, glances and smells. (86)

At Mama Elena's ranch, the inhabitants are involved in all sections of the food process, including the raising and slaughtering of livestock, the growing of certain herbs and crops, as well as the actual cooking, serving, and eating process. So the kitchen becomes a centre of life and death – especially at a ranch where Tita was born on the table. As the person who manages the kitchen, she controls not just the food put on the table but also works with the

people who are employed to perform other domestic duties, allowing her to act as intermediary between the household and staff. Her actions are responsible for bringing the family together throughout the day for meals. In this way, Tita's decisions control the daily activities of the household, especially after Mama Elena's death. The power she has within the domestic space is enough for her to use to influence house guests and make her emotions known. The kitchen gives her a voice denied to Rosaura, who does not have to follow the tradition of the youngest daughter remaining unmarried and yet does not flourish with the opportunities she has that Tita is deprived of. Baderoon writes:

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) Michel de Certeau asserts that the powerless use the objects of consumption in ways that exceed and escape the desires of the dominant classes and gives an example from the colonization of the Americas. The powerless, he says, makes 'innumerable and infinite decimal transformations within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules. (97)

De Certeau's description of the mechanisms of such subversion plays on the notion of invisibility. In contrast to the "centralised, glamorous, and spectacular production" of the elites, consumption by the powerless can be: "devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather shows its power in its ways of using the products imposed by dominant economic order." (1984: xii-xiii) (Baderoon, 97)

Tita is empowered in a way that Rosaura and Gertrudis are not (at least, until Gertrudis escapes and is disowned by her family). Although restricted and unable to exercise autonomy, Tita is still able to express herself within the confines of the kitchen and empower herself through the domestic:

Mama Elena threw her a look that seemed to Tita to contain all the years of repression that had flowed over the family, and said, 'If he intends to ask for your hand, tell him not to bother. He'll be wasting his time and mine too. You know perfectly well that being the youngest daughter means you have to take care of me until the day I die.' (Esquivel 91-93)

Much of Tita's kitchen magic is based on her feelings for Pedro, as otherwise she is happy working in the kitchen. During preparation for his wedding to Rosaura, Tita cries into the meringue mixture, and this has chaotic results for those who eat the cake:

She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she didn't notice that all around her something very strange was taking place. The moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. Even Pedro, usually so proper, was having trouble holding back his tears. Mama Elena, who hadn't shed a single tear over her husband's death, was sobbing silently. Only one person escaped: the cake had no effect on Tita. (Esquivel 378-384)

Tita's food is utterly life changing to her sister Gertrudis, who eats quails Tita prepares and draws people to her from all over the land as they smell the rose in the food she ate, and are overcome with lust for her.

Tita's emotions and her expression of them are confined within the domestic sphere: she is not only a woman who is expected to stay within the home and private spheres, but she is also a woman denied agency by other women, and almost given the status of servant. When Mama Elena dies, Tita's mistaken pregnancy is suffering, a stunted growth or psychological block taking a physical form that is only eradicated once Tita banishes her mother's spirit for good:

Tita had said the magic words that would make Mama Elena disappear for ever. The imposing figure of her mother began to shrink until it became no more than a tiny light. As the ghost faded away, a sense of relief grew inside Tita's body. The inflammation in her belly and the pain in her breasts began to subside. The muscles at the centre of her body relaxed, loosening violent menstrual flow. (Esquivel 1835-1838)

Emotions are rendered physical within the novel, able to be shared and experienced through food, but also controlling the body, specifically the feminine space of the womb. The restrictions on Tita are designed to stop her natural development as a woman, forbidding her to marry and have her own children.

Tita's own heartache begins in the womb when she is born with floods of tears, and her magic itself is strongly feminine: she nurses the baby Roberto, despite not having any milk,

and her need to provide for her nephew causes the milk to flow. Tita ultimately takes it upon herself to nourish the whole family, cooking, raising Roberto before he is taken to Texas, and then Esperanza. Born into the domestic space of the kitchen, forced to remain there by tradition, Tita asserts herself within this space until it responds by aligning with her emotions, similar to Hill House in *The Haunting of Hill House* becoming a welcoming space for Eleanor as she stops trying to leave. Tita's magic is not controlled by her, but is rather a response to the strong emotions she is experiencing, and in this way she is able to influence large groups of people, although she is unable to predict this, and seems largely unaware of her own power.

Tita's final act of magic is her own demise. After consummating their love without hiding for the first time in their lives, Pedro dies in Tita's arms, and she uses her power to ignite a flame that burns them both.

Despite the novel's inherited female domestic traditions, it is situated within modern writing and postmodern reworkings of popular texts, examples of this being Angela Carter's revised fairy tales. Ultimately, *Like Water for Chocolate* shows the same domestic entrapment for the female characters, despite the almost half century separating Carter's and Esquivel's work. This entrapment begs the question of whether popular perception of women and the domestic has evolved with the times or whether women are still bound to the domestic sphere, even in modern writings. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the main character eventually surrenders to madness rather than remain restricted within the expectations for women; Tita is able to express herself through her kitchen magic but, despite the magical element of the magical realistic text, the female characters are still unable to escape the imprisonment of the domestic sphere, and the physical, social, and mental implications thereof, despite the text being written in contemporary times. In contrast, Angela Carter's writing takes the old texts and reworks them to mirror contemporary popular attitudes towards female empowerment and independence from men, while Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* does not seem to allow for female autonomy, even within the scope of magical realism.

## Conclusion

In her book *Female Gothic Histories*, Diana Wallace poses this question about the Female Gothic:

... if ... 'History' is based on the assumption that public and political events have more 'value' than private and domestic events, and are more worth recording, how can we revalue, or re-imagine, women's unrecorded experience in the past? (Wallace 2)

With the texts in this thesis spanning from 1892 to 1989, a century of writing in the West looked at highly selectively and all preoccupied with domestic entrapment and how women navigate between the private and public, one would expect to note a change in how women are perceived in fiction and the Female Gothic. Instead, these texts all point to how even in fiction, women are seen to be without an escape from the domestic sphere and the associated disturbances in psyche formed when the mind is denied autonomy and forced into a certain way of being. As a social movement in the West, feminism has become more popular and pervasive (and categorised), shared on social media and normalised in conversation within more politically liberal spaces. Why then, are madness and death seen as the only viable escape for women in both Nineteenth Century and the more contemporary fiction at the end of the period I focused on in this thesis? The very nature of society is to palimpsest and build upon pre-existing social notions and understandings, and so one expects that certain ideas will reappear in multiple texts, repackaged according to the current social conventions.

The tension between tradition and modernity is at play in all these texts and, perhaps with reason, the outcomes of madness and death for most of the women characters in the texts I have focused on is the very commentary on that tension: even as we consider ourselves modern, we have to negotiate the presence of tradition. The exceptionalizing that still permeates women (in terms of using "woman" or "female" as an adjective or qualifier) in most public discourses today indicates that literature focused on and about women will continue to follow certain inevitable trajectories (the continued campaigning for equal human, social, professional, economic and—considering the internet—cyberspace rights) as far as outcomes and resolutions to plots could go, although how these texts are written and encoded remains a compelling focus area.

Diana Wallace, the current standard-bearer in writings on the Female Gothic at the time of writing, notes that:

From the late eighteenth century, women writers, aware of their exclusion from traditional historical narratives, have used Gothic historical fiction as a mode of historiography which can simultaneously reinsert them into history and symbolise their exclusion. (1)

The Female Gothic then represents how female writers approach a literary canon where they are largely excluded or objectified, and this shows clearly in the reworkings of common tropes, plots, and whole stories, which is intrinsic to the inherited traditions mentioned before. The characters within these texts show the troubled relationship between women and the spaces they inhabit; although many of the characters within these texts marry into these inherited traditions, their uneasy ways of being within the public and private sectors are part of the burden of femininity. What the Female Gothic tradition points to is how society still views women as both dangerous and in danger because of their gender, even in contemporary writings and re-imaginings. Although the outcome for the women in these texts differs, I ultimately read this as a denial of personal and social fulfilment because of their femininity. As the writers and genre differ, as well as the social political context each writer writes within, so does the expression of the denial of fulfilment: it manifests in denying the character agency, in madness, in death, and, in the case of Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House*, all three. I shall briefly explore other contemporary examples of similar preoccupations and endings to point to how the denial of fulfilment within these texts is not isolated to the explicit genre of the Female Gothic, or a particular time period, or wave of feminism.

While all children inherit genetics and initial exposure to the world from their parents, those born female are subjected to a different path to their brothers: they have inherited the female tradition and expectations, just as their brothers do the masculine, but the girls inherit this within a society that automatically objectifies and diminishes them. Many of the characters in the texts I have discussed are from wealthy backgrounds, marry into wealth, or exist among it, as is the case in *The Haunting of Hill House*. I have chosen characters from these social situations partly in order to show how femininity is still a burden even to those with power



and wealth, and also to show how the inherited traditions are not always linked to how one is born, but also how one inherits traditions by occupying a certain space and role.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* the inherited tradition is more weighted: the protagonist, Sethe, is trying to protect her children during the 1800s, when slavery is still rife. Morrison writes about the complexities of being restricted, showing how even in freedom, one can still act like one is imprisoned under the same rules: "Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison, 95). As slavery is an obvious denial of agency, what makes this text align with the others discussed in this thesis is how she continues to entrap herself in her own thought patterns and behaviours, and this results in the murder of Sethe's child, which she justifies by thinking she would do it to save her daughter from the same fate she had suffered. Diana Wallace writes:

The past of the Gothic is closer to that of psychoanalysis: aggressively mobile, prone to return, to irruptions into the present. The past in the Gothic never quite stays dead, and is therefore never fully knowable. This is why Gothic fiction so often seems to demand psychoanalytic interpretations as a way of disinterring the repressed secrets of the past. (4)

The texts all have moments where the past interrupts the present narrative, either internally like with Eleanor's madness in *The Haunting of Hill House*, or externally in the corpses of the dead wives in "The Bloody Chamber". In *Beloved*, the main character, Sethe's, entire life is spent trying to free herself and her children from slavery, and as a mother she takes it upon herself to stop the continuation of these violent traditions within her own family by attempting to murder all of her children; just as in "The Yellow Wallpaper", *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *Like Water For Chocolate*, death is seen as the only alternative to the potential suffering of remaining within the same position, and Morrison's *Beloved* shows how violent the situation was for black people, particularly women, during times of slavery and oppression. A glance towards social unrest in North America today reflects the continued inequality in race relations, indicating that even in contemporary times, too little has changed.

Closer to home is Mary Watson's *Moss*, a collection of short stories published in 2004. The stories are set in Grassy Park, Cape Town, South Africa, and are preoccupied with the inherited traditions, both religious and secular. Many of the stories in the collection speak of

the small religious sect of the Kumo Kirk, founded by Elijah Kumo in 1780 (Watson 150). The stories have many overlapping symbols and characters; one of the central characters calls herself the Virgin Jessica, and she appears as character, narrator, and name in multiple stories, often inserting herself into other people's stories, and ultimately shaping the narrative according to how she would like the reader to perceive her. In the story "Like Flying", she inserts herself and her old lover into a Kirk tradition where the community gathers to watch an adulteress walk up a long cliff with a huge stone tied to her, the wife of the man she slept with following behind her, and the man watching from afar, unpunished and celebrated for confessing his sins. In this, Jessica is toying with the inherited traditions of a religious community, pushing herself into the narrative as seductive anti-heroine. Watson toys with inherited traditions again in "Like Flying II", when the same story is told again as a legend to Jessica's neighbour, who will also insert her into the story when he paints her face on the woman with the stone, as commissioned by the Kirk. As well as religious inherited traditions, there is also that of the Moss Garden, a place where sorrow cannot exist:

He has always told her of the fragile garden where moss grows in wild abundance and exists in the magic hours- twilight, midnight, and dawn. They don't always find the garden, sometimes they just walk and walk in the cool quiet evening; they don't even need to walk- occasionally it comes to them when they are quietly inside. (Watson 72)

The Moss Garden appears to multiple characters, sometimes intentionally, sometimes only hinted at. It appears in child Jessica's fairy tale in the story "The Woodcutter's Daughter", where she features a version of herself as the main character in a reworking of multiple fairy tales, palimpsesting upon childhood fairy tale traditions. Just as Carter does, Jessica reimagines the fairy tale according to what she knows in the modern world, infusing it with the people she knows and more modern conventions. In the story, she finds her way into the Moss Garden (adult Jessica is mentioned there multiple times) and meets an enchanted prince who says to her: "This is an enchanted garden, and you must abide by the rules of this world. And here, should any man rouse a woman with a kiss, she is his" (Watson 107). Jessica is both the narrator constructing the story and the character, and features in multiple disguises in different stories throughout the collection, and this uncanny doubling links back to the tradition of the female gothic, even as she inserts herself into the tangled foundations of a palimpsested reworked fairy tale.

The women within the story collection show themselves to be part of a long line of women, completing the same rituals and storylines that their mothers did before them, re-enacting the punishment of the adulteress with a boulder every year as a moral lesson, and simultaneously draining the authenticity of the event with each subsequent re-enactment, according to the auratic theory of Walter Benjamin. The characters within *Moss* who deviate from these inherited traditions do not seem to find fulfilment: they end up lost, displaced, not at home within themselves. The alternative is to sync into these traditions by trying to become part of the Kirk congregation, as Alice does in “Nightwatch”, or to exist without community as Jessica does. Situated within the familiar local of Cape Town, these characters show how the inherited traditions are built and passed down, and how they give people a sense of home and belonging, although this is shown to be sinister. In Mary Watson’s full novel *The Cutting Room*, the main character ends up following the path of the second Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca* as she excuses any act her husband performs due to her love for him, and her inability to feel at home without him. In *Rebecca*, the second Mrs de Winter finds out that her husband murdered his previous wives and excuses it as it means he only loved her, and in *The Cutting Room*, a violent attempt is made on the main character’s life by her disguised husband, and she still remains in love with him, grateful that he returned to her as she feels displaced without him there to validate her role as his wife.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper” and *The Haunting of Hill House*, the narrators end up succumbing to madness at the end of the novel. For the nameless narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, this is the only alternative to her restricted life under the rest cure, and the only way she can express her true feelings of frustration at being confined. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor succumbs to madness, and mostly this is because of her personality in that she is looking for a home and family, and this is the first experience she has had of that belonging. As a novel that arguably helped begin the haunted house trope within modern horror literature, *The Haunting of Hill House* has many novels and films with similar ideas, palimpsesting on this original text. These include *The Shining* and *The Conjuring*, where an evil within the house plays upon pre-existing feelings, affecting an inhabitant of the house until they go mad; in *The Shining* and *The Conjuring*, the house brings out anger until the characters try kill their own family. In *The Conjuring*, this is a distortion of the culturally sacred bond between mother and child. These texts are palimpsesting on *The Haunting of Hill House*, as the evil of the house infects the character, taking advantage of their insecurities and desires, until they commit violent acts on other inhabitants of the house. Just as the narrator

of “The Yellow Wallpaper” succumbs to madness after being unable to fit into an expected role, the 2010 film *Black Swan* shows a ballet dancer’s descent into madness after being unable to comply to her own very strict standards, and this madness is the only option, resulting in a surreal ending where she physically transforms into a bird before her death during the performance.

The troubled relationship between women and their expected roles in society manifests differently in the different texts: in *Rebecca* and “The Bloody Chamber”, as well as *Like Water For Chocolate*, the effect of these rigid social roles turn inward in a psychological entrapment of self as the characters deny their own agency and fulfilment in accordance with the desires they have been socialised into wanting. In *Rebecca*, the second Mrs de Winter does not find it troubling that her husband murdered his previous wife, reading it rather as a romantic gesture in that it allows for him to marry again, while also securing her position as Maxim’s one and only true love. Even though she hated her work as a companion before, the second Mrs de Winter repeats it after Manderley burns down, restricting herself to a rigid schedule, living to entertain her husband. In her triumph in finding out Maxim did not love Rebecca, she denies herself autonomy by slowly erasing her own wants and desires by placing all her happiness on Maxim’s comfort, instead of fearing that he might tire of her and murder her, too. Carter’s reimagining of the *Bluebeard* tale ties into the Female Gothic tradition of rewriting texts, as Wallace writes:

Women writers have used Gothic historical fiction with its obsession with inheritance, lost heirs and illegitimate offspring, to explore the way in which the ‘female line’ has been erased in ‘History’. The very literariness of the Gothic, its repetition of, and play with, obviously stylised generic conventions, draws attention to its own constructedness, makes it, indeed, a kind of metafiction. (5)

In “The Bloody Chamber”, Carter plays with genre and tradition, tweaking the story to fit within modern conventions and new understandings of social movements such as feminism, recreating both the fairy tale and happy ending for the modern reader who will not be satisfied with a simple ‘happily ever after’. In the story, the narrator is rescued from her murderous husband by her mother, and although she is saved, she feels she must pay penance for falling for someone like the Marquis, surrendering the incredible inherited wealth, and attempting to right the wrong by donating most of the money to charity and living modestly.

In a modern retelling of the *Bluebeard* tale, the 2015 film *Ex Machina* does what Angela Carter does to the story by reworking it, still leaving the original story recognisable. In the film, a programmer named Caleb Smith arrives at the extravagant and isolated house and laboratory of Nathan Bateman, a leader in technological development. He shows Caleb the female android he has made named Ava, and as the film progresses Caleb discovers that Ava is not the first android created, and that the others have been ‘murdered’ by him, just as in “The Bloody Chamber”. Ava achieves her freedom with Caleb’s help and murders Nathan, however she also locks Caleb inside the house, knowing he will starve to death inside, and leaves in order to experience the rest of the world. Just as Carter reimagined the *Bluebeard* tale, *Ex Machina* does so but locates it within the current preoccupation with artificial intelligence, and the threat thereof. Interestingly, many A.I.s in modern depictions are female: this can be traced as early as 1926 in the film *Metropolis*, depicting a female automaton designed for pleasure. These A.I.s and robots are characterised in such a way that they seem to pose a threat towards humanity as a whole in that they are far more intelligent and do not have the same physical weaknesses. Other examples of this are Samantha in *Her*— although the A.I.s do not threaten humanity, but rather transcend it; VIKI in *I, Robot* masterminds a robot takeover; in *The Stepford Wives*, the robot wives threaten new women in the neighbourhood by trying to capture Joanna so that she can be made into a robot, too. Ultimately these texts point to how modern social conventions still view femininity with suspicion, casting women as dangerous, tempting, and deceitful, just as women have been depicted in the past. They reiterate the societal pressure on women to restrict themselves to their prescribed gender roles, and to cast away any woman with deviant behaviour. In *The Stepford Wives* this is literal, as the robots can conform to the rigid gender roles as they are so performative and clearly defined, and the actual wives are disposed of.

The most contemporary of the texts (although written in 1989, it refers back to the period just after the time of “The Yellow Wallpaper” and looks at that period as the consequence of Mexico’s own practice of the separate spheres in the Nineteenth Century) I have discussed in this thesis, *Like Water for Chocolate* toys with the denial of fulfilment through self-denial of agency, and a chosen suicide. Even within modern society, from which point Esquivel was writing, where women are better off than when “The Yellow Wallpaper” was written, the only outlet for women even within a magical realist text seems to be death. Although the text is a parody, Tita’s death is accepted as part of her great love story, instead of a missed opportunity to experience true freedom for the first time. Diana Wallace comments:

With its associations with the supernatural, the Gothic is even more at odds with our notion of history than the realist novel which at least appears to represent the ‘real’. Like so many other binary oppositions, these two terms are defined in opposition to each other. To say something is ‘Gothic’ is at once to imply that it is obsessed with the return of the past, and to define it as unhistorical, not ‘proper history’, fantasy rather than fact. Conversely, historical fiction proper is defined partly by its eschewing of the fantastic, the supernatural, and (ironically) the ‘fictional’ in the sense of the invented or imaginary. (4)

While the fantastical elements of *Like Water for Chocolate* may seem to detract from the commentary on the Mexican Revolution, it is the magical realism aspect of the text that draws attention to how troubled the situation was, as magic is seen as the only (temporary) escape from the reality of their situation, especially characters who are bound by rigid traditions such as Tita and Gertrudis.

In contrast to *Like Water for Chocolate* is Joanne Harris’ 1999 *Chocolat*; both texts use magic in their food to influence people, and both discuss how damaging religious tradition can be, focusing on how it rejects outsiders and denies desire, resulting in obsession, over-excess, and self-destruction. The main character, Vianne Rocher, uses magic in the chocolate and sweets that she sells from her shop, and she imbues her shop and food with positive intentions to influence the consumer: “I sell dreams, small comforts, sweet harmless temptations to bring down a multitude of saints crashing among the hazels and nougatines” (Harris, 26). Pitting religion against secular temptation, the novel shows how an entire community can be controlled by tradition, eventually resulting in the priest, Vianne’s chief opposition, found eating all the chocolates in the shop, and then fleeing town. Vianne’s own power is tempered by her fear: she can control her magic, unlike Tita who is only able to completely control the outcome of her power in order to commit suicide. Vianne is unable to establish a home due to the belief that the Man in Black will always follow her and disrupt her home, thus she follows her mother’s tradition and leaves town whenever the wind changes. She is unable to situate herself within a home, and the two sequels show how different traditions affect different groups of people, including ancient Aztec magic and commentary on Islamophobia in France. The text differs from *Like Water for Chocolate* in that Vianne has more agency than Tita; however, she is still ruled by fear and unable to find a

true escape from it, despite having control over her magic. Tita chooses death rather than facing true freedom, and Vianne is too concerned with what she thinks will happen if they stay to follow her desire to establish a home and community.

Within this thesis I have explored the effects of the Separate Spheres of society, particularly that existed within the Nineteenth Century, and noted how even the fictionalised rewritings of the Nineteenth Century in more contemporary texts still point to the idea that women experience a troubled relationship with the domestic, and feel that it can be a sterile, stifling environment. In the texts I have explored, the characters have felt their only alternative to a life of denied agency is madness or death. From the Nineteenth Century until now, the woman who found herself within the domestic sphere was marginalised and afraid- a fearful sphere within a sphere. With more feminist discourses becoming increasingly available online, and discussed in more mainstream media avenues, the fearful domestic sphere is becoming exposed and criticised. The discourses are becoming global, incorporating literature from Uganda, Kenya, India and Latin America, looking both to the past and the future in their discussions. Over a century after Charlotte Perkins-Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the domestic sphere is still fearful for women.

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