

The Haunted House in Women's Ghost Stories: Gender, Space and Modernity, 1850-1945, by Emma Liggins, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 307 pp., € 88.39 (hardback), ISBN: 978-3-030-40751-3

This well-written book is a much-needed re-examination of female ghost story writers and their representations of ruins and decay as a channel to voice female anxieties and suffering. Drawing on psychological, architectural, and spatial analyses, Emma Liggins's book reconsiders the gendering of space in the haunted house in the works of Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Vernon Lee, Edith Wharton, and Elizabeth Bowen in the 1850-1940 period. Liggins's Introduction lays out the logic of her approach, as she locates "women's ghost stories in relation to debates about Female Gothic, spatial theory, the haunted house and modernity in order to frame [her] analysis of the gendering of the architectural uncanny" (p. 7).

This introduction gives way to a more centred analysis, in Chapter 2, of key themes in the book. Divided into three subsections, this chapter analyses the usage and implications of setting in Elizabeth Gaskell's short stories of the 1850s. Issues such as women's position in the family, their right to property and conflicting views on such rights as well as the incipient tourism industry and how this affects women's perceptions of space are examined. To do so, Liggins considers Catherine Crowe's "Haunted Houses", a chapter in the then-popular *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), as well as Gaskell's own early essay on old buildings and country houses, "Clopton House" (1840). Liggins's deftly wrought argument also tackles issues such as Radcliffean deployments of the ancestral mansion but considers them from the point of view of domestic confinement or the mistress-servant relationships. The writings of Henri Lefebvre also prove of pivotal importance, as the author draws on Lefebvre's concepts of forbidden space to unveil women's navigation of their home as an exposé of hidden, uncanny pasts. Perhaps most remarkably, Liggins offers a fascinating reading of locked doors and the subsequent consequences of their unlocking, as represented in Margaret Oliphant's later story "The Open Door."

It is precisely Oliphant's later stories, published as a collection in *Tales of the Seen and Unseen* (1882), which work as the driving channel for Chapter 3, where Liggins revisits and reconsiders women's exclusions from their property, or repressive patriarchal

traditions, or the possibilities of communication with the dead, all of which are made manifest in literary form via the deployment of such Victorian common spaces as gardens, libraries, and drawing rooms. Devoting one section of the chapter to each space, Liggins explores Oliphant's writings in relation to such space conceptualisations as the ones offered by Vernon Lee and Gertrude Jekyll in their respective essays on gardens. The last, and possibly most innovative, section of the chapter is dedicated to analysing the gendered utilisation of two central spaces in the Victorian house: the drawing room and the library. Here, Liggins draws on Gaston Bachelard to expose how gendered spaces are used in the Victorian ghost story to reflect women's fears, anxieties, and seclusion.

Liggins moves on to considering another Victorian Gothic trope—the Italian setting—which conforms the kernel of Chapter 4. Fascinating Gothic writers from the very beginning, the Italian city has recurrently been portrayed as a haunted site. Liggins's analysis, however, centres on an often-neglected aspect of ghost stories set in Italy—ruinous spaces. The author considers Vernon Lee's Italian ghost stories in their portrayal of such decadent spaces to argue that they become “an uncanny, in-between space” (p. 119). Drawing on Rose Macaulay and Dylan Trigg's philosophical and aesthetic considerations as well as on Lee's 1897 essay, “In Praise of Old Houses,” Liggins reconsiders Lee's portrayal of “the haunted interiors of churches and crumbling palaces” (p. 119). As a colophon to this chapter, Liggins employs Michel de Certeau's discursive analysis on walking as an insightful tool to reconnoitre women writers' mapping of urban spaces and interiors.

Chapter 5 deals at length with the intrusion of modernity in the ghost story. Using the introduction of electricity and other modern appliances in the home, Liggins explores the differences between Victorian eerie dwellings and the modern haunted house in the stories of American writer Edith Wharton. Drawing on Bachelard's considerations of spatial distributions in relation to memory and on Lefebvre's idea of space appropriation, Liggins analyses how Wharton's stories portray the “half-buried memories which threaten women's domestic security” (p. 157). Arguably, Chapter 5's most innovative contribution could be its analysis of the mistress-servant relationship in the face of declining service requirements subsequent to technological advances. Proof of this is Liggins's examination of telephones and servant bells, which “acquired sinister characteristics” (p. 180) in their intrusion into the modern home as substitutes of traditional servant relationships.

Chapter 6 targets female revenants and their “spectral occupation of bedrooms and libraries” (p. 195). Analysing May Sinclair’s stories of the 1920s and 30s, Liggins suggests that such occupation of what in the traditional Victorian home were male spaces constitutes an act of ownership, a challenge to “outdated Victorian gender hierarchies” (p. 195). Delving into psychoanalytical discussions of mourning, Liggins re-examines Sinclair’s observations of the Brontë Parsonage, a place that seems to align “domestic space to the sacred space of burial” (p. 200). The connection between these seemingly opposing spaces serves Liggins as a prompt to discuss claustrophobia, or spatial anxiety, in the modern haunted house. Using Sinclair’s stories as examples of the genre, Liggins argues that such dread of enclosure “becomes terrifying in the modernist haunted house, typically crammed and stifling with its escape routes barred” (p. 203).

Elizabeth Bowen and her stories set in the Irish Big House are left for the final chapter. With the Irish writer’s 1942 biographical work *Bowen’s Court* as a starting point, Liggins explores the concept of emptiness and ruin as transmitted and re-enacted by architectural spaces. For the author, Bowen’s stories of the 1920s exemplify how new suburban spaces inherit the eeriness of old rooms, “prompting a reconsideration of the domestic” (p. 236). The closing section deals with a frequently neglected aspect in Gothic fiction: War Gothic. Using Dylan Trigg’s uncanniness of the ruin, Liggins speculates as to the “in-betweenness of the ruin and the loss of domestic value” (p. 237). Set in bombed-out places, Bowen’s stories and their ruined settings of the 1940s represent, in Liggins’s view, the potential destruction of the past and inherited concepts of the Victorian home.

In her concluding remarks, Liggins re-examines with a critical eye her insightful findings, assuring that “to read women’s ghost stories alongside non-fictional discourses on architecture, tourism and modernisation is to appreciate the necessity of gendering the architectural uncanny” (p. 278). Drawing on the writings of Bachelard, Lefebvre, or Elizabeth Grosz, Liggins certainly proves her point that women’s ghost stories utilize space to voice female repressed fears and anxieties. The only drawback in an otherwise outstanding, well-wrought analytical piece is, paradoxically, the limitations imposed by space. As she herself acknowledges, so that women can “reoccupy genealogies of the ghost story, more work needs to be done on the contribution to the genre by the plethora of under-researched women writers” (p. 279). Emma Liggins’s book sheds light onto an often-overlooked area of work, appealing to both expert and neophyte researchers in the field of the Female Gothic ghost story.

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