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**FACING THE “UNCANNY”: THE GHOST TALES OF ELIZABETH GASKELL,
MARGARET OLIPHANT, AMELIA EDWARDS AND VERNON LEE**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Whenever somebody regales another with a ghost story, the listener or the reader knows they are going to be scared because one of the ultimate aims of ghost stories is to frighten their audience. Still, that feeling of terror is a stimulus for many readers. Some people delighted in being scared before, and some still relish it now—there is no theme park without a house of horror, there are many horror films that are blockbusters and there is also a serried list of horror books which are still published and widely sold. Nowadays, in the twenty-first century, there is still a taste for horror literature that stems from the beginning of the apparition of the ‘Gothic genre’, and it still maintains many elements coming from its origins, albeit adapted to the times. At the present time, as we have already mentioned, in literature or in some films or television series, ghost stories satisfy our hunger for this category; and, as always, these stories do not try to explain our terrors, but to expand our imagination to what is unknown, to the ‘unseen’—in Oliphant’s terms—or to the ‘uncanny’. It is thus that ghosts will visit our homes and lives.

Ghost stories can present different formulae because they can range from the mere anecdote, to the personal nightmare. The question is that such issue has not been an impediment insofar as ghost stories have drawn the attention of children and adults similarly, not only in Victorian times, but also since the very beginning of its origin. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, if there is a period when the ghost story was at its peak, this was the Victorian era. This might be connected to the way they looked at death and the afterlife. People were prepared to face the loss of a beloved person; at least, they tried to be, because they considered it was a part of life. Generally, the Victorians

lived a convulsive period, to the extent that people wanted to be in contact with their dead and practiced séances to keep in touch with their relatives. Even Dickens frequented spiritual séances and Elizabeth Gaskell once thought to have seen a ghost. The ghost meant the coming back of their own dead to their lives.

Perhaps, the feeling of being near their departed people seems rather awkward for us today, especially given the fact that our way of living is putting aside all that can cause us pain and sorrow. Society is not attracted by spiritual questions, what may lead to a crisis of values—in general, people's axiom is *carpe diem*, and not *memento mori*, and death is carried away from our lives. Victorian people, unfortunately, would see many relatives pass away in their intimate, domestic sphere and they were constantly touched by death. They even had to stick to a protocol of garments to wear when mourning. All this culture of bereavement has faded away. As a kind of consolation, they brought back their relatives in ghost stories, most of them told around the fire.

All the circumstances that converge in the century favour the apparition in periodicals and the high success of the ghost story. With the spiritual uncertainty after Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, which was first published in 1859, religious bases were shaken. With the development of new technologies and progress, people felt unsure about their future and their convictions. The ghost was perfect to reinforce spirituality and the belief in the other life, apart from constituting a link with the past.

In the middle of this social cataclysm, there was a rather encouraging ambience for the production of short ghost stories. Nevertheless, the crucial issue which concerns us in this study is related to the women who wrote the

tales, the women who read them and the women who appeared in the stories. It is probably a truism that female figures have been deemed a sinister being in humanity. It is pivotal to take this into account, especially in the Victorian period. Thus, as a consequence of this creed, women could see themselves surrounded by a patriarchal world which harassed and oppressed them. This persecution against women as 'the other' was a measure to dominate and subjugate them—just because patriarchy feared their subversive power.

Bearing in mind what Nina Auerbach suggests in her book *Woman and the Demon*, it can be appreciated that we can obtain a complete testimony about women's sufferings not only in literature, but also in sculptures, in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, in drama or in children tales—in which there is an underlying, subliminal message against certain feminine attitudes. Yet, concerned as we are with literature, mainly with short ghost stories, we can see the reflection of reality in accordance with the distinct types of women's roles.

The Female Gothic provides women writers of the period with a space where readers and writers can share their feelings, emotions and fears in order to exorcize their own scourge, by verbalising them. Some of the authoresses find their own terrain for fantasy in their writer roles, whereas other women partake in that world as their public and attend thus such exorcisms. These common ideas, shared by women confronting patriarchy, will show us throughout our dissertation that barriers referring to social conditions imposed on women are not defining their feminine self; but the common feature was that of the condition of feminine gender. It was a challenge for us in this study to work with so different writers insofar as they were supposed to have been also determined by their educational experiences and their life, in other words, their

biography was the pivotal element setting them apart from one another. Although this was true to a certain extent (considering we cannot escape the consequences of life experiences), we do not have to misinterpret the facts—patriarchy was stronger than their life conditions, and so it was the ‘missing link’ ensuring cohesion between the four authoresses. It may seem astounding to uphold that Vernon Lee bears strong similarities with Oliphant, Edwards or Gaskell, but, in this thesis, we attempt to prove that, being deeply committed to, and influenced by their own times, they share a common space—womanhood. Femininity leads these women authoresses of the Female Gothic to write ‘facing the “uncanny”’. With this opposition to society, they create a social and political genre devoted to femininity, which, in all possible ways, tries to awaken women to subvert manly rules in order to vindicate female rights. Our four authoresses, subtly or vividly—depending on their personality—, demand a fair world for both sexes. With their methods, they achieve a profound rewriting of the masculine universe, as far as vindicating the mere role of a mother of keeping their children with them in case of separation, or even reclaiming their sexual freedom.

Such driving force, as writing can be, will unconsciously guide them to the kingdom of fantasy. This realm may be situated between the border of fiction and reality, and has the power of being a sort of ‘nowoman’s land’ where they can denounce the social, religious and political order. Apart from the aforesaid feature, the space of Female Gothic is also placed in the limit where life and the after-life can be in contact; thus, this communication with the dead makes them stronger because they can conserve their own roots, tradition and memories. It will be indisputable, then, that from their Female Gothic, they will

start their coded revolution. From this female cosmos, they will be the restless driving force of social transformation. It will be a novelty to prove how such different personalities, as those of the writers tackled in these lines present, can originate the rewriting of society and the impulse for collective feminine protest.

Central to the entire research will be the methodology we use in order to study our four writers, which will be based on deduction. As the deductive method requires, we shall depart from the general outline of the Victorian century and then specify how its effects were present in our writers. As a result of constant pressures in an absolutely male dominated society, women felt imprisoned and repressed. Apart from being demanded to be the 'Angel in the House' to give solace and comfort to everyone, they equally had to take care of all the domestic matters. However, they were invisible, unheard and ignored, like ghosts. Our writers felt they had to expel all the torments that haunted them—the metaphor of the ghost was perfect; but what they yearned for was to be seen, heard and valued. Their catharsis was achieved by means of writing ghost stories, where the spirit was the simile of their condition of women in a tyrannical society. Writing was a drive which made them happy and such was their vocation. Therefore, the key aim of this study is to explore how, with their short tales, they achieve to subvert and reverse all the evils of society with their beloved phantoms. For this purpose, we will endeavour to observe how they subvert patriarchy by means of ghosts' help and advice or even self-assertion; with spirits' behaviour and their relation with the people on earth they can be a menace for men. Ghosts can blur frontiers and break natural and human law.

In a society which was oppressive to all its members—without distinction, men and women—we can appreciate that the ghost story allowed

women writers the kind of liberty they were denied in real life. Not only could they include the fantastic and the supernatural, but they could also denounce their society in a subtle way at the same time—this included making critiques of male power and sexuality, more often than it had ever been possible in other genres. This form of literature was the main means by which Victorian women were able to explore and convey the deepest female fears about women's oppression, dispossession of power and incarceration within patriarchy, as well as highlighting the negligence they suffered as a result of being excluded and abandoned outside the symbolic order, which coded the elements in tradition and society, which were in turn related to the masculine qualities of the period. This negligence turned women into ghosts—'they are nowhere, never in touch with each other and lost in the air'.

A vast variety of criteria can be used to achieve the analysis we purport to carry out, but due to the fact that we are interested in the role of women and their place in the Victorian society, we will follow feminist theories, which state the equality between men and women. In this work, we will try to investigate how our writers of short ghost stories—who were not only writers of ghost tales, but also of many other works such as novels, travel books, and essays—try to explore questions related to the role of men and women in their society. Especially, these women will attempt to denounce those issues related to sexual identity and their place within their social context. They will reflect their ideas from their personal life experiences, as well as from their knowledge about the society they lived in. We must also consider women's knowledge, interests and routines and the legislation applicable to them, as well as home economics, literature and education. As a result of these verifications, we will

see that women are victims of discrimination, oppression and stereotyping throughout the diverse writers. Nevertheless, there is a discipline we must not forget, immersed as we are in the twentieth-first century—Gender studies. Being a transversal discipline, Gender studies, which are an important field of research nowadays, aim to take gender identity or its representation as a central, general category. As a result, women's studies, which touch on women, feminism, gender and politics, are necessary to achieve a comprehensive vision of the Gothic genre, namely because they equally cope with the study of sexuality in the field of literature.

We consider that the Female Gothic remains a productive field of investigation and study as well as being an ever-popular subject for students, being plenty of neglected or forgotten texts and women authors of short stories, as is our case, waiting to be studied in depth. Not to mention it has also been a discovery to appreciate the intimate relation borne among the Female Gothic, Feminism and Gender studies.

Leila Walker says, in *The Female Gothic: Then and Now* (2004), that it was Ellen Moers who first used the term 'Female Gothic' to define "the work that women writers had created in that literary mode which, since the eighteenth century, has been called 'the Gothic'". Moers treats the 'Female Gothic' as a coded expression of women's fears of enclosure in two key areas—'the domestic' and 'the female body'. Many critical works have been focusing on the ways women gave vent to their disappointment with the patriarchal society they lived in and how it directed the position of maternal influence within that society. Moreover, in the 1990s, as a consequence of poststructuralist studies, which

tried to destabilise the categories of gender, we now consider the 'Female Gothic' as a separate literary gender in its own.

Having studied in depth the nineteenth-century ghost stories of a few writers, Diana Wallace demonstrates that these tales explored how patriarchy suppresses the images of the maternal and she adds that ghost stories enabled heroines to evade marriage and thus personal suppression—the evasion of marriage being itself a recurring theme within Female Gothic novels.

One cannot but wonder why there were so many Victorian women novelists who devoted themselves to writing short ghost stories and to writing about the 'uncanny', and when we scratch the surface we find there were many reasons why women in this period felt attracted to do so. Also, apart from the personal motifs each one had, which were different from those of the others, there are certain overarching features. However, from the vast variety of women who wrote during Victorian times, we have chosen to focus our study on Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Amelia Edwards and Vernon Lee, because they cover all the Victorian century, and, as it is a considerable span, the evolution in the Gothic elements can be better appreciated.

It is intriguing to see the manner in which women like these—i.e. women who had to struggle against the rules—started fighting in contradiction of patriarchy to achieve their status as women and not as ghosts by means of writing about that significant topic, and even today there are times when one questions if the situation of women is so much better. Was the woman the centre of the 'home'? Was the woman the daughter, the wife and the mother without having her personality divided? Why does Amelia Edwards not mention women in her works? Why has the femme fatale survived until today? Was it

then, that the femme fatale was so menacing for males? These were only some of the questions that arose as their most famous stories were analysed.

Throughout this study, we will perceive there has been a continuous development in the mode of the genre. A number of features belonging to the Gothic genre have been adjusted to the times. Traditionally, the Gothic has been associated to ancient times, but it is necessary to say that there is Gothic literature in the twenty-first century, which can be considered heir to the literature of the Female Gothic. Unfortunately, as patriarchy has not disappeared yet, women sometimes still feel banned from achieving the same goals as males. It is extraordinarily shocking, to check how patriarchy has become more refined and, as a consequence, it seems things go better, but it is not so. There are many examples which can be extrapolated to our days.

What is undeniable is that ghosts' tales possess Gothic elements which are common to all of them and they typify the genre. We do believe that the best way to achieve our aim is to analyse each story by paying attention to the plot in order to have access to the characters that appear and show what they reflect or subvert—as long as they do so. We will also dive into the world of their characters by making the distinction of gender, insofar as their behaviour will not be the same. Another important clue for our study will be that of the narrator—an important element of the tale to the extent that they can relate the story biasedly or impartially. The last point of our analysis of each tale will be that of the setting or *genius loci* which, in Gothic literature, is fundamental and in turn creates the atmosphere and the style of the author.

The first step in our journey is the referential framework. This chapter will be divided into three parts. First and foremost, we will attempt a complete

vision of the real panorama in which Gothic literary studies are nowadays—from Ellen Moers' coinage of the Female Gothic until the third-wave feminist movement. Nowadays, there are many scholars interested in this subject of the Female Gothic genre which has become demanded in Universities, overall because the tradition still continues. Inside this referential review, a critical evaluation of the main critic figures will be undertaken. Secondly, the theoretical part of this chapter will take us as far as the origins of Gothic literature. The diverse periods of the Gothic will be revised, as well as the antecedents to whom our writers resorted from time to time. In this way, we will expound the works of Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Dacre, Mary Shelley and the Brontë Sisters.

Continuing with our interests, a definition of the Gothic genre will be sketched. Exploration will show us that the Female Gothic and the Male Gothic have differences and that Female Gothic is concerned with the status of women in patriarchy. At the same time, we will try to define how short ghost stories derive from the Gothic genre and are also often named 'uncanny' stories.

In the following step, the status of women inside the patriarchal society will be delineated. This period saw the increasing division of men and women into separate spheres of the public and domestic worlds, and this brought about the birth of the 'Angel in the House'. Apart from this, we will see how women writers were influenced by this social context and what effect it had on the presentation of female or male characters in their work—Oliphant's ghosts are women, whereas no women ghosts appear in Edwards' stories, hence being completely neglected. In order to fully understand the portrayal of female sexuality in their texts, the depiction of male figures must be equally examined

to show it in opposition to the woman—not to mention that all Edwards' ghosts are men and show a different universe from that depicted by women. Gaskell's spirits are both male and female and Lee's phantoms are bestialized *femme fatales*. Male characters are analysed in terms of their relationships with the concept of the feminine. Although male characters vary from text to text and from author to author, it is argued that, in their portrayal, the authors were providing a critique of the patriarchal system. While some of the texts describe male characters that challenge traditional stereotypes concerning masculinity, others outline the disastrous and sometimes fatal consequences for both men and women of the rigid gender divisions, which disallow the male access to the emotional kingdom restricted by social prescriptions to the private and domestic world of the female. It is contended that, as all the texts assert the necessity for male and female interaction, masculine and feminine collaboration should be united on equal terms. This point will illustrate Oliphant, Edwards, Gaskell and Lee's tales.

Third and last in this chapter will be a general view of how our writers, by means of fantasy, could transmit us their own ideas and how they found in fantasy a way to expurgate their own pains and sorrows—albeit within the limits of credibility.

Then, in the third chapter, we will analyse Gaskell's life and writing, especially "The Old Nurse's Story". We have chosen this tale because it is about ghosts and we are interested in how women of the nineteenth century used this metaphor to heal their souls. Elizabeth Gaskell was a good biographer of the Brontë sisters, but her life has aroused scholarly curiosity as well.

Needless to say the best biographers to study her have been Winnifred Gérin and Jenny Uglow, who has also studied the works related to her life.

In our fourth chapter, the author to be tackled will be Margaret Oliphant. Oliphant's peculiar biography has been the object of study of many scholars. Many have dealt with the relationship between her novels and her life, the major work being that by Jay, who made an in-depth examination of the relationship Oliphant's ghost stories bore with her life and ideas. Oliphant has also been the target of feminist studies inasmuch as she was actually perceived as anti-feminist. However, through her ghost stories, we will discover this is not so and in fact it is most likely a question of misinterpretation. Hence, analysing the historical period she lived in and all the changes in society she saw, our conclusions may differ. The Oliphant's works we will deal with are "The Open Door", "The Portrait", *Old Lady Mary*, "Earthbound", *A Beleaguered City* and "The Library Window".

Following Oliphant, we will embark on Amelia Edwards. Edwards' life, works and main characteristics will be studied in a small corpus of her stories, namely "The Phantom Coach", "The Engineer", "The Four-Fifteen Express", "The New Pass", "Was it an Illusion?", "The Story of Salome" and "In the Confessional". We will try to evince how Edwards writes her stories according to their principles and way of living—she reflects her society and her class, apart from her own anguish in their writings. Contrary to what happened with Margaret Oliphant, the question with regard to Amelia Edwards is different—she has been totally forgotten or, at least, severely neglected by scholars. There are scant studies about her as a writer of short stories, and any other critiques that still exist about her deal only with her travel books. However, Joan Rees has

more recently published a thorough study of her life and so has A. Ballesteros written about her ghost stories. Recent studies, concretely Amanda Adams' book titled *Ladies of the Field: Early Women Archaeologists and their Search for Adventures*, give us a view of a valiant explorer and a self-assertive woman. Having said that, she has awoken great interest as an Egyptologist and as a member of feminist and suffragist movements now examined in modern women's studies. Yet, it seems there have been no works published about her ghost stories—it is even hard to find articles on the subject.

Last but not least, another authoress we will study is Vernon Lee. Being very significant, her tales in this study are “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady”, “Oke of Okehurst” and “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers”. When analysing Lee's short tales, one can see that there is an enormous evolution from Gaskell's tales to her way of writing in the Female Gothic tradition. Her characters or *femmes fatales* can sometimes be equalled to heroines who share some of her features or idiosyncrasy. Being an intelligent woman, she had to fight to find a way in the book market in England while living abroad. She can be considered as a key writer because of the time she wrote and how she did it. She belonged to the aesthetic movement of the *fin-de-siècle*, which was to mark her for life.

Finally, an analytic comparison between them will be developed. A brief review of their similarities and differences will be interesting to illustrate our work and our comparative standpoint. We will try to study the general characteristics of the 'Female Gothic' genre, the characteristics of feminine ghost stories in the nineteenth century and how these features are shared in Gaskell, Oliphant, Edwards and Lee's works. What it is challenging for us is to

discover how it is possible that being women may have conditioned them to such an extent that they had their personality divided, just as their heroines. Society has not ceased to oppress and repress female and, in turn, it has felt menaced by them.

2. GENERAL FRAMEWORK

First of all, our main task will be to expound the major studies dealing with the Female Gothic—and therein we will focus on the four writers concerning us: Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Amelia Edwards and Violet Paget. This task of revising and studying Female Gothic works will prove laborious, because much research has been conducted on the matter, not only about the Female Gothic, but also about all our four writers. Nevertheless, we seek to provide a mere general outline of the main streams of knowledge in order to frame our study. Equally, although we know about a serried host of scholars whose systematic investigations would be most suitable to favour a holistic approach to the gender institutionalisation, and despite being aware that each of our four writers has been studied separately from clashing perspectives, we have preferred to embark on this study from the standpoint of feminism.

Still, and despite the fact that feminism will play a prominent role in the main part of this study, we will not take it to its logical conclusion. In point of fact, we will be centred in the analysis of the main characters in short ghost stories by Victorian women writers. We seek to lay bare common characteristics—if there are any—, coincidences and disparities, no matter whether we deal with the narrator, the ghost or the other characters that happen to appear in the story or whose absence is conspicuous.

As for the analysis of the basic elements or parts constituting the feminine universe, it will be carried out from the point of view of Victorian women who feel trapped in society. By deconstructing, and delving in, their written works, we will be able to comprehend the nature of the subversion they incarnate, due to the fact that—aware or unaware of being so—there are

women writers behind the stories, women who build up their characters fibre by fibre and who carry out the creative activity. It will be the literary mode of the Female Gothic short story, and namely its depiction and—to a certain extent—subversion of the oppressed femininity in the Victorian period what will provide us with the theoretical framework for this work. It is utterly irrelevant how different our writers were, since all of them fought against patriarchal society and, at the same time, came up against their own ghosts.

For clarity purposes, we have divided this part of the study into several sections. On the one hand, and to begin with, we will critically examine the referential framework by reviewing the main authors who deal with the Female Gothic. The institutionalization of Female Gothic Studies will be equally considered. On the other hand, we will proceed to explore the theoretical framework—with a reassessment of the historical moment and the definition of all the notions we will use in our study, as well as the definition of the Female Gothic Genre. And, finally, we will go through the conceptual framework, in which we will delimit and clarify the notions or ideas involved in our investigation.

2.1. Referential framework

2.1.1. Critical revision

According to the article “Female Gothic and the Institutionalisation of Gothic Studies” (13) by Lauren Fitzgerald, the term Female Gothic was coined in a lecture delivered at the University of Warwick in the 1970s. Later on, it would appear in some articles for the *New York Review of Books* in 1974, but its current noteworthiness is due to it having appeared in Moers’s decisive study

about this genre in *Literary Women* (1976). Fitzgerald (2009) warns, however, that Moers was not the first critic concerned with the existing relation between the Gothic genre and its women writers. In this line, initial observation proves that there were many other feminists at the same time, who were preoccupied with the issue of the emerging new genre. Fitzgerald sharply criticises that Moers considers the Female Gothic as something related to feminine tradition and not a product of the historical moment, as she hints in her Preface of *Literary Women*:

The great women writers have taught me that the literary traditions shared among them have long been an advantage to their work, rather than the reverse. They have taught me that everything special to a woman's life, from its most trivial to its grandest aspects, has been claimed for literature by writers of their sex ... (xiii)

Fitzgerald holds that the formulation of this postulate, stating the female literary tradition, is a consequence of the summit of feminism and feminist literary criticism in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, which would influence literary tendencies. One possible implication of this view could be that what Moers had once dismissed as irrelevant turns into something significant, and she goes so far as to deem it essential to discuss women writers autonomously in the more general history of literature. This interpretation stands in sharp contrast with that of Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1970), because she tries to unveil misogynistic traditions in women's literature, whereas, Moers sticks to the dictates of the American feminist literary criticism which wanted to reveal the tradition of women's literature.

Robert Miles, in *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (qtd. in Wallace and Smith 14) tallies with Millett (1970) in the sense that dealing with women

writers from the point of view of feminism is an advantage and it could be a central focus for new insight. Thus, women are not to remain on the sidelines any more, being considered as they deserve and not as minor writers measured against male authors, as they had previously been. Feminism was the key factor in institutionalising Female Gothic studies, so that, from the 1970s onwards, all disputes in which academics had been embroiled were settled, hence assuring the legitimacy of the Female Gothic as a field of literary study in its own right.

However, the American post-structuralist ideas of the 1980s on feminist literary criticism would pinpoint some problems with which the aforementioned conception was fraught. In the 1990s this onslaught of criticism mounted, dismissing the Female Gothic as a too simple category which consecrated gender as the pivotal element in Female Gothic fiction and which revolved around the deeply ingrained, intrinsic idea of 'femaleness'. Such is a new categorization which may be considered, according to Fitzgerald (2009), as a precise reaction entailed by a concrete period of history (15). True as it is, it is also a commonplace observation that there is a bidirectional interaction between feminist criticism and the Gothic. Nowadays, the Gothic is read differently and considered in literature with greater concern and interest thanks to feminist criticism and, in return, the Gothic has significantly changed feminist criticism. As a consequence of this interaction, a new concept was developed by feminist critics: that of 'property', which becomes central in Gothic fiction by women writers. Moers (1976) is the one to introduce it for the first time, asserting that 'property seems to loom larger than love in *Udolpho*' (136). The Gothic has exerted a pervasive influence on the public, criticism and culture;

but, as Moers contended when defining the Female Gothic, it has troubles as a critical category.

Additionally, when defining the Female Gothic, Moers presupposes a direct relation between the biological sex of the writer and the 'gender' of the text. We must not forget that Moers' work was one of the early attempts to outline and give significance to an idiosyncratic female tradition of writing; and as we can observe nowadays, it has proved to be very fertile. In effect, Fitzgerald (2009) considers that Moers belongs to both the history of Gothic criticism and the Gothic tradition (17).

Researchers have shown that the second period of feminist criticism in the US was also nourished by the contributions of Elaine Showalter and her *A Literature of their Own* (1977), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), who encountered enormous difficulty in trying to recuperate the female literary tradition. According to Wallace and Smith (2009), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examined female fears and angsts about authorship and space conveyed by female writers (2). They would have to make use of the psychoanalytic theories in order to decipher such 'single secret message' underlying the female Gothic. With this method, they achieved a more universal interpretation of female writing, which would outshine Moer's.

Throughout this work, from the point of view of the Gothic and feminist theorists—and following Fleenor, Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter and Stein, among others—we try to demonstrate that, in the short ghost stories analysed here, there is a patent subversion of women's figure in patriarchal society carried out by different ways. These ways can vary from one writer to another—depending on the writer's character, marital status, living conditions—but, from

my point of view, throughout their writings, all of them show how they can destabilize, sabotage and undermine the pre-established societal order. Our women describe the different behaviours of characters that represent and reflect their roles in society. As a result of such representation and because of their position, characters are expected to abide by the rules of the sex and class whose reality they mirror in the world of fiction. Contrary to expectation, they rebel against the established power. Some characters follow their own dictates and are considered transgressors if they disobey. However, transgression may only mean running away from home—a woman who elopes with her lover and gives birth to a child without her father's consent, as in Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story"—or being a scientist who believes in the after world—like the isolated man in Edwards "The Phantom Coach". Others do not rise up in rebellion until they are dead, that is, when they can break the rules, and, for this reason, they come back as spirits, since they are not considered to transgress the boundaries of a society to which they no longer belong. This can be mainly due to the fact that many of the ghosts are women who played the same role in society as they do now in the after world—they can be felt but nobody can see nor hear them. Indeed, in the afterlife, they are free and self-assertive, let alone necessary for domestic life in spiritual terms. When they are dead they can give their opinion and nobody punishes them but God.

Central to the entire study will be the figure of the narrator, because they can give us a biased account of the story. If we think of a tale such as "Oke of Okehurst" we can see that we are conditioned in our perception of young Alice by the narrator's view. The different idiosyncrasy of the narrators—there is a

wide range of them—will provide us with a sketch of the assorted classes of Victorian people.

In addition to the narrator, the ghosts will be at the heart of our study, helping us in the understanding of the way Victorian women confronted the Otherness. Ghosts, phantoms and spirits constitute a fundamental issue to appreciate how our authoresses reflected their own life and their own fears in such a subtle manner that it sometimes becomes a rather difficult task of interpretation. The result, in the end, as they pour their unexpurgated thoughts in their confessions, is that they are victims of economical and socio-cultural conditions. Specifically, in this study, we will try to expound how these constituents or pieces of reality turn into creative ingredients which seem, monstrous and uncanny because of disrupting society and subverting and undermining patriarchy from the beginning to the end of the period. To put it more simply, my intention is to highlight how our writers share the same circumstances and denounce the same things despite belonging to the beginning or to the end of the Victorian period. Gaskell introduces the Gothic tradition into the nineteenth century and Edwards, being in contact with Dickens, participates of the genre by feminizing it; Oliphant focuses the Gothic on the domestic sphere and Lee continues with the self-assertive heroines, emulating Charlotte Dacre.

Recent developments in the field of Gothic studies have aroused an increasing interest and a great acceptance at university level and many English departments have scholars specialized in this genre. Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace (3) state that since the 1990s Female Gothic studies are starting to get into the core of criticism, in contrast to what had happened before, when Gothic

was the object of ridicule. Now it is celebrated for its anarchic and imaginative quests and it is seen as an autonomous literary category. Moreover, it is equally noteworthy that there has been a shift from psychoanalytical interpretations to socio-cultural readings, as we ourselves will consider in this paper. Kate Ferguson Ellis in *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (qtd in Wallace & Smith 3) investigated the relationship between gender, domesticity and capitalism through the house or the castle; although in the end she would conclude that it was the lack of definition in the self that created the exploration of boundaries. Eugenia DeLamotte (qtd in Wallace & Smith 3) thought that women's anxieties can be connected to social realities such as "money, work or social rank" (3) and examined how these elements can confine women both in society and psychologically, as we will see in due course with our writers. Our writers were beset by economic worries, due to the education they received, which differed markedly from one writer to another. Victims of socio-economic barriers, it is inconsequential which one of them we tackle—either Gaskell or Vernon Lee, to Oliphant and Edwards—they had to struggle to make money. I am of the opinion that psychological anxieties are a response to the social realities they had to face and, what is more, that on account of their condition of being mothers, daughters and wives they could not shirk any responsibility. In other words, their own vocation, which was creative writing, had to be left aside for their spare time and they wrote because in some cases they needed money and also by virtue of an interior drive, an internal force which compelled them to convey their anguish.

In 1994, Robert Miles, in an issue of *Women's Writings*, asseverates that the term 'Female Gothic' has been consolidated as a literary category. In this

line, many other authors, such as Ellis, Milkbank and Williams, produced a number of essays in this respect and contributed to the consolidation of the term.

It is nevertheless Diane Long Hoeveler (1998) who makes us gain a different perspective of Gothic Feminism in her work *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (qtd in Wallace & Smith 5). She posits that the Female Gothic emerged during the Industrial Revolution as a fragmented discourse in which women reflected their ideological struggle against patriarchy. In brief, we can observe Gothic Feminism from clashing perspectives, either as a conventional or dissident writing, because, as Hoeveler says, it is the beginning of the “victim feminism.”

In her work *Gothic and Gender* (2004), Donna Heiland classifies Gothic novels as patriarchal narratives. She argues that they bespeak all about patriarchies—their functioning, what menaces them, what helps them to perpetuate themselves in time. Nevertheless, what becomes clear as one reads such texts is that patriarchy is not the only subject of Gothic novels. On the contrary, it is the mere seed of the Gothic structure: thanks to the patriarchal established order a male’s creative power is celebrated, hence requiring the suppression and repression of women by dint of absolute sacrifice. This evinces the connection and concern of the Gothic novel with the subversion of power structures. In other words, that means that social and moral conventions are at the centre of the genre, being challenged all the time or that, as Heiland puts it, Gothic fiction inevitably means transgressions of all sorts ranging from national boundaries to social, sexual or even one’s identity boundaries. The limits between opposed conditions such as life and death, the natural and the

supernatural, sanity and insanity, males and females or consciousness and unconsciousness are blurred.

It is these antithetic binomials in constant tension what will be present in some parts of our critical revision that will help us to start with the definition of concepts concerning short ghost stories written in the Victorian period.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Origins of Gothic literature: antecedents and successors

As we have been weighing up, Gothic literature has sometimes been thought to be dangerous and subversive, as well as straying far from the traditional values of society and religion. This conception is grounded on the fact that Gothic literature experiments with the supernatural. Despite this fact, we cannot deny that Gothic literature has exerted a fascination and attraction for readers of all ages: both men and women—even in modern times, such literature of the Gothic, whose origins are owed to unreason and terror, holds a certain appeal for many booklovers.

Maybe readers feel attracted by Gothic components which conform the structure of the genre, therefore, we should tackle a difficult point in our work—that of the definition of Gothic literature and its components. It is a complicated issue because it is not confined to a literary school or historical period, whereas our emphasis will be on women writers of the Victorian age and our centre of interest lies in the Female Gothic. Nevertheless, for a better understanding of the Gothic literature, it will be interesting to follow a historical development of the Gothic in order to shed light on it as a literary mode.

To begin with, it is imperative to examine its etymological origin. The term is derived from the Goths,—always according to Ellis—a German tribe which invaded England and destroyed Roman civilization, carrying connotations of “crude”, “barbarous”, and “uncivilised” character. This notwithstanding, Gothic fiction has always been associated to horror, terror and some kind of romance. Admittedly, this conception has been changed over the course of years, in harmony with the evolution of the Gothic genre. Something remarkable is that part of the evolution has been in the hands of women writers, who originated the Female Gothic as a reaction to some works written by men belonging to this genre. As Antonio Ballesteros states in *Escrito por Brujas (2005)*, it is thanks to the fierce fight some people spearheaded against the established power that some changes are possible (14-20). Therefore, it is because of this fact that we owe some attention to the first women who devoted themselves to this genre, even when it is for the mere purpose of exploring how our writers receive their inheritance. As a consequence of avoiding a direct confrontation against the patriarchy, women writers before the Enlightenment had to dedicate their writings to religious subjects in lieu of writing about their own experiences and in order to escape censorship. It is also noteworthy that, being immersed in an age of reason as the 18th century was, fantasy becomes the core of literature. Ballesteros argues that in an epoch like the Enlightenment, when everything is under the control of the all-pervasive reason and technology, fantasy opens up new ways, offering us the extraordinary, the unseen, the other or the uncanny, where we can let our imagination run wild. It was then in England where the Cartesian logic was overturned by the Romantics—they imposed imagination to reason and the supernatural prevailed. Following his study, we judge it

necessary to explain the origin of gothic women writers from the beginnings, because some of our writers are their heiresses. In other words, our authoresses try to reflect quotidian tensions as well, in that they all had a wedge driven between the public and the private sphere and were oppressed women in a patriarchal society who followed a female tradition started by Sophia Lee, Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and the Brönte Sisters. Our writers do not start from a wasteland—they collect the fruit their precursors had planted when they started their reaction against the Gothic novels of their time.

We will structure our study by delimiting the different periods of the Gothic and, therein, we will pay attention to the most important writers who contributed to the consolidation of the mode until it arrived to our writers. Thus, we can find four periods in the evolution of Gothic literature: Early Gothic (1764–1788), High Gothic (1789–1813), Late Gothic (1814–1838) and Post-Gothic (1839–1898 and beyond).

2.2.1.1. Early Gothic (1764-1788)

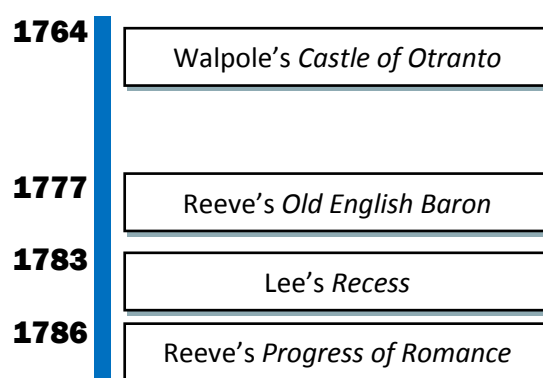


Figure 1: *Early Gothic Timeline*

When the Gothic emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, it was understood to have been sparked off as a reaction against neoclassical

romanticism. The Gothic novel has not been included as a part of the romantic period until more recently. Despite the literary establishment not considering Gothic fiction as a genre in its own right, it quickly spread and acquired a large readership. It is undeniable that the popularity of the Gothic novel was due to the change that the literary production experimented towards the public, its taste and literary values. Women made up a sizeable portion of that public in a double way—as readers and as professional writers.

As Botting has elucidated (23), all these changes produced in the readers—qua class and gender—are related to social and political transformations such as the industrialization, urbanization and politics. The American Revolution and Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789 were two turning points. In the middle of this chaotic situation, both revolutions were felt as menaces, especially because there was enough evidence that a change in class was taking place. Under those turbulent circumstances, Gothic fiction helped create a vague impression with the boundaries that rule social life, because Gothic transgressed social restrictions of class and gender. Additionally, those limits which link present with past are not well-defined so it is a good terrain for gothic; moreover, distinguishing nature and culture, reason and passion, the individual and the familiar leads to the trespassing of borders because the limits are easy to cross.

It was thanks to the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, that the genre was born. This novel, which displays many features typical of the Gothic genre, was the final outcome of the author's intention of creating a medieval romance mixed with the modern novel—too confined to strict realism. Walpole sought to bring forth a strong response

against the domestic feeling of Richardson. It was a conscious work whose chief purpose was to redress fiction by forcing it to abandon the observation and supersede it by free creation. The novel aimed to change the interest in the present for the interest in the past to get immersed into the world of the mysterious and the supernatural instead of the world of mere experience and, indeed, it proved fertile and was startlingly original for the time.

Before appreciating the novel's later influences—perhaps in our writers, as we will examine in due course—we must mention some of the characteristics it shows. First of all, the preface is written in third person and keeps the writer distant from any impropriety. This preface will be a salient feature in Gothic novels trying to enrich the novel with authenticity. It is set in medieval Italy—in a bleak castle with labyrinths, a villain and women under patriarchal oppression. The terror and the superstition the novel is filled with are more similar to a terror of a supernatural power than to a masculine threat. Chivalry and honour are reminiscences of the old order that should not be handed down to the Enlightenment. In effect, *The Castle of Otranto* can be seen as a corroboration of eighteenth century values which are still dependent on honour and virtue. It was in this novel where the demonic found its expression in the middle of Augustan Enlightenment. Suddenly, unreason was voiced and once again—as Ballesteros (2005) indicates—the limits of the novel were questioned. But what is even more important is that *The Castle of Otranto* opened us the doors to a new genre that was to be crucial for women to give free rein to their fantasy. The novel was not well received then, nor when Walpole admitted to his authorship in the second edition. This was mainly because *The Castle of*

Otranto was thought to be empty of didactical purpose and the readers viewed it as an obstruction and unacceptable as a modern production.

We must not fail to remember that almost everybody reacted to this novel originating then a stream to which many authors joined, especially women. Singular attention must be paid to the apparition of the Female Gothic in this context of refusal to gothic, because it is unquestionable that some differences exist between Male Gothic and Female Gothic. Nevertheless, we will deal with these disparities in the following epigraph, in which the definition of the genre is attempted. This notwithstanding, it is important to point out that, according to Ballesteros, Gothic writing is usually more violent and more innovative than the Female Gothic and that *The Castle of Otranto* stirred up the interest of many of the women Gothic writers. It was not very estimated by the Establishment but those women made it proliferate in the period of time comprised between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, when there was a change in the readers' tastes.

2.2.1.1.1. Clara Reeve

The original writer of *The Old English Baron* was born in 1729 in Ipswich, where her family had resided for long. She was the daughter of the Reverend William Reeve and, for this reason, she had the opportunity to receive a desirable education, apart from having an innate drive for study—both things thanks to the influence of her father. She was keen on matters such as politics, an interest which would be of great usefulness to her after her father's death, when she became an authoress. Literature was the only way of earning her

living but, still, devoting herself to literature made her suffer the conditions of women writers who received very little money in exchange for their works.

It was not until 1777, quite a few years after *The Castle of Otranto* was published—exactly thirteen—, that she produced her first and most distinguished work: *The Champion of Virtue, a Gothic Story* published by Mr. Dilly of the Poultry (who gave her ten pounds for the copyright). According to Ballesteros, that subtitle is worthy of notice, since it emulates the famous antecedent set by *The Castle of Otranto*, as well as remaking and subverting it. The work came to a second edition the following year, and it was then titled *The Old English Baron*. We must point out that the book was inscribed to Samuel Richardson's daughter, who helped her and gave her support revising and correcting Reeve's work.

Unusual and modern as the novel was, Reeve tried to keep balance between old times and the increasing fiction of her own days—and she did so while building the atmosphere of the plot. Ballesteros contends that she wanted to create a new feeling of horror, different from the sensation evoked by Walpole. Reeve wanted to justify the supernatural in order to avoid the ridiculous that appeared in Walpole's story which led not to horror but to laughter. Thus, to forestall mockery, she tried to counterbalance fantasy with reality. She paved the way for many women writers: as well as Ann Radcliffe's stories—not to mention some of our authoresses—Reeve's stories are moral tales whose purpose goes beyond the mere education of female readers and even awaken and teach them to keep their feet on the ground. That is to say, women had to understand reality as it was and not as patriarchy wanted them to see it—life was not supernatural. She was the first authoress to bring the

supernatural to its proper place, choosing feudal England as the setting for *The Old English Baron*. England as the genius loci will be used by many authors of the Gothic in the nineteenth century, such as Dickens, Edwards, Gaskell and Oliphant. It was in the dark recesses of time where Reeve was comfortable and where she would introduce the struggle of social classes which stood for the supernatural, owing to the fact that, in her novels, everything had a rational explanation instead of a fantastic one—probably too rational, but it would open the way to the following authoresses of the Female Gothic.

2.2.1.1.2. Sophia Lee

She was the second of five surviving children and was born in 1750, christened at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden, in London. She died in 1824.

A paramount fact, which was to mark her life, was that her parents were both actors—John and Sophia Lee. As a consequence of their job, they performed in theatres all over Great Britain and this meant an unsettled life in her early years, not to mention her father's quarrelsome character. They lived between London, Bath, Dublin, and Edinburgh. In the winter of 1756, her father was imprisoned for debt—something usual in the family—leaving his children evicted. Later in 1772, Sophia went to accompany him to the bench again for the same reason. They were constantly harassed by creditors and, so, they moved from place to place to avoid them until 1778, when the family settled permanently in Bath, where her father John bought his own theatre.

Her first play, *The Chapter of Accidents* (1780), was conceived during her stay with her father in prison but it was probably not until her father was ill that she wrote it. This might answer to the fact that she was the only source of

income in the family, since her brother had abandoned their home and nobody earned a living. Fortunately, and although her father did not like it—let us say that Sophia maintained a tense relationship with her father, despite adoring him—, the play was performed over a hundred times in London and Bath in the early nineteenth century, and it was often reprinted, and translated into French and German.

Sophia Lee earned money enough to afford to set up a girl's school with her sisters after her father's decease and they performed their tasks so well that they became an institution in the place, mixing with the bourgeois and aristocrats of the city. It has been suggested that it was possible that Ann Radcliffe was one of their pupils.

She devoted herself to writing, and a few years after founding the school—in the lapse of time between 1783 and 1785—she composed *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times*. The novel won immense popularity for many years and was translated into five languages and, as Ballesteros mentions, it was even translated into Spanish. Its success indulged the taste for both Gothic and historical fiction, of which it is one of the earliest instances in English literature. *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times* is a novel about the conflict between Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, told through the eyes of Mary's fictional daughters. The crowning achievement of the work inside the Gothic novel was that the story was set in England and it took place in the Elizabethan period of the 16th century. The medieval predilection had lagged behind.

The characters that appear in the story are mostly historical, such as Sir Francis Drake, the poet Sir Philip Sidney, the count of Leicester or the Queen Elizabeth I. Nevertheless, the girls who tell the story are supposedly the

daughters of the Duke of Norfolk and Mary of Scotland. Both girls are imprisoned in the subterranean cellar to avoid being killed by Elizabeth, as she did with their mother. The absent mother was a referent for the female Gothic, implying that the daughters are unprotected after her death, apart from being deprived of their liberty. The novel is a prime example of Gothic fiction, because it does not contain as many supernatural elements as historical ones. It is very far from what one can find in Radcliffe—Sophia Lee’s atmosphere is dark and dingy and it is located in frightening castles with bloodcurdling authoritative figures, kidnappings, prisons, murders and disguises. In point of fact, what should draw our attention is that those states of terror and horror are fuelled and inflicted by a victimizer woman, Elizabeth, who represses the feminine world. Besides, one can notice that the use of suspense that Sophia Lee masters, shown together with the painstakingly accurate, picturesque descriptions, leaves the door open to many authoresses who will follow in her footsteps. Many claustrophobic situations and tortuous states of the mind are described in the novel, represented with full expertise by means of the metonymy of the labyrinth of galleries where both sisters cohabit. Many of these elements will be present in our writers’ short stories as well—we can name a few, such as the gloomy descriptions by Amelia Edwards in “The Phantom Coach” and by Vernon Lee in “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers”, the labyrinth of galleries in Oliphant’s “The Secret Chamber” and many others we will tackle in due course.

As Ballesteros puts it, it seems there is a period of peace and happiness, when Matilda and Elinor escape from the recess and marry Lord Leicester and the count of Essex. Nevertheless, the situation is not as idyllic as it seems—when their own identity is discovered, one will die and the other, disguised as a

man, will have to flee patriarchal power, seized by the politics of corruption. In this way, one can draw the conclusion, as Ballesteros does, that the recess is the best place for them to dwell. Although they long to achieve a domestic life and overcome the absence of their mother, their determination pushes them outside the room, experimenting how the external world or the public sphere is something unreachable for them. Likewise, this inaccessible public sphere will menace and eventually destroy them. Once again, we are witnessing how assertive women are punished by patriarchy with violence and injustice, as we will later see with regard to the case of Lee's Lady Oriana, who is completely dismantled. This sense of assertiveness is reinforced by one of the characteristics of the novel, its structure. The entire novel is written in first person, which gives credibility to the readers. Equally important is that it approaches the novel to the public, in that it is nearer in time. On the whole, the novel created a sensation of pessimism that counterbalanced an excess of feeling.

Lee was encouraged to write a tragedy, *Almeyda, Queen of Granada* (1793), which was produced in London in April 1796 but lasted for no longer than four performances. By then, Sophia Lee was living a blessed period, when she adopted an orphan girl called Elizabeth Tickle, albeit refusing to marry William Godwin. Later on, life would not be as pleasant for her—one of her sisters ran away with a man of a lower social class and her younger sister Anna committed suicide at their new home at Hatfield Place, near Bath. Either discouraged by this event, or by the dismal failure of her works published after retirement, Lee ceased publishing after the abject breakdown of *The*

Assig nation. She died at home, near Bristol, on 13 March 1824, in the arms of her sister Harriet.

2.2.1.2. High Gothic (1789-1813)

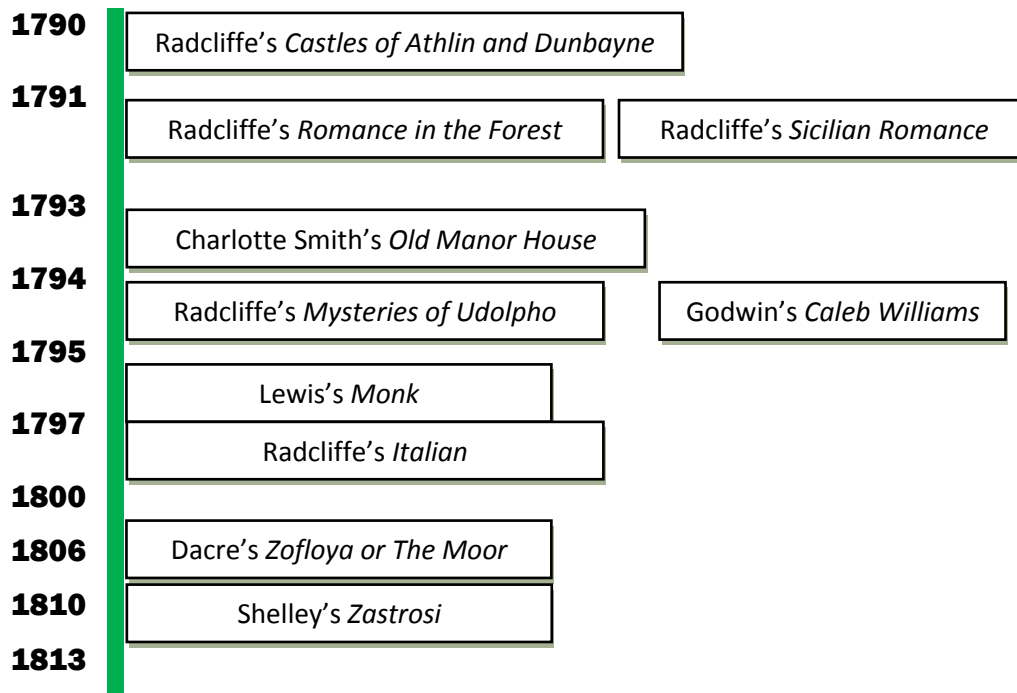


Figure 2: *High Gothic Timeline*

The Gothic genre had its boom in the 1790s and it lasted until 1813, when many of the main Gothic texts had been published. Gothic stories invaded every literary magazine, from the shelves of circulating libraries to drawing rooms. Little by little, all the Enlightenment ideals were fundamentally transformed: the reason and the man as the measure of everything metamorphosed into something ambiguous, the notions of 'unreal' and 'uncanny' appeared to threaten their world and terror was fashionable. In fact, terror had won a pivotal political meaning at the time—that of the French Revolution, which led to sweeping changes in monarchy. In Britain, it was seen

to amount to the dramatic dissolution of the social order, which was habitually conveyed by images of fear and anxiety which overlapped politically and literarily—the heroine and the family felt under attack, on the one hand, from inside because of the radical ideas and, on the other hand, from outside, with the revolution across the Channel.

At the end of the century, in the 1790s, a marked change of taste was brought about in the reading public once again. This shift was tightly knot to the notions of terror and horror. On the authority of Burke's aesthetic theory, terror elicits an expansion of the soul and an awakening of the faculties to preserve life, whereas horror contracts the individuals and freezes them. Horror is present in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and the novel was so welcome that it was one of the most important works of the time. The novel is set in an implausible Madrid created by Lewis' unbound imagination. It is needless to say that some characteristics of *The Monk* were inherited from Radcliffe, such as the excess of the Gothic machinery, whereas other components were a complete satire of Radcliffe's works, particularly sentimentality.

2.2.1.2.1. Charlotte Smith

When going along the path that will culminate in our writers, it is necessary to stop at Charlotte Smith for two main reasons: one is that she issues a bitter denunciation of the situation of women in her period, and the other is that she was to influence Ann Radcliffe.

Charlotte Smith was born in May, 1749, in London. Her mother died when she was three but she was given the opportunity of completing the education of the time, inasmuch as she belonged to an affluent family. She read

every book which fell in her hands and she displayed a prodigious, inborn talent for poetry. Withal, her father's spendthrift economies drove him into bankruptcy and then he married the rich Henrietta Meriton in 1765. To prevent Charlotte from being ill-treated by her stepmother, her aunt arranged a disastrous marriage for her with a violent and profligate man named Benjamin Smith, at the early age of fifteen. She grew wretchedly unhappy with him and with her in-laws, who scoffed at her because she liked spending time reading, writing, and drawing. She was completely alone trying to bring up her children and was pregnant over again—up to twelve children, although she lost many of them while they were still babies. Only her father-in-law tried to leave her some money to ensure her future and that of his grandchildren, though it was unfeasible in the end because the documents of his will were fraught with legal vices. Benjamin, then, spent more than a third of the fortune and was imprisoned in 1783 with his family. Charlotte had to write *Elegiac Sonnet* in order to make an attempt to remedy the situation. Her poems achieved a resounding success, allowing her to pay for their release from prison. Once Benjamin was freed, the family went to France to escape from creditors and, seeing that negotiations had collapsed, they would have to remain in France for a time.

When they returned to England, Smith's relationship with her husband had not improved at all, as a result of that, after twenty-two years of disastrous, loveless marriage, she abandoned him. This was not so uncomplicated those days, but she was determined and brave enough to face such a thorny situation—she preferred being rejected as an indecent person than continuing with him. It was in 1787, with eight of her children, when Smith had to write for a

living. With the purpose of managing to cover her basic needs, she had to write considerably quickly, but the quality of her work did not resent much because of the high speed at which it was written. One thing was manifest—she gave preference to novels over poetry, because it was much easier for her to make money from a novel than from poetry. Her first novel, *Emmeline* (1788), resulted in a conspicuous success. There, she makes vivid depictions of the countryside as well as in *Ethelinde* (1789). She can be considered as being the predecessor of Ann Radcliffe because of the inclusion of poems in her narrations, what stood in sharp contrast with previous works. It was Smith, the first professional female writer of the Gothic novel, who presented us new feminine characters. Her heroines are mature, both in their way of thinking and in their way of feeling, at variance with the heroines of the previous Gothic novel, who were ignorant and candid. Thanks to her heroines, she started the battle our authoresses would be engaged in some years later—she denounced problems of legitimacy and inheritance, and the role of maternal characters against patriarchy.

Sometimes, as readers, we lose the perspective of time and fail to remember that, when her writings appeared, she had to come up against several, daunting barriers—not only the ones referring to her own indecent situation, but also her opposition to the Establishment. In her writings, she was defying the masculine world, both in sexual and socio-political terms. She was a woman committed to the War of Independence in the United States in 1776, as well as the French Revolution, which stirred up her interest her because of her first-hand experience with the issue. In *Desmond*, she tells the story of a man who travels to France and is firmly convinced of the rightness of the revolution. Similarly, in the *Old Manor House* (1793), the most representative of her gothic

fictions, she sets the novel in the American War, thus indulging herself in the examination of the democratic reform from a different standpoint. The *Old Manor House* was written in William Hayley's mansion with the company of some friends and was published in four volumes. The exquisitely woven plot presents us an orphan, chaste heroine, who has to overcome formidable barriers to marry the man she loves. Monomia, the protagonist, embodies a novelty inside the Gothic novel on account of her humble origins, and she will give in the leading role to Orlando, the male character, hence rendering the plot dynamic. Both characters follow a parallel evolution—Monomia being sexually harassed by depraved men and Orlando's fate are both victimised. In conformity with Ballesteros' opinion, the fear of her own sexuality is symbolically masked by the fear of being raped, and the novel's end proves that the mutual passion between Monomia and Orlando does not let them achieve their happiness. There is no invaluable contribution for the Gothic tradition in her novels, but one can pick up her trail in Austen, Radcliffe and other writers. Smith was the first writer to vindicate feminine values deliberate and consciously and she is the most radical in the social sphere because she defends the otherness inside a patriarchal system which she repudiates as unfair. This stance of the writer will appear in the female Gothic from that moment on.

It was between the years 1787 and 1798 when she earned the largest amount of money but, later on, the public seemed to lose interest in her work. This dwindling enthusiasm was attributed to the revolution and to periodicals, both conservative and radical, criticising her works on this topic. In order to earn money again, she redressed her works and touched on less politically defined

genres. Apart from being short of money, she suffered from some diseases—namely gout, which made it tough for her to write—and survived some of her children until 28th October, 1806, only a few months after she had inherited part of the money her husband owed her.

2.2.1.2.2. Ann Radcliffe

Known as ‘the Great Enchantress’ by her readers or as ‘Mother Radcliffe’ by Keats, she was a paramount figure in Gothic literature— just as Hitchcock was for the cinema of the 20th century, as Ballesteros likens her to (51). He thinks Radcliffe paves the way for other women writers of the Gothic. There were many imitators of her art but none rivalled her in production, nor in popularity.

There are not many details about her life except that she was born in 1764, the same year *The Castle of Otranto* was published. She lived in London in her early years, and in 1780 she dwelled in Bath with her family and, most probably, attended Sophia Lee’s classes. In 1787, Ann married William Radcliffe and went back to London with him, where she would live until 1823, when she died. Not many details are known about her life. Some speculate that she spent her last days in an asylum. The few facts we know are that she was near the Alps in a journey with her husband and part of the scenery of her novels is inspired there.

Her works were very spread out among the readers of the time and was also praised by the critics. She earned a high sum of money for her works and her popularity is measured with the numerous imitators of her art.

Similarly to Sophia Lee, Radcliffe constructs her heroines as virtuous, young women in the Middle Ages and, as Walpole, she uses settings in the European countries of Italy and France. Her predominant locations are isolated castles and abbeys with secret vaults and passageways, tenebrous woods and spectacular mountain regions. Thematically, Radcliffe is quite similar to the male writers of the Gothic, but it is in the formal and structural part where she comes up with the real innovation. Her production and development of terror scenes and supernatural incidences constitute an assorted series of events, where the illusory, uncanny fears overlap with mysteries which are close to reality and home. This means that, after uncanny events have awakened our curiosity and terror, they are explained in some sections of the narrative. This use of suspense is characteristic in Radcliffe's technique—the rational explanation is always presented in keeping with the conventions of realism in the 18th century.

For most of her followers and contemporary readers, the charm and great part of the innovation of her art lie in the zealously detailed descriptions of landscape. Radcliffe uses the techniques of the picturesque art of her time and follows her favourite painters: Salvator Rosa, Claude, and Gaspar Poussin. Through the 'Sublime' scenery, potent emotions are reflected as her heroines pass by. There is like a symbiosis—a mutual relationship of necessity—between her heroines and the landscape. In the undulating country sceneries and in the grandeur of the Alps and Apennines, her heroines will act in harmony with the aesthetic taste reinforced with quotations of poetry. It is through the sublime that she creates the gothic atmosphere where her women will be

pursued by villains in cellars and dungeons. This sublime landscape will be inherited by Amelia Edwards and Vernon Lee.

In a short period of time, Radcliffe wrote several works. In 1789, *The Castles of Athlin and Dubaynne* was published. This work is in line with *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* and some references to Shakespearean works are equally recurrent. In 1790, *A Sicilian Romance* tells the poignant tale of a young woman who refuses to marry the man her father has chosen for her. As many of Radcliffe's main characters, she has to flee her home, even though she comes back later, to reencounter her mother who had been secluded by her father, Mazzini, in order to marry a younger woman who, in the end, kills him. Once the oppressor has disappeared, the order is re-established—the girl marries the young man she loves and her mother regains her place. Radcliffe took on the topic of the absent mother tackled by Sophia Lee, identifying her with the house or the inheritance. This became one of most persistent topics of the Female Gothic.

It was in 1794 when she wrote *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the story of Emily, brought up in France by her father and virtuously educated in the domestic sphere. She is a very sentimental girl and marries Montoni, following her aunt's advice. Montoni covets her possessions and menaces his wife, who has to escape from her home and suffers from extreme vicissitudes until Valancourt—the young man she wanted to marry—helps her to recover what she has lost. Radcliffe, in the same way as Reeve, transformed Gothic fiction into something adequate thanks to the moral at the end of the tale.

According to Botting, Radcliffe pleased the critics of the period; *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was considered as correct in the sentiment and elegant in

style but her technique of prolonging the mysteries by means of suspense was believed to be excessive at that time. Nevertheless, Ballesteros avows it is a pleasure to follow all the trials and tribulations of her characters because the uncanny is the main reason to read her novels. He argues that, although one can predict the end or the result of an action, the pleasure resides in accompanying the heroine along her way, enjoying the atmosphere she creates. It is also true that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was such an overwhelming success that Matthew Lewis published *The Monk*, which is written trying to emulate *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, however Lewis tried to write his novel in an extreme way, violent and morbid to ridicule it. Radcliffe was deeply irritated with him and tried to answer him back by writing another novel, *The Italian*. Still, far from being a mere response, it was a better play than the previous one, a jewel of the Gothic literature. This work is set in Italy, with the mysterious and wicked friar Schedoni, who makes us recoil in horror.

If there is one thing we have to bear in minds, it is that, in Radcliffe's novels, women are never restrained within home and family. Although domesticity is restored in some of her works and the home is the place where they are supposed to act, they can learn to be unbound from home, to be in contact with dangers, violence and corruption from an underprivileged position without family life.

Apart from being an innovator in the use of the supernatural, the landscape and the structure of the novel, it is indisputable that she influenced a serried host of the Gothic writers who followed her. Together with the influence of Lewis, there was a proliferation of works which reflected one of the styles or both of them. There are many authors who write works which Jane Austen

would call 'horrid novels' in her *Northanger Abbey*. With this, we can observe how women partook in literary life with their writings and opinions, having something to say about Gothic writings.

2.2.1.2.3. Charlotte Dacre

Having reached this point in our study, we cannot exclude a woman writer whose work is difficult to classify, but worth naming—primarily because she was influenced by the previous writers. Contrary to what could be expected in these times, we face a controversial writer—Charlotte Dacre's work was based on the supernatural and, because of that, it was badly considered, along with the fact that she dealt with sex. This was an unthinkable topic for a woman to touch upon. *Zofloya or The Moor*, written in 1806, was abjectly dismissed pornography. The novel is about a Venetian woman who is tempted by a moor—a kind of 'otherness' in society. The problem lies in the fact that, being an assertive woman who talks about her sexuality and her desire openly, she becomes scandalous. The novel was silenced for a long time. Having followed the steps of Lewis, Goethe and Milton and escaping the characteristics of feminine criticism, Dacre is able to subvert all the previous tradition. As Ballesteros puts forward, she is able to show a feminine character in the role of a villain, unspeakably cruel and violent. The protagonist is able to confess her own desires to her Moorish servant, showing at the same time frenzy for the 'other'. The virtuous young woman who appeared in Radcliffe's novels is here a psychologically disturbed woman, who derives pleasure from causing pain to, or torturing, other people.

2.2.1.3. Late Gothic (1814-1838)

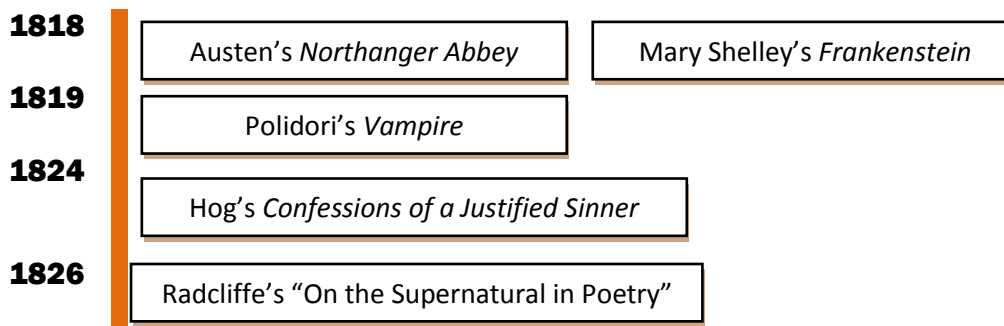


Figure 3: *Late Gothic Timeline*

Late Gothic emerged in the period of Romanticism, and within it, a crucial change took place—the internalisation of Gothic forms. Darkness and landscapes started to represent the mental or emotional state of characters. We appreciate a change in the plots and narratives—even though they still follow Walpole, Radcliffe and Lewis' mode—which approached Romanticism. Nonetheless, the most wholesale change was the individual question. For this reason, the human being, the consciousness, the freedom and the imagination of the personality are to be taken into account. Therefore, the villain, a male, is usually an outsider and he is villain and victim at the same time. He rebels against social customs. The villain differs from Radcliffe's—he demands for order to be reinstated and equally asks for respect and understanding. As a consequence of this, many narrations will appear in first person and this will be a more effective way of denouncing suffering and social alienation.

2.2.1.3.1. Mary Shelley

If there is a character who epitomises all these qualities, this is Frankenstein—a male, an outsider, a monster who defies description, a villain

and a victim. He is at the same time the stereotype who resists the social norms. For all these reasons, it is necessary to examine Mary Shelley in detail. She must be taken into account to help us in the understanding of the evolution of our women throughout their literary career due to the fact that some of them display the same symptoms as Mary Shelley does. Gothic women writers reproduce their ghosts in their writings. Their life was not free from societal or familiar bounds and neither was Mary Shelley's.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was born on 30 August 1797. Both her parents were eminent writers and this was a source of undue, unrelenting pressure for her. Not only did she feel different, but she was also privileged because of receiving an education most of the women of her time did not. Her mother Mary Wollstonecraft was the leading feminist intellectual of her generation. She wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1793), a passionate petition for state-regulated education for girls in which she asked for female independence. Mary's progenitors stuck to revolutionary principles, both in politics and in their private lives and they probably married to facilitate Mary's entrance into society. We have to remember that Mary Wollstonecraft had already maintained unsuccessful relationships before meeting William Godwin, but this was no impediment for them to start a new life together with the daughter she had already had with Gilbert Imlay, Fanny. Godwin adopted her and, curiously, she would become his favourite. It seemed Mary's mother had achieved happiness, but it was for a short time. Mary Wollstonecraft died ten days after giving birth to her daughter, from puerperal fever. This event was to become deeply ingrained in Mary's mind forever. As Ballesteros posits, Mary Wollstonecraft was to die as many women had died before her—as a victim of

their own gender. The absent mother, portrayed in the dining-room, was to be there her whole life.

Mary's father, William Godwin, was a radical political philosopher and novelist who wrote both *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*. When his wife died, he started courting several women until he found Mary Jane Clairmont, whom he married. She came to his home with her two children, Charles and Jane, who later called herself Claire. Her stepmother did not care much about Mary's education; she was busy with the household, at which Godwin was no good whatsoever, leaving everything for his wife. Nevertheless, Mary was taught to read and write at home. Her father enhanced her imagination and gave her access to his impressive library of English authors. He allowed her to sit quietly in a corner and listen to his political, philosophical, scientific or literary discussions with William Wordsworth, Charles and Mary Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Hazlitt. Mary would always bear in her mind "The Ode of The Ancient Mariner" for the landscape in *Frankenstein*.

Mary blamed her stepmother for her father's disaffection, but he was immersed in his studies and accumulating debts. As a consequence, Mary and William's relationship deteriorated and Godwin decided to send her away with an acquaintance of his, William Baxter, and his family in Dundee for several months. She liked the Baxter family and felt close to them at once. Later on, they would inspire her fictional representations of the family, equally dependent, respected and self-sacrificing individuals.

Mary returns home from Scotland and meets Shelley. Percy Bysshe Shelley was the heir of a noble family in Sussex who had written some letters to Godwin and had introduced himself as a follower of him. In 1811 Shelley had

been excluded from Oxford after publishing a pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism*, together with Thomas Jefferson Hogg. His family was horrified, in particular, when he, barely nineteen, married Harrier Westbrook and took her and her sister Eliza to Ireland with him, where he distributed his pamphlet. Shelley was irresistibly attracted by Mary's beauty, her intellectual interests and her evident sympathy for him. They began to go on daily walks to the grave of Mary Wollstonecraft at St Pancras churchyard while reading her mother's writings, and there she declared her love for him on 26 June 1814.

On 18 July 1814, Mary escaped with Shelley to France, possibly after warning Godwin that she would otherwise commit suicide. Godwin, who had become financially dependent on Shelley, was not very keen on that engagement, probably because he knew Shelley too well: Godwin was not as libertarian in his sexual ideals as he had preached. And, even worse, the new lovers took Jane Clairmont with them, who changed her name for Claire. This was not to end well for Mary, insofar as Percy and Claire became lovers in the period that Mary was pregnant. But it was not a secret that Percy was promiscuous, as he liked lying with many women and believed in free love.

At the beginning, Mary was incapable of establishing her own literary credentials, but Shelley encouraged Mary to write, but neither he nor she ever saw her as his literary equivalent. Shelley set himself up as her literary counsellor. However, she was more productive than him during these first weeks of living together. She published her journal and her letters: *History of A Six Weeks Tour through a part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, with Letters descriptive of a Sail round the Lake of Geneva, and of the Glaciers of Chamonix* in 1817.

On 13 September 1814, they returned to London due to financial problems. By that time, Harriet Shelley, by then six months pregnant of another man, took legal action for custody of her children and for financial support. A few months later, Shelley's grandfather died, leaving his inheritance to Percy Bysshe Shelley and his oldest male heirs after the death of his father. He could negotiate with his father a determined quantity of money to receive it periodically.

Mary gave premature birth to a daughter named Clara in 1815. The infant died two weeks later, a death very much lamented by Mary. Shelley was unsympathetic to the destiny of his female progeny—he went off with Claire and left Mary to be consoled by Hogg, who was now with them. Mary, distressed with the affair her husband had with Claire, urged her to leave, and she eventually left. There is a trail of all these events in her novel *Frankenstein*, where the most significant peculiarity of the monster is the abandonment he has suffered from his creator, Victor. Mary and Percy, now alone, go to live in Bishopsgate where William was born in 1816. Percy's health worsened and they had to go to Geneva in search of a better climate. Claire accompanied them. It was in Switzerland where Shelley met Byron. Seeing that Shelley was not going to embrace her, Claire became Lord Byron's lover during that winter, despite his obvious lack of affection and the birth of their daughter Allegra Alba.

The literary atmosphere was served. As Ballesteros avers, never before had there been two idols joined together by their love of poetry. They had felt sympathy for each other since they had met. There were philosophical debates conducted by the two poets, to whom the women could listen silently. At night, from 15 to 17 June, after reading ghost stories aloud, a collection of German

tales under the name of *Fantasmagoriana*, Byron challenged them. The entire group, Mary, Shelley, Lord Byron and Doctor Pollidori, Byron's physician, who had been talking about the powers of galvanism and some experiments, agreed to write a horror story. When the stories were written they would be art and part by deciding which one was the best of them. They all set out to work, even Claire, but it was only Mary and doctor Pollidori who benefited from the experience: Mary wrote *Frankenstein* and Pollidori wrote *The Vampire*.

Mary, who idolised Shelley, felt obliged to write a good story. This and the loss of her daughter were tantamount to a source of anxiety, mixed with her burning desire of writing like both her progenitors. On 16th June, in a kind of *walking dream*, she saw the student and the monster of her novel. This creature would become the most well-known literary monster. Greater than his maker, reason for which he usurps his creator's identity. This creature embodied ugliness and otherness, which would arouse feelings of horror in the readers.

Mary was consolidating the Gothic as a particular female form of novel, because she was straying away from the tradition insofar as her central character is not a woman. Shelley helped her with numerous revisions. The writing of the novel lasted for nine months, just the same time she was pregnant of her daughter Clara Everina. In Mary Shelley's case, the direct relation between literary and biological creation is at its *summum*. Nevertheless, there is an abysmal lack of maternal figures throughout the novel. We have to remember Mary's feelings about the absence of her mother, and all the later tales, novels and short stories on the same topic—we will also see this trait in some of our writers, like Gaskell in "The Old Nurse's Story" or Oliphant in "The Portrait". Victor is completely desolate at his mother's death and becomes a

substitute mother for the monster, which invalidates the capacity of being a mother in Elizabeth Lavenza and the female-monster. However, the only mother who survives is Margaret Saville, who has the same initial letters as Mary Shelley—M. S.—and is the last receiver of Walton's letters and diary. These letters articulate the structure of the narration as if they were concentric circles containing one story inside the other. Probably Mary Shelley's message is that she misses being a reader of the period, being with her family in her own drawing room especially in that moment of her life, far away from home and surrounded by those people. She also transmits in her novel that science may have an unlimited power but it cannot be compared to what a woman can create inside herself, because only monsters can come out of laboratories.

Ballesteros understands that the play is still a reflection of science today, when we are constantly exposed to new generation devices that can become weapons in the hands of some people. Frankenstein has always been the referent and representation of scientific malformation.

In September 1816, Mary, Percy Shelley, William, and Claire came back to England and they became aware that Fanny Godwin had committed suicide. Unfortunately, to make things worse, on 10 December, the corpse of Harriet Shelley was found in London's Serpentine, into which she had jumped in order to commit suicide. On 30 December, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin married Percy Bysshe Shelley at St Mildred's, London.

A few months after, Clara Everina was born. In March 1818, Mary and Percy, Claire and Allegra Alba travelled to Italy to put the girl under the care of Lord Byron and to improve Percy's health. In August, Shelley accompanied Claire to Venice to see her daughter, who was ill. He ordered Mary to go after

him with the children, though Clara was ill herself too. She died shortly after her arrival in Venice, after having traversed Italy in a terrible heat. Mary blamed Shelley for her death, as he had forced her to travel with the sick child and had neglected to consult a doctor in Padua, as he did not want to interrupt his talks with Byron. Mary was completely desolate with grief, and her misery increased when in June, 1819, Mary's second child William died of Malaria in Rome. She became detached from her husband, whom she blamed for the death of both children. Shelley left her alone to stay in the company of Claire. In her grief, Mary began writing *Mathilda*, a father-daughter incest fantasy, which was not published during her life. It illustrates much of the resentment Mary felt both towards her father, and her husband. But then, fortunately, there was a ray of hope—Percy Florence was born in November, once they had settled in Florence. This son was to fill her with happiness for the rest of her life and they had a special relationship that was to console her forever.

The Shelleys moved to Pisa, where Mary began writing *Valperga* in September. In 1821, Edward and Jane Williams became close friends of the Shelleys. As Mary withdrew more and more from him, Shelley sought consolation from Jane Williams and also from Emilia Viviani, for whom he wrote “Epipsychidion”, one of his best poems. In May 1822, Allegra Alba died, and the Shelleys moved to La Spezia, where Mary miscarried during her fifth pregnancy. There Shelley bought a sailboat—*Don Juan*. Shelley and Edward Williams went sailing and were found drowned ten days later. Mary had a terrible commotion and suffered from dreadful feelings of culpability towards her dead husband, for she had wished his death many times. Still, she devoted

herself to the memory of Percy for the rest of her life, which prevented her from having any other relationships with men.

His friends left her alone, with the exception of Jane Williams, who was the only one to give her support. Mary travelled to Genoa and, later, to England in 1823, where Jane Williams was settled, although she would betray Mary joining Tomas J. Hog, who was Mary's sworn enemy. Mary had made amends with her father by then. In London she attended a performance of *Frankenstein* which was gratifying for her. In 1826, Mary had to negotiate with Sir Timothy Shelley in order that her son received his grandfather's money. It was in this way that Percy Florence received his inheritance when his grandfather died. She was left alone and could only remediate her loneliness by getting immersed in the literary circles in London, which welcomed her happily. She declined several marriage proposals—one from John Howard Payne and another from the writer Prosper Mérimée. Even Edward John Trelawney suggested to Mary they marry, but she rebuffed him, although they were friends. She was devoted herself to her son, who was an ordinary man. He studied in good schools and graduated in 1841. He married Jane St John, who always respected Mary. When Sir Timothy Shelley died, in 1844, the estate of baronetcy was indebted. Then, in 1849, she went to live with her son because he was financially secure.

Although her *Frankenstein* had become a success after the publication of 1831, she led a relaxed life until death arrived in 1850 after some psychosomatic illnesses and nervous attacks. She was buried between her mother and father, whose remains had been transferred from St. Pancras to St. Peter's churchyard in Bournemouth.

2.2.1.4. Post-Gothic (1839-1898 and beyond)

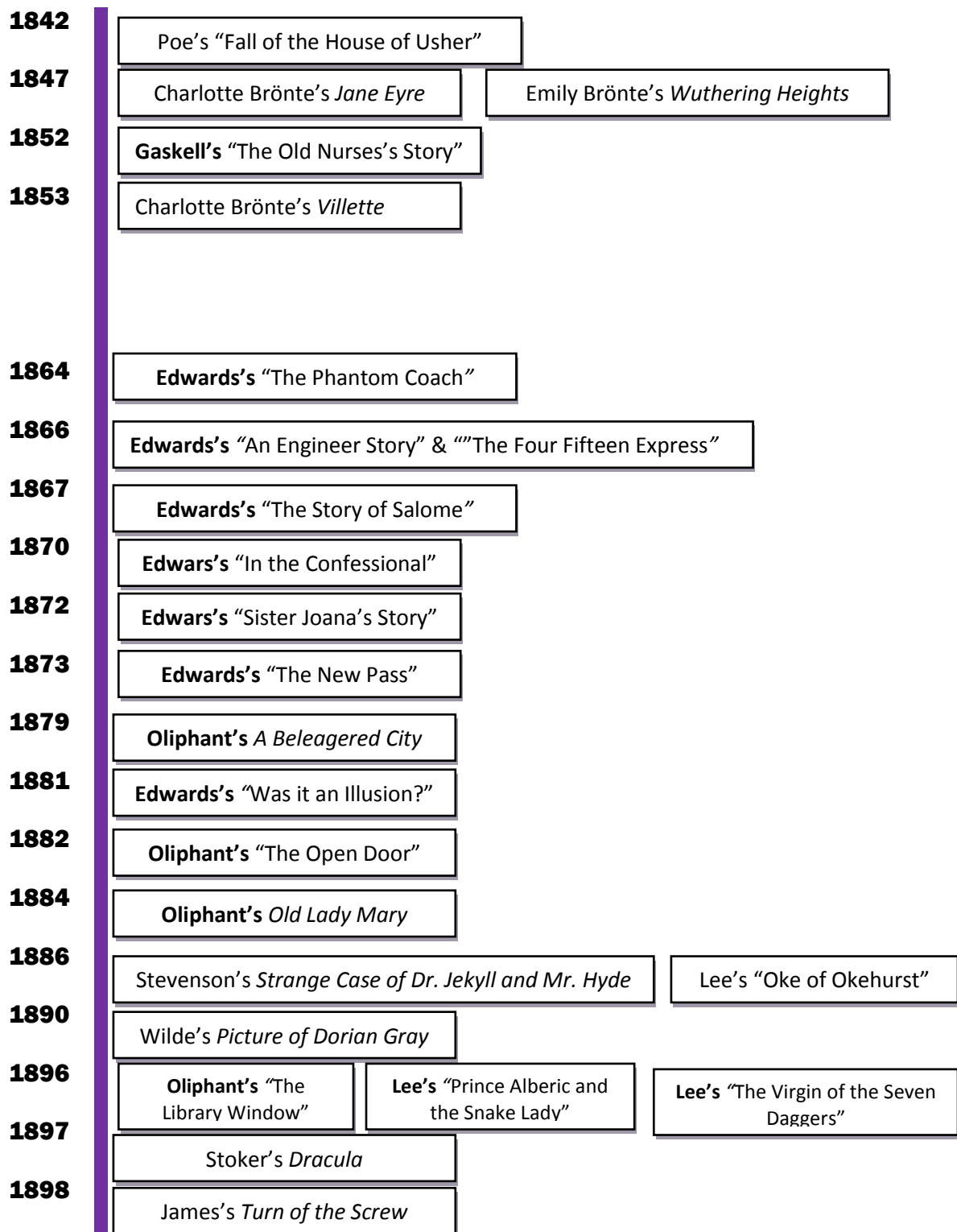


Figure 4: *Post-Gothic timeline*

If there is a period in which the Gothic literature is of utmost importance and is reborn, this period is the Victorian era, the Gothic period *par excellence* as Alexandra Warwick declares in "Victorian Gothic":

Victorian is in many ways *the* Gothic period, with its elaborate cult of death and mourning, its fascination with ghosts, spiritualism and the occult, and not least because of the powerful fictional figures of the late century. (29)

As Warwick hints, there was a death in the period that did not happen: Queen Victoria's. This led to identify the subject of the period as 'Victorian', and that lasted for a long time, between 1837 and 1900. Historically, this was important because, from 1850 to 1870, economic prosperity was achieved and liberal reforms were rapidly implemented, whereas the late years of the Victorian period were times marked by social uncertainty and different positions in the Empire. Recently, the *fin-de-siècle* has been separated from the rest of the century, constituting a different field of study and focusing on social and political crises. Nevertheless, this study will deal with this period because it is impossible for us to tackle Vernon Lee without mentioning the social upheavals and, as a consequence, the innovations fantastic short stories of the female gothic experiment.

Although there are many authors that can be connected with realism, we can assure some of them committed themselves to cultivate also Gothic literature: Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot wrote Gothic tales, for instance. Gaskell's stories were initially published secretly and almost all those in Dickens' *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* are considered by Warwick as outdated and folkloric. Warwick adds that we can see it in *Disappearances*, published in 1851, which represented a modern version of folktales and where

she describes a number of urban legends on mysterious disappearances of individuals. We are of the opinion that, although her tale “The Old Nurse’s Story” seems at first reading to be obsolete and ancient, she may have done it on purpose. The genius loci of the story seems to take us to the Enlightenment, and it appears to be that the period of time is the Gothic element for her.

The literary panorama of the 1880’s and 1890’s was mainly ruled by women—Lee among them. Women of the end of the century, as Showalter claims (viii), started writing about female topics and interests: feminine sexuality, disgraceful marriages and new aesthetics principles. They were the New Women of the end of the century. These women, as Showalter posits, are the bridge connecting Victorian writers with Modernists. If any time these writers have not been considered as deserved, it has been because they were producers of short stories rather than novels. *The Yellow Book* was their favourite newspaper to publish their stories.

Contrary to general belief, several realist writers felt attracted by ghost’s stories. There is sufficient evidence that ghost stories could voice serious concerns such as the afterlife, the soul, death and many other issues referent to religion which were to be terribly shaken with Darwin’s theories in 1859. All these terrible doubts which preoccupied men of the period started to change at the end of the century. Two determining facts were to end with Victorian spirits: the First World War and Freud’s psychoanalytical theories. In keeping with Briggs (23), from 1920 onwards, the Gothic novel started its decline and has never recovered. She postulates that science fiction has replaced it.

2.2.1.4.1. The Brontë sisters

Patrick and Maria Brontë had six children: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne. Charlotte and Emily were born in 1816 and 1818, respectively. Although all the children were specially gifted for writing or painting, we will focus our interest on Charlotte and Emily, because of their gothic writings.

Patrick was transferred to a parish in Haworth, Yorkshire, and the family settled there. After a short lapse of eighteen months, his wife died, leaving the parson and the young children behind. This fact caused deep, emotional distress to the children, although their father forged a strong bond, comforting his children and helping them live as a united family in a cosy atmosphere. Patrick also encouraged his children to attend reading sessions. He lost his eyesight and his youngsters read books aloud for him, as well as news. They finally managed to build their own world, with lingering echoes of his old Ireland. Besides, the children were exposed to the profound influence of their nurse, Tabitha Aikroyd, whom they loved unconditionally and who lived with them until the moment of her death at an old age. Her kitchen was her kingdom, where Emily could have been exposed to love and death stories that would later lead her to *Wuthering Heights*.

It is also true that there was another woman living with the children, but she was not as important for them as Tabby was—Elizabeth Branwell, Maria's sister. She went to live with the children because his brother-in-law had failed to espouse another woman. Coming from Cornwall to the cold lands of Yorkshire proved unbearable for her. She could not get used to those lands. Neither could the children get used to her strict discipline and ideals about a terrific hell and a

vengeful God. Unfortunately, she passed away before the aptitudes of her nieces were recognised and praised.

Things began to worsen when Maria, Elizabeth and Charlotte began to attend Cowan Bridge School three years after their mother's death, a school that was for daughters of poor priests. Tragically, Maria and Elizabeth both died of tuberculosis, which they had contracted at school. Maria had been the closest reference to a maternal figure they had had, because she had been taken as such when her mother died. Possibly Maria was who inspired Charlotte when she created the character of Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*. Helen is Jane's first mentor—both girls were voracious readers, what helped them to escape from reality, as the children did. Helen is passive and submissive to authority. Jane will have to move in a spectrum framed by this limitation on the one side and the so-called “abandoned rebellion”, embodied by Bertha Mason, on the other. She will have to strike a balance between both. Nevertheless, in Ballesteros' view, Helen is a model of ‘otherness’ on account of her opposition to the system, because she abides by her own law. Jane undergoes significant changes under the influence of Helen, as well as learning how to live in accordance with one's conscience. Jane internalizes everything she learns from Helen—she makes Helen's principles part of her system of values and affects her emotional responses, behaviour and decisions from then on. Once more, the absence of their mother is rendered patent in our women. Charlotte craved for such figure, inasmuch as she had lost all those who could have stood for mothers. In Helen, she saw her sister Maria and also Miss Temple—who was another woman who took care of her—, who disappeared and left her behind. The absent mother was the most likely factor to have fashioned the girls'

character—they were insecure and pathologically shy. Although Patrick hastened to bring Charlotte home after the deaths of his two older daughters, Charlotte had internalised all the experience she had lived there, and she recreated it in the part of *Jane Eyre* when she is in Lowood, subject to the will of Blocklehurst. Similarly, Patrick thought he had heard her sister crying after she was deceased, what could have inspired Emily the beginning of *Wuthering Heights*, with the spectre of Catherine Earnshaw trying to get into the house. In line with Ballesteros' stance, we believe that both show us a direct relation between their biography and their writings, as almost all women in ghost stories will do, at least those contemplated in this study.

In 1826, Mr. Brontë brought home a box of wooden soldiers for Branwell. Charlotte, Emily, Branwell, and Ann, playing with the soldiers, conceived and began to write in great detail about an imaginary world, which they dubbed Angria. Charlotte had to go to Roe Head School in 1831, and her sisters tried to continue with the stories but, this time, they placed the story in Gondal, an island Emily and Ann created. This imaginary world was to re-appear in Emily's poems when she was an adult.

Both Charlotte and Emily attended Roe Head School, one as a governess and the other as a pupil. Still, Emily fell into depression and had to come back home. Emily's character was inclined to feel miserable when she was far from her moors, apart from being extremely introverted and a free, wild spirit, not fettered by rules. At home, just as her sisters and brother, Emily devoured books of all kind—like Homer, Virgil or Milton. But it was Byron who inspired Emily to create Heathcliff. They also read *Blackwood's Magazine* with

many gothic stories, and probably read Ann Radcliffe. They imitated everything meaningful.

The youths started to grow up and had to earn a living, not to mention that it was notoriously difficult for them to marry because the girls were plain and so terribly shy they maintained very few relationships. Thus, the alternatives they were offered were to become governesses or teachers and so they did. Nevertheless, the experiences were not gratifying at all. Neither Charlotte in Roe Head, nor Emily in Law Hill or Anne in Dewsbury Moor profited from such episodes. Charlotte and Anne could bear it stoically, but Emily, the wild spirit, could not continue and came back feeling homesick.

Charlotte continued being a governess because she rebuffed a marriage proposal from Henry Nussey, who was Ellen Nussey's brother—Charlotte's best friend. This man was to inspire her character of St John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*. She worked in Stonegappe for the Sidgwick family, which tried to take advantage of her and would inspire her many parts and of *Jane Eyre*, including Thornfield, the mansion.

Charlotte and Ann returned home and met William Weightman, who was the priest destined to help their father in the parsonage. Charlotte tried to found a school with her sisters but, faced with the economic problems it posed, she went to Brussels with the company of Emily. They stayed at the Pensionnat Heger, where they became pupils of Monsieur Heger and Madame Heger, who was the headmaster. Charlotte fell in love with Monsieur Heger, but it was unrequited—he loved his wife and never let Charlotte think anything different. Her days at Brussels were indeed turbulent: she was in a kind of painful happiness mingled with stressful situations. Madame Heger knew how to

handle it. Monsieur Heger was the main character in both novels *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*.

In Haworth, Aunt Branwell had fallen very ill. Charlotte and Emily rushed home only to find out she had died. Her death would be a turning point for the life of the sisters, who received a good sum of money from Aunt Branwell's inheritance. Emily stayed at the Parsonage forever and would never abandon the moors, taking care of her beloved father. She felt that such was her world—reading to her father, talking to Tabby and writing love poems secretly.

As for Charlotte, she went back to Brussels. She wanted to be near her Monsieur Heger, although she had little to do with him, something she knew at the bottom of her heart. Monsieur Heger, aware of Charlotte's suffering, avoided being near her. Early in 1844, Charlotte came back home, but continued to write to Monsieur Heger, even though he only allowed her to write to him twice a year in order to separate her letters in time. These letters were studied some years later by Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte's biographer. Once again at home, the sisters embarked upon their project for founding a school, which resulted in abject failure. It was easy for Emily to stay at Haworth because she felt comfortable there. Conversely, for Charlotte, it was miserable. She had enjoyed the life in Brussels and now she felt like in a recess. Branwell, Ann and Ellen Nussey were her sole motivations. In those circumstances, she was filled with implacable hatred against Monsieur Heger and succumbed to depression, mulling over the idea that nobody loved her.

Branwell, who had been with Emily in Thorp Green, was expelled from there because he was thought to be in love with the woman of the house. Emily accepted the situation and was indulgent with her brother, whereas Charlotte,

who was hurt because of love affairs, was scandalized by the event. Refused again by the same woman once her husband had died, Branwell became a drug addict and a burden for his family. He tried to set fire to his bed under the effects of drugs, an episode that appears in *Jane Eyre* when Bertha Mason does the same to Jane.

In the middle of the tempest, there was a beam of light, when Charlotte discovered Emily's poems by chance. Emily had been writing secretly since 1843 until then, 1845, and Charlotte was amazed by the high quality of the poems and the mysticism of her sister's soul. Everything pointed towards *Wuthering Heights*. The three sisters—leaving Branwell aside—decided to publish a collection of poems under pseudonyms that were taken as masculine. In Victorian times, women were not always treated fairly in the business world and, thus, they assumed masculine names so that their books had a better chance of being published, and, moreover, they could avoid being exposed to ridicule while defying the norms. This event came as a harbinger of good fortune. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne had begun publishing their poetry and novels. In 1847, Charlotte published *Jane Eyre*, Emily followed suit with *Wuthering Heights* and Anne with *Agnes Grey*. Although it had been written before, it was not until after her death that *The Professor* was published in 1857. The novel was not enthusiastically welcome. It would be later, when a biographer appreciated its vital importance, that its authentic material was highly valued. Charlotte had begun several novels, but she never finished them.

It is curious to mention that *Jane Eyre* was Charlotte's door to escape, giving her access to the literary world of the moment. Contrary to common belief, *Jane Eyre* is not a realist novel, although in this novel—as in many of the

stories we will analyse in this study—there are many biographical events. From my point of view, *Jane Eyre* is within the female gothic tradition due to the fact that it shows us a patriarchal Victorian society reflecting an entire social order, but mainly condensed in a social class—affluent people—and inside a family. It is here where a woman appears as the ‘other’. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, merely being a woman who longs to be independent and be granted the same rights as men is more than enough. Besides, Jane is also the ‘other’—as a child and as an adult—who searches for family and place. To achieve her goals, Jane subverts society and its foundations, which will mete out a punishment for her. *Jane Eyre* is undoubtedly Charlotte’s *alter ego*. The novel is the story of her life and adulthood, divested of any direct references. Her attempts to forge a personality are images in the mirror, her dead mother’s voice or the crazy woman in the attic. Bertha is the imprisoned madwoman, surrounded by the stringent conventions of society and thus cast out of favour and deprived of her voice, because she is sexually assertive. For this reason, her husband assumes her speech. Bertha embodies the stereotypical Victorian beliefs about madness. In the novel, she represents the supreme irrationality, which is strengthened by the fact that she is from another country and belongs to another race. It seems Bertha is warning Jane not to become the ‘other’, just because a man like Rochester is going to deceive Jane in the name of love and perhaps to assume her voice as well. We can conjecture that Bertha’s madness is a condition brought about by rebellion over patriarchal control.

Along with *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* equally participates in this phenomenon of the “explained supernatural”. Moreover, as in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* is also a reflection of family life. Emily witnessed how love

could destroy human beings—it had happened to her sisters and brother. One can see many of Branwell's attributes in Heathcliff himself. Likewise, we can see Nelly Dean, one of the main narrators, as the copy of Tabby, their nurse. Heathcliff represents the 'other' in the community, the disturbing element; he comes from outside and his traits are like the gypsies'. Heathcliff is Catherine's alter ego, and the patriarchal tension between her two lovers will lead Catherine to her fragmentation and to her death. Her spirit comes back to earth in the form of a girl and she appears to the narrator, Lockwood, whereas it is Heathcliff who wants to see her. This experience is astride dream and fantasy.

Once again we can perceive that nature is a pivotal element in *Wuthering Heights*, as it was in Radcliffe's novels. There is a complete identification of the natural scenery and landscape with the vicissitudes of the male characters. Meanwhile, all the females are preys to the patriarchal system and, as a result, they are confined to the domestic sphere, as it is rather commonplace in gothic fiction. Nevertheless, we can also say that there is a manifest subversion of the feminine role in the novel. In a patriarchal system, it is usually the male who is the intelligent partner, while, in the novel, Cathy teaches her future husband to read and write. This is an inversion of the usual role. We should not forget that the novel was written by a woman and she was also a woman with culture and able to teach anyone.

Wuthering Heights starts and ends with the apparition of a ghost, which one may believe or not, and it belabours the idea that love is beyond life. Nevertheless, the novel was not well considered by Victorian society and was criticised for being violent and masculine.

Charlotte started to move in literary circles and to make important acquaintances, such as William Thackeray, George Henry Lewes, Harriet Martineau or Elizabeth Gaskell. She was pleased with this kind of life, but misery was knocking at the door. Her father underwent an operation, Anne suffered from influenza and Branwell died as a result of his deteriorated life. Charlotte was deeply affected; perhaps she felt remorse as a result of her behaviour towards him. They had barely recovered from Branwell's death when Emily passed away as well, three months later. Emily, resembling her characters Catherine and Heathcliff, rejected food or medicines necessary to survive. Charlotte could bear it and overcame this misfortune, thanks to her father's insistence and Ellen Nussey's company. Nevertheless, what supposed the limit of it was Anne's death of tuberculosis.

After all these incidents, she devoted herself to writing and to learn about the peculiarities of being a professional woman writer. She met the editor James Taylor, who fell in love with Charlotte and wanted to marry her, but he was refused. She could not see her ideal hero in him, apart from the fact that he left for India for five years. She published *Villette* in 1853 and she earned an important amount of money.

Arthur Bell Nichols, his father's assistant at the parsonage, made her a marriage proposal. She refused him, too. This notwithstanding, they continued writing letters to one another and having secret encounters, although he was in another town. Little by little, Charlotte began to fall in love with Nichols. He came back to Haworth when Patrick accepted him and they got married on 29 June 1854. Happiness came back again to Charlotte's life but, when she was

expecting a child, she died of tuberculosis. Patrick was the only survivor of the Brontë's family.

2.2.2. Definition of genre: Female Gothic Ghost stories

Ghost stories were at their highest peak between 1850 and 1900. At that time, supernatural beliefs, wherever they came from, were under scrutiny and Christian beliefs were roundly condemned. The Christian church failed to comfort many of its followers. The Church was seen from a different standpoint, dispossessed of its magical powers. It was then the age when even priests had to recur to medicine, when doctors were considered men of science and human spirituality was very far from faith. This question is well reflected in Oliphant's writings.

It is a blatant observation that it is in the very human nature the capacity of being aware of death and life, and this same question is portrayed in literature. Especially in this period and with ghost stories, all these doubts transcend to ghosts stories, ranging from doubts as to the otherworld, to the body and the soul, the man and the universe, the nature of evil or all kind of spiritual questions. For this reason, there are many serious writers—men and women—who are enthralled by this genre.

We must not forget that Gothic narratives have been interpreted also in terms of gender. As a consequence, there are some critics who consider that Gothic is inherent to the female gender—critics like Becker, Fleenor and Hoeveler defend this position—, while there are other critics, such as Milkbank and Williams, who consider that the Gothic consists of two genders—the male and female gender. These two tendencies appeared to categorize the differing

schools of Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe. From my point of view, gender will be one of the key concepts for our writers just as it will influence their feminine or masculine characters, the topics, the anxieties and social injustice. Nobody could escape from gender in the Victorian period, overall, because of the different role in life and society which was attached to each one.

If we follow Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, we pinpoint the problem, which arises from the distinction between sex and gender. Sex is biologically given, whereas gender is socially constructed. In other words, gender is the social significance that sex supposes in a given culture. Judith Butler evokes Simone de Beauvoir's words that "one is not born a woman, but, rather becomes one". As claimed by Butler, the aforesaid denotes that one is not born with a gender, but gender is acquired and is the cultural construction of sex. Butler goes one step further because, if gender cannot be said to be inherent to a determined sex, that means that to be given a sex is not to be given a gender. Thus, if gender is not bound to sex, there is no reason to maintain the dual distinction which is confirmed by the existence of gender identities that can transgress the two traditional categories of male and female. Some of the characters in these stories will make use of transgression of the social and cultural rules related to their conditions of males and females—even our writers will do, and, when they transgress the rules, they subvert society.

Short ghost stories are commonly characterized as belonging to the female tradition and many critics have recognized the relationship between women writing and the Gothic genre—specially short stories—and in particular because these stories are concerned with household dramas and threats to women.

In order to have a proper definition of the two different kinds of Gothic, we must itemise the dissimilar characteristics presented by each one, so that we can state our purposes and classify our stories, which will shed light on whether these stories are only born from female pens or there are any other circumstances or conditions to be fulfilled.

As Williams says in *Art of Darkness*, both female and male Gothic have their own plot, set of narrative conventions and a tale to tell about the desires and the fears of the self in the world. The division, mentioned above, of Gothic writings into male and female traditions generally sticks to the sex of the author, although this may not be a very consistent division. As Alison Milkbank puts forward, there are female writers like Mary Shelley, who wrote in the male tradition, and Henry James who could be considered in the other order—but perhaps, apart from Mary Shelley and James, exceptions are rather scarce. In this work, we will see that our four writers—Gaskell, Oliphant, Edwards and Lee—belong to the Female Gothic tradition.

Having referred to the two main different types of realization of the different forms of Gothic—male and female—we must indicate the most essentially dissimilar aspect: the male Gothic generally focuses more on generating a sense of horror, whereas the female gothic evokes emotions and experiences of terror.

The difference between both horror and terror lies chiefly in the treatment of the supernatural and sublime. The female Gothic uses terror to stimulate the mind and imagination, whereas the male Gothic encourages too much fear, which has the effect of freezing the mind. The female Gothic, therefore, presents itself in a Romantic sense. Although the reader is encouraged to be

enveloped in stories of love and chivalry, the public is tested by the supernatural, without forgetting that reason and rationality are restored at the end of the novel.

When we use the term 'ghost story' in its general use, the term can denote not only stories about ghosts, but also about possession and demons, spirits, vampires, werewolves and *Doppelgängers*. They are all stories of the supernatural. Nevertheless, it is necessary to indicate that in this study I will only deal with stories about ghosts—the dead who have returned. The ghost story has been commonly seen as a separate genre but we should remember that it stems from the Gothic tradition, and it recurrently uses Gothic strategies, themes and locations inside the Gothic mainstream. In structure and content, however, it differs, because it is 'supernatural'—it is the dead who return and there is no reasonable explanation for this. In artistic writing, ghosts seem to act within an ethical and physical universe that enters our own, yet this may seem incomprehensible to us.

From time immemorial, ghost stories have been present in all cultures, and have formed part of a literary genre, having enjoyed their own recognised conventions. In the literary ghost story, the ghost is supreme, it is the centre of the work, and the arousal of fear is the story's chief purpose. But this is not the case in stories by women where the ghost has always a task to perform without trying to menace or frighten anyone. Ghosts seem obliged to carry out certain, specific deeds, such as the revelation of a murder, giving a warning, completing an unfulfilled affair or helping anybody; they always had to remedy a wrong situation. In women's stories ghosts are benevolent.

Amazingly, the golden period of the ghost story is the Victorian era and it is amazing because it was a period when reason and scepticism were uppermost and scientific explanations and technical achievements prevailed. Never before, according to Ballesteros, had the ghost been as real as it was in the second part of the 19th century in England. Literary ghost stories often contained disapproval of rationalism; others tried to establish the objective existence of supernatural phenomena by weaving storylines and plots in which the author pretends to be the recorder of events. These stories presented sceptical men, usually lawyers, or men of science, like doctors or scientists, or they showed us the world of technology.

If rationalism, science and industry were something to do with men, women writers would show their heroines seeking love and self-knowledge, putting especial emphasis on the spiritual projection and even the supernatural prognostication of the individual. But there is one question we cannot deny: in the middle of the feminine world we can see science, technology and industry because they cannot evade the society they live in, although most of the times the purpose is to denounce the evils culture presents. It seems that the literary terrors of the time represent a change in the telling of the tales, despite the fact that their oral archetype, their structure and purpose was not transformed as much as their view of the 'uncanny'. It did not matter if it was listening or reading ghost stories; in any case, the unknown gave these women a terrain to exorcize their fears in a controlled way. By sharing their fears, uncertainties became manageable for them—women could not only overcome their terrors, but subvert them instead.

In the middle of these new aims, there was a mutual goal to induce fear by the use of the supernatural, but this was led in a disparate way to the Male Gothic. Women of the Female Gothic did not use magic or portents, nor premonitions or dreams. Very far from these things, women writers of ghost stories had to struggle with the plots situated on the borderline of the natural and the supernatural. The point was that a ghost story was sustainable for thirty pages but not for a longer novel, as Julia Briggs suggests in her book *Night Visitors: the Rise and fall of the English Ghost Story* (13). As she propounds, by being shorter, the reader can follow the purpose of the ghost, hence avoiding getting lost in the intricate plot of the Gothic novel, which manipulates the reader's feelings. As a consequence of that, the short story structure is characterized by its use of a small number of main characters and a limited series of events we will detail in each authoress. We will also point out that some of the stories follow the same pattern or a similar one. The complexity of the tale will be determined by the point of view from which the story is told. Sometimes it is the governess who tells the tale to the children—like in “The Old Nurse's Story”—; with some others, it is a person who has experienced the events themselves—like in “The Open Window”—or several people to give us different points of view—as in “A Beleaguered City” by Oliphant—; there are also men representing society—as it happens in any of Edwards' tales or in Vernon Lee's. The action is comparatively simple.

When we consider the ghost story as a way of revival of the past that is interconnected with the present, there is a link—the figure of the narrator. The scepticism this personality is involved in anticipates that disbelief of the audience. Most of the narrators mention their own scepticism regarding the fact,

that makes the reader able to admit more easily his testimony. This scepticism differentiates the Gothic short story from the stories of the previous centuries. Writers are now preoccupied with verisimilitude. The reader has to perceive the real world as existent and see that the supernatural has intruded in it.

As we have said, ghost stories came from Gothic tradition, but the structure and components developed in a very different form from their predecessors. Gothic authors were not concerned with present history or reality and, consequently, the best writers of Victorian ghost stories locate their supernatural events in everyday settings. Those *genus loci* were altered from one writer to another. On the one hand, they depicted the familiar world. For the depiction of the domestic sphere, they used home ambiances, which created a feeling of security because they were known; they used the world of the ordinary, which was usually that of the middle class life. In comparison with prior settings, ruined castles, bleak vaults, gloomy graves and corridors, it may seem this setting has nothing fearful, but the reader has to understand that the after world has come into the very core of the family. On the other hand, when writers had to suggest the unknown world, they would use a threatening setting that was normally described naturalistically. This second setting was usually far from civilization, a place in which a man could feel like a stranger. The landscape increased in importance and men were unfitting elements in the middle of open spaces, steep mountains, lowering branches and bad weather conditions that supposed a menace for people. Nevertheless, sometimes this space was similar to paradise; this is the case of Edwards or other times the space was that of the past, like in some of Vernon Lee's tales. Wherever the action took place, the vibrating tension between the known and the unknown, security and

insecurity, the familiar and the strange, scepticism and credulity was maintained. The longing for more supernatural beliefs with the combination of modern scepticism was the basis for the grounds of the ghost story, which continued to be a dominant leitmotif in Victorian literature.

The Female Gothic novel tries to work with the explained supernatural, and it has a happy ending which demands marriage, while the Male Gothic prefers a tragic plot. The female ghost story represents an exception to these rules. It allows women writers to use the 'unexplained supernatural' and does not need marriage for a happy ending. To my mind, Female ghost stories try to restore spiritual peace. They try to establish contact with the past, a contact with which it is possible to recover the system of values that comes to us in the hands of our own dead. The spirits of those who have suffered physical death cannot be corrupted now. This is possible because their literature moves on the border of the explained and the unexplained supernatural and, for this reason, we can call them 'stories of the uncanny'.

The term uncanny, which was coined by Freud must be accurately defined. On the one hand, it makes reference to what is frightening. This leads back to what is known of the 'old and long familiar'. It points to that which should have remained secret and unknown but has been revealed—so it is both strange and familiar. A. Ballesteros points out in *Escrito por brujas* that the term 'uncanny' is also related to the figure of the mother and, by extension, with home. Moreover, if we follow Freud's ideas, there is a factor of repetition as the basis of the uncanny feeling. That is to say, the uncanny feeling arises in us when we notice the repetition of the fact—usually ghost appearances are reiterative. Apart from these features, there is another aspect to take into

account when thinking of the 'uncanny'—that of repression. Perhaps some of the elements which are shown as frightful have been repressed before in a way or another that recurs. This can represent the uncanny—nothing new but familiar, alienated from its place through repression. As believed by Diana Wallace in her article "Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as Female Gothic", the short story is often related with the marginalized and especially with women writers and, curiously, it has become a vehicle to denounce everything oppressed and repressed in literature. This will be one of the main points of our work.

Supernatural stories were a place where women could experiment these feminine spiritual anxieties which oppressed them. As they were considered writers of minor works, they could sometimes escape from criticism, and this was especially beneficial for the ghost stories which were so famous during Victorian times. These stories were not inspected as realistic fiction, also because they took the form of short stories. But one thing we must not forget is that ghost stories in the nineteenth century were based on realistic foundations. And yet, their own purpose was to deal with the absent, the transcendent and the unreal. Women writers of the genre felt freer thus and it was for them like writing mysterious secrets. The ghost story was definitely a form in which women could be allowed to express their doubts because it was not considered as a professionalized procedure. It was associated to oral story-telling, something poorly considered by the literary establishment.

Hard as it may seem to define the Gothic as a literary genre, most texts belonging to it share a number of features that necessarily lead us to infer, in keeping with Botting's definition of the genre in *Gothic*, that the two most

important traits are 'excess' and 'transgression'. For him, Gothic literature depicts feelings and characters in their extremes, which creates a strong impact on the reader's imagination. Some of the characters—mostly men—will appear as mad when they face the supernatural, such as the scientist in "The Phantom Coach" or the boy who is ill in bed in "The Open Window". These tangled emotions which we encounter in Gothic texts run a wide gamut, as varied as mistrust, fear, terror, love and desire. These emotions appear, of course, exaggerated or sometimes understated, depending on the writer. As we will see, it will not be the same emotions for Margaret Oliphant as for Vernon Lee—who is near the decadence style—nor for Amelia Edwards or for Elizabeth Gaskell.

Botting holds that we cannot discuss 'excess' and 'transgression' as separate features. He understands by 'transgression' the power Gothic literature wields to go beyond the limits of what is commonly accepted, meaning that this can entail trespassing social and moral boundaries, in the same way that we can think of the transgression of reality and probability. These situations can be seen in Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Grey Woman" when a virtuous maiden is seduced by a villain—which crosses moral limits—, when an innocent is murdered or when the spirit of a person comes back to life to solve a situation. This type of events occurs in most of the short stories by Oliphant, Edwards and Vernon Lee. This coming back of the dead supposes a possibility of transgression, which is a frequent use of the supernatural in Gothic fiction. This supernatural fact of a spirit coming back is, according to Botting, a "disturbing return of pasts upon presents" or, in Kilgour terms, the "return of the repressed"

in our case mainly women ghosts—albeit not always women—who have not been able to perform a task because of the fact of being women and repressed.

2.2.3. Historical situation

2.2.3.1. Women and men in Victorian society

The four authoresses of our study cover the whole Victorian century—encompassing the entire period if we consider the dates of their births and deaths. Taking into account their first publication was in 1852, we will place their works in the Post-Gothic period, what coincides with the high point of the ghost story. Born between 1810 and 1856—Elizabeth Gaskell was born in 1810, Margaret Oliphant in 1828, Amelia Edwards in 1831 and Vernon Lee in 1856—, they can be expected to have followed the steps of the great authors of Gothic stories. When writing ghost tales, as Ballesteros puts it, with their fantastic work, those marvellous writers come to form part of a resistance to a system they repulse as unfair in many aspects—political, social and sexual. All of them are far better in their fantastic works than in their realistic ones. Rebellious and risk-taking women—somewhat forgotten today—showed us it was perfectly possible to overcome the obstacles the *Establishment* had set for women at both levels—social and literary. Elizabeth Gaskell was at the same time the wife of a minister and a woman who had to carry out social labour and take care of her children and, even more, she wrote to support her family and show women's fears. Margaret Oliphant used her terrifying, supernatural narratives as a way of escaping from a tortured life, with the successive family tragedies she had to bear, but that were not enough to discourage her fervent will to write. Amelia Edwards also felt attracted by supernatural stories. She was a contemporary of

Margaret Oliphant and, albeit much more forgotten today, she was well-known in her days. She wrote some realistic novels and a good collection of fantastic stories, let alone travel books. Vernon Lee, as a *fin-de-siècle* writer, showed us the emerging figure of the New Woman, who sought liberty.

It is probably a truism that the best way to live inside a society without being considered a stranger is to abide by certain rules. Nevertheless, rules often stifle human individuality because the same rules affect all members of a society, without distinction. We have to remember that people are different and diverse and, occasionally, there are individuals who cannot conform to society because they cannot choose the option they fit in—overall because perhaps there is no option for them to fit in. Therefore, we find there are some people who fight against the rules to defend their rights to be an individual. Going one step further, although this individual does not fit the rules, he should not be considered as the 'other'.

To understand how women may have felt in Victorian times, it is utterly necessary to try to conceive how they lived and how they operated inside the society which dictated norms and rules. In some cases, unthinkable as it may seem, we have to remember that the same restrictions which were placed upon women were imposed on men as well. I completely concur with Ballesteros in that “women have been victims of patriarchal order and that this patriarchal order has generated an unfair life for women” (13). He also says “that men suffered from Victorian oppression too because they were brought up according to the rigid Victorian morality and principles, and this education led them at times to psychological stress and internal conflicts”. This is one of the aspects

we can appreciate in the narratives included in this study, with which we shall deal later.

This notwithstanding, as Ballesteros continues saying, it is on women that society vents its anger, and, as a result, women became the most oppressed beings. So, it is in this way that women have been deprived of anything important or significant in life—and, especially, of their freedom. Yet, we should not forget that throughout the course of history some women embarked upon the process of liberation of their rights because they felt menaced. This vindication engendered a fight some women would not survive. The consequences of the war they were waging could be devastating for them. Women who, in patriarchy's view, did not stick to the dictates of religion, society, ideology, culture or sex, were seen as a threat, hence being turned into demons, fallen women or madwomen, and were dealt with in accordance with their denomination.

Nina Auerbach in her work *Woman and the Demon* (188-189) asseverates that all the measures that Victorian society took against women came to prove that men were really afraid of what women could do; they feared the powers of women, men thought women were versatile in respect of mobility and they could make extraordinary changes. Indeed, Queen Victoria was seen as a woman with power who called into question the relationship between femininity and power. It is true that women formed part of an oppressed group and, at the same time, they were considered as the 'Angel of the House'. At home, they ran the household, yet they were totally secluded within the home. They were thus central figures of a culture which separated them from the public sphere. Signifying the power of the ruler and the threat of the oppressed,

women were at the very centre of their stage, while, and at the same time, eliminated from public institutions.

The second part of the nineteenth century was extremely prolific in fantastic narrative. Queen Victoria, who was head of the nation from 1837 until 1900, represented a kind of femininity which was focused on the family, motherhood and respectability. Accompanied by her beloved husband Albert, and surrounded by her many children in the sumptuous but homely surroundings of Balmoral Castle, Victoria became an icon of late 19th-century middle-class femininity and domesticity.

In this period, it was stated that a woman's place was in the home and the woman's fulfilment is domesticity and motherhood—a theme that will be so well reflected in some of Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant's works. So women were kept away from the public sphere except for charitable missions. The notion of the separate spheres—women in the private sphere of the home as the 'Angel in the House' and the man in the public sphere of business, politics and sociability—influenced the choices and experiences of all women, at home, at work and in the streets.

In this private sphere, the mother and her children were the most important protagonists. The role of the mother was idealized and was thought to be enough to fulfil the expectations of the women of the middle class. Marriage gave women maturity and respectability, but motherhood was the confirmation that a woman had achieved the world of virtue. For a woman, not to become a mother was deemed inadequate, hence becoming a failure. Nevertheless, there were many questions concerning the role of mothers and maternal voice. We will focus on the Victorian middle class due to the fact that our writers belonged

to it and that they represented their mother characters—if they represented any—within the middle class.

Parents belonging to the middle class struggled to follow a code of conduct, but they were ignorant of which one to choose to rear their children best. The upper middle classes tended to imitate the aristocracy, whose own ideal was that mothers were not engaged in raising their children, so they had wet nurses and women could be prepared to conceive children sooner. As a symbol of wealth, many servants were held in the households. Elizabeth Gaskell used to walk to many places because she was short of money and Margaret Oliphant wrote at high speed because she had a family to support, but both of them had several servants and nurses for their children at home. However, in their case, they always fought for the right of mothers to bring up their own children in close contact to themselves and the right to enjoy their own children. Mothers had to dedicate themselves to their children, to teach them to socialize, to converse with them and this was tough, indeed. We must remark that some women started to consider this was not a productive employment, leading to a big dissatisfaction in women's life in the nineteenth century. And yet, there are some authors, like Gaskell and Oliphant, who explore the advantages of the relationship between mother and child, and the strength the children derive from it.

For a better understanding of our study, we will now examine what the conditions of men were during this period of time that gave rise to such duality and contradictions. Men and women were, at times, equally overburdened with despair and did not know what to do without contradicting social rules to assuage their own desires. They battled in the cause of the cultivation of an

outward appearance of dignity, decorum and self-control with unfair social phenomena.

As we have seen, the division of the two spheres carried a problem with it—what did masculinity have to do with domesticity? This is the probing question John Tosh poses in his book, *A Man's Place*. He continues by saying that masculinity was based on home, work and all-male association. Men's duty was to protect their home. But it is not frequently mentioned in patriarchy studies that men bore the masculine prospects of their sons in the sense that a man's place in prosperity depended on leaving sons behind to continue their lineage. Men also felt the pressure of marriage and descendants, and also to provide a home for them, as he would otherwise have failed. But, nevertheless, the masculine status as a breadwinner confined his wife to a second place—home-maker. When men stressed their authority, they acted as patriarchs, but when, in turn, they wanted their wife's support, their behaviour was like that of a child towards his mother. Dependence of men on women was only correct if the woman was seen as the 'Angel Mother'.

In the middle of this social commotion, men and women had to survive by dint of being faithful to their own principles and the values dictated by their status, which inflicted sometimes great suffering when any of them could not accept the social rules he or she was expected to respect or they did not want to conform to, because they wanted to cross the barriers—just as women writers did. This crossing of the religious and social barriers lead Victorians to pigeonhole the kinds of women they had and, following Auerbach, this classification appears also in paintings of the time.

In spite of that, we know women were, at the same time, constantly evoked and denied, torn apart from literature—in both ways, as authoresses and as characters—whereas they provided fictional and non-fictional realities. Women led a different life outside “the attic”, although it was not always seen this way because of the female literary tradition. In our study, we will try to show that, within our writers’ short ghost stories, there is enough evidence women are limited to the attic—where they are hidden and imprisoned—or to the house, and never let out in the public sphere. However, they always manage to break the boundaries they have been imposed, and subvert their role. Most of our women will be prisoners, no matter whether they are good women as wives, daughters or sisters, locked up inside the house like the girl in “The Library Window”, who tries to escape with her imagination to the trap the window has become for her. Even fallen women, who are prisoners in open or closed spaces, try to escape their sentence. By means of an illustration, in “Earthbound”, Maud is entrapped in a double space—her picture in the attic and her spirit in the garden.

2.2.4. Women writers amidst Victorian society

For the purposes of gaining the most comprehensive view of the works we are going to study, we must penetrate in the handicap women writers cope with during the age they lived in. Apart from the differences within society we have seen in the previous lines, women writers had to surmount many other serious difficulties, too often derived from the very conception society had about women. These ideas did not only condition their lives but also their writings.

On the authority of Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of their Own*, we should bear in mind the difference existing between the literature created *by* women and literature written *for* women or the so-considered 'female literature' (4). Women novelists have been insecure and, albeit aware of their individual personality, identity and experience, they have not been able to consider it part of their history.

Apart from this, criticism has diverted attention away from those who are not 'great', a fact that has led to neglect minor novelists from that period of history. According to Showalter (6), as a consequence, we are lacking a manifestation of continuity of the writings by women, as well as consistent information about their lives or any change in their legal, economic, and social status. We beg to differ from this statement, since, as we will try to demonstrate how Gaskell in "The Old Nurse's Tale" makes use of intertextuality which reinforces the continuity of tradition. It may be clear she had read the Brontë sisters and she used the scene of little Catherine's ghost outside the window in a cold night for her tale. Furthermore, in the case of Amelia Edwards and Vernon Lee, they recall the genius loci from Radcliffe.

Showalter claims that Victorians expected women's novels to reflect the feminine world, culture and duties they considered women had to comply with, but they did not contemplate that women had personal ideas about their role and thus they did not expect to see them on the written page.

Inside Victorian society, male criticism was humiliating and partisan. Male critics were eager to induce readers to think that women writers wished to avoid special treatment and that they did not want to appear unwomanly. Yet, instead of trying to mirror all the values and norms of their society, women writers

attempted to demonstrate their importance and, thus, literature became the symbol of their triumph. It is because of this dilemma that women novelists developed some personal and literary stratagems. In the personal aspect, there was a self-condemnation because they were women and they reflected it with humility, modesty or, sometimes going one step further, with self-hatred. Showalter adduces that, in a letter to John Blackwood, Mrs Oliphant expressed her doubts: “whether in your most manly or masculine of your most manly and masculine of magazines a womanish story-teller like myself may not become wearisome” (17). The novelist really believed to be antifeminist herself. So, while working at home they were advocating submission and self-sacrifice, and simultaneously they denounced female self-assertiveness; all this made them to feel they could reap the rewards for their determination to write.

This determination to write—or let us term it ‘vocation’—demanded an authentic supremacy of female identity. We should remember that Victorian women did not choose their vocation—being a woman was already a vocation in itself. In the same way as men, women were also expected to accomplish their task and carry out the work in the house. Nevertheless, there was a difference; all women’s work was destined to ‘others’: Gaskell spent most of her time doing community work because of her husband’s position, for example. If women worked for themselves, there was a conflict because they did not respect subordination and repression, characteristics of femininity. The will of writing and everything it implied, like self-development or liberty to express opinions, turned this profession into a menace to family and society, because women could not cultivate their ego indeed, they had to negate it.

As Showalter continues in the second chapter of her book, feminine novelists formed a subculture-class due to the fact that they constituted a homogeneous group—this was because women novelists in Victorian times were mainly the daughters of the upper-middle class, the aristocracy and the liberal professionals. Women novelists and male novelists had different patterns to follow in their careers, which diverged in three aspects—education, means of support and age at the time of their first publication. Contemplating these three items, it is clear that it was much more onerous for females to make any progress in their careers, as they were not afforded the same opportunities as men. To begin with, women writers had education barred, not because of class, but because of sex. Middle-class Victorian girls witnessed how their brothers were sent to school as they, poor inferior beings, were left at home to learn domestic skills. Therefore, feminine writers had to make strenuous efforts in order to achieve the educational standards of the *Establishment*.

Middle-class women had very little employment opportunities available for them, apart from writing, possibly publishing or working as copy-editors, and often women writers contributed to the support of their families out of need. As Showalter indicates, Oliphant never found the formula to fight against bankruptcy. She had to support her family—her brother, her own children, and nephews— and had to deal with editors and publishers to write as much as she could, just for a living. There are many letters in the British Museum where she wrote to publishers to implore an advance. But it is also certain that, like many other novelists, she was able to give her sons luxuries she did not enjoy in her own life, such as going to Eton. Writing was the only financial opportunity which remained open for her, not entailing sexual discrimination. Gaskell could afford

to buy a bigger house with her work because her husband received a little assignation. Little by little, the acceptance that middle-class women could earn money through writing was becoming more widespread.

However, Victorian men believed women writers thought they were women first and artists second, and, on account of this, they were judged on a two-fold standard—firstly, for their work and, secondly, for their femininity, a judgement after which they were compared to other women writers.

With reference to the place of women in literature, Margaret Oliphant said in “The Modern Novelist—Great and Small” *Blackwoods* LXXVII (1859): ‘This, which is the age of so many things—of enlightenment, of science, of progress—is quite as distinctly the age of female novelists’. The new appearance of women’s novels was shocking for everybody, so who would have agreed with Margaret Oliphant? Many critics thought of women writers as a female body destined to childbirth, and saw a career as a writer as incompatible. Even Dickens recommended Gaskell to write short stories in order to be able to care for her children. Moreover, men perceived women as a lower order of being, not gifted with the same intelligence as they did. However, this was not a handicap for women because it allayed their anxiety to show they were meriting writers, hence writing with a more natural style. Women wrote in magazines, they did share-publications and serialisation and voiced their opinion and consternation about the judgments other women made with regard to them. In this vein, Showalter explains that ‘Mrs Oliphant could not conceal her annoyance at Martineau’s woeful claim that overwork had destroyed her health and would send her to an early grave’ (65). She mocked her contemporary’s view on weakness and sickness in women.

This notwithstanding, one fact we cannot obviate in our study is that the great part of novelists involved in serialization was formed by women writers, at least, in the first third of the century. Some of them were noticeable women who were against serialization, but they knew it was the key for other females to go into the literary scene—be it as writers or as readers. There was a serried host of female writers and readers in the nineteenth century literary market which led to an association of novels with female authorship—that meant that some male writers were taken for female authors. This was in such a force that literary models were contrived for the feminine pleasure.

However the serial publication had a consequence—it was a close link between text and audience or between audience and author. For women readers of serials, the extended time of publication wove a tight union between fictional characters and themselves. Considering this link, we can infer that those works of serial fiction presented to women, where authoritative declarations were not done, provided women with a space, free from the boundaries of leading masculine societal structures. It gave them a place to discover their reactions to a literary work.

In the same way, serialization provided women with a space where they could give vent to their worries and feelings. Women who were the 'Angel in the House' were thought to feel no passion nor strong feelings, so they were not considered able to express all aspects of life in their writings, although this was not so. Oliphant and many other writers condemned the romanticism in feminine creative writing, but they knew it was, in part, due to the lack of feminine education and weakening women's values. They could not write about women's physical problems in childbirth, or any intimate experience of their own sex. But

women writers emphasized their points of view and tried to render their literature a reflection of the deluge of unsaid, women's daily feelings, turning this into a device for their art and self-expression—some novels by Gaskell were not well received by the public because of dealing with sex. Some novelists, like Oliphant, wanted to clarify that writing was for them a compulsion, driven by the possession of a muse. She did not agree whatsoever that only frustrated women wrote or took less care of their home as a result of their work. In effect, she declared she wrote in the room which was the neuralgic centre of her family—the drawing-room—and she was keenly aware of everything that happened. Gaskell wrote in the same place, too, and never left apart her domestic affairs. That self-consciousness of being a writer like Oliphant and Edwards had led them to write under their own name, whereas many other authors—Gaskell at the beginning or Vernon Lee during all her life—used a pen name, just as the Brontës or George Elliot did.

Another point to consider is that serialization was also adapted to middle-class female readers, on the grounds that female life in those times was characterised by the interruption of their occupations for the benefit of domesticity or something more important. Even someone like Florence Nightingale asserted women had the right to cultivate themselves, something which seemed rather difficult and unthinkable in the middle of their drawing rooms, crowded with children. It was, then, rather impossible for women to embark on long novels.

2.2.4.1. Victorian women writers, ghosts and the supernatural

When a woman chooses to recognize a ghost, she welcomes the return of the repressed and also demonstrates a universal, female desire to readmit those facts that the male dominant culture officially casts out. In the Victorian world, literature was subject to a censoring view that classified two different worlds—the inside world, inclusive, characteristic of reason, men, reality and nature; and the other, characteristic of women, which was exclusive of madness and had implicit the supernatural and the unreal. It is in this world that not only characters, but also women writers of the supernatural, and women writing about ghosts or spirits are trivialized, mainly because women are often associated with emotion, hysteria and unreason.

Victorian women writers wrote about the supernatural aiming at a female public, because ladies were those who tried to experiment and admitted supernatural beliefs. Nevertheless, we must remember that nobody wanted to address the subject of the uncanny because it was disreputable, as it had always been considered a matter of old wives—it was like a superstition, and it was not clearly religious. At the same time, it was against science, technology and materialism, which were the bedrock values of the period. If a man confessed seeing a ghost, he would immediately lose his privilege, for ghost-seeing in Victorian England was feminine, neither masculine nor real. Jennifer Uglow, in her introduction to *Victorian Ghost Stories by Eminent Women Writers*, suggests that men who saw ghosts turned into ‘timid, nervous, and helpless’ beings—characteristic features of female temperament. Still, there are many men who are ghost-seers in the tales of our four women writers who never show these negative characteristics.

Victorian times were a convulsive and ferment age. People saw factories, railroads, Corn Laws, poorhouses and the doctrines of evolution and, consequently, they got to know materialism, scepticism and empiricism and, in the middle of it all, women's lives were affected. They had no place, nor space or substance, so they faded in the real world. They were expected to give physical, moral and spiritual help but, then, they had to restrain themselves, to be silent and be still. As Vanessa Dickerson avers in the introduction of *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*, women's role changed so much in the nineteenth century that they were annulated and confined at home in such a way that they became as invisible as ghosts. It was a miracle that, although they were oppressed by domesticity and culture, they could conserve their spirituality, maybe because it was implicit in their angelical status. Yet, a woman was responsible for moral care; her position was uncertain, subsidiary and ghostly. That is the reason why we face a paradox—women were influential and marginal, which is expressed in women's relation to the supernatural, namely in the figure of the ghost, or indeterminacy, endangered identity and insubstantiality. The ghost can represent the women's invisibility, power and weakness.

Victorian men wrote supernatural tales too, just as women writers did, but in a radically different way. The supernatural tales by men like Sheridan Le Fanu, Dickens or Stevenson are more linked with medical, technical and journalistic explanations. Men wrote from the hegemonic position in which men are uppermost, but it is only to women that ghost stories can provide a means of libidinous energy of frustrated ambitions and restricted egos.

Victorian female writers felt attracted to writing ghost stories because they could shatter the label 'Angel in the House', and by means of these stories they could explore their impulses, desires and feelings, as well as their own status as the 'other' or the intermediate state between angel and demon.

Victorians were wandering between opposed poles—that of empire and equality, religious conviction and science, mysticism and materialism, belief and disbelief and all their doubts were reflected in their stories. Both men and women were trapped between the old order and the new emergent one: in this condition of transformation, where the two worlds coincided, the state of *ghosthood* appeared. In this sense, the figure of the ghost can represent the Victorian way of thinking—between utility or rationality and spirituality.

As for the church, it was reluctant to recognize the phenomena of spiritualism, which led to intimidate people who reclaimed more power in the séances; thus, individuals seized more powers in these sessions contacting the other world. As a consequence, there was a division—the church was for tradition and spiritualism was for science. There was a point in which science seriously undermined the principles of clergy and supernaturalism, even though clergymen denied the reality of spirits communicating with the living—but such is not the case for all of them, since there are some who do not deny them in our writers' stories, and most are also ghost-seers or key characters to exorcise the ghost. Nevertheless, it is true that, thanks to these skills, in Oliphant's works, for instance, clergymen appear in a status similar to that of women and, in Edwards' tales, clergymen are direct witnesses of ghosts. As in Oliphant's and Edwards' tales, the scientist and the practical man tried to avoid supernatural matters, but the priests are the in-betweens.

In front of this void of religion and science, in which no one could offer a clear and certain explanation of what happened after death, for some agnostics or atheists, some people believed in these revelations of the other world. Ghosts represented the afterlife and another way of being, they could fill the lives of people who lived among science, prosperity and technology and also gave comfort to those who had abandoned their faith in God. This was the reason why ghosts were in the centre of the Victorian life, instead of being relegated to old wives, young children or prepubescent girls.

2.2.4.2. The publication of Female Ghosts' stories

Until recently, there had been no serious critical consideration of women's ghost stories—which were usually associated with anthologies or magazines and other temporary kinds of publications—and this, in turn, had been a consequence of the disrespect of the appraisal of the short story. Not to mention that most ghost stories in Victorian anthologies were written by men.

Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to support that some anthologies of ghost stories were written by women, although most of the writers were better known for being novelists, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Vernon Lee and Amelia Edwards, the latter being famous for her travel books and works on Egyptology. The stories of these four women, with whom we are concerned, are therefore associated with the Female Gothic tradition and almost all are ghost stories—each with their own peculiarities—because each one deals with their own ghosts in their idiosyncratic form.

The last part of the nineteenth century marked the high point of the form of the ghost story. Between the years 1850 and 1930, the short ghost story was at

its peak. It won such a widespread acceptance that it was written by the major writers of the day, as well as by journalists and many women writers of the period. This resounding success was thought to be a consequence of the increase of the reading public who consumed fictional journals enthusiastically. There were a great number of periodicals and magazines at that time, such as *Blackwoods*, *Cornhill*, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, among many others. These periodicals offered entertainment at a certain speed. The middle class audiences liked sitting round the sofa and finding stories of the supernatural because, overall, ghosts were usually portrayed in the middle of their houses. Some periodicals were made to be read aloud to the whole family and these ghost stories were perfect because they were written in well divided parts, published in several episodes. The climax and the elements of the story had to be well measured. The taste for short stories was also encouraged by Dickens, who was an editor. As a matter of fact, he published short stories in special Christmas edition and, afterwards, more regularly. It is worth mentioning that the authors of the short ghost stories were both women and men.

Many female writers, such as Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell, had already published their short stories of the supernatural by 1859, i.e. by the time Darwin had published his theory of evolution. Darwin's theory of the origin of the species reinforced the criteria for women to be inspired with spirits and ghosts and, apart from that, this year was the end of a very important decade in the history of the ghost stories. Some literary critics surmise that it was during the 1850s that the ghost story touched perfection, and that it was from then on that it started to change and become the anti-Gothic novel. Gothic stories written after the 1850s are immersed in a

climate of change and reform influenced by the women's rights to education, employment and suffrage, as well as the enactment of the married woman's property act and the rise of the New Woman. This rise was an alarm for the patriarchal society because it supposed a feminization of the world. This change started in the 1860s and continued until the 1890s with new literary forms that even changed the feminine mythology, and then the sensation novel and the writings of New Woman arrived. After the 1850s, the supernatural novel and the sensation novel shared their emphasis on sexual and social liberation, along with the critique of marriage. Thus, on the one hand, the sensation novel did not only restore the taste for supernatural fiction, but it stressed the taste for it; and, on the other hand, there were many other women writers considered as minor artists who continued publishing during the 1860s and 1870s. Dickens published until the 1870s in *All the Year Round*, and he gave people stories like "The Old Nurse's Story" by Gaskell, "The Four-Fifteen Express", "My Brother's Ghost Story", "How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries", "The Phantom Coach" and "The Engineer" by Amelia Edwards.

By the mid-1870s and 1880s, the supernatural tales by female writers tended to explore the feminine condition no matter where the woman was placed, and in the 1890s the change was radical because women moved away from their domestic dominions. As Dickerson posits, for Oliphant, the tales were a way of protesting and escaping. For other women, tales showed their power or questioned their own identity and, overall, it was a way of keeping the readers interested and earning money, like Mrs Gaskell, by means of an illustration, who could even buy a house for her family.

Ghost stories proved to be a lucrative source of income because they were saleable, especially at Christmas, when spiritual associations reinforced a stronger belief in spirits. In Victorian England, Christmas was a time for ghosts insofar as there was a culture of the rite and transcendence, in which there was faith but not in the dogma; this converted the Saviour's birth into a season of apparitions, in line with Auerbach in *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians*: 'the infant Christ became another Victorian child the promise of whose beginnings was smothered by celebrations of death' (102). The vast majority of Victorian ghost stories were published at Christmas and written for this occasion, granting the festival a spectral and uncanny character.

Dickens was one of the drivers of Christmas publications. Dickens liked writing about Christmas and its festivities because the season had a special charm for him. Perhaps he liked showing the contrast of the gloomy part of life, which could be changed when people were surrounded with love. He liked depicting how warmth and security which gave the Christmas atmosphere altogether with the family could exorcize the terrors in a controlled context. This setting of security and familial companionship at Christmas is present in many ghost stories.

As we know, Dickens contribution to the ghost story was not only that he wrote his own stories, but he also published many others from different authors. It was in 1850 when he was the editor of *Household Words* and introduced a supplementary edition with some seasonal poems and tales by different writers. He used to send some instructions to his contributors for them to touch on a theme so that he could assemble all the writings more easily, under an aspect of unity and thematic continuity. In 1852, this supplement was called *A Round of*

Christmas Stories by the Fire, and it included two supernatural pieces by Dickens and one by Gaskell—"The Old Nurse's Tale". From 1854 onwards, the framework for the Christmas tales got more and more complex and some of the best Victorian writers became contributors.

In 1859, he closed down *Household Words* and began a new weekly magazine, *All the Year Round*, in which he continued his Christmas tradition. Dickens achieved the imposition of Christmas reading tradition on middle-class Victorian readers. He fostered a link between ghosts and Christmas by means of reading Christmas ghost stories on Christmas Eve, which kindles our interest by virtue of its psychological significance. Dickens' Christmas stories were thought to be read aloud while the family gathered together, old and young, sharing their ghosts. Possibly, in that situation, the family was even extended those days because of an unmarried friend or close relatives who were also assembled. As it grew dark, everybody opened their minds to the 'night visitors' coming from the unseen. The atmosphere of security those meetings provided gave the attendants the power to exorcise both the story and their lives.

In the year 1866, the theme was a railway station, *Mugby Junction*, and there were short stories like Amelia Edwards' 'The Engineer' and Dickens' 'The Signalman'. Amelia Edwards was a regular contributor to this magazine at Christmas editions, and she followed the prototype of the ghost stories of the sixties and seventies. Yet, we cannot obviate that, at that moment, most of Dickens' contributors were women and, although Edwards was the most outstanding, personalities such as Oliphant also partook in the group. The latter wrote a story, *A Beleaguered City* (1879), which was imitated towards the end of the century.

Publishing their tales at the end of the century, popular female writers, such as Oliphant, Riddell and Marryat, were earning an important amount of money— hence calling into question their ideas of female submissiveness and economic powerlessness. All of them, Oliphant, Riddell and Marryat, wrote stories concerning money and the murders committed for it. The question of money is not so patent in stories of the beginning of the century, when Gaskell presents us feminine characters who are not preoccupied with it because they own it by birth, like Miss Furnivall in “The Old Nurse’s Story” or Bridget Fitzgerald in “The Poor Clare”. On the contrary, Gaskell’s women are troubled by paternal force.

2.2.5. Women writer’s characters.

2.2.5.1. Female characters

In assent with Showalter in *A Literature of their Own*, Oliphant was one of the first women writers to elucidate that Jane Eyre, being a heroine, changed the course of the female tradition in literature, and affirms that Oliphant saw herself as less passionate and less feminine than Charlotte Brontë. In our opinion, we do believe that she might have been less passionate, but not less feminine. When one thinks of *Old Lady Mary* or the narrator of “The Library Window”, we see that these women almost act like men, but they have a clear view of their position. Oliphant thinks she has a masculine standpoint, but we venture our surmise that this is a consequence of her own existence—she was burdened with the weight of the family and the need to be in control of all the members; it is almost sure that this situation overcame her most times. What is clear is that Oliphant knew women’s nature in depth and she demonstrated it to

us with full dexterity in her ghost stories. There is an unbridgeable gap between what Oliphant felt and how Edwards and Lee should have felt. Both led individual lives like a woman can choose nowadays. Edwards omits women in her ghosts' tales but Lee presents us femme fatale.

Women's characters cover all the social scale, ranging from good women as mothers, daughters and wives, and diametrically opposed to femmes fatales. However, the gallery of characters can include children and men of any social class as well. This is due to the writer's travelling, her understanding of the historical moment and feminine conception and perception of life.

Darwin's discovery of evolution by natural selection exerted an overwhelming influence on the idea that the scientific community had on women, deemed lower-rank beings. And, even more, as Darwin claimed, evolution tended to specialization and women were supposed more maternal than any other thing. With these principles, women were kept outside the Victorian world, and it was commonly accepted to see them as the 'Angel in the House' from the social, moral and cultural point of view. In this way, Victorians elevated women spiritually, but put them aside from society physically, reiterating the mystery so long questioned—that of menstruation and childbirth. Victorians reversed these powers and managed to rebuild them as debilities, seeing them as weakness, uncleanness and hysteria. The question of menstruation was adroitly parried. However, there are the exceptions of some metaphors referring to the moon or the colour red, as in *Jane Eyre's* horrible room, for example. Nevertheless, as a consequence of childbirth derived motherhood, the central item for a woman in those times. A woman was, as Coventry Patmore said, 'the Angel in the House' who is to comfort her husband

and care for her children, but only at home—never outside, and, even less, if that meant to reassert herself outside the domestic realm, where her power could be misinterpreted as hysteria or demonic.

This notwithstanding, if we bear in mind what Nina Auerbach suggests in *Woman and the Demon*, it is true that Victorian art illustrated us with a different image of women—we could see images of mermaids, lamias, serpents, queens, saints, old maids and fallen women, among others. In her study on mythology, Nina Auerbach proposes a classification of women in Victorian period according to their life, beliefs and behaviour. Some of these categories correspond to the different ways women and men had to face the uncanny, and, for this reason, they are the characters of some short stories. When they found a woman was subversive, they labelled her and immediately put her aside, when women abandoned their domestic confinement, they showed they were capable of self-creation or to live independently without a male figure around—they were demonic outcasts.

In order to achieve a good vision of the characters we will encounter in our writers' short stories, we will try to outline the different traits each category of women presents. In this vein, we have the 'Angel in the House', as in Oliphant's stories, the 'demon' (with some variants like the lamia or serpent in Vernon Lee's case), the 'spinster' or the 'fallen woman'—groups that, on Auerbach's authority, intensified women's powers through the same categories instead of limiting their authority and control.

Despite the aforesaid, we have to think that the boundaries among these different types of woman are not well drawn—they can mingle and provide mutual support to one another. Let us say that the duality angel / demon is a

product of Victorian theology and religiosity, whereas the old maid and the fallen woman are Victorian social types, created by the patriarchy and cast out from family life and domesticity.

2.2.5.1.1. Angel in the House

All women had to be kept within a family, under the protection of a male representative and they could not desire or search for anything other than being daughter, wife and mother. Orphans and old maids were at a loss.

Women were compared to angels because angels were thought to be humble and self-sacrificial—two qualities for a perfect Victorian woman, particularly if she was married. ‘Angel’ and ‘house’ are so close that the expression leads to the idea that women can only exist within the boundaries of the family, hence epitomising the virtuosity of femininity and women’s captivity.

Angels proliferate in the literature of the 1840s and 1850s. We can see them in Oliphant’s stories, like *The Little Pilgrim* or *Land of Darkness*.

2.2.5.1.2. Women as Demons

The association of women with monsters or with uncanny elements, that are not human, can be considered as a disgrace or as a celebration of the female powers to transform. Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* insists on the first idea.

Lamias are very abundant in British fiction. They are serpent-women, a variant of the mermaid, but with terrestrial life, and they have an undisclosed power of self-transformation, which poses a threat for patriarchs because these women wield social power and can displace male authorities. The lamia and the

mermaid that fill many pages of the nineteenth century are necessary for us to get to the bottom of the period we are studying because, according to Auerbach, they represent a popular demonstration of a mythography of femininity whose understanding we cannot thoroughly get.

This serpent-woman with the face of a lady moves and crawls through the gardens, and she leads a life similar to that of Queens with their own gardens. We have a representative in 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' by Vernon Lee—Lady Oriana is the Snake Lady.

Regardless of the form which demon women adopt, there is a great difference from demon men in Victorian literature. Take Jekyll and Hyde by means of an example, they share the same body, but are at the same time so dissimilar to one another that it seems to us they have no connection—they have different stature, voice, hands—and, more concretely, Hyde is associated to apes. This identification reduces the impact of his evil spirit; there is a fragmentation of angel and demon in two different faces, the same as in the case of Dorian Grey and his portrait. We can say then that demonic men are dissociated from divinity and that means that, when the man is evil, he is powerless. For an evil woman, her face is the source of a spiritual power but in both cases—being an angel or being a demon. In fact, a femme fatale is defined as a deadly, but extremely beautiful woman.

Different from her male counterparts, the female demon does not long for pleasures or boyhood, as Dorian Gray, nor does she show an antisocial conduct like Hyde. Contrary to this, female demons have no social boundaries but long for transcendence and perfection. To put it simply, when men are evil,

they are wicked, but not in the sense that women are—women incorporate their angelic power represented in their face.

2.2.5.1.3. Women as Old Maids

Unmarried women were commonplace in Victorian England, thus filling drawing rooms. Old maids were seen as monstrous and comical, her needs always revolving around a perfect hero or bachelor and even rejected by the devil. We can see Old Maids ranging from a Gothic pathetic figure to a variant of the “Angel in the House”. Sometimes they can be even defined as genuine female heroes who possess angelic and demonic powers in the same way angels and demons do.

Nevertheless, as Auerbach contends, what this stereotype really masks is the potential power of life these women held, unbound to men or domesticity. We must remember the different life our writers had, two of them being married—Gaskell and Oliphant—and two of them being “Old Maids”—Edwards and Vernon Lee. The two Old Maids did not have to handle with the daunting problem domesticity supposed—not having children, motherhood, being a wife and many more things. They would choose to live their lives as they pleased although, of course, respecting a minimum of certain social rules. We will come back to this point later in the main body of this work.

In Oliphant’s *Autobiography*, one can effortlessly experience the feeling she harboured for these old ladies when she writes: “I wrote a little book in which the chief character was an angelic older sister, unmarried, who had the charge of the family of motherless brothers and sisters” and, of course, this character had the approval of her mother and brother. Likewise, Gaskell’s old

maid in *Cranford*, Miss Matty, is complete because she has demonstrated her maternal feelings and, for this reason, she has the approval of the reader, although she has not raised her own children.

Similarly, we must not overrule that fictional figures had powers spinsters lacked in real life and, after all, spinsters were oppressed women in their jobs of seamstress, governess, teachers or genteel spinster. They had no power at all and were sometimes dependent of a family sometimes not even of their own.

But what we cannot deny is that spinsters were like an authority in being independent. Queen Victoria was against female independency but, in contrast, she was a widow who had to reign in an empire alone, and showed the opposite effect she wanted to avoid. This was reinforced by her unconditional support to Florence Nightingale's labour, although Nightingale's declaration of spinsterhood was challenging. Women did not want to be feminists, they saw their own realization through men—as a father, husband, son or relative—but there was an open possibility they could do it by themselves.

As we have said before, this spinsterhood state was somehow oppressive for women to the extent that they sometimes opted for exile or long periods abroad. These periods far away from family, relatives or their own land are very significant for Victorian women because, in some cases, it was seen as a man's period of liberty at university. Nightingale went to Crimea and also abroad went George Eliot, Frances Power Cobbe and many others—among them, Amelia Edwards and Vernon Lee. All these women who chose to move abroad could find in exile something they did not find at home: a better destiny, where, perhaps, they were not to be silent.

2.2.5.1.4. Fallen Women

This fallen woman is at variance with the spinster because she appears as glamorous, heart-breaking, but is also an outcast. Although she shows a mixture of innocence and experience, she symbolizes everything that is perilous, tragic and exultant, beyond social boundaries.

Nevertheless, this fallen woman shares with spinsters the same condition, in her own way—both are exiled from woman's familiar place conventionally. Both existed shapelessly, this means without the conventional feminine identities of daughter, wife or mother and were associated with exile, being then a fusion between criminal and missionary: old maids were encouraged to immigrate to the colonies and prostitutes were deported there.

Patent though it might have been in real life, the division between women and fallen women was not so in literature. Generally, the fallen women had to die at the end of the story because, perhaps, death was more redeeming than marriage and, at the same time, it did them justice.

2.2.5.1.5. Women as ghosts

Females turn into spectres and become super naturalized, and this fact is emphasized from the point of view of their power to create life. As Vanessa Dickerson puts forward, "Victorian women were at some profound level the real ghosts in the Victorian noontide." (30) She continues saying that it is through writing that they explored their own spirituality while participating in supernatural phenomena. These phenomena of mesmerism, spiritualism or ghosts allowed women to make public their own experiences, their own beliefs and also their own fears. At the same time, they could criticise the role of the church and draw

attention to their writings because in a time when society struggles against materialism and the theory of evolution, it is necessary to believe in spirits or ghosts. In metaphorical terms, one can say that a ghost is like a sleep-walker spirit who is troubled by a feeling of guilt or anxiety towards an unfulfilled duty.

If we are to wonder who ghosts are, the answer is simple—they are the dead who return. The dead want their relatives to know that they are gone before them but they are not lost forever. Considering this idea, the ghost story has the sense of loss and gain, due to the fact that it is inviting the reader to abandon scepticism and come back to the old values. Ghosts follow a similar pattern. In the female Gothic, there must be a reason for a supernatural event. If a “night visitor”, as Briggs dubs them, walks around in the earth, it is because the owner was not buried in the proper ceremony—as it is the case of Salome in Edwards’ “The Story of Salome”—, as well as it can be the case of a spirit expiating a sin—this is the case of Maud in Oliphant’s “Earthbound”. It is even possible that the phantom seeks to give us some information, like *Old Lady Mary*, who wants somebody to discover her will and help the poor orphan.

2.2.5.1.6. Absent or present mother

Many discussions have ensued about the presence of ideal mothers as characters in Victorian fiction, and many reasons have been adduced in this respect. On the one hand, part of the criticism had neglected the absence of the female progenitor, as if it were an uninteresting fictional character. Conversely, it is unquestionable that a dead, absent or distant mother permits the main characters a wide range of action, especially if the orphan is a young woman, because they are at a loss. It may be certain that mothers can be sometimes

the representations and voices of conservative ideas. But, as we will see in the tales, our mothers are able to come back from the other world to help their offspring and carry out an especial task in order to prevent a catastrophe in their lives. To our mind, in the case of our writers, mothers are the subversive voice needed by the main characters to support their performances which defy society or which obey to their desires or ideals. As for Gaskell, she was an orphan herself, and it is blatant that she could never overcome being motherless—neither in life nor in fiction. When she was young, she felt close to her aunt and cousin, and when she had children, she felt stressed every time they went through difficult situations. Vernon Lee felt displaced by her mother and her brother—something hard for her to endure. On her part, Oliphant was a hard-working woman who never ceased to work for her children and represented mothers of all kinds. All of them, in their lives, as we will see, had an outstanding relationship with their mothers and, similarly, they considered mothers as a crucial element in the development of children. Women authors knew it was difficult in their society to represent and construct the ideal mother, namely if these mothers were subversive and controversial representations of women who did not fit the world they were immersed in. Notwithstanding, they appeared in fiction and, whether absent or present, a great emptiness was filled with them.

2.2.5.2. Children

Life was hard in Victorian society and there was an alarming maternal and child mortality rate. This was due to poor sanitary conditions and a lack of medical and technical advances. The death of a child in a family was a very

frequent phenomenon in Victorian England. The scene of mourning for somebody in the family and, in most cases, the mourning of a child was rather recurrent. As a result of those conditions, children enlighten Victorian literature when they die—it is one of the things which writers excel at. According to the beliefs of the time, youngsters or children who truncated their lives early in childhood represented eternity and the best of themselves. In this case, they present perfect ghosts who demand help. With their death, they usually take the readers with them.

Additionally, if we pay attention to Briggs' words (149), she claims that children are easily puzzled between what belongs to fantasy and to reality and that both concepts are merged in their consciousness. Children's awareness is like a state of dreaminess because they have not been spoiled by social prejudices and their intuition responses make them perfect to be the ideal ghost-seers.

There are also many ghost stories where the haunted child is the subject of the story, and another child is the ghost-seer. It seems communication between children is easier than with an adult. We can think about what happens in "The Open Door" by Oliphant, where the ghost is a child looking for his mother, and the ghost-seer is another young boy who can listen to him. In "The Nurse's Old Story", by E. Gaskell, two girls get in contact—the ghost girl and the ghost-seer girl. It also happens with adolescents, like in "Earthbound" by Oliphant and "Was it an Illusion?" by A. Edwards. Children or adolescents are sometimes symbols of the vanished past and they represent a different order of being to adults. Nevertheless, Victorian child-ghosts are not the demonic spirits of the Gothic literature. Here, in the Female Gothic, they are tender, innocent,

albeit frightening at the same time. They constantly appear as victims of the adult world, which they do not understand, in “The Old Nurse’s Story” none of the girls can understand the situation and, in “The Open Door”, the boy demonstrates he has not had the learning process of being an adult—their behaviour is very much related to their mother’s conduct behaviour or absence.

There is much literature and many films nowadays in which these theories remain perfectly valid. In the film *Casper* (1995), directed by Brad Silberling, the main character is the sweetest child-ghost in the story of cinema, and, as always, the fact of being a child makes him forget he is dead and why he is earthbound. In the film *The Sixth Sense* (1999), directed by Night Shylaman, a boy, who is the ghost-seer, is absolutely terrified because he does not understand how he can handle the situation. *The Others* (2001), by A. Amenábar, tells us the story of two children who are dead, albeit completely unaware; the little girl is the first who can get in touch with the boy of the family who now dwells in their former house. *The Orphanage* (2007), by A. Bayona, is a film where the ghost is a child dead long ago and seeking for revenge, taking another young boy with him. There are many ghost-children who were killed in the place coming back for revenge and seeking a mother. This list is not exhaustive whatsoever, but these examples may show us that ghost-children are still a trite topic in art.

2.2.5.3. Male characters

As well as heroines, there were heroes in ghost stories. As Showalter points out (109), Charlotte Brontë declared that women had to imagine their heroes without knowing them. We must bear in mind that not only some parts of

masculinity were taboo but, in the same way, women were not allowed to speak about certain things connected with femininity in public. Some critics thought that heroes were in part projections of feminine aspects which were incomplete. By 1850, the female representation of men had turned into a quasi-stereotyped figure in the household, like governesses. It is beyond all doubt that the principal male is an idealised man, but with some special masculine characteristics which could be observed from experience. Thus, most male characters were ridiculous, disreputable and idealistic. Showalter (111) explains that Oliphant confessed to her friend Isabella Blackwood that, when women described men, they were obscure personages and very different from the women characters who could be portrayed by women writers. In these cases, women heroines were mature characters who had their boundaries clearly defined, while male characters were, in many cases, secondary or subordinate. This, however, is very different to what happens in Edward's stories or, at least, in her ghost stories, where there are only a few women and these are always secondary characters.

Male characters were, for the most part, products of women's ignorance, since they were the result of women's fantasy visions—they imagined how they should act and how they ought to feel, but always from the standpoint of women. Critics have sometimes observed that, when analysing male characters, they represent a wish-fulfilment of women who desire they were men because, as Showalter asserts, women could only achieve more freedom of action by being men. Women's heroes are their *alter egos* and what permits them to act freely in an oppressive society whose powers are seized by masculinity. Then, men become the product of female dreams, and are more

related with power and authority than with any other aspects of life, like spirituality or paternity. We will spot this crucial, striking difference between both sexes in Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City*. Many of these males are established in economic terms and are successful in society and life. When women wrote, they identified with all the privileges of the masculine world, and their heroes stood for the life they wanted to live. All characters by Amelia Edwards belong to this class of hero.

In works by Victorian women writers, mothers, sisters and wives were the basis of the education of men. Such is the case in "The Portrait", Oliphant's story, where the mother instructs both her son and her husband—even after death.

There is still another male character Oliphant portrayed in her writings and that appears in some of the stories we will deal with later. This is the clergyman. He is portrayed almost as being of an intermediate sex—he is not as virile, hairy or violent as other men that appear in her stories and seems to be more accessible, at least, to female imagination. Let us insist that priests are characterized by spirituality. It is, in fact, thanks to the clergyman in "The Open Door" that Willie, the ghost, comes back to his mother.

As a result, Showalter concludes, since women used male characters in their writing, they understood that men were human beings just as they were, although they understood that the sexes showed obvious differences—the main one being that they used to think men lacked an inner life. In other words, men did not have a constant dialogue going on inside them—a dialogue whereby women used to interpret, and come to terms with, the world around them.

By 1860, sensational writers, like Amelia Edwards, saw their production as well as their art as accomplishments. They could publish their works and enjoy professional power. In their writing, they valued passion and confident action. They had changed the form of literature, insofar as some conservative and domestic magazines had changed their tone. Editorials were owned by women and started to display feminist principles.

The sensationalist, as Showalter asseverates, introduced crime and violence into the domestic sphere, but women writers went one step further, as they disclosed their secrets in their writing. Consequently, they not only gave the solution to their mysteries, but also demonstrated their dislike of the role they had in society as mothers, daughters and wives. By subverting the traditions of feminine fiction, they were instigating other women of the audience to wake up, recognise and express their female emotions or fantasies openly.

2.2.6. Genius loci

The 'spirit of the place' or the genius loci plays a pivotal role in the construction of the ghost tale. Warwick considers that there is a substantial shift in Victorian Gothic, which she understands as a Gothic revival from the 1840s onwards. She explains this shift on the grounds of the change of Gothic locations; in the first place, there is a displacement from the castles, cemeteries and gloomy corridors to a bourgeois domestic setting and, in the second place, there is a movement to the urban environment—bleak cities, gloomy streets and depressed suburbs. This will not be the case of our writers.

Differing from the Victorian conception of 'home' as peaceful, safe and protective, we can observe that Female Gothic stories are replete with images

of doors and windows. As a matter of fact, one cannot negate that home was one of the pillars for Victorian families, but, at the same time, there was an occult side—the feeling of the woman inside the house. All those windows and doors with women inside, preventing them from leaving are assimilated to prisons. For example, in Oliphant's "The Library Window", the heroine is allowed to observe but not to act, and women outside have the entrance barred. The little girl in "The Old Nurse's Story" or "Sister Johanna's Story" is framed within a window, which keeps her indoors and does not permit her to have contact with the dead.

There is a constant desire in women to be inside or outside and the consequences are fatal for them, because, as claimed by Warwick, they are modern women searching themselves and for their own place in an antagonistic world. We completely agree with her opinion: women cannot be free to move like men, and they always have limited mobility—they can only have access to places where they have been previously permitted. As she labels it, this was the beginning of the sensation fiction in content and form, presenting bigamy, madness and murder to the reader. This sensation fiction was helped by the publication of these stories after the repeal of the tax on printed materials in 1855, and when the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 made divorce easier, which elicited a proliferation of stories in Gothic language, characterised, in turn, by sensation, terror but inside the domestic area.

One of the main purposes of this study is to show these women's imprisonment is a recurrent metaphor in all our writers and that it was a reflection of the position of women in the Victorian world. Consequently, we remark that we can also find a variation of scenery, considered as an enclosure.

Enclosures used by the Female Gothic are very different from the spaces used by Male Gothic fiction, where we can appreciate threatening edifices, vaults, and cellars— such is the case in Edgar Allan Poe’s writings and even more oppressive is Dracula’s coffin or Dickens’s metropolis. Women are usually placed in lovely and well-arranged gardens, like Oliphant’s Maud in *Earthbound*, but most women appear behind a window as mere observers of life, banned from it. Gilbert and Gubar already speculated about women being prisoners and having a window in front of them. They said that this appears in children’s tales, such as Snow White’s mother, who was sewing behind a window at the beginning of the story. Some of our women cannot get out of a place or cannot enter it. However, we must specify that the prison is sometimes symbolised by a room, as Vernon Lee’s ‘yellow room’, or even by a paradisiacal garden, like the palace of Lady Oriana’s palace—who is also secluded in a trough—or, even, the crowning metaphor of them all: the Moorish Infanta who is kept in the entrails of the Alhambra.

Dickens is a prominent figure in this genre, since he helped it to develop from the eighteenth century primary form to the nineteenth century renovation in tastes, as a response to the conditions of contemporary experience. There is an evolution of the Gothic genre in his work that can be followed through the use of tropes and figures of speech in his novels. He will introduce and establish a metropolitan sensibility that distinguishes a new Victorian Gothic, which includes the urban areas, although in a very dissimilar way to women who situate terror in the middle of the home or inside it, where rooms like the attic, the cellar, the kitchen or a simple bedroom can become a kind of entrapment. However, there is a writer who will follow his steps in reflecting cities and the

world of technology—Edwards. She will set some of her ghosts' tales in the city, in the middle of a hustling and bustling railway station with fog, or in the city of Venice. An important constituent in the atmosphere of the cities will be the fog. Fog is a sublime element and the excess of it can signify lack of vision and consciousness. Mighall (56) states that this misty vapour carries with it a lack of visibility which, in turn, prevents a complete knowledge; therefore, certainty is blurred, giving an ominous character to the event.

There is another kind of location linked with the change of ideas, connected with the conception of the sublime and not considering London as the epicentre of the civilised world anymore, though it was zealously depicted in some novels as the darkest place on earth. The alternative location can be that of 'the sublime, rugged landscapes of southern France, Italy or Spain, the deep forest or craggy peaks of Germany', as Robert Mighall states in "Gothic Cities" (54). This new change in location is followed by some of our women writers. Coming from the Female Gothic tradition, the 'Sublime' which Radcliffe commenced to use is also present in our writers. They inherit the force that mountains and forests could breathe into their heroes or heroines. Margaret Oliphant located her stories in the English countryside, or in the domestic sphere. Gaskell used England in the story we are concerned with: "The Old Nurse's Story", and it remains inside the topic of the old haunted mansion, but most of the other stories are also situated in Europe. Edwards and Lee will use different settings as well, like Italy, Germany or the sublime gardens of Vernon Lee's stories.

2.3. Conceptual framework

Bearing in mind all the previously included and revised considerations, we can proceed to discover who our four authors were, where they lived and with whom, what their first priorities were and how they led their life. All these analyses are of utmost importance for our study, since, depending on the similar or dissimilar lives they lived, they fashioned their own souls and, by extension, their own, particular ghosts. It is a daunting challenge for us to draw a comparison between them, because, while continuously referring to their own lives in their writings, we appreciate at the same time how, with a span covering the whole Victorian century, they shared the same collective and individual ghosts—those of oppression and repression for being women, just as Antonio Ballesteros suggests and with whose proposals we completely agree. We can describe their writings as their perception of their own reflection in the mirror and also, linking our surmise to the aforementioned collectiveness, as a communal abstraction representing all of them.

We intend to demonstrate that our writers, following Female Gothic conventions, depicted their society and female conditions in a subversive fashion, a characteristic trait that allowed them to reach the forefront of the English writing of the time. They all touch on recurring themes and motifs amenable to adopting a different hue depending on the way or perspective of the writer. But still, they always share a common feature—they all concern the feminine cosmos.

As a matter of fact, they all try to make a critical depiction of gender sexuality and identity, namely focusing on women. At the core of their works, they portray how female identity has its contour lines conditioned, or even

imposed, by patriarchal society and how it is regarded by female Gothic fiction. By dint of comparing them, we will perceive, on the one hand, how our writers espouse images of femininity fixed by a patriarchal society and, at the same time, how they adamantly oppose some of those ideas. Just to advance a few examples of what we will cover in this study, Gaskell, in her own way, shows us a heroine who disobeys her father, whereas Oliphant's women are always within the stringent limits of social norms—even though they subvert them. As for Lee, fantasy will help her show us rebel women who are very close to the New Women of the period and who are held to be *femmes fatales*.

Some critics have stoutly declared that these women writers could be regarded as anti-feminist. But that contention parries or, rather, takes for granted, the probing question of whether or not they were aware of the feminist catechism. One thing remains undoubted—they were unhappy with their role in society. Gaskell withstood unrelenting pressure because of the community work with which her husband burdened her; Oliphant was a lonely widow deprived of the independence a man could enjoy. Edwards and Lee had to live abroad to live their own life. This is a common trait we will delve into, and not a merely isolated fact. Indeed, as a consequence thereof, we will also contemplate such features in their stories, and how their Gothic heroines fulfil their aspirations by destabilising the foundations of the patriarchal society, underpinning the critiques of women as writers, readers and rational beings.

With the purpose of giving sense to all these proposals, we must not overrule that our women made use of fantasy for their writings, which offered them something they were not offered in other genres of literature. Just as they had freedom denied in real life, they could escape from reality thanks to fantasy.

Following the book *Fantasy* by Rosemary Jackson, as she puts it, we can interpret that literary fantasies provided our writers with a free world without conventions and limitations, a world where they could avoid or transgress the unities of time, space or character, where they could break the difference between animate and inanimate objects, where they subverted the self and the 'other' and with a realm where they closed up life and death in a way in which sometimes one cannot tell whether reality or fantasy is involved. In Victorian times, we cope with the duality of reality and fantasy. These women could have chosen Realism, as some did for certain aspects of their narrative, but in those stories, they could not subvert their role or protest against the norms while remaining unpunished.

Nevertheless, fantasy can be understood as an attitude tending to pleasure for pleasure's sake, but we do not place the cause of our authoresses exploring the world of fantasy in sheer pleasure nor in mere escapism. On the contrary—we hasten to clarify—, they went one step further, by trespassing barriers without being noticed. Writing was their vocation, one that could not be understood by the masculine power and one that, being unable to challenge patriarchy openly, subtly subverted it, by means of fantasy. Furthermore, as they were immersed in a particular society, its culture and rules are equally patent and present in their works. This issue is mentioned in Rosemary Jackson's book, when she avers that "a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context" (3). We dare round off this utterly true affirmation by nuancing that sometimes texts are based on the tension between the social context and its limits, in our case, on women's world. Every element that appears in a particular text is determined by the various social and

psychological factors that are revealed and interrelate each individual work. This is one of the reasons why this study proved so interesting to us, since we can explore how these historical, social, economic, political and sexual drives are so different or so similar in four different fantasy writers, and namely in their Gothic short stories. They could not escape their own surroundings; they were prisoners of their own roles. Everything they were in contact with, determined them.

In Gothic tales, fantasy can manifest or exorcize a desire which threatens the cultural or social order, or even both at the same time, since a desire can be exorcized when made patent by the writer and the reader. It is then when fantastic Gothic tales unbolt disorder, illegality and all manner of characters and desires outside the establishment or the values of the patriarchy. In our fantastic tales about ghosts, we will find the 'unsaid'—what has been silenced—, and the 'unseen' of culture—what has been made invisible in, driven out or expelled from, the patriarchal order. Many of the settings are shrouded in fog, and it is at night when the action takes place, in order not to see what it is forbidden or politically incorrect. This fantastic literature traces its roots back to the late eighteenth century, when the industrialization process was bringing about sweeping changes to western society. From the early nineteenth century onwards, fantasy written by female Gothic writers was tantamount to texts denouncing the psychological effects of that industrialization, i.e. narratives decrying such method of keeping things 'unsaid' and 'unseen'. Our writers tried to verbalise hidden truths and to visualise themselves at the centre of the patriarchy.

As we have just said, our writers subvert patriarchal norms by making use of fantasy and presenting facts based on the possibility of what can be. This is linked with the definition of fantasy and reality. In Victorian society, the 'other' is carried to the missing, unknown areas of this world, and yet, it is full of paradox, since what is familiar, comfortable and known will, in the end, become the 'other'. In Rosemary Jackson's work, these notions are couched in the term 'par-axis', meaning everything which is on either side of an axis. It is a question related to the reflection of reality as if there was a mirror, so that what lies between the axis or lens and the image is the paraxial zone, where the 'other' can be placed. There, nothing is entirely real or entirely unreal. This bears strong resemblances with ghosts, who are neither dead nor alive. They are neither worldly, nor heavenly beings—they remain in an intermediate place, instead

Equally important is that most ghosts in our stories are earthbound. Facing the 'uncanny' by facing ghosts, causes the reader genuine distress, inasmuch as realities different from those they trust may be seen. These other worlds, which are not verbalised, nor known, are out of our cognitive limits but, in my opinion, this is no impediment for the reader to believe, or get immersed in the story. Our women recount facts and expose their convictions, which trespass the boundaries of our comprehensible world, as something that may happen and that female sensibility and only some men can perceive. Women ghosts are highly regarded, insofar as they have their own voice, they can decide, express themselves and take decisions and, by doing that, they reveal us something possible—the subversion of society. As they are not supposed to

be in the earth but in the border of both worlds, there is no masculine authority to punish or restrain them.

In a strong, non-secularized culture such as the Victorian one, the 'other' can take the form of a religious fantasy of angels, devils, images of heaven and hell; whereas, in a secularized society, the 'other' can be a projection of human fears, 'uncanny' or 'strange' and generated by unconscious forces. In this line, according to Rosemary Jackson, from Gothic fiction onwards, there is an evolution from the marvellous to the uncanny, going through fantasy. Consequently, and considering the fantastic as a mode and not as a genre, Rosemary Jackson reminds us of the different nuances which range from the pure marvellous to the pure uncanny stated by Todorov (qtd in Jackson, 32) and she modifies his classification. The fantastic is defined as a mode that possesses elements stemming from the marvellous and the mimetic, seeing that, on the one hand, they claim their story to be real and, on the other hand, they intend to break the postulates of realism, by responding to conventions and ideas that are unreal. Fantastic tales lead the reader from the experience and safety of their world to a sphere of abundant possibilities and improbabilities, which seem marvellous. These tales are related by a narrator who is not certain of anything that is taking place, like the protagonist (overall, because, in many stories, both coincide). Not even when the story finishes dare they uphold what they have witnessed, as they consider themselves mere recorders of the fact. Thus, fantasy is astride these two modes—the marvellous and the mimetic—and, as Jackson maintains, it gains the possession of the extravagance of the marvellous and the ordinary of the mimetic mode. In the case of our writers,

they range from the nearly mimetic Oliphant, Gaskell and Edwards to the other end of the spectrum, with the completely marvellous Lee.

Fantasy emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century with these characteristics, and it was bound to be consecrated as a genre, because it was similar in form to the novel. Nevertheless, it conjured up a dissimilar image—it conveyed a confused vision, with a meaning diametrically opposed to the bourgeois society of the moment. This idea is reinforced by the fact that fantastic tales are based on the assumption that what cannot be said or shown does not exist, hence mingling the notions of reality and unreality. However, an unflinching support that strengthens this area of unreality is thrown by the scenery, and the topics or matters treated in the plot. For this reason, we appreciate vivid and sublime landscapes—sometimes contrasting with bleak settings for the apparitions—which are equivalent to imaginative spaces in the mind of the writer. Those vivid landscapes are a distinctive trait in Edwards and in Vernon Lee, in whom the settings seem to be places deeply ingrained in their minds. We can find spaces behind the visible, behind the image, in an area from where everything can emerge, such as the case of “The Library Window”—what the girl can see may be considered as the other part of the mirror, the paraxial zone, the area where her deepest, most fervent wishes can be expressed, but where no other person can see them; that is why there is no real window. The girl is placed on the window sill and the window panes act as a mirror. She can see her writer between the image on the window panes, the idea of her father’s image and her own imagination or desire.

There is an overriding concern about vision and visibility. This can be due to the plot revolving around ghostly images, mirrors, glasses, sparkling diamond

rings, reflections, portraits and defective vision—as a result, reality can be easily distorted into the unfamiliar, as it is bound to unveil or uncover what is occult. Margaret Oliphant is the master of this effect and all her short stories which we will deal with in this study are related to visibility and invisibility, eyesight or light. By means of an illustration, take “The Library Window”, or “The Portrait”—where the lady of the picture is the mother of the boy she is possessing—, or “The Open Door”—where every man who witnesses the apparition takes a different kind of light—or “The Secret Chamber”—where there is a mirror kept in it. In Edwards’ tales, fog impedes a good visibility, which is mistaken for a bad sight or hallucinations. Such a cardinal importance attached to vision reinforces the preoccupation for fantasy and invisibility. We have to bear in mind that in a society like the Victorian one, where the ‘real’ is on a par with the ‘visible’, the eye is the prevailing organ, and plausibly, that which leads quicker to conscience. What is not seen or invisible threatens society, because it can be brought to fruition only when it is seen—it cannot have a subversive power until it is acknowledged. According to Jackson, the faculty of understanding is promoted by the strength of the vision, bringing closer the ‘eye’ and the ‘I’.

Fantasy has placed limits on reality, from the very moment it becomes possible to go beyond it, and it has foregrounded the troubles of the ‘I’ or the ‘self’ to the problem of reality. Thus, it has given name to ‘the other’, it has encountered the uncanny, embracing a revolution in its perception, insofar as it has altered cultural values and terrors by refurbishing their conception. What is meant by this is that anything considered as ‘the other’ is usually expelled from society, because it poses a threat which can shatter our values. Then, if we

name 'the other' or we utter our most intense longings, they imply a gesture of recognition equivalent to ideological awareness. Presuming that what is dissimilar to ourselves is deemed a menace for our existence, a stranger, a foreigner and an outsider can be viewed as a menace for men. But in the case of our women, this is even stronger, because they step on a deeper territory—they present ghosts, spirits, lamias, portraits, reflections and an assorted range of impending dangers hovering above us and which can disturb the familiar and 'the known'. The status of 'otherness' for our writers is always placed in the other world, 'the other' lies in the domestic sphere, regarded as supernatural. It is more than human but never, in our case, being related to anything other than ghosts or apparitions—devils, demons or fairies lie outside our scope of study.

All the aforesaid leads us to the concept of 'the uncanny'. As we have mentioned before, Freud sees 'the uncanny' as the effect of extrapolating our own desires and fears into the environment and people akin to us. Assuming that, then, we can find a place in fantastic literature where our hidden and occult wishes appear, and this fearsome force directs us to 'what is known of old and long familiar'—as Freud posits. Fantastic literature transforms the 'real', because it lays bare our desires, it does not create something new but what we conceal from others' sight. By uncovering our fears or desires, fantasy brings to light a dark zone placed between what we dub the homely and the native, or, according to Jackson, a zone 'alongside the axis of the real'. Fantastic literature only transforms what became alienated by the process of repression, because it caused a hazard to patriarchal society and locates it in an uncanny area, regardless of what it is that may appear—be it a ghost, an apparition, a spirit, a fairy, a devil or an angel.

There is no question that we are concerned with ghosts in this study, and in concert with what we have considered so far, we venture to surmise that the figure of the ghost in short ghost stories is, first and foremost, a representation of death, such as the skeleton was a *memento mori* topic in ancient times. Secondly, we do believe that the ghost is the closest relation one can bear with death, although it is a figure of strangeness—even though it is even more extraordinary the interaction between the ghost and the character with whom it interrelates. When one recalls the origins of ghost stories, which spring from folklore and continue with Gothic fiction, being greatly admired by the Victorian society, one can conclude that despite the fact that the ghost figure evokes the supernatural and marvellous, it is also distressing and somewhat disconcerting, as it means the return of the dead as the undead. With this crossing of the fine line which separates ‘real’ life from that of ‘unreal’ life or fiction, all notions of reality are subverted. Even so, we understand that one way of overcoming that strangeness is to present a very close person or a relative as the apparition, in that there is recognition. In women ghost stories, females never catch sight of other ghosts than their own ghosts—their dead children, their dead mothers, or close relatives. Oliphant, for instance, in *A Beleaguered City* relates us how all the dead people who came back to life were people from the town of Semur, and those who could see the dead were not afraid whatsoever, because they were their fathers, mothers, daughters or wives.

We shall return later to the point concerning the line between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ life, where ghosts can be seen, with the sole purpose of stressing that by making the undead visible or, what it is the same, making the ‘other’ visible by writing about it, our writers introduced absences. The ‘other’ is absent, to the

extent that it has no place in life, it has no expression to become significant, there is a wide gap between the signifier and the signified and we can find it in fantasy, as Jackson postulates. That is the reason why fantasy, giving sense to, and naming, what is 'unreal', destabilises cultural foundations, which are the basis of society and, at the same time, undermines the social order, due to the fact that it reminds people of the 'other'.

We only have to bear in mind that the 'uncanny', or the 'other', has the function of transgression—it unleashes internal drives which, in theory, ought to be kept secret, in the same way that our writers' drives for writing should have been kept secret, unsaid and repressed, because they also posed a threat to cultural continuity. However, paradoxically, it was in fantasy where they could find an open way to give vent to their own drives, namely the one for writing, which liberated them.

3. ELIZABETH GASKELL

3.1 Life and works

When one thinks of Elizabeth Gaskell after getting cognizant of her biography, one can imagine her leading a really busy life, not only outside, but also inside her household. One of the first aspects Jenny Uglow (1999) comments in her book *Elizabeth Gaskell* is that

...she wrote in the dinning-room with the doors open to all the demands of children and guests, like Jane Austen in the midst of the household, only hiding her papers when visitors came. With no sign of inertia or chilled intellect, Elizabeth Gaskell squeezed six long novels, a major biography, dozens of short stories and hundreds of letters into the compass of an extremely active life. (3)

These sentences pose us the probing question to which we shall return when tackling the part devoted to Margaret Oliphant. Both Gaskell and Oliphant wrote in the middle of the drawing room, with all their offspring around. They did not even have, in Virginia Woolf's words, "a room of their own". Immersed though they were in all these adverse conditions—as it was considered that literature was mainly for men—, they could feel something that was even stronger than their daily tasks—the drive for writing. Plausibly, for Gaskell, it was a kind of exorcism, due to the fact that writing allowed her to escape from the events happening to her family and relatives. Likewise, we should like to analyse how the other writers of our study also used their writing as a kind of exorcism. We anticipate that, at least, the aforementioned could be considered as one common aspect of their writings. In this sense, Gaskell was within the Female Gothic tradition.

According to Winifred Gérin (1976) in her book *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Gaskell received a twofold heritage from her parents. On her father's side, she

inherited a love for the sea, a secret passion which sometimes tempted her and to which her brother fully devoted himself. On the distaff side, she was inbred with a special feeling with the wonders of the earth and of the countryside, where she spent part of her infancy. From both sides, she was part of the Unitarian church, an unorthodox community—the least tolerated by the Establishment at that time. Undoubtedly, this way of living strictly sticking to their creed was decisive for Elizabeth Gaskell and would mark her during her life.

Her father was a distinguished member of the Unitarian community who had been appointed preacher to Dobb Lane Unitarian Chapel near Manchester, where he would meet his future wife, Elizabeth Holland. The wedding took place in 1797. Nevertheless, by then, he had already abandoned his post as a preacher. The couple undertook a farm near Edinburgh where John, their first son, was born in 1798. Unluckily, after several years of bad harvest, they were forced to abandon the farm, moving to the capital.

William Stevenson joined Edinburgh's active life and he devoted himself to writing pamphlets, gazettes and he became a usual contributor in periodicals. In 1806, Lord Lauderdale, Governor-General of India, invited him to accompany him as his secretary. This sea change seemed to be like a dream for William Stevenson, who, at the time, was thirty-four. Unfortunately, Lord Lauderdale's appointment was hindered by the East India Company and everything fell through. Thus, Lauderdale tried to help him, and, later on, he was recruited as keeper of the records at the Treasury, where he stayed for twenty-three years. During that time, he published works, such as *A System of Land Surveying*

(1809), or *A General View of the Agriculture of Surrey* (1809), fruit of his vast knowledge gained in previous employments.

Elizabeth's mother appeared to be rather different from her husband. First of all, she had to struggle with difficulties together with him, apart from the fact that she was almost always pregnant—she had eight children in thirteen years. Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born on 29 September 1810 in Chelsea. She was the second daughter and eighth child of William Stevenson and Elizabeth Holland. She was the only one to survive all of them, together with her brother John. Elizabeth's mother was almost forty when she was born and she did certainly not recuperate entirely, dying one year after giving birth to Elizabeth. Hannah Lumb, Elizabeth Holland's sister had nursed her during the last days. This woman, whom Elizabeth Gaskell named Aunt Lumb and whom she considered "more than a mother", was to be of utmost importance for Elizabeth's life, owing to the fact that she was to live together with her for the rest of her days until her marriage. We should not forget that Hannah Lumb had a daughter, Mary Anne, who was twenty-one when Elizabeth Holland died. Indeed, it was on her advice that Hannah Lumb took Elizabeth in. It is equally necessary to mention that Mary Anne was to inherit from her father and she wanted to divide her bequest between her cousin and her mother, but destiny is capricious and she died on the way to the solicitor, leaving her mother with a small income to be shared with Elizabeth.

Despite the fact that she remained with Aunt Lumb, it is also a truism that all the rest of the Holland family were in touch with Elizabeth; this was the reason why some of her relatives play an important role in her life, and why they appear incarnated by some characters of her plays. Apart from her aunt, there

were three more uncles—Dr Peter Holland, Samuel and Swinton, the banker. As all of her uncles were married twice, she could count on fifteen cousins as contemporaries, and, as a result, she felt she belonged to the Holland clan. This notwithstanding, she experienced loneliness, and, even more, she suffered the absence of her mother because, in Knutsford, everything reminded her of her unknown maternal figure. When Elizabeth was four, her father remarried. Her new wife was Catherine Thomson. Catherine was Dr Anthony Thomson's sister, who had witnessed both Elizabeth's birth and her mother's decease. For one reason or another, Catherine felt superior to her husband and openly despised Elizabeth, especially after having had her own children, William and Catherine. As a result of her stepmother's behaving towards her, it is easy to understand that, apart from her aunt, the only solace Elizabeth could find was her brother John, who was twelve years older than her and was, in Jenny Uglow's words, 'warm-hearted and romantic, thrilled when an aunt gave him his grand-father's sword' (21). However, although he truly loved his sister, something different was uppermost in his mind—go to sea, as the Stevenson predecessors. She would always remember when she was twelve and went to see him sail, an episode which would even be recalled by Elizabeth's daughter Marianne. But, contrary to this, it would be absurd to suppose that this was the only world Elizabeth knew, due to the fact that Knutsford was a part of a bigger world connected to her through her father and the Unitarian net.

Under these particular circumstances of her life, she developed a special personality which led her to write, not about 'ordinary' families, but about the ones outside the prototypical scheme with the *paterfamilias* at the cusp, a caring mother and developing children. Instead, we can easily find self-sufficient

women, as her aunt Lumb, leading their own lives and earning their living. The people around her were in similar circumstances—her cousins had also lost their own mother. In this respect, most of her novels or short stories show that the heroine is the only child of one parent—usually a father— or that she is an orphan. For the reasons stated, she will try to show that, in the bosom of these broken families, it is the heroine who must be strong and face any problem that may arise. Women must not rely on a father or a husband to be heard; they must act for themselves. In addition, the more we delve into her writings, the more we discover that, in some strata of such, there is a lost mother, an absent father, the stepmother who rejects the child, the good woman who cares for the child, the sailor brother and a wandering prince who never returned.

Elizabeth was taught at home by Hannah, who tried to repeat the same pattern the family had learnt. Very differently from other girls of the period, and crucial for Elizabeth, Unitarians firmly believed that girls, and not only boys, had to attend school and to form their own moral judgements at a very early age, even if the books she could handle with were somewhat old-fashioned for her. Nevertheless, she was used to seeing that the women around her were very active, intelligent and they also took part in the public sphere. They were women who assertively stated their own opinion in important affairs, such as religious reform or Catholic emancipation, and, at home, they participated actively in the Unitarian community. Contrary to these facts, she could also see women prone to depression because they were intimidated by their fathers or their husbands. Consequently, we dare assert that the aunts, who were a model for her, thought that the role of women was marriage and motherhood. Hence, Elizabeth faced diametrically opposed models of female freedom and

submission. This conflict was not new on the grounds that some women—among them Mary Wollstonecraft—had claimed for an equal right to education. Needless to say that Unitarians did not approve of Mary Wollstonecraft's way of life, but they understood, and identified with, her words. In the autumn of 1821, Elizabeth was sent to a boarding school in Warwickshire for a more formal education as a direct suggestion of Katherine Thomson, her stepmother's sister-in-law, who had been working for nine years with Maria Byerley and her sisters. She remained there until 1826.

John, her brother, was always in contact with the Holland family and with Elizabeth, and, in the decade when Elizabeth remained with the Hollands, they were prosperous and affluent, whereas the Stevensons had been undergoing terrible economic conditions. Agitated and preoccupied by his future and Elizabeth's destiny, and seeing his father was unable to manage the situation, John decided to give up sailing and settle in India, where he thought he would be able to earn more money for helping Elizabeth. That winter of 1828, he got lost, and it is still not known whether it was at sea or when he arrived in India—but he was not to reappear. After this news, Elizabeth travelled to Chelsea to nurse her father, who was terribly overwhelmed by John's loss and fell ill. Because of his anxiety, on 20 March 1829, while having tea with his family, he suffered a stroke and two days later he died. Elizabeth never mentioned her feelings about the incident or about her father, though, in her fiction, fathers would be men in two minds, showing a force that masked weakness, such as Lord Furnivall, who is extremely strong but unable to repair the situation. When his father died, she received a small inheritance and, as always, the Hollands took charge of her. In the late autumn in this same year, she moved with the

Turners, and during her stay with them Elizabeth gained acquaintance of that kind of work and people she was going to devote herself to during her life in Manchester—community work.

Elizabeth dwelled in Newcastle for two winters, and, during this period, possibly trying to escape a cholera epidemic, she went to Edinburgh with Ann Turner, substantially older than Elizabeth and who was in charge of her. She came to have contact with society, and there she met William John Thomson, who painted her miniature—not because she could afford it, but merely because he was her stepmother’s older brother. It was widely known both women were rather impoverished during their stay. Ann Turner’s friendship was good for Elizabeth, and, after being in Edinburgh, both visited Manchester, where Ann Turner’s sister, Mary Robberds, the wife of a Unitarian minister, lived. This visit was crucial for Elizabeth inasmuch as it was thanks to the couple that she met the man who was to be her husband—Reverend William Gaskell, a junior assistant in Revd. Robberds’ ministry. William was born in 1805, the first of seven children. This burdened him with an onerous responsibility, along with the deaths of some brothers and his father. At fifteen, he went to Glasgow, just after his mother had remarried. In 1821 he began training for the ministry at Manchester New College, situated in York. He had always been determined to become a minister; for this reason, when he successfully achieved his training in York, he chose the main Unitarian chapel in Manchester placed in Cross Street. It was there where William Gaskell and Elizabeth made each other’s acquaintance. By the end of the spring in 1832, Elizabeth was engaged, and, by the end of the summer, they were married. William had taken a house at 14 Dover Street, near where he had resided with Eliza, his sister.

William Gaskell was exceptionally tall, pretty slender and fairly attractive. Nevertheless, until people knew him more familiarly, he seemed serious and austere, diametrically opposed to Elizabeth, who was energetic and open. Interaction was served—Elizabeth could find his warmth and humour, apart from his romantic feelings, and he ensured her emotional stability, which was no trifle for her. However, she sometimes had the impression she could breathe more when he was away from home, but she always longed for her husband's return. She always reached her own decisions, but she also wanted to question him about those she had made. He turned into her most valued critic, and also the best support against other's trenchant criticism. Despite their strong union, their marriage faced some problems along the years, which worsened by dint of the distance that separated them. Nevertheless, it was from him that she gathered the force to write, and it was perhaps in their shared work that she could fashion her own style. They always showed mutual respect for each other's opinion, although not absolute faith. They also adhered to democratic values or doctrinal liberalism in politics. Their common vision of Unitarianism was plenty of optimism, which led them to a blind confidence in human beings who perhaps misbehaved, shifting the blame on social evils—if such were created by men, then they ought to be necessarily remedied by human intervention.

At this stage, it is no longer possible to proceed without pondering the fact that they lived in the Victorian period. We underscore this idea because it must have been hard for Elizabeth to be a minister's wife, according to the way the Establishment esteemed the role of women within society. Therefore, there is no need to say that the way Unitarians perceived women and their rights to

learning and to a free opinion, as we have previously mentioned, helped Elizabeth in her way of feeling, and thus, marriage did not suppose submission for Unitarian women, in general, and for Elizabeth, in particular. However, Elizabeth was an assertive woman who, according to Jenny Uglow (1999), wrote in a letter that she was aware that she had to learn about obedience, something she assumed. But we have to highlight that obedience was an utterly different thing from performing a submissive role. Such distinction is partially reinforced by her way of signing after marriage—Elizabeth Gaskell, and not Mrs William Gaskell. Elizabeth had decided to lead her own life. She wrote to Tottie Fox in 1856 to sign the petition for the Married Women's Property Act, because she felt ambivalent about marriage; she thought men could tyrannize their wives' and it is especially in her short stories where she depicts dominating husbands. Nonetheless, and despite what we have mentioned before, his opinions were a source of stress, referring to her writings, and this supposed a confusing feeling for Elizabeth. On the one hand, he pushed her towards self-assertiveness, whereas, on the other hand, Elizabeth felt as if asking for his opinions undermined her independence.

In the late summer of 1832, they began their married life being immersed in the city's health with community work. In July 1833, she gave birth to a stillborn child, whom she saw, but left unnamed. She seemed to be able to leave disasters and pain behind, but misery consumed her, and, three years later, she was to write the child a lovely sonnet on the occasion of visiting her grave. By December 1833, she seemed to have overcome the loss, and was again immersed in community work, although she still looked for relief in the near family circle. These tensions and sufferings were to strengthen her

recurrent illnesses and leave her exhausted. On the 12 September 1834, Marianne was safely born. The delight of a first born baby is often recalled in her novels.

Although throughout her life she recollected experiences, she reflected in her narratives the arduousness to find her own voice. As all of the writers we will deal with in this study, Elizabeth Gaskell's life is directly related to her own writings: on one side, she showed brightly coloured literature, and, on the other side, she hid the dark side of personal tragedies she suffered and saw around her. Her voice fluctuates depending on the time of her life. In order to understand how she reached her own voice, we should follow her wandering, and we deliberately use this word, insofar as she was not sure where she was to arrive.

According to Gérin (1976), Elizabeth was in correspondence with Eliza Gaskell, William's sister, but in the moment Eliza got married, she did not have time enough for her sister-in-law—Eliza had eight children and could not devote much time to Elizabeth's mail, although they professed love and admiration to each other. It was then, in March 1835, that she made the decision of starting a diary dedicated to her dear Marianne. This diary was to be admired, loved and inherited from generation to generation. Most part of the summer of 1836 was spent at Knutsford, with part of the two families and the child. It was in the countryside that she knew so well, where Elizabeth started writing. She would even publish some extracts later in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.

After the summer, Elizabeth came back to Dover Street and to the Sunday schools for the poor. That winter she was pregnant again, and, unfortunately, rather unhealthy. For this reason, Aunt Lumb fostered the other in

Knutsford until Margaret Emily (familiarily known as Meta) was born on 7 February 1837. Elizabeth's happiness was not going to last for long. Aunt Lumb suffered a stroke on 8 March, and, hurriedly, Elizabeth, with her new born child, went to care for her beloved aunt together with Marianne and her servant Betsy. They dwelled next-door to Heathside until her aunt passed away on 1 May 1837. Just as Elizabeth was deeply grieved, so was young Marianne disturbed, bearing in mind that she was used to Hannah's care. After such an event, Elizabeth did not depart for Heathside, which was left to Hannah's sister Abigail; in lieu of that, Elizabeth would go to her uncle's home. Nevertheless, her aunt's allowance of £80 a year, which ensured Elizabeth independence, altogether with changes in the family—the two children were now with her—marked an end of a period in Elizabeth's life. Still, due to her unspeakable sufferings, a recent birth and her aunt's death, Elizabeth collapsed, and, in September, William took her to Plas Penrhyn, leaving the children behind. This breakdown was one of the several that were going to scar her for life. Wales was like a breath of fresh air and a sweeping change from duties at home—neither the strain of the children, nor the chapel and the social demands would incommode her.

Without being aware of her powers and still looking for her style, while helping William with his poetry lectures for the poor, she strove to unravel her own path. She was to be enriched from the contacts with these humble people, as it allowed her to catch a glimpse of sheer beauty and poetry in everyday life.

In May 1838, she made the acquaintance of Mary Howitt, an established writer. The Howitts were a couple whose articles were published in literary journals. They had the intention of publishing topographical and historical

pieces of writing for working-class readers. Elizabeth felt attracted to the project, and wrote to the couple providing them with some indications about her adored county of Warwickshire. She issued a vivid description of Old Clopton Hall, of which William Howitt would later use verbatim extracts in his article. In point of fact, Elizabeth's description of Clopton Hall shows the seed of Gothic scene setting. She looks back in time and, in Winifred Gérin's words (1976), "In her case the nostalgia was not a destructive, nor even a sterile emotion ... but the incentive to future creative work"(62). This work is framed by Jenny Uglow (1999) within the Gothic tradition, due to the fact that it gives vent to Elizabeth's worries about sexual role, death, entrapment, man's authority and female weakness. In this respect, "Clopton House" is very similar to Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" published in the same year, in 1840, and it also shows the decay of a family. This will be the first of Gaskell's houses haunted by the past. It is noteworthy that the women of "Clopton House" will be the germ of oppressed heroines, albeit rebellious, that will appear in stories like "The Old Nurse's Story"—which will be especially dealt with in this study—"The Grey Woman", "Morton Hall" or "Crowley Castle". Elizabeth's characters are independent, radical, feminist and, as many other writers of gothic short stories—as we will return to this point later—, she would use Female Gothic conventions to denounce the painful tyranny of women, in general, under the dominion of the patriarchal forces, especially, aristocracy. She would depict the other side of womanhood; how they helped the poor, cared for their children, their relatives, other women and how they valued the unswerving loyalty of servants. The piece was so exquisite that William Howitt urged Elizabeth to write for the public.

Nevertheless, in spite of writing stories, Elizabeth felt alone because William's interests were outside, in the public sphere—with his pupils, with his sermons. When she needed to verbalise her feelings, she had to write to her sister-in-law, Anne Robson. She felt ill and abandoned and feared a second marriage if she died. Consequently, she never forgot her mother's absence and she always looked for female confidants. When William saw Elizabeth was depressed, he strove to distract her attention urging her to be active. That was chiefly why she helped many poor who were victims of 'the hungry forties' in Manchester. Both devoted their time to help people with relief work. In the summer of 1841, she visited Heidelberg and the Rhineland, giving a good account of her voyage to Lizzy. She would transpose the superb scenery she took in there into one of her short stories: "The Grey Woman".

Back again into family life, on 7 October 1842, Florence Emily was born. The following July 1843, Elizabeth spent a month with her children at Silverdale, a small town by the sea. Plausibly, "The Doom of the Griffiths" was based on a local tale about the pressure on men to abandon gentleness and show masculine affirmation.

In autumn 1842, the Gaskells moved to 121 Upper Rumford Street. The new house was to some extent bigger, and it was run by Elizabeth and their servant Anne Hearn, who was to become her 'dear friend', and was to take care of them for fifty years. On 23 October 1844, William was born and he brought his mother a delirious joy. The following July 1845, the Gaskells took Marianne and little William and went to Snowdonia to avoid contagion of scarlet fever. Nevertheless, this was inescapable—Marianne fell ill and William died on 10 August. After the boy was buried, Elizabeth collapsed. William, as always, tried

to distract her with work, and, this time, he encouraged her to write a novel: *Mary Barton*, published in 1848. Writing helped her to repress her sorrows, and, at the end of the book, she could start looking back on her sorrow, because of two reasons: on one hand, she was now sure of the subject about which she wanted to write; and, on the other, she was pregnant again. Julia Bradford was born on 3 September 1846. Step by step, she reincorporated herself in William's work, her daughters were dependent on her, her friends called for visits and she finally returned to social life. For her daughters' well-being, she pretended to be in high spirits and resumed parental duties once more. The girls were growing, and their teacher, Fergusson, who had always been with them, was replaced by proper teachers for both girls, who were in need of more lessons. As for her part, Elizabeth lamented Fergusson's departure because of her dependence on female faith and need for love. In her stories, she reflects such closeness of women who become substitute mothers, sisters or daughters. By means of an illustration, we can cite "The Poor Clare", where we are shown a state of sisterhood; and also "The Grey Woman", when a young, mistreated wife and her servant live together, disguised as husband and wife—both stories are given in a context where one of the females assume the role of protective security, when the other is suffering. Elizabeth Gaskell craved for a feminine friendship who understood her little details and the trivialities of life she attempted to mirror in her writings, but she equally needed a feminine soul who could share her drive to write—Mary Howitt, Eliza Fox and Charlotte Brontë. These women could help her and they were practically the only writers of the time she could have contact with until 1849. She was starting to become aware of her own voice and wrote for *Howitt's Journal* which had no class preference

and it included every kind of causes, counting also on the rights of women, among which Elizabeth's contributions were among the most energetic.

It was in 1850 when she wrote to Eliza Fox, because she was troubled by the conflict she noticed between domesticities and writing. Moreover, it was in this same year when she foregathered with Charlotte Brontë, and when she started writing for Charles Dickens. Elizabeth and Charlotte met each other. On the one hand, thanks to Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, who knew Charlotte and invited her. But it was also thanks to Sir James' wife, who knew Elizabeth and would arrange the meeting. Elizabeth went unaccompanied and she and Charlotte became bosom friends in their stay at Windermere. On her return home, Elizabeth wrote letters to many people, to the same Charlotte Brontë, and to Charlotte Froude and Tottie to recount her stay to them. Contrary to Charlotte's life in the middle of the moors, Elizabeth's life was too busy for her not to meditate about how to put to rights her life as a mother, as wife, and about that great drive, which led her to write, not without considering herself selfish because of it. This internal conflict appeared again when Dickens asked her to write in his journal. He was planning a new weekly journal, *Household Words*, and he wanted her to participate in it. Thus he coaxed her merely to obtain her regular contribution. Dickens just went so far as to say to her that what he tried in his periodical was to denounce the poor social conditions dealing with education, housing and sanitary reform—something he knew was going to prick the Gaskells' conscience. Yet, Elizabeth still felt divided between home and writing, but, in order to avoid this, Dickens advised her to write short stories, hence being able to handle both things. She wrote "Lizzie Leigh", and got £20 for it. Most of the payments Dickens sent Elizabeth were done straight

to her, even though it was William who assisted her with contracts and receipts: William never made any use of his legal right over his wife. Writing for *Household Words* throughout the years proved to be a profitable benefit that made her write from time to time a short story when she needed money without delay. This time, she did not write in her own name, and as Dickens was named as 'Conductor', the story was credited to him and "Lizzie Leigh" appeared as his, in American *Harper's*.

For the first two years, their relationship was friendly and steady. And although she also wrote something for Chapman, Dickens became her main editor and she could take advantage of such a situation, due to his shrewdness and delicacy towards her, namely when he had to comment about something she should correct—like her marked tendency to describe in detail and be too long-winded. As long as he let her do her work on her own, everything went perfectly. But it was in 1852, with "The Old Nurse's Story", when tension escalated, and battles reached their peak over the serialization of *North and South* in 1854. However, it is crucial not to lose sight of the fact that out of over forty stories and articles written by Elizabeth Gaskell between 1850 and her death, two-thirds were published by Dickens, either in *Household Words* or in *All the Year Round*.

It was also in this same year, 1850, when the Gaskells moved to a new house at 42 Plymouth Grove, thanks to a bequest to Elizabeth from Hannah Lumb. The house was bigger, so she needed help; that is why, apart from Hearn, she employed five more servants. Inevitably, Elizabeth got involved in her servants' lives, which can make us presume she disregarded class distinctions. In point of fact, the importance servants had in her life would be

reflected in her fiction. She strived so much and was so busy with social work that she suffered from migraine, neuralgia and total lassitude—nowadays the results of stress. At the end of October, she had to take two weeks off in Lancaster. But in November, she was to travel to London to find a school for Marianne, in order to keep her away from an undesired adolescent romance. At the end of January 1851, Marianne came back to Manchester, where she settled at Mrs Lalor's for two years. The two younger children were still taught at home: Florence, who was nine at that time, was beset with the problem of always being ill; Julia was five and too young to live away. As for her part, Metta, who was the most intelligent of them all, was also sent to a school for two years. As everything seemed solved, Elizabeth sat to write during that spring. However, from April on, she started to grow overwrought. In order to avoid her state of agitation, she stayed in London until the end of Marianne's term; then, they came back to Plymouth Grove, and, after a while, the family parted for Silverdale. There, she worked on her novel early, before anyone had woken up and could have disturbed her, later she was supposed to be with the children and friends and accompany them on promenades and drives. When they returned to Manchester, a great part of literary London was eager to invite them to some events. She could only write in the little time she was left. In mid-October 1852, being in the Lakes she wrote "The Old Nurse's Story" for the special Christmas number of *Household Words*. She visited all her local friends and it is a woman from the Westmorland who recounts the story to Elizabeth.

In November she was still working with *Ruth*. *Ruth's* final chapters were written hastily with intense concentration, and this caused in Elizabeth such a distress that her nerves overcame her. Nevertheless, the novel was finished

and Christmas went by and a new year started at Plymouth Grove. *Ruth* was published in January 1853. The novel caused Elizabeth the heartache she had anticipated. The first reactions were shocking—her friends were upset about the story and Bell's Library in London withdrew the novel because of its being unsuitable for family readings. Conversely, some people relished the novel. Some friends of hers tried to give her their support and the list of requests at the Portico Library was so big that a second edition had to be issued. In the end, *Ruth* enhanced Elizabeth Gaskell's reputation, and with it, she regained her sense of humour and stability.

As a result of the aforesaid facts, the spring of 1853 was more agreeable for Elizabeth. There had been many changes at Plymouth Grove: Meta was in Liverpool in Rachel Martineau's school; Marianne was now teaching Flossy and Julia, and she proved successful. Elizabeth intended to start a series of travels every year, twelve years after she had visited Heidelberg. From then on, she journeyed to France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. She was usually accompanied by one of her daughters, while William preferred to holiday alone. But, this time, William, Elizabeth and Marianne prepared to go to Paris.

By 1853, there had been three women who had served her as models—Charlotte Brontë, Mary Clarke Mohl and Florence Nightingale. All of them taught her about women's role in society, about independence and domesticity, as well as the search for determination and the need for love. It was before the family left for Paris that she was pleasantly surprised by Charlotte Brontë's visit. Charlotte was uncertain of her future, because she had met Nicholls and her father was bitterly disappointed, so she needed advice. In Paris, Elizabeth met Mary Clarke Mohl. She was the opposite side of the coin of Charlotte Brontë:

Mary Clarke Mohl wrote completely free—something unthinkable and inaccessible for women in the nineteenth-century British society.

On her return from Paris, despite the fact that William's work in the parish was increasing greatly, Elizabeth did not return to parish duties—she remained in London instead. There, she prepared herself for holidays: together with William, Flo and Julia, they went to North Wales. In September, she visited Charlotte in Haworth, and, convinced Charlotte should marry Nichols, she tried to help them.

By 1854, Elizabeth was seeking a space for herself to write away from Manchester and from family. Dickens made her an offer, and Elizabeth accepted after having consulted Forster. Then, she planned her novel *North and South*. Elizabeth hesitated about writing a serial, but Dickens warned her not to worry, inasmuch as he would decide on the division of the story into parts. However, Elizabeth started getting alarmed, as it seemed Dickens was stealing her material. *North and South* proved to be a failure in serial terms. *Household Words* dropped its sales and Dickens blamed Gaskell's novel. Once more, disagreement arose again between Dickens and Elizabeth. Looking for a place to write in peace, Elizabeth went to Lea Hurst, near Matlock, in Derbyshire. There, at the Nightingale's house, she met Florence, who was on holiday. In Florence, Elizabeth discovered a woman who was able to separate intellect and domestic bounds. But Elizabeth was not only captivated by Florence's personality when she met her, she admired all her work, the way she lived, and praised her always. Elizabeth continued at Lea Hurst until late October, and then, she had to hurry to conclude the novel at Plymouth Grove. She wrote at lightning speed and the final episode appeared in *Household*

Words on 27 January 1855. Although Dickens congratulated Elizabeth, and he added extra money to her payment, she decided not to write for *Household Words* again. Elizabeth was convinced she had sacrificed her form, which was very important for her, for the sake of time.

On 31 March 1855, Charlotte Brontë died at the parsonage, and, for Elizabeth, this was a bitter and unfortunate event. A few months after Charlotte Brontë had passed away, her father, Reverend Patrick Brontë, requested Elizabeth to write a life of his daughter; she accepted, and began to gather materials. Elizabeth devoted herself to Charlotte's life and she finally wrote a biography, which was two-fold. The biography was *prima facie* conventional, but it was completely subversive and extremely feminine, because it was based on her private life, relationships and character, what made the biography far too different from other biographies of the period—as Margaret Oliphant said: 'a new kind of biography'. When the biography was about to be finished, Elizabeth expected Elder Smith to begin with the printing, so that she could rectify the mistakes. As Elizabeth usually worked, she involved all the family, and, in January 1857, nothing else was more important in Plymouth Grove than the biography, to which all the women of the house were devoted—Elizabeth, feeling ill, had asked her daughters, Marianne and Meta, to copy uninterruptedly. So, when the book was finished, she wanted to go far away, and avoid reading any severe reviews, as Charlotte did; she wanted to forget about it forever. In this case, she went to Rome with her two elder daughters.

Fortunately, the experience of going to Rome was unforgettable. First of all, voyaging made Elizabeth overlook all the criticism about *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*; and, secondly, she met Charles Norton—a thirty-two year old

eminent professor who worked at Harvard. She was very rewarded by the experience—she escaped her anxieties as a writer; being surrounded by people who were younger than her made her feel unrestricted and euphoric. Charles Norton was one of those men who had a special talent for friendship and meeting people, like Emerson, Henry James and Ruskin. He praised Elizabeth and admired her sincerely, and this admiration evolved into affection over the time. Elizabeth visited Rome, Florence and Venice with the company of Charles Norton, who introduced her to Ruskin's prose. On 27 March, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* had been published, and it was the first work to carry her name on it. She consumed the whole summer with reconsiderations of the *Life*, and she felt depressed, thus, at the end of July, she moved away to Skelwith to see Julia and Flossy. The third edition of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was published in November.

As we have said before, the revision of the *Life* had been hard for Elizabeth, but, as one can suppose, it was not the only reason to overburden her. On the one hand, her house was hectic, filled with visitors during all the summer, and she shouldered the frenetic tasks of being a hostess; on the other hand, Meta got engaged to Captain Charles Hill. Hill had been with the Gaskells during their stay in Italy, accompanied them to Paris, and then, stayed in Plymouth Grove since July. Elizabeth was involved in the planning of a wedding, which did not please her much. But then, in the light of bad news coming from India, where there was a mutiny, the wedding had to be postponed, as Captain Hill had to leave for that country. As this wedding had implied a great shock for Elizabeth, she felt relieved with the idea of the delay. Many people considered that, perhaps, Meta wanted to get married hurriedly in

order to depart from her mother, due to the fact that Meta had also been affected by the stress of copying the *Life*. Nevertheless, as the Gaskells wanted to please their daughter, they suddenly commenced an approach to Captain Charles Hill's life. When Hill went to India, Elizabeth took Meta to Chatsworth, though the trip was a mere stratagem to cheer her. It was in November that they visited Oxford, and they really enjoyed it. Meta was better, although news from India were not to be relished.

Accumulated fatigue and nervousness lead Elizabeth to illness, and it was Marianne who took care of her. Something was brewing in Elizabeth's mind—she needed to write again. She questioned her future career as a writer, and she explored possible publishers for her works. Later in October, she sent "The Doom of the Griffiths" for *Harper's Magazine*, although she sent her friend Charles Norton to inspect *Harpers'* finances. The story appeared in the magazine in January 1858. Nevertheless, Elizabeth had Meta's engagement deeply ingrained in her mind. The Gaskells had used all their influences to ameliorate Captain Charles Hill's situation in India, giving him the command of a regiment. Nobody could guess how ambitious Captain Charles Hill was, but William Gaskell had already been suspicious of him. Moreover, Meta had heard gossip that worried her, and in order to be sure about it, she wrote to him—but he never wrote back to her. To break their engagement, Captain Charles Hill argued he could not get married to a woman who did not trust him. As a result of this situation, Meta broke their engagement. They heard about him two years later; he was coming back to England to marry Matilda Wilson, the Finance Secretary's daughter. In order to avoid him, Meta visited Wedgwoods. Meta took a very long time to forget this man, but it was not without pain—she felt ill

and was tearful. One thing is clear: devoted to charity and good works, Meta never married.

That same year, to get some money, she started writing “My Lady Ludlow” for *Household Words* in Lindeth Farm. Writing was perhaps a way of escaping that took her mind off things, and, at the same time, she helped Henry Green with the history of Knutsford. But, in this case, writing was more than ever a sign of love, since she was earning money to recover Meta’s joy. Indeed, with this work, she earned three times the money she had previously made. Then, it was time to set off—Elizabeth took Meta away and they spent the autumn in Heidelberg. Being short of money at that time, she sent Dickens “Right at Last” and “The Manchester Marriage”, published in *Household Words*. Dickens sent her £40 for these two stories and also a third one, which was to be a burden for Elizabeth for the next four years. On her return from Germany, life was quiet, despite the fact that William had been offered the most senior post of the Unitarian church of Britain, which he declined. In 1859, Elizabeth wanted to go to Paris, but they had a stringent budget, so they stayed in England to spend the summer. As they were in London, Meta made Ruskin’s acquaintance, as well as that of the Pre-Raphaelite painters—which motivated her. Afterwards, they moved to Scotland, where Elizabeth conceived a long piece of work—*Sylvia’s Lovers*.

It was in November 1859 when Elizabeth Gaskell and the girls came to the Yorkshire coast, in Whitby. During her stay, she took long runs with Meta, in spite of the rain. There, she became interested in Whitby’s life in the 1790s. However, she continued with the usual events of life, and she wrote to Charles Norton about daily events. One problem, which was worrying Elizabeth by that

time was Marianne's relationship with her second cousin, Thurstan Holland. Thurstan's father did not approve the engagement on account of economic reasons—neither of the engaged were rich, and both parents knew there was not much future in that engagement.

Elizabeth prepared a trip to Oxford with William and Meta, and, from there, she continued to London while suffering a terrible cold. That spring in 1860, she was concerned with *On the Origin of Species*, which was extremely controversial in all social circles. In April, when she came back to Plymouth Grove, she could have the house almost to herself, because Meta was to depart for the Pyrenees with Charles Darwin's older sister, Marianne was on a London tour, and Julia and Flossy were at school. Elizabeth could write freely, but was interrupted when Marianne suffered from smallpox in London. For her recovering, they went to Heidelberg, where the troubles of home seemed far away. Notwithstanding, before coming back to her writing, she had to arrange her daughters' future. By that time, Flossy, who was eighteen, would be taught languages and music at home in order not to commit the same error she had done with Marianne and Meta, who had merely become her substitutes—secretaries, housekeepers, teachers and so on. The summer was oppressive for her, and, as a result, she could not concentrate well on her book. In September, Plymouth Grove was replete with visitors and William was even more immersed with the ministry, his classes and committees than even before. Hearn came back to restore order and help her, but it was not enough for Elizabeth to start writing again. At the end of 1860, as she was desperate, she wrote "The Grey Woman", inspired in Heidelberg, in a kind of exorcism to give peace to her soul. In June, Elizabeth was in London visiting the arts exhibition

at the Crystal Palace, and, from that summer on, Marianne and Thurstan got secretly engaged until both families were not in discord. Among all this hustle and bustle, Elizabeth could not write, except when William was away. She feared quotidian things of life, which prevented her from writing, including local things at Manchester, where she set up 'sewing schools' for the poor women. In December, Elizabeth and Meta collapsed, and thanks to an invitation to Worthing from Philo Brodie, they could recover, and then, Elizabeth came back and fully dedicated herself to *Sylvia's Lovers*.

Sylvia's Lovers was published by Smith Elder in February 1863. The critics were sharp—they did not like her retreat to the past, neither her use of local speech. Elizabeth went abroad. Writing had been an escape from Manchester, and now she was about to complete her job, to secure the mill-girls employment, she longed for the sun and peace. She had been paid £1,000 for the complete novel, and, in March, she and Julia went to France to stay with the Mohls, where Julia and Meta joined them.

In Paris, Elizabeth felt free and she prepared to meet everyone, however, Florence had different plans—she was engaged to a distant cousin without her parents' consent. After both love experiences with Meta and Marianne, Elizabeth felt shocked and thought her daughter had abandoned her. In spite of all the adversities, the group continued the journey towards Italy. Charles brought Flossy and Meta to Paris, and he showed himself very satisfied and his parents' letters were of love towards their son; who was thirty at that moment, ten years older than Flo, and the eldest son of a barrister. Charles tried to do everything to please Elizabeth, and he was generous and loving with Flo, who was delighted with him. Elizabeth pretended to be glad in front of them all, but

she could not find the pleasure she got the first time she visited Italy. They were in Florence until the end of May; there, they shared the company of British residents, like Thomas Trollope and some friends from home. Far from being able to relax, Elizabeth thought of everything—Florence's wedding, Italy and England. There, she wrote an article about Camorra, but, when she wrote the second article, Smith rejected it because it lacked originality. She was angry and they left going towards Paris. In Versailles, they met Charlie, who took them to London to his parents' house. Both families maintained a good relationship with each other. The younger group was settling down—on 8 September, Florence married Charles Crompton, a lawyer, in Brook Street Chapel in Manchester. After the honeymoon, the couple went to Plymouth Grove to stay with her family; and it was blatant that Flo relished her independence, though her mother thought her very young to be married.

Cousin Phillis was written quickly after *Sylvia's Lovers*, but in many ways they are opposed to one another: *Sylvia's Lovers* is romantic and *Cousin Phillis* is Pastoral. Phillis adheres to many conventions: the linguistic pastoral, the identification of women with nature from the Romantics and the Victorian rhetoric of women as children. The story appeared in the *Cornhill* from November 1863 to February 1864. Before finishing the novel, she had been writing, but she was tired because she had to arrange some translations and American editions. She wanted to make money from old material and she was having disagreements with Chapman, but all her publishers had had some difficulties in publishing her works.

In the summer of 1864, Elizabeth was beset with worry as regards Marianne and Meta. Marianne and Thurstan finally announced their

engagement; they had been engaged for six years and Marianne was then thirty, so there was no point in waiting for any longer. They married after eight years of having known each other. Nevertheless, there was another fear—Meta had not recovered from a winter fever and was ordered to breathe fresh air. Except William, all the family went to Switzerland, but Meta was suffering from migraines, and she sometimes had nervous attacks. Many things were uncertain, perhaps she had forgotten Captain Hill, but her lack of personal aims and her mother's powerful personality probably created mounting pressure on Meta, as well as on her sisters. Meta was in Brighton for a recovery, and Elizabeth succumbed to depression, although she had had time to write *Wives and Daughters*.

Her life was now different—Elizabeth wrote to the point of exhaustion, stopping only when it was necessary, because her social work and life in Manchester were over. She did not exercise much; she had an unhealthy eating habit and kept on having collapses. She yearned for escaping from Manchester once more. She thought of buying a house in the south, so that they could stay near her two daughters, Marianne and Flossy, and so, William could work there. She wanted to have all the family, especially Meta and Julia, away from Manchester, which had oppressed her so much.

Meanwhile, she visited Paris again in March 1865, and, once there, in a high mood, she started writing compulsively and joined the Mohls' habits of life. After a few weeks, she fell ill and came back home, where she felt better, and continued her frenetic way of writing. She began the purchase of the house for her retirement, not taking into account that it was complicated, because the house was situated on the other side of England. The house was fraught with

problems—drains, house-purchase—and these tribulations, added to the heat and writing, made her collapse again.

For eighteen months, thousands of readers followed *Wives and Daughters* in the *Cornhill*. With this play, she came back once more to many of her themes—the ‘mother want’, the troubled second marriage, the lost brother, the silent sexuality, and one which will be connected with “The Old Nurse’s Story”, the confrontation with the father. The patriarchal figure has become the representative of an inevitable male force which is to possess and dominate women; and this behaviour in men can be observed similarly from the home male to the master, or the State relationships with people.

That September, before leaving Manchester, she thought of Rome, but she went to Paris in the end, and she also stayed in Dieppe. In November, Elizabeth and Hearn came back to England and went to their new house. When they arrived, Elizabeth had to put her writing aside in order to arrange the house as she liked it. The final purchase of the Lawn at Holybourne, Alton, was about to conclude. Florence and Charles had gone to the Lawn on Saturday, and the following day, they accompanied Elizabeth, Meta and Julia. In the afternoon, while they were having tea, Elizabeth died in the arms of Meta. She was buried on November 16, at Brook Street Chapel in Knutsford.

3. 2. Elizabeth Gaskell’s works: short ghost tales

For a better understanding of Elizabeth Gaskell’s works, we cannot neglect that she was a woman of the beginning of the Victorian period; and, as a consequence of that, it was difficult for her to become a woman writer, just as it was complicated for all other authoresses who wanted to be granted access

to the public sphere. First of all, from her biography, we can deduce that she had to fight against domesticity, just as the other women did. Women had to shoulder the burden of domesticity, including the bringing up of their offspring, and this was regardless of the part of the century they published or lived in. In addition, she had to deal with men who were publishers and editors—and who possibly considered women as minor artists—and, undeniably, she had to get round social prejudices by means of fake names, as many other women had to do. In her case, she did it, at least, at the very beginning of her career. Nevertheless, the moral support she found with other women writers helped her profile her art, which can be added to her husband's encouragement to write. Moreover, it is patent that Elizabeth Gaskell was not considered a minor artist, as other women writers of the time were, due to the resounding success her novels enjoyed, and due to the great quantity of readers she was able to attain.

On focusing our attention on Elizabeth's Gaskells works, we can observe that, in the mid-50s, she was immersed in the writing of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and, although we can consider there was a great lapse of time between her two novels, *North and South* and *Sylvia's Lovers*, it was filled with fiction in short tales. There were realistic and fantastic stories, like "The Poor Clare", *My Lady Ludlow*, "Lois the Witch", "The Grey Woman", and many others. In these short stories, she posed thorny questions concerning gender, faith, authority, power and pain. She was able to show the real vices of her own society—sorrow, ambition, speculation; but it is also true that she subverts and undermines, with her own vision, the basis of this same society. This could seem contradictory because, being a Unitarian minister's wife, she was regarded as the 'voice of Victorian convention'. Linda Hughes and Michael Lund

state in *Victorian Publishing and Mrs Gaskell's Work* that Gaskell was referred to as 'Mrs Gaskell' because of her good reputation: a faithful wife, a virtuous mother and an appreciated woman writer—far from being seen as a subversive writer in any manner. These characteristics, which defined her and many writers of the Victorian period, can have been confusing for some twentieth-century readers, but not for her admirers, who could understand her intentions when denouncing the society of the time.

Her books and stories were able to adapt to the literary formula, to the canon of the time and narrative pace of the moment. She was able to highlight issues that had not been aired until that moment about women's lives—motherhood, menses, pregnancy and sexual desire. When she did so, she defied Victorian ideas of gender and authorship. But those two authors, Hughes and Lund, aver that she had to find new forms of literature in order to express her concerns, just because she was a female writer. She managed, indeed. Apart from her short stories, which range from ghosts stories to disappearances of people, or stories that showed 'otherness' and doppelgänger, she also created a new form of serialization in novel, and a new form of biography that confronted her with male contemporaries. Women followed her. The popularity she had among women readers and writers was outstanding. In the hands of Gaskell, the Victorian serial did not destabilise economic structures or literary forms, and, at the same time, women were pleased with it. Serialization was the best way for some women readers or writers to enter the literary market.

At the end of 1859, she was working on three different projects, and looking for editors. She was weighing the advantages and drawbacks of her continuity with Dickens' publishing relationship, because of their continuous

give-and-take relationship. An illustrative example was when she exceeded Dickens' word limits with *My Lady Ludlow*, which caused her great tension. The result of that situation was that Elizabeth felt professionally insulted, undervalued and not respected as much as she deserved, which led to secretive disapproval. In 1859, Dickens also did her wrong: he published a short story called "Character Murder" in *Household Words*, and it was based on the continuation of one of Gaskell's anecdotes of her "Disappearances" of 1851. Although she felt she had been cheated and misrepresented, she protested by asking Wills for a reply, which she received, but was evasive.

She also mingled her own emotions when Dickens separated from his wife. Everybody was turning their backs on Dickens, even the co-producers of *Household Words*, and it was then that Elizabeth received a letter announcing Dickens' intention of founding another journal. She considered about giving Dickens' the money back, because she had had it in advance, but, in the end, "Lois the Witch" ran in the *All the Year Round*, in October 1859; and, for the Christmas Number, she sent him "The Crooked Branch", renamed as "The Ghost in the Garden Room".

She could have worked more with *Cornhill*, but she did not have a good relationship with Thackeray, since there had been problems between their daughters, and because she had not been very generous with a description of him in the *Life*. She had gnawing doubts as to whether she should write in *Cornhill* when Smith asked her to, but "Curious if True" appeared in the second number of February 1860 without a complaint on Thackeray's part. Moreover, Elizabeth always supported new writers, she passed on possible contributions

for *Cornhill* to Smith; pieces from people like Camilla Jenkins, William Westmore Story and Mary Molh.

As we have mentioned previously, the interaction she had with other women writers or the support she found in them was a crucial drive for Elizabeth to find the connection between writing and the morality of private life, specially connected with Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. It is necessary to highlight this point: her relationship with these other women will be key to the achievement of her art.

Elizabeth read pieces written by George Eliot, and she discovered her talent at first sight. In 1857, she had shown Charles Norton some pieces of “Scenes of Clerical Life”, and, in March 1859, she asked for a copy of *Adam Bede*. She was so impressed that she sent the author a letter of support and congratulated him on this novel, presumably knowing it was not the person he pretended to be—since both women use the name ‘Gilbert Elliot’. Within a few weeks, Elizabeth Gaskell received some news of the author, who was supposedly Mary Ann Evans. Elizabeth wrote to Miss Evans to tell her that, since the moment she had known she was the authoress of the writings, she had devoured them and that she admired her even more than before. Although Elizabeth and Miss Evans never met, it was clear that Miss Evans had read and revered Gaskell’s writings too, because she had compared her with Harriet Martineau and Currer Bell. She had lionized her to the point of differentiating her writings from those ‘Silly Novels by Lady Novelists’, and she said Elizabeth was, in the part, one of those female writers who suffered male critics because of being women. They exchanged letters of deep acknowledgment and shared a number of the ideas immersed in “Art and Life”, although there was one point

where they dissented—that of ‘maternal emotions’. Gaskell thought that men could also feel maternal sentiments, and, if they acknowledged it, everything in the world could change. Eliot came to this point in *Silas Marner*. Both writers, far from idealizing women, presented them in a dark form because maternal feelings were considered as a sexually negative side.

For her part, Charlotte Brontë explored the differences of sex and oppression of women by means of the supernatural in *Jane Eyre*, whereas George Eliot in *The Lifted Veil* uses the supernatural to analyse the limits between the real and the possible. Gaskell’s short stories show us how a woman writer could put a different sight on the supernatural and her life seemed more stabilised than those lives of her contemporaries who wrote ghost stories, though it was not so. She was not the fornicator or adulterer the society deemed Brontë or Eliot, but she also felt isolation and exclusion. This was because of being a Unitarian—she felt outcast by other Christian groups.

Curiously, Unitarianism had provided her with education and independence of ideas in the midst of Victorian society. In fact, Vanessa Dickerson’s states in her book *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide* (1996), in her chapter dedicated to Gaskell’s supernatural tales, that Unitarianism kept her from falling into the place where most Victorians found the space for the ghost story once they underwent a crisis of faith. Gaskell was not struck by the religious crisis that affected most Victorians. She was not troubled with the afterlife, and neither metaphysical nor spiritual qualities of sin appeared in her works. Her ghost tales do not show ghosts, but manifestations of somebody’s troubled mind. Nevertheless, she could see what was happening around her in society, especially in Manchester, where she could observe scientific or

materialistic principles. She went away from Manchester any time she could in order to avoid materialism based on technology. Nevertheless, in the middle of that confusion of sentiments, she wrote a letter to her friend Tottie, where she wrote: 'I SAW a ghost' in the middle of a street. In brief, she felt like a woman of her time, while she believed in the supernatural.

Gaskell's short stories have been considered, on the one hand, as 'potboilers', and, on the other hand, as pieces of literature that stirred up her intense imagination, mixed with her taste for the past and for legends. But one thing is clear, when we observe Gaskell's stories of the supernatural, looking for the evidence that these stories have been used by women writers to demonstrate and explore the spiritual fears other women felt, we draw the conclusion that Gaskell is as persuasive in her tale about these topics as she is in her realistic works.

Most of Gaskell's short stories were written in periods of great tension—either when she was feeling stressed or when she wrote after long works. "The Old Nurse's Story" was published in a special Christmas number of Dickens' *Households Words* in 1852 after her novel *Mary Barton*. These stories provided her with imaginative freedom, because they allowed her more liberty to write. The patriarchal world she lived in, where something related to ghosts was considered as juvenile, innocent and immature, amenable to be dealt with by women, offered her, as well the other writers of ghost stories, a vast array of spectres with which they could mirror social, cultural and spiritual realities.

In her short stories, Gaskell develops her art, which is imbued with life. She explores the real and the surreal, the comic and the tragic. All these things seem to form part of daily life events; that is why one can say that the richness

of Gaskell's fiction is taken from the very completeness of her own experience. As well as being a writer, she was a mother and a wife surrounded by these daily routines, which limited her writing activity. But, at the same time, her world was filled with different experiences and emotions, personal contacts and interaction of ideas, reminiscent of bonds forming a double helix: dynamic, self-reinforcing and flowing endlessly in both directions. And, if there is one thing we have to bear in mind, this is that she was at the very centre of many different areas of life. As Jenny Uglow (1999) posits, Elizabeth's life would be like 'overlapping circles, drawn by a compass whose point is fixed in a central circle of Elizabeth's family, marriage and faith' (309) It is nevertheless important to mention that, despite being the centre of her life, she was considered off-centre. She was dismissed as such because of being the wife of a Unitarian minister who scandalized his husband's congregation as a consequence of leading a separate life from him and writing about such problematic matters. She was a Manchester inhabitant who spent most of her time elsewhere, a woman of modest earnings who could come into the households of the wealthy and the humble, without being part of either world. And, in addition, something crucial for women writers in Victorian times, she was a writer who was in contact with the London literary scene. And, although it was not very common for women to be immersed in political matters, she gave free support to Barbara Leigh Smith and her 'Langham Place Group'. She signed for the amendment of the Married Woman's Property Law prepared by Barbara in 1854. With this group, she had been in contact with the new fervour in the fight for women's rights. Although she was married, a status that gave women position and consideration, she felt sympathy for single women. She had been writing about the struggle of single

women within a context of service and common support. In the tale we are going to analyse, the governess, a single young woman, is the person who helps the other characters because she professes uninterested love towards the girl she takes after. A controversial aspect of life she was also to challenge, when writing, was sex. This was to harden her writing task. Dealing with sex in her novels and stories made her question her own sexuality; and, in a Victorian context, sexuality for a decent Victorian woman was seen as a source of anxiety and culpability, even inside the sacrament of marriage.

It is necessary for us to mention that Gaskell's minor works have been eclipsed by her novels; but something we cannot forget is how ingenious and innovative she was in the art of short stories. Yet, we must say that most stories are not short at all, some are considered novellas and others are even fifty pages. These stories are varied. They have different subjects, style and setting; and also range from moral tales to Gothic mysteries. They are simple at first sight, which allows them to present central themes and characters, such as disobedient sons, severe fathers or husbands, motherless children, ill wives, resolute servants and solidary heroines with other women. Some of these stories could be in Elizabeth's mind for a long time, but, on the other hand, she could write the story with certain quickness, which led her to make some mistakes, like confusion in characters' names, the number of somebody's children or repeating details.

Most of the stories Gaskell wrote between the 1850s and early 1860s, reverse the patriarchal pattern of Victorian society. By doing so, she presents a threat to the dominant force and she comes back to examine the basis of that power incessantly, discovering it has been imposed and accepted by force,

stressing the domination and submission of women. For Gaskell, rules and ritual help to reinforce control by codifying it. Similarly, institutions enforce and maintain it, even the family like in “The Old Nurse’s Story”, or the priesthood in “Lois the Witch”. Gaskell criticises from both sides—the social and the personal. On the one hand, she shows the prejudices of the State and the Church; and, on the other side, she shows the hell a marriage can be, or, even worse, how subverting norms and giving in to sex can lead women to disaster.

In the short stories of that period, women are the natural victims of the despotic system they are immersed in; they are punished by disobedience. If they are capable of rebellion, then, perhaps they will not survive—such is their punishment. This rebellion to social customs is patent in the story we are working with. Miss Maude breaks out the rules and marries a man secretly without her father’s permission, and, moreover, this man belongs to a different social class, inferior to hers. Not only is the mother, Miss Maud, the one to die in the snow, punished by her father, but also the innocent child who has not even defied the norms. All of Gaskell’s fiction is full of pain and love, of annihilation and assertion of women’s self. Her short stories are replete of mental and physical cruelty; in “The Grey woman”, a young German girl is married to a bandit who tortures his victims and annihilates her in his castle—his wealth is her tomb. Her servant, Amante, helps her escape, both of them disguised as man and wife. The bandit pursues them, and kills a woman whom he mistakes for his wife, and, some years later, Amante is also killed. The young German finally escapes societal norms by means of a bigamous marriage with the doctor who helped her in childbirth. This story is also representative of women’s entrapment and suppression of the self. Many times, women in Gaskell’s stories

are denied the power of speech, and, consequently, their identity. However, she leaves possibilities for them to survive—i.e. the company of other women, such as servants, friends, and mothers. In the case of “The Old Nurse’s Story”, it is the governess who takes care of the child.

3.3 “The Old Nurse’s Story”

“The Old Nurse’s Story” is one of the loveliest Victorian ghost stories of the Female Gothic genre. Perhaps, thanks to the Gothic, Elizabeth unleashed her own prejudices without being consciously aware. With the aristocratic setting in the old house, she tackles the same themes of unmarried sex and illegitimacy of the offspring in an audacious and wide fashion, so differently treated in *Ruth*. She does not use innocence in this play, but wild passions in solitary women; she attacks the jealous sister and denounces the punishing, intolerant father, among many other topics. It is essential to point out that one of the central points that make Gaskell’s stories distinct is that of the relationships between women—she is depicting for us the defences of the feminine world inside a patriarchal frame. As a result, from our exegesis, we deduce that these women are tangled in a net of relationships among them. Via these female relationships, Gaskell reflects the entire Victorian familiar universe, which had characterised her life. In “The Old Nurse’s Story”, Gaskell presents us a family story in which the connections among the women of the story are prominently important, because each woman depends on another. Firstly, Rosamond depends on Hester, who is her caretaker; then, the dead baby depends on her mother, Miss Maude, who was expelled from home, and on Rosemond. Also Miss Maude is subject to her sister’s compassion; and her sister, Miss Grace,

leans on her assistant, Miss Stark. This dependence on one another succeeds or fails in the same measure as it happens with their lives.

3.3.1. Narrator

Many short stories by Gaskell feature a narrator who tells the story to a friend by the fire, or is part of a community of story tellers who gather in *Round the Sofa*. This was a convention which reflected a social practice in Victorian times. This informal situation, when the unintentional turned up, allowed more freedom to raconteurs; they could escape from strict rules of form. This liberty also allowed the narrators to conjure up different worlds—the experienced in travels, the recreated past or the fantastic realms, were claimed to be real. According to Jenny Uglow (1999), one of the most interesting elements in Gaskell is the narrator, since its figure always asks for veracity. Aware of literary conventions, Gaskell recognised the attraction of a good story, although there was a great danger—crossing the delicate frontier between accuracy and invention; that meant not to incur in something which could result unbelievable. Although in her short stories she likes playing with that borderline—being conscious of what is fiction and what is reality—she never forgets that the facts are fictional.

The telling of ghost stories was a favourite distraction in Victorian England. It was a good ability to get a job. In fact, the art of story-telling was a practice frequently reserved for children caretakers, for mothers and for nurses, like Hester in “The Old Nurse’s Story”, or Brontë’s Bessie in *Jane Eyre*; thus, they could entertain children. As an anecdote, Dickens called Gaskell “Scheherazade”, because she was really good at telling stories.

In this tale, everything starts when Hester, an old nurse, tells some children the love she professed to her orphan child—their dead mother—and the determination she had to accompany her “to the end of the world” (1). The narrator, then, in “The Old Nurse’s Story”, is Hester, now an old woman, who was a young girl of eighteen at the time the facts happened. She told the story of the two sisters of the Furnivall family; events that occurred long time before she and the orphan went to the manor, and she also told what happened when they arrived. At the beginning, Hester is required in the local vicarage to take care of a girl. When the rector and his wife die, she is in charge of Rosamond and has to take her to live with an elderly relation, named Grace Furnivall, who lives in Northumberland.

It is noteworthy that Hester is a nurse; because, on the one hand, it was typical for governesses to take care of children, acting as mothers; and, on the other hand, because nurses and servants were present in Gaskell’s life. Servants are of crucial importance in some of Gaskell’s stories, since they play an essential role inside her tales—they are vital as they are needed for the survival of other women. On these grounds, we can determine that servants were more important for Gaskell than for other contemporary writers of short stories, due to the fact that servants offered her the friendship she could not find in the familiar circle, and because they helped her to bring up their own children. In this case, Hester is more like a child—we must not fail to remember she was very young, and that is the reason why she likes playing hide-and-seek with the little girl. Notwithstanding, she feels anxious and worried because she loves Rosamond; she feels more than responsible for the girl. This anxiety, Hester feels, is paralleled to the same sentiment Rosamond has with the little phantom

girl. Rosamond is also determined to follow her girl in the snow, though that leads her almost to death.

The fact that Hester is a nurse connects with the literary tradition of plays, such as *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. We know Gaskell read *Jane Eyre* when it was published in 1847. Both of them—nurse and governess—share many characteristics. At the beginning of the Victorian era, being a woman was a difficult task that would result in a difficult life, particularly if the woman was motherless, “disconnected, poor and plain” (187)—just as *Jane Eyre* describes herself in the eponymous novel. Neither *Jane Eyre* nor Hester in “The Old Nurse’s Story” are wealthy. On the contrary, they are governesses who are marginalized for two essential reasons—gender and class. As middle-class women, the only option they had was to become governesses. The second factor of marginalization was they belonged to an ambiguous class status. A Victorian governess had an awkward position—she was not exactly a servant, nor a member of the family. This uncertain social status prevented them from being accepted by the family or servants. This liminal position made people feel governesses were disturbing domestic elements, caught between two worlds—similar to the literary Victorian ghost. In the same way a ghost was a disrupting presence, so was the governess or nurse inside the Victorian home. As these women emphasize the relation between them and ghosts, we can affirm that “The Old Nurse’s Story” lines up also with Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Villette* (1854), Mary Braddon’s “At Chighton Abbey” (1871) and Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). All of them establish different connections between supernatural phenomena and governess-like characters.

Victorians were aware of the position these women occupied in their homes and in society. They were a mixture of relatives, guests, lovers, and, at the same time, none of them; but a caregiver or teacher with an intimate relation with the family, in exchange of economical compensation, which made them close to servants. Nevertheless, from our point of view, some nurses feel real love by their children, and this sentiment is not something money can buy. Jane Eyre feels sympathy for the girl. In Hester's case, she could have followed her little darling to the end of the world and beyond, just as Henry James' governess would go to the end of the otherworld in *The Turn of the Screw* with her two dear children.

As many other stories told by governesses, "The Old Nurse's Story" is narrated in the first person singular. It is not like Jane Eyre, who had such a strong voice and ran against common views of the proper role of such a woman in Victorian England—there was a disparity between her voice and the normal connotations and status of a governess in that period. But it is certain that her role allowed her audience to see life from the point of view of a servant's place and the aristocracy's place. Hester's voice discovers for us how an aristocratic family is falling down, and she does so from the point of view of an outside element in family life. Diegetically speaking, the 'I' brings the text into being in all cases. It is the way to come into Rochester's house in *Jane Eyre*, into the Furnivall Manor in "The Old Nurse's Story", or into Bly in *The Turn of the Screw*, and, it is the way to know the facts from the nurse's story. The manifestation of ghosts inside the house is something that can be spoken about, because a creature like a nurse can verbalize it, that is to say, to render it public to everybody.

As we have previously stated, the narrative strategy of *Jane Eyre* is a first-person point of view, like “The Old Nurse’s Story” or *The Turn of the Screw*, and, by means of that, the events and dialogues—even those primarily involving other people—are always related to the ‘governess-narrator’ herself. The focus is constantly on the narrator’s feelings and attitudes. Although Hester is told the story of the family by Dorothy, it is always her vision that we perceive.

3.3.2. Characters

The story displays the world of a decadent aristocratic family mostly inhabited by women. As we have seen, the narrator is a woman, and the orphan is a girl, Rosamond, a distant relative of the Furnivall family. There are two household employees, a couple—James and Dorothy—and a girl named Bessy. There are two sisters, Miss Maud and Miss Grace, but, as the last one is dead, we will include her in the ghost’s group, with her dead child. Something we ought to point out is that, although the two male characters are absent in the story—the dead father is now a ghost and the other disappeared—, they give the impression to have affected Miss Maud and Miss Grace strongly, because their acts and decisions will define both women’s destinies. In this part, we will concentrate mainly on Grace Furnivall because it is the main character that is alive; and the rest of the characters in the family are connected to her. But, in addition, we would like to study Rosamond and Hester.

In her short stories, Gaskell deals with the phenomenon of the interaction among women—in most situations she shows how they help each other or how they oppose one another. As a matter of fact, in this one, “The Old Nurse’s Story”, we are concerned with the relationships among all the women of the

tale; and this web of interactions will form the plot and the reflection of the social alliances of a Victorian feminine world under male oppression, where women are given a determined role. Some of Gaskell's works show this multiplicity of roles, or, in this case, polarity between female creativity and victimization. In *My Lady Ludlow* (1858) and in "Lois the Witch" (1859), Gaskell exemplifies this opposition. *My Lady Ludlow* shows us the gradual change from a patriarchal aristocratic power to a more democratic motherly code. "Lois the Witch" shows fanatic, religious, manly society victimizing women, and the story denounces and condemns the male 'texts' and authorities, which act against women and justify cruelty. In this story, Gaskell suggests that there is a mode of 'women's writings'—perhaps the Female Gothic—and that ranged from the real to the surreal. This also connects with "The Old Nurse's Story", which will be the purpose of our study among all Elizabeth Gaskell's corpus, because we will focus on stories with ghosts, and this is the only one featuring them.

From our point of view, in this tale, women can be creators or destroyers, and, sometimes, the destroyed. Miss Grace, in this story, is the destroyer by omission of help, and, at the same time, she will be destroyed. In the middle of the winter, and little by little, the colder the night, the louder the music of an organ that can be heard from the east wing of the house, which is completely locked. Then, one Sunday in the middle of the snow, Rosamond is drawn outside the house by the ghost of a girl of her own age, who has caught her attention by tapping at the window. Step by step, we know that Grace, who is now old and deaf, lost the man she loved—a foreign music teacher—who decided to escape with the company of her sister Maude. Thus, Grace betrayed her sister, and gives support to their cruel and revengeful father. Maude and her

illegitimate daughter are expelled to die out under a hawthorn bush in the snow. At the climax of the story, in the middle of a terrifying scene with gale force winds, spectral music and crashing doors, the spirits of the child, Maude, Grace and Lord Furnivall suddenly appear. Then, Grace collapses, because she feels remorse towards her sister when the scene happens again. At his very moment, the themes of regret and secret are exteriorised, although Miss Grace has kept silent for many years. This is one of the principles of the uncanny—what had remained secret becomes known. But, from our point of view, when it is undisclosed, as Rosemary Jackson says, nobody can deny it. Not even Grace, who dies verbalizing her remorse as she dies: “What is done in youth can never be undone in age!”. (25)

Both Maud and Grace were very proud and vain. As we infer from the facts, Gaskell tries to expose that their arrogance and contemptuous nature are their natural traits. It will be their abuse of pride that will lead the two sisters to their destruction. Maud and Grace competed for the same man's affections. After the competition, Maud and Grace are torn apart. Gaskell reminds us that envy has left both sisters completely and emotionally destroyed. The rivalry between the two sisters is so extreme that Grace reveals to her father Miss Maud's secret marriage to the music teacher, and that her sister has had a child with him, in spite of the fact that the music teacher has already abandoned them both. Miss Grace, showing no piety, is acting as a victimizer, subjugated to her father's wishes—she has become a revengeful sister, inducing her father to be a destructive force. However, the direct consequence of having made her father banish her older sister from the house and the propriety is that Miss Maud is found dead with her baby in the Fells. Nevertheless, the point is that having her

sister expelled from home and sent out in the snow is an atrocious act for which she will have to pay until her death. Since the very moment the deed occurs, Miss Grace is doomed to destruction, little by little, for the rest of her life; first, physically, and, then, psychologically. The physical destruction is to arrive first, as she is old and deaf; and, psychologically, it is clear for us when she tells Hester not to let the poor Rosamond go with the phantom girl. Then, we know she is aware of the ghost presence and she fears it. And it is because of the terrible fact of believing in ghosts that Dorothy tells Hester, Grace should be feared, to what the nurse declares: “All this time I kept away from Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, as much as ever I could; for I feared them” (21) as if it was possible that Miss Furnivall could hurt her and Rosamond, too.

Paradoxically, Miss Grace, whose name means ‘mercy’ or ‘clemency’, shows none of these qualities in her life. She has committed a sin against women as mothers, daughters and sisters. As we have mentioned before, if we pay close attention to the relationship among the women in “The Old Nurse’s Story”, we can appreciate that all the women in the story need protection and assistance. Curiously, Rosamond—whose name means ‘protection’ in its German origin—is an unprotected orphan; Maud, who has been abandoned by her husband, and has a little child, needs her sister’s help to convince her father to foster her and her child. Miss Grace should have been the person who should have shown compassion and support for her sister, insofar as those faculties were thought to be more frequent in women than in men. Hester succours Rosamond with passion, and names her “my little lady—my lamb—my queen—my darling” (13), the phantom child tries to relief her mother’s pain by bringing Rosamond to her, and thus, she can embrace a living child. Even

Dorothy, in her kitchen, receives Hester and Rosamond with love. Contrary to all these women, Miss Grace has been punishing her sister and her niece by keeping the east wing closed, even though, at the same time, it has been a punishment for her. She never feels care for another woman, not even Mrs Stark, as Hester describes to Rosamond's children, and neither does Mrs. Stark feel sympathy for her—she treats Miss Grace as an equal:

Sitting with her ... was Mrs. Stark, her maid and companion, and almost as old as she was. She had lived with Miss Furnivall ever since they were both young, and she seemed more like a friend than a servant; she looked so cold and grey, and stony, as if she had never loved or cared for any one; and I don't suppose she did care for anyone except her mistress (5)

Miss Grace is now deaf, although, as the saying goes, there is no one so deaf as that who will not hear. In this line, this natural deafness has come to substitute the wilful blindness and deafness of her youth, when she closed her eyes and ears in front of her sister's claiming for assistance. According to Vanessa Dickerson's interpretation of the story (1996), she says that the key of the story is that Miss Grace is identified as a child because she has refused to help her sister and her niece—perhaps avoiding responsibilities was easier than following her father's wishes. For Dickerson (1996), this is more important than the final scene that replicates the act of expelling, more important than the mother weeping in the Fells, and than the organ music played by Mr Furnivall's ghost. Nonetheless, in our opinion, natural deafness has helped her not to listen to all these previous things we have mentioned, but especially she cannot listen to her father's music reminding her of her duties as a complacent daughter; or, what is the same, her deafness helps her not to hear her father's voice. As a result of this voluntary deafness, through the years, she has been able to

change her mind and feelings, because, when the final scene is re-enacted, she is capable of showing her opposition to her father, although there is nothing she can do to alter fate. Nobody can; but Grace can feel differently by means of her remorse. In other words, Grace is not the destroyer's helper at this moment, because she has become the destroyed inside patriarchy. She has become a spinster, something no man wants in his family—the lineage is dead with old unmarried women. Nevertheless, she has changed her mind about everything that happened in her life. When she dies, her last words are referred to the eternity of sins and the perpetual harms of youth, meaning that age is one option to reconsider the mistakes of one's life, specially, if one has been far away from the world, but with no qualms. From our point of view, she has been redeemed by repentance.

3. 3. 3 The ghosts

In the story, we encounter several ghosts, although the girl and the grandfather are the recurrent ones. Hester can listen to the music played by Lord Furnivall, and the phantom girl can be seen by Rosamond until the final scene, when she is visible for everybody. Dickens enjoyed the story and considered it a representative of the ghost story genre, which had been written exquisitely, although the ending did not satisfy him. It is that there were some differences between Dickens and Gaskell at that moment. Dickens was of the opinion that only the girl, Rosamond, should see the spirits or phantoms; whereas Gaskell thought that this was not so. Although she had had some previous discrepancies with him before, she answered Dickens that her belief was that Grace had to be face to face with her culpability, but visibly. They did

not come to an understanding, because they were both just as resolute. Dickens proposed that Elizabeth to forget about the story for a while, and then, he altered it himself, and tried to show Elizabeth he was right. He sent Elizabeth the amended story—needless to say, Elizabeth disallowed his variations. Dickens gave in, but he wrote her a challenging letter, which caused her another collapse.

Among the other spirits that appear in the tale, we see Miss Maud. Miss Maud is a victim of the society of the time in every aspect of her life. First of all, she falls in love with an evil man. She marries him secretly, but he leaves her and her child alone. Her decision, her self-assertiveness has carried misfortune on her; she would represent the 'fallen woman' because she drives herself away, not for love, but for sex, as society would contend those days. First of all, a woman could not decide who she wanted to marry, and thus, she appears to her father's eyes as a disobedient daughter who has eloped with a stranger. And, moreover, she has had a baby, which is the recognition for her father of her lust—the baby girl is the sin of the mother. We consider that Mr Furnivall hits the child and not Maud because it is the encoded sin, and he knows he will hurt her more by means of striking the child.

Maud seeks solace in her sister Grace, but Grace punishes her; on the one hand, because she is jealous, and, on the other, because she cannot contradict her father—she does not have the courage to do so. Maud's ghost is like the mourning mother who has lost her child, not because she was not able to carry out the task of bringing her offspring up, but because she has tried to do it outside the social rules. She has been punished, because of following the dictates of her own will and trying to show women could defy social norms.

The phantom child, a girl who taps the window pane from outside the house in the snow, is the innocent victim who expiates her mother's sins. For this reason, she is hit by her grandfather, and, had it not been because of her aunt's lack of affection, she would not have been trying to enter the house or the family—she would have been inside. Once more, in the female Gothic, the child is let outside the house where she cannot enter; she is barred from entering the home or the family; something which corresponds to her by birth, although her grandfather hinders her entrance. Miss Grace is even guiltier than her father, because, if she had had motherhood instincts, she would have let the girl in, although she was a phantom, overall, once Lord Furnivall was dead. To our mind, the girl wants to enter, just as it happened in *Wuthering Heights* when Emily Brontë makes the little ghost of Catherine ask to be let in. The same occurs in the short story by Augustus Derleth "The Drifting Snow", when the ghosts come near the window of the house and ask the living to be given entrance. There is a similar case with a vampire girl who is outside the window of the houses of the families or homes she wants to go in. The film is titled *Let me in* (2010), by Matt Reeves, and is based on the book by John Ajvide Lindqvist. It is curious enough that all these phantom children, who try to enter other people's homes, are not permitted to do so, as they are hindered from having a family or a social group to fit in. This may be because, for one reason or another, they do not fit the class they want to enter, as they are considered as 'others' and they take the form of: vampires, ghosts, illegal sons or daughters. In addition, if home is considered as a mental space created through family relationships between the father and the mother, and only accessible by the mother's agency, then, it is understandable that they do not enter—most of

them are motherless children. All these homes to which children cannot have access present a common characteristic: the absent mother. There is no maternal figure, no sisterhood who could redeem these children. And there is another common element: the sins of their progenitors.

Apart from that idea, the spirit of the child can represent the evil past coming back to the father's house to take revenge on his grandfather for his bad actions, and, by doing so, the child is defying the male authority. The child is voicing her own dissatisfaction to her grandfather, because, by negating her proper recognition, he is denying her being part of the family. Both their daughters have been punished for disobeying him. What is more, the little girl has never been under his oppression or the excessive burden of society rules—she has not been in contact with Victorian society, or, even better, she has rebelled against it from the beginning.

Faithful to his principles, old Lord Furnivall led his and his daughters' lives with pride and harshness before his decease. However, he seems to be absent during the entire story—the father appears at the end, as a ghost, to re-act the scene of the expulsion. He comes back when the night is cold to play the organ in order to remind everybody he is still the aristocrat patriarch. It is a clear instance of men's domination over women's lives. It is undoubted that women could react against patriarchal oppression, and, in this respect, Lord Furnivall can see his eldest daughter react against the established power by means of disobedience; in this example, women do not agree with their quiet and silent role in Victorian times. Their struggle against men leads them to annihilation, because they have not struggled together.

Lord Furnivall, as it is presented by Gaskell, is the representative of a dominating father. But, interpreting more and generalizing, by despising his own daughters, he despises women in general. In the first pages, he is described as having “broken his poor wife’s heart with his cruelty” (13) This male authority creates in women an oppressive sense of imprisonment. Maud’s marriage does not exist without her father’s blessing, and she is imprisoned in the Fells; contrary to Miss Grace, who is confined in her own room. Gaskell tries to make us see the weakening power of women in front of a male governed society.

Domination in “The Old Nurse’s Story” exists in the present and in the past. In the present, Lord Furnivall comes to play the organ because it exercises control over them and he plays the music to show his influence outlived him. And, at the same time, women who hear his music, like the women in the household, feel weakness, as they are unable to control the fearful music—a metaphor of controlling men.

3. 3. 4. Genius loci

Something of utmost importance for women writers of the supernatural is what we call the *genius loci*. We should remember that, according to the Oxford Dictionary, this concept refers to “the prevailing character or atmosphere of a place”.

When reading or listening to ghost stories, the individual is immersed in an especial atmosphere. Everything, every unknown place, darkness, sudden sounds, lights or voices can frighten us. This setting or atmosphere is going to characterize the style of our writers, and, if we go a little bit deeper, this will configure their writing. Our fears will rise depending on the setting or the

elements that can make our soul shrink. In this case, then, we can infer that it is necessary to develop the story in the proper place, with the fundamental characteristics for the gothic writing in this situation. Let us mention that these characteristics will be different or similar in all our writers, and they will be present in all of their tales, just as they are patent in this story. The way of using or creating these *genius loci* will also show their own fears—as writers and women, i.e. as mothers, wives and daughters.

To begin with, Gaskell's atmosphere is inside the domestic habitat. Most of the things, like the final scene, occur inside the house. Nevertheless, there are other scenes that happen outside and nearby. Notwithstanding, her stories are replete with haunted houses. We know that Gaskell started with her stories while writing the description of a house: Clopton Hall. She sent this description to the Howitt's, and she issued a wonderful description of it. In "The Old Nurse's Story", almost at the beginning of it, there is a complete depiction of the Furnivall Manor, which seems solitary and strange. The external appearance does not seem to be in a very good conditions, from our point of view, a metaphor of the state of the decaying family.

...and then we saw a great and stately house, with many trees close around it, so close that in some places their branches dragged against the walls when the wind blew; and some hung broken down; for no one seemed to take much charge of the place; - to loop the or to keep the moss-covered carriage-way in order. Only in front of the house all was clear. The great oval drive was without a weed; and neither tree nor creeper was allowed to grow over the long, many-windowed front; at both sides of which a wing projected, which were each the ends of other side fronts; for the house, although it was so desolate, was even grander than I expected. Behind it rose the Fells, which seemed unenclosed and bare enough; and on the left hand of the house, as you stood facing it, was a little, old-fashioned flower-garden, as I found out afterwards. A door opened out upon it from the west front; it had been scooped out of the thick, dark wood for some old Lady Furnivall; but the branches of the

great forest-trees had grown and overshadowed it again, and there were very few flowers that would live there at that time. (4)

From this portrayal, we can deduce that the lineage of the family, or the remains of it, is striving to survive. The inference can be supported because it is the front of the house, the part which faces society, which is still kept clear, although, significantly, the shadow of the tree branches—we interpret them as the shadows of the past—are covering the vestiges of aristocracy. The manor, greater than Hester expected, is not well cared for and is desolate; and, in addition, it is set in some sort of rural area in the country near the Fells, which is tantamount to isolation from society. Every place is predicting the end of the story, the Fells are very hostile and it is where Maud dies—excluded from the social circles; the house is surrounded by death and Maud has been sent outside, to the moors.

We are told that inside the house everything is in the same, old-fashioned condition. Everything seems to be in a decomposing estate, just as the family is. There are remains of a different, luxurious past, difficult to perceive, but easy to guess. There is also another hint: the lack of light—the branches around the house prevent the light of the sun coming in, and this prevents people inside from seeing reality clearly.

But in the western and northern part was many a pleasant room; full of things that were curiosities to us, though they might not have been to people who had seen more. The windows were darkened by the sweeping boughs of the trees, and the ivy which had overgrown them; but, in the green gloom, we could manage to see old china jars and carved ivory boxes, and great heavy books, and, above all, the old pictures! (7)

With this scenery in our minds, we can imagine the kind of place our little girl is going to be placed in. Nevertheless, there is another important fact which will determine the ghost story atmosphere—the season, the winter and the snow.

The snow is a cold, white, blazing element, which in this tale is associated with death. The first time the girl takes Rosamond to the Fell, it is snowy and she almost dies. Strangely for the characters that look for Rosamond, there are no other footprints in the snow but hers. That is significant—it means the girl is a ghost. We can see there is a tale titled “The Drifting Snow”, written by Augustus Derleth, in which there is an isolated house where the owner forbids anyone to open the western curtains. She is afraid of something. Her guests believe there are people surrounding the house in the middle of a snow storm and they want to enter. Aunt Mary, who is the owner, argues they cannot be let in because they are dead; she has checked the snow many times and she has never found footprints in it. In both tales, the women who had survived the family close the part of the house where their ghosts appear; one closes the east wing and the other follows suit with the western curtains.

When Hester and Rosamond arrive at the place, it is in September, but it is not until winter comes that the organ does not start to be heard. The colder and windier the winter is, the more Lord Furnivall plays his music. One day in November, Hester leaves her darling with the women, and, when she comes back home, Rosamond has been taken away long ago by the ghost girl in the middle of the snow. Snow is associated with death, overall because the ghost girl and her mother passed away in the snow. In the middle of the Fells, where

nobody wants to be, on a winter night, Rosamond has seen the girl and her mother. The girl wants Rosamond to go with her mother because she wants a child to care to remedy her own child's death. We can interpret the Fell as a place of social exclusion and of social death, not *de juris* but *de facto*, before that physical death arrived, as a kind of punishment.

Another night before Christmas, the little girl taps on the window of the room, where Rosamond is. Rosamond wants to let her in, so that she can prevent her from dying, but she is hindered from doing it. Curiously, though she intends to shout, nobody can hear to her because the patriarchal voice stifles hers. As a woman, she has no voice, and she is imprisoned outside the social circle she belongs to:

I saw a little girl, less than my Miss Rosamond—dressed all unfit to be out-of-doors such a bitter night—crying, and beating against the window panes, as if she wanted to be let in. She seemed to sob and wail, till Miss Rosamond could bear it no longer, and was flying to the door to open it, when, all of a sudden, and close upon us, the great organ pealed out so loud and thundering, it fairly made me tremble; and all the more, when I remembered me that, even in the stillness of that dead-cold weather, I had heard no sound of little battering hands upon the window-glass, although the phantom child had seemed to put forth all its force; and, although I had seen it wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound had fallen upon my ears. (16)

The final scene just takes place one night after New Year's Day. The day had finished with a lot of winter wind. And, again, there is lack of light and heat: "the great bronze chandelier seemed all alight, though the hall was dim, and that a fire was blazing in the vast hearth-place, though it gave no heat". No light and no heat means for us that there is no understanding, no conscience of what is happening—and this is because there is no love.

There is another element necessary to be mentioned due to its importance. The sound of the organ is as imperative as was the will of the ghost when he lived. Gaskell describes the organ music and it seems that the reader can hear the notes. The description is oppressive. It seems as if one were watching a horror film, in which the music is the component preparing the viewers and getting on their nerves. The voice of the male father is filling the house and the story, as the music of the organ can even fill a cathedral, where nobody can speak, because no one can be heard. There was no solution for women to be heard when a man's voice filled every place around them. To our mind, the real subversion was becoming deaf—she cannot hear him and therefore faces him.

As we know, Gaskell wrote this tale when asked by Charles Dickens to write a “ghost story” for his magazine *Household Words*, so as to appear in the first Christmas issue. This story was a suitable topic for Christmas time, a season associated with themes of reconciliation and love, just when the story happens in fiction.

3. 3. 5. Structure

The construction of short stories belonging to the Female Gothic may present some characteristics in their structure that are common for most of them, although not all. In this tale, “The Old Nurse's Story”, we can observe that Gaskell has stuck to a pattern most ghost tales usually follow.

From our observations, we can consider the following parts in this tale:

- Travel
- Apparition

- Information about the appearance
- Reason for the apparition
- Performance of the requested task, if there is any.

In most of the stories, as we will also see with the other writers and some of the tales, there is a journey in which the narrator, and, in this case, little Rosamond, is away from home. Being away from home was something which would cause a bit of anxiety to inexperienced women. Both Hester and Rosamond are orphans and inexperienced; and, thus, going to stay with a family member they did not know was a factor causing fear. It is needless to say that it is far from their domestic atmosphere where all their fears multiply, namely in the middle of a hostile family. Moreover, Hester and Rosamond arrive at an old house, which is haunted, and they feel displaced because it represents the state of the family. Hester is overcome by nervousness in the new lodging, until she knows she is near the kitchen with Dorothy and with her husband near them. They are not welcome by the family member, but by the staff, i.e. they are not accepted as family, though Rosamond is. Would it have been different if, instead of a girl, the descendant had been a boy? We think it would—there are no doubts whatsoever.

The apparitions are multiple because there are many ghosts. The first apparition is the playing by Lord Furnivall, which Hester can hear from her room. Many times, she is scared by the music of the organ, which she can hear from time to time. When she asks about the music, Dorothy informs about it. It is the old Lord Furnivall who plays it. Hester cannot believe the tale, but she is terrified when she finds the old organ in the hall is unusable. We understand

that the reason why Lord Furnivall comes back from the dead with his music is in order to remind Grace, over and over again, that he still continues to be the voice of the house, and that nobody must enter the family, especially the little girl.

Nevertheless, it is not until the second time the phantom girl appears that Hester cannot know who she is, and it is again the servant Dorothy who tells her the story she is supposed to have heard in the village. She is horrified when she gets cognizant of everything. This little girl is the only one able to defy her grandfather. She comes back once and once again to demand help from women. The primary reason why she wants to come in is that she is convinced that it is her legitimate right. She is vindicating her position in the family, and her mother's as well, because it belongs to them by birth. She attacks the patriarchal order.

Then, one night, in the middle of a storm, all the ghosts appear in the hall by the organ, and they reproduce the final scene. Miss Grace, who has never been able to let her niece's spirit come into the house, and on the occasion she could have helped her, she refused to do it, is now capable of trying to stop her father from repeating the wrongdoing. We do not agree with Miss Grace when she says that what one does in youth cannot be undone at an older age. As we see it, she has changed, she has undergone a change of attitude, and she claims for their pardon. She intervenes in their name—the phantom girl and her sister. With her development, Grace cannot undo past actions, but she shows repentance and regret, which can entail eternal pardon. She needs to face her father to die and rest in peace.

3. 3. 6. Style

Elizabeth Gaskell excelled at telling stories, she was a memorable oral communicator, and, fortunately, she was superb at transforming these oral skills into written language. From our point of view, she made such a use of an excellent narrative technique that the stories seem to have been written as though they were to be read aloud. Probably, they were on paper for this purpose, due to the fact that they were published in periodicals, and not everybody was able to afford one.

Nevertheless, and apart from this fact, nowadays, as readers, we still have the sensation that the nurse is telling us the story, and that we are also sitting round the fire on a Christmas night. In the introduction of the tale, she addresses some children, and, by using the pronoun 'you', it seems that the reader is included in the audience team. It is true that she draws the readers' attention by including them into the audience group, but she also gains the readers' benevolence and compassion, because the children are orphans, just as their mother was.

Another attractive trait the story presents is that, as it is narrated in first person, it provides the story with credibility. At first, Hester starts with the story, just as a grandmother would have told their grandchildren details about their parents, and she finishes as a witness of its fatal outcome. For us, the fact that Dorothy has to supply the details of the people from the family does not diminish Hester's credibility. It is a necessary device insofar as the events occurred a long time before Hester and Rosamond went to Furnivall's Manor, and the narrator in this story also acts as a part of the events, as the story is a past experience.

“The Old Nurse’s Story” has descriptive passages when it sets out every detail about the death of Rosamond’s parents or the journey to Northumberland. It also issues painstakingly accurate descriptions of the house, but we have included it in the part dedicated to the genius loci before, as an element of Gothic writing. She explains how they settled in the house and she lets us know her anxiety about the situation they are living. But, even in these descriptive fragments, tension is raised, because the nurse can transmit to us her inner stress when she is describing the characters in the house, and she can have access to their psychology by means of her own interpretation of the people. When she describes Mrs. Stark, Miss Furnivall’s companion, she says:

she looked so cold, and grey, and stony, as if she had never loved or cared for any one; and I don't suppose she did care for any one, except her mistress; and, owing to the great deafness of the latter, Mrs. Stark treated her very much as if she were a child. (5)

As an omniscient narrator, she allows herself to give her own opinion about the characters and their feelings, as when she tells us about Miss Furnivall’s portrait:

Such a beauty she must have been! but with such a set, proud look, and such scorn looking out of her handsome eyes, with her eyebrows just a little raised, as if she wondered how any one could have the impertinence to look at her, and her lip curled at us, as we stood there gazing. (7)

After all the setting has been depicted, we start to suspect that something strange is happening when we are told that music from the organ can be heard at night. Nevertheless, our fears are not confirmed, as James tries to confound Hester by saying it is only the wind, although Bessy tells her it is the ghost of Lord Furnivall. We really know we face supernatural events when Hester tells us that, when she checks the organ, she sees it is destroyed and that her “flesh

began to creep a little” (7) Tension increases staggeringly, although the tale has a slow-paced plot, because it is not until the end that everything is revealed. From that particular moment, strange things begin to happen—the organ can be heard louder and louder, Rosamond disappears in the snow at night because the ghost child has taken her away to the Fell. Miss Grace warns Hester not to leave Rosamond alone, or near the windows. Nonetheless, the climatic event in the narration is when Rosamond tries to help the child, and the final scene happens again and Miss Grace begs for the child’s pardon. We consider that the reason why Miss Grace’s ghost reappears is to ratify the action she is now able to accomplish—to ask for forgiveness. We do, in effect, believe that, in this case, Gaskell is experimenting, by means of the supernatural, the spaces and tensions that exist between the actual and the possible. Miss Grace Furnivall had to be in front of her ghost of the past to convince herself she had achieved a different nature in herself as a mature woman—that of repentance, compassion and love. In this final act, we compare what Grace was like when she was young and what she is like now with age, although, in her final words, she cannot perceive the change. She wants to change her past actions, but could she have done something against patriarchy, mostly when she was blinded with jealousy? Not even had she tried to do so. Only now, when she faces the ghosts of the past, can she overcome the situation.

3. 3. 6. 1. Use of dialect

A number of writers of the 19th century were interested in specific dialects of their native region—Scottish for Sir Walter Scott and Margaret Oliphant, or Irish for Maria Edgeworth, among many others. Elizabeth

Gaskell does not hesitate to use dialectal expressions and vocabulary of the northern part of England without, however, going so far as Emily Brontë in her transcription of the particular pronunciation of Yorkshire, or Dickens, in the syntax of the fishermen of Yarmouth in *David Copperfield*. Gaskell developed a reputation for the skillful use of dialectal forms to show status, age, or intimacy between speakers. In this story, she uses some words like *bairn*, *wee* and *lammie* to refer to Hester's little girl.

4. MARGARET OLIPHANT

It has been in the last few decades that Oliphant's works have started to receive the attention they deserve. Oliphant was usually ignored and disregarded—she was not taken seriously. Since she had to earn money for the family, she was dismissed as an anti-feminist, old-fashioned, prudish, second-class writer. It is hardly possible for any of these labels to be true, but it is certain that she was subject to her personal circumstances. We do not think that the quantity of works is directly proportional to quality, and yet, previous criticism has focused mostly on her production, not taking into account that she left delicious literature—mostly because of its subtle and subversive inherent character.

4.1. Life

Margaret Oliphant, née Wilson, was born in 1828 in Wallyford, Midlothian, outside Edinburgh. She was the third of three surviving children and the only girl. Her parents were almost 40 when she was born. Her mother devoted herself to her daughter, and her father was a bad-tempered, minor civil servant. Her mother, Margaret Wilson, offered Margaret a model to follow when she was a widow and dedicated herself to her children.

Most probably, Margaret was educated at home by her mother and the stories about their family and Scottish origins influenced her. Margaret spent most of her life living in England and travelling in Europe but she never forgot her Scottish heritage—she was so proud of her land that she recalled it in her fiction and nonfiction. She inherited her love for writing and literature from her mother, who was very proud when she entered the Edinburgh literary society;

there, she made friends like the Moirs and the Blackwoods, who were going to help her throughout her life.

When she was 17, she started writing *Christian Melville*—not published by her brother without her permission until 1856. She wrote this novel in a moment of personal suffering connected to a rupture with her cousin Frank and her mother's sickness. It is uncertain when she began to write fiction, but she might have done it when she was nursing her mother in 1845. She was first published at twenty-one and began a prolific career for fifty years.

Yet, from that moment on, she achieved prodigious output, with her fictional writing proving to be much better than her attempts at realism. In accordance with A. Ballesteros (2005), many critics have branded her tremendous output on the basis that it did not possess enough literary quality. Still, this is only true to some extent. What we should bear in mind is that Margaret had to overcome a number of problems to perform such incredible feats of prose—she underwent terrible personal tragedies, which she herself considered were the origin and catalyst for her writing. Thus, it is for this reason that Ballesteros asserts that 'Margaret Oliphant wrote the fantastic as the exorcism of her own personal tragedies' (153)

Her mother and her brother Willie enjoyed political and somewhat radical conversations, and all the members of the family were active in trying to bring about the repeal of the Corn Law—a piece of legislation which favoured the rich landowners who kept the price of the corn too high for starving poor people to buy. Hence, as we can see, she was educated in progressive political values, and these gave her the strength and knowledge to become an independent, self-sufficient writer.

The first problems of her life arose when Willie, her brother, succumbed to alcoholism after a period of sobriety. Willie was a Presbyterian minister, but he was eventually forced to leave and not to appear in public places. He came back to his family home and did not try hard enough to find a job. He dedicated himself to copying some of his sister's novels that were published under his name. It seems that Margaret, wanting to escape the situation, decided to marry her cousin Frank, whom she had refused six months previously in 1852. It was this year when she started her relationship with *Blackwoods*. After they were married, they settled in London and her parents went to live with them. The first seven years of marriage were a disaster due to the bad relationship between Frank and Margaret's mother, Mrs Wilson. Margaret had to divide her attention between her mother and Frank's quarrels, and her daughters Maggie and Marjorie, born with only one year difference between them. Mrs Wilson died and Margaret lost a baby in 1854; though Margaret felt guilty about both events, she was also relieved to have a better home atmosphere as a result.

According to Elizabeth Jay (1995) in *Mrs Oliphant A Fiction to Herself*, writing fiction counterbalanced her sorrow for having lost her baby and her mother. Margaret could see then that her talent was not a menace for her maternity and in this way—writing—she could contribute to the family budget.

Thus, in 1854, she started with *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and not only did she achieve a regular income, but also she established herself as a critical force in Victorian literary life.

Four children had been born by 1856—Maggie (1853), Marjorie (1854), a stillborn boy (1855) and Cyril (1856)—and money was welcome. But this period of good luck would reverse very quickly. In 1857, Frank's tuberculosis worsened

and they moved to Italy looking for a better climate for him. She found herself in Italy with a sick husband, two small children, a maid servant and pregnant again. In addition, Willy was no longer able to live independently and money had to be found to help. When Frank died in Italy in 1859, she had to wait until baby Francis was born to come back home. After Cecco was born, she came back to Britain but settled in Scotland briefly. It was a difficult time for her: she was in mourning, she owed one thousand pounds to *Blackwoods*, and had had some articles rejected—thus, she thought she could not write any more. Nevertheless, in the next five years she wrote *The Doctor's Family*, *Salem Chapel*, *The Perpetual Curate* and *Miss Marjoribanks*.

Tragedy came again in 1864, when Maggie, who was ten, died suddenly in Rome—indeed, for the next twenty-six years, Margaret never mentioned Maggie's name again—and, as a consequence of her death, Margaret devoted herself completely to her two sons, Cyril (Tiddy) and Francis (Cecco). In 1865, she decided they had finished touring Europe, and, as she wanted her two sons to go to Eton, she settled in Windsor. To afford all these expenses, she had to work hard indeed. Shortly after her return, her Brother Willy's family then needed urgent economic help; he had left the Bank of England, was unemployed and got to work in rural Hungary. Margaret had to assume his debts, and bring his wife and two children to live with her in Windsor. Later, after the death of his wife, Willy, widowed and broken, also returned to his sister's and stayed with her. Five years later, Cyril went to Oxford and Frank, her nephew, went to India. Meanwhile, her brother Willy died in 1875. Cyril, who was talented but unambitious, proved to be a disaster, incapable of performing his studies at Oxford, running up high bills and having a tendency to drink. His

mother saw the beginnings of another Willy in her son. Thus, she moved to Oxford to supervise her son's examinations. Then, news arrived that her nephew Frank had died from typhoid in India. In 1880, Cecco seemed to start to show the same tendencies as Cyril at Oxford, yet he was offered intermittent employment thanks to his mother until he was advised to go abroad for his health. However, Cyril died after only four days sickness in 1890. Margaret could find no solace for the death of Cyril. In 1894, Cecco died from tuberculosis. It was after suffering all these tragedies that Margaret wrote "The Library Window". She herself was diagnosed of cancer of the colon and died in 1897.

If one thinks of Margaret Oliphant's life, one can perceive that she was, first and foremost, an unlimited devotee of children and that she dedicated herself to her domestic affairs because she was the head of the family. She was very comfortable at home, but she was also able to move in society with certain ease. Her friends highlighted her high intellect.

4. 2. Oliphant's short ghost stories

It seems that one of the few exceptions to the simplicity with which Oliphant wrote comes in the form of her tales of the supernatural. When we compare her prolific literary production in other areas, Oliphant's supernatural tales—which she did not begin writing until the age of fifty—are few and less than a dozen. It was in 1880, with the publication of "Earthbound", that our authoress coined a title under which she published most of her twelve stories and three novels that deal with supernatural events—"Stories of the Seen and

the Unseen". Presumably, readers were given free rein in these stories to delight in the domestic and Christian creed.

The majority of these tales were collected in the volume *Tales of the Seen and the Unseen* and despite their generic titles—"The Open Door", "The Portrait", *Old Lady Mary*, *A Beleaguered City*, "Earthbound" and "The Library Window"—they are distinctive and diverse in their representation of the supernatural. In one, she emphasises the theme of familial love; in another, loss; in others, mourning, guilt and the less than unsuccessful role of religious faith in comforting the bereaved. "The Library Window", one of Oliphant's finest ghost stories, is perhaps atypical in this regard. Not only is it her only supernatural story with a definite female narrator, but it is also a tale whose theme of loss is most vividly represented, not through death, but through missed opportunities and unrealised possibilities.

We could make a division between Oliphant's tales—the ones that make a graphic representation of the landscape and activities of the afterlife, and those that suppose an escape from an alternative world to ours, tied to the earth. In the first section, we can find "The Little Pilgrim" and "The Land of Darkness", while, in the second, representative stories include "The Open Door" or "The Portrait". The case of *Old Lady Mary* is different because the action takes place in heaven and on the earth. To help us with the chronology and the titles, let us list some of them, among which the bold-lettered ones are going to be dealt with in this study:

1879 ***A Beleaguered City***

1880 "Earthbound"

1882 "The Open Door", "A Little Pilgrim in the Unseen", "The Lady's Walk"

1884 ***Old Lady Mary***

1885 “**The Portrait**”, “The Land of Darkness”

1886 “An Anxious Moment”

1888 “The Dirty Little Angel”

1891 “The Golden Rule”

1892 “A Girl of the Period”

1893 “The Members wife”

1895 “A Maiden’s Mind” and “The Mysterious Bridegroom”

1896 “The Library Window”

1897 “The Land of Suspense”

Oliphant’s works were seen as controversial by the public in the second half of the nineteenth century, insofar as she confronts many conservative ideas concerning the position of women, the standards of morality and Darwin’s theory of evolution. She also denounces materialism and aestheticism by means of social protest. She was a believing Christian, albeit not an unquestioning one—perhaps because she could not find in her faith much consolation to all the tragedies of her life. In these tales, she tries to reflect her thoughts about the subject of death and about what lies beyond. It is in the liminal space, which is situated between the ‘here’ and the ‘hereafter’, where Oliphant explores all these topics. If she ponders all the subjects she explores in these border regions, along with gender matters and roles, nobody can hold her as an anti-feminist writer.

Once she wrote to *Blackwood* that she could write stories like “The Open Door” only when they came to her. Some critics have seen these stories very close to poetry. “The Open Door” is reputed to be one of the most powerful of

her supernatural tales. Bearing this in mind, it would be possible that she did not write them only for financial reasons. As we have seen in her biography, and as one of her contemporaries pointed out, the years when she wrote these stories were characterised by grief, which was to accompany her during most of her life. Nevertheless, the same writing of the tales is the evidence of her struggle against her sorrow and bereavement. Paradoxical as it may sound, we surmise one can easily see that she produced a great deal of work, finding perhaps her only aid in hard work; meanwhile, another person in the same circumstances would have felt impossible to carry out. This was her exorcism. She also let us see in some stories her inner problems of faith, namely after the death of her beloved daughter in 1864. Probably, it was hard for Margaret to accept the existence of God. She was tormented by the reason why some people had to die so prematurely, especially children.

In order to follow the development of the research we have attempted in this study. Here is a comparative table about the stories dealt in this thesis:

OLIPHANT SHORT STORIES: COMPARATIVE TABLE					
SOCIETY	NARRATOR	GHOST	TASK REQUIRED	PLOT PATTERN	GENIUS LOCI
<i>A Beleaguered City (1879)</i>					
Atheistic and Irreligious masculine society who is materialistic against feminine fervour.	Several men and women: Martin, Paul Lecamus, Bois-Sombre, Agnes, Mme Veuve.	The Dead people of the village.	Believe in God again. Recover faith. Mend sacrilege.	People are expelled from home. Apparition Information about the ghost: already known.	Semur, France inside and outside the city walls.
<i>'Earthbound' (1880)</i>					
Victorian morality. Condition of women. Penalty for idealization.	Omniscient narrator.	A predecessor woman: Maud	Castigate too much pride	Travel Several apparitions. Information about the ghost: discovered in the end.	Garden of the family House.

'The Open Door' (1881)					
Mother's absence. Lack of pardon.	The family's father.	Boy from the parish.	Repentance & ask for forgiveness from her mother.	Travel Several apparitions Information about the ghost: known by the priest.	Ruins of a castle near the house.
'Old Lady Mary ' (1885)					
Women's roles and invisibility in Victorian time. Lack of mother.	Omniscient narrator	Old Lady Mary Reason: bad conscience.	Remedy young Mary's situation: young girl dispossessed because of negligence.	1 Apparition Information about the ghost: reader knows. Only child can see her	House and Heaven.
'The Portrait' (1885)					
Women's oppression and invisibility. Lack of mother.	Young man: the ghost's son.	The dead mother of the family.	Remedy a relative's state of abandonment and help her son.	Travel 3 Apparitions Information about the ghost: already known	Family house. Drawing room.
'The Library Window' (1896)					
Women's oppression and unviability of becoming a writer. Lack of mother.	Young girl.	Young man, a writer.	Awake the girl's imagination.	Travel. Several apparitions. No information about the ghost, but recognition from the women of the story.	The town Library

Table 1: *Oliphant's short stories: comparative table.*

4. 2. 1 Society and gender issues

Most of her life was admirable and she was venerated by many Victorian women, including Queen Victoria. We have to remember that there were many widowed women at that time and that some of them had to resort to writing to survive; but, in the case of Mrs Oliphant, her success as a writer was incredible—her imagination was able to transmit the suffering of real life, of human life. She could indeed depict life as a tragedy. That is the reason why Elizabeth Jay, in *Mrs Oliphant A Fiction to Herself*, considers that her life became “a fiction even to her”, because when she wrote her life story she knew

she needed conventions and literary decisions, as well as special moments and emphases. The tension between her life and her work is patent in her *Autobiography*. She was one of the first women who had to examine her life as feminists started to do—in terms of working conditions, legitimization as a writer, and the need to compare her work to other women’s work. The ideas about the position of women, their independence from men and their own capacity to earn their own living are subverted in many of her stories. For example, in *Old Lady Mary*, she shows us the different life a woman can lead depending on her fortune. It is the story of a woman who dies after hiding a will in which she leaves her possessions to a distant relation, who is also named Mary, and for whom Lady Mary cared in life, because she was alone. Trying to joke her lawyer, Lady Mary hides the will in a secret draw in her cabinet, and, as a result, young Mary is left dispossessed because everything must go to a closer male relation, although this man is so immensely rich that this inheritance will be only “a drop of water in the ocean”.

Lady Mary dies and goes to heaven, but it takes her some time to realise she is dead. Then, she remembers her little Mary, who has been left destitute, and when she is aware of the suffering Mary will have because of her joke, she comes back to earth as a ghost, hoping she will be able to reveal the location of the will. Meanwhile, Mary has been lodged in the vicar’s house, while all the members of the community try to solve young Mary’s situation. Here we witness a commonplace situation in the nineteenth century—a girl of eighteen, impoverished and with only the basic education given to Victorian middle-class women. Her position is, thus, threatened, since she belongs to middle-class but

she will have to earn her living. Reflecting something not dissimilar to what Oliphant had to face when she was a widow and strove to maintain her family. They coincide in that they have to work for a living, because Oliphant is a widow, like old Lady Mary, and young Mary is a spinster. Everyone criticises Old Lady Mary but nobody has told poor Mary about her position. Single women became spinsters or old maids and had to find lodging within the home of distant relations if they were not able to perform a task and were poor. We must remember they had to be around a male figure or relative, and the solution was to become governesses or seamstresses. There is a remote possibility for Mary, because the doctor is tempted to marry her so as not to abandon the poor girl, but the doctor's mother forestalls the wedding—she is not a rich woman and lacks social position.

This reminds us of similar traits with the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. In the same way as Jane, Mary was a woman who was motherless and poor. Being a woman in the Victorian period was tough and would result in a hard life, particularly in those conditions. The oppressor is the patriarchal Victorian society, reflected in an entire social order, but mainly centred in a social class—rich people—and inside a family. Women's career was marriage and they were educated for it—they had to be able to sing, play an instrument, and speak French or Italian. The qualities of a Victorian gentlewoman were innocence, virtuosity, obedience and not having an intellectual opinion. It was of no importance whether they were married or not, because all of them had to be weak and helpless, without any power of decision, apart from selecting the menu or educating the children in moral values. Women had to guarantee that the home was a place of comfort and security for her family, which was far from

the stresses of the Industrial Revolution. The only solution our young Mary has is to become a governess and she decides to be one, as Jane also does. As Jane, young Mary receives an inheritance and becomes rich. The difference is that Jane marries Rochester once she does not need him economically, whereas Mary remains unmarried.

From our point of view, Margaret Oliphant does not consider marriage as the best alternative, as portrayed in Gothic novels—for Oliphant, it is interesting for young Mary to discover that she is able to sustain herself on her own, despite Lady Mary's mistake. This is a feminist standpoint and a reflection of her life, although she does not make Mary marry to be independent. From the starting point of the subject of death and mourning she evolves towards the topic of the useless and helpless role of women in a society like the Victorian one. Oliphant shows us how women can become cooperative among themselves; but, afterwards, she continues with a developing of the young girl towards self-awareness, ending with a rebellion against the airless situation.

If one does not understand clearly what was intended by Mrs Oliphant, one would think she was an anti-feminist writer, although this is not the case, as we have seen in the previous example. Mrs Oliphant and George Eliot were cognizant of the cultural oppression that Victorian women suffered when they were denied the right to vote, as well as the injustice they suffered when they were denied higher education, contrary to that afforded to men. Indeed, rich and middle-class men could have a privileged education, whilst their sisters were refused the same consideration. This is what happens in "The Open Door". A family consisting of five members have arrived from India and they settle in a house in Brentwood. One of the first questions Henry Mortimer, the narrator and

the father, has to decide is what he can do with his son's education, which is his responsibility and on which his son's future depends. He declares there is no place better than Eton in England, but, as his son is his only surviving male heir, he cannot bear to be parted from him. This was something opposed to the general feeling of the period, because it was commonly thought that sending one's son to the best college and leaving him alone there would "make a man" of him. Whereas, in this case, his son is too loved by him, but we also see that the father is including his Scottish beliefs in the equation: "The English system did not commend itself to Scotland in these days. There was no little Eton at Fettes; nor do I think, if there had been, that a genteel exotic of that class would have tempted my wife or me." (171)

It is rather curious that, having sent both her sons and her nephew to Eton, Margaret Oliphant despised it in such a way, as to make a comment like this one—except if we consider that she was deceived by the result of the education all of her men received from there, because so far all of them had had problems. By that time, Cyril was 25 and he had embarked upon a career resembling that of his uncle Willie, and Cecco seemed to be following suit. Mrs Oliphant was aware that her friends considered her son's laziness to be her failure, because of their having a widowed mother. It was also a common belief in the period—children with single mothers needed a male presence in the house. Notwithstanding, it will be by the guidance of his dead mother that the spirit of the little child will be redeemed. Willie looks for her mother, not her father.

According to E. Jay (1995), Oliphant is defying the conventional rules by means of the supernatural to show Victorian middle-class constructions of

gender, and, in our opinion, by means of that, she shows us in this story how a male's education was considered much more important than that of a female.

Women's education posed no problems—Henry Mortimer does not have to decide much about his two daughters' education, because he recognises they needed special training in those days. But we see they only practised some disciplines, such as painting and drawing, like many other women in Victorian times, although he wants them to be more prepared than their mother, who seemed to be educated to be the 'Angel in the House'. We do believe this opinion about being better than their mother stems from a woman like Oliphant, who is trying to subvert the feminine role in society but only subtly.

The two girls also found at Brentwood everything they wanted. They were near enough to Edinburgh to have masters and lessons as many as they required for completing that never-ending education which the young people seem to require nowadays. Their mother married me when she was younger than Agatha, and I should like to see them improve upon their mother!' (171-172)

As we can interpret from Mortimer's words, one of the daughters is now older than her mother when he married her, but he does not seem to be concerned by this. Moreover, he admits that young people, whether women or men, need more education than the one offered.

Mrs Oliphant moved at two different levels—between her husband and her family—and it was hard for her to progress, precisely because of her difficult family. Sometimes she did not know how to maintain her personal authority, which she did not actually recognise as correct, but which she nevertheless had to display in front of them. Mrs Oliphant thought that men did not value the task women did in their household labours for them either, and, consequently, that ultimately reduced their self-esteem. During some campaigns for professions for

women, she had the feeling that many women of the middle classes failed to understand their labour at home was valuable. According to Jay (1995), what Mrs Oliphant was doing was to defend the right of women to support a man; and, if society considered that unorthodox, it was because the codes of conduct had become old-fashioned and defunct.

She never thought her work interfered with her domesticity, she felt she could do both things—as society dictated women had to be in the home—but, for her, it was also true that women were not considered as they should have been considered: they were undervalued. Of course, this is all related to the ideals of the Victorian society. From the very beginning of the tale, Mortimer shows a different attitude towards his son; he considers Roland “the light of his eyes” (175), while—far from despising them—the girls are only “dear girls”. Nevertheless, throughout the story, there is an exclusion of women from any active role, to conserve the masculine preponderant order. It is as if Oliphant was denouncing the unfair treatment given to women, whereas it is a dead mother who saves her son’s soul. In effect, it is only through the agency of a mother that the home is available for the family. In the story, women are kept outside the events, and are relegated to nursing and keeping their home in order. Never, during the events, does Mortimer make his wife participate in any of the actions or tells her about the ghost, not even does he reveal to her what kind of illness Roland is suffering. Although he loves his wife and his daughters, he never breaks his silence as regards the ghost. But, why does he behave thus? He has the certainty that women are irrational and they would firmly believe in the ghost. Mortimer tries to solve the problem to prevent his son from becoming a ghost-seer.

Just as his father is within the patriarchal order, so is Roland. Although he is a young boy, he is integrated into his culture and excludes his mother and sisters from his own experiences. He contemplates the possibility of women being scared: "I said to myself, I won't frighten mother and the girls."(177) Roland considers only men can face those matters. This is why, when he has to tell his father what happens, it is the child who gives orders to his father in a reversal of roles. And, in addition, Mortimer accepts that the child expels his mother from the room, and his father watches her leave, as if it were a usual attitude.

We should not forget that Oliphant made use of gentle humour in respect to the abilities of both sexes. This was easy for her to understand, due to the fact that, in her life, she had to assume both roles. As a consequence of that, sometimes, in her ghost stories, she portrays powerful loyalties between women and supernatural forces, and also some men who are able to accept a woman's perspective, and, thus, find a solution. The minister in "The Open Door" is the one who is able to restore peace for Willie, by means of the inclusion of his mother; contrary to what Mortimer has done—he excluded women—the minister includes them. With the simple gesture of orientating the boy's spirit, showing sympathy and understanding, the problem is solved. This mixture of men's characters leads us to think of Oliphant's men, who were rather unsuccessful. Going one step further, Willie was his brother's name, and, at that time, he had been expelled from the church. In the end, Mortimer comes to a new position: he feels sympathy and pity for the ghost—it is as if Oliphant was speaking through him. Mortimer's development as a character let us venture that he is taking a maternal point of view: he believes in the ghost and he

associates the ghost Willie who is at a loss with Roland who is also disorientated and in need of help.

As Jay (1995) points out in *A Beleaguered City*, the women are also set aside. Even the mayor Dupin recognises their undesirable position and declares:

Agnes with the other women sitting apart on one side and waiting. I recognised even in the excitement of such a time that theirs was no easy part. To sit there silent, to wait till we had spoken, to be bound by what we decided, and to have no voice - yes, that was hard. (44-45)

A Beleaguered City, which was written in 1878, presents us the possession of a whole city, the Burgundian city of Semur. Although at the beginning Dupin declares that women are ignored, throughout the novella we attend an unexpected and rapid reversal of roles. One evening, after one of the citizens of Semur declares that their true God is money; all the people can see a mysterious sign on the gates of the cathedral. The sign says the inhabitants are residing there illegitimately, and thus, they are all expelled from the city.

The women of the town are the first to understand that the city has been occupied by the dead, whereas men look for a logical justification. Therefore, women's mission is to make men understand that there is a necessity of spiritual values. Ironically, the tale finishes saying that life in Semur continues as it did before, with men in their predominant role and without any change in their attitude towards women, although it has been thanks to their spiritual values that the city has been saved.

Oliphant's tales of the Unseen are based on the exploration of men's transgression and what comes out of it. If we focus on her first story of the Unseen, *A Beleaguered City*, Oliphant reflects on what can happen when men

abandon their spirituality on behalf of money, whereas the spirituality is definitely connected to women, who are able to save the city. It is necessary for us to point out a collective of women who appears in this story—the nuns. The nuns are ruling the Hospital of Saint Jean and they are angry because patients have been complaining about their masses, because they disturb people. Both Dupin and M. le Curé cast suspicions concerning the nuns—which means that nuns are suspected by both the clerical and secular power. Dupin is preoccupied with the safeguarding of the patriarchal order, and so, he abhors women who have the same liberty of thought and decision as men. Dupin's idea about women is disturbed by the nuns, because they have used the religious faith in favour of the secular power. The nuns find sustenance in the money-worshipping underclass, which Dupin disdains, since they show to have a religious culture.

Women are able to see the spirits who are their own dead—ghosts of family members. Women consider Dupin is guilty that the Unseen are in the town, inasmuch as he prohibited the nuns to celebrate their mass. In contrast to women, the curate blames the sisters of Saint Jean for the darkness, by saying “It is never well to offend women, M. le Maire. Women do not discriminate the lawful from the unlawful: so long as they produce an effect, it does not matter to them.”(23) He seems to suggest women usually have the power of good decisions, and they can stay far enough from men, when controlling the social order. Oliphant is conveying us the power the nuns had in the middle of the nineteenth century, and she is highlighting that they were considered as a threat by men. Spinsters and nuns were ill-considered in Victorian times, because they defied the patriarchal order of the family, and, moreover, nuns were thought to

be connected with the supernatural. Nevertheless, it is the socio-political power, in this case Dupin, who obviates them.

Throughout her stories, Margaret Oliphant plays with the metaphor of the visibility or invisibility of women. It is important whether the women are the ghosts or not; whether they are those who can see them and why; how they feel; and what the hidden message is. In this case, we will reflect on the invisibility of some women that appear in the short tales we are dealing with. There is a moment when Lady Mary is walking around as a ghost and everybody is going home, but nobody can see her. Oliphant is reflecting how women could be ignored in Victorian society, and, whereas in “The Portrait” the woman is unseen but heard, in this case, it is not so—she is completely ignored:

... but to be thus left outside of life, to speak and not be heard, to stand unseen, astounded, unable to secure any attention! ... For a moment she stood looking round her, lost and alone in the wide universe; no one to speak to her, no one to comfort her: outside of life altogether. (240)

Of course, when Lady Mary was alive, she had never felt like this before, because she was a rich widow who was taken into consideration. From this perspective, she had accomplished her goal in life: she had got married and had an heir. In addition, she had money and good social relations. But Oliphant is trying to make the character repent for her trivial behaviour; she suffers the indifference society can impose on a woman if she is disposed. Lady Mary feels terror in front of the possibility that ignorance could last forever:

What if she should be condemned to wander forever among familiar places that knew her no more, appealing for a look, a word, to those who could no longer see her, or hear her cry, or know of her presence?” (240)

Women of the Victorian period were supposed to wander in a kind of second world inside familiar places. The same occurs with Maud in "Earthbound". Maud is a girl of nineteen who is condemned to stroll in her house dominions eternally because of having felt too much pride of her possessions. The first encounters with the young man, Edmund, are characterised by a lack of communication, as she thinks he cannot see her. She confesses to him that she is always around, but nobody can see her. She recognises that, sometimes, it is difficult to be among people if nobody sees you, but it is much better if somebody can see you or talk to you: "It is not hard: when you are used to it, when now and then you meet someone who sees you, it is not so hard. I am a little hard sometimes, but very happy now." (156)

When success in the workplace began to arrive for women, Oliphant addressed the new phenomenon. In "The Portrait", Oliphant denounces the complete invisibility of Victorian women through the disappearance of the drawing-room, yet that does not mean that her stories are mourning the death of woman, but mourning the absence of a female voice instead. Leila Walker, in "Ghosts in the House: Margaret Oliphant's Uncanny Response to Feminist Success", says that Oliphant's ghost stories emphasise the significance of women within the existing patriarchal system and she tries to make obvious the uncanny effects of their absence. This demonstrates that, when the mother is absent, the disaster is absolute, and that the centre where the mother can be found is in drawing-rooms, as the representation of femininity. As a consequence of that, the drawing room in "The Portrait" is central. In this story, the drawing room is considered the centre of cultural notions, as well as feminine identity, and, in this case, it has been closed since the mother died,

and thus, the boy has never been exposed to feminine culture. As far as he remembers:

The drawing room I was aware of only as a place of deadly good order, into which nobody ever entered. ... My father did not like the room, which probably was not wonderful, though it never occurred to me in those early days to inquire why. (276)

Then, his father takes him to the drawing room because he wants to show him something, and the impression he has of it is not the same he recalls. It has plenty of light—the portrait is there and there is an identification of the portrait with the female presence, which enlightens his life: “The drawing-room was already lit with a flickering array of candles upon the mantelpiece and along the walls, producing the pretty starry effect which candles give without very much light.” (285)

Most of Oliphant’s stories of the supernatural eliminate women from key spaces, as is the case of the drawing-room; but even the house itself is used in other stories and, by means of this device, she examines the uncanny results of separating women from the domestic. According to Leila Walker (2009), the feminine absence in the home was considered a menace; when women gained property rights, they could be independent from their husbands at the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps Oliphant’s stories were a way to re-inscribe the importance of the woman in the home and vice versa, without creating a gap between them. Walker says that, for Oliphant, home is similar to a spiritual space, which is created through family relationships, and she adds that this place is easy to get to through the mother’s intervention. We tally with Walker’s opinion. As we see it, this kind of triangular relationship is present in some tales. The ghostly presence in “The Open Door” can only rest in peace when he

knows his mother is waiting for him. His home is not in the physical place, where Willie lived, but where his mother is. Young Phillip in “The Portrait” cannot feel at home until his mother establishes the feminine figure in the family.

In Oliphant’s stories, the characters are terrified only when the normal order of the household is disrupted, and the stories conclude when the normal functioning is restored. This restitution is complete with the affirmation of the mother-child relationship that was disrupted with the mother’s death. In the case of “The Portrait”, we believe that the mother-child relationship restoration happens in two ways—first, in the sense that Philip learns to see in a womanly way, and, second, in the sense that his father is able to do right by his wife’s relative through the intervention of his son, and so, harmony between the dead and the living is restored.

Oliphant has also demonstrated that Victorian women do not need to be seen to be heard, and this will be repeated in her tales about absent mothers, such as “The Open Door”, “The Portrait”, and *Old Lady Mary*. Again, in “The Portrait”, there is Philip, who has been haunted by his mother’s spirit. He does not know what message he has to deliver to his father, but it is really vital that he transmits it. Possessed by his mother, he comes into his father’s study several times and it is clear that his father knows the meaning of his visits. At the end of it all, Philip convinces his father to do right by his wife’s poor relative; but the climax comes when the young woman uncovers her face and the father thinks she is Agnes, his wife. In our opinion, it is then that he really understands what the spirit of his dead wife was trying to say.

Once more, the tale presents two characters who were at a loss—Philip, because he does not know what to do with his life until the spirit of his mother guides him, and Philip's father who has lost his 'Angel in the House'. In this vein, our ghost has appeared because she had a task to perform.

Another story also concerned with femininity, the condition of women and a drawing-room is "The Library Window". The drawing room was considered the neuralgic part of the house, in Gaskell and Oliphant's words. However, this was considered by extension the place where the women's stimulation and imagination could be awakened. The story begins with the narrator recalling her stay at Saint Rule's, which, in reality, is Saint Andrew's. She has been sent there to spend the summer with her tolerant aunt Mary, who allows her to use the recess in the window-seat of the large drawing-room of the house, which is situated across the street from the university Library. It is this Library that the title indicates as the main source of interest, and it seems that the question is about the window in the library. At first, the main aim is to discover whether the window is real, painted, or a "living" window, as the girl says. But, nevertheless, the first-person narration of a young girl may let us think that the real objective lies elsewhere and it is in her developing consciousness. It is one of the few Oliphant's stories in which the central figure and the narrator is a woman. The girl starts the story from the recess in her aunt's house and gives her opinion about it: "...and even I, who am so fond of that deep recess where I can take refuge from all that is going on inside, and make myself a spectator of all the varied story out of doors, withdraw from my watch-tower."(364)

This window, which the girl takes as refuge from the outside boredom of the world and from the old female customs therein, opens up the opportunity of

observing life outside the drawing-room. It is implied that the recess is something similar to Mrs Oliphant's study in Windsor, which was like a second drawing-room, where everything happened. We have to remember that the drawing-room is also important in this story and it is the nucleus of feminine life. It is in the drawing-room that the narrator's spare time is divided between books and sewing, though this last activity is only performed when the sewer feels 'moved' to do it. From our point of view, this activity is related to the patriarchal conception of women. Sewing is an activity that women perform silently and in a way that makes them invisible, and could, moreover, be seen as a form of subjugation. In this case, the girl does not often perform this task and her aunt does not punish her for not doing it, contrary to what her mother does when she sees her rambling around the house. We can say that this is a story about female sensibility, although the heroine is never named. Like many women in the nineteenth century, she is hidden in her own recess, though that signifies her physical and mental qualities are limited—she spends her day in her aunt's house, doing women's things, until she is in the recess and can dream.

Although Mrs Oliphant's tales and ghost stories do not symbolise marriage as the aim of a woman's moral fulfilment, she does not reject her marriage and motherhood as a feminine goal, because she considers that women in these roles can actually achieve moral maturity. This is perhaps what she intends to say in "The Library Window"—the women who had the vision are not married, because they are dreamers and do not have the character and temperament of Victorian women. Let us now examine the case of "The Library Window". This tale was published the year before Oliphant's death and Jay

(1995) considers it as “the most accomplished and least self-indulgent account of the woman’s writer predicament that Mrs Oliphant ever produced”. (263)

Gates, doors and windows are usual images in Oliphant’s tales. These barriers permit people and ghosts to almost meet and touch. For Oliphant, these everyday doors, windows or gates are a recurrent symbol of the flexible nature of the threshold that separates the human world from the hereafter world of the spirits. They may be opened or closed. This will depend on the meaning of the circumstances and individuals. Apart from these ideas, we can consider them as metaphors of human attitude towards supernatural events.

“The Open Door”, as its name suggests, presents us a mysterious, open doorway. From the beginning, Mortimer feels as though life was gone from that place; but the voice of the ghost in the ground and Roland’s suffering are represented by the open doorway.

No offices remained to be entered - pantry and kitchen had all been swept out of being; but there stood the doorway open and vacant, free to all the winds, to the rabbits and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing - closed once, perhaps, with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning. (173-174)

Mortimer will afterwards discover that the open door conveys a meaning. It is the door that gives Willie, the ghost, access to his home, although he has misinterpreted the door as his home. It is not until the priest indicates to him that is only the entrance to the other world where his mother is.

We endorse the opinion that, in “The Library Window”, the window recess is pivotal, just as the window in the library is crucial, too. The trope of the window as an imprisonment for women is recurring in some of Oliphant’s short tales. As many women in gothic stories, our girl can see the world through a

window, or, as we interpret it, as a spectator of life. She can only read or sew in the window seat, from where she can sometimes flee with her imagination. She is due to sew, but she prefers reading. This figure appears also in “Earthbound”, when Edmund is looking for his women in white, and it is through a window that he can see a seamstress sewing at home—as a reference to women’s behaviour. In the case of “The Library Window”, the girl wants to become a writer, as the man she can see in the other window. Curiously enough, she is doubly barred—there are two windows, and the second prevents her from entering the masculine world. A writing man belongs to the public sphere, and thus, to the masculine domain. The greatest deception for the girl is when she realises there is no possibility for her. When she comes back as a widow, there are many things in her life which are different from those days she was behind the window. First of all, the girl, now a woman, is not imprisoned in the window sill.

In the case of “Earthbound”, we can see that the barrier between the two worlds is the gate of the garden where Edmund can see Maud. It is only when they are at the other side of the gate that they can talk, but they cannot have physical contact—Edmund is unable to grab Maud’s hands. It is equally true that Maud can enter into, and wander in the house, but nobody can see her in the house only in the garden. The boundary between the two worlds is situated in the gate.

We also consider that there is, notwithstanding, the aforesaid trope which leads us to a connection with women’s oppression and imprisonment—the portrait. In the case of Maud, the secret remains enclosed in two places: firstly, in the portrait, where Edmund can know who she is; and, secondly, in the attic.

The attic, as well as in *Jane Eyre*, is a recess from where women cannot go out if nobody helps them out, and, at the same time, it is where everything the family wants to keep secret is left aside or hidden. Maud's identity was what had to remain unknown in the family.

Another story which uses a women's picture is "The Portrait". This is placed in the drawing room and her husband visits it frequently. Her spirit needs her son to escape from her seclusion. Apart from being in the portrait, this is inside the drawing-room, which is, in turn, closed.

We will pay special attention to *A Beleaguered City*, because it is rather dissimilar to the others. In this tale, the dead have besieged the city and the inhabitants have been expelled from their homes. Ironically though it may seem, when the spirits possess the city, the inhabitants are dispossessed of everything. The inhabitants are completely barred from entering the city, because the city wall door has been closed. The other world spirits are separated from the inhabitants of Semur by the wall—the spirits are inaccessible, unheard, invisible and distant. Differently from *A Beleaguered City*, in "Earthbound", we can observe the extreme proximity between the human and the ghost.

The figure of the ghost provided Victorian writers with an extraordinary presence that reinforced their beliefs in their lives and spirituality in front of such an unpleasant materialism. Ghosts did not solely represent the afterlife, but also the being, reasserting the power of life. Ghosts, in a figurative sense, could be trusted by people who looked forward to material prosperity. This was a double-edged sword. It attracted people who denied the idea of God and who believed in the supernatural, and, at the same time, in science and technology.

Materialism seems to subvert the centrality of home in Oliphant's stories, but Walker says that independence is not totally opposed to a situation which connects home and family because the home that Oliphant refers to and is so central in feminine life is a static entity. For a Victorian woman, independence was relative—it did not mean independence in the sense that men used to enjoy, it only meant women did not have to ask for help. In that sense, Little Mary attains her independence in her old home, a static entity, but using all the changes that have taken place to enable her to earn a living. She has used the space to create her own home alone. Conversely, Willie's ghost in "The Open Door" mistakes the door of the house for the mother-centred home; the mother is the symbol of the home—she is the mediator who lets everybody have access to the familial relationship. Old Lady Mary fails to see that Little Mary has learned the ability to create her own home. Maud, the ghost in "Earthbound" has confused her possessions with her home. She loves her material possessions and obviates her familiar relationships or relatives; she has created her home in the physical space that is the reason why she is condemned. In exchange, Mrs Beresford is in mourning, because she has lost one of her sons, but is trying to maintain her family out of grief and bereavement, since she knows the true essence of home.

4. 2. 2 Narrators

In his article "The Paradoxes of Oliphant's Reputation" inside *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive* edited by D. J. Trela, John Stock Clarke states that some critics see Oliphant's works as conventional. Nevertheless, Stock contends that this view corresponds to a superficial reading

of her works, due to the fact that Oliphant was very careful and it seemed she did not want to defy the canon. Yet, it was clear she did not write about sexual matters openly, and she made few experiments with the structured family she admired so much. Anyhow, she knew about bereavement and grief, which led her to explore the dark sides of human nature. Sometimes, her short stories, as well as her novels show us disturbed or unstable people who tend to strange and irrational behaviour, which sometimes results in self-deception, monomania or melancholia.

Margaret Oliphant does not have a stereotyped kind of narrator. In her minor works, and namely in the stories we are concerned with, she presents dissimilar kinds of reporters. We allow ourselves to call them reporters, because they are relating us extraordinary facts connected with the other world. Oliphant's narrators will range from melancholic people, like Lecamus in *A Beleaguered City*, including the narrators that show a strange and irrational behaviour, as it is the case of Mortimer in "The Open Door" and the young man in "The Portrait", to the almost obsessive and self-deceived girl of "The Library Window" or the completely obsessed Edmund in "Earthbound". As narrators are important figures inside the stories, we will pay special attention to them.

"The Open Door" is related by Colonel Mortimer, who tells us about his family experiences with the supernatural at their rented estate outside Edinburgh. The entire story seems to be immersed in a masculine framework and viewed from a masculine perspective, but, in the end, it is not so—it is gently reversed. At the beginning, Mortimer is outside his home, but he has to come back because he is urgently needed to help his sick son. From that moment on, the shadow of death accompanies him. Moreover, as a curiosity,

his name, “Mortimer”, comes from French and means ‘dead see’, which comes to bode a bad omen—the voice of the boy and his sick child, reinforced by the open door. Mortimer is perhaps worried because of the sensitive nature of his son and this makes him think Roland can cross the boundaries between reality and the supernatural, and then, he can lose his most precious treasure.

As we have mentioned before, Mortimer has a different attitude towards Roland than towards his daughters. This could be due to his own convictions as a man. To put it more simply, Mrs Oliphant had her male characters freed from domestic ties, but they are anxious to protect their sons—which is very important in the symbolic order. Mortimer is a man and a retired soldier; these two facts oblige him to educate Roland in order to accomplish the masculine ideal of virtue and strength. However, sometimes men fail when they are just sons or brothers—like the spirit of Willie in the same story, Willie fails to look out for his mother. Nevertheless, while Roland and Mortimer are talking about the ghostly occurrences, their discussions enumerate all the qualities a man needs—courage, rationality, moral power and governance.

In her ghost stories, we can see lawyers, doctors, clerics and squires exercising their profession in the most domestic of environments, contrary to women, who cannot act with the same freedom as they do, because their own little world allows them few opportunities of being heroines. In her articles, Oliphant denounced the disadvantages of those youths who had to go to India for promotion, because they had otherwise bleak prospects. The narrator of “The Open Door”, for example, has just come from India with his family after a long period of absence, and before starting a more comfortable life.

The story continues and one day the boy runs home from school and he can hear a tormented cry when he passes by a ruined building. As he thinks someone is in terrible trouble, he sought his father's help, and, in the meanwhile, he becomes ill, but, curiously, not of fear, but with "anxiety for the suffering spirit". When Henry listens to the story, he is incredulous; he claims to be a sceptical man:

I am a sober man myself, and not superstitious — at least any more than everybody is superstitious. Of course I do not believe in ghosts; but I don't deny, any more than other people, that there are stories which I cannot pretend to understand. My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer; for that generally means a hysterical temperament and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children. But that I should take up his ghost and right its wrongs, and save it from its trouble, was such a mission as was enough to confuse any man. (181)

From the text, we can infer that he is not worried about the ghost, but the reason for his suffering is that his son can see a ghost with all the consequences entailed—men who can see ghosts are thought to be lunatics, hysterical or simply weak, because the supernatural sensibility belongs to women. Hence, with the ability to perceive the ghost and not only to understand its suffering, but to also ask his father to aid him in its salvation, the boy shows an aspect of his character that is not considered proper for a boy and is more usually associated with a girl or a woman. Seeing a ghost is the antithesis of manliness, and so, his reaction seems normal: : "My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer; for that generally means a hysterical temperament and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children" (181). The ghost comes to a second level because it means a disrupted behaviour, and Mortimer prefers it to be a hallucination or a fever, which may nevertheless entail his son's death. However, according to

Jay, events will force him to recognise the inadequacy of a manly code and to reconsider other facets of life inside his code of manliness.

In an age when rationalism was so important, our father, a colonel cannot be anything other than a sceptical man—what Oliphant is doing is rejecting rationalism by showing the father's attitude of incredulity when confronted by his son's vision; and, in this way, we think that Oliphant intensifies the impact on the reader when the narrator changes his point of view as regards the facts.

When Henry Mortimer hears his son's account of story, the first person he visits in his investigations is a countryman called Jarvis, who is a simple man from the area and who at first refutes everything Mortimer tells him. He tries to pretend nothing happens in the haunted place, but, when he is on the verge of telling Mortimer what he knows, his wife threatens him that it is not appropriate to talk, because nobody else believes the place is haunted, arguing that important men, like the doctor or the priest, actually laugh at the idea. Interestingly, Jarvis' wife is the more dominant of the two, and, in so being, she does not conform to the notion of the 'Angel in the House' insofar as she does not belong to a middle-class—she is, in fact, an ignorant woman from a low class. This opens up new points about the different perceptions of women of different classes generally held at the time.

When Jarvis' wife realises Mortimer knows that she believes in the strange phenomenon, she tries to dismiss it as a result of her own ignorance:

'But you believe in it', I said, turning upon her hastily. The woman was taken by surprise. She made a step backward out of my way.

'Lord, Cornel, how ye frichten a body! Me! — there 's awfu' strange things in this world. An unlearned person doesna ken what to think. But the minister and the gentry they just laugh in your face. Inquire into the thing that is not! Na, na, we just let it be.' (187)

This woman, who is outside the codes of gentility, relieves Mortimer's burden; not even in this case does he ask his wife. Although the circumstances are beyond his control—he would have managed better a hard situation in India as a colonel—he obviates his women. Nevertheless, it is women's vision which he needs to save his son.

Probably, Oliphant stresses the masculine codes of the Victorian, while she subverts them. Since Mortimer tells us the story from inside, he modifies his convictions about the supernatural, and, paradoxically, he lengthens his rationality. In the end, it is the Colonel who is more affected than his son with the ghostly encounter.

Similarly told from inside domestic life, Oliphant offers us another story, "The Portrait". The narrator in this story is the young man of the family, and the tale is recounted from his own perspective, just as in "The Open Door" and "The Library Window". Our young man seems to share the great distress and anxiety the girl of "The Library Window" suffers, as well as that of the father of "The Open Door". But gender will determine two things as regards the men and the young girl—how they comport themselves in front of a supernatural situation, and how they are treated by the people who surround them. It coincides with "The Open Door" in that the story is given to us from a masculine perspective.

The young Philip Canning, who has come back from India without any success, and who is, moreover, ill, has to face a state of affairs which he finds incongruent as well as uninteresting, and a rational explanation escapes from him. He confesses at the beginning that he assumed his mother's death as many other children did, without questions or grief. It seems that her mother's absence did not worry him—he declares that the housekeeper "was the only

female influence in the house” (276) Nevertheless, he identifies his void surroundings, his home, with a void in his life:

The drawing-room I was aware of as a place of deadly good order, into which nobody ever entered ... Sometimes I gazed into it as a child from without, wondering at the needle work on the chairs, the screens, the looking-glasses which never reflected any living face. (276)

Contrary to what one can expect from a motherless child, his acute awareness and sensibility seem to be intact, as well as his infrequent perception for supernatural events. Almost immediately after the coming of his mother’s portrait, Philip experiences the first visitation or occurrence, as he dubs it. The manifestation is penetratingly corporeal, and with such vehemence, that it is not found in any other of Oliphant’s short stories:

My heart leapt up and began beating wildly in my throat, in my ears, as if my whole being had received a sudden and intolerable shock. The sound went through my head like the dizzy sound of some strange mechanism, a thousand wheels and springs, circling, echoing, working in my brain. I felt the blood bound in my veins, my mouth became dry, my eyes hot, a sense of something insupportable took possession of me. I sprang to my feet, and then I sat down again ... and felt my pulse: it was beating furiously, about 125 throbs in a minute. (296)

As we infer from the passage, Philip is completely fatigued when the possession finishes, and noteworthy is that he is aware of being “a helpless instrument without a will of mine”. (306) Similarly to “The Open Door”, the first person to be asked about this anomalous behaviour is the doctor, and many other doctors, of course. Curiously, in both stories, none of the medical remedies they can be given are effective, because they cannot allay the young man’s pain. None of the young men need a scientific response, but a spiritual one.

In “The Portrait”, it is Philip himself who discovers the real purpose of his dead mother’s visitations, when he accepts a relative of his, a young woman who is an orphan and her mother’s niece. As Judith van Oosterom-Pooley puts it, in her book *The Whirligig of Time: Margaret Oliphant in Her Later Years*, it is when the narrator Philip is united to young Agnes and his father gets in contact with the portrait that they all regain the sense of domesticity. We agree with the idea insofar as it has been thanks to the agency of the mother that they have had their home restored and that there is another potential mother.

Differently from the other stories we have previously seen, we are guided by a feminine narrator in “The Library Window”. This time we will enjoy the tale from the point of view of a woman. Our unnamed girl narrator is at the time of the events in the middle point between childhood and adulthood.

As Jay (1995) remarks, the position of the girl cannot be clearly considered as that of spectator-narrator, since the information is vague and it is also imprecise about the real subject of the story and the girl’s temperament. The reader is not told if she has been sent to St Rule’s as a place for recuperation, as a place to correct her character or as a punishment:

Everybody had said, since ever I learned to speak, that I was fantastic and fanciful and dreamy, and all the other words with which a girl who may happen to like poetry, and to be fond of thinking, is so often made uncomfortable. People don't know what they mean when they say fantastic. It sounds like Madge Wildfire or something of that sort. (364)

As deduced from the quote, she is considered to be completely different to what a woman of the period should be—she is ‘fantastic’, ‘fanciful’ and ‘dreamy’. Indeed, she displays some of the characteristics a woman writer would need. She deems her capacity to do two things at the same time

something good, as Aunt Mary says, and claims to have a special way of seeing things, but she also knows this can be seen as very obnoxious, like the behaviour of Madge Wildfire, who was thought to be mad. So, perhaps, she has been sent to this conservative community with the hope that she can change her temperament. There is another possibility that some critics have considered—the girl suffers from hysteria. If this were so, Oliphant would be subverting this idea concerning the female malady. Moreover, Aunt Mary believes the girl is similar to her. The probing question will be whether Aunt Mary considers her a woman “of our blood” (398), although these words do not define who and how ‘these women’ are. But we do not think she regards herself as a hysterical woman, but a dreamer instead. This comes also reinforced by the narrator’s self-recognition that her capacity of dreaming has been part of her natural characteristics since she was a child. This fantasising attribute is not a characteristic trait of puberty, but of intellectualism. She has been treated in her family as a different woman because of her character, and this reason has led her to be similar to that community of women who have denied themselves motherhood and marriage for the sake of learning. The heroine feels terribly, as suggested by the negative words used to describe her and her anomalous characterisation—she has felt like ‘the other’ even at home. Social conditions are once more a burden for women. Nevertheless, Oliphant always depicts ‘dreaminess’ in the girl as a positive quality, although she lets us see the ambient of hostility towards the narrator’s characteristic, as though it were an ethical or emotional failure.

The heroine of the story becomes obsessed with the window of the Library, which is opposite her recess. This window is not visible to all the

people, and the heroine can only see it when the light is perfect, in the twilight, when it is fading. She observes the Library in successive evenings, and, every day, she discovers a new thing: a room, a bookcase, a desk; but the climax is reached when she discovers a young man writing at the desk— just in the same way it was thought Sir Walter Scot used to write at his house. The more she sees through the window, the more absorbed she becomes and the more attentive she is to the vision. Gradually, this vision stands for reality—it becomes more real than the life around her. People around her think she is daydreaming, and she feels humiliated and furious because she cannot see reality, and her vision causes her values to be distanced from the values of the old generation, among which, she now lives.

The girl is completely entrapped by the vision, in which she can see the young man face to face. She cannot see him clearly, the lines of his face are weak, and she only gives general details—he is young and beardless. We can infer that there is a mental progression through which the girl can see more and more. This skill the girl develops in connection with the vision of the writing man can imply that the scholar represents the projection of her involuntary wishes to be as free as a man. Intellectually, she has been mocked at home, and her mental health has been questioned in St Rules. There is no need to say that she feels like an outsider in both places, and it is thanks to her ability to see the library window and the man that she can escape from her recess. We have already mentioned that Oliphant uses the metaphor of the window to indicate the imprisonment women suffered in Victorian times. In this case, the window seat is placed in a corner of the drawing room, apart from the social life it boasts, just in a place between the outside and the inside world. In this border

space, the girl feels at ease. Here, where she is completely self-confident of her abilities, she can see through the window. It is also here where Oliphant solves questions based on gender, thanks to fantasy. It seems she tries to merge female sexuality with the female intellectual development. Metaphorically, the narrator is crossing a boundary—a line that blurs the two worlds; the girl breaks the rules of Saint Rule and arrives at a new space, that of Oliphant's fantasy.

The narrator is invited to go to the library and that visit does not only consist of a walk across the street. The girl is crossing the line which will define her sexuality. She has become an adult. She wears a white dress, like a bride. Nevertheless, the girl's experience is appalling—the room where she can mix her mental and sexual desire does not exist in the building. As a consequence of that, she suffers a rational collapse and a physical breakdown.

Yet, at the end of the story, the heroine does look at him face to face or, at least, that is what she thinks—she could delineate his face when she was looking at the vision. Thus, Jay (1995) suggests that it could be her own image that she was seeing, but she did not recognise herself. Jay posits that, given the time of the day of the visions, she may have been actually seeing her own reflection on the inside of her own window, but because writing was perceived to be a male occupation, she transferred the image in her fantasy to an imaginary male figure. Thus, for an imaginative girl who sees the writing task as a male prerogative, like that of her father, the possibility of attaining a status as a woman writer is considered dangerous, alluring, and, at the same time, impossible.

The greeting of the young man through the window has sexual connotations, hence symbolising her fulfilment as a woman, though she does

not understand this. However, when she comes back to St Rule's after having experienced marriage, childbirth and widowhood, she realises nothing has been comparable to the vision of the window, and her then sense of fulfilment. Indeed, on her way home from abroad, alone, recently widowed and in need, she fleetingly spots the same face in a crowd—perhaps this is symbolic of her once more being free from male power and being able to achieve her potential as a writer. Jay says that the last paragraph of the story comes back to other characters, and this is because Oliphant wants to make us see that the main focus was not the Library window, but an interwoven net of characters in which our writer appears. Oliphant can be seen to represent herself in the heroine as a young woman and a story-teller, also in Aunt Mary, with her eventful past but now content to be quiet and preoccupied by the younger generation, and, finally, in Lady Carnabee, only interested in bringing to light the talents of other's by being a good critic.

Although Oliphant wrote *A Beleaguered City* in 1879, even before some of the stories we have previously commented, she presents us a mature narrative with multiple narrators. It has an exquisitely woven plot, and dissimilar ways of living the events are recounted by the different narrators. Moreover, according to Esther Schor in "The Haunted Interpreter in Oliphant's Supernatural Fiction", in the middle of a critical event, she makes the reader attend dissimilar interpretations. With these versions, our writer makes us see how gender and class can authorise diverse understandings. We can consider the text as an allegory of interpretation, due to the fact that it is the entire community who analyses the facts. The text exists because Dupin writes the official history of the city's possession by the dead, and, in order to achieve a

more faithful report, he asks other characters to help him. As a result, he should have a broad verification, rather than a story with holes or lapses, but, in lieu of that, he receives contradictory explanations that remark the intricate nature of interpretation.

First of all, the mayor of the town, Martin Dupin, is the narrator who leads the story. It is from his perspective that he relates the events, but always from the point of view of his position as the established power in Semur. Maybe Oliphant is using this character to epitomise the rational, political and material order in the middle of confusing circumstances. Dupin tries to let us know the distinguished place his family has maintained in the city for long, and the integrity of all their members, and this serves his purpose to make the reader aware of the position he occupies.

Notwithstanding, as we have said before, we will be given more accounts of the facts. Apart from Martin Dupin, the other narrators are Paul Lecamus, one of the townsmen; M. De Bois-Sombre, another man; the Mayor's wife, Madame Agnes Dupin de la Clairière; and his mother, Madame Veuve Dupin. All the narrations are under the supervision of Martin Dupin in order to give a complete version of the facts from different sides, because he thinks such is his mission.

The narration of two women is called into doubt, although they are his wife and his mother. We only have to pay attention where they are placed:

Chapter 1. M. le Maire

Chapter 2. M. le Maire

Chapter 3. M. le Maire

Chapter 4. M. le Maire

Chapter 5. Paul Lecamus

Chapter 6. M. le Maire

Chapter 7. M. Bois-Sombre

Chapter 8. Mme Dupin

Chapter 9. Mme Veuve Dupin

Chapter 10. M. le Maire

It seems as if the narratives of the men were surrounding even physically the women's account of the facts, to control what they have to say. The final outcome is that all the rest of the interpretations subvert Dupin's own authority. But his authority is undermined in two senses—with respect to the control of the document and to the analysis of his principles of government. Dupin shows a lack of control throughout the story—he cannot control the Unseen that come into the town, nor the citizen reaction facing them; and he cannot control the events related by other narrators, either. This might be because by giving us different perspectives of the Unseen, Oliphant is offering us her own vision on materialism and spiritualism; she may question gender, class and the roles of men and women in the Victorian society, namely in the public and private spheres. Throughout *A Beleaguered City*, there is a parallel identification: men epitomise the Seen, whereas women are associated with the Unseen. This can be due to the fact that Victorian men are seen as powerful, wealthy, intelligent and sceptic, whereas women are seen as emotional and introspective—they can be believers or ghost-seers. Nonetheless, the arrival of the Unseen to the town disrupts Oliphant's limitations. Disruption, which is threatening, is patent when we analyse the diverse narratives. Agnes' narrative is centred on spiritual matters, whereas his mother's centres on social issues, especially women and children. In line with Jay (1995), the texts of the women are relegated to a

secondary place, because they cannot draw any conclusion—both of them are narrators because they are related to Dupin. However, the multiplicity of views makes us think there is no concluding opinion of the Unseen. Notwithstanding, it seems that Dupin has chosen the other narrators depending on what they could say, as *alter egos* who were allowed to say in the report what he could not because of his authority. As a way of outline we could say that:

- Lecamus enacts Dupin's imaginative impulses.
- Bois-Sombre enacts Dupin's defence of official authority.
- Agnes represents Dupin's spirituality.
- Mme Veuve Dupin represents the social context for women.

Contrary to Dupin's association of both spheres, Paul Lecamus, who has had the experience of meeting his dead wife in the town, considers this is of no importance for the account, because it belongs to his personal sphere. Nevertheless, he gives Dupin an account of the meeting with his wife and the great pleasure he felt with a kind of embrace, similar to that of Edmund and Maud in "Earthbound". Lecamus is the only man who can communicate with the Unseen by means of his wife, thanks to what the citizens know the purpose of the dead sieging the town and how the town can be saved.

Bois-Sombre is an aristocrat who has seen his family holdings significantly reduced by the Revolution. Focused on class, he refuses the challenge to assume the authority Dupin wants to assign him. Dupin's two male substitutes make us guess his necessity of inhibiting his imagination and his love of control.

Something worth mentioning is the description Dupin makes of his own life, both in the public and in the private sphere. He gives details of his domestic

life, he mentions the good relationship of his wife and his mother and he implicates them in his duties as a mayor—they have to take care for women and children to assist him. When he recognises the significance of women's role in the home, he is questioning male authority insofar as he assures that "In such a case, the wives are the best guardians, and can exercise an influence more general and less suspected than that of the magistrates" (96)

Totally opposed to male narratives, the women's versions give preference to the private sphere, where they have a role, even though each one has a distinct vision of the conflict. Through their vision, Oliphant seems to make a reflexion on the role and place of women in society, but, more specifically, the part they play in the spiritual life of the community. Agnes Dupin is the most representative character to see the blending of women and faith. She is able to see her dead daughter Marie. When she wilfully offers herself to enter the city to face the Unseen and solve the situation, there is a negative response on the part of some men. Dupin considers his wife as an angel full of faith: "Her face was sublime with faith. It is possible to these dear women; but for me the words she spoke [about the love of God] were but words without meaning." (44) As she is a woman, M. le Curé comes to dissuade her and Dupin agrees: "It was natural that the Church should come to the woman's aid" (44), though he still thinks his wife is an angel. It is Lecamus who enters the city and who undergoes the spiritual experience, and who, finally, explains that the Unseen does not disapprove of women's spirituality but of men's.

Apart from being a religious person, Agnes is sensible and critical. Consequently, she denounces the status of women in the town; the men of Semur think women are unable to control themselves, and thus, they try to

control women's actions, lest they lose their control. When men do not let Agnes enter the city, she admits she was ready to go despite of her husband; but, as she is a woman and nobody would trust her, she declares "they might have said it was delusion, an attack of the nerves" (74)—adding that women are never trusted in those cases. Oliphant believes hypocrisy is on the base of this contradiction, which is intrinsic to the values of the middle class.

On the other hand, Madame Veuve Dupin declares to remain always under the orders of her son, but she remarks that it is because of her support to him. Nevertheless, she seems to choose to do what she really wants to do. On the other side, she starts her narrative claiming she will not be able to reflect the facts properly because she lacks the skill for writing, and then, it is very likely that she will not agree with her son. And sometimes it is so—Madame Veuve Dupin disagrees with regard to the status of women, and that reflexion is contradicting Agnes' views. We consider Oliphant is questioning men's authority by that of women. Dupin's mother vindicates her own authority, because she possesses social and material belongings; with this, she should be assimilated to her son's authority. In contrast, she is not linked to Agnes' spirituality, but to his son's position, in order to support him and to avoid her sadness when she knows Agnes can catch sight of the Unseen. In this case, we can deduce Madame Veuve Dupin is an *alter ego* of her son and helps him to maintain his status and authority. Dupin sends her mother to La Clairière, their country house, to take care of the rest of the women and children. Both women describe their stay at La Clairière. Oliphant should have felt sometimes like Dupin's mother, when taking care of their own sons after Maggie died.

Both women's narratives describe how they dedicated themselves to these domestic duties. Madame Veuve Dupin wants to send women and children away, but Agnes reminds her of their task because it is the will of God and of the Unseen and also Dupin's wish. With this consideration, we can interpret women are the link between the Seen and the Unseen. Madame Veuve Dupin moves away from spiritual affairs to focus on domestic issues. She prepares everything at La Clairière, even her dead husband's room. Although, on some occasions, she thinks of faith, she becomes obsessed with domesticity in order to avoid the anxiety of the situation.

It is important for us to consider that the narratives of both women seem to have a similar purpose. Although women can be considered as non-reliable narrators, they prove to be independent thinkers. Perhaps Oliphant is trying to make the society question women playing the same roles as men. A notable example of having their own opinion is when Dupin's mother, although she has been supporting her son all the time, declares she does not agree with her son's opposition to the nuns at the hospital—she goes so far as to say that all the events happening in Semur are a corollary of her son's decision. This suggest Oliphant tries to say that women can contact the Unseen, but they can also be critical and enter in the societal structures; and, more than that, they can perceive the mistakes made there.

Not even during Dupin's tour in the city is the same Dupin able to see his feminine side. When he enters into the library, he notices some changes:

The old bureau which my grandfather had used, at which I remember standing by his knee, had been drawn from the corner where I had placed it out of the way (to make room for the -- furniture I preferred), and replaced, as in old times, in the middle of the room. It was nothing; yet how much was in this! though only papers. I glanced over them in my

agitation, to see if there might be any writing, any message addressed to me; but there was nothing, nothing but this silent sign of those who had been here. (64)

Being left no patriarchal message, he is in the same place as his mother—dispossessed of any male inheritance.

Dupin is not able to see that the merit of it all was due to women's work. With this, he is underestimating them and curtailing their power, limited to the Unseen. At the end, when all the citizens are in the mass, Dupin believes that the entire town in the cathedral was what the spirits wanted. As he specifies, all the narratives in the texts have been made from "different eye-witnesses (94)—which can obviously carry divergences. Nevertheless, Oliphant tries to reflect that the spiritual and the material are indivisible, and women are the link between them.

4. 2. 3. Characters

Mrs Oliphant's works provide men and women with the same opportunities of being the main characters of her stories. In "The Open Door" and "The Portrait", the story's main character is a man, and, in *Old Lady Mary* and "The Library Window", the main characters are women. A family with her brother Frank and his son, her own sons and their friends let her observe male habits and behaviour—she could even imitate the affected tone of adolescent young men, and, going one step further, she could equally reproduce their speech in very intimate moments. The strength of Oliphant's depiction of male characters does not stem from observing gender differences, but this force comes from knowing them from the point of view of a woman. Men hardly ever

demonstrate the sensitivity or self-sacrifice of which females are capable. If one looks back on Margaret's family, it is easy to imagine that the failures of her men were for her an explanation of her own attitude to men in general. In addition, she never needed any man's approval for writing, due to the fact that her mother was the person who had supported her art. When women appear in her stories—when they are not put aside—she usually does not describe them as the weak sex, but rather the converse. Her women are depicted as intelligent, strong minded and more active sexually than men. In this vein, we can interpret it as an inversion of the conventional roles they played inside the Victorian community. Her depiction of women was one of the most subversive aspects of her writing.

Since the publishing of "Earthbound", Oliphant puzzles and amazes the readers, but she presents us a situation in front of which the characters will react in different manners:

There was but a small party for Christmas at Daintrey. The family were in mourning, which meant more than it usually means, and the whole life of the place was subdued. Christmas was coming; and though there could be no Christmas festivities in the ordinary sense of the word, one or two old friends and connections were invited. (137)

Oliphant is questioning Christmas, and, in doing so, she is making usual terms and conventions uncertain, and after, each person in the story will show different feelings about Christmas depending on their convenience. It is Christmas, but the family is in mourning because little Willie has passed away. Mourning is a heavy burden, especially for a mother, but she will be the driving force of them all. Mourning was different for men, women and children, but Lady Beresford, as Oliphant remarks, has her "heart ... still bleeding", though she

scarcely has time to cry. Oliphant, in this case, gives free rein to her feelings, as her nephew has died in India. She explains how she has to restrain her grief and sorrow:

A mother who cannot give herself over to her sorrow, who must work through all her little daily round of duties all the same, and think of the girls' bonnets, and the boots and flannels of the boys at school, and only now and then in a spare moment can shut her door or turn her face to the wall and weep a little over her dead, the tears that have been gathering slowly while she has smiled and talked and kept everything going through the long day — has a hard task when her troubles come; but Lady Beresford bore her burden as sweetly as a woman could holding up as long as was possible, then stopping to have her cry out, and rising and going on again. (137-138)

On the contrary, Mr Beresford does not worry himself about the visitors who are coming, and, although he is said to have become “morose with his grief” (137), he also pretends not to show it. The children seem to have a different mood. Christmas is otherwise understood by old and young:

... but there was some talk among the older people about those sensations and pre-sentiments that seem sometimes to convey a kind of prophecy, only understood after the event, of sorrow on the way ; and the young ones amused themselves after a sort with discussions of those new-fangled fancies which have replaced that old favourite lore. They talked about what is called spiritualism, and of many things, both in that fantastic faith and in the older ghostly traditions, which we are all half glad to think cannot be explained. The older people, indeed, unhesitatingly rejected all mediums and supernatural operators of every kind as impostors (140)

Young's spiritualism makes Oliphant find gratification in some events that are inexplicable, such as the death of young children who died too early, as her Maggie or many others. The truth is that, thanks to the dead boy, all the family is united in their social discourse and Oliphant tries to place it in the public sphere, though the unexplained or supernatural may engender a wide range of reactions.

Coming back to the role of Mrs Beresford, we have said she is in mourning, but, besides this, she is preoccupied with being a matchmaker mother. Edmund Coventry is one of the guests arriving at Daintrey. Edmund was Sir Robert's protégé, and is suspected of having an obscure past. Nonetheless, Mrs Beresford thinks he is a good match for Maud, because, when she sees them, it seemed "they were like brother and sister" (141). Esther Schor, in "The Haunted Interpreter in Oliphant's Supernatural Fiction", argues that Maud and Edmund can be brothers, taking into account the hint Mrs Beresford gives when talking about him and Maud, and Mr Beresford's reaction to the coming of the young man, in addition to the to the proposal his wife has in mind. According to Schor, the "possibility of something more" (141) suggests incest between the two young. Maybe Oliphant is emulating here Charlotte Brontë as regards Heathcliff's paternity in *Wuthering Heights*, but in the case of Maud and Edmund they marry in the end. However, in this story the romance between Maud and Edmund is secondary in respect to the story of Edmund and the woman in white, who is also named Maud. Lady Beresford, who is doing what she was supposed to do in her time, i.e. trying to find a good match, has to subordinate the success of her daughter's marriage to the failure of the relationship of Edmund and the lady in white.

While walking at night under the Lime-tree Walk, he can see the white figure of a woman's back. He cannot guess who the woman is and starts questioning everybody. When he meets her face-to-face, in the second apparition, he becomes more interested in her, but it is on the third apparition when they establish oral communication. The key point is that she answers "I am Maud". A single name for two women of the same family is catastrophic for

Edmund because it impedes the identification of the woman in white. Identifying this woman is the only way Edmund has of marrying her, possessing her, and accomplish his desire. It is an attempt to bring the 'Unseen' into the 'Seen', but by possessing it. In this story, Oliphant tries to illustrate what can happen if the borders dividing the 'Unseen' and the 'Seen' are traversed. As a result, there could be physical effects on the living. The first time he sees her, "his heart began to beat" (44). At first glance, he is surprised by the dress the woman is wearing—a white dress in the middle of the winter. Following Maud Beresford's indications, he looks for the woman in the keeper's cottage, but it is not the girl sewing there. The more mysterious the ghost, the more willing Edmund is to discover who she is. Yet, it is only to comfort himself, and be convinced he is the dominant male, and he declares "she did not look at all like that kind of those women who assert a right to walk alone, and to do whatever pleases them." (152) With this comment, we can deduce he tries to authenticate the occurrence just to give the status of person, and then, he can end with her autonomy through sexual mastery. In one of the last encounters, Edmund tries to grab the woman but it is impossible. When he realises that the woman is, in fact, a ghost of an ancestor, he does not want to admit it. However, considering the fact that he never comes back to Daintrey, we can deduce Oliphant wants to transmit us the idea that Edmund has changed, and is never the same after having been in contact with the unseen.

We should like to address the fact that it is Sir Robert Beresford the person who identifies Maud. Sir Robert shows Edmund an eighteenth-century portrait in the family gallery. As stated by Schor, Sir Roberts wants "to contain a ghost within the structure of marriage". She says that, with this fact, Sir Robert

legitimizes the apparition of the ghost, as a Beresford, and, at the same time, he legitimizes Edmund's paternity. For us, it is like a revelation from father to son, like in "The Secret Chamber", where the father of the family has to pass on the secret of the old ancestor, and, after that, his son is never the same, but he shares the family's secret. It is also similar to what happens in "The Library Window", where the aunt's girl is the one who admits that the girl is "a woman of our blood", legitimizing the vision of the girl; and the same happens when the girl changes radically after the experience.

The encounter of both Edmund and Maud can be based on the review Oliphant wrote of Wilkie Collins' *The woman in White*. Both works are similar, but Oliphant's is ironical. Oliphant's work is inside the 'uncanny', and Collins avoids appearances and supernatural elements. In the first meeting, we can see some of the elements of Wilkie Collins' *The woman in White*, where Walter Hartright and Laura Fairlie meet not at dusk, like in "Earthbound", but after midnight, although the setting is the same—an isolated road, the surprise in the meeting, and the figure of a woman dressed in white, albeit human and alive this time.

In Oliphant's "Earthbound", the occurrences gain in strength, because they are recurrent—what is frightening, according to Freud. The climatic encounter is the last one, when Edmund tries to touch her and is unable to do it, feeling himself violent: "Then in Edmund's head was a roaring of echoes, a clanging of noises, a blast as of great trumpets and music; and he knew no more" (169). Edmund's excess in *harmatia* or fatal error, leads him to desire to possess the ghost physically and it is the reason that makes him to lose her. The physical and the spiritual cannot intermingle.

In “The Library Window”, the main character is a girl. The ghost she can see is a man, the referent for a writer, because it is a vision of a man seen through the window—and we know her father is the model she looks up to as a writer. As the vision reappears, she seems to get ever closer to her father—at least, in her imagination. Her father has given her a model of what a writer should be, with intense devotion. As a result, we contend that she admires her father and every time she sees something new, she tries to portray the situation in the way her father would have done—not only because he always had the solution, in her opinion, but because he was her idol:

Papa is a great writer, everybody says: but he would have come to the window and looked out, he would have drummed with his fingers on the pane, he would have watched a fly and helped it over a difficulty, and played with the fringe of the curtain, and done a dozen other nice, pleasant, foolish things, till the next sentence took shape. “My dear, I am waiting for a word,” he would say to my mother when she looked at him, with a question why he was so idle, in her eyes; and then he would laugh, and go back again to his writing-table. (380)

Here, we can also perceive how the man is described as an artist who looks for inspiration, but note how her mother is described in a different way: she would have questioned her husband had she found him ‘idle’, which demonstrates to us that her mother does not understand the writing process, and, while her husband is waiting for inspiration to come, she thinks he is at leisure. Her mother is depicted as the person who feels responsible for keeping ‘nonsense’ out of her daughter’s thoughts, and, with that purpose, she always keeps her doing trivial tasks:

My mother would not have let me do it, I know. She would have remembered dozens of things there were to do. She would have sent me up-stairs to fetch something which I was quite sure she did not want, or down-stairs to carry some quite unnecessary message to the housemaid. She liked to keep me running about. ... My mother thought I should

always be busy, to keep nonsense out of my head. But really I was not at all fond of nonsense. I was rather serious than otherwise. (364 - 365)

Aunt Mary and Lady Carnabee may have lived similar situations in their youth—they may have even witnessed similar visions. It seems to be the first vision of the diamond ring worn by Lady Carnabee that activates the vision of the window. We find great significance in the fact that the diamond can only be seen from the inside part of the hand, thus making it easy to hide. In our opinion, the diamond could be the proof that she has seen the window, but, as it is not visible to everybody, and for women of ‘their blood’, it is something that must remain concealed: “the big diamond blazed underneath in the hollow of her hand, like some dangerous thing hiding and sending out darts of light.” (367) It is Lady Carnabee who arouses our heroine’s curiosity towards the window. Later in the story, we know that the ring had belonged to a scholar-writer. It is Lady Carnabee who makes the vision disappear, because she knows it is dangerous for the girl to have such an illumination. These women of the ‘same blood’ have abandoned the dream of being “too dangerous”, but they did it too late—they remained single. Indeed, they have known the seduction of the vision and they have rejected human suitors—Aunt Mary, for example, was courted by Mr Pitmilly. Now it is time the girl abandons her dream because they fear that, if she does not, she will follow their destiny. Her Aunt Mary tries to impose “feminine tasks” on her when she sees her in a terrible state, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and then, a friend of her aunt, Mr Pitmilly helps the girl to end her vision. He accompanies her to the Library, where she discovers there is not really a room or a window. Finally, her aunt tells her the story about the scholar-writer with the diamond ring and how a previous

daughter of the house, who had fallen in love with him, had tried to make him come to her, but, in a state some confusion, her brothers killed him.

The combination of "The Open Door" is perfect for an innocent child who is lost in a world he does not understand—the hereafter. Willie symbolises the loss of innocence in this world; he was a prodigal son, and, now, he is lost, though he is able to be redeemed. The minister's exorcism is successful, because he appeals to his mother, who is absent, to guide the boy to heaven, hence demonstrating the perceived relationship of women with both the home and heaven. On earth, where the mother is absent, 'the house' takes on a ghostly presence, lacking the solid reality which mother brings to it.

All the story is presented to us from three different points of view, represented by three characters—the doctor's, the father's and the minister's. The doctor is the man of science who can only explain the facts from a physical explanation; he explains Roland's sickness as 'cerebral excitement', because, for a doctor, there is no other medical explanation. A man of science cannot believe in the 'unseen', and, throughout the story, he does not change his condition of 'man of science'—there is no evolution of his character. At first, Henry declares "He did not believe a word of the story" (195), and he always looks for an explanation, for instance, when he says: "Oh, account for it! — that's a different matter; there's no accounting for the freaks our brains are subject to. If it's delusion, if it's some trick of the echoes or the winds, - some phonetic disturbance or other -" (195)

He is asked to go with Henry to help him with the voice, and he shows his reluctance to go, because it would not be appropriate—people would know he believes in ghosts or that he goes ghost-hunting. Nevertheless, it is clear he

tries to investigate the juniper bush, because it plunges him into confusion, and, when the doctor is critical with Henry, he always attacks him with the thorny question of the juniper bush. Nevertheless, after the final experience, he continues being, as the narrator says, 'sceptical and cynical'. It is Mortimer who criticises him for being so cold-blooded.

As for Henry Mortimer, there is a sweeping change and marked evolution in his character throughout the story. As we have noted before, the first time he listens to the facts, he is completely at a loss, but he claims to be sceptical. Then, he faces the country people and recognises they believe in supernatural phenomena, and, along with that, that they can even date the origin of the voice, although, as they are ignorant, they only create amazement and confusion in him. As a result, he looks for comfort in the doctor's words, but he finds none—the doctor blames Jordan's illness. After the first experience, that has been moving: "when suddenly, in a moment, the blood was chilled in my veins, a shiver stole along my spine, my faculties seemed to forsake me" (188) and he can hear the sound, just as the country people and Jordan described. Therefore, a wholesale change takes place in him and he starts to believe—he admits "My scepticism disappeared like a mist."(189) But his transformation continues when he confesses that it is the conversation with the minister that gives him consolation: "This gave me a little comfort—more than Simson had given me."(201)

At the end, Mortimer shows his complete metamorphosis, because, once his son is well, he demonstrates his total sympathy for Willie, although he is not sure of how to name him—spirit or ghost:

It was no "ghost," as I fear we all vulgarly considered it, to him, — but a poor creature whom he knew under these conditions, just as he had known him in the flesh, having no doubt of his identity. And to Roland it was the same. This spirit in pain, — if it was a spirit, — this voice out of the unseen, — was a poor fellow-creature in misery, to be succoured and helped out of his trouble, to my boy. (209)

Oliphant did not believe that science or mechanics could help to improve life, and she opposed what she called 'the pretensions of science', which tried to explain the whole of life on earth. She thought science was the enemy of imagination, as well as religion. In "The Open Door", common sense and science cannot do anything to save his child, but popular beliefs and spiritual compassion can do what is required to resolve the situation. The minister is the only person who can exorcise little Willie. We have to remember that, usually, priests or clergymen were considered by Oliphant as having less obvious male features; they were not so masculine and they appeared more reachable and touchable—more like women. In the following instance, the minister is described as a good man with Scottish qualities, who trusts more human qualities than theology:

The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, [...] and who was said to be very sound in doctrine, without infringing the toleration with which old men, who are good men, are generally endowed. He was old-fashioned; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublesome problems of theology as many of the young men, nor ask himself any hard questions about the Confession of Faith; but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. (200)

It is not a question of faith that is the key for Willie, but a question of human understanding and compassion without questioning the origin of the spirit. He combines the moral and spiritual authority he has over Willie with sorrow and kind-heartedness:

Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No! — I forbid ye! I forbid ye!" cried the old man". (205)

4. 2. 4 Ghosts

Oliphant's spirits are tormented beings and they do not usually want to do any harm. Ballesteros (2005) explains that they communicate with humans in an intimate manner, like Old Lady Mary, who can be seen only by a little girl, who is not afraid of her, and it is only by love and forgiveness from her association with human beings that she is relieved. In this case, we see that the ghost's destiny lies in the hands of the human.

In the tales we are concerned with, it is necessary to attempt to classify the ghosts we have encountered so far. In some of her stories, there are three focuses: the first is often a male protagonist and narrator who asks for something; the second focus is a female ghost, a silent presence that sees how her narrative is suppressed. These can be the cases of "The Portrait", *Old Lady Mary* and "Earthbound". There are two tales in which the ghost is a man—"The Open Door" and "The Library Window". The most different of them all is *A Beleaguered City*, in which the ghosts are the predecessors of the townspeople and this is the third possible focus.

Having stated the different roles or types of spirits, we will tackle *Old Lady Mary* first. *Old Lady Mary* is the tale of a ghost who wants to come back to remedy a situation, although she is told that it is not sure to end up successfully. She is warned too, that living people are afraid of ghosts and, perhaps, she will not be as welcome as she hopes. Much to her surprise, she is unable to communicate with living adults, but a baby can see her.

Lady Mary, who has died, had hidden her will, hence making young Mary, her ward, work for a living. She witnesses how Mary faces poverty and misery, until she comes back to work in Old Lady Mary's home as a governess. This home, with its original contents respected, is now under the new ownership of a family, with a little girl called Connie. Connie can see Lady Mary's ghost. When the Italian cabinet is sold, the children accidentally discover the missing will. All the attempts Lady Mary has made to look for Mary and make good her ill-conceived joke of concealing her will seem to prove worthless after her death. Mary has demonstrated to be able to take care of herself. So, despite all her efforts, and although the will is only found by chance, Lady Mary, the ghost, is not unsatisfied, because, when she returns to heaven, she declares she has been forgiven on earth: "I am forgiven," she said with a low cry of happiness. "She, whom I wronged, loves me and blessed me; and we saw each other face to face. I know nothing more." (273)

As maintained by Leila Walker (2009), this ending is out of the ordinary, because, from her point of view, Lady Mary does not answer the question somebody has asked her, and because forgiveness was not her original aim for returning to earth, yet it seems as though in the end Lady Mary wanted to make her journey profitable. However, a different reading can be made—Lady Mary is happy, because, fortunately, Mary's situation has been resolved without her help; besides, she has also gained something she was not expecting—forgiveness, a deeply fundamental need women aspire to and that puts an end to remorse.

Nevertheless, after reading "Earthbound", we believe that both ghosts, Maud and Lady Mary, come back to earth, not to help anyone, but to purge their

sins and errors. Lady Mary has asked to be allowed to come back to earth to amend her negligence, but it is as if the punishment for her was to witness the situation young Mary is suffering, which should be enough to redeem her. A similar situation is presented in "Earthbound"—Maud is not in the hands of humans. She is in the 'Seen' until she purges her error, her *harmatia*—too much pride. Walker tells us that, compared to other women ghosts in Oliphant's stories, Lady Mary is the most helpless of them all and she adds that, perhaps, this is due to the circumstances of its writing. *Old Lady Mary* was written in 1884, in the decade following the passing of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882. This is almost certainly the underlying reason behind the change in Oliphant's political thought, now that women were able to be an individual in their own right and did not have to depend on their previous household identities of daughter, sister or wife, etc. As women began to receive their own inheritances, mother's like Oliphant, who were also writers, were preoccupied that women's importance in their children's lives would become monetary or material, rather than moral or psychological. This can be the reason why love prevails over inheritance. Our reading begs to differ—although money is important, love is of prime importance for Lady Mary, and so, no preoccupations are necessary.

Nevertheless, Walker continues and says that, due to the change in the narrative voice by the end of the story, which is not as distant as it was at the beginning, she leads us to think that "'There is no more.' said altogether. 'For everything is included in pardon and love'" (273), hence emphasising the maternal role as based on love and self-sacrifice.

A commonplace observation made in Oliphant's supernatural tales is that women can perceive better than men, and, in almost all her works, women can be more pragmatic and capable than men. In "The Portrait", Jay (1995) qualifies the tale as an investigation of the male spiritual sterility by alternatively removing and replacing feminine influence in a young man's life. But we can affirm that this sterility ceases when the man shows feminine qualities—i.e. when he is able 'to see the heart of nature'. Everybody thought that Philip Canning was rich, and thus, he did not need to work, but he was very dissatisfied with his life. One day, something happens—a woman with a baby in her arms asks him for help, as she is one of his father's tenants and she cannot pay the rent. This is the first confrontation between father and son. Each one tackles the problem differently. First, the boy starts seeing things in a "feminine" way—in other words, feeling sympathy for people, understanding their problems and not thinking only of money. As for his part, his father only thinks in economic terms. The catalyst to change his way of thinking is his mother. Agnes died very young, when he was still an infant—Philip only knows her through a portrait. The absence of the mother makes the son feel at a loss when he comes back to domestic life. Agnes' husband does not show the sensitivity and sensibility women display in Oliphant's tales. On her part, Agnes has been deprived of her discourse, and this is the reason why she possesses her son's body to help both men and her niece. Through various possessions, Philip learns to feel womanly, and, although he is unable to give any message to her father, the old men can understand when he sees the face of young Agnes. She has accomplished her task—she has helped young Agnes, who

marries Philip and helps her son and her husband. As the ghost wants in this tale, home is restored again.

In “Earthbound”, we also find a woman who is a ghost. From our point of view, Maud’s ghost is more difficult to interpret than the other we have previously seen in Oliphant’s other tales. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that this ghost is completely independent from humans and her destiny does not lie in human hands. And, on the other hand, this can be an example of how a spirit can take physical human form and does not look like a ghost. The paranoia Edmund is haunted by, with regard to Maud, revolves around her physical aspect, which bars him from undergoing a spiritual evolution.

The first impulse he feels is to try to discover if she is a woman or a lady. The second question is to know her social class, because the dress the woman is wearing is not appropriate for the season, and, although Maud Beresford tries to devise an explanation—she can be a dressmaker because they “may walk like a lady and dress like a lady”(147)—Edmund refuses it, associating her to the “aesthetic circles”. Maud is an authentic figure with her own symbolic power. She is not in Edmund’s hands, she does not need him. In a conversation, she tells him the reasons why she is on earth:

‘I was always fond of it’ ... ‘That was what was wrong with me. You know’, she said, with her little soft laugh, ‘I was so fond of the house and the trees, and everything that was our own. I thought there was nothing better, nothing so good. I was all for the earth, and nothing more. That is why I am here so much’. (155-156).

Maud does not need him to help her or to perform a task for her to be free. Maud denotes independence in her very essence. During their meetings, she always refuses to tell him who she is. Maud is equally proud. Nonetheless, she permits him to accompany her along the lime-tree grove. They keep pace

together and they cross the “dark lines”, but the romance occurs under the auspices of the moon—which means women’s creativity and liminality, making reference to the threshold between the two worlds. As Lady Mary, she does not need any help to purge her sin, and even less, she does not need a man to marry her and subjugate her by means of sexual desire. Maud does not take Edmund’s marital hand—marriage is not the solution. The only moment when she regrets something is her invisibility for most people in the house; there are very few people who can see her. At the end of the story, she is supposed to have finished with her penance, and, when Edmund comes back to Daintrey long after the events, she is no longer there.

The stories in which the ghost is a man are very different from each other. In the tale “The Open Door”, the ghost is a youngster named Willie, who had run away from home. When he returned, his mother had already died and the absence of his mother had left him at a loss. He does not discern how to reach the other world—he is in the ‘Seen’ world, but looking for her mother. If we remember Oliphant’s conception of home, we dare say that Willie is at the door of his home, but as it is the agency of his mother that he still needs to create his home, he cannot find it. He confuses the door of the house with home. As his soul is in great sorrow, all the townspeople can hear his mourning in the ruins; and what is affliction becomes lamentation: “Mother! mother!” and express his will: “Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!” (177) It is again the image of a young spirit asking for permission to enter his home, although, in this case, it is because he is lost: let us name young Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, the young girl in Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story” and in this case Willie.

This spirit's destiny is in human hands—he cannot mend the situation on his own. None of the three men who visit the ruins—the colonel, the soldier or the doctor—know what to do in front of the unexplained. Therefore, it is not until the priest joins the group that the solution is not found, maybe due to the fact that Oliphant considers priests as being spiritually strong and they can be midway between men and women in respect to supernatural occurrences. The minister recognises Willie's voice, and then, understands the situation. The minister proceeds to give Willie some instructions to follow his mother in Heaven and assures him the Lord will admit him in Heaven with her.

As Willie, the ghost of the “The Library Window” is also a man. At least it seems to be a man, a writer—or that is what the girl thinks to have seen through the window. The man does not need help, perhaps it is the girl's desire to become an artist, and the only way she could do it freely in that time could be by belonging to the opposed sex. As a result, some critics sustain that it is the girl's own reflection that she can contemplate in the window panes. We agree with this idea, owing to the activities the girl likes doing, considered as belonging to males.

Women and men, together with children, siege of the city of Semur. All the dead of the townspeople rise out from their graves and take the city. This time, the Unseen crosses the Seen, and, moreover, the humans are in the hands of the dead—they have been expelled from their houses. The besiegers remain the entire story invisible, inaudible and distant. Additionally, the city remains wreathed in clouds and nobody can see it. Nevertheless, women are the first to understand what has happened, whereas the men seek a rational explanation. Everything comes back to normality when women convince men

they have to abandon materialism on behalf of spiritualism, and they celebrate a mass. When the tale ends, there is irony in the final remark that life continues as it was before the dead had taken the city, whilst women are not considered better than before—even though the city was saved thanks to them.

4. 2. 5 Genius loci

We should define Oliphant's style as tender and moderate. Nevertheless, we should equally remark that she was imbibed of two styles. In Oliphant's works, we must not forget that she inherited two traditions—that of the Gothic tale and of Scottish ballads. The Gothic tale, as previously mentioned, was strongly established in Victorian culture, and some of its inherent devices were a new language of mystery and metaphors for reality, going far beyond the mere rational. The Scottish ballads taught her desolate confrontations and dilemmas—conflict between good and evil is at the centre of these ballads. Besides this, ghost stories were very popular in Victorian times because they were a new phenomenon and came as a response to the familiarity with death, an intimate experience for almost all families at a time of high infant mortality. They were a way of maintaining bonds with the dead, and they were a way of exploring psychological emotions. Oliphant seems to believe the dead are among the living in everyday life, and, moreover, they are here for a purpose. Perhaps this conviction is a consequence of her life—all her loved ones had died thus, she imagined they were with her, and so, according to Ballesteros (2005), they gave real meaning to her desolate existence. Such a way of thinking in consonance with Victorians reflected the desire of maintaining bonds with the dead.

One can conclude after reading some of Oliphant's tales that she makes use of the convention of the Female Gothic style but adapted to her Philosophy of life. The scenery most of the times is home. The disturbance of the space considered as home is the perfect starting point. If we had to categorise Oliphant, we would put her inside what we call the Domestic Gothic. The 'uncanny' is found at home, very related to the *unheimlich* Freud studied about.

In *A Beleaguered City*, very different to many tales about ghosts, the time of the year is June, in the summer. Suddenly, a grey thick mist wreaths the city, it is cold and the narrator compares the weather to that of a day in November. In a few hours the city is cloaked in a dense cloud "growing darker and darker" (9), through which it is impossible to see and by means of which the dead are sieging the city. The cloud penetrates in the city of Semur and the inhabitants have to depart. Not even the towers can be seen from outside the walls. Apart from being at night when Dupin and Lecamus face the mist, the fact that they cannot see is fearful—it is as losing one's conscience, along with the anxiety of feeling impotent to use one's vision.

The darkness was great, yet through the gloom of the night I could see the division of the road from the broken ground on either side; there was nothing there. ... There was in the air, in the night, a sensation the most strange I have ever experienced. ... This was the sensation that overwhelmed me here—a crowd: yet nothing to be seen but the darkness, the indistinct line of the road. We could not move for them, so close were they round us. What do I say? There was nobody—nothing—not a form to be seen, not a face but his and mine. ... Ah! you would think I must be mad to use such words, for there was nobody near me—not a shadow even upon the road. (13-14)

In "Earthbound", the genius loci is in the family mansion, namely in the "lime-tree grove", which is separated from the house with a wall and a garden gate. In this case, Edmund does not feel afraid. It seems logical, as he knows

the house, the garden and the lime-tree walk, and, in addition, the ghost has a human figure, which seems attractive to the man. However, Oliphant makes use of the description of the family house, as in the Gothic tradition:

Daintrey was a handsome house of no particular period ... On the south side of the house was a green terrace... ornamented with vases as in an Italian garden and separated by the brilliant parterres of the flower-garden from the house. Running along the upper end of the garden and connecting it with the west end of the house was the lime-tree walk ... but the little square corner which connected them was not beautiful. Here, for no apparent reason at all, a wall had been built ... screening in a square and rather gloomy angle of grass, in the midst of which stood a high pedestal surmounted by a large stone vase. (141-142)

The time of the year is Christmas time, until January, i.e. the darkest and coldest months, which contain all the ingredients for the story. Edmund and Maud always meet at night and in the grove.

In respect to the issue of lights, Margaret Oliphant uses images of light and darkness to describe how human beings can face the other world and, by extension, the dead, and this helps her to define the *genius loci*. In “The Open Door”, when the three men of the story go to face the ghost of Willie, Oliphant wants to reinforce the contrasts that exist between our three men. When the man of science—the doctor—and the man of God—the minister—set out for their adventure, they are provided with a sort of light. The doctor carries a ‘flickering taper’, and the minister, an ‘old-fashioned lantern’ which shines steadily, and Mortimer has a lantern which produces ‘a stream of light’ (209). In this moment, he is in the process of transformation from the rational to the spiritual—his lantern does not blow out when everything happens, whereas it is not intellectual enlightenment: it is the taper of science that proves effective. When everything has occurred, the doctor offers to carry the minister’s lantern, as he has not been able to see the “hidden heart of nature”, as Oliphant used to

say. To understand it, he would have had to recognise the connections between human and dead, and, to do that, you need a special light and a special ability to see. Oliphant said you needed moral and spiritual projection instead of intellectual rational.

“The Open Door” is a mixture of several characters that configure the traditional inclination of the Scottish imagination to accommodate the unseen and the inexplicable. She uses many devices to achieve major effects—a controversial history to justify some actions and an uncompromising religion, together with the contrast of rationalism and spiritualism

The setting where the entire story takes place is also important, as it is the house where they live. There is a powerfully evocative setting, which is not identified, but clearly located near Midlothian’s river Esk. We can see it has all the elements of the Gothic tradition:

... the Castle and Calton Hill, its spires and towers piercing through the smoke, and Arthur’s Seat lying crouched behind, like a guardian no longer very needful, taking his repose beside the well-beloved charge, which is now, so to speak, able to take care of itself without him ...(172)

Castles, rivers, villages, a complete description of the place and a detailed report of the house where they lived—a Georgian house where the ruins seem to be something anomalous in the landscape and inside the construction of the house—constitute the setting. The *genius loci* where the apparition takes place is located in the ruins of a house which was the ghost’s home:

In the park which surrounded our house were the ruins of the former mansion of Brentwood ... The ruins were picturesque, however, and gave importance to the place. ... The old building had the remains of a tower, an indistinguishable mass of mason-work, overgrown with ivy, and the shells of walls attached to this were half filled up with soil. ... There was a large room, or what had been a large room, with the lower

part of the windows still existing, on the principal floor, and underneath other windows, which were perfect, though half filled up with fallen soil, and waving with a wild growth of brambles and chance growths of all kinds. At a little distance were some very commonplace and disjointed fragments of the building, one of them suggesting a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed. This was the end of a low gable, a bit of grey wall, all encrusted with lichens, in which was a common doorway. (173)

The action takes place in the months of November and December at night. Nonetheless, the setting described by the narrator is not frightening, but 'picturesque', because it is a house, or the remains of it. Again, there is darkness all around, and, although the men are carrying lights, it is the sound they hear that is appalling for them—the mourning of a boy.

If we had to compare this story with "The Portrait", we would say that in "The Portrait" nowhere is as terrifying or as oppressive as the "The Open Door". The setting of "The Portrait" is lacking in terror, it has been Philip's home since he was born and he qualifies it as 'a kind house', though there are some elements of the Gothic tradition, such as candles, long corridors or closed doors, but, from our point of view, terror is something usually related to what we don't know, and, in "The Portrait", Phillip knows the place and there are no strange elements for him. All the ghostly possessions of Philip occur in this house. What causes unease, from our point of view, is the disorientation the two men suffer due to the lack of feminine presence. When the portrait is taken out of the Library and put under the light, there is a new metaphor—the figure of the woman of the house is placed in its proper place and the family recovers all its feminine connotations. As a consequence of that, the order is restored, and the task of the ghost, achieved.

To create an appropriate atmosphere in “The Open Door”, Oliphant transports us to the months of November and December, when the light is naturally dim and faint. At the same time, she describes the same landscape at night, when everything appears different and distorted, using repeated words related to a penetrating darkness that makes our narrator feel confused and nervous:

It was very dark, as I have said; the old house, with its shapeless tower, loomed a heavy mass through the darkness, which was only, though not entirely, as solid as itself. On the other hand, the great dark cedars of which we were so proud seemed to fill up the night. My foot strayed off the path in my confusion and the gloom together, and I brought myself up with a cry as I felt myself knock against something solid. What was it? (188)

As we can observe, she creates mounting tension until the voice of the child is heard—that is masterly. If we pay attention to the vocabulary in the passage, we can find ‘dark’, ‘darkness’ and ‘gloom’, all of which make reference to the lack of light and are often the cause of a feeling of horror and unease in humans. This concerto of increasing intensity is repeated every time the characters go to the ruins and it is sometimes so strong that some of them faint, like the soldier Bagley, they feel horrified, like Mortimer on the first encounter, or become as pale as the doctor. Ballesteros (2005) classifies this tale as claustrophobic and oppressive in its initial planning, but apart from all the elements Ballesteros itemises, what also helps create this oppression is the use of discourse devices employed by the authoress—she plays with language, proving a true artist. When Mortimer goes to the encounter with Bagley, he falls ill. Upon analysis of the scene, one can see that the characters are stretched to their limit with all their nerves at screaming pitch, and, for this reason, it is

demonstrated that, although Mortimer embodies the virtues of male physical courage when placed in a situation of extreme stress, he shows the contrary:

He thought it was a man, and was at once relieved. But at that moment the voice burst forth again between us, at our feet, — more close to us than any separate being could be. He dropped off from me, and fell against the wall, his jaw dropping as if he were dying. (192)

Once again, in “The Library Window”, light and dark play together. The use of light for the girl’s visions is a very important element in this story; and, as we know, very representative of Margaret Oliphant’s art is a device she uses in most of her ghost stories, but how she plays with it in this story is masterly—light is pivotal. Indeed, in Scottish folklore there is a time when light mixes the two worlds, the world of the living and of the dead; it is then that the border between the two worlds is open. It is usually at this time when our heroine can see her vision. It is astonishing how the quality of perception changes, depending on the nature of the light, but it is in the evening when she sees most:

It was a night in June... but it was still clear daylight, that daylight out of which the sun has been long gone, and which has no longer any rose reflections, but all has sunk into a pearly neutral tint--a light which is daylight yet is not day. (369)

She becomes so enthralled by the vision of the window that she does not notice the light has faded, and then, when lights are lit inside the house, the vision outside grows fainter and artificial light gains play:

‘Your lamp?’ I cried, ‘When it is still daylight?’ But then I gave another look at my window, and perceived with a start that the light had indeed changed: for now I saw nothing. It was still light, but there was so much change in the light that my room, with the grey space and the large shadowy bookcase, had gone out, and I saw them no more: for even a Scotch night in June, though it looks as if it would never end, does darken at the last. (371)

This situation can lead us to think that what the girl is looking at is her own reflection on the window pane; perhaps, she can enter other levels of reality when she is daydreaming, and then, she can reverse reality because she is so young that she can mistake the room and its occupant as reality. Changes in the quality of light mark the different parts of the story, and it is true what Ballesteros explains—that the increase of light is related to what the girl can see. The tale makes us, the readers, confused—what is fiction and what is reality? From our point of view, the girl wants to explore this notion in-deep, but the factual forces of patriarchy do not allow her to do so; her mother picks her up, and she never sees the phantom window again.

The light-darkness game is also present in *A Beleaguered City*. It is a dark cloud which shrouds the city, although the sun shines all around. The presence of light and the absence thereof are contrasting. It appears as a gradated light playing with shadows, candles or lanterns. Mme Veuve Dupin's account is enlightened because her interpretation is done in religious terms, feeling compassion for the poor: "This all become clear to me as I sat pondered, while the morning light grew around me, and the sun rose and shed his first rays" (93). After this comment on the light of the sun, the towers of the cathedral are made visible again.

The first time Edmund can see Maud's ghost is at twilight, exactly when she is crossing from daylight to the shadows of the garden under the trees. For me, it is as if she was indicating that she is walking on a liminal land between the two worlds. He can never see her in the sunlight, not even when he is shown the portrait—which he can merely observe in the candle light.

4. 2. 6 Language

Something that fashions her characters and reinforces the differences between different personalities is the transcription of their language. Oliphant is indeed very proficient at reflecting the nuances of the language of Victorian country folk, which is sometimes almost incomprehensible to our modern ears:

'No, no, Cornel. Wha wad set themsels up for a laughin'-stock to a' the country-side, making a wark about a ghost? Naebody believes in ghosts. It bid to be the wind in the trees, the last gentl'man said, or some effec' o' the water wrastlin' among the rocks. He said it was a' quite easy explained; but he gave up the hoose. And when you cam, Cornel, we were awfu' anxious you should never hear. What for should I have spoiled the bargain and hairmed the property for no-thing?' (184)

However, it is equally true that it gives the reader the impression that Oliphant pursues—the character is imagined as plain as a country man, with no refinement. Notwithstanding, in “The Library Window” Oliphant does not report country people’s speech, because these are supposed to be educated people, yet their Scottish accent and vocabulary is recurring throughout the story:

'And the panes are pented black too. It's no window, Mrs Balcarres. It has been filled in, in the days of the window duties: you will mind, Leddy Carnbee.'

'Mind!' said that oldest lady. 'I mind when your mother was marriet, Jeanie: and that's neither the day nor yesterday. But as for the window, it's just a delusion: and that is my opinion of the matter, if you ask me.'

'There's a great want of light in that muckle room at the college,' said another. 'If it was a window, the Leebrary would have more light.' (p189)

5. AMELIA EDWARDS

5. 1. Biography

Amelia Edwards' life can be studied as divided into two different periods, the period around the 1850s, when she was young and devoted herself to writing novels and short stories, on which we are going to centre this study, and the winter of 1873-74 when she visited Egypt. The first period is noteworthy because she was starting her career as a novelist and journalist and the second is equally remarkable because it was to change her life forever—she abandoned fiction and dedicated the most part of her life to archaeology.

Amelia Blandford Edwards was born in 1831. Her father had been a soldier but had to retire on account of bad health and led a civilian life, having to work in another job to sustain his family. Her mother, Alicia, married her father, Thomas, in Sligo when he was forty-three and she was thirty; Amelia was born fifteen years later. Her father was very silent and hardly spoke, as opposed to her mother, who was lively, intelligent and had interests beyond the domestic sphere. She was the one to care for Amelia's education with governesses and masters. Amelia was a very good student—she was able to read whatever she wanted thanks to her parents' education and she could also accompany her mother to the theatre from her early years because of her mother's broad-minded view of the education of young girls. Amelia was given a perfect education of drama and books but she was always kept away from domesticity and domestic tasks. Alicia felt domestic tasks could be left for other kinds of girls, feeling that Amelia's talents could be better used elsewhere. Thus, Alicia cultivated Amelia's talents and trained her to be self-confident.

Amelia dedicated herself to music from fourteen to twenty-one (1845-1849). Her mother was so proud of her daughter that she was always praising her in her presence and this was to forge her character—contrary to what might have seemed, she was unspoilt, but such treatment left a deep mark in her life. Everything seemed to go perfectly, but then she abandoned music and turned her hand unsuccessfully to painting. Amelia had turned to music and worked with purpose, very characteristic of her, but, although she thought she would become a proficient singer, things showed against her will. A series of illnesses affected her—colds and sore throats—and she had to abandon and focus on another branch of art.

Finally, in the 1850s, she turned to literature. She joined the *Saturday Review* and the *Morning Post* and became a successful journalist who covered every type of topics in her career—something which is reflected in her short stories. It is between 1855 and 1858 that she wrote *My Brother's Wife: A Life History* in 1855, *A Summary of English History* in 1856, *The Ladder of Life: A Heart History* and *The Young Marquis: A Story from a Reign* in 1857, *Hand and Glove: a Tale* and *The History of France* in 1858.

The way was arduous and her parents were anxious about her future, due to previous failures in music and painting. Her mother and relatives' admiration compelled her to be brilliant. Hard work was a habit for her, but she was aware that she was going to find some barriers—the fact of being a woman, and her longing for an independent life and a distinguished career in the 1840s and 50s challenged the social forces of Victorian society. Perhaps Amelia's confidence felt damaged and her parents experienced some anxiety, just as she sometimes did. One cannot forget that recognition for women artists

and access to higher professions was a question of the emancipation of women which was still to come.

Her parents looked for an engagement for their daughter, Mr Bacon, because they were old and wanted to make sure she was not left alone upon their demise, but their search ended up in failure. So, in 1851, Amelia found herself miserably lonely and ill and in a terrible state of mind. It was at this point that she abandoned everything and dedicated herself to writing, which would ultimately bring her money and success.

She started travelling—first to Paris then to Germany and Switzerland—, and, in 1855, with the publication of *My Brother's Wife*, she overcame her crisis and left music completely. She met Emile Stéger in Paris and he taught her to talk, to smoke, to drink champagne and, thanks to this, she achieved happiness.

Two novels provide details about her early life—*The Ladder of Life* and *In the Days of my Youth*. In the latter, she gives a complete description about life in Paris, which is so painstakingly accurate that she was believed to have passed herself off as a man in order to gain access to places prohibited to women, including public baths for men where she would have observed naked men as a male painter would have done. It was perhaps Emile Stéger who introduced her to places she could not have gone on her own and it is possible she could have gone there cross-dressed as a man—nothing infrequent those days if we think of George Sand with her trousers and her cigars, showing she could overcome social conventions. Amelia did not go so far, not even later when she was in Egypt would she dress as a man openly—even though perhaps she did it occasionally, because of George Sand's example.

Her artistic circles and friends presented her to people who were not only bohemian, but also radical in politics, nearing her to republicanism.

In the 1860s, Amelia was about to be shocked by a change in fortune—her father died at the age of seventy-two with bronchitis and her mother died four days later of pneumonia at the age of sixty. The double blow was terrible, particularly that of her mother's death, whose companionship she thought she would enjoy for a long time still to come—she was very close in emotional terms to her mother. Amelia's relationship with her mother had never been curtailed by marriage or a separation, and, moreover, Amelia's career was not independent and established yet. This set of circumstances led Amelia to a turning point in her life. Amelia had developed a strong mother-dependency and this directed her towards a new relationship of a mother-dependant nature with a woman thirty years older than her: Mrs Emma Braysher. Mr Braysher had died in 1863 and their only daughter had followed him to the grave one year later. Amelia and Mrs Braysher decided to overcome their mutual losses by living together and sharing a home, a cohabitation which was to last for the rest of their lives. Amelia's life seems to come to a confinement, sitting at her desk, in the local society of Westbury-on-Trym in the solitude of The Larches, the house she lived in. It is from this period on when she wrote short stories.

In 1871, wanting to escape from ill-health, loss of friends and whatever was worrying her, Amelia went on a trip to Switzerland, Florence and Rome. In "In the Confessional", written in 1871, the narrator confesses to being nervous and in a shock—the same that perhaps was happening to her. In 1872, being in the Italian lakes, she went for an expedition in the Dolomites whose landscape, apart from being described in the travel book *Untrodden Peaks and*

Unfrequented Valleys, would later appear in some of her ghost stories. In Amelia's day this zone of northern Italy was untamed and lacked comfortable hotels, like a *terra incognita*. Travel through these mountains could only be done on foot or by mule and contact with the outside world could only be achieved with difficulty, which, besides, was not very safe for tourists. All these things were seen as a challenge—the more difficult the pass, the better, and that way she left tourists behind. Amelia seemed to be very fit at this time and she would take risks; she gave the impression of being happy in the mountains, for they pleased her in many senses. According to Joan Rees (1998), they were a delight for her visual sense and she sketched them while she described their colour, contour, and formation, as if it were a pastoral view of Arcadia.

In her personal life, Amelia fought between the need for domestic security and the need for a companion who would not stop her from travelling—it was Miss Lucy Renshawe who was to accompany her to Egypt. Lucy was smaller than Amelia and not so enthusiastic. Amelia's attachments to other women have not been easily explained, though her male relationships point to a probable heterosexual orientation. However, it is certain that her mother's death boosted her need for female support. Yet, it was her relation with Marianne North that brings up the possibility of lesbianism or possible bisexuality. Marianne North came from a better provided social background, and, like her, she was devoted to one parent—in this case, her father. Despite the fact that they were in correspondence with one another for a long time, they were conscious they did not want to lose their freedom and Amelia was well aware marriage is an inconvenience.

The second period of her life started when she went to Egypt. To a better understanding of what this travel could signify one has to remember that the first Victorian women who were archaeologists finished with the Victorian conception that women had to be soft, nurturing and submissive. In line with Amanda Adams in her book *The Ladies of the Field* (2010), the pioneering female archaeologists were a diverse group and the very first to ride a camel or to step on the desert sand was Amelia Edwards, nicknamed the “Godmother of Egyptology”. She defied her times with dirt under her fingernails, living in the *dahabeeyah*, leading male workmen, attending university lectures and never being married.

Going to Egypt today, as Ballesteros (2005) says, is rather easy for us but, in the days when Amelia set off for Egypt, things were completely different. Amelia’s journey from Brindisi to Alexandria in 1873 was full of incidents—sand storms, hurricanes and quarantine. The two ladies defied society norms; they appeared with sunburnt faces, whereas Victorian women had creamy complexions, under hot skies. With a sketch pad and a parasol, they started their work; faithful to Victorian sensibilities, they stayed in the *dahabeeyah*, with flowers on the table, brown bread to eat and tea in the afternoon. Despite of being a Victorian woman, Edwards was not afraid of dark places and the unknown. In fact, she wrote many ghost stories in her life, she wrote them to earn a living, early in her career. She was always at the front of her boat, directing every manoeuvre, even though it was extremely risky. It was in Abu Simbel when she decided to be an archaeologist and take it as a personal experience—it had become real.

When she wrote *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, she made a perfect account of everything, since the details of the journey included every detail from money to food, as well as the landscape she observed from the window. The experience was idyllic but life on the Nile was arduous. Egypt had a big impact on Amelia's heart and made her vibrate intensely. Some of the reasons for the impact are easy to deduce. On the one hand, the monuments, the statuary, the reliefs, the paintings appealed to her artistic sensibility. On the other hand, Egypt was to provide her with many backgrounds and sensational events to be later used in her writing.

Eight years after her arrival in Egypt, she was a woman behind her desk who had returned to her life in England and who had gained a good reputation as an Egyptologist.

In 1882, the Egypt Exploration Society was founded in London to promote and finance excavations in Egypt and this was due to the influence of Amelia Edwards. She had been moved by the monuments of Egypt and she tried to prevent irresponsible neglect and despoliation that had begun with the French during Napoleonic wars. She also asked for financial contribution to promote a great deal of investigations and she recruited Sir Flinders Petrie to follow the works. Over the times, her work became more administrative and, in 1886, she had to write many letters to raise funds. She became very tired, and her finances were bad, since she was not writing novels any more. In 1888, a Committee Member accused her of not having a good system for recruiting members. She thought she had to pay too high a price in her life for dedicating to the Society and receiving mere ingratitude in return.

On her return to London, a journey which had left her very weak, she met Kate Bradbury, with whom she shared a big interest in Egyptology. She was a big support and companion and took her to her home where she could recuperate from her London visit, and it was she who helped Edwards to go to America.

In 1889, she was invited to undertake an American lecture tour which excited her so much that she accepted. She was to gain recognition and acclaim in America. She gave about a hundred and twenty lectures to universities, colleges and learned societies in Boston, Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore.

The New England Women's Press Association gave a reception in her honour. The women of the Association were feminist in their activities and aspirations, so the arrival of Amelia was an event they enjoyed with great pleasure—they admired her as a novelist, travel writer, lecturer and artist. Amelia spoke of the opportunities offered to women in the newspaper world and compared England and America, finding that America offered women more chances than were available in England, where women were confined to reviewing, and where higher-education for them was not so developed.

Amelia's vision of women's contribution to peace in the world was challenging for the Women's Press Association, because it signified their start in a helpful social role. America was the climax of Amelia's career, despite male journalists who disagreed with her. In Columbus, while she was at a conference, she fell down and broke her left arm, but she continued with the lecturing schedule. In January 1890, she felt bad and she was diagnosed incipient cancer and was later operated. Thanks to Kate Bradbury, she was able

to finish her book *Pharaohs, Fellahs, and Explorers*, but she was very tired of travelling and she lacked energy. She died in April 1892, after having received a retirement fund for her contribution to literature and archaeology from the British Government. Her legacy was destined to promote the cause for ancient Egypt and to go to create the University College of London, which was managed by one of her friends.

5. 2. Amelia's works: short ghost stories

Unfair as it is, Amelia Edwards has been thrust away from the great writers list and included among the minor Victorian novelists. Her work deserves more attention because, on the one hand, it shows the development of her art, and, on the other hand, it is also embedded in the Female Gothic tradition. Just as it belongs to this tradition, it can be considered that it shakes the foundations of the Victorian tradition—defying society and criticizing it from a woman's point of view.

There were a number of women writers who were her contemporaries and who supported their families by their writings; they were women such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Mrs Braddon, Vernon Lee, etc. Amelia never gained a following of readers in the way the others did and she did not produce her work at the same speed as Oliphant or as Gaskell. Indeed, it could take her two years to work on a book if necessary. Amelia wrote a large number of short stories, among them ghost stories, and they are proof of her gift of writing—she obviously enjoyed creating them so much that sometimes she even included some within her longer stories. Amelia worked better with the short span. Amelia's ghost stories were among the most successful of the

genre. She was one of the selected important writers Dickens commissioned for the Christmas' numbers of *All the Year Round*, together with Mrs Gaskell and Wilkie Collins. From 1860 to 1866, with certain regularity, Dickens invited Edwards to contribute seasonal tales to his annual *All the Year Round* Christmas numbers—"How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries"(1863) or "Number Three" (1863) and "The North Mail"(1864) are some examples. It is sure that "The Four-Fifteen Express" was written in 1866, for a special number of *Mugby Junction* published by Dickens, which along with his classic "The Signal-Man", were dedicated to the railway. When Edwards finished her work "The Four-Fifteen Express", it surpassed the required length, and, quite probably, Dickens insisted on changes, alterations or cuts which Edwards found improper. That is plausibly why she sent her story to his rival, *Routledge's Christmas Annual*, the very same month, although she wrote a shorter story for *Mugby Junction*, entitled "The Engineer".

It was from 1866 on that she started dealing with *Tinsleys* and *Routledge's Magazines*, and, then, she sent no more stories to Dickens, even though Charles Dickens junior, Dickens' son and editorial successor, would invite her again to *All the Year Round* and there she published "In the Confessional" (1871) and "Sister Johanna's Story"(1872). Her last story, "Was it an Illusion?" (1881), appeared in the Christmas number of *Arrowsmith's Magazine: Thirteen to Dinner*

It is important to be provided with a chronology of her short stories because of two important reasons—firstly, we will work with some short ghost stories, and, secondly, it will be a guide for us to know the year of publishing, and, depending on the year of their writing, we will be able to observe that there

are many details of her life in each of them that coincide in time with the year of the tale. From the entire list we will analyse the ones in bold:

“My Brother’s Ghost Story” (1860)

“How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries”(1863) or “Number Three” (1863)

“The North Mail” (1864) or “The Phantom Coach” (1864)

“The Discovery of the Treasure Isles” (1864)

“The Guard-Ship at the Aire” (1865)

“The Recollections of Professor Henneberg” (1865)

“The Four-Fifteen Express” (1866)

“The Engineer” (1866)

“The Story of Salome” (1867)

“A Service of Danger” (1869)

“The New Pass” (1870)

“A Night on the Borders of the Black Forest” (1871)

“In the Confessional” (1871)

“Sister Johanna’s Story”(1872)

“Monsieur Maurice” (1873)

“Was It an Illusion?” (1881).

Her writings offer the reader a surprising wealth of experiences from which they can learn much about life and the world—as well as the shocking experiences in her ghost stories—; they also show manners, history and the topography of the European continent, not to mention the educational benefit to be derived from discussions about art, literature and other contemporary

subjects, such as engineering construction. All these topics are from a Victorian point of view, as Joan Rees (1998) dubs it, “unfeminine material”, an unconventional territory for her in those days, but this shows us what her interests were. Amanda Adams (2010) posits in *Ladies of the Field* that once she was interviewed about writing as a profession for her and she was able to anticipate “the typewriter” because she had the feeling that technology someday would be at its service.

We will try to analyse some of her tales, and, for such purpose, we will deal with the same aspects in each one, if they appear, because they share many traits—albeit not all of them. Since we will attempt to do the most accurate analysis possible, we include a synoptic grill about Edward’s main features in the ghost stories selected, which will make us easier to see the similarities and differences while we read the dissertation.

The main points according to which we will compare Edwards’ stories are several. First, we will point out the aspects of society or the Victorian period that are present in the stories. Then, we will pay attention to one of the most important elements to articulate the story—the narrator. Afterwards, we will continue with the ghost that is always connected with the narrator with whom he has a task to perform or a direct issue to deal with. We will only treat the plot pattern in a special part due to the fact that the plot is already analyzed in relation to the other elements, but there is a special pattern which is repeated in some works. Our last point will be that of the *genius locus*, so special for our feminine writers.

AMELIA EDWARDS' SHORT STORIES: COMPARATIVE TABLE

SOCIETY	NARRATOR	GHOST	TASK REQUIRED	PLOT PATTERN	GENIUS LOCI
'The Phantom Coach' (1864)					
Scientist Belief in the supernatural.	Man Sceptical Barrister	Four men Reason: Take revenge of the narrator; he did not die in accident	-----	Travel 1 Apparition No information	English Moors Night Cold and snow
'An Engineer' (1866)					
Railway world	Man ----- Train engineer	Narrator's friend Reason: help his friend and save narrator's soul	Make Gianetta know she has been forgiven	Travel 1 Apparition Information about the ghost: already known	Italy Train machine Night
'The 4'15 Express' (1866)					
Railway world Victorian morality	Man ----- Railway businessman	Man Railway businessman Reason: Save his own reputation	Find out the assassination and his corpse.	Travel 1 Apparition Information about the ghost: already known	England Train
'In the Confessional' (1871)					
Religion Women's oppression.	Man ----- Authoress <i>alter ego</i>	Man Farmer Reason: Be punished	Narrator can help the priest to think he is not mad.	Travel 3 Apparitions Information about the ghost: after seeing him	Switzerland
'Sister Johanna's Story' (1872)					
Women's roles	Woman ----- Wood-carver & domestic tasks	Man Wood Sculptor Reason: Repentance & ask for forgiveness	Johanna finds his body and the finished Christ.	----- 1 Apparition Information about the ghost: already known	Switzerland Christmas Eve Night Cold and snow
'The New Pass' (1873)					
Engineering success and development	Man Sceptical Barrister	Young boy Reason: Advice to save his brother from death	Make the travellers change their route.	Travel 1 Apparition Information about the ghost: recognition by his brother	Switzerland Arcadia Afternoon
'The Story of Salome' (1874)					
Women's oppression	Man ---- Authoress <i>alter ego</i>	Woman Reason: She's been denied being buried according to her creed.	Perform a Christian burial ritual	Travel 3 Apparitions Information about the ghost: already known	Venice: cemetery in the Lido. April sunset /night.
'Was it an Illusion?' (1881)					
Schools Means of transport. Science	Man Sceptical Inspector of Schools	Young boy Reason: Avenge his death, inducing his murderer to commit suicide.	To be a witness of the facts.	Travel 3 Apparitions Information about the ghost: <i>a posteriori</i> of the findings	Northern Moors November Twilight Cold with fog.

Table 2: Amelia Edwards' short stories: Comparative table

5.2.1. Reflections of society

First and foremost, we will start dealing with the characteristics of Victorian society Amelia Edwards reflects in her stories and how she includes them so delicately that one forgets one is reading a ghost story, as one focuses on the period and on the matter she writes about. In her works, she used to avoid talking about controversial themes, which can be exasperating for a contemporary modern day reader, and she circumnavigated the use of scenes depicting conventional English life, as well as reflecting life in other parts of Europe depending on the setting of the story, but never domestic life, as for instance Oliphant would do. She filled her books with every topic one can find in the world—the origins and language of Etruscan people, the theory of evolution, fine wines, Italian dialects, customs, cities, landscapes and so forth. She also had a sharp view for satire and focused this acute eye on society manners: her characters belong to different social classes, and at the same time she never forgot what class she belonged to, not only because she commented on some low-class people on her travel to Egypt in *Thousand Miles Up the Nile*, but also because her main characters belong to her same class.

Even in fiction a woman's world in Victorian times was too incarcerating, too oppressive, especially for a woman who had learnt to live without the typical encumbrances of being a woman. Amelia lived her life as many women would have liked to do, having success in her writing, travelling around the world and having nothing to do with domesticity; a life similar to that of a man. From our point of view, here is the clue for her subversion and reversion in her stories. On the one hand, she is subversive because she writes as a woman, but with a male voice, and she writes about male matters. Still, one can never forget she is

inside the Female Gothic conventions—her characters are all typical of the Female Gothic and they behave as the ones born from feminine quills. She equally rebels because she obviates the feminine world and the feminine figure in most of her stories, and when she does so, she does it from the point of view of a woman—hence showing a complete reversion.

This is probably the main reason why she makes the most of her narrators and characters of her ghost stories males—males are the conventional centre of action. Out of sixteen short stories, only two are centred in women or women appear as a character or narrator. To be more precise, the only story with a woman narrator is “Sister Johanna’s Story” and a woman as a ghost appears in “The Story of Salome”.

Throughout her stories, these male characters represent each and every aspect of Victorian society. The display of characters she reflects in her writings belong to the middle-class—we see doctors, lawyers, and clerks—and also to the lower middle-class—as head teachers, journalists, shopkeepers, and skilled workers like carpenters or wood-cutters for children’s toys, who are usually defined as the people who do ‘clean’ work, and are the narrators of her stories. The upper-class, i.e. men who had total control of society and politics and who had gone on to establish themselves as the ruling class, appear as secondary characters.

The middle-class grew rapidly in influence, and their values were widespread—they valued progress, they introduced the well-known *laissez-faire* in politics and competitive business practices; hope, honesty, domesticity, materialism and so on were all deemed desirable traits. The middle class dominated life because it fired enthusiasm among people. They were moreover

stratified on the basis of their earnings. Businessmen were respected as self-made men. The new middle-class was often overtly materialistic and they enjoyed showing their wealth through houses filled with expensive furniture, wall coverings, paintings etc. Competition became a facet of life for business and society.

Thus, in her ghost stories, we will find pieces of reflections of Victorian society which cover many fields. We will start with “The New Pass”. Here, through the voice of the narrator, we perceive the model of what was considered the perfect Victorian society, but it seems not all the characters in the plot agree that the social model portrayed is actually a perfect way to live. A group of friends on holiday try to go through the New Pass and only one of them can see the spirit of a man who is warning them not to continue on their way. As the narrator introduces the other characters to us, we are told that Egerton Wolfe is engaged to a perfect woman—beautiful and rich, a baronet’s daughter, who will serve him as a medium of social mobility, insofar as he is ascending the social scale by marrying her. Nevertheless, Egerton—who is about to contract an ideal marriage—is ‘not perfect’ for the period he lives in, and, thus, the narrator describes him as “a poet, a dreamer and an artist”, the opposite pole to a man of reason. We have to remember it was considered weak or feminine to feel passionate about poetry or art at this time, as well as to believe in hypnosis or mesmerism. This reinforces the main trait of our narrator, who is “a rational man”. Frank, the narrator, is described as a “man of the world” and a “lover of it”. So, when they are contemplating the landscape as something wonderful, their vision of it is very different. Egerton cannot understand why Frank does not feel the first sentiment Adam had for nature, but our protagonist

mocks his words as he prefers being as he is, because, as he declares, “the best poetry comes out of cities nowadays”. Frank is also in favour of progress, because, when they talk about destroying the mountain to build tunnels, he also holds it as a wonderful idea. Egerton believes these mountains represent Arcadia and he can only observe sadly how men are destroying nature. Being in those evergreen forests makes him feel happy, but such joy is tinged with sadness because he remembers his brother Lawrence, about whom he feels miserable. He knew his brother wanted to go there with him but, unfortunately, he died young. He believes he died because he did not fight enough against his illness even though Frank does not tally with him on this point.

The landlord of the chalet in “The New Pass” where the travellers stop helps our authoress to denounce indiscriminate progress, by putting a eulogy of progress in the mouth of the character. We must not forget that she liked “Untrodden Peaks” and that she was an admirer of natural landscape. The landlord explains to them how the engineer has built the New Pass and thinks that the new construction will be “a long gallery which will please the travellers” and so does Frank. In addition, the construction will also be practical and economical because it will bring visitors, and people nearby will gain profit from it—a perfect combination in the Victorian age, when money was as highly-regarded as it is now. Nevertheless, the high point of the conversation is when the landlord tells them how the waterfall has been changed and re-arranged. An engineer daring to change the course of nature is depicted as going too far in man’s intervention with nature.

Also the upper-class of the country has a place in Amelia’s works. In “Was it an Illusion?”, the owner of the house, as bleak as his mine, who

confesses to being “the king of Hades”, because he owns all the mines in the county, is a typical man of Victorian times who has money, and, as a result, can do anything he wants, as he himself declares. He refers to his workers as rats and the social scale in the story is clearly defined by money. As a manifestation of his acquisitive power, he buys useless things but “with an exotic and eccentric taste” wherever he goes in a deliberate display of his affluence.

Amelia showed fascination with characters that prove to have superior intelligence and a heightened capacity for powerful feeling. This is something one can see in “The Phantom Coach”. There is a strange character in the story that helps our narrator see a different point of view from his. When the narrator, James Murray, gets lost in the middle of the night, he arrives at a big house where he asks for help. The owner of the house is a scientist the reader might suspect to have gone mad. Living in a house far away from civilization, the scientist spends his time looking through a telescope and is not too pleased to see the narrator treating him at first in the most inhospitable way. The room where the man spends all his time is more a laboratory than a comfortable living room and he himself is described more like an artist, such as Beethoven, in the way he dedicates himself to his work. The man has been rejected by society because he believes in the mysteries of the supernatural, which cannot be proved. He distanced himself from the world because they considered him to be a dreamer and a fool. He obviously possessed far superior intelligence to other men and demonstrates passionate feelings about his particular field of interest but he has paid a high price in personal terms. He seems to be like a woman, because he is as an outcast, and has been more than twenty years completely isolated from people voluntarily. Nevertheless, when the narrator arrives at his

house, he compared the door to that “of a prison” and it is through the window that the master observes the world; for us, the window is equivalent to a trap that keeps him away from the rest of the world and nothing from the outer world can come therein.

Another important aspect of the progress in Victorian times Amelia Edwards shows us is the Railway, which she was able to experience personally during her life. The Railway was of utmost importance for Victorian Britain, and, by extension, for Europe, because it revolutionised communication and rapid movement, hence changing life for everyone, let alone business opportunities. For this reason, it even entered into fiction. It is in “The Engineer” that two characters, Matthew Price and Benjamin Hardy, who is also the narrator, become immersed in the world of train business. They are about thirty years old, and work for a railway company, and, as a result, they are sent to Italy to start a new line between Turin and Genoa. They are hard workers and are soon granted a promotion—Benjamin Hardy is made superintendent. Amelia gives the reader a complete description of what a man’s life would have been like in the middle of a part of society to which she did not have personal access. Yet, she describes the details of the contract just as if she had been in the railway business and knew it inside out. She goes on to say that the characters were happy and they deserved success as their work was challenging.

Indeed, the railway brought such sweeping changes to life as it had been previously known that it was often used as a central theme in the literature of the time. Amelia Edwards, as the returning traveller she was, knew all about it. In the story “The Four-Fifteen Express”, even the title makes reference to the importance of time and punctuality in a railway schedule. William Langford

takes a train because he is visiting a friend of his, but he has to change his vehicle because he cannot arrive by train. Langford is a junior partner of a well-known firm—he represents a typical Victorian middle-class businessman. Edwards places her characters in the middle of the chaos that a railway station engenders and the story starts in a railway station and in the carriage of a train. It is very well described and the simplest detail becomes significant for the plot, the key of the compartment, the smoke that comes from the train, the hustle and bustle of the stations, etc.

As we have said before, Amelia wrote two stories where women play important roles, although there are other women who appear briefly and are secondary characters in these and other tales. Although it seems that Amelia casts out the topic of femininity from her fiction, here we can see that she follows the patterns of the rest of the female writers of her period. To put it more simply, she reflects Victorian women in their behaviour and in their way of thinking, but subverting and reversing the rules.

The first tale is “Sister Johanna’s Story” where the narrator is Johanna, who is a good daughter, a good sister and a spinster. Being a spinster was not deemed satisfactory—it was better for a woman to have children—but for spinsters there was an option: to take care of the others around a masculine figure. According to Nina Auerbach in *Woman and the Demon* (1990), spinsters were usually tolerated by society because they were considered victims. Still, they menaced male society because they were like leaders and they endangered the future of the race. Yet, it had to be distinguished between old maids (volunteer spinsters) and women who were accidentally unmarried and whose life had to be centred on ‘father, brother or other omnipotent male’.

Here, Johanna is the narrator, i.e. we tackle a story by Edwards narrated by a feminine voice. She starts the narration addressing the reader: “If you have ever heard of ...” (105) and then she identifies herself: “I, Johanna Roederer...” (105). She belongs to a family of artisans, namely wood-carvers, lower middle-class people, and she dwells with her mother and her sister Katrina. Her two neighbours belonged to the same social class, but their work was different—Ulrich was the finest wood sculptor and his brother, Alois, was a very good painter.

Johanna and her younger sister Katrina have to work because her father is dead. But little by little Johanna is busier with the house tasks as a housewife with “cooking, washing, mending, making, spinning, gardening and so forth” (105) the typical labours for an “Angel in the House” including her character and temper.

Although Johanna had always imagined Alois and Katrina would make a good match, due to the similarity of their temper, it is Ulrich who is engaged to Katrina. In this case, Ulrich has not taken her into consideration. Johanna thinks Ulrich and Katrina are too different, diametrically opposed poles, like antithetic terms—“being so grave himself, and she so gay” (108). Johanna can foresee the relationship is doomed, but she conforms because she loves them both. Nevertheless things complicate when Alois, who was in Italy, comes back home and he is offered to paint an altar-piece for the altar of Saint Marco and he paints Katrina in it. Thus, so as not to leave them alone during the sittings, Johanna keeps their company. She is the oldest sister, so she is made responsible for Katrina’s behaviour; she is destined to be the victimizer of her sister and, for that reason, she becomes a victim herself: “I have reproached

myself since for letting that moment pass as I did. I believe I might have had her confidence if I had tried, and then what a world of sorrow might have been averted from us all" (111). She feels guilty for her sister's runaway and all blame her for that. Notwithstanding, it will be her who can redeem Ulrich and it is her who can, and must, look after her sister until the end of her days. On the one hand, she demonstrates she is able to take care of her sister without a man in the house—she is not dependant on anybody. And, on the other hand, she makes public she is superior to an ordinary woman, attached to a man, at the same time she shows superiority of soul and heart. It was also very usual to find the pair of an old maid and a fallen woman under her protection.

Katrina's character is opposed to Johanna's. We are told at the beginning of the tale that Katrina is "delicate, pretty, younger ... spoiled" (105); she is always protesting, she doesn't like working. Contrary to Johanna, she is volatile, glad, crazy, she enjoys dancing around, but her mother likes it, though she possesses all the negative qualities for a Victorian woman. Katrina accepts Ulrich's proposal though she falls in love with Alois, with whom she elopes. Katrina and Alois are similar in character and mood, rather far from Victorian rules. When the story finishes we can observe Katrina has experienced a tremendous transformation: she is a grey woman, sad and silent; she has infringed society norms and she has been punished—she has become a fallen woman. By a curious paradox, we can see our narrator Johanna as a mere recorder of the facts and as an implicated part, but she has not suffered any visible transformation—physically she remains the same, a spinster looking after her sister, but psychologically she has become a heroine. They both shared the undefined identity of women as old maids and fallen women behind

the categories of daughter, wife and mother, although it does not seem Johanna worries too much about that.

The other Edwards' story that contains a woman as a character, in this case, as the centre of the tale is "The Story of Salome". Salome is a girl who is described not only as beautiful, but also as a noble and refined person who is helping her father in his shop. It is noteworthy that she is described as the most beautiful girl the narrator has seen because it is considered that people's face reflect people's interior—it is as if the writer tried to convey the idea that nothing bad can spring from a beautiful woman.

Salome represents the perfect daughter. Salome and her father are Jews and she dresses according to her religion—the narrator compares her to an "empress". Nevertheless it seems there is something wrong: in Victorian society daughters cannot decide by themselves. Before dying, Salome converted to Christianity, and, by doing so, she defied her father and rabbi's rules. Salome has come to seek for peace and it is very significant, because the name 'Salome' means 'peace' in Hebrew. She has been buried according to the Judaic rites and although the two men—her father and rabbi—know she is a Christian, they deny her right to choose her religion freely or to be buried according to it, as she has opposed the patriarchal forces in society. In order to lie in peace she needs the Christian ceremony to be performed on her grave and it will be the narrator, Harcourt Blunt, who will do it for her. Had she not appeared as a ghost, she would not have even been able to fetch help—this was not possible for Victorian women because, in this case, the narrator's aid was for her self-assertion against her father and her rabbi. Moreover, this is

ratified by the fact that she does not ask for her father's consent—as she did in life—or his pardon, but she demands to reassert herself with her beliefs instead.

5.2.2. Narrators

In Edward's short ghost stories it is always interesting to pay special attention to the narrator who guides us through a series of incredible events—they constitute the central axis because it is around these chroniclers that the story comes to life, that it is told to the reader and that all the characters and events of the narrative become meaningful. Without narrators, the tale does not exist, the ghosts and their petitions are ignored and the peace for the earthbound is not achieved. Moreover, the relationship between the narrator and the ghost is pivotal, due to the fact that there is a common belief, by the feminine writers, that ghosts are not "beyond reason", as L. Carpenter and W. Kolmar say in her introduction to their book *Ghost Stories by British and American Women*. This can imply that women's ghost stories defy, weaken or redefine reason. There has been a long tradition considering women emotional, instead of rational; ghost stories give women writers—who are cognizant of the charge they are tied to—a chance to contradict society and demonstrate this is only a conjecture. Sometimes, then, in women's stories, reason and rationality are used to blind the perceiver to the existence of the supernatural, and to obstruct the ability of other characters to understand the supernatural. In contrast, we have that these qualities—reason and rationality—have been dealt with extreme admiration and respected by narrators of male gothic stories. Any male narrator who says to be rational and reasonable in a woman's ghost story is likely to be dismissed as unreliable. The representatives of reason in this

period and in the female gothic, as L. Carpenter and W. Kolmar (1998) contend, are professional men, like doctors or lawyers, who seem to have been denied the ability to see the supernatural. Nevertheless, in the case of Amelia Edwards, there seems to be a solution: although her narrators belong to these liberal professions, they never claim to be rational but to be sceptical, that is the reason why they consider themselves as mere recorders.

We have classified the vast array of narrators we encounter in her stories in three types: some that embody male narrators representing Victorian society; two stories with male narrators being an *alter ego* of the authoress; and one story with a female narrator.

In the first class, male narrators are actually not very different from one another, and, in fact, when we look deeper, there are even some characteristics that she uses that are common to all of them. It is commonly believed that ghost stories usually hold ideas against rationalism—this may be one reason why in some of the stories by Edwards there is somebody who is in favour of science and progress, and somebody who is not and the debate is laid open to the narrator. Nevertheless, Edwards's narrators try to establish the objective existence of supernatural phenomena by formulating a storyline and descriptions in which the narrator himself, always in first person singular, pretends to be the recorder of events. Most of them begin their stories in the same way, as in "The Phantom Coach": "The circumstances I am about to relate to you have truth to recommend them...", in "The Four-Fifteen Express": "The events which I am about to relate took place between nine and ten years ago." or also in "The New Pass": "The circumstances I am about to relate happened just four autumns ago..." One of the most important things to note is

that all of them consider themselves to be chroniclers of the actions. Thus, it is more credible for the reader to believe what they tell us as something verisimilar, due to the fact that they claim to be rational and reasonable men; that is the reason why the narrators are going to relate but they never say if they believe what they see or not, and they maintain to be incredulous though they would rather say they are sure they lived the events. In “The Phantom Coach”, the narrator is a barrister, somebody who is supposed to be sensible, who gets lost in the middle of the night and who is portraying facts that happened twenty or thirty years ago. He has only told the story to one person during all this time, and this person, his doctor, thinks it was a dream. As a result, he wants the reader to judge the facts for himself, and, as an excuse for not voicing his own opinion, he announces that, for his part, he will only trust his own senses: “My mind on this subject is quite made up, and, having the testimony of my own senses to rely upon, I prefer to abide by it.”

Other narrator, Francis Legrice, also a barrister, in “The New Pass”, claims to be the perfect Victorian man, neither romantic nor imaginative or an artist. He is sceptical, too, about strange phenomena:

... it would be difficult to find many persons less given to look upon life from a romantic or imaginative point of view. By my enemies, and sometimes, perhaps, by my Mends, I am supposed to push my habit of incredulity to the verge of universal scepticism; and indeed I admit that I believe in very little that I do not hear and see for myself. But for these things that I am going to relate I can vouch; and in so far as mine is a personal narrative I am responsible for its truth. What I saw with my own eyes in the broad daylight I offer nothing, therefore, in the shape of a story but simply a plain statement of facts, as they happened to myself.

In “The New Pass” Amelia Edwards presents us two different classes of men—the one who believes in ghosts and does not trust science, who is able to

undo his way and change his route because he follows the warning of the ghost, whereas Frank, the narrator and the representative of Victorianism, is the rational, strong man who is prepared to lose his life before admitting he has seen a ghost; he prefers to think it was “some kind of optical illusion”. When Egerton and the guide have departed, Frank gives a tutorial about ghosts and why one should not believe in them, not even Egerton:

Such phenomena, though not common, are by no means unheard-of. I had talked with more than one eminent physician on this very subject, and I remembered that each had spoken of cases within his own experience. ... That I must have been temporarily in the condition of persons so affected, I took for granted; and yet I felt well - never better, my head cool - my mind clear - my pulse regular. Well - I would never disbelieve in hallucinations again. To that I made up my mind but as for ghosts...pshaw! How could any sane man, above all, such a man as Egerton Wolfe, believe in ghosts?

Although he could have saved his life, he decides to defy the ghost's warning and continue on his way as planned, because it is his way of proving ghosts do not exist. And, furthermore, even if he had been able to check whether the danger was real, he confessed not to believe in ghosts. For Frank, the fantastic cannot be rationalised, although, in the end, he is ridiculed, because he is about to lose his life and it is patent that Frank saw a ghost. Going through the tunnel is the most frightening experience Frank had ever had and it is wonderfully described from the beginning to the end; it seems the world is crumbling into pieces. The situation causes real horror to Frank, who imagines the cause of all—he admits “a great horror fell upon me”. This, curiously, contrasts with the peaceful manner in which other characters have seen a ghost. Something that helps to create the chaotic climate in the destruction of the pass is the accurate description of the fall.

Contrary to all these narrators, the character of “Was it an Illusion?”, Mr Frazer, an Inspector of Schools, does not try to present himself as a sceptical man. Instead, he declares himself a witness of the events, just as some of the other narrators: “I have thus far related events as I witnessed them. Here, however, my responsibility ceases. I give the rest of my story at second-hand, briefly, as I received it some weeks later...” At the end he only asks the reader to consider the question in the title:

Ay, indeed! That is the question; and it is a question which I have never been able to answer. Certain things I undoubtedly saw – with my mind’s eye, perhaps – and as I saw them; withholding nothing, adding nothing, explaining nothing. Let those solve the mystery who can. For myself, I but echo Wolstenholme’s question: Was it an illusion?

As a man and a representative of his class and job—he is a railway businessman—the narrator of “The Four-Fifteen Express” does not say anything about apparitions. At the beginning, the experience seemed so real that William Langford is not aware that he had encountered a ghost. In fact, no one knows that Mr Dwerrihouse, the ghost, is dead until they investigate and find his corpse. So differently to the previous raconteur, this narrator is trying to find a rational solution all the time. At first, he is shocked by the disappearance of Mr Dwerrihouse, and then, he thinks about it:

It was the strangest disappearance in the world; ... It was not worth thinking about, and yet, for my life, I could not help pondering upon it—pondering, wondering, conjecturing, turning it over and over in my mind, and beating my brains for a solution of the enigma.

When he tells about the experience to other people, who also knew Mr Dwerrihouse, while dinning, they think he is scoffing at his hostess, who is a relative of Mr Dwerrihouse. Yet, it is only the narrator who has seen Mr

Dwerrihouse, questioning himself if he was dreaming once he has received the information about the disappearance: “Could I dream of a branch line that I had never heard of? Could I dream of a hundred and one details that had no kind of interest for me? Could I dream of the seventy-five thousand pounds?”

But everything only seems to indicate that he is a dreamer. Nevertheless, by recognising the person who talked to the ghost in his vision, he denounces him publically. However, the other men chose not to believe him and he is ridiculed and offended:

There are few things more annoying than to find one’s positive convictions met with incredulity. ... I was not proof against the civil sarcasm of the chairman’s manner. Most intolerable of all, however, was the quiet smile lurking about the corners of Benjamin Somers’s mouth, and the half triumphant, half-malicious gleam in the eyes of the under-secretary.

Nonetheless, our narrator still wants to ratify himself and demonstrate what kind of rational man he is, and he uses the cigar case, which is the element needed to prove it all, to aid his plight. At the end, the two men—Jelf and Langford—wonder about the vision:

What was it, then, that you saw in the train?
What was it that I saw in the train? That question remains unanswered to this day. I have never been able to reply to it ... that I was guided, as it were, by that vision on the platform to the identification of the murderer; and that, a passive instrument myself, I was destined, by means of these mysterious teachings, to bring about the ends of Justice. For these things I have never been able to account.

It is in “The Engineer” that Benjamin Hardy starts his story in first person plural because the story is about two friends and the narrator is one of them. He proceeds to relate and it is not until the end of it that he states his position about the story:

I am prepared to the objections that may be made to my story. I expect, as a matter of course, to be told that this was an optical illusion, or that I was suffering from pressure on the brain, or even that I laboured under an attack of temporary insanity. [...] My own mind has been made up upon this subject for many a year. All I can say – all that I know is – that Matthew Price came back from the dead, to save my soul and the lives of those whom I, in my guilty rage, would have hurried to destruction. I believe this as I believe in the mercy of Heaven and the forgiveness of repentant sinners.

He does not care about people's minds and he really believes in apparitions, because it is his close friend whom he recognises. In this case, there is no place for doubts because the narrator and the spirit have been so close in life that Ben never dares wonder about what has happened in the train—he dares not believe it has been a hallucination or an illusion, although he leaves an open possibility that it might be an hallucination or an illusion, lest it seem too irrational.

The second type of narrators is that of those who share Amelia Edwards' coincidences with her life. We do believe our writers, like any living person, are prisoners of the events they have lived in their life, and, in this case, in "In the Confessional" and "The Story of Salome", there are some details through which the life of the writer is rendered patent and so is her mood. She uses details of her life and travels, resorts and people to create the climate of the story.

She wrote "In the Confessional" in 1871. As we have said before in her biography, in this period of her life, she did not have good health, she had lost some friends and, of course, there was something which was worrying her. In "In the Confessional", the narrator who does not even have a name—people call him *Herr Englander*—declares to be anxious and the same was happening to her:

My manner of life at that time was desultory and unsettled. I had a sorrow—no matter of what kind— and I took to rambling about Europe; not certainly in the hope of forgetting it, for I had no wish to forget, but because of the restlessness that made one place after another *triste* and intolerable to me.

It was change of place, however, and not excitement, that I sought. I kept almost entirely aloof from great cities, Spas, and beaten tracks, and preferred for the most part to explore districts where travellers and foreigners rarely penetrated. (Page 46)

For this reason, because she says through the narrator's voice how she feels at this time, we consider the narrator is the *alter ego* of Amelia—albeit always a man. We must not have to forget that, although she felt a free and liberated woman—though in the modern sense of the expression—it was better for her to speak from a masculine voice: she reflected her own life as she was used to do it.

In the first person, he experiences the facts, situates the story eighteen or nineteen years before—as in all the rest of the tales—and transmits an atmosphere of confusion: 'I was not young then; I am not old now.' (47) The narrator does not want to forget in the same way the ghost will forget neither.

In this case, the narrator does not show reluctance to believe, nor does he describe himself as a believer—he just tells us about his experience. He saw a man in the confessional and thought he was a priest, but, later on, he discovered the man who was in the confessional was a ghost.

In the case of "The Story of Salome" written in 1872, the narrator reflects some of the travels Amelia used to go on while she wrote the story: "My tour lasted many months longer. I went first to Egypt and the Holy Land; then joined an exploring party on the Euphrates; and at length, after just twelve months of Oriental life ..." (web) Here, the narrator is a male again and his name is

Harcourt Blunt, but there is no description of him, apart from some details that are revealed to us, such as the fact that he is a counterpoint to his friend Coventry. He does not declare anything about the matter of Salome until the end of the tale, when he accepts he has seen Salome's ghost and he is sure of it: "Enough that I watched and waited but that her gracious spirit appeared to me no more. I wait still, but I watch no longer. I know now that our place of meeting will not be here."

The last kind of narrator is the case of "Sister Johanna's Story", where a woman is the voice of the tale. Johanna makes a direct appeal to the public: 'If you have ever heard of...' (page 105) and this establishes a feeling of complicity just enough to convey the reader her own sentiments about the facts of the tale at the time they happen: 'there began for me such a period of misery that ...'(119) and sometimes she predicts what is to come to predispose the reader and to prepare him: 'I felt beforehand, would be worse than useless.[...] Now, just about this time I am telling (that is towards the middle of August)...'(110)

Once again, when the narrator finishes her story, she wonders about the apparition—it is only a reflexion because she cannot assure whether it was true:

Did I indeed see Ulrich Finazzer that night of his self-murder? If I did so with my bodily eyes and it was no illusion of the senses, then most surely I saw him not in life, for that dark mark which looked to me in the moonlight like a bruise was the bullet-hole in his brow. But did I see him? It is a question I ask myself again and again, and have asked myself for years. Ah! who can answer it? (116)

In this case, Johanna never tells us if she believes or not, but she tries to transmit the reader her credibility. When Ulrich is outside the window, Johanna tells us "I heard or I fancied I heard" (115), and, by saying this, she makes us participate in her doubts. Notwithstanding, from our point of view, she appeals

to agnostics and is sceptical to believe in her vision: “I tell you as plainly as I see my own hand” (115). In this case, despite being a woman, Amelia follows the same pattern she uses for male narrators; Johanna does not affirm or assert anything about rationality or irrationality and she does not try to make the reader believe in spirits. On the contrary, she finishes her relating as the other narrators have done—questioning the vision. She behaves in no different way from the male narrators.

5.2.3. Ghosts

By analysing Amelia Edwards’s ghosts, we have been able to establish some similarities among them as well as some differences. Thus, some of them can be grouped on the basis of their common traits.

Amelia’s ghosts look like human people, behave like human and they seem so real, that some of the narrators do not realise they are dealing with a ghost. Apart from that, they are not terrifying or perverse as in male gothic narratives. They are in the world of the living for a special purpose—some to denounce a murder, others to prevent people from suffering something bad, others also to ask for a favour, and even show their repentance about something they did, although there are some, from our point of view, which are resentful and full of bad intentions and come to take revenge.

Moreover, there is a series of common traits among the stories, depending on the plot, and one of them is the recognition of the ghost on the part of the narrator. When the ghost appears, the narrator does not have the sufficient information about him or her. Thus, if the narrator knew the ghost prior to the apparition, it is certain that he or she does not know the person is dead

and that is the reason why the narrator does not think that what he has before him is a ghost. It can be also the fact that the narrator did not know the ghost previously and then he needs some information to be cognizant that he has seen a ghost. We have attempted to point this out in the chart when comparing the ghosts.

There are two ghosts that ask for help and it can be considered as a favour or task the narrator has to do to restore their peace. One is the case of the ghost in “The Four-Fifteen Express” and the other is the ghost in “The Story of Salome”.

Amelia’s ghost in “The Four-Fifteen Express” is a rich lawyer named Mr Dwerrihouse, who appears in the carriage in which our narrator is travelling. At first sight, Langford thinks his face is familiar to him, and, after a while, he recognises the ghost; he is so painstakingly depicted that the reader would be able to recognise him in a photograph. Mr Dwerrihouse is a relative of the people Langford is visiting and Langford appreciates that Mr Dwerrihouse looks paler and worse than the last time they met—he observes “sickness and sorrow” in him. The narrator feels impatient and preoccupied with the ghost, because he is so real he can even perceive his state of mind from his mere appearance. This is one of the cases mentioned above: the narrator knew the ghost previously, though not very closely, but he was unaware that he was dead.

The ghost in this story wants to report his assassination to save his honour and his reputation as an honest man, since everybody believes he fled with the company’s money. He is a middle-class Victorian man, who is going to build a “branch line from Blackwater to Stockbridge”; once again the characters

are connected with railway construction and improvement. In Mr Dwerrhouse's words, the new branch "will be an improvement" and he feels important because it has been his own idea. After a long speech about the advantages and disadvantages of the railway system, Mr Dwerrhouse talks about the big sum of money he is carrying with him to pay for a deal.

The difficulty Langford will come up against will be that nobody will believe he has seen Mr Dwerrhouse, because the others think he has escaped with the money. At the beginning of the story, he seems to be more worried about something he has lost and it will be this that he gives to Langford: two pieces of evidence, that is the story about the blue room at the Jelfs' and the cigar case—which will prove to be the definitive clue because it bears the silver monogram of Mr Dwerrhouse and everybody had been able to recognise it as his. At the end, the ghost is judged innocent by everyone, even though Jelf and Langford knew the board of directors was against him—they represented the typical Victorian morality.

The other story about ghosts asking humans for help is "The Story of Salome". Harcourt Blunt, the narrator, describes Salome as the most beautiful creature he has ever known:

For she was indeed very beautiful – beautiful in a way I had not anticipated. Coventry Turnour, with all his enthusiasm, had failed to do her justice. He had raved of her eyes – her large, lustrous, melancholy eyes – of the transparent paleness of her complexion, of the faultless delicacy of her features; but he had not prepared me for the unconscious dignity, the perfect nobleness and retirement, that informed every look and gesture.

This is significant because, as Auerbach (1982) says in her book 'A woman's face is the source of her spiritual power'. Salome is beautiful as her soul is, and, at the same time, she is powerful, insofar as she has chosen her

religion in life, despite having disobeyed her father, who oppresses her in that sense denies her Christian prayers in her burial. She is powerful, because, as one of the prototypes of Victorian women who were powerful was that of a queen, in the tale, the narrator describes her like a “young empress” who is able to come back from the world of the dead to reassert her choice. Consequently, she asks the narrator for a task: he has to carve a cross on her tomb and he has to read a Christian prayer to let her rest in peace. Nevertheless, for a woman, the only way to achieve her objective in the Victorian period is being a ghost, which is, in other words, the only means to gain the freedom she did not have in human life. As a result, we can infer that Amelia is exploring and fighting against feminine frights.

There is another type of ghost we should equally mention—one which wants to prevent a catastrophe or catastrophic events which could entail horrible consequences. The first is the case in “The New Pass” and the second is the case in “The Engineer”.

In “The New Pass”, Lawrence, Egerton’s brother, a young man who died at the age of 16, is the ghost. He only appears once in the story to warn the men not to go through the New Pass because they were doomed to disaster. He is the kind of ghost who does not frighten anybody who is, as the guide names him, “*a blessed spirit*”. What seems contradictory and full of paradox is that the only person who can see the ghost is the one who claims to be a sceptic—Frank. This notwithstanding, it is true that thus we can believe that the ghost has really appeared, because Frank lacks the innate imagination to see it and this is reinforced by Egerton’s words: “I should not have believed my own eyes”. But he believes Frank’s.

When Frank catches sight of the ghost, he fails to understand the young boy is a real spirit because he has no information about his death or about his physical appearance until he describes the young boy to Egerton. He recognizes his brother Lawrence because of some details in his clothes. In this case, the ghost is not frightening, as it is very close to one of the characters and he is young and does not approach them.

In “The Engineer”, there is a different situation—the reader cannot feel frightened by the presence of the ghost because we have met him from the beginning. Two true friends since childhood are separated by study and later reunited when grown up. They work for a railway company and go to Italy. They settle in Genoa in a couple of rooms in the street, submerged in a lovely atmosphere. They meet a girl, Gianetta, the most beautiful woman imaginable—so beautiful that Benjamin feels unable to describe her; even a poet would be lost for words.

Curiously, Gianetta is wicked, and we remark *curiously* because she is the only woman that appears in this story, and, yet, she is evil. They both fall in love with Gianetta and, as a consequence of this, their harmonious life starts to split apart and the situation for them becomes complicated. Remarkably, Benjamin thinks neither of them is to blame and what happens is her fault because she toys with them without loving either. It is admirable how in this case Amelia is able to speak through a man’s voice so as to express that no woman is worthy of their friendship; even so, despite the warning signs, they do not avoid her. And, what is more, in some of the stories, she makes patent that marriage is a sign of social ascents—what happens if she prefers money to love? Is it not the same case as Coventry Turnour in “The Story of Salome”,

who marries in the end a rich woman? And is it not the same as in “The New Pass” that Egerton Wolfe marries also a rich woman? To our mind, Gianetta is free for doing the same, but, of course, at the time, she is considered as a mistress and, by extension, a fallen woman.

Matthew confesses to Benjamin that Gianetta is engaged to Marchesse Loredano and they both get angry with Benjamin, accusing Matthew of being a liar. They start a fight and Benjamin stabs Matthew—it is fairly surprising how fiercely Amelia reports the fact, with incredible quickness, without thinking. Ben takes care of Matthew until he dies, but they recover their unswervingly loyal friendship before the end comes. Before dying, Matthew also wants Gianetta to know he has forgiven her. Benjamin goes to look for her, but he goes berserk at her because of everything that has happened, and, then, in a moment of madness, he tries to kill her while he is driving the train. Thus, it is Matthew who comes as a ghost to rescue him from himself, hence preventing the assassination and his friend’s subsequent condemnation.

Repentance and forgiveness will be the motives why Ulrich, the ghost of “Sister Johanna’s Story”, does not leave the earth until he keeps in contact with Johanna.

Ulrich, who has been significantly named after the patron of the village, undergoes a great transformation throughout the story. He is a good man, even compared to a saint. Additionally, he excels at his work—he carves wooden, religious sculptures—and, moreover, he is very religious. His tragedy is that he falls in love with the wrong woman, Katrina, due to her character; she is on the opposite side of life of her sister Johanna and Ulrich. Katrina does not love him, but she accepts his proposal since she thinks she has no other opportunity to

be married. Ulrich is a self confident man and he trusts his brother and his fiancée, who fall in love with each other inevitably. When Ulrich discovers they have both escaped together, he blames Johanna for not having told him anything, instead of realising that he was guilty too, as he preferred to finish his sculpture to going with them. He is so furious that he casts a curse on the three of them; he pursues Alois and Katrina and kills his brother, although, afterwards, he cannot bear the guilt.

Ulrich, who had disappeared for a long time, comes back. At Christmas, Johanna knows Ulrich is at home because she can see the trampled snow in the path and smoke coming from the chimney of Ulrich's house. She can also hear much noise in the workhouse. Johanna thinks he has come to repair everything and apologizes for his behaviour, but this is not so. From our point of view, we do believe that he has come back home because he is repented and remorseful, and the only way to expiate his guilt is, on the one hand, finishing his Christ as a good religious man, and, on the other hand, to contact Johanna to let her know his body is in the workhouse. Curiously, when he appears to Johanna, he is in the street and he can see her through a window. We must point out a remarkable symbol here: Ulrich cannot enter the house, since he has committed suicide and assassination, and Johanna is also entrapped, because of being a woman and she cannot go out to come closer to him—it is only by gestures that they communicate. They both represent a different part of oppression in Victorian Society: Johanna, as a woman, is not allowed to leave her house—even less if it is to help a man—whereas Ulrich is a sinner and cannot be reinstated in society. Ulrich needs her to redeem his sin and she can help him knowing he feels like Cain, who killed his brother. Johanna seems like

Joan of Arc, who defies society and is able to act like a man, not in battle in this case, but rescuing all the characters around her and helping the ones who need her. The title of the story leads us to think, too, that she can be paralleled to a nun—she is ‘sister Johanna’—relegated to the service of others.

Very different from the previous ghosts is the one that appears in “In the Confessional”. Caspar Rufenacht is a man who committed two crimes and sacrilege. Caspar is described as an animal: “I only observed that his eyes were large, and bright, and wild-looking, like the eyes of a fierce animal” (page 50)—animalisation is very effective in his depiction. Except the men who are also ghosts in “The Phantom Coach”, no other ghost has been so cruelly described.

The first Père Chessez did not want to break the secret of confession, and, thus, Caspar killed him and took his place to listen to his wife’s infidelity. After listening to her, he puts an end to her life with a hatchet. The following morning, he goes to the police and confesses his two crimes and sacrilege. He is hanged for the two crimes, but nobody judges him for sacrilege. If he does not want anybody to help him, then, why is he earthbound? He does not show repentance, he does not demonstrate remorse, and, although he has been punished for his earthly crimes, he has been obviated by sacrilege. We do believe that his sentence is to go from his house to the confessional forever—akin to a divine sentence for having committed sacrilege. This is why the second Père Chessez dies. There is a moment in the story when both the second Père Chessez and our narrator see Caspar’s ghost together and this is a relief for the Père Chessez because, until the narrator arrives at the village, he is the only person who can see the ghost. This had been a great pain for him, because he thought he had gone insane and, moreover, he kept the secret

because, otherwise, this would have affected his credibility as a minister of the church. Not to suffer anymore, he asks God not to see Caspar's ghost any longer, and the following morning he dies—Caspar has to continue with his sentence.

We can find two more ghosts and they come back to take revenge—one appears in “Was it an Illusion?” and “The Phantom Coach”.

In “Was it an Illusion?” the ghost wants to report a crime—more than that, he wants to denounce his own assassination. The ghost is a young boy who appears three times and who is unknown to our inspector of schools, Frazer, who has been sent to a remote district to supervise a school. On his way to the district, he can see two people separately at the other side of the park—one of them is the boy and the other is the schoolmaster of the school he is going to, whom he recognises because he is lame. When the schoolmaster is later questioned, he refutes the facts as given by Frazer—he has not really been there, but Frazer is confused, because he has seen him in an illusion.

When the inspector has done his work and is talking to the schoolmaster, he sees a shadow and he observes the schoolmaster has seen it too, because he has turned pale.

In this case, the boy does not give an object to the inspector, but he appears to him instead, and denounces his murderer, since the figure of his father is shown to the narrator. When the corpse is accidentally found, everything is revealed and the truth emerges. The information about the ghost is obtained *a posteriori*, when the police have discovered who the boy was.

The same shadow of the boy appears again in the cell of the schoolmaster and he commits suicide—the shadow had pursued him like a

nightmare to wreak vengeance, hence the reason why the schoolmaster was so scared. In this case, the ghost was laying bare the deeds of the schoolmaster in order to obtain justice because he was not being punished. For us, it is essential that, in spite of the schoolmaster being also the boy's father, the boy goes one step further—he punishes his father until this one commits suicide. This shows us how cruel the ghost of the boy is, even though it is true that Skelton has killed his own son. Curiously, the name of the father is Skelton, which evokes the word 'skeleton'—something tenebrous hinting on his personality.

Something worth mentioning is that, when the corpse of the boy is found at the bottom of the tarn, significantly named Blackwaters, the narrator leaves the story there, as if he had been a mere witness; and it is in the letter that he receives where there is a detailed account of how things have been found or discovered, which concludes the tale. There are details about clothes, face, hair, chemical processes and identification of the boots by the shoemaker. It seems almost as if Edwards was attempting to relate accurately the discovery of a tomb in Egypt in all its minute detail.

The majority of ghosts we have come across in Amelia's stories are benevolent and kind—except the two last ones: the boy of the "Was it an Illusion?" and Caspar Rufenacht, whose name can mean 'cry in the night'. Also in "The Phantom Coach" is the spooky apparition and the atmosphere is as oppressive and rotten as the coach.

James Murray has been left alone to take the North Coach and he gets in it in a state of confusion. The coach contains three silent men, and he cannot catch sight of their faces at the beginning; little by little he sees their eyes, and,

when the last passenger looks at him, he feels frightened: “The ghost looked like a living corpse”. Having observed the men inside the coach, he tries to escape and the accident happens again. He then discovers that he was the fourth passenger of the coach the day that the accident happened for the first time and the others had come to take him with them. The narrator is entrapped in the coach; he cannot open or escape—just like women through windows. The ghosts in this case are enraged because he escaped death and they did not, and, although they want to take him, destiny helps him once more.

5.2.4 Genius loci

Most feminine ghost story writers present us more or less plausible or implausible heroes or heroines, spirits or ghosts, who are very important or prominent, because they represent the be-all and end-all of the narrative. This notwithstanding, the ‘scenery of places’, which shapes the stories at the same time that it provides them with a frame, is as important as the characters or the plot.

We have seen that ghosts are not frightening in Edwards’s stories, but one can feel chills when reading them. In our opinion, however, there is always something that predicts evil in her stories—sometimes it is the landscape, others the setting: she prepares the scene where the apparition is going to take place and the *genius locus* helps for the climax of the moment. Thus, it will be interesting to pay attention to the *genius locus* Amelia feels attracted to, since it gives us her vision of the setting or ‘spirit of the place’. One thing we perceive is that this ‘spirit of the place’ is patent in both her ghost stories and her travel books—she finds a ‘spiritual reality’, i.e. a spirit that it is occult in all types of

places: for her, in the land, in the mountains, namely the Dolomites, in Switzerland, in the cities of Italy—Venice or Genoa—, and in the northern part of England. There is a strong connection between Amelia's travels to the Dolomites and the setting, the descriptions of landscape, villages, mountains, sunsets, etc; the stories coincide with the place where she was.

Amelia was a frustrated painter who could observe landscapes with a high sensibility, and, thanks to her full dexterity with language, she was able to manipulate the story through the picturesque description of nature. She attains this by means of the use of poetic language to establish the mood rather than just an image, using words as oppressive as the situation she creates or as relaxed as she wants the reader to feel. She could create such an atmosphere that the reader would find it incredibly wonderful or terribly frightening.

There is a common belief that descriptions in the novel interrupt the main action and give too many details and are too recurrent, but, as far as Edward's ghost stories are concerned, the narration is often completely and effectively replaced by the description of the atmosphere and so successfully that there is a symbiosis between characters and setting, which make the action develop.

To our mind, this symbiosis is mainly used by the author as a device to intermingle suspense and terror in the plot—the key is that Edwards always establishes connections between nature and the situation being described and these, in turn, are identified with the character and how he feels in a given moment. In effect, one can say that the connection between character and nature gives more power to the story. The description of nature is not the representation of terror, but the reaction of the characters to it is what can cause moral collapse.

We will find three different locations: one in the Dolomites with stories such as “The New Pass”, “In the Confessional” and “Sister Johanna’s Story”, two in Italy specially “The Engineer” and “The Story of Salome” and the third in England with “The Phantom Coach”, “The Four-Fifteen Express” and “Was it an Illusion?”.

We will start describing the *genius loci* of the Swiss Mountains in “The New Pass”, where the landscape is described as if it were “Paradise”. Egerton does indeed compare these mountains to Arcadia and he observes sadly how men are destroying nature. Being in those evergreen forests makes him feel joyful, but such is a bittersweet happiness, as he remembers his brother Lawrence, now dead, who also loved the mountains and cannot share his pleasure. When the story begins, we are introduced to the tale through the landscape, the setting of the action. The reader relishes this short story, because, on the one hand, the authoress makes one visualise all the details of the landscape, as if holding a postcard. On the other hand, the description is as if one was reading *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys*, where Amelia describes similar scenery, and where she says she is “at a hotel in a valley three thousand feet up besides lakes Como or Lugarno...” (Chapter 1). The difference is that in the story she seems to show us the scenery through a camera travelling, beginning in the hotel and following the character’s steps till we contemplate the valley through the narrator’s eyes. She is so painstakingly accurate that she is able to mention every single detail, just as in her travel books about the Dolomites or a description of a street in Egypt. In “The New Pass”, she itemises the people in the streets—“the itinerant vendors”, “the barefoot children”, and so forth, all along the whole valley. Then, the journey

begins and she starts portraying each part very closely and in great detail—the valley, the path, and the lake. They start the ascent and by changing the characteristics of the closely observed scenery, she creates the desired atmosphere:

Then overhead, through the close roof of leaves, we saw patches of blue sky and golden shafts of sunshine, and small brown squirrels leaping from bough to bough; and in the deep rich grass on either hand, thick ferns, and red and golden mosses, and blue campanulas, and now and then a little wild strawberry, ruby red.

It really seems to be Arcadia. It is fairly surprising how Amelia Edwards creates the climate of the story because, when she describes the surroundings, she brings them to life and evokes their mood, and so, for the reader, there is total identification. The changes in one predispose the readers to face a change in the other. The higher our characters ascend, the more beautiful the sights they enjoy, far from the most barren earth. When they are at the highest point, there is a heavenly view: “An immense panorama of peaks, snow-fields, and glaciers lay out-stretched before us to the left, with an unfathomable gulf of misty valley between. The hot air simmered in the sun. The heat and the silence were intense.”

The culminating point arrives when Frank, who has never sung the praises of the landscape, compares it with the entrance to the cave; there is a strong contrast, something dreadful, so he says: “It was like the transition from an orchid house to an ice-house—from midday to midnight. The darkness was profound, and so intense the sudden chill, that for the first second it almost took my breath away”. The entrance of the tunnel is like the Averno’s mouth.

Curiously, Frank has seen the ghost without being afraid and it is at the sight of the tunnel when he is really scared.

Another tale whose *genius locus* is set in the Dolomites is “Sister Johanna’s Story”, but, very differently from other tales, the description of the *genius loci* is reduced. We are only told that the story takes place in a village called “Grödner Thal” and this is “the children’s paradise, and supplies the little ones of all Europe with toys” (105). The apparition of the ghost happens on Christmas Eve and the weather is freezing. In this case, the apparition of the ghost is similar to other domestic ghosts, due to the close relationship of the ghost and the narrator in their previous life, although one can think that Johanna is already in the domestic sphere, because she is inside the house and Ulrich has been cast out from domesticity because he is outside and cannot enter.

Also “In the Confessional” there is an extended depiction of the same landscape, more lengthy than in previous works. We are again in the Dolomites, in Rheinfelden, in the Upper Rhine. He describes: ‘but my way lay through a smiling country, studded with picturesque hamlets, and besides a bright river ...’ (47). Amelia depicts it like in a painting: the town, the light of the sunshine, the houses, and the roofs; all from a high point—again as if with a camera—she does such an accurate portrayal of the setting that one could draw the place just with a mere reading of the passage. In contrast to that, the first apparition takes place inside the church where it is ‘cold and quiet’. The main facts occur in a November evening.

A different setting is portrayed in “The Engineer”. The first she describes is the Black Country in England and it is set against the place where they

decide to settle, which is like a 'fairy city'; they are caught up by the atmosphere of the city, which seems more exotic than Italy:

... the street of jewellers, like an Arabian Night's bazaar: the street of palaces, with Moorish courtyards, its fountains and orange-trees; the women veiled like brides; the galley-slaves chained two and two; the processions of priests and friars ... made, altogether, such a combination of wonders that we wondered about, the first day, in a kind of bewildered dream, like children at a fair.

This leads our men "to turn our backs upon Birmingham for ever" and they live in Genoa. After the fight that Ben and Mathew had, Ben takes Mathew to the coast of Italy to look after him and after a lapse of several years travelling to Marseille, Constantinople, Austria, Alexandria and many others; he comes back to his Italy again. The apparition of the ghost is not scary, but surprising, and it is in March, in a train engine at night.

Venetia, *traghetto* San Marco, does not seem a place where a ghost can appear; but Amelia Edwards describes the atmosphere of the city and Saint Mark's Square in complete detail and with her usual cinematographic method: from the boatmen to the orange vendors, the 'flâneurs', the band, the bell tower ... and then confusion in the streets of the Jewish quarter. The shop where Salome is looks like an Oriental bazaar full of exotic goods, far from our culture giving the story and the character a mysterious atmosphere.

In opposition to this previous exotic quarter, our narrator sees Salome again in The Lido, in a cemetery, a desolated Jewish cemetery at sunset, abundant with "yellow lichens" with some headstones which "were half-buried", although the enclave is precious: "On the one hand lay the broad, silent Lagune bounded by Venice and the Eugenean hills—on the other, stealing up in long, lazy folds, and breaking noiseless against the shore, the blue Adriatic." Notwithstanding, the more one reads the story, the more beautiful is rendered

the scene of the sunset and Salome is compared to a queen. Despite being in a cemetery, which was old in the beginning, and where afterwards Harcourt finds a new part, where Salome is buried, the scene is never spooky or frightening. On the contrary, it sometimes seems as if we are in a romantic scene between two lovers:

The sun went down in glory. The last flush faded from the domes and bell-towers of Venice; the western peaks changed from rose to purple, from gold to grey; a scarcely perceptible film of mist became all at once visible upon the surface of the Lagune; and overhead, the first star trembled into a light.

We endorse the opinion that never before a ghost story has been set in such beautiful scenery.

The rest of the stories in our work are set in England, and two of them are related to the railway. She is able to find her terrors, not in domesticity, but in quotidian life. As it has been said, railway is important for Victorian and for people, but, at the same time, it is a source of evil from the point of view that it is unknown and new for many people and it can be a source of anxiety. The first of them, "The Four-Fifteen Express", happens in a carriage of a new line and in the station of the railway in the evening with "a diffused and luminous haze". The setting is inside the carriage, and then, it opens till the body of the spirit is found in a lake.

The atmosphere of terror is created from the beginning of the story in "Was it an Illusion?". Edwards is a good explorer of inhospitable places, and, on this occasion, it is the inspector who is in the middle of a land he is unfamiliar with, and he fears it, because it is "a dull raw afternoon of mid-November growing duller and more raw as the day waned and the east wind blew keener".

He is left alone and decides to cut across an old footpath, with a bleak house and a mine nearby. Just like in a Gothic novel, fog was creeping up to intensify the mood. To add further tension, the narrator says he is in a horrible place where “Now, to lose one’s way in such a place and at such an hour would be disagreeable enough”. In our opinion, there is lack of conscience because there is lack of light and the scene is shrouded in a thick blanket of fog. This is the scenery for the first apparition, and, for this cause, the narrator is not able to know or scarcely recognize anyone. He is also preparing for the arrival at the house, and hence he feels nervous and is “looking anxiously ahead”.

The story where Edwards plays most with words and sensations is “The Phantom Coach”; here, she shows her great dexterity, even though it is situated in the moors of northern England. It starts on a winter’s night in December, and, as the writer avers, he is in the middle of “a bleak wide moor”, without any reference and “It is not a pleasant place in which to lose one’s way”. Moreover, the weather is helping create uncertainty: “feather flakes of a coming storm... leaden evening closing”. He feels depressed, like the weather, and he wonders many things to make us aware of the dangers of that night. There is a complete identification between the climatic conditions and the narrator’s feelings. As the weather becomes colder, so does the character. When the coach appears and he gets into it, he can feel the filthy and decaying conditions of the air.

5.2.5. Structure

Amelia Edwards’ short tales follow a similar structural pattern in their plot, common to most of them if we take into consideration all the constitutive actions that conform the intrigue of the tale.

In Female Gothic short stories, it is important to know what to do and how to do it; but, at the same time, it is significant to know who performs the action, in both ways—the one who demands something and the one who is ordered. The characters are pivotal because they determine the goal of the narrative—reversion and subversion—but also the actions are essential for the purpose of the Female Gothic, since they serve the purpose of rendering oppression patent, vindicating women’s role in society and many others, as we have previously hinted. The main characters are the same in ghost stories: the narrator and the ghost—although the individual characteristics can vary from one to another—; they determine certain actions, such as the background about the person who is the ghost, and it depends on them whether the reader will have a better understanding of the reason for the apparition and the performance of the requested task, if there is any.

We could state that Edwards’ ghost stories have the following parts:

- Travel
- Apparition
- Information about the appearance or the supposed person
- Reason for the apparition
- Performance of the requested task—if there is any.

Here is a chart of the structural plot pattern of all the tales analyzed:

SHORT GHOST STORY

STRUCTURAL PLOT PATTERN

“The Phantom Coach”
(1864)

Travel: A young man through the moors of northern England
Apparition: 1
 No **information** about the ghost, only about the accident
Reason: Take revenge of the narrator; he did not die in accident
Task: Take the narrator with them

‘An Engineer’
(1866)

Travel: Two friends go to work to Italy **Apparition:** 1
Information about the ghost: already known, the spirit is one of the friends.
Reason: Save his friend’s soul.

	Task: Make Gianetta know she has been forgiven
'The 4'15 Express' (1866)	Travel: A businessman through the country of England Apparition: 1 Information about the ghost: person already known, but not he had disappeared. Reason: Save his reputation and denounce the guilty man. Task: Find out the assassination and discover his corpse.
"In the Confessional" (1871)	Travel: A young man through the Dolomites. Apparitions: 3 Information about the ghost: after seeing him Reason: He is condemned Task: Reassure the new priest he is not mad ----- Apparition: 1
"Sister Johanna's Story" (1872)	Information about the ghost: already known. It is her neighbour. Reason: Repentance & ask for forgiveness Task: Johanna finds his body Travel: An excursion in the mountains of Switzerland.
"The New Pass" (1873)	Apparition: 1 Information about the ghost: recognition by his brother Reason: Warning to save his brother and friends from death. Task: The travellers must change their route. Travel: Two friends in Italy Apparitions: 3
"The Story of Salome" (1874)	Information about the ghost: already known Reason: Reassure her position and will. Task: Perform a Christian burial ritual not to be earthbound. Travel: A School Inspector through the moors of England
"Was it an Illusion?" (1881)	Apparitions: 3 Information about the ghost: <i>a posteriori</i> Reason: Avenge his death, inducing his murderer to commit suicide. Task: To be a witness

Table 3: *Structural plot pattern of Edwards stories*

Except "Sister Johanna's Story", all of them start with travel done by the narrator, who is a new person who arrives in a new place he does not know. This can signify that there is a similarity between travelling and experiencing life, and, at the same time, it is easier for the authoress to reach her chosen place for the story.

It is in this place, unknown by the narrator, where the apparition of a spirit occurs. Most times, this spirit is also unknown for him—the narrator needs to know who the spirit is and there is always recognition on the part of the narrator. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that somebody from the place tells the narrator the necessary information to know how to act or it is the innkeeper, or a

person of the village who tells him what happens and the main things about the ghost. On the other hand, the spirit is normally somebody easily recognized by other people close to the narrator.

Apparitions of the spirits can radically differ from one another, but what they usually have in common is that they seem so real that they are considered illusions of the mind. The apparition can be simple or reiterative, until there is communication of the task on the part of the spirit, although the commission from the ghost's part is not always clear. The narrator has to perform or understand what they are asked for. In the story of Salome, for instance, it is not until the third apparition that Salome asks for a favour, or, in "Was it an Illusion?", the narrator needs to see the spirit several times to believe or understand the requested task—he has to witness everything to report it. The same happens in "In the Confessional", where he does not directly ask for help, but he helps the Père Chesez to reassure and restores confidence in his own common sense.

In the last part, the reason for the appearance is disclosed. Normally, spirits are earthbound because they have a matter to solve here. Mr Dwerrihouse wants to keep his honour intact; Salome wants to be buried according to Christian rites; the boy in "Was it an Illusion?" wants to have revenge; Caspar Rufenacht has been punished to purge his sin; in "The Engineer" and "The New Pass" both want to save a friend; in "Sister Johanna's Story" to show repentance and in "The Phantom Coach" the ghosts want to take the last passenger with them.

Once this question is solved the ghost or spirit does never come back again, not even to thank the person who has done them the favour; that is why the narrator in Salome's story accepts he will see her again in heaven.

5.2.6. Style

As we have already expounded before, Amelia had special descriptive abilities that improved all her stories, even more than her travel books. We have seen that her stories contain "charming pen-pictures of a foreign locale", as Richard Dalby says in his introduction to the edition of the collection *All Saints' Eve*. This was all a product of her direct observation and her abilities as a painter and she is also able to paint with words: "In the Confessional" she makes us a depiction of a river "sparkling as champagne", conjuring up the idea of the champagne colour, the bubbles and the flavour in a synaesthesia.

Short stories are difficult to write because of the constraints of the length. This seems no problem for her: her style is usually abundant in rhetorical devices repeated throughout her writings, with which she keeps the reader's attention, the reader's suspense and emotions and she can concentrate on the plot.

There is a possible classification of these rhetorical devices according to the effect she wants to attain. First, she uses repetitions or anaphora. Sometimes it is the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences, commonly in conjunction with climax and with parallelism. Anaphora can be used with questions, negations, hypotheses, conclusions, and subordinating conjunctions, although care must be taken not to become affected or to sound rhetorical and bombastic. We can

see an example in a passage replete of musical sentences with repetition of words and structures of "The Phantom Coach": 'Would it be possible ...?', 'Would there not come ...?', 'How hard to die just now...', 'How hard for my darling ...' (web). In this case, she is arousing the reader's anxiety, who will also wonder what will happen. The use of comparatives is equally recurrent: 'I shouted again, louder and longer ...' And so is the use of metaphors: 'Not a star glimmered in the black vault overhead'. When he is going along the road, where the coach is due to pass, the language plays again a role: parallel structures are once again used, like "how silent it seemed now ... how silent and how solitary!" Loneliness is terrifying and the air is "colder and colder" and cold makes the narrator feel near to death. The climax comes when inside the coach he has a sensation of nausea; this terror causes a collapse in him. When he can see, everything is rotten and decaying and it is something so strong that he cannot find the words to describe the vision: "... oh Heaven! how shall I describe what I saw?" The vocabulary in the last lines is as spooky as the vision: "putrefaction ...dank with the dews of the grave".

Another situation in which she uses anaphora is when she desires to create expectation about what she is not going to explain because she thinks the answer is obvious and at the same time she is relating the story, there is an example in "The New Pass":

How I did so, dripping and weary, and minus my Alpenstock, how I arrived at the chalet ... how the Swiss press rang with my escape for, at least, nine days after the event; how the Her Becker was liberally censured for his defective engineering; and how Egerton Wolfe believes to this day that his brother Lawrence came back from the dead to save us from utter destruction, are matter upon which it were needless to dwell in this pages

There is a passage similar to the previous one in “The Engineer” where the effect is the same—she suggests to the reader everything connected to the explanation but she does not go into detail: “I am not going to dwell on this part of my story. How I worked out ...how, when I had served my full time ... how he, naturally quick to learn ...how, during all these years... are facts which I need do no more than outline in this place”

Sometimes she wants to emphasize her own words or some given circumstances; in “Was it an Illusion?”, she makes sure that there was not anything, but the two men in the place where the ghost appears: “There was not a bush or a tree within half a mile. There was not a cloud in the sky. There was nothing that could have cast a shadow.”

Something similar to parallelism or anaphora is the enumeration of elements combined with rhetorical questions and the avoidance of connectors or asyndeton. When the narrator sees Salome in the cemetery, he has some doubts about her being alone in life and then he says: “And Salome—was she left alone? Had she no mother? no brother? —no lover?”

One of the impacting moments in the stories is when in a few words she is able to tell us the fight between the two friends in “The Engineer” that will lead to Mathew’s death. This is a good case of asyndeton and a good illustration of economy in language; just for such an important an act as this is for the story in question:

A curse – a blow – a struggle – a moment of blind fury – a cry – a confusion of tongues – a circle of strange faces. Then I see Mat lying in the arms of a bystander; myself trembling and bewildered – the knife dropping from my grasp; blood upon the floor: blood upon my hands; blood upon his shirt. (web)

Apart from all the devices this paragraph displays, this time she has used gradation in her enumeration because she starts with a curse and finishes in death—the actions have been happening *in crescendo* and the consequence has been lethal.

She uses many times the absence of conjunctions or asyndeton, what allows her to gain speed in the plot and in the pace. By means of an illustration, in “The Engineer”: “I could not help pondering upon it – pondering, wondering, conjecturing, turning it over and over ...”

In these inhospitable places, one can always find a character that keeps distant from the narrator and this distance is suggested by means of language; they are often characters from rural places who speak with the accent of the region or who are illiterate and whose speech is hard to understand. Let us see some examples.

In “The Phantom Coach” when James Murray is walking across the moors, he encounters the butler from the house where he will be sheltered; he is portrayed as a man from the northern part of England who articulates using difficult pronunciation:

Eh, then, folks do get cast away hereabouts fra’ time to time, an’ what’s to hinder you from bein’ cast away likewise, if the Lord’s so minded? It ain’t o’no use,” growled he, “He ‘ont let you in – not he.

In the story “Was it an Illusion?”, there is a moment when someone who is reporting to the men what has happened in the mine speaks and he does it in a peculiar and vulgar way:

Seven foot o’wayter in Jukes’s seam, an’ eight in th’owd north and south galleries,’ growled a huge red-headed fellow, who seemed to be the spokesman.

'An'it's the Lord's own marcy a'happened o'noight-time, or we'd be dead men

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is also something Edwards uses in “The New Pass” and other stories. Here, she introduces expressions in other languages to create a more exotic climate and to differentiate the language of certain people: “*Bon voyage!*” said our host, ‘*meine Herren*’, ‘*Ehu, fugaces!*’, ‘*Diavolo!*’. One thing is sure—she introduces words in the languages she was in contact with during her travels in Switzerland, in Italy or Germany. There are barbarisms in “In the Confessional” such as “*Père Chessez*”, “Her Englander”, or in “Sister Johanna’s Story”, such as “*Mädchen, fête, festa*”. This contributes to help her create her genius loci.

6. VERNON LEE

After a first contact with Vernon Lee, the first impression we gain is that she is substantially different from the other writers treated in this study, and, *prima facie*, she stands as a challenging author to be analysed, as she seems so dissimilar to the others. Nevertheless, by adopting an in-depth approach to her works, some aspects of her personality can be discovered, as well as her life and way of writing, which can give us all together the clue to understand her tales and the reason why she has equally been included in this study.

To begin with, Vernon Lee is the last of the Female Gothic kind, that is to say, the latest of the Female Gothic short story writers inside the Victorian tradition. She is considered to belong to the Decadence and the aesthetic movement, which was the seed of Modernism. After her, there is a terrible change in the psychoanalytic point of view of ghosts and, as Ballesteros contends in *Escrito por Brujas* (2005):

En el prefacio a la obra, Lee defiende que lo sobrenatural, para causar una sensación a la vez terrible y deleitosa a “nosotros, escéptica posteridad”, precisa de un halo de misterio que penetre en nuestro interior. Rechaza lo que ella entiende como la moda al uso del Pasado espiritismo fútil y pretendidamente científicista, pues los fantasmas, entes impregnados de nobleza, solo pueden ser producto de la imaginación literaria, del pensamiento fecundo que se opone a la vulgaridad de la materia. El Pasado (*sic*) es el lugar desde donde el escritor debe invocar a los espectros para plasmarlos en sus textos. (180)

Lee stills continues in the tradition of the ghost as the subversive spirit, which is latent inside humans, and links them with their past. After her, with the phantoms of the First World War and the Psychoanalysis, there was a wholesale change in the genre because the phantoms were then products of the subconscious. Lee still continues to look for her ghosts in the past. And, in

addition, her tastes about Italian art and history were to be one of her creeds, which will be present in her works where she will find her spectres.

6.1 Life

Violet Paget's grandfather, Edward Adams, amassed his fortune in Jamaica and dedicated himself to banks and trade business. With the money he earned, he bought a state in Carmarthenshire, but, although the family could have lived in prosperity, it lost part of their fortune due to litigious problems among its members. Mathilda, Violet's mother, married Captain Lee-Hamilton, and it turned out to be an appalling union. A son would be born from that marriage in 1845, James Eugene Lee-Hamilton. In 1852, Captain Lee-Hamilton died and the widow had to move to Paris, due to the fact that their possessions were still involved in litigations and she could only make use of some money of her own; and also because it was cheaper for them to live outside England.

There, she needed a tutor for Eugene, who was seven at that time, and Henry Ferguson Paget became his teacher. Having a non-well-defined past, connected to England and France, but possessing no money, he became Mathilda's second husband and Violet's father. Both, Henry Ferguson Paget and Violet were people with a character capable of bearing Mathilda's eccentricities without many protests. Indeed, Mathilda inculcated strict individual moral principles in her daughter, and such rules of personal conduct would accompany Violet all her life. In other words, her mother's beliefs did not allow her to act freely—had Violet thought of a homosexual companion, this would have been considered by her mother as a sexual deviation. As a consequence, and as it is most likely, Mathilda had to be an unbearable burden for Violet. Still,

they both seemed to share the same little taste for sex—Mathilda gave freedom to her husbands, and all love was received from her son Eugene; meanwhile, Violet seemed to receive love from her friends.

Violet Paget was born on 14 October 1856 in the chateau St Leonard, outside Boulogne-sur-Mer. There were many English families living there and with Mathilda's low income, the Pagets followed the example of many families living abroad: they rented rooms or stayed in country inns. This way of life—i.e. moving from one country to another—resulted in an intellectual enrichment for Violet, and Eugene prepared himself to depart soon to Oxford in order to study modern languages. Both Mathilda and Eugene paid attention to Violet's learning and they appreciated that she was an extraordinary child—she showed early intellectual signs, avid precocity for learning, a alert imagination and good language skills. Mathilda was an authoritarian mistress, who received respect, confidence and love, and, in exchange, she offered Violet admiration and support, although her only favourite was Eugene. Mathilda was more concerned with Eugene's well-being than that of her daughter's. This obsessive love for her son had dire consequences for Eugene, who became more and more devoted to his mother and less independent. Although Henry Paget and Violet lay outside this relationship, Violet was loving and respectful with him. She had to look for affection, being close to other women who acted like substitute mothers. The first woman, she felt attached to, was a governess named Fräulein Marie Schulpach: their relationship was even more intimate than that with her mother. After Fräulein Marie, there were some other governesses who also took interest in Violet's learning.

Another woman entered Violet's life. The Pagets met her while in Rome and in Thun: Henrietta Camilla Jackson Jenkin. This woman was very concerned with Violet's education because she was also a novelist and knew the intricacies of writing. She encouraged Violet and introduced her to interesting people. The other woman was Cornelia Boinville—Henrietta Camilla Jackson's friend—with whom she shared independence and brilliant intelligence. Both of them recognized Violet's talent and understood her.

In the winter of 1868, the Pagets and the Sargents—an American family Violet was very close to—were in Rome. There, Violet was occupied with lessons her mother had arranged for her, and also with the visits in the company of the Sargents to indulge themselves in the monumental and modern city of Rome. Violet went with Mrs. Sargent wherever she went, but, at the age of twelve, the city came as a revelation to her. Apart from being Violet's cicerone in Rome, Mrs. Sargent was also the main cause for her starting to love Italian art. At the same time, she was pursuing her vocation—in Rome, the past came alive not only in places, but also in art and in the atmosphere. All these influences—Mrs. Paget, Mrs. Sargent, Fräulein Marie and other governesses, Henrietta Camilla Jackson Jenkin and Cornelia Boinville—broadened her knowledge to such an extent that she had nothing to envy to an academic learning, and, although Violet was aware of the imbalanced opportunities between men and women's learning, she did not feel affected. In general, and according to Christa Zorn in *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (2003), Violet considered gender matters inside "national historical contexts". Perhaps, Violet might have felt like an expatriate, and could not see herself immersed and reflected inside the Victorian society of England.

Sometimes, she was accused of a lack of British patriotism, reinforced by her defence on pacifism during the World War I, not to mention her unfortunate justification of Germany. Nevertheless, one must understand that she felt part of a group of cosmopolitan expatriates—citizens of the world. We could even go one step further: could it be possible that her attraction to aestheticism had been a corollary of universal symbolism instead of national identity? We can make an educated guess that perhaps Violet felt like Henry James—a citizen of the world. A probable explanation to this fact can be Violet's familiar situation, insofar as they did not settle until Eugene was ill. Therefore, it is likely that many of her characters have a longing for coming back home and feel displaced wherever they are; in other words, they felt like foreigners—like the 'others'.

With regard to her family life, Zorn (2003) states that thanks to her mother's character—being so open-minded which was contrary to what was expected from a Victorian woman—Lee could feel free from some social prejudices. She led a life like a man of the period. Although she had a woman's body, she always toyed with ambiguity, wearing men's clothes. This transgression could lead people to consider her as the 'other', too. If we add together the factors of not having a defined nationality, and lacking a determined sex with the proper subsequent behaviour, we are completely aware that she was defying society, and that she wrote for and against Victorian principles—in other words, Lee was subverting and reverting Victorian morals.

In 1870, at the age of fourteen, and written in French, she publishes *Les aventures d'un pièce de monnaie* in a Lausanne journal. Violet started very soon to deal with the world of publication. She experienced the frustrations and pleasures of being an authoress and also the different reactions of the people of

her ambit, who either praised her, approved her works or even became angered when a publisher wanted to make amendments to her writings. After publishing, she was so self-confident that she put no limits to her ambitions. She had ambitious writing plans, encouraged by her mother and brother. Eugene left Oxford and came back home. He became a diplomat and was posted to the British Embassy in Paris in 1870. In the meantime, it was Eugene who gave his mother instructions about his sister's education—as Violet's father had all possibility of opinion denied—and this caused severe stress in Violet, because she always craved for her brother's approval. Mathilda and Violet visited him the following summer, but their stay was shortened by the outbreak of war. They could come back home in the winter.

In 1871, Violet was fifteen, and, in contrast with other teenagers, she had definite aims and significant ambitions; she had already developed a love for the past, which, perhaps, was due to her mother's influence or because of the time she spent in her infancy living in premodern Europe. Her own achievement had overpassed her brother's expectations and efforts to publish. It was in 1873, when Eugene started to develop a paralysis which turned him into an invalid for twenty years—everything at home would from then on revolve around him. An adolescent Violet was to be in charge of her brother, organizing his visitors, or reading for him. This episode was uppermost in her life. On the one hand, she saw her brother's weakness as the feminine position in society, although he did not lose his masculine role because of her mother's recognition of authority. As a consequence of this change of vision about her brother, it appeared that Violet started to get progressively separated, not only from Eugene, but also from authorities. She was forging her character and it would

be patent in the following twenty years of her writing. What is more, when she suspected his paralysis was autosuggestion, she felt the strongest of them all in the family.

Since Eugene's illness was an impediment for the family to move, they settled definitively in Italy. It was in 1875 when Violet met Giovanni Ruffini, who insisted on applying to the editor of *La rivista europea* in order to offer a series of articles about English women novelists and *Tuscan Fairy Tales*. By 1877, she became a professional writer in Frazer's Magazine under the pseudonym of Vernon Lee, with her aspiring project of writing a history of the eighteenth-century Italian opera: *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*. All the family became involved in her work: her father helped her with research work and her brother followed her progress.

There were numerous changes in the following years due to the Eugene's state. Their itinerant existence was put to an end when they settled in a house in Florence, but, by the spring of 1889, Mrs. Paget received an inheritance and bought a house near Florence named Il Palmerino—the definitive home for Violet, as she would live there until her death. This house was to be visited and known by countless people, just as the family was to be well-known. In 1880, Mary Robinson was on a tour in Italy with her parents, and meeting many people. Mary Robinson, who was the same age as Violet, also wanted to become a writer, and she admired Violet and everything which was around her, even her invalid brother. The Robinson family visited the English colony in Florence, and met Violet, who was a noticeable associate. When Mary Robinson arrived in Italy, she had already published a volume of poetry and she knew several people. Concretely, she had known John A. Symonds, with whom

she maintained a pleasant relationship before meeting Violet. Although Symonds was a suspected bisexual, he was jealous of Mary's closeness to Violet. He accused them of lesbianism, but, as single women did not use to live alone, and, furthermore, their company was well seen to live, travel or another desirable purpose, nobody backed him. Moreover, although Mary was in Violet's home, Mathilda and Eugene were considered as their guardians. Mary Robinson's staying with the Pagets may have contributed to the increase in emotional stability for all the members of the family. In point of fact, women were not seen as a major problem unless they tried to assume men rights and privileges, and neither Violet nor Mary Robinson posed a menace for men. It was certain that Violet had taken a masculine penname and had adopted the voice of a male narrator in her philosophical essays, but this was a usual practice those days. Of course, it was also true that she donned mannish garments, but she followed the 80's and 90's fashion. What was not accepted was her personality and strong character—she was talkative, dogmatic and liked dominating conversations. Lee was usually considered as having an exaggerated tendency towards being among female intellectuals, but people felt hurt due to her manners, which were far from being thought of as feminine—she displayed brusque conducts and lacked humility. This notwithstanding, we have to bear in mind that Lee faced a period when women writers did not own the proper role, place and respect they deserved, but they were in the middle of a masculine world and male professions. That was why, had it not been for Mary's tolerant and patient character, they would have not been able to live together in harmony. For Violet, this was one of the most complete periods of her life—emotionally, at least.

Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions appeared in 1881 and *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance* followed suit in 1884, highly praised by Pater on account of its powerful style. Both works are heavily subjective—Lee does not intend to be objective, it is through her observation that she is in contact with the cultural systems. At the same time, they report Lee exercises of self-knowledge. It is remarkable how these years she got used to be distant from home. She was able to travel abroad with women of her own age—Annie Meyers and Mary Robinson.

In *Belcaro*, she becomes an aesthetic critic and her change of style and purpose is related to Violet's emotional affair and involvement with Mary Robinson. Violet had been craving for requited love and it was the first time somebody loved her unselfishly. Nobody knows to what extent there was physical love between them, but desire seems manifest, at least on Violet's part. *Belcaro* converts romantic love into aesthetic terms.

When Violet and Mary Robinson went to England in 1881; they also went to Oxford, where they met Wilde, Browning and Pater, the most important writers of the time. Violet suddenly got on well with Pater, because he respected her and praised her work; and, in addition, Pater consulted her on his own writings. Violet found a master in Pater and she possibly considered him as her equal. Friendship lasted from their first meeting in 1881 until 1894; every time she visited England, she stayed for some days at the Paters'. These visits to England were to give her much satisfaction as regards the literary world. In 1881, her interest was centred in being part of the literary society of the time, and, as a consequence of being with the Robinson family, she was able to

achieve her aim. Mary Robinson's father was a banker who fostered artists' reunions to educate his daughters. In Mary Robinson's house, Violet could get in touch with the most prominent literary celebrities of the time. This gathering helped her feel like an individual in the middle of what her family had considered for her—a world without separate spheres.

In these times, Violet tried with a novel and began writing *Miss Brown*. At the outset, the novel was satirical, but the more she wrote, the more critical she became. Unaware of which were the dictates of society and having always been under her mother's influence—overall, with respect to matters of sex—, Violet abided by a severe code of behaviour. She felt a disgusting sentiment towards sexual practice, but, apparently, contrary to this idea, Violet as well as the protagonist acknowledged that humans need love and friendship. Nevertheless, what was even more important than sexuality was aestheticism, which became corrupted—in her opinion, Walter Pater's theories were carried to the furthest limit of sensuality and aestheticism. The novel was well sold and the opinions were favourable, but it was read as a *roman à clef*, where characters could be identified and related to the writer's life. As an example of this, it could be that Oscar Wilde found himself caricatured in the novel and refused to meet her in 1894, when he went to visit Eugene to read his poetry. Many other people also felt offended and Violet had to face all the protests and criticism when she visited England in 1885. Violet was bitterly disappointed because the support of the people she admired—Pater and James—did not appear. Violet was aware that her novel had been a failure. Nevertheless, she was sure of her own vocation and her own abilities for writing and, albeit confident of her power on her readers, she felt her moral values were not valid for everyone.

Mary Robinson and Violet still continued to share most of their lives together, but, due to an association of characters in one of Violet's writings, frictions began to appear. Violet's family felt as always and made no objection to their friendship, but circumstances were not the same at Mary Robinson's house. They considered both women's friendship as an advantage for Violet, on the grounds that she was only seeking her own promotion and that thanks to them she was meeting all the significant people of London, specially publishers. Apart from this, Violet considered herself a member of the family and expressed her own opinion freely, no matter what they were discussing or talking about—this caused annoyance in the family. As a result, there was a quarrel and both women rented a flat in Sussex, where Mary acted as a housekeeper and all was sublime. At the end of July, they separated because each one had to attend the needs of their own families. Although it seemed they lived a disconnected life from one another, this was not so—they continued spending summers in England and winters in Italy together until 1887. Violet did certainly not stay at the Robinsons' as much as before, but it was also true that while she stayed with them, she met the most exquisite elite of the society of the moment. She felt very comfortable with these people, although she did not always appreciate their moral values. As we were explaining before, Mary and Violet continued with their friendship and seasons together, but, from then on, they went their separate ways. On the one hand, Violet wanted to travel to push her career and be outside her family bounds. She also visited some cities in the Tuscan county and, as Henry James suggested, this was just to take a breath of fresh air—a rest from a family centred on Eugene. On her side, Mary was trying to promote

herself, now that she was having good sales on a volume of poetry. The 1880s were prolific for Mary Robinson, who had been working side by side with Violet.

In 1886, a French philologist, James Darmesteter, asked Mary to translate her *Italian Garden* into French. They met each other in August 1887, and soon they got engaged. The announcement caused a great shock to Mary's friends, mostly because, on the one hand, he was not an elegant, good-looking man, and, on the other hand, he came from a poor Jewish family. That same summer, Violet had been in England, separated from Mary and meeting new people, as she liked. Violet was at Susan Muir Mackenzie's house, where she met Clementina Anstruther-Thomson. Violet was in turbulent waters, because she was moving in women circles who advocated for feminism, independence and it was in that context that Kit (as everybody used to call Clementina) felt attracted by Violet. It was completely by chance that Kit was near Violet when she heard about Mary's news. Kit left Violet a rosebud on her pillow and Violet kept it, knowing it was the start of a new life. Yet, Violet was not prepared to start a new relationship, though it seemed Kit was eager to take Mary's place in Violet's life. However, things were not so easy for Mary, who suffered a lot of friction from both families—her own and Paget's. Neither of them thought she was making a good match and Violet argued theirs was a platonic love. But what is rather curious is that all this strong resistance significantly weakened poor Violet, who collapsed and was ill for several months. Kit came to Florence to cherish the indisposed Violet, who recovered, but only partially. In spring, Violet was better and, although Mary and Darmesteter were married, Kit and Violet had started their lesbian relationship, which was to last for ten years.

Violet had never perceived how her family had overburdened her with criticism and had created her acute anxiety. It was when she needed them, after Mary had left, that she felt disappointed by them all. This was one of the reasons why Violet accepted Kit's love and company so gratefully. In effect, Violet even changed her role with Kit's relationship—she was now the one to be cared. With Mary, she had been the dominant part, but Kit was a handsome woman, tall, sporty and with enough determination to take care of them both. Kit was facing a difficult affair because Violet was a problematic person to live and deal with. Violet's character was argumentative, dogmatic and pedantic and liked to monopolize conversation. These features made her lose many of her friends and admirers, including Henry James' friendship. In 1894, she realized that such a part of her character was inherited from her family—her mother had educated her as a pedantic and bluestocking woman, helped by her dominated son, and, all that, reinforced by a father who did not care about familiar issues. The results of the family background were several breakdowns in her life, some of them very hard. Living with the Paget family was bearing a secret grudge. Nevertheless, she never thought of leaving her family and going to England to live far from them—many women writers were living independently, but Italy was her home. Mrs. Paget was eventually sensitive to her daughter's needs and in 1889 she rented a comfortable villa, Il Palmerino, which supposed a change for Violet. This was an incentive for her. She bought the house a few years later and she remained there until her death.

By 1890, Kit had completely replaced Mary in Violet's heart and she had settled with her. Violet was happy and thankful to her because Kit had been by her side at the most problematic times. In 1894, her father died of a sudden

attack of asthma and she wrote to support her. In the same year, Mary Robison's husband, James Darmesteter, died and Mary remained in France. Two years later, her mother fell ill, and luckily for Violet, Kit was with her, helping with the nursing cares. In the morning of March 8, Mrs. Paget died. With her decease, Violet was finally freed from all obligations with the family, overall because Eugene was healed thanks to hypnosis, and, after his mother's death, he abandoned the Paget's house. Violet felt liberated, but perhaps it was too late.

Violet and Kit started their investigations. Kit had a simple idea of drawing, and, at first, she was not at all interested in renaissance sculpture or painting, but, by 1892, she had become one of Violet's students of aesthetics. They travelled around Italy and Kit was in charge of the sketches, whereas Violet took down notes on the landscape, churches and museums. From 1889 until 1897, Kit was a dedicated secretary for Violet. In fact, it seemed that Kit was always disposed to help everybody who needed help.

In 1898, Kit decided to go away to take care of Mrs. Christian Head. This time, their interests seemed to differ. Violet suffered again; not in the same way as she had felt Mary's abandonment, but because she felt there was no other possibility of having another fulfilled sexual relationship. Their separation was very different to the previous one. When Violet separated from Mary, it was as a romantic affair, and she was aware Mary would not come back again; but when she separated from Kit, it was like a broken marriage. Violet felt that she would never recover Kit again, although she did never maintain any other relationship with any other woman. By 1900, Violet had assumed the separation was definitive, but she still wrote long letters asking Kit for longer visits, such as

accompanying her on a tour to Venice—but Kit was never to be Violet’s disciple, even though she collaborated with her in several essays.

Although Eugene lived with his wife Annie Holdsworth near Il Palmerino, Violet maintained a reserved relationship with the couple. Annie and Eugene had a daughter, who died before she was one year old. Eugene was angry with Violet because she had not paid the child enough attention—he blatantly ignored that Violet had left her £2000 secretly. Eugene fell ill and Violet accompanied him to Switzerland to visit some doctors, but, unfortunately, he died in September 1907.

Contrary to what we might suppose, Violet was not alone. Her family had passed away and she decided not to substitute Kit’s place by anybody. But one thing we cannot deny is that from 1890 to 1910 she was a milestone in the intellectual and social life of the moment. Many writers were her audience—among them, Ottoline Cavendish-Bentick, Henry James, Mary Wharton, Augustine Bulteau, including women with noble title. Nevertheless, these women of the nobility had to show a taste for literature as the others. Ethel Smyth was introduced to Violet in 1893, and, although they did not get to know each other fully soon, they were lifelong friends. Smyth was overtly bisexual, having had relationships with men, but feeling more attracted to women. Smyth recognized in Violet her extremely suppressed lesbianism and thought it was her repression what protected her against the world.

Something we must also highlight about Violet is that she stuck to two ideals throughout her life—liberalism and socialism. It is certain that the Pagets had no political adscriptions, due to the fact that they had lived abroad and had sympathy for Italian independence. Still, Violet was exposed to many different

tendencies and she chose the one she liked. She kept in contact with the Fabian society, but she was not a member in order not to subject her ideals and she was not preoccupied with women's rights, although she did not ignore them.

When the war broke out in August 1914, Violet was in England on her usual annual trip and this meant she could not come back to Italy. At first, she thought that the war was going to finish soon, but she soon became hopeless. Carlo, her servant, was in charge of Il Palmerino, and Italian friends sent her news from Italy. Nonetheless, she knew she was better in England, where there was a pacifist movement; the problem was that she could not touch a wide public there—many periodicals to which she wrote were now closed to her. Many of her friends were doing voluntary work for the war: Kit was doing assistance work for the Belgian, Mary Robinson was a nurse in France, and Edith Wharton was covering war journalism. She felt isolated and away from her Italy, and, as a result, her writing energy went away. When the war ended, she came back to Italy and there she could attend emergent forces of nationalism and repression of freedom. She did not have the strength of youth. Now, Violet was a mature woman whose health was debilitating and her readers were dwindling. During the conflict, she had been speaking against the war for four years but her voice had been stifled. Reviewers and readers associated her to the Victorian age and in those times—the 20s and 30s—it meant for the public that she had become old-fashioned and unconnected with their world.

As a consequence of that situation—being ineffective for readers and for public action—, she devoted herself to writing letters to her friends, notes and essays, but she was never able to publish again. In the 30s, Violet travelled as

much as she could to England and France to visit Ethel Smyth, Bella Duffy, Emily Ford, Emily Sargent, and Mary Robinson (Ducleaux). She also remained in Italy in the company of Baroness Elena French, Countess Maria Gamba and Count and Countess Pasolini. Moreover, despite being in her seventies, she made new friends of the younger generations, such as Aldous Huxley and Mario Praz.

Although Violet came to Italy because it was her home and wanted to die there, she did not like the new climate of fascism and totalitarianism of the day. Il Palmerino had her roots and family memories; it was her home. In the end, Il Palmerino proved to be a burden for her, but, with the help of Irene Forbes, who rented one of the cottages, Violet could maintain it.

Kit died in July 1921 and, during her illness, Violet visited her at least three times, writing on her memoir in the introduction to *Art and Man*, a tribute to her perseverance to her work. On the other side, Mary, who was a widow for a second time, did not marry again and stayed in France until she died in 1944. Violet started to have heart attacks more frequently and severe each time and she finally died in February 1935. She chose to be cremated and buried in Eugene Lee-Hamilton's grave in Florence.

6.2 Fictional works

Before proceeding to examine Vernon Lee's short ghost stories, it will be necessary to remark that, although ghost tales were contemplated as minor works at the time the authoress wrote them, as pieces of study, they are more well-known nowadays. Her fantasy tales were written between the 1880s and the 90s and they were believed to embed certain eroticism, which was

characteristic of the decadent gothic tales. Lee's short fantastic stories are astride the "uncanny" and the "marvellous" as Rosemary Jackson (2001) posits, following the categories stated by Todorov. Christa Zorn (2003) endorses the opinion that Lee uses the fantastic to draw the sentiments and sensations get out of us, by means of the transgression of norms. These feelings can be in the most recondite place of our consciousness. The reader, the narrator or the characters look for an ordinary or supernatural explanation, and then, this justification is only possible through fantasy. To illustrate these ideas, there are three of her short stories which are very representative: "Oke of Okehurst", "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" and "The Virgin of the Seven Daggers". These tales are the most illustrative of the Decadent Gothic tales and they introduce a range of characters and elements which suppose a great change from the previous writers of short stories. These tales are the missing link between Victorian gothic tales and modernism.

Lee is an innovator in many aspects. But the most shocking feature in these tales is that she shows to the public women of a different kind. This becomes emphasized, overall, when we compare her women characters to the other female writers. Coming from the past, we will face three *femme fatales* who are able to defy the norms of the Establishment and who fight against patriarchal power. *Femme fatales* promise pagan pleasures to men who desire them, but, of course, these men will have to pay a high price. Most times, it is hard to differentiate if the protagonists long for a superb sexual experience or they crave for a return to the past—both notions seem to be interchangeable in Lee's stories.

An interesting fact we should bear in mind when analysing Vernon Lee's short stories is that, due to the period when she wrote them, her tales are very different from the other writers dealt in this study. She belongs to the *fin-de-siècle* movement, or, as Showalter labels them, she belongs to a group of women writers of the period—the “Daughters of the Decadence”. Her stories appear in a climate when some key novels were written: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by R. L. Stevenson, *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891) by Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). These novels, perhaps, could inspire her to develop the “other” topic in some of her stories. These contemporary works intermingled reality and imagination and put the reader, and sometimes the characters, at a loss. In Rosemary Jackson's theory (2001), fantasy has the power of transgression and this contravention allows both the reader and the character to trespass the limits of reality, and, moreover, fiction is able to subvert and reverse the rational order. The aim of the decadent gothic is not outside, not even a strange unfamiliar power, but it is something dreadful in the face of which the human psyche reacts.

One of the major Influences in Lee's works is E.T.A. Hoffman's *Der Sandman*, considered the maximum exponent of Freud's “uncanny”. This is the sentiment of that which is no longer familiar or strange because of repression, leading us to fear infantile terrors which come back to haunt us. Let us remember that the tapestry of the Snake Lady is semi covered, so that no one can see the Snake Lady's body, i.e. the part which shows her as a monster. Duke Balthasar takes it out of sight, placing the tapestry in another room, covered with a piece of furniture. By doing this, he avoids thinking about it and avoids remembering the dark legend of the family. Nevertheless, it is curious

that what is uncanny and fearful for one man—Balthasar Maria—is stimulating for another—young Alberic, who is recurrently thinking of the tapestry and tries to grasp its meaning. This meaning or the legend in itself, which is unknown to the boy, is for Lee the engine that activates his imaginings. The darkness, the vagueness, the uncertainty of a fantastic event spurs our souls—especially legends and traditional folklore. Lee does not like to regard the past as something that is forgotten, since she can find sources in the books of the past, and she is aware that she can find the reason for fear or the explanation to the unbelievable. In our three tales, there is a legend from the past which can give us an explanation, but we can only find sense through fantasy. In these narratives, Lee is able to find the most potent epitomes of the uncanny.

Nothing is understandable for our narrator—and, of course, for us as readers—until the painter of “Oke of Okehurst” knows of the existence of a legend in the family about old Alice Oke. At first, we are given clues with the portrait in the hall and with the behaviour young Alice has in the yellow room, apart from the dress she is wearing. When the legend is told, William’s terrors can be understood, and young Alice’s behaviour can be appreciated from the beginning, being unrelated to hysteria. We finally get cognizant of the reason why the narrator was so puzzled and could not capture Alice. Nonetheless, we regain sense in the other part of the mirror, that of fantasy, according to Jackson (2001). Likewise, the uncanny element in “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady” is known through the tapestry representing Alberic the Blonde and Lady Oriana. Not only is it impossible for us as readers, but so it is for young Alberic, who cannot understand his life and his grandfather’s fears until he finds out the origin of the family, which is the legend of the mystery of his ancestors.

The same happens in the previous story of “Oke of Okehurst”. There is something hidden in the most secret place of the house—the yellow room. In the third story “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers”, Lee lays bare the secrets of Don Juan before he starts his way to hell, so that it is more comprehensible, and, at the same time, more astounding, as one sees how he is penetrating the Earth’s entrails. Lee excludes all the rational for the reader to understand her; for the public, the legends would be the rational excuse. Perhaps for this reason, she needs a special kind of narrator who seems disturbed or paranoiac, something she shares with her friend Henry James—but this will be dealt with in another section more deeply.

6. 3. Society and gender issues

When Vernon Lee started writing, she found a very special panorama in the society in which she lived—it was the *fin-de-siècle* and fatalism was going to be uppermost in everybody’s minds. This terrible shadow had been coming over Britain at the time the century was ending and Queen Victoria left the throne. Things were seen rather differently—the British Empire was declining and people felt frightened and vulnerable. This was crucial for English letters.

As Sondeep Kandola (2012) expounds in *Vernon Lee*, our writer came in contact with the literary world when authors were wondering about the moral conventions, exaggerated materialism and the traditional and immobile tastes of Victorian society. Kandola adds that the last decades of the nineteenth century were controversial. Everything started in the ‘Fleshy Controversy’ in 1871 in response to the negative and violent reaction of the public against Decadent art and artists. All this was aggravated by Oscar Wilde’s prosecution for indecency

in 1895. With all these ingredients, the end of the century stirred up heated debate in the press, in literature and sometimes before the courts. From this point of view, it can be stated that a great part of the fiction Lee wrote was in response to those debates about the principles of high art. Was it moralised or permissive? In her tales—"Oke of Okehurst" and "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady"—she conveyed her vision of the moral and ethical issues she could observe in the literary fashion of the moment and the public reaction to them. Very differently to our previous authors, Lee posed questions about the writer's obligation regarding the content and moral meaning of their work, but she also urged the Victorian audience to leave their prejudices aside in order to improve society, although it was with the ideas of these new artists.

It is necessary here to clarify how Lee deals with gender issues. She presents us different women. After all this social and ethical upheaval, there is a change in female and male roles that Lee reproduces in her tales. The New Women started challenging their role in society and economics, as new feminist theories were supporting them. As a consequence, a new conception of the family, which had always been the basis of Victorian society, appeared. Then, the decline of the empire plus the disintegration of the family were undermining the basis of the patriarchal Victorian society, which, at the same time, led to a degradation of masculinity. The New Women were desperately masculine, that reverted in a new male figure—the Decadent man, who was extremely feminine. This blurring of frontiers between both sexes brought confusion in the limits of gender in a dreadful manner. In literary works at the end of the century, masculinity was destabilized by conflicting ideas between both sexes and was characterized by manliness.

We can see that the old order or system opposes the new in Vernon Lee's "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady". Balthasar Maria represents a villainous Duke who abuses aesthetic values and he represents the feared hedonism of decadence. After Wilde's trials, pleasure-seeking was the culprit of the degeneration of Britain. People considered effeminacy as illicit sexuality; they associated it to venereal diseases and sterility. Balthasar Maria incarnates a cliché representing society, but which misunderstands the new masculinity—he suffers from deception, extravagance and narcissism, because he wants to achieve the youth and beauty Alberic possesses. The Duke seems to have a good taste: the obsession which he shows in the pursuit of art is to fill the space that the achievement of youth does not give him.

Coming also from the seventeenth century, Don Juan Gusman del Pulgar is put under judgement. Considered as the representative of machismo, Don Juan is judged by a New Woman, the Moorish Infanta, who can decide if he deserves her or not. And, although she is denied a proper voice, when she utters her sentence for him, she bears some resemblances to Lewis Carroll's "Queen of Hearts" in *Alice in Wonderland* ordering "Off with his head!"—probably one of the most fearful queens wielding power. Don Juan proves not to be apt for the circumstances of the new era and he is overcome by a New Woman.

Even though Lee seems to share some common features with her friend James, she gives the impression of being more centred in gender issues than him. Lee tries to reflect a historical reality—she is able to submerge the reader into the historical moment of the women of her legends—so that we can transfer their situation to our reality. In this way, as Zorn (2003) says, Lee leads us to

draw a parallelism between the subjectivity of women of the past and women of the present. All our three women—Alice, Oriana and the Moorish Infanta—represent the mythical women who are capable of displaying all their seductive charms, and, with that, they do away with men’s ethical order. Notwithstanding, in Lee’s stories, in contrast with what decadent artists would do, women are not undermined. On the contrary, we think women are not only able to scorn men, but also to fight and beat them. When analysing the relationship between Balthasar Maria and Lady Oriana, it is patent that both of them maintain a silent dispute in order to see who is to achieve and gain the young boy’s trust.

As the ideal of the family was changing in the frame of society, a new model was required. Vernon Lee offered us a world of new values. Neither young Alice nor old Alice Oke had descendants and the former is not worried in that respect, although she and her husband are the last of their family. The princess does not seem interested in the topic either, and, curiously, Don Juan, who was thirty-two when the facts happened, did not even mention anything in this respect. In the last family, that of Oriana, Alberic and Balthasar, it seems that the situation of the characters is the typical one, in which the mother is absent because she is deceased; but, instead of a male figure representing the father, the head of the family is an effeminate and decrepit old man belonging to a distinct order and who does not know what to do.

6.4. Narrators

The new observation of the human mind was associated with the “uncanny”, even before Freud made use of such term. Lee was completely aware of the instability of the human mind, and, as a result of this fact, she

normally used unreliable narrators in her short stories. The use of men, who seemed to be unstable, resulted in an untrustworthy source of the uncanny. They are one of the key points to interpret the story through their reading of the facts. In these three tales, narrators are very different from one another. Her stories “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady” and “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers” have an extradiegetic narrator. Both stories are distant in time, and, for this reason, the narrator is completely outside the plot. He is the voice that portrays to us the period of the stories. Prince Alberic’s story goes back to the Italian seventeenth century and “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers” happens in the Spanish seventeenth century.

A completely different issue is the story of “Oke of Okehurst”, where the narrator is a young painter who witnesses the ghostly events of the story, but, luckily for him, he does not take part in them. This character was probably inspired in John Sargent, a friend of Lee’s. The painter tells us the story of a couple for whom he is working; he has been required to paint a portrait of the owners of a lovely Jacobean manor—Alice and William Okehurst. It is through his gaze that we meet young Alice, who is described in oxymoronic terms:

The most marvellous creature, quite, that I have ever met: a wonderful elegance, exotic, far-fetched, poignant; an artificial perverse sort of grace and research in every outline and movement and arrangement of head and neck, and hands and fingers. ... when she smiled she had the most marvelous dimples here. There was something exquisite and uncanny about it. (3)

We have to remember that the narrator is an artist, and this could condition the vision he has of Alice, but what he achieves is to transmit to the reader the strange physical characteristics of his hostess. He is describing Alice as a *femme fatale* and he likes her. She is said to be “exotic”, which carries an

uncanny connotation in those times, as well as “far-fetched”, instead of restrained, as a woman was supposed to be. But what draws the reader’s attention is that she has a “perverse” “grace” and that she is “exquisite” and “uncanny” at the same time, creating the sensation that she is a *femme fatale*. Deducing from the quote, the painter feels inebriated with Alice’s appearance until he observes she pays no attention to him. At first, he declares to be the only person to empathise with her until he feels ignored. As a consequence of this ignorance, the painter feels frustrated and describes Alice in different terms: “That woman would slip through my fingers like a snake if I attempted to grasp her elusive character.” (39) By means of this comparison, Alice is linked with the genealogy of *femme fatales*, in line with Lilith or Medusa. Alice asks for a portrait, but, unfortunately, the painter finds it impossible to paint her, despite doing great number of preliminary sketches. She is a *femme fatale*, and thus, her soul cannot be imprisoned, captured or perceived by a man. Even though the metaphor of the painting as a prison is recurrent in many Female Gothic tales, young Alice, who is the double of old Alice, resists being secluded. For our painter, the explanation for this fact is that he is unable to finish the portrait because Alice can be an evil spirit and a destructor of femininity. The narrator is not able to see that his male gaze has failed to capture Alice’s body because he has failed to capture her essence, although he has “never thought of her as a body—bones flesh, that sort of thing—but merely as a wonderful series of lines” (8) He has merely considered her as an object he can reproduce. The fact that she is indescribable from the part of the artist, leads us, as readers, to classify her as “uncanny”, and hence, an object of fear. At the realization of his failure, he looks for an excuse—the diagnoses of the doctors to explain her behaviour:

“It was the most extraordinary craze, of all the extraordinary crazes of childless and idle women” (14). Rapidly, when he perceives he cannot achieve the aim, he shifts the blame on the woman. It was thought that women’s sterility was caused by hysteria. In this way, women who could not have children or perform their motherhood as other women were prone to be manic or hysterical. In this sense, women were considered only from the point of view of their reproductive function. With this explanation, the painter refuses to accept a supernatural cause. In addition, as Julia Briggs (1977) adduces “the story conforms to the ‘psychological’ prototype” (122). It is clear that the narrator makes his choice and prefers the medical reasons, but the reader is not certain of what has happened.

The first time the narrator sees the portrait he declares that they are not similar, but identical:

There were the same strange lines of figure and face, the same dimples in the thin cheeks, the same wide-opened eyes, the same vague eccentricity of expression ... the same beautiful line of nape of the neck and stooping head as her descendant (12)

The narrator can infer both women are similar in gestures and manners; and, by saying so, he plays with the ambiguity of being in front of the self or the ‘other’. By reducing both women to only one, there is a reduction of personality. And, strange though it may sound, it is true that young Alice’s personality is completely nullified in the yellow room, and, while wearing her ancestress’s clothes, everybody is stunned at her behaviour.

Antonio Ballesteros, in his book *Narciso y el doble en la literatura fantástica Victoriana* (310-311), puts forth some considerations about the role of the painter in *Dorian Gray*. It would also be possible to analyse the role of the

painter in “Oke of Okehurst”, because he can give us clues about those two women. Basil paints Dorian’s portrait and he renders the innocent boy conscious of his own beauty. It is the first time Dorian contemplates his image. Basil has done so well that the portrait is a double of the model, reinforced by the fact that Basil has been able to capture Dorian’s *anima* or *alter ego*. As for Alice’s portrait, the painter is unable to capture young Alice’s soul; and, as a consequence, he is ineffective at joining both women as a double. Presumably, the painter cannot find Alice’s *anima* because it is already imprisoned in the old portrait, where old Alice retains it. Painters have different aims. Basil gets the double of Dorian himself—his soul is in the portrait and the original perverts his own soul. Compared to both Alices, it is the double or old Alice who perverts young Alice and determines her destiny. Narcissism would be the driving force that makes both characters admire their own image and also condition their way of acting. Narcissism, in part, has induced young Alice to imitate her ancestress. It is, as Ballesteros implies, that their picture is the motive that leads both characters to be aware of themselves. With this allegorical representation of the portrait, both writers, perhaps, lead us to measure the power of art to become the object it represents.

The narrator accompanies us throughout the story and he is a witness of the events. As a person who has to give credibility to his relating of the facts, he declares himself a sceptic man, following the tradition of most narrators of the Female Gothic:

We have all heard of ghosts; had uncles, cousins, grandmothers, nurses, who have seen them; we are all a bit afraid of them at the bottom of our soul; so why shouldn’t they be? I am too sceptical to believe in the impossibility of anything, for my part. Besides when a man has lived ... with a woman like Mrs. Oke of Okehurst, he gets to believe in the possibility of a

great many improbable things, I assure you, as a mere result of believing in her. And when you come to think of it, why not? (33)

6.5. Characters: male characters

Had we to choose how to define the male figures appearing in Lee's tales, we could assert that there are two well-differentiated types, depending on their interrelation with women. Clearly recognizable are those males who are women's antagonists, although there is another kind of man—those who are women's allies. Being as it is, and without taking into consideration their causes, for the time being, what all men share in Lee's short stories is their obsession towards a female.

One cannot escape easily from surrounding conditions or convictions, and Lee was fascinated with art. Consequently, in these tales, she gives the impression of transmitting to us that *femme fatales* are, in part, like art figures which make sense through male gaze. This gaze, derived from their obsession, gives a biased vision of women. As a result of this gaze, a *femme fatale* is considered to be the antagonist of the tale, but, in the innermost core, their subversive aspect is unperceived by men. This aspect of the male idea about women will be a recurrent topic in her short tales discussed in this work. There is an obsession on the part of a man towards a woman—the fixation arises by virtue of different purposes. We venture that each man has his own impulses to be infatuated by a woman, but they fail in perceiving how these women subvert their own masculine values in resisting their imprisonment or capture. The painter wants to reflect Alice in a painting, but in order to do a perfect portrait he must capture young Alice's body and soul. Old Alice is a woman of the past that can haunt men through her portrait, so we find a *femme fatale* who has a violent

beauty and is always represented by means of art. In this same way, Don Juan's gaze and compulsion is completely libidinous, on the one hand, and redemptive, on the other—the Infanta is the sexual, deadly feminine part of the woman who orders Don Juan's beheading and the Virgin is the maternal figure who helps him. Under other circumstances, Balthasar Maria fears the snake—a diametrically opposed behaviour to that of his grandson, who loves the Snake Lady. Oriana seems to defy Balthasar Maria in order to come close to the boy—who is obsessed with her—and teaches him to disobey the Establishment rules.

Such is the difference of the men's gaze towards women that it would be better to pay attention to each male character separately. In the tale "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady", Duke Balthasar Maria is a peculiar character, as his relationship with the Snake Lady proves. In this tale, there are two male personalities radically opposed—that of the Duke Balthasar Maria and that of Alberic. On the one hand, we see how Balthasar represents the male decadents, characterized because they were behaving as women were expected to comport themselves in those times—paying attention to dresses, hair, cosmetics and trivial things. We have to remember that, in this period and after the famous trial about Oscar Wilde's homosexuality, the idea about masculinity was differently conceived. The duke is a representative of this societal cliché, which could be compared to Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, as Caitlin Ehman expounds in her article "The Aesthete, the Hedonist, the Imperialist, and the Dandy: The Construction of Masculinity at the Fin de Siècle in Vernon Lee's "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" and J. M. Barrie's "Peter Pan"". Both of them, Balthasar and Captain Hook, can be seen as fighters in favour of extravagance in luxury, selfishness and vanity. They are capable of

doing anything ethically and morally corrupt in order to achieve the qualities Peter Pan or Alberic possess. The Duke is described as having a “delicate taste” for art, but he does not care about showing interest for having moral education or cultivation of the mind. This makes us infer that Balthasar wants to be surrounded by art only for the mere pleasure of having it, as a display of richness but not because he can understand it. His pursuit of beautiful, younger women, makes the reader think of him as a vain “old sinner” (46).

On the other hand, Alberic is the epitome of the other extreme. The Prince is described to us as a youth out of the ordinary:

Alberic was sixteen, but far taller and stronger than his age would warrant. His figure was at once manly and delicate, and full of grace and vigour of movement. His long hair, the colour of floss silk, fell in wavy curls, which seemed to imply almost a woman's care and coquetry. His hands also, though powerful, were, as the Dwarf took note, of princely form and whiteness. As to his garments, the open doors of his wardrobe displayed every variety that a young Prince could need; and, while the Dwarf was watching, he was exchanging a russet and purple hunting-dress, cut after the Hungarian fashion with cape and hood, and accompanied by a cap crowned with peacock's feathers, for a habit of white and silver, trimmed with Venetian lace, in which he intended to honour the wedding of one of the farmer's daughters. Never, in his most genuine youth, had Balthasar Maria, the ever young and handsome, been one-quarter as beautiful in person or as delicate in apparel as his grandson in exile among poor country folk. (21)

Contrary to his grandfather, Alberic does not pay attention to his person, as Balthasar does. And this is for one simple reason—because Alberic has been blessed with these innate and beautiful qualities without falling into effeminacy, as Balthasar. As a consequence of possessing natural beauty, he can comprehend the “art for art’s sake” principle. This comprehension is what leads him to cherish the tapestry of Prince Alberic and Lady Oriana. His admiration for the blond woman is even greater than the esteem he feels for his ancestor. The

young boy, Alberic, has always been living by the tapestry and he has learnt many things from it. Bearing in mind that Lee thought that legends and ghosts connected us with our past, here, the tapestry is Alberic's family tree, which serves the boy and Oriana to start the first contact—being family. He is the third descendant of the people of the tapestry.

The boy has always been obsessed with the blond woman; and, unusually, when he sees Oriana's serpent-body, he feels excited instead of terrified. Of course, Balthasar had put all the impediments he could in order to counterattack Oriana's haunting. Alberic's consideration for Oriana makes him respect her and give her the force to pursue her aim. He is also captivated and spellbound at the only sight of the castle of Sparkling Waters because he recognizes exquisiteness. Remarkably, in this period of Decadence, Alberic is a superb admirer and connoisseur of art, and he feels emotions and sensations that awaken his imagination. He becomes the paradigm of the male aesthete insofar as he has what the other males pursue in appearance, manner and attraction to be aesthetes. It can be considered that aestheticism helps Oriana and Alberic. Although we have already dealt with Balthasar's character before, he is the principal man in the dukedom, who is the prime mover of the tale and of fatal events, and his first action against Oriana was not only to conceal her from public view, but also to degrade her as though she did not belong to his family. There are two characters who are obsessed with Oriana—one is Balthasar and the other is Alberic. Balthasar is an old decadent man who is in charge of his grandson because he is an orphan, that is to say, Alberic is the last descendant of the House of Luna. However, Balthasar does not keep frequent contact with the boy; on the contrary, prince Alberic is with his nurse in

a room, where the tapestry of Alberic the Blond and Lady Oriana covers the wall.

William of Okehurst represents the typical Englishman of the Victorian time, as the narrator recounts:

He was a very tall, very well-made, very good-looking young man, with a beautiful fair complexion, beautiful fair moustache, and beautiful fitting clothes; absolutely like a hundred other young men you can see every day in the park, and absolutely uninteresting ... the only interesting thing about him—a very odd nervous frown between his eyebrows, a perfect double gash—a thing that usually means something abnormal; a mad-doctor of my acquaintance calls it the maniac frown. (4)

As it is possible to appreciate, William Oak is an ordinary man, who is interested, as every male in Victorian times, in class, social status and gender roles. He longs for a family leading a traditional middle-class life. He would be fond of a wife who was able to perform domestic tasks and be the perfect hostess, i.e. socially impeccable. Still, his wife is very far from being an ordinary woman. In no way does Alice avoid her least minimal chance of humiliating him in public. All the time, she takes advantage of her husband's weakness and frightful temper and she takes pleasure in mocking him every time she has the chance—at dinner, trying to tell the painter something about old Alice's story; or in the masquerade, with her cross-dressing. In effect, in the charade, Alice is cross-dressed as a boy and William is flabbergasted at this act, but the cogent reason for such a reaction is that William is completely aware of her usurping his male, husband role. She is subverting the rules and making such subversion known to the public sphere—she is trying to disrupt the nineteenth-century norms and to adapt them to her own profit, even though she has to ridicule her husband.

By praying to the Virgin of the Seven Daggers, Don Juan Gusman del Pulgar, asks the Madonna for the salvation of his soul in exchange for being unswervingly loyal and faithful to her and he proclaims there is no other woman as pulchritudinous and gorgeous as the Virgin. In his invocation to the Madonna, we can deduce, from Don Juan's words, the beauty and immaculateness of the sculpture, as well as the value of women in materialistic terms. Don Juan, who is a parodic figure of the famous Don Juan created by Zorrilla, is described as a "Grandee of Spain" (198) known as a heavy sinner for committing adultery and murder. Contrary to the reader's expectations, he pays the Virgin his highest compliments: "O Great Maddona, O Snow Peak untrodden of the Sierras, O Sea unnavigated of the tropics, O Gold Ore unhandled by the Spaniard, O New Minted Doubloon unpocketed by the Jew" (197) in order to stress the different treatment and respect he pays to the Virgin and to the Princess. However, Don Juan is imploring the Virgin's help to have his final sexual adventure, which is fairly ironic, because Virgins are models of chastity and this is opposed to Don Juan's intentions. The new girl is the daughter of a medieval Moorish who was buried long ago in the soil of the Alhambra, with her father's treasure. To revive the Infanta, Don Juan needs to recur to the necromantic converted "Jew Baruch" (204). Although the Jew has the treasure promised at first, he counsels Don Juan not to execute his plans. Baruch feels they are betraying all religions, even those other than Catholicism and Judaism. In the beginning, Don Juan is frightened, but he is determined and immediately he goes into the underworld. The narrator points out that, while he is in search of the Infanta, he can hear his previous lover voices trying to stop him. Under no circumstances does he desist. Furthermore, he represent

machismo in its pure essence—“Silence, you sluts!” (209) is Don Juan’s reply. It is difficult to believe that, being so repentant when asking the Virgin for help, he could be so chauvinist to despise women to such an extent. But what these voices can represent in this scene is that his model of machismo is undermined and the sexist power of male can be disempowered.

Pulham (2008) thinks Don Juan has captivated and won the heart of so many women that there is no earthy female who can offer him something new. He decides to go in search of emotions, and, contrary to what one can expect, he asks the Virgin for help in his new enterprise: to descend to Hell—or, as Pulhman puts it, “he seeks for in other realms” (93). His pursue will start with a profanation of the feminine space. The Alhambra is like the Infanta’s kingdom and he does neither need permission, nor does he asks for it to enter. The image used in the story is that of a key penetrating the lock to give free entrance to the invader of the space: “and the great hand ... projected a wrist, an arm to the elbow, and turned slowly in as secret lock the flag-shaped key” (207) In Pulhman’s words, this can be compared to a penetration. The more he penetrates to find the Infanta, the more he profanes her femininity—which is described as hell, with all kinds of animals, snakes and bats. If we understand the cave as the feminine womb, then, it is completely denigrated. When, at last, Don Juan meets the Infanta, he describes her as the most beautiful of all his lovers; but, when Don Juan is asked whether the Virgin is more beautiful, at least, he does not betray her—that is his first good action towards a woman. Don Juan is beheaded by order of the Infanta. The tale continues until the reader discovers that it is Don Juan’s spirit who is wandering through the streets of Grenada the day of the Liberation. He points that there is a trail of blood

following him, until he finds himself lying headless and everybody looking at him. The character has done a boomerang itinerary—he started in the Virgin's church and he comes back there again to pray for his salvation and the Virgin's help. The Virgin ascends him.

Don Juan is not the only man who has descended into Hell in search of a woman. The plot reminds us of Dante plunging into hell because he wanted to recover Beatrice, and also of Orfeo, who also goes to the underworld to ask Hades for his lover Euridice. Still, neither Orfeo nor Dante have the dominant and defiant attitude Don Juan shows. Taking Don Juan Tenorio as a referent, it can also be stated that Don Juan Gusman del Pulgar shares with him the same reputation of being a sexual exploiter. Don Juan is going to be sent to Hell by the Infanta, although the Virgin is the mediatory who helps him to go to Heaven because he has been faithful. In the case of Don Juan Tenorio, he has been unfaithful to Doña Inés and, a long time after the events took place, the Commendatory's spirit—Doña Inés' father—comes back to earth to take Tenorio with him to Hell, but it is then when Doña Inés intercedes for him and takes Don Juan with her.

When Don Juan traverses underground corridors, getting near the Infanta, some people start to appear. These people had been sleeping for three hundred years, and, by the way, like in *Sleeping Beauty*, when Don Juan passes by, everybody wakes up. Compelling enough is the figure of the eunuch because they are the only men who are surrounding the Infanta. One thing is clear: men who are in contact with a fatal woman have to be submissive, and, from this point of view, castrated eunuchs can be more than faithful because sex is not a driving force for them. The Infanta is being served by eunuchs, and,

principally, she transmits her words to the Chief Eunuch, who is responsible for Don Juan's decapitation under the Infanta's orders.

6.6. Ghosts: fatale women

Both Henry James and Vernon Lee shared a 'Sense of the Past', as Julia Briggs dubs it in chapter 5 of her book *Night Visitors* (1977). Both of them experienced in their lives social disaster, when tradition was starting to disappear and classic gothic ghosts were fading away. The thought that "any time in the past was better" was an increasing tendency due to the speed of progress. Ghosts offered a means of communication with the past and that caused the impression of continuity. As a result, ghost stories were an advantage inasmuch as they permitted a direct contact with past events, but could be seen and analysed with modern eyes. Furthermore, ghosts supposed a bond linking people with their past. All the tales in this study show the reader someone who is obsessed with a ghost of the past. This ghost is a fatal woman—a character which is a clear representative of the *fin-de-siècle* literature.

When we study Lee's tales, she adopts the trope of the *femme fatale* in the interest of denouncing women's position. In contemplation of this, her *femmes fatales* are the substitutes of her Victorian precedent ghosts. She does not use ghosts as they had been presented before. Her spirits do not only haunt places or houses; her ghosts are more psychological than before. In point of fact, her ghosts haunt our desires. With the *femme fatale*, Lee delineates a new construction of woman with a female personality and characterization—she is a deadly woman with unearthly beauty. This kind of female is seen as an object of

sexual desire and evil in men's fantasy, and, simultaneously, these women are courageous characters who subvert society with their strength. It must not be forgotten that the male gaze will be at the heart of people's understanding of the *femme fatale* because men's vision is not objective, as it responds to a patriarchal law.

The term *femme fatale* did not appear until the twentieth century, but we are heirs to a cultural tradition where the myth of a beautiful, deadly seductress is a well-known referent. This *femme fatale* will defy sex and gender structures, as well as family schemes and political, economic and religious strata. Sometimes, the kind of attraction men felt towards these women could be seen as masochistic, because these men had to adopt a submissive role that denigrated them; and it seems that *femmes fatales* take pleasure in dominating men, overall, by means of sex. Ironically, it was an explicit complaint about the role women had to perform continually in front of their husbands. This fight for the preponderant role leads us to infer an externalization of two imminent menaces: on the one hand, it signified the fear that male showed about female subversion of patriarchal society; and, on the other hand, it showed that people had a huge feeling of dread of the origin and nature of the 'other'. In the three stories we are concerned with—"Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady", "Oke of Okehurst" and "The Virgin of the Seven Daggers"—we face a divergent *femme fatale*. Fatale women are reified, animalized or sexualized. By doing this, women can become objects, and, consequently, they help men make indistinct the limitations of gender, sex and power. In our tales, we experiment that the Snake Lady is animalized, Alice Oke is to be transformed into a portrait—she is

reified—and the Moorish Infanta is a character of a legend and the supreme expression of sensuality and sexuality and a menace for Christians.

Alice Oke is completely obsessed with the character of her ancestress, old Alice. There is a legend in the family concerning old Alice and the poet Christopher Lovelock, her supposed lover. At the beginning, the narrator gives the reader a clue by describing her as being “from heaven or another place” (4). With this, it can be understood that it can also be from hell or the ‘other world’. Alice is a fatal woman, but she tries to be the double of her ancestress; being so, there are two deadly women to be afraid of in the same family. To reinforce the links that the two women have, Alice imitates her ancestress behaviour and she dons the dead Alice’s clothes to demonstrate she has a special bond with the dead poet. Thus, she gets an immediate response with her husband’s jealousy. The double is the central pillar of the tale, because this alterity is the “uncanny”, the “other”, the object of terror—due to the fact that there can be a displacement from the self to the ‘other’ or vice versa. For an ordinary person, it would be outrageous to lose one’s conscience, as this would mean becoming mad; but young Alice has been suffering a slow process of adaptation to the “other”. Since her first visual contact with the portrait in childhood, young Alice assumed the double personality, because she pretended to be her ancestress. As Alice and William are cousins, they played the story of wicked Alice at an early age, while William felt horrified and refused to be Alice’s husband, Nicholas. Now, they are adults, and Alice still tries to materialize her dead relative by dressing like her or reading Lovelock’s poems as if they were written for her.

Quite surprisingly, young Alice has lived with the obsession of becoming a unique self with old Alice, and, when she acts like her ancestor, she frees herself from obstacles, prejudices, social, moral and gender barriers. Young Alice feels powerful and gives free reins to her wishes, but, at the same time, both women lose their individuality and this is seen by scholar Liz Delf as women's denigration. Perhaps, the fact that young Alice has always wanted to be like her ancestor and that she has been centred in her obsession can be because she knows it is the only way to achieve liberty. This feeling of freedom can be due to the fact that she needs to be inspired in old Alice to rebel against everything surrounding her. Undoubtedly, young Alice has propitiated the similarities between both, and she is not against possession on the part of old Alice. Going one step further, young Alice has been performing all the events again, and every time young Alice revives a new event, the frontier between the two women becomes more undistinguishable.

Weird though it seems, there is a double haunting which goes in both directions—from one Alice to the other. Young Alice is so immersed in evoking and emulating her ancestress that she is able to retain her ancestress in the border between the dead and the living—in that precise moment she is a ghost which haunts her descendant. Without any doubt, there is a double haunting reinforced with the sense of identity the two women share and this opposes the 'otherness'. Alice's incarnation of her ancestress makes her bring old Alice come back from the dead, and, at the same time, young Alice takes advantage and tries to subjugate all men around her. With this fact, Alice is haunted by her ancestress, although she never appears in the story by any means. Intriguing as it is, the haunting of the tale is effective through young Alice's body. The fact

that the ghost of the tale coincides with the ghost of the manor, perhaps, makes it easier for Alice's to predispose herself to receive the spirit; apart from the especial circumstance that the spirit is her relative and she knows it—she even knows how the story ends.

When Alice is described in the story by means of a connotative language which drives us to a spiritual background, she is said to be “diaphanous” (15), “shadowy” (18), “elusive” (33), “ethereal” (34) There is a patent immateriality in young Alice; she is also the ghost in the house and these are the reasons why she cannot be painted or chased to be put in a portrait. The enlightening metaphor of the portrait gives us many clues in the relationship between both women. Old Alice is imprisoned in the portrait, but, at least, her spirit can escape when the other woman evokes her. Despite this fact, she was free in her life because she did what she wanted—she even killed her lover. Meanwhile, young Alice is not able to act as freely in life as her ancestress, although her spirit resists the painter's aim—to imprison her in a portrait. By means of the portrait, the *do ut des* between both women can be materialized—the portrait acts as a reminder of the legend of old Alice's ghost. Young Alice helps her ancestress enacting what she desires through her body and by acting like her; and, by dint of being possessed, young Alice can act as a New Woman—behaving this way, she can be free from social bounds.

There is a reasonable insight to examine and scrutinize to what extent both Alices are representatives of a fatal woman. When we try to spin the fine details which characterize these two women, we can assure that old Alice is a fatale woman because she killed Christopher Lovelock physically, and, afterwards, she possesses her descendant, turning her into a victim and destroying her.

Paradoxical as it may seem, young Alice is also a fatal woman. She achieves this role in the moment she teases her husband and causes him moral pain, and, moreover, she drives him to rampage and bereavement. In this story, Vernon Lee presents us a significant approach to the way a *femme fatale* story is usually woven. First of all, and in contrast to what is usually done, it is a woman who is obsessed with another woman and not a man who is obsessed with sex and death, as will happen in the other two stories we are concerned with. Young Alice is not only enthralled by her ancestress' story—because she knows it beforehand—but she wants to be like her in order to achieve that freedom which would be so impossible to obtain, and, as a *femme fatale*, her victim will be a man—her husband.

The relationship between the two women is pivotal for the tale. Nevertheless, there is no proof that old Alice appears in any form, she only appears in the portrait, and, consequently, she cannot take part in the final events. It seems that young Alice is the one who makes the possession possible because of her obsession with her ancestress, but, if there is something she really covets, that is power. And there is something more: young Alice wants to become the fatal woman herself. Considered sometimes as the victim, young Alice achieves her aim and the possession completes her. As a *femme fatale*, she fits all the characteristics. First of all, she has a submissive husband, who is perpetually grieved and offended, because she takes pleasure in disdainning him, which means she is the powerful member in her house and marriage—which was unthinkable for a Victorian couple. Torturing her husband can be her affirmation as a female being before the patriarchal power. Moreover, this is also reinforced by the lack of lineage. Both of them are

cousins, and, with them, the end of the family is imminent. She was pregnant once, she had a miscarriage and has not been interested in being a mother since. Although her husband William confesses he was not interested in a descendant either, he most likely says so because he is afraid of his wife. Alice is menacing the family, which was one of the bedrock institutions of Victorian society, and a similarity is strongly borne with Lady Oriana. Alice and Oriana bring about the end of the family. Both die carrying with them the decease of their partners—Alice's husband dies with her, just as Alberic dies because of Oriana's death.

A *femme fatale* is said to be deadly, and, as an example, we have two stories where they die, but, in the case of "Oke of Okehurst", it is necessary to pay attention to how it happens. Cross-dressing takes special importance as refers to elder Alice. The night Alice and her husband go to kill Lovelock, she is dressing as a groom in order to reinforce male violence when shooting Lovelock. Unusual as it is for fatal women, elder Alice helps to kill her lover to avoid her husband getting killed. This can signify that even though her male clothes fill her with courage enough, she sticks to the submissive role she is obliged to in the patriarchal system—reaching the conclusion she has been overcome by masculine forces. The conventional way for *femme fatales* to act is what young Alice does—they lead men to their destruction, while grieving and annihilating them. That is to say, elder Alice wears men's clothes to assume their role, whereas young Alice uses men's attires to mock the dead and to disturb and shock her husband and her guests. By means of cross-dressing, young Alice regains masculinity for her at the expense of ridiculing William. But if one keeps in mind that the New Women who were appearing in society were

dressing in mannish robes, there was a latent menace for males, because new values were appearing in the patriarchal culture.

As a *femme fatale*, Alice is described as an object which cannot be painted, but also as a stereotype of misogyny, which is a consequence of the anxieties revolving around the feminine sex. Although the readers are told by the narrator that she is “The most marvellous creature” (3), there is a glaring paradox—Alice is animalized—the narrator identifies her with a beast, even with a serpent, which is one of the symbolic representations of *femme fatales*, just as Oriana. With these ideas and the language used to depict Alice, the referent of the Western woman and the misogyny of the Decadents is manifest.

In the “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers”, the *femme fatale* is, paradoxically, represented by a Moorish Infanta and also by the Virgin. Such feminine figures are scarcely represented as fatale women, though they share characteristics with the trope. In addition, there is a dichotomy personified by both figures, according to Liz Delf (2011) The Moorish Infanta, thus, is the other extreme to the Virgin of the Seven Daggers, although both women incarnate the myth of the *femme fatale* by showing both sides of the coin—mother/whore (82). Confusing as it seems *prima facie*, the Virgin embodies the redemptive powers of a mother, hence symbolizing the maternal ideal, whereas the Moorish Infanta exemplifies the destructive powers of a beautiful, sexual and deadly Oriental woman.

The Virgin is, at the beginning of her description, reified; she is presented as a doll in a suffocating artistic atmosphere. The image is covered with ornaments, neither negative nor positive—she is just overburdened, which evokes a *horror vacui* style in the church: “Her skirts bulge out in melon-shaped

folds, all damasked ... with silver roses; the reddish shimmer of the gold wire, the bluish shimmer of the silver floss..." (195) According to the features of a fatale woman, the Madonna is declared to be physically beautiful in spite of being a sculpture: " Her face surmounting rows and rows of pearls, is made of wax, white with black eyes and a tiny coral mouth; she stares ... with a sad and ceremonious smile." (196)

We cannot obviate the fact that, for most religions, including Catholics, some Orthodox and Anglican Christian, the Virgin Mary is the "Mother of God". Therefore, contemplating this typical trait of motherhood, Don Juan Gusman de Pulgar, knows that the Virgin Mary will fulfil her duty, which will consist in both protection and intercession for him. The Virgin has always been considered as a mediator for humanity, but has never been regarded as a goddess by the church.

There is a possibility, as we have already mentioned, of including the Virgin and the Infanta as part of the multiple faces of fatale woman. If we analyse both figures from the standpoint of Neopaganism, it is believed that the "Mother Goddess" is formed by several feminine deities. The most extended theory is that three identities are integrated in this "Mother Goddess"—a Maiden, a Mother and a Crone, being this last one the wicked part. Thus, taking this into consideration, it can be speculated that the Mother could be the Virgin, and the Maiden and Crone could be assumed by the Infanta.

In fact, Lee shows that such an exotic Islamic princess is connected with sexual peril, being comprehensible in the period, because the East was portrayed to the Western civilization as exotic and erotic. Meanwhile and, moreover, this Orientalism—which was so menacing—was considered as the

'Other'. The Infanta would also represent the aforementioned 'Crone' inasmuch as she is the one who orders Don Juan's beheading, and, consequently, represents the worst part of a powerful woman. In order to counteract this wicked and destructive figure, Lee gives us the antagonistic version of the Virgin. With this opinion, the authoress tries to undermine the idealized versions of the uniquely sexual or maternal figures, so frequently found in a male founded society. It is very likely that Vernon Lee wanted to reflect how the changes of the times were altering some typical conceptions. Indeed, these innovations were blurring the limits of gender, sex and holiness.

As we are trying to define the two differentiated faces of the same fatale woman in the story, we can say that both of them share a characteristic—they are voiceless as well as immobile. The Virgin and the Infanta are compared to dolls, or, at least, are described as if they were so; by being deprived of movement, they are held as valuable objects for males, like sculptures. They, like the *femme fatale*, are in the men's hands, and they are also an object to be proud of because of beauty. This kind of silent and passive women was required in those contemporary times and reflected in some literary works—it is a reminiscence that shows the sway of E.T.A. Hoffman on Vernon Lee. Then again, the misogynist tendency to keep control over women was manifest. Both women are in powerful positions, as a 'Queen of Heaven' and as a 'Princess of Hell', but even being thus, they are seen as objects—dolls. The Virgin is continually described in terms of decorative ornaments and she does not answer Don Juan, not even when she helps him ascend to Heaven. Being voiceless comes to ratify that, even though she is the "Mother of God", the power is in men's hands. Fortunately, it is her own decision to redeem Don

Juan, which comes to demonstrate that she is powerful enough to decide who can be saved beyond life and death. Similarly, the Infanta is also reified, though not like the Virgin in a material sculpture, but as an apparition. The Infanta seems to lack her own voice and subjectivity to decide, although the events demonstrate it can be the converse. First, the Infanta was reduced to a treasure by her father who had buried her as a valuable object: “buried his jewels, his plate, and his favourite daughter” (204). The same opinion will be shared by Don Juan many years later, as covets the Infanta and the gold. With these sleeping damsels waiting to be rescued by men, one can infer that they are waiting for marriage, which is tantamount to an end for their punishment. For us, Don Juan awaits the prize for awaking the doll: marry her. Moreover, the description of the Infanta’s dress and exotic appearance—like an oriental doll—as well as the extravagance in her robes is similar to that of the Virgin: “Her breast was covered by rows and rows of the largest pearls, a perfect network reaching from her slender throat to her waist among which flashed diamonds embroidered in her vest.” (217). The princess is completely silent during the tale, but for one exceptional moment. Don Juan tries to speak to her directly, but the eunuch intervenes and speaks on behalf of the princess—this is one of the crucial moments when the barriers between the princess and the Virgin of the Seven Daggers start to fade. In fact, there is a metaphorical identification between them both; this mixing of both women comes reinforced because the princess is also described as having “the rigidity of a statue” (217).

Ironically, although both women are deemed objects, both of them are powerful enough to decide what they desire and if they are to redeem or punish anyone. When the princess asks Don Juan the fatal question, which will lead

him to death, she is said to “fix into the cavalier a glance long, dark, and deep, like that of a wild antelope” (221). Although she is animalized to connote the cruelty of the deadly woman, she is able to reify her suitor because, at that moment, she is mightier than him and can unchain her deadly strength. Being aware that his response would carry fatal consequences for him, he overlaps both women as if fading from one into another, meaning that both are identifying and becoming one: “and the image of her was blurred, and imperceptibly it seemed to turn into the effigy ... and seed-pearl stomacher of the Virgin of the Seven Daggers” (221). Although she does not perform the beheading—the “Berber of the Rif” does instead—she is like the *femmes fatales* who do not kill their victims, but cause their destruction.

After all our discussion, it is clear that the Virgin and the princess complement each other to ameliorate the fatale woman with different aspects, due to the fact that they possess different traits of personality, which are complementary to be considered as one. After the princess condemns Don Juan to die and go to hell, not only does the Virgin save him, but she helps him to be redeemed—in the last moment, he repents for his sins and commends himself to his Virgin, the subversive part of the *femme fatale*. Being overlapped with the princess, the virgin seems to be sexualized and eroticised and deviated to a dark place not suitable for her. Nevertheless, the Madonna is able to reverse the role. When Don Juan dies and she pardons and ascends him to heaven because he is redeemed, the Virgin separates from the princess realm and a wedge is driven between them both.

Recapitulating, the first figures of the *femme fatale*, Alice Oke and her ancestress, are the epitome of a doppelganger; in other words, two different

women become only one by means of a portrait and a family relationship—and, moreover, they defy their English Victorian society and all the patriarchal powers by being beautiful and deadly. The second *femme fatale* has also been formed by two women who are complementary parts of a fatal woman. The Virgin represents the maternal instinct and the princess presents the image of power, beauty and death—after all, she is powerful. The third character is the Snake Lady, who is transformed into a snake, albeit unwillingly. Only one woman can defy all patriarchal structures and can make men feel that the foundations of their world are shaking. Once more, the reader will be able to contemplate throughout Oriana's tale how Vernon Lee shows the real woman who was about to conquer her terrain in the *fin-de-siècle*.

As we have explained, the three ghosts or *femmes fatales* are each one interrelated with a legend belonging to the past. In other words, these women are the “uncanny” element in their plot; and, although in two cases this “other” element belongs to the family, like in “Oke of Okehurst” and in “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady”, or to the past of the city, like in “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers”, the reader or the character needs to know the legend to give sense to the facts. Old Alice Oke was the protagonist of the family legend in which everybody must know she committed homicide and killed her lover. Fantasy leads us to the bottom of the underworld to prove the legend about the buried princess is true. And, of course, the plot starts to gain sense when we, as readers, fathom the reasons from the legend, because they justify the character's behaviour.

Proceeding to analyse Oriana's tale, a consequential action for the relationship between Oriana and Balthasar, the Duke of Luna, is that the duke

will never respect her; in other words, he prefers to give vent to gossiping and negate the evidence of her existence, though, contradictorily, he feels panic of snakes. We are aware of each other's repulsion from the very beginning of the tale. Balthasar is not emphatic with Oriana and the reader is given a clue: "The first act of hostility of old Duke Balthasar towards the Snake Lady, in whose existence he did not, of course, believe" (1). As the boy grows up, the nurse decides to go to another room, and, accidentally, the tapestry is left uncovered. Amazed and surprised, the boy "ran to his nurse, exclaiming: 'O, nurse, dear nurse, look—the lady—!'"(6).

From Vernon Lee's entire *femme fatale* saga, Oriana represents the ophidian myth, from whose consequences women are still suffering. This is due to the fact that religion has a bad conception of "snakes expelled from a paradise" or fatal women. Oriana was, at the very beginning, a powerful sorceress, who lived in her own possessions and was the Lady of the Castle. She had servants, money and power—if not worldly, at least, unearthly. She possessed the same status Balthasar occupies in his dominions, but she will continuously be denigrated. A wicked sorcerer, the name of whom does never appear, casts a spell on her. She is condemned to live into a trough in a garden under the form of a snake. Only for one hour a day under the moonlight can she recover her feminine form, provided someone kisses her. She has a punishment inflicted, akin to that of Odette in *The Swan Princess*. As the reader might remember, a wicked man has Odette transformed in her animal form of a swan, releasing her only at night. This story is also reflected in Tchaikovsky's libretto of his ballet *The Swan Lake*.

She can break the spell by means of finding a man able to remain faithful to her for at least ten years. Oriana undertakes her epic lifelong voyage and the first man with whom she starts an affair is Alberic the Blond. Being an illustrious cavalier of the House of Luna and having fought at the Crusades, he arrives at Oriana's island because Macomet sends him there. Probably, Macomet—tremendously furious because he had been beaten by Alberic—thought that the worst fate Alberic could have was to meet a *femme fatale*. Alberic the Blond is asked to help the lady:

O Knight of Luna, valorous Alberic, if thou wouldst show thy gratitude to the hapless mistress of this castle, summon up thy redoubtable courage, and, whatsoever creature issue from my marble heart, swear thou to kiss three times on the mouth, that Oriana may be released. (33-34)

After the young man reads the inscription, he faces a big snake with golden eyes and, trying to overcome his fears, he kisses the animal, but, suddenly, magic appears and the serpent is transformed into a woman. The first impact is that Lady Oriana is animalized. With this procedure of reflecting women as animals, men could denigrate female more than in other ways. By dint of being transformed into a snake, Oriana is humiliated in many senses. She is unable to move like a human being, and, as a result, she can be easily confined—she is turned into an object of fear, insofar as snakes are poisonous and deadly animals. She can only be in men's hands, because it is not until Alberic kisses her that she cannot be a woman except for an hour—so, she has been deprived of wish. This trait is shared by the three fatale women in these stories. Although the three women are compared to animals, it is Oriana the one who takes an animal form; the other two women are differently considered—

their denigration is not as strong as with Oriana. Neither of them is transformed into a creature, but they are compared to them. The painter says that Alice sometimes is like a snake, and the princess is said to show “antelopes eyes”, but Oriana is completely transformed.

Equally related to fatale women is that Oriana connects with the ophidian myth of Lilith, with a reminiscence of Medusa. Medusa was one of the Gorgon sisters, but in contrast with them, she was characterized by her great beauty. Atenea was angry with her and also jealous, and thus, she decided to turn her into a horrible monster with his hair constituted by snakes. Moreover, she would petrify everybody with her eyesight. Continuing with the snake’s genealogy, Robert Graves and Rafael Patai (1964) tell us in Lilith’s story that she was the first of Adam’s wives. As she was created by God, not from Adam’s rib, but from the same dust, coming both from the earth, she rebelled because she wanted to be equal to him. As a result she escaped and was then expelled from Paradise, but condemned to be a snake for the rest of her days. Being a serpent bears a strong connotation for the readers—she will seem disobedient, menacing and sensually sexual. Strikingly, although keeping her snake form, Alberic the Blond remains with her, after the kissing, for a period of time, just until he was due to perform some of his obligations—to marry a princess. Lineage was important for Victorians, and staying with Oriana would have meant the end of the House of Luna.

There is significant evidence that a fatale woman can destabilize family, overall, when we take into account that none of the heroines has or wants to have offspring. Young and old Alice are childless and do not worry about the matter at all. With young Alice and her husband, the family line is extinguished.

The Moorish princess is not interested in continuing her dynasty, among other reasons, because she craves for Don Juan's refusal and betrayal to the Virgin. The Virgin, for the princess, would mean family, motherhood and submission, whereas she desires to undermine all those worthy and also defy Don Juan's misogynist values.

That aside, Oriana's desires about family are not as clear as for the other women. First of all, Alberic the Blond stays with her until he is convinced he deserves a princess—patriarchal forces can recover him from the deadly woman. With the second of the line, Marquis Alberic, Oriana stays for at least nine years, despite the fact that he had already been married before; but long enough to surmise that he is Alberic's father and that Oriana is her mother. Nothing is mentioned in this respect. In lieu of that, when Oriana appears to Alberic, she says: "I am, though you do not know it, your Godmother." (26) At that moment she is a wonderful woman and every day she will stay with the prince, leading his education, covering his basic necessities and spending their life together. On the one hand, being a snake and giving solace to the boy subverted the Bible's myth. On the other hand, being a godmother, but in the role of *femme fatale*, can be guessed as subverting patriarchal strata. She shakes the foundations of religion, politics and social life. The old priest of the village near "Sparkling Waters" reveals the entire story to the young boy—he is sixteen then—and, suddenly, he comes to recognise that Oriana, her godmother, is the Snake Lady. Suddenly, without any doubts, Oriana has found a faithful man. Nevertheless it will be from that moment on that fatality will enter into their lives.

The three men who work side by side with Balthasar are of the most villainous type—the Jesuit, the Jester, and the Dwarf—who were equally his counsellors. All of them think of gaining Alberic’s confidence to assassinate him when his grandfather has died and thus reclaim the throne for themselves. Meanwhile, they spy “Sparkling Waters” and go there personally to check who is helping Alberic, concluding there is something related to magic. In order to avoid his misery, he requires Alberic to come back near him and he has engaged him to a rich heiress whose father can help him. With it, he challenges Oriana because she considers Alberic as her ward, her protégé and like his son. The Jesuit has guessed Alberic carries a snake with him. Therefore, he invents the rumour that Alberic has a lover and suggests that they should discover her. Balthasar and the counsellors enter in the room where Alberic and the snake lady are secluded. As soon as Balthasar sees the serpent he cries “with eyeballs starting with terror, as he tottered convulsively. ‘The serpent! the serpent!’” (58) Everybody knows he is afraid of snakes because he knows the legend. The three men jump towards the animal before Alberic could avoid the act—the snake is brutally killed. Paradoxically, Oriana has been destroyed because of Alberic’s love. Unable to leave her godmother safe in “Sparkling Waters”, he took her into the “Red Castle”, where she was finally vanquished.

Similarly to many *femme fatales*, Oriana is killed. According to the traditional belief, a *femme fatale* can only be dead if she is beheaded. One must remember that the vampire Lucy Westenra had to be decapitated to die and a stake had to traverse her heart. This is also the case of Oriana—she has to be beheaded, and brutally dismembered as well.

Another essential point these fatale women share is their lack of voice. Not only is Oriana disposed of their voice because she is animalized, but also the other two are also voiceless women. Starting with the two Alice, we can observe that old Alice is framed within a portrait, and, as a consequence, she cannot speak—she is a silent *memento mori*. However, in a slowly increasing way, it is old Alice who possesses her relative and it is her voice the unique voice the reader can hear, through young Alice's mouth. The Virgin and the princess, who are reified as dolls, are voiceless, too. However, they act as they wish, the Virgin saving him from condemnation, and, the princess, ordering his punishment. Oriana is disposed of her speech, except for one hour a day; and, sometimes, she seems not to need it. She knows when Alberic needs her and accompanies him, albeit speechless.

The figure of the '*femme fatale*' is nowadays an ever-present character in many books and is even more deep-rooted in films. One can make inquiries about the admiration both female and male had for these characters in the past, although they were supposedly objects to imitate or vindicate. Still we would venture our surmise that *femme fatales* are attractive entities to emulate in our times, due to the fact that there is a fatal attraction to what is subversive and seems maleficent. In this way, we can assert that the peculiar features that had conformed *femme fatales* of all times are still present in the literature and filmography of today. There is a vast gamut of women, ranging from Lisbeth Salander in the *Millenium Saga* by Stieg Larson, who defies corrupted men making vivid the patriarchal superiority, undermining social values—she is a bisexual—, family principles—she does not have babies and her end is not marriage, not even love. The same happens in the cinema, where women

represent several traits, if not all features that a *femme fatale* can possess. Let us see some of the most illustrative films. The most deadly fatal woman in the cinema may be Catherine Tramel in *Basic Instinct* (1992), playing the role of a crime novelist who is also a brutal criminal and a bisexual. Nicole Kidman interprets an apparent submissive and lovely wife in *To Die For* (1995), but, in the moment her husband asks her have children, her inner self emerges and she starts to do sexual favours to other men just to arrange her husband's murder. Curious as it is, the figure of Xenia Onatopp, who appears in *Golden Eye* (1995), interpreted by Famke Janssen, is equally lethal, smart, chic, extremely sadistic, cold-hearted, sexually psychopathic, and villainously playful; she is able to achieve sexual pleasure while killing her lovers. Our famous Halle Berry is a catwoman, in the eponymous film (2004), where she is an animalized fatale woman who possesses the abilities of the animal. Also Rachael, starring Sean Young in *Blade Runner* (1982), is a robot and a reified woman, though she thinks she is human—she is lovely but beaten by men. It is arduous to deny that, as observers and readers, there is certain pleasure in contemplating fatal women's perversity. Perhaps it is worse to recognize that in our times we still need *femme fatale* films to verbalize women's rights.

6. 7 Genius loci

Paramount in this study for an entire vision of Vernon Lee's supernatural tales is the analysis of the *genius loci*. This is so vital for Lee that there is a need to be explicit about the concept the writer had about it—she defined the term in her book of the same name written in 1899:

The Genius Loci, like all worthy divinities, is of the substance of our heart and mind, a spiritual reality. And as for visible embodiment, why that is the place itself, or the country ; and the features and speech are the lie of the land, pitch of the streets, sound of bells or of weirs ; above all, perhaps, that strangely impressive combination, noted by Virgil, of " rivers washing round old city walls " (web)

From the beginning of literature, the relationship between man and nature has traditionally been a trope. Men are in contact with nature, but the natural surroundings can be sometimes uncontrollable and unknown. Equally important in this relationship is to be aware that men can perceive nature as something external to them and also as an irresistible influence on them. As a consequence, the *genius loci* or "spirit of the place" can also cause anxiety and fear, and, in the Gothic tradition, sometimes it is part of the "uncanny". In the end, it gives the tale such a strength that these settings are as necessary as characters. As Colby suggests, the settings, in Vernon Lee, are "based on the reality of geography" (224) However, we would rather add that, apart from the vision of the geographical sight during her travels, she uses her imagination and masterly transforms the setting into a new place, which can be real, like Grenada and the Alhambra, or imagined, like the dukedom of Luna.

Her supernatural stories are set in Italy, such as 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady', in Germany or in Spain, such as 'The Virgin of the Seven Daggers', with the exception of "Oke of Okehurst", which is the only one set in England.

The painter of the Oke's portrait sets off on his journey to his sitters one day in August. At first, when he is describing his train voyage and the landscape he goes through, he qualifies it as "monotonous" (5) but when he can see the house, contrasting with his previous ideas, he is pleasantly surprised. On one of

the outside parts of the house, the painter describes “a huge oak, short, hollow, with wreathing, blasted, black branches, upon which only a handful of leaves shook in the rain.” (6) This tree is an image of the Oke family—the words ‘Oke’ and ‘oak’ are homophones. With this pun, the writer gives us a premonition of how the story may finish. The oak tree—as if it were William—is almost dead, empty, as with little sentiment, “blasted”, like William’s heart and with a thin thread of life because there are still some leaves.

The narrator continues describing the house and he finds it charming—a Jacobean mansion. His room is so alluring he experiments a sense of ecstasy. This could be interpreted as a complete immersion in the house and the family. Moreover, he gives the impression of feeling transformed by this countryside atmosphere, culminating in the rapture of his room. Nevertheless, the most impressive area, which contains the “spirit of the place”, is the yellow room—which is depicted as having Italian characteristics: “The walls were hung with flowered damask, whose yellow, faded to brown ... For the rest, it reminded me more of an Italian room than an English one.” (17) It seems as if the yellow room, where Mrs. Oke evokes Christopher Lovelock, and which carries erotic overtones, is compared to *The Yellow Paper* where erotic short stories were published. Alice Oke likes being in the “yellow room”, where nobody else in the family will enter. Far from being so, all the relatives consider this room as something weird and dangerous, although nothing has happened there. It is in this yellow room where young Alice completely transmutes and reads Christopher Lovelock’s love letters, which he dedicated to her ancestress, as though such missives had been written specially for her. It is precisely in this room where the pivotal moment of possession takes place. This room, the

central point of the 'uncanny', is the place where young Alice spends long hours alone—while wearing old Alice's dresses and where she can be isolated from the rest of the world. Without any doubt, it is Alice who gives the room its power and it is the room which predisposes Alice's soul for a *Do ut des*. On the one hand, it is her past and the legend of the family what makes the enchantment come true and haunt Alice, but it is also Alice the agent who bedevils the yellow room and the people around her. William, who has gone insane and is able to see Lovelock's ghost, murders his wife in the yellow room. William cannot tolerate the yellow room.

Undeniably and unfortunately, Vernon Lee disliked Spanish baroque art. Her short story "The Virgin of the Seven Daggers" is set in Grenada. The way of starting the tale is as if a camera was filming from a general scene in which there is a complete view of Grenada that is focusing little by little on the church of Our Lady of the seven Daggers. Slowly but with firm steps, the reader penetrates into the church until the attention is centred in the image of the Madonna. As it was mentioned in Lee's biography, the moment when she visited Spain, she was having a nervous breakdown, which could influence her vision of Spanish baroque. The church and the Madonna are described with negative connotations: "monstrous heads", "barbarically green", "pompous, pedantic and contorted Spanish" (194). She does not derive pleasure from architecture or the Catholic culture of imagery with "waxen Christs with bloody wounds" (195). As readers, we can grasp the revulsion the narrator experiments in front of a *horror vacui* church and the image of the Virgin:

Her skirts bulge out in melon-shaped folds, all damasked with minute heart's-ease, and brocaded with silver roses; the reddish shimmer of the gold wire ... Her body is cased like a knife in its sheath, the

mysterious russet and violet of the silk made less definable still by the network of seed pearl and the veils of delicate lace which fall from head to waste. (195)

With the description of the religious ornaments, Lee is criticising the fragile boundary between Catholicism and secularity, purity and eroticism, as well as spirituality and materialism. When the princess's setting and robes are described, it seems there are some images that overlap with depictions of the Virgin. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion, the Infanta is kept distant so that the division and separation between these two women remains clear.

The story happened two centuries before it was told and it is an autumn night in Grenada—to be precise all the action takes place in the Tower of the Cypresses in the Alhambra. Once more, the reader is given an augury: “The sun had long since set, making a trail of blood along the distant river” (203) On the one hand, it gives us the clue that something atrocious might happen. On the other hand, this same trail of blood will follow Don Juan's ghost as far as the church of the Virgin, although he is already dead.

To open the door of the enchanted palace it is necessary for the moon to be in a given position, since the haunting cannot be otherwise performed. The moon is the symbol of women; in ancient times, it was considered the deity of femininity and fertility. Don Juan can profane the princess sanctuary because the moon, which was warding the princess, obeys him thanks to the malign forces he has invoked. Likewise, it is in the moonlight when Oriana can recover her human form, and many other women ghosts appear only at night for this reason.

Outside the Alhambra the “spirit of the place” begins to appear—in the form of all manner of strange animals: “devils with the bodies of apes”, “demons, in the shape of white elephants but with snakes for their trunks” (206). From that moment on, it seems Don Juan is like Dante in hell: both of them in pursuit of their lovers listening to the pennants. Don Juan is listening to the voices of the condemned—calling for him—being all the women who have been doomed to be in hell because of having been dishonoured by the same Don Juan. However, the experience is contrasting, because, while penetrating through a narrow space, described as a vampire’s grave, the “spirit of the place” leads us to imagine a *femme fatale*.

The venue where the Infanta is secluded is like a subterranean chamber. When the Duenna and the Eunuch are described, there are hints of Orientalism, and so many details that the reader forgets Lee is describing hell and the Infanta is not depicted as oriental: “Her face was oval, with the silver pallor of the young moon” (217). Lee also gives us a vast amount of details in her description about her makeup and her garments. Among snakes, spiders, eunuchs, dancers, shadows, dim lights, veils and silk, the atmosphere is very contradictory. On the one hand, many elements indicate decay and death, whereas, on the other hand, there is a sensual and sexual atmosphere. All of sudden, everything gets black—the change is categorical, the reader can feel perplexed. After traversing Grenada, he comes back to the church and everything finishes when the Virgin takes him to heaven through the cupola of the church.

As well as in the previous story, in which we can find two differentiated *genius loci*, each one for a distinct symbol, the same happens in the story we

are now analysing. In “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady”, one can find defined spaces in which each action is developed; and, in addition, we will see places evocating the exotic and the mystic—topics which Vernon Lee takes from the romantics.

Alberic lives with his grandfather in the “Red Palace” but the “spirit of the place” is in the tapestry of his room. The story happens in 1680 in Italy, and the tapestry represents a scene of “courtly love” in the Middle Ages. But the evocation of such an idyllic atmosphere will condition Alberic’s life. When the boy looks through the window, he feels anxious in front of all the artificiality of the site. Animals are carved and there are no natural elements, inside or outside the artificial garden. The name “Red Palace” also carries some connotations—negative, at least, to our mind. Red is the colour of passion, but also for rage and blood. Alberic hates the “Red Palace” or “tomato-coloured plaster” (8) as it is said, but even more important are the words the narrator uses to transmit to us how Alberic feels in this place. The boy “abominated” (8) the palace and felt that the Caesar’s busts were “uncanny” (8). There was a grotto in which “colossal” satyrs were represented—which would be the symbol of Balthasar—and the boy’s feeling about it is “abhorrence” (9). These emotions seem to predict the end that will take place there.

On the other extreme, all the *genius loci* which surround Oriana will reflect her spirit. At first, she lives in an island with a paradisiacal setting, as we know from the man who tells Alberic the story, and then, she and Marquis Alberic went to live to “Sparkling Waters”. The name suggests happiness and effervescence of feelings, although it is now ruined. Alberic feels highly satisfied and delighted, owing to the fact that it seems the tapestry has come true. There

are animals, trees, a tower like he used to see a nice garden and a well in it. It is in the middle of this garden that Alberic and Oriana start to have contact for one hour a day, at sunset—again, with the moonlight, i.e. the light of the femininity which can protect them both. Nevertheless, it is also in the garden under the moonlight when he kisses the serpent's head three times. Unfortunately, Alberic was sent back to a lonely room in the "Red Palace" and he carried the Snake with him. In that solitary room, which is not even described, the final events take place. But it seems that a comparison between the end of the day and the end of Alberic and Oriana is made:

It was a burning day of August, a Friday, thirteenth of that month and after a long prevalence of enervating sirocco ... The sun, setting among ominous clouds, sent a lurid orange gleam into Prince Alberic prison chamber (57)

6. 8 Style

If Lee had had to explain her reasons for writing ghost stories, these would not have been the popularity of the genre, but her attraction to the past. As it always happens, children usually listen to tales. In Lee's case, she was particularly exposed to folklore and fairy tales. She had many advantages other youngsters lacked—e.g. she had read Grimm's stories with her German maiden. She was used to being near antique ruins belonging to ancient civilizations and she took some references from mythology, from Paganism and also from Christianity. Moreover, we cannot forget art—Lee's characters are not real at all, they were the product of her invention and the stories are completely individualized by her own taste.

According to Zorn (2003), Lee could attract attention to herself, even to the most prominent men of the culture of the period like Walter Pater or Henry

James, but, due to the fact that she belonged to a period between two different literary movements, she was condemned to ostracism. Things have changed now and she is well known and better considered.

Lee's gothic works can be contemplated as a bridge to the past and not only her characters could cross the bridge, but also language was appropriate in taking us back to the character's time. With her style, she immerses the reader into the kingdom of fantasy she is dealing with in the story, and she is able to let us remain there as if it was a way of no return. Due to her accurate and meticulous studies about the periods and the places, she can recreate the atmosphere, although she does not use any words in a language other than English. There are only few exceptions, like some names such as "Brillamorte" (32) which is the name of a sword, or Oriana, the Snake Lady's name she uses to build the atmosphere.

With all her knowledge about history from Italian Renaissance until the eighteenth century, she evokes with full dexterity how Italian gardens smelt and also the typical flowers that created the scent, probably, like the Mediterranean gardens she could observe in *Il Palmerino*:

A plantation of orange trees filled ... lemons were espaliered ... There were no lilies, indeed, but big carnations hung down from the tower windows, and a tall oleander, which Alberic mistook for a special sort of rose tree, shed its blossom on to the drawbridge. (13)

Her portrayals are very near the Romantic Gothic, where ruined castles and towers imply decrepitude and ancient times: "its marble pillarets clear in the light, slumbered the little Gothic palace of white marble." (14) In this line, when he arrives at "Sparkling Waters", the narrator seems to be in a Romantic Gothic setting:

For the Castle of Sparkling Waters was little better than a ruin ... The original cradle of the House of Luna, and its principal bulwark against invasion, the castle had been ignominiously discarded and forsaken a couple of centuries before ... The castle was therefore reduced to its outer circuit of walls ... and to the large gate tower ... for the housing of the farmer, his cattle, and his stores. (11)

The narrator of the “Oke of Okehurst” feels also depressed because he expects a romantic Gothic House: “My spirits sank lower and lower. I began to meditate upon the modern Gothic country-house ... I was doubtless being taken.” (5), but, in the end, he is comfortable in the manor.

As we have mentioned in a previous section, Lee’s ghosts do not haunt corridors or close spaces, but a bigger cosmos—that of the psychology of the characters. Nevertheless, there is a direct relation between the character’s feeling in that place and the “spirit of the place”, which interact between them. She uses description to create the adequate “genius loci” and make the reader be completely immersed in the tale; in this way, depending on where the actions take place, she depicts gardens, as we have observed, and also buildings, which range from a house in Britain to the church of the Virgin in Grenada, going through the castles we have just seen and the countryside or the entrails of the earth.

If there is an idiosyncratic feature we can highlight in her works, it is the painstakingly accurate and precise use of adjectives and specialized terms of art she displays. Sometimes she seems to be giving a course of art:

columns and architraves curl like the curls of a peruke ; walls and vaultings are flowered with precious marbles and fretted with carving and gilding like a gala dress ; stone and wood are woven like lace ; stucco is whipped and clotted like pastry-cooks' cream and crust ... A golden retable closes the church at the end ; a black and white rood screen, of jasper and alabaster, fences it in the middle ; while along each aisle hang

chandeliers as for a ball ; and paper flowers are stacked on every altar.(195)

From this extract, it can be inferred that Spanish baroque is over-adorned because she plays with exaggeration with her language, for instance, when the Church of the Virgin of the Seven Daggers is portrayed as “monstrous”, “barbarically green”, “pompous, pedantic, and contorted” (194).

Lee reflects the periods she chooses for her tales in language, too. There are a few words which are old-fashioned or even obsolete: “malefica or strix” (38) when referring to Oriana; or “farthingale” (195) when referring to the virgin’s dress.

The reflection of ancient language is also patent when the characters speak or the readers can have access to their speech:

“O Knight of Luna, valorous Alberic, if thou wouldst show thy gratitude to the hapless mistress of this castle, summon up thy redoubtable courage, and, whatsoever creature issue from my marble heart, swear thou to kiss it three times on the mouth, that Oriana may be released.” (33-34)

Navarrete (1998), commenting on Lee’s style, argues that, in the short ghost stories, Lee develops a picturesque prose which can connect her with the supernatural. We completely agree with her, as we are of the opinion that someone who deals with a subject of her own fascination, as it is art for Lee, it is possible to improve in stylistic forms. In other words, Lee was an art scholar who liked observing and contemplating works of art. She probably had an especial sense for it, and, moreover, she had the ability and grace to transform it into words. With language, she could stimulate the reader or suggest there

could be a mixture between the pure fantastic or marvellous, where language could take us.

Developing her best techniques of studying art, she could create a style which is only her own. With this individual style, her short ghost tales carry a great weight in the tales of the Female Gothic, which is indicative of a privileged and exclusive woman.

7. COMPARISON: DIFFERENT VISIONS OF THE FEMALE GOTHIC

The aim of this part of the study is to reveal the similarities and emphasise the differences one can perceive when reading our authoresses' ghost tales. In point of fact, it is probably a truism that there are many elements within the Female Gothic tradition our women share in their tales, not to mention the gradual evolution from the first tales to the last ones. Having analysed some Gothic short stories belonging to our four writers and based on all the findings throughout the study, a comparison among them imposes itself.

First and foremost, it is necessary to mention that these writers belong to what is named the Post-Gothic period, which lasted from 1839 to 1898 and beyond. The stories we are concerned with are all immersed inside this cycle of the genre. In order to have a clear reference when we talk about any of them and to trace the evolution and constant changes which the genre experiments through our writers, here is a time line of all the stories dealt with in this study:

"Old Nurse's Story"	1852	
	1864	"The Phantom Coach"
	1866	"An Engineer" "The 4'15 Express"
	1871	"In the Confessional"
	1872	"Sister Johanna's Story"
	1873	"The New Pass"
	1874	"The Story of Salome"
<i>A Beleaguered City</i>	1879	
"Earthbound"	1880	
"The Open Door"	1881	"Was it an Illusion?"
<i>Old Lady Mary</i> "The Portrait"	1885	
	1886	"Oke of Okehurst"
"The Library Window"	1896	"Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady"
Figure 5: <i>Time line</i>		"The Virgin of the Seven Daggers"

Readers tend to see Gothic stories as something outdated or old-fashioned, but we would venture the surmise that there are many novels today which can be considered as belonging to the Gothic genre, which inherits our writers' tradition. Gothic has also its place in our society with 'excess' and 'transgression' as well, but adapted to current tastes. From the beginnings of Gothic literature, with Walpole, Lewis, Radcliffe, Sophia Lee, Poe and many others, we can arrive of *Millennium*, a trilogy by Stieg Larsson—with a heroine fragmented into up to six different personalities—and *Twilight*, a saga with a love triangle involving a virgin, a vampire and a werewolf. In brief, their legacy has endured in time.

The first element to take into consideration about these four women should be their lives. It is certainly a defining constituent for their writing and it is worth of mentioning because what they lived conditioned their works. Moreover, with their life span, they covered all the Victorian period, from the beginning to the end. This is crucial for our work because, apart from following the evolution of the time, we can analyse the variations in Victorian ghosts' tales throughout the whole century. We will give commencement to this part of our work with Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865)—who is considered to be heir to the Brontë sisters—, we will continue with Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897), whose ghost stories are posterior, albeit born before Edwards. After that, we will continue with Amelia Edwards (1831-1892), just to culminate our study with Vernon Lee (1856-1935), who will be the link with Modernism and one of the last creators of the Victorian ghosts' as they were understood during the Victorian period. Being all of them short ghost story, Female Gothic writers, we purport to demonstrate that these women shared characteristics of the genre they devoted themselves

to, although they were not in contact with each other. As Moers contends, there is a Gothic tradition, and all of them participate in it. In a general way, we can observe that they connect with the Brontës and with Radcliffe, and they handed over the baton to Lee and her later tales. However, we must point out that, unfortunately, after Lee—with Freud's theories and the psychoanalysis—ghosts' stories changed fundamentally out of recognition. After these women, spirits were to become ghosts of the mind and not the metaphor of inner fears it had been for these writers.

Being a woman in Victorian times presented serious drawbacks, as we have defended in previous chapters. However, in spite of all the difficulties with which women writers were fraught, they continued with their lives and vocations. As a matter of fact, society did exert pressure on females, a strain that may be considered a common factor for womanhood. As a result, this stress was what could be hidden behind their temper's idiosyncrasy, what led them to coincide in their concerns about women, ideas, religion and profession. As it is easily supposed, their way of life, parents, husbands, children, education, life circumstances and many other reasons could be, in the same way, key factors to analyse their differences. These similarities and disparities are the possible areas which can give us the answers or the clues to our research.

To begin with, there are some questions which can help us speculate about the reasons women preferred to cultivate this genre, because there is obvious evidence that they coincide in so many subjects and topics, and this makes it rather impossible to have doubts as to why they used ghosts in their tales. Still, we can attempt to uncover which reason led them to write ghost

tales—if they tried to communicate anything special, and if, by doing so, they were able to exorcise their own spirits. The most likely answer is that they believed in ghosts, or, at least, they wished they did. Some of the questions we are posing in order to discover the aforementioned reason may be more easily assumed than others which require more intricate solutions. In addition, although one of the first issues in this respect is that there is a considerable amount of women writers of the “uncanny”—many female authoresses devoted themselves to short stories about strange phenomena—, it was supposedly due to the fact that there were many women readers of the same. In order to expound the facts clearly, we will try to prove each writer had their own personal motifs to write—what each one tries to communicate by writing about ghosts and how they managed to expel their suffering. We will also ponder and discuss how all of them or, at least, the majority, acted against the patriarchy and used similar topics and procedures to achieve their aim.

What is undeniable, however, is that all of them wanted to be writers—from Gaskell, to Lee, going through Oliphant and Edwards. As far as vocation is concerned, we are of the opinion that all of them were sure that their driving force resulted in writing. Gaskell started because she liked it; in fact, she started writing letters to a friend; and, afterwards, she continued making descriptions, until somebody recommended she start writing seriously. Apart from her strong motivation, Gaskell met people like the Brontës, who awakened her passion, and she saw what the results of achieving her aim and popularity were—a new horizon. And it is needless to remark that it was extra money. Oliphant, in her case, started writing *Christian Melville* at seventeen, much before she was in need of money, and began with fiction when nursing her ill mother. Perhaps, it

was Oliphant the one in more dire straits than the rest. Edwards, who had cultivated several artistic disciplines, decided to write, but not only ghosts' stories—also travel books. In fact, Edwards was wealthier than the rest, and so, she could afford her travels abroad. And, last but not least, Lee—who lived on her mother's income at first—coincided with Edwards: although she started with studies in art, she also wrote short ghost stories. But it was thanks to her money that she could buy Il Palmerino and help her brother economically.

Perhaps, in order to see how each authoress faced her own time, it is necessary to remember the social conditions a Victorian woman writer was encircled by. Mainly, the status of being a writer was reserved only for males. Women—writers or not—were immersed in a markedly sexist society. This two-tier masculine world made women be put aside as “Angels in the House” or *femmes fatales*, depending on the main features they displayed. This kind of label should have made them feel irritated, frustrated and, paradoxically, ‘uncanny’ in a strict society who despised them. We can surmise that, in accordance to the established behaviour people should maintain, Gaskell was considered a perfect wife, doing part of her husband's job, although she suffered from neurosis due to the fact she did not want anybody to see her as abandoning her familiar duties. Also Oliphant was considered an “Angel” because she was a widow like Queen Victoria, and the only worker of the family. In fact, both Gaskell and Oliphant were named *Mrs.* Gaskell and *Mrs.* Oliphant until almost the twentieth century. In contrast, this did not happen with Edwards and Lee. Probably, their sexual condition made them feel like ‘uncanny’ elements in a society which attempted to annihilate them. Both opted for life abroad.

Apart from gender, which was the first negative prejudice society held against them, their life experiences would equally play an important role. We have always been of the opinion that one cannot escape vital, sociocultural and economical background. We are preys to our personal living experiences from early childhood, not going as far as Freud did, but considering our previous life experiences as determining. In a few words, we would say that we are what we have been, and also what other people have done with us. Moreover, in conformity with what De Lamotte believes, the four writers were absorbed by the world around them—they wanted and needed money, they had to work and they wanted to attain a respectable position in the literary circles of the time. Gaskell was in contact with the Brontës and other literary people of the period, like Dickens, who appreciated her art. Oliphant was highly considered by Queen Victoria while Edwards achieved a distinguished recognition for being an Egyptologist, and Lee was in contact with artists such as Henry James, Pater and Oscar Wilde.

As a consequence, women writers of the period tried to explore all the questions related to the female world and the roles they performed in the society they inhabited, and also relating to their existence in respect to the men around them. Our writers will control the sexual identity of females and the consideration this requires within society. They have problems because they cannot cross barriers—they assume male roles while keeping their femininity.

Aware of their personal life and by virtue of the social interaction between men and women, it is very likely that a woman's being felt divided, i.e. women's personality having split into several parts. This internal struggle leads us to the fragmentation of women—as characters and as human beings—and this

breakup might be related to three points which will define the personality of female characters. The first element is their own body, which concerns questions related to gender matters and sex. Another division might be their own social part linked with women's role in society but also with men—the Trinitarian classification of daughter, wife and mother. And the last one is that part of the human being intrinsic to their own personality—their own will.

Central to the entire understanding of the tales and their art is considering the extent to which women were conscious of the external, manly world, and whether they complain about or escape from it. In their case, and as a consequence of their extreme perception and reaction, there is also a matter that must be borne in mind—whether they were able to perceive the world modifications and changes in their own body, mind and role. We cannot forget Victorian times were beset with some internal contradictions, because many technological and ideological changes were brought about and that aroused fears and instability. Immersed in society as humans are, we interpret a role on the basis of which we will be judged. As a result, it was the role patriarchal society imposed on men and women which determined the conditions and position of women inside the community. Using other words and referring to Jung, this means that what is in the individual conscience appears reflected in the collective conscience defining the archetypes. According to the rules, women could be namely mothers, wives, daughters, old maidens or *femme fatales*. Inside a sub-group, women could manipulate, undermine and break the rules. Our writers do not breach the rules in real life because they leave it for fiction; but they subvert and reverse them, at least, in their character's life. It is equally noteworthy the casuistic of their female characters because, although

they lived under the same societal conditions, each one undertook their own circumstances in a particular way. Conventionally and by tradition, society rules can influence or indoctrinate writers and, consequently, their characters. A literary character does not exist in isolation; characters are defined and shaped in keeping with their relationship with the rest of the characters, but they do also act as a reflection of the social order, as a mirror in which society is displayed. If we could show it on a diagram for a woman figure, it would be similar to this:

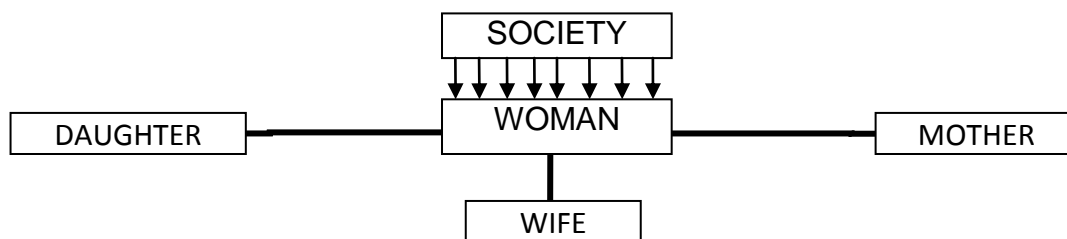


Figure 6: *Diagram for a woman's role.*

Society dictates norms for individuals—both men and women—; and, if we remember Jung's theories, in the collective, we find the idea of the masculine, the feminine and the self, where there is the centre of personality. But, as we can infer, these norms are applied to men and women differently, always according to their gender role in society and, concretely, in the case of females, the norms were applied to women but taking men as a standard. Foundational to this study is to understand how women writers decided to reflect this situation in literature: for the authoresses, the use of the ghost was a metaphor of women and their condition. The phantom, the ghost, the spirit, the *femme fatale* will be invisible, silent, assertive and abounding in qualities. With these female ghosts' tales, there was a rewriting of the Victorian family and its models. This rewriting of the family was done, on the one side and to the extent it was possible, from their lives; and, on the other side, from their heroines.

According to A. Ballesteros, all these women felt an instinctive desire to write ghost stories. Wondering about their cogent reasons for writing, one can guess the creative act could give them that freedom which was not possible to find in their lives. On the one hand, they were not free inside or outside their home and sometimes their domestic and familial tasks did not let them have the time or the energies to write. Those tales were like a means of escaping that transported them to liberation in their creative process. This was reinforced by the use they made of the fantastic and the supernatural in these same stories. The world of fantasy, where natural laws are broken, allows them to denounce society and gender matters.

But we must not forget that carrying out their intentions and their careers was not as easy for them as it was for men in some other aspects of life. Therefore, regarding ghost stories, in order to publish, they had to resort to serialization, which was at its high point in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it must be clarified that not only women, but also men were bound to serial publications, especially in this kind of stories. This was an advantage for writers. The great success of the short tale can be explained because the mixture between fantasy and reality is sometimes hard to discern. On the one hand, serialization in periodicals offered the public a good price and, on the other, it offered a good content. This was the cause why rivalry grew among writers, as they all wanted to publish in the best periodicals. Newspapers offered women writers of ghost stories complete freedom and a place for earning their living. Apart from this fact, its topics, which were between fiction and reality, with the plot subverting and reversing the established norms, emphasized the unseen as a means of true creed. This feeling was also shared by a large part of the

reading public. All of our four women writers in this study participated in periodicals exemplifying the ideology of the same. Margaret Oliphant, Elizabeth Gaskell and Amelia Edwards were usually in contact with Dickens, who published most of their tales in *Household Words* or in *All Year Round*; none would dare contradict him, were it not for monetary matters—after all, that was why they wrote in periodicals. Even Lee, who was living abroad, came to Britain to publish her tales in periodicals.

At first sight, these women of our study were thought of as inoffensive for patriarchal ideas and for society; and it really was a real proof—as we have mentioned before—that at least Mrs. Gaskell was a priest's wife and Mrs. Oliphant was a respectable widow. But reminding the ideology of our writers, it can be assured that their discourse was seen as harmless, though it was subversive—they did not agree with what was expected of them. Anyway, something that should not be denied was that periodicals improved women's publishing condition with an important opening, because female gained in voicing their ideas and a place to do so.

7.1. Their lives: personal circumstances

Before proceeding to compare these writers, we have placed an illustrative chart in Annex I. In this table, we have tried to mark the relevant events of the century on one of the columns and, chronologically, the most important facts these writers lived at the same time.

Given the fact that all the authoresses in this study wrote short ghost stories inside the female Gothic tradition—though sometimes this was secondary to their aim of writing—one might wonder about the necessity they

had to write these fictions, and, in addition, why they defined society in those short tales. What is patent, *prima facie*, is that all of them explore the role of women within Victorian society, something they carry out according to their sexual identity and from their own personal experiences. Gaskell does so from the point of view of a substitute mother, not only in her tale “The Old Nurse’s Story” but also in “The Grey Woman”, where a woman runs away from her husband in company of another woman who acts as a substitute mother, too. Oliphant, ‘the gentle subversive’, showed us her life was by far conditioned from the point of view of being a mother—she had no more time than that allocated for taking care for people of her own family. Edwards, sometimes following Dickens exigencies wrote about the new technology and from rationalism, almost always omitting feminine presence. Lee, in her case, wrote from the fatale women’s vision and almost exclusively inside the kingdom of fantasy.

Having reached this point, and once we have analysed our four writers’ works throughout the study, we can see that all of them had their sound reasons for writing ghost stories. In the chapter of his book, *Escrito por Brujas* (2005), which is dedicated to the four authors with whom we are dealing, Ballesteros contends that one of their drives to write was to exorcise their own ghosts and the others’ as well. But, whatever their reasons were, it seems that a burden they shared was that they were women totally overwhelmed by the responsibilities of their life, namely their families. Obviously, these charges or obligations varied markedly from one author to another. Then, as a result of our inferences, the first part of this comparison should focus on their life conditions, which biased their art.

Being born even before Queen Victoria, we will start with Gaskell, who precedes the others in time. Gaskell writes not only short stories, but also novels, although devoting time to writing supposes an overburden in her daily work. Being an active woman who had the possibility of doing part of her work like men, she could visit the public sphere thanks to her husband's parish work. Were men really able to think a woman like Gaskell, who worked in the slums of Manchester, could not appreciate women's conditions? If so, they were undeniably undermining this woman's values in many aspects. In addition to being an artist, she had plenty of work with her four daughters and the parish tasks because her husband was the Minister. Physically, Gaskell paid a high price, according to Gérin—one of her biographers—because overstrain caused serious deterioration in her nervous character and extremely busy life. Elizabeth, as well as Oliphant, broke with the tradition that men were the ones who had to earn money for the family—the Minister's income was not enough to buy a house, while she could afford one. In view of their external appearance, it may be easily thought that our authoresses could be deemed innocuous Victorian women, but, in the end, what they were doing was to rewrite life. In a similar situation, we can face Oliphant, whom people accused of having a great bulk of works in order to support her family. In some troubled times, after the death of some of their children, Oliphant and Gaskell had to put aside all the sorrows of their heart and write to maintain the others. This was even harder in the case of Oliphant, who needed to keep her public interested and earn a living. Oliphant was a young, poor widow who had to work for many dependants, and, in her case, she was encumbered with relatives who were in financial needs. As readers and as observers of their biographies, we cannot be

completely certain they had the intention to rewrite family life in their tales, but, at least, at home they did. Nevertheless, we can venture the surmise that they were doing it from the interpretation of their stories and the lack of impediments from the side of their families. Gaskell's husband always encouraged her to write, and her daughters helped her copy the manuscripts of her books. However, none of Oliphant's sons was able to help her in anything—even though we must accede to the fact that there was no reluctant husband to prevent her from writing. In some way, their families were organised around them. Subversion was served.

Otherwise, the other two writers did see things very differently. Both were single and, although there was a time when they may have found true love, they never did feel completely fulfilled as lovers. To our mind, if something is true, it is that they seemed fatale woman in their way of living. Edwards was like a fish in the water in the middle of the desert, and she looked like an archaeologist, although she never wore trousers, as Adam (2010) says, but was independent and an entrepreneur. Lee usually wore men's garments and she had a mannish appearance, but it was her choice. Both gave conferences and were admired in cultural circles.

Edwards wrote short stories to earn some money until she dedicated herself to work in Egypt; the fact she already owned her parent's house let her live not as stressed as Lee, who could have lived more time on her mother's low inheritance income, but preferred to write instead. Both, Edwards and Lee were presumed homosexuals, a fact which was to condition them forever, although each of them dealt with it in a disparate way. Edwards never mentioned anything about it in her life or, at least, in her tales; but she lived far away from

her land—her work required it and, there, she could feel freer. Lee lived in Italy, but there are some critics who have analysed Lee's short works and have apperceived a latent homosexuality in any of them. However, and in keeping with human nature, Edwards and Lee also looked for a distinct family to the established at that time. Being independent, they could rewrite their families, although two women living together was not disapproved of.

It gives the impression that the first determining fact which can be taken into account as decisive to form part in our writers' 'own ghosts' was the influence their mothers exercised on them. If we start with Gaskell, it is necessary to say that her mother passed away shortly after childbirth. She was adopted by her aunt Lumb—who was to be for her 'more than a mother'. Elizabeth always felt dispossessed of her right to have a family until she could raise one of her own. Her cousins had also lost their mothers, but this was no comfort for her; as a result, she showed her characters as heroines reclaiming their rights to have a family. Gaskell was a cultivated person, due to the fact that she was able to share the education the other writers of this study achieved, and this was possible because she belonged to the Unitarians, who gave the same education to boys and girls. The difference with the other writers is that the others learnt because their mothers wanted them to be intellectual and not only women of the time.

Plausibly, Oliphant, Edwards and Lee suffered their mother's pressure. Contrary to what one can expect from mothers, we can ratify they endured their progenitor's temper. Trying to be more explicit, it can be observed that Oliphant's mother, as well as Edwards' and Lee's, did not only give them a free road to the cultural world, but, admirably, they were also engaged in a constant

struggle for their daughters to be different from the rest of women. In fact, as Joan Rees (1998) explains about Edwards and as Colby (2003) states about Lee, neither of them was able to perform any domestic task until they needed it—one when in Egypt, the other when she was alone. The three mothers shared a characteristic—a strong-willed temperament which led them to dominate the domestic affairs, being determined to fight in a predominant masculine world. It is also true that their husbands proved spiritless, dispassionate and sometimes apathetic; and the mothers had to be the driving force of the family. Oliphant's mother was completely dedicated to her two children and provided Margaret with a model to admire when her husband died. Oliphant's liking for Scottish folklore was certainly due to her mother's heritage, as well as her passion for writing. The liaison among Margaret, her mother and her brother was enviable from the point of view of their interaction in social affairs and progressive thinking. But the real fact was that, although her father had died, her brother's alcoholism and her mother's dedication to him supposed more than an overburden for her—this situation led Margaret to marry her cousin in an attempt to escape her family. Comparing Oliphant's family situation with that of Lee's, it was quite analogous as concerns the relationship with their mothers and the problems their brothers supposed for them. Lee's mother, Mathilda, was known for being a dominant woman, self-assertive and eccentric. As Lee proved to be a genius for writing since the beginning, both her mother and Eugene, her brother, encouraged her to continue. Mathilda was so strict that it was believed that Eugene suffered a trauma and was ill most of his life, conceivably on account of her mother's expectations of him. On the one hand, both, Margaret and Violet had to overcome their mothers' prosections on their

future—what could be the principal source of stress and sorrow in their lives. On the other hand, they had to bear their brothers' incapacity to fight against their progenitors. Margaret had to be taking care of her alcoholic brother, and she also cared for him and for all his family, when his wife died. Equally, Violet had to foster Eugene until he recovered, but she felt obliged to help him for the rest of his days. Apart from the admiration Lee had felt for him, she felt guilty of her own success and chose to finance him as far as she could, until the end of his life. Would have she felt guilty had she been a man? Things would have been rather dissimilar.

Undoubtedly, the big difference between Oliphant and Lee is not only their sexual inclination but what their choice of it meant. Conventionally, Oliphant used her marriage to escape from family problems and this led her to more complications: her husband's turbulent relationship with Margaret's mother—which submerged her in terrible pain and sadness—, her seven children and the most painful event for a mother—the death of them all. In most of her ghosts' stories, she reflects the domestic domain plenty of happy children, contrasting sometimes with the profound sorrow of adults, namely mothers, who have sometimes lost a descendant and hide their own sorrow in order to cheer up the others—this happens at the beginning of "Earthbound". Contrasting with Oliphant, Vernon Lee also used the excuse of being with Mary to escape, at least at the beginning. She also felt oppressed by her mother and her brother, but she was unable to separate from them, until things became unbearable. What she had in her favour was the relationship of other people, apart from Mary, who awakened her sense for art. In addition, the fact of attending the literary circles of the time was supposed to have been like a cure,

overall, when she stayed at the Robinson's or at the Pater's. Being a homosexual, even though not wholly recognized, because women could live together with the rest of the family, she was freed from all tasks, hence allowing her to write at her own pace, unlike Gaskell and Oliphant, who had to work against time because of their children. This fact was also reinforced by Mary's Robinson's attentions to her, because Mary did not devote herself to her poetry but to her friend—as Zorn (2003) and Colby (2003) coincide, Mary was the woman of the house. Only by Mary's love could Violet remain with her family until Mary left her. Although this caused her a nervous breakdown, Clementina Anstruther Thomson was near her, and, thanks to her help, she could bear her family until her mother died.

Amelia Edwards' mother died when she was relatively young. Alicia, Amelia's mother, put all her energies to give her daughter all the best education. Alicia's husband was like that of Mathilda's—silent, old and spiritless. Amelia could have a good outside life due to the fact she went with her mother to the theatre, literary meetings and social acts. Nevertheless, Amelia was not sure to what she could devote her life to—either music, painting or writing. Her parents' lack of confidence made her feel a nagging anxiety that could not be relieved, and then, a marriage was arranged. But, like a character of one of her ghost's stories, she felt this was not her destiny. She travelled abroad for a time and, then, both parents died within a few days of each other. She felt alone and abandoned; her mother had been her whole world. Childless like Lee—but without a lover or friend—she sought for company, a substitute mother, just as many heroines of ghosts tales—although not in hers—and as Gaskell. This was

Mrs Braysher. But it was Marianne North who was to be with her and help Amelia to forget her sadness and to achieve her aims.

So far, one can see that not only the figure of the mother has influenced these women in their lives, but also in their literature—specially creating representative characters of the period; these figures range from mothers to sons, from godmothers to orphans. According to Barbara Z. Thaden (1997), in her book *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction: Rewriting the Patriarchal Family*, the fact of being physically a mother is not an essentialist argument to write, because she does not think that the mental or biological processes are different from those of other women who are childless, from fathers or from men. We agree with the author to the extent that the creative process can be the same for everybody, but it is also certain that sometimes pregnancy carries out a creative practice and in many women it has been crucial. However, it is clear we cannot escape social circumstances, as these women could not, and families were perhaps the most influential factor around which their topics were conditioned. The result of continuous feminists struggles has been the power of decision of women and the consideration of their own value, not in reference to the worth society placed on them. Women are no longer useful for lineage and fertility, but the fact of being a mother in Victorian times placed these women in a different position in relation to society, history and culture. Extrapolating this aspect to narrative, probably mother authors, Gaskell and Oliphant, were more aware of the contradictions mothers of the nineteenth century had to confront when trying to be a good wife and a good mother, apart from writing. They were badly affected because the common and statutory law prevented them from the ownership of their children if something bad happened and, moreover, the

burden of domesticity was something that prevented mothers to devote themselves completely to compose. Gaskell had to stop her literary activity when she was preparing her daughter's wedding. Of course, this was, without any doubt, an advantage for Edwards and Lee. They dedicated themselves to whatever they had in mind if their mental health or their spirits let them do so. When they were in need of quick money, they could write short stories, like the others, to have financial help for a living, which was an advantage. Edwards and Lee were free to write or abandon their house without asking for permission for anything. Edwards spent her life for the most part in Egypt, as an independent woman would have done nowadays. The inconvenient was that transport and conditions were not as they are currently and it was hard for two women to travel around, as Ballesteros points out.

Thaden (1997) also suggests that there might be a striking difference in fictional narratives depending on the representation of motherhood. She makes a comparison between authors who were mothers and others who were not. The same comparison will be a point in our study, being the two mother authors Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant and the other two writers who were not mothers Amelia Edwards and Vernon Lee. Although Thaden analyses their main works or novels, this study will centre only in some of their many short ghost stories. The fictional world of Gaskell, Oliphant, Edwards and Lee will enlighten personal, social and legal inconsistencies Victorian wives, mothers and daughters faced, but it is now, when, perhaps, we can interpret their attitudes as subversive.

Gaskell and Oliphant bore some resemblances as mothers and writers. However, we must remember that, during their life, Elizabeth Gaskell and

Oliphant found, on the one hand, domesticity as a barrier for writing—as all other married women did—and, on the other hand, they had to face men who were publishers and editors and sometimes did not understand their problems, among whom Dickens was one. These men possibly rejected women as minor artists and motherhood was an impediment for the good name of the family. In order to avoid these circumstances, Gaskell had to defy society by means of fake names as many other women had to do as well, such as Charlotte Brontë and her sisters or Vernon Lee, who is more known by her penname than by her own. Nevertheless, a strong point for Gaskell was the moral support she found in other female writers, which helped her define her art. Neither Gaskell nor Oliphant ever concealed their identity or their sex when writing after having a name, but they never showed the existing conflict between being a mother a working woman and a writer. However, Gaskell confessed to Dickens on one occasion that she could not write because of domestic troubles, and she dedicated herself to short stories more often because it was easier for her to concentrate on them than on a long novel.

Something similar happened to Oliphant who also had a large family. Although Oliphant did not have to do community work as Gaskell did, she had more people who depended on her and she did not have the comfort Gaskell could find with Mr. Gaskell or Charles Norton, or even other friends. Oliphant could not find a friend to help her, at least, one that would only listen and, unfortunately, her two dear boys, who were grown up, proved incapable of working.

7.2. Reflections of society

All writers' work is immersed within the genre of the Female Gothic because their ghost stories try to create emotions, and, at the same time, develop experiences of terror where the mind can be stimulated but not paralysed. In addition, as the tales are identified to belong to this genre, it can be said all the works are subversive, because, in one measure or another, they denounce society as we will try to demonstrate. By means of using the feminist literary theory to examine the tales, we have an inexhaustible catalogue of female characters reflecting society and specially the role of women within it. In addition, this women's role may have been adapted to the societal circumstances of the moment originating more authoritative or repressed characters.

7.2.1. Women issues: domesticity

Based on the tales we have analysed, Oliphant's kingdom is that of domesticity, which she knew so well. The main themes in her ghost stories are mostly about love between family members. She explores the relationship between mother and child; she shows us how between them both there can be a close spiritual union not even broken by death. In "The Open Door", Willie cannot rest in peace until he understands his mother has forgiven him and is waiting for his arrival in heaven; he has mistaken the central core of the home, where the mother dwelled, as heaven. Also Agnes Dupin, in *A Beleaguered City*, can meet her child's spirit because of her maternal, undying love, even in the afterlife. Just as children come back from the other world, so do mothers try to help their children and visit the living world as a spirit form like the mother in "The Portrait". Considering the family an important cornerstone of Victorian

society, Oliphant tried to describe how the lack of familiar relationship can affect family life, mostly when it is due to the absence of the mother that can deteriorate the entire domestic sphere. It is not the father, but the mother who is the agent of the family. Things would have been otherwise, had Mrs Furnivall been alive, in Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story", when both sisters competed for the same man. But never, not even once, is the mother mentioned in the tale. As it can be remembered, it is the paternal voice which everybody can hear, even though he is dead. The disastrous fate of both sisters is not well managed by Lord Furnivall. Both Oliphant and Gaskell demonstrate the terrible imbalance the lack of a mother can cause—family life is seen as the product of the well-doing of the woman, not the man. Inside the family, patriarchy is not at the forefront. In addition, writers denounce that the management of men within their families can lead to disaster. Lord Furnivall is a cruel father, capable of abandoning a daughter with a little child in the snow. With the intercession of a mother, it would have been possible to control a father in front of his daughter begging for his clemency towards her and the baby; and, on the other side, a mother would have been able to prevent her daughter to become a fallen woman. Also in Edwards' tale "The Story of Salome" the poor young girl with the status of a daughter has to face two men who do not respect her wish—one can think of the possibility of a helping mother, who is absent once more. Similarly, Lee lets us guess her conception about the absence of the mother in her tale "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady". For prince Alberic, the discovery of Oriana is the starting point of his life in all aspects. Had it been for his grandfather, he would have been annulled and used for the others' purposes. Without Oriana, Alberic was at a loss in his grandfather's hands. Avoiding the traditional

interpretation of a *femme fatale* (that she is deadly), and considering they subvert and reverse the rules, it can be inferred that Lee had a particular belief as regards the family. Putting aside her own experiences—which are included in some tales—it is clear that Lee is a *fin-de-siècle* woman and her ideas are far from Gaskell's and Oliphant's, though not as far as they seem. In "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" all has been misery in the dukedom while no woman has appeared—Balthasar is ruined and the estate is in decay. This could have been changed, had Oriana not been eventually killed. Their ideas are only apparently distant, and this is because of the style each authoress uses. Lee directly presents her women as defiant against family whereas Oliphant is known as the "Gentle Subversive"—she is so subtle sometimes it is not easily appreciated. Both Oliphant and Lee are rewriting the family, since Victorian wanted brave and intelligent males, although they proved to be nothing but a mess, loss and chaos. However, a conspicuous feature is that love is forbidden for them due to the fact that a Victorian man could not show feelings or emotions in order to be radically different from women, who were prone to seeing spirits.

7.2.2. Women's invisibility

By means of their stories, women writers of the Female Gothic denounce the invisibility of women and their subordinate position in a patriarchal society. Writers did not parry controversial themes about the role of women and their rights; and, indeed, tackled them bravely. Although it is manifest that they decided to use the metaphor of the phantom to represent the female world, there are feminine characters who share the characteristics of ghosts, without

being one. Throughout our stories, we can see a wide and varied gamut of women who embody the three roles society required from them—daughters, wives and mothers. If we start with Gaskell, we can see that the ghost of the girl is not seen by anyone except for the other girl, Rosemond. This assertive spirit, who has suffered her grandfather's cruelty, is claiming for her right in the house and the family, in the end, she is a direct descendant of the Furnivall family, differently from Rosemond, who is a distant relative. Miss Grace, who is a woman subordinated to patriarchy, does not want to see or listen to her niece; she acts as if nothing happened. With this girl trying to penetrate into the house, Gaskell may mean that women who vindicate for their rights can be neglected by the patriarchal order. Furthermore, those women, like the child's mother, Miss Maude—dismissed as a fallen woman—, can be punished for having defied men and having acted abiding by their own will. As for the survivor of the Furnivalls, Miss Grace, the mechanism is simple—when one denies and does not verbalise nor recognise facts, hence they are inexistent. Another aspect is that of the fragmentation of women, which is nothing but the outcome of living immersed in a society ruled by men. As a result of being abandoned by her lover, Miss Maude Furnivall, cannot play the role of a wife, not even that of a mother. Moreover, she has failed as a daughter; subsequently, there is no way she can be herself again.

For Oliphant, the invisibility of women is a recurring metaphor as well. It is not a question of importance the status they have, but, from our point of view, by being mothers and wives, women can feel a union with their relatives to act as they are expected to—the problems arise with daughters. Both Mme Veuve and Agnes in *A Beleaguered City* feel completely satisfied while obeying and

carrying out their duties as mothers and, as for Agnes, also as a wife. In “The Portrait” the woman is not perceived as a wife; his husband is unable to feel her presence, whereas the union between mother and son is so tight they can communicate. However, this communication is to reach to her husband through her status of mother. Old Lady Mary is absolutely invisible for everybody, except for a child, when she comes to earth. It is then when she has to act as an individual herself, being aware that nobody can see her; formerly, she was held in esteem not because of being a woman, but because of being a widow and rich. Oliphant uses women to denounce gender matters. In the case of *Old Lady Mary*, she loudly proclaims that the opportunities open to women in Victorian times, if they were not rich, were marginal—Mary is poor and has been denied a high education because of being a woman. Nevertheless, Mary is able to demonstrate women are capable of being independent. In “Earthbound” we find, on the one hand, mother and wife together, as if they were the two sides of a coin. The mother of the family can shoulder both roles, encouraging everybody to continue with their lives because she feels it is her obligation to do so. However, when she is alone she faces that part of herself which is completely different from the rest—her own visage, that of a mournful human being who needs consolation. She is not allowed to show her own face in front of society, hence transforming women’s sorrow in invisible feelings. In this same way, women’s will is always silenced and made invisible, as it is illustrated in “The Library Window”. The young girl is sent far away from home because she feels free, like men do—and her own personality requires so. She is sent with women like her, spinsters who disturb society and do not even feel fragmented but

deprived of exercising their own will—she aspires to be a writer like her father. By assuming wifedom and motherhood, the woman is deprived of all wish.

7.2.3. Women's imprisonment

Whatever the role women play in Gothic tales, they are always prisoners, either of their own convictions or society prejudices. They do not need to be locked in a place, openly said, but we will find symbolic ways of being secluded. In most stories, there is a physical barrier which prevents them to act as freely as they like, and this obstacle bans them from keeping contact with the real or the after world. Metaphorically, there is a space from where they cannot escape and they are enclosed. If we go back in time as far as the beginnings of the Gothic novel, we can appreciate it is one of the conventions of the genre. In *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, we can see one way of dominating women is to have them imprisoned in their own rooms; Manfred assailed Isabella because he wants to force her to marry him and he secludes her: he confines the girl to force her to accept a social role, to be his wife. Trying to flee from him, the youth gets trapped in the secret corridors, the castle entrails. In *The Monk* (1796) by Lewis, the character of Antonia is entombed in the vaults of a cemetery. Continuing with the tradition, Ann Radcliffe also makes use of this metaphor in two of her important novels. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily is imprisoned by Montoni in the eponymous castle to make her marry him; and, in *The Italian* (1797), where Elena is imprisoned in a convent until she is visited by death. This tradition of secluding girls and forcing them to marry villains or raping them persisted during the nineteenth century Gothic literature. We can find some more examples inside the Gothic tradition which are very

close to our writers. Such is the case of Catherine Linton, imprisoned by Heathcliff in order to marry Linton Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë, and her sister's example in *Jane Eyre* (1848), where Rochester has imprisoned his wife in the attic because she is believed to be mad. Also in Willkie Collins' *Woman in White*, (1860) Sir Pierce, the villain of the novel, tries to keep his wife in an asylum. This imprisonment conveys the idea the heroines usually explore and casually discover secrets hidden long ago, although these mysteries are familiar for everybody except for her. Unfortunately, those enigmas or mysteries are always related with death, reclusion, or the insanity of another woman. If we remember "The Old Nurse's Story" we recall that the girl, Miss Rosemond, discovers the secret of the phantom girl and her mother's death. Let us remember *Jane Eyre* again, where the heroine of the eponymous name discovers the madwoman in the attic. The young girl in the window sill of "The Library Window" discovers her own imprisonment on the window panes or the outside restriction for her own wishes.

This idea of imprisonment seizes our writers' minds, albeit subtly. They do not always present young women as clearly secluded or enclosed; but the idea is clear. They may use sophisticated images related to this imprisonment, to which women are subject. The idea of seclusion is very different from what we have seen in the antecedents of literature; what we mean by this is that the space where they are placed can be a garden or an outside space of the house. It is more the impediment of being able to trespass limits or borders that vetoes their complete liberty.

In line with the aforesaid, there is a symbol which is repeated in some of the tales—that of the portrait. From our point of view, we believe that the portrait

can have distinct intentions for our writers. First of all, the picture may symbolize the purpose male have of dominating women by capturing their soul. Secondly, we can suppose another alternative can be that portraits become *alter egos* of those women who escape from them as ghosts. And, thirdly, they can be understood as mementos of the 'uncanny' secret of the family as well. In the first tale in which we can find a portrait in this study is in Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story". The Furnivall sisters, Miss Grace, and Miss Maud, have been captured each in a big portrait. They were exhibited in the hall of the house as a trophy. In the time the story was set, daughters were still considered as the source of the family lineage, a valuable good. They were symbol of pride, beauty and power. Once the terrible events happened, one of the sisters was in a "drawing-room over the hall, and there was a picture of Miss Furnivall; or, as she was called those in days, Miss Grace ... Such a beauty she must have been! but with such a set, proud look, and such a scorn looking." (7) The other sister, the one who disobeyed her father, was in a room in which nobody entered and "then I helped Dorothy to turn a great picture, that leaned with its face towards the wall, and was not hung up as the others were." (8) Apart from the symbol of having both daughters' souls in their portraits, lord Furnivall takes out Miss Maud's portrait in order not to remember her sin and to punish her. It can be seen that both sisters are always imprisoned after the events. Although voluntarily, Miss Grace is always inside her drawing-room and her bedroom—this is her way of following her father's indications, inside the domestic sphere, where nothing can be changed. In contrast, Miss Maud has been forbidden the entrance to the family house and dominions. She has been expelled from her family, isolated from social life and imprisoned outside the house, in the snow

where she dies. However, her little girl, who has inherited her mother's sin, is defying the social order and appealing to the new one, Rosemond, to change things. Rosemond has the power to liberate her from prison, and that is why Rosemond opens the door.

In Oliphant's "Earthbound", Maud, an ancient ancestor, is confined to the limits of the family's property. Inside the house, within the limits of the garden and in the Lime-tree Walk, she can go errant because she has been punished to be on the earth to expiate her sin—she had been too proud of her earthly possessions—although she is also enclosed in a portrait and put aside in an old room akin to a gallery. We face the same case as the previous one of Miss Maud in Gaskell's story. Family secrets are hidden from public view and usually kept in the attic or, as is the case, in a gallery. In addition, her *alter ego* can escape from the portrait as in Gaskell's tale, too, but she cannot probably leave this world if there is no breaking of the painting—she shall remain subject to it, unless somebody recognises it. Oliphant repeats the image of the painting in "The Portrait". The spirit of the woman of the house, the mother, is likely to communicate and possess her son through the painting. Her soul comes back to the family house when the picture is brought in. In this way, her son can contemplate part of her soul and the communication between them can be easier. On this occasion, the portrait is like an open door to spirituality; it permits the entrance of the mother's memoirs and allows the communication between members of the same drone, whereas in the two aforesaid stories the hiding of the portrait was the expulsion of the core of domesticity.

Lee's "Oke of Okehurst" uses the portrait for the same reasons—to show women can be imprisoned by the patriarchal order, but at the same time they

can escape. In this story the woman of the painting is the double of a young descendant. Old Alice represents the soul of both women, and she perverts young Alice who identifies with her and tries to emulate her ancestor. When the painter tries to capture young Alice, he cannot achieve his aim due to the fact that her soul does not belong to her but to the woman of the portrait. Old Alice can escape from her imprisonment thanks to her possession of young Alice's body. Nevertheless, there is a new thing in this story which makes us remember that of *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier. Rebecca, who is already dead when the story begins, is always present in the novel. A reminiscence of Rochester's wife in the attic in *Jane Eyre*, Rebecca reproduces this figure. Contrary to being hidden, in the same way that in "Oke of Okehurst", the alluring haunting portrait of old Alice is in the hall where everybody can recall her. As well as Rebecca, old Alice of Oke reminds of her life and death to the dwellers of the house and the guests—her presence fills all the venues of the mansion.

A representation of Oriana and her lover, Alberic the Blond, is shown in a tapestry—which we may consider a portrait for the purposes of this study. In Oriana's case, her imprisonment, in reference to all feminine incarceration, is stronger. Lee's "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" exemplifies women's confinement to a large extent. Oriana is triply incarcerated: firstly, as a snake in a trough; secondly, as a woman in a garden and a part of the dukedom and thirdly, as an incantation in the tapestry. No other woman in all the stories has suffered from such a tremendous oppression as Oriana. She seems to be punished for all the facets of her existence. Perhaps, if we had to compare this femme fatale with a current heroine in contemporary literature, it would be undoubtedly with Lisbeth Salander from *Millenium*. Many feminist critics have

defined her as the third-wave Gothic heroine, though she never vindicates feminism. She fights against sadistic men, like the ones who murder Oriana. A striking difference is that, as Oriana is not a twenty-first century Gothic heroine, she cannot be the offended and the avenger. It is not possible for Oriana to punish her offenders, she can only fight psychologically from inside and subvert male norms. As Oriana, Salander is shut away as a bad child in a reformatory; having helped the hero, Blomkvist, she has to resort to self-imprisonment in order to avoid being killed because the mafia is looking for her; and, once she has killed her father and half-brother, she is secluded in a psychiatric hospital until she is judged. It is then when she becomes a ghost in the virtual world; from her seclusion, she keeps contact with the people she wants; and from the room—with a personal computer—she can help them.

Sophisticatedly, either from inside or outside, windows are double devices which represent a physical barrier. Windows, then, connote the lack of freedom of the being inside, and the expulsion from society or family life of the being outside, person or ghost. Gaskell's phantom girl can see her relatives through the window, and it is by tapping on the window panes that she asks for permission to enter: "I turned towards the long narrow windows ... and beating against the window-panes, as if she wanted to be let in." (16) Rosemond can see the girl also through the window, but she cannot have contact with the phantom. The window may be the barrier separating both worlds—the real world and the afterworld, but both children have their entrance barred by the window. Edwards' "Sister Johanna's Story" shows us a similar scene: "Then, hearing no more, I opened the window and outer shutters ... and there on the shinning snow below, stood Ulrich Finazzar." (115) The ghost is outside a

window, Ulrich's soul cannot enter the house, the real world, because he is dead; and, as far as she is concerned, Johanna cannot have access to the world of the dead, i.e. the snow. She can observe and interpret and, as a result, communication is established, though she is locked in.

An adolescent girl is completely isolated from the real world in her recess of the window sill. Oliphant's "The Library Window" represents a girl who is contemplating the world of her imagination and it is her will to find refuge near the window: "I was so fond of Aunt Mary's drawing-room, and the deep recess of the window" (364) Although it may be interpreted that the window is like an impediment for her to take part in adult life, it is certain she has decided to be there on her own: "At the time of which I speak the deep recess of the drawing-room window was a great comfort to me." (364) Nevertheless, we do endorse the opinion that the window is like an impediment because it is from where the girl can see the street, the external life, and her own dreams. The window has a two-fold function—on the one side, it broadens her views; and, on the other side, it prevents her from being set free.

The Moorish Infanta in "The Virgin of the Seven Daggers" is in the entrails of the earth and even a key must be used to have access to her. The key which can release her is also an element of humiliation if we consider it the symbol of the sexual act of penetration. Although it may remind us of some scenes by Radcliffe and Sophia Lee in the caves and gloomy castles, Vernon Lee's recesses are more claustrophobic and much more difficult to abandon, although the Infanta has the freedom to choose if she wants to remain or not.

It may seem shocking and also alarming how women felt imprisoned in the eighteenth century and how they may feel incarcerated still nowadays in the

twenty-first century. From Radcliffe, who represents the origin of the Female Gothic, through to the female writers Gaskell, Oliphant, Edwards and Vernon Lee and even many more until our decade, there is no woman in the genre who has not paid the toll of following her own decisions.

7.2.4. Science and materialism: a man's world

In contrast with the other authoresses, Amelia Edwards never dealt with women's themes as exhaustively as they did—indeed, she was more interested in surprising the readers by her ghost stories, using them as a vehicle for discussions about ethics, scepticism, science, manners, and reflections upon the period itself. As an image of Victorian society in literature, the man of the period appears as a cultivated man, 'a man of science', a 'rational man', a 'materialistic man' who claims to be sceptical and who is supposed to receive retribution or recompense at the end of the story. With these male characters facing spiritual ghosts, we witness the tug-of-war between materialism and spirituality. Ghosts start to gain more prominence in fictional works. Nevertheless, each writer's reaction in the face of spirits will be very particular. Amelia Edwards seems to be in favour of progress and development; she is a traveller and makes use of many of new inventions, such as the railway, and she has her sight on the new technological horizon. We have to recognise that, when she deals with the topic the railway, she is obviously in favour of future prospects of science. But it is equally true that, in spite of advocating new advances, she never puts aside spirituality. In her story "The New Pass", one can draw the conclusion that she is of the opinion that, if the man is too disrespectful of nature, he will be punished. By having constructed the tunnel,

men intend to be similar to the power of nature and this would have had terrific consequences, had the spirit not given the travellers advice.

As a proof of her confidence in her time and her world, she depicts her male characters as all being highly intelligent and educated. Amelia Edwards's men are all archetypes of the Victorian middle-class, the representatives of the patriarchy; they do not appear in relation to women because women do not appear in her stories, but all of them are well portrayed. They work as schoolmasters, inspectors, barristers, engineers, lawyers, businessmen, and all kinds of liberal professions which held the power in society. Amelia's men are also sceptics, and, in the same way as Oliphant, she compares them to the men considered least rational, like poets, dreamers and artists. Men of the arts were perceived to have a different sensibility to men of reason. As a result, these kind of men, who have a response based on their own feelings, can see ghosts.

Rationalism is deemed important in "this age of progress", and, contrary to Edwards, Oliphant rebuffs it. Oliphant sets the man of science against the man of God. The scientist is, in her view, incapable of peering into the heart of nature. Moreover, Oliphant thought science was interfering in matters of God and religion. The priest is the only man for Oliphant whose gender wise falls between men and women—whilst considered a man of the world, he is also able to feel like a woman and feel empathy with the spirits. It is the priest who helps little Willie to go to his mother in "The Open Door", and not the doctor, who is only looking forward to experiencing it like a paranormal activity. There is a coincidence here because, in Edwards' "In the Confessional", the only person who can see the phantom is the priest—like in Oliphant's tales—but, thanks to the narrator, the priest corroborates his vision, at the same time that he audits

his sanity: “All-merciful God, I thank Thee! I thank Thee I am not mad, and that Thou hast sent this stranger to be my assurance and my comfort!” (59)

As regards materialism, one thing is certain—Oliphant sets the feminine world of religiosity and spirituality and the materialism of the masculine world one against the other. In *A Beleaguered City* there is an opposition between the atheistic and irreligious, irreverent world of men, who are punished for this against the feminine fervour. The same happens in “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady” when Balthasar intends his grandson to marry a woman the boy does not even know, because he is in dire straits. For Balthasar, there is nothing like economic power and physical beauty. Also Don Juan Gusman del Pulgar tries to revive the princess not only because she is beautiful, but because he knows she has a huge treasure with her. Materialism goes before love in both cases.

7.3. Characters

7.3.1. Female characters

Women’s *dramatis personae* were very far from what the Female Gothic writers had reflected when women started writing Gothic literature. The minute men were creators of Gothic stories, they projected their masculine images of femininity on women characters—and this was no favour for readers. As women started writing more tales of the genre, a new vision of females was given to the world. It was like liberation for women to read a novel in which the heroine was a woman, asserting that their sex was no barrier for anything. Since the origins of the Gothic, characters sweepingly changed, until the nineteenth century. Young virgins in Radcliffe’s way are not our matter of discussion because they

were the heroines of novels and not short tales. The protagonists, we are concerned with, are rather dissimilar. There has been an evolution and a change in tastes. This virgin, who is persecuted at the beginning, will become a *femme fatale* at the end of the century. However, it is equally true that this virgin girl has arrived until the present day in recent novels like *Twilight*, where Bella—the protagonist and the vampire’s girlfriend—would be the representative of the virginal heroine.

If we had to define the main features which are important for a female heroine within the Gothic tradition, we would say she is always good—the best at what she does, no matter what her role is. Nonetheless, it is clear that this kind of perfection, displayed by the heroines we have analysed in this study, has depended on the own writers’ conceptions about the character and on the societal expectations of these women. Then, as we have seen, characters change with people and over time—women in Gaskell’s tales are not the same as Vernon Lee’s fatal women. Gaskell’s females in her story could have been considered silent and submissive to be perfect, whereas Lee’s female are valued because they are strong and outspoken.

Coherently, related to their ideas of life, writers define their characters. A wide cast of mothers, wives, daughters, nurses, girls and old ladies is easily found in their tales; and, in the same way, they differ greatly from each other, though they also share some traits, which help us to define the Female Gothic feminine person.

Bearing in mind her own life and what she knew, Oliphant’s characters are men and women inside the domestic sphere, where she tries to show that there is a necessity of interaction between them. The feminine subversion

Oliphant's characters show is inside the domestic kingdom. Most times, in our opinion, she tries to awaken male conscience in order to make them realise they should take part in domestic life, because that would mean they would show sentiments and keep in touch with their family. That is one of the reasons why Oliphant analyses the male characters in terms of their relationship to the female characters, although some of the females are ghosts, or embody the concept of the feminine. Females are the guides for males in this domestic terrain. This communication between husband and wife and also with their offspring is crucial for her, all the members of a family are necessary. Hence, in some cases, it is the lack of the mother which leads to a misunderstanding between the father and the son, like in "The Portrait", or to the disorientation of the son who looks for his mother, like in "The Open Door". As a result, we can infer that she intends to make the readers aware that domesticity and family must be a shared task, which could involve father and mother altogether.

One of the tricks Oliphant uses with her women is to remove them from the scene, turning them into ghosts. Thus, she can demonstrate that the lack of women in life leads to disaster and that there must be something of femininity in the house as a representative of the female figure. In "The Portrait", the drawing room was closed when the woman died; since that moment, both men—father and son—are at a loss. Oliphant indicates the drawing room is the centre of feminine transmission and identity: she has gone a step further than Gaskell. In "The Old Nurse's Story", where the drawing room is no other place than a recess to be free from reality, both women inhabiting the room are passive characters afraid of acting. In fact, Miss Grace pretends to be deaf and blind, not to take part in any action and to be on no side. The action is taken by the

little girl, who has also been removed from the drawing room, where the patriarchal power cannot affect her. The drawing room is free from male influence and power, but, unfortunately, it is the only place where women can feel free, in their own prison.

In the main, there are few women in Amelia Edwards's ghost stories, and, as all her characters are usually men, the domestic sphere or the feminine domain does not exist at all. In one of the stories in which a woman appears, she is depicted as an evil woman who ironically comes between two men, forcing them to fight and lose their friendship and the happy life they knew before she came on stage. This story is "An Engineer", in which both men fall in love with the same woman. There are two other stories involved with women's characters—"Sister's Johana's Story" and "The Story of Salome". In both stories, Edwards shows us the oppression women felt in Victorian times. On the one hand, in "Sister's Johana's Story", the protagonist, who is also the narrator, tells us about her sister, who runs away with an artist and represents the 'fallen woman' because of love—a man's victim. In the second tale, "The Story of Salome", the woman is a daughter whose spirit is not at peace, just because she has not had the freedom of election—she wanted to be a Christian and neither her father nor the rabbi let her act freely. Probably, with the presence of her mother, things would have been better for Salome, who ends in her father and rabbi's hands.

Their mother characters are never working mothers when they appear in a story—this conflict stands out of question for them. On the contrary, they try to portray to us the inconsistency a nineteenth-century middle-class woman had to face due to the family structure, the duties and responsibilities of a Victorian

bourgeois wife who has to fulfil the expectations she is required to play in the household. All reflect that women had no legal right to participate in the education of their children or things that refer to their upbringing, some women are only aware of education at the first levels. In Oliphant's "The Open Door", the mother does not want her son to be sent to a faraway school and it is the father who decides on the matter. Both Gaskell and Oliphant write stories that outline the magnitude of being a good mother and educate their children properly in order to contribute to the liberation of mothers.

We know Gaskell was apparently happily married for the most part of her life, but we also know that she wrote stories in which her heroines subvert the ideas of education and try to defy society when they intend to raise and educate their children outside marriage—as happens in "The Grey Woman", where a pregnant mother-to-be escaped her husband's dominions to avoid the contact between a malevolent father and a child. Something similar happens in "The Old Nurse's Story", where the poor Miss Maud Furnivall is abandoned by her husband and punished to be homeless by her dominant, cruel father, who leads her to death. In this case, she has not succeeded in raising her own child, although she has strived.

Perhaps Gaskell's life was centred on her role as wife and mother, but it is also certain that in some of her notes on her diaries she writes about some frustrations of married motherhood. Both Gaskell and Oliphant describe in their diaries and letters that they dedicated themselves, first of all, to their children and maternal responsibilities and, secondly, to their work or vocation, although both of them had several nurses to take care of their offspring, which would be a great help for them—indeed, they were able to do long journeys on their own

for a long time, or, at least, so did Gaskell. Nevertheless, in their letters, they seem to reflect some mismatch or rather incongruence between marriage and motherhood: it is not what it seems to be, it is not as the promised paradise and women worry, show fears and doubts.

Gaskell and Oliphant put mothers on a pedestal—although their experiences as mothers were rather different, they coincided in that maternal love is essential and necessary for children and, by doing so, they were vindicating the right of women to have their own children even when divorced. Writing thus involved a substantial risk for them in Victorian times. Nevertheless, they might have been claiming a special tie between mother and child which was not well accepted in those days. We have to remember that Gaskell's mother died and her father let her cousin, Mary Anne Lumb, adopt the child. Although the adoption could never be official, Elizabeth remained with her until the end, and, as a result, a strong identification of the women emerged. On her side, Oliphant had her mother alive for a long time; she was the only daughter of a loving mother and Margaret loved her in return. When her mother died, she had already had several children. Nevertheless, Oliphant's experience as a mother should have been taken into account. One cannot forget Oliphant was the most unfortunate of all of them, in the sense that she lost all her offspring—she survived seven of her children. We have many times heard about the feeling of resilience, which is defined by the American Psychological Association (2014) as an “individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity. Stress and adversity can come in the shape of family or relationship problems, health problems, or workplace and financial stressors, among others”. When her dear daughter Maggie died, she did not write in her diary for

over twenty years, but she continued with her life. Sorrow and pain must have been Oliphant's companion during her life, although there are no sad endings in her stories, but the converse, instead. Nobody could imagine how Gaskell would have felt when she lost one of her children, a very young boy, and succumbed to depression, which was tough for her to overcome. Both women might have considered their maternal figures as a good source of strength and psychological state.

The case of Edwards is dissimilar in the sense that, as regards her stories, she never mentions mothers; for her, the maternal woman is non-existent, like for many other writers of the period. Nevertheless, the loss of her mother was something Edwards could not bear, and that caused her many stability problems, for she had been very close to her. When her mother passed away, Amelia was led to depression until she could find a substitute mother, like many heroes and heroines of short stories do find in their nurses, tutors or close friends, but never in her stories. One can wonder if this could be due to the fact that she never broke the bond with her mother and she never went one step further, to become a mother herself, differently from Gaskell and Oliphant, who became mothers and got a different perspective of life. In this same way, we can say that Vernon Lee also had a strict mother who was able to annul her in many aspects—she could fight her, but was never able to be happy with other relationships. This notwithstanding, her characters also have substitute mothers, as in "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady", where Oriana is the woman who vindicates her right to be with his protégé and educate him with a different vision of the world, the feminine side. Lee shows us a valiant godmother struggling for his ward against all the societal forces, and embodied by a snake.

The big distinctness with Oliphant's mothers is that Lee presents her women outside the domestic realm, and they are presumed to be able to cope with tasks which were reserved only for men. The Snake Lady was, at first, in a paradisiac garden and had powers as a man would have, as mistress of her possessions, but, afterwards, she is confined to a remote part of the dukedom—the one that has feminine action. This could be compared to a drawing room because no man, except Alberic, has access to it, and this is the neuralgic point of his learning. In the same way, by means of symbolism, the Moorish Infanta is placed in a cave under the earth, but we can interpret the cave as her drawing room, in a palace where she is surrounded by her servants. Also the Virgin is a substitute mother, who is in the middle of the church, where we find the core of domesticity. In this case, the Madonna of the Seven Daggers is a maternal figure, though distorted by baroque style, but she is protective like a mother. Everybody who goes to see the Virgin needs her help. With the change of women's powers that Lee displays we can infer that women can change the masculine world—women with power, as mothers are, do not fall in the category of fatal women, but are considered as the Virgin instead: idealised women or "Angels in the House". One question is adroitly evaded, in our opinion, that of sex. Mothers and Madonnas are not related to sex; otherwise they would become fatale women.

Having no mother had become a synonym of tragedy and never having a good mother or a substitute mother meant an obstacle to happiness both in the fictional and real world. As a consequence, in some of their stories, our writers focus on the meaning of the lost mother remembrance, specifically on what this lack of progenitor means to the heroes or heroines. This is one of the reasons

why nurses or godmothers became so important. Let us see some examples. Gaskell's little Rosemond is unprotected when faced with a hostile world, but it is her nurse who prevents the ghost from killing her, and fights against strange forces, this is what Hester declares: "I held her tight with all my strength; with a set will, I held her. If I had died, my hands would have grasped her still, I was so resolved in my mind" (23) Would a mother not have fought with such determination for her own child? In Oliphant's "The Portrait", the young hero is at a loss without his mother, because the household is managed by a man who has lost his wife and has not overcome her loss yet. In this situation, his mother's ghost appears to him to guide her boy in the circumstances he is involved and more than that, she has chosen her son's wife, and at the same time she acts as a helper of the unprotected descendant. Mothers play significant roles as matchmakers. As in the previous story, in "Earthbound" the mother is in mourning because one of her sons has just died, but she still has in mind a good match for her sisters. In effect, the narrator declares: "A matchmaking mother is a thing that is supposed on English soil to be extremely objectionable; and yet if she does not think of the welfare of her girls, who is to do it?" (138) And although she is in mourning, she has in mind the convenience of the Christmas meal. Perhaps, we will never be able to understand how these nineteenth-century women could face death in such an opposed way to the one we do. Sometimes, we wonder whether women were so self-demanding or they were asked to be thus by a sorrow-blinded society. In this same story of "Earthbound", the young man, Edmund, has a tutor because he is parentless, and the Mistress of the house decides he is good for Maud, her second daughter. Young Mary in *Old Lady Mary* is under the protection of the character

of the eponymous story, and abandons the unprotected ward to her fate. Repentant of her deed, Old Lady Mary has to come back to earth to solve it. A great curiosity in relation to the children's fate after their mother's absence was that when she became a widow, Oliphant, who had lost her mother and her husband in a relatively short time, was pregnant and, in the event she died in the birth of her daughter, she had prepared herself for the worst and had drawn up her will to assure her children's welfare. She always tried to communicate children need to be protected. And, from this reflection, we can venture the surmise that she thinks as a modern and present day mother—she started raising the question that today is well-taken into account.

Whereas, for Gaskell, having no mother meant being alone, not safe from harm, unprotected and guideless, for Oliphant, it means that the young person will have difficulties to become a normal human being. They ratify, thus, that mothers have a great inheritance for their offspring, not based merely on money, but on moral values that give them happiness and mental health. Gaskell has a big gallery of motherless girls and, for her, the lack of a mother leads the heroines to seduction and betrayal and their ulterior failure as human beings. This can be observed in our story "The Old Nurse's Story", where, in our opinion, had there been a living mother, it would not have been possible for the same villain to seduce both sisters at the same time. The way Miss Maude acts, fleeing away from home and marrying secretly, leads us to see her escape as a way of freedom for heroines who chose to follow their own instincts. Nevertheless, we should not forget that these girls are considered as demoralized because they do not stick to strict rules, but, in the real sense, they

remind us that young motherless girls do not have the moral force of a mother who advises them how to act and make forced decisions.

There is a complex issue for us to appreciate as twenty-first century readers: these writers, Gaskell and Oliphant, abandoned the narrator's voice to take the mother's speech, but not because of that change of position did they accept the dominant ideology; contrary to what may seem, it is because they rebelled against it. Both wrote many stories and were widely read during the nineteenth century. Subsequently, it may seem many women could also think that motherhood was fundamental to help women to define their role in society. That could mean that, if rebellion and subversion was thought to come from women as daughters, from their point of view, it could also come from women as mothers. Mothers were not seen as women who were only destined to childbirth, who had to be silenced or confined; conversely, mothers played a pivotal role in the development of their children, whether or not the Victorian family or the British Law would recognise it. And the summit was the view Lee transmitted to us in her stories. For Lee, women could be rebels regardless of their status. In addition, they have power whatever their position in society is, but, in the end, they do not escape from social punishment. Still, their main achievement is they rewrite family and society.

There is a question which remains unanswered and relates to sex. It is necessary to name it in this part of the study and in relation to women. In this aspect, Lee is inside the female Gothic tradition, because it is patent that she is not the first one to show sex in her tales. We can go back in time and remember that female sexual appetite had already been shown in *Zofloya*. With the arrival of the Women's Rights Movement, the idea of sexual freedom changed.

Women, who had always been virginal and faithful, became fatal women. While men were the only beings to show desires and participate freely in sex, at the end of the century, fatal women did not refrain themselves. With the introduction of the fatal women and the increasing of sexual tension, more liberated female characters, like those of Lee, started to appear in ghost's tales. At the *fin-de-siècle*, New Women were fighting to become more socially accepted even though they could hint at their sexuality.

Vernon Lee recounts us another version of women. In her tales, women are visible and, to be precise, it is the male vision that transforms them into monsters. With the New Women, there is a vindication of the existence of female human beings, and this illustrates the change in society: from being invisible, women become considered as deadly and beautiful monsters—a threat to society. The change has been considerably perceptible. With Lee's women, we can observe the change females have developed in the Female Gothic. At the beginning, they were poor girls in the hands of men acting like bandits and killing them or mistreating them like in Gaskell's tales—not only in “The Old Nurse's Story”, but also in “The Grey Woman” and other stories. It seems she is nearer the early Gothic tradition where man used physical force against them. Only the male voice could be heard. Afterwards, with Oliphant, they are like “Angels in the House”, exactly inside the domestic domain—invisible, submissive, silent—but there has been a new change with the *femme fatale* of the *fin-de-siècle*. Women are defiant, assertive, and strong. Nevertheless, they still feel as fragmented as before and cannot feel as a complete being because the cause is the same—a male ruled society cannot permit women to be equal to men.

Whether we pay attention to Alice Oke, the Moorish Infanta or the Snake Lady, they fail in a determined point, distinct for each one, but they coincide in their great achievement—not being afraid of sex anymore. Old Alice and young Alice Oke, in “Oke of Okehurst”, failed to be mothers—they did not have children—they failed to be good wives as they led their husbands to die and they never felt complete one without the other. In “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers”, the Moorish Infanta is a good daughter; plausibly, her being buried was not her decision, but she failed being a wife, though, in this case, such had been her wish. Oriana, or the Snake Lady, does not achieve her goal as a wife either—she is abandoned twice; but she is successful in being a mother-godmother. Alberic professes true love for her. In respect to their achievement, not being afraid of sex, both Alice’s main *hubris* is their sexual appeal and, in the first one, especially being an unrepentant adulteress. The Moorish Infanta is the sexual ‘otherness’ par excellence. She is the temptress and she does not hide it, but very near to the modern *femme fatale* it is she who decides, not the Byronic anti-hero. In spite of her imprisonment, Oriana has had two lovers, who have been sexually attacked by her sexual desire, but none has remained near her.

These fatal women—who are seen by men, women and society in general as stigmatised, reified or animalised—are still present in our culture and they still fall prey to the same stigmatisation. Curiously enough, nowadays, fatal women possess a charming power of fatal attraction, and they are present in comics, literature and filmography. As some examples of heroines who turn into animals, we have, among others, the main character in the film *Catwoman*, by Pitof Comar (2004) though poorly performed by Halle Berry, *Catwoman*

transforms herself into an animal in front of danger—it is then when she displays her characteristic traits and skills she shares with the cat. Similarly, in *Maleficent*, a film directed by Robert Stromberg in 2014, the main character of the film, who is half dragon and half woman, is a *femme fatale* who defies the family. Rachel, in *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott in 1982, shows a robot that can feel like a woman.

It is supposedly unexpected, but there is a feeling of empathy with women who defy rules because they are subversive elements in culture. However, they are not outlaws, yet sometimes the thin divisive line blurs. Still, the real curiosity is that through the ages, the characters that Lee presents us as rebellious and subversive are still in our readings or in films; is it because they still represent liberation for women? Do they represent the up-to-date version of the New Women's *femme fatale*? We would go so far as to say that there are many references to fatal women in fiction nowadays—more than we would imagine.

For the last times, the raising of sexual appeal and sensual stories based on a more liberated female in our century has made it possible for heroines to be at the centre of the story. It does not matter whether there is a man in their way because they are not in men's hands to be liberated from anything. Fatal women are still attractive and appealing for both genders as it is sometimes hinted in some stories at the *fin-de-siècle*. We can have Oriana and young Alberic in Lee's story or the relationship Mina and Lucy Westenra lead in *Dracula*—this is perhaps the last well-considered lesbian relationship between women in literature. This is the consequence of women's emerging sexuality in literature and the exteriorization because they belong to the New Women. From

then on, women had to justify relationships between them, which had always been seen as above suspicion.

In order to see how the tradition of the *femme fatale* is still in literature nowadays, there is a character worth mentioning—Lisbeth Salander, the Gothic heroine of the *Millenium Saga* (2005 - 2007) by Stieg Larsson. Lisbeth is very similar to the Gothic heroines and also to the fatal women of the end of Victorianism due to many reasons. By means of an illustration, we can pinpoint her invisibility to the eyes of society. She is a little woman who has chosen to hide her physical appearance and appeal. Peculiarly, it is this inconspicuousness which permits her to be free to act. Namely, as a fatal woman she is not said to be beautiful yet she can be deadly. Her appeal is that she is astride legality and illegality as all our *femmes fatales*. She fights for justice, but she can be a gasoline-bomb-throwing attacker, she steals money, she is armed with guns, and she is a sexually-adventurous detective. Her appearance is strange—she can easily go unnoticed, and be easily invisible, although she dons Gothic clothes and is full of tattoos. Especially, a tattoo is the symbol of her soul—a dragon, comparable to Oriana's snake appearance. The difference is that she does not need transformation, for verisimilitude's sake, but the most prominent is that she has selected the animal, not a patriarchal force. Salander does not really care what other people can think of her; and, in fact, she considers her privacy is above everything else, and strives for anonymity. Apart from her girl lover and Mikael Blomkvist, Lisbeth has no more physical human contacts. Like Oriana and Alberic, who are both the other's refuge Salander has only a few persons to trust in. Moreover, if we are to compare her with all the other heroines, she is not motherless, but it is as if she had been.

Her father's mistreatment of her mother had driven her insane; hence she was locked up in an asylum. This forced Lisbeth's temper because she had decided to defend women in distress, as if she were a cavalier in shining armor.

7.3.2. Male characters

Male representations in ghost tales are something standing apart from the feminine side. It is clear that male characters vary from text to text and from author to author, but what we cannot deny is that they provide a real critique of the patriarchal system. This notwithstanding, when we follow the path of our writers, we can observe masculinity has suffered a gradual change throughout the years the Female Gothic was in vogue.

As a brief outline before we continue with our task, it is worth mentioning that the great villains in the castles are outdated for our writers, although some of them still pervade Gaskell's pages. There are no traces of romance in our ghosts' stories; at least, the ones we are concerned with. Being so, for most women writers, men of the Gothic are not the protagonists of the stories, they will be either collaborators for solving the problem, or even antagonists in most of the plots.

In relation to Gaskell, far from being a villain or a bandit, Lord Furnivall represents the patriarchal power of the family, but he is the antagonist because he opposes his daughters' wishes and leads them to their disastrous fate instead of to happiness. We are completely convinced Lord Furnivall is symbolically compared to an organ. It can be inferred that his voice is so strong that nobody else can speak or give opinion. Curiously, there are only women around him, which can mean that one man is enough to silence a group of

women and stifle their thoughts. It is similar to the example of extreme masculine power, which is still related to the previous authoress of the genre. The father is like 'God the Father' who determines everybody else's fate. Mr. Furnivall is an authoritative father, able to destroy every person's world and expectations. However, he still uses violence with his daughter and granddaughter as a punishment, which can be a common trait with previous characters.

Although there is only a gap of twelve years between Gaskell's Lord Furnivall and the male characters of "The Phantom Coach", a universe of difference sets them apart. Of course, we have mentioned "The Phantom Coach", because it is the first chronological ghost story by Edwards we are concerned with in this study, but, in fact, there are many others which follow it, being the last one in 1881. Astoundingly, Lord Furnivall seems to belong to the old order, whereas Edwards' men are immersed in the cosmos of the nineteenth century. This idea is crucial to understand men's behaviour and appearances in Edwards' tales. While we may consider that Amelia's male characters depict the traditional stereotypes of masculinity, the truth is that they are incomplete males, because most of the times they lack the interaction between the two different sexes. It is needless to say that this communication between the two genders is an endless absence in all ghost tales of the time. Women do not exist—they are like an incognita that sometimes appears because it is in the house or because it is the ghost of the story, but Edwards's tales are outside the feminine world. It is necessary to say here, too, that she has two tales where this help between a man and a woman is needed and successfully resolved. Poor Ulrich Finazzler needs Johanna's help, and no one's

help other than hers, because of the love and friendship they professed each other in life. Technically, she is the instrument to find his corpse and show his repentance—being thus a conspicuous example of human cooperation. By chance or by fate, the opposite example happens near the Lido in a Jewish cemetery. Appealing to the infatuation the narrator felt with Salome, a Jewish girl, when she was alive, she urges him to perform a Christian ceremony for her. In the name of love and respect, the narrator decides to devote himself to her petition. Little by little, women and men perform reciprocal actions to help one another, which renders the two spheres in contact and makes them establish communication between men and woman for transcendental issues of life and afterlife.

The fact that Edwards' men usually seem to be more preoccupied with the public sphere does not mean that men do not represent any other thing than materialism, economics and rationalism. It is palpable, after all we have said, the existence of something laudable—as men of the time and modernity, they are updated with science, they possess knowledge about railways, construction of bridges, tunnels and the like. However, contrary to these notions, only men who can consider themselves as artists can be the main speaker to tell the story. The eternal controversy between men of science and phlegmaticness opposed to men of arts and sensitivity was served.

A different aspect is presented by Margaret Oliphant's male characters. The writer describes the catastrophic and serious results for both men and women because of the division between the two spheres—the domestic and the public. This division frustrates male access to the emotional realm of feelings, which is restricted to the private atmosphere of one's family, or, in other words,

the domestic world of the female, whilst, at the same time, it forbids women to play an equal role outside the home. Oliphant's stories assert their necessity for males and females to be united and enjoy equal conditions. For Oliphant, males lack sympathy for, and understanding of, other beings; and, moreover, they seem to be bad at maintaining good relationships, although, as fathers, they can become particularly preoccupied with their sons or their wards. In "The Open Window", when the son is ill and summons his father, the colonel abandons all his business in order to assist his son as if he were a woman. He shows sentiments and preoccupation in front of a delicate problem—Henry sparks off his reactions when he knows the news: "This was a thunderbolt to fall upon a man's head who had only one son, and he the light of his eyes!" (175) He feels pain, anxiety and nervousness, let alone sadness, because he loves his son. Men are also used as a symbol of liberty and independence, as we see in "The Library Window", where the ghost who appears is supposed to be a writer and apparently the referent the girl has for being a writer is her father. Oliphant's male characters are all depicted as free from domestic responsibilities. She exhibits the masculine universe through a wide range of male characters that varies from lawyers, barristers, doctors and clerics and other liberal professions who are immersed in domesticity, but without the need for being involved in domestic tasks. Exactly like the other males who appear in the four writers, the exemption of home duties is a characteristic feature our writers share. No men are involved in domestic affairs as their own husbands were not—Gaskell and Oliphant's—, nor were their father's in Edwards and Lee's lives.

Coinciding with Edwards, both show the same type of male representative, nothing related to the male shown by Gaskell or Lee. Oliphant's men—as well as Edwards'—claim to be sceptics, because the ability to 'look in the heart of nature' is only characteristic of women who are able to believe in ghosts due to their possessing of irrational natures. Someone who believes in the supernatural has to be a romantic, something which was perceived as a negative trait for that time. Thus, someone who believed in visions or apparitions was considered to be a fool, or a poet or a sick boy who is still innocent. In *A Beleaguered City*, each man is a victim of his own thoughts and his way of comporting himself, but is determined, in our opinion, by his social role. Not every man displays the same characteristics, but only Lecamus, who is considered similar to priests, can see the dead, apart from women, of course. In this novelette, men cannot believe in the afterlife and the events occurring, because their position in society would fall into disrepute.

At variance with what we have perceived with the other authoresses, the idea of life Vernon Lee will transmit in her tales is completely new for us. As a consequence of her own convictions, wearing mannish garments and belonging to the cultural elite while sharing both spheres, Lee has the perception of a new change in the masculine world. The old man is transforming into a new one—the Aesthete and the Decadent. Lee was used to dealing with men such as Pater, Wilde and James, who were all representatives of the new kind of men. It is not the general tone in all her stories, but in "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady", Balthasar is observed as being the representative of the old order and Alberic is the new Decadent man. This kind of new man resulted in a confusion blurring the limits of gender. Victorian society was completely shocked at this

change—having been so strict about male and female delimitation in behaviour and manners, the new man was also defying their old values, hence shaking the Establishment. The Decadent man was extremely feminine and disturbing for the Victorian male. But what was still more astounding for Victorian males and their contemporaries, not included in the movement, was that the Decadent man had become an Aesthete who rejected nature on behalf of art. As a result, the new Aesthete model appears in literature and it illustrates a great conflict between the qualities a man should display. In Lee's tale, Balthasar is like a hedonistic distorted image of what aesthetic values can mean and he stands in stark contrast with Alberic because the youth is a genuinely aesthetic man. Alberic appears in the tale like an androgynous character that has 'natural grace'. Balthasar is jealous of the young man because he tries to be and look like him. The result is that, by dint of imitating natural grace and not possessing the true principles of Aestheticism, he only makes a fool of himself by trying to be young, paying excessive attention to garments and recreating nature by means of art. Alberic excels at art, but he lacks artifice; moreover, he has the appearance, demeanour and attraction that render him a complete aesthete. Nevertheless, we do believe that all the skills he has and his naturalness are achieved because there is a woman who is in charge of his education. Perhaps something to bear in mind when we think about Alberic as a man of the new order is that he has been in the hands of the Snake Lady. On the other hand, Duke Balthasar does not achieve the parameters to become a man of the new order, but he has in lieu of that the wry features which turn him into the decadent man, both ridiculous and feared. Paying again especial attention to the development of male characters, we still appreciate how the essence of the

eternal problem is the same—the old patriarchal order and the reminiscences of the same are the vestiges which still oppress society. They kill women—metaphorically, of course. What Gaskell saw as a master who determined women's fate was perceived by Lee as threatening for the feminine world. With these men, there is not even one remote chance of collaboration between spheres of distinct gender. She leaves, however, an open door: that of the new generation of men who, like Alberic, is predisposed to annul differences of gender.

Curiously, and in contrast with the men we have seen in that tale, the other men Lee presents us are particularly different. One of them, Don Juan Gusman del Pulgar, the main character in the tale "The Virgin of the Seven Daggers", is a symbol of machismo. Lee plays with time, i.e., the story is set in the seventeenth century in Spain. With the great distance in time, she can express her ideas without hurting readers. Don Juan is the typical manful macho who despises women and only wants to dishonour them by means of sex. All his love conquests are based on beauty; and, now, the last one, also on money. Lee shows us that he has faced fatale women, who, although not seen at first sight, can overcome men. He is punished in the end.

There is still another kind of masculine character Lee recreated in her ghosts stories—those men who condition women because of their vision. As we mentioned when analysing Lee, the attitude men display in front of women is crucial because, as we see it, this disposition is a reflection of the respect they have for them. Women are not given the opportunity to show themselves as they are; in other words, men determine the category in which the readers or the rest of the characters in the story must classify them. In the story "Oke of

Okehurst”, both her husband and the painter define Alice through their vision. First of all, the artist’s regarding Alice is that of an art object or an object of desire; the painter wants to capture art without being able to apprehend the pure essence of art—which is symbolised here by the woman’s soul. As readers, we might infer men and women are not able to achieve complete, mutual understanding. The woman’s husband, William Oke, is fearful of his own wife because he knows she is the strongest of them and, in Victorian times, this can be seen as weakness on his part. It is one of the times in which women and the feminine is held as destructive and as a disruptive power, which can menace the masculine in all senses. After the behaviours men and women exhibit, we understand that Lee comes to defend the other writers’ assertions—the feminine and masculine spheres are worlds apart and it is almost impossible for them to come to terms with each other.

As we have seen, the change of the role of the masculine hero throughout the history of the genre has been gradual. From the stories of the beginning to the narrations we can find in our decades, it is clearly seen that the role of men has decreased. Little by little, the sexual purity of women in the Gothic has diminished and, as a result, it is not necessary for men to trespass this limit. Living in a hypocritical society, which still seems to belong to the masculine order, men are not badly-considered, although they can be as promiscuous as they like—in the end, they are heirs to a conservative society. It is not the same for Gothic heroines. If they acted sexually as men did, then they would belong to the ‘other’, not to mention if heroines are homosexual. This may be because, in the same way, men and women can be affected by the bias they are presented in their society. It would be a good measure, perhaps, if

there was a just and balanced representation of both sexes trying to liberate the oppressed, but perhaps this is yet to come.

7.4. Narrators

Narrators are less likely to be judged than characters, whereas they are as influential as the previous ones; overall, if we bear in mind that they are the voice of the tale. Therefore, and due to the fact that we deal with tales, we can deduce that they are supposed to represent someone telling us a story—either an omniscient narrator or a first person relator—but the most important fact in literature is they can manipulate our perception of the facts pretending not to be stating what they are saying, and assuming what is being said by other people. Narrators can be objective or subjective, but, in the case of these tales, narrators cannot be said to be objective, because their voice helps our writers to achieve their aim—to transmit through their accounts all their own fears and anxieties. From that point of view, the narrator becomes a narrative conscience which is externalising women's concerns; and thus, the consequence is that, with this externalization, women writers verbalize their thoughts and they recognize their own dreads. At the end of it all, authors face society because they create the story, and, in our case, they are women who are behind all the stories.

As we have been discussing, if we apply all these notions related to raconteurs of the ghosts' stories, and consider their role in the tales, one may infer that narrators, apart from being pivotal elements for this genre, they are a crucial and incisive way for tales to draw the reader's attention and get them immersed in the story. This is reinforced by the fact that tales were supposed to

be read aloud, hence turning such voice into a driver of the plot. Tales appeared in newspapers and, overall, at Christmas time. And, to be honest, one must recognise that ghosts' tales tried to appeal to the readers' sensibility and awareness about the matter. Our writers were completely aware of that.

There is a wide gamut of narrators in short ghost stories. In our study, they range from the omniscient narrator to the witness of the facts, and their features run from sceptics or unbelievers to the most fervent devotees. They are so essential in the composition that storytellers can make the character seem a disturbed person when they do not believe the story being told, their voice is the authority.

In order to provide a guide of the narrators appearing in our stories we have compiled the voices of our tales and their main features in a table:

TALE	NARRATOR	FEATURES
"The Old Nurse's Story" (1852)	First person narrator: secondary character	Hester, the old nurse. Substitute mother.
"The Phantom Coach" (1864)	First person narrator: protagonist	Man, Sceptical barrister
"An Engineer" (1866)	First person narrator: protagonist	Man, Train engineer
"The 4'15 Express" (1866)	First person narrator: protagonist	Man. Railway businessman
"In the Confessional" (1871)	First person narrator: protagonist	Man. Authoress <i>alter ego</i>
"Sister Johanna's Story" (1872)	First person narrator: secondary character	Woman. Wood-carver & domestic tasks
"The New Pass" (1873)	First person narrator: protagonist	Man. Sceptical barrister
"The Story of Salome" (1874)	First person narrator: protagonist	Man. Authoress' <i>alter ego</i>
"Was it an Illusion?" (1881)	First person narrator: protagonist	Man. Sceptical Inspector of Schools
<i>A Beleaguered City</i> (1879)	First person narrator: protagonist	Several men and women
"Earthbound" (1880)	Omniscient narrator.	
"The Open Door" (1881)	First person narrator: protagonist	The family's father.

“Old Lady Mary “ (1885)	Omniscient narrator	
‘The Portrait’ (1885)	First person narrator: protagonist	Young man: the ghost’s son
‘The Library Window’ (1896)	First person narrator: protagonist	Young girl. Without name. Secluded in a window recess
“Oke of Okehurst”(1886)	First person narrator: secondary character	Man and sceptical Painter: Male Gaze. Man cannot capture young Alice’s soul
“Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady”(1896)	Omniscient narrator.	
“The Virgin of the Seven Daggers” (1896)	Omniscient narrator.	

Table 4: *Narrators’ comparative chart.*

Amelia Edwards’ narrators guide us through a series of facts that end in supernatural experiences. All of them, without exception, are first person narrators who directly tell us about the facts. Surprisingly, from all our writers, Edwards is the one who presents us narrators in a very different fashion from that of Oliphant, Gaskell or Lee. She is terribly preoccupied with credibility. Edwards’ characters and narrators belong to an age of rationalism, and, thus, they are unable to believe what their senses tell them, and, so, they let the reader judge by himself, saying they only record the events and explain what took place. Thus, although they have apparently experienced the event first-hand, they never confess to believing in the supernatural, they claim to be sceptic. At the beginning of “The Phantom Coach”, once the narrator explains he is going to tell us the facts he went through, he declares himself impartial about the events:

All I entreat, meanwhile, is that you will abstain from forcing your own conclusions upon me. I want nothing explained away. I desire no

arguments. My mind on this subject is quite made up, and, having the testimony of my own senses to rely upon, I prefer to abide by it. (Web)

In the story “The Four-Fifteen Express”, the narrator does not have a rational explanation for all what has happened and he also declares to believe his senses because he is unable to adduce any other reason:

What was it that I saw in the train? That question remains unanswered to this day. I have never been able to reply to it. ... that I was guided, as it were, by that vision on the platform to the identification of the murderer; and that, a passive instrument myself, I was destined by means of these mysterious teachings, to bring about the ends of Justice. (Web)

Among all our writers, it is Edwards who is most dissimilar to the Female Gothic writers, especially concerning this figure of the relator, and although she still lies within the scope of the Female Gothic convention. Therefore, having reached this point, it is necessary to name Charles Dickens—who was the first promoter of short ghost stories in his periodicals—because Edwards inherits part of his tradition as well. Dickens perceived the ghost story had a rich heritage, but it needed a change. He was deeply immersed in this genre, as he sometimes commented the work of his contributors—he was disappointed with Gaskell’s end of “The Old Nurse’s Story”, and he asked Edwards to write a story about the railway. As he was so aware of the genre conventions, it was challenging for his writers to overcome him. Visionary as he can be considered, he declared to be an innovator of the genre and he expected the same from his providers. He sought changes in intrigue, notion and accomplishment; he craved and struggled for originality, which he could obtain from our women’s ghosts. Dickens, as a man of his time, was as preoccupied as Edwards with credibility and he questioned the existential scepticism of the supernatural

experiences undermining the liability of the ghosts-seers by means of the narrators—e.g. Scrooge has eaten something that affected his dreams in the story “A Christmas Carol”, and curiously Claudia Hammond, a health expert wrote about it in an article published by the BBC, by the way, it was cheese. When we think of Dickens’ “The Signalman”, we find a signalman who is desperate—as he cannot understand his visions—and when he meets the narrator of the tale, he tells him his supernatural experiences. As he is not capable of discerning between reality and the otherworldly appearances, he commits suicide, in spite of the ghost’s warning. As Victorians were interested in differentiating between sanity and insanity, ghost tales gave them the opportunity to experiment. Although the signalman kills himself, nobody harbours doubts as to his visions, but the real controversy about clairvoyance in this rational, modern, industrial moment may counter his version. Edwards seems to use her narrators in a similar way to Dickens. Ironically, Dickens, as Edwards, toys with the psychology and the exploration of the senses and, being in a world of technology, where the narrators are placed, it is difficult for these characters to interpret the signs and signals of the otherworld people. When the narrator is facing one of the appearances, it seems the first thing they appeal to is common sense and they always finish the story without accepting they have seen a ghost. The question always remains in the air, be it in the title of the tales, such as “Was it an Illusion?”, be it at the end of the story, when the narrator questions everything, as in “The Four-Fifteen Express”: “What was it that I saw in the train? That question remains unanswered to this day. I have never been able to reply it.” It is in stories like “The Signalman” where the narrator is on the verge of believing or not. He cannot believe because he is not

the seer but he cannot disbelieve either, because the signalman is not mad. Nevertheless, the fact of pleading sceptic and their professing that they are rational men serve the purpose of the authoress to reinforce the apparition itself and the story—it is easier to believe a rational man than an artist. With full dexterity, Edwards transfers this dilemma to the reader. It is the reader who has to decide whether the apparition or the story is real. In other words, we are not the seers, but the characters of the narrators are supposed to be trustworthy, since they are men of the period and men of science, and, in addition, they allow us to discern that the seer is not insane.

In all the tales, we have clues to confirm the character is mentally balanced. In “The Phantom Coach” we have a narrator who has not told a word to anybody, except to his doctor, who has not believed him. The only tormented man of the story is the owner of the house, who keeps him from the storm. In the story “The Engineer”, we cannot doubt the train engineer because he was co-protagonist of the story and the ghost was his close friend. How can a man be insane if he is the person to transmit pardon and repentance? There is no place for doubts at all. Moreover, in “The Four-Fifteen Express”, Edwards uses an object which belongs to the disappeared man to corroborate our relator is not mad, but completely sane instead. With the cigar-box, the narrator demonstrated the vision was not only certain to us, but to the rest of the characters of the story as well. Even, in “Was it an Illusion?”, the Inspector of Schools shows his good judgement when the boy is discovered thanks to him, and the person who was found guilty of assassination commits suicide, because the ghost boy threatened the prisoner.

Contrary to this situation, in the tale “In the Confessional”, the narrator is the element that brings the solution to the poor ghost-seer. The Père Chessez thinks he has gone mad, because he tells the narrator he can see a ghost; but in the moment in which the narrator, Her Englander, ratifies he can also see him, the pennant priest is relieved: “The good people here believe that much sorrow and meditation have touched my brain. I have half believed it myself till now. But you—you have proved to me that I am the victim of no illusion.” (59)

Men narrators in Oliphant’s works, as well as in Edwards’ tales, declare themselves sceptics, but they differ in that, by the end of some of Oliphant’s stories, they have actually changed their mind and they assume the apparition. They have undergone a spiritual experience and, as a result, their vision has changed. “The Open Door” is one of the instances. The narrator is the father of the family, and he feels terrified of the idea of having a son who can be a ghost-seer. At first, before starting to take part in the facts, he is worried about his son’s sanity: “Was it the disordered fancy caused by great bodily weakness?” (179). In the same way as Edwards, Oliphant depicts a man concerned with social prejudice. The narrator cannot let us think he does not belong to his period as a rational man. In the same way as Edwards, Oliphant makes us see the narrator as the clue to consider the events properly. As he has gone through the supernatural experience, Colonel Mortimer is relieved as his boy is free of being taken as insane and he feels strong enough to deny the doctor’s conclusions, although he will not contradict him in order to maintain his status:

‘I told you it was human agency,’ he said triumphantly. He forgets, I suppose, how he and I stood with our lights seeing nothing while the space between us was audibly traversed by something that could speak, and sob, and suffer. There is no argument with men of this kind. He is ready to get up a laugh against me on this slender ground. (210)

Taking into consideration the point of view narrators provide to the story, it is worth mentioning Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City*. This novelette is the exponent of her art as a short story writer, insofar as she uses the technique of the multiple narrators, and despite the fact that it was one of the first to be written. With this technique, she achieves several aims. First of all, in this novelette, credibility is not a question of belonging to the time of reason and technique; there are more ingredients to be borne in mind, namely gender, class and spirituality. The patriarchal world is subverted by the women of the novelette. Dupin is the representative of authority, the establishment and all the other narrators seem to be the aspects of his personality he cannot assume because he will incur in unreliability. As a patriarchal representative, he cannot be spiritual like Agnes is; he cannot have visionary compulsions like Lecamus, who is placed half-way between men and women, nor can he describe the women's world as Mme Veuve, who set the social context. He can only identify with Bois-Sombre's account of facts in order not to lose all his power in the face of society. By including both women in the tale, Oliphant identifies them with the Unseen, the spiritual, the unearthly, whereas men are tied to materialism and power. This narrative can also be seen as a "gentle subversive" way of redefining social roles. With Oliphant's women narrators, we enter the world of the feelings, of the private sphere Edwards does not mention in her stories. Oliphant's women narrators reinforce family bounds even beyond death.

As Oliphant survived all her children, she might have known how a mother feels in such circumstances. Narrators portray this situation several times; from the omniscient narrator in "Earthbound" and *Old Lady Mary*, to the first person in "The Portrait". Family ties are analysed from the narrator's

standpoint. They depict mothers or substitute mothers who feel doleful because of the death of a child, a woman who comes back to earth to help an unprotected girl, or a mother who possesses her son in order to show him his way. This same phenomenon happens in Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story", where a complete vision of family relationships is depicted. The reader is completely immersed in the family life. Hester, the nurse and narrator, describes all the characters and the feeling of sympathy and empathy they had for one another.

Also Vernon Lee shows us family relationships through her narrator's description of the facts. Certainly not as gentle as Oliphant's, there are family ties in Lee's tales as well. The narrator, a painter, in "Oke of Okehurst", lets us see that the possession of Alice Oke has been conceivable because of their family closeness. Young Alice has always wanted to seem like her ancestor, and contrary to what can be expected, this tie has been stronger than the union with her husband, as she is childless. However, we are told at the beginning of the story by the painter himself that he is a witness:

You didn't know that it all took place under my eyes? I can scarcely believe now that it did: it all seems so distant, vivid but unreal, like a thing of my own invention. It really was much stranger than any one guessed. (4)

This is one of the examples where the story is told by a first person narrator who is a secondary character, but his biased version of the woman and the events are to the detriment of Alice's values.

We must be precise and not forget there are some stories told by women, although they are rather scarce. We have always said that this is a defence shield against the conception the Victorian had about women being

imaginative. Amelia Edwards offers us a woman narrator in “Sister Johanna’s Story”. Sister Johanna is a witness of the events and a participant at the same time; but, despite being a woman, she acts as all of Edwards’ narrators—she questions what she has seen. To gain credibility—so necessary in Edwards’ tales—she prefers the narrator to question her own vision by throwing the reader a rhetorical question: “Did I indeed see Ulrich Finazzer that night of his self-murder? If I did so with my bodily eyes...” (116) There is no dissimilitude with the male narrators; she does not state to have seen Ulrich’s ghost.

It is not the only tale where a woman’s voice is heard, although the narrators, in both tales, are completely the opposite. With “The Library Window”, we can appreciate how a young girl transmits to us her experiences and feelings with no intermediary person. In this case, we witness the process in which a girl is disposed of all her hopes and dreams. At the end of her life, Oliphant, probably, thought back to being a young girl, when she was free enough to become a writer, just as the young girl is longing for. The girl knows that being a writer is a job reserved for men in Victorian times, but it is also certain that it was not impossible to write, inasmuch as Oliphant was a writer. In other words, the girl’s hopes are like those of men, because she has not learnt society will transform her. When the narrator, who is an adolescent, comes into adulthood, the disenchantment is on a par with the transformation. As the ghost-seer and the narrator coincide in the story, it is in the hands of the other characters, Lady Carnbee and Aunt Mary, to let us see that the little girl is not insane, as ghost-seers usually are. The mechanism of credibility is radically different, from the characters to the narrator—the characters, who are “women of our blood” (398), as Lady Carnbee proffers, give the girl credibility. With the

girl narrator, Oliphant makes us see the procedure by which girls are subdued, and their wills repressed. This narrator is far more distant from all other narrators, and, at the end of the story, it seems to bear a repressed melancholy in her heart. By confessing the reader all her feelings, she is subverting her own role. She is denouncing how she has been forbidden to write her own life in order not to rewrite the Victorian family.

7. 5. Ghosts

The perception of Victorian ghosts was to change all the previous ideas about science and religion and also the relationship between all of them—or such is the thesis Jen Cadwallader (2009) tries to defend. We would dare to say that this is by far more stressed in the Female Literary Gothic, especially in short tales, because these women try to redefine this relationship without damaging either science, or religion. Covering the whole Victorian century, our four writers share some of the characteristics which support the same ideas. Regardless of the period of the century in which they lived, social criticism about women's position is present in all of the four writers. However, due to their especial and particular style and the time of the period they were immersed in, their ghosts will seem different, though they will embody the same ideas—those of the Female Gothic. It is not the same to deal with Gaskell's ghosts', which seem to belong to the eighteenth century, as Lee's ghosts, that represent the *femme fatale* at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As Ballesteros (1998) says, Britain had been suffering from a spiritual crisis since the *Origin of the Species* had appeared, and Britain was at the forefront of the industrialization process. These social events brought about

many changes, but it brought a taste for ghosts' stories. Writers did not 'let sleeping ghosts lie', neither did the readers. There was a reaction in which psychology was driving people towards spirituality in order to get an answer. Such a phenomenon as the ghost story made writers of all disciplines compose short ghost tales, but, far from being despised as a feminine task, there were writers of both sexes.

Against general belief, in the face of such a quantity of changes, another factor to take into account in the ghost story is that the past is not something which can be simply left behind and forgotten. There is no straightforward, linear progression from previous times onwards; instead, the past can intrude into, and has immediate bearing on the present and the future. Thus, in an era when a primary ethic was the forward thrust of science, technology and commerce, the supernatural tale proved a perfect foil. As its short format suited its women authors, so did the cyclical nature of the ghost story adapt to their message. There was no nostalgic longing for the past, but a reminder of its endless power, both positive and evil. Insights into the mistakes and triumphs of humanity could hopefully be gleaned. Lee's fiction, for example, concentrates on the dangers of an intrusive past, which her Victorian characters cannot leave behind. Gaskell offers both a warning against a repetition of man's darker episodes, as well as a celebration, in her love of folklore, of an enduring and flourishing wisdom. The writers featured in this thesis recognized the balance required in both, embracing and breaking from the past.

Balance is perhaps at the very centre of the ambitions of Victorian women's supernatural stories. Perhaps with the exception of Lee, none of these four writers imagined or desired a social revolution. However, Lee's career, of

course, benefited from freedom the earlier writers had not been able to profit from. Especial as she was, Lee bitterly criticised the institution of marriage, as it stood, and what she regarded as the enslavement of women. She equally gave her opinion on other issues, such as pacifism, about which she had strong feelings—the other writers battled more quietly. They did not hate men—neither did Lee—nor abhorred marriage or the family, but they perceived, and were aware of, the insidious nature of injustices, which were enshrined in patriarchal ideology.

These were assumptions, which, on the one hand, demanded that women were the moral and spiritual “Angel in the House”; whilst, at the same time, they downgraded them as inferior, weak and irrational beings. Additionally, the fixed notions of masculinity exerted equal pressure on men. They largely fought against the sheer inflexibility of such rules. They disputed hardened, unquestioned dogmas, which insisted that women should conform to one ideal and a man to a strictly separate other, and what these women saw was responsible for so much unnecessary unhappiness. They were frustrated by the limitations it enforced, and the abuses it permitted. What they envisaged was a system that allowed for greater respect for women, and for collective and individual strengths. The female characters in these stories are adept at managing alone, but they also gain from inclusion in networks and communities of other women. Once again, there is a balance to be achieved.

There were striking differences in the extent to which women writers worked from within the patriarchy. Lee was arguably the most independent—plausibly thanks to the time in which she lived and wrote, choosing to live alone and at a distance from society and its regulations. Although she did not

deliberately flout the latter, she felt happy to strike out in whatever literary direction she felt inspired, heedless of popular opinion, morality or expectation. She was capable of offending, especially at a personal level, but showed no indication of needing approbation. She was able, to a greater extent, more than any of the featured writers, to devote herself to writing.

Obviously, Lee's life was more similar to that of Edwards, by virtue of the fact that neither of them was married. Gaskell was the only one of the four who remained married for a long period, and, therefore, had to take into account the dynamics of that relationship, although Oliphant certainly retained family duties after her husband's death. It is clear, from the comments of both, however, that such family ties, as well as causing some impatience and sorrow, also brought happiness and an additional meaning to their lives, and it is impossible to suggest either would have exchanged their situations for Lee's exclusivity of purpose. It was balance, as Gaskell so very often stated, which was sought. Oliphant had a vested interest in remaining within the accepted ideology, in line with the way she marketed herself.

All these writers, in their different ways, illustrate how an individual can be repressed, with various outcomes—be it tragedy or escape. The supernatural can be vengeful, illuminating, cathartic and empowering. For the author, it could involve working through troubling personal issues, such as loss, loneliness, or struggles in determining a sense of self. In addition, it could illuminate issues on a wider social scale. In both cases, the stories deal with matters that could affect anybody, as well as concerns pertaining exclusively to women. The supernatural always allows assertive action and change, and demands re-evaluation and self-examination, whether on the part of the creator

or the reader. However, whether the challenge is open or implicit, the encouragement to question is consistently there. With the emphasis placed firmly on those haunted, a supernatural encounter is never something which merely 'happens' to a character. The short story was not only ideally suitable for women's writing, but was the perfect vehicle for containing a message. Succinct as they are, any underlying themes would not be lost in bulky narrative, but remain available for the avid reader who chooses, or is able to see them. The ghost story, as this thesis has attempted to illustrate, was peculiarly effective in conveying hidden agendas and forbidden topics. As Ballesteros posits in *Escrito por Brujas* (2005), the ghost story helped these women to exorcise their own ghosts and the others' as well.

As women's and individuals' rights have progressed during the twentieth century, the subversive contributions of these women have been overshadowed, and perhaps viewed as redundant, as more open ways of comment and protest are now possible. Much would be lost, however, if this significant period—when so much courage was demanded in demonstrating in favour of the very basic freedoms to which we give so little thought today—were allowed to disappear from view and memory. Each of these writers is distinct in style and content, and, yet, they share a common bond in their explorations of a genre that furnishes such wealth of opportunity for broadening women's experience. These stories stand on their own merit, for the undoubted talent displayed in them, and also because of their message.

When we think about the significance of the communication, we raise an important issue—how is the message delivered? How does it reach us? The reply is clear—by means of a messenger, i.e. the ghost. Probably, if we look up

the definition of ghost in a dictionary, it will define it as an apparition of a dead person which is believed to be visible to the living in a kind of nebulous image. Women's ghosts are surrounded by an especial atmosphere that serves our writers to free themselves. The ghost is the spirit between the earth and the otherworld, and it can cross boundaries. For the mere fact of being dead, ghosts can say what they want and are not permitted in real life; the ghost is like an escape valve for our writers. Their ghosts embody their anxieties, fears and desires in a kind of gentle aura in order to denounce their oppression.

In relation to the depiction of ghosts, we can say that our writers differ little in their portraying of phantoms. In order to follow a better comparison among the characters representing spirits, we can follow the chart:

	GHOST	TASK TO PERFORM
"The Old Nurse's Story" (1852)	Lord Furnivall, Miss Maud and the Phantom child	Lord Furnivall, remind people he is the authority. Child, vindicates her own place.
"The Phantom Coach" (1864)	Four men	Take the traveller with them
"An Engineer" (1866)	Narrator's friend	Save narrator's soul
"The 4'15 Express" (1866)	Railway businessman	Find out the assassination and his corpse to save his own reputation
"In the Confessional" (1871)	Farmer	Be punished.
"Sister Johanna's Story" (1872)	Wood Sculptor	Johanna finds his body. Reason: Repentance & ask for forgiveness
"The New Pass" (1873)	Young boy, a character's brother.	Advice to save his brother from death. Make the travellers change their route.
"The Story of Salome" (1874)	Woman	Have a Christian burial ritual performed.
"Was it an Illusion?" (1881)	Young boy	Avenge his death, inducing his murder commit suicide.
<i>A Beleaguered City</i> (1879)	The Dead people of the village.	Make people believe in God again. Mend sacrilege.
"Earthbound" (1880)	A predecessor: Maud	Castigate too much pride
"The Open Door" (1881)	Boy from the parish.	Repentance & ask for forgiveness from her mother.
"Old Lady Mary " (1885)	Old Lady Mary	Remedy young Mary's situation: young girl is dispossessed because of negligence.

'The Portrait' (1885)	The dead mother of the family.	Remedy a relative's state of abandonment and help her son and husband.
'The Library Window' (1896)	Young man, a writer.	Awake the girl's imagination.
"Oke of Okehurst"(1886)	Double: old Alice and young Alice.	Defiance of family. Defined her as a hysterical woman.
"Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady"(1896)	A Serpent Woman who is also Oriana.	Godmother for the boy.
"The Virgin of the Seven Daggers" (1896)	Our Lady of the Sorrows and the Moorish Infanta.	Dichotomy, women's double role: Mother/Whore and Redemptive/ Destructive

Table 5: *Ghosts' comparative chart.*

As we can see in the chart, we find a vast amount of ghosts ranging from humble brave mothers, proud women, old ladies, engineers, boys, a Jewish lady, sceptical barristers, or a *femme fatale*. One of the first issues we should mention is that our writers do not discriminate sex when presenting us a spirit. Although their phantoms are a reflection of themselves in society, men are also included in real life. In addition to this, men are human beings as well, and, in some occasions, our writers transmit to us this feeling of collaboration between the spheres. It is not necessary to state the obvious—men have feelings as fathers, as sons as well as husbands. Our writers always teach us that not even patriarchy can control men inside the domestic sphere: it is an inevitable outcome of living in a family. As a result of being concerned about family bonds, the phantom described is a young boy who tries to prevent a family catastrophe that can be avoided—as far as the expedition in which his brother is participating believes in him. The spirit, in "The New Pass", comes to help his brother who is in danger of losing his life—brotherly love is greater than death. Coinciding with Edwards, Oliphant lets us see how the boy of "The Open Door" comes to look for his mother, as he is preoccupied with the gathering of the family in the afterlife. These two examples come to demonstrate men have the same necessities of love inside the domestic sphere.

The writers of the study had no intention of frightening their readers, and thus, their ghosts do not have a freaky appearance. All of them have human form and they do not panic anyone, as they sometimes confound the ghost-seer who takes them for another living person. Sometimes, the ghost-seers have to make some enquiries until they discover who the ghost is. We can find several reactions in front of a ghost—it can vary from fear, such as in “The Phantom Coach”, to the infatuation Edmund feels for Maud in “Earthbound”. This fascination is taken to such an extreme that the ghost-seer falls in love with the ghost. This feeling is also present in “The Story of Salome”, where the narrator is in love with the phantom girl and, when the story comes to an end, Hartcourt Blunt declares:

how my heart has never throbbed, my pulse never leaped, for love of mortal woman since that time—are details into which I need not enter here. Enough that I watched and waited; but that her gracious spirit appeared to me no more. I wait still, but I watch no longer. I know now that our place of meeting will not be here. (web)

Also Alberic is attached to Lady Oriana and will defend her against any man who tries to damage her and even dies when she is brutally killed.

To the question why the dead come to visit the living world, we ought to set out two chief purposes—on the one hand, in order to connect the living to their past and, on the other hand, because they have a task to perform. Their motifs can be diverse: from announcing future danger, to communicating pardon and love or solving something that was left undone. There is always an honourable purpose that they have to accomplish or a petition for someone to execute it for them. And, if there is a common element in all the stories where

the spirit is a woman, this component is that the ghost woman defies, subverts and menaces the established power.

Gaskell's spirits appear in the form of a woman, a girl and a man. As we have been commenting about Edwards, Gaskell's female spirits do not frighten anyone, neither the woman nor the child; in fact, when the ghost-seeing girl describes them, she does so in lovely terms. About the girl, she says: "and this little girl ... she was so pretty and so sweet, I could not choose but go," (14) and about the woman "there I saw a woman weeping and crying; but when she saw me ... and smiled very proud and grand, and took me on her knee, and began to lull me to sleep" (14) The male ghost is not so gently depicted: "the figure of a tall old man, with grey hair and gleaming eyes. He drove before him with a relentless gesture of abhorrence, a stem and beautiful woman, with a child" (14)—perhaps his sign of abomination is what frightens the girl and Hester.

Gaskell gets involved in women's questions and she demands the women's right to choose their own destiny without being punished. Both female spirits are afflicted souls who are bound to the earth because they struggle for their rights. The mother, Miss Maud Furnivall, who has been in touch with society, deceived and punished by patriarchal rules, feels completely overcome. Her spirit is under a tree, but she does not move, it is a symbol of paralysis, whereas it is the girl who is strong enough to demand for her rights, no matter whom she has to face. This maybe is the reason which makes them be earthbound. The poor Rosemond is the person who feels empathy for the little girl—the most innocent person is the first to defend the little girl in the snow. This comes to demonstrate that women are always understood, valued and

appreciated inside female communities. Nevertheless, the rest of the women of the tale—like the servant, or Miss Grace, including Hester—are afraid of the little girl and of old Mr Furnivall's ghost. Not even after death can a male ghost show some piety or commiseration with his daughter and her child.

As we have mentioned above, Amelia's spirits are different from those of the other writers of the study; in other words, she seems to be half way between male and female Gothic. Her ghosts always appear in human form—like Dickens, Oliphant and Gaskell's—so that the person who has the encounter with them is never scared or frightened, and, as a result, the ghost-seer does not perceive phantoms as visions or spirits, especially because they are not gloomy or depressing. In the case of "The Four-Fifteen Express", the narrator is constantly looking for a rational explanation to the events he has experienced because he cannot believe Mr Dwerrhouse, the ghost, is dead, since, in the encounter, the narrator describes him as: "a tall, spare man, thin-lipped, light-eyed, with an ungraceful stoop in the shoulders and scant grey hair worn somewhat long upon his collar." (4) As everybody who knows Mr Dwerrhouse thinks he has run away with the money of the company, our ghost needs Langford's help to clear the facts that will restore his honour. Everyone thinks he has stolen the company's money, while he has been assassinated and his corpse has not been found. Not to leave any doubts about this ghostly encounter, Edwards helps the narrator with a physical proof: the cigar-case. There is a similar situation in the story "Was it an Illusion?", where the ghost is a young man: "I saw a man emerging from the fog ... I observed that he dragged the left foot, limping as he walked ... I could see he wore a dark suit and an Anglican felt hat, and looked something like a dissenting minister." (149) Clearly

perceived as a lad, the spirit comes to report a crime somebody has committed against him and he longs for revenge and justice. As it happens in “The Four-Fifteen Express”, in “Was it an Illusion?”, it is by means of the narrator that the ghost’s requirement is accomplished. A similar situation is illustrated in “Sister Johanna’s Story”. Ulrich has committed fratricide and, repentant of his act, he commits suicide, but afterwards, he asks for Johanna’s help to discover his body and be forgiven. Forgiveness is also at the core of the story of “An Engineer”, along with the danger of losing their soul. The ghost appears to his own friend who has to convey the message to the woman who has separated them.

As we have said before, Salome appears to the narrator of the story with lovely human form:

Salome, pale and worn as from some deep and wasting grief, but more beautiful, if that could be, than ever. Beautiful, with a still more spiritual beauty than of old; with cheeks so wan, and eyes so unutterably bright and solemn, that my very heart seemed to stand still as I looked upon them. (web)

Salome appeals for Blunt’s help as the other spirits also requested for aid. The difference here is that she does not rest in peace because male forces have denied her the right to be free. Nevertheless, like most other women of female ghosts’ stories, her fate is again in male hands.

Nonetheless, there is one occasion when the ghosts do not have a good appearance, in “The Phantom Coach”:

the light of putrefaction—played upon their awful faces; upon their hair, dank with the dews of the grave; upon their clothes, earth-stained and dropping to pieces; upon their hands, which were as the hands of corpses long buried. Only their eyes, their terrible eyes, were living; and those eyes were all turned menacing upon me!

Moreover, apart from being disgusting to the narrator, they are also his cause of fear and anguish insofar as they have come for him, to kill him or, in other words, to take him with them.

Oliphant's ghosts are benevolent, but also tormented spirits. We can find her ghosts have also human form, representing mothers, children, daughters, wives and also boys and men. In her tales, there are phantoms that come back to earth to solve a problem they have; others come back to help someone in need, but they do not frighten anyone, as happens with Edwards' ghosts. How can we be afraid of Lady Mary if we have known her from the beginning of the story just before she dies? And, overall, if we know she wants to help Mary, her protégé, although it turns out not to be necessary, we are aware of her intentions. We do not even need the description of the character because we already know her beforehand. In the case of *Old Lady Mary*, there is no task for her to perform, but she gets cognizant of her negligence and what it can suppose for young Mary. Oliphant's ghosts seem to be free from requiring tasks from any helper—they are those who have to help people perform their duty. Let us see the dead people of the village in *A Beleaguered City*. They come back from their graves to make people aware of their injuries and sacrilege against God for money and materialism's sake. Nobody is afraid of their own dead. In "The Library Window", the ghost's duty is to awaken the girl's imagination and desire to be a writer; with it, Oliphant is defending women's rights to be equal to men. And, moreover, the writer has an attractive appearance. The mother in "The Portrait" comes back to avoid her son to commit a mistake and put him on the right track. In this case, it is the ghost who

feels empathy for the little girl, although she is a distant relative. With this woman's help to her family, Oliphant shows how female agency is necessary.

In the story "The Open Door", the phantom is a child, but there is no physical description, owing to the fact that nobody can see the boy, but listen to him. It is the complete lack of light that makes the apparition frightening. Willie comes back to earth because he is confused; so that he needs help to find his mother. Although at the beginning, Mortimer, the colonel, is terrified at the sound of the voice, he is the person who provides help, but what the boy is missing is his mother's agency to achieve his aim.

An exception to the scheme of a ghost who comes back or who feels bound to the earth may be found in two stories—one by Oliphant, "Earthbound", and the other, "In the Confessional", by Edwards. These two spirits are wandering in the earth because they are expiating their sins. In "Earthbound", Maud, has been punished because she was too proud of earthly possessions in her youth; whereas, in "In the Confessional, Caspar Rufenacht is purging his sin of having killed his wife. There is a great difference between them both—Maud is a lovely woman with "a tender little pensive face, with soft very large eyes ... a pensive half-smile about the mouth." (150), while Caspar has the characteristic of the villains of the beginning of Gothic tales: "his eyes were large and bright, and wild-looking, like the eyes of some fierce animal, and that his face ... looked lividly pale." (50)

Consequently, in all these stories, we can appreciate that ghosts serve Oliphant's purpose to explore matters of gender and that, in most of her stories, ghosts represent women who have no voice in society, such as Willie's mother. She shows us women who do not comport themselves as society requires them

to behave—they are imaginative and rebel, and so they are punished for it, like Old Lady Mary, or Maud, who is excessively proud, or the young girl in the window sill. However, it is certain that they rewrite society by gently subverting patriarchal rules.

Not in a gentle and subtle way as Oliphant, Vernon Lee speculates with gender matters and the role of women at the end of the Victorian period. Her ghosts are *femmes fatales*, i.e. assertive women, who are a great menace for masculine power. First of all, fatal women do not always have human form—Oriana, the Snake Lady, speaks for itself; she has a snake form, but for one hour when she is described as the most beautiful lady: “a damsel, richly dressed and beautiful beyond compare.” (34) Necessarily, fatal women had to be extremely beautiful in order to appeal to men’s sexual desires and dominate them by this means. The same happens with the other fatal women of Lee’s tales; the Moorish Infanta, whose orientalism, together with her attractiveness, is a source for Don Juan’s libido is said to be: “more beautiful than Oriana ... than Gradasilia ... than Helen of Sparta ... than Venus herself” (216); what is more, young Alice’s uncanny beauty, which is the reason for men staring at her, is described as: “The most marvellous creature, ... I have ever met: a wonderful elegance, exotic, far-fetched, poignant, an artificial, perverse sort of grace ... exquisite and uncanny” (3). As unearthly spirits, the only task they have on earth is to defy the established norms and rewrite women’s roles because they represent the New Woman of the time. Assertive, brave, defiant, redemptive, destructive and protective, it does not matter what they are like because they are always doomed to failure inasmuch as society overcomes them in all aspects. Alice is killed by her husband in an attack of jealousy; Oriana is

dismembered by *de facto* powers; and the Moorish Infanta is refused on behalf of the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows.

If we draw a thin line of comparison between our writers, we can observe, at first sight, the alteration in the figures of ghosts in all the authoresses. Gaskell's ghosts still continue in the tradition of patriarchal spirits where women do not have any chances of beating men because they are disorganised as a group and are not strong enough. Also at first sight, it gives the impression that Amelia Edwards does not explore gender matters, but it is certain that she rejects the rigid morality of Victorians. Her ghosts are sure and assertive, they are really aware of what they want to achieve. Oliphant is in line with Edwards as she also criticises Victorian morality by means of her ghosts, but within the family. With Vernon Lee, we situate ghosts at the other extreme to Gaskell's—Lee shows assertive, valiant women who represent all that men can fear in a woman, although they are the most beautiful ones.

7. 6. Genius loci

One of the conventions of Gothic writing is the setting where the narrations occurs, as well as all the typical elements of these Gothic places, so characteristic of the style of the excess and transgression, as Fred Botting says. It may be rather hackneyed finding characters in Gothic fiction in a bizarre place; this place can be 'the other', the 'uncanny' element—which is as distinct as being considered mysterious and terrific. This space can be sometimes menacing and hostile, as well as fierce; or it may be sexually tantalising or appealing. Sometimes, it can be even a prison, as we have already seen in some examples of women's imprisonment.

In *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole transforms his own house into a simulated Gothic castle, which is turned into a fantastic territory that was imitated by many writers. Walpole showed the enigmatic features of antiquity as a spirit of place which created horror and came in the form of bizarre and fearsome buildings. Years later, more or less in 1790, many novelists continued the path Walpole had initiated. Nevertheless, one of the notable initiators of the Female Gothic, Ann Radcliffe, rediscovered some *genius loci* conventions. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), she takes the name of a fictional Italian castle placed on the bleak mountainsides of the Apennine Mountains. She never placed her stories in English territories; she made use of her travels to recreate her settings. In a similar way, Charlotte Dacre follows the path Radcliffe initiates and, in *Zofloya*, Dacre uses the sublime, like many other women writers of the Female Gothic. In this story, the sublime comes to reinforce the character's strength, motivate her and avoid fears. In Dacre's *Zofloya* it is the sublime which describes Victoria's feelings.

In general terms, we can appreciate that, out of the four writers in this study, only two of them will find their *genius loci* in England and, more concretely, within the domestic sphere—often, the family house: Gaskell and Oliphant. Meanwhile, the other two, Edwards and Lee, will be reluctant to place their tales in England and they will use other sceneries.

7.6.1. Haunted houses

Gaskell's short stories partake in the tradition of the old, haunted house; and, as an illustration, "The Old Nurse's Story" occurs in an old mansion which is haunted, both on the inside and on the outside. No sooner has Hester, the

nurse, the property in sight that she starts giving a vivid description of it. At first sight, the garden is not taken care of, only the front path is tidied up. On the other hand, Hester depicts the house evoking an obsolete style of life, according to the state of the garden outside and the furniture inside. She says the house was “desolate” and “grander than I expected” (4), but it is full of pieces of furniture like “old-fashioned sofas” (5) Apart from that, there is a symbiosis between the state of the Furnivall family representing the patriarchal power, and that of the family inside that need shelter. The house, devoured by the forest and coming to the end, is the symbol of the end itself. In this senior house, to be precise in the main hall, the deeds will be reenacted.

There is a similitude between this description of the house and the garden with the display of the family house of the Okehurst in Vernon Lee’s “Oke of Okehurst”. Vernon Lee does not usually set her short stories in England, but “Oke of Okehurst” is an exception. At the beginning, the narrator is depicting the English countryside and goes so far as to identify his own mood to that of the landscape. As there is a “heavy downpour” and the ground is muddy, he feels that his “spirits sank lower and lower” (5) as he comes closer to the house he imagines as ghastly. Likewise, Gaskell assimilates the exterior decay of the estate to that of the family, Lee also finds the omen of the end of the lineage in the landscape around. Outside the house, there is an oak, with “only a handful of leaves”, which we interpret as the Oke’s genealogy. It is also in the house where the incidents take place, though the building has pleasantly impressed the painter. Nevertheless, being “overcome by the beauty” (6) of the house, the painter depicts a sublime building which changes his mood for the better. But, despite all, it will be inside the yellow room where the “Italian” style

creates a refined atmosphere and where the most infamous acts are performed. As it can be inferred, it seems to be the place which may induce the narrator's feelings and transform the characters as they enter the room: "To sit in a room like the one I was sitting in ... is a special kind of voluptuousness, peculiar and complex and indescribable, like the half drunkenness of opium and hashish" (7)

Apart from being in England, where Oliphant places her narrations, she sets them inside the domestic life and the like, i.e. she can choose the family house or an especial part of it—which is usually the drawing-room. The house is important, but domesticity is more than vital, and, as a result, it is constantly present. In works like *Old Lady Mary*, everything happens at Lady Mary's home, although she is also in heaven; in "The Portrait", it happens in the drawing-room of the family's old house. Thus, was this not significant enough that Oliphant was displaying what she really knew best? Of course it was—domesticity was Oliphant's kingdom, but, as an informed woman and the head of the family, she never ceased to fight for feminist causes, drawing attention to the double standards that undermined women as thinking, rational beings, with equally great possibilities of contributing to society, as their male counterparts. It is through the ghost that these women exorcise their troubles and enigmas. Taking into account that to exorcise is to expel evil from one's body or mind, then, by writing and with the help of ghosts, they could dismiss all their torments.

7.6.2. Landscapes

Some of the stories by Edwards we have dealt with in this study touch upon life in England, although she never depicts domestic matters in this

country. In point of fact, when she does locate her stories in England, she circumvents contemporary domesticity completely. How is it possible then that she can achieve such frightening passages? Her favourite places to set the scenes seem to be those of extreme isolation, either physical or psychological; it is there where the worst events happen or are predicted. For this purpose, she sets the plots in inhospitable parts of the country, like in “The Phantom Coach”, which is staged in the middle of “a bleak wide moor in the far north of England”, or as in “Was it an Illusion?”, where the narrator says: “a West of England district ... what a policeman would call 'a new beat', up in the North”, i.e. in an unknown, remote place. As for “The Four-Fifteen Express”, the story occurs in “Dumbleton Manor, Clayborough, East Anglia”. This story was written to commemorate the progress of the railway and the genius locus is found in the railway station and the train compartment. These are elements of a new class and a new society, which threatens the old one, and that Edwards knew so well.

One can only imagine what Edwards might have brought into her works had she been able to enjoy her life as a man, with all the privileges she could have afforded. Yet, her portrayal of scenes taken from men’s lives suggests that she was not deprived of an insight into such lives, undoubtedly gained by means of her various intrepid adventures. Sometimes she uses rhetoric, like in “The phantom Coach”, to make our adrenaline surge—the reader is tensely following the journey inside the Coach at night, with three corpses and nobody there to fetch help. Her use of language is more aggressive than Oliphant’s, who is more delicate in her phrasing. Similarly, Edwards also transcribes the words a servant utters and it renders the understanding of “The Phantom

Coach” a bit tougher, hence obliging the reader to concentrate heavily. This device makes us feel lost, just as the character, who is listening to the same words and following a strange man amidst the English moors at night. In other stories, she uses expressions in other languages in order to render patent the differences between the various people in that place.

A curious coincidence is that both writers have a taste for reflecting the language of the illiterate and poor, but their intention is to recreate an atmosphere of the place where they are. On some occasions, Oliphant writes down the words some of the characters utter, as if she was doing a phonetic transcription; such is the case with one of the characters in “The Open Door”, which helps her to recreate a real context and to draw the main traits of the character. One can imagine a house in the middle of a small village and get immersed in the events. Everything takes place in one of the Gothic common places—the ruins of the previous house. In a city of Scotland named ‘Brentwood’, the ruins are described as “picturesque” (173) with a “tower ... overgrown with ivy”—all the ingredients of a Gothic story. But, as a writer of the Female Gothic, even the ruins are sublime though she does not reach excess. In “The Library Window”, she depicts the perfect group of Scottish ladies talking to the girl and using words in their language, as if she were submerging the reader into the situation. In these circumstances, the reader can appreciate how the girl is surrounded by Scottish heritage and outside the scenery lies the “broad High Street of St Rule’s, which is a fine street, wide and ample, and very quiet” (363)

Apart from England, there is another place which is the maximum expression of magnificence—heaven. It is necessary to say that Oliphant uses

heaven for her short ghost stories; and, in our selection of her stories, there is a tale—*Old Lady Mary*—where it is described. Amazingly enough, heaven is not a place for Oliphant; when Old Mary asks her guide if they are in it, he answers: “‘That is a word,’ he said, ‘which expresses rather a condition than a place.’” However, all that Old Mary finds there are pleasant sentiments: she feels better physically and she can find people she has not seen for a long time.

Aware of transporting her readers to another country, Oliphant sets *A Beleaguered City* in the village of Semur; and, by evoking the popular knowledge of France, she depicts the place as: “It is not necessary for me to describe what summer is in the Haute Bourgogne. Our generous wines, our glorious fruits ...as a perpetual fête” (8). This pastoral and bucolic atmosphere is brusquely truncated by the arrival of a black and dense cloud of mist: “unusual greyness wrapped earth and sky”. Consequently, this affects citizens with a “depressing effect” (9). As well as Radcliffe, Edwards and Lee, Oliphant made use of her recollections of her travels, especially in this tale.

If we come back to Edwards, she has other tales which are placed in other parts of Europe, such as the Alps or Italy. She does not need darkness to make a spirit return to our world—the spirit can appear in the middle of a lovely landscape in the Alps when the light of the sun is strong or in the most beautiful mountains in Italy or Switzerland. It is in those moments when we can recall Radcliffe’s use of the sublime, as we can see in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:

On every side appeared the majestic summits of the Pyrenees, some exhibiting tremendous crags of marble, whose appearance was changing every instant, as the varying lights fell upon their surface; others, still higher, displaying only snowy points, while their lower steeps were covered almost invariably with forests of pine, larch, and oak, that stretched down to the vale. (web)

We had already mentioned Edwards' abilities to describe landscapes because she relished painting and was asked to write travel guides, but, when comparing both authors, Radcliffe and Edwards, we see the similarities between them are extraordinary:

'It's like a stray fragment of Arcadia.' ... a mere rugged path winding steeply upwards in a soft green shade, among large forest trees and moss-grown rocks covered with patches of velvety lichen. A little streamlet ran singing beside it all the way, now gurgling deep in ferns and grasses; now feeding a rude trough made of a hollow trunk; now crossing our road like a broken flash of sunlight; now breaking away in a tiny fall and foaming out of sight, only to re-appear a few steps further on.

There are more tales that are set in central Europe, namely in Switzerland and the Dolomites: "Sister Johanna's Story" and "In the Confessional". It seems Edwards uses the same technique in all of them. From our point of view, the sublime makes the apparition or the catastrophe seem stronger in opposition to it. The crumbling of the tunnel in the middle of such scenery is magnified. Such a picturesque village like that of Grödner Thal in the Dolomites, which is depicted as a travelling cinema, is disturbed by a crime. A landscape made of "a smiling country, studded with picturesque hamlets" is the witness of a phantom who is pennant, which makes the apparition seem more devilish than it is.

There are other stories that are set in Italy: "An Engineer" and "The Story of Salome". In the first, "An Engineer", the genius loci inclines both friends to penetrate in the exoticism of the city and to love the same woman—a representative woman of that land. The sublime, the exotic has made them loose their senses because the characters are not used to it and they do not resist:

It was a wonderful change for two Birmingham operatives fresh from the Black Country. The fairy city, with its crescent background of Alps; the port crowded with strange shipping; the marvelous blue sky and the bluer sea; the painted houses on the quays; the quaint cathedral ...

Using this time a typical symbol of the Gothic, a cemetery, Edwards transports us to a Venetian sunset in a way that readers forget where they are and that the narrator is seeing a ghost: "The sun was now just going down—had gone down, indeed, behind a bank of golden-edged cumuli—and was flooding earth, sea, and sky with crimson. It was at this hour that I saw her." In this case—like in Radcliffe's *Victoria*—the protagonist gets her power from the sublime. It is at that wonderful, magical hour when she appears.

7.6.3. Time

Just as places are enigmatic, gloomy or secret in Gothic fiction, so are some characteristic epochs. Gothic times are those considered as moments of transition. Those moments can be very variable because it can be seen as a sunset or a deeper change like the transition between the medieval period and the Renaissance, or a period of progress which entails revolutionary changes like the *fin-de-siècle*.

First of all, Oliphant comes from the Gothic tale and Scottish ballad tradition and she uses the end of the day to set the scenes. Language is her strength: using metaphors and images of light and darkness, she can play with our minds and enable us to see the other world as if we were the characters in a play. She uses light and darkness for the encounter with little Willie, where the light symbolises the religion or faith the minister is capable of transmitting to poor Willie. Darkness is the 'reason', symbolised by the doctor. Light and

darkness appear again in “The Portrait” because light is needed to see a picture; and, of course, the most remarkable work where she masterfully plays with the changes of light is in “The Library Window”. Oliphant uses this time of the day, when the light is so dim, because, according to Scottish tradition, at this time of day, the dead are able to come to our world.

In Lee’s short ghost’s stories of the 1890 until 1899, she developed a picturesque narrative recalling those of Ann Radcliffe and Amelia Edwards. This florid prose opened up a way to her supernatural. She was cognizant thereof, and, with her words, she formed a precious ornate style with the power of suggesting what cannot be contemplated in reality, but in fantasy.

Having lived in different countries, Lee thought that the genius of the place could provoke especial impressions on the reader and arouse emotions which could be evoked by the place or by the time. Her genius locus is brought to an excess and this profusion of elements, things and ornaments constitute the uncanny, the horrific and the mysterious. We are aware that we have treated the genius locus in this part of the study as if it were to be found only in houses, in landscapes or in other tropes of nature; but there is also another possibility: that the tale is abounding in the different elements.

As Lee lived in Italy, she could use Mediterranean and Italian venues as she pleased; she does not use the grandiosity of mountains or forests like Radcliffe and Edwards—she prefers orchards and small paradises instead. However, she is able to bring these venues to the excess with a prolific prose, in line with her descriptions. Not being enough, at the same time, she makes use of a legend from medieval times to complete her genius loci in “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady”. In the dark times of the crusades, a woman is

transformed into a serpent and she is to haunt all the men of the House of Luna. The story, told years later, at about 1680, altogether with the landscape and the reflection of life in the tapestry—which is central to the tale—, stands in sharp contrast with what the boy, Alberic, can see through the window. In the tapestry all is magnificent:

consisted of beautiful garlands of leaves and fruits and flowers ... acorned oak leaves: sheaves of lilies and heads of poppies, gourds and apples and pears, and hazelnuts and mulberries, wheat ears and beans and pine tufts.... various birds, big and little butterflies on the lilies, snail, squirrels, mice, rabbits ... (2-3)

The vision of his ancestors and the 'spirit of their place' will be totally opposite to the dead nature Balthasar's place offers him—his grandfather has substituted life by art. In 'Sparkling Waters', the garden things are natural, but, when the orchard is described, it also touches the excess: "other birds, wonderful white and gold creatures, some of them with brilliant tails and scarlet crests" (13) Inside the dukedom, there are two residences and 'Sparkling Waters' is described as belonging to "the barbarous days of the Goths" (14) The whole citadel where 'Sparkling Waters' is placed reminds us of a Romantic site. Alberic can see the place is similar to the one he had seen in the tapestry: "It had battlements, a drawbridge, a great escutcheon with the arms of Luna, just like the castle in the tapestry." (13) Contrary to general belief, this Gothic place exercises influence on Alberic and it is here where Oriana can educate him. We would venture that Alberic is the most affected one by the genius loci because, depending on where he is, he can act and feel and in 'Sparkling Waters' there is a profound liaison between the place and the young man.

From the sierras of Grenada, as though it were a film by means of travelling, Lee leads us to the inside of the church of the Virgin of the Seven Daggers. The travelling finishes in such a little space as the Virgin's niche. Nevertheless, the spirit of the place is reinforced by the time of the events, which is the Spain of the seventeenth century. Making use of her visits around the world, like Radcliffe and Edwards, she describes the Spanish baroque style and the Alhambra. As there are two antagonist women, we find antithetical genius loci. The Moorish Infanta inhabits the entrails of the earth under the Alhambra.

Lee does not show any liking for Spanish baroque art; consequently, when she describes the genius locus where the Virgin is, we can appreciate such a list of terms which are too excessive for the purpose:

jagged lines everywhere as of spikes for exhibiting the heads of traitors ... But the grandeur of the church is not merely terrific—it is also gallant and ceremonious: everything on which labour can be wasted is laboured, everything on which gold can be lavished is gilded (195)

By using the term 'terrific', she makes a pun that evinces her refusal. This notwithstanding, in the middle of this splendour, the Virgin is identified as a redemptive figure.

The lavish and luxurious Infanta inhabits the inhospitable passages of femininity. The symbiosis is fantastic, as well as the symbols of the cave, of the fire, the pennant souls and the animals. It seems to be the entrance of the Averno:

Don Juan Gusman del Pulgar plunged down a narrow corridor, as black as the shaft of a mine ... The air was icy damp and heavy with a vague choking mustiness ... the smell of dead bats. Hundreds of these creatures fluttered all round ... grazed his face with their claws, their damp furry coats, and clammy leathern wings. (208)

The sublime has disappeared in this tale, only the excess remains to describe the 'spirit of place'. Perhaps this genius locus, in an antithetical way to the place of the Virgin, undermines Don Juan's strength. Coherent as it is, what weakens Don Juan makes the Infanta feel powerful before him.

As we have seen in this part of the study, the four writers are peculiar in their own way of writing, but there are certain elements which are common for all of them. Although they cover all the century, some features of the Female Gothic are always present. Their ghosts denounce society and they find themselves prisoners in an emerging world of technology and materialism, where spirituality has no place. Regardless of their lives, their creeds or sexual tendencies, all of them raise their voices against injustice.

8. CONCLUSION

The present study confirms previous findings about the Female Gothic gender and comes up with conclusive evidence that endorses that many women writers were able to face the 'uncanny' thanks to short ghost tales. The results of the research, throughout this work, contribute to reinforce the idea that, by dint of confronting all the evils of society, women writers of the Female Gothic subverted Victorian moral principles.

One of the questions which has been very shocking when working with Gaskell, Oliphant, Edwards and Lee is that each writer had been previously studied in a different way from the one we offer in this paper. At first, Gaskell was always referred to as Mrs. Gaskell because of being a priest's wife, which necessarily conditioned the way to tackle her works. Here, her marital status is seen as a burden which barred her from being free. Whereas Margaret Oliphant has been the centre of interest of many scholars, she was also looked on as the widow matriarch and was also referred to as Mrs Oliphant. Amelia Edwards had been put aside. It is strange Edwards did not awake the same interest over time. Nevertheless, we have to remember that she was a pioneer in her life, when the enterprises she undertook were hardly conceivable from all perspectives. Edwards' life was hard in the sense that she never found a place within it for a family and a home—instead of that, she had a variety of alternative company during her life. Yet, still during her days, she did enjoy the admiration and recognition she richly deserved for her work, her writings and her ideas. She could additionally demonstrate to the entire world that she was completely independent and a feminist. Lee has been object to different approaches, ranging from critics of art to literary critics. The analysis of her

plays has ratified she is the missing link between the Victorian and the modernist Female Gothic. As it can be seen, they were among the first women to fight against the patriarchal forces of society, albeit each one in their own way. We have to consider that the majority of Lee's stories were written between 1886 and 1889, and they follow the style of the Decadents, hence being categorised, as Showalter posits Lee, as one of the 'daughters of the Decadence'. They toyed with such a high degree of perversion that they were denigrated as New Women writers, among whom stood Vernon Lee.

Society was tyrannical and cruel to women, and they were excluded from the public sphere. However, since they deserved a better treatment than they had, and they proved not to conform to the role destined for them, they went on to overcome their exclusion in an original way—by writing. Gaskell wrote in spite of paying a high price: nervous breakdowns. Oliphant was able to support her own family and her brother's thanks to her publishing books, reviews and short stories. As for Edwards, she managed to sustain herself, to earn money and to lead the life she wanted, as an Egyptologist and as an adventurer. Lee wrote and achieved financial security to buy a house and help her brother at the end of his life. All of them, through their ghost tales, gave us a complete panorama of Victorian customs, manners, and ideology; and, in the middle of such a controversial period, they portrayed the place of women in the middle of that world of contradictions which Victorian times engendered. Similarly to the other Gothic writers, Vernon Lee deals with gender matters—she was also suffering herself because of being homosexual and a woman writer who depended on a masculine world. Nevertheless, it is true that, in contrast with other writers, she made use of parody to subvert the gender roles in society.

Women writers of short ghost stories subvert the norms in a kind of discourse which seems to be in accordance with rationality and capitalism, but, in reality, it is destabilizing both of them and denouncing fears of gender and class. Vernon Lee attacks bourgeois values and beliefs by undertaking opposite attitudes and a different model of expression. She becomes the exponent of the Decadence because she injected perversity in her art.

As women writers, they could be satisfied enough, because, although they had to come up against many daunting obstacles in the period, they demonstrated they were part of a corpus of great writers by getting their work into print and obtaining a following of readership. It is certain that all of them had to deal with men as publishers. Gaskell dealt with her editors and with Dickens, who was rather critical of her, and encouraged her to write short stories in order not to disregard her family. However, it is equally a truism that he admired her work. She published all her books and the bitter criticism directed at her novels affected her mental health. Gaskell coincided with Oliphant and was a defender of the role of the mother inside the family—she explored the topic of the absent mother and of collaboration between women.

Oliphant lived a hard life, sad and with many obstacles, and, moreover, she had to write at high speed to earn money, and, when she needed an advance to survive, she had to resort to her editor. Nevertheless, she was able to write subversive literature through her ghost stories in such a subtle way that sometimes it is difficult to recognise. Her ghost stories were controversial and admired by women and her success was to pour her suffering in her stories. At the same time, she denounced gender matters in her ghost stories due to her awareness of women's cultural oppression and consequent feminist ideas. She

explored the concept of the uncanny when femininity and motherhood were absent. She sets her ghosts among us and, at times, she demonstrates that the destiny of the dead lies in the hands of the living.

Edwards published short stories and travel books: as she chose to write, she was able to earn a living. From all the writers we deal with, she was the one who was not so tied to editors in order to publish her books. It is also true that her biography is not as accurate as the other writer's biography, which may leave this open to debate.

It is also known that Lee had to travel many times to England in order to look for editors for her writings. From the four writers in our study, Vernon Lee was the least popular in her time. This reaction from readers was due to the fact that her tales demanded a high level of culture and background. Not at any moment do we intend to say that the other writers were not at her level, but her prose was not for ordinary people whatsoever. Her public was asked for culture, leisure, cosmopolitanism and intellect—she wrote for an elite. Perhaps these elements made her different from the other women writers.

It has been a hard task to evince that short ghost stories have allowed women writers a certain liberty they did not enjoy in real life. By means of fantasy, they were able to criticise the social system they lived in, thanks to the independence the genre afforded them. The first thing we have clear is that the 'Female Gothic' is different from the 'Male Gothic', and the main point of this disparity is that the Female Gothic deals with feelings and imagination. Taking all the tales together, we can say that the genre is about the dead, which, as a topic, was deemed irrational in its time. Moreover, the Female Gothic cannot be presupposed as a different genre due to the origin—it also stems from the

Gothic tradition and it uses many of its elements, as we have appreciated in the examination of the works of our writers.

With a sample of several tales by the four writers we are concerned with, the plots of the tales are similar in the sense that there is a ghost who comes back to earth to solve a situation, never to frighten, but to help. Spirits in women's ghost stories always have a task to carry out and are, broadly speaking, benign. As we have seen in the tales, phantoms need sometimes somebody to help them perform an act in order to be liberated from their bond to the earth. With regard to the topics treated, each authoress had a definite taste for one. Gaskell is similar to Oliphant and deals with domestic affairs. Edwards chooses technical development and Lee directly touches on women's questions, being the most defiant of them all.

Characters are the second element in a tale, which provide us with clues for our analysis. In Gaskell's tales, a dominant and cruel male, whose voice is the law, can be seen as destroying the feminine universe around him. However, there are women who search for solace in other women's company. Oliphant's characters, who were mainly women, and Edwards' characters, who were mainly men, did altogether feel the oppression of society as individuals. The same happens with Lee's men and women, who, in one way or another, are both under the stringent conditions society imposes on them, and, in addition, they are regarded as menacing.

The reason why those men or individuals feel repressed and coerced by society is due to the fact that not every individual abides by the rules. Let us say that Gaskell's male is the oppressed father who puts social prejudice before her sister's happiness. Oliphant's women are completely suppressed by patriarchy,

which makes them invisible and turns them into ghosts because they cannot obey the rules. Such is the case for Lee's women, who turn into animals or are reified. And, finally, Edwards' men also suffered from being earthbound until things were repaired due to the double morality of the Victorian period.

Characters tend to represent the two ideals of Victorian society, the perfect man and woman. This notwithstanding, the present work has proved that both women and men suffered from a high level of anxiety, to the extent that they had a fragmented personality. Sometimes, nothing good derived from this excision of their identity, but it was a common feature among women. Oliphant's women tried to represent the 'Angel in the House', though she lets us see that it is not contradictory or unreasonable to be independent. In the context of the tales, the role of the mother is deemed the most important aim for women. No place for other types of women, overall for Lee's *femme fatales*, who are dismantled by patriarchal forces.

By and large, it was assumed that it was easy for women writers to portray the characters of women. This could be the result of the implication women who were in touch with one another, and, second, because the two sexes were not permitted to mix freely in polite society. Moreover, there were certain topics which were thought of being exclusively dealt with by men or by women—finally, it was actually difficult to portray the character of a man if you did not live his life style.

A conclusion about the feminine characters is that it does not matter the writer we elect because all women share an important trait, which is the ability to become a model for women of their time, regardless of their role. We can assume that, in spite of the conception patriarchy has on Gaskell, Oliphant and

Lee's protagonists, her females always stay true to their own beliefs and creeds—it does not matter if in their way they subvert and reverse all the masculine powers. By dissecting all feminine personalities in the tales, we have commented that, undeniably, female characters have been an interesting case of psychological study that has embodied femininity. What has been the most empowering trait is the ability Female Gothic protagonists have displayed to rise archetypes of former female weakness and submission against the established rules.

By paying attention to our four writers' tales, we can conclude that, concerning the depiction of masculinity, there is a vast amount of male representatives in all aspects and the general archetype was accurately achieved. Oliphant knew men very thoroughly, because she was able to observe them at home with her husband, her brother, her two sons and also her nephew—all having proved incompetent to solve problems, although this ineptitude was not the rendering she gave of manhood. Oliphant's men do not have the same sensibility that women almost innately possess, and are not able to see what she dubs 'the heart of nature'. She places them outside domesticity, and it is by means of male characters and their way of thinking and acting in the face of problems that she rejects the notion of rationalism. For her part, Gaskell also knew men because of her brother, her father and husband, but they were not as Oliphant's. Gaskell's story gives us only a little clue of what she thought of men, and we conclude she would not probably have a high opinion. By using other stories and some information of her biographer, Gérin, she felt occasionally overburdened with marriage. Coinciding with them, Lee had many friends who were men of arts and famous writers who introduced her to the

literary world. Apart from this, she also nursed her brother for the most part of her life, and it seems she did not think about men very positively. She used her acquaintances for her books, yet she usually satirised them. Amelia Edwards spent much of her life living like men, enjoying the freedoms as a man of the period, but refusing to wear trousers despite being in the desert. Taken together, all the portrayals of her men characters are as if she had been in contact with them all her life. Therefore, Edwards' men are completely free to go wherever they want, and are depicted as middle-class men in the public sphere—in business, politics and the like—, but they are not exempt from having their feelings oppressed or being marginalised within society—like the scientist in “The Phantom Coach”—, if they do not abide by the rules. Her male ghosts are also earthbound if they do not behave as gentlemen. Her works show us a great variety of knowledge about many matters—she was cultivated in painting, music and literature. Probably, as a woman in a patriarchal society, she found that, even in fiction, being a woman was too repressive for her and, thus, she chose men for most of her characters. In Edwards' ghost stories, there is a wide gallery of men who display the customs, ideals, business expertise, and values of the epoch. All of them belong to the middle class and are atypical of men of reason. Ironically, she nevertheless rejects rationalism as Oliphant conceived it.

Men show themselves as sceptics when they are the narrators of the tale, especially in Edwards' stories. They confess to be mere recorders of events who tend to make criticisms about rationalism, science and industry. However, narrators in Oliphant's tales are also men who belong to the Victorian technological world, but who are not as rational as in Edwards' and nowhere

near as sceptical. Each man is the representative of one of those characteristics and some men, like priests—who are faithful to religion—, are in the middle. With this line-up of chroniclers, we can intuit the atmosphere of the spirituality versus materialism. Being radically different from Edwards and Oliphant's narrators, Lee presents us the narrator, who is the epitome of society who despises women, and he condemns females with their biased view. Prejudices against women are not only surreptitious but it was outspoken.

All the findings in the study have led us to the conclusion that ghosts were the metaphor our writers used to denounce social conditions. It is the silent weapon to attack patriarchy by means of self-assertion. It does not matter the gender of the phantom because the purpose is the same—to denounce society. Edwards' ghosts are human and they do not frighten the reader at all, and they are sometimes so good-looking and smartly-dressed that they seem real. Some of them may be termed 'restless spirits'; they wish to report a crime and ultimately seek peace. Oliphant's spirits are gentle and sweet, children, mothers, wives. They capture the ghost-seer's emotion because sometimes it is familiarly related to the person. She denounces social conditions as well as Gaskell. Lee, on her part, does the same as her peers—she denounces women's conditions. The dissimilarity is that her spirits are not sweet and gentle like Oliphant's, but so self-assertive that they do not achieve their aim. Putting aside the idiosyncratic features each woman's ghost presents, we can infer all of them are the instrument for subversion.

The events depicted take place in different settings. All our women relate the 'spirit of place' or *genius loci* with the event and the atmosphere of the venue. We have also established relations with the 'Sublime' our woman were

so keen on. This 'Sublime' takes the form of quotidian settings, domestic in Oliphant's case. Although Oliphant comes from a strong Scottish tradition, she is capable of incorporating Gothic elements in her setting and plays with the language of metaphors with light and shadows. Most of Edwards' tales occur outside England and she makes use of the 'Sublime', reminding us of Radcliffe. Edwards conjures up fear and suspense by means of sceneries and landscapes that identify with the mood of the character and she achieves this to great effect. Lee's characters gain force taking it from the 'Sublime'. Settings like Grenade and the Alhambra reinforce femininity in the protagonists. Also, the little recess in the 'Sparkling Waters' mansion infuses confidence in them.

Social and gender anxieties have frequently been reflected in literature. We can acknowledge that Female Gothic tales are abundant in examples where the position of these females in the social panorama of the time is patent. Short ghost stories were like a modern platform for all those worries, where there was a collective feminine conscience through which communication among women—which was socially forbidden—could be achieved. This notwithstanding, it was a genre which was not considered serious enough for the subversive purposes it showed. Always undervalued, or at least most of the times, the Female Gothic was thought of as a genre for women, as many Gothic novels can still be qualified for young women nowadays—some illustrative instances are those of *Twilight* or the *Millenium Saga*.

Nevertheless, a question still hovers in the air—is the Female Gothic still appealing to scholars? Perhaps, the writers analysed in this study are dismissed as something belonging to an ancient time. But such an assertion is nowhere near true. After all the ideas analysed in the study, we venture that, as

far as an opposition of sexes exists, the Female Gothic will continue to be interesting and attractive to scholars. To put it more simply, it can be considered that the opposition between sexes has been the main source of the oppression women have suffered; and, within the patriarchy, there is still the masked existence of male preponderance in many aspects of modern life. But what is undeniable is that nineteenth-century Female writers are completely up-to-date, and we may even be flabbergasted at discovering that some among us still pander to the same prejudices people aired when the works were written. Heroines could be considered impious because of feeling attracted to a man who was different from them on the grounds of race, class or religion. There are many open gaps nowadays in patriarchy based on gender construction—the remnants of an old system, like the one which Gaskell described in her tale, and which seems to be far away, has nevertheless persisted throughout the time. Society has tried to show that those questions referring to female oppression are no longer present in our society, but the only change, which is not easily palpable at the present time, has been to develop a more refined and sophisticated code to perpetuate male power. We can observe nowadays how the opposition of genders is favourable to men, who do prevail, to the detriment of women, who are discriminated against. The main consideration about this paper is that the Female Gothic and women writers of the genre do remain a prolific field of research, as there are still many texts and many women writers which have not been tackled appropriately and from whom most readers would derive extreme pleasure.

It is equally a truism that the Female Gothic has many shared characteristics which form the tradition of the gender; nevertheless, each of the

writers reflects her own life and injustices in their respective stories. Despite all the studies scholars can attempt about the Female Gothic, we can venture that all the women writers of the genre form the different sides of a tetrahedron—each woman with their own personal ghosts but tending to the same aim: defy an unfair society.

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