Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in Western Tradition

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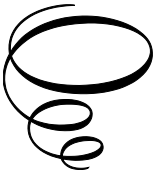
No More Miss Perfect

Edited by
María Dolores García Ramos
and María José Ramos Rovi

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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INTRODUCTION

MARÍA LUISA CALERO VAQUERA

If preserving the memory of past events is a necessary requirement to understand the facts of the present, in the specific case of women's history it is a requirement to delve into that particular part of history in order to obtain an accurate-as-possible image of their development and, consequently, to calibrate their current circumstances. Evaluating with wisdom the social situation of women in our time and the Western context is only achieved by considering with vigilant care the route: its variable stages, routes, milestones, stops along the way and changing landscapes. And we will have to stop at each point of this trajectory, especially those most remote and marginal, where traces of women's life and production may have remained, without forgetting the external and contextual elements that have conditioned their growth as free human beings and as full citizens integrated into the community. Only in this way can Oscar Wilde's well-known phrase be carried out: "The only duty we have with history is to rewrite it."

Writing the history of women to rewrite, incidentally, the history of humanity is the aim of many works published in Western countries in recent years. In this growing catalogue we can include the present volume, which not by chance has been coordinated by two competent historians: professors María José Ramos Rovi and María Dolores García Ramos from the University of Córdoba. From this crucial historiographical perspective, they have managed to bring together a solvent research team whose members come from different areas of knowledge and universities: contemporary history, art history, didactics of social sciences, didactics of language and literature, English philology, and translation. This interdisciplinary warp constitutes a mosaic of different perspectives that is very appropriate for achieving the purpose of the book, which is nothing more than offering a set of studies about some advanced women who, at certain moments in the Western tradition, broke with the stereotypes that are usually considered typical of the female gender.

This is the case of the seven Spanish women who star in the documented chapter signed by the art historian Alicia Vallina Vallina, "Spanish Women in Military History": María Pacheco (c. 1496–1531), leader in the revolt of

the Castilian Comuneros against Carlos I; the conquistador and soldier Inés Suárez (1507–80), known for her remarkable courage in the period of the conquest of Chile; María la Bailadora, who participated as a soldier in the battle of Lepanto in 1571; Isabel Barreto (1567–1612), considered the first woman to hold the position of admiral in the history of navigation; Catherine of Erauso (c. 1585 or 1592–c. 1650), soldier, nun and writer, popularly known as the Nun Ensign; Ana Mª de Soto y Alhama (1775–1833), the first woman to serve in the Marine Battalions; and Raimunda Elías (1911–2001), pioneer as an unpowered flight pilot in Catalonia. This is a sample of "atypical" women with respect to the role assigned to those of their sex who, as can be seen, belong mostly to remote times. And, in a similar thematic line, the article by Noelia Ojeda Muñoz (University of Córdoba) "The Woman that One Must Be: Models of Woman versus Realities in Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War as Portrayed through Visual Propaganda" presents, through the detailed analysis of a selection of speeches, books and posters produced by Spanish anarchism in the 1930s, a new and brave image of the model of woman to which Spanish women should aspire, an image that contrasts with the docile and passive profile with which they have been characterised throughout history.

This demonstrates the value of cultural manifestations as a means to know the circumstances that have accompanied the life of our predecessors. In a prominent place in these cultural expressions is literature, as a source of knowledge of the events that occurred (always with logical caution before the possible presence of elements of fiction), and, in that aspect, an invaluable auxiliary field of history. Thus, the work of Javier Martín Párraga (University of Córdoba), "And History Would Call Me Chingada: Chicano Women Poets and La Malinche Myth," allows us to delve into different interpretations of the disputed figure of La Malinche, who in the conquest of Mexico acted as interpreter of Hernán Cortés, and of whom was later a companion. Faced with the stereotype that has been assigned to her as a traitor of the Aztec people, two poems by Chicano feminist writers (Rosario Castellanos, Carmen Tafolla and Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell) are analysed here that, in the second half of the last century, left us alternative and more lenient visions about this controversial historical figure.

As can be seen, the genre of poetry could not be missing from this volume as a tool used by the writers themselves to confront the patriarchal moulds hitherto dominant in literary canons. This time with reference to the Spanish context, the poet and professor María Rosal Nadales (University of Córdoba) addresses "Demystifying Patriarchal Models in Poetry Written by Women in the Late 20th Century," specifically in 1980s poetry written in Spanish. Its objective is to analyse the different resources that these

contemporary poets use to oppose the patriarchal legacy, and offer in their verses a vision of women much more in line with the reality of the current times. These resources include the use of the autobiographical mask, irony and parody, and the presence of a playful desacralising eroticism.

Two further chapters analyse specific aspects of the work of two nineteenth-century writers in the English language, which, each in its own way, contradict well-known female stereotypes. The article by specialist in English literature Esther Díaz Morillo (UNED) entitled "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': Re-presenting the Sexual in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' in Illustration" analyses the most famous and enigmatic poem – due to the ambiguity of its symbolism – by Christina Rossetti (1830–94), published in 1862, to focus on the feminist iconography present in her verses as well as her possible connections with the current #MeToo protest movement, a suggestive proposal that makes the poem in question topical. On the other hand, a representative text of women's Gothic literature is studied in the chapter "'The Giant Wistaria': A Study of the Female American Gothic in the Nineteenth Century" by Paula Chaves García (University of Córdoba). It is evident here how the author of the ghost story "The Giant Wistaria," the well-known American feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935), uses this and other works as effective instruments of social denunciation that will feed the empowerment of women.

Already in more current times, literary works of a narrative nature continue to appear profusely, whose women protagonists go beyond traditional female roles and archetypes. This is studied in the work of Anna Motisi (University of Córdoba) on "Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*: Translation Analysis from an Interdisciplinary Perspective." In the novel by Calvino, entitled in its language of origin *Se Una Notte D'inverno Un Viaggiatore* (1979), and especially appreciated by critics due to its rhizomatic structure which breaks the linearity of conventional writing in the manner of a hypertext, Anna Motisi analyses its translation into English, focusing on the role played by female characters. Another author, the Senegalese Aminata Sow Fall (b. 1941), is considered one of the pioneers of French-speaking African literature, and built her novel *Un grain de vie et d'espérance* (2001) from a selected series of recipes. The interest of this work lies in the fact of filling an activity as characteristic of women as culinary art with cultural, even ethical and religious content: "Mealtime creates social awareness," writes Aminata Sow Fall. All this is fully reported in the chapter "An Approach to Senegalese 'Art Culinaire' and Its Translation into the Work of Aminata Sow Fall" by the translator and interpreter Manuel Gómez Campos (University of Córdoba).

A new type of written source serves the social sciences in detecting the presence of female stereotypes: the texts of judicial sentences. Raúl Ramírez Ruiz (Professor of Contemporary History at the Rey Juan Carlos University, Madrid) in his article "Women and Crime: The Image of Women in the Texts of Spanish Judicial Sentences of the Early Twentieth Century" investigates part of the judicial archives (specifically the Books of Sentences) of the Provincial Court of Córdoba corresponding to the period 1900–31, to conclude that in the criminal field, as in other places, women were considered – in contrast to the figure of the male – subaltern persons. For example, sometimes they were judged with a certain dose of paternalism, and other times suffered a process of re-victimisation, especially in case of having been subjected to rape or insults. As the author of the study, Raúl Ramírez, has well recorded and interpreted, such judicial behaviours happened at the beginning of the twentieth century, but still resonate with us a century later.

Some of the chapters that make up this volume can be elaborated in the light of the so-called "seventh art," as another cultural manifestation. The study of the art historian María Dolores García Ramos (University of Córdoba) on "Agnès Varda's Career: Fostering Women's Freedom" is right to consider one of the pioneers of female film directors and feminist cinema, and also the only female representative of the group of French filmmakers known as *Nouvelle Vague*. Varda (1928–2019) has gone down in the history of culture as an artist of visual storytelling who from the 1960s made the motto "the personal is political" her own through the particular lives of the female characters in her films and documentaries.

On the other hand, the Anime subgenre is also present in this book, an animation style of Japanese origin that combines graphic art and cinematography: thus, the work of Marina Eva Cabezas Morales (CONCORD Project Researcher), "Beyond Gender: *Himeyuri* or the Battle Girls of Okinawa" focuses on the documentary *Himeyuri* (directed by Shohei Shibata, 2012), which describes the harsh conditions in which a group of teachers and students recruited as nurses for the Imperial Japanese army worked during the Battle of Okinawa (April–June 1945). As the author points out, in the narration of this war episode, gender stereotypes are broken when women assume iconographies typical of the male sex, giving rise to a new representation in which conventions disappear before the priority of accounting for the memory of that conflict.

In the category of visual arts it is possible to include a chapter that investigates a type of audio-visual genre very popular in our days: television series. "Apparent Transgression in the Female Universe of *Dopesick*," by art historian Ana Melendo (University of Córdoba), examines the question

of the female gender as represented in the series *Dopesick*. There is talk here of "apparent transgressions" of gender in the scripts of the aforementioned series, which supposes a shrewd analysis and high critical awareness on the part of the author of the work, which comes to quarantine certain female representations in the audio-visual world, which, not because they are of recent invoice, guarantee the rupture with the well-known stereotypes assigned to women.

A similar assessment can be found in the article written by María José Ramos Rovi (Professor of Contemporary History, University of Córdoba), "Margarita Landi, Charismatic Reporter for *El Caso*: Prototype of the Female Comic *Mary Noticias*." In the aforementioned comic (*Mary Noticias*, 1962–71), the first female comic strip in which women appear with a certain degree of autonomy, the (fictional) protagonist aims to emulate the adventurous spirit of the journalist Margarita Landi (1918–2004), a real character who from the 1960s managed to transcend gender roles thanks to her charisma and audacity in her profession as a journalist of events. However, the protagonist of the comic does not appear totally free from male domination since she does not stop searching for the "ideal boyfriend," and, in her profession, exudes glamour and charm, although it is her partner who, as the repository of intelligence and courage, finally solves the cases. And all this happened despite the fact that, in many cases, it was the women themselves who were involved in the creative process of the female comic, as either cartoonists or scriptwriters. This is how Professor Ramos rightly puts it: "In this way, a paradoxical phenomenon was created: the woman was spoken by herself from a process of internalization of the representation that the man had imposed."

Also the analysis of the songs, as manifestations that are of a certain culture, occupies a place in the choral work that we preface. Precisely in the article "'Pop Singer Kinds Of Girls': Female References for a Young Postfeminist Generation" by Laura Triviño-Cabrera (Didactics of Social Sciences, University of Malaga), the question of what it is to be a feminist and what kind of feminism is appropriate for the times is addressed, having as a background of this debate the process of national selection of singers and songs to represent Spain in the Eurovision Song Contest.

As indicated at the beginning of this introduction, in the description of the events of the past, researchers must not leave aside the external and contextual elements that have conditioned the course of history. Among these conditioning elements, the education that women have received, always less attended and valued than the education of men, as well as the legislative history that has marked the guidelines for this intellectual formation stand out. This line is illustrated by the article by the specialist in

Didactics of Social Sciences, Marta Rojano Simón (University of Córdoba), "From Housewives to Secretaries of State: How 'The Seven Sisters' Enabled Women to Transcend Domesticity," which deals with a specific case in the chronicle of female education in the USA. The "Seven Sister Schools" studied here (Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mount Holyoke College, Radcliffe College, Smith College, Wellesley College and Vassar College), created between 1837 and 1889, have the particularity that they were the first universities founded exclusively for women, with the transcendent consequences that this political decision had for the progressive change of their social and professional status. For her part, and also in the field of education, Belén Calderón Roca (University of Malaga) proposes the study entitled "New Princesses, Witches and Heroines through an Audio-visual Graphic Narrative: Educating Citizens in Values 'In Feminine.'"

In short, this book coordinated by Mª José Ramos Rovi and Mª Dolores García Ramos (whom I thank for their generous trust in commissioning me to write their introduction) has the merit of addressing the deconstruction of some of the most deeply rooted stereotypes – from the Greek στερεός (stereós = "solid") and τύπος (typos = "impression," "mould") – that women have been accused of since the earliest times, as attested by the various documentary sources analysed here. Stereotypes usually point to a lack, to some defect: weakness, docility, lack of intelligence, the passivity of an asexual body, among others. All of this is considered from very different disciplinary perspectives. That is why we predict the wide interest that this volume will arouse in specialists from different fields of knowledge, who will find in the following pages an intelligent tour of some significant chapters of women's history. This is a journey carried out with an evident feminist consciousness, whose conclusions come to demonstrate precisely this fallacy: that female stereotypes are nothing more than stereotypes; that is, mental constructions of the most rancid patriarchy.

Córdoba, December 26, 2022

CHAPTER ONE

"THE GIANT WISTARIA": A STUDY OF THE FEMALE AMERICAN GOTHIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

PAULA CHAVES GARCÍA

Introduction

Gothic literature is a genre that has been widely read and studied throughout the centuries. Practically everyone who has some interest in literature would easily recognise the names of Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, or Edgar Allan Poe, and would probably be able to provide the name of at least one of their works. However, in this paper I am going to focus on the qualities that characterise a subgenre within Gothic literature which has not received nearly as much attention as other traditions belonging to this type of fiction. I am referring to the female American Gothic fiction of the nineteenth century.

The fact that this subgenre had not received enough academic appreciation has been pointed out in the work of several authors and scholars, such as Alfred Bendixen, Wendy K. Kolmar and Lynette Carpenter, and Jeffrey A. Weinstock. It is interesting to note that this lack of appreciation was criticised by Bendixen in *Haunted Women*, published in 1985, where he referred to this subgenre as an "unjustly neglected tradition" (2). Over twenty years later, in *Scare Tactics* (2016), Weinstock calls attention to the importance of this "unacknowledged" subgenre, which he considers has received very little scrutiny (3). This may show that, even though the existence of this body of literature has been recognised, it still needs further study.

My intention is to look closely into the characteristics of this subgenre, and for this purpose I will analyse "The Giant Wistaria," a short story written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1891. Gilman's best-known work "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) is also an excellent example of the female

Gothic; however, I would like to bring attention to "The Giant Wistaria," which is not as well known, and which has not been subject of as many studies as "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Weinstock 8). Although "The Giant Wistaria" has gained recognition in recent years, Eulalia Piñero Gil points out the fact that the story had been unknown by modern readers, until Gloria Biamonte and Gary Scharnhorst included it in their essays on the story (170).

Even though these two tales are examples of the female Gothic, they are not a reflection of the kind of work that Gilman created during her literary life. She was an important leader of the feminist movement and produced mostly non-fictional work, her most famous piece being *Women and Economics* (1898), a book in which she analyses women's position in marriage and society, and offers possible solutions to the inequities that women suffered within these institutions (Gil 167).

Together with Gilman, a great number of prolific authors confirm the female American Gothic of the nineteenth century. To mention a few, whose work Weinstock analyses in *Scare Tactics*, we have Harriet Prescott Spofford, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Anna M. Hoyt, Edith Wharton, Elia Wilkinson Peattie, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward and Gertrude Atherton, among many others, who together constitute a collection of brilliant writers who used the Gothic to portray issues and anxieties that exclusively concerned women, such as the precarious position of women within society, domestic confinement, motherhood and marriage (Lundie 2).

Regarding the contents of this paper, after this introductory passage, there will be a section dedicated to the methodology followed in the elaboration of this essay. Following this, there will be a state-of-the-art section, in which I will comment on the most relevant bibliography used for the writing of this paper, as well as providing background knowledge about the origins and development of Gothic literature, so as to contextualise the main focus of my essay. This point will be developed within "Analysis of results," in which "The Giant Wistaria" will be examined. Following the analysis, there will be a section dedicated to the conclusions that are inferred from the research. Finally, a bibliography including all the resources used in the formulation of this paper will be provided.

To carry out this project, I have followed a qualitative research method, through which I have analysed and interpreted a series of resources which include books, both in physical and electronic form, mostly related to Gothic fiction; literary reviews, articles and collections of Gothic short stories by American women in the nineteenth century were also a fundamental resource in the elaboration of this paper.

First, I searched for bibliographies related to the topic of my project, the female American Gothic literature in the nineteenth century. In the first place, I looked for material that would provide background knowledge about the genesis and constitution of the Gothic as a literary genre; later, I searched for sources related to the origins of the American Gothic and its development in the nineteenth century. Finally, once I had gathered enough information, I proceeded to focus my research on the female branch of American Gothic literature in the nineteenth century, which is the main focus of this paper, and from there I went on to choose the text that I would use for the analysis. The study of this text led to a series of deductions that are collected in the section "Conclusions."

Gathering information regarding the origins and development of the Gothic genre did not present a problem. A wide selection of resources about the female and male traditions of British Gothic literature of the nineteenth century was available. In contrast to this, when I attempted to find bibliographies related to the female tradition of American Gothic literature in the nineteenth century, it was extremely hard to do so: resources regarding this specific topic were extremely scarce. In fact, practically none were accessible in the library, and many of them had to be purchased. This lack of availability of resources may be an indicator of the limited amount of literary study that this subgenre has received. This academic neglect has been criticised by scholars throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; some instances are Alfred Bendixen, Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar in the twentieth century; and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock and Charles L. Crown in the twenty-first.

The objective of this project is to look closely into the characteristics of the female American Gothic of the nineteenth century. For this purpose, I will analyse the short story "The Giant Wistaria." There were two reasons why I chose this text. The first was related to length limitations; since the extension of this paper is limited, I considered that the analysis of a shorter work would lead to clearer and more evident conclusions than trying to examine a longer work, such as a novel. The second reason was because, although it has gained recognition, "The Giant Wistaria" has not been as widely studied as some of Gilman's other works (Weinstock 18).

Gothic Fiction

Regarding its origins, scholars consider that Gothic fiction was established as a literary genre with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which was published in England in 1764 (Hogle "Introduction"). This novel became extremely popular, and it was also the first to use the term "Gothic" in its

title when a second edition was published in 1765. However, in the eighteenth century, the term "Gothic" was not applied in a literary critical sense; it was mostly used to refer to the period of time in which the novel was set. Its use as a literary term was mostly a twentieth-century coinage; one of the best justifications for its use was "by analogy with the Gothic revival in architecture, which also began in the mid eighteenth century." Also, Walpole was recognised as the progenitor of the genre, and, for this reason, the term "Gothic story" gained academic weight (as he used the word "Gothic" in the title of his most famous book) (Clery).

This new kind of fiction emerged as a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment period (O'Sullivan 19). *The Castle of Otranto* was written at a time in which the idea that novels should be realistic, moralising tools was predominant. Walpole considered that fiction had become "too probable," and decided to use his novel to break with this view (Clery). He completely succeeded by combining elements of the supernatural, medieval-chivalric and ancient Greek features (Hogle "Modernity"). Also, Walpole purposely does not provide a useful lesson for life in the novel, in contrast with other authors of his time, such as Samuel Richardson (Clery).

After Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, another remarkable early Gothic novel is Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, first published in 1777 under the title *The Champion of Virtue*. This novel is considered to have consolidated Walpole's tradition (Miles). After Clara Reeve, other authors stand out for their importance in creating Gothic fiction: Sophia Lee with *The Recess, or a Tale of other Times* (1783–5); Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis were also fundamental for the development of the genre (Miles).

Development and Delimitation of Gothic Fiction

Although the writers mentioned above were all important for the creation of the Gothic, three authors were particularly influential in the delimitation of the Gothic as a genre: Walpole, the Aikins, and Sophia Lee (Miles). As Robert Miles explains, each writer contributed to this delimitation in different ways: Walpole added the haunted, usurped castle element, as well as the element of pastiche; the Aikins integrated the "terrific sublimity into the tale of feudal ruins through their theoretical essay 'On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror' and in some of their stories"; Sophia Lee was a pioneer in the use of history through the exploitation of the legend of Mary, Queen of Scots.

This is of importance to this paper because the particular features that each author added to this genre would go on to influence the American

writers of the Gothic, one of which I will focus on in the section "Analysis of 'The Giant Wistaria.'"

Some scholars have provided a classification of the varieties found within the Gothic genre. For instance, in *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (1938), Montague Summers supported the idea that Gothic fiction could be classified into three different categories: terror Gothic, sentimental Gothic and historical Gothic (qtd. in Davison 343). Kay Mussel provides the same classification in *Women's Gothic and Romantic Fiction: A Reference Guide* (1981). She also offers a brief description of each class, and how they influenced the authors of the American Gothic.

Within the terror Gothic category, we can find the novels by Walpole and Lewis, who paid especial attention to the supernatural. This type of work remarkably influenced authors who "used the supernatural to explore psychological states and the meaning of evil" (Mussel 4). Another variety is the sentimental Gothic, which was the most popular and which had a greater impact on the writers of the time. Radcliffe is the main figure belonging to this subcategory, and she "used the supernatural for suspense but always revealed a human hand behind her effects" (Mussel 4). The last category to mention is the historical Gothic, which romanticised the past and which benefited from the strangeness of earlier times to amplify the atmosphere of terror (Mussel 4).

American Gothic

The American Gothic was greatly influenced by the British Gothic and, as a result, they share some common features that were conventional in the genre by the nineteenth century. Some of these characteristics are the idea of claustrophobia, violence, and gloomy atmospheres; the use of haunted houses, tombs or prisons for the setting is also typical, as is the inclusion of elements like the paternal curse or the vengeful ghost (Savoy). However, because the circumstances in America were different, there were also some distinct features that were particular to the American Gothic.

For example, when it comes to setting, we can find that, in some works, the authors used places such as the wild woods, the city or distant houses as alternatives to the traditional monasteries or abandoned castles that are found in the British Gothic, because those were not part of the American architecture (Lloyd-Smith 4). As we can see, American authors adapted the Gothic settings so as to represent the American experience. In this line, they also used this genre to address issues that were particularly American. Some of these concerns are listed by Lloyd-Smith in *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (2004). Within this enumeration he includes "the frontier

experience with its inherent solitude and potential violence; the Puritan inheritance; fear of European subversion, anxieties about popular democracy … the relative absence of developed 'society' … and racial issues" (4).

Regarding the creators of the American Gothic, it is considered that Charles Brockden Brown was the first to start the Gothic tradition in America with his novel *Wieland*, written in 1798 (Carpenter and Kolmar 3). In this work, we can appreciate the influence of Ann Radcliffe's "explained supernaturalism," as he uses elements such as ventriloquism and somnambulism among others to create a Gothic atmosphere (Lloyd-Smith 29). After Brown, many authors followed and developed the tradition that he constituted in America. In *Haunting the House of Fiction* (1991), Carpenter and Kolmar list a number of authors whose contribution was essential for the development of American Gothic fiction in the nineteenth century. They include Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. We cannot deny the importance of these authors and the brilliance of their contributions to American literature. However, it is interesting to note that, while male writers have received the recognition that they deserved, this is not the case with female authors of the Gothic of the same century in America (Weinstock 2).

Female American Gothic

Even though the female American Gothic had started to be recognised as a subgenre by the twentieth century, it still has not received nearly as much attention or literary criticism as its male counterpart. This failure to acknowledge the importance of female authors has been criticised in several works throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These works have tried to address the neglect that the female branch of the tradition has suffered. For example, Alfred Bendixen's *Haunted Women: The Best Supernatural Tales by American Women Writers* (1985) remarks on the importance of the female Gothic for the American literary heritage, and denounces that it is a tradition that has been "unjustly neglected" (2). This is also criticised by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock in *Scare Tactics* (2016), where he comments on how the British Female Gothic has received "a fair degree of academic scrutiny," while the American Gothic written by women "has almost escaped notice entirely" (2).

In this book, Weinstock offers a clear and concise definition of the female American Gothic, describing it as a "coherent genre of female fiction organised around recurrent themes and tropes that developed out of, responded to, and, in many cases, critiqued the roles of women in Victorian

and Edwardian America" (2). He goes on to remark on the importance of this body of work, which, he finds, has generally been excluded from the analyses of the American Gothic literature (3).

The fact that there is a branch of the American nineteenth-century Gothic made up of female authors, who used the genre in a particular way to address concerns that were unique to women at the time, leads us to the conclusion that there are characteristics that differentiate the male and female traditions. I would like to provide a brief comparison of the characteristics of these two traditions. However, it is important to note that the female and male Gothic are not completely different: within the female and male tradition of the American Gothic there are elements that can be found in both branches, but there are also features of the female tradition that cannot be found in its male counterpart, or that are used in different ways, and vice versa.

Contrasting the Female and Male Traditions

In this section, we will briefly examine some of the contrasting characteristics between the female and male traditions within the American Gothic. Some of these characteristics are analysed by Catherine A. Lundie in her book *Restless Spirits* (1996).

(a) Characters
Male and female writers used the Gothic to address different topics and issues, from distinct points of view. As a result, the genre of the characters varies between traditions. Male authors usually include narrative voices, protagonists and ghosts that are male. On the other hand, women writers would usually use female figures to perform these roles because their intention was to put the focus on female experience. Also, men would have minor roles within the plot, and, in contrast with women's attitudes within the story, they show themselves to be antipathetic to the very possibility of the supernatural (Lundie 2).

(b) Topics
There are also differences in the topics addressed by the authors of each tradition. In her research, Lundie found that that male writers treated the "weighty" cultural anxieties and concerns of their time, whereas women focused more on issues related to their vulnerability and marginality. However, she argues that, even though it is true that women did treat those topics, they also dealt with themes addressed by male authors, such as moral, psychological and political issues, even if they did this from their

"intellectual, economic, and political milieu" (Lundie 2). Nevertheless, female authors did put the focus on the institutions and ideological issues that shaped their lives. Among the topics that were recurrently portrayed in these women's works we can find: "marriage, motherhood, sexuality, mental and physical health, spinsterhood, and widowhood" (Lundie 2).

(c) Rewriting of the Gothic

As I have mentioned, women writers tend to focus on female concerns. However, in *Haunting the House of Fiction* (1991), Carpenter and Kolmar suggest that, in addition, "ghost stories by women challenge the assumptions of men's work in the genre," and seem to write their stories "in conscious antithesis to men's stories" (10). An example of this is that whereas men's works make a clear distinction between reason and unreason, science and spirituality, the conscious and the unconscious, the natural and the supernatural, women writers portray in their works a world in which the natural and the supernatural are interconnected (Carpenter and Kolmar 12).

Male authors choose either one side or the other; there is no middle ground. In opposition to this, female authors choose to represent these dualistic terms in a continuum. Following this idea, Weinstock remarks how women used the Gothic genre so as to rewrite the stories of the male tradition to "highlight its inadequacy for representing female anxieties" (*Scare Tactics* 23). Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria," the short story I will analyse later on in this paper, is an excellent example of this, as it can be analysed as a rewriting of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) (Weinstock *Scare Tactics* 174).

(d) Supernatural apparitions

The characteristics of the ghosts that appear in the female and male traditions are usually quite distinct. Whereas ghosts included in male authors' works are considered as a "sluggish, hellish night-abomination midway betwixt beast and man" (Lundie 3); in women's works, ghosts have the same personality and physical appearance they had while alive. This allows the characters to sympathise with the ghost, with which the character feels identified, and also to "understand and act upon the messages brought by them" (Carpenter and Kolmar 14). These messages are often delivered to warn them against the "dangers of domesticity" (14).

As we can see, there are some remarkable differences between the female and the male traditions of the American Gothic in the nineteenth century. Also, the existence of the works which study the female Gothic mentioned shows that, even though, generally speaking, the female tradition has not received the literary attention it deserves, an evolution started in the

twentieth century and continues to this day. *Scare Tactics* (2016) or *A Companion to American Gothic* (2014), which dedicate a number of sections to the female Gothic tradition in New England in the nineteenth century, are relevant works that examine this field.

Authors and Works of the Female Gothic

Women writers in the nineteenth century used the Gothic to address women's issues, and all of them did so from different angles and perspectives. In *Haunted Women*, Bendixen offers instances of how some of these authors used the Gothic to approach their concerns. Due to length constrains, I can only mention some of the most prominent ones. However, it is important to bear in mind that this subgenre was formed of a great number of prolific authors who addressed a wide variety of topics, including racism, homosexuality, gender issues and domesticity.

One of the works that Bendixen analyses in his book is "The Amber Gods" (1863) by Harriet P. Spofford. This tale challenges the fundamental values of nineteenth-century America. In it, the author depicts the opposition between two female characters: Yone, an exotic, amoral and self-absorbed character who ignores the rules to be followed by respectable women; and Lu, the pure and virtuous but dull cousin. Through these two characters, the author emphasises the contrast between the "self-centred sinner" and the "self-sacrificing saint" in order to portray the inadequacies of both extremes (Bendixen 2, 3).

Another instance is "The True Story of Guenever" (1876) by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. In her tale, Phelps depicts the frustrations of a woman in an unsatisfying marriage. By doing this, the author uses the supernatural to "contrast romantic expectations with feminist realities" (Bendixen 3). She also wrote this story to inspire women to aim further literarily, and exceed the limitations imposed on them in this field (Bendixen 3). The Gothic tale also provided these women writers with a chance to discuss the subject of sexuality. Harriet Beecher Stowe approaches this topic in "The Ghost in the Cap'n Brown House." According to Bendixen, the story suggests that, at the time, there was not much difference between being a mistress and being a ghost. Also, he considers that the story implies that the New England mentality is "haunted by a fear of illicit sexuality" (4). In addition, authors who addressed the topic of homosexuality include Alice Brown and Rose Terry Cooke.

The subjects of marriage and its dangers and uncertainties are recurrent topics in the tales of this tradition. "Story of a Day" (1893) by Grace King; "The Little Room" (1895) by Madelene Yale Wynne; and "Her Letters"

(1895) by Kate Chopin are examples of Gothic works that deal with the institution of marriage (Bendixen 4, 5). Josephine Daskam Bacon also approached issues related with domesticity. Another topic that authors treat in their tales is the power (or lack of power) of females. Usually, Gothic stories depict women as victims; however, some of the tales affirm the power of women. This is the case of "The Foreigner," written in 1899. In this work, Sarah Orne Jewett uses the supernatural to "suggest the capacity of women to transcend loneliness and anguish" (Bendixen 6).

"The Giant Wistaria"

The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Gilman was born in Connecticut in 1860. She was raised by her mother after her father abandoned the family. This affected Gilman's education in a negative way. Nevertheless, she wrote extensively, one of her most important works being *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. This volume, published in 1898, established her reputation as a social reformer. Because she based the centre of her analysis on the idea of gender, and subordination based on gender, she became a pioneer figure of the feminist movement in America (Gough and Rudd 7). She investigated the nature of sexual identity; the evolution of male/female roles and the origin of female subordination; the nature of work in society; the significance of child-rearing; the relationship between private and public spheres; and the limitations imposed by institutions of domesticity (which included home, family and motherhood). She intended to make her audience understand how society was constructed, and in this way allow them to learn how to change it so as to create one based on equality (Gough and Rudd 7). Her work also addressed the issue of how to resolve the tension between motherhood and work, love and intimacy, and autonomy.

In *Women and Economics* (1898) "she examined the economic relationship between men and women and asserted that the economic dependence of women on men was the key to understanding the subordination of women" (Gough and Rudd 8). Based on this central idea, she wrote her next two books, *Concerning Children* (1900) and *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), in which she examined the idea that the home was the source of women's oppression. Val Gough and Jill Rudd support that "by making gender the centre of her analysis as no one had done before, she made the invisibility of gender oppression visible" (8). For all of the previous points, Gilman is considered, to this day, a representative figure within feminism.

In 1884, she married the artist Walter Stetson. After giving birth to her daughter in 1885, Gilman suffered an episode of depression. Because of this, she consulted Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, a very famous American writer and physician. He usually treated relevant figures in North America and Europe, and is mostly associated with the "rest cure", a treatment that he invented so as to treat cases of neurasthenia (or nervous exhaustion). In the case of Gilman, this rest cure consisted of confining her to the domestic place and limiting her intellectual stimulation. This "cure" only deepened her depression and, in the end, she and her husband divorced and she moved to California, alone.

The failed treatment inspired her to write her best-known short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," published in 1892, which depicted, in a fictional way, her experience with the "rest cure." In this story, she also criticised the disempowered role of women in society and their lack of autonomy. Even though this short story was considered by some academics as a "neglected masterpiece" (Carpenter and Kolmar 64), it has received a fair amount of literary criticism. However, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is not the only horror tale by Gilman, in contrast with David Hartwell's claim in *The Dark Descent* (qtd. in Weinstock 174). A very interesting piece published a year before "The Yellow Wallpaper" is "The Giant Wistaria," which "combines the supernatural with real or perceived aberrant psychology, framed by sexual politics" (Lundie 123).

In many of her works, as Gloria A. Biamonte points out, Gilman considers issues related to confinement and motherhood, which were "often accompanied by creative attempts at liberation" (33). As mentioned earlier, the female Gothic literature of that century and location dealt with concerns that were the result of the patriarchal society in which women had to live. It is also worth mentioning that "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Giant Wistaria" are not the only stories by Gilman that make use of Gothic conventions. Within these, Denise D. Knight includes "The Rocking-Chair" (1893) and "The Unwatched Door" (1894) (qtd. in Weinstock 174).

Jill Rudd, in "The Torn Voice in 'The Giant Wistaria' and 'The Unnatural Mother,'" comments on how some features of Gilman's personality, such as resolution and determination, are reflected in the qualities of the women in her short stories (69). These characters often face difficult situations by being obstinate with their decisions. Like other fellow writers of the female Gothic of her generation, such as Harriet Prescott Spofford, Grace Elizabeth King, Madelene Yale Wynne and Gertrude Atherton, she used the supernatural tale to explore the aspirations and frustrations of women (Bendixen 1).

As previously mentioned, Gilman is considered to have written a number of short stories using Gothic conventions. Her most popular story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," enabled Gilman to respond creatively to the forces that repressed the creativity of women (Bendixen 4). This tale depicts the journey of a woman succumbing to madness, as she is confined in a room by men who equate women's creativity with disease (Bendixen 4). The story serves as an account of what being a woman in the nineteenth century in America implies. It is also a powerful critique of a society that deprives women of meaningful work and mental stimulation (Bendixen 4).

In "The Giant Wistaria," Gilman addresses a number of issues regarding the disempowerment of women within a patriarchal society, namely motherhood, marriage and confinement (Biamonte 33, 37). With this piece of work, Gilman desired to direct the readers' minds towards change, and longed for gender inequalities to disappear (Biamonte 33). Because of the themes portrayed in "The Giant Wistaria," I consider that the analysis of this short story could be a good way to both delve into the characteristics of the female tradition within the American Gothic in the nineteenth century and show appreciation for this piece of work, which has not received as much academic attention as Gilman's most popular Gothic tale, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Weinstock *Scare Tactics* 18).

Analysis of "The Giant Wistaria"

To explore the characteristics of the female American Gothic of the nineteenth century, I will carry out an examination of the short story "The Giant Wistaria" (1891) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

This Gothic tale is divided into two stories that, as the plot unfolds, will appear to be connected. Even though neither of the two parts contain references that specify the exact time in which they take place, there are a series of hints that indicate the period in which they are set, approximately. The first half seems to develop at some point during the eighteenth century in New England. It introduces the story of a young, unwed woman who has arrived in America from England with her parents, and who has just given birth to an illegitimate child. She is locked away by her father, Samuel Dwining, who is determined to marry the young woman to her cousin against her will. Separating child and mother forever, so as to cover the stain on the family's name, he plans to leave the infant in New England, while the rest of them go back to England.

The second part of the story starts approximately one hundred years later, introducing three young married couples – Jenny and George; Jack and Jenny's sister, Susy; and Kate and Jim – who rent that same house for

a vacation. A series of supernatural occurrences take place, including the apparition of the young mother's ghost, which lead to the finding of the remains of a woman and child. In short, Gary Scharnhorst describes the tale as "a terrifying diptych about an unwed mother, tormented by Puritan patriarchy, whose spirit haunts a decaying mansion" (qtd. in Weinstock *Scare Tactics* 174).

Structure and Time in "The Giant Wistaria"

The tale includes two separate parts that take place in the same setting, but approximately a hundred years apart. As mentioned before, the time in which each half takes place is not specified, but there are some hints that allow the reader to locate the stories in time.

For instance, the first line of "The Giant Wistaria" is the following: "Thou hast already broken the tender shoot! Never needle or distaff for thee, and yet thou wilt not be quiet!" (Gilman 1). The use of pronouns such as "thou" and "thee," and the forms "hast" and "wilt," which were no longer in use by the time the story was written, allows the reader to come to the conclusion that this part of the story is set in the eighteenth century. In contrast, the diction and grammatical forms represented in the second part of the story, together with the finding of the corpse of the infant, which seems to have been preserved for "all of a century" (Gilman 6), show that the second part is set in the nineteenth century.

One possible reason why the author decided to use a structure that allowed her to represent two different centuries within one story probably relies on the writer's desire to contrast the situation of the women in her own time and the women of the previous century. The first part of "The Giant Wistaria" depicts the struggles and violence that a young woman suffers under the rigid Puritan patriarchy. In the second half, on the other hand, Gilman portrays what could be considered "the uncanny afterlife of Puritan patriarchy – the ways in which her turn-of-the-century American culture remained haunted by the spectres of gender oppression and the circumscribed autonomy for women" (Weinstock *Scare Tactics* 176, 178).

The autonomy that the women in the second part of the story enjoy, compared with the victimisation of the women in the first part, is encouraging and suggests that the patriarchy is not as powerful anymore. However, the finding of the bodies of the mother and child evokes what the reality of being a woman in a patriarchal culture implied, suggesting the violence and repression that females were subject to in the past. Also, this horrific finding could indicate the possibility that the women in the second

part will suffer this systematic disempowerment as their marriages develop and they become mothers (Weinstock *Scare Tactics* 178, 179).

Gothic Conventions in "The Giant Wistaria"

In "The Giant Wistaria," there are some Gothic features that are unique to the female Gothic, as well as some that can be found in the tales of its male counterpart. The way in which the author uses Gothic conventions that are common to both traditions to address issues that are exclusively female, together with the use of elements that are specifically female, makes "The Giant Wistaria" a perfect example of the female American Gothic literature of the nineteenth century.

Depiction of the Puritan Patriarchy

In the nineteenth century, the Gothic genre became a tool through which American women writers expressed concerns that were specific to them. Gilman was a prominent feminist figure, as explained in the "Literary Review" section, and as such, she explored the position of women within society in her literary works. "The Giant Wistaria" presents a perfect example of her criticism of the patriarchal norm of the time.

We previously mentioned how the first part of the story depicts the struggles of a young mother who suffers from a violent and repressive treatment inflicted by her father. The father, Samuel Dwining, represents the embodiment of the Puritan patriarchy, which compelled women to occupy an inferior place within society, leaving them powerless against systematic violence and oppression, and limited to the domestic sphere.

During the nineteenth century, the idea of "True Womanhood" became prevalent in American society. Women were judged by society depending on their compliance with four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. A woman who possessed these attributes was promised power and happiness, but without them, whatever her achievements were, she was nothing (Welter 152). This value system is openly criticised in this first part of the story.

Samuel is presented as a cruel, unsympathetic figure, who prioritises the family's honour over his daughter's emotional and physical wellbeing. He completely disregards whatever say the young mother may have about her own life, as well as ignoring and belittling his wife's opinions on the decisions he makes and which affect the whole family. The father forcibly separates the mother and the child, who was born outside of marriage, and thus the young lady cries to her mother, begging for sympathy: "Art thou a

mother and hast no pity on me, a mother? Give me my child!" (Gilman 1). However, this cry for sympathy is physically silenced by the father's "hand upon her mouth" (1), as he compels her to be locked away in a room. We never hear the mother's answer, and her daughter never receives any consolation or relief in her pitiful situation.

As the story develops, we find more examples of Puritan ideals regarding family honour conveyed through the father's extreme opinions and interventions. For instance, he states that he would rather see his child drown than living with the shame of an illegitimate grandson (Gilman 1). This statement is probably a criticism of the Victorian idea that a woman who lost her "purity" was considered a "fallen woman," and, in fact, death was preferable to the loss of innocence (Welter 154). The following excerpt presents an example of how virtue was considered more important than life itself:

> "Thou art very hard, Samuel, art thou not afeard for her life? She grieveth sore for the child, aye, and for the green fields to walk in."
> "Nay," said he grimly, "I fear not. She hath lost already what is more than life …" (Gilman 1)

In addition, he plans to marry his daughter to her cousin, without caring about the daughter's opinion of the union. Samuel's cruel and uncaring character is portrayed through not only his words and actions, but also his physical description; the following is a good example: "He strode heavily across the porch, till the loose planks creaked again, strode back and forth, with his arms folded and his brows fiercely knit above his iron mouth" (Gilman 2). This reinforces the idea of his nature being harsh and unkind, probably mirroring ruthless Puritan attitudes towards women that did not perfectly comply to the norm.

Opposing the cruel, unsympathetic figure, the wife shows concern about the young lady's feelings and desires. She calls Samuel "hard" and wonders whether the daughter would agree to marry the cousin, who is a "coarse fellow" and whom the daughter "ever shunned." However, the mother, the only character who wishes to support and protect the young girl, is impotent against her husband, who states that if she refuses to marry the cousin, she would be locked away in her chamber for the rest of her life (Biamonte 36). As we can appreciate, whereas the father embodies the grim reality of Puritan patriarchy, the powerlessness of the women in the story represents the vulnerability and inequalities that women suffered within their Victorian society.

The Confinement Trope

Spatial confinement is a typical Gothic trope that can be found in the earliest works of the genre, including Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Lewis's *The Monk*. Even though this spatial confinement can also affect men, females are usually the victims of it (Tóth 21). One of the characteristics that makes "The Giant Wistaria" an example of the female American Gothic is the use of this Gothic convention, through the imprisonment of the young lady by a patriarchal figure, to address the violence that American women were subject to "in a culture that sanctions the male control of female sexuality and circumscribes female autonomy and expression" (Weinstock *Scare Tactics* 55).

The young mother suffers confinement for the social stigma of giving birth while being unmarried. As it was previously mentioned, purity was one of the four pillars of "True Womanhood." Because the young woman does not comply with this societal norm, she is punished by being physically confined in a room, separated from her child and the outside world. Juliann E. Fleenor argues that becoming a mother results in imprisonment in the social structure symbolised by the house (qtd. in Conner). This confinement results in the young mother existing in an uncertain space between life and death. Before turning into a ghost, the young mother already became a death-in-life character (Conner). Her physical description depicts this state: "a white face amoung [*sic*] the leaves, with eyes of wasted fire" (Gilman 2). Patriarchal rule, which has wrenched the life out of her, chains her to the house in which she and her baby encountered death, forcing her to exist as a restless spirit, replaying the events that led to their horrific end.

Rewriting the Gothic

In Haunting the House of Fiction, Carpenter and Kolmar explain that it was common for the stories by writers of the female American Gothic tradition to challenge "the assumptions of men's work in the genre" (10). Weinstock considers that Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria" could be analysed as a rewriting of Daniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850) (*Scare Tactics* 177), which is another feature that characterises the tale as part of the female American Gothic. In *Scare Tactics*, Weinstock supports the idea that authors of this tradition used their stories to rewrite the male Gothic in order to "highlight its inadequacy for representing female anxieties" (173).