Liggins, Emma. *The Haunted House in Women's Ghost Stories: Gender, Space and Modernity, 1850–1945*. **London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 307 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-40751-3**

Viktória Osoliová

People have always been interested in the supernatural, which reveals our fascination with ghosts, spectral appearances and haunting. The popularity of the ghost story in the Victorian period has been thoroughly explored in relation to spiritualism, superstition, funerary practices, despite skepticism about the supernatural. Ghost literature became increasingly popular, especially among female authors. *The Haunted House in Women's Ghost Stories: Gender, Space and Modernity, 1850–1945* by Emma Liggins focuses on Victorian and modernist haunted house narratives in ghost stories by female authors such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Vernon Lee, Edith Wharton, May Sinclair, and Elizabeth Bowen.

This well-researched book reveals how female authors from the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century used spatial tropes to articulate their anxieties about domesticity. Liggins' aim is to re-examine female ghost story writers and to provide a "feminist history of the ghost story" (2) by offering new perspectives about this under-researched genre, incorporating feminist insights and spatial theories. Drawing on spatial, architectural, and psychological analyses, this engaging book reconsiders the gendering of space in the ghost story. It explores ideas about gender, space, and identity, referring to theorists like Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, Elizabeth Grosz and Luce Irigaray.

Liggins puts a special emphasis on space and various architectural dimensions that have occupied a prominent place in Gothic fiction since its inception. The chapters look at haunted houses and other architectural features such as mansions, gardens, villas, Italian churches, and ruins in women's ghost stories. Liggins explores spatialities connected to women, the ways in which they inhabit and navigate space in the Gothic mode. The broad time span covered by the book is meant to highlight women's experience of domestic spaces and their roles in the household across many decades. Liggins explains that the gendering of space has not been fully explored in the context of the ghost story and the Gothic haunted house, and she traces the development of the haunted house narrative in order to explore the relationship between the home as site of terror and women's fears, desires, and perceptions of gendered space. Liggins also discusses how women reacted to the modernization of the home at the turn of the century, including the servant problem and changing household relationships.

The organization of this book is logical, and the author's argument is coherent. Structurally, the book consists of one introductory chapter and six chapters, each divided into subchapters. The book uses a chronological order which maps the gendered implication of space and the changing household relations through various decades in female-authored Gothic fiction. In each chapter, Liggins explains the historical and cultural context of the authors and incorporates non-fictional writing on architecture, interior design, technology, and the servant problem. Each chapter focuses on one author and includes a brief bibliography of theories and interpretations, as well as summaries of the short stories. In the introductory chapter, Liggins presents the writers to be analyzed, the main themes, motifs, key concepts, and the theoretical context within which the book can be read.

The second chapter explores the representation of haunted space in Elizabeth Gaskell's ghost stories of the 1850s in relation to women's experiences of spatial restriction within the Victorian household. The short stories are read in the light of Victorian concerns about the family, women's place in the family, women's right to property and how these influence women's perception of space. To do so, Liggins brings into focus such non-fiction works as Catherine's Crowe's chapter on "Haunted Houses" in *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), and Gaskell's own essay, "Clopton House." Liggins considers the eighteenth-century Radcliffean castle with its forbidden spaces and locked doors in relation to Victorian spatial divisions. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's concept of forbidden space, Liggins argues that the Victorian house's doors and windows act as barriers. These spatial restrictions in "The Old Nurse's Story," "The Poor Clare" and "The Grey Woman" signify women's imprisonment in the patriarchal society.

In the third chapter, Liggins offers insights into Margaret Oliphant's ghost stories of the 1880s and 1890s, collected in *Tales of the Seen and Unseen*. This collection explores the visibility/invisibility of the figure of the ghost and relates it to the Victorian woman's visibility and invisibility in a patriarchal society. Liggins considers typical Victorian spaces such as libraries, drawing-rooms, and gardens which illustrate women's financial exclusion, female inheritance, and women's sense of being shut out from domestic comfort. Liggins explores how these gendered spaces appear in Oliphant's ghost stories to reflect women's fears. In "The Library Window," a young girl is attracted to a ghostly library, while in "The Portrait," a father and son are haunted by the ghost of the mother in the drawing-room. In these short stories, Liggins reads the library as a masculine space and the drawing-room as a feminine space. Liggins draws on Gaston Bachelard's inside/outside dialectic and interprets the haunted garden in "Earthbound" and "Lady's Walk" as a place which belongs to the house but at the same time is also outside it.

The fourth chapter deals with Italian settings for the ghost story in Vernon Lee's (Violet Paget's pseudonym) short stories. Ever since the Gothic mode's inception, Italy has been portrayed as a haunted space. Liggins focuses on Italian ruinous spaces in Vernon Lee's ghost stories, where the ruin becomes "an uncanny, in-between space" (119). Her Italian ghost stories are saturated with descriptions of gloomy, decaying, and ruinous buildings. Liggins reads the stories in the light of Lee's travel writings and diary about Italy and through the lens of ruin studies, which examines

the turn-of-the-century fascination with decaying buildings. "The Legend of Madame Krasinska" is about an old Italian house which becomes a crypt, while "The Doll" features a female collector and a museum-like old house and a decaying doll. Liggins also draws on Dylan Trigg's work, *The Aesthetics of Decay*, as well as Rose Macaulay's contemplation on "ruin-pleasure," *The Pleasure of Ruins* (1953).

The fifth chapter investigates the differences between the old-fashioned Victorian house and the modernist house with its modern devices such as electricity and telephone in Edith Wharton's ghost stories from the early twentieth century. The chapter studies the gendered dimensions of the modernist haunted interior and the transformation of domestic space by technology. Liggins explores the newly modernized household in Wharton's ghost stories, and the ways in which it impacted its female inhabitants in frightening ways. In "Pomegranate Seed," the female protagonist is haunted by her husband's dead first wife, who is somehow responsible for the husband's unexplained disappearance. In "Afterward," the female protagonist's husband also vanishes, leaving the wife abandoned in the domestic space. "The Duchess at Prayer" is influenced by Vernon Lee's representations of Italy. The story is set in a ruined villa in Italy, where the jealous husband of the adulterous duchess orders a statue of his wife to be placed over the entrance to the crypt where she meets her lover, entombing him alive.

The sixth chapter focuses on May Sinclair's exploration of patriarchal spaces in the ghost stories of the 1910s and 1920s. Sinclair's stories are set in claustrophobic spaces. The haunted houses in her stories are smaller, and the smallness of domestic space, crowded with outdated furniture conveys a sense of claustrophobia. In this chapter, the author's most innovative section is dedicated to analyzing the bedroom. The bedroom is a recurring trope in Sinclair's stories and symbolizes death/mourning and sexual intimacy. Drawing on theories by Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz on women's reoccupation of space, Liggins reads bedrooms as sexual and maternal spaces in "The Intercessor" and "If the Dead Knew."

The last chapter explores the twentieth-century world and the modern house in Elizabeth Bowen's ghost stories of the 1920s and 1940s. The period between the two world wars brought about many changes, especially a radical transformation in the domestic sphere. In the second section of this chapter, Liggins examines Bowen's spectralization of suburban houses and interprets them as feminized spaces. Liggins reads Bowen's haunted house narrative in relation to anxieties about the ideal home and perfect housewife in the interwar period. In the third section of this chapter, Liggins places Bowen's short stories within the theoretical frameworks of War Gothic and ruin studies because of their explorations of emptiness, loss, inhabitability, and the spectral connections between bomb-damaged houses of London.

Overall, *The Haunted House in Women's Ghost Stories: Gender, Space and Modernity, 1850–1945* is an excellent book for academics and students of English and American studies interested in Gothic studies, the ghost story, Female Gothic, Victorian and modernist women's writing, gender studies, and spatial studies.