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“Haunted houses, haunted bodies: spectral presence in *Arlington Park*”

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Introduction

In the second chapter of *Arlington Park*, a spectre appears. It is that of Amanda’s grandmother, whom her son Eddie sees through the window shortly after she passes away. The little boy has not been told yet that his great-grandmother has died, which adds to the uncanny atmosphere of the scene. Only Eddie “sees” the ghost, which is not described to the reader. It does not appear again and does not affect the plot either; rather, the purpose of its appearance in a mundane environment—the garden of a suburban house on an ordinary Friday morning—seems to be to introduce the supernatural in everyday life and thus put the latter at distance.

The presence of this literal spectre (the only one of its kind); the repeated use of the words “ghost” and “spectre”, their derivatives, as well as related cognates such as “shroud” or “tomb”; the intertextual references to fairy tales or Gothic literature—all serve related purposes. They make it possible to go beyond the smooth surfaces of the houses of Arlington Park and the conventional roles played by their inhabitants to suggest lurking violence and self-estrangement. The novel centres on five female characters who are all, each in their own way, haunted—by their former and future selves or by other people's projections for instance—in a disrupted time sequence. The following pages intend to show how Cusk uses

the literary means mentioned above to question the contemporaneity of the present to itself as well as the continuity in identity.

1. Lurking Evil: The Spectre of Violence

The first, very general type of haunting that may be found in *Arlington Park* is simply the suggestion that there is more to suburban life than meets the eye, that there is evil lurking beyond the surface. The reader is prepared to take such a dark perspective from the very introduction of the novel. Indeed, the book opens with an evocation of the city in the rain, at night, and of the shapes the clouds take: "clouds like dark cathedrals, clouds like machines, clouds like black blossoms flowering in the arid starlit sky" (1). The clouds function as a dark and monstrous double of the city below: "Unseen, they grew like a second city overhead, thickening, expanding, throwing up their savage monuments, their towers, their monstrous, unpeopled palaces of cloud" (1).

In *Arlington Park*, neighbours spy on one another, trying to unearth secrets. Thus, one character tells another: "I often say to Max, you know, those *Clapps* are very quiet, what *can* they be up to in there? We decided that you must have a secret life" (52; italics in the original text). This is said in a joking manner, but the hidden possibility of evil and violence is repeatedly intimated in the text, leading one character to say: "I'm more frightened here than I was in London" (103). The statement suggests that the horrors of suburban life may be darker than conformity and boredom.

Such a possibility is conjured up by means of an intertextual play with different genres: fairy tales with their ogres who eat little children, Gothic novels with their "lords of the manor", and detective novels, or even psychopath stories. In the opening chapter of *Arlington Park*, Juliet remembers walking to the Milfords', where she and her husband were invited on

the night before the novel begins. The couple turns into Hansel and Gretel, mesmerized by a house in which they may be eaten:

> ... Juliet felt at one minute that she and Benedict might be eaten, or enslaved; and at the next that some form of reward awaited them. It was exciting, in a way.
>
> But then, glimpsing the armoured forms of the big, expensive cars crouched among the shadows in driveways all along the park, she had a sort of oceanic sense of malevolence, of a great, diffuse evil, silently undulating all around them in the darkness. In the Milfords' own driveway an enormous glittering Mercedes crouched on the gravel on giant, ogreish tyres. Its tinted windows seemed to cast on everything their shuttered, annihilating gaze. Juliet had felt a force of pure aggression emanating from its metal surfaces. It was the car of an assassin, a killer. (12-13)

Here, echoes of fairy tales and Gothic novels are interwoven with social commentary on the violence of appropriation.

The car of the killer brings to mind the scary stories that regularly crop up in newspapers, like that of Betsy Miller in the novel. The little girl appears three times, indirectly, in the characters' dialogues: the first and second times she is mentioned, she is missing (65, 149); the third and last time, she has been found dead (225). The three references are scattered throughout the novel, thus giving the impression that horror is going on in the background while the text unfolds and our attention is focused on the central characters. Violence towards children and echoes of fairy tales are also to be found in the scene that shows Amanda at the butcher's. Indeed, she imagines her little boy cut up as meat: "Eddie stood and fingered the glass so that the spectacle of dismemberment behind it seemed to expand itself, to incorporate him. She saw his parts arrayed on metal trays, in fans and pyramids of flesh fringed with

parsley" (46). Later in the novel, Maisie's outburst of violence turns her into an ogre in the eyes of her two daughters as she accuses them of ruining her life: "[T]hey had clung together like children in a fairy tale before a fulminating ogre" (173). A rather trivial incident may trigger murderous impulses. For example, when Amanda sees that her friend Liz's son Owen has used a red marker to draw on her immaculate cream-coloured sofa, thereby leaving a " big red patch like a stain of blood", she tells him: "I could kill you!" (71). What she would have done to her own son had he been the culprit is left to the reader's imagination: "She didn't know what she'd have done to him. The possibilities seemed fathomless" (73). Violence is omnipresent within the family: between spouses, between parents and children, between children and even between children and their pets or toys. Thus, Jocasta Fearnley seems quite relieved that her daughter's rabbit has died, as its demise put an end to her daughter's "fondly punitive experiments": "I'm not altogether sorry he's gone … [S]he was terribly severe with him. She seemed particularly to enjoy the locking-up part" (51).

However, the threat of evil and violence is sometimes downplayed in humorous anticlimaxes. For example, the arrival of Juliet and Benedict at the Milfords', already mentioned above, ends on these lines: "It was the car of an assassin, a killer. Louisa Milford opened the panelled front door and looked at the Randalls rather blankly. Was she a killer? Juliet wasn't sure" (13). Here the boring housewife fails to live up to Juliet's dark suspicions. Another example would be when Amanda finds her neighbour Jocasta Fearnley digging a grave and imagines it to be meant for one of the Fearnleys. Here, the novel leans towards the detective genre:

> A feeling of precariousness had been steadily besieging her on the wire, ever since they left the butcher's shop: it crystallized now into the belief that it was a human grave Jocasta was digging, for a member of her family she had either already killed or

> meant to. Hadn't Max Fearnley been ill recently? Come to think of it, she hadn't seen him for a week or two. (50)

But then Amanda learns that the grave is actually meant for the family pet—the rabbit.

Such anticlimaxes are typical of a novel which offers suggestions rather than assertions and does not content itself with oversimplification. Statements such as "All men are murderers" are explored *and* qualified. "All men are murderers" is Juliet's motto in the novel and in her case it refers to how her career and, more generally, her self-fulfilment have been sacrificed to her husband's. It is echoed by the remark that Amanda's husband James "is like one of those characters you always get in films: the very, very last person you'd suspect of having committed the crime" (71).

Around the character of Juliet, another intertextual relation develops with *Wuthering Heights* and the Brontës' tormented family history, particularly with the life of the writers' mother, to whom the father was very cruel, ripping a valuable dress, "the only lovely thing she possessed", to pieces. In Juliet's words, "she had died murdered—there was no harm in calling a spade a spade—by her husband" (164). Here, the metaphorical spade signals back to Jocasta Fearnley's literal one, which thus takes on grim connotations again.

What Juliet seeks in literature is "the truth, as she saw it, of female experience" (154). As an English teacher and head of the literary club, she picks books supposed to warn the young girls against their fate. During one of the meetings of the literary club, Juliet is confronted with a caricature of her perception of family life in the mouth of a teenager, who asserts: "I'm not even going to have children. I'm going to live on my own. And I'm never, ever getting married. Marriage is just another word for *hate*" (166-167; emphasis in the original text). In the light of the teenager's brutal formulation, Juliet's motto seems insufficient, too clear-cut to

be true. Moreover, it is hinted that Juliet's frustration arises not only from the unequal dynamics of marital relations but also from her inability to love and to express herself.

Typically, the novel's last words ("Come here") uttered by Joe to his wife Christine may be read either as threatening (Joe is indeed one of the "lords of the manor" in the novel—powerful, sexist, homophobic, and racist) or as comforting (in an unexpected upsurge of tenderness from a husband for his wife). The curtain falls before we readers can know what is about to take place; it is our task to imagine what happens off stage—tragedy, or reconciliation? The image of the theatre is present in the very first pages of the novel, in which the noise of the rain falling on the city is compared to that of applause:

> In their sleep they heard it, people lying in their beds: the thunderous noise of water. It penetrated their dreams, a sound like the sound of uproarious applause. It was as if a great audience were applauding. [...] It made them feel somewhat observed, as if a dark audience had assembled outside and were looking in through the windows, clapping their hands. (5)

This last sentence marks the end of the introduction, and readers are immediately put in the position of the "dark audience" as the first chapter lets us "look in through the windows" of Juliet's home. The image of applause is used again in the account of her perception of the rain ("During the night ... she had woken and heard the thunderous water in the dark. It had made a sound like the sound of applause" [7]), and it appears that the sound had given her a sense of impending tragedy: "She didn't know why, but it had made her afraid: she had felt a fear of something it was too late to prevent, something that had already occurred" (7). It is quite revealing that before Joe utters his ominous words, his face should be compared to a stage:

> Joe was still standing in the hall. His face was full of expression. It was like a little stage with all sorts of things being acted on it. It was as if everything had made its way there, everything she knew: it had all found its way to Joe's face as a form of safekeeping, the whole world of herself concentrated on this little stage. (240)

The passage is clearly meant to be a climactic moment, especially through the concentration of "everything" in one place, but the exact nature of the climax is left for the readers / audience to imagine—embrace or murder?

To readers of Gothic criticism, Juliet's statement ("All men are murderers") is reminiscent of Joanna Russ's article on the "Modern Gothic", entitled "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband". Russ focuses on modern Gothic novels written for middle-class housewives, just like the characters of *Arlington Park*. Such novels abound in stereotypical characters. Similarly, *Arlington Park* is pervaded with the claustrophobic sense of playing a part which has already been written. For instance, Maisie is under the impression that her husband Dom and herself are playing parts defined by gender construction as well as consumer society: "They were like people in an advertisement, or a play" (170); "It was here [in the kitchen] she felt most often that they were in a play, and that it was not a play she liked" (175); "*Do you know what* had lately become, Maisie didn't know from where, one of Dom's catchphrases, and was a sign that they were in a play" (181; emphasis in the original text); "[S]he said what she was supposed to say ... It was her next line in the play, though she had fought to keep it down" (182). The real violence may lie in this determinism or what Christine calls this "acceptance of things" (230).

The claustrophobia is particularly apparent in the character of Maisie, who sees herself as "imprisoned for life" (173). When she goes up the stairs to her children's bedroom, the carpet is compared to a "penitentiary road" and she feels "that she would always be walking up these

stairs and that this moment would endure for ever: the splashes of paint were like pieces of frozen time, the line of the carpet passed like a rod through the centre of her life, skewering her manifold selves" (182). By moving to Arlington Park, Maisie realizes she may have stopped the "wind of possibilities" (183) and made it impossible to satisfy her "shiftless need for change and movement" (184). The Gothic motif of live burial appears in the passage: Maisie feels "entombed", the "untidiness of her house" being "draped over her like a shroud" (185). The real violence lying behind the surface would then be a passive, insidious one which deprives the characters of the possibility of change, killing or freezing their potential selves.

2. Spectral Selves

As noted above, the only "proper" spectre is that of Amanda's grandmother, whom her son thinks he sees through the window. Different types of haunting converge in this climactic scene. The characters are standing in the kitchen, an empty space in which the presence of the walls which have been torn down by the Clapps can still be sensed: Amanda feels "the inexplicable desire to bring those rooms back to life" (55). The appearance of the ghost is prepared by the phone conversation during which Amanda is told that her grandmother has died. First she recalls her: "Amanda *saw* her grandmother, a white, wordless slip of a woman in an institutional armchair" (58; my emphasis). Then she expects to see her: "She looked out of the window at the garden, as though expecting to *see* her grandmother there, with her face at the glass" (62; my emphasis). She becomes aware of "how death had entered the kitchen, how it had come in from the rainy day through the large windows" (71). The spectral kitchen provides the setting for the apparition: Eddie sees the ghost when he is "in the middle of the spot where the old kitchen had stood" (73).

When the child tells his mother that he has seen his great-grandmother in the garden, thereby realizing her expectations, "[a] shadow" is said to "pass over" her (76). This echoes the way characters, when perceived by others, are assimilated to ghosts. Indeed, the novel

stages uncanny moments when women feel estranged from themselves, as when Amanda finds herself "strangely transfigured" in Liz Connelly's eyes: "a sort of *ghost* passed through her that was both herself and not herself" (73; my emphasis). Similarly, Amanda's grandmother's last words about her—"Amanda's cold. She's always been cold. She's got no love in her heart" (68)—haunt her consciousness.

Women are haunted by their former selves. One male character tries to deny the importance of childhood, asserting: "You can't blame everything on your childhood. I don't go around blaming everything on my childhood. What would be the point? It's over and done with. There's nothing you can do about it. You might just as well get on with your life" (211). The novel, however, asserts childhood's status as a defining moment. Thus, Maisie Carrington is keenly aware of the fact that her childhood determines the way she raises her own daughters, "compensating them for these small, incessant brutalities that they had neither witnessed nor, mostly, knew about, and for the unyielding atmosphere in which they had occurred" (173).

Moreover, as the novel stages women who look back on their life choices—marriage, a family, a suburban life—their pre-marital selves are brought back to life: thus, the image of the busy working woman that Amanda used to be surfaces at different points in the chapter devoted to her (54, 56, 58). These repetitions are what creates the haunting, the sense of a fleeting presence in the background—Amanda's former self has not completely disappeared. As for Juliet, her bitterness arises out of her failure to achieve the promises of her youth. She is haunted by who she might have been, as well as by other people's expectations and discourse:

> She had never expected to find herself here, where women drank coffee all day and pushed prams around the grey, orderly streets, and men went to work, went there and never came back, like there was a war on. She had thought she would be in a

> university department somewhere, or on the staff of a national newspaper. Other people had thought so too. At school she was the exceptional one. She was the one everybody talked about. She came top in all her subjects; she got a scholarship to university. They even made her Head Girl. (22)

Women examine what the novel repeatedly refers to as their "possibilities", meaning who they might have been and who they might still be. It is quite telling that Cusk should use spectral images to refer both to past and future, or virtual selves. As Derrida suggests in *Spectres of Marx*, spectres upset the linear conception of time, beckoning to the future as well as to the past. He points out that there are "several times of the specter": "[I]t is a proper characteristic of the specter, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being" (99; italics in the original text). He argues that the present cannot be contemporary to itself, and that the different present times are not organized in a linear manner. To him, the effect of spectrality consists in deconstructing the opposition, or even the dialectics, between actual presence and its other:

> What is the time and what is the history of a specter? Is there a present of the specter? Are its comings and goings ordered according to the linear succession of a before and an after, between a present-past, a present-present, and a present-future, between a "real time" and a "deferred time"?
>
> If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality or even the simulacrum in general and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. Before knowing

> whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the spectrality effect does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other. (39-40)

He also rejects the "general temporality … made up of the successive linking of presents identical to themselves and contemporary to themselves" (70). Spectrality ensures the "non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present" (xix).

Jean-Jacques Lecercle, in his "theory of haunting", has shown that the present—if there is such a thing—is haunted by what is to come. In his analysis, whereas spectres come from the past, haunting functions in relation with the future (7). The phrase "being haunted by the fear of death" illustrates the "temporality of haunting": "Haunting is the shadow cast backwards by an event which has not happened yet" (6; the translations from the French are mine). Haunting "blurs" time because "it illustrates the paradox of a future which leaves retrospective traces in the present: haunting is a form of anachrony" (8). Although Derrida and Lecercle's terminologies differ, both critics stress that haunting does not necessarily come from the past and disrupts temporality.

In *Arlington Park*, time is indeed "out of joint".[1] Solly Kerr-Leigh, who is pregnant, thus metaphorically gives birth to her eighteen-year old self: she "brings forth" a recollection of her youth (123). The memory "passes over her", just like a ghost (123). In another disruption of time, Maisie Carrington finds herself reverting to a foetus because of the monotonous repetition of the days spent at home. She feels "suspended, like a foetus in its fluids, within itself" (169-170). She also sometimes perceives her daughters as "small, reincarnated versions of her parents" (173). These examples show time being disrupted by haunting: Solly, who is

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[1] Derrida reads the inaugural sentence of the *Communist Manifesto* ("A spectre haunts Europe: the spectre of Communism") and the *Manifesto* itself in the light of the phrase used in *Hamlet*. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, I, 5 (G.R. Hibbard, ed.) Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998, p. 196.

pregnant with a future child, gives birth to her past self; family roles are reversed as Maisie becomes a foetus again while her daughters become her parents. As in Derrida's theory of haunting, past and future do not stand opposed but seem to work conjointly to show how the present, in this case the present self, is not contemporary to itself. Cusk's specificity is to stress this element of non coincidence in the female experience.

The author shows how the experience of pregnancy turns the body into a house, the future and its potentialities then “rehousing” themselves in children (144). The image of life bubbling up in houses is brought to Christine's mind by the sight of Maggie's pregnant body: “Wasn’t it incredible how the spring of life just bubbled up, rose up in these thousands of houses, amidst all this solidity” (220). Christine later reckons that “[s]he needed the spring of life to bubble up again, bubble up through the floorboards and fill her to the brim with tomorrow” (237). The body here is assimilated to a house, a container which holds the future. A related image is that of the mothers who have “transferred [their] soul[s]” in their daughters' bodies and have been left “empty, voided” (164-5). In Juliet's mind, the process is akin to soul-sucking, evoking the “un-dead” of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and bringing us into the realm of Gothic literature again: “Was that what Juliet would be, one day? Empty, all poured out into Katherine, into Benedict and Barnaby? Dead yet living?” (165)

Cusk draws on the assimilation of body and house, which, as Victor Sage has shown in *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition*, lies at the basis of the Gothic tradition and its many haunted houses. He argues that the image has scriptural origins: "Christian iconography commonly represents the body metaphorically as the house or mansion of the soul" (1), and that the "theological content of the image ultimately derives from various biblical sources, the most important of which is perhaps St Paul's Corinthians" (2). Being alive is assimilated to being buried alive, and death to the liberation of the soul (2). In a dark vision of the fate of sinners, the house / body provides the basis for a fantasy of burial alive, arrested decay and

isolation (3). In *Arlington Park*, houses can be abodes of horror too. Maisie, for instance, stays away from the kitchen, where she suspects "something terrible" may have taken place:

> The kitchen was the dingiest room in the house. Everything in it—the walls, the ceiling, the cupboards and doors and window-frames—was thickly and uniformly painted the same colour, as though something terrible had happened there, something that had resulted in the walls and cupboards being indelibly stained so that someone had decided to paint them rather than clean them. (174)

It is not surprising that images of horror should cluster around Maisie, as she is the character who feels "entombed" in her home.

In the theological allegory, the body is the house of the soul; in Cusk's version, the body is the house of the self and its potentialities. Such houses are shown to be precarious, as the past and the future may erupt at any time, threatening continuity.

3. The Quest for Knowledge

The female characters try to find permanence through change in different ways. In Maisie's case, love is defined as the "task" of "keeping [the] representations of [the loved one] together, making them continuous" (198). Offering continuity through time is a way of protecting the other against splitting, fragmentation, and dissolution—threats which are very much present in the novel.

Indeed, identity often seems to be interchangeable and transferable, especially between sisters, or between mothers and daughters. For example, Amanda says her sister Susannah killed her rabbit before remembering that she did it herself. A dive into her consciousness reveals that "[s]he had wanted both to have the rabbit and be it. She had wanted to be Susannah" (75). Similarly, when Maisie goes to her sister Georgie's bedside, she realizes that

“[s]he was in a sense rushing to her own bedside, much as she sometimes cared for her child self through her children” (179).

Moreover, the novel is built on doubling. During the trip to the mall, some details—the fact that Christine’s daughter took her rabbit with her, the presence of a young girl called “Savannah”—echo the murder of Susanna's rabbit. Characters often function in pairs and in terms of structure the novel is framed by two similar dinner parties which mirror each other. In both, a woman gets intoxicated with wine and scolded by a condescending man. Identity is transferred again, as the female role is first played by Juliet and then by Christine.

Discontinuity is not limited to the psychological realm but affects the very body itself. Repeated pregnancy is experienced by Solly as fragmentation: “It was just that she couldn’t locate a continuous sense of herself. It seemed to lie all around her in pieces, like the casings of Dora’s Russian doll when all the babies were out” (120). This specific image also appears in Cusk’s autobiographical book entitled *A Life's Work. On Becoming A Mother*. After giving birth, the author writes: “All that is clear at this point is that I have replicated, like a Russian doll. I left home one; I have come back two” (50). Another type of doll used to evoke pregnancy is the Mexican pinata: “This same body held the promise of future violence, like a Mexican pinata doll full of sweets” (12). Generally speaking, *A Life's Work* displays the same concern for continuity in the self and the same fear of fragmentation, Cusk writing for example: “I feel like a house to which an extension has been added: where once there was a wall, now there is a new room” (94), or “a person now exists who is me, but who is not confined to my body” (95). She is afraid of the “lactating, matronly spectre” she may become (108) and states that she “haunt[s] the ruin of [her] body” (134). Here again, metaphors of haunting, and more specifically haunted houses and ruins, convey the sense of self-estrangement created, in this case, by pregnancy.

This quest for identity and the attempts to maintain continuity in spite of threats explain the focus on reflections in mirrors, windows, as well as in children and other women. Reflections appear in shop windows (37) or car wing mirrors (80). The phrase "Mirror mirror on the wall" features in the overdetermined girl's bedroom at the furniture store at the mall (92). Scenes in which women put on clothes or make up in front of the mirror are moments of assessment, during which they try to ascertain what they look like and who they are. Paola, the sophisticated Italian student who rents a room at the Kerr-Leighs, functions as a mirror or yardstick for Solly, the pregnant housewife. When she enters Paola's bedroom, Solly is confronted with a refined version of femininity—elegant clothes, lingerie, pearl earrings, and perfume—which only highlights the grossness of her own version.

However, women also define themselves by their marital status, social class, and place in the consumer society, and when it comes to family life, Solly thinks she has the advantage over Paola: "[I]n Paola's presence [Solly] felt herself to be a failure, yet a part of her believed that a woman of thirty-four with no husband or children was the greatest failure of all" (129). The same kind of contradiction appears in Christine's conversation with her mother, before the final dinner. Christine's mother complains about being stifled by her husband and trapped in the role of a housewife, but her parting words endorse the very conception of that role: "Make sure the chicken's cooked right through, won't you? All these people coming. You've got your reputation to consider" (209).

Finally, beyond their individual identities, women are shown trying to grasp the essence of "femaleness". The social construction of gender is highlighted through Juliet's daughter Katherine, who learns how to be a girl at school. As she studies Katherine's reflection in the mirror, Juliet feels nostalgia for her daughter's vanished "femaleness": "Until that moment, the possibilities for Katherine had seemed endless. Katherine's femaleness had seemed like a joyful, a beautiful thing. It had seemed invincible, even in its half-formed fragility. She had

not realised what she was. She had only delighted in it, in her female being" (27). Juliet herself realizes that "[she] had forgotten she was a woman. She had forgotten she was a native creature, a thing of the flesh" (36), a thought which is echoed at the other end of the novel by the vision of Maggie, who is pregnant, as "a pioneer woman or an Amazon" living in the jungle (220). In the end, different versions of femininity are outlined, none of which seem to be entirely satisfactory.

The novel stages women aspiring to "knowledge" or "truth", whether it be freedom, self-expression, love, purity or their inner selves. Moments of epiphany are depicted, rich with life-changing opportunities, or at least with possibilities to grasp one's self, but what remains uncertain is whether the characters will prove capable of seizing them and freeing themselves. In Susannah's case, revelation comes with the death of her grandmother: she wants a chance "to discover what life really is, to see death in life, actually in it" (61). For Juliet, the epiphany is more aesthetic: "she saw the world not filtered through her veil of anger, but as it was" (167). At the end of the passage, beauty is embodied by the two swans flying "in a kind of ecstasy" (168). When she is confronted with her reflection, Maisie finds that "It was like a portrait of death; like a picture an artist might paint of himself in an access of terror and despair and self-knowledge" (194-195), and realizes that "she was only what she strove to be, what she had the guts and the good sense to go after" (193).

However, those moments of epiphany and the chances they offer are not always seized, as the example of Amanda Clapp shows quite brutally and comically:

> Soon they would go; she would cause them to go. First, she would cause Eddie to let go of her legs. Then she would package the Connellys up and put them out in the rain, with the red stain remaining as a reminder of this day, this day of her life in which all the other days seemed to be coming together and showing themselves at last.

Then she would cook the mince. (77)

Conclusion

By focusing on women and their homes, treating their bodies *as* homes and exploring the strangeness of their experience, Cusk goes back to the root of uncanny literature. As Freud pointed out in his essay on the uncanny, the very etymological root of the German *unheimlich* is *heim* ("the home"). In Freud's analysis, a sense of the uncanny appears when the unfamiliar erupts in the familiar, when the familiar itself becomes unfamiliar. "*heimlich*" ("homely") can also mean "secret", which undoes the apparent opposition between homely and uncanny. In the novel, the effect is achieved by several means—a vision of a ghost, the use of spectral metaphors, an intertextual play with fairy tales, Gothic novels and horror stories. A tension appears between hints at evil and violence lurking behind smooth surfaces and brutal returns to trivial reality. The impression that remains is that although all mothers may not be "fulminating ogre[s]" (173) and all husbands may not be murderers—or not all the time, or not literally—interpersonal relations are fraught with latent violence.

Freud pointed out that the uncanny arises when the self is divided or even fragmented, and when there is a return of the same—same names, features, characters, or fates (236). With her focus on doubling and splitting, and the interchangeability of identity, Cusk creates uncanny effects in order to convey her vision of the hazards of the female experience.

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