UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
Faculdade de Letras

Reading Objects in Late Nineteenth Century Literature

Maria Inês Mateus Robalo

Orientador(es): Prof. Doutora Ângela Maria Valadas Fernandes
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Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor no ramo de Estudos de Literatura e Cultura, na especialidade de Estudos Comparatistas

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the examination of the relationship between the Realist novel and the notion of object, with the aim of understanding some metafictional mechanisms at play in the nineteenth century narrative and the resulting conceptions of representation and interpretation of the world. Thus, I will offer an analysis of four novels published during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Europe: *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot, *Effi Briest* by Theodor Fontane, and *Los Pazos de Ulloa* and *Madre Naturaleza* by Emilia Pardo Bazán. The underlying assumption for bringing these texts together aligns itself with the idea that a renewed understanding of the nineteenth century novel entails presenting "the object" as a key-textual-clue to the staging of the perception of a representational and interpretational crisis. Throughout the nineteenth century, both the idea of representation and experience, as well as the conception of an *a priori* subject and of an immutable object are transformed into ammunition in the battlefield of an aesthetic and epistemological crisis, whose echoes are repercussed in the novels of Eliot, Fontane and Pardo Bazán. If, on the one hand, the Realist novel comes to be seen as the proverbial mirror of the real, on the other hand, through the pen of the authors studied here both fiction and reality are transformed into an object of semiotic disquiet.

Keywords: George Eliot; Theodor Fontane; Emilia Pardo Bazán; Realist novel; Representation; Object; Metafiction.

RESUMO

Esta tese centra-se em torno do questionamento da relação entre o romance Realista e a noção de objecto, com o intuito de compreender alguns mecanismos metaficcionais presentes na narrativa oitocentista e as suas implicações para o entendimento da representação e interpretação do mundo no texto literário. Para tal proponho-me analisar quatro romances publicados na Europa, no decorrer das últimas décadas do século XIX, a saber: *Daniel Deronda* de George Eliot, *Effi Briest* de Theodor Fontane, e *Los Pazos de Ulloa* e *Madre Naturaleza* de Emilia Pardo Bazán. A premissa subjacente à leitura conjunta destes textos assenta na ideia de que tomar o "objecto" como chave textual permitirá dar conta da percepção da existência de uma crise representacional e interpretativa no seio da própria literatura oitocentista. Ao longo do século XIX, tanto a ideia de representação e de experiência, como a ideia de um sujeito *a priori* e de um objecto imutável tornam-se no campo de batalha de uma crise estética e epistemológica, cujos ecos se fazem sentir nos romances de Eliot, Fontane e Pardo Bazán. Se por um lado o romance Realista se vê caricaturado como espelho do real, mesclando-se o entendimento deste último no mundo material e numa visão positivista, por outro lado, é possível encontrar nas obras dos autores referidos a transformação tanto da ficção como da realidade num objecto de inquietação semiótica.

Em *Daniel Deronda* (1876) exploraram-se as implicações da estruturação do romance em torno das noções de escala e balança, condensadas na palavra inglesa *scale*, isto é, propõe-se um estudo em que a representação literária da relação entre percepção e mundo se pauta por ajustes linguísticos de ponderação e perspectiva. Por outras palavras, o movimento narrativo é acompanhado por modulações perspectivais de aproximação e afastamento, dando conta de uma preocupação centrada nas possibilidades de coexistência entre o global e o particular. Ao mesmo tempo, há consequências quanto às implicações que os desequilíbrios nesta relação possam acarretar para o acto interpretativo, nomeadamente, provocar uma oscilação imprevisível entre visibilidade e invisibilidade, significação e insignificância, materialidade e imaterialidade. Tendo em conta a presença de caracter metaficcional de relíquias familiares e de obras de arte ao longo de *Daniel Deronda*, nas quais se espelham processos retóricos da constituição do sujeito e da percepção, ensaia-se a ideia de que o romance oferece as bases para uma meditação acerca dos actos interpretativo e representativo enquanto *sympatheia*. Assim, George Eliot parece sugerir a inclusão do romance na matéria sensível do mundo enquanto superfície textual não meramente reflectora, mas também na qualidade de objecto incorporador e transformador.

Em *Effi Briest* a realidade material e observável é figurada enquanto textura e substância indeterminadas. Assim, o romance de Theodor Fontane é apresentado como narrativa na qual os sentidos são acometidos por uma constante necessidade de dar forma, consistência e de nomear o mundo, para assim lhe conferir o estatuto de real.

Neste âmbito, analisa-se o modo como narrador e personagens delineiam estratégias para distinguir realidade e ficção, nomeadamente, o recurso a objectos visuais (imagens), objectos escritos (livros, cartas, lápides), objectos naturais (plantas, rochas), em contraste com a evocação de figuras espectrais e vozes sem corpo. Deste modo, argumenta-se que o papel estruturante destes objectos na narrativa é colocado ao serviço de uma proposta estética de Fontane, em que o romance se apresenta como superfície instável de inscrição da realidade.

Em *Los Pazos de Ulloa* e *Madre Naturaleza* a análise é norteada pelas noções de moldura e cenário, isto é, aquilo que delimita e o que está em "segundo-plano", tendo em conta a identificação de objectos que neste díptico narrativo se constituem como figuras de trânsito entre o textual e o extratextual. Assim, apresenta-se uma faceta pouco explorada da poética de Pardo Bazán relacionada com o emprego de estratégias metaficcionais ao serviço de uma reflexão acerca do texto literário como espaço limítrofe da experiência humana da linguagem, das suas realidades e ficções.

Palavras-chave: George Eliot; Theodor Fontane; Emilia Pardo Bazán; Romance Realista; Representação; Objecto; Meta-ficção.

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En las calles no había más ruido que el rumor
estridente de los remolinos de polvo,
trapos, pajas y papeles que iban de arroyo en arroyo,
de acera en acera, de esquina en esquina revolando y
persiguiéndose, como mariposas que se buscan y huyen y
que el aire envuelve en sus pliegues invisibles.

Leopoldo Alas "Clarín", *La Regenta*

Introduction
Perspectives on the Object

The aim of this dissertation is to interrogate the way acts of reading (representations of perception and interpretation in general) and objects interact in the context of nineteenth century European literature. Having surveyed the work of novelists like George Eliot (1819-1880), Theodor Fontane (1819-1898) and Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921), it became gradually clear that the attention given to the daily life and the material world, which has been generally ascribed to those writing under the aegis of Realism,[1] is a complex phenomenon that goes beyond considering the novel as the proverbial mirror of the then emerging new face of capitalism as a consumer, industrial and imperialist society, or being exclusively considered a symptom of that socio-economic period. Although this aspect will not be discarded,[2] there are other facets worthy of exploration, particularly the ones concerned with the idea of materiality coming into play in literary fiction to garnish new ways of understanding representation, perception and interpretation. Thus, I align this inquiry on the Realist novel with the necessity to ask "questions of form, language, and rhetoric, repositioning realism as a literature not just of historical chronicle or socio-psychological observation, but also of wide ranging epistemological, phenomenological, and psychological experiment." (Weitzman 6). My departing hypothesis consists in proposing that if we consider novels like *Daniel Deronda* (1876), *Effi Briest* (1894), *The House of Ulloa* [*Los Pazos de Ulloa*] (1886) and *Mother Nature* [*La Madre Naturaleza*] (1887)[3] and start by taking into account the presence of everyday

[1] See Stewart 28-31. Here the author supports herself in Jean-François Lyotard to make the point that description, in what she terms bourgeois realism, embodies social hierarchies and class relations: "particularly in the era of late capitalism we can see all aspects of the material world become symbolic of class relations, all signs referring with careful discrimination to their place in the system of signs" (29).

[2] For a varied approach about the representation of consumer and industrial cultures in literature see El-Rayess, *Henry James and the Culture of Consumption*; Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money*; Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*; Erlin, *Necessary Luxuries*; Miller, *Novels Behind the Glass*; Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust*.

[3] A few words on some paratextual choices that need to be accounted for given the multilingual nature of the core corpus of this dissertation. I opted for the smoothness of the reading experience, thus, regarding the texts of the

objects and the supposed emphasis on physical observable and material reality in general, we will notice that most acquire the status of metafictional figures. In this guise, what unites these European writers seems to be the shared belief that through the creation of narratives (in this case, in the form of the novel) one can inquire into the puzzling nature of referents that purport to sustain reality and to demarcate the lines of fiction.[4] In other words, I seek to map what I term Eliot's, Fontane's and Pardo Bazán's semiotic drive, which is moved by the notion that not only the Realist novel, but also the world are convoluted in the elusiveness of sensory reality and the mimetic processes that both mediate, create it and let it escape.

Thus, at this point I propose to introduce a brief exercise in the etymology of the word "object" (in English). According to *The Oxford dictionary of English etymology*, the word already in use before 1389 was *obiect* and it meant "tangible thing", having been borrowed from Old French *object*, and directly from Medieval Latin *objectum* "thing put before the mind or sight". So, the object implicates its very existence both in cognition and perception (senses); as to what may be considered an object is left in the open, no requirements to objects having to be animate or inanimate are enunciated. An additional consultation of the entry "object" in The *New Oxford Dictionary Of English* also defines it as "a person or thing to which a specified action or feeling is directed to". These very bare definitions translate key points in what could be considered a mixed genealogy of theories of perception, *i.e.* subject-object relations, which

primary corpus, whose original language is not English, the English translation will be provided first, followed by the original, full bibliographical references will be provided in the "Works Cited" section. In relation to quotations from texts belonging to the group of secondary bibliography, when available, I opted for existing translations in English, when that is not the case, the translation is identified as my own.

[4] See Gallagher, "The Rise" 336-363. Here the author defends the idea that the "rise of the novel" in the eighteenth-century coincides with the "rise of fictionality" understood as a core positive value associated with Aristotelian probability and verisimilitude. Thus, following a chiefly British tradition, Gallagher is interested in investigating the various "referential effects" and how they translate in the reader's affects and sense of reality. Leading her to claim that the novel, founded in the paradox of both enclosing and displaying its fictionality, and the difficult balance of part and whole or individual and typical that the realist novel imposes on itself, produces a sense of incompleteness, and therefore, as readers we "seek in and through characters, therefore, are not surrogate selves but the contradictory sensations of *not being a character*. […] We experience, that is, the elation of a unitary unboundedness. On the other hand, we are also allowed to love an equally idealized immanence, an ability to be, we imagine, without textuality, meaningfulness, or any other excuse for existing." (361).

by the end of the eighteenth- century had started to shift from a Cartesian-Lockean model, where ideas are "objects in the mind" or "representations in the mind" imprinted from a knowable outside reality, passing through the Kantian claim that one may only attempt to engage in the nature of things insofar as they appear to human perception in a subjective fashion.

Both representation and experience, the idea of a pre-given subject and of an unchangeable object, become the battlefield of a generalised epistemological crisis which throughout the nineteenth- century is deemed to have reached its apex, leading a figure like Sigmund Freud, for instance, to overview this intellectual atmosphere as the result of "the history of modern science as three blows to man's naive self-esteem. Copernicus had shown that the earth was not at the centre of the universe; Darwin, that man was not at the apex of creation; and Freudian psychoanalysis, that the ego ('das Ich') 'is not even master in its own house' (*SE* XVI,285)" (Robertson 156). Furthermore, one could follow Stefan Zweig[5] in his analysis of the nineteenth century and add Friedrich Nietzsche to the stream, especially the way in which in the famous essay on "Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873) ["Über Warheit und Lüge im Außermoralischen Sinn"] the philosopher calls attention to humanity's immersion in power and language and pleas for the necessity of a shift in the modalities of interpretation of the world. Indeed, as Christoph Cox has noticed in a survey of the later *Genealogy of Morality* (1889) [*Zur Genealogie der Moral*], Nietzsche juggles with the idea of an "affective interpretation". Cox quotes the following passage from the essay:

> [O]bjectivity [ought to be] understood not as "contemplation without interest" (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to have one's For and Against *under control* and to engage and disengage them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations [*Perspectiven und Affect-Interpretationen*] in the service of knowledge. Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject"; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirit" [«absolute Geistigkeit»], "knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces [*die aktiven und interpretirenden Kräfte*], through which alone seeing

[5] See *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche*.

> becomes a seeing-something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing [ein perspektivisches Sehen], only a perspective "knowing" [ein perspektivisches «Erkennen»]; and the more affects we allow to speak about a thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can lend to the thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this—what would that mean but to castrate the intellect? (III: 12)

According to Cox, this passage is a condensation of what had been emerging as a new phenomenological epistemology based on perspectivism and "affective interpretation", changing the answer to the questions of who claims to know, to experience, to represent, and what is the knowledge about/ of, what is experienced and represented? Nietzsche's answers to these questions are "affects" and "the apparent world" respectively. In fact, these are questions that Realist writers had been tackling since the second half of the nineteenth century. For now it suffices to summon George Eliot's often quoted letter to her editor John Blackwood, in which she states "I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are, seen through such a medium as my own nature gives me" (Eliot, *Letters* II 362). In other words, Eliot does away with the naivety associated with the subject's mind as a transparent mirror of reality and by analogy literature, and the novel as a particular form, although seeking to represent "things as they are" is an interpretation within a particular medium and sensibility. Moreover, Pearl Brilmyer ("Plasticity" 67) calls attention to Eliot's posthumously published essay "Notes on Form in Art" where the author espouses the notion that in both poetry and life form is "a limit determined partly by intrinsic relations or composition of the object, and partly by the extrinsic action of other bodies upon it. This is true whether the object is a rock or a man." (Eliot, *Essays* 434). In this essay written in 1868, Eliot counters the strict distinction between form and matter, in that she considers form to be "the relation of multiplex interdependent parts to a whole which is itself in the most varied & therefore the fullest relation to other wholes. […] The highest Form is the highest organism […]." (Eliot, *Essays* 433). Thus, what unites writers like George Eliot, Theodor Fontane and Emilia Pardo Bazán in what I earlier termed a shared "semiotic drive" is the growing notion

that it is not "only" the subject, who is no longer the master in his own house, but also the realization that the lived world is also embedded in language and affect, so it is not an *a priori* given object. Taking a cue from this minimal definition of object as an organic cluster of human and non-human relations, throughout this dissertation it will become clear that represented objects are taken into consideration as long as they are things or entities understood to be at play in the realm of perception partaking in a network of perspectives, actions or feelings, in other words, both people, inanimate things and imaginary entities may come to integrate the "world of objects". In the quest to posit the novel at the epicentre of this turmoil shaking the lived world of language, in *Daniel Deronda* Eliot tackles objects via the recurrence to the "structure" of the scale, Fontane does the same by connecting representation and objects to the idea of texture in *Effi Briest*, and Pardo Bazán, unwilling to give up on transcendence, addresses it through the idea of frames in *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*. Thus, the chapters of this dissertation are arranged around these nodes: Scales, Textures, and Frames.

Contemporary research on the nineteenth century Realist novel centred on the theoretical implications of considering objects beyond the narrower sense of produced goods has been closely linked to the work of Bill Brown and to his advancements of "thing-theory" as a theoretical looking-glass through which to consider the role of material culture in literary discourse. Bill Brown's general contention in the essay "Thing Theory" (2001) is that a traditional opposition between subject and object, in which the subject looks through objects to unveil what they say about culture and oneself by following codes that make them meaningful, disregards the existence of a third element in the equation, the "thing". According to the author, this realization can lead to a modification in the way objects are understood, and as a result to their positing in the field of agency, whose *modus operandi* could be described as a sort of "thinging" (to adapt Brown's designation borrowed from the Heideggerian lexicon). In fact, Brown states that "the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story

of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (4). Taking this into account, and considering the emphasis Brown allocates to the amorphousness of the word "thing" because of the multiplicity of its denotative power, it might be legitimate to conclude that the author's identification of "thing" as the emergent *tertium quid* in the subject- object relation, to a certain extent, casts in doubt the very mechanisms of the agency of objects and highlights its resistance to definition, where "You could imagine things, second, as what is *excessive* in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects- their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems" (Brown, "Thing Theory" 5. My emphasis).

This type of reasoning summons to mind some of the already ongoing debates in the nineteenth- century (and prior to that) about subject-object relations understood as a crux of aesthetic and epistemological concerns. For the English art critic John Ruskin, for instance, this divided pair was unproductive, since he was convinced this was a limitation of the Kantian legacy. In the fourth chapter, of volume III, of *Modern Painters* (1840-1863), the critic proposes instead an opposition between activity and passivity when dealing with the issue of agency and perception: if an object was capable of affecting another, irrespective of being animate or inanimate, then this was a manifestation of agency. In fact, as the literary scholar Branka Arsić has noted in the essay "Materialist Vitalism or Pathetic Fallacy", in Ruskinian thought:

> things, stones, plants, animals, and humans are all agents with the power to manufacture sensations of themselves in others. And conversely, they are all subject to experiencing other beings according to the way they are acted upon. Thus, everybody is conjured to see things in a certain way, while simultaneously conjuring the ways that the others perceive (126).

Notwithstanding the appeal of such ideas, especially if one takes into account the prevalence in popular culture of an interest in superstitious thought about paranormal activities,

such as hauntings or animated furniture,[6] many were the voices raised against them, believing these propositions to fall under the traps of the pathetic fallacy. For a succinct rendition of such positions, for now it suffices to evoke Kenneth Burke's 1945 *Grammar of Motives*, where he underscores the fact that personalized feelings are a condition for agency, and furthermore, that the capacity to be affected is exclusive of the thinking subject. Despite these objections, it is nonetheless necessary for the purposes of this dissertation to overview this aspect of nineteenth- century thought as it will pave the way for a better understanding of the presence of objects in the literature of the period and how they shaped ideas of perception and an opening up of the intermingling of categories of reality and fiction. The short story by Guy de Maupassant entitled *Who Knows?* (1890) [*Qui Sait?*] is a telling example: one day a man comes back to his house only to find it completely empty. One of the advanced explanations to account for such disappearance is that the furniture abandoned the house by its own accord (the more plausible hypothesis that the house might have been burgled is only briefly entertained). As the narrative illustrates, objects, and furniture in particular, were very much alive in this century, even though the nature and source of their volitions remained an interrogation. It seems then, that strictly ontological concerns are subdued and what stands out is the interest in the processes of perceptual exchange between subjects and objects. In addition, the text "The Philosophy of Toys" (1853) [*Morale du Jou Jou*] by Charles Baudelaire could also be brought to the fore as a case in point, given that it presents the toy as "the child's earliest initiation into art, or rather it is the first concrete example of art" (199) ["la première initiation de l'enfant à l'art, ou plutôt c'en est pour lui la première realisation" (683)]. This short text grouped under Baudelaire's *Curiosités Esthétiques* is particularly persuasive in advocating the existence of an animation process mediated by fantasy, which connects subjects, works of art and other objects.

[6] On this subject see Briefel 209-234.

In these respects, it is possible to identify at least two major trends in the research dedicated to the representation of common objects in literature. One trend focuses on what one may call Realist literature's relationship to the emerging commodity realm and the concomitant importance of the latter not only at a thematic level, but also at a theoretical level with implications in the conception of representation proper. When scrutinizing the presence of that material world in narrative discourse, description (*ekphrasis, hypotyposis*) emerges as the most obvious and inescapable point of where objects gain shape and present themselves.[7] However, as it was shown by Roland Barthes in "The Reality Effect" ["L'effet de réel"], giving as an example the writings of Gustave Flaubert, the issue was not so much with rendering an exact copy of the empirical world or reality, as it was a matter of substituting it with (exquisite) metaphors. In other words, a matter pertaining to the manipulation of language to convey a certain idea of how a "realistic depiction" of the real world in literature should be effectuated, which at the same time, vehiculated a notion about what reality was. According to Barthes:

> All the same, the aesthetic goal of Flaubertian description is thoroughly mixed with "realistic" imperatives, as if the referent's exactitude, superior or indifferent to any other function, governed and alone justified its description, or— in the case of descriptions reduced to a single word— its denotation: here aesthetic constraints are steeped— at least as an alibi— in referential constraints: it is likely that, if one came to Rouen in a diligence, the view one would have coming down the slope leading to the town would not be "objectively" different from the panorama Flaubert describes. ("Reality" 145)

Accordingly, the reality effect obeys to the changeable principle of verisimilitude (*le vraisemblable*), which in the nineteenth century Realist tradition tends to imply "the direct collusion of a referent and a signifier" ("Reality" 147), apparently endorsing the belief that reality is the world of material existence. Thus, as Barthes succinctly observed, the Realist project operates on the basis of a "referential illusion", in which "eliminated from the realist

[7] Roman Jakobson notices that description in the realist novel helps explain his double pole theory of aphasia, thus he identifies one of its preferred structuring modalities, metonymy: "Following the path of contiguous relationships, the Realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synecdochic details. In the scene of Anna Karenina's suicide Tolstoj's artistic attention is focused on the heroine's handbag; and in *War and Peace* the synecdoches "hair on the upper lip" and "bare shoulders" are used by the same writer to stand for the female characters to whom these features belong." (Jakobson 111).

speech-act as a signified of denotation, the 'real' returns to it as a signified of connotation" ("Reality" 148).

Therefore, the prevalence of narratives with plots structured around characters defined by their relations to property or material things in general should come as no surprise: the gambler, the capitalist, the speculator, the destitute, the collector are staple presences in nineteenth century fiction. Furthermore, money is often a mediator in the lives of such personages, and as a result of this liaison, they came to embody the socio-economic changes that were shaping the face of a new and emergent financial system, characterized by a disjunction at the core of the monetary sphere, where money is circulating in its physicality as currency and in its abstract value. Thus, in *Realist Vision*, Peter Brooks argues, this new situation fed the emergence of a "cash-nexus", which made possible to conceive money as to represent representation itself, that is a system of signs for things (14-15).[8] It is this very desire of part for whole which both animates narrative and, in fact, creates the illusion of the real. On this matter Umberto Ecco writes

> It is possible to consider the exchange of commodities as a semiotic phenomenon not because the exchange of goods implies physical exchange, but because in the exchange the use value of the goods is transformed into their exchange value- and therefore a process of signification or symbolization takes place, this later being perfected by the appearance of money, which stands for something else. (Eco, *Semiotics* 24-25; *apud.*Stewart 6).

In fact, money used as metonymy of representation at one and the same time reinforces and shatters what Barthes termed "referential illusion" under whose aegis Realism operated (148).

The other trend concerned with the role of objects in literature has been largely influenced by the rise of Bill Brown's conception of "thing theory", to which I have already alluded to at the beginning of this introduction. Brown's proposals figure at the basis of some research done pertaining to the agency of the inanimate world, which attempt to move away from the referential illusion debate. For instance, Elaine Freedgood in *The Ideas in Things*

[8] Further discussions on this can be found in Bivona and Tromp (ed). *Culture & Money in the Nineteenth Century: Abstracting Economics*; Bartlett. *Object Lessons*; Armstrong. *Victorian Glassworlds*; Michie. *The Vulgar Question of Money*; Miller. *Novels Behind the Glass*.

argues that in Victorian novels, furniture, although deprived of articulate voice, potentially unveils a lustre of narratives of colonial dominance, and in so doing refers back to the "historical world". In a similar vein John Plotz presents the novel as "the logical breeding ground for reflections on cultural portability in large part because its own form— the self-sufficient but mimetic narrative, bound in covers but free to roam— makes it an ideal inhabitant of this world of portable cultural property" (72). In a narrower scope, in *Novel Craft* Thalia Schaffer investigates the cultural history of domestic handicraft through the Victorian novel, suggesting that handicrafts helped vehiculate tensions between modernity and tradition, ideas of femininity, economic and class values. In her account, the handicraft represented the nostalgia for the "authentic object" deemed lost amidst commodity culture and industrialism.

Thus, despite having distinct starting points, what comes to the surface in both approaches outlined above is the inquiry into the ideas expressed by "things" amidst their web of relationships. In this dissertation I chose to focus on those, which, for a lack of a better term, have metafictional and meta-referential implications in the novels of Eliot, Fontane, and Pardo Bazán. By this I mean that I selected those objects that appear to be used to problematise the boundaries of perception in the cultural context of nineteenth century Realism, as a way for the authors to explore the plasticity of the novelistic form and their own practice of it, not only in its representative quest for embodying all things visible and material, but also the idea of an extended reality beyond the visible. However, this affirmation should not be confused with an Acteon like manoeuvre or an ontological quest to unveil "true reality".[9] Instead, on a distinct modulation, my premise is that these authors help us foresee the need to stress a perspective interpretation of subject-object relations, a position which consists in the surmise that this relationship rests upon a constant permutation of the referent's positioning, thus eluding a sharp distinction between objective and subjective locations.

[9] See Brooks, *Body Work* 97-106; Barthes, *The Pleasure*.

In fact, nineteenth century literature and criticism provide valuable sources that testify to the prevalence of concerns regarding the thresholds between materiality and immateriality during this period, that was closely connected to the pair of visibility and invisibility.[10] As it has been widely documented,[11] the identification of this dichotomy emerged in close connection with the appearance of new technological devices, namely the photographic apparatus and the cinematograph, which altered the relationship between human visual senses and reality. In *Realist Vision*, Peter Brooks makes an argument for considering Realism as an aesthetic movement generally based on the conviction that the sense of sight is a privileged channel to access the world, claiming that "Realism tends to deal in 'first impressions' of all sorts" (3). Furthermore, Brooks notes that the "world of phenomena and a detailed report on it- a report often in the form of what we call description. […] narrative fiction of the realist type uses and represents itself in metonymy, the selected parts that we must construct sequentially into a whole." (16).[12] Even though I take these claims as cues for establishing that in most of the novels of my corpus vision is at the basis of subject-object relations used to reflect and theorize about human perception *vis à vis* literary representation (aesthetic object), they also make clear that Realism rethatches a competition between the senses and perceptive modes (mediations). Thus, in *Daniel Deronda*, *Effi Briest* and *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature* one may actually notice an unease around "the ocular metaphor" (Prendargast 59) that constitutes a myopic glance at literary representation. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, it goes

[10] "The Victorian age is a key period in this history as an era in which the agency, composition, durability, dynamics, and origins of matter were fiercely debated in scientific investigations and pondered in artistic and literary explorations of materiality. Even though 'nineteenth-century discussions about the ontological status of humans, inorganic matter, and machines live on in assessments of our own 'posthuman condition,'' as Katharina Boehm argues (2012, 10), the Victorians are hardly considered trailblazers for new materialist concerns. While the Enlightenment is often associated with the consolidation of 'nature-culture, human-nonhuman, animate-inanimate binaries' (Barad 2007, 171), dualist thinking became increasingly tenuous in the course of nineteenth century philosophical enquiries into the inextricability of organic and inorganic matter, or bodies and minds." (Waal and Kluick 2).

[11] See Nead, *The Haunted Gallery*.

[12] See Buescu, *Incidências do Olhar* for a thorough exploration of visual perception in relation to nature and landscape in the context of Romanticism.

hand in hand with the identification of a permutability of the referent, and as a consequence, with the idea that representation may be a sensuous object to be seen, heard, read and even touched.

A different fashion of addressing the binomen perception-representation is to be found in Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book*. Here the author puts forward the compelling hypothesis that the vividness of perception is what distinguishes the material from the imaginary world. Scarry valorises the haptic qualities in particular, not only the visual as we tend to find being the case in the Peter Brooks' oeuvre mentioned above.[13] This book is a reflection of an heuristic nature, where the author proposes that the reader engage in a thought experiment as a prerequisite to follow the contentions being made. First, the reader is told that if he or she conjures a mental image of an object or something else from the world, the imagined product of such exercise would be a blurred image, something lacking definition and density, which Scarry characterizes as similar to the ones produced by our activities of daydreaming. On a second step, Elaine Scarry introduces the idea that literature, contrary to our daydreaming, is able to induce in us a process of sensory mimesis that resembles our own perceptual acts when in contact with the empirical world, despite being almost wholly devoid of actual sensory content (4). The author continues saying that

> what in perception comes to be imitated is not only the sensory outcome (the way something looks or sounds, or feels beneath the hands) but the actual structure of production that gave rise to the perception; that is the material conditions that made it look, sound, or feel the way it did. (9)

[13] See Kumbier for a critique of the five modalities of writer's rhetorical instructions presented by Scarry as the pillars of a "mimesis of perception". According to Kumbier "Yet this mimesis seems almost always in Scarry's readings to be strongly, pervasively (if not always exclusively) visual, and hence always ultimately representational. No matter how intricately writers work their images, the images always seem to refer to something that can be seen or, more precisely, that one can imagine seeing. An obvious limitation of this orientation is that it leads one away from what the text presents that *cannot* be pictured, and one might argue that it is exactly what cannot be pictured when reading that matters most: the play and interplay of the words, what Jakobson referred to as the words' *poetic* function. Most of the time, Scarry seems remarkably unconcerned with the dimensions of verbal description that do not refer us to an external reality, imagined or not, as much as they do to other words." (74).

The corollary of Scarry's contention is that writers are able to bring this about by describing surfaces of different consistencies overlapping each other (ex: a wall seen through a veil, or with shadows projected upon it). The author claims that writers[14] give instructions that guide and direct the reader's imaginative acts to resemble perceptive acts. However, it could be argued that although Elaine Scarry grounds her conclusions on a close reading of texts, her intent to devise a general theory of imaginative cognition remains nonetheless a rendition of particular rhetorical devices in a selected number of novels.

So far, I have surveyed a few studies which informed my approach to the Realist novel in general, and my proposed understanding of object as a crucial metafictional and metareferential aspect that implicates the binomen materiality/immateriality (and other threshold conglomerations)[15] to explore interpretation and perception in the constitution of literary representation for authors like George Eliot, Theodor Fontane and Emilia Pardo Bazán. Nevertheless, before engaging with the particular novels, it remains necessary to cover some ground in relation to actual items of material culture that garnish fiction in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Of all the symbolic settings where the objects of material culture are put on display within narratives, from museums and galleries (public display of knowledge and art), shopping-windows (public display of commodities), to the slums (public display of destitution),[16] it is the private home that tends to capture the most attention,[17] and in fact, it is a common denominator in *Daniel Deronda*, *Effi Briest*, *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*. The space of the home, as Estela Vieira has shown through her analyses of Iberian and Brazilian nineteenth century novels, becomes the threshold point where public and private intersect, and the exterior and interior negotiate their existences, "the interior space in these novels emerges

[14] Many examples are extracted from Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*.
[15] I have briefly alluded to debates around agency and intentionality, and to oppositional pairs such as animate-inanimate, visibile- invisible.
[16] See Schülting for a study of dirt as the counterpart of the commodity in Victorian material culture in general and literary representation in particular.
[17] See Cohen; Schaffer; Bernstein; Vieira.

as a place that acts out the contradictions challenging the development of the self and society" (Vieira 57). Moreover, according to Vieira, looking at the narrativization of the home interior (its settings, decorative details, and furnishings) and noticing the visibility accorded to the new bourgeois material interests goes hand in hand with the phenomenon of a new subjectivity to be read in the "use [of] the intimate dwelling space to underscore modern concerns about the self's growing alienation, drawing attention to the need of public and moral response to the decay of social order." (Vieira 75). In fact, taking a moment to dwell on the spaces where the *objets d'art*, the knick-knack, bibelots, handicrafts, antiques and other collectibles or commodities are put on display in narrative, puts in evidence the imbrication of self and thing on the representative plane. Let us consider for instance the text bellow:

> And then, during that period when Des Esseintes had felt the need to draw attention to himself, he had devised a sumptuous, peculiar, schemes of decoration, dividing his salon into a series of variously carpeted alcoves, which could be related by subtle analogies, by indeterminate correlations of tone, either cheerful or gloomy, delicate or flamboyant, to the character of the Latin or French works he loved. He would then settle himself in that alcove whose furnishings seemed to him to correspond most closely to the essential nature of the work which the whim of the moment induced him to read. (Huysmans, *Against Nature* 11)
>
> [Puis, au temps où il jugeait nécessaire de se singulariser, des Esseintes avait aussi créé des ameublements fastueusement étranges, divisant son salon en une série de niches, diversement tapissées et pouvant se relier par une subtile analogie, par un vague accord de teintes joyeuses ou sombres, délicates ou barbares, au caractère des oeuvres latines et françaises qu'il aimait. Il s'installait alors dans celle de ces niches dont le décor lui semblait mieux correspondre à l'essence même de l'ouvrage que son caprice du moment l'amenait à lire] (Huysmans, *A Rebours* 89).

This paragraph taken from Joris-Karl Huysmans' *Against Nature* [*A Rebours*] (1884) serves not only to illustrate the widespread idea that the decoration of one's home could mirror one's interiority or state of mind, but it also makes the case to consider decoration a rhetorical art on par with human language, in other words as being capable of allusion, analogy, and even to embody the essence of literary works.[18] Only a few decades later, the novelist Edith Wharton (1862-1937) would dedicate herself (together with Ogden Godman, Jr.) to the writing of a home decoration manual, where she urged for a reformation in Victorian decoration practices,

[18] Emily Apter considers that *A Rebours* encapsulates the decadent cabinet, a space where the forbidden and the hidden give reign to a voyeuristic gaze (9).

claiming that "The vulgarity of current decoration has its source in the indifference of the wealthy to architectural fitness" (xviii). For Wharton, architectonic structure (deep) and décor (superficial) should have an harmonious relationship, and even goes so far as to argue that the decoration of the home can be a mirror image of the narrative construction one finds in the literary field.

In this manner, homes and their furnishings are presented as story-tellers and coextensively as entities able to transmit knowledge and aesthetical pleasure. Since the early modern period, for instance, cabinets of curiosities became more and more common, and brought to the inside of the home objects that opened up this enclosed space to that of the natural world and scientific knowledge. According to Maria Zytaruk in "Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge", "it was the capacity of the cabinet to accommodate divergent readings of nature and embody rival systems of knowledge, which makes it a crucial site for the history of early modern science" (3). Gradually and during the nineteenth century the bibelot[19] comes to gain a privileged appearance at the interior of (bourgeois) homes. As Janell Watson defends, "telling the story of the bibelot involves telling stories of collecting, displaying, decorating, selling, shopping, classifying, and cataloguing" (Watson 2). In this scope, collections are more than the devices for the objectification of desire (of acquisition), as considered by Susan Stewart in *On Longing* when she claims that "within the development of culture under an exchange economy, the search for authentic experience and, correlatively, the search for the authentic object became crucial" (Stewart 133). In the interior of the home the bibelots brought a disarray of information and incited variegated readings and feelings on those who came into contact with them. Considering the commodity as a preferred representative object of nineteenth century material culture in fiction, casts some light on the guiding

[19] The "bibelot" congregates a plurality of meanings: a disparate array of goods, ranging from mass-produced trinkets to priceless collectors' items and handcrafted objects.

hypothesis that consists in presenting the Realist novel as the representation of an ongoing struggle of interpretation: the commodity due to its masked duplicitous nature (construed as object of desire and material object) resists interpretation and the assignation of a single denotative meaning. As Janell Watson summarily puts it:

> Furthermore, as Marx insists in his theory of the commodity, relationships among things are inseparable from relationships among people, implying that the world of things is a social world, with a social structure which includes not only class relations and social positioning (the stuff of 'distinction''), but also gender relations, written and unwritten rules of exchange, usages of objects in daily life, and the significance accorded to objects, implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously. (7)

The commodity is put aptly to use in the fiction of this period not only to reflect upon issues of perception, but also to work out issues of the order of aesthetics and poetics, namely how the representation of commodities challenges the way narrative constructs meaningfulness and meaninglessness. This pair is at the core of the act of description. The descriptive modus operandi can be of a cataloguing and inventory type, providing the reader with a heap of objects placed side by side in the tissue of narrative, which can create a digressive space within it and thus thwart the expectations of a meaningful contribution to the understanding of the story being told, or it can simply delay narrative closure. As is widely known, almost to the point of having become a cliché in literary theory, George Lukács in "Narrate or Describe?" ["Erzählen oder Beschreiben?"] took issue with there being "too much" description, and contended that description should be a selective practice and be subordinated to the function of the thing described in the action. Janell Watson identifies the problem from a different perspective, "there is the matter of interpretation, of finding meaning in superfluous material things, of reading things for information about people, or for historical or anthropological knowledge" (3). As we have seen earlier, it is possible to find the echo of the question posed by Barthes in "The Reality Effect":

> Thus, description appears as a kind of characteristic of the so-called higher languages, to the apparently paradoxical degree that it is justified by no finality of action or communication. The singularity of description (or of the "useless detail") in narrative fabric, its isolated situation, designates a question which has the greatest importance for the structural analysis of narrative. This question is the following: Is everything in narrative significant, and if not, if insignificant

> stretches subsist in the narrative syntagm, what is ultimately, so to speak, the significance of this insignificance? (143)

At this point, allow me to resort to a heuristic mention to Jorge Luis Borges' short-story entitled *Tlön, Uqbar Orbis Tertius* (1940), perhaps an unexpected connection to the writers constituting the corpus of this dissertation and to Barthes' question transcribed above. This well-known narrative from the mid twentieth- century Argentinian writer deals with the written construction of worlds, or better yet, tackles the subtle riff that comes along when conceiving the world we inhabit as an object of language and the implications it bears on the categories of fictionality and reality that guide our experience. *Tlön, Uqbar Orbis Tertius* tells the story of a secret sect, set in a near future, who create an encyclopaedia of an imaginary country named Tlön. These pages, upon circulating widely in the world of the narrator (which is also supposed to be the empirical reader's world), start to produce tangible effects in it. Amongst those effects is the appearance of the "imaginary" objects of Tlön in the narrator's world, and the possibility of the immediate conversion of thoughts into tangible realities. In other words, the transformation operated is so deep that the 'real' world becomes the fictional world of Tlön. Thus, the narrative opens up a path that can lead to the conclusion that language intervenes in the world, and creates it, which consequently blurs the significance of maintaining the opposition between reality and fiction, if everything is ultimately language and discursive codification. Tlön's reality, being written by human beings, would then assuage the doubts regarding the world's ontology. However, I would like to call the attention to the fact that the world of Tlön only starts to supplant the "historical reality" when the physical elements of Tlön begin to materialize in the world of the narrator (which corresponds to the "real world"). It could be argued that this Borgesian narrative operates and proposes an inversion of the typical understanding of realism and its affiliation with mimesis, in which literature or art take upon themselves the enterprise of representing the referents of the historical world. Instead, in this

short-story one finds writing providing the world its referents, in other words, the world represents art, and that representation is lived and interpreted as reality, as the real thing.

Despite belonging to a different cultural context, the novels that constitute the core of this dissertation are grounded in this unshaken and in a way still puzzling nature of literature's and life's referentiality (Prendergast 62). Although there is, on the one hand, a mainstream credo in Realist fiction engaged in making form invisible, *i.e.*, to transform the "textual effect" into a "reality effect", on the other hand, the novels partake in the growing notion of a phenomenal reality of which writing is also a part of. So, they are novels that devolve us the fictionality of reality. In a way, these novels could be seen as a refrain to Shakespeare's dictum "We are such stuff /As dreams are made on" (*The Tempest*), by questioning the nature of that "stuff", and the difficulty of defining it. Another way to present this could perhaps be found in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where Merleau-Ponty writes that "The subject of perception will remain unknown so long as we cannot escape the alternative between created [naturé] and creating [naturant], between sensation as a state of consciousness and as the consciousness of a state, between existence in itself and existence for itself." (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 216).

One could say there is then an inherent (maybe even necessary) confusion or flowing between object and subject relations that captivates nineteenth century literary landscape. When Thing Theory appears in the late 1990's by the hand of Bill Brown, as mentioned above, it is to tackle these kind of relations in literary works and to argue for more attention to be given to the world of objects. It also delves into what is considered as material and the linguistic aspect of the referent in the discussion of mimesis, as well as, ideas of what it means to represent reality. In contiguity to this, Hal Foster in "Real Fictions" recapitulates Roland Barthes' contribution to what is to be subsumed under the term the "Real", from the necessity

to unmask the "sign" and demystify culture, to the study of the reality effect in the essay of the same title. Foster summarizes:

> in such narrative, Barthes argued, everything is expected to mean; even incidental details that seem not to signify do so nonetheless, for what they thus signify is insignificance, and the apparent meaninglessness of the mere facts of the contingent world helps to clinch the realist evocation of the real. In this account nothing escapes the "empire of signs" and so it was but a short step to see realism in toto as a system of conventions, as Barthes did in *S/Z*, his painstaking analyses of the Balzac short story "Sarrasine" (1830). There he demonstrated, line by line, how Balzac referred "not from a language to a referent but from one code to another"- that is, how the narrative consisted "not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real. "This is why realism cannot be designated a 'copier'," Barthes concluded, "but rather a pastischeur" (through secondary mimesis, it copies what is already a copy (19).

This study aims at analysing these novels through this lens, in order to test these "copies of copies" producing effects as the imagined vocation of true literature. Furthermore, this position also implicates considering an "intentional realist reader or reading", to use Darío Villanueva's expression, that is a certain interpretative or perceptive experience cannot be taken out of the equation:

> "In relation to realism, however, we need to determine the precise meaning of the term 'referent.' […] Instead of unreflectively postulating a consistent and unequivocal world accessible to the subject's direct perception, I have invoked the mediating presence of a third discourse which consists of the modalization, construction, or interpretation of the world, being already embedded in Aristotelian mimesis. (Villanueva, *Theories* 85)

Thus, we come full circle with the theoretical framework that guides this thesis in exploring notions of representation, perception and reading espoused in the work of George Eliot, Theodor Fontane and Emilia Pardo Bazán, via the use of objects as metafictional elements.

Finally, a few words on the organization of this work are now in order. In the first chapter entitled "Scales" we will be dealing with Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Here I propose to consider the novel through the notion of the scale as an apt structural image to understand the novel's reflective endeavour on the relation between humans and world, the scale being an image which not only evokes balance and weighing, but also perspective. In other words, the narrative is formed through the alternation of perceptive scope (zooming in and out), a mode followed not only by the omniscient narrator, but also by the characters themselves at the level of the plot. This aspect is intimately related to strategies for striking a balance between the

whole and the detail, which ultimately makes the scale's plates either pend for the side of meaning or for the one of meaninglessness, for vision or for blindness, for materiality or immateriality (without necessarily conflating the pairs with each other). Thus, it is by highlighting the rapport of family heirlooms (jewels and books- chest of papers), works of art (paintings and statues), to characters (Gwendolen, Daniel, Mirah, Grandcourt, Lydia Glasher, Mordecai), that *Daniel Deronda* offers a meditation on the implications of considering contiguity between subjects and objects at the turn of the century, opening up the novel to the sensitive matter of the world, as a space of embodiment rather than reflection.

In the second chapter the focus will be on *Effi Briest* as a novel where reality appears as an indeterminate texture and substance, challenging representation and interpretation. Thus, *Effi Briest* will be presented as a narrative in which the perceptive senses are overwrought by a continuous summon to give shape, consistency and name the world and its experiences. It will be shown how characters and the world become folded in one another, creating a multi-layered reality whose double meanings threaten to transcend them (characters). Through the picture of a ghost, heliotrope, stones, and disembodied sounds, the novel stages itself as an unstable surface of inscription.

In chapter three, it will be shown that through an approach based on the narrative categories of frame and background it is possible to discover in *The House of Ulloa* and in *Mother Nature* an implicit reflection on realist representation as a processes of reading materiality. In accordance, I will survey the role of natural landscape and home interiors in both novels and, subsequently, that of the book, in conveying not only figurations, but also protocols for the act of reading materiality as a metafictional discourse on literary representation and of human perception. Following this line of thought, I will demonstrate how both novels explore the status of background in fiction as a problematic framing and a convoluted process by the very use of background figures and imagery in her narrative,

particularly those pertaining to surfaces and outward structures like the house, the bibelot, the book in several stages of material (de)composition.

Chapter 1
Scales

Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot?

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

—so odd it was that the sense of her understanding wouldn't be abated, which even a particular lapse, he could see…

Henry James, *The Sense of the Past*

1.1. Reading in detail

In Ian Watts' historical and now historic analysis undertaken in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) one of the elements identified as having shaped the epic genre and the romance into their modern novelistic form at the turn of eighteenth- century England was the growing space given to individual experience, the everyday reality and speech of non-noble characters, which in literary history became tangled with the problematic epithet of realism. As Watt underlines

> The main critical associations of the term 'realism' are with the French school of Realists. 'Réalisme' was apparently first used as an aesthetic description in 1835 to denote the 'vérité humaine' of Rembrandt as opposed to the 'idéalité poétique' of neo-classical painting; it was later consecrated as a specifically literary term by the foundation in 1856 of *Réalisme*, a journal edited by Duranty. Unfortunately much of the usefulness of the word was soon lost in the bitter controversies over the 'low' subjects and allegedly immoral tendencies of Flaubert and his successors. […] The prehistory of the form has commonly been envisaged as a matter of tracing the continuity between all earlier fiction which portrayed low life […]. (10)

Although it is not the scope of my analysis to dwell on a diachronic account of the history of the novel or realism, it is nonetheless noteworthy to mention the fact that many literary historians have established a coeval parallelism between the development of the modern novel and genre painting (including the Dutch School and still-life painting), precisely because of the centrality both ascribed to the everyday affairs of the world, which according to some persuasions were previously less widespread. Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-1615) usually figures as a pioneer in this genealogy, illustrating, among many other things, the changing (and intermingling) paradigms of the epic poem, the chivalry novel and the

picaresque, as the everyday prosaic reality enters the narrative. Notwithstanding as mentioned in *The Rise of the Novel*,

> If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would only be an inverted romance; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it. (11)

In fact, this focus on "the way it presents it" is echoed in Peter Brooks' affirmation that "fictions have to lie in order to tell the truth: they must foreshorten, summarize, perspectivize, give an illusion of completeness from fragments. […] It is how you pretend that counts." (*Realist Vision* 6). Thus, this view presupposes a synecdoche like quality in representation, and concomitantly a scale perspective balancing between the whole and the detail.

The strike of this balance seems to me to be a central preoccupation of George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda*, which the author addresses by staging various ways of looking around and reading one's surroundings.[20] In fact, with this chapter I aim to show how material objects are used to investigate on the one hand human perception (seeing from afar or close-up), and on the other hand, how they seem to become metafictional instruments for thinking about giving shape and form to the literary narrative, via the figuration of detail and the descriptive.[21]

In general, George Eliot's *oeuvre* can be grouped together with other nineteenth-century writers interested in developing a new sensibility for the life of common people, thus, gradually abandoning plots centred on exceptional events and characters (ex.: historical painting, the epic), in favour of a privileging of more mundane situations.[22] In fact, one is talking of an occurring double shift in terms of hierarchy or preponderance of subject-matter.

[20] For a thorough investigation about perception in connection to the idea of landscape and nature see Buescu 1990.

[21] Thus, reassessing Gezari's (1978) claim that in her writings Eliot usually disregards issues of form and instead theorizes mostly about the nature and social function of literature.

[22] It could be argued that even some strands of Romanticism veer towards the more "mundane world of people" in the wish for developing a universal language capable of reaching everyone and promote man's aesthetic education (Ex.: Wordsworth and Schiller). However, it is not my aim to trace what could very much be construed as a forced similarity between the Romantic aesthetic and the weight that everyday life would have in Realism and Naturalism, especially considering that it is the "how" rather than the "what" that interests me in this chapter.

On the one hand, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries showcase a growing presence of plebeian life in the arts, on the other hand, this also seems to be accompanied by a gradual focus on the contexts in which the stories take place, specially aspects related to space and scenery. In her first published novel, *Adam Bede* (1859),[23] George Eliot is adamant about this point. In the famous chapter entitled "In Which the Story Pauses a Little" the author coins what has widely been acknowledged as the manifesto of her own strain of Realism:

> So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things better than they are; […] It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. […] I turn without shrinking from cloud-borne angels, from prophets and sibyls, and heroic warriors, to an old woman bending over her flower-pot, or eating her solitary dinner, while the noonday light, softened perhaps by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap, and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel, and her stone jug, and all those cheap common things […] or I turn to that village wedding […] where an awkward bridegroom opens the dance with a high-shouldered, broad-faced bride […] with very irregular noses and lips, and probably with quart pots in their hands […]. 'Foh!' says my idealistic friend, 'what vulgar details! […]'. (222- 223)

Taking this extract as an illustration of Eliot's views on the development of new narrative models, one could argue that it attests for the willingness to distance her work from a certain idealisation of the real, thus substituting it for an unapologetic introduction of the less glamorous aspects of life, that do not conform to the aesthetic precepts of symmetry and beauty. Here, the author establishes a dialogue with Hegelian aesthetics and with voices closer to home such as Sir Joshua Reynolds. Moreover, this paragraph functions equally as a sample of how to actually go about rendering that new way of representing the lives of people. As the derogatory voice proclaims, the text will seem to be composed out of a collection of "vulgar details", put differently, the narrative may be in the way of becoming populated with "broad-faces" and other completion and physical details distorting Neo-classical paradigms of beauty. Furthermore, it will be punctuated with unremarkable objects, such as a spinning-wheel (here deprived of the mythical power of weaving destinies like the *Moirae*'s did, or of being the instrument of cunning used by Penelope), flower pots, leaves or quart pots, which the narrator

[23] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*. Ed. Stephen Gill. Penguin, 1983. Further references are to this edition and will be given in the text.

painstakingly enumerates (and ascribes them nonother role than being there as part of a quotidian backdrop). However, beginning with a text apparently concentrated on objects as minor and unremarkable details to introduce the analysis of objects in *Daniel Deronda* might appear a puzzling choice, given the central and structural role played by objects in this novel, one that goes beyond scenic existence or marker of a verisimilitude with the reality of common people.[24] Furthermore, *Daniel Deronda* being a novel in which Eliot brings back the figure of the prophet and the idea of the larger-than-life destiny in characters like Daniel Deronda and Mordecai, for instance. Taking this into account, this chapter will show how the objects pullulating Eliot's last novel are made to function as challengers of the way the concept of "detail" is perceived in the novelistic aesthetics. In connection to this, it will be possible to identify George Eliot working with the very idea of (their) legibility/readability espoused via a test each character seems to have to pass, *i.e*. prove to be capable of reading or hence misreading their situation, and point of perception. Differently put, we will become aware of the fact that objects perceived as minor details and consequently derided in previous aesthetic theories acquire the statute of miniatures with magnified significance. In the first moments of *Daniel Deronda* we observe Gwendolen Harleth getting rid of a necklace, a mere ornament supposedly negligible to the story, only to see it come back in the story fully charged with meaning, thus becoming a performative element in shaping the evolution of the narrative.

In a book appearing in the 1980's Naomi Schor discusses the position occupied by the detail in the Western history of ideas. As she states in the introduction to *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics in the Feminine* the appraisal gained by the detail, the partial and the marginal in the aftermath of post-structuralism

> runs the risk of inducing a form of amnesia that in turn threatens to diminish the import of the current privileging of detail. For, as any historian of ideas knows, the detail has until very recently been viewed in the West with suspicion if not downright hostility. The censure of the particular is

[24] It should be added that George Eliot also expresses her views on the desirability of introducing unidealized aspects of common life while reviewing the historic-sociological work of W.H. Riehl in her essay "The Natural History of German Life" (1856).

> one of the enabling gestures of neo-classicism, which recycled into the modern age the classical equation of the Ideal with the absence of particularity. The normative aesthetics of neo-classicism did not, however, simply fade away upon the advent of Romanticism; constantly reinscribed throughout the nineteenth century they continue to resurface well into the twentieth, constituting the indelible marker of nostalgics of the Ideal (e.g. Lukács and Baudrillard). (3)

Taking Schor's remarks into account, one may better understand George Eliot's insistence on inverting the relevance accorded to detail prevalent in the neo-classical and Idealist aesthetics and thus one may read her understanding of and practice of Realism based on this very point.

Although *Daniel Deronda* departs from the middle-class and peasant entourages of her previous novels, it is here that we come to find a condensed reflection of what a detail can be and the position it might aspire to occupy in the novelistic milieu. To better grasp the reason why this concept is central to my understanding of Eliot's last novel, we can turn to the definition advanced by Philippe Hamon (2001):

> The "detail"- maybe this is the only definition we can find for such a blurry concept- is what overdetermines significance and insignificance. It is what stops, blocks, and suspends the movement of reading. But it also requires a "translation" regarding its meaning, and its function in the work, it challenges and interrogates the reader, who he transforms into a hermeneut, it is at once an asyndeton and an anaphor. (My translation)
>
> [Le 'détail'- c'est peut-être la seule définition que l'on puisse avancer d'un concept aussi flou- c'est ce qui surdétermine sens et insignifiance. Il est ce qui arrête, bloque, et suspend le mouvement de la lecture. Mais il réclame aussi, alors, une 'traduction' quant à son sens, à sa fonction dans l'œuvre, il interpelle et interroge le lecteur qu'il transforme en herméneute, il est à la fois asyndète et anaphore. (18-19)]

In *Daniel Deronda* we find echoes of this idea of the detail encapsulated in jewellery and tiny objects that by their repetitive appearance gain an anaphoric quality and by their meaning evolution and juxtaposition expand like asyndeta. It should be also noted that Hamon's definition of detail follows a reflection on description and the descriptive, in which the author traces a derogatory attitude in treaties of poetics towards a type of description filled with details. In this brief genealogy the author highlights a distinctive critical appraisal of the detail, since for many authors to elaborate a detailed description just for its own sake or solely for the pleasure of using beautiful language was seen as a negative quality of a text, in summary a derivative preciousness. Although there is allowance for description, when a text received the

qualificative of descriptive, this generally encompassed a negative assessment. According to Hamon's reading of the French eighteenth- century author Jean François Marmontel "the pleasure of describing, does not belong in literature" (My translation) ["le Plaisir de décrire, donc, n'a pas de droit de cité en littérature" (15)].

Nonetheless, in Eliot's novels we will find ourselves at difficulty in applying a purely thing theory framework to analyse the representation of objects, or to make the case that this Victorian novelist was exclusively and primarily concerned with material objects as "independent things", or with their agency outside human subjectivity and perception.[25] Furthermore, it would also be erroneous to infer from the presence of luxury items and greedy characters in *Daniel Deronda* only a pretext to comment on the crescent commodity culture and thus to make of them a mere contextual synecdoche. Notwithstanding, the view of Eliot's work presented here does map the emergence of the new ground the author seems to have been experimenting with, and which aligns itself with what Pearl Brilmyer considers to be "Eliot's interest in literature as a mode of enhanced sensation" (36). In this article dedicated to *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), Brilmyer argues that through the form of the character sketch Eliot elaborates a reflection on the limits of human perception, in which "to have 'a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life,'[…] entails treating the human being not as a *subject* to which the author has special access but as a new kind of sensible *object*- a dense and complex material body like any other." (36).

In a novel of about six hundred pages and seventy chapters the reader is told a story that spans approximately two years in 1860's London, from October 1864 to 1866, opening *in medias res* on September 1865 in the fictional German spa-town of Leubronn, and predominantly engages with the life of two main characters: Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel

[25] See Andrew Cole, "The Call of Things. A Critique of Object Oriented Ontologies." *Minnesota Review*, vol. 80, 2013, pp.106-118; John Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory". *Criticism*, vol. 47, no 1, 2012, pp. 109-118.

Deronda. Like in many other Victorian novels the plot of *Daniel Deronda* is, in part, propelled by conflicts of an economical nature, conflicts of heredity and secret family histories. More precisely, Gwendolen, her sisters and mother (the widow Mrs. Davilow) are on the verge of becoming destitute in the aftermath of a speculative investment in the railway system gone wrong, which forces them to live under the charity of their uncle the Pastor Gascoigne. This situation conduces Gwendolen, the older and more beautiful daughter, to contract a loveless marriage to the county's powerful nobleman Henley Grandcourt, while at the same time forsaking her consciousness for the pride of maintaining an aristocratic life-style. In fact, after having discovered that Grandcourt had casted away a former mistress, Lydia Glasher, and his children to a marginal and secret bastard existence, the young woman notwithstanding marries the baronet and foregoes the job position offered her as governess in a gentile family as means to support her family. As a consequence, Gwendolen's story has oftentimes been compared to a purgatorial existence, in that the young woman is compelled to go out through life repenting her choices and seeking atonement. This fashion of understanding this strand of the plot usually considers it to be cross-cut by the presence of Daniel Deronda functioning as a moral barometer measuring the female's character progress. Moreover, Daniel's appearances throughout the novel usually have him occupy a vantage point of observation (not rarely connected to his judging),[26] Gwendolen is sensible to this from the start as we can infer from the following interior monologue: "But always in this latter scene there was the presence of that Deronda watching her with exasperating irony, and- the two keen experiences were inevitably revived together- beholding her again forsaken by luck." (12). Later it is Daniel himself who confirms this persuasion, "[…] I am sure she is a creature who keeps strong traces of anything that has once impressed her. That little affair of the necklace, and the idea that somebody thought her

[26] I will abstain from transcribing the famous inaugural chapter, which starts with Daniel observing Gwendolen at the gambling table from afar.

gambling wrong had evidently bitten into her." (334). In other words, Daniel is constantly summoned by Gwendolen to a series of furtive encounters, since she believes he is in the position to assist her invert and correct the course of her life, the macula and oppression caused by her rash decisions. However, the romantic *agon* enveloping both characters is frustrated in its expected conclusion of union, leaving them instead to follow uncertain separate ways and curtailing any conventional form of closure as provided by typical marriage or adultery plots.[27]

The story comes to an halt when the widowed Gwendolen is at a transitional point in her life, and Deronda is about to embark in an idealised marriage with Mirah and pursue the then yet uncertain quest of Zionism into foreign lands. So, amidst a narrative slipping into rarefaction, and marked by uncertainty in the protagonists' courses of action, the objects they come in contact with and the sort of preceptory processes that ensue function as nots in the plot, forming a chain of chance correspondences in the form of a web. In fact, I consider that, on the one hand, they are miniatures when compared to the expansiveness of the subject matter of the novel and the events making up the plot, but on the other hand, by functioning as moving details, they magnify their significance in the narrative, being in fact essential both to hold the narrative and to expand it, like an uneven scale oscillating between meaning and meaninglessness they contribute to give it a form, that of the web.

Gordon S. Haight in *George Eliot: Originals and Contemporaries* recalls Henry James' take on the episode in which Klesmer criticizes Gwendolen's musical abilities and her choice of repertoire, he postulates that the Bellini aria she chose to be appreciated by "the passion and thought of people without breath of horizon […] no cries of deep, mysterious passion- no conflict- no sense of the universal" (Eliot, *Deronda* 38). To the American author writing for *Nation* in 1876, Klesmer's verdict encapsulates

[27] In *Adultery in the Novel* Tony Tanner argues that the (bourgeois) novel is from its inception an endeavour of transgression, focusing on deviatory characters and/ or behaviours, so in this line, we could contend that George Eliot ends up transgressing the conventional unconventional plot of adultery. Consider also Judith Armstrong, *The Novel of Adultery*, The MacMillan Press, 1976.

> the secret of that deep interest with which the reader settles down to George Eliot's widening narrative. The "sense of the universal" is constant, omnipresent. It strikes us sometimes perhaps as rather conscious and over-cultivated; but it gives us the feeling that the threads of the narrative, as we gather them into our hands, are not of the usual commercial measurement, but long electric wires capable of transmitting messages from mysterious regions. (*Apud.* Haight 70)

It is this oscillation in perspective, that is simultaneously a reading scale alternating between surface and depth, closeness and distance that define George Eliot's endeavour with *Daniel Deronda* in experimenting how the realist novel might deal with or "wire", to use James' phrase, what is visible and invisible in the world, meaningful and meaningless. In a letter addressed to Charles Bray, George Eliot wrote

> Alas for the fate of poor mortals which condemns them to wake up some fine morning and find all the poetry in which their world was bathed only the evening before utterly gone - the hard angular world of chairs and tables and looking-glasses staring at them in all its naked prose. It is so in all the stages of life […] and at last the very poetry of duty forsakes us for a season and we see ourselves and all about us as nothing more than miserable agglomerations of atoms - poor tentative efforts of the Natur Princip to mould a personality. This is the state of prostration - the self-abnegation through which the soul must go, and to which perhaps it must again and again return, that its poetry or religion, which is the same thing, may be a real ever-flowing river fresh from the windows of heaven and the fountains of the great deep - not an artificial basin with grotto work and gold fish. […] I feel a sort of madness growing upon me, just the opposite of the delirium which makes people fancy that their bodies are feeling the room. It seems to me as if I were shrinking into that mathematical abstraction, a point. (Eliot, *Letters*, vol.1, 264)

Here Eliot expresses, in other words, the impermanence of meaningfulness and concomitantly the difficulty of interpreting life that constitute her worldview, it is consubstantiated by the distressing idea that like the self "filling a room" or being a "point" may be a perceptive fiction, so too the world can be puzzling to read and perceive.

1.2. Poisonous details

The first chapters of *Daniel Deronda* concentrate on Gwendolen's gambling at the German spa-town Leubronn in the company of the Langen family, while contemplating ways to avoid a commitment to Grandcourt's marriage proposal. Indeed, this opening in *medias res* is actually an episode revolving around the pawning and recuperation of a necklace. More precisely it focuses on Gwendolen's turquoise necklace, a piece of jewellery which had

belonged to her late father's chainwatch. Since Gwendolen had never met her father the necklace presents itself as a mere trinket that could remorselessly be pawned for money, it was "in all respects the ornament she could most conveniently part with" (14). In fact, the necklace does not even merit a very thorough description, differently put, its appearance does not correspond to a wordy embellishment of the text, nor to a moment of ekphrastic pause. Quite on the contrary, at this point the gem was ready to disappear from sight and to dematerialize itself into money, the entity which defies concrete physical descriptions *par excellence*. Thus, Deronda's act of restitution of the necklace counteracts the position of vanishing point ascribed to the ornament and, as a consequence, inscribes it with a magnified significance in the narrative. As it has been advocated by Katherine Osborne in "Inherited Emotions", the necklace becomes an amulet for Gwendolen and thus also the focus of the narrative at several points, even if its only appearance is around Gwendolen's wrist. However, the exchange between Gwendolen and Daniel mediated by the necklace inverts the traditional symbolism that might have been ascribed to it, to quote Osborne:

> Although in the nineteenth century heirlooms were believed to gesture to generations past and offer promise for future descendants, George Eliot reconfigures their significance on an individual level: they are important not as symbols of timeless family traditions but, rather, as emotional epicentres or psychic landmarks in Dorothea Brooke's and Gwendolen's Harleth's interiorities. Traditionally, heirlooms stimulate nostalgia for bygone times, places, and people, but Eliot imbues heirlooms in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* with erotic, sensual, punitive, redemptive, and even moral charges, which affect character interiority and future social interactions. (466)

Indeed, the uprooting of the turquoise necklace from its familial bonds signals towards other possible emotional attachments between the characters. However, it should be pointed out that this process of detachment cooccurs through the necklace's repetitive appearance in the narrative. In fact, after the scene we quoted above (of Gwendolen pawning the necklace and been given it back by Daniel), the female character will start wearing it as a protective item against her growing guilty conscience towards Lydia Glasher and the fear of Grandcourt's psychological violent control. In fact, the symbolic reach of the necklace extrapolates the very

margins of the text, in the sense that part of its meaning is actually derived from the extra-textual realm.

In this respect contextual knowledge might come in handy, as Katherine Osborne points out, in the Victorian period it was common to find treaties on gems and stones in public circulation,[28] in other words, there was an abundance of texts concerned not only with the geological characteristics of these types of artefacts but also with their supposed powers and symbolism. Although George Eliot does not explicitly refer to any of such texts, we find them notwithstanding entering the narrative and, as a consequence, magnifying the weight of the jewels present in it. According to one Charles W. King in *The Natural History of Gems or Decorative Stones* (1867) the turquoise was a stone granted with protective effects and reflecting sympathetic inclinations, qualities that at first sight Gwendolen seemed untroubled to part with (Osborne 479). Furthermore, the fact that Gwendolen was unadvisedly getting rid of the necklace in a moment she actually needed to guard her family from economical upheavals, seems to reinforce the existence of a case being made in the novel for the judiciousness of developing the ability to read details and that which appears to be a mere ornament. In fact, it suggests a reading movement that travels from the surface to the depth and delves into minutiae and nuance. As Hesselberth *et al* (2018) state

> All legibility is historically, culturally and materially specific, and has a political and ethical dimension. Consequently, what is required is a complex elaboration of what makes something legible- or, alternatively, illegible- and to whom or what, as well as a careful account of what kinds of reading, processing or navigating this il/legibility facilitates or forecloses. (2)

Following this line of reasoning, one could describe *Daniel Deronda* as a novel where the character's moral dilemmas are outplayed and mediated through a network of objects, and moreover as a narrative where the objects as well as characters require a reading protocol based on the perusal of detail. Albeit with little descriptive space accorded de facto to the jewels, they

[28] For example: Charles W. King, *Antique Gems: Their Origin, Uses, and Value as Interpreters of Ancient History*; and as *Illustrative of Ancient Art: with Hints to Gem Collectors* (London: J. Murray, 1860); Augusto Castellani, *Gems: Notes and Extracts*, trans. Mrs. John Brogden (London: bell and Daldy, 1871).

are constantly being summoned from the background and from ornamental existence. Despite the scarce information on their appearance, through their constant presence they almost acquire the profuseness typical of the arabesque, in an otherwise loose text. Taken this way, the narrative unveils before one's eyes the struggle involved in the process of reading and interpretation. In fact, this agonistic process acquires a performative structure observable for instance in the triadic struggle between Grandcourt, Lydia and Gwendolen, which is mediated by and transferred to Gwendolen's turquoise necklace and to Grandcourt's family diamond necklace. As becomes clear after Grandcourt's visit to Gladsmere to force Lydia to give back the diamonds, so that Gwendolen could wear them as his law-ledged wife, this necklace marks the baronet's sway over the female characters. As has been noticed before, for Grandcourt the female body becomes the mere exhibitory instrument of the masculine power. [29] However, Lydia herself is able to control the symbolic effectiveness of this family heirloom the moment she returns it to Gwendolen accompanied by a recriminatory letter. Feeling betrayed and prey to injustice, Mrs. Glasher reaches and affects Gwendolen by means of the necklace, in that she transforms it into a poisonous item. The following extract taking place after Gwendolen opens the casket is illustrative of this investment of the jewel:

> It seemed at first as if Gwendolen's eyes were spell-bound in reading the horrible words of the letter over and over again as a doom of penance; but suddenly a new spasm of terror made her lean forward and stretch out the paper towards the fire, lest accusation and proof at once should meet all eyes. It flew like a feather from her trembling fingers and was caught up in the great draught of flame. In her movement the casket fell on the floor and the diamonds rolled out. She took no notice, but fell back in her chair helpless. She could not see the reflections of herself then: they were like so many women petrified white; but coming near herself you might have seen the tremor in her lips and hands. She sat so for a long while, knowing little more than that she was feeling ill, and that those written words kept repeating themselves in her. Truly here were the poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor young creature. […] He saw her pallid, shrieking as it seemed with terror, the jewels scattered around her on the floor. (296)

[29] In chapter XXX this can also be identified in passages such as this one centring on Lydia Glasher: "Her head, which, spite of emaciation, had an ineffaceable beauty in the fine profile, crisp curves of hair, and clearly-marked eyebrows, rose impassively above her bronze-coloured silk and velvet, and the gold necklace which Grandcourt *had first clasped round her neck* years ago." (283. My emphasis). And also through the ring sent accompanied by letter as Grandcourt's marriage proposal to Gwendolen.

In his turn, Grandcourt makes use of the diamonds to exercise his token over Gwendolen, knowing that she does not know that he knows about her revelatory encounter with Lydia and her children:

> Gwendolen had said to herself that she would never wear those diamonds: they had horrible words clinging and crawling about them, as from some bad dream, whose images lingered on the perturbed state. She came down dressed in her white, with only a streak of gold and a pendant of emeralds, which Grandcourt had given her, round her neck, and little emerald stars in her ears. […] 'Put on the diamonds,' said Grandcourt, looking straight at her with his narrow glance". (353)

Thus, in order not to betray her supposed secret, the female protagonist is forced to wear the necklace and consequently to drink the poison of and acknowledge her own guilty conscience, which spreads like a miasma. In the sequence of this situation, the turquoise necklace-chain will be construed by Gwendolen as an antidote, and made to function as a counteractor, on the one hand of Lydia's recrimination, on the other hand of Grandcourt's dominion, and furthermore as a marker of the power of Daniel's judgement and its effect on her development. However, as the episode at the New Year's Eve party hosted by Sir Hugo Mallinger, excerpted in the passages bellow, shows, Gwendolen will wear the turquoise awkwardly and "clumsily":

> When Gwendolen was dressing, she longed, in remembrance of Leubronn, to put the old turquoise necklace for her sole ornament; but she dared not offend her husband by appearing in that shabby way on an occasion when he would demand her utmost splendour. Determined to wear the memorial necklace somehow, she wound it thrice around her wrist and made a bracelet of it […]. (365)

> She had her reason for staying, though she had begun to despair of the opportunity for the sake of which she had put the necklace on her wrist. But now at last Deronda had come. […] While he was gone she had drawn off her glove, which was finished with a lace ruffle, and when she put her hand to take the glass and lifted it to her mouth, the necklace-bracelet, which in its triple winding adapted itself clumsily to her wrist, was necessarily conspicuous. Grandcourt saw it, and saw that it was attracting Deronda's notice. "What is that hideous thing you have got on your wrist?" said the husband. (368)

Here it becomes clear that from the moment Daniel interfered in Gwendolen's gambling, the turquoise necklace became a significant detail and an integral part of Gwendolen's life narrative. Although Grandcourt is unable to decode it properly, to him the jewel doesn't merely stand as decorative item fulfilling a superficial aesthetic purpose, he is able to read it as poorly disguised innuendo, a conventional sign in a romantic exchange. In fact, objects presented as

details tend to encapsulate this hermeneutic tension between meaninglessness, misreading, and "correct" reading or deciphering. The very gesture of Gwendolen removing the glove and "the lace ruffle", which are distracting or meaningless ornaments, surface details that obstruct correct reading, attests to the importance of moments of revelation mediated by objects in *Daniel Deronda*. Moreover, this seems to suggest that Gwendolen sees the turquoise as the reified manifestation of her identity's essence.

1.3. Equivocal wholes: the ring and the book

Further sustentation for this view, *i.e.* of Eliot's enterprise in developing a narrative exploring a reified subjectivity that may be unveiled by an act of reading objects, can be found in the portrayal of Daniel's quest for his own and Mirah's hidden family history. Throughout most of the novel Daniel is plagued by the uncertainty of his provenance and of having never met his mother, while being suspicious, at times, that his father might be his guardian Sir Hugo Mallinger. Thus, Deronda is often described as a disenfranchised character, with directionless emotions and an equally uprooted relation to the world:

> But how and whence was the needed event to come? - the influence that would justify partiality, and make him what he longed to be, yet was unable to make himself - an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real? (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 301)

Although Daniel perceives his *dilettante* tendencies as a flaw, he still seems incapable of concretizing his yearnings. In fact, on many occasions the character is portrayed as dismissive of the quotidian aspects of reality, and in particular of its materialist side. In one of his first incursions into the Jewish quartier Daniel comes across a bazar window:

> his attention was caught by some fine old clasps in chased silver displayed in the window at his right hand. His first thought was that Lady Mallinger, who had a strictly Protestant taste for such Catholic spoils, might like to have these missal-clasps turned into a bracelet: then his eyes travelled over the other contents of the window, and he saw that the shop was that kind of pawnbroker's where the lead is given to jewellery, lace and all equivocal objects introduced as *bric-à- brac*. (316)

To Daniel Deronda that someone, like Lady Mallinger for instance, should be interested in the missal-clasps and even recycle them as personal ornaments amounts to an error, thus in his eyes these are "equivocal objects". However, in an ironical plot turn Daniel does get to know his family history through such an "equivocal object": a diamond ring.

In a paper precisely entitled "Equivocal objects: The Problem of Women's Property in *Daniel Deronda*" Deborah Wynne connects the uneasiness towards women interested in material belongings and property rights to George Eliot's own ambiguous position towards the emerging Woman Question and the passing of the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882.[30] Wynne highlights aspects in the novel related to property that show the female character's positions as "makeshift" and "equivocal". In fact, it is not only Gwendolen that appears "as a girl likely to make a brilliant marriage" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 29) in the eyes of her uncle Mr. Gascoigne, other characters like "The heiress Catherine Arrow point resents the fact that her primary function is to 'carry the property gained in trade into the hands of a certain class' (211) through marriage, indicating that she too is intended to be a 'makeshift link' between male owners." (Wynne 11).

This gendered approach to the novel presupposes the receding of female agency into small scale portable property exchange, and a concomitant valuing of abnegation and renunciation, set in contrast to a purported male large scale reaching power both of control and self- expression. This dichotomy is hardly an exclusive device of *Daniel Deronda*, as Nancy Armstrong has shown in *How Novels Think* through the example of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)

> The Victorian novel not only portrayed all women who expressed extreme forms of individualism as extremely unattractive but also punished them so harshly as to persuade a readership that the very excesses that once led to self-fulfillment and the illusion of a more flexible social order now yielded exactly the opposite results. Rather than acting out excesses that would qualify her to tell the story of how she became an individual, a woman was much better off internalizing those excesses, as Jane Eyre does. By having her heroine perform

[30] Up until then British women lived under the status of coverture once they contracted marriage. This meant that the law gave husbands legal and financial control over their wives. Before the passing of the Acts women's ability to dispose of belongings was reduced to "portables". For more detailed information see Wynne 8-9.

> extravagant acts of self-abnegation, Brontë created what can only be described as an ontological gap between her most famous protagonist and Bertha Mason, a woman whose monstrous interiority disfigured her appearance and behavior to the point where they were no longer recognizably female, much less feminine. (Armstrong, *How Novels* 79)

Furthermore, in one of George Eliot's earlier novels, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), to which Armstrong also attends in her study, the main character Maggie Tulliver embodies this concatenation of "bad desire" (Armstrong, *How Novels* 92) and the imperative of abnegation. Through the use of a series of hydraulic metaphors both female and male desire is made to oscillate between containment and overflow. Ultimately, Maggie is pushed into errancy and to the margins of society,

> Why – her own brother had turned her from his door – he had seen enough, you might be sure, before he would do that. [...] It was hoped she would go out of the neighbourhood – to America, or anywhere – so as to purify the air of St Ogg's from the taint of her presence – extremely dangerous to daughters there! (Eliot, *The Mill* 620-621).

Thus, Armstrong contends that Maggie may be compared to the "purloined letter in Lacan's reading of Poe's story. Like the errant letter, she is out of place. Beginning with her father and ending with her brother, a number of men compulsively try to master her." (Armstrong, *How Novels* 94).[31] In *Daniel Deronda* it is possible to find some parallels with the story of Mirah Lapidoth, who although being saved from a suicide attempt by drowning by Daniel, finds her place and home in the narrative precisely because she submits herself to a process of erasure, giving up her artistic and singing talents for Daniel's Jewish cause.

In *An Ethics of Becoming*, Sonjeong Cho touches on this aspect of reduction of female characters in relation to Gwendolen's story[32] and reads it as "an ironic interrogation about the very dichotomy between feminine specificity and universality." (196). For Cho

[31] The implications of the "errant letter" as a mechanism in *Daniel Deronda* will be developed farther on in this section.

[32] To situate this position within the novel, I refer to the following extract: "Strangely the figure entered into the pictures of his present and future; strangely (and now it seemed sadly) their two lots had come in contact, hers narrowly personal, his charged with far-reaching sensibilities, perhaps with durable purposes, which were hardly more present to her than the reasons why men migrate are present to the birds that come as usual for the crumbs and find them no more." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 515).

> The vital question is, when space and time reduce the individual to the level of insignificance of a 'mere speck,' how can a particular, individual accident such as an unhappy marriage be meaningful and be portrayed at all? How can the narrative of a girl's unhappiness and pain be written in terms of the universal? In what sense can 'this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant' (102), deserve as much significant attention as, for example, Daniel's grand idea 'of restoring the political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national centre' (688)? (Cho 196)

In fact, in the scope of Eliot's last novel one could venture to speak of an exploration of disengagement from such gendered hierarchies, on the one hand, and on the other, from the universal and the detail as an "either-or" type of relation. In other words, universals can constitute as much an "equivoque" as particulars, so the concern with the "equivocal" espoused in *Daniel Deronda* is established on another vector, that of distinguishing an equivocal reading from an accurate one.[33] Thus, through Daniel's search for his hidden identity, or more accurately his hidden story (in a cluster with Mordecai, Mirah, Jacob and Klesmer), Eliot tappers into the idea that to discover one's past in order to live the present and to position oneself amidst the transmission of inheritance, are processes consubstantiated by an interpretative act.[34] Throughout the narrative, the reader, alongside Daniel, comes across three items or *realia* that function as mediators of this idea of the constitution of reality as interpretation, as a reading exercise across space, time and body: Leonora Charisi's diamond ring, Daniel's own body, and a chest of written documents/ Scripture. Each of these encounters with objects essays a modality of reading that must come to terms not only with the possibility of error, but equally with re-interpretation, of constantly missing the point. In fact, Daniel's quest for personal and universal meaning has him entangled in a process of re-reading and

[33] Elaine Freedgood talks about George Eliot's anxiety towards interpretation and her complicated relationship to the literal and the figurative. Freedgood refers to a comment by the narrator of *Middlemarch* as an illustration: "'Signs are small measurable things […] but interpretations are illimitable, and in girls of sweet, ardent nature, every sign is apt to conjure up wonder, hope, belief, vast as a sky, and coloured by a diffuse thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge.' Remarkably, knowledge takes material form in this description: it comes between the sign and its meaning, providing 'colour' rather than clarity. The infinite digressions of meaning making that sweet, ardent girls might pursue can be vertiginously multiplied by all the other kinds of readers Eliot might well have worried about." (Freedgood 112). For more on this topic consider Catherine Gallagher's claim that "[d]espite her explicit professions of faith in a readable universe, her very earliest fiction manifests a deep skepticism about the legibility of facts, the apprehendable significance of appearances." (*Industrial Reformation* 222).

[34] See Livesey.

recontextualizing history (the ring leading him to the encounter with his mother). Furthermore, Daniel appears as the vehicle of an invisible culture and knowledge only shareable between initiates, thus he approximates the paradigm of revelation in detriment to that of hermeneutical interpretation.[35]

Here, it might be useful to introduce some contextualization about the introduction of the ring as an important detail in Daniel Deronda's story. The ring had been entrusted to Sir Hugo by Leonora Charisi, Daniel's mother, as a token of his ascendency, which should otherwise be kept from him. Leonora Charisi was a famous Jewish singer, whose acquaintance Sir Hugo had made in his youth and agreed to educate her child as a gentile, thus enabling her to pursue her career on stage. The revelation that Daniel's mother is alive and has taken up the noble title of Princess Halm-Eberstein through marriage to a Russian nobleman is overshadowed by the simultaneous discovery of her being Jewish and consequently him too. The Jewish theme sways its course throughout the novel,[36] however only at this moment does the protagonist come to regard it from within himself and not merely as something external and other.[37] Notwithstanding, what I intend to highlight here is not so much the question of coming to terms with one's ethnicity in a climate of prejudice in Victorian England, but much more to turn the light towards the media that carry such inheritance and how it is interpreted. To put it systematically, Jewishness is something that the narrative presents as not merely biologically manifest,[38] oftentimes recurring to aspects of erroneous physiognomy to prove this

[35] See Plotz 74-75.

[36] It has been analysed by several scholars some perceiving it as a sign of Eliot's modernity and unprejudiced approach to ethnical prejudices in Victorian society, others as farfetched plot splint. See F.R. Leavis for this latter position.

[37] Daniel's first wanderings in London's Jewish quartier in Rotten Row come to mind here, where he finds himself with aversion toward the locals: "'you are perhaps of our race?' Deronda coloured deeply, not liking the grasp and the answered with a slight shake of the head, 'No'. […] Daniel could not help looking towards the door from the back with some anxiety […]. Not that there was anything very repulsive about her." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 320).

[38]"I have said that under his calm exterior he had a fervor which made him easily feel the presence of poetry in everyday events; and the forms of the Juden-gasse, rousing the sense of union with what is remote, set him musing on two elements of our historic life which that sense raises into the same region of poetry; -the faint beginnings of faiths and institutions, and their obscure lingering decay; the dust and withered remnants with which they are

fallacious reasoning, but rather as culturally mediated through outward signs and behaviour and through written register. One of the final stages of Daniel's *bildungsroman* occurs in chapter fifty, when he is summoned to Genoa to finally meet his gravely ill mother, and to hear from her the reasons for having given him away and most of all why she had wanted to keep the Jewish (Sephardi) ancestry a secret matter. Through the Princess, Daniel receives an account of Judaism different from the one vehiculated by Mirah and Mordecai, one that reveals the princess's experience of the religion as one dominated by patriarchal values curtailing her artistic aspirations and musical talents. So in an attempt to severe her and Daniel's identity from Jewish culture, she chooses a diamond ring and a small portrait brooch as tokens consigning the memory of her, thus standing in clear opposition to the chest of documents and writings that her father had left behind and intended to pass on to a male descendent. In this symbolical strife between the heirlooms and the chest of Hebrew documents, Daniel dismisses the former once more as "equivocal" and "repugnant": "he trembled lest the next thing she had to say would be more repugnant to him than what had gone before" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 524).

In fact, as Cynthia Chase has suggested, Daniel's surprise at his ethnicity constitutes a supplementary aspect to characterize his inattentive reading of the particulars, *i.e.*, of that which is closer to him, for example his circumcised body, which could have provided a precocious clue to his genealogical particularity. According to Chase, "the mere emphasis on Jewishness, quite apart from any reference to circumcision, was enough to produce discomfort in many Victorian readers of *Daniel Deronda*. It led them to object to the construction of the

apt to be covered, only enhancing for the awakened perception the impressiveness either of a sublimely penetrating life, as in the twin green leaves that will become the sheltering tree, or of a pathetic inheritance in which all the grandeur and the glory have become a sorrowing memory […]. In fact, Deronda saw various queer-looking Israelites not altogether without guile, and just distinguishable from queer-looking Christians of the same mixed morale. In his anxiety about Mirah's relatives, he had lately been thinking of vulgar Jews with a sort of personal alarm. But a little comparison will often diminish our surprise and disgust at the aberrations of Jews and other dissidents whose lives do not offer a consistent or lovely pattern of their creed; and this evening Deronda, becoming more conscious that he was falling into unfairness and ridiculous exaggeration […] " (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 302-303) .

plot, pointing out what constitutes, in fact, its metaleptic structure." (Chase 222). By this observation, Chase highlights the reading and representation model that the figure of Daniel Deronda incorporates and embeds into the structure of the narrative, that is the idealist model. Chase evokes the ironic introduction of a letter written by Hans Meyrick addressed to Daniel at the time of his *sojourn* in Italy to meet his mother and complete the puzzle of his identity. In the letter Meyrick describes his continued interaction with Mordecai in the following manner:

> But now I have given ear to him in his proper person, I find him really a sort of philosophical-allegorical-mystical believer, and yet with a sharp dialectic point, so that any argumentative rattler of peas in a bladder might soon be pricked in silence by him. The mixture may be one of the Jewish prerogatives, for what I know. In fact, his mind seems so broad that I find my own correct opinions lying in it quite commodiously, and how they are to be brought into agreement with the vast remainder is his affair, not mine. I leave it to him to settle our basis, never yet having seen a basis which is not a world- supporting elephant, more or less powerful and expensive to keep. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 532)

Meyrick's calling out the lack of "basis" in Mordecai's spiritual and national endeavour, emphasises the idea that as much as there may be "equivocal objects" there may also be "equivocal wholes". In Daniel's and Mordecai's idealist reading those "equivocal wholes" become "sympathetic" and products of "emotional intellect", while in such transformation installing a perspectival angle that the painter Hans Meyrick's ironic stance is made to miss. Despite their length, I will transcribe two key passages, which clarify this positioning:

> I said, let my body dwell in poverty, and my hands be as the hands of the toiler: but let my soul be as a temple of remembrance where the treasures of knowledge enter and the inner sanctuary is hope. I knew what I chose. They said, "He feeds himself on visions," and I denied not; for visions are the creators and feeders of the world. I see, I measure the world as it is, which the vision will create anew. You are not listening to one who raves aloof from the lives of his fellows. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 413)

> And

> At least, Deronda argued, Mordecai's visionary excitability was hardly a reason for concluding beforehand that he was not worth listening to except for pity sake. Suppose he had introduced himself as one of the strictest reasoners. Do they form a body of men hitherto free from false conclusions and illusory speculations? The driest argument has its hallucinations, too hastily concluding that its net will now at last be large enough to hold the universe. Men may dream in demonstrations, and cut out an illusory world in the shape of axioms, definitions, and propositions, with a final exclusion of fact signed Q.E.D. No formulas for thinking will save us mortals from mistake in our imperfect apprehension of the matter to be thought about. And since the unemotional intellect may carry us into a mathematical dreamland where nothing is but what is not, perhaps an emotional intellect may have absorbed into its passionate vision of possibilities some truth of what will be--the more comprehensive massive life feeding theory with new material, as the sensibility of the artist seizes combinations which science explains and justifies. At any rate, presumptions to the contrary are not to be trusted. We must be patient

> "with the inevitable makeshift of our human thinking, whether in its sum total or in the separate minds that have made the sum. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 425)

Here the narrator, in close association with Daniel, presents their vision not as an absolute one, but as a "dreamland" among many others that are the product of a "makeshift" human nature, and thus, worthy of defense despite its drift from orthodox scientific procedures. In fact, even the theoretical apparatus and the interpretative process are peculiar, since, although they are supposed to derive from Hebrew writings and documents (among them the chest entrusted to Daniel), their particular contents are never really discussed or transcribed into the narrative body. John Plotz notices this aspect and considers that "Eliot turns the hoary resurrected-documents plot on its head" (84), in fact, he states "The papers themselves, treasured as association copies but persistently reluctant to yield up any sort of quotable, or even paraphrasable, meaning, end up operating as a kind of novelistic foil. They are brought to advertise their superfluity." (Plotz 85). Instead, the "Jewish plot" rehearses a "discussion of heritable perceptions, experiences, and conceptions." (Driskill 24), which could be aligned with the investigations in psychology carried out at the time by Eliot's companion George Henry Lewes in essays such as "Mr. Darwin's Hypothesis" (1868) and *Problems of Life and Mind: The Foundations of a Creed* (1874).

In these texts, Lewes muses on the hypothesis that human beings and reality amount to clusters of signs, for instance, admitting that "Very important is it to bear in mind that Species is a subjective creation having no objective existence: it is an idea, not a thing; a systematic artifice, not a living entity" (Mr. Darwin's 359). Furthermore, Lewes presents humans and reality as phenomena of re-written and re-printed experiences:

> What the Senses inscribe on it, are not merely the changes of the external world; but these characters are commingled with the characters of preceding inscriptions. The sensitive subject is no tabula rasa: it is not a blank sheet of paper, but a palimpsest. (*Problems* 162).

Then, as "palimpsests" subjects are permeated my layers of images, that is representations of sensed experiences. In George Lewes' words:

> An image, therefore, — being a representation, a *Vorstellung*, an indirectly excited feeling, — may be called the ideal form of a sensation. It is a transition between the pure real and the pure ideal, *i.e.*, between sensation and symbol. Because of its connection with sensation, it passes into pure sensation when the energy of its tremors is greatly increased; as in Hallucination, wherein the feeling, although excited by internal stimuli, having its antecedent in a subjective state and not in some objective *res*, does assume all the energy of a sensation objectively excited. (*Problems* 149).

Likewise, Daniel and Mordecai are "excitable and sensitive" subjects, to whom "the *res*"[39] may be an equivocal detail, something that can be skipped or put in the margin. They configure a symbolical reading where the particular and the universal do not necessarily enter into a dialectical relationship, but instead, run closer to the brink of an hallucinatory imagination.

The end of the novel prefigures Daniel's spatial and temporal uprooting and disembodiment from the narrative. Announcing his departure to the East to Gwendolen and answering about a possible return, Daniel displaces his Jewish national quest from narrated (and narratable) time: "That is an object," he said after a moment, "which will by and by force me to leave England for some time — for some years. I have purposes which will take me to the East. […] "But you will come back? She said […] "If I live," Said Deronda — "s*ometime*." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 668). Moreover, Daniel's voyage to the East does not take place in the narrative. In fact, the final scene, which entails the preparation for departure, concludes with Mordecai's death and his ultimate frail breath vaticinating that:

> "Death is coming to me as the divine kiss which is both parting and reunion--which takes me from your bodily eyes and gives me full presence in your soul. Where thou goest, Daniel, I shall go. Is it not begun? Have I not breathed my soul into you? We shall live together." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 675).

In other words, the voyage and the forming of a Jewish community is transformed into a virtual wandering narrative, that might rest on the text like the extract from Milton's closet drama *Samson Agonistes* (1671) inscribed at the of the novel. The poem appears neither as a recitation

[39] In the terms of the novel it could be made to correspond to the contents of the documents, or to the "basis" referred in Hans Meyrick's letter.

by any of the characters, nor as a narratorial comment, it simply appears to materialize as a coda once Mordecai exhales his last breath, in the manner ideas and affective communities do on the surface of the text conjured by spiritual correspondence.[40]

1.4. Narrative survival: accidents, recognition, blindness

The following quote from Aristotle's *Poetics* serves as the epigraph to book six entitled "Revelations": "This, too is probable, according to that saying of Agathon: 'It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen'.". In fact, in the chapters that constitute this part of the narrative, all the seemingly fortuitus and accidental previous events come to be revealed as part of a destiny being fulfilled: that Daniel should have found Mirah's brother Mordecai in a metropole and thus, as we have seen, come to embody a teleological narrative of a spiritual nationhood. In addition, Gwendolen by a strike of bad luck at the gambling table falls out of the probable and expected plot of an advantageous marriage, so according to these coordinates this female character appears as a loose thread curtailing narrative closure. In one final lament, Gwendolen alludes to this impossibility of closure, remarking that "'Things repeat themselves in me so. They come back— they will all come back,' she ended, shudderingly, a chill fear threatening her." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 641). Through these mirroring and repetition effects that emerge in moments of shock or accidental events (in Gwendolen's life), the narrative explores an apparent inability of reinterpretation and re-imagination of one's situation (into the future), in other words, it explores situations of ignorance, failed recognitions and partial knowledge.

In general terms, as shown by Ross Hamilton in *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History*, the accident has been conceived as a transformation coming either under the guise of

[40] According to John Lurz, *Daniel Deronda* prefigures the conceptions of aura and memory that Walter Benjamnin would come to develop later: "Eliot's last work offers an ideal site to elaborate the concept of a personal, auratic "book memory" in the resonance between the model of embodied transmission articulated through the figure of Mordecai within the novel's narrative and the temporality of its monthly serial publication scheme." (440).

an "unexpected event" (prevalent understanding nowadays in close association with chance) or in the Aristotelian tradition brought about by "mutable or inessential qualities of a thing" (1) and expressed by the Greek word σὔμβεβηκός (*sumbebekos*). Owing to this understanding, Hamilton tells us, we can still find in "Augustine's conversion and Rousseau's illumination involved this second sense of accidents as qualities. Their transforming experiences purged them of qualities unessential to a sudden redefinition of who they were" (2). Moreover, it would be useful to trace yet another ramification in the understanding of accident connected to the moment of sudden recognition, namely its configuration as an unwarranted thought intrusion. For instance, for the seventeenth century philosopher John Locke and his theory about a controlled self-formation, chance experiences were problematic to accommodate:

> Perplexed by the fact that even fair-minded people can be guilty of irrational beliefs that they cannot set aside. [...] Chance associations enter the understanding, bringing a whole gang of unnatural connections into the mind. Uninvited, hidden in the form of new sensations, the invasive irrational associations can take the mind hostage, posing a powerful threat to the understanding, and their malevolent strength is expressed in the individual's extravagant speech or actions (Hamilton 131).

So, if on the one hand the accident is connected to these described moments of recognition as a "purge of unessential qualities", on the other hand, it can also constitute a moment of confusion, or of the irruption of unrecognised and unacknowledged thoughts, belonging to the realm of the "irrational". However, both conceptions also encapsulate the idea of the unexpected event that causes change, a reversal or turning point associated with catastrophe and then an emotional and cognitive relation to it. The accident, in this conglomerate of definitions, can be understood, on the one hand, as a particular unmotivated eruption in a wider universal narrative thread, and on the other hand, it can also be considered either a contingent or a necessary (meaningful) event part of a larger mysterious whole, finding its manifestation in a particular situation.[41] In *Daniel Deronda* we find this duality to be a matter of interpretation

[41] Also consider Frank Kermode's distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*.

and perception, but not of a definitive explanation and motivation.[42] In fact, there abound moments that could be viewed as accidents in the sense of catastrophic events and in the sense of chance,[43] to which is coupled either the possibility of gaining knew knowledge, or on the contrary, a perpetuation of a previous state of affairs and no gained insight. Particularly of a kind we might term accidental recognitions and misrecognitions, which tend to be brought about by the confrontation of the character's gaze with works of art and mirrors, that is with types of reflection and ekphrasis.

Aristotle, of whom Eliot is a close reader as her notebooks testify,[44] in his characterization of tragedy in *Poetics* deals not only with the effects of representation upon the public, that is with what happens in the confrontation with a work of art (drama in this case), but he is also interested in the ways the plot should be composed in order to produce the desired purging effect. In this point, the Greek philosopher is particularly keen on defending the idea of the necessity of an event functioning as a "motivated accident", thus he postulates that

> tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident, for even coincidences are more striking when they have an air of design. (Aristotle 70)

Contingency then is more or less removed from the equation in favour of an "air of design", usually conveyed by a character's tragic error or hamartia. With *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot

[42] However, at the level of plot structuring, as Catherine Brown notices, for Eliot there is a preoccupation in creating an interconnected and motivated whole out of the particular lives of characters "In October 1876 she expressed impatience with 'readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there'." (Brown "*Daniel Deronda*" 304).

[43] One of the most salient examples is to be found in Gwendolen's family financial ruin due both to banking speculation and to Gwendolen's own gambling: "Gwendolen, we have seen, passed her time abroad in the new excitement of gambling, and in imagining herself an empress of luck, having brought from her late experience a vague impression that in this confused world it signified nothing what any one did, so that they amused themselves. We have seen, too, that certain persons, mysteriously symbolized as Grapnell & Co., having also thought of reigning in the realm of luck, and being also bent on amusing themselves, no matter how, had brought about a painful change in her family circumstances;" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 128). Another type of example could be when Mirah attempts against her own life and almost drowns, but is rescued in the last minute by Daniel Deronda, who spots her at the margin of the river by chance while rowing (Chapter XVII). Another illustrative case is when Grandcourt accidentally falls from a boat in Genoa, and Gwendolen does not intervene to alter the course of events (Chapters LV and LVI).

[44] See Elliot *Miscellany*, especially Eliot's note on *The Spanish Gypsy*. For an overview see Mansell.

establishes a meditation towards those moments of forced contemplation of the representations of life before the characters, in other words, they are confronted with life as a perceptive fiction, either in the form of art or the mirrored self. Thus, the novel evolves as a study of the magnitude and scale of those reactions upon the contact with such representations, oscillating between interpretations pending for contingency or design, the capacity to see the "whole picture" or the partial. Ekphrasis, the verbal representation of a visual representation, becomes the site of such negotiations in *Daniel Deronda*, and particularly in what regards Gwendolen's story and character presentation.

Therefore, another aspect that needs to be taken into account while considering the ekphrastic aesthetic at play in *Daniel Deronda* is the influence of Pre-Raphaelites and Victorian narrative painting on George Eliot. In fact, as Molly Youngkin claims in her study about George Eliot's connections to and interest in the Pre-Raphaelites and Victorian narrative painting, they become united by a keen investigation of suspenseful moments. In other words, according to Youngkin it seems to be a paradigmatic characteristic of "Victorian narrative paintings, whether they were multi-frame or single frame, emphasized 'defining moments,' the 'climactic moments of truth, tension, anticipation, crisis, discovery' in people's lives, the same moments that are central to compelling fiction." (3).

The enactment of a *tableau vivant* in chapter six of *Daniel Deronda* provides a moment where accident and ekphrasis coincide. In this episode, the reader comes upon a scene of indecision amidst the party reunited at Offendene as to what theatrical play should be chosen to be portrayed, the only guiding criterium being "Gwendolen's desire to appear in her Greek dress" (Eliot, *Deronda* 47). In the end, at Rex's suggestion, the two contestants are the re-enactment of the abduction of Briseis by Achilles, or the revealing of Hermione's living statue in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Both stories involve the domination and violence against female characters, and by extension comment on Gwendolen's own situation torn between

being the love interest of her cousin Rex, the violent grip of the union with Henleigh Grandcourt, and also Daniel Deronda's ambiguous interest. To Derek Miller ("A Note") this episode connects with the narrator's earlier warning that "all meanings, we know, depend on the key of interpretation" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 45). Following Miller, choosing to connect the characters from the two distinct proposed *tableaux vivant* would provide the correct interpretation key. In fact, being acquainted with the fact that Hermione is also a character from the Trojan cycle, she is the daughter of Helen and Menelaus, places her as a prefiguration of Gwendolen's downfall through marriage to Grandcourt:

> Mr. Gascoigne, who sees himself as paternally responsible for Gwendolen, urges her, in his snobbish indebtedness to the aristocracy, to make a match with Grandcourt, much as Menelaus is paying the political debts he accumulated at Troy. In this reading of the Hermione incident, the commodification of Gwendolen deepens; her terror of the "upturned dead face" includes herself as an aghast and fleeing murderess; and both Shakespeare and ancient fable encourage those who would like to think of Gwendolen finding her best self in marriage to her cousin Rex. (Miller, "A Note" 46)

This view is also held by Ian Adam, although consubstantiated in a psychoanalytical analysis of the intertextual relation brought about by Shakespeare's play. In Ian Adam's reading of Gwendolen's impersonation of Hermione there is also a displaced superimposition of Leontes, in that to Adam both characters suffer from "sexual anxieties" and are usually indifferent to the feelings of others (9). In fact, on several occasions Gwendolen is portrayed as being self-absorbed and narrow-sighted, for instance "she rejoiced to feel herself exceptional; but her horizon was that of the genteel romance where the heroine's soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion;" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 42). Furthermore, this character expects to be admired while maintaining an aloof attitude, "Miss Gwendolen, quite aware that she was adored by this unexceptionable young clergyman with pale whiskers and square-cut collar, felt nothing more on the subject than that she had no objection to being adored." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 45), and finally she chooses to modify *The Winter's Tale* scene by having Leontes and Paulina kneeling beneath her. According to Ian Adam, Gwendolen's alteration of

the fifth act signals her unwillingness to destroy her fantasy of self-aggrandisement, since in this scene Leontes and Hermione were supposed to reconcile. For the critic Leontes' jealousy and presumptions of betrayal:

> generates its nemesis in the death of a son and the apparent death of a wife, Gwendolen's generates an image of death which is to stun her here and to haunt her marriage and to become finally the actual death of her husband. The picture acts as an immediate nemesis for her arrogance. "She looked like a statue," says the passage, and for Klesmer her frozen immobility at this point is the most impressive moment in her impersonation of Hermione: "A magnificent bit of plastik that!" This Hermione is more removed from humanity after the chord of music than before. Instead of loving husband (or a cousin kneeling to kiss the hem of her robe) she sees an image of desolation, of death, and death-in-life. It is a nemesis generated, like Leontes', by a principle of justice. Neither he nor Gwendolen really wants others about them in their autonomous authenticity: they get their wishes, Leontes in fact, Gwendolen in an image which is to foreshadow facts to come. (Adam 10)

Moreover, it should be made clearer that the image of death being alluded to and Gwendolen's statue-like petrification and scream take place when Klesmer's entrance music makes a moveable panel open (which incidentally Gwendolen had already closed when first arriving in the new home). The sequence unfolds thus:

> and before Hermione had put forth her foot, the movable panel, which was on a line with the piano, flew open on the right opposite the stage and disclosed the picture of the dead face and the fleeing figure, brought out in pale definiteness by the position of the wax-lights. Everyone was startled, but all eyes in the act of turning toward the open panel were recalled by a piercing cry from Gwendolen, who stood without change of attitude, but with a change of expression that was terrifying in its terror. She looked like a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered: her pallid lips were parted. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 48)

Thus, for Ian Adam this is the image of death that will reappear to Gwendolen after her marriage to Grandcourt, when her situation throws her into imagining either his or her death at each other's hands: "The thought of his dying would not subsist: it turned as with a dream-change into the terror that she would die with his throttling fingers on her neck avenging that thought" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 503). Continuing with this line of thought Adam claims that "It is in the course of this reading progress that roles again shift and we start to see not Gwendolen but Grandcourt as Leontes— not too surprisingly since, as I have suggested, he is in many respects her double, her creation." (11). According to this perspective Grandcourt lies outside any redemption for his violent psychological manipulation. Nevertheless, Gwendolen

also becomes trapped, and is not really able to come to life like she had intended with the re-enactment of Hermione's statue awakening. Although Adam's analysis does provide an illuminating reading of the *tableau vivant* episode, particularly by focusing on the triangulation between Leontes, Gwendolen/Hermione, Grandcourt, and concluding for Gwendolen's moral petrification,[45] I would like to give further attention to the aspect of self-reflection and speculation,[46] and the replica effect of the ekphrastic motive created so to speak by an apparent accident. Thus, bringing to the fore what seems to me to be George Eliot's proposed meditation on the theoretical limitations of understanding fiction only as a mirroring effect of reality, or that such mirroring process should be understood as direct correspondences.[47]

In fact, the incident during the representation of *The Winter's Tale*, which presents reader and audience alike with a petrified body, a falling head, and scream does constitute an ekphrastic *leitmotif,* especially if we recall past and future encounters between Gwendolen Harleth and Lydia Glasher (who seem to happen by coincidence, but are in fact orchestrated by Grandcourt and Lush) such as the one happening in the passage bellow:

> The Medusa-apparition was made effective beyond Lydia's conception by the shock it gave Gwendolen actually to see Grandcourt ignoring this woman who had once been the nearest in the world to him, along with the children she had borne him. And all the while the dark shadow thus cast on the lot of a woman destitute of acknowledged social dignity, spread itself over her visions of a future that might be her own, and made part of her dread on her own behalf. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 502)

Although Lydia's apparition was to function as an apotropaic image (Medusa), her disquieting effect is not achieved by herself, but by the indifferent reaction of Grandcourt. As stated in the extract above, Gwendolen's perturbation stems form observing her husband's impassive demeanour at the sight of his former lover, and especially by projecting herself as a future Medusa with no protective or lethal effect. In *Picture Theory Essays* J.T. Mitchell claims that

[45] A position also held by scholars, who connect Gwendolen to the medusa figure that appears throughout the novel especially when Gwendolen is confronted with Mrs. Glasher. For further reading on this matter see Fast and Pell.
[46] See Swann 434-445.
[47] See McGowan 173.

"Medusa is the perfect prototype for the image as a dangerous female other" (172) because it subverts the act of contemplating beauty, by dissipating the traditional distinction "between the sublime and the beautiful, the aesthetics of pain and pleasure" (172). Mitchell arrives at this conclusion through the surveying of some paradigmatic examples of the Medusa being used as ekphrastic motif: Keats "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819) and Shelley's "On the Medusa of Leonardo Da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery" (1824). The critic analyses these poems through the lens of the debate around *pictura* and *poesis*, which according to him is a discourse comprised of premisses imbued in ekphrastic hope and in ekphrastic dread.[48] In other words, on the one hand we find the desire of visualization and, on the other hand, the fear of petrification brought about by what may be made visible.

However, in the scenes of *Daniel Deronda* mentioned above the "medusa effect" does not fully work in these terms of paralysing thought or action, on the contrary, it activates a reflective and imaginative state in the characters (at the diegetic level), which is not completely removed from (narrative) temporality, and furthermore, sets the ground for a metafictional take on the modes of representation of the novelistic form.[49] For Rebecca Rainof, the scene of the *tableau vivant* is one among the many images that Eliot uses in *Daniel Deronda* to "rehabilitate the tragic female figure in Victorian painting and poetry by putting this figure in motion- albeit slow motion- and staging the clash of *pictura* and *poesis* as the drama of her heroine's 'slight progression'" (877). According to this scholar's perspective, the fact that Gwendolen is

[48] In this chapter dedicated to ekphrasis, Mitchell proposes to reconsider the Horatian *ut pictura poesis* thesis and one of its most influential reconfigurations proposed by G.E. Lessing in the *Laocoön.* To Mitchell the issue at stake is not so much the specificities of each medium, or what and how one can aim to represent something or not, but more the notion of visualisation and revelation.

[49] The novel's narrator provides clues for the valuableness of pausing, when, for instance, in countercurrent with classical poetics, he presents these parts as moments that enable the representation of a multitude of contradictory actions without incurring in incongruence, in that according to him, the mind of characters becomes a sort of virtual testing space of many plots and possibilities: "For Macbeth's rhetoric about the impossibility of being many opposite things in the same moment, referred to the clumsy necessities of action and not to the subtler possibilities of feeling. We cannot speak a loyal word and be meanly silent, we cannot kill and not kill in the same moment; but a moment is room wide enough for the loyal and mean desire, for the outlash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentance." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 33).

described as a screaming statue upon seeing the rolling head can be taken as George Eliot's playing with G.E. Lessing's assertion that representation via plastic forms should withhold from this kind overt and exacerbated emotional expression (what J.T. Mitchell would term "ekphrastic dread"). Although Eliot's discordance with Lessing's position regarding the strict separation between the temporal and the spatial arts has been thoroughly studied (Rainof; Manion; Youngkin), we should not disregard a more nuanced consideration of Lessing's argumentation and Eliot's own peculiar engagement with it.[50] In *Laocoön* it is claimed that all arts should aim at creating a plot (Lessing 19-22) and producing an affective response, and in the case of the visual and plastic arts this should be attained through a process of withholding extreme emotion. In other words, to Lessing this means that visual arts must appeal to the imagination as according to him "Painting must be content with coexistent actions or with mere bodies which, by their position, permit us to conjecture an action." (77) and thus "painting too can imitate actions, but only by suggestion through bodies." (78). George Eliot is also attuned to the potentiality of the capturing of the "fruitful moment" as understood by Lessing, even though the English writer does not seem to partake in the idea of the withholding of climax in visual representations, as for instance Rebecca Rainof has shown by calling attention to the figure of Gwendolen as a screaming statue in the re-enactment of *The Winter's Tale*.

In fact, Eliot's position regarding the interaction between movement, stasis and emotion can be further observed in a letter to the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones, Eliot writes:

> It would be narrowness to suppose that an artist can only care for the impressions of those who know the methods of his art as well as feel its effects. Art works for all whom it can touch. And I want in gratitude to tell you that your work makes life larger and more beautiful to me—I mean that historical life of all the world in which our little personal share often seems a mere standing room from which we can look all round, and chiefly backward. Perhaps the work has a strain of special sadness in it—perhaps a deeper sense of the tremendous outer forces which urge us than of the inner impulse towards heroic struggle and achievement: but the sadness is so inwrought with pure elevating sensibility to all that is sweet and beautiful in the story of man and in the face of the earth, that it can no more be found fault with than the sadness of midday when Pan is touchy—like the rest of us. I cannot help telling you a sign that my delight must have taken a

[50] See Eliot "Art and Belles Lettres".

> little bit the same curve as yours. Looking, *a propos* of your picture, into Iphigenia in Aulis to read the chorus you know of, I found my blue pencil marks made seven years ago . . . against the dance-loving Kithara, and the footsteps of the Muses and the Nereids dancing on the shining sands. I was pleased to see that my mind had been touched in a dumb way by what has touched yours to fine utterance. (Eliot, *Selections* 414-15)

The writing of this letter was prompted by George Eliot's and George Henry Lewes' visit to the Dudley Gallery, where in March 1873 Edward Burne-Jones had two paintings on show: *The Garden of Hesperides* and *Love among the Ruins*. As can be deduced by the missive, Eliot praises the painter for his capacity to capture the fruitful moment in the details, a moment of sylvan joy before Paris plucks the fateful golden apple, which would throw Iphigenia in the grips of a sacrificial story larger than herself. Thus, to Eliot, *The Garden of Hesperides* achieves a similar suspenseful gaiety to the one conveyed by the chorus in Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*, possibly the reference being to the third stasimon in which the wedding of Thetis and Peleus is narrated and thus, constituting an ironic contrast to the pretence wedding to Achilles that summoned Agamemnon's daughter to the shores of Aulis (Euripides 1036-1056).

Regarding this tragedy, which has nurtured many polemics among scholars about its "authenticity",[51] Naomi A. Weiss offers a convincing argument for the apparently unusual relationship between the modality of the intervention of the chorus and the female protagonist, which very much resonates with George Eliot's lasting interest in this tragedy (both in its Euridipian and Goethean takes), namely that of a search for a place of crossing between points of view and points of action in the face of communal and individual irreconcilable positionings. Thus, for Weiss the characteristic zero sum game that brings about the pathos in tragedy is audaciously worked by Euripides in a non-orthodox fashion by having the chorus and Iphigenia performing a swirl of perspectives, especially in the intermingling of voices during Iphigenia's final intervention as she consciously offers herself as sacrificial heroine. According to Weiss:

[51] One of the main focuses of contention has to do with the *ex machina* saving of Iphigenia by Artemis and the fact that this part of the tragedy is relayed by a messenger after the last intervention of the chorus. Iphigenia's final paean is also point of debate.

> During the course of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* the focal point of the drama gradually contracts, from the immense Greek army gathered at Aulis, waiting for the winds to allow them to continue on to Troy, to Iphigenia, Agamemnon's young daughter who is to be sacrificed so that the army can depart. The panhellenic view at the start of the play is effected by means of the unusually long parodos, in which the chorus describes the extraordinary sight of the various Greek troops arrayed along the shore. As Froma Zeitlin has noted its song gives the impression of "a full *skēnographia*, a painted backdrop to frame the drama of Iphigenia as it unfolds on stage before the eyes of the spectators in the audience." (Weiss 120-121)

The veering from the general to the particular is operated by Iphigenia as she metamorphoses herself from victim of history into the true heroine and destroyer of Troy through a celebratory chant, which she exhorts the chorus of Chalcidian women to follow. As once again Naomi A. Weiss mentions *a propos* Iphigenia's last intervention in the form of a monody (then turned into antiphonal singing): "This evocation of the paeanic genre inverts the gender roles it usually entails: whereas performances of paeans outside tragedy were almost exclusively male, here a female chorus answers the opening song of a female leader." (Weiss 125). Furthermore, it is this mixing play between genre and gender that allows for the commingling of the fatal general will of the gods and of the community with the particular transformative power of the singular individual:

> It is above all through the performance of *mousikē* (both music and dance) that the audience's attention is increasingly directed toward Iphigenia through the course of the tragedy, away from the panhellenic *choreia* of the parodos. In the Chalcidian women's last song, they function as both audience and chorus, beholding Iphigenia as she goes to her sacrifice and finally joining her in song, transforming her death into a paeanic celebration while also reminding us of the poignancy of her sacrifice. (Weiss 128)

In other words, this Euripidian tragedy draws its force from manipulation of point of view that also becomes the point of speech and self-representation of the sacrificial character.[52] Unable to counter the destiny her father, as representative of the community and the will of the gods, and aware of the futility of lament, Iphigenia projects herself as a heroine, thus not only submitting herself to the *ethos* of female obedience, but also wrapping herself around the cloth of *kleos*. Thus, it could be claimed that Iphigenia's transformation is of a rhetorical kind as the

[52] For discussion of the female as figure of transgression and liminality in Greek tragedy and its reception in twentieth century German language drama see Gil *Mitografias*.

character herself is mindful of when expressing the wish to possess Orpheus's gifts to save her life (Euripides 1211), in this moment of rhetorical creation she is able to incorporate and guide the destiny of the whole community without seeming to lose herself.

George Eliot's interest in the tragic figure of Iphigenia is not only noticeable in the letter to Edward Burne-Jones quoted above, dating from the time she was giving the first steps in the conception of *Daniel Deronda*, but is in fact a paramount presence throughout her work. Indeed, Eliot's interest in the theme of sacrifice and in the figure of Iphigenia is a continuum not only discernible in her novels, but also in her writings in other genres. In a commentary found among her papers pertaining to the dramatic poem *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868), the germen of which was the sight of Titian's *The Annunciation* (ca. 1557) in Italy, George Eliot contends that the heroine "is chosen, not by momentary arbitrariness, but as a result of foregoing hereditary conditions: she obeys. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' Here, I thought, is a *subject grander than that of Iphigenia*, and it has never been used." (Eliot, *Miscellany* 126. My emphasis).[53] Further on, the author continues to present aspects of tragedy that captivate her mind:

> […] the whole background of the particular struggle is made up of our inherited nature. Suppose for a moment that our conduct at great epochs was determined entirely by reflection, without the immediate intervention of feeling which supersedes reflection, our determination as to the right would consist in an adjustment of our individual needs to the dire necessities of our lot, partly as our natural constitution, partly as sharers of life with our fellow-beings. Tragedy consists in the terrible difficulty of this adjustment. (127)

Taking this into account, what I earlier termed the rhetorical adjustment undertaken by Iphigenia in order to bridge the irreconcilable breech between her individuality and the needs of the community she belongs to, for George Eliot this would amount to an act of reflection (doubling) and self-preservation. The "terrible difficulty of this adjustment" that enticed the English author's sensibility is precisely the commingling of reason and emotion, that she

[53] For a defense of the influence of Heinrich Heine's tragedy *Almansor* (1823) see Szirotny.

identifies in tragedy's grounding dichotomy comprised in the individual and the community.[54] In *Daniel Deronda*, as I have been arguing, Eliot continues to tackle this tension via ekphrastic motifs, in other words, via a rhetorical device, which puts to the test the perceptive and representative grasp of one of its main character's, Gwendolen, and the reader's alongside with it. Gwendolen, often referred to as a "queen in exile", is forced to accept and learn that her rhetorical and aesthetic self-fashioning are flawed, because there is an egotistical imbalance in how she reads and connects to the world.

The idea of Gwendolen's moral inferiority motivated by her egotistical nature has been noticed and sometimes used to condemn Eliot's moralism instantiated by the priestly figure of Daniel. However, I have been focusing on a different angle. Although Gwendolen's story is conveyed as a repetitive entrapment, the image the character embodies is that of a metamorphous or hybrid being. Firstly, she appears as an aquatic nymph, who, nevertheless, upon closer inspection is revealed to resemble a monstruous being, a Lamia. This is Gwendolen's metaphoric portrait during the first moment of crisis that we are allowed to witness as readers, it is traced by those observing her gambling at the roulette:

> The Nereid in sea-green robes and silver ornaments, with a pale sea-green feather fastened in silver falling backward over her green hat and light brown hair, was Gwendolen Harleth. […] "Yes, she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now— all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual."/ "She is certainly very graceful; but she wants a tinge of color in her cheeks. It is a sort of Lamia beauty she has." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 7-8)

Furthermore, this serpentine mould is a conductor for the moral condemnation of the character "[…] attractive to all eyes except those which discerned in them too close a resemblance to the serpent, and objected to the revival of serpent-worship." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 13).

[54] So, in *The Spanish Gypsy* in Eliot's own words: "Silva represents the tragedy of entire rebellion: Fedalma of a grand submission, which is rendered vain by the effects of Silva's rebellion: Zarca, the struggle for a great end, rendered vain by the surrounding conditions of life" (Eliot, *Miscellany* 128). Furthermore, the poem "Arion", which, being composed in the early 1870's, gives Wendy S. Williams leave for arguing that it too was a way for Eliot to develop the theme of self-sacrifice without providential contours (since, contrary to the traditional myth, Arion is not saved from drowning by a dolphin). Moreover, Williams connects the theme of sacrifice with Eliot's biography, conceiving it as the author's drive toward self-effacement after the notoriety she had achieved with the publication of *Middlemarch* in 1872.

Chapter twenty-one is particularly elucidative of this characterisation. The chapter reprises the situation at Leubornn with which the novel opened up (and to which I have already alluded to in the first section of this chapter), and it marks the closure of the analepsis pertaining both Daniel's and Gwendolen's main life events up until their encounter at the German gambling town. After receiving distressing tidings from home, an unexpected blow in Gwendolen's sense of self and reality, the narrator depicts the scene of her journey back to England in the following manner:

> Gwendolen felt that the dirty paint in the waiting-room, the dusty decanter of flat water, and the texts in large letters calling on her to repent and be converted, were part of the dreary prospect opened by her family troubles; and she hurried away to the outer door looking the lane and fields. But here the very gleams of sunshine seemed melancholy […]. The railway official also seemed without resources, and his innocent demeanour in observing Gwendolen and her trunks was rendered intolerable by the cast in his eye. […] The vehicle- a dirty old barouche- was within sight, and was being slowly prepared by an elderly labourer. Contemptible details these, to make part of a history; yet the turn of most lives is hardly to be accounted for without them. They are continually entering with cumulative force into a mood until it gets the mass and momentum of a theory or a motive. […] it was a sample of what she had to expect. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 188-189).

In fact, this episode in offering a sample of Gwendolen's life, constitutes a synecdoche of the structure of the narrative. Not only does it imply that the reader is about to accompany a moral journey, that is, a process of repentance and conversion, but also, that this process (narrative progress) is made up of conflicting points of view and the details they put in perspective. In other words, life is represented and hypothesised either as a series of epiphanies or a series of gradual slow realisations. As in other moments in the narrative, for instance, as it was already observed *a propos* the *tableau vivant* scene, which introduced the "medusa motif", so to this scene of crossing gazes constitutes, according to the narrator, the "cumulative force into a mood until it gets the mass and momentum of a theory or a motive" (188). As I have been arguing throughout this section, in line with scholars like Peter Brooks, the act of looking and the gaze is an integral part of Gwendolen's story, constituting a conspicuous motive, "[…] we see Gwendolen over and over again looking at herself in mirrors […] and seeing herself mirrored in the gazes of others." (Brooks, *Realist Vision* 97). Whereas, according to the afore mentioned

scholar, within Daniel's story line one "enters a world where the visual is discounted in favor of voice […] that disfavors representation and favors revelation" (Brooks, *Realist Vision* 106).[55] For Peter Brooks, this structural distinction signals George Eliot's juggling position between nineteenth-century realism and early Modernism, which is another way to say that George Eliot conceives *Daniel Deronda* as a laboratory of perspectives on how to read and represent the world, and above all, the experimental search for the referents and language that make the world representable and readable, on par with which, for her, is still the mystery of the revelation mode and the intuition of the evasiveness of meaningful wholes to be contained in the novelistic form.

The novel's episode quoted in the paragraph above could be considered an illustrative example of the treatment of this topic. There we witness Gwendolen reading her surroundings as a projection of her anguishes, and furthermore, seeing herself negatively reflected in the eyes of the stranger[56] pilling up her luggage. The scene reads like a pausing station, one of a series of attempts of Gwendolen at self- examination and of her surrounding situation. However, as for instance Brian Swann has noticed in "Eyes in the Mirror: Imagery and Symbolism in *Daniel Deronda*", reflection in Gwendolen's case often becomes an act of solipsism:

> Afraid, and inviolately brittle, she is guilty of "neglect of resemblances," since she can only see herself wherever she looks. She does not possess that true "dignity and rectitude," since, as George Eliot puts it in *Theophrastus Such*, both these qualities are "proportioned to our sense of relationship with something great," more than "the securing of personal ease or prosperity" (209). (Swann 435)

Thus, the "neglect of resemblances" is made out to be the distinctive marker that portrays Gwendolen in opposition to Daniel, and it offers an image of two modes of reading and interpretation with different ethical and aesthetic implications. This emphasis on "the neglect

[55] I will return to the importance of these two modes of relating to the world for the understanding of George Eliot's poetic credo in general.
[56] Thus, repeating Daniel's cast of the "evil eye" and the "consequent" turning of fortune similar to the first chapter.

of resemblances" is a common rebuke made towards Gwendolen, for instance Daniel suggests that she should try to "Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action — something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 370). The "neglect of resemblances" or the disregard of sympathy, s*ympatheia*, to use a Stoic and Neoplatonic concept of interconnectedness of things and their affinity in the cosmos, constitutes Gwendolen's displacement from the community, her antipathetic dislodgment.[57] In fact, as Carolyn Burdett notices "Gwendolen Harleth is egoistic but she is also defined by her antipathies — 'she was subject to physical antipathies' (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 99) — and the forms of unlimited dread to which they give rise." (Burdett 3). It is not only that the character awakens feelings of dread in others, as we have already alluded to in relation to her Lamia like appearance, but it is also Gwendolen herself, who claims to harbour hatred towards those surrounding her, *a propos* Burdett reminds us of the following passages from the novel: "'I can't love people. I hate them', she sobs to her mother" (Eliot, Daniel Deronda 67), and "'I have not been fond of people', she tells Daniel, without knowing why" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 374). Although Gwendolen comes across as this severed character, one that, apparently, fails to see the world beyond herself, the narrator does set her in connection with a communal subtext of historical figures and their pictorial representation at moments of crisis in her life story. Thus, Gwendolen's metamorphosis is an aesthetic and ethical one mediated by a gradual reading lesson of the surrounding world and of herself. From the monstrous seduction and

[57] As Eric Downing explains the origins of notion of sympathy are closely connected with Ancient divinatory practices and beliefs. According to Downing, divination contrived a technique of reading, which took as its referents three main items: entrails, birds, and chance words and coincidences. Furthermore, the author summarises the notion thus: "The principle by which the gods were thought to communicate through the signs of the liver was that of analogy, grounded in the ancient belief in the connections between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic realms mediated by a force that […] the Stoics and Neoplatonists came to call *sympatheia*, a sense of participation in a common *logos* that connects all parts of nature by contact and likeness." (9).

solipsism of the Lamia and petrification of Medusa, Gwendolen shapeshifts to a Victorian Pia de Tolomei, that is into a purgatorial figure. In other words, Gwendolen becomes someone who looks at the past and re-reads it. It is not in vain that the narrator mentions early on, "Sir Joshua would have been glad to take her portrait; and he would have had an easier task than the historian at least in this, that he would not have had to represent the truth of change —only to give stability to one beautiful moment." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 94), allocating his task as narrator in closer kinship to that of the historian, and thus characterizing his story as one of tracing change and movement.[58]

Gwendolen's purgatorial transformation starts in chapter fifty-four and is fully consummated after the boating accident in Genova that mortally victimizes Grandcourt. It is the narrator who first brings to the fore the association of Gwendolen with a new set of beings, and it is he who suggests a sympathetic reading of this character. However, as mentioned earlier, sympathy is not reduced to a moral category and to the appraisal of behaviour, instead it primarily operates by interlacing and uncovering that which is hidden, in other words, sympathy functions as a hermeneutic and perceptive protocol. The suggestion of Gwendolen's change is contrived by a paratextual device, the epithet taken from Percy Shelley's verse tragedy *The Cenci* (1819).[59] In addition, this new image of Gwendolen is strengthened in the same chapter's opening paragraph, which directly compares the character's lot with the story of La Pia de Tolomei fixated in Dante's *Commedia* (1320), a figure whose story would continue being retold in the visual arts, for instance, in Gustave Doré's illustration of canto V of *Purgatorio* (1868), or in *Melancholy, or Pia de' Tolomei* (1846) by Eliseo Sala, and in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting *La Pia de' Tolomei* (1868). The stories of Beatrice Cenci and La

[58] George Eliot made a similar statement in a letter she wrote to Sara Hennell on 18th May 1870 while working on *Middlemarch*: "One must not be unreasonable about portraits. How can a thing which is always the same, be an adequate representation of a living being who is always varying?" (*Letters*, V, 97).

[59] "The unwilling brain/ Feigns often what it would not; and we trust/ Imagination with such phantasies/ As the tongue dares not fashion into words;/ Which have no words, their horror makes them dim/ To the mind's eye."

Pia became famous for their violent contents and events, the first pertaining to a true story of parricide (in sixteenth century Rome) and the second to a medieval legend of marital incarceration. In the preface to *The Cenci*, Shelley classifies the life events that inspired his play as "eminently fearful and monstrous" (4). In fact, due to censorship instituted by the Licencing Act of 1737, the play would only be able to appear on stage in 1886, much later after the poet's death, and even then, the Shelley Society had to produce it as a private event (Berger). Shelley writes the following in the authorial preface to the play:

> There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. **The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself**; […] If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly no person can be truly dishonored by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. **Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character.** (4. My emphasis)

According to the poet, Beatrice's murderous plot against her abusive father, not delivering her the expected justice and culminating in her own execution, turns her into a tragic character. In fact, the debate about the defence or the condemnation of her act echoed the heated political atmosphere of the context in which Shelley was writing in 1819, and that of the staging much later in the century.[60] The story of Pia de' Tolomei (or Pia of Sienna as she is also known) brings to the fore another story of violence within the family. In the *Commedia* the encounter between the poet and La Pia is very brief and does not open any breaches in the understanding as to why that woman, who had been incarcerated and possibly murdered by her husband, finds herself in Ante-purgatory in the company of those who repented upon their impending death, and besides without giving any indication of her having partaken in unvirtuous deeds. In *Daniel Deronda*, comparing Gwendolen to La Pia the narrator states the following:

> And thus, without any hardness to the poor Tuscan lady, who had her deliverance long ago, one may feel warranted in thinking of her with a less sympathetic interest than of the better known Gwendolen who, instead of being delivered from her errors on earth and cleansed from their effect in purgatory, is at the very height of her entanglement in those fatal meshes which are

[60] For a thorough analysis of the play's reception and the heated debate it generated both in 1819 and 1886 see Berger.

> woven within more closely than without, and often make the inward torture disproportionate to what is discernible as outward cause. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 554)

In other words, Gwendolen reflects these literary women with a difference, she remains ensnared in earthly misfortunes, and keeps being revisited by intimations of her past actions.

The ultimate moment of crisis related to Gwendolen's story appears in the final chapters of the novel and corresponds to the boating accident that mortally victimizes Grandcourt. The circumstances of Grandcourt's drowning are never actually directly narrated the moment it occurs, the incident is only described at a later moment when Gwendolen tells Daniel about what happened and her probable involvement in her husband's death. The narrator only gives access to the scene of Gwendolen and Grandcourt sailing together at the bay of Genoa, hinting at the great tension between the two, showing Gwendolen's oppression "As she sat guiding the tiller under her husband's eyes, doing just what he told her, the strife within her seemed like her own effort to escape from herself." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 565). Unlike Mirah, who had chosen to take her life in the Thames, the water of the Genoa Bay becomes the inverted mirror where Gwendolen is compelled to drown her oppressor instead of herself. Moreover, we are given an account of Gwendolen's inner turmoil, which she is powerless to shake off, "yet quick, quick, came images, plans of evil that would come again and seize her in the night, like furies preparing the deed that they would straightway avenge." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 566). The motif of repetition and imprisonment is already present in this phrase and Gwendolen will loudly compare herself to the Captain of the Flying Dutchman. In fact, in the three chapters that compose the "accident cluster" there is a strong intertextual imagery that suggests entrapment in crimes of impossible atonement and victimization, as I have mentioned in previous paragraphs.

Although Gwendolen ascertains her willingness on survival (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 672), the images that reflect and mirror her "self", ranging from the Medusa, La Pia, Beatrice Cenci, and the Captain of the Flying Dutchman, counteract the full consummation of her belief.

Like the mechanism of *mise en abyme*, which is "that which refers, and in referring recounts, in infinite regression, all that has already been recounted, to the future." (Bal, *On Meaning* 46), Gwendolen's existence seems to be, in fact, expunged out of the plot's wider flow of time and thrown into a loop. Apparently, Gwendolen's story carries a contradiction, because although she becomes a metamorphous figure, her purgatorial transformation does not seem to provide the necessary continuity for a renewed life narrative. Moreover, by the end of the narrative this character seems reduced to an opaque existence as the following extract may lead the reader to presuppose:

> In her struggle between agitation and the effort to suppress it, she was walking up and down the length of the two drawing-rooms, where at one end **a long mirror reflected her in her black dress**, chosen in the early morning with a half-admitted reference to this hour. But above this black dress her head on its white pillar of a neck showed to advantage. Some consciousness of this made her turn hastily and hurry to the boudoir, where again there was a glass, but also, tossed over a chair, a **large piece of black lace** which she snatched and tied over her crown of hair so **as completely to conceal her neck,** and leave only her face looking out from **the black frame**. In this manifest contempt of appearance, she thought it possible to be freer from nervousness, **but the black lace did not take away the uneasiness from her eyes and lips**. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 504. My emphasis)

Gwendolen's interior self becomes reduced to an exterior darkened outline, the articulation of her inner experience and vision seems to slip under the silent trembling of her eyes and lips. Thus, the narrative arch departing from Gwendolen's initial short-sightedness regarding her surrounding environment, *i.e.*, her unsympathetic reading, comes full circle in the narrator's own short-sightedness concerning the character's inner world, her inner narrative. As readers we may appreciate this irony, and recall at a distance the narrator's rhetorical comment right at the outset of the narrative: "What in the midst of that mighty drama are girls and their blind visions? They are the Yea and Nay of that good for which men are enduring and fighting. In these delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages treasures of human affections." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 101). According to this moto, affect offers a double-edged perspective, it may blind one to the historical and collective dramas of the world, nevertheless, it may also be the element needed to intervene and break the short-circuitry of repetition and misreading. In fact, it is suggested that like Daniel, Gwendolen must also come to terms with the exigencies

imposed by the blind vision of affect if she is to achieve any kind of progress, to use Rebecca Rainof's expression again.

However, what Gwendolen grasps with her mind's eye that allows her to proffer "I shall survive" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 672) seems impervious to the narrator and to the reader. Thus, through this final construction of Gwendolen as an impenetrable character, George Eliot explores another plate in the scale of her representative endeavour. In this, Eliot pends closely to John Ruskin's idea that a "true" apprehension of the world transcends both the intellect and the senses, it is instead found in a feeling of blessedness in contemplation. As it will become evident by the quotation bellow, Ruskin's formulation shares some similarities with Shelley's own formulation evoked earlier about the "teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies":

> Now the term "aesthesis" properly signifies mere sensual perception of the outward qualities and necessary effects of bodies; in which sense only, if we would arrive at any accurate conclusions on this difficult subject, it should always be used. But I wholly deny that the impressions of beauty are in any way sensual; they are neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral: and for the faculty receiving them, whose difference from mere perception I shall immediately endeavour to explain, no term can be more accurate or convenient than that employed by the Greeks, "Theoretic." […] the exulting, reverent, and grateful perception of it I call Theoria. […] it is dependent on a pure, right, and open state of heart. (Ruskin, *Modern Painters II*, 13-16)

Still, the contents of such experience remain elusive in a figure like Gwendolen. Thus, by presenting Gwendolen siting on an armchair in the final scene of her story arch, the character is made to resemble the image of the blind girl sitting on her luggage at the crossroads of a luxurious landscape portrayed by John Everett Millais in *The Blind Girl* (1854-1856). As Kate Flint puts it:

> Yet the blind girl, in her sightlessness, may be read as a vehicle which reminds the spectator of the importance of a higher, inward vision: a valorisation which interrogates the limits of what a painting may directly be able to show. Thus, the dominance of the material, visible world is called into question, and Millais' work can be seen as a consideration of how one might represent a different sort of vision. (Flint, "Blindness" 2)

Mutatis mutandis Eliot appears to be implying the need for the representation of a different kind of reality and different modes of perception, and, consequently, allocating Gwendolen's narrative survival on this very condition.

As I have been arguing, *Daniel Deronda*'s plot is permeated by a series of perspectival blind-spots and oscillations, which Eliot questions and challenges by staging competing forms of reading the world and the people inhabiting it. Although the characters have traditionally been ascribed an enclosed placement in this perspectival play, that is, set to represent either the pole of myopic vision and antipathetic reading, or the pole of global vision and sympathetic reading, there is one particular scene where they are made co-present, or as Marilyn Orr considers they are "forc[ed] [into] collision" (88).[61] In fact, Gwendolen's visit to Mirah's lodgings, in order to invite her to sing at a private recital and to inquire into the nature of her relations to Daniel, places Gwendolen at a threshold of rooms "[…] where there were folding-doors, and she heard Deronda's voice behind it." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 489). Upon hearing Daniel's voice, Gwendolen asks Mirah for clarification, who informs her that "He is reading Hebrew with my brother." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 489). This realization makes her "aware that she was out of place, and to dread Deronda's seeing her" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 491), and furthermore, as the narrator states "the phrase 'reading Hebrew' had fleeted unimpressively across her sense of hearing, as a stray stork might have made its peculiar flight across her landscape without rousing any surprised reflection on its natural history." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 492). Thus, in these rooms of adjoining conversations, Gwendolen does not dare to peer behind the "folding-doors" of the "natural history" the Hebrew community and is satisfied with ascertaining the nature of Mirah's connection to Daniel and the effect it might have in her life. Still, Gwendolen recurs to Daniel to reinterpret her predicament and lift the curse of having betrayed Lydia Glasher and murdered Grandcourt, in other words, to relieve her of the haunting narrative paralysing her life and the vision of her self reflected in the head of the Medusa and the drowned bust of Grandcourt. In *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, David

[61] See Fisch for a perspective concentrating on the critical reception considering the separateness of Gwendolen and Daniel plot lines. See Lurz.

Caroll suggests that by focusing on a discourse of repentance and guilt, Daniel believes he is able to offer Gwendolen a narrative of redemption, even if he is to be physically removed from her as he embarks on his messianic quest. According to Carroll, the turning point of Gwendolen, from considering herself "forsaken" to the adhering to the reinterpretation of "survival", is related to an emancipation from both from Grandcourt's and Deronda's discourse:

> for Gwendolen finally begins to tell her own story which incorporates both of their typologies. What we are left with at the end of George Eliot's epic of empire is the heroine's first religious experience, a glimpse of the true relationship between the self within its own horizon and a plurality of other horizons, the most sophisticated expression of which is Mordecai's vision of the divine unity. From the pulsations of the self, the influxes in the darkness, the mysterious seedlike images, has emerged this embryonic moral being, the self and the world stabilising at last into a world-view which is Gwendolen's own. (Carroll 312)

The religious experience to which Carroll alludes to is another way of noticing the structural importance of the idea of sympathy and the etymology of religion not only as *relegere*, that is re-reading, but also in connection to *ex eligendo*, sellecting, and *ex diligendo*, attending on what one loves.[62] Carroll evokes a passage, in which for a passing moment Gwendolen "was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving." (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 669-679). However, as I have argued Gwendolen's narrative survival remains outside the novel's grasp. Although there is an apparent liberation from the purgatorial repetition and of the reflection of the haunted self, Gwendolen's vision of the future (and of her future self) remains a blind-spot in the narrative, an object that in the activity of re-reading calls for a re-writing and above all a re-telling.

[62] See Bisla.

Chatpter 2
Textures

I have been struck with the important truth,
that far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through
perplexed combinations of concrete objects, pass to us as involutes […]
in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled,
than ever reach us directly, and in their own abstract shapes.

De Quincey, *Suspiria de Profundis*

2.1. "The limit. Where does it lie?"

There is in *Effi Briest* a recurrent moto usually proffered by the old Herr von Briest whenever he wishes to finish a conversation, it goes like this: "but that is too broad a field" ["das ist ein zu weites Feld"]. This sentence comes up whenever complex situations and topics present themselves and von Briest wants to either dismiss them or spare himself of a lengthy discussion, thus flattening the subtleties that might have challenged a safer yet restricted vista, particularly the putative moral responsibilities in the demise of their adulteress daughter. In contrast, Effi, the protagonist of the novel, often engages the world with fancy, and seems to bring a wider field of perception to the fore. As Frau von Briest says during a trip to Berlin in order to shop for Effi's dowry: "'all these things mean very little to Effi. She's undemanding as far as worldly goods are concerned; she lives in the world of her imagination'" (Fontane, *Effi*b16) ['Alle diese Dinge', so sagte sie sich, 'bedeuten Effi nicht viel. Effi ist anspruchslos; sie lebt in ihren Vorstellungen und Träumen […]'" Fontane, *Effi*a 23)].[63] In fact, this statement configures a tension in the narrative, and, accordingly, configures a relation to the reality of social rites and the way it is lived by the characters. On the one hand, one finds the so-called

[63] In the English translation "Vorstellung" and "Träumen" are condensed in one designation "imagination", thus rarefying the distinction between imagination and dream ("Traum"), and moreover eclipsing the differences between the German "Vorstellung", "Einbildungskraft" and "Phantasie". Usually, the English word imagination would be connected to the Latin "imaginatio" and the German "Phantasie" to the Greek αντασία, whereas "Vorstellung" would stand for representation in a broader sense, a term in closer alliance with "Einbildungskraft" first introduced at the turn of the 18th century. For an overview of the evolution of these three terms in the German language see Karl Homann "Zum Begrif Einbildungskraft nach Kant".

conventional world of social and physical existence, on the other hand, that of the imagination. This neat binary opposition between objective and subjective realities, or between a purported objective reality and fiction, as we shall see, will be constantly challenged throughout *Effi Briest* and outplayed as an inadequate dichotomy not only to understand life and its representations, but also faulty to reach any understanding regarding the perceptions and the real from which they spring.

The two modes of engaging with the world enunciated by Louise von Briest in the quote above are symptomatic of a tension that both George Levine in *Realistic Imagination* and Geoffrey Baker in *Realism's Empire* consider to be at the core of nineteenth- century Realism:

> whatever else realism means, it always implies an attempt to use language to get beyond language, to discover some non-verbal truth out there. […] realism obviously depended in large measure on changing notions of what *is* "out there", of how to best represent it, and of whether, after all, representation is possible or the "out there" knowable. Novels that bring the "out there" into the "in here" foreground and amplify the contrasting epistemologies represented by the two terms. (Baker 10)

To Baker the "out there", in an analogy to the "broad field" of *Effi Briest*, is a topographic metaphor for "subjects too large to be contained or known" (201). Moreover, it also structures a philosophical opposition between enchantment and disenchantment as a modality of thought and perception towards the world and reality. According to Baker's view, Theodor Fontane, alongside writers such as Honoré de Balzac and Anthony Trollope, challenges the idea that Realism, as a literary aesthetics and period, is only concerned with the representation of life as an empirical, socio- historical and scientific reality. Notwithstanding, it should be mentioned that Baker's argument is orchestrated to show that European imperial and colonial dynamics produced and entered in a variety of narratives as figures of exoticism and marginality of the Other outside the Western cultural bounds. According to Baker, these narratives uncover a dialectical relation between enchantment and disenchantment at the core of Realist novels throughout the nineteenth- century, in that "marginal areas become portals for the reintroduction of enchantment into the secularized domestic space […]" (23). On this

point, Baker aligns himself with a legacy of socio-cultural diagnostics and sociological interpretations of modernity, who see in industrialization and in the scientific revolutions the final dismantling of religious and mythological lenses through which to explain and experience the world. This phenomenon was ingeniously described by Max Weber in a 1918 lecture entitled "Science as a Vocation" ("Wissenschaft als Beruf") in the following words:

> Thus, the process of intellectualization and rationalization does not imply a growing understanding of the conditions under which we live. It means something quite different. It is the knowledge or the conviction that if only we wished to understand them we could do so at any time. It means that in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle control everything by means of calculation. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world. (13)

However, Weber's analysis of the zeitgeist of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encapsulated under the umbrella expression "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*) offers some nuanced views. As one can read in the quote above, Weber is also hinting at the emergence of a new set of mystifications that deposit an absolute revelatory power in science as once had been done with religion. In other words, to the German sociologist the disenchantment of the world cannot be equated, for instance, with Positivism or with the belief that science and secularization constitute "'the path to true existence,' 'the path to true art,' 'the path to true nature,' 'the path to true God, 'the path to true happiness'"(17) instead he argues it is a process of making one "able to ask the right question" (17). In fact, on par with this phenomenon of widespread rationalization that came to be the cornerstone of so many accounts of modernity, so too sprung other narratives which identified a concurrent desire for new mythologies of meaning once religion could no longer hold them (nor science itself for that matter).[64] In a 1853 essay entitled "Realismus", Fontane himself comments on this

> Our epoch is surrounded by *Realism* from all sides. Doctors discard all conclusions and combinations, they want experience; Politicians (from every party) direct their eyes to the real needs and lock their egregious templates inside the desk; the military shrug at the Prussian military constitution and demand "old grenadiers" instead of "young recruits"; but above all it is the material questions, along with the thousand attempts to solve the social problems, that so

[64] For a now classic text on modernity and the challenges posed by the dichotomies that permeate it see Zygmunt Bauman *Modernity and Ambivalence*. For a succinct account of the influence of Friedrich Schiller in Max Weber's use of the term "disenchant of the world" see Lyons 873-95, and for a summary overview of discussions around re-enchantment see Jenkins 11-32.

> vehemently come to the fore, and so there remains no doubt: the world is tired of speculation and longs for some "green fresh field", which is so close and yet so far away. (My translation)
>
> Was unsere Zeit nach allen Seiten hin charakterisiert, das ist ihr *Realismus*. Die Ärzte verwerfen alle Schlüsse und Kombinationen, sie wollen Erfahrungen; die Politiker (aller Parteien) richten ihr Auge auf das wirkliche Bedürfnis und verschließen ihre Vortrefflichkeitsschablonen ins Pult; Militärs zucken die Achsel über preußische Wehrverfassungen und fordern „alte Grenadiere" statt „junger Rekruten"; vor allem aber sind es die materiellen Fragen, nebst jenen tausend Versuchen zur Lösung des sozialen Rätsels, welche so entschieden in den Vordergrund treten, daß kein Zweifel bleibt: die Welt ist des Spekulierens müde und verlangt nach jener „frischen grünen Weide", die so nah lag und doch so fern. (141)

To finish this small detour let us return to *Realism's Empire* where Baker elaborates what he considers to be a metanarrative about European Realism as an agonistic conjunction of the supernatural, the colonial and the secularized world. To this author, *Effi Briest* provides a case study of "problematic 'realist' works" (176) in that the introduction of an "exotic" figure such as that of the Chinese ghost

> has a decisive and decisively troubled impact on the novel's arrangement of rationalism and enchantment, and it blurs both the comfortable imperial divisions between zones of domestic order and zones of mystery […]. Fontane articulates the tension between the spiritual imagination and the secular rationalizations of geographical expansionism. It attempts to envision, in the carefully attempted but ultimately failed recuperation of the mysterious, a means of unmapping the mapped and ordered world and restoring uncertainty to a text that both craves and fears it. (176-77)

This perspective may be put side by side with that of other critics who have defended that Realist novels engage with, rather than radically oppose romance, gothic or fantastic genres, which are the genres where magic, the exotic or the unexplainable are at home *par excellence*. A case in point is the work developed by Helen Chambers, who was one of the first scholars to identify this generic contamination trend and to address it specifically in the works of Fontane. In her 1977 doctoral dissertation entitled *Supernatural and irrational elements in the works of Theodor Fontane*, Chambers defends the structural significance of what she termed the supernatural and the irrational throughout Fontane's *oeuvre*. Thus, Chambers reads this nineteenth- century writer against the grain of his own proverbial self-proclamation as someone merely concerned with observation of the exterior facets of the social world. For instance, statements that concur to this received image of the German writer can be found in the following letter to Georg Friedländer:

> I consider life, and especially the societal elements in it, as a theater play and I follow every scene with an artistic interest from my seat at Parquetplatz No. 23. Everything is connected, everything has its bearing and its meaning even the smallest things, even the most superficial. (Fontane, *Briefe* 47, 5. Juli 1886. My translation)
>
> [Ich betrachte das Leben, und besonders das Gesellschaftliche darin, wie ein Theaterstück und folge jeder Scene mit einem künstlerischen Interesse wie von meinem Parquetplatz No.23 aus. Alles spielt mit, alles hat sein Gewicht und seine Bedeutung auch das Kleinste, auch das Äußerlichste.] (Fontane, *Briefe* 47, 5. Juli 1886). [65]

Moreover, in a letter from 1864 to Ernst von Pfuel, Fontane states that his poetic credo is framed by "bringing the local to life, and the poeticizing of events" [„die Belebung des Lokalen, die Poetisierung des Geschehenen"].[66] Notwithstanding, we also find statements such as "All I have produced is 'psychography' and criticism, creation in the dark, put to rights in the light." (*Apud*. Mann 296). Behind this more or less unsystematic presentation of his poetics, there is a *basso continuo* that could be described as a desire to give texture and consistency to both the hidden and the surface (directly observed) aspects of the world and human experience.

Until the 1970's, these two takes on Fontane's literary production, or in other words, the history of his critical reception remained more or less unchanged: a variation either of Thomas Mann essay *The Art of the Novel* [*Die Kunst des Romans*] and *The Old Fontane* [*Der alte Fontane*], or of Erich Auerbach's classic vaticination in *Mimesis* that Fontane, in syntony with his Germanic compatriots, failed to represent the social and political dynamics of their time (452-53; 518). To the German romance philologist Fontane was an estimable and humorous storyteller, however one who failed to have a deeper perspective on the problematic of modernity when compared to the cosmopolitanism of his French neighbours (Hohendahl 9). Of course, this is Auerbach's very particular view (which he never claimed to be other than the observation of some tendencies) of the development of realism as the tear and pull between

[65] Theodor Fontane's reputation as a *homme de lettres* has been looked down upon early on in his career and reception, even by the author himself, as is testified by some of his correspondence (Mann 294). In fact, Fontane proclaimed a certain aversion to the practice of literary criticism and had a distaste for a kind of thinking based on rigid genre and periodic demarcations. This trait of ostensible anti-intellectualism or, if we will, his withholding from reflection on his own craft is what perhaps led Thomas Mann to be of the view that "his theory falls far below the standard of his practice" (*Apud*. Bowman 129).
[66] Letter to Ernst von Pfuel, 18 January 1864. Fontane, *Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 115.

pure aesthetics and social impulse (505), the constitution of a mixed style where the everyday is treated seriously (555).[67] To be clear, I am not trying to posit these more dismissive positions towards Theodor Fontane as the cause for a relative dormancy of its critical appreciation until more recent decades. In fact, these seem to have more to do with an application of a grid of generic precepts, based on prescriptive criteria of Realism elements to be met, thus, brushing to the side authors who are not "Realist enough". In *Re-Interpretations* J.P. Stern addresses and criticises a tradition in German studies that used to focus on a perceived belatedness in the appearance of the Realist novel in Germany, or on its underdevelopment, a condition seen as related to a conception of literature as "non-political" and on the comparatively late emergence of a unified nation-state. This take on German literary history is mostly in line with what Thomas Mann, in the essay *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* written in the early years of I World War, called the division between *Kultur* (culture) and *Zivilisation* (civilization), which corresponded to a cultural division between German and Western Europe respectively. According to this view, *Zivilisation* embodied superficiality, *i.e.* human existence and freedom understood as institutional and political entities, whereas *Kultur* encapsulated the essence of "true" humanity and "true" freedom and a profound spiritual interiority. In many ways, the cultivation of this distinction and isolationism is usually what lead critics to speak of a parochialism in German nineteenth-century literature.[68] Nonetheless one could venture to state that Fontane's critical fortune changed precisely because his works constituted a subdued challenge to the literary genre categories inherited from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and coincided with a renewed interest in the period and a new understanding of it and its poetical practices.

[67] All in all, Auerbach settles this "polemic" in "Epilegomena to *Mimesis*". See Auerbach 570-71.
[68] However, it is beyond my intent to engage in this debate in the scope of this dissertation.

As we have seen in some paragraphs above, to Helen Chambers, on the other hand, Fontane's novels encompass a broader understanding of the represented reality,[69] which is not exclusively constituted by the social world, in fact, "[…] the characters themselves express an awareness of the existence of irrational forces directing their fates. […] To all of them it is an aspect of reality which they neither can nor do subject to rational analysis." (165-166). This observation provides a move from more traditional appreciations of Fontane's novel such as that of Peter Demetz in *Forms of Realism: Theodor Fontane* [*Formen des Realismus: Theodor Fontane*], who saw in the German author's literary production a continuum of the romanesque into the society novel. Thus, in this line of inquiry *Effi Briest* is usually read as offering a critique of a conservative society, particularly one who is guided by double standard regarding gender roles and social status based on property and money, where the women are constrained by prejudice and an imbalance of power.

In fact, these sociological considerations do offer a superstructure to the plot, so to speak, especially if we consider it to consist of the story of a young noble/ bourgeois girl, living in a secluded yet lively home in the Brandenburg region, who is forced into marrying a middle-aged man on his way to become a high- ranking figure in the Wilhelmine administration. A marriage of convenience, which forces the female protagonist to fulfil the role of the "angel in the house", and grants the male figure with a position of power over her. Feeling entrapped and isolated in East-Pomerania, Effi pursues a brief extra-marital affair with Major Crampas, which goes unnoticed and is only discovered after its dissolution many years later. The discovery leaves Effi in the company of many other outcast female figures in the novel, such as Roswitha, the maid, who in her youth had been shunned from her catholic family because of an illegitimate pregnancy, or the bohemian women with whom the divorced Effi shares a boarding

[69] We will see a similar perspective *a propos* Emilia Pardo Bazán's reflections on Naturalism and Realism in *The Burning Question* and *The Novel in Russia*.

home in Berlin. As it has been pointed out, *Effi Briest* does invite readers to question the moral categories that conduce the judgment of human behaviour and interaction, and does incite readings that look beyond the immediate moral and social rationale available. Metaphorically speaking, the narrative directs the gaze to the broader and unstable field of human relations. These preliminary remarks are to be understood merely as an instance or manifestation of a prevalent widespread concern in the narrative with indeterminacy, and an inquiry of the "broad field"**,** or differently put, not only the difficulty of encompassing and delimiting it, but also that of grasping its content and matter, the constant double *entendres* of which for instance Herr von Briest is constantly being admonished for by his wife (Fontane, *Effi*a 295; Fontane, *Effi*b 239). Continuing with this subject of the moral subtext of the novel, it should also be noted that Innstetten is not oblivious to the weight and the intricacies of social codes of femininity and masculinity. "The limit. The limit. Where does it lie? Was it there? Had it already been crossed?" (Fontane, *Effi*b 195)/ ["Die Grenze, die Grenze. Wo ist sie? War sie da? War sie schon überschritten" (Fontane, *Effi*a 243)], these are the words that the Baron uses to reason with his conscience, after having killed his rival Crampas in an anachronic duel. This episode indicates he has crossed both a moral and a literary genre barrier: making justice by one's own hands, and through this bringing a Romantic and "Oneginian" flair to late nineteenth-century fiction.

In the 1990's book *Adultery in the Novel* Tony Tanner identified a prevalent engagement in the nineteenth- century novel with un-normative personal liaisons, relationships and situations that challenged the boundaries of sanctioned bounds in bourgeois society. According to Tanner the adultery plot becomes the quintessential enactment of such transgressions, and it is perceived as particularly disturbing because it introduces multiplicity: "bourgeois society tends to enforce unitary roles on its members who then impose them on themselves. From the point of view of that society, adultery introduces a bad multiplicity within

the requisite unities of social roles." (13). Taking this as a cue, one could concede that *Effi Briest* is a novel grounded on such multiplicity, or to use an image closer to the novel, a work concerned with the "broadened field" glossed as the indeterminacy of human relations and ways of relating to the world. Thus, this novel becomes a representational field with multiple planes undermining each other: the social world *vs.* the emotional and psychological, reality *vs.* imagination, visible *vs.* invisible, guilt *vs.* redemption, Realism *vs.* Romanticism and the Gothic. In sum, these are all structural oppositions that could be subsumed under a more general one consisting of the relationship between the material and the immaterial, subject and object, which assumes the form of an indeterminate texture and substance that evades a clear-cut interpretation. Notwithstanding having mentioned Tony Tanner's interest in the adulterous thematic, I contend that in *Effi Briest* the adultery plot is more instrumental to the activation and unfolding of this idea of textual indeterminacy, than as a thematic cluster to get the discussion around morals or gender politics going. In another take at the "subversiveness of narrative trajectories in nineteenth-century novels" inspired by the work of Tony Tanner, Greenberg argues that "though partly determined by nineteenth-century novelistic conventions of adultery, broken marriage, woman's guilt, and atonement by death, Effi Briest is also a text whose unfinished narratives subvert its overt design for closure and in so doing undermine its submissive and conciliatory ending as well as received notions of resignation and contrition" (770). As Josef Thanner defends "Fontane does not moralize, that is, he does not make reflections on good and evil, not even metaphorically. He depicts, however, his favorite subject, the highly sensitive, fascinating woman who is, through her obedience to her impulses, in constant danger of transgression." (192). In fact, siding with Peter C. Pfeiffer, who proposes a reading of *Effi Briest* as a novel centred on a theorization of Realist aesthetics at its twilight, we can evoke the well-known position of Fontane towards the *oeuvre* under scrutiny here:

> Critics have continuously held on to Fontane's statement, that it was not the story of Mrs. Ardenne, "an adultery story like many others", which inspired him to write *Effi*

> *Briest*, but the words "Come, Effi" and that the ghost was a pivotal point for the whole narrative. (Pfeiffer, "Fontanes *Effi Briest*" 75. My translation)
>
> [Die Kritik hat immer wieder die Äußerungen Fontanes aufgegriffen, dass nicht die Geschichte der Frau Ardenne, „eine Ehebruchs-geschichte wie hundert andre mehr," ihn zu seinem Roman *Effi Briest* angeregt habe, sondern die Worte „Effi, komm" und daß der Spuk „ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte" sei. (Pfeiffer, "Fontanes *Effi Briest*" 75)]

If the Chinese sailor is indeed the vector of the narrative, this happens not only because it allows Innstetten to create a hold on Effi by instigating fear of the supernatural and as a foreshadowing of the adultery plot. In a psychoanalytical analysis of the adultery plot Joachim Küpper in "A modernidade occulta em *Effi Briest* de Theodor Fontane" argues that the narrative may be understood as having a prefiguration structure, which is achieved through a mechanism of the story within the story. In short, Innstetten takes some time before disclosing the story of the past owners of the house he and Effi will inhabit in Kessin. First, the baron only lets out some bits of information, never the whole story. Finally, in chapter 10, he concedes to acquaint his wife with the story of Captain Thomsen, his granddaughter and a Chinese seafarer. This story is told in a very typified fashion almost as a fairy tale where the characters have no proper names and no idiosyncratic subjectivity. Captain Thomsen had a Chinese employee, who was said to have eloped with his granddaughter on the day of her wedding to another man. Neither of them was ever seen again, until the cadaver of the Chinese was found in the outskirts of Kessin. According to Küpper this story is a prefiguration of Effi and Crampas future extramarital liaison. However, my main interest in this figure and its hold on the narrative, I will argue, is derived more specifically from its indeterminate material status, which in connection with other objects interspersed throughout the narrative concurs to give it a volatile texture. Furthermore, in the quote above, Peter C. Pfeiffer makes another reminder about the importance of the expression "Come, Effi", which is proffered by Effi's friends (the twins Hertha and Bertha) calling her to play. This is a summoning that pulls Effi away from her first meeting with her future husband, Baron von Innstetten, and provokes in him the

uncanny sensation that Effi does escape him and is beyond his perceptive universe (Fontane, *Effi*b 12, 14; Fontane, *Effi*a 18, 21). Thus, like the Chinese ghost Effi's corporeal and psychic existence is indeterminate, and ultimately becomes condensed as a text, a name inscribed in a tombstone amidst heliotrope at the end of the novel and that lends itself as title (Fontane, *Effi*b 238; Fontane, *Effi*a 294). The question lingers on and imposes itself as to what can be read in such mortuary inscriptions, almost inviting us to "read unreasonably" to use Elaine Freedgood's expression *a propos* Pip in *Great Expectations*, who as an orphan in front of his family gravestones "wishes that their skimpy lines *could* supply him with even the slightest raw material for the connections he never had the chance to make" (Freedgood 17), and in his interpretative frenzy, Pip "bears an unsettling resemblance to that of the reader of the realist novel, who must also decide on meaning a relevance on an item-by-item basis" (18).

Throughout the novel ghosts, voices, pictures, paintings, decoration pieces, letters, tombstones and natural landscapes/ backgrounds give the narrative a polymorphous texture. More than being invested with the symbolism of omens or prefiguration, these objects and elements of heterogenous materiality are turned into depositories of metafictional reflections on Realist aesthetics, and particularly in the instable divide between the real and the fictional. In fact, the ontological destabilization that one finds in *Effi Briest* is fuelled by indeterminacy of the referential world: the uncertainty about the nature of the real (and about the human experience of it) permeates and challenges the narrative's attempt to demarcate reality and fiction. Moreover, the perception of individual characters seems to be neutralized under the portmanteau of an omniscient third-person narrator, and it becomes uncertain whether the material objects reflect hidden realities and imaginaries of their observers and readers, or have an agency of their own.

One way to go about the peculiar place occupied by objects in the novel, or better said the material story world of the diegesis, could be to consider, alongside Bill Brown in *The*

Sense of Things, that *Effi Briest* belongs to a family of texts "[…] that describe and enact an imaginative possession of things that amounts to the labor of infusing manufactured objects with a metaphysical dimension." (7). However, in Fontane's novel one will not come across mysterious moving furniture like in Guy de Maupassant's *Qui sait?* (1890), or a speaking vase like in *Der Goldne Topf* (1819) by E.T.A. Hoffmann, nor any form of the eighteenth-century popular genre of it-narratives, where objects become narrators telling stories about their very human grievances and difficult lives among oblivious people.[70] Quite on the contrary, as we shall see, the objects enumerated above (at the beginning of the previous paragraph) seem to escape this prosopopoeia like quality, but nonetheless stand simultaneously for something other than themselves, as they become "trapped" in an metafictional interpretative chain. In other words, they come to stand for regimens of representation, and could, in fact, be grouped in general categories comprising the image, writing and sound. They constitute a texture within the narrative that interrogates its own mechanisms of embodying reality and fictionality, a form questioning its referentiality and effects amongst porous subject-object demarcations and reading practices.

2.2. *A piece of bric-à-brac left over: deixis am phantasma*

As previously mentioned, the introduction of the Chinese ghost in the story can be seen as a concession to the gothic and romance genres, which J.P. Stern in *Re-Interpretations* has considered to be "a piece of *bric-à-brac*" and therefore a stain in Fontane's novel (319). In

[70] Most of these narratives were published anonymously in circulation magazines. For a representative example see "Adventures of a Quire of Paper". *London Magazine*, vol. 48, 1779 and "The Adventures of a Robinson Crusoe. Written by Itself". *The Young Gentleman's and Lady's Magazine, or Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction and Amusement.* 1799-1800. For a critical approach to the early eighteenth-century thing-poem see Benedict 193-207. Benedict connects the emergence of the modern market and the concurrent ubiquity of advertising with the appearance of the literary form of the thing-poem, in that the advertisement poured its influence into literature as it "could literally 'turn the mind' (*ad+ verto*) toward a topic, propel an event or a thing into public notice" (195). To Benedict early eighteenth-century thing-poems are also a symptom of the uncertainties about "whether significance lay in things or in people" (204).

response to this apparently limited interpretation, scholars like Pfeifer ("Fontanes *Effi Briest*") or Chambers (*Supernatural*; *The Changing Image*; "Theodor Fontane as Realist") have opened- up other lines of inquiry that consider crosspollinations between genres and forms, and thus, purport to draw attention to the metafictional play that the figure of the ghost brings to Theodor Fontane's novel. For instance, in the article "Gespenster des Realismus" Begemann suggests that the novels of the Realist period may be better understood not as the art of getting rid of supranatural beings and of allocating them to the genre of the fantastic or the period of Romanticism, but instead as an arena where imagination and ideas of reality are tested and challenged on their ontological grounds: "All this seems to me reason enough, not to focus on the mechanisms of separation of the fantastic and the spectral, but much more to search for the affinities of realist literature with the uncanny and marvellous and to investigate their literary functions." (Begemann, "Gespenster" 226. My translation). However, if we obviate the judgement of value implicit in J.P Stern's remark, it quite touches a crucial aspect of the novel. Stern's suggestive characterization of the figure of the ghost as *bric-à-brac*, as something left over and disassembled that does not belong to the structure of the narrative, reminds one of the assertions of one of the practitioners of New Criticism, John Crowe Ransom.[71] When, attempting to characterize poetic discourse, Ransom defended that it is not always "tight and precise on its logical side as a scientific prose structure generally is, it imparts and carries along a great deal of irrelevant or foreign matter which is clearly not structural but even obstructive"

[71] Ransom was criticized early on for his view of poetry seeming to imply "that a poem has two kinds of meanings: the 'ostensible argument' (the structure), which may be reduced to prose, and the 'tissue of meaning' (texture), which may not. […] In spite of the protests of some critics that this structure-texture formulation is too near the false division of the poem into form and content, Ransom reiterates his conviction that the poetic discourse has a logical structure which can be rendered in a prose paraphrase […] the kind of duality Ransom defends is too near the age-old dichotomy of form and content and can lead to the erroneous conclusion that a poem consists of a 'prose sense decorated by a sensuous imagery'." (Young 74-79). It should be noted that in the essay "The Concrete Universal" Ransom answers his detractors, espousing a physiological understanding of poetry as having a head (intellect), heart (feeling), and feet (rhythm), a whole of which his definition of texture is made of: "My 'texture' in particular has given offense, and the fact is that I had no sooner uttered it than it struck me as a flat and inadequate figure for that vivid and easily felt part of the poem which we associate peculiarly with poetic language." (559). In brief, Ransom recaptures the terminology of Idealism (and Hegel) to defend a unique form of knowledge achieved by a poetic language that would vehiculate the universal through particularity.

(Ransom, "Wanted" 147). Similarly, the ghost of the Chinese, in its many material iterations, appears as obstructive texture, an obstructive figure in readability. Thus, as I will attempt to show bellow, the spectre becomes the literal and the figurative symbolic object of fiction,[72] as something that puzzles interpretation and fuels unconclusive (mis)readings, is capable of inducing action but also of arresting it.

The first allusion to the personage of the Chinese sailor and his ghost occurs when the newly- weds, Baron Geert von Innstetten and Effi Briest, are entering the town of Kessin and pass by a small grave stone outside the churchyard. On the occasion Effi is hoping to find in that remote place some bits of exoticism to entertain her mind in what she foresees will be a dull provincial life.[73] On this occasion, Innstetten grabs the opportunity to inform that even that remote town had its share of worldliness, cosmopolitanism and eeriness, having had "even a Chinaman" (Fontane *Effie*b, 35) [„auch einen Chinesen" (Fontane *Effie*a, 46)] amongst its inhabitants, whose remains were now under that isolated grave. Right from the outset the character of the Chinese is presented as simultaneously belonging to the realm of the living and to the other-worldly. Effi's curiosity to know more about this local figure is refrained from her fear of her own imagination and the dread to "get visions and dreams […] a Chinaman appearing beside my bed" (Fontane *Effie*b, 35) [„ich habe dann immer gleich Visionen und Träume und möchte doch nicht […] gleich einen Chinesen an mein Bett treten sehen." (Fontane *Effie*a, 46)]. In response to Effi's anxieties Innstetten interjects with an ambiguous remark "'No, he won't do that.'" (Fontane *Effie*b, 35) [„Das wird er auch nicht"(Fontane *Effie*a, 46)]. Although there is seemingly a negation of the ghostly haunting, at the same time it is deemed

[72] The identification of the presence of supernatural beings as symbols of language in many literary works is one of the takeaways of Todorov's *The Fantastic*. For a thorough analysis of this trope in the nineteenth-century short-story see Amândio Reis book *Writing the Unknown*, especially the chapter on Machado de Assis, where Reis argues for Machado's practice of a supernatural use of language that comes to the fore without the recourse to the typical supernatural beings created by language (ghosts, vampires, etc.), but instead transforming literary language into a supernatural entity in itself (86-87).

[73] For an analysis on the structural importance of boredom in the modulation of narrative speed see Tucker.

a possibility, especially when Innstetten attributes the apparition to an act of the purported ghost's volition. Thus, in *Effi Briest* the ghost is a figure that transits between the oneiric realm of Effi's imagination as a fantastic and eerie creature, as well as a discursive image conjured by Innstetten turning it into a real haunting presence.

Furthermore, in chapter eight, as Effi is touring the house to get more acquainted with it, the figure of the Chinese comes again to the fore. This time, it assumes the shape of a picture presumably cut out from a magazine or a children's book:

> […] and a little picture, half the length of a finger, had been stuck on the arm of one; **it represented a Chinaman**, in a blue coat with a baggy yellow pantaloons and a flat hat on his head. "[…] you can **see it's cut out just from a children's picture- book".** Effi thought so too, and was only puzzled that Innstetten took it all so seriously, **as if there was something in it after all**. (Fontane *Effi*b, 46-47. My emphasis)

> […] an die Lehne des einen war ein kleines, nur einen halben Finger langes Bildchen geklebt, das **einen Chinesen darstellte**, blauer Rock mit gelben Pluderhosen und einem flachen Hut auf dem Kopf. „[…] Du kannst sehen, **es ist aus einer Fibel herausgeschnitten**". Effi fand es auch und war nur verwundert, daß Innstetten alles so ernsthaft nahm, **als ob es doch etwas sei**. (Fontane *Effi*a, 61. My emphasis)

This scene in the attic and the tour around the house, which was supposed to transform the remote and inhospitable place into a homely one, strikes as an odd uncanny experience. This oddness is not solely derived from a hint of comicality in the situation,[74] as the scene not only seems to bring the character's buried feelings to the fore, but it equally seems to unveil the Chinese as an iconic figure of representation and fictionality more explicitly (so the enmeshing of these two planes is perturbing to Effi in particular). As highlighted in the passage above, the oriental character is presented as a picture, an icon. However, there is an ambiguous play with its referential status, and consequently with its ontological nature. Effi's remarks prompt two main questions: is it autoreferential, *i.e.,* a picture from a children's book? Or, as Effi muses, is there "something in it after all", meaning hypothetically a connection to an independent existence beyond that surface? In other words, Effi is trying to find out whether her fears originate from a real ghost or a fictional ghost. Here, one becomes already attuned to the

[74] The comic quality of the scene will be clarified below.

complexity and the inadequacy of this distinction. Nonetheless, the ghost, more than being a fantastic element in the sense of Tzvetan Todorov's famous formulation in *The Fantastic* (which places it in "the duration of this uncertainty" (25), that is, the hesitation of opting between supernatural explanations and rational ones (33), between the real and the imaginary, accurate and misguided perceptions (36)) it is foremost a metafictional figure. As readers we surmise that the placing of the small picture on an old chair in the attic was an ironic move by Innstetten. The attire of the portrayed probably reminds one of Werther, whose blue coat and yellow pantaloons had become infamous thanks to a series of young men who emulated the tragic story and followed suit taking their lives after their idolized fictional character. Furthermore, the picture chosen to plant the idea of the existence of the Chinese sailor is not his actual portrait, but simply an image of an Asiatic person taken from a children's book apparently coping Werther's dressing style. Thus, the image feeds on clichés and on an exotic view of the foreign other devoid of interiority, and consequently prone to become a projection surface or screen of the observer.

Taking all these aspects into account, one could venture to say that the picture is a fake, in the sense that, not only is it not the real image of the Chinese sailor, but it is also equally purported to be the figuration of an inexistent referent (the ghost) in the lived "real" world. In fact, it is in this quality of a "figure of representation" that lies its metafictional quality within the narrative. This quality of "falseness" associated with the image is borrowed from the Platonic tradition, which as J.T. Mitchell recalls "distinguishes the *eidos* from the *eidolon* by conceiving of the former as a 'suprasensible reality' […] the latter as a sensible impression that provides a mere 'likeness' (*eikon*) or 'semblance' (*phantasma*) of the *eidos*" (Mitchell, *Iconology* 5). However, the Chinese ghost, the literal *phantasma* of the narrative, overthrows and confuses this theoretical legacy. Thus, *Effi Briest* could be a candidate companion to some other novels and films that, according to Stanley Cavell in *The World Viewed*, grapple with the

intuition that "It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with." (85). Cavell makes this remark with Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) in mind, suggesting that the character played by James Stewart could be seen as a modern Pygmalion, who, contrary to the mythical sculptor king, "reverses his exemplar's handling of his desire, and turns his woman to stone" (86). Baron von Innstetten is not out of place in this genealogy of men whose fantasy and desire "cause him not merely to forgo reality but to gear every instant of his energy toward a private alteration of reality." (Cavell 86).[75] In fact, Major Crampas, on the occasion of one of his courtship strolls with Effi in the dunes known as the Plantation, reveals his old friend Innstetten's penchant for telling ghost stories during their military service times in order to frighten their comrades: "'See ghosts! I'm not saying that, but he did like to tell us ghost stories. And once he'd got us really worked up and some probably even frightened, it suddenly seemed as if he simply wanted to make fun of his comrades.'" (Fontane, *Effi*b 104)/ ["'Ein Geisterseher! Das will ich nicht gerade sagen. Aber er hatte eine Vorliebe, uns Spukgeschichten zu erzählen. Und wenn er uns dann in große Aufregung versetzt und manchen auch wohl geängstigt hatte, dann war es mit einem Male wieder, als habe er sich über alle die Leichtgläubigen bloβ mokieren wollen'" (Fontane, *Effi*a 131)]. From here on it becomes more or less clear to Effi, that her husband had been orchestrating an environment to leave her petrified with fear ("educate her through the ghost"/ "Erziehen durch Spuk"), and thus rendering her unable to enact his own fears of betrayal.[76] Symptomatically at the end of this

[75] However, in the case of Innstetten we are not dealing with a character whose symbolic sense of reality has been overthrown.

[76] Here we have access to Effi's reasoning of the situation: "She could accept that Innstetten should have a ghost to hand so that he didn't live in an ordinary house, it fitted his tendency to set himself off from the crowd, but the other aspect, that he was using the ghost as a means of educating her, that was too much, was almost insulting. And "means of education" was only the half of it, the lesser half, she was clear about that; what Crampas had suggested was much, much more, a device deliberately calculated to create fear. It was totally devoid of feeling, almost bordering on cruelty. […] what guarantee do I have that Crampas is right? Crampas is amusing because he has a wicked tongue, but he's unreliable, just a coxcomb, and not a patch on Innstetten." (Fontane *Effi*b 106) / [Daß Innstetten sich einen Spuk parat hielt, um ein nicht ganz gewöhnliches Haus zu bewohnen, das mochte hingehen, das stimmte zu seinem Hange, sich von der großen Menge zu unterscheiden; aber das andere, daß er

conversation Effi rides by the grave of the Chinese, passing between "the churchyard and the railed-off plot" (106), she doesn't flicker with terror as she had once confided in a letter to her mother,[77] the ghost's haunting becomes buried in that tomb, and thus, lifted the spell, Effi steps into the "railed-off plot" of the extra-marital affair. Apparently leaving the gothic and fantastic genres behind, Effi will enter into another fictional pact with Crampas, that of the realist novel and the adultery plot. In fact, as they get out of the woods into the churchyard, Crampas evokes biblical references to the original sin by comparing the ghost to the angel guardian placed at the gates of the Garden of Eden by God to prevent Adam and Eve from reentering after the Fall: "'He's often driving round the district, and then the house is empty and unguarded. But a ghost like that is like a cherub with a flaming sword…'" (Fontane, *Effi*b106) [„,Er kutschiert oft im Kreise umher, und dann ist das Haus allein und unbewohnt. Aber solch ein Spuk ist wie ein Cherub mit dem Schwert…'" (Fontane, *Effi*a 133)].

Stepping back once again to the scene in the attic and taking into account Crampas' innuendos, it could be argued that the ghost is a key element in Innstetten's *mise- en- scènce*, and thus gives shape to what would otherwise be an invisible fictional pact. Returning to Effi's letter to her mother, one sees that the character somehow understands she may be part of an enchantment trick, in other words, that she is entering a pact over which she has no control. Her co-fabulation is required, but under the guidance of Innstetten's rhetoric or *mise-en-scène*. In the letter Effi writes "He wanted me to look on it as women's nonsense and laugh at it, but then all at once he seemed to believe in it himself and rather oddly expected me to regard a family ghost like that as something superior and aristocratic." (Fontane, *Effi*b 79)/ ["Er

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den Spuk als Erziehungsmittel brauchte, das war doch arg und beinahe beleidigend. Und „Erziehungsmittel", darüber war sie sich klar, sagte nur die kleinere Hälfte; was Crampas gemeint hatte, war viel, viel mehr, war eine Art Angstapparat aus Kalkül. […] Wer bürgt mir denn dafür, daß Crampas recht hat! Crampas ist unterhaltlich, weil er medisant ist, aber er ist unzuverlässig und ein bloßer Haselant, der schließlich Innstetten nicht das Wasser reicht. (Fontane, *Effi*a 134)].

[77] "but the house we live in is… is haunted. […] I thought that otherwise I'd see him sitting on his grave" (Fontane, *Effi*b 79)/ ["denn das Haus das wir bewohnen ist ein Spukhaus. […] weil ich glaube, ich hätte ihn sonst auf dem Grabe sitzen sehen." (Fontane, *Effi*a 100)].

verlangte von mir, ich solle das alles als Alten-Weiberunsinn ansehen und darüber lachen, aber mit einmal schien er doch auch wieder selber daran zu glauben und stellte mir zugleich die sonderbare Zumutung, einen solchen Hausspuk als etwas Vornehmes und Altadliges anzusehen.“ (Fontane, *Effi*a 100-101)]. With Innstetten one witnesses a process of manipulation of language. In order to fulfil his strategy, the Baron uses objects in place of deictic linguistic props to entice supernatural beliefs in his wife. The ghost of the Chinese, then, becomes the figuration proper of an intricate narrative, and invites the reader to view the real as a phantasmagorical linguistic construction and evocation. Innstetten reconstructs verbally a non-immediate context to the senses, thus accomplishing his intent of entrapping his wife in an apparatus of fear. The replies of the servants Frau Kruse, Johanna and Roswitha never seem sufficient to counteract Effi's weird sensations and what may be quasi hallucinatory perceptions.

Therefore, the ghost embodies what we could call the referential apparatus of *deixis am phantasma*. Not wanting to incur in anachronism, I will evoke the pioneering work of the psychologist and linguist Karl Bühler (1879-1963), who put deixis at the forefront of semiology, and should be auxiliary in showing how *Effi Briest* problematizes an understanding of Realism as a mimesis of transparency, and as a stabile relation with the referent understood as the objective world of nature. About Bühler, Karl Popper said in *Unended Quest* (1976) that

> This theory became important to me for many reasons. It confirmed my view of the emptiness of the theory that art is self-expression. It led me later to the conclusion that the theory that art was "communication" (that is, release) was equally empty, since these two functions were trivially present in all languages, even animal languages. It led me to a strengthening of my "objectivist" approach. And it led me- a few years later- to add to Bühler's three functions what I have called the argumentative function. The argumentative function became particularly important for me because I regard it as the basis of all critical thought. (79)

This observation by Popper, which plays on an analogy between art and language, becomes relevant because while acknowledging his debt to Bühler in "discovering" the argumentative function of literary language, in retrospective it helps us understand Bühler's position that it

would be impossible to have a language theory purely based on a physical approach to the sign. Popper, by directing the attention to the argumentative and critical aspects, brings us to the intersubjective, or if we will, a common perceptual situation that allows interpretation of the representational filed. The German linguist's interest in language was by no means restricted to the "mere" signalling function of deictic expressions, on the contrary, he was keen on encompassing its conceptual and representational dimensions: "in the speech event, language is not only a means for the presentation of a state of affairs but also constantly brings the speaker into relation with the hearer." (Bühler, *The Axiomatization* 89).

In her introduction to Bühler's *The Axiomatization of the Language Sciences*, Elisabeth Ströker very succinctly connects the discussion around language to Plato's legacy, which tends to configure it "either as an image of reality or as a *tool*, a *medium* 'between' man and the objective realm, or in speaking of the 'vicarious' or also 'representing' function of linguistic signs"(79). As it is well known, Bühler proposed a tripartite presentation of deixis: *ad oculos*, anaphoric, and *am phantasma*, their common ground being an anchorage in a perceptual *origo*. In other words, to Bühler language appears as an intersubjective instrument by which a sender communicates information to a receiver concerning objects or states of affairs. Furthermore, the interpretation of deictic terms depends upon the addressee relating the deictic terms to one or more dimensions to the context of the utterance, for example, spatial, temporal, or person *i.e.*, participant relations. Briefly, deixis is founded by a shared perceptual situation (Bühler, *The Axiomatization* 136), thus deixis *am phantasma* or imagination-oriented deixis, as it is also called, is a peculiar case because it is supposed to guide or orient perception towards something absent. Quoting from Bühler:

> That is necessary because it turns out that the role played by this orientation is transferred *in toto* to "imagined space", to the realm of the somewhere or other of pure phantasy, the realm of the here and there of memory. The initial astonishment at the possibility of imagination-oriented deixis is based on a largely false presupposition. It is not at all the case that imagination-oriented deixis completely lacks the natural deictic clues upon which ocular demonstration is based**. Rather, the speaker and hearer of a visual description of something absent possess the same talent and**

> **resources that permit the actor on the stage to make something that is absent present and which permit the audience to interpret what is presented on the stage as a mimesis of something absent**. (Bühler, *Theory of Language* 142. My emphasis)

This is then a form of "mostration" *in absentia*, the referential field prompted by the speech act is not a real pre-existent space but is instead generated by language itself. This is why Fernanda Irene Fonseca in *Deixis, Tempo e Narração* [*Deixis, Time and Narration*] considered that deixis *am phantasma* is simultaneously referential and textual, and, as a consequence, is able to make a detour from the enunciation context, and present what is absent. In addition, Fonseca evokes Paul Ricœur's idea of the referential productivity of language (27). It is a move away from focusing on the communicative function of language towards its evocative function.

To be clear, this notion of productivity evoked by Fonseca is conceptualised by the French philosopher in *Interpretation Theory*[78] as a productive distancing, which according to him happens in the passage from orality to writing (25). Working to move beyond the structuralist emphasis on *langue* in detriment of *parole*, Ricœur is interested in understanding *parole* or discourse as an evanescent event, which writing works to try to hold or fixate, in other words, to inscribe. Far from wanting to override the nuances of Ricœur's thought by nibbling at it, here one finds the seeds for the idea of the autonomy of the text, both from an author (understood as a psychological entity) and from a particular addressee, thus, from a singular meaning and context. In the second essay that constitutes *Interpretation Theory* Ricœur states:

> This dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention of the author gives to the concept of inscription its decisive significance, beyond the mere fixation of previous oral discourse. Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means. The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it. (29-30)

[78] The book is the result of the compilation of three lectures proffered by Ricœur at Texas Christian University in 1973.

Ricœur's hermeneutics is posited as an alternative to the Romantic hermeneutic tradition (inaugurated by Friedrich Schleiermacher and continued by Wilhelm Dilthey), which according to him "tended to identify interpretation with the category of 'understanding,' and to define understanding as the recognition of an author's intention from the point of view of the primitive addressees in the original situation of discourse." (22). Thus, Ricœur elaborates the concept of productive reference as equivalent to "reality shaping" in his investigation of how fiction refers to reality and defends the idea that instead of reproducing reality, mimesis is a process that refers to it in a productive way, and therefore increases reality (Ivic 70-71). Taking into account Bühler's concept of *deixis am phantasma* as a "mimesis of something absent" and Ricœur's idea of mimesis as production of reality, in other words, something that is posited in front of the text, as opposed to being behind the text. This is how the philosopher conceptualizes a move from the intentional fallacy. In *The Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative* Ricœur further develops his understanding of (fictional) narrative referentiality as a triangulation of resignification involving reader, text, world (what Ricœur conceptualizes as mimesis III). I argue that it is this tension that the ghost dramatizes in *Effi Briest*. The ghost mediates between an inexistent or impossible to define "real" and between its own production of reality as a fictional entity, especially through its effects on the emotions of the characters and destabilizing their own sense of reality. A key moment is described in the following passage:

> On the other side of the road was a fenced-in square, not much bigger than a flowerbed, and nothing could be seen in it apart from a young pine tree rising up from the middle./"Is someone buried there as well?" Effi asked./ "Yes, the Chinaman."/ Effi started; it was like a stab of pain. But she had the strength to control herself and asked, with apparent calm: "Ours?" […] "So there is something after all. A story. You said something like that this morning. In the end it'll be best if I'm told what it is. As long as I don't know, despite all my good intentions, I'll be the victim of my own imaginings. Tell me what really happened. The reality of it cannot torment me as much as my imagination."(Fontane, *Effi*b 65-66).
>
> An der anderen Seite des Wegs war ein eingefriedeter Platz, nicht viel größer als ein Gartenbeet, und innerhalb nichts sichtbar als eine junge Kiefer, die mitten daraus hervorragte. „Liegt da auch wer begraben?" fragte Effi. „Ja. Der Chinese." Effi fuhr zusammen; es war ihr wie ein Stich. Aber sie hatte doch Kraft genug, sich zu beherrschen und fragte mit anscheinender Ruhe: „Unser?" […] „Also es ist doch was damit. Eine Geschichte. Du sagtest schon heute früh so was. Und es wird am Ende das beste sein, ich höre, was es ist. Solang ich es nicht weiß, bin ich,

> trotz aller guten Vorsätze, doch immer ein Opfer meiner Vorstellungen. Erzähle mir das Wirkliche. Die Wirklichkeit kann mich nicht so quälen wie meine Phantasie.“ (Fontane, *Effi*a 83-84)

Thus, moving back to *Effi Briest*, we can see how the ghost of the Chinese, through its multiple material manifestations and densities, embodies an agonic relation with literary referentiality and that some understandings of Realism tend to obviate. Through the ghost, *Effi Briest* stages an understanding of Realism that has to come to terms with being a “mimesis of something absent”, that “produces reality” and more importantly, that produces fiction, thus suggesting an understanding of reality as something that is not a natural given in the world, but rather produced and hence represented. At first sight, it could be said that Crampas’s interference in the story of the ghost haunting would be an interpretative gesture of trying to identify and reveal the intention of its author (Innstetten), and thus have the effects of the fiction vanish by means of that interpretative act.

Although Effi does seem to break free from the hold of the story, both she and Crampas fail to account to that aspect of the autonomy of the text (in this context perhaps the spectral text would be a more appropriate designation), to recapture Ricœur’s terminology summarized above. Even Innstetten misses this point in his controlling and demiurgic calculations. In fact, the ghost becomes more than a controllable device, since its symbolic presence gains an actual interference in the narrative and becomes the medium of expression of hidden psychology and desires of multiple characters, or with whoever comes into contact with it, thus re-signifying itself, and unleashing ever new mechanisms of interfering in the characters’ lives. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the stories of hauntings end up pushing Effi towards the comforting company of Crampas, thus defeating Innstetten’s plan.[79] As summarized by Silke Arnold- de Simine, many have been the critics who have considered the ghost only as a projection either

[79] This would be assuming that Crampas interpretation is correct. For an account that focuses on Innstetten’s own ambivalence towards matters of superstition see Swales 114- 123.

of exoticism (Ehlich), of the foreign in imperial and colonial contexts (Utz, Parr),[80] or of psychological states and social context:

> In this way the Chinese would also be interpreted as an external instance of projection of Effi's conscience or as an instrument of the power subtly exerted by society in general and Innstetten in particular on a young woman's sexuality and vitality. However, new approaches emphasize Effi's participation in the creation of the ghost. (83. My translation)
>
> Dabei wurde der Chinese als auch außen projizierte Instanz von Effis Gewissen oder als Instrument subtiler Machtausübung durch die Gesellschaft im allgemeinen und Innstetten im besonderen über die junge Frau, ihre Sexualität und Vitalität, gedeutet. Neuere Ansätze heben dagegen Effis Beteiligung an der Schöpfung des Spuks hervor. (83)

Arnold- de Simine filters these multiple perspectives through the lens of what she calls the female gothic, which according to her is a narrative genre revolving around a female protagonist who "can never be sure of the reality status of her uncanny experiences, and consequently her identity unravels: is she dreaming, is she fantasizing, or is she insane? Can she trust herself and her senses?" (85. My translation) / ["Da sies ich über den Realitätsstatus ihrer unheimlichen Erlebnisse nie sicher sein kann, gerät auch ihre Identität ins Wanken: träumt sie, fantasiert sie oder ist sie verrückt? Kann sie sich selbst und ihren Sinnen noch trauen" (85)].[81] Moreover, referring particularly to *Effi Briest*, Arnold-de Simine likens the ghost to a symptom of psychological perturbation that once cured properly, read explained, becomes "the key to solving the enigmatic incidentes" and reveals the haunting as "the secret of the 'other' (dead) woman, which is connected to illegitimate love, guilt, violence and crime" (84. My translation) / ["Der Schlüssel zur Lösung der rätselhaften Vorfälle ist das Geheimniss der 'anderen' (toten) Frau, das mit illegitimer Liebe, Schuld, Gewalt und Verbrechen verknüpft ist"(84)].[82]

[80] As mentioned before in this chapter Geoffrey Baker is also a case in point.

[81] As we shall see in the next chapter, Emilia Pardo Bazán also makes use of gothic elements to tackle the challenges of interpretation.

[82] An argument has been made for the depiction of female frustrated desire in *Effi Briest*. According to this view, each female character is like a double of the other, in other words, they are made to correspond to typologies of female desire trying to actualize itself in the face of societal constraints, where each personage is attempting to succeed where the "predecessor" or the other failed. Thus, Louise von Briest is living vicariously through her daughter her love for Innstetten, Effi goes to live in a house where a woman encountered death because of an impossible love, Johanna is forced to comply with class hierarchy and repress her feelings for Innstetten, Effi herself loses her health in the aftermath of an affair.

However, what I have been arguing more keenly, without discarding the other aspects mentioned by other critics *a propos* this ghostly figure, is that the ghost haunts precisely because it propels many readings, it eschews a single explanation, even when "solved" or "interpreted" its effects continue to shape the narrative, it frustrates those who hear the tale about it and those who sense it, because it is never actually seen. The ghost is instantiated by a story, a picture, a tombstone, and character's sensations, thus, it is absent and present at the same time. In fact, the Chinese ghost is a protean figure moving through various planes and material incarnations. A telling example of the elusiveness of the ghost manifesting as such can be found in Effi's nightly terrors and the impression of being assailed by uncanny presences:

> "I was even a little frightened. […] there was a very odd noise above me. At first it sounded like long dresses with trains dragging across the floorboards, and I was so worked up I thought I could see little white satin shoes a couple of times. It was as if people were dancing upstairs but very quietly." (Fontane, *Effi*b 41)
>
> „Habe mich sogar ein wenig geängstigt. […] Es war über mir ein ganz sonderbarer Ton […]. Erst klang es, wie wenn lange Schleppenkleider über die Diele hinschleiften, und in meiner Erregung war es mir ein paarmal, als ob ich kleine weiße Atlasschuhe sähe. Es war, als tanze man oben, aber ganz leise." (Fontane, *Effi*a 53)
>
> And
>
> "I was fast asleep and suddenly I woke up with a scream… perhaps it was a nightmare… […] So I woke with a start and screamed, and as I was looking round, as far as that was possible in the darkness something brushed past my bed, just there, where you're standing, Johanna, and then it was gone. […] And when I ask myself what it was… I don't like to say it Johanna… but I think it was the Chinaman." (Fontane, *Effi*b 59)
>
> „Ich schlief ganz fest, und mit einem Male fuhr ich auf und schrie… vielleicht, daß es ein Alpdruck war […] ich fuhr also auf aus dem Schlaf und schrie, und als ich mich umsah, so gut es eben ging in dem Dunkel, da strich was an meinem Bett vorbei, wo Sie jetzt stehen Johanna, und dann war es weg. […] und wenn ich mich recht frage… ich mag es nicht sagen Johanna… aber ich glaube der Chinese." (Fontane, *Effi*a 76)

These two extracts are particularly eloquent in conveying Effi's sensations throughout her time living in Kessin. As we have discussed earlier, her fearfulness appears to be triggered by the uncertainty of what and who is actually producing such intrusions in her dwelling space. In the first quote, Effi is confiding to the maid Johanna what could be considered an hallucination, where the detail of prosaic objects, like the floorboards upon which dresses slide and white

satin shoes move, operate as a resonating camera for a spectre, by lending their visibility and materiality to it and letting themselves be animated by it. In the second extract presented above a similar situation occurs, in the middle of a nightmare Effi wakes up to the sound of a scream, and the question imposes itself once more: is the loud cry a product of her own voice, of her imagination or has her home "really" become haunted? In an attempt to comfort her mistress and dispel her fears, Johanna offers another interpretation to the story of the haunting. The maid claims that everyone in the household used to think that the house was haunted too, but in the end, it was settled that the noise came from the long curtains and the draughts in the superior floors. Thus, the staff disenchant the world of Effi and return the sounds and the objects of the house to the inanimate world devoid of symbolic life.[83]

However, as I have shown before, such rational explanations and interpretations are not enough to halt the effects of the ghost story in the lived world of the characters. Further corroboration may be found in another moment in the narrative, where the theme of haunting and specters appears as a form of metalepsis under the guise of a White Lady folk legend. The episode in question finds Effi perusing the most "matter-of-fact" of travel guides to appease her distress of being home alone. Nevertheless, she ends up coming across a narrative populated with local supernatural legends, along with the descriptions of sights of interest and artworks of the region. Indeed, to the character's dismay one of the highlights is a "female portrait […] with severe, slightly sinister features […]. Some maintain it as an old margravine from the end of the fifteenth century, others are of the opinion that it is Countess Orlamünde; […] who […] has achieved a certain notoriety […] as the 'white woman'" (Fontane, *Effi*b 54-55). In an article dedicated to the presence of the "lady in white" in Fontane's *Before the Storm* [*Vor dem Sturm*], Matthias Bickenbach first surveys the use of this half historical half folk

[83] An individual section will be devoted to the topic of sound and its acousmatic manifestations in the novel. See page 117.

figure in the generality of the author's writings,[84] and concludes that the "significance of the motif lies precisely in the variations and differences in the genealogy of the lady in white" (200). The extract quoted from *Effi Briest* some lines above not only attests to this contested genealogy, but also reflects a more general interest in ghosts that was shaping popular culture since the late eighteenth century. The figure of the white lady features in several folk narratives, not only in northern mythologies and territories, but also in Gaelic and British ones. Generally, the lady in white is a spectre of a woman, who died by murder or suicide, usually found haunting and bearer of bad omens. For context, I will summarize one of the most widespread tales featuring a white lady in the Germanic cultural environment. The most well-known variation of this folk tale is connected to the Hohenzollern family. In it the countess Kunigunde von Orlamünde (1303-1382), widowed from Count Otto von Orlamünde, falls in love with Albrecht, the Beautiful (son of the Nurnberg elector Friedrich IV). However, Kunigunde's parents oppose the marriage between the two. Determined not to let the obstacles to their union get to them and plunder their spirits, Albrecht promises Kunigunde that he would espouse her once "the four eyes are out of the way". According to the legend, Kunigunde interpreted Albrecht's promise to refer to her two children, and thus she stabbed them in the eyes, killing them. The crime horrified Albrecht, who refused to marry her. Distraught, Kunigunde sought absolution for her sin near the Pope, who ordered her to build a monastery and become a nun. Nonetheless, in other versions Kunigunde is said to having been sentenced to live in prison for murder and others that she died of exhaustion while on pilgrimage. In all the variations of the legend, Kunigunde becomes a ghost, haunting the castles of the House of Hohenzollern.With *Before the Storm* in mind, Bickenbach states

[84] Theodor Fontane's first use of the lady in white as a literary character dates back from a 1853 ballad entitled *Wangeline, die weiße Frau*, which he presented at an encounter with the group *Tunnel über der Spree* (in 1875 an edited version appeared as a fragment with the title *Wangelinge von Burgsdorf oder Die weiße Frau*). Furthermore, the lady in white features in other novels like *Vor dem Sturm* (1878), *Graf Petöfy* (1884), *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1887), *Frau Jenny Treibel* (1891), and in the travel narratives *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg* (1862-1882) and *Fünf Schlösser* (1889) (Bickenbach 2).

> The ghosts in *Vor dem Sturm* are not important because of their place in a literary tradition, but rather because of their role in the real lives of the novel's characters. They are part of a culture that keeps telling stories about them as it undergoes historical change. The ghosts are revenants in the sense that they return perennially as interesting topics of conversation. They do not merely belong to the realm of folklore and popular history. (207)

Thus, in *Effi Briest* the aim seems to be less to establish the origin of the "true" Lady in White, and much more to explore this figure as an archetype and in its peculiar material condition the capacity to move across different worlds, which also corresponds to a slippage between diegetic levels. To make this point more intelligible, let us return to Effi's reading moment which proceeds like this:

> She opened the book again and read on, "… and precisely this old portrait (the ***original*** of which plays an important role in the history of the Hohenzollerns) plays a role as a ***picture*** in the history of Hermitage Palace itself, which is probably connected with the fact that it is **hung on a concealed door, not visible to outsiders, behind which there is a staircase coming up from the basement**. It is said that when Napoleon spent the night there, the '**white woman' came out of the frame and walked towards his bed**. The Emperor, starting in horror, called his adjutant, and to the end of his days used to talk indignantly of that 'maudit château'." (Fontane, *Effi*b 55. My emphasis)

> Und sie schlug wieder auf und las weiter: „… Eben dies alte Porträt (dessen ***Original*** in der Hohenzollernschen Familiengeschichte solche Rolle spielt) spielt als ***Bild*** auch eine Rolle in der Spezialgeschichte des Schlosses Eremitage, was wohl damit zusammenhängt, **daß es an einer dem Fremden unsichtbaren Tapetentür hängt, hinter der sich eine vom Souterrain her hinaufführende Treppe befindet**. Es heißt, daß, als Napoleon hier übernachte, **die 'weiße Frau' aus dem Rahmen herausgetreten und auf sein Bett zugeschritten sei.** Der Kaiser, entsetzt auffahrend, habe nach seinem Adjutanten gerufen und bis an sein Lebensende mit Entrüstung von diesem 'maudit château' gesprochen." (Fontane, *Effi*a 71. My emphasis)

The passage about the Hermitage seems to perturb Effi not because it talks about the "original" (and "real") portrait of the countess, but because it is a story about a picture of her, *i.e.* a representation, that breaks out of the frame separating reality from fiction. Thus, it is the animated and living aspect of fiction that scares Effi. Moreover, the fact that the breach in the frame may be a leap of the imagination emerging from the most recondite of spaces, suggests the uncanniness of a virtual existence that is not only present in the mind's eye. This dread regarding the intrusion of fiction in the "real" world is a recurrent aspect in the novel and, furthermore, a topic of conversation between the characters. In fact, in one of the social gatherings of the Kessiner elite, the guest of honour, the singer Marietta Tripelli, comments on

the subject of ghosts, and by doing so elaborates what could be considered a loose typology of spectral manifestations:

> "Well, yes, my dear Madam, what you are talking about there is different, it's something that's real or at least could be real. A ghost walking in a ballad, that doesn't give me the shivers at all, but like other people I find a ghost walking across my room very unpleasant. […] "I come", Maria Tripelli went on, "from a very enlightened family […], and yet my father said to me, when there was all that talk about the psychograph, 'there's something in it, Marie.' And he was right, there is something in it. We're surrounded, we're being watched from all sides. That's something you'll find out for yourself." (Fontane, *Effie*b 74)

> „Já, meine gnädigste Frau, was Sie da schildern und beschreiben, das ist auch etwas anders, das ist ja wirklich oder kann wenigstens etwas Wirkliches sein. Ein Gespenst, das durch die Ballade geht, da graule ich mich gar nicht, aber ein Gespenst, das durch meine Stube geht, ist mir, geradeso wie andern, sehr unangenehm." […] „Ich bin", fuhr die Tripelli fort, „aus einer sehr aufgeklärten Familie […] und doch sagte mir mein Vater, als das mit dem Psychographen aufkam: ‚Höre Marie, das ist was.' Und er hat recht gehabt, es ist auch was damit. Überhaupt, man ist links und rechts umlauert, hinten und vorn. Sie werden das noch kennenlernen." (Fontane, *Effi*a 93-94)

Marietta's remark comes after she entertained the room singing a ballad by Heinrich Heine entitled *Sir Olaf* (1844) [*Ritter Olaf*], and parts of Richard Wagner's *Flying Hollander* (1840) [*Der Fliegende Holländer*], which deeply impressed Effi.[85] This intertextuality is not something operating only at the level of the extradiegetic, especially if we take into account that the characters themselves connect these stories to their own lives and experiences, as if they were *leit-motifs* in their life's narrative. So, to Effi both the *Flying Hollander* and *Sir Olaf* resonate very familiar to the local rumour of the captain's granddaughter tragic love, and may also create feelings of unease because of the similarities pertaining the love triangle starting to take shape between her, Crampas and Innstetten.

However, for Marietta Tripelli the spookiness does not reside in "ghosts walking in ballads", but when spectres trespass that imaginary frame between their world and step into ours, as is suggested with the example of the psychograph. In *Ghostwriting Modernism* Helen

[85] It should also be noted that Gieshübler, the host, had a selection of partitures among which was Goethe's *Erlkönig*, however, Marietta Tripelli decides against it. This ballad tells the story of a little boy, who dies terrified of/from the elf king as he is crossing the wood with his father on horseback. Although this tragic story set to music by Schubert differs from the ones chosen by Marietta in that it does not address the love-death theme, it takes up the theme of porosity between the supernatural and the natural world. *Erlkönig* is a narrative where the forest as a *locus horrendus* comes alive in a nightmarish manner in the eyes of the child, but under the dismissal of the father. Thus, there are two realities in confrontation, and the world of spirits and the elf king seem to come out victorious by claiming the life of the boy.

Sword brings attention to the intermingling of "high" and popular cultures via the spiritism movements in the mid-nineteenth century. Surveying an array of spiritist staple figures (mediums, three legged tables, Ouija boards, psychographs, etc.), Sword argues that these arose from a generalised preoccupation that occupied the minds of the era: the conception of human existence in language and through language. According to Sword, the popularity of these practices "betray a characteristically modernist obsession with all things textual: reading, writing, authorship, publication, libraries […]" (11). Often, spiritist seances were not only designed to give messages from dead relatives, actually more commonly than not, these sessions turned into the places where great writers and artists would manifest. Thus, this gave way to a trend, which consisted of many mediums publishing books claiming they had been dictated by celebrated artists from the other world, in short, making themselves ghost writers of geniuses. In a letter to Hans Hetz dated from March 2nd 1895, Theodor Fontane makes the observation that he wrote *Effi Briest* "as in a dream and almost as if I were using a psychograph" (356) [„Vielleicht ist es mir so gelungen, weil ich das Ganze träumisch und fast wie mit einem Psychographen geschrieben habe."]. However, this corresponds more to a subjective process (Trippett 89), than the actual conditions of composition of the novel and other works of the German writer, which Petra S. McGillen has shown through the analysis of his notebooks that

> Fontane produced his prose fiction, feuilleton essays, and other contributions to the press in a creative process that was the exact opposite of his self- staging as the inspired mouthpiece of the muses. Deliberate at every step, he assembled his texts from pre- mediated sources with scissors and glue, in an extraordinarily inorganic, radically intertextual, and completely conscious manner (4).

Taking this into consideration and returning to *Effi Briest*, Marietta Tripelli makes a "distinction between ghosts in fiction and ghosts in real life, amusingly unstable because articulated by a character in fiction." (Hardy, "Tellers" 120). Taken as such this distinction could be deemed a fallacious dichotomy, nonetheless, it gives voice to an antinomy that permeates *Effi Briest* as a whole, which has to do with the kind of relationship between fiction

and reality, and as I have been arguing is given form by the ghost as a deictic device transiting between two worlds.

In fact, both the reading of the travel guide and the conversation at the *soirée* present some affinities with Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* published only a few years later, in 1898. This famous story is strongly structured around the intricacies of interpretation and the inglorious task of attempting to fix the bounds of meaning and reality by simply making a division between a psychological (internal, subjective) sphere and an external, worldly one. Furthermore, there are some other parallels to be drawn between *The Turn of the Screw* and *Effi Briest.* Two impressionable young ladies are sent to an isolated place with only a fertile imagination for company and the insinuation of mysterious dangers lurking. Effi is intimated by the ghost of a Chinese sailor, the governess is confronted with the apparition of her deceased predecessors Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, who are surmised to have been people of ill moral conduct. This story of a governess, who is employed to go down to a manor in the English countryside to take care of two orphaned children (Flora and Miles), belongs to the class of narratives usually termed as "a story within the story". More specifically, within the frame narrative, a nameless narrator tells of a particular Christmas eve when his friend Douglas, pressured to produce a really scary tale to entertain the commensals around the fireplace, offers to tell a true story whose manuscript he is in the possession of. The manuscript in question is penned by the governess protagonist herself, in Douglas' words "'Is in old, faded ink, and in the most beautiful hand.' He hung fire again. 'A woman's. She has been dead these twenty years. She sent me the pages in question before she died." (8). Thus, aside from this frame narrative that functions as a prologue, and a spot for observational distance, we, as readers, are left only with the governess' text, we are, so to speak, cast inside it. Moreover, as Douglas tells the narrator, the "young lady who should go down as governess would be in supreme authority"

(12) and should never trouble her employer in London, "that she should never trouble him- but never, never: neither appeal, nor complain, nor write about anything [...]" (13).

In other words, like Innstetten, the governess's employer draws a scenario of mystery with half-uttered innuendos, and then, one could claim, expects the governess's imagination to take hold from there. Or, it could also be argued, the external events are let to take hold of the situation. However, this "either/or" position in the realm of the possibilities opened- up by the narrative may not be tenable as such. On the contrary, James' novella plays with the undecidability pertaining to the nature of Jessel's and Quint's ghosts, the governess' own sanity and the state of the siblings themselves. This puzzle, which has occupied much of the critical output about *The Turn of the Screw,* could be put into words in the following manner: are the apparitions real or the product of the governess' hallucination, and are the children Miles and Flora corrupted by evil? In fact, Douglas' famous reply is that the story won't tell, and in this frustration lies its (the narrative's) power of leaving an "impression" on one's sensibility. As readers we are left in the dark as to what evils Miss Jessel and Peter Quint were supposed to have done or taught the children, and "can only" give large to our imagination based on general and unnamed fears of the governess as to what might be haunting that cast away place.

According to Henry James's preface to the volume twelve of the New York Edition of his works,[86] *The Turn of the Screw* "[…] had […] the immense merit of allowing the imagination absolute freedom of hand, of inviting it to act upon a clear field, with no "outside" control involved […]." (170). In other words, the reader, like the governess, is left to her own imaginative devices. Their power is to imagine what they would conceive as the absolute horror, so the author, like James mentions in the preface, does not have to delve in the coarse task of explanation, he is "released from weak specifications" (176). Furthermore, taking

[86] Here, I will use and make reference to the volume *The Art of the Novel,* which compiles in a single book Henry James' prefaces.

James' affirmations at face value, assuming there is no external discursive authority to fix the meaning of the events taking place at Bly under the eyes of the governess, then it is her voice that spills over every narrative frame, in other words, "The governess herself has no name: she's merely a point of view, that of a clergyman's daughter, for whom Evil would have strong and sinister power" (Fagin 200). So, for Fagin, while eschewing the many psychoanalytic readings of the novella,[87] "*The Turn of the Screw* is an allegory which dramatizes the conflict between Good and Evil. The apparitions are the personifications of evil [...] the governess [...] is a sort of guardian" (200). Fagin supports his reading of the novella as a rhetorical exercise in allegory on James' commendation of the use of this figure by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and latter's interest in sin and evil. Nevertheless, as is also poignantly singled out in this article, James did not take to allegory with enthusiasm[88] and disparages the "delight in symbols and correspondences, in seeing a story told as if it were another and a very different story" (James, *Hawthorne* 63), but concedes "The only cases in which it is endurable is when it is extremely spontaneous, when the analogy presents itself with eager promptitude" (63).[89] For James, such is the case of stories like *Rappaccini's Daughter* whose "charm is that they are glimpses of a great field, of the whole deep mystery of man's soul and conscience." (65) and the author treats the subject in a natural way "they have the further merit of seeming, for what they are, to spring up so freely and lightly. [...] His tread is a light and modest one, but he keeps the key in his pocket." (65). Such a statement would be an apt description of *The Turn of the Screw*, which

[87] In particular Edmund Wilson's emphasis on the sexual subtext of the narrative and psychoanalysis.
[88] See Kelley for an overview of the understanding of allegory in literary criticism and literary practice, spanning from its acquired negative reputation after the Renaissance and its reconfiguration in Romanticism and Modernism via Walter Benjamin's readings of Baudelaire and Paul de Man's reading of Romanticism.
[89] Here the complete appraisal: "allegory, to my sense, is quite one of the lighter exercises of the imagination. Many excellent judges, I know, have a great stomach for it; they delight in symbols and correspondences, in seeing a story told as if it were another and a very different story. I frankly confess that I have as a general thing but little enjoyment of it and that it has never seemed to me to be, as it were, a first-rate literary form. It has produced assuredly some first-rate works; and Hawthorne in his younger years had been a great reader and devotee of Bunyan and Spenser, the great masters of allegory. But it is apt to spoil two good things—a story and a moral, a meaning and a form; […] The only cases in which it is endurable is when it is extremely spontaneous, when the analogy presents itself with eager promptitude." (James, *Hawthorne* 63).

as I have already mentioned, is a narrative evading "weak specification", so as in *Rappaccini's Daughter* Giovanni is plagued by the wondering about the evil kernel of Beatrice's poisonous breath, so to the governess in James' novella is tormented by the putative moral corruption of Flora and Miles, whose specificities are never uttered explicitly, nor the apparitions of Quint and Jessel. Thus, in the same way the key kept in Hawthorne's pocket, the story won't tell according to Douglas' admonishment. In fact, *The Turn of the Screw* outspans more the frustrations of interpretation and of reading allegorically,[90] particularly the governess who makes obstinate correspondences between her visions and the children to point at an abstract idea of evil. In the final interpretative frenzy to press Miles to spell out the transgressions he might have committed at school and the nature of his relationship with Peter Quint, the governess precludes any other interpretation of the events that would disturb her manicheist view and self-positioning as representative of Goodness, as she briefly admits "for if he *were* innocent, what then on earth was *I*? Paralysed, while it lasted, by the mere brush of the question […]" (119). Thus, in this final scene, Miles succumbs asphyxiated at the unwitting hands of his supposed saviour with his story left unregistered, as through her embrace the governess literally strangles any other versions of the story and other modes of reading it.

In fact, one could argue, the tragic end of Miles and the role of the ghosts in its fate are linked to the reading abilities of the other characters (and by extension our own), which appear as markedly deficient. To start, the uncle, who bluntly refuses to read anything coming from Bly, be it the governess's reports or Miles headmaster's letter, followed by the other member of the staff, Mrs. Grose, an illiterate housekeeper. In "The 'Quasi-Turn-of-Screw Effect': How to Raise Ghosts with Words", J. Hillis Miller brings to the fore not only the equalizing of writing with the conjuring of ghosts, but also this centrality of reading in the narrative

[90] Or as Fagin maintains it is only secondarily allegorical.

manifesting almost as detective like drive, an idea to which he finds consubstantiation in James's comments comparing the crafting of *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Sense of the Past*,

> In one place in the 'Notes' James speaks of my "essential hinges or, as I have called 'em, *clous*, that mark the turns or steps of the action" (307). A turn is a twist is a trope, that is, a figure of speech. The word "trope" means "turn"; as in 'apotropaic'; which means "having the power to turn away". To say, however, that each twist of the story, each turn of the screw, is another trope, each episode a complication a troping of the episode before, calls attention to the general tropological or even allegorical (in the de Manian sense) dimension of the novel. Each apparently "realistic" or mimetically represented element stands for something else that is named only indirectly, can be named only indirectly, in catachresis, in a constant displacement from clue to clue or from *clou* to *clou*. (Miller 128)

As suggested, the polysemic play with the screw as clue and *clou* (the French for nail), creates a tropological texture not unlike the one I have described earlier as a *deixis am phantasma*, where the search for the ultimate referent, the final clue to pin down a definite reading, gives back the reflection of the "uncanny power of words" (Miller 128), in the image of a spectre, and also in that reflection our attempt to read and not turn away frightened by its apotropaic force (like Miles and the boy in *Erlkönig*, who succumb, and the governess, who becomes momentarily paralysed by the "mere brush of the question").

This idea of fiction as a spectral apparition is common currency in nineteenth century literary culture, and as Theodor Fontane mentions in a letter quoted earlier in this chapter, it constitutes the vectorial point of *Effi Briest*, and at this moment, I may already venture to say, a trope not unlike J. Hillis Miller's notion of it. Thus, similarly to what happens in *The Turn of the Screw*, in Fontane's novel the figure of the ghost lends itself to a permutation of readings, standing for something else difficult to pin down. However, in *Effi Briest* this virtuality, or metafictional quality, is navigated through a more emphatic focus on a material semiotics of the reference. In other words, since the ghost (read fiction) appears as a small picture, a story, a figure stepping out of a frame, unconscious desire, a tombstone, all these different semiotic manifestations constitute the threads that transform the ghost into a texture, whose reality is questioned by its visibility and readability. In fact, the "referential fallacy defined by Umberto Eco consists of the belief that an actual state of the world must underwrite the functioning of

every semiotic entity." (Lewis 460). Differently said, referent and reference are mixed, and this is something that Fontane explores throughout the novel, a sort of uninterpretable limit that constitutes our experience and the "impossibility of stepping into one's shadow with anything but the imagination".

Innstetten, the supposed master conjurer of the spooky narrative, suggests as much when he compares ghosts and the bacilli invisible to the naked eye, "It's something one can believe in or, better, not believe in. But assuming such things do exist, what's the harm? The fact that there are bacilli, you'll have heard about them, flying around in the air is much worse and more dangerous than all these rollicking ghosts." (Fontane, *Effi*b 63) [„Es ist eine Sache, die man glauben oder besser nicht glauben kann. Aber angenommen, es gäbe dergleichen, was schadet es? Daß in der Luft Bazillen herumfliegen, von denen du gehört haben wirst, ist viel schlimmer und gefährlicher als dies ganze Geistertummelage." (Fontane, *Effi*a 80)]. However, Innstetten's observation has a sort of tongue in cheek to it, as it once more blurs the lines between that which can be "scientifically seen", via instruments of microscopic observation, and that whose existence relies on a only fictionally split referential apparatus, thus on imaginative vision. As Peter Brooks suggests "There is something unsatisfactory about the field of vision: it can never quite see, in its entirety and its meaning, the body that is its central concern." (Brooks, *Body* 96) and the "the value given to the visual in any realist tradition responds to the desire to know the world: it promotes the gaze as the inspection of reality." (Brooks, *Body* 99). All this focus on the material is to try and reach something else, that is why the ghost is a medium, but we are always uncertain as to what it is supposed to show or reveal, other than its imaginative and linguistic hybridity of physical and immaterial existence.

When the Innstettens finally move out of Kessin and find residence in Berlin,[91] Johanna carries the picture of the ghost in her wallet, and alas Effi comments.

> "Certainly I believe in it. Such things do exist. Only I don't really believe in what we had in Kessin. Has Johanna already shown you her Chinaman?" "Which one?" "Well, ours. Before she left our old house she peeled it off the arm of the chair upstairs and put it in her purse. I saw it when I asked her for change for a mark recently. She admitted it, though with some embarrassment." "Oh, you shouldn't have told me that, Geert. Now there's something like that in our house again." (Fontane, *Effi*b 166-7)

> „Gewiß glaub' ich daran. Es gibt so was. Nur an das, was wir in Kessin davon hatten, glaub' ich nicht recht. Hat dir denn Johanna schon ihren Chinesen gezeigt?" „Welchen?" „Nun, unsern. Sie hat ihn, eh sie unser altes Haus verließ, oben von der Stuhllehne abgelöst und ihn ins Portemonnaie gelegt. Als ich mir neulich ein Markstück bei ihr wechselte, hab' ich ihn gesehen. Und sie hat es mir auch verlegen bestätigt." „Ach, Geert, das hättest du mir nicht sagen sollen. Nun ist doch wieder so was in unserem Hause." (Fontane, *Effi*a 207-8)

When Effi is living in a boarding-house in Berlin, after her parents refused to accept her home for being considered an adulteress, Roswitha comes to visit her, and Effi makes the following remark:

> "Do you remember the time when the ghost of the Chinaman haunted the house? Those were happy days. At the time I thought they were unhappy, but that was before I knew how hard life can be. Since then I've found that out. Oh, a ghost is far from being the worst thing." (Fontane, *Effi*b 211)
> „Weißt du noch, wie's damals war, als der Chinese spukte? Das waren glücklichen Zeiten. Ich habe damals gedacht, es wären unglückliche, weil ich das Harte des Lebens noch nicht kannte. Seitdem habe ich es kennengelernt. Ach, Spuk ist lange nicht das Schlimmste!" (Fontane, *Effi*a 262)

Thus, a way of understanding this figure could benefit from tracing its similarities with the medium object (*oggetto mediatore*) evoked by Remo Ceserani in *The Fantastic* [*Il Fantastico*], a re-reading of Todorov's theory of the fantastic. The medium object is conceived as the operator between two ontological levels of the story world. A common analogy to explain the medium object's operative mode is Samuel Coleridge's poem *Anima Poetae*,[92] in which the poet finds before him a flower that had appeared to him in a supposed dreamy state of a trip to Heaven. The presence of the flower in the realm of the poet's enunciation is puzzling and destabilizes one's sense of reality. As Martinez mentions "Because of its materiality,

[91] The move is mainly Effi's suggestion, because not only does she wish to escape the haunted house, but also find refuge from the moral haunting of the undiscovered affair with Crampas.
[92] "If man could pass through paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had already been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awake- Aye, what then?".

obvious presence and unusual origin, the medium object is simultaneously eloquent and silent, conclusive and inquisitive" (370). Furthermore, we could also call to the fore Lynda Nead in *The Haunted Gallery*, where she concisely presents the definition of medium as a

> middle state; something that is intermediary between two qualities or degrees. It can also mean a person or an object that acts as intermediary; an agent, channel or conduit of communication and expression. The word thus describes the materials and techniques used in artistic creativity and various forms of mass communication such as newspapers and radio. A medium conveys images and impressions to the senses; it is fundamentally concerned with the generation of representations and meanings. Within spiritualism, a medium is an intermediary agent between the living and the dead, communicating the appearances and desires of the past to the present. […] intermediary spaces."(1-2)

Nevertheless, in *Effi Briest* the picture of the Chinese and his tombstone present an ambiguous case of the medium object, as they seem to be already implanted in the narrative and in the character's lived world at that. In other words, these objects do not come from another ontological plane *per se*, nonetheless, it could be argued that they function as gates for a metalepsis within the referential grounds of the narrative, because indeed they are construed as originating from another existential plane. This plane could be the plane of desire, that finds it difficult to materialize and express itself is the gap between Effi's desire for an exciting life and boring reality, but also the mismatches that characterize the other characters Geert Innstetten and Louise von Briest.[93] As Christian Begemann suggests "what the reader is convinced to know amounts to numerous splinters and versions of a story scattered throughout the text." (Begemann, "Ein Spukhaus" 208. My translation).

2.3. Misreading correspondences

Stories and tales circulate profusely throughout *Effi Briest*. Even though the letters exchanged between Effi and Crampas are only retrieved belatedly and never find their way to the printed page of the novel, with the known tragic consequences, the narrative is kept moving

[93] See Greenberg.

by an abundant written correspondence, particularly via telegrams, newspapers and letters. The epistolary richness, the structure of the story within the story[94] and other intertextual elements lead Barbara Hardy to claim that it "puts together the jigsaw of uncertainties, undercurrents, externalities, treacheries, shocks, judgements and tolerances which compose gossip and rumour, and the imitation may seem to compound, but, drawing our attention to narrative unreliabilities and multiplicities, undermines realism." (Hardy, "Tellers" 122).

In fact, the novel dramatizes several fictional pacts in which the heroine usually takes part in, even if at times unwittingly or not reading them correctly. When Effi and Crampas past affair is discovered, several versions of the story circulate in the press, enveloping the female character in a web of gossip and judgemental narratives, reminding one of Kleist's *The Marquise of O…* (1808) and the journalistic mediation of a dubious romantic relationship. In what concerns *Effi Briest*, one of the aspects commonly considered by critics is Crampas' rhetoric of seduction based on the paraphrasis of Romantic poetry and theatre. Although it is a lengthy passage, it is worth quoting Major Crampas' attempt at enticing Effi through his version of Heinrich Heine's poems:

> Anyhow, Heine gave the poem another name, "Sea Spectre" or something like that. But it was Vineta he meant. You'll forgive me if I tell you the story – as he passes the spot, he, the poet that is, is lying on the deck of a ship looking down into the water, and there he sees narrow medieval streets with women in hoods tripping along, and they all have hymnbooks in their hands and are on their way to church, and all the bells are ringing. And when he hears that, he is seized with longing to go into the church with them, even if it's only because of their hoods, and in his desire he cries out and is on the point of plunging in. But at that moment the captain grabs his leg and shouts, "Doctor, are you possessed by the Devil?" […] No, it's actually quite short, a bit longer than "You have diamonds and pearls" or "Fingers soft and lily-white"…' and he gently touched her hand. 'But long or short, what descriptive power, what vividness! He's my favourite poet and I know him by heart, not that I go in for poetry much, though I've dabbled in it myself, for my sins. But Heine's different: it's real life somehow, and above all he knows about love, which is the main thing in the end. Not that he's one-sided in that respect… (Fontane, *Effi*b 109)
>
> Übrigens hat Heine dem Gedicht einen andern Namen gegeben, ich glaube "Seegespenst" oder so ähnlich. Aber Vineta hat er gemeint. Und er selber — verzeihen Sie, wenn ich Ihnen ohne weiteres den Inhalt hier wiedergebe —, der Dichter also, während er die Stelle passiert, liegt auf einem Schiffsdeck und sieht hinunter und sieht da schmale, mittelalterliche Straßen und trippelnde Frauen in Kapotthüten, und alle haben ein Gesangbuch in Händen und wollen zur Kirche, und alle Glocken läuten. Und als er das hört, da faßt ihn eine Sehnsucht, auch mit in die

[94] In the previous section I focused on the ghost story as a framed narrative. However, the staging of plays is also a pervasive motif in the narrative.

> Kirche zu gehen, wenn auch bloß um der Kapotthüte willen, und vor Verlangen schreit er auf und will sich hinunterstürzen. Aber im selben Augenblicke packt ihn der Kapitän am Bein und ruft ihm zu: "Doktor, sind Sie des Teufels?" […] „Nein, es ist eigentlich kurz, etwas länger als ‚Du hast Diamanten und Perlen' oder ‚Deine weißen Lilienfinger'. . ." und er berührte leise ihre Hand. »Aber lang oder kurz, welche Schilderungskraft, welche Anschaulichkeit! Er ist mein Lieblingsdichter, und ich kann ihn auswendig, so wenig ich mir sonst, trotz gelegentlich eigener Versündigungen, aus der Dichterei mache. Bei Heine liegt es aber anders: alles ist Leben, und vor allem versteht er sich auf die Liebe, die doch die Hauptsache bleibt. Er ist übrigens nicht einseitig darin. (Fontane, *Effi*a 137)

Crampas' rendition of "See Spectre" purposefully glosses over the melancholy tone of Heine's poem in the volume *The Baltic* (1825-26), which is not about a valiant and passionate sea man fascinated with joyful maidens and wishing to make big love gestures, but deals, instead, with a bleak world of rejection and the depiction of passion as a delirious dream, a spectre belonging down the depths of the ocean's abyss (Heine 11. 1-7), and in fact, the poem portrays the image of a prisoner girl living underwater:

> In yon deep-ocean city,
> Upon an ancient and high-gabled house,
> Where sits in lonely melancholy
> A maiden at the window,
> Her head on her arm reclined,
> Like to some poor, forgotten child,
> And I know thee, thou poor, forgotten child. (Heine 10. 47-53)

Crampas omits the possible analogy between Effi and the melancholy maiden, thus mirroring Innstetten's own production of truncated narratives to achieve some ascendent over his wife, in this fashion leaving the foreseeable tragic ending outside consideration. As Peter Pütz observes,

> The abundance and significance of explicit and concealed quotations, which in this context also include allusions to Goethe's ballad of the king in Thule and Heine's *Romanzero von Vitzliputzli*, the bloodthirsty god of the Mexicans, and which all deal with unhappy love, revenge or both, are not only internal cross-references, but also prove to be an expression of the lack of reality and feasibility of a relationship based on love in the novel. As events progress, it becomes increasingly clear that romance takes the place of a deeply rooted feeling, and so Effi leaves no doubt, until the end of her still young life, that she basically did not love Crampas at all. (Pütz 181. My translation)[95]

[95] „Die Fülle und Bedeutsamkeit der offenen und verdeckten Zitate, zu denen in diesem Zusammenhang auch noch Anspielungen auf Goethes Ballade vom König in Thule und Heines *Romanzero von Vitzliputzli*, dem blutdürstigen Gott der Mexikaner, gehören und die alle von unglücklicher Liebe, von Rache oder von beidem handeln, sind nicht nur innerliterarische Querverweise, sondern erweisen sich auch als Ausdruck mangelnder Wirklichkeit und Realisierbarkeit der Liebesbeziehung im Roman. Mit fortschreitendem Geschehen wird immer deutlicher, daß an die Stelle eines tief verwurzelten Empfindens die Romanze tritt, und so läßt Effi bis zum Ende ihres noch jungen Lebens keinen Zweifel daran, daß sie Crampas im Grunde gar nicht geliebt hat." (Pütz 181).

Although in the beginning of the novel Effi does seem attuned to the more obscure elements of human society, particularly when she and her friends talk about drowned women while playing by the lake, it is also tenable to affirm that Effi's imaginary and reading allegiances lie elsewhere. In fact, it should equally be taken into account that the world of fairy-tales plays a fundamental intertextual role in the novel, especially the play *Cinderella* by Bendix, which Effi sees on the pre-nuptial trip to Berlin, and Heinrich von Kleist's play *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* (1810), which the guests stage on the eve of the wedding party. Regarding Kleist's play, Anna Marie Gilbert calls attention to two distinct reviews made by Theodor Fontane in his capacity as theatre critic. In the first review, dating from May 1873, Fontane is chiefly struck by the Elder- tree scene, claiming that "Käthchen's soul is immersed in Poetry, there is something somnambule and secret surrounding her; the angels carry her and shape her being into a miracle" (*Apud*. Gilbert 101. My translation) ["Ihre (Käthchens) Seele ist in Poesie getaucht; etwas somnambul Geheimnisvolles ist um sie her; Engel tragen sie und gestalten ihr Dasein zu einem Wunder." (*Apud*. Gilbert 101)]. However, in his 1875 essay on the same play the author emphasizes the violent countercurrents that subvert the tranquility of the fairy-tale modeled text. Here Fontane accentuates the travesty of love:

> when there is talk of the 'false' teeth of Kunigunde, of false hair and false calves, it is disturbing, it is no longer fairytale-like, and when Count Wetter von Strahl takes the whip to chastise and expel Kätchen, this in turn is unseemly, disturbing. A love which, when a pair of trousers are thrown at you with intentionally cynical encouragement: "sew on the buttons," in order not to choose even worse examples, happily submits itself to this demand, is no longer a love which can awaken our special participation. Many times what Käthchen calmly accepts bears this stamp and makes us angry not only against the insulter, but also against the one who lets the unworthy please. (*Apud*. Gilbert 101. My translation)

> wenn von den ‚falschen' Zahnen der Kunigunde, von falschem Haar und falschen Waden die Rede ist, so stört das, das ist nicht mehr märchenhaft, und wenn Graf Wetter von Strahl die Peitsche nimmt, um Käthchen zu züchtigen und zu vertreiben, so ist das wiederum unschön, störend. Eine Liebe, die, wenn ihr ein Paar Hosen mit der absichtlich-zynischen Förderung hingeworfen werden: „Nah mir die Knöppe an," um nicht noch schlimmere Beispiele zu wählen, sich dieser Forderung glückselig unterwirft, ist keine Liebe mehr, die noch unsre besondre Teilnahme wecken kann. Mannigfaches von dem, was Käthchen ruhig hinnimmt, tragt diesen Stempel und macht uns nicht bloß ärgerlich gegen den Beleidiger, sondern auch gegen diejenige, die sich das Unwürdige gefallen laßt. (*Apud*. Gilbert 101)

Thus, that this play should feature the repertoire of Effi's wedding eve is not only an ironic choice, but also an attestation of the superficial reading practiced by Effi in her initial naiveté.[96] Taking this into consideration, Patricia Howe suggests that the potential for making a correspondence between these stories with happy endings and Effi's future are subverted by Fontane. Howe cogently argues that Frau von Briest's forcefully arranging the marriage between her daughter and her former sweetheart echoes yet another fairy-tale, *Donkey-Skin* [*Allerleirauh*], which contains elements of the *Cinderella* tale and the *Käthchen* play. In the brothers Grimm tale, on her deathbed a dying woman wishes that, after her earthly departure, her husband should re-marry only if he is able to find a woman who can match her beauty. Confronted with this plea the king decides to marry his daughter. As a stratagem to protect herself, the daughter demands a dowry composed of the most exquisite garments, and furthermore, asks for a coat made from hair and fur from all the existing animals. Like Penelope, she gains time while assembling the coat, so that she may grow to be old enough to choose her own groom. As Patricia Howe notices "Effi's fairy-tale reverses these motifs; when Effi asks for a fur coat as part of her trousseau, Louise refuses it because it will make her seem older than her years" (147).

In other words, the fairy-tale intertext requires an anamorphic reading, a perspective attuned to its double eerie and disturbing meaning. If, on the one hand, Effi's initial comparison to Käthchen evokes the lifting "Angel" (*Apud*. Gilbert 101), on the other hand, as the narrative progresses we come to see it has the chastising "cherub with a flaming sword" (Fontane, *Effi*b106) / ["ein Cherub mit dem Schwert" (Fontane, *Effi*a 133)]. In this narrative progress, Effi is intimated to learn to read anew, to make the right correspondences.

[96] The character is played by Effi's friend Hulde, but on the whole the play is supposed to be a present and homage to the bride-to-be.

2.4. Textures of indeterminacy: acousmatic callings and silence

"Throw them open, and make it good and loud, I want to hear a noise, a human noise… I know it sounds funny but I have to call it that… and then open the window a little so that I have some air and light." (Fontane, *Effi*b 59- 60) [„Stoßen Sie sie auf, recht laut, daß ich einen Ton höre, einen menschlichen Ton… ich muß es so nennen, wenn es auch sonderbar klingt… und dann machen Sie das Fenster ein wenig auf, daß ich Luft und Licht habe." (Fontane, *Effi*a 76)], this plea made by Effi to Johanna constitutes a moment of paramount importance in the narrative, in that it explicitly introduces acoustics as an element in the development of the novel's texture of indeterminacy. The noise with no visible or perceptible source provokes anxiety in the character and transforms the narrative into an acousmatic soundscape to use Michel Chion's terminology in *The Voice in Cinema*. Deriving his research from the work of the musicologist Pierre Schaeffer, Chion's interest in the acousmatic, "a sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen" (18), led him to study the changing "relationship between what we see and what we hear" (19). In the case of film

> for the spectator, then, the filmic acousmêtre is "offscreen", outside the image, and at the same time *in* the image: the loudspeaker that's actually its source is located behind the image in the movie theatre. It's as if the voice were wandering along the surface, *at once inside and outside*, seeking a place to settle. Especially when a film hasn't yet shown what body this voice normally inhabits. (Chion 23)

Although the trope of the disembodied voice finds in the cinematic medium and in the filmic image a fertile terrain, looking back at fiction written from the late seventeenth- hundreds onwards, it is possible to argue that, actually, cinema "only" fosters a renovated visualization and synesthetic strategy to address narrative representation and fiction as a spectral construct of indeterminate materiality. Thus, Effi's request to give sound a visible and tangible source, to locate it in her vision field and make it human, constitutes her attempt at disenchantment or, to return to Chion once again, "*de-acousmatization*" (23) of the real. As noted by Lucie Ratail

the recurrence to disembodied voices and sounds is a common phenomenon in literature, especially within the gothic genres we find that:

> Gothic acousmatic voices are disembodied, go through walls, and invade the shelters found by characters. They also have the ability to guide through darkness protagonists who, by sensory vicariance (Purnell 94, 99), follow the sobs, groans other timbral evidence that someone is nearby. Both in scenes of curiosity and in moments of terror, voices hence paradoxically become signs of human presence and spectral disembodiment of human self, voice-as-self and materialization of acousmatic spirit. (Ratail par. 16)

In fact, throughout *Effi Briest* there are several instances of disembodied voices and sounds emerging from the outside of the field of vision of characters (and of the reader's), which accentuate the atmosphere of indeterminacy and the intimations of an apparently invisible, immaterial but audible world. Barbara Everett notices this aspect of Fontane's poetics, considering the importance of "what he leaves out" (87). Likewise, Rüdiger Görner defends the idea that,

> Time and again, the ambiguity and the ambivalence in the narrative structures of Fontane has been stressed, especially in his late work and especially in *Effi Briest*. Fontane understood the art of omitting, of cutting out, like hardly any novelist of his time, which corresponded to his sense of narrative economics, which he let rule even when he had his characters quarrelling. With the formula "this is a (too) wide field" (p. 350), Briest himself has an ideal language bridge to get into the indefinite via the untold. (Görner 134. My translation)[97]

Indeed, the referential regimen of *deixis am phantasma*, which was characterized in the previous section, seems not to be reduced to the image of the ghost or the figural embodiment it might provide, but is pervasive in a more insidious manner throughout the narrative, namely through sounds outside the field of visual perception.

In his 1973 filmographic adaptation of *Effi Briest*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder emphasises this poetics of indeterminacy of Fontane's novel by precisely selecting those scenes in which voices are heard coming off-screen, and by making the concatenation of events appear

[97] "Immer wieder hat man auf das Mehrdeutige, Ambivalente in den Erzählstrukturen Fontanes hingewiesen, vor allem im Spätwerk und besonders in Effi Briest. Fontane verstand sich wie kaum ein Erzähler seiner Zeit auf die Kunst des Auslassens, des Aussparens, was seinem Sinn für Erzählökonomie entsprach, die er selbst dann walten ließ, wenn er seine Charaktere schwadronieren ließ. Briest selbst verfügt mit der Formel ‚das ist ein (zu) weites Feld' (S. 350) über eine ideale Sprachbrücke, um über das Nichterzählte ins Unbestimmte zu gelangen." (Görner 134).

severed by a white light fade-out filling the image on screen.[98] One of such selected moments corresponds to the betrothal scene in which Effi's friends summon her through the window back into the garden, where they had been re-enacting a mourning ritual evoking the "olden times poor, unfortunate women used to be sent to the bottom too. Because of infidelity" (Fontane, *Effi*b 9)/ ["so vom Boot aus sollen früher auch arme unglückliche Frauen versenkt worden sein, natürlich wegen Untreue." (Fontane, *Effi*a 14)]. The above-mentioned episode unfolds in the following manner in the novel:

> "[…] the heads of auburn-haired twins appeared in the middle of one of the wide-open windows, half overgrown with Virginia creeper, and Hertha, the more exuberant of the two, called, 'Come, Effi'. Then her head disappeared and the two sisters jumped from the back-rest of the bench they'd been standing on down into the garden, and all that could be heard was their soft giggles and laughter." (Fontane, *Effi*b 12)
>
> „Wurden an dem mittleren der weit offenstehenden und vom wilden Wein halb überwachsenen Fenster die rotblonden Köpfe der Zwillinge sichtbar, und Hertha, die Ausgelassenste, rief in den Saal hinein: ‚Effi, komm.' Dann duckte sie sich, und beide Schwestern sprangen von der Banklehne, darauf sie gestanden, wieder in den Garten hinab, und man hörte nur noch ihr leises Kichern und Lachen." (Fontane, *Effi*a 18)

Both in Fassbinder's adaptation and in Fontane's novel the voice coming from the outside into the bourgeois living-room perturbs Innstetten, who continues to hear the calling even after it has subsided and the twins are out of sight (Fontane, *Effi*b 14; Fontane, *Effi*a 21). The Baron's reaction condensates the dread towards the natural world to which Effi seems compelled to inhabit in opposition to the social world of norms and honour.[99]

Moreover, after the Christmas party while returning home on a sleigh with Sidonie, Effi is convinced to hear some music and asks her acquaintance whether she can hear it as well. Sidonie advances with the hypothesis of the sound being an organ, to which Effi replies that, "No, not an organ. That would make me think it was just the sea. No, it's something else, an

[98] See Borchardt 201.

[99] Consider some of the designations Effi's parents employ to describe their daughter: "Effi, maybe you should have been a circus artiste after all. Always on the trapeze, a daughter of the air. You know I almost think that's what you would like to be." (Fontane, *Effi*b 4) / [„Effi, eigentlich hättest du doch wohl Kunstreiterin werden müssen. Immer am Trapez, immer Tochter der Luft. Ich glaube beinah, daß du so was möchtest."(Fontane, *Effi*a 8)];"Innstetten's an excellent fellow but he is something of an art enthusiast, and Effi, our poor Effi's a child of nature." (Fontane, *Effi*b 27-28) / [„Innstetten ist ein vorzüglicher Kerl, aber er hat so was von einem Kunstfex, und Effi, Gott, unsere arme Effi, ist ein Naturkind." (Fontane, *Effi*a 37)].

infinitely delicate sound, almost like a human voice… […] I hear… well, of course it's too silly, I know, otherwise I'd imagine I'd heard the mermaids singing…" (Fontane, *Effi*b 125) / ["Nein, nicht Orgel. Da würd ich denken, es sei das Meer. Aber es ist etwas anderes, ein unendlich feiner Ton, fast wie menschliche Stimme … […] Ich höre ... nun gewiß, es ist Torheit, ich weiß, sonst würd' ich mir einbilden, ich hätte die Meerfrauen singen hören …" (Fontane, *Effi*a 157)]. So, Sidonie rebukes Effi and considers it is an hallucination caused by a "nervous disorder" (125). Once again, voices with no identifiable source invade the character's perceptive realm and, furthermore, the mermaids' chant may constitute an omen for retroactive interpretation as signs of seduction and temptation yet to arrive. In fact, shortly after this exchange with Sidonie, because of the snow, Effi changes to the carriage occupied by Crampas, who incidentally had been making her courtship. Here, the narrator removes himself from the scene, maintaining the interior of the carriage outside the fields of vision and sound, thus the next moment Effi surfaces to the fore she is approaching the village and out of the forest:

> When she opened her eyes again they were out of the wood, and a short distance away she heard the bells of the sleighs hurrying on ahead. They became more and more audible, and as they turned from the dunes into the town just before Utpatel's mill, the little houses with their snow-covered roofs lay on their right." (Fontante, *Effi*b 129)
>
> [Als sie die Augen wieder öffnete, war man aus dem Walde heraus, und in geringer Entfernung vor sich hörte sie das Geläut der voraufeilenden Schlitten. Immer vernehmlicher klang es, und als man, dicht vor der Utpatels Mühle, von den Dünen her in die Stadt einbog, lagen rechts die kleinen Häuser mit ihren Schneedächern neben ihnen. (Fontante, *Effi*a 162)]

In this passage, instead of the luring chant of the mermaids it is the warning sound of the bells that fills the atmosphere. From this moment on, the narrative will fall into silence as the voices and callings will be transferred to the soundless circulation of letters between the two lovers and their impenetrable encounters in the *Plantage*.

The instances mentioned above are meant to be illustrative of two adjoining sides of Fontane's exploration of indeterminacy, on the one hand, the use of what I termed acousmatic soundscapes, which introduce noises of questionable reality and significance, and on the other hand the silence and invisibility surrounding supposedly "real events", leaving narrative

sequence truncated. Unlike the mirror, sound does not reflect its source or the "original" image, unlike bundles of letters it cannot be stored away, it evades repression and while disembodied becomes a haunting presence in the narrative. Edward M. V. Plater pointed out that in *Effi Briest* there is almost no mention of mirrors beyond their decorative function, with the exception of one occasion in which Effi becomes distressed because of her involvement with Crampas, "disturbed by the ease with which she has gotten used to dissembling, steps before her mirror and sees someone looking over her shoulder. The mirror functions here as a symbol of her conscious self, in which her overwrought imagination allows her to glimpse her guilty conscience." (Plater 178). On this aspect, it is useful to convoke again Fassbinder's *Fontane Effi Briest* and his variegated employment of mirrors and scenes of imagistic reflections, which contrasts with Fontane's sparsity. In the film adaptation the characters rarely speak directly to each other, in fact, they often address each other via the reflections in the mirror, which not only signals impaired communication (Plater 178), but also suggests the haunting replication of the past into the present. In other words, the mirrors transform the present characters into each other's doubles and make them embody past repressed desires. Furthermore, the mirror becomes a device to signal duplicity and social masks, for instance, when Effi chastises Roswitha for a flirtatious interaction with Herr Kruse as "she says this, her image, duplicated in the polished surface of the piano top" (Plater 183). Thus, in Fassbinder's adaptation, the qualms of Fontane's indeterminacy are figured more prominently as the revealing of hidden duplicity via mirror images (not solely by the white fade-out and acousmatic sound mentioned earlier):

> Examples include the juxtaposition of Effi's childhood of warmth, love, and carefree innocence to the dull, desperate existence awaiting her after her marriage to Innstetten; the co-existence within Effi of the affectionate, imaginative, fun-loving child and the lady of position and responsibility; the duplicity she engages in by projecting the image of a faithful wife while concealing adulterous thoughts and deeds; the duality of Innstetten's personality, loving yet cold, ostensibly noble yet secretly manipulative; or the contradiction in both Innstetten Wüllersdorf between their public and private attitude toward society's code of honor." (Plater 187)

However, as I have been arguing, in Fontane's novel these various levels of duplicity inhabited by the characters are usually pushed out of sight from each other and, instead, are often implied via sounds and silences, suggesting the presence of an immaterial kind of reality.

The instances of acousmatic soundscapes listed in previous paragraphs show sound being connected to the realms of the non-human, of nature and of fantasy or hallucination, which ends up finding its way into the world of social convention and order. As it was mentioned, Innstetten shivers at the possibility of the manifestation of an ominous "calling of nature", even though the particulars of that "calling" and that "nature" are never directly represented. In fact, in the narrative such a division appears to be only an interpretative hypothesis, a way of reading the world. In Fontane's novel neither social conventions, nor nature are neatly placed in an hierarchy of reality, and to use Rüdiger Görner's aptly chosen designation, in *Effi Briest* "material things turn out to be objects of *transition* from realist representation to symbolic meaning. The thing can be a *threshold*" (Görner 132. My translation and emphasis),[100] a position similarly held by Christian Begemann when he refers to the negotiation between "the epistemologically unclear status of the 'real' and the 'natural' from which the characters themselves depart" (221. My translation)[101] and to the porosity of modern human consciousness (222). In fact, what is deemed to belong to "nature" varies considerably throughout the narrative, it goes from encapsulating the Edenic state of innocence found in the Hohen Cremmen garden with all its biblical flora, staging Effi as a "little Eve" (Fontane, *Effi*b 24; *Effi*a 33),[102] to the evocation of exoticism by the stuffed animals hanging from the hall of the house at Kessin.[103] Moreover, nature is equally associated with the sacrificial stones near

[100] „Bei Fontane nun erweist sich das Ding als Objekt des Übergangs von realistischer Darstellung zu symbolistischer Bedeutung. Das Ding kann bei ihm Schwelle sein […]." (Görner 132).
[101] „den epistemologisch unklaren Status des ‚Wirklichen' und ‚Natürlichen' überhaupt, von dem die Figuren wie selbstverständlich ausgehen." (Begemann 221).
[102] See Schuster.
[103] For an account of Theodor Fontane's interest in cabinets of curiosities and the declined invitation to accompany Prince Karl Friedrich on an Oriental grand-tour see Wegmann 122- 125.

the Herthasee hinting at forbidden love and punishment and to the elderberry tree taken from Kleist's play *Käthchen von Heilbronn* (Fontane, *Effi*b 18; *Effi*a 26), or to maritime sounds and other diffuse resonances of nature that seem branches of the imagination or of another realm altogether. Thus, nature becomes both a visual and a sonorous landscape, encapsulating a "surplus of meaning" (Görner 134. My translation), whose intelligibility is, nonetheless, not wholly ascertained. In relation to this topic, Rancière defends the idea that,

> Analysis is not the reduction of the multiple to the simple but the discovery of the duplicity hidden in every simplicity and the secret of that duplicity, which manifests itself in another theatre where it is at once unveiled and covered anew. The work of science is not to disenchant the world whose occupants are supposedly lost in illusory representations. It must show, conversely, that the world that sober minds deem prosaic is actually enchanted, whereby its constitutive sorcery must be discovered. (Rancière 53)

Nevertheless, in *Effi Briest* the constatation of the world's immanent duplicity, and the porosity between reality and fiction only accentuates the ambiguity with which characters are faced.

Furthermore, the social world, which Innstetten dreads so much to see being disturbed, constitutes what Patricia Howe, borrowing the term form linguistics, calls an "empty domain", or in other words, "blanks whose content is unknown" (31), but prone to be filled by fiction. Howe bases her argument on the idea that Innstetten being put forward as the representative of Prussian nineteenth century society becomes a contradictory figure, due to a discrepancy between the values he believes to rightly uphold and Effi's counter perspective of an ideal society, which is mirrored in her fantasy of the "ideal bridegroom" (Howe 32). In order to describe this situation, the scholar uses the "term 'Awful Being', which also occurs in pronominal form as 'lui' or 'that other him', is a literary construct, an element of world-modelling that designates the figure of the ideal bridegroom, and predominantly a product of female reading and story-telling." (Howe 32). Throughout the novel, we witness Effi's gradual disillusionment with the narratives sustaining the marriage institution, and even Innstetten in his monologue before the fatal duel questions his position. In fact, the Baron's name carries with it the sonority of "instead" ["*anstatt*"], that is, the intimation of substitution and

permutability of the reality he represents. However, the answer to the question of what could have happened "instead" what reality could be "instead" remains unsatisfactorily answered. Effi, upon reflecting about her actions, the resulting estrangement from her daughter Annie, the divorce, and the social ostracism she was voted to, exhales a resigned "what else could he do?" (Fontane, *Effi*b 237) / ["was sollt'er am Ende anders tun" (Fontane, *Effi*a)]. Nevertheless, Effi's conformity is not to be taken at face value, especially if one considers the fact that her last wish is to remove herself completely from the any association with conventional institution of marriage and society, she expresses this resistance by readopting her maiden name: Effi Briest. Thus, as social fictions face disenchantment, they become "empty domains" that the characters (Effi in particular) are no longer willing to fill. In comparing Fontane's novel to Arthur Schnitzler's *Libelei* (1894), Valerie D. Greenberg notices how "Love and marriage appear to be empty bourgeois constructs, myths that have lost touch with their origins. Both women characters, however, retain identities unamenable to reshaping and control from the outside." (Greenberg 779). Ultimately, the rules and moral conventions of nineteenth-century Prussia become "empty domains" whose gaps the characters no longer desire to fulfil.

During Effi's final moments in Hohen Cremmen, as she examines her conscience, sound and silence enter her room simultaneously:

> from the distance she heard the rattling of a train coming nearer and nearer until, two miles away, it passed Hohen-Cremmen. Then the sound died away until silence reigned once more, and there was just the moonlight on the lawn and just the rustle of the plane trees, like rain falling. But it was only the night air stirring. (Fontane, *Effi*b 176)
>
> [vernahm sie von fernher das Rasseln des Zuges, der, auf eine halbe Meile Entfernung, an Hohen-Cremmen vorüberfuhr. Dann wurde der Lärm wieder schwächer, endlich erstarb er ganz, und nur der Mondschein lag noch auf dem Grasplatz, und nur auf die Platanen rauschte es nach wie vor wie leiser Regen nieder. Aber es war nur Nachtluft, die ging. (Fontane, *Effi*a 220)].

The sound of the train, as Gisela Zimmermann notices, pulls one to the universe of *Anna Karenina* (1876) and to the scene of her suicide, in this guise, death, self- reproach, guilt and shame penetrate into Effi's sphere as acousmatic entities. This intertextual intrusion in the form of sound evokes the ready-made script of the Realist adultery novel from which Effi gradually

appears to diverge. Although the haunting sound is made present, at the same time, it must cohabit with the silence of "only the night air stirring". For a moment, the conjugation of these two elements in Effi's perceptive field conjures a gloomy sound like "rain falling", a soundscape that brinks on the hallucinatory. In fact, as Effi withers away, inexistent sounds of dropping rain become audible: "The stars shimmered, not a leaf stirred in the park. But the longer she listened, the more clearly she could again hear something falling like a fine drizzle on the planes." (Fontane, *Effi*b 237-38) / [„Die Sterne flimmerten, und im Parke regte sich kein Blatt. Aber je länger sie hinaushorchte, je deutlicher hörte sie wieder, daß es wie ein feines Rieseln auf die Platanen niederfiel." (Fontane, *Effi*a 294)]. Thus, once again, the reader of *Effi Briest* is confronted with an indeterminate surplus of meaning, on the one hand, Effi rejects both her annihilation as an outcast and the redemption provided by the silence covering up empty social norms,[104] on the other hand, her alternative imagined scenario remains virtually inscrutable. In *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life,* Kenneth Gross recalls a figure called the "dark interpreter" presented by Thomas de Quincey in *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845), highlighting the following aspects:

> Thomas de Quincey, to cite only one example, gathers curious stories about what he calls 'the dark interpreter,' a half-recognized, shadowlike presence that appears in human lives at moments of crisis, violence, and crime, an obscure witness of our inhuman passions, a representative of the 'shadowy projections, umbras and penumbras, which the unsearchable depths of man's nature is capable, under adequate excitement, of throwing off, and even in stationary forms.' (Gross, *Puppet* 137)

The acousmatic soundscapes in *Effi Briest* may function like the dark interpreter, at once a "faithful representative" (Quincey 33) of oneself and "subject to the action of the good *Phantasus,* who rules in dreams" (Quincey 33), an umbra or a sound that "will not always be

[104]"And bearing this guilt inside me,' she repeated. 'Yes, I am. But does it really weigh down on me? No. And that's why I'm horrified at myself. What does weigh down on me is something else: fear, mortal fear, the constant dread that it will eventually come out after all. And then, apart from the fear… shame. I'm ashamed of myself. But just as I don't feel a true remorse, I don't feel proper shame. I just feel ashamed because of the eternal lies and deception." (Fontane, *Effi*b 175-176) / [„Und habe die Schuld auf meiner Seele," wiederholte sie. „Ja, da *hab* ich sie. Aber lastet sie auch auf meiner Seele? Nein. Und das ist es, warum ich vor mir selbst erschrecke. Was da lastet, das ist etwas ganz anderes - Angst, Todesangst und die ewige Furcht: es kommt doch am Ende noch an den Tag. Und dann außer der Angst... Scham. Ich schäme mich. Aber wie ich nicht die rechte Reue habe, so hab ich auch nicht die rechte Scham. Ich schäme mich bloß von wegen dem ewigen Lug und Trug." (Fontane, *Effi*a 219)].

found sitting inside [my] dreams, but at times outside, and in open daylight" (Quincey 34). Moreover, de Quincey complements this characterization comparing the dark interpreter to the chorus in Greek tragedy:

> the leading function of both must be supposed this− not to tell you anything absolutely new,− that was done by the actors in the drama; but to recall you to your own lurking thoughts, […] and to place before you, in immediate connection with groups vanishing too quickly […], such commentaries, prophetic or looking back, pointing the moral or deciphering the mystery, justifying Providence, or mitigating the fierceness of anguish […]. (De Quincey 34)

Likewise, in her death bed, Effi replays and rereads her life, and with the window open vanishes along with the night air, only to emerge again as a name inscribed on a gravestone among the foliage which, "since the equinox, that had brought three days of gales, leaves were strewn all over the ground." (Fontane, *Effi*b 238) / [„seit den Äquinoktien, die drei Sturmtage gebracht hatten, lagen die Blätter überallhin ausgestreut." (Fontane, *Effi*a 294)], thus, coming full circle to the name engraved on the cover of the novel, only now letters that murmur another story.

Chapter 3
Frames

Das aktuell Wahrgenommene, das mehr oder minder klar Mitgegenwärtige
und Bestimmte ist teils durchsetzt, teils umgeben von einem dunkel
bewußten Horizont unbestimmter Wirklichkeit. [105]
Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie*

3.1. Scaffolding: real unease in the house of Naturalism

By the time the countess Emilia Pardo Bazán published her diptych novel constituted by *The House of Ulloa* [*Los Pazos de Ulloa*] (1886) and *Mother Nature* [*La Madre Naturaleza*] (1887) she had already made a name for herself in the intellectual world of Regenerationist and post- Carlist Wars Spain, and had acquired a reputation of *femme de lettres*, although not without tumult and upheaval. As early as 1882, with the publication of a series of articles in *La Época*, later collected under the title *The Burning Question* [*La Cuestión Palpitante*],[106] Pardo Bazán was credited with being among the first to introduce and discuss Naturalism in Spain and opening up the Spanish literary scene to European airs.[107] Doña Emilia establishes herself as an idiosyncratic participant in an otherwise conservative atmosphere, debating the various forms of conventions, literary and others. To say that Emilia Pardo Bazán directed the attention towards the novelty of Naturalism is, by no means, to say that she did so without a critical lens or complete submission to the principles primarily devised by Emile Zola in *The Experimental Novel* (1880).

[105] "The background is a dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality." (Husserl, *Ideas*).
[106] Henceforth, I will use the English version of the title for purposes of linguistic cohesion within the body of the text. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from excerpts of *La Cuestión Palpitante* edited by José González Herrán are my own and the pages indicated refer to this edition of Pardo Bazán's text.
[107] About the reception and polemics surrounding *The Burning Question* see José González Herrán's "Introduction" 64-74.

Although in a way the Galician writer does frame her work in dialogue with this aesthetic tradition, if one is to observe the treatment the author gives to the *milieu* via sceneries for instance, it becomes salient that Pardo Bazán turns Naturalism on its head. And she does this by way of a meta-discourse on the short-comings of the determinism consubstantiated in the power attributed to social context and heredity as unproblematic coordinates for understanding human behaviour and its representation in fiction.[108] In fact, as noted by the literary scholar José González Herrán in his introduction to *The Burning Question* (43), Doña Emilia's references to Naturalism become those of a critical observer, one who wants primarily to locate and study the literary movement historically, something which becomes even more evident in the series of conferences she proffered in 1887 with the title *Russia: its people and its literature*.[109] In these public addresses at the Madrid Ateneo, the Galician author strives to present to a Spanish audience the evolution of the novel in Russia; in other words, Pardo Bazán puts forward an exercise in comparative literature, where the novel is described as an European circulating meta-form infused by the cultural particularities of the national boundaries it rests upon.

The first part of *Russia: its People and its Literature* consists of a historical and political account of the formation of the Russian Empire, which Pardo Bazán considers fundamental for one to understand the peculiarities of the development of the novel in this territory, whose aesthetic and ideologic substratum she covers in the second part of the text. Thus, in a way, one could argue her exposition method is actually very much that of Naturalism, in that she seeks to trace the socio-political genealogy determining the literary practices in Russia.

[108] Already in the 1950's Arthur Allan Chandler wrote his doctoral thesis contesting the exaggerated emphasis placed on the role of Naturalism in the critical appraisal of Doña Emilia's fiction, and instead opted to chart other influences in her work, and as a consequence show the author as literary theorist and practioner in her own terms.
[109] Pardo Bazán proffered this conference originally as *La Revolución y la novela en Rusia.* As early as 1890 it merited a translation into English as *Russia: its people and its literature* by Fanny Hale Gardiner. For a brief review of Pardo Bazán's engagement with Russian literature see the article by Ronald Hilton "Dona Emilia Pardo-Bazan, a Pioneer of Russian Studies".

Throughout this exposé, Doña Emilia ends up, in fact, formulating a general, even if not systematic, theory of the Realist novel.[110] To her mind, literary history and aesthetical developments are predicated in a mimetic parameter, in which "the novel is a clear mirror, a faithful expression of society …" (Pardo Bazán, *Russia* 284). In general, the idea of truth and faithfulness appears as a cornerstone in the writer's conception of the Realist novel, and is constantly reiterated in her writing. For instance, while making reference to the literary critic Eugène-Melchior de Vogüè, Pardo Bazán asserts that,

> "The French realists," says Voguié, "ignore the better part of humanity, which is the spirit." This is true; and I have said and thought for a long time that realism, to realize to the full its own program, must embrace matter and spirit, earth and heaven, human and superhuman. I entirely agree with Voguié in believing that naturalism—or to call it by a more comprehensive name, the School of Truth or Realism— should not close its eyes to the mystery that is beyond rational explanations, nor deny the divine as a known quantity. (283)

For Pardo Bazán, then, the realist novel should orient itself toward truth understood as a broad encompassing of the real. Here the real is not only the sum of observable visible reality and facts, nor is it reduced to its representation provided by scientific explanation, it is instead a binomen of "matter and spirit". Moreover, Pardo Bazán's position towards Realism and Naturalism is also influenced by the accusations of immorality from which many novels and its authors were under sway. Repudiating the application of censorious mechanisms in the arts, Pardo Bazán is of the persuasion that when novelists represent reality, they work with what a society in a given moment presents them with, and as a result, if one identifies a problem of moral transgression in fiction its root is to be found in society rather than in the arts themselves. Nevertheless, Doña Emilia posits a poetics based on a rule of proportion, a sort of barometer on how to present the various aspects of reality even the most sordid:

> In order to carry out the great precept of modern art, the novelist must copy life, —the life that we live and that unfolds about us everyday. But life does not unfold as it is represented in many novels that are the product of French naturalism. The Zola school makes use of abstraction and accumulation in uniting in one scene and one character all the aberrations and vices that only a collection of profligates could be capable of, with the result offered us in pictures such as the house in 'Pot-Bouille,' that should be handled with tongs for fear of soiling one's fingers. We turn to the

[110] Pardo Bazán uses the terms Realism and Naturalism almost interchangeably, notwithstanding she actually tends to prefer to use Realism as the umbrella term for the novel aesthetics developed throughout the whole of the nineteenth century.

> reality, and we find that all these colours exist, that all this vices are actual, — yes, but one at a time, intermingled with a thousand good or commonplace things; then we are in a rage with the novelist, and even fear him a grudge for having a mania for ugliness. The impressions which life makes upon us is quite different; the alternative of good is evil, of poetry vulgarity; we demand a recognition of this from the novelist, and this the Russian novelists have given us, yet without leaving the firm ground of realist art. They present the material, the bestial, the trivial, the vile, the obscene, the passionate, as they appear in life, in due proportion and no more. (288)

Furthermore, in "Notes Towards an Autobiography" Pardo Bazán emphasises her cautionary approach to Naturalism specifically, and distances herself from any commitment to what she considers to be its radical doctrines:

> I did not simply translate French Naturalism for a Spanish audience, about selected only those aspects of it that seemed to me sensible and commendable, and I opposed the rest repeatedly. I made this same protest, which I repeat now with the encouragement of foreign opinion, in an argument with Luis Alfonso published in *La Época*, in 1884: "I cannot get over my astonishment at people trying to turn me into a female Zola, or, at least, an active disciple of the revolutionary Frenchman," I wrote. "I depart from Zola conceptually: as you well know, I have already tracked down all his determinist, fatalist and pessimistic doctrines in *The Burning Question* […] and declared that no Catholic could follow him along these paths." And let it be said that the philosophical concepts are the very heart, the very marrow, of any system. (269)

This overview of Pardo Bazán's perspective on the literary production of her time brings to the fore not only an aesthetic programme, if we will, but also its imbrication in a personal moral stance towards the coeval society and humanity's place in the world. However, Doña Emilia's positions are at times convoluted and stem from an amalgamation of various influences loosely tied with her Catholic faith, and with the need to defend herself from the more conservative sectors of Spanish public opinion. From the previously quoted writings one can acquiesce that Pardo Bazán's theory of the novel bears its weight upon absolute moral categories, which are translated into the thematic thread of her narratives. For instance, economic decay, unsanctioned sexual behaviour, political corruption, indolence and similar vices appear in her novels as moral ills critically looked at and in opposition to a desired ideal society of a more ascetic nature. To put it differently, in novels like *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*, Pardo Bazán does espouse some of what she considers to be the gory interests of the Naturalist school, nonetheless, she exercises a selection method that filters reality, usually by privileging a narrative focalization through characters who are connected to the set

of ideal values being defended (ex.: priest Julián, Nucha, Gabriel) and not those she terms as belonging to "the human beast" (Pardo Bazán, *La Cuestión* 62; 209-210).

In summary, Emilia Pardo Bazán tends to reject physiological determinism of human behaviour and encounters several difficulties with the emergence of Darwinism.[111] When addressing this aspect of Pardo Bazán's fiction in *The Catholic Naturalism of Pardo Bazán*, Donald Fowler Brown terms her space of navigation through the literary and philosophical trends of the nineteenth-century a no-man's-land, and summons the attention to a passage in *The Burning Question* where the author explains her standing in the literary landscape of her time:

> If what is real has a true and actual existence, then, in the arts, *realism* offers a broader, more complete and perfect theory than *naturalism*. It encompasses the spiritual, the body and the soul, and it conciliates and reduces the opposition between naturalism and rational idealism. Everything can be subsumed under realism, except for the exaggerations and extravagances of two radical schools, which, as a consequence, become reductionist. (67)
>
> [Si es real cuanto tiene existencia verdadera y efectiva, el *realismo* en el arte nos ofrece una teoría más ancha, completa y perfecta que el *naturalismo*. Comprende y abarca lo espiritual, el cuerpo y el alma, y concilia y reduce a unidad la oposición del naturalismo y del idealismo racional. En el realismo cabe todo, menos las exageraciones y desvaríos de dos escuelas extremas, y por precisa consecuencia exclusivistas. (67)]

This contextual survey provided so far should not be mistaken for an attempt to pinpoint any consideration regarding Pardo Bazán's fiction exclusively on her relation to Naturalism, but solely as a sketch of an author who positions herself in an aesthetic threshold and convoluted theoretical background, and thus arranges her worldview as a sort of scaffold constituted by heterogeneous materials assembled along the way.

In fact, as mentioned before, this chapter will focus on how Emilia Pardo Bazán's novels consistently use the idea of the background, the surrounding and the framing, understood in terms of a threshold of what contains and the contained, the seen and the unseen,

[111] In an interview conducted by Rodrigo Soriano for *La Época*, Zola points out the intriguing position of Pardo Bazán in the modern literary scene. Specially because the French author considers that Pardo Bazán does not fully commit to look at the world through a naturalist (and scientific) lens, that is, she is "still" guided by a faith in the absolute (Brown, *The Catholic* 44- 46). In *Darwin's Plots* Gillian Beer tackles precisely the variegated reception that Darwinian theory enjoyed in its early days, and shows how it was not only assimilated but also resisted by several literary figures.

the material and the immaterial, a point of transit. These elements function as a poetic mechanism with a metafictional penchant, in which, the furnishing of interiors, making a home, finding a space of dwelling can be equated to the writing of a novel, like Estela Vieira proposed in *Interiors and Narrative* though with other nineteenth century authors in mind (39). As we shall see, the surrounding can be figured in a literal manner, composed of the settings the characters move about, on the other hand, it also appears as a perceptive framing, as a particular kind of apprehension by a subject.

The novel compound *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature* addresses typical themes present in much of nineteenth century fiction, and by and large ticks all the boxes of a text-book definition of the realist-naturalist genre. Throughout the twenty-nine chapters of *The House of Ulloa* and the thirty-six of *Mother Nature* the story of the Moscoso and Pardo de la Lage families unfolds in the Galician landscape, the first novel set during a stand-still in the Carlist wars on the eve of the Glorious Revolution, the second roughly ten years afterwards. Don Pedro Moscoso, a debauched and uneducated nobleman sews the threads of his lineage's decay when he marries his cousin from Santiago de Compostela, Marcelina (Nucha) Pardo de la Lage and has a child (Manolita) with her, while maintaining an illicit relationship with a servant (Sabel) and conceiving an illegitimate child (Perucho) with her. Nucha presented as the epitome of purity and innocence perishes unable to cope with the sordid reality of her husband's life. In *Mother Nature* the younger generation of Moscosos, the half-siblings Manolita and Perucho, will succumb to the weight of these hereditary taboo relations and, at a first appraisal, will be unable to overcome the destiny dictated by their blood-line. Conspicuously, even the partite structure of the novel suggests a kind of familial imbrication, as if *Mother Nature* were the offspring of *The House of Ulloa*, and consequently would have to lead to the *dénouement* of that convoluted heritage. Moreover, this paratextual given presents a narrative sequence,

which seems to imply a reversal in the then perceived order of the human nature, from creationism to randomised evolution.

The narrative starts with an already formed social unit, the family (represented by the house of Ulloa), differently phrased, it opens *in medias res* between nature and culture. However, in the sequel (*i.e. Mother Nature*) the plot inverts its course and directs the reader to ponder on the implications attached to postulating transcendental origins of human life, thus, rewriting and reconfiguring orthodox Naturalism, where language appears as a problematic contender in the dialectic nature- culture binary. In fact, as Jobst Welge points out "Insofar as they are concerned with a genealogical crisis on the level of plot, the predominantly provincial world of *Los Pazos de Ulloa* tends in the direction of degeneration, while the predominantly idyllic world of *La madre naturaleza* portrays a failed project of regeneration." (89).

Although, as was mentioned earlier, Pardo Bazán's uneasy relationship with Naturalism has been a point of discussion from the start of her career, the treatment of this aspect has, for the most part, remained circumscribed to a thematic level and relegated to the author's Catholic persuasion. Analytic emphasis has been placed on the representation of a corrupted political system (caciquism amidst the parliament election), uneducated elites, which mingle with characters and produce a series of taboo relationships, which plant the seed of tragic and unavoidable outcomes. As referred by Lara Anderson in *Allegories of Decadence in Fin-de-Siècle Spain* the widespread literary representation of decadent *mores* accompanies the diagnostic in line with "[t]he Regenerationist understanding of Spain as decadent, sick and politically backward", which "was accompanied by grave concerns about the country's lacklustre economic performance" (81). Even if, generally speaking, Pardo Bazán's characters tend to be constructed as social types, and the novels may be accurately read as a dramatization of a worldview set on the conflict between nature and culture, the pages that follow try not to subsume this topic exclusively to the logic of a strict subordination to a literary genre or school,

and thus, in these respects take Pardo Bazán's lead and avoid the "isms" she felt so uneasy about (Pardo Bazán, *Russia* 175). With that in mind, my approach aims to disentangle the environment, or *milieu*, from a strict Naturalist understanding, and show how in Pardo Bazán's novels it is transfigured into a metafictional threshold category vehiculated through backgrounds and frames, which invite a reflection on the mimetic act as an opening up and filling up of space in search of a dwelling, questioning in the process the divisions and porosities it creates, and what lies at either side of the threshold of representation and human nature.

To start I will take Maryellen Bieder's cue about Doña Emilia's use of genre as a launch-board for my own analysis. According to this critic, genre is deployed as a

> "textualized and contextualized referent" in several […] novels […]. the multiplicity of genre intertexts and the confusion of genre boundaries produce an "overdetermination of reference" that manifests itself in unresolvable generic ambiguity. The multiple genre intertexts in these novels and the gendered expectations they arouse are therefore a frequent cause of misreading. (58)

Despite Bieder's focus being that of genre used as a referent which, according to her, allows Emilia Pardo Bazán to "play" with (gender) conventions and interpretative expectations, there is also here an implicit idea of frame at work. In fact, it is framing or the image of the frame that I wish to extract from Bieder's reading, because it highlights Pardo Bazán's attentiveness to surrounding, *i.e.*, to that which inserts a threshold in the text to use Gèrard Genette's terminology. In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* [*Seuils*] Genette invites us to think about the peculiar status of that which occupies both the interior and the exterior of the text. For the literary theorist, the paratext is such an entity that lies at the threshold between the literary and printerly conventions that mediate between the world of publishing and the world of the text. It is in this fashion, although extrapolating it metaphorically, that I propose to present the diegetic background or surrounding as something creating a liminal breach in the narrative thread. In other words, the threshold between what is visibly and objectively presented and its simultaneous metafictional/ metatextual existence.

In fact, through the primacy given to the background I do not position my analysis very far from the legacy of thinkers like Roland Barthes and his elucidation of *l'effet de réel*,[112] in that it calls attention to the realm outside of action and meaning that constitutes the modern novelistic narrative. However, my interest in the background is precisely at the point where it challenges an exclusively mimetic (or better said understandings of mimesis as mirroring effect) understanding of representation in the novel, and where it avows a porous relationship between fiction and the real. Upon reading the two novels by Pardo Bazán one comes to realize that they too might have some light to shed toward Jacques Rancière's diagnostic in *The Edges of Fiction* [*Les Bords de la Fiction*] concerning the development of modern fiction as "the movement by which its [fiction's] centre of gravity was shifted from its traditional core, constituted by the knot of narrative events, toward those edges in which fiction is confronted with its possible cancelation, or returned to such and such a figure of alterity." (9). Rancière shows how in some narratives appearing in the nineteenth century the presence of windows and doors does not merely comply with a symbolic function, that of signalling transition or separation, for instance, but does in fact embody a new narrative vantage point onto human experience. As on a thematic level the novel gradually presents more and more scenes from common everyday life, many coeval critics "turn the novel itself into a door open onto the world that engendered it." (Rancière 14). Notwithstanding, Rancière notices that if one is more cautious in sanctioning this appraisal of the history of literature as an evolution from the representation of noble life to that of commoner's existence, it becomes possible to observe windows functioning as thresholds, and as blurred topographies in the narrative text. Thus, they become the tangential point of multiple gazes, subjectivities, polities, and realities. As the author mentions in the first chapter of this *œuvre*:

> By themselves they blurred the relations between inside and outside, noble and vulgar, whether by submitting the salons of the elite to the gaze of entomological science or by offering to the gaze of

[112] This concept has already been thoroughly discussed in the introduction and in the chapter dedicated primarily to George Eliot's work.

> the artist or the lover the poetry of society's dark face. They created new affects muddling the hierarchy of passions, the aetiology of their causes, the forms of their expression and their assignation to this or that social condition. They thus have rendered uncertain not only the boundaries between conditions but also the very divisions between contemplation and action, the fictive and the real. (16)

It is precisely this kind of porosity that we will see at work in the backgrounds and the world of objects and surfaces that pullulate in *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*.

To conceive of literary representation, of fiction, under the sign of an architectonic structure, a house to be exact, is not a rare feature in literary history. Henry James's coining of the term "house of fiction" in the preface to *Portrait of a Lady* in the New York edition of his *œuvre*, published between 1907 and 1909, some decades later to Pardo Bazán's novels under scrutiny in this chapter, is only one example among a wide lineage.[113] In this famous text, the American writer conveys the notion that the scaffolds of fiction are the characters and inner perception, in other and abbreviated words, fiction stems from within rather than from the outside, it is the representation of a psychological abode filtering reality. Bringing to the fore this aspect of James's literary theory may seem a convoluted and stray-way to address Pardo Bazán's espousing of a representational field originating in the exterior, observable aspects of life, that what may be documented. However so, it is also in this preface that James tactfully scorns and distances his literary practice from delving with the contingent world at large and infuse it with multitudinous plot-lines (42). According to the author, it is much more the character that creates the setting, or the *milieu* than the other way around. This compositional scale is said "[…] to inspire me [James] with the right confidence for erecting on such a plot of ground the neat and careful and proportioned pile of bricks that arches over it and that was thus to form, constructionally speaking, a literary monument" (52).

It would be incurring into flagrant anachronism to pretend that Doña Emilia read this preface when she was conceiving *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*, nevertheless,

[113] For a broad perspective on the uses of architectonic metaphors in literature and philosophy see Susan Bernstein's *Housing Problems*.

bringing it to the fore allows to identify a pervasive metaphorical use of architectonic vocabulary to tackle the representational poetics of the novelistic text. In fact, it helps us to see how buildings, and spatial elements in general are literally used in Pardo Bazán's cycle novels to complicate the metaphorical basis of Naturalism's ideology of the ambiance and *milieu,* and thus forge her own different understanding of the novel's scope in the literary field of her time and place. To view these novels exclusively under the aegis of Naturalism's determinism would be to miss Pardo Bazán's preoccupation with and exploration of the multiple ways of looking, reading, and interpreting human reality. In *Housing Problems* Susan Bernstein contends that the "house under scrutiny always reveals itself to be another text, another inscribed surface"(3), a palimpsestic principle also in operation in Pardo Bazán's novels.

3.2. (Mis)Reading backgrounds I

Throughout *The House of Ulloa* the narrative brings the landscape of Galician countryside decay close to our eyes, which at a first sight might appear to be the reflection of its inhabitants: the corrupt Primitivo (*majordomo* to the estate of Ulloa), the uncultured and churlish Marquis of Ulloa living in concubinage with Primitivo's daughter, the caciques Trampeta (Liberal) and Barbacana (Carlist), the lax abbot of Ulloa. The first depictions made about the manor of Ulloa, the estate around which most of the action is set, are of a sombre, backward place and mainly seen through the perspective of the newcomer priest, Julián Álvarez, who is sent to the manor in order to restore decorum and spiritual elevation. As readers we approach the manor house for the first time alongside Julián on a night when, so the narrator tells us, "there was no moon and the darkness made it impossible to distinguish any details of the house, so that one was only aware of its imposing enormity. Not a single light shone from within" (10) ["Era noche cerrada sin luna […]. No consentía la oscuridad distinguir más que sus imponentes proporciones, escondiéndose las líneas y detalles en la negrura del ambiente.

Ninguna luz brillaba" (104)]. Furthermore, the first room to be stepped into is a shabby kitchen, in which corner "stood an oak table, blackened with the use and covered with a rough cloth that was thick with wine and grease stains" (11) [En el esconce de la cocina, una mesa de roble denegrida por el uso mostraba extendido un mantel grosero, manchado de vino y grasa" (105)]. This unagreeable vision to Julián's sensibility is heightened the moment the kitchen appears as a site where the delimitations between human beings and other living creatures become blurred, the moment the former is perceived as the latter. For instance, when the baby Perucho is mistaken for a dog, "what he had first taken for another dog was in fact a three- or four-year-old boy whose long brown jacket and white burlap breeches resembled at a distance the patched coats of dogs- with which the child seemed to live in perfect harmony and fraternity" (11) ["advirtió que lo que tomaba por otro perro no era sino un rapazuelo de tres cuatro años, cuyo vestido, compuesto de chaquetón acastañado y calzones de blanca estopa, podia desde lejos, equivocarse con la piel bicolor de los perdigueros, en quienes parecía vivir el chiquillo en la mejor inteligencia y más estrecha fraternidad." (106)]. As Gillian Beer explains in *Darwin's Plots*, throughout the nineteenth century the dread which accompanies imagining a reconfigured and shared nature between humans and other beings is often attested through a "physical shudder":

> Darwinian theory takes up elements from older orders and particularly from recurrent mythic themes such as transformation and metamorphosis. It retains the idea of *natura naturans*, or the Great Mother, in its figuring of nature. It rearranges the elements of creation myths, for example substituting the ocean for the garden but retaining the idea of the 'single progenitor'- though now an uncouth progenitor hard to acknowledge as kin. […] Many Victorian rejections of evolutionary ideas register a physical shudder. […] In its insistence on chance as part of a deterministic order it perturbed in the same mode as the Arabian Nights- though more profoundly, because claiming the authority of science not exotic fiction. (7).

In fact, on many occasions, throughout *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature* this uneasiness around hybridisation is embodied by characters with physical deformities, such as *La Sabia*, whose face, distorted by goitre, resembles a grotesque Janus (Pratt 74), a "shiny, horrible, and featureless second face" (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 35) ["la lustrosa y horrible

segunda cara sin facciones" (99)]. Recapturing the etymology of the Roman god, *La Sabia*'s spells become an open passage to the supernatural, and the instinctive, as she opens her mouth to cast evil eye upon those crossing her path (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 155; *Madre Naturaleza* 275), thus planting the lingering doubt concerning a magical malediction influencing the lives of the Moscoso family, particularly those of Perucho and Manuela. Thus, the preoccupation with the genesis of human morality, the relation between free will and destiny is presented as a double hypothesis, one where the supernatural holds the key, the other, encapsulated in the episode featuring Perucho likened to a dog, and provides a text-book snapshot of the decadent environment conditioning and determining the development of human behaviour, in that it links the character to the world of instinct and unbridled action, and as a consequence, vulnerable to fall prey to unsanctioned carnal relations.

This kind of persuasion is echoed in some degree by other characters in the *House of Ulloa*, for instance when Julián recalls a conversation with Señor de la Lage talking about his nephew, Don Pedro Moscoso, and saying that "'you'll find my nephew rather rough around the edges. When you're brought up in the country and never leave it, you can't help being dull and churlish'" (17) ["—Encontrará usted a mi sobrino bastante adocenado… La aldea, cuando se cría uno en ella y no sale de allí jamás, envilece, empobrece y embrutece." (113)]. This discourse deemed typical of Naturalism's concern with heredity and environment continues to intersperse the narrative, but not without ironic innuendos made by the narrator. The trip the Marquis of Ulloa makes to Santiago de Compostela to visit his uncle and to find a wife among one of his cousins is a case in point. The narrator presents *Señor* Pardo de la Lage in the following terms:

> A magnificent specimen of a race bred to fight wars and live in the mountains, was wasting miserably away in a small town, where he who produces nothing, teaches nothing, and learns nothing, is no use to anyone and spends his days in despicable idleness. What a waste! Had that pure-blooded Pardo de la Lage been born in the fifteenth century, he would have given plenty for archaeologists and historians of the nineteenth century to think about! (72)

> Magnífico ejemplar de una raza apta para la vida guerrera y montés de las épocas feudales, se consumia miserablemente em el vil ocio de los pueblos, donde el que nada produce, nada enseña, ni nada aprende, de nada sirve y nada hace.! Oh dolor! Aquel castizo Pardo de la Lage, naciendo en el siglo xv, hubiera dado en qué entender a los arqueólogos e historiadores del xix! (182)

The narrator clearly vocalizes the conviction that the environment interferes in human disposition and constitution, in this particular case, by presenting what he considers to be an instance of a corruption of a genetic heritage.[114] However, tongue-in-cheek, he mocks a putative inattention given to the influence of urbanization and modern life by the coeval scientific community. In other words, the research efforts in temporal profundity by the mentioned historians and archaeologists are portrayed as producing a sort of blindness to the present circumstances.

This is, of course, a biased way to read the environment or the environs through which the characters move, and presents, apparently, only a one-way relationship between the two elements. Thus, one can admit that one of the problems underlying *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature* is inaugurated as a question of interpretation of the background and its constitution as a liminal, and palimpsestic frame. In fact, the moment in the story (in *The House of Ulloa*) focusing on the period spent in Santiago de Compostela (ranging approximately between chapters nine and thirteen) brings to the fore several other forms of blindness and misreading of reality as it is figured in the material world represented in the novel. Thus, it is possible to identify the contours of a reading protocol instantiated by the narrator based on

[114] In "Evolutionary Logic and the Concept of Race in Pardo Bazán's Short Fiction" Lou Charon- Deutsch summarizes Pardo Bazán's position regarding the latest developments in science and the connected understanding of humanity as part of an ecosystem of natural-biological relations: "In *Reflexiones científicas contra el darwinismo*, she outlined her basic stance on evolution (or *transformismo* as she variously calls it) and heredity that remained substantially unchanged during her long trajectory as a writer. In *Reflexiones* she accepts the notion of atavism, but soundly rejects that of natural selection as an explanation for the common origins of all living things. It is not religious belief, she asks readers to believe, that leads her to reject Darwin's theory of evolution, rather she faults the shoddy scientific hypotheses of Darwin, Haeckel and others that she refutes at length in this essay. She acknowledges humans' innate "struggle for life" (545), and ability to adapt to environmental pressures in explaining variations in humans, but insists that no new species is possible by way of natural selection since no fossil evidence exists to prove it. If natural selection perfected existing species or produced new ones, she reasoned, there would be no low creatures that had not yet evolved into higher forms. Any individual aberration in a family is owing solely to an atavistic inheritance from a distant relative rather than a regression to a previous moment on the evolutionary scale." (65).

what could be termed, in a simplifying manner, neo-platonic categories of exteriority and interiority, which in turn are placed in a scale of value measured by a putative closeness to the pair reality and truth. In the Tanner Lectures on Human Values given by Umberto Eco at Cambridge University in 1990, the semiotician entwines the evolution of modalities of interpretation in the Western tradition, focusing particularly on how medieval Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Rationalism and Deconstruction are based on dichotomies of the outside and the inside of the text (or the object being interpreted), which are paramount for the respective understanding of the world and reality. Eco advances the notion of the "intention and rights of the text" as a better way to navigate the hermeneutical circle and its author and reader categories.

This protocol becomes quite evident in the presentation of female characters primarily through the gaze of the male characters and by an incidence in their attire and external appearance. Upon the introduction of the De la Lage sisters two contrasting types emerge: whereas Rita is characterised by her physical attributes and outward appeals, Nucha comes about to signify the fallacious nature of surface appearances, and the moral superiority of the veiled inner life beyond "the clay exterior" (76). For instance, to Julián the interior life of a person is the determinant element in character and irradiates to all other aspects of existence:

> To Julián, Nucha was, in short, the ideal model of the biblical wife. She was a poetic example of the strong woman, still in her youth, bearing an aura of innocence but promising future wisdom and majesty. As time went by, her gentleness would become more severe, and her dark tresses would turn to silver, but no sin would ever stain her pure forehead, no guilt would leave a single wrinkle. What mellow ripeness was augured by such a gentle spring! (116)
>
> Parecíale a Julián que Nucha era ni más ni menos que el tipo ideal de la bíblica Esposa, el poético ejemplar de la Mujer fuerte, cuando aún no se ha borrado de su frente el nimbo del candor, y sin embargo ya se adivina su entereza y majestad futura. Andando el tiempo aquella gracia había de ser severidad, y a las oscuras trenzas sucederían las canas de plata, sin que em la pura frente imprimiesse jamás una mancha el delito ni uma arruga el remordimiento.! Cuán sazonada madurez prometía tan suave primavera! (239)

The courtship scene in the drawing-room further consubstantiates this operative dichotomy, when the exterior and stylized image of the characters is emphasized:

> They passed the afternoon in the drawing-room, showing Don Pedro numerous knick-knacks, such as stereoscopes and photograph albums, which in those days were very elegant objects and not at

> all common. Rita and Manolita made sure that their cousin had a good look at the portraits that showed them leaning against chairs or pillars- the classic postures insisted on by photographers at the time. (77)
>
> Enseñaron a Don Pedro infinidad de quisicosas: estereóscopos, álbunes de fotografías, que eran entonces objetos muy elegantes y nada comunes. Rita y Manolita obligaban al primo a fijarse en los retratos que las representaban apoyadas en una silla o en una columna, actitud clásica que por aquel tiempo imponían los fotógrafos. (187-88)

In summary, the presentation of the female characters as images, *i.e.* as visual surfaces fashioned according to the latest trends of taste, introduces a different interpretative regimen from the one preferred by Julián. In addition, this superficial reading appears to be the sole level Don Pedro Moscoso is capable of engaging with, and even so deficiently. In effect, Don Pedro fails to perform other reading protocols, and seems unable to imaginatively understand the new regimens of perception that the stereoscopes and photographies operate. In the course of the two novels, Don Pedro's hermeneutical failure appears to be presented, at least partially, as the cause for the decay the family line is subject to. It could be argued that it is in part due to Don Pedro's deficiency in understanding that Primitivo, the *majordomo* of Ulloa, is able to exert power over his master, as he is the one who manages the family archives, who writes in them and thus controls the family history and finances, and keenly plots its demise under Don Pedro's oblivious eyes. By inscribing Sabel into the Moscoso genealogy and symbolically scratching Nucha from its pages (a case in point is when the majordomo tries to prevent the trip to Santiago and Don Pedro's marriage by actually attempting to shoot Julián; Nucha falls ill when aware of the illicit relationships going on at *Los Pazos*), Primitivo is also inscribing the lines of the incest plot to be developed in *Mother Nature*.

To continue with the episode taking place in Santiago de Compostela, we can select a few moments centred in interpretative skills of the characters that spill to the whole narrative. In addition to the portraying of the female characters mentioned above, another instance of reading exterior appearances is conveyed on the occasion Don Pedro is touring through the town. Let us consider the quotation bellow:

> As for the things that in an ancient town can delight a cultivated spirit- the eternity of *art kept alive in monuments, ruins, and relics*- Don Pedro understood these about as well as he understood Latin or Greek. *Old mossy stones*! He already had plenty of those in the manor. […] For example, the Gloria portico in the cathedral. Look how badly made saints were! The female ones so skinny they *didn't even look human*! And the pillars- look at how roughly they were carved! It would have been worth seeing one of these learned men who inquire into the meaning of a religious monument trying to prove to Don Pedro that the Gloria portico contained great poetry and profound symbolism. *Symbolism? Fiddlesticks!* The portico was just a piece of *shoddy workmanship*, with figures that looked all crumbly, which went to show how backward they were in those antediluvian days. In short, of all the sights in Santiago, the marquis paid attention to only one, and that of very recent making: his cousin Rita. (79-80. My emphasis)

> y en cuanto a lo que en un pueblo antiguo puede enamorar a un espíritu culto, los grandes recuerdos, la eterna vida del arte conservada en monumentos y ruinas, de eso entendía Don Pedro lo mismo que de griego o latín. ¡Piedras mohosas! Ya le estaban las de los Pazos. […] por ejemplo, la Gloria de la Catedral. ¡Vaya unos santos más mal hechos y unas santas más flacuchas y sin forma humana!, ¡unas columnas más toscamente esculpidas! Sería de ver a alguno de estos sabios que escudriñan el sentido de un monumento religioso, consagrándose a la tarea de demonstrar a don Pedro que el pórtico de la Gloria encierra alta poesía y profundo simbolismo. ¡Simbolismo! ¡Jerigonzas! El pórtico estaba muy mal labrado, y las figuras parecían pasadas por tamiz. Por fuerza las artes andaban atrasadísimas en aquellos tiempos de Maricastaña. Total, que de los monumentos de Santiago se atenía el marqués a uno de fábrica muy reciente: su prima Rita." (190-91)

Here it becomes evident that we are upon a literal reader. In other words, in his vague understanding of art, Don Pedro considers that art amounts to nothing more than a replica of reality, and while doing so, should only be concerned in appealing to his personal sense of the beautiful. The flattening of symbolic meaning into an insignificant object (or differently put, an object whose meaning is reduced to its practical function), a "fiddlestick", echoes the famous "object-lesson" episode in Charles Dicken's *Hard Times* (1854) when Sissy Jupe, admonished in her fancy, is constrained into defining a horse exclusively based on its biological attributes. Moreover, this passage provides us with an example of the metafictional scope the background can acquire in the narrative. The several enumerated monuments and picturesque places of the city are the elements composing the narrator's postcard presentation of Santiago de Compostela, and if on the one hand, this picture-like description creates a "reality effect" and seeks to establish a mirror relation between the representation and its referent, on the other hand, the referent itself, the supposed "real thing" is called into doubt. This ambiguous status could be the result from a particular subject reading or representing it, one could argue, Don Pedro seeing the Cathedral as a pile of stones, or the mere scenery serving as the frame for Rita. Or another option, an educated individual observing in it all the carvings of an

architectural school, its palimpsestic or intertextual resonances. However, it is my persuasion that the narrative is conveying something slightly different from the possibilities of multiple-perspectivism: it is implying the very opaque status of the referents one equates with reality.

3.3. (Mis)Reading home backgrounds II: fragile materiality

The fragile nature of the referent as an anchor of reality instantiated by the background and the material elements that belong to it emerges at other places in the *The House of Ulloa*. A case in point is the visit made by the newly-weds, Don Pedro and Nucha, around the districts of Cebre and Loio. In Cebre the couple visits the local elite represented by the judge. The material possessions and exterior environment this family inhabit are a conspicuous synecdoche to the backwardness of the provincial town and the countryside's gentry. In the judge's house for instance the corridors are too narrow for two people to walk side by side and are badly lit, and consequently makes people bump into furniture. This being a physical and painful contact with the world of objects. Furthermore, the dressing fashion of these characters is also made part of the symbolic conglomerate of backwardness and decay. Here, instead of hiding some other reality or masking a deeper truth, the surface comes about not only as a revelatory screen but also as the sole constituent of a character. This becomes more intelligible if one considers the conclusions Nucha reaches about the Judge's wife by simply surveying her fashion sensibilities. The judge's wife inadequate sense of what is fashionable contributes to a negative depiction of provincial life, making Nucha, one of the novel's moral barometers, subsume to a perspective of mockery:

> Nucha did not usually laugh at people, but she could not help being amused by the judge's wife, who was considered the most fashionable woman in Cebre. She gave a secret smile to Julián and pointed out, with an imperceptible wink, the necklaces, lockets and brooches the señora was wearing round her neck. The judge's wife, in turn, studied the newly wedded lady from Santiago with great attention, and made a mental note of the simplicity of her "accessories". (124)

> Aunque Nucha no pecaba de burlona, no pudo menos de hacerle gracia el atavío de la jueza, que pasaba por el figurín vivo de Cebre, y a hurtadillas sonrió a Julián mostrándole con imperceptible guiño los collares, dijes y broches que lucía en el cuello la señora, mientras ésta a su vez devoraba e inventariaba el sencillo adorno de la recién casada santiaguesa. (248)

In Loiro a similar sense of decay is portrayed, albeit this time, the surroundings acquire more gothic undertones:

> The road up the mountain to Loiro ran along cliffs and precipices that only properly became passable as the domain of the Dean was reached— a domain once vast and rich, but now reduced almost to nothing through disentailment. The monastic- looking rectory still boasted signs of past splendour. […] then laboriously descending the staircase with its wide steps and huge stone banister, came two monstrous, deformed human beings, who seemed even more grotesque because they were together. (124)

> Era preciso para ir a Loiro internarse bastante en la montaña, y seguir una senda llena de despeñaderos y precipicios, que sólo se hacía practicable al acercarse a los dominios del arciprestazgo, vastos y ricos algún día, hoy casi anulados por la desamortización. La rectoral daba señales de su esplendor pasado; su aspecto era conventual. […] Por la escalera de anchos peldaños y monumental balaústre de piedra baja dificultosamente, con la lentitud y el balanceo con que caminan los osos puestos en dos pies, una pareja de seres humanos monstruosa, deforme, que lo parecía más viéndola así reunida: el Arcipreste y su hermana. (248-49)

Equally the visit to a local noble family, the Limiosos, does not provide a change of scenery, in fact, "even worse awaited them in the entrance hall. It had been years since woodworm and time had destroyed the floor-boards […]." (127) ["Fue peor quando entraron en la antesala. Muchos años hacía que la polilla y la vetustez habían dado cuenta de la tablazón del piso." (252-53)] and the episode concludes with a tragi-comic note of a chair falling to pieces upon being touched:

> without even a creak of resistance the chair began to collapse in all directions. Nucha stood up […] and let one of the last vestiges of the Limiosos' splendour collapse on to the floor forever. […] Although they made no comment on it, perhaps even being unaware of it, they had been touched by that inexplicable sadness evoked when one witnesses something coming to its inevitable end. (128-129)

> [y apenas se hubo sentado en él, conoció con terror que el asiento se desvencijaba, se hundía; que se largaba cada pedazo del sitial por su lado sin crujidos ni resistencia; y con el instinto de la mujer encinta, se puso de pie, dejando que la última prenda del esplendor de los Limiosos se derrumbase en el suelo para siempre … Salieron del goteroso Pazo cuando ya anochecía, y sin que se lo comunicasen, sin que ellos mismos pudiesen acaso darse cuenta de ello, callaron todo el camino porque les oprimía la tristeza inexplicable de las cosas que se van.] (254)

This crumbling furniture and settings index the precarious status that materiality and objects occupy in the narrative, and as a consequence, compromise their own aptitude to be stable deictic entities, stable focus of direction or meaning. If, on the one hand, they are a reflex of some social group (or particular person), offering a kind of metonymic representation of it, or

may even stand for the environmental conditioners of character, on the other hand, they materialize as fragile indicators of such aspects of human nature since they are on the verge of disappearing or letting one literally fall through termite eaten boards. Thus, they are what could be called porous and unreliable settings and objects.

As Nucha and Don Pedro travel around the district, their trajectory describes a circle spiralling inward, a narrative container that denotes porous framing qualities and thus, transfigures *Los Pazos* into a contiguous ruin of its environs. In other words, the narrative operates in this imagery of surrounding and entanglement between the frame and the framed. In the same way in which at the beginning of the narrative, Julián shuddered at the sight of hybridization between the human and the animal world, the pious Nucha is possessed of an intrepid rush to "inquiring into everything, investigating every nook and cranny" (118) ["mostraba afición suma a recorrer la casa, a informarse de todo, a escudriñar los sitios más recónditos y trasconejados"(241)], an attitude which leaves the chaplain in great distress, should she find the true secret harbored behind those walls. The manor house articulates this imbrication of camouflage and visible transgression, appearing as a sort of vault that needs to be unlocked, and in a mirroring effect, the narrative itself is overwritten in the image of the house holding a secret. Not unlike we have seen in *Effi Briest*, there is a play with a Gothic revival, especially if we attend to the literary prototype of a terrified woman inhabiting an inhospitable place neglected or abused by her spouse, prey to a series of untamed and unnamable emotions.

However, evoking the Gothic undertones of Pardo Bazán's novel also brings to the fore what in *Housing Problems* Susan Bernstein describes as "an easily recognizable architectural rhetoric" (46) that is not only manifest in the construction of buildings *per se*, but also in the appearance of a gothic literary genre in which "the exaggerated and mechanical repetition of architectural features in Gothic literature, described conventionally and consistently installs the

very structure of the genre"(48). The use of "Gothic" as a descriptive term has a layered outspan: on the one hand, it is a term which appeared during the Renaissance to designate medieval architecture and thus retrospectively present it as whole style of excessive ornamentation and lack of organic totality (44); on the other hand, it transported an ideological and semiological luster which associated it with barbarism, that which is foreign and unsettles delimitations of the outside and the inside, the pure and the impure, dating back to the disputes between the Roman Empire and the other European peoples. As I have mentioned before, Julián is one of the characters through whose Christian eyes the frontiers of order and propriety appear blurred. In particular, the narrator tells of an episode where the chaplain accidentally witnesses a cartomancy session conducted by La Sabia in the kitchen of the manor, and this may be considered a gothic episode.

In this session, La Sabia is, supposedly, revealing to Sabel the future of the Moscoso family, and one infers, with hints from the narrator, because the latter might want to know not simply if she will replace Nucha, but rather how to do so. Despite the dramatic set-up of La Sabia, the narrator ironizes her "revealing" of the failed marriage between Nucha and the Marquis as a statement of the obvious. However, perturbed by this devilish divinatory ritual, the signs of which he only half understands, Julián falls into a nightmarish slumber that reads like a transfer from a Gothic scenery script, as he finds himself entrapped in

> a dull almost monastic eighteenth-century building. Now, although still recognizably the same place, it had changed its shape: the garden with boxwood trees and ponds was now a wide, deep moat; the thick walls were filled with arrow-slits and crowned with battlements; the doorway had become a drawbridge, with creaking chains- in other words, a real medieval castle with even the romantic detail of the Moscoso standard floating above the keep. (Pardo Bazán, *The House* 167)

> su aspecto amazacotado, conventual, de construcción del siglo XVIII; sino que sin dejar de ser la misma, había mudado de forma: el huerto con bojes y estanque era ahora ancho y profundo foso, las macizas murallas se poblaban de saeteras, se coronaban de almenas; el portalón se volvía puente levadizo, con cadenas rechinantes; en suma, era un castillote feudal, hecho y derecho, sin que le faltase ni el romántico aditamento del pendón de los Moscosos flotando en la torre del homenaje. (297)

Thus, as Nucha musters the courage to rummage in the obscure and maze-like rooms of the manor, she is also exhuming its soiled history. Nucha's investigations intensify as she becomes more and more perturbed by her suspicions about the conniving between Primitivo, Sabel and her husband.

Nucha's behaviour goes very much in line with the Female Gothic plot, which Anne Williams describes as a "narrative of disclosure and reparation: the fiction of 'psychoanalysis.' Like that of the Freudian analysand, the heroine's 'hysterical misery' may be alleviated by exploring the dark corridors, opening the closed doors, lifting the black veil" (171). In this way, exploring the house is equated to the investigation of the psyche and the past and eventually "The past impinges upon the present in the form of family history, and happiness is possible only when those hidden ties are brought to light." (171). In this analysis, Anne Williams sets Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1795) as the prototype of the female Gothic and identifies in it a revolutionary embryo of female emancipation in that it shows the process of working through emotions and thus surmounting violent circumstances and relations of power "it claims 'reason' for the female, it affirms the reality principle, and it claims that a young woman should not marry a man who does not offer her the prospect of a 'rational happiness'" (172). However, in *The House of Ulloa* Nucha's quest to escape Don Pedro's violent temper and bring to light the taboo relations that entrap the world of Cebre at large (not just Ulloa or the family) is somewhat frustrated. For Nucha moving through the manor is like engaging in physical violence, a "hand-to-hand fight" (174) ["lucha cuerpo a cuerpo" (306)], at the end of which, at last, she finds a truck hidden in underground tunnels, in a chamber where forgotten pieces of decoration and furniture are confused with human corpses, the scene of a crime in the shape of a sinister *tromp l'œil* of organic dead matter:

> the foot of a table looked like a mummified arm, the face of a clock was the white face of a dead man, and the worm-eaten riding-boots, sticking out from under the pile of papers and rags, made one imagine that the corpse of a murdered man lay hidden there. Nevertheless, Nucha went boldly towards the damp, macabre muddle and, with the choked and shaky voice of someone who has just achieved a great personal triumph, she shouted: 'Here's the trunk! Have them bring

> it up to me later.' She emerged in a lively mood, pleased with her persistence, having won the hand-to-hand fight with the large ramshackle house that frightened her so much. (174)
>
> [la pata de una mesa parecía un brazo momificado, la esfera de un reloj era la faz blanquecina de un muerto, y unas botas de montar carcomidas asomando por entre papeles y trapos despertaban en la fantasía la idea de un hombre asesinado y oculto allí. No obstante, Nucha, con paso resuelto, fue derecha al caos húmedo y medroso, y con la voz ahogada y conmovida de los que acaban de obtener un gran triunfo sobre sí mismos, gritó: —Aquí está el arcón… Que me lo suban después… Salió muy animada, satisfecha de su resolución, vencedora en la lucha cuerpo a cuerpo con el caserón que la asustaba. (306)].

Nevertheless, the chest vexes the hopes deposited in it, as it is found to be empty, there is nothing revelatory or empowering in its opening. Despite being construed as a possible key to the events and history surrounding the family, the chest appears to be nothing other than a mute pandora box, that instead of empowering Nucha to set the family record straight and restore the order sends her into a hysterical meltdown from which she will never fully recover. Shortly after the endeavour we described above, Nucha "screamed, […] let out broken hysterical laughs that sounded like sobs. Her trembling hands tore off the hooks on her dress, pressed against her temples, grabbed the sofa cushions and tore at them furiously." (175) ["se incorporaba lanzando un chillido, […] lanzando interrompidas carcajadas histéricas, que sonaban a llanto. Sus manos crispadas arrancaban los corchetes de su traje, o comprimían sus sienes, o se clavaban en los almohadones del sofá, arañándolos con furor." (307)]. The emptiness of the chest extracted from the most recondite corner of the manor materializes the silence of its archives, the symbolic figuration of their inaccessibility and erasure. Furthermore, this impossibility of reading any family history, that is the frustration of knowledge, as Julián for once rightly infers, casts a heavy weight and fear upon Nucha, who has no other alternative than to succumb to a hysterical "outburst" (175) ["explosión" (307)], in other words, Nucha becomes the symptomatic body of hidden and unverbalized family history.

Through this idiosyncratic highlighting of the Gothic reality that constitutes the world these characters inhabit, Emilia Pardo Bazán seems keen to suggest that the greatest violence and transgression is the act of blocking knowledge and of hindering the access to it, or even, as the presence of the empty vault appears to insinuate, that there is no ultimate truth or

knowledge to be gained. Moreover, La Sabia's cards with their excessive symbolic potential may in fact constitute an infinite charade, like Susan Bernstein concludes: "The suggestion of the role of architecture in the Gothic can be seen not only or not simply as a historical question, but rather as a problem of signification" (49). Indeed, it is the use of the generic frame of the Gothic with its machinery and its architecture as setting that allows Pardo Bazán to present family history as something uncanny, something that disturbs the division between internal meaning enveloped by external signifiers. Thus, the violence of the Ulloa familial relations (both past and present) in its excessiveness and literality chatters the architectural frame of the home, and by this token the narrative of family history becomes an unhomely place. Even the reconstruction of the chapel[115] and the plan Julián and Nucha hurriedly elaborate to escape the manor with the baby Manolita, which would restore a salvific Christian spirit, fail to hold a homely haven. The hindering of the resignification of the family legacy leads to death and unrooted wandering, suffice to think of Nucha's premature death and Julián's *de facto* exile.

> Quite clearly, things were back to the way they were the year before last, and it was equally clear that it was wrong for him to remain in that house another moment. He would have to leave, driven away by vice and vile wickedness. The Christian marriage, which, in a way, was his doing, had fallen apart and there was no trace left of a home, only a den of corruption and sin. (Pardo Bazán, *House of Ulloa* 159)
>
> [La cosa era bien clara. Situación: la misma del año penúltimo. Tenía que marcharse de aquella casa echado por el feo vicio, por el delito infame. No le era lícito permanecer allí ni un instante más. Salvo el debido respeto, se había llevado la trampa el matrimonio cristiano, en cierto modo obra suya, y ya no quedaba rastro de hogar, sino una sentina de corrupción y pecado. (288)].

In fact, like Colahan and Rodríguez mention "the violence exerted against Nucha by her husband, nonsensically imagined by Julián in the episode with the spider, is actually confirmed through the bruises the chaplain finds in her wrists, and in the end, she doesn't escape alive neither from the place nor from the story" ["la violencia contra ella por parte de su marido, ridículamente imaginada por Julián en la escena de la araña, se verifica después en

[115] Don Pedro only agrees to reconstruct the chapel for the sake of appearances among his electorate and to fall in the good graces of his Carlist supporters on the eve of the elections and the conflicts leading to what would be known as the Glorious Revolution.

las marcas rojas que el sacerdote le descubre en las muñecas, y al fin, ella no se escapa viva ni del lugar ni de la historia." (Colahan and Rodríguez 403)].

As readers we had already encountered the afore mentioned chest when, before Nucha's arrival from Santiago, Julián had attempted his luck at organizing the Ulloa archives. Overwhelmed by the reigning confusion, Julián is unable to break the cycle of Primitivo's self-serving book-keeping and other types of forgery and theft harboured there.[116] Nevertheless, alongside Julián's inglorious perusing through the mould eaten documents, the narrator makes us privy to the double inheritance of the current owner of the Ulloa manor, a paternal branch voted to intellectual liberal pursuit and the mother side keen on the accumulation of material richness. In fact, according to local legend, doña Micaela had been a hoarder, with a mania for exchanging every possession for gold coins, which she hid in chests in secret places (though this did not prevent their being stolen), so Nucha's finding might have been one of them. This excavating in the roots of the family tree also brings to the fore the forgery or the undue appropriation of the title of "Marquis of Ulloa" by don Pedro Moscoso, in a piece of paper that confounds Julián: "documents concerning a small land-division claim brought by Don Alberto Moscoso, don Pedro's father, against… the Marquis of Ulloa" (32) [la documentación relativa a un pleitecillo de partijas, sostenido por don Alberto Moscoso, padre de don Pedro, con… ¡el marqués de Ulloa! (133). Hence the real Marquis led his life in Madrid unaware that another branch of the family unduly used his title. Thus, in *The House of Ulloa* excavating family history becomes both a confrontation with empty signifiers (the chest) and forgery, in other words, narrative elements that adulterate the "original" story, rewriting it as an unhomely dwelling place.

[116] "All Julián got from his famous reorganization of the archives was an aching head and sore feet. […] He could scent abuses and disorders wherever he went, but he was unable to put a finger on anything and so stop such practices, because of his lack of guile and astuteness." (34) ["Del famoso arreglo del archive sacó Julián los pies fríos y la cabeza caliente. [...] labor inútil, pues olfateando por todas partes abusos y desórdenes, no conseguía nunca, por su carencia de malicia y de gramática parda, poner el dedo sobre ellos y remediarlos" (136).

In this aspect, the work of Doña Emilia shares some similarities with Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and even with other novels like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), or with George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) analysed in the first chapter of this dissertation, where the centrality of the family history is connected to the randomness of its revelation and effects, and to quote Anne Williams in *The Art of Darkness* referring the Gothic charge of these works, "the prevalence of coincidence and accident in the tradition, no mere awkward plotting, is a thematic assertion that human experience creates a web of intricate connections, partly known, partly hidden (though no less powerful)" (Williams 171). On the whole, these novels give voice to the incognita ruling the relation between destiny and gratuitousness in the shaping of human life, as well as to the conception of the family lineage and pedigree as narratives of forgery, thus a world where nothing is what it seems, but whose effects become more noticeable when manifested as violence exerted upon the female characters. In Hardy's novel, the poor peddler John Durbeyfield's learning by chance of his noble d'Urberville ancestry is the catalyst for the tragic story.[117] In this way Durbeyfield, and the passing-by Parson, direct the narrative into a return to ancestral and atavistic stories, a trajectory that begins with the sending of Tess on the mission to get acquainted with the gentry inhabiting the d'Urberville mansion, hoping to make fortune and thus leave behind the haggler's life. However, this encounter at the d'Urberville estate reveals that, in fact, the present owners are not related to the original family: the merchant Simon Stokes simply changed his name to d'Urberville after he moved to that area of the county. Not knowing this, Tess lets herself be seduced by the exploitative Alec d'Urberville and accepts to work for him in order to make amends for the financial difficulties of her family she feels responsible for. Thus, like it happens in *The House of Ulloa* the quest for the hidden

[117] "Don't you really know, Durbeyfield, that you are the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the D'Urbervilles, who derive their descent from Sir Pagan D'Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conquerer." (Hardy 60).

"true" origins reveals yet another narrative of forgery, destitution, and violence. Furthermore, like in Pardo Bazán's novel, it is also the heirlooms and their interpretation that lead to uncanny dead-ends, instead of the desired acquittal and sense of homeliness. Mrs. Durbeyfield's obsession with the silver spoon, presumably a proof of their d'Urberville nobility, reveals to be sterile and meaningless in the fast- changing modern world, and indeed the look for shelter among the old tombs of the d'Urberville knights is no substitute for the eviction of the family. As Sophie Gilmartin reminds us in her analysis of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, "both common and old things can claim 'pure' pedigree, 'purity' in this sense signifying the pedigree's traceability back to an origin or early ancestor. The 'new and modern spirit without' which is 'shaking' Wessex disperses and dilutes purity of lineage." (201). Nonetheless these objects remain omens of past crimes and barbarism, as the narrator surmises

> Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter. (Hardy 157)

Similarly, Pardo Bazán, by making use of the Gothic framing, is able to contour the orthodoxy of Naturalist determinism and try instead to consider heredity and its moral baggage in terms of uncanniness and forgery, as in a blurring of its meaning and interpretation frontiers. Unlike Colahan and Rodríguez who consider that Pardo Bazán "designs the novel according to a typically gothic partiture with a comic-serious and parodic intent" ["construye la novela dentro de una pauta típicamente gótica con actitud serio-cómica e intencionadamente paródica" (401)],[118] I claim the Galician writer seems closer to use the Gothic to suggest how symbolic

[118] The introduction trip and the concomitant visit to the Limiosos and the Abbot and his sister do have a comic effect. Furthermore, Julián's fearful imagination can equally be conceived as a parody of Gothic's exploration of strong emotions and sexual violence, again "o la represión sexual de Julián, que en vez de tomar carácter violento, halla salida en una ridícula fijación de 'familia sagrada'; o, ya realmente rayando así en lo melancó1ico como lo risible, la descripción de cementerio que cierra el libro, con el dolor fren6tico de Julián por Nucha y la idea de que en la vegetación 'se habrían encarnado, por misteriosa transmigración, las almas, vegetativas también en cierto modo, de los que allí dormían para siempre, sin haber vivido, sin haber amado'." (Colahan and Rodriguéz 402). However, as I have argued throughout this chapter, the use of Gothic is not limited to that effect. Here I agree with Tenreiro Prego when he contends that "The source of the parody, then, is not to be found in the Gothic

power may complicate the narrative of the noble bloodline. As we have seen Don Pedro Moscoso's appropriation of the title of Marquis is a strategy of exerting influence in his rural community, however, the manor in ruins and dependent on loans to its own *majordomo* tells the story of a progressively empty signifier with weak performative power in the modern world. The name and the manor of Ulloa are no longer apt containers for the regeneration of family line, even more so if we consider that Don Pedro refuses to recognise his daughter as heiress. However, neither is Julián's religious utopia of the re-enactment of the Biblical Marriage. In fact, as Jobst Welge argues in *Genealogical Fictions*, Julián's own projection in the place of Don Pedro in the marriage to Nucha and in the parenting of Manolita casts him in the role of a "metaphorical father (or second "mother") of such an imaginary, nonbiological family […]. The imaginary and the biological family are shown as equally pathological and as complementary sides of the same tragic constellation." (103). Thus, *The House of Ulloa* ends in a register of failure of re-signifying the family and of building alternative narratives to house it.

3.4. Summoning all to the library: the text behind the text

There are two symmetric scenes in *The House of Ulloa* (chapter IV) and *Mother Nature* (Chapter XVII), which take place in the library of *Los Pazos* and in which the protagonists are the outsider members of the family and of its story, the priest Julián Alvarez and Gabriel Pardo de la Lage (Nucha's younger brother), who come as visitors to the shrines of Ulloa with the aim of organizing the moral and financial life of the familty. The upfront appearance of the library is conveyed by the sensations of fear and unease it provokes on those who go inside. [119]

elements she employs, but in the social context of the rural world, depicted as ignorant, brutal, or superstitious" (15).

[119] "The truth was that the archives had given Julián that same sense of unease as the rest of that vast, threatening ruin, which may once have been a symbol of greatness, but which now was rapidly crumbling. Julián had not actually analysed these fears of imminent decay, but, had he known more of the marquis's family history, he would have realized that they were fully justified." (29) ["La verdad era que el archivo había producido en el alma de Julián la misma impresión que toda la casa: la de una ruina, ruina vasta y amenazadora, que representaba algo

As it has been mentioned previously, it is an uncanny space, where family secrets remain latent and where Primitivo cunningly robs the patrimony and earnings of his employer.

When Julián first enters the library he comes across a disorganized and damp room, where the bookshelves instead of being protected by see-through glass are locked by panels of iron grille-work. Moreover, the whole place is filled with bundles of paper commingling with vermin. Therefore, the "family archives" as Don Pedro half-solemnly, half- mockingly names the library, seem much more a place of erasure and dismantling than an organized and systematised repository.[120] As Julián sets to make his way through the piles of paper and gather information about the family history, book-keeping and the like, he comes across a set of books which disturb his priestly sensibilities. This neglected pile of books includes some of the most famous names of the Enlightenment period, such as Voltaire and Rousseau. Julián's conservative sensibility, however, impels him into a destructive act to these volumes deemed subversive by letting them succumb to decay:

> Everything was now in order, except for one section of the cabinet containing some sombre-looking old books whose dark spines were embossed with gold leaf. It was the library of an Ulloa from the turn of the century. Julián stretched out his hand, took one of the volumes at random and read, "La Henriade, a poem by Monsieur Voltaire, translated into Spanish verse…" […] Not that he was excessively intolerant, but he would gladly have treated Monsieur Voltaire in the same way as he had treated the cockroaches. However he limited himself to condemning that particular set of books to eternal dustiness, and did not even pass his old rag over their spines, so that moths, maggots and spiders, so ruthlessly pursued every corner, might find refuge behind merry Arouet and his enemy, the sentimental Jean-Jacques, who had also been sleeping there peacefully since 1816. (27)
>
> todo estaba arreglado ya, excepto un tramo de la estantería donde Julián columbró los lomos oscuros, fileteados de oro, de algunos libros antiguos. Era la biblioteca de un Ulloa, un Ulloa de principios del siglo: Julián extendió la mano, cogió un tomo al azar, lo abrió, leyó la portada... "La Henriada, poema francés, puesto en verso español: su autor, el señor de Voltaire..." [...] no era en extremo intolerante, pero lo que es a Voltaire, de buena gana le haría lo que a las cucarachas: no obstante, limitose a condenar la biblioteca, a no pasar ni un mal paño por el lomo de los libros: de

grande en lo pasado, pero en la actualidad se desmoronaba a toda prisa. Era esto en Julián aprensión no razonada, que se transformaría en convicción, si conociese bien algunos antecedentes de familia del marqués." (129)].

[120] Bundles of papers and documents could be glimpsed through the half-open doors of the book-cases, while on the floor, on the two calfskin chairs, on the table and even on the window-still were more bundles, all of them creased and torn, yellowed with age, and nibbled by vermin. Such a mass of paper gave off a damp, stale smell that burned the back of one'd throat unpleasantly. The marquis of Ulloa stopped in the doorway and, with a somewhat solemn expression, announced, "The family archives". (Pardo Bazán, *The House*, 23-24) ["Las estanterías entreabiertas dejaban asomar legajos y protocolos en abundancia; por el suelo, en las dos sillas de baqueta, encima de la mesa, en el alféizar mismo de la enrejada ventana, había más papeles, más legajos, amarillentos, vetustos, carcomidos, arrugados y rotos; tanta papelería exhalaba un olor a humedad, a rancio, que cosquilleaba en la garganta desagradablemente. El marqués de Ulloa, deteniéndose en el umbral y con cierta expresión solemne, pronunció: —El archivo de la casa." (122)].

> suerte que polillas, gusanos y arañas, acosadas en todas partes, hallaron refugio a la sombra del risueño Arouet y su enemigo el sentimental Juan Jacobo, que también dormía allí sosegadamente desde los años de 1816. (125-126)

As can be seen from this excerpt, the character refrains from engaging with and reading the material that is presented to him. Maybe this aspect stands out because literary history has provided us with so many instances of readers spell-bound by fiction, whose very act of reading becomes the motor of plots (Don Quixote being the paradigmatic example). Here, however, we seem to be in the presence of a character who chooses not to read and therefore not to know. Julián's unwillingness to face knowledge is in fact what allows the story to continue developing, the illicit relationships continue their course under his nose, and his own delusions pass unchecked, contributing to what Denise DuPont called Julián's "failed Quixotic project" (305).[121] Foregoing the engagement with the Enlightenment thinkers, Julián evades the new models of society being forged, the defence of religious tolerance, the contestation of absolutist monarchy and remaining structures of feudalism, in some novel ways of conceding the relation between nature and culture. Furthermore, the dismissive attitude of Julián to the texts referencing to the "quarrel" between Rousseau and Voltaire *a propos* the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755,[122] from which resulted Rousseau's *Letter on Providence* and Voltaire's rejection of it, seems to insinuate Julián's inability to respond, not to a natural catastrophe per se, but to the violence of familial relations at Ulloa. As we have seen in the previous section, Julián's incomplete sentimental and intellectual education is linked to the failed understanding of uncontrollable aspects of nature and the inadequacy of his own vision of the re-enactment of

[121] DuPont also integrates the aspect of gender, arguing convincingly that Pardo Bazán, in this case, by describing the chaplain with "typically feminine" attributes, connects him with unbridled emotion and poor rationality. The obvious gender bias and its important role and evolution in the work of Dona Emilia, however, will not be thoroughly addressed in this dissertation.

[122] The rivalry between the two philosophers is alluded to in the following passage: "[…] so that moths, maggots and spiders, so ruthlessly pursued in every corner, might find refuge behind merry Arouet and his enemy, the sentimental Jean-Jacques […]" (Pardo Bazán, *The House* 27)/ "[...] de suerte que polillas, gusanos y arañas, acosadas en todas partes, hallaron refugio a la sombra del risueño Arouet y su enemigo el sentimental Juan Jacobo [...]" (Pardo Bazán, *Los Pazos* 126).

the holy family as a providential intervention, thus leaving the door open for the incest plot and the disintegration of the family by the end of *Mother Nature.* Notwithstanding, Julián's reluctance to make room for the ideas vehiculated by the above referred philosophers, draws the attention to the very pile of books he wishes to cast into oblivion, and consequently into the ideas professed inside them. Thus, Julián allocates these texts to the background of the plot, and with this action transforms them into the subtext of the plot and into its underlying referent. The book's titles, paratextual entities *par excellence*, become the real upon which the novel sets its representative scheme, and whose denouement will inform *Mother Nature*.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, *Mother Nature* presents a mirror scene to this one impersonated by Julián. The episode in question concerns Gabriel's visit to the library and his becoming interested precisely in the books that had been left to rot by the priest many years before:

> When he opened the cabinet doors, covered with wire grillwork instead of glass, a very song smell of mold, dust, and dampness was emitted; frightened ash-gray moths took flight from their favourite refuge.[…] Each book he opened was a depository of larvae, a network of tunnels opened up by the teeth of some bibliophilic insect, and the cadaver of the eighteenth century, all eaten up by worms, was rising from its grave. Perforated and shaped into a thousand picturesque designs by moths, there were *The Henriade*, *The Social Contract*, the *Universal Morality*, the *Confessions*, the *New Héloïse*, and *Pamela Andrews*, on which the rats, in order not to accomplish less than the bugs, had gnawed away the front edges and made the edges of the pages look like a jagged saw. All that Gabriel found in fair condition were the works of Feijoo and Sarmiento, some volumes of *The Universal Traveler*, and a copy of the *Names of Christ*. (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 133).

> Al abrir las hojas forradas, en vez de vidrios, de rejilla de alambre, salió una tufarada de moho, de polvo, de humedad; cenicientas polillas huyeron despavoridas de su refugio predilecto. [...] Cada libro que abría era un depósito de larvas, una red de túneles abiertos por el diente del insecto bibliófilo: y el cadáver del siglo XVIII se alzaba de su sepulcro, todo comido de gusanos: allí estaban, calados y alicatados por la polilla con mil pintorescos dibujos, *La Enriqueida*, *El Contrato Social*, la *Moral universal*, las *Confesiones*, la *Nueva Heloisa*: y también las novelas del género sentimental interminable; *Clara Harlowe*, *Pamela Andrews*, a las cuales las ratas, por no ser menos que los bichos, habían roído los cantos y puesto como una sierra el borde de las hojas. Lo único que encontró Gabriel en mediano estado fueron las obras de Feijoo y Sarmiento, unos tomos del *Viajero universal* y un ejemplar de los *Nombres*, así como la traducción del *Cantar de los cantares*, [...]. (Pardo Bazán, *Madre Naturaleza* 246-47)

Thus, Gabriel's presence reactivates or resuscitates these dormant representatives of eighteenth century philosophical thought into the narrative, by taking the time to sit and read in the library. By focusing on the conspicuousness of the titles I am suggesting that, the books, which had

constituted the innocuous background in *The House of Ulloa*, the rotten and crushed subtext, are brought to the fore not only as a possible organizing principle for the interpretation of reality and resignification of family history, but also as a *mise en abyme* of the novel, thus suggesting that "what language refers to- any language- is a textualized and contextualized referent." (Hutcheon 171). In a very literal sense, Pardo Bazán through the literal figure of the book in *Mother Nature* blurs the distinction between text and context, real and representation, nature and culture, a strategy followed in several other novels, which has compelled Maryellen Bieder to defend that it "produce[s] an 'overdetermination of reference' […] the multiple genre intertexts […] and the gendered expectations they arouse are therefore a frequent cause of misreading." (58). In fact, as it happens in many other Pardo Bazán's novels, it will be shown, especially through the narrator's ironic gaze, Gabriel will be prone to misread situations, and in the act create ill-advised parallels and correspondences resulting in a stale family narrative, which is the result of "an amalgamation of romantic, *costumbristas* and realist elements, creating a grotesque contrast between lyric and prose, idealism, romantic sentiment and vulgar prosaic reality" (My translation) ["una amalgama de elementos románticos, costumbristas y realistas, resultando de ello un contraste grotesco entre poesía y prosa, entre idealismo, sentimiento romántico y realidad prosaica y vulgar." (Sotelo Vázquez 429)].

Nucha's brother is a figure moving between the secluded space of the home and the open space of nature, and consequently consubstantiates the peripatetic personage popularized in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782), an author whose works, as mentioned above, figured amongst the shelves that caught Gabriel's eye. In fact, Gabriel Pardo de La Lage is a character that will reappear in another text by Doña Emilia, in the novella *Midsummer Madness* [*Insolación*] (1889), and although the events in the two texts are autonomous, the constitution of the character's personality and mode of thinking is established

in parallel with *Mother Nature*.[123] In the later novel Gabriel appears as a "naïf, very eccentric, and possessed by certain odd ideas which he advocates at times with the greatest warmth and persistency" (Pardo Bazán, *Midsummer* 9) ["inocentón, y sobre todo muy estrafalario y bastante pernicioso en sus ideas, que a veces sostiene con gran calor y terquedad (Pardo Bazán, *Insolación* 31], and furthermore as the protagonist of a unbelievable story: "others declare that he is hopelessly in love with a cousin or niece, and that she is the heroine of I don't know what extraordinary romance." (9) ["otros afirman que está enamorado de una prima o sobrina suya, acerca de quien se refieren no sé qué historias raras." (31)]. In this way *Midsummer Madness* retrospectively reads *Mother Nature* also as a product of romanesque fantasy and gossip, which as a consequence places this novel in an uncertain frontier of genre. In other words, this connection between the novels places *Mother Nature* at the threshold of distinct representations of the relation between reality and fiction, and in so doing exacerbates the conscience of the difficulty of achieving a unified and clear vision of the world.

Gabriel's perceived eccentricity stems also from his political and philosophical convictions, which are not formed by the experience of the world, but in other words, his relation to the world is often portrayed as being mediated by his readings. When his niece Manuela takes him on walks to make him familiar with the Galician countryside, the vocabulary Gabriel finds to describe and cognitively apprehend what he is being shown is to make use of Rousseaunian terms, of describing people living innocently in a state of nature. Gabriel imagines himself as a Pygmalion and the countryside as the place where sociological utopias and experiments might still be possible to be performed and thus guide humanity in direction of progress. For instance, he entertains ideas such as extracting people's desires and aspirations, "'Don't you think it would be pleasant to go about entering all the houses of these

[123] In *Midsummer Madness* we find a bed-ridden female narrator recounting the misadventures that caused her to catch an insolation (this aspect evokes Rousseau's own *Reveries* written when he was bedridden in the aftermath of an accident).

poor people one by one finding out what they need what they think?'" (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 140) ["¿No te parece a ti que daría gusto ir entrando así en todas las casas de estas pobres gentes, una por una, y enterarse de lo que necesitan, de lo que quieren, de lo que piensan…?" (256)]. Moreover, the Major sees his niece as the embodiment of innocent nature "she was in short, like virgin wax and Gabriel had an intoxicating presentiment of the delightful impressions a man such as himself would know how to instill in her." (141) ["era en suma una cera virgen, y Gabriel presentía enajenado los deliciosos relieves que un hombre como él sabría imprimirle." (256)]. Consequently, Manuela's connection to the countryside is also made the vehicle to articulate the topos of the dichotomy between the pure countryside and the corrupted, artificial urban space:

> we have here what you might call a *naife*, that is a diamond in the rough? […] Oh! Unaffectedness, a primitive rustic character, exclusive contact with Mother Nature, her only teacher and her only protector. The devil take all of what one is so fed up with seeing out there: conceited young women all dolled up and dressed in accordance with the latest pretentiousness in the women's magazine *Elegant Fashion.*. (*Mother Nature*, 177).
>
> "Tenemos aquí lo que se llama un *naife*, o sea un diamante en bruto […] ¡Ah! Sencillez, carácter primitivo y campestre, comercio exclusivo con la madre naturaleza, su única maestra y su única protectora… Cargue el diablo con todo eso que está uno harto de ver por ahí: muñecas emperejiladas y vestidas según las cursilerías de *La Moda Elegante.*" (302).

Notwithstanding, as already mentioned in the beginning of this discussion, nature also emerges as something dreadful, to which Gabriel reacts with a "humanitarian shudder" upon entering La Sabia's house and noticing the cohabiting of humans and animals in the same rooms (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 138; *Madre Naturaleza* 253). This vision collides with Gabriel's idyllic understanding of the state of nature. On the other hand, Manolita herself relates to the natural world differently, she navigates it not through the moral lens, but through a literal approach: she distinguishes wheat from rye (Bazán, *Mother Nature* 130; *Madre Naturaleza* 239), that is, for her nature is not a uniform amalgam of abstract representations, but composed of discrete elements with practical functions, and is usually presented as having a sensorial connection to it.

At this point it becomes clearer that the focus on the books scattered on floor, piles with the volumes of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, complexifies the traditional idea of the state of nature as a state of innocence and moral neutrality, which to quote Paul de Man goes beyond "Rousseau's assertion of the primary of voice over the written word, his adherence to the myth of original innocence, his valorization of unmediated presence over reflection" ("Reading Rousseau" 3). It is widely taken for granted that in his *First Discourse* Rousseau condemns the arts and the writerly practices as producers of artifice and deviating human kind from the cultivation of virtuous citizenship, a position which although having led him to win the essay prize of the Dijon Academy, also placed him in counter-current to the Enlightenment. However, one could recall that in *Of Grammatology* Derrida's thesis is that Rousseau's theory of language, as expounded in a subsequent work like *The Origins of Human Language*, is in fact a metaphysics of presence with a disguised postulation within itself of its own impossibility via the prevalence of the linguistic experience as the grounding relation to nature, thus one that postulates distance and absence. In fact, in Pardo Bazán's novel the reference to the Genevese philosopher works not so much to depict the state of nature as the state of innocence, but to precisely suggest the equivoque in such a one dimensional view: as the final lament of Gabriel will confirm, nature is both mother and stepmother. Gabriel's shudder is the fearful discovery of duplicity in a world he wished transparent, grounded in identity rather than in difference.

Further along, in chapter twenty-five, we will also find Gabriel reclining under a chestnut absorbed in a reverie. Presented in a fragmented page layout, Gabriel's thoughts are rendered as a free-association process, a congregation of all the scattered and incomplete conversations that had previously taken place in the narrative and the ones which would still do so, presented in the form of maxims. In this dreamy state Gabriel asks what may be the one of core the questions of both novels: "And in short what do I see?" (194) ["Y yo, ¿qué veo, en resumen?"(327)]. If Pardo Bazán's two novels would be considered as a *roman à thèse*, the

"message" would not so much be found at rest in the consensual diagnosis of the decadence of Spanish society embodied by the incest plot and the uncivilized countryside. Instead it would be sought in this question that connects the way the world and nature are read or interpreted and how the representation of such perceptual relations translates into a viable narrative of regeneration. So Gabriel continues asking "That the outside world doesn't exist; that we create it? That's nonsense! Transcendental idealism. This urge to scrutinize the basis of all things can go to blazes" (195) ["¿Que no existe el mundo exterior; que lo creamos nosotros? ¡Puf! Idealismo trascendental… Váyase a paseo este afán de escudriñar el fondo de todas las cosas…". (328)]. At the beginning of the narrative, we are told that Gabriel dabbles in many of the philosophical currents of his time, after the Carlist wars, for instance, Gabriel turns from metaphysics to positivism. He dedicates himself to geology, the matter of the earth, however, in a dilettante manner and quickly discouraged because this science did not provide him with the answer to the enigma of "substance" (80). In fact, his inability to conceptualize substance is ironized by the narrator and, in this way, Gabriel appears as a somewhat unreliable reader and interpreter of reality, and therefore, an unlikely candidate to halt the course of decay of the Ulloas (and Spain, if we consider the synecdoche aspect of Galicia). Furthermore, Gabriel is usually found in dreamy states throughout the narrative unable to avoid the "irresistible tendency of his vivid, feverish, plastic imagination to construct an entire poem, a system, a vast, universal theory, upon the sight of an object, upon the base of a word" (84) ["la irresistible tendencia de su imaginación viva, ardorosa y plástica, a construir, con la vista de un objeto, sobre la base de una palabra," (175)]. Daringly comparing himself to Diogenes with the lamp, Gabriel believes he is always trying to see beyond what is immediately perceptible. However, the amalgamation of various half-understood philosophical currents and literary genres ebbs in his frustration, and conduces him to a disenchanted and somewhat conservative view of the world:

> "How disagreeable all this lying, all these social conventions are for me!" […] This society, which seems to be a badly restored monument, where hybridizations of all styles and hotchpotches of all manner keep piling up […] And so you go along with this one …, and that one …, and the next one …, and the one after that … It's true that it's all necessary to suppress human bestiality … If it weren't for that …, crash! When he found that the side on which he had stretched out was now warm, Gabriel turned onto the other side; and this change undoubtedly suggested revolutionary ideas to him, because he thought: "Present-day society is really harebrained! They might just as well blow it all up with dynamite …" But this new cold, pleasant corner could not help but inspire conservative doctrines in him" (178)

> —¡Qué antipática me es […] la mentira, la convención social! […] ¿Esta sociedad que parece un monumento mal restaurado, donde se amontonan hibridaciones de todos los estilos y mescolanzas de todos los órdenes… […] Y ajústese usted a esta… y a aquella… y a la otra… y a la de más allá… Verdad es que todo hace falta para reprimir la bestialidad humana… A no ser por eso… ¡crac! Encontrando caliente ya el lado a que se había tendido, volvióse Gabriel del opuesto; y sin duda este cambio le sugirió ideas revolucionarias, porque pensó: —¡Valiente estafermo está la sociedad actual! Aunque la volasen con dinamita…Pero el rincón frío y agradable que halló hubo de inspirarle doctrinas conservadoras. (303-4)

With these final imprecations, Gabriel closes the circle of the philosophical reveries that had been initiated by Julián in *The House of Ulloa* by the sight of a pile of books in the manor's library.

The two inaugural moments in the library, as we have seen, show how the texts literally figured as books in the background, while should furnish the context for the plot, actually merge this hierarchical boundary. In fact, they guide the plot through many writing genres, each presenting a possible model of representing the relation between nature and culture, from the religious narrative, the pastoral idyl, to the naturalist novel. So, this textual and generic imprint on nature carried out by the two characters (Julián and Gabriel) at different times and different novels, creates the effect of repetition. The first tries to find in nature and the world correspondences with the divine world, wanting to picture it in the image of the "city of God" (fleeing or destructing everything that might shatter this view). The second character, however, ends up by finding the contradictions in nature, the spots that cannot quite be seen by human reason. Gabriel's dreamy reflections and wanderings in the countryside become intimations of a "crash", of a vision point where nature and culture are shadows of each other.

3.5. Erring in nature

In "From 'Fundamental Truths' to 'Playthings of Science'" Dale J. Pratt encounters, in spatial allegorical figures, the presence of an interrogation about evolution's and nature's roles in humanity. According to this scholar, the scenery in which Pedro and Manuela circulate and become romantically entangled, while unaware of being siblings, is revealing of this. At the beginning of *Mother Nature*, finding themselves under a storm, the young pair seeks shelter under a tree and inside a grotto, which according to Pratt

> each site allegorically representing a different possible origin for human nature, the Genesis story and Darwin's evolutionary model. The tree— […] ("Patriarchal tree")— is Eden's tree of life; the cave […] does not hold the thorns and weeds of a fallen world but recalls the teeming life of Darwin's "tangled bank". (74)

In fact, the love story between these two characters develops at the outskirts of society's norms and their interactions occur mostly in the middle of the natural world, in other words, they are usually enveloped by the vegetal, animal and atmospheric realms. As the narrator tells us, Manuela and Pedro circulate in the exterior space amidst "roads that are generally difficult to negotiate" (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 168) ["caminos generalmente difíciles" (290)][124], on the move like characters from a picaresque tale, the protagonists transgress various layers of the prevalent *mores*. These two characters cross the hierarchical divisions established by social conventions by holding double identities: Pedro is the servants' son, who is a bastard of nobility, and receives a gentleman's education in the town of Orense; Manuela is the noble girl, whose experience of the world is no different from that of a peasant connected to the traditional cycles of the land, thus becoming a mountain girl, as the narrator calls her several times. As mentioned, most of the interaction between Pedro and Manuela occurs as the oblivious couple explores the country territory and contacts with its inhabitants. Through each of these encounters they come across a sort of learning stations, where diverse half-assimilated theories

[124] Here the narrator is describing the Galician territory as a patch of farm properties, divided by haphazard delimitations and family relations, and also geological formations such as "corredoiras".

for the origin of human life and nature comingle. For instance, by the mouth of a drunken bonesetter, Señor Anton, they hear that

> it says there, yes, señorito!, that the stars in the sky are just like us…, if you'll forgive me!, like this universe- world over here…, and the people are also born there, and they die, and they eat, and run around chasing girls… […] No matter how much you may go round and round, this big, big, very big thing […] is more powerful than you and I, and the other one, and everyone, hang it all! (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 43)

> Pues allí dice, ¡sí, señorito!, que las estrellas del cielo son como nosotros… ¡con perdón!, como este universo mundo de acá… y que también allí nacen, y mueren, y comen, y andan atrás de las muchachas… [...] Por muchas vueltas que se le dé, esta cosa grande, grande, grandísima […] "puede más que vusté, y que yo, y aquel, y que todos, ¡carraspiche! (111)

Thus, the bonesetter introduces the idea of an undefinable contiguity between humanity and nature, a shared existence ruled by instinct and by random contingency. This episode then functions as one of the many innuendos of the doom awaiting Perucho and Manolita. In fact, at the end of this episode, Manolita worries that the intoxicated man might be in danger of falling into the river, a fear Pedro dispels. Unwittingly, however, the protagonists have witnessed a prefiguration of their symbolic fall from Eden. As the characters neglect the subtext of this moment, they are by the same token connecting themselves more deeply to its fatality. Of course, this symbolical prefiguration is set into motion and works precisely because the key interpretative element, the secret concerning their blood relation, had already been revealed to the reader by the end of the *House of Ulloa*. It was the discovery by Nucha that her husband had fathered an illegitimate child that drove her to a fatal illness, thus maintaining the secret burried.

Taking this into account, one may find further corroboration for considering Manuela and Pedro's tragic connection as a story of the loss of innocence. As they traverse the fields and valleys ascending in the direction of the *Castros*, the narrator focalizes our attention on the particularities of the flora they pass by, "[…] the couple was slipping through a narrow corridor of chestnut tree trunks which barely offered them enough space for one person facing forward." (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 47) ["Deslizábase a la sazón la pareja por un estrecho pasadizo

de troncos de castaño, que apenas daba espacio a una persona de frente."(117)], or "they went over to the oak, where the horizontal branches and very dark foliage formed an impenetrable vault against the rays of the sun." (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 173) ["Acercáronse al roble, cuyo ramaje horizontal y follaje oscurísimo formaban bóveda casi impenetrable a los rayos del sol." (296)]. It is at the crossing point between the chestnut trees that Manolita inquires Perucho for the first time about the nature of the feelings they share, thus this declaration of mutual love marks the beginning of the incestuous relation. The tree bears not only a biblical connotation, but also opens up another branch of relations, so to speak. The chestnut brings to the fore *Jane Eyre*'s imagery of the tree struck by lightning upon the announcement of Jane's and Mr. Rochester's engagement; although in a slightly different way, this relationship also encompassed a transgressive nature because of Mr. Rochester's hidden marriage to Bertha Manson, a woman gone mad that he secretly kept locked up in the house.

The painstaking enumeration of the scenery seems to serve as the perfect construction for the backdrop of a tragedy and deterministic outcome to the characters, and ends up exceeding the *costumbrismo* tendencies of picturesque description. Following this reasoning, Pedro and Manola are simply fulfilling what their background literally and figuratively predetermined or wrote for them, although they are unable to read it in time. In contrast, the reader is given all the clues in advance, every element is disposed so as to perfectly and apparently naturally suit the story that is being told. In other words, the narrative is carefully elaborated to camouflage its duplicity:

> Anyone who was accustomed these deep-lying roads and the Galician countryside in general, wouldn't be surprised at the peculiarities that *corredoiras* offered […] its being drawn with strange regularity, like the work in which not only the hand of man was revealed, but also that of an expert and able hand, which gives proportion and symmetry to its works. (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 168-169)
>
> [Quien estuviese hecho a conocer estos caminos hondos, y el país gallego en general, no se admiraría de las particularidades que presentaba aquella corredoira, así en su virginidad y misterio como en ser más honda que ninguna y en estar trazada con extraña regularidad, como obra donde no sólo se descubría la mano del hombre, sino una mano ducha y hábil, que da a sus obras proporción y simetría.(291)]

Taking this into account, the conspicuousness of the natural landscapes becomes more than an inkling to determinism, it is an invitation to abandon innocent reading. Nature here is also created by God's "expert and able hand".

3.6. Of Homes

Sabel and her husband Angel, also called the Rooster, live in a house inside a house. More precisely, the couple arranged an independent living space inside the Moscoso's family manor. The contrast between the two spaces is markedly pronounced, "as much as the rooms upstairs where the master lived were dilapidated and sad, so those downstairs […] were comfortable and cheerful. Every nook and cranny was crammed, there was nothing lacking there" (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 116) ["Y cuanto tenían de destartalados y tristes los aposentos de arriba, que habitaba el señor, otro tanto de cómodos y alegres los de abajo, [...]. Llenitas como un huevo, nada faltaba en ellas" (223)]. From the outset it becomes clear that this modern space is the product of Angel's ambitions and self-fashioning as a bourgeois intellectual, who comes across as a sort of rustic dandy wishing to climb the social ladder by partaking in the consumerism of an emergent commodity culture. Thus, amidst these rooms one finds a composed scenario of modern amenities, collectibles ranging from china, furniture, bibelots, where nothing lacked:

> Every nook and cranny was crammed, there was nothing lacking there: not the convenient, recently painted wardrobes, nor the useful clothes racks, nor the chairs and sofa made of *jute*, nor the large mirror in the small sitting room, nor the quite ridiculous photographs in their gilded frames, nor the chromolithographs of friars and flashy young women, nor the small porcelain figures playing the violin, nor a tear-off day calendar, nor, in short, any of the objects that make up the false sense of well-being or the cheap, vulgar imitations of luxury that have penetrated even into small towns nowadays. (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 116)

> ni los cómodos armarios recién pintados, ni las útiles perchas, ni las sillas y sofá de yute, ni el espejo grande en la salita, ni las fotografías harto ridículas, en sus marcos dorados, ni cromos de frailes y majas, ni muñequitos de porcelana tocando el violín, ni calendario americano, ni, en suma, ninguno de los objetos que componen el falso bienestar y el lujo de similor que hoy penetra hasta en las aldeas." (223)

The narrator, focalizing through Gabriel's eyes as he arrives at and enters in the Ulloa estate for the first time, disparages this new emergent modern world, where apparent social and economic mobility seems, in fact, to be of dim substance. Even the performance of intellectual and cultural status is rendered as a gag, where Angel is not only shown stuttering as he reads, but also confusing and superficial in his engagement with current events:

> And the more distant and inaccessible, reasonably speaking, these events were, battles, devastations, and cruel evils to his understanding, the more they delighted, interested, and moved him; and it was curious to hear him explain them in a dogmatic tone to other peasants less informed than he concerning European foreign policy, at a certain *tertulia*, or social gathering, where they would come together in the kitchen at los Pazos. (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature*, 113).
>
> Y todos estos sucesos, batallas, asolamientos y fieros males, cuanto más lejanos y más inaccesibles, razonablemente hablando, a su comprensión, más le deleitaban, interesaban y conmovían; y era curioso oírselos explicar, en tono dogmático, a otros labriegos menos enterados que él de la política exterior europea en cierta tertulia que solía juntarse en la cocina de los Pazos. (219)

In effect, this topic of luxury and counterfeits finds development in numerous literary works of the time. Guy de Maupassant's celebrated short-story "The Necklace" (1884) is a case in point, telling the story of a middle class woman consumed with the desire to be wealthy and to belong to the upper class, who ends up destitute because of it. Mathilde Loisel lives unhappy with her husband's lack of ambition, when one day she receives an invitation to a high society ball and in order to mingle seamlessly with the guests, she borrows a diamond necklace from a rich friend. However, Mathilde loses the necklace, and ashamed to admit it to her friend, decides to buy a new one on credit to replace it. Therefore, Mathilde and her husband are forced to mortgage all their belongings and savings, and spend a decade of miserable existence in order to pay everything back. At the end of the story there is an ironic twist that reveals Mathilde's perception to be in discrepancy with reality. One day Mathilde finds her friend by accident and finally confides in her that many years earlier she had lost the necklace, but nevertheless, had bought one to replace it at great sacrifice of herself. The friend is surprised and lets escape, with a certain exultancy, that the original necklace was actually a fake, and moreover, she hadn't noticed the difference of the replacement. Furthermore, in "The Jewels" the French author returns to the topic of the confusion between the "original" and the

"imitation", telling the story of a man, who, upon the death of his wife, finds out that all the bijouterie she owned was in fact "real" and not just "paste", and then proceeds to squander everything and marry unhappily. The discovery that the jewels were genuine, however, hints at the possibility of cheating, and, consequently, at the "fakeness" of the feelings involved in marriage.

T.M. Segnitz recalls Henry James's short-story entitled "Paste" in its intertextual relation to the Maupassant's texts mentioned above. "Paste" is a story about the litigation of Arthur and his cousin Charlotte over a pearl necklace inherited from his stepmother, a theatre actress. Although the item was confirmed to be genuine, Arthur refuses to accept such claim, as it would imply his aunt would be the indecorous recipient of a lover's gift. Arthur insists that Charlotte keeps them, after some passing of the necklace among many characters it mysteriously appears one day on the neck of Mrs. Guy, and the reader along with Charlotte is left to wonder whether Arthur had something to do with that transaction.

It is not possible to establish with any certainty that Emilia Pardo Bazán read any of these texts, that she might have read "Paste" is particularly unlikely, however she does write about the work of Maupassant and at one occasion, actually mentions that "my only merit is to have done what I believe no one has yet in our land: to read every novelist deemed realist, from Champfleury to Guy de Maupassant." (My translation) ["Mi único mérito es haber hecho lo que creo yo que no hizo casi nadie por acá a saber, leerme todos los novelistas que pasan por realistas, desde Champfleury hasta Guy de Maupassant" (*Apud.* DeCoster 587)]. Notwithstanding, the brief look at these short narratives enables us to place *Mother Nature*, and in particular the scenes related to Angel's home, in a network**,** to use Fraco Moretti's term, where the emergence of commodity culture within the bourgeois milieu generates specific narratives. In these narratives the play with the blurring of clear distinction between materials via the illusion upheld by counterfeit items serves both as a critical eye towards the way

symbolical value arises and as a metafictional device. In Segnitz's reading of the texts mentioned above,

> it is almost as if James had appropriated Maupassant story to show how it should have been written: in his critical essay (1888) on him, James strenuously objects to Maupassant's insistence that "'psychology should be hidden in a book, as it is hidden in reality under the facts of existence.'" But eventhough Maupassant deprecates analysis or reference to motives in fiction, "the sexual impulse... is nonetheless the wire that moves almost all M. de Maupassant's puppets.... His pages are studded with that particular analysis; he is constantly peeping behind the curtain, telling us what he discovers there. (Segnitz 218-19)

Pardo Bazán is not so much preoccupied with the hiding or revealing of individual psychology, but keener on hinting at a new emergent social-class as a counterfeit, or an adulteration metonymically represented by the bibelots and the *décor* in Angel's saloon. The bourgeois home interior, as Walter Benjamin would sustain in *The Arcades Project*, constitutes an autofiction (a self-fashioning act), a way for the individual to "sustain his illusions" (9) since "the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment" (Benjamin, 20). However, while some authors revel in such artificiality (think of Charles Baudelaire's "In Praise of Cosmetics" [1863] or Joris-Carl Huysmans' *Against Nature* [1884]), being able to "divest things of commodity character" (Benjamin 9), others like Pardo Bazán will denounce it as a "spiritually" vacant interior, as we have been testifying through the case of Angel's rooms. To better grasp situation presented in *Mother Nature* it might be worthwhile to dwell momentarily on Baudelaire's position presented in the essay "In Praise of Cosmetics". Here the poet advances the idea that "The majority of errors in the field of aesthetics spring from the eighteenth century's false premiss in the field of ethics. At that time Nature was taken as ground, source and type of all possible Good and Beauty." (31). In order to dismantle this equivoque Baudelaire considers it necessary to postulate instead that beauty and goodness are the result of artifice, whereas crime and moral decadence are the product of nature:

> **Virtue, on the other hand, is artificial, supernatural**, since at all times and in all places gods and prophets have been needed to teach it to animalized humanity, man being powerless to discover it by himself. Evil happens without effort, naturally, fatally; **Good is always the product of some art**. All that I am saying about Nature as a bad counsellor in moral matters,

> and about Reason as true redeemer and reformer, can be applied to the realm of Beauty. I am thus led to regard external finery as one of the signs of the primitive nobility of the human soul. (Baudelaire, "In Praise" 32. My emphasis).

Bien entendu, the Rooster's mania for bibelots and adornment is not actually similar to the view presented by Baudelaire through the image of cosmetics, implying the supernatural and superhuman (*i.e.*, artificial) feats of creation and creativity. The confusion of art with imitation or pastiche is precisely what appears to be problematized and criticized in *Mother Nature*, along with a naïve conception of (human) nature I have already alluded to in the previous part of this chapter. In fact, in a series of later articles published in the *ABC*, Pardo Bazán would positively associate the Baudelairean perspective with "a period in which the cult of beauty is ardent and creative, and in which lyrical sentiment, though exhausted at its romantic sources, has a revival in new exalted and at times marvellous forms" (Pardo Bazán "Um poco de crítica" 3. My translation)/ ["un período en que el culto a la belleza se muestra fervoroso y engendrador, y en que el sentimiento lírico, al parecer agotado en sus fuentes por el romanticismo, renace en formas nuevas, exaltadas y a veces maravillosas" (Pardo Bazán "Um poco de crítica" 3)].

That being said, Pardo Bazán's novel sustains a subtle hierarchical dichotomy between baroque and the "modern" style, through the comparison between the various styles of rooms to be found inside the manor. The upstairs rooms belonging to the Marquis are described as not up-to-date with the latest developments in design, and this at Gabriel's eyes becomes invested with a "poetic" light and nostalgic undertones:

> the dinning room seemed poetic to him, so different from what is seen everywhere, without sideboards, without small Japanese plates, or those from the town of Manises, hanging from the wall, without curtains or a fireplace; whatever adornment there was consisted of baroque fresco paintings, peeling or faded, representing birds, clusters of fruits, rolls, mice climbing up to eat them, and other caprices of the painter; and in the middle opposite the huge oak table and the hard benches, with uncomfortable abbatial backs, the solemn pendulum. He also took into his head that the table had *character* or *cachet*, that very indefinable archaic quality that captivates weary imaginations. (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature*, 115)

> Le parecía poético aquel comedor tan distinto de los que se ven en todas partes, sin aparadores, sin platitos japoneses o de Manises colgados por la muralla, sin cortinas ni chimenea; por todo adorno, barrocas pinturas al fresco, desconchadas y empalidecidas, representando pájaros, racimos, panecillos, ratones que subían a comérselos, y otros caprichos de la fantasía del pintor; y en el centro, frente a la vasta mesa de roble y a los bancos duros, de abacial respaldo, el

> péndulo solemne. "También la mesa se le antojó que tenía carácter o cachet, ese no sé qué de arcaico que enamora a las cansadas imaginaciones modernas," (222)

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Rooster's rooms adorned with the commodities of an emergent consumerist lifestyle are not solely an arena where the possessors of such objects and the cultivators of interior design are criticized by the narrator as being superfluous endeavours. Furthermore, in these rooms there is no space for Pedro and Manolita's story, it is an eventless space, a stand- still. The bourgeois room presented as the symbol of disconnection from the natural and immediacy, momentarily displaces Pedro and Manolita's at once transgressive and innocent love from the narrative. Thus, when one considers both these polar backgrounds that provide a space of dwelling (the Galician fields and the home interiors), it becomes clear that *Mother Nature* is working upon a tension of modes of accessing the experience of the world and its representation. Having already alluded to the rousseaunean notions of the natural state and language that appear to be the undercurrent of the library scenes and the narrative of the incest plot, it is now necessary to refer to the regimen that the background filled with bibelot's and nick-knacks installs.

In these respects, it could be useful to recur to Janell Watson's analysis of the significance these kinds of objects acquire in nineteenth century culture. In *Literature and Material Culture* Watson shows the bibelot as an intersection of cultural spaces: the household, the marketplace, the collection and the museum. As a consequence, the bibelot becomes a point of hybridity in nineteenth century culture, a point where the literary history of the bibelot merges with that of material culture (2), thus, it appears midway between a product of industrial fabrication and a work of art. As such it destabilizes the traditional confines of aesthetical experience, the ascribing of value, and also epistemological inquiry. The bibelot is a commodity doubly displaced, it travels from the industrial realm (the market of goods) to the realm of art, usually via a collecting act that transforms the private household into an extension of the museum or gallery, where traditionally art is displayed. Although Karl Marx thoroughly

examined the process of alienation produced by the emergence of the commodity in the first volume of *The Capital*, which allowed him to present a case study concluding that the world of things is a social world, where the relationships among material objects are inseparable from the relationships established among people, these aspects are only diffusely present in the treatment of the bibelot in Emilia Pardo Bazán's novel. The background constituted of diverse nick-knacks seems to acquire a metafictional character, offering a comment on how the realist novel, so to speak, sees itself in a new relation to the understanding of the real and the mimetic procedures that literature activates to deal with it. Although, as we have seen, Pardo Bazán's fiction does take an interest in the social reality and dynamics of her time, the descriptive placement of the objects in passages such as the ones quoted above appear to be more than an illustration of the consumerist taste of the time. In fact, there is a disparaging of "vulgar imitation of luxury" which goes along with superficial discussions of political and philosophical matters by characters such as Angel and the rustic *tertulia* he organizes in his petit-bourgeois abode. Once again relying on Janell Watson's analysis of nineteenth century material culture, it was not uncommon to find "both literary and commercial writing make use of a stereotype of middle-class 'artistic' décor as a vulgarized imitation of more elite cultural models" (70). Moreover, according to Watson, in literary works, the bibelots tend to not be reduced to an extension of a mainstream bourgeois mentality, instead they become usually associated with representing "distinction or aesthetic sensitivity, or in their use for creating seductive salons and boudoirs. The latter uses are […] in keeping with popular novelistic elements such as the portrayal of social climbing, of seduction, and of psychological complexity."(71).

In *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) Henry James also surveys the double stance regarding the constitution of home interiors that we find in *Mother Nature* through the eyes of Gabriel and the Rooster in the episodes mentioned earlier, and further consubstantiated by Janell

Watson's survey. In *The Spoils of Poynton*, Mrs. Gereth sees the furnishing of her home as a biological extension of herself, thus when she finds herself in a dispute for her house with her son and his fiancée, the loss of Poynton is expressed as follows

> Everything was yet upside down; nevertheless, in the sense of having passed the threshold of Poynton for the last time, **the amputation**, as she called it, had been performed. Her **leg had come off**- she had now begun to stump along with the lovely **wooden substitute**; she would stump for life, and what her young friend was to come and admire **was the beauty of her movement and the noise she made about the house**. (James, *The Spoils* 46. My emphasis)

For Mrs. Gereth the decoration of the interior is a personal narrative executed with artistic mastery, according to her "there had been her personal gift, the genius, the passion, the patience of the collector- a patience, an almost infernal cunning." (James, *The Spoils* 8). Thus, what perturbs this character is not merely who shall inherit the things themselves, but foremost, who will be able to read in the décor her life story aesthetically. The fact that Fleda Vetch, although being of a lower class, partakes in Mrs. Gereth's aesthetic sensibility grants her the position of a desirable candidate to integrate the Gereth family lineage, even more so than the family's heir Owen and his fiancée Mona Brigstock, who is described as being interested in the monetary value of the property. The marriage finds the opposition of Mrs. Gereth, we are told, because upon visiting the Brigstocks home at Waterbath and surveying its décor arrangement, she finds their possessions express poor taste. Following Lee Clark Mitchell in his essay entitled "'To suffer like chopped limbs': The Dispossessions of the Spoils of Poynton", to Mrs. Gereth, Poynton is the measure of an aesthetic ideal against which everything must be compared, and only then can something's value be judged.[125] In addition Mrs. Gereth's devotion to her collected items at Poynton is compared to commodity fetishism by Lee Clark Mitchell "Mrs. Gereth's vision of Poynton enlivens not by disguising the labor invested in the collection but always by recalling it, narcissistically aware of how they speak to her, her past and present." (25).

[125] To continue with Lee Clark Mitchell, "at the same time the novel implies that Poynton's value is meant as a testament to the highest taste, the finest cultural values, of objects deliberately stripped of any labor or past beyond Mrs. Gerethe's own, and thus made to stand vibrantly as a sign of culture itself." (25).

Moreover, according to Bill Brown in *A Sense of Things* this shows that "things mediate social relations in the novel […] and it establishes a politics of taste wherein cultural capital, is irreducible to class." (145). Brown goes on to argue that Fleda Vetch's value lies in her mind and sensibility "the impossible account of the role of nature, not nurture, in the education of cultural semiotics has the effect of naturalizing— that is, of universalizing— what reads like the novel's own discrimination, its own judgment" (145). In a way one might see in Fleda a counter-image of Angel of *Mother Nature*, who tries to compensate for lack of education with material acquisition. For Fleda Vetch the mere act of accumulation seems not to be satisfactory and is not in accordance with her ethos. In order to substantiate this claim, we can read the following passage when Fleda Vetch is momentarily living with her father in London:

> She had in their common sitting-room the company of the objects he was fond of saying he had collected – objects, shabby and battered, of a sort that appealed little to his daughter: old brandy flasks and match-boxes, old calendars and hand-books, intermixed with an assortment of penwipers and ash-trays, a harvest gathered in from penny shops and bazars. He was blandly unconscious of that side of Fleda's nature which had endeared her to Mrs. Gereth, and she had often heard him wish to goodness there was something intelligible she cared for. Why didn't she try to collect something?- it didn't matter what. She would find it gave an interest to life- there was no end to the curiosities one could easily pick up. (James, *The Spoils* 100)

To Fleda this type of mindless hoarding is a devitalizing process, something she associates with the suburban life she leads in London feeling like a "lonely fly crawling over a dusty chart." (99). There is another scene almost at the end of the novel that captures Fleda's intent into proving her artistic sensibility and taste to Mrs. Gereth, when she comments upon her new home arrangements at Ricks:

> Ah the little melancholy tender tell-tale things: how can they not speak to you and find a way to your heart? […] This is a voice so gentle, so human, so feminine- a faint far-away voice with the little quaver of a heart-break. […] "If there were more there would be too many to convey the impression in which half the beauty resides- the impression somehow of something dreamed and missed, something reduced, relinquished, resigned: the poetry as it were, of something sensibly gone.' […] ah there is something here that will never be in the inventory!' 'Does it happen to have a name?' 'I can give it a dozen. It's a kind of fourth dimension. It's a presence, a perfume, a touch. It's a soul, a story, a life. There's ever so much more here than you and I. We're in fact just three!' 'Oh if you count the ghosts-!"
> "Of course I count the ghosts, confound you! It seems to me ghosts count double- for what they were and for what they are. Somehow there were no ghosts at Poynton."(James ,*The Spoils* 172)

The way Fleda elaborates the story she sees displayed at Ricks calls to mind Gabriel's description of the run-down rooms of the manor of Ulloa, in both instances the enchantment of the interior relies on the capacity to evoke absence, to conjure a story, turning the home into a haunted place for those who can discern the plot. The conversation between Mrs. Gereth and her protégée quoted above takes place when the former returns to Poynton the contents she had taken from there upon her "expulsion", having been under the (equivocal) impression that Fleda was to marry her son Owen. Here we are presented with a different outlook on the objects that are the point of conflict and desire throughout the novel. At this moment, Fleda realises that she had lost the opportunity to live surrounded by what she considered to be aesthetically pleasing décor pieces.[126]

However, differently from Mrs. Gereth and Mona Brigstock, pecuniary value and aesthetical value are not the main elements to be taken into account when considering the importance of the inanimate object world and its relationship to the living. In the passage quoted above, Fleda casts the modest contents of Ricks as mediators of past stories and memory holders. In other words, for Fleda the object's value resides in their fictional potentiality, their capacity to evoke something that is not present, touchable or material. As Bill Brown has cogently argued in *A Sense of Things*, Fleda Vetch allows the objects to become something more than the reflection of one's subjectivity and taste. Following Brown's reading, one could argue that through Fleda's outlook Henry James is experimenting with the story-telling potentiality of objects in fiction or, differently put, he is addressing one issue that proved to be a central concern of his poetics throughout his career, which is to calibrate how much things

[126] Like Lee Clark Mitchell has noticed, Fleda is not outside the realm of the desire for acquisition, which dictates the characters' actions in the novel: "By contrast, Fleda's self-possession is only further disrupted by Owen, and the chapter ends as she returns wide-eyed to London: 'what she stared at from the train in the suburban fields was the future full of the things she particularly loved'(40). What those 'things' *are* that give her life a 'singular quickening' initially appears to be the seductive vision of Owen himself- until the opening of the next chapter clarifies instead that it is Mrs. Gereth's objects at Poynton, which 'had recently passed into the possession of her son'" (23).

can say or suggest by themselves. In the preface added by the author to the New York Edition of the novel, one reads that "[t]he spoils of Poynton were not directly articulate, and though they might have, and constantly did have, wondrous things to say, their message fostered about them a certain hush of cheaper sound- as a consequence of which, in fine, they would have been costly to keep up" (xlvi). To summarize James eschews the viability of a narrative where material possessions are story-tellers on their own, or are the story themselves. Nevertheless, without them, as James equally admits, there could be no story. In fact, the objects in *The Spoils of Poynton* do come to the fore as agents and eloquent interpellators to the characters by means of their aesthetic properties, and by this token they put the character's consciousness to the test. According to Lotus Snow in "'A story of cabinets and chairs and tables': Images of Morality in *The Spoils of Poynton* and the *Golden Bowl*", the furnishings and treasures of Poynton instil a war-like relationship between family members (416), the bellicose vocabulary used to describe Mrs Gereth's appropriation of Poynton's content, thus subverting the legal dispositions of her late husband's testament, is a case in point, as is Owen's obstinacy in withholding the estate and Mona Brigstock blackmailing. Fleda Vetch emerges then as the only figure who has character (James xlvi, xlviii, xlix), which shines through the way she deals with the objects that are the point of contention for all the other characters.

As we have mentioned before Fleda is endowed with the necessary imagination to weave narratives out of the bibelots and other decorative pieces that abound in the spaces through which the characters circulate, furthermore she is the figure through whose perspective possession and ownership are portrayed as a matter of morality. Of course, she is the only character who refrains the desire for acquisition at all costs (an example of this is the refusal to "steal" Owen from Mona, thus sacrificing her love). In a novel where the characters either concern themselves with the acquisition of property or of people, creating an enmeshing of such transactions, to Mrs. Gereth Fleda is "a great find" just like any other bibelot, Fleda can

appreciate the impact such trading have on people. Like Snow concludes "From her introduction among the horrors at Waterbath to her final scene at Poynton 'gone for want of right help,' she never for a moment fails to see intelligently and intensely. What she sees is that the straightness in art and in life of the artist's moral vision is "the thing that's most beautiful and precious" (435).

In *The Sense of Things* Bill Brown has called the attention to the fact that although *The Spoils of Poynton* revolves around the struggle for the possession of objects, detailed and individual descriptions of the objects are very sparse, in fact, the reader is never given a thorough description of Poynton. In one of the rare moments that the narrative detains itself in such an exercise, we are not even given the complete picture of Poynton, but only its partite version as it is partially displaced to Ricks (James, *The Spoils* 47-50). Actually there is no ekphrastic drive throughout the narrative, Mrs. Gereth's collection is usually labelled under general terms such as "*morceaux de musée*", "gems", "bibelots", "furniture", the one deserving a more individualized treatment is a maltese cross. According to Brown:

> To recognize that James was writing a novel about things, but without things, is to appreciate the fire [the one that breaks out at the end of the novel] as an act (or rather a mark) of purification. Precisely because the novel is 'weak about the specifications' […] it has the strength to recommend itself as the James novel that most patently challenges realism- or challenges […] the 'popular superstition that 'realism' asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects'(45). Insofar as the fire marks this strength, it should be understood as the conflagration in which realism as such is consumed. (Brown 150)

Brown is not alone in noticing this narrative dynamic as a sign for James's reworking of the realist tradition in which, on the one hand, the plot is determined by character's obsessions with the furnishings of a house (each one for different reasons), and on the other hand, it resists the "bibelot- effect". In fact, Elsie B. Michie in *The Vulgar Question of Money* notes that "it is the relation between women and property that interests James in writing *Spoils*" (190), and as a consequence, the house furnishings also become disembodied signifiers of the struggle for inheritances which is the popular trademark of the nineteenth century marriage plot. Although

Fleda Vetch is committed to let the objects speak and in imagining their autonomy when she says that it is Poynton who belongs to the objects and not the other way around, their conspicuous absence in the descriptive panel of the narrative suggests otherwise. Taking this into account, it could be argued that the objects become passive instruments of the Victorian marriage plot, a plot that despite needing them, ends up by producing their very destruction. We can reach this conclusion if we take the marriage of Owen and Mona to be one marked by rapacious interest and thus taking away the control of Poynton from those with the sensibility to zeal for it. Continuing to follow Michie's lead, it is possible to remark that by marrying these two characters, James robs his readers of the objects which are also "a fictional incarnation of the aesthetic rewards the nineteenth century novel typically offers its readers when the hero and heroine make the right rather than the wrong marriages, the ones based on taste and love rather than wealth and ambition" (191). By the end of the novel, it seems to be suggested that the objects and things become mute entities when bound to the logics of the marriage plot and its stress on material inheritances.

In *Mother Nature* the scenes associated with the domestic space and bibelots revolve around the emergence of the concept of the artificial, natural, and interiority, that start to complexify and detach from the binomen nature and culture. One way in which Pardo Bazán's novel addresses this transformation is to recover paradigm scenarios of a history of the novel from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries up to the *fin de siècle*. However, this perceived change is marked by a new understanding of referentiality shaping fiction and the real, more so than by tracing thematic differences between literary genres. Although there is not an actual moment of "burning down the house" in *Mother Nature* like we find in *The Spoils of Poynton*, there is still a questioning of the realist novel as a house of visible things. In other words, *Mother Nature* makes a procession of spatial narratives that constitute different types of sceneries of dwelling (the Gothic manor, the pastoral idyl, the bourgeois interior). These

sceneries do not simply offer the reality effect of a decorated background, but constitute instead a narrative threshold, a point of transit that shows the home or dwelling space as a porous site intersecting the character's desires, social and aesthetic narratives, and by extension the same applies to the realist novel. Thus, in Pardo Bazán's novel, the search for and the creation of home appears not as "fixed in space", to borrow the distinction made by Mary Douglas in "The Idea of a Home: a Kind of Space", but as a "localizable idea" (289) and "embryonic community" (288) emerging in the threshold of reality and fiction. This is in fact an aspect which we had already encountered in *Daniel Deronda,* where the main characters live in an almost permanent state of itineracy and facing some kind of eviction, while at the same time being guided by an imaginary sense of homes and search for dwelling.

The partite structure of *Mother Nature*, which is activated by the backgrounds mentioned so far, calls to mind the infamous dichotomy devised by Georg Lukács in "Narrate or Describe". For instance, the episodes dedicated to the character Angel, "the Rooster", are in fact of little consequence to what is construed as the core of the story being told in *Mother Nature*, they are moments of stale description of material surroundings in catalogue fashion with equally superficial interaction between characters. Accordingly, the bourgeois private space is unable to provide a satisfactory substitute for plot development. If the natural background fosters the boundary bending incest plot protagonised by Perucho and Manolita, Angel's *tertulia*, the Vimioso's small receptions produce type characters devoid of experience in the middle of commodities and items, which are also devoid of a conscience of language and discourse as social constraints of reality.

By now it seems possible to state that *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature* are novels questioning frames of interpretation, namely those professing the orthodoxies of a Naturalism understood as the documentation of human action through a scientific lens focused on heredity and the *milieu*. Thus, the background in Pardo Bazán's novels, constituted by the landscapes

of the natural world, home interiors with their crumbling furniture, bookshelves and bibelots, becomes a metafictional subtext of interrogation of a model of representation and understanding of reality. The fact that all of them seem to fail to properly house the characters, to sustain them in a homely narrative, appears to suggest Pardo Bazán's beginning of a search for new ways of building the house of fiction.

Conclusion

Die Form ist flüssig, der „Sinn" ist es aber noch mehr.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*

Je te vois, rose, livre entrebaîllé,
qui contient tant de pages
de bonheur détaillé
qu'on ne lira jamais. Livre-mage

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Roses*

Realism is the impossible [*Il realismo è l'impossibile*]: this is the title chosen approximately a decade ago by Walter Siti for a pamphlet, in which, at a certain moment in his exposition and taking the French writer Émile Zola as an example, the Italian scholar states that "the writer is vaguely conscious of the fact that, in his score, the contingency of the chronicle and the eternity of the symbolical overlap, but that the complete map is never included — it is an uncertain zone, in which underneath each step the Aleph may nestle." (37. My translation).[127] It would not be farfetched to see this claim as equally fit to describe the views of the European writers surveyed throughout this thesis *vis-à-vis* the relation between reality and fiction conceived as a means to give shape to a tensional struggle engaging the whole and the particular, and their respective imaginary vantage and blind spots to represent it. In fact, we may well recall Emilia Pardo Bazán's defending the idea that novels may "present the material, the bestial, the trivial, the vile, the obscene, the passionate, as they appear in life, in due proportion and no more." (Pardo Bazán, *Russia* 288). In addition, we may once again bring to the fore Theodor Fontane picturing the location of his enunciative point of view through a theatrical metaphor: "I consider life, and especially the societal elements in it, as a theatre play and I follow every scene with an artistic interest from my seat at Parquetplatz No.

[127] "lo scrittore è vagamente consapevole che nella sua partitura il contingente cronachistico e l'eterno simbolico si sovrappongono, ma non ha mai presente la mappa completa – è una zona insicura, dove sotto ogni gradino può annidarsi l'Aleph." (Siti 37).

23. Everything is connected, everything has its bearing and its meaning even the smallest things, even the most superficial." (Fontane, *Briefe* 47, 5. Juli 1886. My translation). Finally, we may evoke George Eliot's claim of "how inevitably subjective art is, even when it professes to be purely imitative— how the most active perception gives us rather a reflex of what we think and feel, than the real sum of objects before us." (Eliot, "Three Months" 247). Through these individual understandings and accounts of what might constitute the relationship between art and the world, it is possible to identify a transpiring counternarrative to the attractions of the bird's eye view that became so characteristically associated with the omniscient narrator deemed typical of nineteenth-century Realism, a position that the figurative "Aleph" would ironize some decades later.

In fact, with the study carried out in this dissertation I proposed to look at some novels published during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, not with the intent of redefining what might be understood by the multi-layered notion of Realism, but instead to bring to the fore a discourse encapsulated in the novelistic format of this period, exemplified by *Daniel Deronda*, *Effi Briest*, *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*, as it thinks about itself in terms of linguistic and aesthetic matter. In *How Novels Think* Nancy Armstrong advances the idea that Realist fiction, hand in hand with the rise of the modern novel, establishes itself as a response to the perceived unboundedness of gothic and romantic subjectivities. In other words, according to Armstrong, the Realist novel tries to investigate the mechanisms of self-enclosure and to ward-off the porosity between subject and object. Hence, she characterizes it as a project seeking to vanquish the notion that things or objects may mean more than they mean, and in accordance, the novel encompasses and represents the norms of rationality that are supposed to guide the budding bourgeois society. Thus, Armstrong invokes a disparaging countenance towards the "mimetic fallacy", which she describes as "information that is not at some point anchored to a referent as potentially bad information. When it succeeds in passing itself off as

truth, such information observes what might be called the mimetic fallacy." (19). Furthermore, Armstrong brings to the fore Jane Austen to get her point across:

> nothing could shortly be clearer, than that it had been all a voluntary, self-created delusion, each trifling circumstance receiving importance from an imagination resolved on alarm, and every thing forced to bend to one purpose by a mind which, before she entered the Abbey, had been craving to be frightened. (*Apud.* Armstrong 19)

This reproachful attitude towards what could be termed magical reading will not be completely absent, as we have seen, from a novel like *Effie Briest* and the diptych *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*. Moreover, to some extent, it is a tenable position to attach also to George Eliot, if, for instance, we take into consideration her being invested in Positivist currents of thought at some stages throughout her career, particularly in phrenology as basis for the construction of characters in a "scientific" manner (Wright). However, in *The Chain of Things,* Eric Downing has recently called for a mitigated view of this association between the Realist novel with objective reading, claiming that although "Realist novels might seem to militate against magic reading in their characters, and to advocate for more rational, purely 'human' modes of reckoning […] the very nature of novel reading brings magic back." (21). In fact, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the thread's fabric weaving the corpus together are the acts of reading, of interpretation and of representation conveyed as a problem that cannot be solved by postulating the separateness between subject and object, or ultimately between reality and fiction.

Thus, in my reading of these authors' novels, I leaned on Erich Auerbach's still valid and commendable counsel of exerting caution when using absolute categories as a grid for literary analysis, and in so doing, treaded along with the moto that they "should acquire their meaning only from the context, and in fact from the particular context." (Auerbach 572). However, paying attention to the particular should not be confused with the cutting off from a network of relations, be they transhistorical, transnational, interartistic or other as Mieke Bal has shown in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*. In fact, my intent has been to shed some

light on the aesthetic implications brought about by the concept of object, in its material and symbolical reification, upheld as a literary motif, which travelled across disciplinary and national borders in the late nineteenth century European literary landscape, finding expression in some novels of writers like George Eliot, Theodor Fontane and Emilia Pardo Bazán. These are the constitutive elements of the particular context and of the terrain for my comparatist reading, which enabled me to tackle such an absolute conceptual category as that of Realism in the terms of an aesthetic and semiotic threshold. In other words, through the appraisal of such diverse novels as *Daniel Deronda*, *Effi Briest*, *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature* via the kernel of the object, as that which might be conventionally expected to be tangible, knowable, or perceptible, it became possible to argue that the novel while positing objects as something to be interpreted, *i.e.*, as signs and linguistic products, places itself in contiguity with them. In fact, throughout these chapters a varying array of objects was given centre stage: on the one hand, some that could be grouped under the category of commodity, others under the category of works of art, others still under the designation of elements of nature, all of these constituting material existences outside a subject or character; on the other hand, internal objects to the subject, such as the self. However, this neat separation constitutes a delimitation that the novels analysed here contest and find trouble in defining, hence the metafictional use of objects that transforms them in a *mise en abyme* of the novel's own representational and interpretational processes.

There have been numerous and valuable insights provided by research done on objects integrating the perspective of material culture and literature, which illuminate the imbrications of represented objects in symbolic regimes that point to and (un)cover colonial histories, consumer habits, gender and inter-class relations and struggles, that is objects as gates to the representation of historic reality. Despite having built some of my reflections thanks to the way paved by such research (Bartlett; Cohen; El-Rayess; Freedgood; Plotz; Brown, *The Sense*),

reading George Eliot's, Theodor Fontane's and Emilia Pardo Bazán's novels led me to advocate the position that there is something new to be gained for the understanding of the nineteenth century novel if we look at "the object" as a key-textual-clue to the staging of the perception of a representational and interpretational crisis. Thus, I position the result of my dissertation as a starting point for further research that does not see the nineteenth century novel as a self-contained phenomenon, or a format that was abandoned and an end point that modernist avant-garde surpassed and declared forsaken; but in fact, the nineteenth-century novel embodies a crucial discussion around textuality, creation of meaning and interpretation that is far from being closed and whose echoes we might hear in more contemporary works such as Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot,* even if we unrealistically imagine them to come through a stuffed and mute animal.

At this point, I will direct our attention to the more tangible conclusions extracted through the case studies provided by the four novels of the corpus. The reading of the diptych formed by *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*, through the lens of the background understood as a frame marking the point of transit between the textual and the extratextual, endorsed the exploration of a scarcely studied aspect of Pardo Bazán's poetics. In both novels one comes across two main types of backgrounds, which merit long descriptive moments in the narrative: natural backgrounds and (human-made) cultural backgrounds. The first are for the most part constituted by the Galician landscape, while those belonging to the second group range from books, buildings and furniture (mostly items to be found in the interior space of buildings, or the home). However, as I have argued, these backgrounds are in fact made to mingle and in so doing Doña Emilia is able to put forward a complex reflection on the representation of human nature in art in general and in literature in particular.

Thus, in the emblematic library scenes of *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*, the books that appear as physical objects on display, and not merely as subtle intertextual allusion,

are at the service of a metafictional operation under the figure of a *mise en abyme*. On the one hand, we find oeuvres authored by Benito Jerónimo Feijóo and Fray Luis de León in relatively good state; on the other hand, "the cadaver of the eighteenth century, all eaten up by worms, was rising from its grave" (Pardo Bazán, *Mother Nature* 133) ["el cadáver del siglo XVIII se alzaba de su sepulcro, todo comido de gusanos" (Pardo Bazán, *Madre Naturaleza* 246)], whose "limbs" are the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Samuel Richardson, William Tiberghien (disciple of Krause). The latter pile of books and León's translation of *Song of Songs* attract Gabriel, who, when taking up some of them to read enters into a philosophical daydream. While being in this altered consciousness state, Gabriel feels impelled to question the division between nature and culture, and as a consequence, to suddenly realize the incestuous relation between Manolita and Perucho, thus refiguring the idyl into the tragedy of the human condition. In fact, concurring with Diane F. Urey, *Mother Nature* may be portrayed as a reflection on duplicity, an anamorphic discourse where nature is both "mother" and "stepmother":

> The paradoxical last words of *La madre naturaleza* suggest, instead, that there is no right or wrong that can be maintained in the text. Those words imply the equal and alternating coexistence of two interpretations of the same term or of two signifieds for the same signifier/two signifiers for the same signified, as it were. (Urey 118).

The other type of background whose importance was highlighted due to its metafictional implications was that of the home interior constituted by architectonic Gothic elements and tokens (mainly in *The House of Ulloa*), and by the modern decorated home (Rooster's headquarters in *Mother Nature*). In *The House of Ulloa* the novelistic text appears as a cryptic vault, its imagistic tokens provided by the empty chest or crumbling furniture, for instance, testify to the hindrance of interpretation and the impossibility of revelation, in other words, the novel thematizes processes of sabotage in understanding and representing reality. The manor house, managed by Don Pedro and Primitivo, becomes a detached place enveloped in the language of deceit and concealing, severed from the outside world in this manner, it

annihilates any disruptive or exterior reading of the tabu it harbours. Hence, *The House of Ulloa* is steered by an "obstructive principle" rather than by the "sympathetic" one we find being interrogated in *Daniel Deronda*, where each object becomes part of a chain of revelations and paves the way for a free associative reading pressuring the boundaries between the textual and the extratextual. Thus, inside *Los Pazos* we find the perpetuation of a mortiferous self-referential narrative that ensnares the characters, and which culminates in Nucha's death, both in the physical sense and symbolically by her impossibility of evading the Manor's textual prison. Regarding Angel's and Sabel's rooms inside the Manor in *Mother Nature*, the issue turns to the regimen of pastiche instituted by commodity culture. Through this motive the novel complexifies the ongoing debate between nature and culture, between what is human and non-human, with the addition of the notion of the artificial. Here with the recourse to the character of the paradoxical figure of the "rustic dandy" and his predilection for "fake art" and "fake philosophy", Doña Emilia inscribes in the novel the beginnings of the thematization of a discussion that would occupy most of her later critical essays (articles published in the *ABC*, *El lirismo en la poesía francesa* [1921]) and novels such as *Homesickness* (1889) [*Moriña*] and *The Black Siren* (1908) [*La Sirena Negra*] just to mention a few examples. The power for creating illusions and the artificiality that permeate both "fake art" and "art" establish a tie with the language issues presiding over *The House of Ulloa* and *Mother Nature*. In both novels, Pardo Bazán espouses a complex meditation about language as the unhomely home and frame of human relations and the world.

In *Effi Briest* we also encounter a work invested in questioning the world as a semiotic cypher. Although this novel shares some affinities with the nature- culture divide we find in Emilia Pardo Bazán, for instance, through the portrayal of Effi as *naturkind* severed from the Edenic Hohen- Cremen, it did not constitute the main alley of my analysis of Theodor Fontane's venture in interrogating the modalities of reading and representing the world. In fact,

in *Effi Briest* the world and the novelistic text appear as a texture of signs, a conflation which Fontane metafictionally explores by testing the limits of the "literary motif" device as interpretative key. Peter C. Pfeiffer's cues in "Fontanes *Effi Briest*: zur Gestaltung epistemologischer Probleme des Bürgerlichen Realismus", prompted my mapping of the epistemological insecurity that permeates the whole narrative, which has not only the Chinese ghost at its epicentre, but also, as Eisele Ulf has argued, "old Briest's stereotipical saying 'weite Feld', which is not only to be perceived as an evasive and indifferent truism, but equally as the metaphor diametrically opposed to a detective type revelation." (Ulf 68. My translation).[128]

Thus, throughout this thesis *Effi Briest* was presented as functioning under the aegis of *deixis am phantasma*, that is, I have argued the novel explores metafictional figurations of imagining and perceiving absence which mirror the creation of fiction. Throughout the narrative it becomes gradually noticeable that the world the characters inhabit is constituted by lacunas of several kinds. Most notoriously, the objects that are expected to function as omens and signs either do not give out complete information or are ironically opaque. About this latter category, one could bring to the fore the decorative pieces hanging from the ceiling of the Innsttetens' entrance hall at Kessin:

> But there were many, many other things, some very strange, as well as this. There were three beams running across the hall, dividing the ceiling up into separate sections; from the one nearest the front door a ship under full sail with a high afterdeck and gun-ports was hanging, whilst farther back a huge fish seemed to be swimming through the air. […] "And what's right at the back there, that looks like a huge cigar outside a tobacconist's?" "That's a young crocodile." (Fontane, *Effi*b 38)
>
> [Aber noch viel, viel anderes und zum Teil sehr Sonderbares kam zu dem allen hinzu. Quer über den Flur fort liefen drei, die Flurdecke in ebenso viele Felder teilende Balken; an dem vordersten hing ein Schiff mit vollen Segeln, hohem Hinterdeck und Kanonenluken, während weiterhin ein riesiger Fisch in der Luft schwimmen schien. […] „Und ganz dahinten das, was aussieht wie eine große Zigarre vor einem Tabaksladen?" (Fontane, *Effi*a 50)]

The profuseness of decorative pieces that stuff the house create a surrealist scenario, amidst which a crocodile may be confused with a cigar. Thus, the narrator mocks the possibility of

[128]„Schließlich wird man das stereotype 'weite Feld' des alten Briest wohl nicht nur als evasionistisch unverbindliche Floskel zu begreifen, sondern darin auch die dem detektivischen Aufdecken entgegengesetzte Metapher zu erkennen haben." (Ulf 68).

straightforward interpretation of these marine omens. Furthermore, Effi comments on this intricate opaqueness when she murmurs a line from a folk song "small and crammed is my cottage" (Fontane, *Effi*b 39)/ ["Eng und klein is meine Hütte." (Fontane, *Effi*a 51)], which she nostalgically contrasts to the balcony vista with which "she was gripped by a longing to see all that. But then, almost with a start, she remembered the event that was so close at hand." (Fontane, *Effi*b 86)/ ["im Augenblick erfaßte sie eine Sehnsucht, das alles zu sehen. Aber dann gedachte sie wieder dessen, was ihr so nahe vorstand, und sie erschrak fast." (Fontane, *Effi*a 109)], that is a clear view with no haunting or hidden meanings.

Moreover, the picture of the Chinese ghost and the noises the ghost produces become an interpretative conundrum haunting the narrative. The ghost, in its different material incarnations, does not allow for a seamless passage between reality and fantasy, or in other words, it does not provide a clear distinction between reality and fiction. In fact, the spectre constitutes an odd medium object, in that it belongs neither completely to one world, nor to the other. As a narrative device used by Innstetten, the ghost grips the emotional world of Effi, who becomes consumed by fear without ever seeing it, but, nonetheless, sensing its presence. In addition, as Geoffrey Baker summarily paraphrases it,

> The apparition that haunts Effi has been explained in several different ways, all of which rigorously diminish its theoretically supernatural possibilities either as a psychic projection of Effi's repressed longings, as a strictly pedagogical tool, as the return of the oppressed colonial or female Other, as a penchant for the exotic, or as a systematically thematized allusion to political and social history during the period of the novel's production. (Baker 176)

Thus, my aim was to inquire into the use of the ghost as metafictional figure deployed at the service of the representation of the world as an interpretative riddle on par with the narratives it produces.

Furthermore, it was argued that the plot is moved by gaps of knowledge consubstantiated in half uttered phrases or incomplete accounts. In fact, there is an acousmatic penchant to the narrative, which is encapsulated in the calling "Effi come", first heard coming

from a character hidden in the garden, and lastly written in a letter. In conjunction with the sacrificial stones near the town ominously named Crampas, the summons constitute a mysterious force pending over the destiny of the main character of the novel. The inscription of the name Effi Briest at the cover of the novel and in the grave at its closure attach this calling to the body of the text. Like the Chinese ghost, *Effi Briest*'s plot becomes the living interval of imagination between inscription on paper and stone, pointing to what is in front of and behind of the text.

In *Narrative and its Discontents* D.A. Miller claims that

> For the production of narrative - what we called the narratable - is possible only within a logic of insufficiency, disequilibrium, and deferral, and traditional novelists typically desire worlds of greater stability and wholeness than such a logic can intrinsically provide. Moreover, the suspense that constitutes the narratable inevitably comes to imply a suspensiveness of signification, so that what is ultimately threatened is no less than the possibility of a full or definitive meaning. (272)

This could be an apt description for the mechanisms I presented in relation to Theodor Fontane's novel as a narrative exploring the gaps in signification, in other words, a narrative whose fuelling engine is the interpretative uncertainty of the world's signs and objects and the constant deferral of revelations, which spark the imagination in-between. Notwithstanding, D. A. Miller's statement could also resonate with George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, in that the novel stages a duel of different types of interpretative modes and its respective blind-spots. In fact, the analysis carried out here enabled me to present *Daniel Deronda* as a novel where the idea of reality emerges under a principle of imminent distortion. Throughout the narrative, the reading of detail, encapsulated in heirlooms and texts, brings to the fore a set of characters whose narrative survival depends on their hermeneutical qualities, that is, the ability to move between equivocal and sympathetic readings.

George Eliot juggles with the anchors of reference that demarcate reality and fiction. Recalling the letter of Hans Meyrick to his friend Daniel,

> My dear Deronda, In return for your sketch of Italian movements and your view of the world's affairs generally, I may say that here at home the most judicious opinion going as to the effects of present causes is that "time will show." As to the present causes of past effects, it is now seen

> that the late swindling telegrams account for the last year's cattle plague— which is a refutation of philosophy falsely so called, and justifies the compensation to the farmers. […] In fact, his mind seems so broad that I find my own correct opinions lying in it quite commodiously, and how they are to be brought into agreement with the vast remainder is his affair, not mine. I leave it to him to settle our basis, never yet having seen a basis which is not a world- supporting elephant, more or less powerful and expensive to keep. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 531- 32)

The parodic nature of the letter enacts a metafictional moment in the narrative, in that it exposes Mordecai's interpretative process to which Daniel and the narrator at times tend to adhere to. Furthermore, as Cynthia Chase defended "Meyrick's inverted phrase names the contradiction that characterizes this narrative structure. It is a chiasmus or a metalepsis, a reversal of the temporal status of effect and cause: cause is relocated in the present and effect in the past." (Chase 218). Thus, Meyrick's ironic rebuke reveals how Daniel's present quest or "cause" is based on a rereading of the past, which goes contrary to realist conventions of the order of cause and effect. In this way, one may appreciate the virtuality of *Daniel Deronda*'s ending, the voyage to the Oriental parts of the globe becomes a narrative that can only be imagined, but not represented in reality. Thus, with this novel, Eliot instils a reflection on the fact that final and totalizing views remain absent from the representational field of vision in order to be imagined as future possibilities. In Eliot's poetics both the self and the world on par with narrative require a constant re-reading and re-writing.

In the manner of a final remark, let us evoke a passage from Catherine Levine's *Forms*:

> the most common literary formalist reading method involves binding literary forms to their contents, seeking out ways that each reflects the other. […] But a typical novel or poem will touch on so many different objects— diamonds, hair, chocolate, the ocean— that it could not possibly adjust its own forms to every material it incorporates. (10)

In fact, the materiality of the extratextual world is not the novel's ultimate determinant. The authors surveyed here help to chart how Realism is a process of reading. It is a common feature in them that as their career progresses and they publish their last works the text's textuality and how it is read in a web of the "extra-textual" becomes a major concern that they try to resolve formally. Thus, they transform Realism in an aporetic aesthetic mainly through the recourse to

metafictional strategies. At the hands of Fontane, Pardo Bazán and Eliot the novel becomes a fictional threshold between life represented and life experienced.

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