CHAPTER 3

Unhomely homes
Life writing of the postwar 'scholarship' generation

Accounts of working-class life are told by tension and ambiguity, out on the borderlands. . . . this is a drama of *class*.

–Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 22

Introduction: The Butler Act and its uncanny legacies

Turning from the world of boarding houses, rented rooms and bedsits that offer sites of improvised or surrogate kinship networks, this chapter now addresses representations of what might appear to be the more traditional domestic setting of the family and childhood home. Focusing on postwar autobiographical accounts of working-class childhood, however, this chapter engages with evocations of domestic interiors and representations of self which are distinctly unsettled; these are works which eschew autobiographical realism for something altogether more strange. It addresses writing by authors who formed part of the Robbins or 'scholarship' generation and who consciously reflect upon the expansion of access to education following the 1944 Butler Education Act. This act, which overhauled the restricted provision of education in Britain by the introduction of universal secondary schooling, produced radical changes in the social landscape of the mid-twentieth century, enabling children from working-class homes to enter the grammar school system and propelling some of them into higher education. Among other factors, it had a marked impact on gender and the family; girls who passed the Eleven Plus exam had the option of entering academic schools rather than being pushed towards more vocational options (or leaving school altogether), thereby presenting them with opportunities that were inconceivable for their mothers. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the narrative of the scholarship story is often framed as a form of home leaving – a move away from a particular environment and the entrance to a new realm of opportunity. Although this is the

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

accepted version, my rereading will frame it instead as a domestic narrative, albeit one of a very specific kind.

The figure of the 'scholarship' boy/girl is, as one author points out, 'that most archetypal of post-war characters'.[1] As a cultural 'type', it is found in forms of social realism and the 'kitchen sink' aesthetic – often more lyrical and experimental than its name suggests – which have constituted the dominant mode for the iconic angry young people of this era.[2] My reinterpretation of this body of life writing points to a common tendency among the writers to eschew gritty realism in favour of distinctly unrealist modes which invoke the literary apparatus of the uncanny, particularly the modern Gothic and fairy tale.[3] My account therefore seeks to redress the tendency in criticism to view mid-century working-class experience within the aesthetic parameters of social realism (a representational form whose implicit ideology serves to 'reflect' life 'as it is'). Indeed, this body of life writing could be said to display what is a conspicuous absence of reference to materialist detail or consumer and popular culture in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Instead, the texts steer away from realist devices, centring instead on the dynamics of class and the enduringly influential idea of the uncanny, epitomised in ideas of the strangely familiar and the unhomely home.

By focusing on representations of the recalled or reimagined homestead in the memoirs of writers from Richard Hoggart to Hilary Mantel, I show how an anti-realist aesthetic transforms working-class domestic spaces, such as the urban terraced house, into mysterious sites of unexplained phenomena, presenting scenes (real or imagined) of conflict, secrecy and even violence. The parallels and echoes among the memoirs under consideration are uncanny in and of themselves: echoes of the Victorian *Bildungsroman* and its stock narrative devices, family secrets, a history of 'bad blood', childhood sickness, the writer's self-seclusion into the world of books, doubtful parentage, questions of illegitimacy and a first-person voice which speaks uneasily of the relations between ambition, guilt and betrayal. In some of the works I address – Seamus Deane's

[1] Terry Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir* (Allen Lane: 2002), p. 52.

[2] Well-known examples of this 'archetype' feature in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1959) as well as the films of the British New Wave, such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961) and *This Sporting Life* (1965).

[3] The idea of working-class literary British Gothic remains relatively unexplored; see, however, Sarah Gamble, 'North-East Gothic: Surveying Gender in Pat Barker's Fiction', *Gothic Studies* 9:2 (2007), 71–82; Brian McCuskey, 'Not at Home: Servants, Scholars, and the Uncanny', *PMLA* 121:2 (2006), 421–36.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Reading in the Dark and Mantel's *Giving Up the Ghost* for example – domestic interiors seem to be haunted by 'real' ghosts.[4] In others, the idea of a haunting takes a more figurative dimension and serves to articulate a sense of profound division and doubleness which disrupts the individualist narrative of self-progress. As the epigraph to this chapter from Steedman suggests, the 'drama of *class*', as a story 'told by tension and ambiguity, out on the borderlands' is one that lends itself to the tropes, settings and figures that populate the realm of the uncanny.

Hauntings and ghosts imply the idea of 'seeing things' – an ambiguous phrase which implies close examination or interpretation and extrasensory perception. I explore this double meaning to address the idea of the scholarship child's sense of separation from the family and their awareness of a critical faculty, or interpretative stance, that at least in part creates this divide. To the readerly child of these memoirs, everyday landscapes may be translated into something portentous, symbolic and fused with subjectivity.

A sense of doubling and doubleness – a defining characteristic of the uncanny – recurs throughout the texts, as the writers attempt to represent their family and class origins by means of a narrative that pulls in the opposite direction towards the plot of individuation. Often self-reflexively casting themselves as the young protagonist of the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*, or as the orphaned figures of the classic fairy tale, the writers portray the domestic interior as a doubled space, one that is central to identity formation as well as being the site from which they must escape.[5] Of course, the rendering of a chiaroscuro escape from 'dark' poverty to educational 'enlightenment' is itself a well-established motif in nineteenth-century working-class autobiography (and endures in the type of autobiographical model used by George Acorn and Kathleen Woodward, as shown in Chapter 1 of this book). Ronald Goldman, reflecting on his experience of what Rose terms 'the climb up the scholarship ladder', uses precisely this trope: 'Being at home was like a slow death to me and leaving home felt like moving into a free world of light

4 Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (London: Vintage, 1997), it should be noted at this point, is not a memoir per se (although, as I argue later, at a meta-textual level the work significantly engages with the politics of the autobiographical form in ways which make it an important addition to this chapter).

5 For the influence of fairy tale and romance in the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*, see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 89–136, and Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, new ed. (London: Verso, 2000).

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and rationality'.[6] In contrast to this ideological framework of enlightenment, however, I stress how these recent autobiographical explorations of working-class childhoods shift significantly away from a model that entails movement from darkness to light. For while the family home – and all that it represents – is at turns resisted or rejected, it continues to 'haunt' these ambivalent autobiographical narrators in significant ways.

Despite appearances to the contrary, the uncanny modes of Gothic and fairy tale are deeply engaged with material matters as well as issues of social class and its boundaries. Yet haunting, doubles, divisions, blood, bodies and border crossings are elements generally aligned with the architectural spaces of the 'big house' and landed gentry in British (and Irish) literature. Indeed, there is a type of currency or cultural capital to the Gothic, from the ghost story to the horror film, based on the assumption that it is usually the mansions of the rich and the town-houses of the middle class which are sites of intriguing disturbances involving hidden sources of wealth, long-standing family feuds and the threat to established order and respectability. Haunted houses, then, are frequently characterised by an architectural semiotics whose familiarity belies its bourgeois roots; in literature and film, hauntings tend to occur in detached, multi-storied homes, with plenty of rooms and recesses – attics and cellars, stairwells and inner chambers – in which malevolent spirits may lurk.

But the idea of the Gothic and the uncanny as a narrowly bourgeois preserve is an assumption that ignores the extent to which these literary forms themselves draw upon a rich legacy of oral culture and folktale. And this is particularly salient in the context of the Irish cultural underpinnings in the texts of three of the authors – Deane, Terry Eagleton and Mantel – that further dismantle the pedigree of the middle-class British Gothic.[7] My analysis therefore engages with the way in which the texts under consideration self-reflexively reclaim the uncanny as part of a working-class landscape. In this respect, I borrow and adapt from Anthony Vidler's influential study of the idea and aesthetic of the uncanny in forms of architecture in which he describes this modern malediction as 'the quintessential bourgeois kind of fear', an articulation of a 'fundamental insecurity: that of a newly established class, not quite at

[6] See Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 145.

[7] Deane and Eagleton engage with the topic of Irish Gothic in their academic writing: see Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood, Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), and Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

home in its own home'.[8] When applied to the landscape of postwar British working-class narratives, Vidler's theorisation of the uncanny as symptomatic of profound changes in class structure is revealing. Indeed it will be central to my analysis of stories of ghosts, family secrets and transgressive acts set within an architectural landscape of terraced back-to-backs and postwar council houses, locations in which the textual figure of the scholarship child is indeed never quite 'at home in its own home'.

i The scholarship boy: Doublings in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*

Beginning with Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* is, perhaps, surprising since Hoggart's pioneering analysis of changes in working-class and popular culture in the first half of the twentieth century typifies aspects of the social realist tradition of mid-twentieth-century writing. Hoggart's pioneering ethnography – intermeshed with autobiographical recollection – looked back to the culture of working-class life in the rented back-to-back terraces and 'tunnel-backs' in Hunslet, Leeds, in the 1920s and 1930s (before the postwar slum clearances and consequent population shift to the new estates). Viewed historically, *The Uses of Literacy* is often taken as a key text in cultural studies, not least on the basis of its form and methodology, which put into practice the idea that personal experience could illuminate and transform sociological enquiry. But this methodology has also invited criticism, specifically in relation to earlier sections of the work which have been read as skewed by the author's sentimental and nostalgic view of a working-class urban culture on the wane. But the expectation that he should have been more objective or scientific in his study ignores Hoggart's own concern with the issue of subjectivity and cultural analysis within the pages of this preternaturally self-reflexive book. Thus in a retrospective comment, Hoggart declared in a significant phrase that one of his intentions was to 'lay one's ghosts', and he was explicit about the book's tendentious aim of telling the middle-class reader: 'see, in spite of all, such a childhood is richer than yours'.[9] Indeed, far from defending himself against accusations that he was overinvested in the text, Hoggart would retrospectively place a perhaps surprising emphasis on the book's autobiographical and literary qualities. He agreed with one

[8] Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny*, pp. 3–4.

[9] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 18.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

commentator who described it as not a conventional academic study but instead a 'rather lyrical re-creation . . . the kind of book you can only write at a certain point in your life, given the level of personal involvement'.[10]

This 'personal involvement' is manifest at the level of form, specifically in what Hoggart himself refers to as the book's 'broken-backed' structure: one that presents a type of before-and-after vision of a working-class community undergoing radical change, together with an account of the irrevocable 'progression' of the author himself.[11] It is a structure that articulates what Hoggart identifies as his own 'double relationship' of class belonging and the deep separation and loss that marks the working-class scholarship child's trajectory.[12] Two voices thus resonate throughout the pages of *The Uses of Literacy*: that of the young watchful boy of the early sections, and that of the retrospective and melancholy adult scholar. It is a form of duality, as Hoggart noted himself, which is intrinsic to the portrayal of working-class culture, language and people by someone who is 'both close to them and apart from them'.[13]

The trope of doubleness – and its implication of self-division – extends to Hoggart's recurrent emphasis on images and codes of home life in this domestic-centred text. His picture of the working-class domestic interior conforms superficially to images of the respectable Edwardian working-class home. Indeed, Hoggart aligns the dominant aesthetic of the working-class home with 'prosperous nineteenth-century middle-class style; the richness showing well and undisguisedly in an abundance of odds-and-ends, in squiggles and carvings, in gold patterns'.[14] Such homes, Hoggart acknowledges, were places that had apparently changed very little since Edwardian times; their abiding function being to present the cherished domestic virtue of 'homeliness'. Thus he presents the working-class home of Hunslet in the earlier part of the century as an intensely private world, rigorously defined by its gendered separation of spheres in which the father is master of the house and an agent in the public world of work, while the mother functions as 'the pivot of the home'.[15] Indeed, the home is defined as lying at the centre of each individual's place in the community, marked by a 'peculiarly gripping wholeness' ('wholeness' and 'centre' are terms which recur symptomatically throughout those earlier sections of the text that centre on an older working-class community).[16] In this account,

[10] See John Corner, 'An Interview with Richard Hoggart: Studying Culture: Reflections and Assessments', in Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 387.
[11] Hoggart, quoted in Corner, *Literacy*, p. 383. [12] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 17.
[13] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 17. [14] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 149. [15] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 41.
[16] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 68.

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then, the home is a private, tangible and safe place, 'a cluttered and congested setting, a burrow deeply away from the outside world'.[17] The home furthermore exists in a neighbourhood characterised by closeness and proximity (a 'knowable community' to use Raymond Williams' term).[18] 'This is an extremely local life, in which everything is remarkably near', Hoggart notes, and people go about their daily lives 'with sights fixed at short distance'.[19] Hoggart thus presents the imagined interior of the working-class home as, above all, authentic. It operates in stark contrast to the cheap and soulless modern interior that he deems to epitomise mid-century consumer capitalism and mass media:

> Compare it with the kind of public room which may be found in many a café or small hotel today – the walls in several hostile shades of distemper, clashing strips of colour along their centres; cold and ugly plastic door-handles; fussy and meaningless wall lamp-holders; metal tables which invite no one and have their over-vivid colours kicked and scratched away: all tawdry and gimcrack. The materials need not produce this effect; but when they are used by people who have rejected what sense of a whole they had and have no feeling for the new materials, the collapse is evident.[20]

Hoggart's apparent sentimentality and nostalgia for the stability of an integral and knowable home has been the subject of some critique. Doreen Massey, for example, has questioned what she interprets as a heavily gendered depiction of home in the work of 'the Angry Young Men' in which the mother is 'not as herself a living person engaged in the toils and troubles and pleasures of life, not actively engaged in her own and others' history, but a stable symbolic centre – functioning as an anchor for others'.[21] In addition, Carolyn's Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), which I address in detail below, professes to be nothing less than a response to Hoggart's depictions of working-class community, specifically the portrayal within this tradition of cultural criticism of 'a kind of psychological simplicity in the lives lived out in Hoggart's endless streets of little houses'.[22] Indeed, Steedman's device in her own autobiographical work is to present her mother as an example of a desiring, angry woman, one 'who finds no place in the iconography of working-class motherhood that Jeremy Seabrook presents in *Working Class Childhood*, and who is not to be found in Richard Hoggart's landscape'.[23]

[17] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 36.
[18] Williams defines the 'knowable community' as a 'selected society in a selected point of view' which is usually identified retrospectively as existing in the past; *Country and the City*, p. 179.
[19] Hoggart, *Literacy*, pp. 60, 92. [20] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 40. [21] Massey, *Space*, p. 180.
[22] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 7. [23] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 6.

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But several recent collections have sought to redress the charge of nostalgia levelled so frequently at Hoggart, and a close reading of *The Uses of Literacy*, one which takes into account its aesthetic and literary features, reveals a far more ambivalent picture.[24] What is striking is precisely the way in which Hoggart's apparently idealised portrayal of a particular kind of working-class domestic life lies cheek by jowl with the unsettling and incongruous fragments of a more submerged autobiographical account of childhood loss and poverty. This strange doubleness disrupts the text's chronological account of cultural change and presents the 'scholarship boy' story as ambivalent and discordant. Thus while Hoggart praises the pleasures of working-class domesticity, he simultaneously notes 'the prevalent grime, the closeness and the difficulties of home life'.[25] Juxtaposed with portrayals of the generalised respectable terraced house cleaned by 'Mother' are Hoggart's memories of his early childhood home, situated in a court in the Chapeltown area of Leeds, in which 'the tiny house was damp and swarming with cockroaches; the earth-closet was a stinking mire in bad weather'.[26] Moreover, a closer analysis of the text reveals the figure of the mother, 'the pivot of the home', to be a type of cultural myth drawn from the author's very loosely defined experience and his characteristic collection of cultural aphorisms and sayings. In fact, by way of the autobiographical, embedded voice, it is revealed that Hoggart's mother was widowed when her three children were still under the age of six; that she struggled to work because of ill health and that the family got by on charitable donations (although she 'thanked no one for their pity or their admiration'); and that she died five years later, leaving the orphaned children to be cared for among the extended family.[27]

Surprisingly, then, at least in light of the criticism of his supposedly hagiographic presentation of the working-class mother, Hoggart noted that his mother's own experience of life 'was too much an unrelieved struggle to be at all enjoyable'.[28] Indeed, Hoggart's brief and terse representations of his own mother in the text, to whom raising three hungry, demanding children afforded little pleasure, prefigure precisely the angry maternal

[24] See Sue Owen (ed.), *Richard Hoggart and Cultural Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and Michael Bailey, Ben Clarke and John K. Walton, *Understanding Richard Hoggart: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[25] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 88. [26] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 48. [27] Hoggart, *Literacy*, pp. 47–48.

[28] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 48. In conversation with Ronald Goldman, Hoggart recalls his mother in the briefest of terms: 'But my mother I remember fairly well. Most of the time she was tired and ill'; Ronald Goldman (ed.), *Breakthrough: Autobiographical Accounts of the Education of Some Socially Disadvantaged Children* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p. 91.

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figure who haunts Steedman's sociological memoir. Thus Hoggart recalls a scene from childhood which at once captures the taboo of maternal ambivalence and anticipates what he calls the 'real rage' of the working-class mother that can be found in a number of autobiographical texts throughout the twentieth century:

> On one occasion my mother, fresh from drawing her money, bought herself a small treat, something which must have been a reminder of earlier pleasures – a slice or two of boiled ham or a few shrimps. We watched her like sparrows and besieged her all through tea-time until she shocked us by bursting out in real rage. There was no compensation; she did not want to give us this, and there could be no easy generosity in the giving. We got some, though we sensed that we had stumbled into something bigger than we understood.[29]

This disturbing disruption of expectation is further mirrored by the disjuncture between Hoggart's proclamations of the centrality of the working-class father, and his text's defining silence and absence in relation to his own.

A tone of unease thus pervades Hoggart's portraits of generic and specific mothers and fathers, revealing itself in the peculiarly stilted syntax and formal diction. Likewise, Hoggart's characteristic use of quotation marks in *The Uses of Literacy* purports to represent his evidence of a distinctly oral and anecdotal working-class culture, but it also appears as a distancing technique that signals the writer's estrangement from these cultural types and experiences. Such features convey a sense of discomfort with the dual factors of debt and betrayal that weave throughout Hoggart's strange sociology. For example, in passages which detail the scholarship boy's sense of un/belonging within the domestic sphere, Hoggart notes how he is 'marked out early', quickly finding that the privacy and solitude needed for his studies require him 'to be more and more alone, if he is going to "get on"'.[30] Using the distancing third-person voice, Hoggart writes of this 'type':

> He will have, probably unconsciously, to oppose the ethos of the hearth, the intense gregariousness of the working-class family group. Since everything centres upon the living-room, there is unlikely to be a room of his own; the bedrooms are cold and inhospitable, and to warm them or the front room, if there is one, would not only be expensive, but would require an imaginative leap – out of the tradition – which most families are not capable of making.[31]

[29] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 48. [30] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 294. [31] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 294.

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The need for private and quiet space was one of the principal problems experienced by the memoirists whose writings feature in David Vincent's study of nineteenth-century working men's autobiography. One such autobiographer, John Harris, whose memoir was published in 1882, expressed a longing for 'some obscure corner' of his own in which to write verses: 'But this was denied me, and I often sat in my bed-room, with my feet wrapped in my mother's cloak, with a pair of small bellows for my writing desk.'[32] The desire for privacy is thus portrayed as a pragmatic requirement, but one which also entails wider, more symbolic, implications.

In contrast to earlier autobiographical accounts in which literacy leads to enlightenment, intellectual freedom and autonomy (as articulated, for example, in the writing of George Acorn and Kathleen Woodward), Hoggart's narrative is marked by a crucial ambivalence. Significantly, then, his own 'imaginative leap' into a world of higher education is portrayed as a narrative of gain – he is 'very much of *both* the worlds of home and school' – as well as loss.[33] In the crucial chapter 'Unbent Springs: A Note on the Uprooted and the Anxious', Hoggart uses a defining image of division to encapsulate the predicament of the scholarship boy, separated from his class by an apparently 'stronger critical intelligence or imagination', and his educational conversion to full literacy and higher education.[34] Such dislocation is experienced as not only a psychological change but as a visceral experience: 'a physical uprooting from their class through the medium of the scholarship system'.[35] The price to pay for the scholarship boy's entry into this other world, he writes, is an 'unusual self-consciousness before [his] own situation' and a lack of physical self-ease in space, finding himself 'chafing against his environment'.[36] Thus the scholarship boy's sought-for solitude comes at a symbolic cost; the room of one's own results in a form of inhibiting interiority – 'the pressure of all this living inside oneself'.[37] Self-conscious and self-doubting, the scholarship boy in Hoggart's text is likened to 'a version of the dissident Byronic hero', one who has 'lost the hold on one kind of life, and failed to reach the one to which they aspire'.[38] Using that strangely impersonal third-person voice, set off by those formal yet anonymous quotation marks, a stylistic mode Hoggart employs for the most 'autobiographical' of his chapters, he describes the

[32] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge*, p. 121. [33] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 294.
[34] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 292. [35] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 292. [36] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 292.
[37] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 315. [38] Hoggart, *Literacy*, pp. 315, 310.

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condition of the scholarship boy as almost phantasmal. He is caught, in a phrase taken from Matthew Arnold, 'between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born':[39]

> He cannot go back; with one part of himself he does not want to go back to a homeliness which was often narrow: with another part he longs for the membership he has lost, 'he pines for some Nameless Eden where he never was'. The nostalgia is the stronger and the more ambiguous because he is really 'in quest of his absconded self yet scared to find it'. He both wants to go back and yet thinks he has gone beyond his class, feels himself weighted with knowledge of his own and their situation, which hereafter forbids him the simpler pleasures of his father and mother.[40]

Importantly, the type of semi-hypothetical, semi-autobiographical, melancholy scholar who is surveyed in this section of *The Uses of Literacy* inhabits rooms that match their sense of unease, marking in their décor 'a division of experience'.[41] Such rooms

> have usually lost the cluttered homeliness of their origins; they are not going to be chintzy. The result is often an eye-on-the-teacher style of furnishing, like their favourite styles in literature; rooms whose pattern is decided by the needs of the tenants to be culturally *persona grata*, not to fall into any working-class 'stuffiness' or middle-class 'cosiness'; intensely self-conscious rooms whose outward effects are more important than their liveableness.[42]

Hoggart deems these places to be 'intensely self-conscious' – an aesthetic of the interior that is apparently hampered by its preoccupation with 'outward effects'.[43] It is a style that structures the form of *The Uses of Literacy* itself; this is a text in which the subject, with his ambivalent status as insider and outsider, is located in an uncanny threshold position which makes past and present unhomely.

ii Against revelation: Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* and Terry Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper*

The Uses of Literacy can be read as a drama of conversion – or to use a telling spatial and linguistic metaphor – of translation and a 'carrying across'. It presents a parallel between the shift from working-class oral

[39] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 300. The fragment of the quotation is from Matthew Arnold's poem 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse' (1850).
[40] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 301. [41] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 311. [42] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 311.
[43] Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 311.

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culture to populist print forms and the biographical narrative of the scholarship boy's movement from a close-knit 'known community' into higher education. In this regard, the use of literacy embodies a form of loyalty (in its capacity to represent working-class culture) and betrayal (in its placing of the narrator as an 'outside' ethnographer of his environment). This conception of literacy as the medium of loyalty and betrayal takes on Gothic undertones in Deane's enigmatic and unsolvable *Reading in the Dark* – a hybrid autobiographical novel rather than an orthodox memoir per se which combines features of the domestic ghost story, the *Bildungsroman* and the Northern Irish Troubles thriller.

If the idea of the border is a recurrent and significant metaphor in the narrative of the scholarship boy, it significantly takes on a physical and political aspect in Deane's Derry-based work in the form of the political sectarianism that divides the space of the city.[44] Unlike Hoggart's presentation of Hunslet, the working-class community in this text is defined from the start not by wholeness but by borders. Accordingly, there is nothing hermetic or safe about the home in *Reading in the Dark*, a point which reflects the fact that in twentieth-century Northern Irish history, home and domestic space are irrevocably steeped in history, politics and violence. Indeed, housing has been a fraught site of political antagonism throughout Derry's fractious twentieth-century history, particularly during the onset of the Troubles in the late 1960s. The enduring political murals on the sides of terraces and council houses in various parts of the city give stark visual form to the very political nature of private life in what was, at least from an Irish Republican perspective, an occupied territory. Indeed, it was the issue of housing that became the catalyst for the onset of the Civil Rights Movement in the 'Squatting at Caledon' protest in 1968.[45] Thus as Deane demonstrates in *Reading in the Dark*, home can offer no sanctuary in a militarised state which works precisely to infiltrate the boundaries of the private.[46] The text presents several instances of the politicisation of the

[44] After the partition of Ireland in 1921, Northern Ireland formed part of the United Kingdom; it comprised a Catholic minority population governed by a Protestant Unionist government.

[45] Dungannon Rural District Council had allocated all but one of the houses on a new-build estate, Kinnard Park, in Caledon, County Tyrone, to Protestants. Two Catholic families had occupied houses on the estate, and after a short period, the Catholic family that had squatted at a three-bedroomed house at 11 Kinnard Park was evicted in favour of a single Protestant woman who was employed by a local Unionist politician. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was involved in the case, and two weeks after the eviction, the decision was taken to hold a civil rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon; this march – and the sectarian violence that surrounded it – is taken by many commentators to mark the start of the Northern Irish Troubles.

[46] As Scott Brewster notes, 'the house is both an overdetermined site, and a curiously overlooked space, in Irish culture', with writers aware of the way in which 'the topophilia of home can easily

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space of the home, not least in a series of brutal invasions by the police acting on supposed tip offs. The failure of the domestic interior as a safe location is particularly acute for the book's young nameless narrator, whose family is doubly marked: they are Catholics with family links to the IRA, but they are also tainted within their own community by rumours that a family member had colluded with the British Army in the past.

While *Reading in the Dark* has more often been interpreted within the specific context of the Northern Irish conflict, I address it here in relation to the nineteenth-century novel of education and the 'scholarship boy' narrative, with their presiding motifs of literacy, social mobility and the consequent anxiety of identity. For it is arguable that the overt political story of this text occludes what I take to be an equally significant social and historical narrative: the depiction of the scholarship boy's education and his subsequent 'betrayal' of the family. As my reading will demonstrate, the boy in this tale develops into a type of domestic spy (and later an 'informer' in a precise sense of the term) – as he becomes aware of, and able to read, the complex hidden signs he glimpses on his journey away from a working-class community into that of higher education and (disappointing) enlightenment.

Set within the housing landscape of the Derry Bogside, consisting of rows of close-standing, sloping terraced streets, the family home in Deane's work is a site of secrecy, conflict and incipient meaning – one in which the repressed and unspoken tensions of the past seem to make themselves manifest through the signs of a domestic haunting. The book's opening immediately signals the haunted house genre with the announcement of a ghost and its simultaneous presence-in-absence: 'On the stairs, there was a clear, plain silence.'[47] The narrative thus commences with a moment of suspension and like the ghost on the liminal space of the landing – suspended between the living and the dead – the protagonist is midway up the stairs, about to cross to the window looking out to the Gothic St Eugene's cathedral, when he is halted by his mother's portentous warning to *stay in place*: 'Don't move. . . . Don't cross that window.'[48]

become territorialisation, a matter of exclusion, silence and vulnerability'; 'Building, Dwelling, Moving: Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin and the Reverse Aesthetic', in Smyth and Croft (eds.), *Our House*, p. 143. Moreover, as Clair Wills acknowledges, dominant conceptions of 'public' and 'private' spheres are uneasily mapped onto Irish society and its specific colonial history; *Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 65–66.

[47] Deane, *Reading*, p. 5. [48] Deane, *Reading*, p. 5.

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The notion of haunting as symptomatic of some kind of unfinished historical business is a staple of the Gothic genre, as is the convention that the return of repressed history is often actively sought out by the protagonist of the novel. But focalised through the scrutinising eyes of the first-person diarist, in *Reading in the Dark* it is arguably the boy's subjective point of view which transforms quotidian life inside the Derry terrace into a signifying Gothic terrain. Scenes of domestic life and poverty are constantly translated by the first-person version of events, and the familiar visual idiom of the working-class home becomes a space of Gothic excess which is seemingly charged with incipient meaning.[49] Thus the young protagonist enjoys the idea of a ghost-in-residence and its transformative potential; seen through his eyes, the prosaic kitchen range has a 'red heart fire', a broken boiler 'expired in a plume of smoke and angry hissings', and 'lids of the saucepans trembled on the range and the bubbling water gargled'.[50] The overall effect is that the dreary domestic poverty faced by the family is rendered not through realist detail but through a signifying web of symbolic and dramatic significance: 'We were haunted! We had a ghost, even in the middle of the afternoon. . . . The house was all cobweb tremors.'[51]

The tension between realist principles and Gothic writing, which underpins the plot and narrative telling of the work, is best illustrated in the title chapter 'Reading in the Dark'. Like the typical protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* – from Jane Eyre to Maggie Tulliver and indeed the autodidacts of working-class autobiography – this section features the young boy engaged in a pivotal act: reading privately to himself (albeit, due to lack of space, with his bedfellow brother's knees pressed into his body). In an earlier urban Gothic novel, *Oliver Twist*, Oliver peruses *The Newgate Calendar* late at night in Fagin's den; in *Reading in the Dark*, the young boy is engrossed in *The Shan Van Vocht* ('The Poor Old Woman'), a dramatic telling of the 1798 nationalist rebellion: 'In the opening pages, people were talking in whispers about the dangers of the rebellion as they sat around a great open-hearth fire on a wild night of winter rain and squall'.[52] The book offers all the elements that fascinate and thrill the child and that he constantly seeks to find in his own family history: intrigue, danger, rebellion and conspiracy.

The boy's dramatic imaginings in this chapter are, however, abruptly interrupted by his recollection of a recent lesson learned at school:

[49] On the Gothic as a 'writing of excess', see Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1–6.
[50] Deane, *Reading*, pp. 6, 9, 128. [51] Deane, *Reading*, p. 6. [52] Deane, *Reading*, p. 19.

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> The English teacher read out a model essay which had been, to our surprise, written by a country boy. It was an account of his mother setting the table for the evening meal and then waiting with him until his father came in from the fields. She put out a blue-and-white jug full of milk and a covered dish of potatoes in their jackets and a red-rimmed butter dish with a slab of butter, the shape of a swan dipping its head imprinted on its surface. That was the meal. Everything was so simple, especially the way they waited. She sat with her hands in her lap and talked to him about someone up the road who had had an airmail letter from America. She told him that his father would be tired, but, tired as he was, he wouldn't be without a smile before he washed himself and he wouldn't be so without his manners to forget to say grace before they ate and that he, the boy, should watch the way the father would smile when the books were produced for homework, for learning was a wonder to him, especially the Latin. Then there would be no talking, just the ticking of the clock and the kettle humming and the china dogs on the mantelpiece looking, as ever, across at one another.
>
> 'Now that,' said the master, 'that's writing. That's just telling the truth.'[53]

The boy's own submitted account, in contrast to this essay, caused him to feel embarrassed

> because my own essay had been full of long or strange words I had found in the dictionary – 'cerulean', 'azure', 'phantasm' and 'implacable' – all of them describing skies and seas I had seen only with the Ann of the novel. I'd never thought such stuff was worth writing about. It was ordinary life – no rebellions or love affairs or dangerous flights across the hills at night. And yet I kept remembering that mother and son waiting in the Dutch interior of that essay, with the jug of milk and the butter on the table, while behind and above them were those wispy, shawly figures from the rebellion, sibilant above the great fire and below the aching, high wind.[54]

Reversing the common literary and filmic convention whereby reality gives way to fantasy and imagination, the child protagonist's imagining of dramatic plots, as he reads in the dark of the bedroom, is abruptly brought down to earth by realist representational modes. The reference to the Dutch interior style is telling, for these seventeenth-century representations of intimate domesticity often capture a sensibility of stillness, order and privacy. In fact, the genre famously inaugurated the visual representation of private life situated in domestic space that was flooded by what appeared to be forms of natural light, and in which the openness and

[53] Deane, *Reading*, pp. 20–21. The 'country boy' in question, who dwells on the minutiae of the homestead, is thought to be based on Seamus Heaney, a classmate at St Columb's College grammar school in Derry.

[54] Deane, *Reading*, p. 21.

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transparency figured by windows and doors were counterpoised with allusions to the individual's possession of secrecy and private property (in the form of a letter, a glance, a key in the door). The 'Dutch interior' of the 'model essay' represents a scene that appears to be inimical to Deane's young narrator, who seems excluded and baffled by its simple, passive details: the mother and son who are content to wait, a father for whom learning is 'a wonder', domestic space that is filled with the meaningless sounds of the kettle and clock. The rebel spirit of the Gothic, which is finally conjoined to the Dutch interior in the final lines of the passage quoted above, can be read as the scholarship boy's yearning for a disruptive and ambitious plot that will propel him forwards and upwards. Yet this image of a fusion between Gothic and domestic realism ultimately encapsulates what ends up being *Reading in the Dark*'s principal aesthetic achievement. For what seem to the child incompatible modes – domestic realism and melodrama – are significantly brought together through the plot and form of this urban haunted house tale.

Ironically, perhaps, it is through this self-reflexive attention to the politics of literary form, rather than any autobiographical disclosure, that Deane reveals himself most clearly. For throughout his critical writing, Deane has demonstrated a preoccupation with the way in which social conflict and the possibility of transformation are transacted precisely by way of aesthetic and literary form. Thus, as noted earlier, the narrator recollects that when discussing the other boy's essay, the teacher had instructed the class that its form of realism is 'real' writing – a way of 'just telling the truth'. But the text seems to suggest that the realism of the Dutch interior cannot represent the reality of domestic space in his 'strange country': a sectarian, surveyed community in which politics can scarcely be kept at the door (the police barracks lie a mere 300 yards from the family home). Using the metaphor of the uncanny itself, Deane wrote in an early essay that 'to live in a ghetto, is to live in a *strange homely and lethal climate*' (emphasis added).[55] In such a state, the homestead offers little sanctuary and is subject to the repeated intrusive violence of the police, as in the raid in the opening sections of *Reading in the Dark*, in which the house is described as being 'splintered open': 'The linoleum was being ripped off, the floorboards crowbarred up, the wardrobe was lying face down in the middle of the floor and the slashed wallpaper was hanging down in ribbons.'[56] This demolition of domestic space produces an almost phantasmal impression: 'Objects seemed to be floating, free of gravity,

[55] Seamus Deane, 'Why Bogside?', *The Honest Ulsterman* 27 (1971), 8. [56] Deane, *Reading*, p. 28.

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all over the room.'[57] The effect of this violation of the private realm is to make the aesthetic of domestic realism impossible as well as to complicate the means by which truth might be told.

Of course, 'telling the truth' is a difficult concept in this monitored community in which social intercourse is often strategically coded, and where history is subject to, or represented as, a series of misrepresentations, including gossip, rumour, secrets and lies. Indeed, throughout the work, the young boy constantly encounters the limits of dominant enlightenment modes structured by the principle of realism: history-telling, chronology, diaries, translation, interrogation and autobiography. This is not surprising, for as Deane has argued in *Strange Country*, which is concerned with Irish manifestations of Gothic (including forms of Irish Catholic Gothic as a lesser-known counterpart to the Anglo-Irish genre), a colonial legacy leaves behind a terrain in which literary realism, with its complacent discourse of veracity, cannot easily take root.[58] This is nowhere more strikingly expressed than in the fact that despite its apparent status as a detective story, Deane's text reaches no conclusions, to say nothing of convictions, a point that has frustrated some readers.[59]

Deane's Gothic scholarship boy tale is crucially about 'informers' who betray not simply a political project but perhaps also their own class or family. For one of the effects of the partitioning of Ireland was the extension of the Butler Education Act to Northern Irish citizens, including, of course, its dissident Catholic population. Thus as Liam Harte has argued, Deane's young protagonist is 'situated at a crucial conjunction of social and historical change, as the oral folk culture of his native community is about to be finally and irrevocably overlaid by the dominant state-sponsored culture of literacy'.[60] Indeed, for Harte, the young boy functions as an embodiment of the generation which would profit from the 1944 Butler Education Act; his 'educational progress is itself emblematic of the Catholic minority's rise to political articulacy'.[61]

[57] Deane, *Reading*, p. 28.

[58] In his discussion of a genre he labels 'Catholic or Catholic-nationalist Gothic' (which anticipates, of course, his own choice of form in *Reading in the Dark*), Deane points to the influence of James Clarence Mangan's unreliable and fantastical memoir 'Fragment of an Unfinished Autobiography' (1882); *Strange Country*, p. 126.

[59] See, for example, Gerry Smyth, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 134; Terry Eagleton, 'The Bogside Bard', *New Statesman*, 30 August 1996, p. 46.

[60] Liam Harte, 'History Lessons: Postcolonialism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*', *Irish University Review* 30:1 (2000), 159.

[61] Harte, 'History Lessons', 158.

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Significantly and paradoxically, perhaps, the alumni of the grammar school system included Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin, both of whom would become powerful figures of counterinsurrection against the British state itself.[62]

The specific interest of Deane's autobiographical novel, however, lies in its tracing of the more personal ramifications of the child's education. For the young boy's self-assigned role of amateur detective – whose job is to analyse the skein of family secrets, pull it all together and return the 'true' narrative to its central players – places him necessarily in the role of interpreter, but also results in his ultimate sense of separation from the family. As a 'scholarship' tale, *Reading in the Dark* thus presents the young protagonist's movement from oral to literate codes, from the homestead to an educational setting which will force him to pass particular kinds of interpretative judgment on the household (including the laying bare of its secrets). It is telling, therefore, that the narrator's progressive discovery of the details surrounding the execution of the informer in the family leads to his confessing that 'I could never talk to my father or my mother properly again', a division that centres on language, interpretation and knowledge.[63] And fittingly, perhaps, the means by which the father rejects the boy's repeated inquisitions about the family secrets is expressed as a prohibition on communication: 'You ask me no more questions. Talk to me no more'.[64]

The fact, then, that Deane has resisted rather predictable attempts either to confirm or deny the book's status as a truthful 'memoir' of his life is central to the text's literary politics. For autobiographical modes here are fundamentally and significantly skewed: the very notion of the revelation of self, or transparent subjectivity, is meaningfully placed in question. In a brilliant interplay of form and content, a narrative relating a mystery story involving hidden identities operates as a riddle at the level of genre and intention.[65] In this way, the book itself serves as a type of Gothic

[62] Deane's fellow alumni at St Columb's College included Seamus Heaney, John Hume, Eamonn McCann and Brian Friel; for an account which frames this generation specifically within the context of the Education Act, see Maurice Fitzpatrick's *The Boys of St Columb's* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2010).

[63] Deane, *Reading*, p. 126. [64] Deane, *Reading*, p. 108.

[65] The UK and US editions of the Vintage paperback used the generic visual hallmark of memoir – a black-and-white photograph of the author and his brother as children on its cover – although the book is classified as 'fiction'. While Deane has distanced himself from the autobiographical angle, partly for literary-critical reasons, his commentary on the text has also served to add to the book's generic ambiguity and opacity. On several occasions he has rebutted the suggestion that the book was a memoir, only to affirm its autobiographical truth: 'I have been insistent in saying that it's fiction,

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autobiography, undoing its formal precepts at every turn. Again, this achievement rests on the use of the uncanny. As Nicholas Royle argues:

> The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from the Latin *proprius*, 'own'), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events.[66]

In *Reading*, the very protagonist is denied a 'proper name' – that stamp of value intrinsic to the novel and the autobiography.[67] But other challenges to the senses of the term 'proper' ramify throughout Deane's text in an quasi-structural way: material possession ('that which is one's own; a personal possession; private property'); attributive ownership ('belonging or relating to a specified person or thing distinctively or exclusively; intrinsic, inherent'); authenticity and truthfulness ('strictly applicable; accurate, correct; literal, not metaphorical'); and conformity ('behaving according to social norms') (*OED*).

Read in this way, the stylistic ambivalence of *Reading*, including its liminality in bordering the genres of the autobiography and the novel, has social and political resonance. For in many ways the novel constitutes its own model of critical interpretation, one in which the 'lessons' learned by the boy are key to a reading of the text. As Deane himself has remarked about the work: 'The only way out is by keeping a secret, keeping things secret. It's very un-American in that sense. There's no talking-cure, no implication that by revealing everything you will

it's not a memoir, but there is a good deal of autobiographical material in it' (Andrew Ross, 'Irish Secrets and Lies', *Salon*, 11 April 1997, www.unz.org/Pub/Salon-1997apr-00017); 'A lot of it [is autobiographical]. I wouldn't want to give a percentage, but in effect it's an interpretation of my own family's history' (Nicholas Patterson, 'An Interview with Seamus Deane', *The Boston Phoenix*, 8 June 1998, http://weeklywire.com/ww/06–08-98/boston_books_1.html). Furthermore, the protagonist of the work remains nameless throughout (and is significantly not given a fictional pseudonym), yet Deane does not extend this 'anonymity' to the protagonist's family members. In this regard, Deane has commented suggestively: 'I could only write when I used the real names of my sisters – if I gave them different names the narrative ceased to be true' (Nick Fraser, 'A Kind of Life Sentence', *Guardian*, 28 October 1996, p. 9). This precise inability to 'economise' with the truth on the crucial matter of the 'proper names' of his family (in a book which is preoccupied with the concealment and revelation of identity) reinforces the sense that Deane is using, and challenging, the conventions and cultural expectations of autobiography and memoir.

[66] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 1.

[67] See, for example, the discussion of the function of 'proper names' in Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract', in Tzvetan Todorov (ed.), *French Literary Theory Today*, R. Carter (trans.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 192–222, and Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Pimlico, 2000), pp. 18–21.

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somehow overcome it!'[68] Resisting narrative transparency and resolution, *Reading* provides a complex way of representing subjectivity that is not premised on the disclosure of self. Deane's rejection of the modes of closure and resolution offered by realism, and his refusal to place a transparent autobiographical stamp on the work, thus takes on political significance rather than being simply a dispute over names and categories. At the heart of the text is a steadfast antagonism towards the individualist precepts of the memoir form in its conventional treatment of one individual or a specific family. Indeed, as in Toni Morrison's historical ghost story *Beloved* (1987), the haunting of one particular house in *Reading in the Dark* serves as a canvas for the exploration of a collective and social history of conflict and communal memory.

Eagleton has likewise engaged with the tensions of literary realism and Gothic in his critical writing and in his memoir *The Gatekeeper*, which self-reflexively and knowingly engages with the grammar school narrative and plot. In his critical work, Eagleton has identified the way in which Gothic modes operate as a type of political unconscious that ruptures the Enlightenment project of literary realism with its failure to articulate the 'disrupted course of Irish history and the nonrealist quality of its fictions'.[69] The idea of the Gothic as a countercultural, disruptive genre is thus key to any reading of Eagleton's memoir. For as with Deane's text, Eagleton's representation of a working-class childhood in industrial 1950s Salford is governed not by gritty social realism but by modes of hyperbole, theatricality and excess. There is, in fact, an irony in this (as Eagleton indicates himself in the memoir) because Salford is the place of origin of many famous proponents of mid-century social realism in a variety of modes, including L.S. Lowry, Albert Finney, Shelagh Delaney and Mike Leigh. But in *The Gatekeeper*'s rendering, the uncanny sensibility of a Salford childhood is self-reflexively produced through an identification with the family's Irish roots and Catholicism, 'a deeply un-English culture'.[70] A Catholic upbringing, in this memoir, exposes the protagonist to nothing less than 'secrecy and

[68] Carol Rumens, 'Reading Deane', *Fortnight*, July/August 1997, p. 30
[69] Eagleton, *Heathcliff*, p. 182.
[70] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 33. Like *Reading in the Dark*, Eagleton's text can also be seen as an example of the type of 'Catholic Gothic' invoked by Deane in *Strange Country*. See also Richard Haslam's analysis of this 'subcategory of Irish Gothic' in 'Gothic: A Rhetorical Hermeneutics Approach', *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 2 (2007), http://irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/IrishGothicHaslam.html.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

doubleness, absolute refusal, Gothic grotesquerie, gestures of extremity . . . self-immolation, death-in-life'.[71]

The identification with Catholicism and, later, the collective belonging of socialism deliberately eclipses the traditional emphasis on the self and the family household which is generic to the traditional memoir form. Indeed, the defining interior in *The Gatekeeper*, with which the text begins, is not the family home but that of the 'holy family' – the Carmelite convent in which Eagleton serves, in a defining symbolic role, as the gatekeeper to the nuns who have chosen a life of self-abnegation. Despite its unprepossessing appearance (a 'squat, ramshackle building, its roof more corrugated iron than Gothic pinnacle'), the convent's inner secret space, to which the gatekeeper has special access, is depicted as an interior that defies expectation, perspective and reason.

> For all its drab outer appearance, the convent was Gothic enough in its own way. It was really two separate spaces hinged cunningly together: the sealed interior of the nuns' quarters, and then, outside the enclosure, a few public rooms, a small chapel open to local people, and the lay sisters' dingy apartments. These two spaces met in a kind of faultline of turntables, concealed doors, secret compartments, small cupboards accessible from both sides, so that the whole building was a sort of *trompe l'oeil*, like a crazy house at a fairground or an Escher drawing. It was as though the familiar world could open at any moment on to an alternative universe, only inches away from it yet incomparably remote.[72]

The convent parlour itself is laden with spatial symbolism, serving as a 'kind of no man's land or air-lock between the nuns' enclosure and the outside world': a locale that is bare but divided by a black iron grille from which 'symbolic spikes jutted ominously'.[73]

As in *Reading in the Dark*, the settings and scenes from childhood in *The Gatekeeper* do not function to reveal the autobiographical protagonist, but form a structural tableaux: a composition of the social and aesthetic formations that frame the writer's modes of analysis and ways of seeing. For Eagleton, the socialist Catholic literary critic and intellectual, 'Catholicism was a world which combined rigorous thought with sensuous symbolism, the analytic with the aesthetic, so it was probably no accident that I was later to become a literary theorist. You did not see reason and mystery as incompatible'.[74] In a characteristic move of self-reflexivity,

[71] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 40. [72] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 4. [73] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 3.
[74] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 33.

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conjoining the apparently impersonal collective space of the convent with the form of the personal life, Eagleton notes:

> It was also an image of my fissured life as a child. One moment I would be playing tag outside the corner shop, and the next moment I would slip through a black hole into a realm unimaginably remote, where my Protestant friends could not follow and where secular reason slithered to an abrupt halt.[75]

As the allusion to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* suggests, elements of fairy tale in the broadest sense, including grotesque shape-shifting, are used to convey the book's predominant motif: the sense of being located between two worlds. This occupation of liminal space – the border within which Deane's scholarship-boy narrator also develops – is again shown to be unsettling and enabling. And as with Deane's text, this representation is politically significant. Thus whereas Lowry's paintings depicted Northern working-class life as a study in rootedness and industrial routine, Eagleton's Salford convent suggests that things are potentially in flux. In that sense, the work presents the convent as an aesthetic space of possibility and transformation.

If the convent is thus the memoir's ironically definitive location, a place where the inhabitants 'ritually avoided the first-person pronoun' for the collective 'our', the opposite of the symbolically charged convent is none other than the family home itself, at which the autobiographer almost reluctantly arrives.[76] While the convent, grammar school and, later, Cambridge University are sites of overdetermination and larger-than-life characters, the description of the family home and its occupants is significantly pared down to a bleak minimum. Eagleton describes a childhood of poverty governed by a spirit of 'grim utility which being poor tends to foster', a way of living that is depicted as 'anti-aesthetic'.[77] Against the literary cliché of the warm, affectionate working-class hearth, Eagleton evokes a home that is singularly bare – marked by an absence of homeliness and explicit affection. In fact, invoking a theatrical comparison, he writes that the 'sparsely furnished house was like a Beckettian stage-set in which nothing ever happened, since we lacked the resources for eventfulness to occur'.[78] That mainstay of the 'respectable' working-class home, the parlour, is presented in this text as a redundant space. Indeed, Eagleton recalls how in his father's childhood home, a small terraced house

[75] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 4. [76] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 13.
[77] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, pp. 104, 103. [78] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 104.

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in a 'Salford slum', the family of fourteen had slept upstairs on principle so the parlour could be kept 'sacrosanct'.[79] The parlour, in this representation of working-class home life at least, 'is kept empty, as a kind of witness to the fact that you have neither time, training nor inclination for such pursuits. . . . It is "kept for best", but since the best never happens it remains a shell'.[80]

Consequently the family home in *The Gatekeeper* is a rather underdetermined space, from which the autobiographical protagonist departs in order to encounter a panoply of Oxbridge dons, bullying landlords and hypocritical aristocratic types. This is important because it reinforces the sense that the self in Eagleton's world is presented as being formed not by the private, familial spaces of the domestic but through the public influences of institutions, mentors, antagonists and ideologies: 'A Catholic aversion to subjectivism went along with a working-class allergy to emotional ostentation, and both were underpinned by an Irish devotion to the tribe rather than the individual'.[81] The family is thus at once an intimate part of this world – the first mention of Eagleton's mother and father is in relation to the Carmelite convent – and set apart in what becomes an almost self-orphaning text.

This symbolic hollowing-out of the domestic interior, the traditional site for the assertion of personal origins, has implications for the book's literary politics. The memoir itself subscribes to the type of 'anti-autobiography' Eagleton describes in sidelong fashion, whose aim is to supplant the 'prurience and immodesty' of the autobiography and its promise of access to the writer's 'inner life', with a stress instead on a portrait of the self through the collective institutions that lend it shape (the church, school, political party and higher education).[82] The emphasis is thus on forms of practice: 'a world of compulsive rituals, not of agonized inwardness'.[83] In this regard, Eagleton notes the impact of Catholic doctrine in and on his young childhood:

> As with the acting technique of Laurence Olivier, you built from the outside inwards, and so were at odds with a social order which made a fetish of interiority. . . . You were raised, then, to be suspicious of the warm glow, the intuitive certainty, the ineffable private experience. Truth had to be publicly argued for, reasoning was to be expected, and the criteria for inner states lay in what you did.[84]

[79] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 116. [80] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 116.
[81] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 32. [82] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 57. [83] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 31.
[84] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, pp. 31–32.

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Eagleton's memoir then presents an implicit critique of the bourgeois ideology of the interior as revelatory of the self and replaces it with a narrative in which the scholarship boy gains access into the heart of institutional spaces, exemplified by his movement towards the cloistered centre of the Cambridge college.

But entry into the cultural spaces of institutional knowledge is, in this text, as in *The Uses of Literacy* and *Reading in the Dark*, also experienced as a type of family betrayal (Eagleton notably recalls how news reaches him of his father's death as he sits waiting for his entrance interview at Cambridge). As with the autobiographical works of Hoggart and Deane, *The Gatekeeper* presents an account of a life which is centrally concerned with the ambivalent relations of language and power. The story in all three of these texts is put into words by the articulate, educated son who is painfully aware of the shadow of a father who is distinguished by a type of silence. This problematic is expressed, aptly enough, in *The Gatekeeper* by a rhetorical question that alludes to Catholic theology: 'What if others win for you by their sacrifice the very largeness of mind which might tempt you to betray them?'[85] In this respect, the protagonist of Eagleton's work, like those of Hoggart and Deane, assumes the role of the insider who is also outsider. The difference is that he inherits less of the agonised doubt concerning this position, instead viewing his 'inauthenticity' as a powerful and strategic political and rhetorical weapon. Being on the inside, as it were, does not require complicity, and it is significant that Eagleton cites Oscar Wilde's role as 'a kind of fifth columnist in the enemy camp, unmasking their own complacent imperial selfhood for the fiction that it was, mocking as well as flattering their social and artistic forms by deploying them even more dexterously than they did themselves'.[86] Ultimately, what distinguishes the narrative of *The Gatekeeper* is its presentation of an autobiographical trajectory that leads towards a political version of the interior, in which access to the 'inner sanctum' of hegemonic institutions provides a means of mimicry, subversion and critique.

iii Scholarship women and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*

The narrative of the 'scholarship boy' or 'scholarship girl', as these enduring epithets indicate, is a highly gendered form. In popular culture, in fact, postwar social mobility has generally been emblematised by the figure of

[85] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 58. [86] Eagleton, *Gatekeeper*, p. 161.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the 'angry young man', although feminist scholarship has demanded and given greater attention to the specificity of gendered experience.[87] The second half of this chapter thus turns towards depictions of childhood interiors and domestic space in the works of female writers who also reflect, through the prism of autobiography, on the border crossing of social mobility or displacement brought about by the grammar school process.

In her introduction to an important collection of autobiographical writings by women which centre on the postwar period, Liz Heron identifies a common thread among the contributions, one determined by

> a sense of not belonging, of feeling like outsiders, either in relation to others beyond our immediate family or community, or in a more singular sense of exclusion. This very common feature of childhood and adolescence was inevitably sharpened in a period when industrial expansion and technological development led to a substantial degree of geographical and social mobility, so that the bonds of community were loosening. Housing developments and slum clearance contributed to this process, and it must also have been heightened by the forms of education which, for some of us, demanded that we separate ourselves from our class or cultural identity.[88]

Depictions of space and place are of course always crucial to narratives of class mobility, but here I will explore how female authors display an acute self-reflexivity towards the positions they occupy as writing subjects. Significantly, the reminder that interiority concerns the body, as well as subjectivity and the imagination, is brought to the fore in memoirs in which 'escapees' and 'refugees' from a particular social environment portray their passage of development as an acutely embodied experience.[89]

Ideas of space and the body are complicated by the female memoirist's identification with the body of another person – namely, that of the mother, who is often conspicuously identified with the place of home. While fathers are silent but symbolically central in the literature by male writers addressed in the previous two sections, in the works of the scholarship women, it is the mother who 'haunts' the daughter's text. The psychodynamics of mother–daughter relations have, needless to say, a prominent and complex place in feminist criticism, not least in the work

[87] For example, see Liz Heron (ed.), *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the 50s* (London: Virago, 1985), and Gillian Whitlock, 'Disciplining the Child: Recent British Academic Memoir', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 19 (2004), 46–58.

[88] Liz Heron, 'Introduction', in Heron (ed.), *Truth*, p. 3.

[89] These are the suggestive terms used by Steedman and Kuhn, respectively, as noted by Whitlock in 'Disciplining the Child', pp. 51–52.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. However, I intend to focus specifically on the way in which the portrayal of mother–daughter ambivalence in memoirs can be read in relation to postwar shifts in gender and social mobility. For the 'angry woman' in these texts is often not the autobiographical protagonist herself but the doubled figure of the mother.

As Gillian Whitlock points out, accounts by women of the so-called Robbins generation frequently recall 'childhoods where the maternal role was performed grudgingly' and include 'the embedded biography of a mother who deeply resented domesticity and the sexual politics of married life in postwar Britain'.[90] These were mothers, she adds, who showed their resentment in a display of an insurrectionist 'acquired domestic incompetence'.[91] The resentful mother is thus significantly aligned to the domestic interior, with the result that the childhood home in the memoirs is a disturbing space of seething conflict, division and a constant sense of things only half explained. Again, then, I read the striking presence of the uncanny in such texts – including the portrayal of various haunted houses, ghostly apparitions, grotesque bodily transformations and maternal figures likened alternatively to 'Cinderella' or the 'witch' – as articulations of a conflict that can be interpreted in the context of material changes relating to literacy, education and class mobility.

In an autobiographical account of her childhood, Valerie Walkerdine suggestively describes her mother as 'the woman who gave her children everything, hoping to find there some fragment of herself. My mother in this history has no history. She lurks silently in the kitchen. She is safety. She is danger'.[92] Walkerdine's description encapsulates many of the recurring difficulties found in these memoirs: the bitterness of maternal self-sacrifice; the paradox of the daughter writing her own account in view of the mother who lacks a textual history; and the edge of danger ascribed to the maternal figure who is rooted to the home. Annette Kuhn expresses it thus in her own memoir *Family Secrets* (1995):

> My father, sick and marginalised, was little more than a spectral physical presence in the house: I knew quite well where the real power lay, and behaved accordingly. My mother, now in her fifties and working long hours in the workmen's cafe she owned, was touchy, ill-tempered, and resentful of her daughter. The closeness between us was still there; but it had assumed a stifling, conflicted, unpredictable – *unsafe* – quality whose feeling-tone I still shudder to recall. School became the focus for everything that was

90 Whitlock, 'Disciplining the Child', p. 56. 91 Whitlock, 'Disciplining the Child', p. 56.
92 Valerie Walkerdine, 'Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood', in Heron (ed.), *Truth*, p. 75.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> amiss between us. She would denounce my newly-acquired 'book learning' as useless for survival in the real world.[93]

This figure of the mother and housewife seething within domestic confines is given another notable depiction in Jeanette Winterson's recent memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2012). Here, Winterson's adoptive mother's fearsome and extravagant proportions allow her to function as the meek 1950s housewife's veritable *doppelgänger*: 'She was a big woman, tallish and weighing around twenty stone. Surgical stockings, flat sandals, a Crimplene dress and a nylon headscarf. . . . She was out of scale, larger than life. She was like a fairy story where size is approximate and unstable. She loomed up. She expanded'.[94] 'Mrs Winterson', as the author labels her in a rather Gothic appellation, is both menacing and pitiful – a woman whom custom and economic circumstances have confined to the house. It is a situation that she retaliates against by making ammunition of her domestic utensils: 'She was a flamboyant depressive; a woman who kept a revolver in the duster drawer, and the bullets in a tin of Pledge. A woman who stayed up all night baking cakes to avoid sleeping in the same bed as my father'.[95] In the manner of fairy tale acts of metamorphosis, which are themselves so often triggered by fits of rage, Mrs Winterson is literally and figuratively unstable; she grows to extreme proportions, her body pressing against the confining walls of the small two-up, two-down Accrington terraced house. Like Kuhn's perception of her mother's power *within* the interior (in contrast to her shortage of social capital outside the house), Winterson portrays her mother as greedily taking up space for herself in the small terrace. Thus the 'larger than life' Mrs Winterson pushes out husband and daughter by growing to an excessive size in a manner which is inversely proportionate to her lack of 'economic clout'.[96]

Yet while Winterson is drawn towards fairy-tale transformations, here, as elsewhere in her writing, she also alludes to the specific tensions related to class, shame and poverty that underlie this shape-shifting creature she calls mother. For in fact Mrs Winterson, it emerges, is wracked by the sense of having 'married down' (a strikingly recurring motif among the mothers of the scholarship women), and a combination of acute class-consciousness and disappointment are said to impel many of her tirades. The mother's unappealing habit of greeting a visitor with a poker

[93] Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, p. 106.
[94] Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (London: Vintage, 2012), p. 3.
[95] Winterson, *Why Be Happy*, p. 1. [96] Winterson, *Why Be Happy*, p. 132.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

through the letter box, for example, is revealed to be more of a defensive rather than purely aggressive gesture: an attempt to prevent outsiders from entering the house and discovering that there was no bathroom or inside toilet.[97]

The expression of the daughter's ambivalent sense of loyalty towards, and rejection of, the mother – whose story she articulates even as she simultaneously maligns her – has been accorded classic status in Steedman's key memoir *Landscape for a Good Woman*. The trope of illegitimacy – of things that are literally outside of the law or that lie at the margins of propriety – is the foundation of *Landscape*'s aesthetic as well as its politics. Again, as with *Reading in the Dark* and *The Gatekeeper*, both of which are also preoccupied with challenging the 'legitimacy' of various political and cultural forms, Steedman's text is a work that manifests deep ambivalence towards the autobiographical genre to which it uneasily belongs. For this is a work that stubbornly refuses to conform to the expectations of the genre, not least in the uncanny doubling effect created by the subtitle to the American edition of the book, 'A Story of Two Lives'.

But Steedman's story aims to be unsettling in other ways, since her stated purpose is to seek out the fissures in those 'central interpretative devices of the culture' which she deems incapable of transmitting her own family history.[98] Significantly, these interpretative devices or explanatory narratives have a distinctive spatial shape, as signalled in the under-explored idea of landscape in the title of the work itself. *Landscape* thus presents an interrogation of two types of cultural interiors. The first is what Steedman posits as the idealisation of domestic life in male working-class autobiography, together with its presentation of the romanticised mother figure.[99] Against this typology, *Landscape* renders an account of the subjectivity and psychodrama of the lives of working-class women – specifically, the desire, envy and rage she believes constitute her mother's life story. Thus using an apt architectural metaphor, Steedman describes her methodology as one that 'widens the fissure between the terraced

[97] Winterson, *Why Be Happy*, p. 100. Like 'Mrs Winterson', Steedman's mother also bans visitors from the house – a fact that is also attributed in the text to her sense of shame at the family's poverty.

[98] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 5. Although a striking feature of the work is *Landscape*'s deep affinity with precisely some of the texts and paradigms it seeks to reject, ranging from Mayhew's oral histories of the working poor to Freud's case study form.

[99] Nicola Wilson explores the way in which the figure of the mother serves as the focus of particular accounts of working-class domesticity in 'Reproducing the Home in Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*', *Home Cultures* 2:3 (2005), 299–314.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

houses that Hoggart and Seabrook have so lovingly described' in order to 'open the door of one of the terraced houses, in a mill town in the 1920s, show Seabrook my mother and her longing'.[100] The second interior which Steedman aims to refurbish through her account is that of the psycho-architecture of the bourgeois household (as located in the fairy tale and psychoanalysis), with its familiar symbolic objects and narrative apparatus. Thus referring to the Freudian case study form, with a particular emphasis on the famous case of 'Dora', she notes:

> The corpus draws its images from the social world (it could scarcely do otherwise); it is made out of metaphors that look as if they describe nothing at all, but rather simply *are* the way the world is: a jewel-case, a pair of pearl ear-rings, a nursemaid, a household ordered this way, now that, a tree outside the nursery window. . . . This story, the psychoanalytic story, could not use the stuff of the world outside the gate in this way: streets, food, work, dirt, can only be used to dispel the complacency of the imagery. The narrative holds within itself sets of images that represent the social divisions of a culture, and only with extreme difficulty can it be used to present images of a world that lies outside the framework of its evidential base.[101]

To be middle class, Steedman argues in effect, is to inherit a thesaurus of signifying objects that serve as convenient props or symbolic ciphers in the articulation of a life: 'The myths tell their story, the fairy-tales show the topography of the houses they once inhabited.'[102] But as a challenge to this paradigm, Steedman uses her own childhood and household to furnish an alternative account that details the specific materials which measure the grammar school girl's move up the social ladder (from the prosaic significance of acquiring a desk in her bedroom to consumer items that facilitate transformation: fashion, shoes, makeup). Alongside this, she creates her own Freudian psychodrama using the visual idiom of her childhood rented house in Streatham Hill, in which a New Look coat, magazines and a bluebell forest form an intricate network of symbolic connections. So while Steedman at times can express rigidity in her view of the way particular genres or narrative structures are aligned to class experiences, her own text in fact shows how the interior landscape can be furnished through a hybrid network of historical and cultural forms.

As a historian of reports by nineteenth-century reformers on working-class households, Steedman has effectively critiqued the politics of the representation of the working-class interior, specifically the question of

[100] Steedman, *Landscape*, pp. 121, 11. [101] Steedman, *Landscape*, pp. 76–77.
[102] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 17.

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the power relations inherent to ways of reading and accounting for the domestic space of poorer communities. Indeed, her attention to the economics and politics of vision underpins the memoir's central demand not for a room of one's own but for a landscape. This view outwards forms part of Steedman's professed bifold defiance: a return of the gaze by which working-class households have been historically surveyed (from the outside in) and an insistence on the need for historians to evaluate how perspectives and viewpoints are determined by the material circumstances from which the subject is positioned. As Steedman comments:

> It matters then, whether one reshapes past time, re-uses the ordinary exigencies and crises of all childhoods whilst looking down from the curtainless windows of a terraced house like my mother did, or sees at that moment the long view stretching away from the big house in some richer and more detailed landscape.[103]

The idea of 'seeing things' in this text again plays on both senses of the phrase, as an awareness of the politics of vision is coupled with the idea of hyper-real or fantastical visions which exceed reality. In fact, the autobiographical protagonist throughout the pages of *Landscape* is either constantly seeing things or being prevented from fully seeing, as for example her recurring dream-like glimpses of a woman wearing the aptly named 'New Look' fashion, or her short-sightedness as a child that caused her to 'literally stop[. . .] seeing for a very long time'.[104] Moreover, she recalls at one point her sense that she and her sister believed themselves to be 'unnoticed, *unseen*', partly as a result of her parents' need to guard the family secret – the children's illegitimacy – from prying, censorious eyes.[105] An anxiety about being seen by others also underlies the self-conscious autobiographical framework of *Landscape*, which constantly reveals its deep uneasiness with the display of the self as any sort of object lesson.

Steedman's heightened self-reflexivity towards acts of perception and self-display is rooted in a sense that class exclusion is internalised from an early stage through social encounters which take place at home. Like *Reading in the Dark*, *Landscape* shows how it is within the domestic interior that the child can acquire a profound sense that the family is riven by secrets and a sense of social marginality. This is encapsulated in an early scene in which a representative of the State, in the form of a health worker (whose function alludes to the nineteenth-century sanitary visitor as well as

[103] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 5. [104] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 44.
[105] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 44.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the wicked fairy who lays a lifelong curse on a household), shames Steedman's mother by telling her 'this house isn't fit for a baby'.[106] Significantly, the stigma and shame of poverty are jointly experienced by the young child and her mother as they 'both watched the dumpy retreating figure of the health visitor through the curtainless windows'.[107] The repeated use of 'curtainless' is a potent image that Steedman, who is well-versed in the social semiotics of nineteenth-century social exploration, deploys to signify the peered-into homes of the working class and the poor. It leads to the daughter's powerful promise: 'It is in this place, this bare, curtainless bedroom that lies my secret and shameful defiance.'[108]

As with Deane's *Reading in the Dark* and Winterson's *Why Be Happy*, *Landscape* reveals a fundamental sense that the impropriety of home is sensed by the young child. And in this text, the scholarship child also becomes a type of amateur detective who tries to piece the family puzzle together by interpreting various clues. A profound sense of illegitimacy in the family thus works like a type of Gothic curse: 'All family secrets isolate those who share them.'[109] The act of reading, as in so many of these grammar-school tales, thus involves a sense of isolation and self-preservation, in which the young girl pursues the world of fantastical storytelling:

> Out the back, outside the room where the child reads the book, there grew a dark red rose with an ecstatic smell. The South London back gardens pressed up against the open window like a sadness in the dusk, and I lay on my bed, and read, and imagined what it was they were doing downstairs.[110]

If Steedman assumes the role of the heroine of the fairy tale, the figure who achieves a form of social mobility and transformation through painful negotiations and transactions, then her mother is figured as the all-important double. For despite her mother's ambition and desire for material things and ideals, including 'a New Look skirt, a timbered country cottage, to marry a prince', her life seemed to have culminated in a reclusive retreat to the Streatham Hill interior: 'She'd moved everything down into the kitchen: a single bed, the television, the calor-gas heater. She said it was to save fuel. The rest of the house was dark and shrouded.'[111]

[106] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 2. For an illuminating historical analysis of the role of the district or health visitor and its relations to working-class privacy (or assumed lack thereof), see Hewitt, 'District Visiting', pp. 121–41.
[107] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 2.
[108] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 2.
[109] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 65.
[110] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 54.
[111] Steedman, *Landscape*, pp. 9, 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

There is finally no landscape view for this woman – 'only the fence and the kitchen wall of the house next door'.[112] In a further twist, as Steedman makes clear, it is the estranged rather than the devoted daughter who has come to visit after a prolonged absence of nine years: 'I was really a ghost who came to call'.[113] Indeed, as several critics have noted, no one castigates the mother in this text quite as effectively as the daughter, as she gives literary shape to the person she calls the 'figure of nightmares'.[114] Adhering to the classic fairy-tale structure, *Landscape*'s preface begins with the death of the 'good' mother and ends with her transformation into a 'witch' as she opens the door to her estranged daughter at their last meeting.[115]

This ending to the narrative, however, offers a further level of complexity. On this last visit before her mother's death, Steedman catches sight of a newly purchased Lowry reproduction on the wall. It is a detail which irritates and disturbs her by introducing an incongruous aesthetic element into the daughter's fairy-tale psychodrama: 'Why did she go out and buy that obvious representation of a landscape she wanted to escape, the figures moving noiselessly under the shadow of the mill?'[116] The comment and its underlying sentiment are significant and challenging. For Steedman's project throughout the book has involved refurbishing the classic working-class interior and infusing it with the symbolism and psychological depth usually associated with the bourgeois family saga. The Lowry reproduction, which the mother chooses for herself, epitomises a classic view of a working-class crowd centred upon traditional forms of urban industry (the factory) and a perceived lack of individuation. In this way, the decorative object of the mother's interior functions as her final act of resistance to the daughter's recuperative project – an act, moreover, that dialectically reproduces Steedman's own aesthetic of disruption and nonconformity to the stories and frames into which individuals are placed by others.

[112] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 1. [113] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 142.

[114] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 46.

[115] Steedman alludes directly to Anthony Browne's illustrated *Hansel and Gretel* (London: Walker, 2008); the stepmother and witch in this children's book bear uncanny visual similarities. See also Bruno Bettelheim's influential exploration of the 'splitting up of one person into two' of the fairy tale mother in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 66–73 (p. 67), and Marina Warner's analysis of the structural complexity of the mother/stepmother/mother-in-law and daughter relation in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 218–40.

[116] Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 142.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

iv Consanguinity in Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* and Hilary Mantel's *Giving Up the Ghost*

The idea of maternal ambivalence, articulated through the discourse of Gothic and fairy tale, is also a distinctive feature of Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood: A Memoir*. The border in this text is again a geographical location (Sage grew up in the Welsh village of Hanmer near the English border) and a symbolic territory for the scholarship girl who passes the crucial Eleven Plus exam and eventually enters university. Revealingly, Sage casts herself as a type of female Dracula, a shape-shifting figure who is formed by her inhabitation of two worlds, sustained by books and the 'bad blood' that is said to run through the family.

Like Deane's protagonist in *Reading in the Dark*, Sage portrays her early self as defined by a rejection of realist description and possessed of a marked preference for deviant plots. 'Although I read indiscriminately', she writes, 'I edited out prosaic or realist stuff, I didn't want to meet *lifelike* characters . . . Books didn't belong to a particular time or place of origin, their contents all mingled and transmigrated'.[117] Like other scholarship tales, Sage also depicts parents who are markedly silent, although in her case, they are obscured by the flamboyant personalities of her grandparents, with whom they lived at the Hanmer vicarage. 'Domestic life in the vicarage had a Gothic flavour', she notes with approval, and her representation of this home as deviant and eccentric, shabby and dilapidated, stands in stark relief to the account of the conformity and stagnation of mid-century Hanmer where everyone '[knew] what they were going to be from the beginning'.[118] Thus in an example of a type of Freudian 'family romance' (in which 'real' parents are supplanted by the child's aspirational alternatives), Sage relishes 'playing the vicarage child', aligning herself directly with her eccentric and anarchic grandfather:

> My real family didn't seem congenial to me at all but – a bit like school – interested in tidiness and obedience, and things I was no good at. My claims to specialness were books, the church and my fund of creepy stories – Grandpa's gifts, all associated with the dark spaces of the vicarage and the vestry, and with the familiar feeling of discontent and want, in which Grandma shared too.[119]

The young protagonist of the memoir vows to effectively dis-locate herself through deviancy: 'I had acquired from Grandpa (bad blood!) vanity,

[117] Lorna Sage, *Bad Blood: A Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), p. 177.
[118] Sage, *Bad Blood*, pp. 9, 4. [119] Sage, *Bad Blood*, pp. 88–89.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ambition and discontent along with literacy. I didn't know my place.'[120] The vicarage then appears to guard the young Sage from the stultifying social strictures of mid-century provincial Britain by rejecting the forces of modernisation and offering instead an insular retreat to the more timeless properties of myth, family feuds and old-fashioned decadence. Throughout *Bad Blood*, the vicarage serves as a symbolic site of origin that Sage envisages as an integral but dissolute element in her own sense of leading 'a double life'.[121]

Sage's early self-identification with Gothic forms is derailed to some extent as the family undertakes the socially mobile move to a newly built council house on the edges of Hanmer in the 1950s. The gloom and dust of the vicarage are exchanged for postwar modernist principles of functionality, transparency and uniformity: 'Bright lights and straight lines were signs of the times.'[122] Thus while the vicarage interior had provided a refuge for the private self, with places in which to read, hide and wallow in the resentment of others, the 1950s suburban semi is by contrast architecturally framed according to principles of transparency and light (deadly, of course, for the self-styled vampire-child who thrives on bad blood). Indeed, as Jane Alison has noted, modernist design, which strongly influenced the new mid-century home, can be read as the 'other' to the decadent, surreal house of the late-Victorian and early-twentieth century. 'With its fitted wardrobes, sliding doors, open-plan spaces, streamlined plumbing, raised living quarters, flat roofs', she argues, modernism 'attempted to iron out all the folds, pretend there were no in-between spaces, no dirt, no dust, no old furniture – no desire'.[123] Ironically, therefore, in an inversion of value that runs throughout the text – and in marked contrast to the spaces of autonomy and independence envisaged in Acorn and Woodward's early twentieth-century memoirs – here it is the bright white council house interior that presents a place of psychological horror and claustrophobia in contrast to the imaginative freedom and 'shadowy prestige' associated with Sage's grandfather and the unruly vicarage life.[124] For Sage, one of the most unsavoury aspects of the brand-new, clean spaces for the socially mobile people of Hanmer is

[120] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 130. [121] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 17.

[122] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 97. The contrast between old, dilapidated, and thus apparently more signifying architectural forms and new, sterile council houses, frames the narrative of Sarah Waters' Gothic country house tale *The Little Stranger* (London: Virago, 2010).

[123] Jane Alison, 'The Surreal House', in Jane Alison (ed.), *The Surreal House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 22.

[124] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 98.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

precisely their modernist eschewal of historical traces. The new builds are deemed to preclude any type of privacy or individuality: 'Family life was the open-plan living-room, the family car. It was like a nightmare council house on wheels.'[125]

The exposure intrinsic to the bright, open-plan council house has the effect of forcing the autobiographical heroine outdoors, and Sage recalls her preference for wandering around outside rather than committing herself to the family in the generic, planned interior of the home. Her sense of separation turns her into an uncanny type of stranger within the home:

> the only interloper in that new nuclear family with the cot in the living-room. On dark afternoons I could see them there in the lamplight because, unlike the other houses, ours didn't have net curtains, an act of impropriety which showed from the start that we didn't know how to behave in our new life. Everything about our situation felt exposed, it was somehow safer outside.[126]

In contrast to Steedman's governing motif of the woman looking out of the curtainless window, Sage positions herself here as resolutely apart from the family, a Romantic wanderer in nature, 'on the outside looking in, through glass that's frosted by my breath'.[127] Thus the medium of fantasy – encapsulated by Sage's preference for Gothic plots and locations – is diametrically opposed in her mind to this 'impotent make-believe' of domesticity and nuclear family living.

> They always closed ranks and pretended that everything was solid, normal and natural. Here we have the family of the period: self-made and going places. Only when you look more closely can you see that this housewife is pathologically scared of food, hates home, is really a child dreaming of pretty things and treats; and this businessman will never accumulate capital, he's still a boy soldier, going over the top again and again.[128]

Like many of the other autobiographical narrators in this chapter (including Hoggart, Eagleton, Steedman, and Mantel), illness and bodily confinement ironically provide Sage's young self with the opportunity for privacy and thus facilitate the ever-significant act of reading. In *Bad Blood*, Sage's chronic sinusitis, which keeps her awake, results in a doctor ordering the family to allow her to read at night by leaving a light on: 'Dr McColl had won me space in the council house, a lighted box of my own.'[129]

[125] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 186. [126] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 102. [127] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 103.
[128] Sage, *Bad Blood*, pp. 273, 186. [129] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 110.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thus like the young protagonist of *Reading in the Dark*, Sage's characteristic desire to break free of the burden of home and family is represented as a desire for a narrative plot and the agency that will direct the self towards autonomy. And again, as with Deane, it is reading Latin – 'the great dead language . . . the tongue the dead spoke' – that signifies the ability 'to detach yourself from here and now, abstract your understanding of words, train your memory and live solitary in your head with only books for company'.[130] Latin is representative, furthermore, of the language of the grammar school (the learning by rote of Latin was one of the defining principles of this schooling system). Indeed, language-learning itself, in so many of these scholarship tales, is presented as deviance, in the sense of taking a different course, as well as departing from norms of behaviour. As Whitlock writes, 'badness here is the addiction to the book, to language and to English literature . . . and the key to the world is always the book'.[131] In this way, Sage's young self reads Bram Stoker's tale in her room as a way of opposing suburban existence: 'I was sinning with an undead dandy while innocents wallowed in oblivion. The night was mine and Dracula's. How I yawned at the thought of common daylight's coffin.'[132]

As in Steedman's *Landscape*, the greatest threat to Sage's sense of autonomy comes from within the household and is specifically located in the person of the mother. Sage portrays her as the new archetype of the unhappy, frustrated housewife, with a loathing of housework, who is embarrassingly exposed in her brand-new council house 'full of light and hard, washable surfaces'.[133] She is a domestic victim in two senses of the phrase, for as Sage writes, 'although she so spectacularly lacked domestic skills, she was nonetheless profoundly domesticated'.[134] Predictably, then, Sage's attraction to the abject quality of the 'bad blood, excited blood' that she sees herself as inheriting from her grandfather, places her in stark opposition to the enforced conformism to the standards of the council house interior that she associates with her mother. But while Sage's self-identification is with male Gothic villains – her grandfather, Dracula, the 'bad wolf' – the narrative arc towards education and social transformation is curtailed as Sage is forced to adopt the mantle of maternity herself. Sage's unexpected pregnancy at sixteen thus seems like a plot twist, the final curse

[130] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 143. [131] Whitlock, 'Disciplining the Child', pp. 48–49.
[132] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 219. For a discussion of the gendered nature of female 'bad blood', see Marie Mulvey-Roberts, '*Dracula* and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo and the New Woman', in William Hughes and Andrew Smith (eds.), *Bram Stoker: History, Psychoanalysis and the Gothic* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 78–95.
[133] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 119. [134] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 123.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the pattern of bad blood designed to ensnare the heroine who had the temerity to think she might make her autonomous, self-sufficient escape. Indeed, the way in which Sage describes her pregnancy is precisely in terms of a loss of her own self-governance and the baring of the private interior space she had made her own: 'I'd been caught out, I would have to pay. I was in trouble, I'd have no secrets any longer, I'd be exposed as a fraud, my fate wasn't my own, my treacherous body had somehow delivered me into other people's hands.'[135]

Sage's sense of detachment, previously represented in the image of the girl looking into the windows of the house from the outside, is now given corporeal form. Her body seems to confirm her status as 'an outsider, harbouring an alien, an alien myself. Having such a secret was like having cancer – a disease which couldn't be mentioned except in shamed whispers'.[136] But becoming pregnant also seems to represent a peculiarly inflected return to the mother from whom she had wanted to escape. When told the news, Sage's mother's reaction is to ask '*What have you done to me?*', while the chapter ends on an unsettling, strange note: 'I've done it now', the teenager thinks to herself, 'I've made my mother pregnant' (italics in original).[137] This metaphorical impregnation of the mother can thus be read as a fantastical reversal of Nancy Chodorow's thesis concerning the passing on of the desire to reproduce from mother to daughter.[138] For in *Bad Blood*, it is precisely the ambivalence of mothering that is passed on from mother to daughter. Sage's memoir, then, may be best read in terms of what Claire Kahane has defined as a revealing feature of twentieth-century Female Gothic. That is, the heroine's adversarial relationship is no longer primarily in relation to the villainous male (often the father or brother) or the dead or displaced mother. Instead, she argues:

> in modern Gothic the spectral mother typically becomes an embodied actual figure. With that shift, the heroine is imprisoned not in a house but in the female body, which is itself the maternal legacy. The problematics of femininity is thus reduced to the problematics of the female body, perceived as antagonistic to the sense of self, as therefore freakish.[139]

The sentiment is reminiscent of the way in which Walkerdine expresses the need to sever ties with her 'ordinary' suburban life by turning against

[135] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 236. [136] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 246. [137] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 236.

[138] See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

[139] Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror', in Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether (eds.), *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1985), p. 343.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the maternal figure. Returning as an adult to her childhood home, an interwar semi in suburban Derby, Walkerdine comments that 'everything about it, its sense of safety, had felt for so long like a trap, the site and origin of an ordinariness both hated and desired. It was the place in which, if I were not careful and being so vigilant, I might turn into my mother'.[140] And yet for all its Gothic deviance, what is presented in *Bad Blood*'s dénouement is in many ways a conservative model – one that aligns the mother and the body as necessarily opposed to intellectual development, creativity and textuality. 'Turning into the mother' is posited as nothing less than a type of anti-intellectual horror story.

The body as a form of entrapment and estrangement – an obstacle to the scholarship girl's progress – fittingly becomes a key motif in Mantel's memoir *Giving Up the Ghost* (2003). From the opening pages, which deal with the bourgeois travails of buying a second home, the memoir rapidly shifts into a narrative concerned with the strangeness of houses and property as visions and ghosts – literal and metaphorical – take their place alongside the author as she looks back to the past. In the book's trajectory through manifestly haunted houses, the apparition of both benevolent and malign spirits again serves to represent the analytic child who, according to the paradigm set out in this chapter, is 'used to "seeing" things that aren't there'.[141] Yet unlike the ghosts of traditional haunted house literature, which are often rooted to a particular place, the spirits of Mantel's memoir move with the author and indeed finally come to serve as a trope for the narrating self.

Strikingly, as in the works by Deane and Eagleton, the domestic setting and uncanny quotidian proximity of the supernatural are aligned with an Irish Catholic aesthetic sensibility. For the young Mantel, growing up amid secrecy, disappearances and a submerged Catholic past, ghosts are not necessarily fearful presences, but a part of the domestic setting and a way of life in working-class mid-century Hadfield, a small town near Glossop in the north of England. Hadfield itself is, again, a type of border country, 'some no man's land', indeterminately located between the country and the city; a mill town which, by the mid-twentieth century, was rapidly changing as its central industry declined.[142] Mantel remembers it as a provincial place where new pebble-dash council houses were built for residents of Manchester displaced by the war, albeit to the

[140] Walkerdine, 'Dreams', p. 63.
[141] Hilary Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost: A Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003), p. 1.
[142] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 114.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

exclusion of Catholic families. Irishness lurks as a type of guilty and unspoken secret in this community, one that bears residual connotations of poverty and shame. But this heritage is manifest in the text in an implicit faith in unexplained events and phenomena, and in the use of fragments of songs and tales that evoke an oral culture of storytelling. It is significant, then, that like *Reading in the Dark*, Mantel's story also begins with the apprehension of a ghost 'flickering on the staircase'.[143] As in the earlier tale, the narrative of the scholarship child is inaugurated by the perception of a phantasm, a border spirit that conveys the sense of belonging uncannily to the given world and another. Later, as a child lying in the back bedroom of her grandmother's house, Mantel recalls seeing 'shadows, objects that are unnameable, that float and are not solid, objects through which the wall behind them can be glimpsed' – a vision which sets up one of the book's structuring motifs concerning the tension between solidity and corporeality on the one hand, and forms that defy and cross boundaries on the other.[144]

Difficult family events rooted in a context of poverty and shame are translated into a spectral domestic idiom, in which the effect of secrecy is to render distortions a part of everyday life and guilt an ineluctable aspect of the young child's perception. Reminiscent of Steedman's *Landscape*, Mantel's depiction of her childhood is affected by family secrets that turn around issues of legitimacy as, early on, the father vanishes from the household (following the mother's shadowy affair) and is never seen by his children again. An internalised sense of social impropriety forces the family to hide themselves within the home, effecting not a sense of refuge, but its opposite, seething claustrophobia: 'We are talked about in the street. Some rules have been broken. A darkness closes about our house. The air becomes jaundiced and clotted, and hangs in gaseous clouds over the rooms.'[145] Home becomes a place of unexplained phenomena and self-estrangement and the analytical child is once more either 'seeing things' from within the interior, or located on the outside looking in. And again, like Steedman, the child's hypersensitivity to domestic tensions results in a pathological type of sensory deprivation. 'At eight, I give up hearing', she writes, with the consequence that 'words are a blur to me; a moth's wing, flitting about the lamp of meaning.'[146]

Like other scholarship narratives, secrecy is not simply a governing motif in *Giving Up the Ghost* but is woven into its very texture and form.

[143] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 1. [144] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 116.
[145] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 86. [146] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 103.

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Mantel's prose style is deeply allusive and emblematises the notion that the self-chronicling autobiography is paradoxically the product of careful concealment. Thus in a line that could serve as an epigraph to many of the texts addressed in this chapter, Mantel acknowledges that 'once you have learned habits of secrecy, they aren't so easy to give up'.[147] The interior is once again a repository for secrets and a framing location which shapes how the child views the wider world. Windows have of course been commonly regarded as the 'eyes' of the house, and, like the mirror, have been a 'traditional metaphor of realist vision directed at the world'.[148] As with Steedman, however, Mantel complicates this simple equation of windows with mimetic 'truth-telling'. 'Good prose', she remarks, quoting George Orwell, may be 'like a window-pane', but she adds,

> window-panes undressed are a sign of poverty, aren't they? How about some nice net curtains, so I can look out but you can't see in? How about shutters, or a chaste Roman blind? Besides, window-pane prose is no guarantee of truthfulness. Some deceptive sights are seen through glass, and the best liars tell lies in plain words.[149]

In Mantel's memoir, the domestic interior becomes a powerful trope for the creative, recuperative methods of historical memory, but it also conveys indeterminacy rather than the certainty of an empirical record. Indeed, the interior as a site of recollection is governed by hesitancy and inscrutability, and the writing of the memoir itself is likened to

> blundering through your house with the lights fused, a hand flailing for points of reference. You locate the stolid wardrobe, and its door swings open at your touch, opening on the cavern of darkness within. Your hand touches glass, you think it is a mirror, but it is the window. There are obstacles to bump and trip you, but what is more disconcerting is a sudden empty space, where you can't find a handhold and you know that you are stranded in the dark.[150]

Elsewhere the metaphor of the room is used to indicate the way in which Mantel colours her past through synaesthetic patterning. Childhood memories become a type of expressive interior décor as the dark greens, creams and 'cloudy yellows' of her childhood are recast as red rooms of a vintage pigment which she labels 'oxblood' – 'a faded, rain-drenched crimson,

[147] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 147
[148] Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 89.
[149] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 5.
[150] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 161.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

like stale and drying blood' that recalls the sculptor Louise Bourgeois' interior installations of childhood rooms in Gothic reds.[151]

The oxblood stain also makes clear the association that occurs throughout *Giving Up the Ghost* between the domestic interior, the body, and the notion of social mobility as a painful transformative process. For like Sage and Steedman's tales, Mantel's memoir contrasts the daughter's educational progress with that of her mother, a woman who was accidentally overlooked for the grammar school entrance exam because of a senseless 'clerical error' and who subsequently begins working in the mill at fourteen.[152] As the daughter who passes the fateful Eleven Plus (despite a family history which taught her that 'it just wasn't what you did, go to the grammar school. You accepted your place in life'), Mantel is determined not to follow her mother and, like Sage, she thrives on solitary reading: 'I wanted books like a vampire wants blood.'[153] Breaking with the family tradition of being excluded from a grammar school place (Mantel's grandfather, it turns out, had also passed the exam but could not afford the uniform), the girl's success in the Eleven Plus seems to summon up the ambivalent ghosts rolling under the stone shelves of the kitchen pantry, 'sucking their teeth in envy and malice'.[154]

Significantly, in the work of the female memoirists that I have considered, the fairy-tale themes of social transformation and metamorphosis are performed on and through the body. In these texts, in contrast to the accounts of the 'scholarship boy', the tale of personal transformation or social advancement is undertaken through an idiom of physical pain (which is in fact common to the fairy tale's portrayal of the shape-shifting bargain). Mantel, for example, like Steedman before her, is disturbed by the implicit violence of the transformation in the fairy tale, including the possibility of the glass slipper 'splintering, and cutting the curved, tender sole of the dancing foot'.[155] Thus in all three of the memoirs by women in this section, the vocation of writer is notably bound up with the body and specifically with maternity. For Steedman this takes the form of a 'refusal' of reproduction; for Sage it appears in the text as unplanned pregnancy; for Mantel it is her debilitating illness and subsequent diagnosis of infertility.

Thus whereas Sage's progress as a scholarship girl is interrupted by pregnancy, in *Giving Up the Ghost* the narrative of educational mobility is hijacked by Mantel's condition of long-undiagnosed endometriosis.

[151] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 25. See Louise Bourgeois, 'Red Room (Parents)', (1974).
[152] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 49.
[153] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, pp. 50, 114.
[154] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 120.
[155] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 50.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The motif of stepping through the looking glass into an unfamiliar world takes on painful literality as Mantel's tale of 'forming and re-forming in some other dimension' becomes a bodily, rather than imaginative, state.[156] From having been light and frail (which led her to be significantly 'cast as a ghost' in a production of Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit*), Mantel is forced to play a different role through illness: 'I will be solid, set, grounded, grotesque: perpetually strange to myself, convoluted, mutated, and beyond the pale.'[157] The symptoms of the illness are portrayed as a malevolent force within her body: 'there was a pain behind my diaphragm, and from time to time something seemed to flip over and claw at me, as if I were a woman in a folk tale, pregnant with a demon'.[158] The etymology of 'endometriosis' (from the Greek 'endo' meaning 'within' and 'metra' meaning 'womb'), emphasises the internal nature of the disease, while its hiddenness, as a progressive scarring of the internal organs that commonly remains undiagnosed, explains Mantel's sense of otherworldliness:

> Those crippling spasms that had to be ignored, those deep aches with no name, those washes of nausea, were not evidence of a neurotic personality, or of my ambivalence about my gender, and they were not brought on by 'nerves' or by fear of failure in a man's world. They were evidence of a pathological process that would destroy the chance of my having a child and land me with chronic ill health.[159]

In Mantel's case, the narrative model of self-fulfilment and agency that the autobiographical form invites is resisted by the body itself. Indeed, she traces a shift from being the active agent of her self-narrated story to the dismal fate of being an object of medical scrutiny ('having my fertility confiscated and my insides arranged').[160] She notes how, lying in the doctor's surgery, she is forced to literally see inside herself in a manner which, ironically, produces a sense of utter estrangement: 'For the first and last time, I saw my womb, with two black strokes, like skilled calligraphy, marking it out: a neat diacritical mark in a language I would never learn to speak.'[161] Following a hysterectomy, she is left with a scar which crudely marks the suture between her body's interior and exterior realms.

Returning to the earliest recorded senses of the word 'interior', used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to denote entrails and inner organs,

[156] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 94. [157] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 54.
[158] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 12.
[159] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, pp. 219–20. The condition is caused by the spread of endometrium cells which grow abnormally outside of the womb, causing an accumulation of internal scar tissue which webs and knots other organs inside the body.
[160] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 179. [161] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 195.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mantel's memoir itself turns into a progressively internalised narrative centring on her attempts to reclaim her body – and narrative of self – from the intrusions of disease, callous diagnosis, botched cures and invasive procedures. For according to her description, her body is a location from which things have been taken away, a place in which a type of changeling substitution has put paid to certain desires. Echoing Winterson, who uses the same metaphor to describe her experience of depression, Mantel figures herself as a form of evacuated haunted house in which she is a stranger to herself:

> Everything about me – my physiology, my psychology – feels constantly under assault: I am a shabby old building in an area of heavy shelling, which the inhabitants have vacated years ago. . . . I am writing in order to take charge of the story of my childhood and my childlessness; and in order to locate myself, if not within a body, then in the narrow space between one letter and the next, between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are.[162]

The self as a haunted house, in Mantel's powerful invocation, is an expression of identity based precisely upon borders and a sense of doubling – the condition of being neither one thing nor the other. And yet, as Mantel's trope implies, this is a state that generates narrative and text, as she 'locates' herself, as she puts it, 'between one letter and the next' and 'between the lines', in defiance of others who seek to control the story.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined autobiographical works of writers looking back to mid-century childhoods through the lens of the uncanny – the unhomely – a peculiarly domestic trope which nevertheless lends itself to the idea of border crossings. I have thus sought to identify how representations of disturbed and unsettled domestic space, exemplified by the unhomely or haunted house, form a distinctive motif among a group of texts by writers who show a particular awareness of their status as first-generation university graduates.

Whereas narratives of nineteenth-century working-class autodidacticism frequently rendered the educational story as a passage of enlightenment (depicting the individual's movement from the 'darkness' of industrial life into the 'light' of literacy and autonomy), the twentieth-century grammar-school narrative resists this paradigm of illumination. Indeed, as Royle

[162] Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 216.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316576830.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has noted, Freud's essay on the uncanny itself unravels binaries of darkness and light. For as Royle argues, Freud's text is marked by the underlying sense that 'it is not so much darkness itself (whatever that might be), but the process of ceasing to be dark, the process of revelation or bringing to light, that is uncanny'.[163] In much the same manner, these autobiographical works problematise the causal links between knowledge, enlightenment and revelation. Often resisting the memoir's traditional form of personal disclosure, these works are concerned precisely with the way in which reading, forms of education and social mobility result in an unsettling liminality. As Vidler comments, in relation to Freud's doubts about the effectiveness of the English translation of the German word 'unheimlich', 'the English word is perhaps more helpful than Freud was willing to admit: literally "beyond ken" – beyond knowledge – from "canny," meaning possessing knowledge or skill'.[164] These scholarship tales are arguably about both knowledge and that which remains unknown ('beyond ken'): family secrets, historical disturbances, the ghosts of the past.

The uncanny manifests itself through depictions of the strange, unsettled, or haunted spaces of the home across these autobiographical works as well as through the writers' portrayals of their sense of estrangement within the family home. It is an aesthetic that captures a sense of guilt and betrayal, for as Freud writes, referring to Schelling's definition of the uncanny: 'everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.[165] The motif of unhomeliness further characterises the texts' presentation of subjectivity as being located and predicated on a type of border crossing and threshold, a process whereby the self is a part of two realms that are not easily assimilated. Finally, the uncanny also reveals itself through the inevitable preoccupation among these works with past selves. For life writing is fundamentally predicated on the idea of a return and a revisitation; the memoirist engages in direct and indirect ways with the uncanny act of creating a literary double – of becoming their own ghostwriter.

[163] Royle, *Uncanny*, p. 108.
[164] Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny*, p. 23. The word 'ken' is notably also a slang word – from the sixteenth century on – for a house, usually of a disreputable kind.
[165] Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 225.

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