

Jeffrey
Andrew
Weinstock

Queer Haunting Spaces: Madeline Yale Wynne's
"The Little Room" and Elia Wilkinson Peattie's
"The House That Was Not"

Most ghost stories revolve around the apparition of someone returning from the grave for a purpose: to offer a warning, redress a crime, seek revenge. A distinction can be drawn, however, between the familiar category of tales in which a house or space is haunted *by* something (usually the ghost of a person) and the more unusual category of stories in which space itself—a room, building, natural feature, or even an entire town—becomes ghostly and itself does the haunting. In two unjustly neglected turn-of-the-twentieth-century tales of the supernatural, Madeline Yale Wynne's "The Little Room" (1895) and Elia Wilkinson Peattie's "The House That Was Not" (1898), what haunts is space itself—space that is unstable, inconsistent, and, as each story repeatedly emphasizes, "queer." In both stories, the confrontation between a woman and a haunting space ends with the space becoming queer in the modern critical sense. These haunting encounters thereby reveal the social construction of gendered spaces—in Wynne's case, the space of a New England farmhouse; in Peattie's case, the space of a Western ranching home—and the ways in which this gendering of space participates in a dynamic of unbalanced power that keeps the protagonists from exercising autonomy and achieving self-actualization. In a departure from the typical ghost story, architectural structures rather than ghosts of people do the haunting in these stories, revealing the uncanniness of domestic spaces along with the complex interplay of social forces that result in the victimization of women. These stories thus not only participate in the tradition of the American female gothic but also suggest that this genre—and perhaps even the gothic in general—might

fruitfully be analyzed in terms of the production and, at least in some cases, deconstruction of unstable gendered spaces.¹

Avery Gordon describes haunting as “a constitutive feature of social life.” To write ghost stories, she asserts, is to reveal how the invisible manages to produce material effects and “how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence.” Following ghosts, moreover, can “lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life.”² Wynne’s and Peattie’s stories, through their treatment of historically specific social spaces, call attention to the “seething presence” of the invisible. They make explicit what usually remains implicit in gothic tales by foregrounding the fact that space in general is gendered (and, by extension, sexualized and racialized) and that this “socially and culturally encoded character of space” participates in the systemic and systematic disenfranchisement of women in patriarchal culture.³

It is not surprising that in American women’s writing of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the setting invested with the most affective energy is the space of the home.⁴ As numerous recent commentators on the female gothic have noted—in keeping with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s now canonical analysis of nineteenth-century women’s literature—familiar domestic interiors in the gothic transform into confining sites of mental and psychological peril.⁵ Ghost stories, perhaps more than any other kind of story, are preoccupied by what we may wish to consider anxious spaces. Hauntings in literature are almost always associated with particular geographic spaces—frequently, houses. As Dale Bailey comments, “Since Poe first described the House of Usher in 1839, the motif of the haunted house has assumed an enduring role in the American tradition.”⁶ Particularly in the hands of female gothic writers, stories about haunted houses penetrate the façade of the home—including the idea that it is an escape from the real world—to reveal domestic space in patriarchal culture as the “ideologically weighted ‘product’” of cultural forces that structure and perpetuate the inequitable distribution of power that results in the oppressive disenfranchisement of women.⁷

This revelatory function of the female gothic has generally been discussed in terms of Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny, in which what was “intended to remain secret, hidden away, . . . has come into the open,” revealing the “unhomeliness” at the heart of the homely.⁸

The gendered aspect of this “unhomely” revelation, however, is proleptically signaled in many of these stories by the repeated emphasis on the word *queer*. In “Queering ‘The Yellow Wall-paper,’” Jonathan Crewe observes that in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s famous 1892 story the term “queer” (and cognates such as “strange” and “peculiar”) recur in ways that seem to call attention to the social construction of categories such as normalcy and deviancy that thereby “queer” the text in the contemporary critical sense.⁹ I believe a similar case can be made for Wynne’s “The Little Room” and Peattie’s “The House That Was Not.” These stories queer space in the sense of making visible “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically.”¹⁰ Such stories produce “harrowing and spooky” spaces, to borrow from architect Aaron Betsky’s consideration of queer space,¹¹ but they also implicitly suggest a “horizon of possibility” with liberatory potential.¹² This queering of space that reveals the social construction of gender roles and sexual identities becomes especially evident in stories such as Wynne’s and Peattie’s where space itself is shown to be both gendered and unstable.

Madeline Yale Wynne’s “The Little Room”

What Marilyn Chandler calls the “ideological weight of space” is the primary focus of Wynne’s remarkable but overlooked uncanny story “The Little Room” (1895), which Alfred Bendixen refers to as a “forgotten masterpiece.”¹³ Wynne, whose literary output has received virtually no attention from contemporary critics, is mainly considered notable for having been the daughter of the man who invented the Yale lock and for her contributions to metal-working—an art form in which she tried to interest other women.¹⁴ Nevertheless, “The Little Room,” first published in *Harper’s* in 1895 and later included in Wynne’s first collection of short stories, “*The Little Room and Other Stories*,” attracted a great deal of attention and praise upon its initial publication. It enjoyed “widespread celebrity at the end of the nineteenth century,”¹⁵ was often reprinted, and even inspired an early-twentieth-century Chicago social club called “The Little Room” for artists, writers, musicians, and others in the arts who met weekly for tea and conversation.¹⁶

“The Little Room” is a ghost story of sorts but not in the traditional sense, because it is a *room*, not a person, that refuses to stay in its place and that takes on different forms. The newly wed female narrator, Margaret Grant, recounts to her husband, Roger, that when her mother was young, she had a favorite play space in the Vermont farmhouse of her two unmarried half-sisters, Hannah Keys and Maria Keys. It was a delightful little room with a couch covered in blue chintz, books on the shelves, and a large, pink seashell. After marrying, however, when her mother returned to the house with her new husband, they discovered a china closet where the room had been. The two half-sisters steadfastly insisted that no changes to the house had been made and that the china closet had always been there, so the husband and wife concluded that the wife, as an imaginative young girl, must have dreamed up the room and, within their family, the expression “little-roomy” was coined to refer to any exaggerated statement.

This remained the story within the family until, following the death of Margaret’s father, Margaret and her mother visited the Vermont farm for the summer. When they arrived, Margaret discovered not a china closet but the little room, exactly as her mother had described it. Aunts Hannah and Maria insisted that the house had always been the way it appeared, that there had never been a china closet. They could not be made to recall that there had been any prior discussion on the subject. Margaret’s mother was severely affected by the (re)discovery of the little room. She grew nervous, pale, and thin and died the following autumn.

After this recounting of the history of the odd little room, this scenario is repeated in the narrative present. Margaret and her husband, Roger, arrive at the farmhouse and discover not the little room that Margaret had seen as a child but a china closet. Subsequently, two female friends, each visiting the house separately, see something different: one sees the china closet; one sees the little room. In each case, Aunt Hannah and Aunt Maria cannot be made to recognize that there has ever been any debate on the subject and, inevitably, at the end of the story, the farmhouse burns down, leaving the existence of the little room seemingly shrouded in mystery forever.

That the little room should appear in a New England home owned and occupied by two spinster sisters seems in keeping with the general tenor of a tale in which a fragile space for female self-actualization can only exist in the absence of men. The story suggests that it is only

by virtue of the fact that no men inhabit the house at all that the little room achieves even its minimal ephemeral existence, and the fact of the two women's spinsterhood adds to the queer overtones of the story. The reader learns obliquely in "The Little Room" and explicitly in Wynne's follow-up, "The Sequel to the Little Room" (1895), that Aunt Hannah was courted by a sea captain but rejected his proposal. In a social climate in which marriage was considered a woman's destiny—as well as necessary for her personal fulfillment—and that emphasized women's moral imperative to marry in order to reform wayward men and produce and raise virtuous citizens, spinsterhood can be read as either a failure to meet or a rejection of cultural expectations for what Adrienne Rich has famously termed "compulsory heterosexuality."¹⁷ In the terms of Wynne's story, perhaps Aunt Hannah's spinsterhood can be read as opting for "a little room" of her own over a china closet. The spinsterhood of the two women in this sense participates in making visible the cultural construction of constraining gender expectations for women in the nineteenth century.¹⁸

In this striking story, not only is space itself revealed to be gendered but it shapes intersubjective relationships. What haunts in this story, and what women are never able to find in the presence of their husbands, is an intimate feminine space of refuge, healing, and play. The reader learns that the ghostly little room exists, to the extent that it exists at all, in the heart of the domestic space of a farmhouse owned by two spinster sisters. The room is described in exceptional detail and is clearly gendered feminine. The reader learns through Margaret, who initially learns through her mother, about the room's position in the house and its diminutive size. We learn about the "blue Stamped" India cotton chintz containing the figure of a peacock: "The head and body of the bird were in profile, while the tail was full front view behind it."¹⁹ The chintz, we are told, had been a gift to the young Hannah from a courting sea captain whom she ultimately rejected; we learn that the room has books in it, including the *Ladies' Album*—a gift annual marketed to women; we are told that Margaret's mother was captivated by a "beautiful pink sea-shell, lying on a mat made of balls of red shaded worsted" and that the walls were covered with flowered paper, "roses and morning glories in a wreath on a light blue ground" (123).

All the details of the room—the flowered wallpaper, the ladies gift annual, the chintz, the sexually suggestive pink seashell—confirm

that it is a feminine space of refuge and intimacy in the heart of the domestic space of the farmhouse. The books, the exotic chintz brought from across the sea, and Margaret's mother's memories of playing in the room characterize it as a place of intellectual stimulation and imaginative expression. It is a place of comfort and healing, because not only did Margaret's mother regard the room as the "only one that seemed pleasant to her" (121), it is also the place where Margaret's mother remembered having recovered from an illness. According to Margaret, "It was one of her pleasant memories of her childhood; it was the first time she had been of importance to anybody, even herself" (123).

In the presence of men, however, this comfortable and comforting room disappears, along with its sense of personal importance to the women. Margaret's mother was made to doubt the existence of the room altogether and to think of herself as deluded for remembering it. Margaret reports that her mother told her "how it was all in her own imagination, and how there really was only a china-closet there" (122). When Margaret and her new husband Roger arrive at the farmhouse on their wedding day and discover not a room but a china closet, Margaret's devastation is a repetition of her mother's experience:

Margaret's husband dropped her hand and looked at her. She was trembling a little, and turned to him for help, for some explanation, but in an instant she knew that something was wrong. A cloud had come between them; he was hurt, he was antagonised. He paused for an appreciable instant, and then said, kindly enough, but in a voice that cut her deeply: "I am glad this ridiculous thing is ended; don't let us speak of it again." (127)

The narration continues: "She saw it all now; *he didn't believe her*. She felt a chill sense of withering under his glance. . . . He went out; he did not take her hand now—he was vexed, baffled, hurt. Had he not given her his sympathy, his attention, his belief—and his hand?—and she was fooling him?" (128). The reader subsequently learns that Margaret intended to ask the hired man, Hiram, about the room, but that "her lips were sealed before her husband" and she never put the question to him (129).

"The enduring power of 'The Little Room,'" claims Bendixen, "stems from both its frightening insistence on the instability of every aspect of reality and its skillful portrayal of the fragility of all human

relationships—even those consecrated by marriage and friendship.”²⁰ While the story’s puzzle presumably concerns whether or not the little room exists or why it appears only sometimes, the impact of this mystery on the married couples—especially on the wives—is unambiguous. It seems essential, then, to note the following: the little room—this flickering space of feminine refuge—can never be experienced by husband and wife together; Margaret encounters this appalling mystery on her wedding day; and most important, what wives encounter with their husbands in place of the little room and its India chintz is a china closet full of “gilt-edged china.” One can read “The Little Room,” then, as Barbara Constance Patrick suggests, as a type of initiation story in which the disappearance of the little room functions as a trope “for the disillusionments attendant upon a woman’s entrance into the world of adulthood and domestic responsibilities.”²¹

Gender differences and uneasy relationships between men and women are in fact highlighted from the beginning of the story. The very first line of the text, “How would it do for a smoking-room?” (119), has Roger mentally appropriating this fantasy space from Margaret for his own masculine purposes. Margaret admits that it would be “just the place,” but then adds that “having just a plain, common man around, let alone a smoking man, will upset Aunt Hannah” (119). Spinster Hannah here is opposed to “plain, common man” Roger, whose simple presence within the farmhouse will undermine the sisters’ authority within their own home.²² Margaret herself becomes unsettled by the volume of Roger’s voice on the train, twice requesting that he speak more softly. Tellingly, her concern is that those around them will overhear that they are newlyweds. When Roger asks her why she is reluctant to let others know of their marital status, she responds: “I want my happiness all to myself” (120).

Unfortunately, keeping one’s happiness to oneself—or maintaining a sense of one’s importance as an individual—is presented as difficult, if not impossible, for women in a world in which men treat women as possessions and colonize space simply by entering it. In the presence of their husbands, the little room—this idealized space of fantasy and self-realization—ceases to exist and becomes a fantasy, a haunting memory of liberty surrendered (or in the case of Aunt Hannah, a memory of love lost). By replacing the little room with a closet and the pink seashell with gilt-edged china in the presence of the husbands, the story implies that the convention of marriage constrains

women to a reality of circumscribed space and domestic labor. The china closet that replaces the little room clearly symbolizes the work that was expected from married women during the nineteenth century and suggests as well that women within marriage were numbered among their husbands' possessions. The replacement reveals that even the interior domestic space of the home is constructed and ordered by patriarchal ideology that narrowly defines women and their roles. That the discrepancy concerning the existence of the little room should reassert itself between two female friends, Margaret's cousin Nan and her friend Rita Lash, who are the last ones to visit the Vermont farmhouse before it burns down, may appear to complicate this reading of the gendered haunting of space. One way to reconcile this apparent deviation from the rule that women see the little room and men do not is to suggest that patriarchal ideology is so pervasive that some women cannot even dream of "a room of their own" outside of or apart from gendered social conventions.

We are left with a story that is insistently queer, in the sense of odd or strange. (The word "queer" is used in relation to the little room six times in the first seven pages of the story.) In another sense, however, one can speak in terms of the story's queering of space in the contemporary theoretical sense of highlighting the social construction of gender roles and sexual identities. The queer, vacillating presence of the little room and of the china closet foreground the constraints that hegemonic cultural expectations place on individuals. By "denaturalizing" what usually goes without saying, the story implicitly provides a position from which "to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviors, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-construction, and practices of community—for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire."²³ What the queer haunting presence of the little room in Wynne's story highlights is the gendered construction and inhabitation of space itself.²⁴

In "Women in Space and Time," Claudine Hermann describes "man's space" as "a space of domination, hierarchy and conquest, a sprawling, showy space, a *full* space." Woman's space, on the contrary, is an "*empty* space" and woman's task is to "conserve some space for herself, a sort of *no man's land*" in order to escape from male control.²⁵ Similarly, Manuel Castells argues that men historically have tried to

dominate space while women generally have lacked “territorial aspirations” and have instead attached more importance to interpersonal relationships and social networks.²⁶ While I wish to avoid the essentialist overtones of Hermann’s and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Castells’s arguments, space as represented in “The Little Room” clearly conforms to this binary framework. Roger initially attempts to take control of space by speaking loudly on the train and mentally occupying the little room as he transforms it into a smoking closet. Subsequently, the china closet that materializes for him, while hardly “sprawling,” is a space in which to store valuable possessions. It is a “full” space not only because it is full of possessions but also because it leaves little room for imaginative possibilities. Numbered among the husband’s possessions, the wife will find that her tasks and obligations are rigidly defined.

In contrast, Margaret’s desire to keep her happiness all to herself resonates with Hermann’s contention that “woman’s task” is to “conserve some space for herself.” Moreover, it suggests a possible explanation for the mysterious appearance and disappearance of the room: it is an intimate space of feminine realization that cannot be shared with someone with whom one vies for control or attention—even a “loving” husband. The little room itself can perhaps be considered empty because it is filled not with social expectations and obligations but with potentialities. It is what we might refer to as a queer utopian space in which to “devise new ways of relating to oneself and others.”²⁷ With its books and seashell and exotic fabric, it encourages speculation and imaginative flights of fancy. It is a space not for serving others but for creating and sustaining one’s own happiness. Wives cannot see the room when they are with their husbands, nor can siblings see the room when they are separated. Indeed, Margaret and her mother are the only couple who clearly experience the room together, a fact that seems to present the mother-daughter bond as especially intimate. But even this shared experience is marred by the fact that Margaret’s mother has come to accept her husband’s conclusion that she imagined or dreamed the room in spite of her own extremely detailed recollections of the space. Although she does see the room with Margaret, her ontological grounding dissolves, leading to her death. What she confronts when she reencounters the room is the ghost of her own surrendered fantasy. The text describes her as terrified by the room’s reemergence, which she cannot explain or rationalize.

Among the odd details of what Bendixen calls “one of the most effective ‘puzzle stories’ ever written” is the fact that Aunt Hannah and Aunt Maria steadfastly maintain that the house has never been altered.²⁸ Wynne playfully suggests that in their surname, Keys, lies the answer to the story’s mystery; however, the two sisters cannot—or will not—offer any explanation to the competing, and seemingly mutually exclusive, experiences people have within their home. When pushed to remember the presence of a china closet, Aunt Hannah states matter-of-factly: “No, there has never been any china-closet there; it has always been just as it is now” (124). And when asked to remember the presence of a little room, the narrator observes: “They went on washing dishes and drying them on the spotless towels with methodical exactness; and as they worked they said that there had never been any little room, so far as they knew; the china-closet had always been there” (128). The mechanical nature of this response is accentuated by Margaret’s observation that they exhibit “not a sign of interest, curiosity, or annoyance, not a spark of memory” (128). The story itself offers no explanation for the sisters’ inability or unwillingness to recognize the strange mutability of their home. It may be that they themselves change with the changing configuration of the farmhouse—that they really do not remember the house ever being different. Or it may be that they suffer from a sense of shame or guilt connected to the alternation of the little room and the china closet—a sense of discomfort or distress related to their own liminal position as elderly spinsters within a culture that emphasizes marriage and maternity as the keys to female fulfillment—that manifests itself in an unwillingness to admit to the instability of their domestic space.²⁹

What the sisters seem to offer in place of knowledge is labor. Hannah and Maria are initially described in the same way: as workers. As Margaret explains to Roger, “They are simply workers. They make me think of the Maine woman who wanted her epitaph to be: ‘She was a *hard-working* woman’” (120). Extending the reference to epitaphs, Margaret continues: “[T]hey will die standing; or, at least, on a Saturday night, after all the housework is done up” (120). Until the end of the story, the two aunts are presented as working machines devoid of emotion and, where discussions of the little room are concerned, devoid of memory. Indeed, there is a sort of obsessive quality related to their constant labor. Their work can be interpreted as activity designed to fulfill their obligations as women within patriarchal cul-

ture and to distract themselves from the distressing realization that reality is not absolute or seamless but a product of social expectations.³⁰ It is almost as though they are attempting to make up for being unmarried women in a society that enjoins marriage upon women as the key to their fulfillment. However, the connection between death and labor foregrounded in the reference to the epitaph of the Maine woman highlights the unhappy consequences of such a repressive strategy. Margaret suggests both that labor gives her aunts purpose—they will remain alive until their work is done—and that they, like many married women, are working themselves to death.

One could argue that it is the labor of the two aunts that somehow generates the little room and that the vacillation of oppositional spaces within their home—one symbolic of patriarchy, the other a utopian female refuge from it—is connected to their simultaneous embodiment and rejection of cultural expectations. As elderly spinsters, they are marginal and even vaguely deviant figures in relation to mainstream American sexual mores, but as workers, they seem firmly embedded in a cultural matrix of forces derived from New England Calvinistic self-denial and the Puritan work ethic. If their ceaseless labor gives rise to the little room, then it is the oppressive ideology of the china closet that creates the utopian possibility of such a room—and vice versa. The little room and the china closet are thus two sides of the same coin: each structures the (im)possibility of the other. In this sense, what the uncanny mutability of the house ultimately reveals is that the china closet is as much a cultural construct—a fantasy space—as the little room, and that what initially presents itself as an either-or relationship is really a kind of optical illusion obscuring simultaneous relationships of both-and and neither-nor.³¹

In the end, however, no “key” to the puzzle is presented and no answers to the mysteries of the story are proffered. Margaret, in thinking back upon her experience with her mother when encountering the little room, finds new meaning in her mother’s statement: “One thing I am glad of, your father knows now” (129). The answers, however, are not for the living because, the story suggests, men and women are not asking the same questions. This is because their very experience of the world—the ways in which they perceive, occupy, and move through space—is inflected differently by the ideological weight of gender. The ultimate unsettling assertion of Wynne’s haunting story is that men and women occupy different—and mutually exclusive—

realities. The queer space of the little room reveals the ways in which ideologies of gender construct different worlds for men and women.³²

Elia Wilkinson Peattie's "The House That Was Not"

The different ways that men and women occupy space and thereby experience the world is also the subject of Elia Wilkinson Peattie's deceptively simple tale "The House That Was Not," included in her collection *"The Shape of Fear" and Other Ghostly Tales* (1898). Although virtually unknown today, Peattie was a prolific author of novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and plays, including thirty-three books between 1893 and 1932. Born in 1862 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Peattie is notable for becoming in 1884 the first woman reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and then for the *Omaha World Herald*. Her work appeared in prestigious journals such as *Atlantic*, *Century*, and *Harper's*, as well as in newspapers and magazines. From 1906 to 1917, she was the *Chicago Tribune's* literary critic.

Peattie exemplifies the Victorian woman who wrote to support an ineffective husband. Because her husband was often ill, Peattie frequently took on commissioned works and also produced her own stories and essays rapidly to support her family, which included four children. Although her tenure as literary critic at the *Chicago Tribune* began after the publication of her collection of ghost stories in 1898, it is likely that Peattie was already familiar with Wynne's work, including "The Little Room," which may have influenced her own uncanny tales.³³

Embedded in Peattie's deceptively simple ghost stories are important reflections on the roles of women in American culture and the abuses faced by the disenfranchised in a capitalist system. In the straightforward plot of "The House That Was Not," Bart Fleming takes his seventeen-year-old bride to his ranch on the Western plains. Entirely isolated, Flora becomes preoccupied with a home that she spies off in the distance, "something like her own," of which her husband has never spoken.³⁴ When she finally asks her husband why he has denied her the opportunity to visit with their only neighbors, potentially denying her the sort of companionship enjoyed by the spinster aunts in Wynne's tale, he reveals that the house is an illusion. There indeed had been a house at that location, but it burned down after a young wife went crazy and killed her husband, their baby, and

herself. Flora finally goes to investigate and finds among the ashes of a burned home a baby's shoe—unsettling confirmation of her husband's account.

As in Wynne's "The Little Room," what haunts in "The House That Was Not"—what blinks in and out of existence—is an architectural structure. And as in Wynne's story, a young wife is confronted with a spectral domestic space—in this case, an entire house rather than just a room—that foregrounds gender inequity. However, Peattie's story is undergirded by a violence that is merely implied in Wynne's tale. Whereas Wynne's story suggests how men inhibit women's fulfillment and self-realization, Peattie's tale of a frontier wife focuses on the material conditions of survival and the ways in which women are threatened and abused by gender expectations that deprive them of autonomy and community.

In keeping with Avery Gordon's meditations on hauntings, the ghostly house appears at the "dense site where history and subjectivity make social life."³⁵ In the same way that the ghostly little room in Wynne's story can be interpreted as the uncanny phantasmatic supplement of Aunt Hannah and Aunt Maria's labor, the ghostly house in Peattie's story is generated out of the social matrix of capitalism, compulsory heterosexuality, and gender relations of which Bart's labor on his 320-acre ranch is a part. The story, significantly, does not attend to the rise of factory farming and the corresponding populist movement of the later decades of the 1800s, nor does it address the displacement of Native peoples, massive immigration, and the related rise of virulent American xenophobia, increasingly prominent American labor disputes that began with the Great Strike of 1877, or the economic downturn of 1892. However, Peattie, as a newspaper reporter in Nebraska and Chicago, clearly would have been aware of these events. Furthermore, as a well-read intellectual and participant in the Chicago-based Little Room social club, Peattie would also have been aware of realist and naturalist literary trends exemplified by Little Room member and promoter Hamlin Garland, among others, with their emphasis on pessimistic determinism and economic reform. Therefore, Flora's removal from her home and marooning on her husband's large ranch distant from all social interaction develops out of a network of cultural forces structured by capitalist expansion. The queer, haunting space that appears in Peattie's story is implicitly connected to Western development and the space of commerce, produc-

tion, and economic growth as well as to the concomitant redefinition of the roles for women in such spaces.

Although Flora's relationship with her husband is presented as happy and loving—ostensibly lacking the tension apparent between Margaret and Roger that manifests from their very first representation on the train—a subtle current of ambient danger charges the entire tale. Peattie emphasizes Flora's youth and powerlessness. The first line of the story reveals that Bart “took” Flora out to his ranch on the plains “when she was but seventeen years old” (55). Revealed in this phrase is Flora's lack of control over her situation; her heterosexual union and removal from her family are presented as a fait accompli. Whether she desired these events or even had any say in them is not addressed in the story. Subsequently, after she expresses some concern about “queer” things that she sees through her window (57), Peattie writes that Bart “picked her up in his arms and jumped her toward the ceiling of the low shack as if she were a little girl—but then, to be sure, she wasn't much more” (57). This action and the narrator's aside call attention both to Bart's treatment of his wife—as if she were a little girl—and her actual age and inexperience—she in fact is not much more than a girl. There is a double violence subtly expressed here. While Flora is perhaps too young to have been separated from friends and family, she is too old to be treated like a child.

Nature itself, beneath the straightforward and folksy tone of the narration, participates in establishing an undercurrent of danger in the story. Once installed in Bart's ranch, Flora spends “a good part of each day” looking out her window, across an “unbroken sea of tossing corn” (55). The harvest sun sinks “all in an angry and sanguinary glow” that foreshadows the revelation of the morbid history of the ghostly house. And most intensely, “at the coming of a storm, a whirlash of purple cloud, full of electric agility, snapped along the western horizon” (56). In Peattie's carefully knit tale, the representation of the storm seems to resonate with the actions of the crazed wife and to foreshadow an awful repetition—a prospect heightened by the connection established between Flora's name and the angry natural setting that surrounds her.

What the representations of nature emphasize most, however, are Flora's isolation, loneliness, and disempowerment. On Bart's acres of corn and rye, he and Flora are far removed from any neighbor. Flora's sewing-room window looks out on an “unbroken sea” of corn, a view

that serves as “her picture gallery, her opera, her spectacle” (55). Flora’s sense of her situation at times is as if a “new world had been made for her” (56). According to the narrator, Flora, being either sensible or happy, “made the most of it” (55). What is emphasized here is that Flora is far removed from the world and has very few options.

“The House That Was Not” is a critique of the increasingly commonplace “traumatic removal” of the young nineteenth-century woman from her mother’s and her own network of female family and friends following marriage.³⁶ As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg observes, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women developed extensive communities of family and female friends so that “geographic separation was borne with difficulty.”³⁷ Flora’s situation is extreme but not uncommon. Not only has she been uprooted at age seventeen from her “mother’s arms” (57) but she has also been barred from virtually all human contact beyond that of her husband. She is, for all intents and purposes, a prisoner within her home. Indeed, Peattie goes out of her way to emphasize Flora’s isolation. Presumably, even given the advances in farming technology of the 1880s and 1890s that facilitated the rise of factory farming, her husband Bart cannot work a 320-acre ranch entirely by himself. However, nowhere in the story is the presence of any other farmhands mentioned; Flora’s only human contact in the tale is with her husband.³⁸

Flora does not complain about this situation. In keeping with cultural expectations, she perhaps accepts it as the inevitable fate of a woman who has chosen to marry a rancher—until she feels that her husband has been neglectful in not mentioning or taking her to visit the house that becomes visible in the distance once the corn has been harvested. “One evening,” she finally broaches the subject “as the sun, at its fiercest, rushed toward the great black hollow of the west” (59). When her husband turns pale but does not answer, she prompts him with the following: “If there’s any one around to associate with, I should think you’d let me have the benefit of their company. It isn’t as funny as you think, staying here alone days and days” (59).

What is revealed by Flora’s belief that her husband must accompany her to visit her nearest neighbors is a whole network of social forces that render women docile and obedient to the wishes of men. Although Flora can see a home in the distance from her window and craves social interaction, her sense of propriety and her willingness to act in accordance with her husband’s expectations—and, by exten-

sion, those of the larger culture—prohibit her from taking the initiative to act on her own desire and go for a visit. In the same way that she was “taken” by Bart when she was seventeen to be his wife and live on his ranch, she must be taken by him to be introduced to their neighbors.

Bart tries to make light of his wife’s reproach by accusing her of being homesick. He attempts to distract her from the question by demanding biscuits, but he eventually capitulates and shares the gruesome story that was related to him about the ghostly house: “[A] man an’ his wife come out here t’ live an’ put up that there little place. An’ she was young, you know, an’ kind o’ skeery, and she got lonesome. It worked on her an’ worked on her, an’ one day she up an’ killed the baby an’ her husband an’ herself” (61–62). Bart then adds that two weeks after the bodies were buried on the site of the tragedy, the house inexplicably burned down. Bart concludes the discussion by demanding that tea be served.

That the revelation of the ghostliness of the house in the distance and the awful acts of violence that presaged its irruption should be book-ended by demands for biscuits and tea foregrounds in general the control men exercise over women and their anxieties that underlie it. Having presented an extreme scenario of female discontentment and violent resistance, Bart immediately attempts to avoid and then to foreclose any subversive meditations on his wife’s part by demanding that tea be served, thereby remanding her to the sphere of domestic service.

Rather than a lost utopian space of feminine refuge like Wynne’s little room, the ghostly house that reappears in the distance is the afterimage of tragedy. But more than this, it is the spectral materialization of female distress. The parallels between Flora’s situation and the mother who went crazy and killed her family are clear. Not only does Flora suffer from comparable boredom and isolation, but the cottage viewed in the distance is described as “something like her own.” Bart is perhaps more correct than he realizes when he playfully diagnoses his wife’s vision of the house in the distance as “homesickness.” What “The House That Was Not” depicts is a sort of sickness of the frontier wife caused by immurement within the home and lack of opportunities for social interaction, personal enjoyment, and self-development. The fragmentary nature of Peattie’s title for the story invites the reader to complete the thought: the house that was not . . .

a home. It is no accident, of course, that the haunting house is visible through the window facing the “great black hollow of the west” into which the “angry and sanguinary” sun disappears. The West is also the void that swallows women as they are uprooted by husbands and ensconced within frontier farm or ranch houses. Peattie’s frontier story concisely portrays the “female gothic” pattern noted by Eugenia DeLamotte and others in which domestic space is revealed to be a prison for women who are disempowered and at the mercy of husbands and fathers. Peattie, however, adapts this format to represent the forms of distress attendant upon being the wife of a Western rancher toward the end of the 1800s, in which the network of social forces structuring gender expectations naturalized social isolation for women living on isolated farms.

For Bart, the fact that the house is visible from a distance but disappears when one gets close to it is simply another manifestation of what he refers to as “queer” things that occur out on the plains: “Some things out here is queer—so queer folks wouldn’t believe ’em unless they saw. An’ some’s so pig-headed they don’t believe their own eyes” (57). As with Wynne’s little room, however, what is “queered” is space itself. The queer space of the haunting house that defies rationalistic understandings of presence and absence and past and present reveals the inequality embedded within constructed codes of gender that disempower Western women and compel them to accept lives of neglect and isolation. The story that surfaces, the tragedy that persists beyond its completion, is the story of a home that was not—of a woman so tortured by loneliness and anxiety and so overwhelmed with the burden of caring for an infant on her own that she destroyed her family and herself. That the house only appears to exist from a distance can be taken as a more general commentary on the ways in which looks can be deceiving. From a distance, one seems to see a home. Up close, one realizes the “seething presence of the invisible”—the fact that the house lacked the qualities commonly associated with a home, including care, love, respect, and safety.

On the day following Bart’s explanation of the house in the distance, Flora sets out on horseback to see for herself. While Flora does not feel herself entitled to visit her presumed living neighbors without her husband’s accompaniment, the assertion that there is nothing there, that there is no house and no family, liberates her to visit the space on her own, suggesting that Flora can only act on her own ini-

tiative in relation to what her husband considers to be nothing. Sure enough, as she nears the site of the tragedy, “the little shack waned like a shadow before her. It faded and dimmed before her eyes” (63). When she arrives at the spot where the house had stood, there is no structure. There is no home. What Flora chillingly finds amid the tall grass, however, is a baby’s shoe, the material remainder of grief and violence. She considers picking it up, but “something cold in her veins” prevents her (63). The narration then records that she grows angry and attempts to force her horse to ride through the site where the house once stood, but the horse resists and, against her direction, gallops fearfully for home.

The discovery of the baby’s shoe, combined with the horse’s agitation, seem to confirm the story told by her husband and to highlight the uncanniness of this site of tragedy. The poignant detail of the baby’s shoe mutely testifies that a woman’s loneliness drove her to such despair, even madness, that she murdered her own child. Such an act, of course, is anathema in the context of nineteenth-century understandings of the nature of femininity. As Smith-Rosenberg, Carl Degler, Barbara Welter, and others have convincingly argued, the “doctrine of separate spheres” or the “cult of true womanhood” that solidified in the first half of the nineteenth century increasingly charged women with maintaining the morality of the home and bearing and rearing virtuous children.³⁹ For a woman to kill her child within a culture that identifies the bearing and nurturing of children as natural female functions is the most extreme gesture of cultural rejection that a woman can make and speaks to what generally goes unstated in nineteenth-century literature: the stresses and anxieties attendant upon childrearing. The unnaturalness of such an act finds its corollary in the impossibility of a house that both does and does not exist. But the thrust of Peattie’s story is that many homes are—actually or potentially—similar deceptions in which the appearance of domestic harmony is merely a façade covering the inequitable distribution of power. Furthermore, the woman’s horrific act of violence is shown to be the response to a more general structure of violence—the social expectations of heterosexual union and childbearing for women, as well as the accepted confinement of women to the home.

The ending of Peattie’s story—like that of Wynne’s—is ambiguous. It is unclear why Flora becomes angry after discovering the shoe and then attempts to spur her horse to ride over the vacant site of the

house. It may be that she is disgusted by this morbid remainder and the macabre story it seems to confirm, so that she becomes angry at the woman who committed this heinous deed. But what the story prompts the reader to consider are the circumstances that inspired the act. It may be that some of Flora's anger arises from an uncomfortable spark of recognition or understanding. Her attempt to ride over the site perhaps can be read as a failed attempt to suppress her own abhorrent empathy—to repress with a shudder the horrific idea that with too much staring out the window, day after day, and, significantly, with the birth of a child for whom she alone must care, she too could lose touch with reality and be capable of violence against those who are supposed to protect her and those she is supposed to love and protect.

The material remainder of the infant's shoe is especially important. One essential difference between Flora and the woman who murdered her family is that Flora is not (yet) a mother. However, one can imagine how difficult it would be for her as a young woman of seventeen to bear and raise children without women's support or any social interaction apart from her husband. Not only was the woman in the now-spectral house cut off from social interaction but presumably she was with her baby day and night. The infant's shoe that Flora discovers in the rubble of the destroyed home is a potent symbol indeed. It not only materializes and condenses the weighty cultural obligations and demands placed upon women regarding motherhood but also prophesizes Flora's imminently looming future—and thereby instantiates her lack of options for self-actualization. Her anger as she surveys the site of the tragedy then may also be connected to a realization on some level of her own lack of options. Not only will her job be to serve biscuits and tea to Bart for the rest of her life, but presumably soon she will also have to face the demands of motherhood alone—including the self-sacrifice that they will entail. With this in mind, Peattie's ghost story can be read as not just a tale that explores the tensions between idealized expectations concerning marriage and the far less fulfilling realities of marital life for many women but also as a daring revelation of the fears and horrors underlying the culture's idea of a woman's highest calling: motherhood. At least for the woman who murdered her husband and child, one may speculate that there was little romance involved with sleep deprivation and perpetual attention to her child's constant needs. For an inexperienced mother, it may

have been the constant presence of an infant that pushed her over the edge, which suggests that this could be Flora's fate as well.

Ultimately the queer space of the apparitional house that appears in the distance, although specific to a sociohistorical moment and situation, prompts an uncanny recognition of the unhomeliness of the home for women in general within patriarchal culture and foregrounds the often unacknowledged social forces that gender the space of the home and compel women to perform assigned identities, regardless of whether or not those assignments coincide with their personal inclinations and talents. In Peattie's tale, both the murdering wife and Flora have surrendered control to their farmer husbands and are subject to confinement, loneliness, boredom, and the cultural expectation of maternity. It is the fantasy of domestic space as haven and source of tranquil fulfillment that is interrupted in Peattie's story and shown to be phantasmatic; as a result, the romantic vision of the family farm as the exemplary site of republican values is subject to caustic critique.⁴⁰ As in Wynne's "The Little Room," Peattie makes use of gothic conventions to critique gender expectations that disempower women. Peattie's story, however, is ultimately much bleaker than Wynne's because the queer haunting structure Flora encounters does not allow for a fantasy of female self-actualization or escape like the possibility presented by the little room. Rather, it posits madness and murder as the only alternatives to a life of social and mental stultification. The only options presented by the narrative for Flora are resigned acceptance or madness. Flora has no "little room" for escape, even in her fantasies. It is almost as though Western ranching and capitalistic expansion have colonized the space of her dreams: she can envision no space of her own apart from that created through the most extreme violence to her family and herself.

In both Wynne's and Peattie's stories, the haunting inconsistency of queer spaces highlights the social forces and conventions that gender space and impose limitations. In "The Little Room" and "The House That Was Not," in keeping with critical meditations on the female gothic, supernatural manifestations reveal the uncanniness of domestic space and the unequal division of power between men and women. In their uncanny fictions, Wynne and Peattie each depict "impossible" ghostly spaces that invoke and implicitly critique the terrors of the real world.

Notes

I am grateful to Gretchen Papazian for her valuable suggestions.

- 1 From roughly the start of the Civil War to the early 1930s, hundreds of uncanny tales were published in the periodical press and in books by now familiar American women authors (such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Lydia Maria Child, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Edith Wharton) as well as by authors generally unknown to today's readers (such as Josephine Dodge Bacon, Gertrude Atherton, Alice Brown, Emma Frances Dawson, Alice Cary, Olivia Howard Dunbar, and Harriet Prescott Spofford). This body of supernatural fiction constitutes what Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar refer to as a "distinctive tradition of ghost story writing" by American women, organized around recurrent themes foregrounding specifically female concerns and frequently manifesting a feminist consciousness. This genre that reflects the anxieties and desires of women in patriarchal culture has come to be known as the female gothic; see the introduction to *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1991), 10.
- 2 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), 22, 17, 8.
- 3 David Bell, Jon Binnie, Julia Cream, and Gill Valentine, "All Hyped Up and No Place to Go," *Gender, Place and Culture* 1, no. 1 (1994): 32.
- 4 See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 22.
- 5 See Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1989); Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of the Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990); and Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995). See also Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979).
- 6 Dale Bailey, *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ky.: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1999), 6.
- 7 Marilyn R. Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1991), 3.
- 8 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 132.
- 9 Jonathan Crewe, "Queering 'The Yellow Wall-paper': A Pedagogic View," in *The Pedagogical Wallpaper: Teaching Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper,"* ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 47–63.
- 10 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1993), 9.

- 11 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 21.
- 12 David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 62.
- 13 Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text*, 3; Alfred Bendixen, headnote to *Haunted Women: The Best Supernatural Tales by American Women Writers*, ed. Alfred Bendixen (New York: Frederick Unger, 1985), 119.
- 14 See Bendixen, *Haunted Women*, 119.
- 15 James Nagel and Tom Quirk, headnote to "The Little Room" by Madeline Yale Wynne in *The Portable American Realism Reader* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 274.
- 16 According to the Newberry Library's "Inventory of Little Room Records, 1898–1931," the club was promoted by Hamlin Garland and Henry B. Fuller. From 1898 to 1931, members met regularly in Chicago's Michigan Avenue Fine Arts Building on Friday afternoons for conversation as well as "light music, drama or some kind of clever presentation." Elia Wilkinson Peattie was a member. See www.newberry.org/collections/FindingAids/littleroom/LittleRoom.html.
- 17 See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979–1985* (1986; reprint, New York: Norton, 1994).
- 18 The unmarried status of the sisters may also reflect the general lack of marriageable men in rural New England in the decades after the Civil War, which wiped out an entire generation of young men. Many women found themselves in desperate economic straits, forced to rely upon their own ingenuity to provide for themselves and their families. This difficult situation was exacerbated by the migration of young men westward or to urban centers seeking their fortunes; see Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984). Elaine Showalter notes that after the devastation of the Civil War, many rural sections of New England were populated solely by old men, single women, clergymen, and young children (introduction to *Scribbling Women: Short Stories by Nineteenth-Century American Women*, ed. Elaine Showalter [New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996], xxxix).
- 19 Madeline Yale Wynne, "The Little Room," in *Haunted Women: The Best Supernatural Tales by American Women Writers*, ed. Alfred Bendixen (New York: Frederick Unger, 1985), 122. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 20 Bendixen, introduction to *Haunted Women*, 5.
- 21 Barbara Constance Patrick, "The Invisible Tradition: Freeman, Gilman, Spofford, Wharton, and American Women's Ghost Stories as Social Criticism" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1991), 62. Patrick actually downplays this particular reading, emphasizing instead

that the story “allegorizes the experience of reading” (62) and raises epistemological questions about the nature of what we think we know and the abilities of our senses to provide us with truthful data about the world. I agree that the story raises these questions, but I see them as directly connected to the issue of gender; that is, the story asserts that men and women understand and interpret the world differently based on their experiences of living as gendered people.

- 22 Margaret’s comment is somewhat misleading because it neglects the fact that the spinster sisters do have a hired man, Hiram, who lives on the premises, although probably not in the farmhouse itself. Although Roger is described here as a “simple, common man,” he clearly is both less simple and less common than Hiram and therefore a more powerful masculine presence in the home.
- 23 Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 62.
- 24 From a contemporary perspective—and particularly in light of my queer reading of this story—there is also a wonderful irony to the little room’s replacement by a closet. It is almost as though Halperin is discussing Wynne’s story when he writes in *Saint Foucault*: “The closet is nothing . . . if not the product of complex relations of power” (29), for the presence of the china closet in Wynne’s story materializes the circumscribed roles and limited autonomy for women in nineteenth-century American culture. In the presence of their husbands, the women in the story can be said to be “closeted”—that is, unable to formulate or express their personal aspirations and desires. The contemporary resonance of closet in this respect is accentuated by the potential pun on “gilt-edged china” in which “gilt” can be read as its homonym, *guilt*.
- 25 Claudine Hermann, “Women in Space and Time,” in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981), 169.
- 26 Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1983), 140. See also David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995), 6.
- 27 Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 68.
- 28 Bendixen, *Haunted Women*, 119.
- 29 The question of whether the sisters are ignorant of the queer nature of their house or are carefully withholding information surfaces explicitly at one crucial moment. When questioned by Rita Lash concerning the India chintz alleged to exist in the little room, Rita thinks she sees Aunt Maria’s cheeks flush a bit, although “her eyes were like a stone wall” (130). Interpretations of Hannah and Maria’s role in this story hinges upon the small detail of the flushed cheeks. On one hand, if the flush is read to signify Maria’s recognition of the chintz, then the posture of ignorance assumed by Hannah and Maria is a façade and their refusal to

- acknowledge the changing nature of the little room is deliberate. Beyond this, such a reading also would suggest that Maria does have thoughts of her own, apart from those of her sister. On the other hand, if Rita is wrong in her observation or if the flushed cheeks are due to some cause other than recognition of the chintz, then Hannah and Maria appear to be without conscious knowledge of the changing nature of their house.
- 30 I have in mind the Lacanian definition of the obsessional subject who works feverishly to avoid realizing the lack or “castration” of the other, of the symbolic order. According to Slavoj Žižek, “The obsessional participates in frenzied activity. . . . based on the ultimatum, ‘If I don’t do this (the compulsive ritual), some unspeakable horrible X will take place.’ In Lacanian terms, this X can be specified as the barred Other, i.e., the lack in the Other, the inconsistency of the symbolic order. . . . We must be active all the time so that it does not come to light that ‘the Other does not exist’ (Lacan)” (*Looking Awry: Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992], 35).
- 31 While “The Little Room” is not ostensibly a story about class relations, the mechanical nature of the aunts’ labor resonates with rapid industrialization and the rise of the factory system. This may suggest that the necessity and desirability of a utopian space of feminine refuge increasingly grows in response to the depersonalization effected by factory labor.
- 32 In “The Sequel to the Little Room,” Wynne picks up with Cousin Nan and Rita Lash immediately after they learn that the Keys’ farmhouse has burned down. Margaret Grant has a ghostly vision of Hannah Keys in which Hannah explains to her that the little room was her secret that sometimes would “get out” (in *The Little Room and Other Stories* [Chicago: Way and Williams, 1895], 75). While many of the questions surrounding the room remain unanswered at the end of the sequel, the nature of the room is tied more firmly to Hannah’s thwarted love affair with the sea captain who gave her the chintz and seashell.
- 33 Peattie’s fiction, like Wynne’s, was very popular at the time of its publication, and reviews of her work were generally favorable. See, for example, the reviews of her *The Shape of Fear and Other Ghostly Tales* in *Bookman*, January 1899, 492; and *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1899, 287–88. Contemporary literary critics and historians, however, have paid little attention to Peattie. Exceptions include Sidney H. Bremer, “Elia Wilkinson Peattie,” in *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Lina Mainiero, 4 vols. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981), 3:360–62; and Judith Raftery, “Chicago Settlement Women in Fact and Fiction: Hobart Chatfield-Taylor, Clara Elizabeth Laughlin, and Elia Wilkinson Peattie Portray the New Woman,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 88, no. 1 (1995): 37–58. The only reference I have found to Peattie’s ghost stories is a comment in a footnote of Patrick’s disserta-

- tion, "The Invisible Tradition," that her stories are "fabulous" but "do not benefit very much for critical analysis" (202).
- 34 Elia Wilkinson Peattie, "The House That Was Not," in *The Shape of Fear and Other Ghostly Tales* (1898; reprint, Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 58. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 35 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.
- 36 See Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 69.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 62.
- 38 The correspondences between Flora's situation and that of the protagonist in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's much more famous tale, "The Yellow Wall-paper" (1892), are intriguing. Flora's and Gilman's narrators suffer similar forms of infantilization and confinement, which give rise in both cases to spectral phenomena seemingly reflective of each woman's mental stress.
- 39 Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), 52. See also Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1976).
- 40 For more on the myth of the farmer as "mainstay of the republic," see Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Gilded Age, or, The Hazard of New Functions* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997), 219–20.