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Landscape and Setting
in Rosa Mulholland's Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

It is a truth universally acknowledged that many horror stories share certain elements that are used to create a distinct Gothic mood. Throughout this paper we will answer the following question: Is it true that landscapes and settings are the main elements that achieve the famous sinister atmosphere which is present in most Gothic narratives? In order to illustrate the importance of this particular combination in achieving this desired horror effect, we will review the necessary bibliography in this regard. The results will later be tested on several literary works written by Rosa Mulholland, a rather unknown Irish female author, to demonstrate that landscape and setting play an important role in Irish Female Gothic.

Keywords: Rosa Mulholland, Irish Gothic, Architecture, Setting, Landscape, Horror.

Es una verdad universal que muchas historias de terror comparten ciertos elementos que se utilizan para crear un típico ambiente gótico. A lo largo de esta tesis responderemos a la siguiente pregunta: ¿Es cierto que los paisajes y los escenarios son los elementos principales que logran la famosa atmósfera siniestra que está presente en la mayoría de las narrativas góticas? Para mostrar la importancia de esta combinación que logra este deseado efecto terrorífico, haremos un repaso de la bibliografía necesaria al respecto. Luego pondremos los resultados en práctica en varias obras literarias escritas por Rosa Mulholland, una autora irlandesa bastante desconocida, para demostrar que los paisajes y los escenarios juegan un papel importante en el gótico irlandés femenino.

Palabras clave: Rosa Mulholland, Gótico Irlandés, Arquitectura, Escenario, Paisaje, Horror.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 7 |
| 1. Architectural Features and Settings in Gothic Literature | 9 |
| 2. Close Reading of Rosa Mulholland's Short Stories | 21 |
| "The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly": An Original Unsettling Story | 21 |
| "The Ghost at the Rath": A Shocking Family Secret | 24 |
| "The Ghost of Wildwood Chase": An Unusual Romance | 26 |
| "Not to be Taken at Bed-Time": A Witchcraft Legend | 29 |
| Conclusions | 33 |
| Works Cited | 35 |

Introduction

This B.A. Thesis seeks to contextualize the Irish writer Rosa Mulholland (1841-1921) in the framework of Irish Gothic literature written by women. Particularly to explain her use of landscape and setting and the reasons of their incorporation in her four horror stories “The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly”, “The Ghost at the Rath”, “The Ghost of Wildwood Chase” and “Not to be Taken at Bed-Time”.

Architecture in English Fiction (1934) by Warren Hunting Smith and *Gothic: The New Critical Idiom* (2006) by Fred Botting represent the main sources that were used for our initial analysis. These publications are concerned with Gothic Studies in general and offer valuable information regarding the use of architecture in literature. Professors, scholars, editors and several writers of secondary sources have also proven to be very useful in our investigation. Some of these authors include Briana Walsh, Kenneth Clark, Silvia Diez Fabre and Tzvetan Todorov among many others. While Gothic Studies regarding architecture were previously conducted, our investigation will focus on the architectural features and settings that are used in literature in order to achieve the iconic Gothic atmosphere, and illustrate this particular effect in the works of our female author.

In order to do this, I have organized this paper into two major units. The first chapter, known as “Architectural Features and Settings in Gothic Literature”, illustrates some of the common characteristics that are found in Gothic architecture and how these structural elements are portrayed in literature. The chapter also contains two major sections that are connected: it begins with the typical Gothic features that are present in English literature and concludes by mentioning the common traits of Irish Gothic fiction, where we formally introduce the writer of our choice: Rosa Mulholland. Our second chapter is a “Close Reading of Rosa Mulholland’s Short Stories” and focuses primarily on the four narratives that illustrate the architectural aspects and locations that are chosen by our female author. We will compare the results of this analysis with the conclusions we reached from the previous chapter and determine if our writer includes traditional Irish Gothic elements or has a unique writing style.

1

Architectural Features and Settings in Gothic Literature

Gothic architecture has played an important role in literature for many centuries. The word ‘Gothic’ also denotes a literary genre which represents a significant milestone in literature. Castles, churches, abbeys, monasteries and haunted mansions instantly became the most recognizable ‘characters’ in Gothic narratives. In this first chapter, we will discover the main reasons that inspired authors to include such menacing structures in their disturbing stories. In order to do this, we will start by identifying the most common traits which are present in Gothic architecture. Once these concepts are explained, we will see how these features are portrayed in Gothic literature. For this purpose, our analysis will begin with Horace Walpole, one of the most iconic literary figures in the history of English literature.

In the second part of this chapter, the study will take on a different perspective and we will draw our attention to certain Irish authors who are considered to have contributed to the Gothic genre in one way or another. Writers such as Charles Maturin and Sheridan Le Fanu will be discussed in order to establish the typical architectural characteristics portrayed in their Gothic novels and thus compare them with the information we gathered in the previous section. We think these architectural features are worth studying in order to understand how writers achieve this so-called horror element in their Gothic novels. Is it true that certain structures or locations can be used in a particular setting to unleash an unspeakable fear in readers? Let us find out.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, authors around the world began using buildings of Gothic origins in their narratives (Smith 90). Several sources confirm that these medieval structures were included in narratives prior to Walpole’s popularization of this device, but in a smaller degree. These buildings were mentioned very briefly and were not considered an important part of these chilling tales. For this reason, architectural descriptions would lack detail. Castles and abbeys started to gain popularity from 1775 onwards, “eventually becoming the chief background of the novel” (Smith 95). From that moment on, the Gothic literary genre was created. It is

worth mentioning that while the literary genre actually originated from an architectural term, Gothic architecture and Gothic literature are two different concepts.

According to Vandana V., Gothic can be strictly understood as an architectural word. She believes that “the word Gothic is an architectural term. The style is best known for the pointed arch that was the feature of Gothic churches. Gothic architecture was prevalent in Western Europe between the 12th and 16th centuries” (36). Several authors reaffirm the idea behind the pointed arch and widely regard it as the most recognizable element of Gothic architecture altogether. This extract assures that:

The pointed arch is another significant feature of the Gothic architecture (...) the use of the pointed arch is both practical and decorative. It distributes the force of heavier ceilings and bulky walls. It also supports much more weight than previously used pillars. The pointed arches were a thing of beauty and grace and gave rise to the vaulted ceilings. Light, bright windows, airy interiors were a welcome relief after living in the dark, dingy, moody and damp structures of the medieval buildings. With Gothic architecture beauty and aesthetic values were incorporated. (Joseph 1232)

The following journal article reveals another significant element which can be found in Gothic architecture. Professor Joseph tells us that:

There are certain characteristics which are exclusive to the Gothic architecture. The most obvious was the height of the structure. Previously due to problems in load distribution, the structures were squat and thin. New techniques allowed them to build very tall structures, almost like touching the sky or reaching the heaven; very apt for churches and cathedrals. So the buildings were tall, grand and graceful. (1232)

The previous paragraph illustrates a rather interesting contrast between two different periods of time and shows the evolution from the Middle Ages until the sixteenth century. The most brilliant architects and constructors during the sixteenth century created an entirely new system which allowed them to embrace verticality on a whole new level. This marked the beginning of a new type of building which was far greater in scale and height compared to its predecessors. This behemoth of a structure was the

iconic castle which was seen as something truly majestic and quite intimidating that defied the laws of physics.

These Gothic structures were included in a great number of horrifying tales, but were given a significant twist. The way in which these buildings are portrayed is somehow based on the horror formula created by Horace Walpole from *The Castle of Otranto*. Published originally in the year 1764, this famous narrative is considered to be the very first Gothic novel that inspired many writers all over the world. On this account, we can assume that this newly-invented horror formula became the distinctive model that many Gothic authors embraced in the centuries to come.

From a literary standpoint, the term ‘Gothic’ refers to the setting of a novel, including mysterious, surreal and even paranormal stories, which are set in dark and terrifying locations. Regarding the default setting in Gothic fiction, Eastern Europe was the main choice for many writers because this area was rather unknown to the vast majority of people living in the Western regions. A remote area that suddenly triggers an inexplicable fear of the unknown would guarantee a certain shock value in readers alike (V. 42). This concept will later become a valuable asset and a standard element featured in most horror stories.

Regarding the locations where the stories are set, we have already mentioned how Europe was the desired choice for many authors. While this is true for the most part, some experts suggest that:

Gothic landscapes are desolate, alienating and full of menace. In the eighteenth century they were wild and mountainous locations. Later the modern city combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest. (Botting 2)

Fred Botting, a professor whose area of expertise lies in the history of Gothic literature, indicates that “the major locus of Gothic plots, the castle, was gloomily predominant in early Gothic fiction” (2). Professor Joseph also states that:

In most of the novels the action takes place in or near a castle. The castle looms in the background almost

throughout the action. There are many secret passages and rooms, trap doors, hidden staircases etc. The castles are usually connected to caves and mysterious creatures. (1233)

While the castle seems to be the predominant structure in Gothic fiction during the eighteenth century, there are many more horror elements used in these terrifying tales. In a similar way to a stage with its necessary props, there are many more components that are included in order to achieve this wanted shock value. While some writers created innovative ways of captivating their readers, the vast majority followed the famous Walpole horror formula since it proved to be an unlimited source of horror and mystery. As a direct result, the castle would also contain “secret passages, trapdoors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections. The castle may be near or connected to caves, which lend their own haunting flavor with their branching, claustrophobia and mystery” (V. 39).

Another architectural component that inspired authors and became quite popular in the earlier novels was the addition of the moat. Combined with the drawbridge, this resulted in an effective defense mechanism that would keep away any unwanted visitors, creating an even greater sense of fear and isolation. The moat, however, would be excluded if the castle was located on a mountain (Smith 136).

From an architectural standpoint, many historians believe that Gothic structures were originally meant to evoke a certain air of elegance and heterogeneity, and not just a simple state of terror and gruesomeness meant to shock the unsuspecting readers (Clark 33). As Professor Joseph acknowledges:

The Gothic style of architecture aimed at providing airy light interiors with huge windows usually decorated with stained glass, tall towers, pointed arches, vaulted ceilings etc. These provided a comfortable dwelling place. However, in the Gothic literature these took on an opposite image. The elements of a gothic novel included an old manor type house or a castle. With lots of gloominess, strangeness, sense of evil and mystery. (1232)

In addition, she also argues that “the surprisingly beautiful and graceful structures are changed into dark and mysterious settings. A storm with thunder and lightning is added

to give the extra chill factor. The atmosphere is transformed into one of darkness instilling fear and terror in the characters” (Joseph 1233).

Ruins of fallen structures could be found all over Europe and were another major element that appeared in these spine-chilling tales. The remains of these establishments offered an excellent way of creating a mysterious atmosphere filled with horror and frightfulness (Joseph 1233).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the use of light was implemented in order to create a distinctive contrast of light and shade. This visual technique was developed in order to shape the overall appearance of the structure without the addition of external landscapes. This unusual method was used by Ann Radcliffe in her quintessential Gothic romance known as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Professor Smith illustrates this vibrant display of lights and shadows in the following segment:

We see Udolpho with the sunset glowing on the upper towers, and fading in purplish dusk on the lower portions; or we behold it partly illuminated by the ruddy glow of a torch, the rest of the structure remaining in darkness. The ends of large halls are always lost in gloom, and arches retreat in perspective until they vanish in shadow. (119)

In addition to all the visual contents that were previously illustrated, there were other elements that some authors decided to implement in their literary works. Jennifer Joseph explains that:

A fear of the unknown exists because of the strange noises in the building. It might be just an old hose settling down or someone/something stalking in the night. Omens and visions are also elements used to lighten the sense of terror and mystery. An old prophecy related to the castle of its inhabitants is another element of the Gothic novel. (1233)

There is also a visible contrast in the aforementioned paragraphs which shows the evolution of the environments that were selected in Gothic fiction and it somehow represents the evolution of society itself. In other words, the general views of the population have changed considerably throughout centuries. The castle, in the company of the gardens and the forest, can be seen as something medieval and quite primitive which was considered otherworldly in that initial period. This image was later changed

to a more urban and familiar scenario and “in later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present” (Botting 3).

From this point on, we will draw our attention to the second part of this chapter and as we enter the realm of the Irish Gothic fiction, some experts find this subgenre quite troublesome to classify. After the British Union at the end of the eighteenth century, one of the main problems present in Ireland was “the struggle to maintain a distinct Celtic identity” (Walsh 18). The resulting turmoil inspired Irish authors who began to resort to the Gothic universe discovering ways of creating a stable national identity in literature during a period of significant change (Wurtz 3). Briana Walsh proposes the following definition:

I would define an Irish Gothic text as one written by a person or persons who claim significant links to Ireland, which engages with specific gothic themes and characteristics and one which includes some of the following characteristics: the presence of the Big House or Irish castle, an Irish setting or displaced Irish setting, themes of colonialism and religious intolerance, fears of marginalization, Catholophobia and Catholophilia, antiquarianism, concerns over the transmission of property and wealth and the pursuer pursued. (23)

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Gothic narratives were oversaturated with castles which were becoming a generic cliché. Several innovations were included in order to prevent the unequivocal decline of the Gothic genre. While the castle was still a valid choice for many Irish authors, it was gradually replaced by the Big House since domestic horror was seen as a new type of Gothic horror in Ireland. However, the image of the Big House undergoes a significant change in Irish Gothic fiction. The segment below illustrates several architectural features that are present in these famous manors. Elizabeth Bowen explains in her essay “The Big House” that:

The paradox of these big houses is that often they are not big at all. Those massive detached villas outside cities probably have a greater number of rooms. We have of course in Ireland the great houses - houses Renaissance Italy hardly rivals, houses with superb façades, colonnades, pavilions and, inside, chains of plastered,

painted saloons. But the houses that I know best, and write of, would be only called “big” in Ireland - in England they would be “country houses”, no more. They are of adequate size for a family, its dependants, a modest number of guests. They have few annexes, they do not ramble; they are nearly always compactly square. Much of the space inside (and there is not so much space) has been sacrificed to airy halls and lobbies and to the elegant structure of staircases. Their façades (very often in the Italian manner) are not lengthy, though they may be high. (qtd. in Lee 26)

Additionally, Silvia Diez Fabre suggests that the Big House usually included a large number of rooms that would meet the needs of very large families with an average of ten children. The entrance hall served as a very large reception room where the owners and their guests could leave their hunting and fishing gear. The Big House also featured a large dining room and various living, dancing and recreation rooms. The decoration and the interior furniture, as well as the architecture of the building, reaffirmed the close connection of the Ascendancy with Great Britain, standing out in preferential places the coats of arms, the military paraphernalia of the first founders and the objects obtained in the military campaigns from the service to the Empire (88).

From what we have seen so far, the Big House is presented as a national symbol that is portrayed as a hospitable household. In fiction, however, this famous manor is actually a sort of metaphor for the Anglo-Irish society and when “the Big House crumbles and falls into ruin, so does Ascendancy society” (Walsh 24). James Wurtz also explains that:

The Big House, alone in the landscape and slowly falling into decay, touches upon primary concerns of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. The crumbling of the house parallels in many ways the crumbling of the Anglo-Irish as an aristocratic class. Both the house and its occupants perceive themselves to be, in a sense, under siege from the increasingly vocal Irish Catholic majority, and as targets of insurgent violence the houses were perhaps the most vulnerable symbol of the perilous position of the Anglo-Irish. (...) the Big House becomes the main site where these issues concentrate, and it can appear, like a mausoleum, as a monument to the glories of the past, as a crypt wherein the past is buried, and as an uneasy repository of the past, neither crypt nor monument, where

what has died can never really pass, and what lives cannot escape the grasp of the dead. (73)

While many experts debate the very existence of the first Irish Gothic novel, it is believed to have originated in the first half of the nineteenth century. Robert Miles suggests that “if critics were to pick out a terminal date for the ‘close’ of the first phase of the Gothic, it would probably be 1820, the year in which Maturin’s *Melmoth The Wanderer* was published” (9). As a result, several critics consider this tale as being the first great Irish Gothic novel “to be set in Ireland and to specifically deal with Irish themes” (Wurtz 16).

Charles Maturin is considered to be one of the first Irish writers whose literary innovations contributed to the Gothic genre. The element of horror created through the use of the domestic setting along with other narrative techniques are some of the features that make *Melmoth the Wanderer* such a significant masterpiece. This can be seen in the following paragraph:

Through a close examination of Maturin’s novel, it is clear that the various Gothic devices, including the convoluted narrative structure, the paradigmatic Gothic villain, and the landscapes scarred by ruins, tunnels, and dramatic weather, work towards the preservation of alternatives to the dominant historical narrative, and reveal the Gothic as a locus for the various representations attached to the violence inherent in the repression of those alternative histories. (Wurtz 11)

In Irish Gothic fiction, the plots were usually based on family secrets or sins and problematic scenarios regarding inheritance and wealth transfer (Wurtz 74). Besides the information already presented, James Wurtz also states that:

The length and the wordiness of the novel do combine, with Maturin’s delight in repetition, to undermine the shock effect of the new horrors that crop up. Indeed, the overwhelming use of Gothic clichés, settings, and situations tends to dull the effect that these devices strive for, and the grand stages of the Gothic, including the madhouse, the dungeons of the Inquisition, and the exotic, foreign locales, do not lead to the downfall of any of the main characters. Rather, it is in the house, the private,

domestic space, where the most flagrant transgressions take place. (46)

One of the main themes that are featured in most Irish Gothic novels is the sense of isolation. This feeling was caused by the constant marginalization that most Irish citizens experienced during the nineteenth century. This is visible in the works of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, where the author uses the image of the collapsing Big House to portray the disintegration of the Anglo-Irish upper classes in the nineteenth century:

In LeFanu's later fiction, the isolation of the Great House was inexplicably disturbed by incidents of meaningless violence (...) to declare such acts meaningless (...) was to reserve some residual dignity and meaning to the Great House itself; nevertheless, the final fate of the House in each novel is desolation. (McCormack 33)

Professor Wurtz also suggests that:

The collapsing house is a trademark of Anglo-Irish Gothic fiction (...) LeFanu, of course, made great use of this trope in his writing, and many of his stories concern themselves with haunted houses and estates, frequently situating them in relation to the countryside with boundaries such as hedges or walls demarcating the imposing figure of the house itself, stark and isolated against the landscape. (72)

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's main contribution to the Big House novel is the addition of the psychological tone to the Gothic perspective. By reducing the overdramatic effects, Sheridan Le Fanu encourages the participation of ghostly supernatural forces in order to emphasize psychological research. The dark forces of human perversity represent the Gothicism of his literary works (Diez Fabre 127).

Another unique feature of Irish Gothic fiction is the use of Irish folklore. While it is true that Sheridan Le Fanu includes certain aspects of the banshee in one of his fictional characters (Carmilla), he does not mention the spirit's Celtic origins (Walsh 26). According to Briana Walsh:

The banshee is an Irish supernatural being whose most prominent feature is her cry, her voice. (...) She is often depicted as a young, tall woman with long golden hair,

wearing white clothes. She is also represented as a short, old, ugly woman. These various representations of the banshee are characteristic of folklore, where numerous representations of the same being are common. (64)

The addition of Irish folklore in Gothic narratives marked the beginning of a new national identity in Ireland. The upcoming paragraph explains that:

In Romantic-era Europe, traditional folklore and fairy tales were the subject of increasing interest (...) In the 1820s, books on national folklores were enjoying something of a boom with London publishers eager to take advantage of an emerging mass market; (...) Folklore and fairy tales, in short, were becoming key cultural components in the formation of national identities and the associated sociopolitical relations therein. (Sturgeon 23)

After exploring the different characteristics that appear in Irish Gothic literature, we have reached several conclusions. First and foremost, due to the sudden political change that was affecting Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the country became a considerable source of inspiration for many authors who wanted to portray the current situation they were living in. The image of the Big House was used in order to illustrate the evolution of the Anglo-Irish society. Before manors and similar domestic households began replacing castles and medieval buildings in Irish Gothic fiction, architectural descriptions were becoming too technical and writers started using less architectural terminology in their narratives (Smith 167).

While the authors that were covered in the previous section belong to the Irish Male Gothic subgenre, certain experts believe there is a second subgenre known as Irish Female Gothic. In Male Gothic narratives, the supernatural element is materialized and danger becomes real. Ghosts, monsters, vampires and witches are a real threat to the characters. In Female Gothic fiction, however, the supernatural is primarily a result of the heroine's imagination (Todorov 41). Briana Walsh also explains that:

The perils that threaten the heroine in Female Gothic mirror those in the real world to show that women have much more to fear from everyday life. Male Gothic fiction problematizes the repressed fears of men by translating them into monsters, while Female Gothic writers drew upon the many fears that were a reality to them at this

time, and this is reflected in the deployment of real physical terrors in Female Gothic fiction. (34)

One of the writers belonging to the Irish Female Gothic subgenre is Rosa Mulholland (1841-1921). The writer of our choice is not widely known and we should bear in mind that historical records regarding her early life are rather difficult to acquire since there is a significant documentation shortage involving her past. The vast majority of the historical facts that will be presented here come from several newspaper articles. These include *The Freeman's Journal*, which is a well-known national publication in Ireland, and *The Advocate*.

We believe the most important aspect worth mentioning is the connection of our female author with Charles Dickens, one of the most famous English writers of the nineteenth century. Historical sources suggest that Dickens encouraged Mulholland to continue her literary work. He is considered to be the main influence which boosted her interest in writing. He was so delighted by her narratives, he even offered her the chance to work for the magazine that he edited, where he would publish her works every week. The first short story by Rosa Mulholland published in Dickens's *Household Words* was called "The Late Miss Hollingford" (1868). With the exception of several short stories that were published during her life, Rosa Mulholland also wrote religious books and novels including *Holy Childhood*, *The First Christmas*, *Marcella Grace*, *Four Little Mischiefs* and *The Walking Trees* among many others. "Vagrant Verses" is another publication that includes some of her most distinct poems.

Close Reading of Rosa Mulholland's Short Stories

In this chapter we will carry out a literary examination which is based on the element of domestic horror. In order to do this, we have selected four of the most famous horror short stories written by Rosa Mulholland. These narratives are “The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly”, “The Ghost at the Rath”, “The Ghost of Wildwood Chase” and “Not to be Taken at Bed-Time”. These are mostly stories involving supernatural elements. The main features we will discuss are two different aspects that are somehow connected. On the one hand, we will examine the architectural aspects that are present in each story and the different locations the narratives take place in. On the other hand, we will compare the results with the typical features that appear in Irish Gothic fiction and see if there is some sort of connection.

“The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly”: An Original Unsettling Story

Our first story has a significant emphasis on domestic horror and this can be seen clearly throughout the narrative. Rather than focusing on medieval buildings the action takes place entirely in domestic households. Before we begin with the architectural descriptions present in the narrative, let us briefly discuss the location of our tale.

From the opening lines we are introduced to the fictional village of Hurly Burly. In spite of the fact that the village is entirely fictitious, it is considered to be located in England, an unusual location in Irish fiction. While the story is set in a remote English area, the action takes place in a typical building featured in Irish Gothic fiction: the Big House. This strange combination is also present in “The Ghost of Wildwood Chase” and could be regarded as a hidden symbol of Irish distinction in order to create a national identity in literature.

This is visible at the beginning of the narrative when we are given a brief introduction to the home of the Hurllys, which is described as a “great house, a mile from the town” (Mulholland 1). From the starting paragraph we can identify this

particular household as a Big House that has aged considerably since it is completely covered in ivy. These are the only exterior features used to describe the house of the Hurlys that indicate a deteriorated condition. This initial ruined state is intensified at the end when the mansion is closed and remains deserted for several years. The image that is being illustrated here suggests a complete state of desolation which is considered to be the inevitable fate that awaits these households in traditional Irish literature. The result is the collapsing house, another significant element of Irish Gothic fiction.

Architectural descriptions are used to emphasize the ghostly presence of the specter, which becomes the main supernatural threat of the story. While these descriptions are mostly interior features of the house, several contrasts of light and shadow can be noticed. These visual elements are used to create the gloomy atmosphere of the narrative. A perfect example can be seen one night when Margaret Calderwood was rushing to the organ chamber and finds Lisa, our protagonist. She sees the phantom torturing Lisa by forcing her to play the organ endlessly:

Moonlight was pouring down the staircase and passages of Hurly Burly. It shone on the marble bust of the dead Lewis Hurly, that stood in the niche above his mother's sitting-room door. The organ room was full of it when Margaret pushed open the door and entered - full of the pale green moonlight from the window, mingled with another light, a dull lurid glare which seemed to centre round a dark shadow, like the figure of a man standing by the organ (...) the dark figure bent towards her [Lisa] with menacing gestures. (...) [Margaret] raised her eyes, and beheld Lisa's face convulsed with torture in the burning glare, and bending over her the figure and the features of Lewis Hurly! (Mulholland 17)

The moonlight present in the aforementioned paragraph is a common element found in all our stories and represents the main source of light which creates a distinctive yet horrifying ambience. The mysterious shadow coming from the phantom increases the disturbing effect of this ghostly encounter. The element of horror is achieved through the use of this terrifying atmosphere and the shock value grows considerably when the disturbed reader is forced to find a rational solution and make sense of the situation.

The use of sound is also present in the narrative when strange noises can be heard during the night which creates a strange sense of uneasiness. These aural instances are inside the mansion and contribute to the development of the sinister atmosphere. This can be seen when “the darkened empty room was locked up and left, we heard as loud as ever the well-known sounds humming and rolling through the walls. Night and day the tones of the organ boomed on as before” (Mulholland 14).

Another important element highlighted in the first line of the narrative is the presence of the thunderstorm. This devastating combination of ear-shattering sounds and menacing beams of light creates a strong sense of danger and vulnerability that many characters perceive throughout the plot. This thunderstorm is used in order to set the initial mood of the story and serves as a good starting point to engage the reader.

An interior component of the mansion present in the story is the gallery. This room makes a strange appearance in all our tales and is primarily used to illustrate past generations of the owners of the house. The gallery from our story, however, is presented as a typical room covered in darkness. There is also a lighting contrast in the passage which is visible when Lisa arrives at the home of the Hurlys and is led to “a long gloomy room at the west side of the house, where the faint gleams from the darkening sky still lingered on the portraits of the Hurly family” (Mulholland 7). We believe these galleries are included in order to offer significant clues that can help the protagonists understand the mysteries that lie in some of these manors.

“The Ghost at the Rath”: A Shocking Family Secret

The second story of our choice takes place in Ireland and features John Thunder, an army commander who returns to his native land after discovering he became the owner of certain properties that were unknown to him. Following the arrival of our protagonist in Dublin, he meets an old friend and encourages him to visit the Rath, the fictional location of our narrative. Being one of his recently acquired estates, the establishment consists of an old house and a park known to be two hundred miles away from their current location (Mulholland 23).

It is worth mentioning that the plot of our second text is actually based on the notion of inheritance and rightful wealth transfer which are very common choices in Irish Gothic fiction. When the protagonist arrives at the Rath, we are given a description of the remote area where the establishment is located:

I made my way to a lonely road, on which I met not a soul, and which seemed cut out of the heart of a forest, so closely were the trees ranked on either side, and so dense was the twilight made by the meeting and intertwining of the thick branches overhead. (...) In these shades I came upon a gate (...) with tall, thin, brick pillars, brandishing long grasses from their heads, and spotted with a melancholy crust of creeping moss. I jangled a cracked bell, and an old man appeared from the thickets within, stared at me, then admitted me with a rusty key. (Mulholland 24)

What is curious about this particular location is the fact that the action is set in the eastern side of Ireland, a region which is associated with urban areas. In spite of that, the landscape that is being portrayed in the previous fragment denotes an isolated rural area which is surprisingly far away from civilization. The result is an unexpected change in the background which creates a certain fear of the unknown. This effect is achieved through the use of a unique element which is rarely used in Irish Gothic tales: the haunted forest. Illusions caused by mysteriously-shaped trees and the unsettling sound of owls croaking create a rather disturbing atmosphere which has a significant impact on the protagonist. The night signals a dreadful change turning everything into a hostile environment, and the character is forced to retreat inside the household where ghost sightings and other spine-chilling events occur.

The park entrance represents one of the main exterior features of the establishment. However, we lack information regarding the overall appearance of the mansion. The external descriptions we have gathered suggest that the household “was vast and rambling” (Mulholland 37). The advanced age of the manor is also reflected through the presence of the ivy which covers most windows from the outside. The house at the Rath can thus be identified as a Big House and has similar characteristics which belong to the collapsing house. This is confirmed at the end of the story when “the Rath has been long since totally dismantled and left to go to ruin” (Mulholland 51).

There is a certain feeling of unease that is triggered from the very beginning of the story as a result of the overall Gothic theme and feel of the mansion. Apart from the exterior features that were previously mentioned, this Gothic effect is also achieved through the use of descriptions denoting the interior condition of the household. While furniture and decorations are regarded as antique and well worn, “the air of the place seemed heavy and tainted” (Mulholland 26) and the manor is also entirely covered in darkness. These features also create a strong sense of suffocation and influence the general domestic atmosphere, turning the household into a menacing environment.

The dark atmosphere is also created through the use of bizarre sounds and lighting contrasts that are noticeable within the household. From footsteps to door knocks, the protagonist hears a considerable amount of noises in the mansion resulting in a significant increase in psychological tension. Some of these sounds are caused by the “clashing of dishes, the echo of voices calling, and the dragging about of furniture” (Mulholland 27). This creates a certain level of anxiety due to the unknown cause of these strange phenomena. Light and shadow contrasts are used to emphasize the claustrophobic atmosphere within the mansion. There is an instance when John Thunder “felt a strange creeping sensation as [he] looked up the vast black staircase (...) and at the heavy darkness bending over it like a curse, while [their] lamps made drips of light down the first two or three gloomy steps” (Mulholland 27).

“The Ghost of Wildwood Chase”: An Unusual Romance

“The Ghost of Wildwood Chase” is another supernatural horror story that follows the unsettling events of an obscure protagonist. The plot is initially set in London, in the quiet studio of a painter, whose name is never mentioned. The unnamed protagonist is then forced to leave the city when one of his clients decides to offer him a job. Several hours later, the artist arrives at his destination in a different region of the country, known as Wildwood Chase, which is the main location of our story. Before his journey begins, the protagonist describes the fictional area stating that he “knew the country round Wildwood Chase was beautiful, famous for its roses and nightingales” (Mulholland 292). This is the only information we are given regarding the location of the narrative and we can assume that it is set in a remote country area outside the city.

While this particular setting was previously used in “The Ghost at the Rath”, the location that appears in our story features less disturbing aspects since the environment is portrayed as a rather picturesque landscape. We believe this initial positive portrayal of the scenery is used in order to give the audience a false sense of security making them believe nothing weird is about to happen and that everything seems normal. By the time we reach the second half of the story, the audience is relaxed and the effect caused by the first ghostly encounter is intensified due to this unexpected change in mood.

The following section deals primarily with the architectural aspects that were present in the tale. The story continues in a distant house owned by Lord Wylder, a wealthy gentleman that hires our protagonist to paint a portrait of his daughter. The initial lines suggest that the building is rather big and this is confirmed when our main character reaches his destination: “I found the great house full of people. Lord Wylder was a genial old man, who had a large family of children and grandchildren whom he loved to gather round him” (Mulholland 293). The household that appears in the narrative is a Big House which is once more present in England, an unusual combination in Irish fiction. The strange part about this particular dwelling is its unbroken state. We are never given an instance suggesting otherwise and we can assume that the house is in perfect condition, which decreases the overall horror factor from the atmosphere.

The gallery makes another appearance in our analysis and acts as a starting point that triggers a significant chain of events in the story. This room signals the presence of the first ghost sighting and interior descriptions of the house are used to illustrate this ghostly encounter:

I had turned away and walked the length of the gallery (...) and I was within a few yards of the door, when it opened noiselessly and quickly; there was a grey flutter of drapery, shone through by the early-risen moon, which looked towards me from beyond the window in the passage on which the end of the gallery gave. I saw a young light-tinted head set against the glistening moon, which formed a golden disc behind it. I saw the spiritual gleam of eyes clear like water (...) and then the door shut, leaving me nothing but the living glance that had been flung towards me from the very face which I had adored and apostrophised on the canvas, now hidden by twilight at the more distant extremity of the gallery. (Mulholland 297)

While sounds are scarcely used in this particular narrative, the moonlight is used to create visual contrasts of light and shadow in order to develop the sinister atmosphere of the supernatural encounter. Chromatic aspects are also noticeable throughout the story and could be regarded as symbols that highlight significant events. In Irish mythology, grey is generally associated with death, which might explain why this chromatic element is present when the ghost makes its appearance in the gallery. There is a similar visual scene within the mansion where the main character “seeing firelight under the not quite closed door of the library, [he] turned in there, and glancing round the brown-panelled room (...) irradiated with firelight, [he] saw a figure rise from the hearthrug” (Mulholland 301). The predominant color that appears in this scene is red, which is known to have negative connotations. This color is usually related to blood or violent death in Irish folklore, and could be used as a device of predicting the brutal demise of the main character. Strangely enough, this unknown artist is the only protagonist from our stories that survives at the end. The supernatural atmosphere is usually created when ghost sightings appear within the walls of the mansion. However, there is an instance where this terrifying ambience is also achieved with the help of external landscapes:

One night, (...) I rose, and letting myself out by a garden door, went for a long ramble through the park and out on

the open downs (...) It was just during that spell of visible darkness which is the forerunner of the return of light, and while I stood on the verge of a small ragged-edged lake, skirted by trees and bushes (...) that I had my second vision of the spirit of Mayflower. (Mulholland 299)

“Not to be Taken at Bed-Time”: A Witchcraft Legend

The last horror story we will discuss is called “Not to be Taken at Bed-Time” and is considered one of the most popular works written by Rosa Mulholland. Compared to the previous narratives, the title of our story does not offer any valuable hint regarding the type of horror that is to be expected. It follows a slightly different formula, since the paranormal setting is replaced with witches and an unexpected shocking ending. From the opening lines, we discover that the narrative is set in the western region of Ireland in an actual location known as the Connemara mountains and the action later takes place in a fictional village located atop these mountains. This remote mountainous area replaces the traditional domestic setting and focuses on external elements that develop a sinister atmosphere. The starting paragraph illustrates this particular setting and reveals certain exterior features of an isolated old house:

This is the legend of a house called the Devil’s Inn, standing in the heather on the top of the Connemara mountains, in a shallow valley hollowed between five peaks. (...) a crazy and weather-stained apparition, with the sun glaring at it angrily between the hills, and striking its shattered window-panes. (Mulholland and Dalby 1)

The building that is presented in the aforementioned paragraph belongs to Coll Dhu, our main character, and this description sets the initial sinister mood of the narrative. The landscapes from our story create a significant sense of danger due to the unstable ground and slippery rocks that are present in these mountainous areas and death can be at every step. The feeling of remoteness is increased when we see our protagonist venturing himself into “the most isolated wastes, dipping into the loneliest valleys, and scaling the nakedest ridges” (Mulholland and Dalby 2). Upon closer inspection, we can see how the old house somehow reflects the personality of our leading character, since they both share a similar trait: isolation.

This menacing house, however, is not the only structure that appears in the story:

By climbing one of the peaks encircling his eyrie, Coll could look sheer down a mountain-side, and see (...) a grey old dwelling with ivied chimneys and weather-slatted walls, standing amongst straggling trees and grim warlike

rocks, that gave it the look of a fortress, gazing out to the Atlantic. (Mulholland and Dalby 1)

This is the first time we encounter a different type of building which belongs to the medieval setting: the fortress or stronghold. These colossal structures were scarcely used in literature and can be considered the predecessors of castles. A perfect example can be seen in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, where the story features “an ancient fortress in the Pyrenees” (Smith 116). The ‘stronghold’ from our story, however, is initially presented as a deserted edifice in ruins, which later goes through a significant change. The collapsed structure is rebuilt from scratch and later refurnished giving it a more modern aspect with additions such as bay-windows and a billiard-room, turning it into a luxurious mansion. This manor belongs to Colonel Blake, the new owner of the lands, who is rescued by our protagonist from a deadly situation. The element of inheritance is revealed when the colonel invites Coll at his mansion and discovers that Blake is responsible for his poverty and the death of his father.

The terrifying atmosphere is also achieved through the use of sounds. The following paragraph includes an element that enhances the horror factor of the scene: the mist or fog. This visual element deprives the characters of any sensorial perceptions leaving them confused and vulnerable. The only sense of orientation is through the use of noises that can guide the protagonist:

Toward the evening of one bright September day, the wind changed, and in half an hour the mountains were wrapped in a thick blinding mist. Coll Dhu was far from his den (...) But while he stalked on his way, a faint and agonised cry from a human voice reached him through the smothering mist. (Mulholland 3)

There is a significant evolution in the previous paragraphs which shows a distinct contrast between two different worlds. The ruined structure at the beginning can be interpreted as the crumbling Anglo-Irish society which lies in ruins and the rebuilding process represents the English civilization. If we compare the initial isolated house of the protagonist with the elegant mansion, two different worlds can be noticed. Our solitary protagonist represents the old Ireland while Colonel Blake depicts the new Ireland, being a period of change and transition. Towards the end of the story, however, the house of our protagonist undergoes a significant transformation and is no longer

recognizable. This procedure might indicate the future of the country and that change is inevitable.

After analyzing these four short stories, we discovered that most of the narratives we selected shared several characteristics, some being typical features from Irish Gothic fiction. There is a sort of pattern that all the stories seem to follow and it also reflects the style of our female author. Regarding the locations of our short stories, we can see that Rosa Mulholland does not have a particular preference since there is a noticeable variety in her locus selection. The stories begin with a real location that is either known to the reader or they are aware of it, and the action later shifts to a remote area that appears to be plausible. Some of these locations include villages, forests and mountainous regions. This isolated scenario is used later in the plot in order to make the reader feel vulnerable and defenseless.

Big Houses are the main architectural structures that appear in the stories and reveal a significant focus on domestic horror. The element of terror takes place within the walls of these buildings and each of the stories features interior descriptions depicting light and shadow contrasts that are achieved through the use of the moonlight. The endings are also quite similar, resulting in the violent death of the main characters. The only protagonist that survives at the end is the unnamed artist from “The Ghost of Wildwood Chase”.

Apart from the similarities that were already presented, some differences can be found as well. “The Ghost at the Rath” and “Not to be Taken at Bed-Time” can be considered true Irish Gothic texts since they are both set in Ireland and the plots are based on common elements which are present in Irish Gothic Fiction: inheritance and wealth transfer. The remaining two stories offer a different approach on the horror genre. While the action in both narratives takes place in England, there is a certain Irish influence in the second story. “The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly” features an original tale whose main horror factor comes from the use of haunting sounds, and “The Ghost of Wildwood Chase” can be classified as an Irish Female Gothic text, since the paranormal sightings are a result of the main character’s imagination. The curious part, however, is that it features a male protagonist.

Conclusions

Throughout this paper, we have introduced a forgotten literary figure belonging to the Irish Female Gothic subgenre: Rosa Mulholland. While her reputation was overshadowed by greater authors from the nineteenth century, she will always be remembered as an iconic figure in Irish literature. The aim of this B.A. Thesis was to illustrate her use of landscape and setting, and the reasoning process behind their incorporation in four of her most distinct horror short stories, in particular “The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly”, “The Ghost at the Rath”, “The Ghost of Wildwood Chase” and “Not to be Taken at Bed-Time”.

In order to demonstrate this hypothesis, a double study was carried out. First of all, the analysis we conducted in the first chapter showed how the iconic castle was replaced by the Big House in Gothic narratives. We are told how these new structures could be used to achieve the same sinister atmosphere through the use of domestic horror. In the second chapter, a close reading of the selected texts was carried out and we focused primarily on the element of domestic horror. Our conclusions confirm that the Big House made an appearance in all the stories we analyzed, although the main location was not always Ireland.

We also discovered several unique traits that belong to our female author which suggest a rather hidden talent worthy of attention. We believe further research can reveal the true potential that lies in Irish Gothic fiction and represents a perfect opportunity to reveal more remarkable authors that are contained within this mysterious Celtic realm.

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