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**GENDERED URBAN SPACES IN PAULA HAWKINS'
THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN (2015)**

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1. Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse Paula Hawkins' 2015 crime fiction novel *The Girl on the Train* from the framework of space theory, gender studies and literary criticism. In order to do so, this work combines close reading techniques with an interdisciplinary theoretical approach to the novel, paying special attention to the gendered spatial representations and embodiment of the three protagonists, Rachel Watson, Anna Watson and Megan Hipwell.

These three voices reflect on their respective mental and relationship problems with their husbands, and their interwoven stories have Megan's sudden disappearance as a leading thread. The novel explores issues of domestic violence, motherhood, femininity, substance addiction and abuse, and has been classified within the domestic noir subgenre, which is characterised by giving special importance to female perspectives within the larger genre of crime fiction. This, together with the novel's location in the city of London and the different embodiment of its spaces by these three women, provides an excellent ground for its analysis from an urban, spatial and gendered theoretical perspective.

The first chapter of my dissertation begins by providing the theoretical foundations for the concepts of urban space and gender. In 2.1., I cover the main contributions to space theory from its origins to modern times, focusing on the crucial academic shift that expanded its focus to study space as socially constructed. Next, in 2.2., I explore the key concepts for the analysis of urban space from a gender perspective. After that, in 2.3, I delve into the role of women in the literary genre of crime fiction, both as authors and literary archetypes. Here, I pay special attention to the characteristics of domestic noir as a subgenre of its own importance.

In the second chapter, I analyse *The Girl on the Train* in the light of the previous theoretical framework. This chapter is divided into three different subchapters that correspond to each of the protagonists' perspectives. I explore the three characters in relation to their different embodiment of space: how they construct it, how they see it, and how societal expectations of womanhood affect their relationship with space. In 3.1., I introduce the novel, its protagonists and its plot. Then, in 3.2., 3.2.2. and 3.2.3., I include the analysis of each female protagonist in relation to the archetype they embody in their relationship with space. Finally, the fourth chapter includes the conclusions I have reached.

2. Conceptualising Gendered Spaces

2.1. Space as a Social Construct

Michel Foucault defined space as that “which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, [and which] is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space” (1986, 3). He claimed that space is a social construct and not a homogeneous, inert, and pre-established entity. His perspectives on space as a means of control where relationships of power are manifested have been crucial in what has been termed “the spatial turn,” a highly influential theoretical field developed since the late twentieth century by social sciences and humanities scholars. These theorists see space as embedded in social tensions. Therefore, they aim to examine the interactions between people, the materiality that surrounds them and the collective codes that permeate the social matrix that connects them. Drawing on Marxist geographical and sociological perspectives, authors like Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and David Harvey have been of particular importance in this reconceptualisation of space. Their research was further developed in recent years by sociologists and geographers who have broadened the approaches to spatial theory through the introduction of feminist and postcolonial perspectives, such as Martina Löw, Fran Tonkiss, Linda McDowell, or Saskia Sassen.

Indeed, the socio-spatial analyses developed by philosophers like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels or Max Weber are crucial to understand more recent perspectives. These early theories focused on the impact of the considerable urban growth that took place during the nineteenth century. This period witnessed the emergence of the first industrial capitalist cities, which made these authors centre their analyses on one of the greatest concerns of the time: the differences between urban and rural life. Analyses of the city developed in the late twentieth century chiefly by Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre have been fundamental to spatial studies and urban theory. Works like de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) and Lefebvre’s “The Production of Space” (1974) paved the ground for later theories, offering new ways of dealing with urban spatiality. On the one hand, de Certeau examined the ways in which people subvert the rituals and practices that institutions impose upon them and how they reclaim their own autonomy in the city. As opposed to institutional bodies, like governments or corporations, which generate and map the city according to their political interests, de Certeau focuses on the individual walker who moves in an undetermined yet tactical way, taking shortcuts, for example, across predesigned urban routes. In this way, the street is seen by de Certeau as the

characterisation of everyday life and its constant subversion of the normative organisation of space. On the other hand, Lefebvre laid down the bases for the analysis of both the representation and production of social space. In “The Production of Space,” (1992) he identifies a three-part dialectic in the representation of space: everyday practices and perceptions, representations, and the spatial imaginary of time. He further contended that there are two different ways of spacialisation: absolute and social space. Thence, spatial analysis needs to consider the mediations and mediators that make space contain a great diversity of natural and social objects and relations (1992, 76). He argued that space is, indeed, a social product which affects social practices and perceptions and, as such, it should be considered an entity on its own:

[Social] space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. (1992, 73)

Lefebvre’s theory provided the necessary foundation for other theories developed at the turn of the twenty-first century, like those elaborated by Marxist geographers such as Edward Soja or David Harvey and which focus on processes of identity building. Soja studies the different ways people live in and experience urban space in his renowned work *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), where he examines how different processes of socialisation produce different interpretations of space and therefore create different experiences of the same reality. Drawing on Lefebvre’s spatial triad, he divides urban space in three parts: Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. Firstspace refers to the “real” material world (1996, 6) and focuses on the physical environment built by urban change throughout history, together with political decisions and planning laws. The way in which this Firstspace is perceived by its inhabitants conforms the Secondspace, a perspective that “interprets this reality through ‘imagined’ representations of spatiality” (1996, 6) ruled by social norms that determine how people act and behave in that space. The combination of these two perspectives is what creates Thirdspace, which Soja conceptualises as follows:

I define Thirdspace as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality. This begins a longer story, or journey, that weaves its way through. (1996, 10)

In the twenty-first century, other perspectives gain momentum, concerning the development of global cities associated to the economic effects of globalisation and which produced new forms of social organisation. For instance, sociologist Saskia Sassen, one of the most influential voices in this area of study, defines global cities as:

the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms. These localized forms are, in good part, what globalization is about. [...] The large city of today has emerged as a strategic site for a whole range of new types of operations—political, economic, “cultural,” subjective. It is one of the nexi where the formation of new claims, by both the powerful and the disadvantaged, materializes and assumes concrete form. (2005, 40)

As we have seen, space is conceptualised in contemporary analyses as an inherently social construct that plays a significant role in our daily life: it defines our identity, daily practices and social patterns.

2.2. Society, Space and Gender

Present-day urban reality is characterised and shaped by multiple social variables such as the presence of non-normative sexualities, genders, cultures, and ethnicities. Space theory has broadened its scope to study these plural and intersectional sociospaces, considering that both gender and space are interrelated social constructs that have an effect on our lived experiences and identities, as well as on how we perform them. The first analyses of the relationship between space and gender appear with the second feminist wave in the 1970s. Feminist geography stemmed from human geography and was part of this wider feminist movement, which reclaimed, among issues related to sexuality, reproductive rights and factual equality between women and men and the academic recognition of female scholars. At this stage, feminist geographers denounced how gender had never been considered an integral part of geographical analyses. In the 1980s and 1990s, feminist geographers become crucial to understand the shift to a social and cultural conceptualisation of space, often influenced by poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives. More recent theories have elaborated on the spatial construction of meaning, identity and subjectivity from the standpoint of affect theory, like Sara Ahmed’s focus on spatial embodiment and the circulation of emotions (2014).

Linda McDowell, a foundational feminist geographer, explains that the focus of urban feminist theory has always been the relationship between gendered and spatial divisions, which have been analysed by pointing at the different experiences that women and men have of the same space (1999, 12). Indeed, the same space is perceived differently depending on a range of intersectional factors —ethnicity, age, social class, etc.— that converge on the gendered body. As simple and inoffensive as an empty street may appear to the privileged white male gaze, it turns into a potentially dangerous space for a woman who is alone, the risk also escalating when the day turns to night. These scenarios are based on ideas of personal safety that originate from gendered differences. The ways in which the same space is experienced differently establish a hierarchical division based on gender that determines that women have less liberty or privileges to move through urban spaces freely and safely.

One of the original standpoints of feminist geographers was the so-called institutional approach. It focuses on the marginalisation of women within the urban sphere and on how this discrimination is reinforced by institutions through difficulties such as accessing basic services and leisure areas around the city (Menéndez Tarrazo 2010, 52). Given that cities have been built according to the needs of white heterosexual men, who are freer to move around them, other forms of living in cities have not been considered. For instance, women, their caregivers' domestic role and everyday life are forgotten by the hegemonic model of the city, which prioritises production over reproduction. Cities are thought to go to work, leaving tasks that have to do with caregiving and daily life invisible. Accordingly, women's movement in the city tends to be in a zigzag, whereas men's —linked to productive work— is more linear. As Jane Darke explains, “[a]ny settlement is an inscription in space of the social relations in the society that built it. [...] Our cities are patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete” (qtd. in Kern, 2019, 13).

This approach suggests that the poor running of the institutions that regulate urban life contributes to perpetuating the physical segregation of women and men, which is based on and involves the perpetuation of traditional gendered stereotypes and prejudices. Women, as caregivers, must take the children to school, to the doctor or get groceries. Men, however, tend to strictly come back and forth straight from work. Significant in this approach has been the perspective of sociologist Sophie Watson, who positively advocates for pragmatic solutions based on political and educational reforms (1999, 291), with proposals which range from the expansion of pedestrian areas or green spaces to the improvement of street lighting at night.

In fact, not only institutions, but also urban structures, help sustain gender differences. In doing so, they endorse women's dependency on private space, which, as opposed to public urban space, is symbolically constructed as "safe." As Daphne Spain contends in "Gendered Spaces and Women's Status:"

In homes, schools, and workplaces, women and men are often separated in ways that sustain gender stratification by reducing women's access to socially valued knowledge. The fact that these spatial arrangements may be imperceptible increases their power to reproduce prevailing status differences. The more pronounced the degree of spatial gender segregation, the lower is women's status relative to men's. (1993, 137)

Thus, gender inequality in a patriarchal urban context causes women to be erased from public spaces, or at best to be subdued when included in it. Following Spain's school example, boys tend to physically occupy the playground to a greater extent than their female classmates and, even if they share the same space in class, boys tend to make themselves more visible than them. Consequently, girls are relegated to the background, and their social status is also regarded as less important than boys': they use more space to play football, for example, whereas girls only need a small corner or bench to talk.

The most explicit representation of urban gender inequality, then, seems to lie in the division between public and private space. Theories of gender stratification have always laid evidence of the implications that originate from the relationship women have with these spaces. The division between the public and private sphere was of great importance during the Enlightenment, to the point that many feminist theorists hold it as the base for the argument that women "belong" or have, at least since then, been ascribed to the private sphere, where the family is instituted (McDowell, 1999, 175). For instance, according to philosopher John Locke in *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), every person holds a role to play within their families, which also determines their social role:

And herein I think lies the chief, if not the only reason, why the male and female in mankind are tied to a longer conjunction than other creatures, viz. because the female is capable of conceiving, and de facto is commonly with child again, and brings forth too a new birth, long before the former is out of a dependency for support on his parents help, and able to shift for himself, and has all the assistance is due to him from his parents: whereby the father, who is bound to take care for those he hath begot, is under an obligation to continue in conjugal society with the same woman longer than other creatures, whose young being able to subsist of

themselves, before the time of procreation returns again, the conjugal bond dissolves of itself, and they are at liberty, till Hymen at his usual anniversary season summons them again to chuse new mates. (1960, sect. 80)

Following his line of thought, while men were expected to ensure the economic sustenance of their families, women ought to take care of their offspring and the elderly. These duties, once transposed on to social roles, translate into men ascribing to the public sphere and women to the private.

Marxist-feminist theorists such as Gillian Rose (1993) or Doreen Massey (1994) have studied the connection between patriarchy and capitalism, analysing the family from a materialist point of view. Authors like Daphne Spain have contended that, in urban industrial societies, mothering is encouraged and romanticised, which contributes to a form of socialisation that stresses affective relationships for women and a division of labour within the home (1993, 137). This configuration of the family is sustained by the common belief that women's probability of earning decent wages in the labour market—which would imply finding a place in the public sphere—may have more negative consequences than carrying on with their responsibilities within the private sphere. Concurrently, women are still expected to assume there are more advantages associated with the privacy of their homes and familial sphere than in public spaces.

According to Linda McDowell, the reason why men and women experiment and embody space differently relies in their upbringings and ways of socialisation:

The idea that women have a particular place is the basis not only of the social organisation of a whole range of institutions from the family to the workplace, from the shopping mall to political institutions, but also is an essential feature of Western Enlightenment thought, the structure and division of knowledge and the subjects that might be studied within these divisions. (1997, 12)

McDowell argues that women's dependence on private space is enforced and has been so historically. Public spaces—such as those occupied by institutions, companies or used for leisure activities—must be transformed in order to achieve social change. McDowell also explains that it is no coincidence that private spaces are associated with women, as here they are assigned the fixed roles of caregivers and nurturers. Public space, on the contrary, is associated with male power, because this is where policy-making and production take place. In fact, it was not until after the First (1914-1918) and Second World War (1939-1945) that

women accessed the public sphere more generally, participating in the job market, as a consequence of increased labour demand and a shortage in the workforce created by war. What the war changed for these women was their actual participation in the work market, and their subsequent access to the public sphere (Martínez del Barrio, 2019, 13).

More recent constructions of space are still reminiscent of the private/domestic divide and even in the twenty-first century, as Fran Tonkiss explains:

spaces are gendered through both social practices and symbolic associations. It can be hard, of course, to separate the two: the practical ways in which people “do” gender in space tend to be overwritten, whether consciously or unconsciously, by a tangle of meanings and images. These extend from abstract representations of space to the minor detail of ordinary conduct. (2005, 97)

The gendered opposition between the private and the public requires, then, a rearticulation of gender asymmetries, passed down through generations and history. Public urban space is built according to these traditional role models and conditions the behaviour of its inhabitants. In this framework, everyday actions can challenge the boundaries of spatial practice. For instance, seeing a woman alone in leisure spaces is often regarded as strange, whereas the sight of unaccompanied men is perceived as normal. Especially in regards to the public sphere, the most decisive element that regulates women’s socialising patterns in gendered geographies is the element of fear. Fear determines women’s embodiment, imagination of and engagement with public space in the contemporary urban world. This complex perception of space has been conceptualised by feminist theorists as the “geographies of fear.” They determine certain spatial behaviours and strategies that are often planned by women before entering certain urban areas. For example, streets are perceived as threatening for women at certain times of the day and circumstances (such as being alone at night). A coping mechanism is, for instance, planning the route back home after a night out, so that no one in a group is forced to go by herself (Menéndez Tarrazo 2010, 63).

Yet sometimes the line between public and private space is not clearly defined and can get blurred, giving way to interstitial spaces. When this happens, men take an active role in their socio-spatial experiences without the negative consequences the same actions would have for women. In other words, in terms of spatiality, male privileges increase while women’s freedom decreases also in these fluid spaces. Interstitial urban spaces, in social theory, correspond to those urban spaces used for a limited amount of time. These are small-scale

settings dedicated to hangouts or meet-ups, and in which people from different backgrounds interact and carry out informal activities, allowing them to temporarily break away from social boundaries. However, the classification of space as private or public can be conditioned by how the individual embodies these spaces. As such, these subjective experiences of space destabilise the clear-cut division between private and public space, blurring the limits between one and the other. As Cohen states, space is conditioned by “the non-intuitive space of modern physics, the immediate sensory spaces which our bodies navigate, the private mental spaces of our dreams, memories, and fantasies and the public geographical space that locates our journey within certain shared coordinates of social and cultural meaning” (2000, 325). The blurred boundaries of liminal spaces allow hybrid identities, from which women can also benefit, given that the classification as private or public will as well depend on how the person embodies these spaces. If we conceptualise spaces according to how they are embodied, then women can benefit from interstitial spaces by destabilising the —sometimes not so much— clear-cut division between urban public and private space and consequently subverting the idea that the first one is exclusively of male domain.

An example of this fluidity is represented by the literary figure of the *flâneuse*, a female version of the male pedestrian who observes the city with total liberty, the *flâneur*. Literally meaning “the stroller,” the *flâneur* is a nineteenth-century literary archetype associated with ideas of modernity and European cities, a man walking the streets out of leisure, observing city life as an spectacle, and whose interstitial nature or ambivalence precisely lies within the urban spaces he wanders across with no other reason than to be a keen observer of the modern, industrialised life, an attitude that consequently situates him as detached from society. Walter Benjamin was the first literary critic to analyse this figure, which became the subject of academic interest during the twentieth century. Benjamin sustained in his work *The Arcades Project* (1940) that the *flâneur*, in his disengaged walking in the city, embodied a critique of capitalism, chiefly of Parisian city life in the nineteenth century. The *flâneur* is not lured by shop windows and does not need any other form of consumption to take pleasure in the capitalist functioning of the city. Instead, he makes walking a pleasurable experience in itself.

However, this figure was not initially conceptualised as female and, despite the vindication of feminist critics about the universality of *flânerie* (the art of walking), male theorists denied the existence of the *flâneuse*, highlighting the exclusion of women from public urban spaces (Carrera Suárez 2015, 854). It was not that female presence in these spaces was

unacceptable, but that it was only accepted when women were the object of the *flâneur*'s gaze, which, on the one hand, excluded the idea of a female equivalent such as the *flâneuse* —with the same power and autonomy— and, on the other, included another female counterpart, that of the prostitute, objectified and consumed. Still, urban feminist theory has demonstrated that locating the *flâneuse* within urban public spaces is possible, reconsidering the relationship between *flânerie* and masculinity by granting the *flâneuse* the freedom to embody these sites, like the *flâneur*. It is important to bear in mind that the urban archetypes ascribed to women in the nineteenth and twentieth century were either that of the prostitute or the *passante* or the *flâneuse* (2010, 75), but also the Victorian Angel in the House, which was reserved for the domestic domain —and was the preferred female archetype as well. As opposed to the figure of the prostitute, whose presence in the public sphere shows how the domestic sphere is understood as more appropriate for women, the figure of the *flâneuse* —in the same line as the *flâneur*— represents detachment from city life, as well as the integration of women in public urban spaces, as a result of the increasing freedoms and social innovations that transformed the nineteenth-century metropolis. Industrialisation moved women away from the domestic space and expanded their participation in public urban spheres, the setting where the *flâneuse* will claim the same liberty, and consequently, privileges, as males. However, as opposed to them, the *flâneuse* often fails to attain the same liberties and, if not, she will be victorious at a very high cost for herself. Another female urban archetype identified with the city in more recent writing on cities is that of the pedestrian, proposed by Marsha Meskimmon:

Conceptually, the pedestrian differs from the flâneur in locatedness and physicality. [...] The pedestrian's body and embodiment are themselves a space which permits engaged interaction with the world around her. She is not a disembodied eye like the theoretical flâneur who wanders through the city 'invisibly' and untouched, but a sentient participant in the city. (1997, 21)

As opposed to the detachment of the *flâneuse*, the pedestrian engages with the city both physically and emotionally, a result of the transformed realities of the global city that this urban figure considers, and which has precisely rendered the itinerant figure *flâneur/flâneuse* obsolete (Carrera Suárez, 2015, 854). The pedestrian, then, is not only closely identified with, but also within the city. She is an active participant of city life, and instead of just distantly gazing at it, the pedestrian makes her own connections with the urban landscape.

The prostitute, the *flâneuse*, and the pedestrian are female urban archetypes that prove how women have always existed in the public sphere. However, this does not imply that they have always been as visible as men, nor socially ascribed to this space in spite of their presence in it. Nevertheless, it is evident that these figures challenge the division between public and private spaces in her embodied spatial performances and, with it, the spatial construction of gender.

2.3. Women in Crime Fiction

Crime or detective fiction has its origins in the nineteenth century, but it is not until a century later (since the 1960s) that it starts to receive academic attention, when the presumed barriers between “high” and “low” literature start to be questioned (Priestman 2003, 1). The genre has always been very popular in its various forms: from short stories to films, novels, radio programmes, television, etc. A clear instance of this is the fact that, in the past few years, crime fiction has been situated as the leading book genre, both in the United Kingdom (Rodríguez González, 2017) and in the United States (Herold, 2020), as well as the most profitable (Writers Online, 2018). The flexible boundaries of the genre have favoured formal experimentation, which has never prevented crime fiction authors from delving into complex social and political issues, often through the use of “strange” characters, liminal figures that, as Carla Rodríguez González and Esther Álvarez López claim, show the necessary detachment to trespass physical and social boundaries in order to solve the crimes (2022, 4). These two aspects —strange(r)ness and trespassing— are particularly ingrained in women’s crime fiction and can be traced back to the so-called Golden Age of Detective Fiction (1920s-1930s). At this time, women authors of crime fiction, like Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, the “Queens of Crime,” acquired great popularity. Their works are crucial to understand the impact not only of Golden Age crime novels, but also the growing centrality and agency of female characters that will be developed further by other authors in later works. These early crime novels are characterised by an anti-heroic pathos in line with the context of trauma of the inter-war period and a by tendency to focus on domestic issues. Indeed, as Susan Rowland argues, a defining factor in the pioneering contributions of the Queens of Crime’s anti-heroic detectives is “the way personal weaknesses and vulnerabilities are not external to the success of investigations but intrinsic to them” (2001, 19). At this time, the relation between women and crime fiction was primarily reduced to being readers or authors of characters that followed a masculine literary tradition in which female characters appeared either as side love interests for the male

protagonist or as the victims of their violent male counterparts, in which case the female presence was reduced to an inert, lifeless (and voiceless) passive body at the mercy of the male characters, especially in what has been termed the American “hardboiled tradition.”¹ Contrary to these passive representations, the archetype of the femme fatale appears as powerful in these works: feared and desired at the same time. Her dynamism and charm always go hand in hand with moral ambiguity and unease, which is reinforced by the original meaning of the term in French: “deadly/lethal woman.” Associations of the villainous nature in femmes fatales follow from the power these characters always have over men, which is indeed their main trait. As Rodríguez González and Álvarez López have argued:

With her independence, agency, and (sexual) assertiveness, the strong-minded fatale posed a menace to the physical and emotional stability of the hero, whom she usually led to his downfall. It was her strangeness—the enigma she represented, her otherness—that was the focus of the narrative, just as much as it being what fatally attracted the hero, often more interested in unraveling her mystery than in solving the crime itself. Regardless of their centrality, plots invariably climaxed with the textual and physical eradication of the woman, who necessarily had to be contained, punished, or killed in order for the disrupted (bourgeois patriarchal) social order and threatened (male) status quo to be restored. (2022, 9)

Yet, as Rodríguez González and Álvarez Lopez further explain, within these highly masculinised associations of the genre, women writers have also made use of and “ruthlessly appropriated the dominant culture’s icons of masculinity, antiintellectualism, capitalism and chauvinism” (2022, 8) providing them with new meanings and associations.

In the 1960s, another generation of women writers of crime fiction acquired great popularity, including novelists like P.D. James and Ruth Rendell. They defined themselves both within and against the devices of the Golden Age, producing realist crime works and operating within the Golden Age generic strategies of the domestic murder (Rowland, 2001, 25). As the detective stories began to evolve into the forms of crime fiction we know today, authors became more interested in psychological suspense. Indeed, a shift begins to be evinced in the 1980s from plot-driven themes to deep character analysis, often focused on the killers’ mental processes and traumas (Priestman 2003, 186). This fixation on the characters’ minds

¹ The American hardboiled tradition has created its own literary types, such as the lone and tough male detective that is always related to the intervention of the femme fatale. He likes to work alone, drink black coffee, smoke cigarettes and always has a gun ready to fight criminals or defend himself. These persisting clichés have made crime fiction be perceived as a masculine literary genre.

dominates contemporary crime fiction, particularly in the work of women writers, who often focus on the psychology of female characters beyond the femme fatale and/or victim archetypes. Contemporary feminist crime fiction challenges issues that include the asymmetrical power relations constructed upon gender or even the gender binary itself.

Indeed, the history of crime fiction written by women shows how, since its origins, gender paradigms have been challenged and reconfigured to denounce various forms of violence against women: physical, psychological, verbal or symbolic. One of the most popular contemporary trends within the crime fiction label is what novelist Julia Crouch has termed “domestic noir,” a subgenre that has taken over the literary market with very popular novels like *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn, *The Couple Next Door* (2016) by Shari Lapena, or *The Silent Wife* (2013) by A.S.A. Harrison. Crouch defines it in her blog as a subgenre which “takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants” (2013). As she explains, it was not after three of her books had been published that she realised none of the available labels for crime fiction applied to her work: “I was happy with the crime-fiction label. But I was less pleased with the psychological-thriller part. Psychological I could buy—my work is all about the goings-on inside people’s heads [...]. But thriller? I had issues” (2018, vii). Crouch was criticised for not including the stereotypical male action expected from the ideal thriller, even when the masculinity imbedded in car chases, crashes, fights and gunfire did appear in her work, although addressed from a different perspective. The difference relied on the dynamics she represented, which were built from a feminist perspective. As a response to this, she came up with the term “domestic noir,” which pairs together the two main aspects of this subgenre: its domestic setting and noir fiction. As Crouch states:

domestic noir puts the female experience at the centre. The main themes are family, motherhood, children, marriage, love, sex and betrayal. The setting is important: the home a character inhabits, and the way they inhabit it, can tell us as much about them as what they say or do. At the centre of these stories is a subversion of the idea of home as a sanctuary. Home can also be a cage, a place of torment, of psychological tyranny, of violence. (2018, vii)

The plot, which revolves around the perspective of complex female characters, is the main characteristic of the domestic noir. By prioritising it, Crouch enables a connection between embodied gendered experiences and women who can relate to them. The importance

of the domestic noir relies precisely on this connection, as she explains: “domestic noir is an important subgenre. It puts the female experience at the centre of the narrative, rather than just allowing it to support or decorate or provide the springboard for the main, male story. It is a new kind of thriller, for a new kind of world” (qtd. in Joyce and Sutton 2018, viii). Domestic noir works show the unquestionable influx of the Golden Age and second-wave feminist crime fiction authors, but also the strong influence of the fiction produced after the Second World War. At this time, hints of what would later be the main characteristics of domestic noir appear in “marriage thrillers” films, portraying abusive and violent marriages fostered by disturbed, aggressive and traumatised men, who came back from the war with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Marriage thrillers, and domestic noir novels, ultimately share a questioning of the centrality of heteronormative relationships, finding them alien and strange rather than embedded and natural. As Laura Joyce remarks, in these works: “spouses become unknowable and marriages shift beyond repair” (2018, 2). Yet what makes domestic noir stand out from crime fiction is not only its focus on subtle forms of violence that exist in the domestic sphere, but also its interest on how women experience it and find alternatives to escape. Domestic settings have general connotations of cosiness, safety and comfort. The relegation of women to the privacy of their homes is represented in domestic noir novels, but it takes a radical turn when violence and danger replace this hyper positive imagery, thence subverting the idea of private space, specifically the home, as a safe and personal sanctuary. In this way, domestic noir relates to “cozy crime” novels, a term firstly coined in the twentieth century and also known as “cozy mystery,”² since both subgenres explore the home as a threatening space. In both cozy and domestic noir works, homes are transformed as menacing in the framework of social crises, which explains that both subgenres experienced a rise in popularity from 2008 onwards, after the global economic recession. Both genres have been very productive to denounce issues such as gender-based violence, socially and trauma-induced mental illnesses, as well as women’s rights. Domestic noir portrays these experiences from the perspective of female characters who resist the male gaze and a patriarchal understanding of these forms of control over women. As Julia Crouch argues, domestic noir foregrounds the home and workplace, exposing and reflecting women’s experiences by exposing those supposedly “secure” settings:

² As opposed to domestic noir, the cosy mystery genre does not explicitly portray sex and violence and its plot does not revolve around the female experience of a protagonist who is experiencing a crisis, but around the solving of a crime that shakes a small community.

In a nutshell, Domestic Noir takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants. (2013)

Danger and violence within a claustrophobic enclosure counteract the idea of private spaces as safe for women. Domestic noir novels showcase female characters that, while spending most of their time at home, are constantly endangered, transforming their homes and the way they inhabit it so that readers can engage in their embodied experience of space. Thus, this genre provides a very fruitful framework for a sociospatial literary analysis, allowing us to explore women's socialising patterns, as well as the elements that determine them. In other words, the construction of gendered geographies, and in particular of the geographies of fear, is displayed in domestic noir novels by means of controversial female protagonists that simultaneously repeat and challenge gender roles: they are mothers and/or wives, live in expensive homes in the suburbs and have an apparently perfect, middle-class lifestyle. However, behind closed doors, their marriages unravel and they suffer from gender-based violence (Joyce and Sutton 2018, 5), as it is the case in Hawkins' novel, through different female characters who are interconnected by their relationship to the killer, who both physically and emotionally abuses them.

3. Gendered Urban Spaces in *The Girl on the Train*

3.1. Locating the Novel

The Girl on the Train is set in contemporary London, where the three main female protagonists of the novel, Rachel Watson, Anna Watson and Megan Hipwell, live and interact. The novel features middle-class female characters who, even if they differ in their values and individual aspirations, share the desire to attain and seek obsolete ideas of financial success—either for themselves, pursuing independence and safety, or for their partners, implying co-dependence and status—as well as familial togetherness and homeownership in an environment of rapidly changing social values.

The novel is narrated from the perspectives of these three characters, yet Rachel's is more prominent, as the plot mostly revolves around her narration of the events and her personal conditions. An alcoholic and divorced woman in her mid-thirties, at the beginning of the novel Rachel has a happy middle-class lifestyle in the neighbourhood of Witney, London, until her

marriage goes through debilitating struggles because of her inability to have children. Consequently, Rachel falls into a depression, using alcohol as an unhealthy coping mechanism, which ultimately makes her lose her marriage, her job and her home. She copes with her new situation by commuting every day from her current suburb to London, both to pretend that nothing has changed in her life and to check on her old Witney house, since the train's track offers a view to its back garden and façade.

Every day she sees the same young couple, a few doors down from her former home, and she begins to imagine their lives, making them up to be a perfect and happy couple, just as she and her once husband were. That is why, when one day she sees the woman kissing another man, Rachel feels enraged by her infidelity and feels the need to know more about what lies beneath the betrayal. Nevertheless, it is impossible for Rachel to make much progress in her personal quest for answers, as Jess —the woman she has seen having an affair, and whom we will later know as Megan— disappears one day. As the novel progresses, the narration includes the voices of Megan, first, and Anna, later. Progressively, Rachel's voice becomes unreliable as a consequence of her substance abuse. Megan's story, beginning in the spring of 2012, takes place a year prior to Rachel's, which encompasses the summer of 2013, and narrates the turbulent events about her past —her living in precarious conditions and getting into toxic relationships, as well as her marital and mental problems— prior to her disappearance. Before this moment, Megan's flashbacks show her husband Scott's possessiveness. Her marriage is worsened by trust and co-dependence issues derived from her dark and abusive past. These events, together with Megan's dissatisfaction with her suburban and domestic lifestyle lead her to cheat on Scott with her therapist, Dr. Kamal Abdic, and with Tom —Rachel's ex and Anna's current husband— after she is hired by him to take care of his and Anna's baby, Evie. Megan's affair with the latter results in her becoming pregnant. Her pregnancy and desire to keep the baby is the reason why Tom kills her. This is the point at which Megan's narration ends. The events catch up with Rachel's narration as the novel advances and reaches the present of Megan's disappearance and its ongoing investigation. In the end, the three women are linked to the killer, Tom, as they gradually reveal information about their romantic relationships with him.

Anna's voice also alternates with Rachel's and Megan's narration of events. She had had an affair with Tom while he was still married to Rachel. Before marrying him, she had a job and was an independent modern woman, but now her family seem to be all that she has. This, together with Rachel's insistent calls on Tom and her randomly showing up at their house,

makes Anna become very protective of her family and strongly oppose Rachel, whom she simultaneously despises and feels threatened by. She turns a blind eye to the reason behind Rachel's behaviour and her growing distrust of Tom, refusing to link him to Megan's disappearance, as a form of safekeeping her daughter and marriage stability. This is why she becomes increasingly frustrated by the authorities' inability to solve the case. However, in spite of all her efforts, her situation quickly gets out of control when she is no longer able to overlook Tom's suspicious connection to Megan's disappearance nor his physical and mental abuse of Rachel, whom he hits and gaslights to make her believe that she is the abuser instead of the victim of the abuse: "I didn't imagine him hitting me. I remember it. Just like I remember the fear when I found myself on the floor next to that golf club – and I know now, I know for sure that I wasn't the one swinging it" (2016, 347). The climax of the novel comes with Tom's death, after he is unmasked as Megan's killer by both Rachel and Anna. He attacks and tries to kill Rachel but, in an act of self-defence, she stabs him with a corkscrew and finally it is Tom who ends up dead. Anna, on the other hand, finally explodes and collaborates in his death by not calling 911 on time, as a way of protecting both her daughter and Rachel: "[Anna] took care of everything. The paramedics arrived, too late for Tom" (2016, 403). She then redeems herself, managing to break loose from all of her previous judgements and emotional dependence on Tom by defending Rachel to the police. Rachel, on the other hand, finally begins her healing journey from all the trauma, lies and gaslighting she had suffered from Tom. The two women, who were against each other in the past, work together now to avenge Megan's death, with whom they identify.

These three characters represent different ideals of the modern middle-class woman. Even Rachel, who goes through financial distress after her divorce, has belonged to this social class before, and in fact wishes to go back to it. Nevertheless, even though Anna is the only one who manages to fulfil this role, she still struggles to maintain her status as a perfect mother and wife who has accomplished a family and a husband to come home to. Rachel and Megan, on the other hand, are not even able to keep this status. They, in opposition, represent the existential challenges that defy the apparently secure embodiment of womanhood in the twenty-first century and which Anna relentlessly tries to conform to. Rachel has internalised her responsibility in failing to become a mother and a wife, and thence the perfect modern woman—an inherited and recurrent traditional ideal based on the archetype of the "Angel in the House"—as a consequence of her alcoholism and infertility. On her part, Megan also feels she has failed to accomplish this model of femininity, which at the same time she reimagines

from a contemporary perspective that nevertheless still goes hand in hand with motherhood. In fact, none of the protagonists can find a balance between their personal and professional lives: Anna has to choose between a family or her career, whereas Anna and Megan lose both. Unlike Rachel, who falls into depression and almost completely gives up because of this feeling of failure, Megan chooses to rebel against the constraints of this role model in her own way, that is, cheating on her husband. However, her subversion is only partial, since to really rebel against this archetype would imply getting a divorce and coming back to the gallery she used to work at. Like Rachel, her failed attempt results in destructive behaviour. In the end, Megan refuses to conform to the pressures of domesticity, representing opposition to an unattainable model of modern womanhood.

These issues shared by the three main characters are associated to highly symbolic spaces in the novel, which are always urban and female-gendered. The urban settings play an important role in the way the characters embody these spaces, especially considering the fact that fear and anxiety are typically associated with women's experience of cosmopolitan contexts. The novel reflects this by focusing on the emotion of fear, which, as Sara Ahmed contends, implies "the intensification of threats, which works to create a distinction between those who are 'under threat' and those who threaten" (2014, 72). Consequently, in the gendered configuration of cities, the female perception of threat is connected to violence exerted on women by men. Thus, as I argue in the following sections of this dissertation, *The Girl on the Train* allows for a feminist spatial analysis through its characters' interwoven female-gendered narratives, which unveils both subtle and cruel forms of violence in their embodiment of urban spaces.

3.2. Rachel: Challenging the Geographies of Fear through the Figure of the *Flâneuse*

Rachel Watson is the novel's main character and primary narrator. The main factor that affects her spatial experience is her life-changing divorce from Tom, who has kept the couple's suburban house in Witney. After this, she finds herself going downhill, both emotionally and physically: "I have lost control over everything, even the places in my head," she confesses (2016, 24). Her life is now ruled by chaos: she moves from a stable (and static) life in her suburban neighbourhood to depending on an old university friend called Cathy to have a roof, sleeping in a tiny bedroom in an apartment that does not remotely feel like it and therefore

being expelled from the geographies of normative affect that used to provide her with an accepted social role and a dignified identity (Rodríguez González, 2017, 114).

In opposition to Anna, who suffers a gradual reduction of space and ends up secluded at home, Rachel undergoes a different dynamic, gaining more freedom —partly due to not having a space of her own, which makes her wander around in the city. Rachel's exclusion from her domestic space of false security also implies her exclusion from Tom's spatial domination. This allows her to explore a wider range of spaces, both public and private, and meddle in others. She is constantly on the move, which facilitates these intrusions and her embodiment of interstitial spaces. She even interferes with external private spaces or homes and keeps interfering in Megan's investigation by randomly showing up at the police station. There are some reasons for this. One is that Rachel's life lacks purpose and she lives through others, becoming so invested in the stories she imagines from the train that, once Megan disappears, she feels she must interfere, as a way of regaining some agency in her own life. Another reason is related to her internalisation of stereotyped female roles and their projection on space. Rachel is not a mother —although she has tried to become pregnant for many years— and after her divorce she is no longer a wife. It is precisely her meddling in the spaces she should be excluded from that gives her the upper hand to discover Megan's killer. On the other hand, we can appreciate her life downfall reflected on her spatial surroundings. She moves from her expensive house to only a small room in Cathy's apartment, displaced from her previous normative geographies according to her social role as a wife. Now Rachel has no real space of her own, not even on the trains she takes every day and whose repetitive rhythms provide her with a false sense of order, because she has no control over their route, stops, nor the passengers that get into them. Yet it is this sense of constant movement and her seminomadic lifestyle that allows her to interfere and meddle between spaces and spheres.

Social exclusion from particular urban spaces can also be reinforced by fear, as Rachel demonstrates. Because of her mental health problems, she is feared by the other characters and is constructed as a threat to dominant life and values. This is transposed onto the novel by the rest of the characters feeling jeopardised by Rachel's presence, whom they view as just an alcoholic who harasses her ex-husband, unable to see beyond her trauma. Her presence is seen as threatening both to the rest of the characters and to their social dynamics, like the investigation of Megan's murder, her secret affair with Tom or Anna's stability, who even claims: "We need to get away from here. We need to get away from *her*" (2016, 143; emphasis in original). In this vein, although Rachel might first appear as a chaotic character and an

unreliable narrator, she is the character with the most fluid access to spaces precisely because she is both threatening and threatened.

The geographies of fear are also explicitly present in the novel, not only in private spaces, but also in public urban space, following common social perceptions of threat, which tend to be linked to the latter. The way people experience urban space in relation to fear is key to understand the geographies of fear. Indeed, as Jon Bannister and Nick Fyfe argue, “fear is allied to urban form and the ways in which urban spaces are utilised and given meaning” (2001, 807). In a similar vein, Rachel Pain examines how gender, together with race and age, influence fear in the city and, consequently, the use of urban spaces:

While many people strongly associate fear with specific places, reflecting wider ideologies of public space as dangerous and private space as safe, fear and safety in different spaces are interconnected - for example, experiences of danger in private space affect feelings of security in public at an individual and societal level. (2001, 899)

This explains why Rachel seems to never be afraid of going out at night on her own, but she immediately gets anxious when she is secluded in her room, due to her previous experience of danger because of Tom’s violence. A clear instance of the novel’s subversion of the geographies of fear is the passage that narrates the morning she wakes up covered in cuts, bruises and dirt, unable to recall the events from the night before. This is when she gets to know the news about Megan’s disappearance and, afraid that she had anything to do with it, decides to return to Witney and to an underpass she vaguely recalls crossing the night Megan went missing. Once she gets there, she is suddenly taken over by very vivid flashbacks of pain, fear and violence, but still cannot remember what happened. As the novel advances, we discover that Rachel had nothing to do with Megan’s death and that the sensorial recollections come from Tom’s abuse, who had hit her in that same spot the night before, after Rachel witnesses Megan getting into his car. By itself, a solitary underpass is an urban site that women would often evade, especially at night. However, Rachel is not afraid to come back to it during the day. Her negative emotions emanate not from the space, but from her embodied memory of Tom hitting there.

Rachel takes the same commuter train in a state of inebriation every morning and night, passing by the same cluster of suburban homes where she used to live. The train is a key element not only for Rachel, but also for the unleashing of events in the novel, symbolising the characters’ common desire to escape from their struggles and societal expectations. The train allows Rachel to project alternative realities on the houses she sees as it moves across the

neighbourhood where her former home is located, giving her the opportunity to bond with Megan and Scott's relationship, to witness Megan's cheating and, from this moment onwards, to be able to interfere in the investigation of her disappearance:

I know that on warm summer evenings, the occupants of this house, Jason and Jess, sometimes climb out of the large sash window to sit on the makeshift terrace on top of the kitchen-extension roof. They are a perfect, golden couple. [...] While we're stuck at the red signal, I look for them. Jess is often out there in the mornings, especially in the summer, drinking her coffee. Sometimes, when I see her there, I feel as though she sees me, too, I feel as though she looks right back at me, and I want to wave. (2016, 15)

The novel shows a connection between Rachel, urban spaces and the train, on which she depends to keep moving and find the truth about Megan's murder: "In the morning, I take the 8:04, and in the evening, I come back on the 5:55. That's my train. It's the one I take. That's the way it is" (2016, 210). This is Rachel's explanation to Cathy when she finds out Rachel has not been going to work every day, despite taking the same train. It is easy for Rachel to come up with this answer, since the train provides her with a routine, with the possibility of pretending that everything is "normal" and of masking her failures to Cathy, so that she maintains her offer of a room to sleep in. On the train, Rachel is surrounded by people on their way to work, which makes Rachel feel she still keeps a life purpose. In fact, as Carla Rodríguez explains, this journey symbolises "a meaningful movement in the eyes of others" (2017, 116). Our daily interactions and routines imply a constant movement between the purely physical and pure landscape, as Phil Cohen contends:

When we take the dog for a walk or go down the road to get the morning paper we unwittingly steer a course between the nonintuitive space of modern physics, the immediate sensory spaces which our bodies navigate, the private mental spaces of our dreams, memories, fantasies, and the public geographical space that locates our journey within certain shared coordinates of social and cultural meaning. (2000 27, 325)

Rachel's everyday routine makes it possible for her to reconnect with her memories and to daydream, putting aside her chaotic life. She fantasises she can embody the geographical space of the neighbourhood again. Her urge to reconstruct her past through the lives of others is a consequence of her relocation in spaces of disempowerment and alienation from the net of power relations favoured by the urban structures that her former neighbourhood signifies (Rodríguez González 2017, 117).

Rachel's instability and nomadism allow her to focus on things that other characters who live a standard—and therefore busy—lifestyle are not able to do, as they are either taking care of their familial, social or working matters. Because of this, Rachel could also be considered a *flâneuse*: she is always observant and her observations situate her as an exceptional witness who, despite being a woman, can freely move across the city. Likewise, Rachel—despite being physically integrated in urban spaces like the train every day—observes city life in a state of detachment from it, partly due to her inebriation, and partly because like the *flâneuse*, observing the city from a distance comes as a leisure activity for her, a spectacle to keep her busy on a daily basis. Indeed, her embodiment of interstitial spaces makes her the most transgressive character, because she defies the male-female geographical dichotomy as well as the notion of stability and unification present in contemporary cities. Rachel's distant observation is a recurrent literary device in crime fiction (Abbott, 2018, 281), intrinsically related to the woman who both watches and feels being watched. This is an image that recurs in the domestic noir genre and specifically in this novel, in which all three narrators constantly feel being watched and judged, but also repeat these behaviours themselves.

3.2.2. Anna: Re-enacting the Angel in the House

Gill Plain contends that when literature provides the necessary foundations to be analysed from the framework of space theory, as it is the case of *The Girl on the Train*, it also problematises specific sets of dualisms (2001, 899). The division between public and private space is one of the most prominent ones, as is the interpretation of the degree of safety that they are thought to provide. These associations are challenged in the novel by each of the three narrative voices, yet Anna's connection with the domestic realm makes her particularly interesting to analyse these tensions. For instance, we can see how her overprotectiveness not only grows as her relationship with Tom progresses but also correlates to her (dissatisfied) embodiment of space:

I even called my sister, [...] she said she was too hungover to spend time with Evie. I felt a horrible pang of envy then, a longing for Saturdays spent lying on the sofa [...] and a hazy memory of leaving the club the night before. Stupid, really, because what I've got now is a million times better, and I made sacrifices to secure it. Now I just need to protect it. So here I sit in my sweltering house. (2016, 235)

Anna used to be a modern urban girl, whom we could even see as a reformed *femme fatale*—professional, seductive and independent. She got involved in an extramarital relationship with Tom, a co-worker who was above her in rank at the time and is now her

husband and the father of their child, Evie. Anna, who used to have a job, live on her own, and party with her girlfriends in the city, is eventually confined to her home and relegated to household chores and taking care of the baby. She, thence, becomes a woman utterly consumed by motherhood and overprotective of her daughter and the family and home she has struggled to create. Her desire to keep her family safe is closely related to her relegation to the domestic sphere, where she believes she can guarantee the security of her daughter and can maintain everything under control. This is the reason why she feels endangered every time Rachel appears or comes around the house, not only because she is intruding her safe space, but also because she debilitates the stability of her and Tom's relationship. On the other hand, the fact that Megan begins to work in her house taking care of their daughter makes Anna's privacy and familial security feel threatened by what she regards as an intrusion into her private space: "Rachel watching us, turning up on the street, calling us up all the time. And then even Megan, when she was here with Evie" (2016, 259).

Paradoxically, this perception of safety linked to the home is radically reversed and substituted by violence and danger in the final chapters, once Tom is finally unmasked as Megan's killer by Rachel, who decides to warn Anna before Tom abuses her too. Anna refuses to believe her, but Tom comes home unexpectedly and confronts the two of them, showing his true face and —although his aggression is more directed to physically attacking Rachel— he threatens Anna and leaves her powerless by holding their daughter hostage in his arms. The idea Anna had of the private domestic space as safe vanishes there and then, when she opens her eyes and cooperates with Rachel to confront and ultimately help her kill Tom in an act of self-defence, avenging Megan and redeeming herself and her blind support of Tom until then.

Anna's relegation to the private confines of her home also correlates to the ideal of female domesticity that originated during the Enlightenment and spread in Victorian times, "the Angel in the House." This ideal followed from the narrative poem of the same title written by the English poet Coventry Patmore in 1854, in which he presents his wife as a role model for the women of that age. The poem reinforced the Victorian theory of separate spheres, the domestic versus public dichotomy, which asserted women's predisposition to thrive in the private domestic sphere, where they could carry out their domestic duties. Following this female archetype, Anna, who before being a mother and a wife did not have a familial role to play, now has a duty to her family, which also dictates her social role. As opposed to her, Tom, now her husband, still keeps his job and usually revolves around public spaces, ensuring the survival of his family by bringing financial support, an activity that is also perceived as having

more value and contributing greater to society, thence being ascribed to the public sphere, where he can correctly fulfil his role as a father and a husband. Anna, who is focused on taking care of her daughter, perfectly matches and fits this Victorian ideal of selfless devotion to progeny:

When I wake again, Tom's not at my side, but I can hear his footfalls on the stairs. He's singing, low and tuneless, "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you..." I hadn't even thought about it earlier, I'd completely forgotten; I didn't think of anything but fetching my little girl and getting back to bed. (2016, 149)

Anna's successful capacity to perform a maternal role contributes to a feeling of rivalry between her and Rachel, who is, unlike Anna, characterised by her inability to perform the same roles. This rivalry is always related to the domestic spaces they inhabit, as well as to the control that Tom exerts over them, which translates into a spatial confrontation between Anna and Rachel. Rachel, dispossessed of her private space, her house, and the home she had built in it, only sees Anna as a "cuckoo laying eggs in [her] nest," who "has taken everything from [her]" (2016: 55). Their capacity to fulfil the traditional domestic roles asserted to women is projected on the spaces they inhabit: while Anna seems to be capable of navigating the complexities of domestic life, Rachel's chaotic situation and instability prove her failure.

Anna's spatial relationship with her house, however, is not only reduced to her motherly duties. It is a complex relationship that can be looked at from two different perspectives. On the one hand, as previously mentioned, she is linked to her house, which for her represents ideas of safety, but on the other, she is aware of the fact that this is the same house in which Rachel used to live while she and Tom were still married and therefore she is aware of the traces Rachel has left in the same spaces she now embodies, which greatly distresses her. This association between the house and Rachel will make Anna believe she is reproducing Rachel's behaviour. This reinforces the negative connotations that both the house and Rachel have in Anna's mind: "I'm doing the things she did: drinking alone and snooping on him. The things she did and he hated" (2016, 313).

This house was chosen by Rachel when she was married to Tom because of its proximity to the trains: "I was the one who insisted we buy it, despite its location. I liked being down there on the tracks, I liked watching the trains go by, I enjoyed the sound of them, not the scream of an inter-city express but the old-fashioned trundling of ancient rolling stock" (2016, 56). Now, Anna unconsciously loathes the trains because they make her feel frightened and upset as they constantly move back and forth: "And then the paranoia came [...] At first, I

used to put it down to the trains. All those faceless bodies staring out of the windows, staring right across at us, it gave me the creeps” (2016, 258). Here, Anna reflects for the first time on the reason behind her discomfort with the trains, which make her feel being constantly watched—as Rachel and Megan’s intromissions in her home do. This constant movement of the trains, and the bodies it carries inside rushing somewhere, while she remains in the same place, makes her uncomfortable. The dynamism of the trains, their back-and-forth movement, is opposed to her fear of moving forward and reminds her of her past, overall accentuating her socio-spatial stagnation at home. She is afraid of making a move in her life, in her relationship with Tom, with whom she can feel that something is not right, and in her social role as a wife and a mother, which does not satisfy her as much as she would have dreamt of.

3.2.3. Megan: The Spatial Subversion and Punishment of a *Femme Fatale*

Megan is the third narrative voice in the novel. She is the woman that Rachel sees from the window of the train, and it could be said that she is also the trigger of the novel’s plot, since her disappearance and later murder is what drive the storyline. We are first introduced to her as “Jess,” which is the name that Rachel gives her from her distant yet constant observation, and which perfectly fits her idealised version of Megan from the tracks: that of a young, white, middle-class and modern woman, happily in love with her husband. In this way, Megan is presented as fitting into heteropatriarchal standards, described as “one of that tiny bird-women, a beauty, pale-skinned with blonde hair” (2016, 19) by Rachel, who projects her own fantasies on her and her husband Scott, whom Rachel initially calls “Jason.” However, as the novel advances, we learn more about Megan’s reality, her character, and her backstory: she is alternatively presented as a misfit, a cheater, a killer, a victim and a mentally-ill woman: “Megan isn’t what I thought she was anyway. She wasn’t that beautiful, carefree girl out on the terrace. She wasn’t a loving wife. She wasn’t even a good person. She was a liar, a cheat. She was a killer” (2016, 273).

The initial image that Rachel had constructed of Megan ends up feeling like a fraud to her, because Rachel is incapable of seeing that Megan is yet another woman who has failed to fulfil the unrealistic and damaging social values of contemporary womanhood because of the abusive relationships she has been involved in. Megan is dissatisfied with a suburban life in which she does not fit, suffering from past trauma concerning motherhood, which is precisely what she is being pressured on by both her husband Scott’s yearning to become a father and the demands of domesticity. Megan is marked by the loss of her baby daughter in a previous

abusive relationship at the age of nineteen, which builds the need to run away from her mistakes as a coping mechanism. In an attempt to overcome her past issues, she begins to attend therapy sessions with Dr Kamal Abdic, but instead of working towards the amelioration of the roots of her trauma and mental health problems, she ends up having an affair with him. The same happens after Megan is offered to babysit Tom and Anna's daughter Evie. This job implies dealing with her traumas, since she feels incapable of mothering after her loss, but it also worsens her marital problems when she establishes an illicit relationship with Tom, which also follows up with her past mistakes of getting into damaging romantic relationships. This will only lead to Tom getting her pregnant and therefore putting Megan in a life-threatening position, between Scott's jealousy and possessiveness and Tom's violent impulses. Indeed, Tom will kill her after Megan refuses to get an abortion, paying with her life for his inability to maintain a spot clean façade of working husband and father, on the one hand, and her inability to attain societal demands of womanhood on the other. In the end, Megan dies for finally wanting to become a mother, which she had previously refused to do within her marriage.

Like the other two protagonists, who embody different archetypes as the Angel in the House in the case of Anna, and the *flâneuse* in the case of Rachel, Megan is characterised by her affairs and seduction and therefore can be regarded as the *femme fatale* of the novel. Anna also used to embody this archetype, but the difference with Megan is that she cannot be tamed by marriage and motherhood within it, in spite of Scott's insistence on her getting pregnant as an attempt to subdue and settle her. In this vein, although Megan has "apparently been redeemed by marriage and [adjusted] to gender normativity" (Rodríguez González 2017, 120), her moral ambiguity goes hand in hand with her attractiveness to men, to which she resorts as a means of evading the confines of domesticity and as a source of empowerment, and for which she is punished.

Space is again crucial to understand Megan's behaviour. Her resort to her desirability is precisely the way she has of getting away from her home, which asphyxiates her and reminds her of both the death of her daughter and her inability to adjust to domesticity and the type of submissive femininity expected in these contexts. Megan's relationship with space is marked by the memories domestic space brings up and, thence, she avoids being at home as a way of avoiding remembering. Unlike Anna, to whom the domestic sphere brings safety, Megan's feelings in these spaces evoke shame and abandonment. Megan blames herself for her baby's

death and feels guilty when she remembers it any time she feels alone and confined in her house:

At night I can still feel it. It's the thing I dread, the thing that keeps me awake: the feeling of being alone in that house. I was so frightened —too frightened to go to sleep. I'd just walk around those dark rooms and I'd hear her crying, I'd smell her skin. I saw things. (2016, 76)

Following Anna and Rachel's previous situations, Megan is also included in the domestic space that Tom controls when she accepts to work as a babysitter for the couple. He is also in control of the site where he kills her, a solitary park, which is a public space, but becomes an interstice too, given that, because they both have a home and a partner in it, their respective domestic and private spaces are not a possibility for meeting. Nevertheless, due to the embodiment Tom and Megan make out of the park, by having a private conversation in it while being alone, the site becomes privatised. On the other hand, parks are precisely associated with this kind of male violence directed towards women, forming part of the urban geographies of fear. As Sarah Ahmed contends in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, this fear of violence and injury "shrinks bodies in a state of afraidness, a shrinkage which may involve a refusal to leave the enclosed spaces of home" (2014, 70). This is something Megan feels as well, the few times she is not fantasising about escape: "Sometimes, I don't want to go anywhere, I think I'll be happy if I never have to set foot outside the house again. I don't even miss working. I just want to remain safe and warm in my haven with Scott, undisturbed" (2016, 92). On the other hand, the geographies of fear may appear as "a refusal to inhabit what is outside in ways that anticipate injury (walking alone, walking at night and so on)" (Ahmed 2014, 70). In this same way, the representation of public urban spaces as dangerous spaces in which women are easily exposed to male violence can also be appreciated when Megan is returning home after being with Kamal:

I'm just turning to walk to the station when a man comes running along the pavement, earphones on, head down. He's heading straight for me, and as I step back, trying to get out of the way, I slip off the edge of the pavement and fall.

The man doesn't apologize, he doesn't even look back at me, and I'm too shocked to cry out. I get to my feet and stand there, leaning against a car, trying to catch my breath. (2016, 279-80)

Here, a sudden object of fear —that of the man, who symbolises violence— arises in Megan's mind. Considering the inherent relationship between this specific kind of violence and urban public spaces, this moment of fear that Megan briefly experiences takes place in the street and at night. Night-time changes women's perspectives on urban, public spaces, to the

point that it may even limit or prohibit their access to them. Indeed, female experience of urban spaces is associated to the fear of being victims of physical violence at the hands of males, according to gendered renderings of space (Menéndez Tarrazo 2010, 69-70). Urban geographies of fear are, consequently, not only gendered but also associated with specific places and routes that may imply a degree of (un)safety depending on how crowded they are, the time of the day and, overall, the kind of access that women have to them.

“Sitting here in the morning, eyes closed and the hot sun orange on my eyelids, I could be anywhere” (2016, 34) is the first sentence we get to read from Megan, in her first chapter. In it, she is daydreaming while she sits in the garden facing the trains from where Rachel observes her every morning without her knowing. Even though the confines of her home, together with Scott’s presence, make Megan feel safe, they do not suffice to make her feel at ease and heal her past trauma, and therefore Megan constantly fantasises about escaping. Not only her house, but also her marriage with Scott grows more asphyxiating for her as the novel advances, and this initial sentence contrasts with her statements by the end of the novel: “I feel like I’m suffocating. When did this house become so bloody small? When did my life become so boring?” (2016, 317). It is interesting to see how she relates the domesticity of her house, a private space which is not small at all, to feeling caged and claustrophobic. This feeling is reinforced by Megan’s surroundings: the middle-class neighbourhood, the families that live there, the mothers and women adjusting to the roles of femininity to which Megan will not settle and the trains. All these elements, which belong to the public urban sphere and its subtleties, only serve to “bore” Megan, since they are reminders of her not fitting well enough in these spheres, reinforcing the feeling of stagnation that impulses her to get away. Like Anna, the dynamic movement of the trains feels like a mockery to her situation:

When I close my eyes, my head is filled with images of past and future lives, the things I dreamed I wanted, the things I had and threw away. I can’t get comfortable, because every way I turn I run into dead ends: the closed gallery, the houses on this road, the stifling attentions of the tedious pilates women, the track at the end of the garden with its trains, always taking someone else to somewhere else, reminding me over and over and over, a dozen times a day, that I’m staying put. (2016, 217)

As opposed to the other two characters, Megan lives in another house with her husband, therefore she does not partake in the other women’s spatial confrontation, not even when she babysits Evie and intrudes Anna’s space. She quickly quits because she feels uncomfortable both by the memories the baby brings up and by Anna’s constant watch, making sure she is

behaving correctly. After leaving this job and losing her previous one in the art gallery, Megan feels further alienated in her own home and at the same time her relationship with Scott worsens. This raises a sensation of danger and violence, which, in an already claustrophobic environment, counteracts the idea of private spaces as safe for Megan. She is then driven to run away from her home when Scott lays a hand on her for the first time, enraged after she confesses that she has cheated on him several times. This is also the moment that most explicitly displays gender-based violence. Although Rachel has suffered it too at the hands of Tom, she is incapable of remembering it because of her trauma. Anna, on the other hand, is not aware of Tom's coercive control until the end of the story.

Megan's embodiment of spaces, both private and public, constantly reinforces the idea of dissatisfaction with urban life:

Is this really what I wanted? I can't remember. All I know is that a few months ago I was feeling better, and now I can't think and I can't sleep and I can't draw and the urge to run is becoming overwhelming. At night when I lie awake I can hear it, quiet but unrelenting, undeniable: a whisper in my head, *Slip away*. (2016, 217)

Megan's attempts to conform to preestablished gender roles systematically fail and so her death appears as a way of liberating her from the pressure and the suffering caused by her relentless efforts to escape the constrictions they entail. Her death is cathartic, as she can finally find peace once she is freed from the labels she has received throughout her life: victim, killer, unstable and chaotic. Yet what Megan's narrative reveals is that, after all, she was only a woman speaking a language that could only be deciphered from the marginal position of someone like Rachel, whose spatial practices are as subversive as hers.

4. Conclusions

Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* delves into contemporary urban life in order to interrogate gender roles, particularly societal expectations about womanhood and motherhood. It does so by means of a complex web of personal relationships that are framed in both public and private spaces, all of which are urban and middle-class but, above all, charged with violence. My analysis of the novel has focused on the spatial embodiment of its main characters—Rachel, Anna and Megan—and on how they subvert the most prominent female archetypes of crime fiction: the Angel in the House, the *femme fatale* and the victim.

In section 2.1., I have explored the contributions of philosophers and geographers such as Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau to the conceptualisation of space as socially constructed. Their perspectives demonstrate that our experience of space is crucial in processes of identity building. I have also revised how Edward Soja's and David Harvey's theories have further developed these ideas and paved the way for feminist geographers, such as Linda McDowell, Daphne Spain, Sophie Watson, including Marxist feminist theorists like Gillian Rose and Doreen Massey, whose work I have revised in section 2.2., and who have examined the gendered division of space, the urban geographies of fear and the productive, rather than reproductive, organisation of public spaces that determine different socialising patterns for men and women. In this section, I also consider Sara Ahmed's affective analysis of spatial relations, which has been of particular interest to explore the emotion of fear in the literary urban environments that I study in the following chapter.

On the other hand, section 2.3. reviews the development of crime fiction, emphasising the role that pioneering authors such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, "the Queens of Crime," have played as foremothers of the domestic noir subgenre. I have identified that domestic noir novels put the female experience at the centre of the mystery narrative, in order to delve into issues such as marriage problems, unattainable gender roles or abuse and violence within small communities and urban neighbourhoods. All these conflicts shape Hawkins' novel, as I have demonstrated in the third chapter of this dissertation.

As such, in Chapter 3, I argue that Hawkins' protagonists subvert the binary gendered opposition of public versus private space, either by re-enacting their social roles—as in the case of Anna, who embodies the Angel of the House—, by reworking the figure of the *flâneuse*—as we see in Rachel's interstitial explorations— or completely reject contemporary notions

of womanhood and our idea of victimhood —as Megan does. I have also maintained that, in *The Girl on the Train*, the domestic space embodied by these three characters is explicitly portrayed as a space of threat and violence exerted by their abusive husbands, which goes against conventional perceptions of these spaces as safe. In order to do so, Hawkins uses a symbol of toxic and violent masculinity, Tom, with whom all the protagonists have a relationship at some point and who links them and their spatial experiences together. His gaslighting keeps him hidden in plain sight as Megan’s killer until the end of the story. Yet, his spatial domination goes beyond domestic spaces and reaches the public domain too, showing how the geographies of fear are malleable, as the violence exerted on women takes place both in spaces of intimacy and outside them. I have argued that these women’s deviation from normative behaviours —their addictions, mental issues and extramarital relationships— are in fact coping mechanisms used to escape the abusive situations they experience. The claustrophobic domestic environments portrayed in the novel are connected to asphyxiating societal roles that, controversially and within the novel’s logics, can only be abandoned through drastic solutions: either by (symbolically) killing the abuser or giving up to be killed by him.

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