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Spatial Longings in Margaret Atwood's *Death by Landscape* and Emma Donoghue's *Room*

Introduction

This paper is part of a larger project entitled *Thresholds. An Agoraphobic Look on Canadian Spaces* whose aim is to read Canadian literary representations of space through the prism of agoraphobia. The first stage of the project focused on my interpretation of Steff Penney's *The Tenderness of Wolves* and then on my analysis of France Daigle's *Just Fine.* The protagonists of both novels are agoraphobic women whose fear revolves around the concept of Canadian open spaces. Whereas, therefore, the present pandemic was not what inspired the project, it has undoubtedly created a context in which the concept of space and an individual's place within it come to the fore. The outside has become the locus of the virus and hence a representation of threat. At the same time – as our ventures in and out have been regulated and limited by the law – it has likewise transformed into a space of longing and nostalgia for the past. The inside, on the other hand, has for the very same reasons become both, a safe haven and prison. Such an ambiguous experience of space is what characterizes agoraphobia and what permeates both texts analyzed here. In other words, I believe that agoraphobia provides a relevant metaphor for the dynamic relationship between an individual and the spaces they inhabit.

As the disorder itself is not the focus of this analysis, I do not delve into the complexities inscribed within it, other than to say that theories of agoraphobia "destabilize the concept of belonging"[1] and unsettle the notion of home. Although it has been stereotyped as fear of *open* spaces, in other words, agoraphobia defamiliarizes domestic spaces, too, as the agoraphobic experience of home is highly ambiguous: "for some, home becomes so 'secure' that they are rendered incapable of leaving, and it can thus simultaneously be experienced as both prison *and* asylum."[2] Consequently, the open space is not merely one of public threat, but also one of freedom and agency, and is thus marked not only by fear, but also by nostalgia for home outside of home. This particular type of longing has pervaded Canadian literature, and is manifest in both, Margaret Atwood's short-story and Emma Donoghue's novel.

Death by Landscape

Margaret Atwood is undoubtedly one of the most celebrated Canadian writers. Outside Canada, Atwood's popularity – which has soared in recent years – is rooted in her dystopian fiction; in particular, her 1985 novel entitled *The Handmaid's Tale*, adapted into an acclaimed TV series and followed by the 2019 sequel, *Testaments*. This article, however, looks back at a text which predates Atwood's late-career success, a short story entitled *Death by Landscape*.

The text was originally published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1990, and a year later became part of a collection entitled *Wilderness Tips*, all revolving around the notion of Canadian spaces. In her overview of the volume, Carol L. Beran makes a striking comment that "in each of the ten stories … readers encounter a stranger in an enclosed world."[3] In *Death by Landscape* it is Lois, the main character, who appears to be such a stranger. Already in the opening paragraph, Lois is relegated to a condominium apartment, one that has a security system whose sole purpose, it seems, is to ward off nature: "[Lois] is relieved not to have to worry about the lawn, or about the ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork, or the squirrels

[1] M. Casey and E. R. White, *Unsettled Homes: Borders and Belonging in Emma Donoghue's Astray*, "The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association" 2017, vol. 50, no. 2, p. 104.

[2] J. Davidson, *Phobic Geographies. The Phenomenology and Spatiality of Identity*, New York 2017, p. 25.

[3] C.L. Beran, *Strangers within the Gates: Margaret Atwood's Wilderness Tips*, [in:] *Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations: Recent Poetry and Fiction,* ed. S. R. Wilson, Columbus, p. 67.

gnawing their way into the attic and eating the insulation off the wiring, or about strange noises."[4] A refuge and a prison, the apartment constitutes the woman's private space, one which simultaneously shields and incapacitates her: "Possibly she should go out, go downstairs, do some shopping; there isn't much in the refrigerator. … But she isn't hungry, and moving, stirring from this space, is increasingly an effort."[5]

Lois's passivity marks a finale of a long process of gradual retirement triggered by a trauma she experienced as a teenager: in the 1940s, at Indian-themed summer camp in Northern Ontario, she witnessed a mysterious disappearance of her best friend, Lucy, who "simply vanished"[6] into the wilderness. Mind you, she did not see Lucy disappear – fall off the cliff or be dragged away by a bear; she only heard her shout, and then she *was* were Lucy *was not*. "The enigma remains unsolved, however, because Lucy's body was never recovered, and the narrator, whose reliability may be challenged, claims to know nothing for certain."[7] A doppelganger and an echo, Lucy possesses Lois who feels she is "living not one life but two: her own, and another, shadowy life that hovered around her and would not itself be realized, the life of what would have happened if Lucy had not stepped sideways and disappeared from time."[8] In endowing Lucy with the ghostly presence, Atwood inscribes her short-story within the Canadian Gothic tradition, an undercurrent of Canadian writing that has recently been theorized by Justin D. Edwards and Cynthia Sugars.

Notably, in his 1962 poem entitled "Can. Lit.," Earle Birney writes:

> We French, we English, never lost out civil war,
> endure it still, a bloodless civil bore;
> no wounded lying about, no Whitman wanted.
> It's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted.[9]

The last verse of the poem in particular "has been subjected to frequent punning and quotation" as a catchy, ironic phrase that aptly "conjures

[4] M. Atwood, *Death by Landscape*, [in:] *Wilderness Tips*, Toronto 1991, p. 49–50.

[5] Ibid., p. 59.

[6] Ibid., p. 58.

[7] T. Gibert, *Spectrality in Margaret Atwood's Death by Landscape*, [in:] "Miscelánea: a Journal of English and American Studies" 2018, vol. 58, p. 91.

[8] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 60.

[9] E. Birney, *Can. Lit*, available: https://eventhealphabet.livejournal.com/84688.html [access: 05.06.2021].

various clichés about Canadian belatedness and practicality."[10] In fact, however, which is evidenced, for instance, by other works by both, Birney and Atwood, Canadian literature has always been inhabited by a great variety of ghosts. These ghosts, in Atwood's terms, emblematize something integral to Canadian national psyche; namely, they are a reflection of a specifically Canadian type of anxiety which is bound to the country's colonial tradition. The anxiety, in other words, is linked to Canadian geography or the ways in which, in Canadian literature, both fear and longing are bound to the notion of space.

The connection was famously theorized by the Canadian thematic critics of the 1960s and 1970s who equated space with wilderness. Northrop Frye, notably, discussed the apparently ghostly nature of Canadian vast landscapes when he declared that: "… a large tract of vacant land may well affect the people living near it as too much cake does a small boy: an unknown but quite possibly horrible something stares at them in the dark."[11] By way of explanation, fear and longing intertwine in Canadian literature, particularly when it is gothic. What needs to be articulated very clearly at this point, however, is that Canadian Gothic is "an expression of primarily modern *Western* fears and anxieties."[12] In *Death by Landscape*, in other words, the protagonist's Canadianness equals being white and Anglophone, which position, however, is conspicuously problematized through both, postcolonial and Gothic elements introduced into the narrative.

Similarly to other short stories by Atwood, therefore, *Death by Landscape* unsettles the protagonist's power position, which happens on several levels. For example, the perspective of the past Lois – a white, rich, Anglophone teenage girl who spent her holidays at camp Manitou – is subverted by the retrospective of the present Lois, an elderly prisoner of her apartment, fixated on the single tragic memory, and yet endowed with a broader cultural awareness. Whereas the past Lois wanted to be "adventurous and pure, and aboriginal,"[13] the present Lois "knows too much about Indians … for instance, that they should not even be called Indians," and sees the

[10] C. Sugars, *Canadian Gothic*, [in:] *A New Companion to the Gothic,* ed. D. Punter, Chichester 2012, p. 409.

[11] N. Frye quoted in D. Staines, *Frye: Canadian Critic/Writer*, [in:] *Northrop Frye's Canadian Literary Criticism and Its Influence*, ed. B. Gorjup, Toronto 2009, p. 253.

[12] T. Sikora, *Multiculturalism and Its Dungeons: the Canadian Gothic and the Politics of Difference*, [in:] *De la fondation de Québec au Canada d'aujourd'hui, 1608 – 2008. Rétrospections, parcours et bilans*, ed. K. Jarosz, Katowice 2009, p. 211. [Italics mine]

[13] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 54.

pretend-native games they played at camp as "a form of stealing."[14] At a deeper level, the wilderness that swallowed Lucy "is a place in which the presence of Aboriginal people has been erased."[15] It is their absence that haunts much of Canadian colonial fiction.

If Canadian ghosts, as suggested earlier, are representations of Canadian anxieties, it seems that perhaps the most pressing of these anxieties is one "over the boundaries of the human."[16] It is in this cultural context that the image of an agoraphobe appears to be a fitting symbol of Canadian cultural revisions. Agoraphobia – "a disorder that affects sufferers' sense of bounded identity,"[17] this "dispossession of the capacity to comprehend and adapt to a particular environment"[18] – forces one to reestablish boundaries.

Even though Lois is never categorized as an agoraphobe in the story, hers is the gradual withdrawal from the outside world into the private sphere of her apartment – which is typical for the disorder – and hers are expressions of spatial anxiety which recur throughout the story. She is, for example, uneasy about bunk beds at the camp: "Bottom bunks made her feel closed in, and she was afraid of falling out of top ones; she was afraid of heights."[19] In a canoe, she "can feel the water stretching out, with the shores twisting away on either side, immense and a little frightening."[20] It is, however, in the aftermath of Lucy's vanishing that Lois first experiences panic: "Panic was rising in her, the panic of a small child who does not know where the bigger ones are hidden. She could hear her own heart. She looked quickly around; she lay down on the ground and looked over the edge of the cliff. It made her feel cold. There was nothing."[21] It is the last statement that I find particularly noteworthy. Whereas "There was nothing" can be translated into "Lucy was not there," it can also be read as an attempt to verbalize the panic Lois experienced.

"[The] panic sensations," as countless researches show, "can be experienced as depersonalization, the feeling that one is being dissociated or

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[14] Ibid.

[15] E. Mackey, "*Death by Landscape". Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology*, "Canadian Woman Studies" 2000, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 127.

[16] T. Sikora, *Multiculturalism…*, p. 212.

[17] J. Davidson, *Phobic Geographies…*, p. 9.

[18] D. Trotter, *The Uses of Phobia. Essays on Literature and Film*, Chichester 2010, p. 2.

[19] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 52.

[20] Ibid., p. 54.

[21] Ibid., p. 57.

detached from one's body, derealization … , "slipping away" from one's environment, and an increased awareness of external and internal sensations where the boundaries between self and the environment are blurred."[22] The sensations of panic, in other words, "profoundly blur the relationship between what is 'inside' and 'outside' of the body,"[23] as well as between what is real and unreal. Consequently, a panic attack epitomizes the "existential challenge to what for most of us, most of the time, is a well--defined presumption of our concrete self-identity."[24] As such, it should not be interpreted as a mere symptom of vulnerability/weakness, but as a metaphor of transgression, resistance, and longing. Although a panic attack is non-locatable, it is also "the open landscape against which the self can choose to define its own existence. It is for this reason that Kirkegaard claims, 'anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.'"[25]

Lucy's spatial anxiety persists as time passes: "She would never go up north, to [her husband's] family cottage or to any place with wild lakes and wild trees and the calls of loons."[26] Although she seems satisfied in the domestic sphere, where "the only plant life is in pots,"[27] she is not completely out of harm's way, as she keeps hearing "empty space in sound,"[28] a calling of sorts. Whereas her fear of landscape, in other words, is satisfied through her withdrawal from it, her longing for it needs to be entertained differently. To that end, Lois collects pictures of landscape, most of which she acquired with her husband's money just because she really "wanted something that was in them, although she could not have said at the time what it was. It was not peace: she does not find them peaceful in the least."[29]

Importantly, the pictures Lois amasses are not just any pictures: all of them are "nationalist wilderness paintings of the Group of Seven."[30] Associated with the search for Canadian identity as distinct from both, American and British identities, and with the aftermath of the First World War,

[22] R. Bankey, *La Donna e Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman*, "Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography" 2001, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 45.

[23] Ibid., p. 38.

[24] J. Davidson, *Phobic Geographies…*, p. 58.

[25] Ibid., p. 60.

[26] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 60.

[27] Ibid., p. 50.

[28] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 60.

[29] Ibid., p. 50.

[30] E. Mackey, *"Death by Landscape". Race, Nature…*, p. 126.

the Group "[mobilized] a symbolism of unpeopled and rugged wilderness"[31] and "saw climate and geography as necessary to express an essential and distinct Canadian identity. Canada as a virile nation … could not be "subservient" and "dependent" on the art of "other peoples."[32] Created against the classical, pastoral tradition, therefore, "the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven do not sustain and construct colonial national identity by inviting colonizing humans to penetrate nature, as the picturesque tradition does. Instead, their paintings reject the European aesthetic in favor of a construction of a nationalist aesthetic based on the sense of an obliterating and uncontrollable wilderness."[33] The fact that the Group's paintings reject the European aesthetic, however, "does not mean that [theirs is] not a colonizing perspective."[34] Conversely, "the obliteration of human presence – specifically the presence of Aboriginal people"[35] is a reflection of colonial violence. In *Death by Landscape*, accordingly, the narrator asserts: "These paintings are not landscape paintings. Because there aren't any landscapes up there. … Instead there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path."[36]

Although, as the quotation above suggests, it is nature rather than landscape that kills you, the title of the story proclaims otherwise. Landscape is NOT wilderness: humans transform nature into landscape. "The type of death announced by the ambiguous title," in other words, "cannot be exclusively caused by a deadly natural environment."[37] For this reason, studying her pictures "fills [Lois] with a wordless unease. Despite the fact that there are no people in them or even animals, it's as if there is something, or someone, looking back out."[38] In the "garbled geography" of her memory, "the body is no longer safely delimited from the outside world."[39] The pictures on her walls, which symbolize an attempt to contain nature, to tame or *frame* it, are, in fact, "holes that open inward on the wall,

[31] Ibid., p. 127.
[32] Ibid., p. 126.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., p. 127.
[36] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 60.
[37] T. Gibert, *Spectrality in Margaret Atwood's "Death by Landscape"*, "Literature, film and cultural studies" 2018, vol. 58, p. 89.
[38] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 50.
[39] J. Davidson, *Phobic Geographies...*, p. 23.

not like windows but like doors" and "every one of them is a picture of Lucy."[40] Inasmuch as Lois's apprehension corresponds to Northrop Frye's suspicion that a "possibly horrible something stares at [us] in the dark," it is worth remembering that he also compared Canadian empty landscape to "too much cake." It seems undetermined, therefore, who, in fact, does the swallowing here.

Room

Room, similarly to Emma Donoghue's earlier works and much of present-day Canadian literature, also unsettles the notion of home, and defamiliarizes the domestic. Reminiscent of John Fowles's *The Collector*, the novel tells the story of a kidnapping. Unlike Fowles, however, Donoghue does not offer any insights into the oppressor's mind, focusing instead on his victim, named Ma, and their child she birthed while still in captivity. In fact, it is the child, a five-year-old Jack, who narrates the story. The boy's uncanny voice extricates the novel from the tradition of captivity narratives and prison novels – born and raised in an 11 by 11 foot cell, Jack is a "happy prisoner,"[41] with no wish to escape. "Whereas Ma's past includes all of her history, pre- and post- abduction, Jack's entire life has been spent in Room, so that space is for him not cathected with any feelings of sadness, loss or pain in the same way."[42] "Outside is the scary"[43] says Jack when the very idea that there *is* an outside is seeped to him by Ma. Ultimately, however, it is Jack alone who has to enact a risky jail-break into the space he finds threatening and unfamiliar.

The boy's extraordinary narration creates an undeniable distance between the reader and Ma. In Lucia Lorenzi's words, "[b]y foregrounding Jack's perspective," Donoghue "unsettles her readers by making the act of textual interpretation significantly more complicated […]."[44] As the boy has no sense of Ma's life before the kidnapping, and is sheltered by her from the severity of her trauma, he does not apply any expected interpretive

[40] M. Atwood, *Death…*, p. 60.

[41] M. Rubik, *Out of the Dungeon, Into the World: Aspects of the Prison Novel in Emma Donoghue's "Room"*, [in:] *How to Do Things with Narrative. Cognitive and Diachronic Perspectives*, eds. J. Alber and G. Olson, Berlin 2018, p. 142.

[42] K. Costello-Sullivan, *Trauma and Recovery in the Twenty-First-Century Irish Novel*, New York 2018, p. 103.

[43] E. Donoghue, *Room*, London 2010, p. 219.

[44] L. Lorenzi, *Am I Not OK? Negotiating and Re-Defining Traumatic Experience in Emma Donoghue's "Room"*, "Canadian Literature" 2016, Iss. 228/229, p.21.

framework to the violence he witnesses. "The author's focus," as Margarete Rubik asserts, "is not on the fact of the abused woman, but on the world view little Jack has pieced together under these extraordinary circumstances."[45] Whereas I see Jack as a disruptor of patriarchal logic, and his perception of space as exceptional, this paper, for the sake of clarity, focuses on the figure of Ma, in order to ponder the problematic relationship between women and domestic space, in the light of theories of agoraphobia.

It was Susan Bordo who in her *Unbearable Weight* famously linked the disorder to the image of the perfect housewife which dominated in the American culture of the 1950s. Importantly, the theorist saw an agoraphobic woman as a contradictory symbol: on the one hand, an agoraphobe yields to the cultural norms and "marries the house,"[46] on the other, she undermines these very norms and becomes an exaggerated version of herself. Accordingly, Bordo described agoraphobia as a disorder which is markedly gendered. Although there are some discrepancies concerning the numbers, researchers agree that upwards 70% of those diagnosed with agoraphobia are women (feminist scholars, in fact, typically quote higher numbers – e.g. in Joyce Davidson's terms, 89% of agoraphobes are women).

On that note, agoraphobia has lately been of particular interest for researchers in the fields of cultural studies, affect studies, and gender studies, many of whom have linked it to the issues of geography, and described women's relationship to panic as "geography of fear."[47] Rather than pathologizing agoraphobia, they have looked at it as a representation, and a logical consequence, of how space is divided and zoned in the Western culture, focusing primarily on the separation of the private, feminine sphere, from the public, masculine one. By the end of the 19th century, which is, coincidentally, when agoraphobia was first diagnosed, "the presence of women in the public sphere was increasingly seen as unnatural and even dangerous."[48] This corresponded to the feminization of the domestic sphere, and the subsequent idealization of home as refuge, "that special place to which one withdraws and from which one ventures forth."[49]

[45] M. Rubik, *Out of the Dungeon*, p. 138.

[46] An idea introduced by Anne Sexton in her poem entitled *Housewife*.

[47] R. Olstead and K. Bischoping, *Men, Masculinities and Constructions of Self in Panic Discourse*, "The Journal of Men's Studies" 2012, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 278.

[48] J. A. Tyner, *Space, Place, and Violence. Violence and the Embodied Geographies of Race, Sex and Gender,* Routledge 2011, p. 32.

[49] Tuan quoted in J. A. Tyner, *Space, Place, and Violence…*, p. 28.

Such an "overly benign" concept of home is, as James A. Tyner suggests, "no longer tenable," as home has come to be understood as "an ambivalent place, one that is simultaneously a spatial and social unit of interaction."[50] Even in the 19th century, though, for women, home was hardly a place one withdrew to and ventured from. The notion of movement and mobility inscribed within this definition was typically reserved for men's experience of the domestic sphere. In her article on agoraphobia entitled "La Donna e Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman," Ruth Bankey suggests that the concept of "the woman in motion does not refer to spatial mobility, rather, it is in reference to the instability and disorder of women's bodies and minds."[51] An agoraphobic woman can, therefore, be construed as a fitting representation of the patriarchal concepts of femininity: passive and immobilized, she is simultaneously irrational and unstable. Her "choice" to see home as "a truly safe place [and] the foundation of an ontologically secure existence"[52] may thus be interpreted as her adherence to the patriarchal concepts of femininity.

The agoraphobic experience of home, however, as I explained earlier, is highly ambivalent. The private sphere of the house "refers to a set of power relations that constitute a specific hierarchy."[53] Agoraphobia thus communicates a perverse version of domesticity, which urges one to "situate our understanding of home … within a larger societal setting,"[54] and see it as "a place of patriarchal control and discipline."[55] Although home is "imagined as a place of domestic order, separate from the outer world of commerce, government, law, and other worldly institutions in which men exercise worldly power,"[56] in Donoghue's novel it is, in fact, infused with violence. It is within the domestic sphere that the hierarchical relationship between the master, or host, and the guest, the foreigner, unveils. Room, in other words, is a place where both domesticity and patriarchy are performed. Consequently, as Naomi Morgenstern suggests, Ma's kidnapper, Old Nick,

[50] Ibid.

[51] R. Bankey, *La Donna e Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman*, "Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography" 2001, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 37.

[52] Marilyn K. Silverman quoted in Joyce Davidson, *Phobic Geographies…*, p. 24.

[53] P.V. Aureli and M.S. Giudici, *Familiar Horror: Toward a Critique Of Domestic Space*, no. 38, 2016, p. 115.

[54] J. A. Tyner, *Space, Place, and Violence*, p. 29.

[55] Ibid., p. 32.

[56] M. Casey and E.R. White, *Unsettled Homes: Borders and Belonging in Emma Donoghue's "Astray"*, "The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association" 2017, vol. 50, no. 2, p. 105.

can be seen not only as a "conventional tormentor of gothic fiction," but also as "the male provider with a stay-at-home mom for a wife," who "reads and performs what remains (for him at least) an available cultural script – the script of "patriarchal sex right" (or domesticity as bride capture)."[57] Old Nick expectats, in fact, to be thanked and respected as the man of the house.

The performance of domesticity for Ma revolves, as her name suggests, around mothering. In Kathleen Costello-Sullivan's phrasing, "Jack's birth, in some respects, mitigates Ma's sense of isolation because 'as long as the victim maintains any other human connection, the perpetrator's power is limited."[58] However, whereas Ma's relationship with Jack is what keeps her sane, or even alive, it is not unproblematic. Margarete Rubik describes their bond as claustrophobic, while Morgenstern refers to Emmanuel Levinas to depict Ma as taken hostage by her son. Undoubtedly, there is little space between the two. Although when the novel starts Jack turns five, he is still breastfed by Ma. There is no door to their bathroom and hence no sense of privacy. The only time the two are separated is when Old Nick comes to rape Ma, and Jack hides in Wardrobe. The most abject symbol, perhaps, of their body boundaries blurring is Jack sucking on Ma's rotten tooth to console himself when enacting the jail-break. Before the escape, in fact, Jack does not really see himself as a fully separate being, and after the escape finds it incomprehensible why Ma wishes to have a room of her own.

What stands in striking contrast to this superfluous physical closeness in the first part of the novel is the times when Ma is, in Jack's phrasing, *gone*. "Today is one of the days when Ma is gone," he reveals. "She won't wake up properly. She's here but not really."[59] Although normally Ma is a heroically capable mother, whose "ingenuity provides [the] elements of safety, security, and imaginative play in an environment of sensory and material deprivation,"[60] from time to time she absents herself and phases out, leaving Jack to his own devices. Whereas Jack does not comprehend what Ma's goneness indicates and what triggers it, he knows it is a temporary state that he has to wait out. Although he proves capable of taking care of himself, Ma's unresponsiveness unsettles him. In essence, "Ma's goneness functions for Jack as a fort-da episode or rehearsal for trauma, death, and

[57] N. Morgenstern, *Wild Child. Intensive Parenting and Posthumanist Ethics*, Minnesota 2018, p. 6.
[58] K. Costello-Sullivan, *Trauma and Recovery in the Twenty-First-Century Irish Novel*, New York 2018, p. 103.
[59] E. Donoghue, *Room*, London 2010, p. 60.
[60] K. Costello-Sullivan, *Trauma and Recovery…*, p. 104.

the entry into a cultural field […]."[61] Importantly, Ma's goneness is not simply a reaction to her prolonged imprisonment. Conversely, it is when they are already outside that Jack finds Ma "the most Gone she's ever," a "zombie" who "doesn't switch on" after her suicide attempt.

Inasmuch as it is not my goal to read Ma as a representation of an agoraphobe, I feel it is important at this point to refer to the phenomenology of a panic attack which epitomizes goneness. The sensations of panic, as indicated earlier, "profoundly blur the relationship between what is 'inside' and 'outside' of the body,"[62] as well as between what is real and unreal: while the personal, physical sensations of a panic attack resemble those of a heart attack and are often compared to being *on a brink* of death,[63] medical authorities construe panic as phantasmagoric, meaningless, as well as feminine. My reading of agoraphobia, therefore, is about blurring the borderlines between the inside and the outside – as epitomized by a panic attack - rather than contrasting the safe space of the house with the hostile outside. Correspondingly, Donoghue avoids the idealization of the outside, and problematizes "the movement from oppression to freedom."[64] In Donoghue's novel, in fact, "the act of leaving Room demands entering a different space of power/knowledge,"[65] in which the characters experience different kinds of institutionalized violence. The fourth chapter of the novel, entitled "After," which culminates in Ma's attempt at ultimate goneness, focuses on "the way in which the experiences of Jack and Ma are reshaped once they and their stories are no longer contained within an 11' x 11' space."[66]

Although outside, Ma's body is no longer "terrorized through sexual violence and imprisonment,"[67] it is placed under surveillance. "In an intriguing reversal," writes Libe Garcia Zarranz, "it is when Jack and his mother enter the realities of this society that disciplinary mechanisms like media, the hospital, and the police saturate [their bodies] by marking

[61] N. Morgenstern, *Wild Child. Intensive Parenting and Posthumanist Ethics*, Minnesota 2018, p. 15.

[62] R. Bankey, *La Donna e Mobile…*, p. 15.

[63] J. Davidson, *Phobic Geographies…*, p. 58.

[64] M. Casey and E.R. White, *Unsettled Homes…*, p. 123.

[65] L. Garcia Zarranz, *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions. New Cross-Border Ethics*, McGill-Queen's University Press 2017, p. 49.

[66] L. Lorenzi, *Am I Not OK? Negotiating…*, p. 27.

[67] L Garcia Zarranz, *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions…*, p. 48.

[them] as a source of monstrosity and imperfection."[68] While the police, the medical doctors, and the media in particular persist in narrating Ma's story as inconceivable and anomalous, "Ma locates [it] instead within a framework that acknowledges trauma as a sociopolitical (rather than a merely individual or psychological) phenomenon."[69] In other words, as Lucia Lorenzi asserts, "Ma's struggles are not necessarily operating within a traumatic binary that locates her experiences in total opposition to 'ordinary life.'"[70] "Far from minimizing the severity of [Ma's] experiences,"[71] what Donoghue expressly suggests is that violence against women – and women's fear of violence – is also part of our ordinary life and is not contained within any particular space or sphere.

Conclusion

To conclude, "Death by Landscape," Atwood's acclaimed short-story written "back to the widely proclaimed Canadian lack of ghosts," as well as Donoghue's bestselling novel, provide yet another observation on the relationship between individuals and the spaces they inhabit. The goal of this paper was to use agoraphobia as "a platform, structure of signification, or metaphor from which to … examine"[72] the representations of space in both texts. My interpretation was based on the assumption that "our ontological and embodied security is constituted by, and in, place,"[73] which both, agoraphobia and the texts problematize. Agoraphobia, in fact, has been likened to a "boundary crisis" which leads to a "crisis of location."[74] Both, agoraphobia and the narratives express a longing for home, and both deconstruct home as an ambivalent place representative of a larger social and patriarchal context. Whereas agoraphobia is in no way a specifically Canadian disorder, it appears to be a useful tool in reading Canadian literature which seems to be particularly focused on the problematic concepts of space, place, and home. In the aftermath of ZOZO, in fact, agoraphobia can likewise be seen as a fitting metaphor for our suddenly problematic – or disorderly – relationship with space.

[68] Ibid., p. 52.
[69] L. Lorenzi, *Am I Not OK? Negotiating…*, p. 28.
[70] Ibid., p. 30.
[71] Ibid., p. 27.
[72] R. Bankey, *The Agoraphobic Condition*, "Cultural Geographies" 2004, vol. 11, p. 347.
[73] Ibid., p. 353.
[74] J. Davidson, *Phobic Geographies...*, p. 24.

Zuzanna Szatanik

Spatial Longings in Margaret Atwood's *Death by Landscape* and Emma Donoghue's *Room*

Niniejsza interpretacja dwóch kanadyjskich klasyków – opowiadania Margaret Atwood pt. „Śmierć na tle krajobrazu" i powieści Emmy Donoghue zatytułowanej „Pokój" – jest w rzeczywistości pretekstem do rozważań o kanadyjskiej tęsknocie za, i strachu przed otwartą przestrzenią. W obu tekstach jej wyrazem staje się nostalgia za przestrzenią zewnętrzną, jednoznacznie nie-domową. Używając teorii agorafobii jako narzędzia interpretacji, proponuję alternatywne odczytanie kanadyjskiej przestrzeni, wpisane jednak w wielowiekową tradycję definiowania „kanadyjskości" poprzez przestrzenne metafory i relacje między jednostką a miejscem.

Keywords: Canadian literature, agoraphobia, space, Margaret Atwood, Emma Donoghue

Słowa klucze: literatura kanadyjska, agoraphobia, przestrzeń, Margaret Atwood, Emma Donoghue