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SPEAKING INTO "ARCHIVAL SILENCE": TRANSLATING TRAUMA AND ABUSE NESTLED WITHIN THE *DREAM HOUSE*

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Abstract

Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* (2019) is a lyric memoir through which she goes beyond the usual representations of space and place in women's writing, refashioning their narratives. By offering a queer geocritical perspective and creating a distinctive space of storytelling, Machado explores abuse between queer women. Drawing on horror and gothic tropes and style, she narrates her personal experience of queer domestic violence, inviting readers to navigate a story that is rarely told, let alone published. In this context, this paper aims to examine the ways Machado employs space, place and spatial narrative strategies and whether and how the embodied experience of space and place transforms itself when a text travels into another culture through a different language. Focusing, as a case study, on the book's translation in Greek, and considering that Machado herself lacked a language to describe what was happening to her while also having to deal with feelings of disloyalty to the very idea of lesbianism, this paper ultimately explores whether and how women's experiences and the spaces in which they engage retain their multiplicity in translation.

Keywords: queer space and place, domestic violence, geocriticism, Carmen Maria Machado, archival silence.

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Introduction

Carmen Maria Machado (b. 1986) is a latina short-story writer, essayist and critic. She published her lyric memoir *In the Dream House* in 2019 (Graywolf Press, US), offering an alternative, yet still evocative, reading of the trope of the house in women-authored fiction. The house, this omnipresent construct across literatures, has stood as a symbol of comfort and security representing a safe microcosm where all inhabitants, women included, are protected and free from fear and abusive behaviour. Nonetheless, it has also been portrayed and explored as a restrictive space where women are exiled, relegated to the margins, and lack voice. Traditionally designated for women and associated with their confinement, the house has been described as a structure shaped by patriarchy in a way that submission and subjugation is forced upon women by male power—in this gendered landscape, women are confined merely to roles of domestic and reproductive labour, often falling victims to domestic violence. Yet, it is this space that can also act subversively as a feminine space. A space where, as Adriana Cavarero suggests, "women belong to themselves. It displaces the patriarchal order, setting up an impenetrable distance between that order and itself" (1995, 17). Several women writers have thus employed domestic spaces as a means to invest women with power voicing their lives which patriarchy invisibilizes.

Machado examines how queer identities and practices disrupt, reshape, and reimagine the ways in which space is constructed and experienced. Intimate spaces such as the house are shown to be fluid, contested, or multifaceted rather than static or monolithic. By adopting a queer geocritical perspective, which interrogates the intersection of spatiality, gender, and sexuality in literary narratives, Machado moves beyond conventional representations of space and place in women's writing, critically reconfiguring their narrative possibilities. In this framework, space is not neutral or immutable but a socially produced and ideologically charged construct, shaped by hegemonic power structures and the lived experiences of marginalized subjects. Queer geocriticism thus reveals how spatial formations—whether domestic, public, or liminal—reflect and perpetuate heteronormative ideologies while simultaneously providing sites for resistance and rearticulation. Creating a distinctive space of storytelling, Machado foregrounds the dynamics of abuse within queer relationships, particularly between women, destabilizing dominant assumptions about intimacy and power in non-heteronormative contexts. Drawing on horror and gothic tropes and style, she tells her personal account of queer domestic violence spotlighting the verbal, emotional, psychological, and physical abuse within the walls of the old house she once shared with her girlfriend and inviting readers to go through a story that is rarely told let alone published. Machado explores the trauma of an abusive relationship defined by the nightmarish behaviour of her female partner. The fragmented state of their shattered relationship is reflected into dozens of short chapters that enable Machado to challenge beliefs about queer love for women and draw readers' attention to the fact that lesbian love and queer love can be

as anxious, problematic, harrowing and abusive as heterosexual love. The house is seen as a place where a man or woman can impinge on another woman. The subhead framing under which each short section appears mirrors Machado's effort to fit her experiences into an existing narrative.

Machado's memoir thus serves as a focal point for critical reflection and commentary on gender and sexuality, normalizing the experiences of individuals historically overlooked by society and prompting readers to consider how space is inherently shaped by female experience (Johnston and Longhurst 2010, 3). Taking the above into consideration and inspired by Amy Wells (2017), this paper focuses on women's writing and their representation of space and place through the lens of geocriticism as defined by Robert T. Tally Jr, that is, "[a]s a way to analyze literary texts, but also as an approach to social criticism. [G]eocriticism can perhaps uncover hidden relations of power" (*Spatiality* 2013, 114), and it can enable an understanding of "the real and fictional spaces that we inhabit, cross through, imagine, survey, modify, celebrate, disparage, and on and on in an infinite variety" ("Preface" 2007, x). For, as Bertrand Westphal argues, "[t]he perception of space and the representation of space do not involve the same things" (2007, 1). In this context, the present paper examines the ways Machado employs space, place and spatial narrative strategies in the *Dream House*. Given that Machado's memoir was translated into Greek in November 2022 by Angelos Angelidis and Maria Angelidou (Antipodes Publications), this paper also explores whether and how the embodied experience of space and place goes through transformation when a text travels into another culture through a different language. Considering that Machado herself lacked a language to describe what was happening to her while also having to deal with feelings of disloyalty to the very idea of lesbianism, this paper investigates if and how the Greek translators have enhanced her voice. Have queer women's experiences retained their multiplicity in translation?

I situate the Greek translation of Machado's book within its historical political context—two years after: a) the rise of the #GreekMeToo movement, b) the first Queer Liberation March which took place in Athens, c) the Greek translation of books (Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, etc.), which made a sensation and marked the beginning of a new era in queer and LGBTQ literature in Greece; and one year after: a) the first Festival of Queer Approaches was held in the city of Xanthi and b) Μπαταρία (bataría) [=battery], a small publishing group, was established in Athens with the aim of promoting works produced by queer writers and other marginalized groups (Misiou, "From 'A Room of Your Own'" 7-8). The writing and sharing of stories by women writers like Machado's *In the Dream House* is a political act as is their very translation—they break the "archival silence" of stories that may never be "uttered in the first place" revealing the truth that "something very large is irrevocably missing from our collective histories" as Machado herself underlines (*Dream House* 13). Such stories and their translation urge readers to get outside their comfort zone, question and subvert the representation(s) of their most intimate places, fill in silences, and give voice to individuals who have been marginalized.

A *Dream House* of Trauma and Abuse

The house in Machado's memoir functions as a site of conflict, repressed anxiety, and abuse. It is portrayed as the space that entraps and traumatizes Machado who does not hesitate to use the most ordinary and secure setting to describe the haunting reality she experienced while involved in a relationship with her ex-female partner. She employs several powerful literary devices and draws on various literary tropes and genres (the haunted mansion, gothic literature, lesbian pulp novels, erotic literature), as well as on history, myths and folklore. Through the vivid narration of the twists and turns of her trauma in the Dream House, Machado helps readers get close to experiencing it themselves. Trauma is examined and defined by Machado not only as the pain inflicted through abuse but also as the lingering psychological and emotional scars that alter one's perception of self, reality, and relationships. It becomes a force that resides within memory, reshaping the narrative of one's life. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's view of trauma as a wound in the psyche, Machado's abuse at the hands of her ex-female partner is seen in this paper as a "speaking wound," "a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or a truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). Additionally, in line with Mark Seltzer who sees trauma as transcending boundaries, "com[ing] to function not merely as a sort of switch point between bodily and psychic orders" but also "as a switch point between the individual and collective, private and public order of things" (1997, 5), Machado's recording and sharing of her personal, private experience is viewed as an attempt to render it public and invite a collective response. Ann Cvetkovich also understands trauma "as collective experience that generates collective responses" (2003, 19), claiming that "it is no longer useful to presume that sexuality, intimacy, affect and other categories of experience typically assigned to the private sphere do not also pervade public life" (32). Machado addresses the issue of same-sex abuse and the accompanying trauma and, at the same time, the non-existence of an archive of these experiences in the public sphere. For, as feminist literary scholars and geographers claim, there is no neutral way of understanding and experiencing space and place (Massey 2005; Wells 2017; Wolff 2004, among others); there are writing and reading, and by extension translating, positions which are constructed and/or to be constructed. Machado aims to portray the reality that same-sex couples consisting of female partners can also find themselves in abusive relationships. Women can and do abuse each other and they can do so in the house.

The story is narrated in 141 episodes-chapters, resembling vignettes, written using the genre of the titles Machado assigns to them—"*Dream House as* Picaresque," "*Dream House as* High Fantasy," "*Dream House as* Inventory," "*Dream House as* Lesbian Pulp Novel," etc. There are different pieces comprising one cohesive story which is told from various angles. The house is real, it is "not a metaphor," as Machado rushes to clarify in the very first chapter (*Dream House* 17). It is "a real place. It stands upright. It is next to a forest and at the rim of a

sward" (17). The *Dream House* is the couple's Midwestern home. It is "as real as the book you are holding in your hands" (17), Machado encourages readers to believe. Yet, contrary to the chapter's title, it is a place of metaphor too. And the "rumours of the dead buried within it" (17) are not a fiction but Machado's own experience of being a living dead, buried within a relationship that has transformed a place destined to perform as a space of domestic bliss and love into a haunting prison.

Machado's ex remains unnamed; she is known only as "the Woman in the Dream House" who Machado, a talented graduate student, meets while being inexperienced with her sexuality. The "Woman in the Dream House" is rigid, hard and refuses change. The house however transforms as it echoes Machado's experiences and repressed memories. In "*Dream House as* Idiom" Machado reveals what the dream house meant actually to her—it was an idiom, a mode of expression, something that could be interpreted and negotiated on different levels following the user's experiences and prior knowledge. Machado therefore shares with readers that she will interpret her experience through the prism of common language, idioms, so that she understands herself and situation and enable their understanding as well. What did house then mean to her? Which common expressions resonated with her? For Machado, the house turned from a "safe place" into a "precarious, easily disrupted" house of cards—one "constructed of hypocrisy, readily shattered" (87). It was not a place she could be safe in for she was not "the person in charge" (87)—she was afraid in what turned to be a place of abuse of all kinds. What phrases about a house and the different versions meant to her when she was young are entirely different with what they ended up meaning to her now. They mirror "weakness … the inevitability of failure" (87). For, at the beginning, this house stood for light and warmth, love and life, and it would shelter an affectionate relationship. It was, in the words of Machado, "a convent of promise (herb garden, wine, writing across the table from each other)" (80). But it stopped being a place of hope, and she decided to call readers to navigate with her its various metamorphoses as it became "a den of debauchery … a haunted house (none of this can really be happening), a prison (need to get out need to get out), and, finally, a dungeon of memory" (80). A place of fear, anxiety, confusion, all resulting from abuse.

She needed to escape the dream house which both haunted her and was haunted. As Machado informs readers, there was "something desperate about the house; like a ghost is trying to make itself known but can't, and so it just flops facedown into the carpet, wheezing and smelling like mold" (82). The figure of the ghost, in the words of Paulina Palmer, "can operate as an image for liminality and border-crossing, as illustrated by its ability to traverse the boundaries between inside and outside, present and past and, even more mysteriously, life and death" (2012, 66). Quite importantly, the ghost can also act as a symbol for "ambiguity and contradiction" (Palmer 67) and this is something that Machado draws on. The haunted house with its ghosts is the most powerful gothic trope employed by Machado throughout her memoir. It does not symbolize downfall, evil and decay

the way the first gothic novel (or what is believed to be the first gothic novel—*The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole) did, but it is used as a means to describe the mental breakdown and decay experienced by Machado herself in an abusive relationship with her former female partner which made living at the house both familiar and unfamiliar at once, known and unknown, canny and uncanny. The Gothic provides Machado with the tools needed to voice her conflict and to share her story about her relationship with another woman, that is a story about desire, queer sex, and women's same-sex relationships. In other words, she has written about what has been concealed, ignored and/or avoided by cultures and societies for centuries facilitating, according to Machado, "queer domestic abuse, much in the same way that it's hindered people's ability to understand themselves" (McCombs, "Electric Lit"). The Gothic, as she highlighted during an interview, "can be conducive to suppressed voices emerging, like in a haunted house. At its core, the Gothic drama is fundamentally about voiceless things—the dead, the past, the marginalized—gaining voices that cannot be ignored" (McCombs, "Electric Lit").

Readers navigate maze corridors of Machado's memory guided by the writer herself as to which doors need to be opened and which not and which paths need be taken each time. Readers, much like Machado, are haunted by and at the same time haunting the house—just like ghosts, they are present and absent in the story based on how much information Machado is willing to reveal and how much light is enabled to permeate the darkness of abuse and destruction. She is young and vulnerable responding to a core element of the female gothic, but she does not present herself as a heroine and this is one of the features that distinguish Machado's gothic memoir from other gothic stories. Machado aims to present a story that includes everyday people, women in particular, involved in a typical love and sexual relationship with which everyone can identify. Her narrative is personal and universal at the same time. For, abuse may be experienced by all people, whether they identify as men, women, queer, gender-free, or as anything else. And it is something that is hard to witness, hard to admit, and hard to deal with. However, it is exactly this that Machado requires readers to do: acknowledge the existence of queer abuse that nobody wants to talk about, not even "within the queer community" (Lesperance, "Electric Lit"). As Alice Lesperance notes, "if the house is queerness, then queer abuse is our monster in the house … The ghost is here, in the house with us, and confronting it is the only way to push through" ("Electric Lit"). Machado does not have to descend stairs in order to confront the ghost, her nightmare; rather, she has to go through "the ultimate descent: into trauma, into the bottom floors of [her] mind, into madness" (Lesperance, "Electric Lit").

Building a Context to House a Story

Throughout the memoir Machado dives deep into the past, recontextualizing it while constructing another, different, new context to situate her story. In "*Dream House as* World Building," Machado explains that "[p]laces are never just places. … Setting is not inert. It is activated by point of view" (80). It is through

Machado's points of view that the house is activated and readers participate in its narrative. However, readers are also actively engaged in meaning making and in the ways in which the story unfolds and evolves. It is not only victims of domestic abuse that have to move, that they are "dislocated" (80) readers too have to move. The writer tells readers that

> a common feature of domestic abuse is "dislocation." That is to say, the victim has just moved somewhere new, or she's somewhere where she doesn't speak the language, or has been otherwise uprooted from her support network, her friends or family, her ability to communicate. She is made vulnerable by her circumstance, her isolation. Her only ally is her abuser, which is to say she has no ally at all. And so she has to struggle against an unchangeable landscape that has been hammered into existence by nothing less than time itself; a house that is too big to dismantle by hand; a situation too complex and overwhelming to master on her own. The setting does its work. (80)

Readers also experience this unsettling feeling of being trapped, of being vulnerable, of being dislocated. Machado wants to make them step out of familiar territories, to be uprooted from safety and stability. She thus has them engage with the text mentally and physically based on the ergodic[1] features that are present. In "*Dream House as* Choose Your Own Adventure®" Machado urges readers to choose how they are going to proceed with their reading and, by extension, with the story, taking an active role in shaping the narrative. The "Choose Your Own Adventure®" format, a well-known interactive structure historically used in books and games, allows readers to make decisions that influence the course of the story. It is as if they can control and change its plot, its development, and how the events occurred. Therefore, readers encounter in this chapter questions that prompt them to decide how they would react if they were in Machado's place. Each choice redirects them to a different section, functioning much like a hyperlink that guides them based on their selection, creating a unique, participatory reading experience. This approach not only encourages reader agency but also reflects the theme of navigating and transforming one's own space within the story:

> If you apologize profusely, go to this page.
> If you tell her to wake you up next time your elbows touch her in your sleep, go to this page.
> If you tell her to calm down, go to this page. (170)

For the next 14 pages readers are faced with choices and prompts—"go to this page" and "turn to this page" (170-184). Machado "imposes agency" upon them asking them to "invest effort" (Misiou, "Multisemiotic Labyrinth" 244-245) while interacting with the story she has lived and now narrates. Drawing on the benefits of its ergodicity, the *Dream House* denies "definitive interpretation" and every re-reading can yield multiple experiences (245). Readers are not, nevertheless, drawn to the bottom of the pages as they read only when asked to reach a

decision; instead, they are also provided with footnotes that inform them about motifs of folk literature which Machado has used along with the narration of real events in her attempt to create links with lived experience. For instance, in "*Dream House as* Diagnosis" readers hear Machado confess: "You feel sick to your stomach almost constantly; the slightest motion makes you nauseated" (*Dream House* 112). A line that is followed by the footnote "Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, Type C940, Sickness or weakness for breaking taboo" (112), forming in this manner a context in which her story can be represented, and which can situate her experience in a dominant archive. Additionally, elements of folk literature act as windows into one's psyche mirroring their struggles and Machado employs them as yet another tool to show that the way we read stories and narrate them tells something about who we are, or who we think we are and/or who others have made us believe we are. Archetypal stories help us find our identity—looking at the timeless patterns we realize that our trajectories may be different versions of the trajectories of other people. In other words, archetypal motifs are powerful enough to transcend the personal, individual paths and lead to something larger. Yet, they can also help us acknowledge the impact imposed by culture, society, others' expectations on us and thus enable us to disassociate from them, to negate their control on our stories and lives.

By employing different pronouns to refer to herself—sometimes she is "I," other times she is "you"—and sometimes just her name, "Carmen," Machado points out that there are so many distinct parts of the self which experience and interpret moments differently that there is no reliable narration. She shifts through points of views presenting herself as an unreliable narrator only to demonstrate how hard relying on memory can be, how telling a story about yourself is actually uncanny. She ofttimes others herself. It is as if the authorial "I" addresses the past "you." Finding the right words to use, the language that can help her express herself adequately and share her thoughts and feelings is not easy at all. She "pile[s] up associations," found in her memory which is "itself a form of architecture," as Louise Bourgeois contends in the quote cited by Machado herself (*Dream House* 8). Throughout the memoir, Machado speaks about herself but she seems to be detached, it is almost as if it is about another person. The "I" stands apart from the "you." The shifts of voice disrupt any sense of linearity within the narrative and any sense of stability. It is yet another exercise, as she reveals in "*Dream House as* an Exercise in Point of View":

> You were not always just a You. I was whole—a symbiotic relationship between my best and worst parts—and then, in one sense of the definition, I was cleaved: a neat lop that took first person—that assured, confident woman, the girl detective, the adventurer—away from second, who was always anxious and vibrating like a too-small breed of dog. (22)

It is as if she became a "you" when she was in this destructive relationship with the Woman in the Dream House. And when she was a "you," she tried to tell her story to people "who didn't know how to listen" (22). But the "I" left

"and then lived" (22) and it is the "I" that now narrates the story. Nevertheless, although the "I" thinks "you" has died, writing this story makes "I" uncertain if this has actually happened, being still engaged in subject-formation. In a way, Machado emphasizes through her memoir the importance of autobiographical and biographical women's writing, the significance of women's conceptions of identity. She tries to write about a queer affective relationship, which like all affective relationships, impacts those involved, determining their very existence and shaping their identity, desires, sexuality, and their life. What makes her story stand out is that abusive queer stories and domestic queer violence rarely make it to documentation.

De-archiving Silence

As Machado highlights in "*Dream House as* Prologue", the lack of writings about queer women's stories, and abusive stories in particular, does not signify the absence of abuse among them and/or among members of the LGBTQIA+ community in general. It is just a matter of indifference to or lack of interest in noticing it and in writing about it. It is just another instance of lack of representation. The unnamed woman, who is Machado's ex-partner, can be read as the writer's attempt to convince readers that anyone can be an abuser. Embarking on writing this story has made Machado deal with difficult truths. One of them was that "sometimes stories are destroyed, and sometimes they are never uttered in the first place; either way something very large is irrevocably missing from our collective histories" (*Dream House* 13); Machado refers to "archival silence" or "violence of the archive" as it is also known, a concept described by Saidiya Hartman (2008, 1), to talk about the stories that are violently buried much like the disappeared bodies of the enslaved that are not present in archives of slavery. Machado resists non-writing her story. And much like Hartman, she too wishes not to let readers "turn the page" once they "see the violated woman" (qtd. in Saunders 10). And this is what Hartman defines as the "strategic use of silence" (10), that is to use critically silence in the narrative, and all the other modes of writing and telling a story. Machado, who has recognized that her story is full of ruptures and silences, relied on her memory, this "disciplinary mechanism … that selects for what is important" (Halberstam 2011, 15), and her lived and learned experience to create a narrative while trying to imagine another form of existence for herself.

Writing this memoir was Machado's vehicle for giving "name to the nameless," as Audre Lorde has argued about poetry (1984, 37). Despite finding no language to dress her story with (*Dream House* 143), she has managed to "transpose" her feelings into a language so they can be shared (37). However, as she maintains, what is written and what is not is a political act determined by both the writing/narrating subject and the context in which they are situated, or to use Machado's own words: "[w]hat is placed in or left out of the archive is a political act, dictated by the archivist and the political context in which she lives" (13). For, based on the etymology of the word, which comes from the Greek word ἀρχεῖον (archēon),

archive means "the house of the ruler" (13). Machado, who cites Jacques Derrida for the definition of the word, clarifies that she found very interesting the use of *house* because she loves haunted house stories and architecture metaphors, stressing also that she was particularly attracted to "the power, the authority" (13) within the house. *Archive* is also a derivative word of *αρχή* (archē), which means "commencement" but also "law court, commandment, government," and itself derives from the verb *ἄρχω* (archo) which means "to govern." Derrida himself summarizes the two meanings of the word when he explains: "In a way, the term indeed refers … to the arkhē in the physical, historical, or ontological sense, which is to say the original, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement. But even more, and even earlier, 'archive' refers to the arkhē in the nomological sense, to the arkhē of the commandment" (1995, 2). It is in terms of these meanings that Machado, just like Derrida, signifies the word *archive*. Derrida further emphasizes that "[t]he concept of the archive shelters within itself the memory of this double meaning of *arkhē*. But it also shelters itself from this memory, which means, it forgets it" (2). Similarly, Machado's memoir helps the construction of an archive and at the same time it decides which pieces of evidence to leave behind, while sheltering within itself the memory of both the commencement and commandment.

Sometimes an event, a story is not recorded, it is not preserved because it is not considered important enough, making this as a clear case of "a deliberate act of destruction" (Machado, *Dream House* 13). This is what happens, according to Machado, to societies which do not document queer experiences. There are "[g]aps where people never see themselves or find information about themselves. Holes that make it impossible to give oneself a context. Crevices people fall into. Impenetrable silence" (13). How could then Machado tell her story, the story of an abused queer woman, an impossible story which resists being said? In the words of Hartman, quoted by Machado (14), she can write a story "with and against the archive," imagining "what cannot be verified" (12). This is why Machado ends up believing that the memoir is mainly "an act of resurrection" (14). And just like all memoirists, she too "can recreate the past, reconstruct dialogue" (14). She will put herself and readers into "necessary context" and she will "summon meaning from events that have long been dormant" (14). Hence, although Machado recognizes that her story is not original, she acknowledges that it is never spoken about and within queer communities it "is even newer, and even more shadowed" (14). This is why Machado decided to "enter into the archive" believing that domestic abuse between two female identifying partners is "both possible and not uncommon" (14), and it looks like the story she narrates. She does "speak into the silence" knowing that she "toss[es] the stone of [her] story into a vast crevice; measur[ing] the emptiness by its small sound" (14). She is determined to do it because she wishes to deconstruct the common narrative that abusive relationships are limited to heterosexual cisgender ones due to aggression being considered a masculine trait only. Machado makes it clear that abusers "just need to want something, and not care how they get it" (103).

At the same time, Machado opposes the "lesbian utopia" upon which lesbian feminism was founded, according to Rebecca Barnes, and which "overlooks the potential for woman-to-woman relationships—sexual or otherwise—to be potentially unequal, exploitative, or even violent" (2010, 234). Therefore, women who experience violence from another woman in a relationship, just as it happened with Machado and her ex-partner, feel disoriented, and lost as they have not been liberated from oppression and they have not been treated as equals in their intimate, woman-to-woman relationship. What is elucidated by Machado's memoir is also the lack of an explanatory framework in which women could locate the abuse by other women, and "approach naming, defining and studying it" (36) as Liz Kelly pointed out back in 1996. It is imperative, as both Kelly and Machado argue, that lesbians understand the use of violence coming from their female partners while considering the context in which their relationships exist. A context that is not a utopian one, but rather "one of marginalization at best, and secrecy, deceit and fear at worst" (Kelly 38). Machado is in favour of expanding representation, of giving "space to queers to be—as characters, as real people—human beings. They don't have to be metaphors for wickedness and depravity or icons of conformity and docility. They can be *what they are*" (55; original italics). With this in mind, it is interesting to examine whether and how Machado's modes of representation and shared experience(s) are negotiated, reactivated and reproduced through translation and whether they can be further explored by target readers.

A Gothic Memoir Reconstructed in Greek

In "*Dream House as* American Gothic" Machado informs readers on the two core characteristics of a gothic romance, that is, "woman plus habitation" and "marrying a stranger" (85). Even though the house "is not essential for domestic abuse," as Machado emphasizes, it "helps: a private space where private dramas are enacted behind, as the cliché goes, closed doors; but also windows sealed against the sound, drawn curtains, silent phones. A house is never apolitical. It is conceived, constructed, occupied, and policed by people with power, needs, and fears" (85). She thus points once again to the dream house and its inhabitants—Machado, that is the one with needs and fears, and her ex-partner, the one with power—asserting that this house was part of their gothic romance despite the fact that the gothic is "by nature heteronormative" (85). This was actually not the only element that was not congruent with the gothic since Machado and her ex-partner were not married and the latter "was not a dark and brooding man" (85). As for the house, it was "just a single-family home" and not "a crumbling ancestral manor" (85). Nonetheless, it was "woman plus habitation" and her ex-partner was "a stranger" because Machado "didn't know her … because something essential was shielded" (86), as underlined by Machado, who grasps the opportunity to cite another folk motif, that of "falling in love with person never seen" (86).

Machado's gothic memoir was translated into Greek by Maria Angelidou and Angelos Angelidis coming out in 2022 by Antipodes Publications. Focusing

on the Greek translation as a case study, this section examines whether and how Machado's embodied experience of space and place transforms when transferred in a new context through a different language and whether and how her queer experiences are represented in translation. In the target text readers encounter the same series of vignettes created by Machado with each chapter being headlined by the phrase "Το Σπίτι των Ονείρων ως…" which renders the equivalent construction "*Dream House as…*". Machado capitalizes the initial letters of the words and italicizes them. In this manner, it is made clear straight from the beginning that this location is very important and that this is where the events narrated take place. In the Greek text, all words of the chapter titles are capitalized as well (i.e. **Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Πρόλογος** [*Dream House as* Prologue]), but only *Dream House* is italicized (*Σπίτι των Ονείρων*) while the rest of the words are rendered in bold typeface, as shown in the example above. According to Theo van Leeuwen, "[b]old can be made to mean 'daring,' 'assertive,' or 'solid' and 'substantial'" (148). What surrounds thus the Dream House is salient, solid, while the italicized font of the house suggests "dynamism and energy" (Febrianti 2020, 125) and therefore changeability. The two translators have tried to recreate the effect achieved in the source text by Machado's use of the Dream House as a narrative device that guides readers throughout the story and through the incidents described.

Expressions in the second-person singular through which Machado addresses her past self (the "you") enable source text readers to directly engage in the story and travel this journey together with the writer. Target text readers also encounter second-person singular forms which create a sense of intimacy and foster the connection between them and Machado. For instance, in "*Dream House as* Spy Thriller" Machado starts this single-paragraph chapter with the sentence "No one knows your secret" (100) followed by a second, 10-line long sentence, filled with examples in a parenthesis, which begins with "Everything you do…" (100). These sentences are rendered almost word for word in Greek: "Κανείς δεν ξέρει το μυστικό σου. Ό,τι κάνεις…" (145), speaking directly to each and every one of the target readers and facilitating their immersion in the story which they experience for real. What is more, all gerunds are rendered with second-person singular verb forms [*running* is translated into *χαϊδεύεις*; *zipping up* into *ανεβάζεις*; etc.] helping readers relate to the narrating subject, while reinforcing Machado's claim and message that her experience can be similar to the one lived by readers and that lesbians' experience(s) do not differ from that/those of heterosexual people. Interestingly enough, due to the fact that the target text is longer—Greek words have more syllables compared to English—and readers might lose the thread, the translators have repeated the phrase "ό,τι κάνεις" (everything you do) right after the end of the parenthesis (145), ensuring this way that readers' attention is maintained and that they keep listening to the narrator:

Dream House as Spy Thriller	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων ως* **Θρίλερ Κατασκοπιών**
No one knows your secret. Everything you do (**running** your thumb along your jawline to search for blonde and spiny hairs, **zipping up** a sinewy boot …) is heightened with what you know and they—all of those ordinary citizens—do not know. (100)	**Κανείς δεν ξέρει το μυστικό σου. Ό,τι κάνεις** (**χαϊδεύεις**, ας πούμε, με τον αντίχειρα το σαγόνι σου ψάχνοντας ξανθές και σκληρές τρίχες, **ανεβάζεις** το φερμουάρ μιας μπότας, …), **ό,τι κάνεις** είναι πιο έντονο λόγω αυτού που εσύ ξέρεις κι αυτοί –όλοι αυτοί οι απλοί, συνηθισμένοι πολίτες– αγνοούν. (145)

This is just one example of the use of second-person singular forms in both the source and target texts, for Machado mostly uses the second person point of view to refer to herself as the abused partner in the *Dream House*. Rarely does she use the third person perspective to speak about herself as happens, for example, in "*Dream House as* Word Problem" (125). The consciously made decision of employing the second personal point of view allows Machado to make readers participate in her traumatic experience and the abuse she "endured," something they are called to "digest and process" themselves (Iglesias, "In the Dream House"). Machado's shifting from "you" to "I" may upset readers but this is something that Machado wishes to happen. She wants them to feel the uncertainty, insecurity and disorientation she herself felt. To find themselves in a deadlock, to be lost. They have entered this elusive space constructed by Machado who even makes them believe they have the option to escape. As seen, in "*Dream House as* Choose your own Adventure™" readers are presumably given the opportunity to decide on their fate being the protagonists of this story only to find out that such an option is not real. Something that target text readers also experience thanks to the translators' decision to reproduce the ergodic features of the text ("Το Σπίτι" 246-261) and facilitate a creative relationship between writer and reader. Much like Machado, readers also discover that they can be hurt by people who are just like them. And this is one of the cases when Machado turns to "I" and shares her hope with readers that one day she will be able to tell them that their pain is common (241).

What also unsettles readers is the fluidity of space since Machado's story does not unravel just in the *Dream House*, but in other locations as well, as revealed by several chapter titles. And this is something readers in the target text get as well, as all titles have been translated word for word:

In the Dream House	Στο Σπίτι των Ονείρων
Dream House as Road Trip to Everywhere;	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Εκδρομή με το Αμάξι Παντού;**
Dream House as House in Florida;	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Σπίτι στη Φλόριντα;**
Dream House as House in Iowa;	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Σπίτι στην Αϊόβα;**
Dream House as the River Lethe;	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Ποταμός της Λήθης;**
Dream House as Cottage in Washington;	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Εξοχικό στην Ουάσιγκτον;**
Dream House as 9 Thornton Square;	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Πλατεία Θόρντον αρ. 9;**
Dream House as Apartment in Philadelphia…	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων ως* **Διαμέρισμα στη Φιλαδέλφεια…**

Following Marie-Laure Ryan (2014) and her description of "spatial frames" as one of the categories of narrative space, Machado has employed various locations, "shifting scenes of action" which "may flow into each other" and whose

"boundaries may be either clear-cut … or fuzzy" (Ryan 797-798), helping readers focus on space, that is the various connections between locations in which important events occurred. The *Dream House* thus is not a certain, physical place—it can be anywhere adding this way to Machado's main argument that any relationship can turn out to be violent and any place can become a space of suffering and trauma. The fact that readers encounter other characters in these locations besides Machado and/or her ex-partner intensifies the feelings of disorientation and confusion bringing them closer to Machado's situation. However, it is not only the *Dream House* that takes many forms, Machado changes as well. She constantly moves from one feeling to another, from one realization to another, and she constantly translates herself while trying to understand her trapped self. And many times she loses herself in translation even while engaging in conversation with her ex-partner. In "*Dream House as* Lost in Translation," for instance, Machado writes:

> You talk to her. You are clear. You think you are clear. You say what you are thinking and you say it after thinking a lot, and yet when she repeats what you've said back to you nothing makes sense. Did you say that? Really? You can't remember saying that or even thinking it, and yet she is letting you know that it was said, and you definitely meant it that way. (95)

The translation of the text in Greek reads the way the source text does—the two translators stay close to Machado and her writing style, reproducing short, clear sentences, using active voice and everyday words as well, and employing direct questions, thus recreating the atmosphere and enabling the emotions emerged in the source text to be evoked in the target text:

> Της μιλάς. Είσαι ξεκάθαρη μαζί της. Νομίζεις ότι είσαι ξεκάθαρη. Λες αυτό που σκέφτεσαι και το λες αφού πρώτα το έχεις σκεφτεί καλά. Κι όμως, όταν σου επαναλαμβάνει τι της είπες, δεν βγάζει κανένα νόημα. Όντως το είπες αυτό; Στ' αλήθεια; Δεν θυμάσαι να το λες, δεν θυμάσαι καν να το σκέφτεσαι, κι όμως, σε βεβαιώνει ότι αυτό είπες κι ότι σίγουρα μ' αυτόν τον τρόπο το εννοούσες. (137)

Machado's emotional reality characterized by instability, anxiety, insecurity is reflected in this passage in both texts mirroring the vulnerable emotional state of the abused in a detrimental relationship. What is intriguing is the translation of the chapter's title and specifically of the rendering of the term *lost* (*Dream House as* Lost in Translation). The way it is used by Machado may be ambiguous as it is not clear whether *lost* refers only to Machado or to both Machado and her ex-partner. In Greek, however, the translators needed to make a choice that is by default a gendered one as all adjectives (and participles) are gender marked, and they must also choose the number of the term. They have therefore decided to translate *lost* in the feminine plural participle χαμένες [$\text{lost}_{\text{NOM.FEM.PLUR.}}$] implying that both women in this relationship were lost and could not communicate with one another. This participle may also be read as referring to all lesbian women

who are trapped in a toxic intimate relationship and to whom Machado addresses her story; or it may also be interpreted as referring to all women regardless of their sexual identity who have been kept in silence unable to access truth, understand what is happening to them and communicate their experience.

As Machado stressed in several interviews such as the one given to Rebecca Rukeyser (2024), "writing this book was difficult and upsetting and stressful" ("Carmen Maria Machado"). Machado lives again what hurt her by narrating past events, she experiences trauma "in the narrative present of storytelling," as Smith and Watson argue in terms of trauma and its "reexperience" by the narrating voice (283). Source text readers get to experience trauma through the narrative as well, and they may also relive events of their own. Target text readers are also enabled to be close to Machado and relate to her and to her fragmented story—alternating between the "you" and the "I" and preserving the cadence of the source text, the two translators convey the powerful emotions that stem from Machado's storytelling due also to her mistaken belief that her past, traumatized self is dead. But no. Her disembodied spirit is resurrected in the haunted house of her memory. "I thought you died," Machado hollowly says, "but writing this, I'm not sure you did" (22) verifying that trauma is relived while narrating. As for Greek-speaking readers, they encounter an equally powerful disturbing moment of confessing revelation: "Πίστευα ότι είχες πεθάνει, αλλά τώρα, καθώς τα γράφω αυτά, δεν είμαι και τόσο σίγουρη" (32) [I thought you had died, but now, while writing this, I am not that sure], which along with the use of the feminine marking of the adjective *sure* [σίγουρη] can make all female identifying readers relate to Machado in alignment with the latter's intention.

But this space, which wields power over the abused woman, is both material and abstract, enclosed and open, haunted and free with its forms changing throughout the memoir. How has this mutating space been translated? In "*Dream House as* Sanctuary," for example, Machado narrates the night her ex-partner "chased" her and she "locked" herself in the bathroom. An enclosed, shut "little" space, the bathroom, was now a shelter protecting her from the rage of her abuser:

Dream House as Sanctuary	**Το** *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* **ως Ιερό Άσυλο**
The night she chased me in the Dream House and I locked myself in the bathroom, I remember sitting with my back against the wall, pleading with the universe that she wouldn't have the tools or know-how to take the doorknob out of the door. Her technical incompetence was **my luck**, and **my luck** was that I could sit there, watching the door test its hinges on every blow. I could sit there on the floor and cry and say anything I liked, because in that moment **it** was my own little space, even though after that it would never be mine again. For the rest of my time in the Dream House, my body would charge with alarm every time I stepped into that bathroom; but in that moment, I was the closest thing I could be to safe. (150)	Τη νύχτα που με κυνήγησε στο Σπίτι των Ονείρων και κλειδώθηκα στο μπάνιο, θυμάμαι να κάθομαι με την πλάτη στον τοίχο, παρακαλώντας το σύμπαν να μην έχει εκείνη εργαλεία, να μην ξέρει πώς να βγάλει το πόμολο απ' την πόρτα. Ήμουν **τυχερή**: δεν έπιαναν τα χέρια της στα μαστορέματα. **Τυχερή**: καθισμένη εκεί μπορούσα να κοιτάζω τους μεντεσέδες να τραντάζονται σε κάθε χτύπημα που δεχόταν η πόρτα· μπορούσα να κλαίω και να λέω ό,τι ήθελα, γιατί εκείνη τη στιγμή **το μπάνιο** ήταν ο δικός μου μικρός χώρος, παρόλο που μετά δεν θα ήταν ποτέ ξανά δικός μου. Όσο καιρό έμεινα ακόμα στο Σπίτι των Ονείρων, το σώμα μου χτυπούσε συναγερμό όποτε πατούσα το πόδι μου στο μπάνιο· αλλά εκείνη τη στιγμή, το μπάνιο ήταν ό,τι πιο κοντινό σε **άσυλο** μπορούσα να έχω. (217)

There are at least three translation choices that are worth exploring in this excerpt. First, the two translators have decided to render the noun *luck* with the equivalent female adjective *τυχερή*) [lucky$_{\text{NOM.FEM.SING.}}$] in the target text. This way the oxymoron produced by Machado in terms of the links she draws between her confinement in the bathroom and her feeling of relief is reinforced. Their decision to place the adjective at the beginning of the two sentences further adds to readers experiencing this eerie feeling—how could one be lucky while stuck in a small room, the bathroom, chased after by their abuser? Also, they have used a full stop instead of a comma which makes the adjective *τυχερή* even more prominent as it is the first word that marks the beginning of the sentence and sets the tone for the rest of the paragraph. Their choice also to repeat the term *το μπάνιο* while translating the pronoun *it* ("it was my own little space" is rendered as "το μπάνιο ήταν ο δικός μου μικρός χώρος" [the bathroom was my own little space]) adds to the symbolism of space and to its various functions from time to time, since a closed, isolated space can provide comfort and protection. What is more, the translators' choice to translate the adjective *safe* into the noun *άσυλο* [shelter] seems to be deliberate since it is a typical word used in Greek when abused women ask for shelter. In a way, they facilitate readers' identification with Machado who is in need of protection. Because, as stressed, Machado wishes to expose the violence exerted on queer people with the conscious concealment of their abuse stories, with the archival silencing that leaves their stories hidden and unsung, pointing once again to the lack of documentation regarding queer abuse of any kind. She was "interested in fragmentation as an experimental mode" (in Rukeyser, "Carmen Maria Machado") and relying on the fragments of her memory she compiled the story narrated in the silence that clothed the violence suffered in a most intimate relationship. Importantly enough, she created the space, metaphorically and literally, for her story to be heard and for domestic violence within lesbian relationships to be represented.

And then, just before concluding this chapter, Machado recalls Debra Reid and her wish "to get an apartment and turn [her] own little doorknob and use [her] own bathroom and eat [her] own food" (150) after being released on parole. Reid had been sentenced for killing her lesbian partner and batterer in self-defence. While in jail, she filed a petition arguing that her trial was not fair, having the support of her legal team and the Network for Battered Lesbians (Russo 2001, 43). However, Reid's fight was not easy as she had to convince everyone, even other incarcerated women that her abuse from her lover was equally serious to theirs, even though the abuser was a woman (43). Russo further stresses the fact that the resistance to Reid's story "had to do with a refusal to recognize the specific victimization of lesbian battery and to recognize how homophobia and racism contributed to that victimization" (43), reminding us of Machado's main claim that her story was difficult to accept because it made even the lesbian community come to terms with the fact that violence involves women both as victims and as perpetrators contradicting therefore the focal narrative of men being abusers and marginalizing lesbians further by not addressing them and/or their problems

and needs. In the target text there are some interesting choices to examine which seem to strengthen the effect of Machado's argument and emotional state. When reading this concluding part of the chapter in Greek, readers encounter an interesting change:

Dream House as Sanctuary	**Το *Σπίτι των Ονείρων* ως Ιερό Άσυλο**
I just want to get an apartment and turn my own little doorknob and use my own bathroom and eat my own food. (150)	Το μόνο που θέλω είναι να βρω ένα διαμέρισμα, **να 'χω τη δική μου πόρτα, το δικό μου πόμολο**, να χρησιμοποιώ το δικό μου μπάνιο και να τρώω το δικό μου φαγητό. (217)

As seen in the example cited above, the two translators have added the phrase "να έχω τη δική μου πόρτα" [to have my own door] just before rendering the phrase "turn my own little doorknob" as "[να έχω] το δικό μου πόμολο" {[to have] my own doorknob}. Although they have not translated the adjective *little* that modifies *doorknob,* they have chosen to imply the repetition of the phrase "to have my own". The use of these phrases not only leads readers to interpret this sentence as the protagonist's claim for a space of their own but also intensifies the feeling of lack of privacy and security. Additionally, it reinforces the interplay created by Machado by having a space where the protagonist ends up being locked and imprisoned presented as an escape room which helps them overcome the fright and shock of the moment. If the *Dream House* was initially a symbol of an ideal relationship, Machado realized that this place, whether confined or not, became the space that made her move, that "dislocate[d]" her; a term that Machado herself has used to refer to the times she felt vulnerable, bereft of safety, comfort, and power. Similarly, readers both in the source text and in the target text have to move, they also feel "dislocated" from everything they know and unsure about what is going to happen next. After all, one's understanding of a particular place and space, Tally Jr notes, "is determined by [their] personal experiences with it, but also by [their] reading about others' experiences" (x). In a similar fashion, the way others' experiences are translated also affects readers' understanding of place and space. From a geocritical perspective, the *Dream House* is in a state of *transgressivity*, that is, it is in "a state in which no representation of space is stable, but dynamic, where forces continuously reshape space" (Westphal 46), encompassing mobility. Both the real and fictional space in Machado's world is characterized by "plurality, discrete multiplicity" (Massey 23); it can be imagined as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far," for space is "always under construction" given its various elements are in continual negotiation shaping its identity (9). It is in constant movement and change which in itself is affected by Machado's change. Nothing is fixed and certain.

Machado plays with readers and their expectations throughout the memoir. In "*Dream House as* Not a Metaphor" she begins by asserting that this house is "a real place. It stands upright. … It has a foundation … it has floors and walls and windows and a roof" (17), only to inform readers at the end of the second paragraph that "your [readers'] actions are mightier than any architect's

intentions" implying that they can change it or that the house can change itself. In the target text, translators have decided to render *you* with the second plural form *εσείς* (esís) as this is indicated by the second-plural verb forms used throughout this chapter which do not require an overt subject and with which anyone can identify, such as in the phrase *όπως ξέρετε* [as you know] and in "οι πράξεις σας είναι πιο ισχυρές από τις προθέσεις οποιουδήποτε αρχιτέκτονα" [your actions are mightier that any architect's intentions] from the example cited above. The choice of the second person plural "you" engages all readers making it clear that Machado addresses them directly while giving them a role of authority and power and making them complicit in her schemes. She herself was not sure of how to proceed with her storytelling; instead, she revealed how painstaking this process was (147). She also talked about her inability to tell her story in an uncomplicated manner in several interviews: "when I tried to tell this story in a straightforward way, I couldn't and no one would listen to me, so I'm just going to throw every metaphor at the wall and just walk you through the ways in which I can insufficiently conceive of what happened [in the Dream House]? Where do I belong? What context should I be entered into? What is the real fact or truth of my experience?" (Nimon "Between the Covers" 00:22:17-00:22:45). Machado's memoir and the paratextual elements such as the interviews she has given so far seem to confirm Leigh Gilmore when she notes that:

> No trauma narrative is easy to tell. … [T]he subject of trauma refers to both a person struggling to make sense of an overwhelming experience in a particular context and the unspeakability of trauma itself, its resistance to representation. Trauma emerges in narrative as much through what cannot be said of it as through what can. ("Limits" 46)

The inadequacy of language as a means to help Machado "articulate" trauma has also been highlighted by the writer in her text, as well as in the interviews and lectures she has given. However, she has used language to voice her story and previously silenced memories or, to use the words of Gilmore, she has told her story through "imaginative transformations available within language" ("Trauma and Life Writing" 885). Engaging with writing and telling the story, understanding and coming to terms with her trauma acts as a form of therapy and just like the personified house which "inhales, exhales, inhales again" (Machado, *Dream House* 83), she too takes her breaths, being determined to prove that her story is real while constructing a new life.

Conclusion

Machado's decision to write her story is in itself a political act. She moves through space and time, and this is what she invites readers to do as well. Her memoir seems to prove Paula Geyh's claim that "subjectivity and space are mutually constructing" (104). The intertwining of subjective and spatial construction is apparent in Machado's memoir which reveals her examination of

the ways in which the lesbian feminine subjectivity "both constitutes itself and is constituted either through or in opposition to the space of the house" (104). In the text, the house, a *Dream House*, contradicts its symbolic dimensions as a safe nest. Machado manages to create the context she was missing to tell her story by using subversively various literary tropes and by experimenting with form and genres as much as she experiments with the concepts of space and place.

Her memoir offers itself for reflection on gendered approaches to spatiality for, as Rita Felski notes, home is "a highly gendered space" (2000, 86) and modern feminism has often attempted to "demystify the ideal of home as haven" (86). As seen, much like modernity and its vocabulary, Machado too celebrates "mobility, movement, exile, boundary crossing" (Felski 86). In this vein, Machado employs the trope of the haunted house to portray a tormented and oppressive domestic environment; yet her focus is not on women who are "[e]nclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society" (Gilbert and Gubar xvii), just like the female Gothic often does, but rather on women being trapped in the architecture of a space defined and dominated by other women. She transcends the domestic fiction written by women identifying writers. As Amy Wells emphasizes, "we must pay close attention to how women writers employ space, place, and spatially informed narrative strategies in their works" (352) to unveil hidden relations of power. The vulnerability of lesbian bodies, marginalized ones, is recognized by Machado and explored throughout her text in relation to both space and place. To this end, she tried to find domestic abuse accounts in same-sex couples, and she then assembled her own narrative being relieved at the opportunity to understand her experience and then voice it (*Dream House* 147).

She has therefore crossed boundaries between space(s) and narrative levels, and she has employed various devices. To use Sara Ahmed's words, Machado too has examined "how queer fiction might offer [a] different explanation of queer unhappiness rather than simply investing its hope in alternative images of happy queers" (89). She has investigated queer intimate partner abuse and portrayed it as realistically as possible, urging readers to do the same, unearthing and casting light on more traumatic stories of abuse within the house. As Westphal maintains: "Any work, no matter how far from sensed reality, as paradoxical as it seems, is part of the real—and, perhaps, participates in forming the real" (85). Source text readers follow her in this nightmarish personal narration of her experience and so do Greek-speaking readers thanks to translation and to the choices made by the two translators who have let Machado's voice be heard and have enabled the experiences of queer bodies, lesbian women in particular, retain their multiplicity while recounting Machado's haunting story. They reproduce the language she has invented and the architectural form she has constructed to give shape to her narrative through which she allows for a critique of queer complicity in concealing truths of queer love, especially love that goes wrong in one's most intimate space, that is the house. Machado's story and her struggle for existence within the silence of the archive had to be heard and was heard via translation as well.

Note

1. Machado's text could be defined as ergodic following the definition given by Espen Aarseth, according to which "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (1).

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