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Author(s)	Spelman, Sinéad
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## **Carmen Maria Machado's Memoir '*In The Dream House*': Exploring Same-Sex Female Intimate Partner Abuse Through Literary Tropes**

**Spelman, Sinéad**

*MA Graduate, Gender, Globalisation and Rights*

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

**Abstract** This research will examine the theme of female intimate partner abuse in the memoir, '*In The Dream House*' by Carmen Maria Machado. The present research aims to generate further understandings of what queer abuse for women can possibly look like, while arguing the importance of personal narratives and accounts for feminist and queer research. Paying particular attention to the literary tropes that Machado includes to help access understandings of her own abusive experience, this research attempts to construct knowledge through this unique space of storytelling that Machado has created. Thus, the research explores how the subversive nature of Machado's unique style of memoir may parallel the subversive nature of feminist and queer theory. Employing a queer reading to texts featuring characters that identify within LGBTQIA+, in this case L (lesbian), makes clearer the lived experiences of certain people and brings overshadowed lives and experiences into the forefront of literary importance.

**Key Words:** Female Intimate Partner Abuse, *In The Dream House*, Carmen Maria Machado, Queer Research, LGBTQIA+ Literature

## Introduction

*In The Dream House* is the award-winning memoir written by Carmen Maria Machado and first published in 2019 in the U.S. *In The Dream House* chronicles Machado's frightening and abusive relationship at the hands of another woman. Most of the story takes place in a beautiful small house in Bloomington, Indiana, where Machado and her nameless girlfriend, referred to as 'the woman from the Dream House', lived together for a period during the authors early twenties. The peaceful atmosphere is soon shattered as Machado's then girlfriend is 'prone to violent outbursts and often engages in emotional, verbal, and psychological, and sometimes physical, abuse' (Iglesias, 2019, para.3). Until recently, there has been a hesitation to explore women's violence, including violence in queer relationships among women (Irwin, 2008). For decades, the issue of intimate partner abuse in heterosexual relationships has been 'at the forefront of feminist activism and scholarship in the western world' (Irwin, 2008, p.199). It was the stories from women who, from the 1970s, courageously spoke out about the secrets of violence and abuse in their lives that 'exposed the extent and seriousness of male violence against women' (Irwin, 2008, p.200). Nevertheless, it took several decades for the extent of this violence to be recognized, and even now, the significance of male violence against women remains open to ongoing contestation from particular groups in the community (Irwin, 2008). Similarly, it has been a struggle for female abuse in queer relationships to be recognized despite its exposure in the early 1980s (Lobel, 1986). Previous research has revealed the existence of IPA among lesbians (Rollé et al, 2018) and it has also been suggested that queer individuals report domestic violence at rates equal to or higher than heterosexual women. According to a recent survey (Swart, 2021), it was reported that 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women experience abuse from an intimate partner in their lifetime, compared to 35% of heterosexual women (Swart, 2021). Despite this, however, queer intimate partner abuse does not appear to be addressed nearly as much as heterosexual domestic abuse and it is important to recognize that sexual minorities face several barriers to reporting and understanding their own abuse, such as homophobic discrimination and legal biases (Swart, 2021). *In The Dream House* demands that queer female intimate partner abuse be acknowledged in contemporary discourse and shows us what abuse between women can look like.

*In The Dream House* is the second popular contemporary text exploring abuse between queer women in recent years. The 2020 Booker Prize winning novel, '*Girl, Woman, Other*' by Bernadine Evaristo (2019), writes about a coercively controlling female perpetrator in some parts of her book. Additionally, Leah Horlick's poetry collection '*For Your Own Good*' (2015) tells a somewhat similar story; but up until now, stories of this kind are rarely uttered, let alone published. The stories of women who experience abuse at the hands of other women are, at the same time, strikingly similar and notably different and so, *In The Dream House* grapples with finding nuanced and interesting ways to explain intimate partner abuse between women. Machado wanted to disabuse readers of notions about lesbian love and, according to the author, queer love can be just as fraught as heterosexual love. *In The Dream House*, thus, combats popular myths surrounding queer love for women. Writing *In The Dream House* put Carmen Maria Machado's experience on record and added it the archive that will hopefully make it possible for similar stories to emerge. This research was guided and inspired by post-structuralist feminist and queer theory, largely due to its expansive applicability to a number

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of subjects beyond just LGBTQIA+ identities, and because it also applies well to narratology/personal narratives (Jackson, 2020). One of the hopes for the future of feminist and queer narrative theory is the reconstitution of an understanding of gender in narrative voice, and to encourage the kind of subversion of normalized, heteronormative presentations of sexuality. ‘Understanding narratives through the intersectional lens of both gender and sexuality brings interpretation closer to a holistic knowledge on the intricacies of oppression and privilege’ (Jackson, 2020, p.15).

### Personal Narratives, Feminist Research & Queer Life Writing

The study of memoir, and writings on the self, has long been considered a basic tenet of feminist research (Purvis, 1992). Feminists have been exploring women’s histories through personal texts for decades, as the lived experiences of women have often been excluded from dominant literature (Purvis, 1992). As a result, we are now writing a more sophisticated and dynamic history of women than was possible in previous decades. It is also a history that is much richer, and more rounded, a story that attempts to capture the complexity of women’s lives, in all their diversity (Purvis, 1992). Over the past two decades, consumer demand for life writings and auto/biography has grown enormously and this shift has often been referred to as the memoir boom (Smith & Watson, 2010). There has been a continued interest in more inclusive and intersectional narratives, and thus a greater emphasis on intersectionality has encouraged exploration into the relationship between gender and sexuality alongside acknowledging marginalized groups in literature. Memoirs and autobiographical texts offer a viable way to provide this (Ingraham, 2017).

Similar to how women’s autobiographies gave voices to women in a patriarchal society, queer life writing and “coming out” stories help to make visible formerly invisible subjects, within the dominant, heteronormative society. Narratives of sexuality and sexual violence demonstrate the liberatory possibilities for individuals to be validated in their sexual identities and experiences, and thus new stories have become possible (Smith & Watson, 2010). LGBTQIA+ life writing is often edgy and countercultural, and in several ways deepens and complicates what it means to be queer. ‘Life writing has proven to be an especially compelling form of testimonial empowerment for those who are marginalized’ (Gilmore, 2019, p.162). From accounts of queer culture during the AIDS epidemic like David Wojnarowicz’s *Close to the Knives* to Cherríe Moraga’s lesbian feminist Chicana coming-of-age *Loving in the War Years* (Gilmore, 2019). Many works by queer authors such as Audre Lorde, Leslie Fienberg, Dorothy Allison, Kate Bornstein, and Terry Galloway move fluidly between autobiography and fiction as well as memoir and theory, thereby blurring boundaries and forms. Besides, the work of prominent queer theorists like E. Patrick Johnson, José Muñoz, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has a strong autobiographical turn. For queer writers, both life writing and queer theory have traditionally ‘been places for individual and collective exploration, ways of understanding the self through the larger fabric of culture and history and relationality’ (Royster, 2011, p.6). These works offer us new forms of knowledge and new ways of seeing the world as ‘queer life narratives explore the boundaries of truth and feeling, myth and lived experience and they see history from the cracks within the surface’ (Royster, 2011, p.6). In

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Audre Lorde's '*Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*', the author uses memoir, history, and myth as lenses to narrate her life. She combines personal and collective experience and explores life writing that pushes the boundaries of easy recognition and transparency (Royster, 2011). The result is a narration of life that embraces odd, uncanny, and not so easily assimilated moments of experience (Royster, 2011). Like *Zami*, the narratives in Carmen Mari Machado's memoir attempt to bring to light invisible, and often taboo, areas of experience through stylistic experimentation.

Since the inception of the #MeToo movement in 2017, a new form of life writing has emerged. The movement has highlighted the vitality of survivors' testimonies, instead of shaming and silencing them (Gilmore, 2019). '#MeToo provides a vivid example of the autobiographical first-person interrupting dynamics of erasure and silencing' (Gilmore 2019, p.162) and represents the emergence of speech in the place where 'patriarchy has clapped its hand over the mouth of marginalized subjects to keep them from speaking or screaming' (Gilmore, 2019, p.63). #MeToo tapped into the history of life writing from the margins, especially by those most vulnerable to sexual violence—women of colour, indigenous women, queer and trans youth. 'It's not that these stories have not been told before now; it's that those who have told them have not been credited by male elites (white, cis-het, not disabled, privileged) as valuable, credible, and worthy of attention' (Gilmore, 2019, p.163) Although not focused on sexual violence specifically, *In The Dream House* demonstrates how survivors of abuse offer complex narratives and how memoirs of violation continue to tell compelling stories.

*In The Dream House* is comparable to other recent autobiographical writings, like Maggie Nelson's '*The Argonauts*' (2016) and '*The Cost of Living*' (2018) by Deborah Levy, where the 'authors transform the tale of their own ordeals into a manifesto addressed to all those suffering from restrictive gender norms' (Schoonheim, 2020, p.77). Additionally, women of colour continue to utilize the memoir space to share their stories, like Elizabeth Miki Brina, Jesmyn Ward and Catherine Cho. Finally, queer authors like Gretchen Felker- Martin and La Marr Jurelle Bruce demonstrate the continued importance of (auto)biographical women's writings and feminist conceptions of 'subject-formation' (Schoonheim, 2020, p.77) while promoting individual queer experience in a society that has, historically, only awarded a white, male, heteronormative narrative to be published (Schoonheim, 2020). For decades, feminists have understood the power of the individual woman's story and this research aims to demonstrate the intellectual weight of *In The Dream House* for feminist research. Historically, the onus of women's literature was, and still is, to create a space for individuals marginalized by history and to explore their lives through literature.

*In The Dream House* toys with genre in interesting ways and Machado's work often takes the form of fable and dark fairy tale while also employing several gothic tropes throughout. Contemporary Gothic horror remains an instrumental space for women writers, including Machado, to reclaim history—a space to examine such matters as marriage and subjugation, the female body and autonomy (Hurley, 1996). It continues to be a place where marginalized voices have space to write their cultural anxieties, to expose fear and trauma, to give voice to the things that remain unspoken. Contemporary queer writers like Leon Craig are continuing

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to use folklore and gothic horror in “refreshingly inventive” ways to explore queer identity, love, power and trauma (*Parallel Hells*, 2022).

### Queer Women and Intimate Partner Abuse

In 2005, Joan McClennan argued that although similarities exist among heterosexual women’s experiences of intimate partner abuse, Lesbian abuse ‘differs in its theoretical underpinnings and is fraught with myths’ (Ristock, 2002, p.14). Within the same sex IPA literature, terms such as “egalitarian myth (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984), the “lesbian nation” (Renzetti, 1992), and more commonly a “lesbian utopia” (Girshick, 2002) are used to describe discourses surrounding lesbian relationships as being egalitarian and non-violent (Cahill, 2019). The origins of this discourse can be found in the writings of second-wave radical and cultural feminists in the 1970s (Irwin, 2013). During the 1970s, cultural and radical feminists contributed to discourses that reinforced the view that only men are violent, and that women are essentially peaceful and non-violent (Cahill, 2019). This approach was adopted to validate lesbian relationships and challenge dominant constructions of lesbians as perverted, sick, and deviant (Cahill, 2019). Lesbian relationships have consistently been glorified as being egalitarian, non-competitive, and free from the power struggles that exist in heterosexual relationships.

As a result of such discourse, the opportunity to discuss violence in lesbian relationships appeared limited, resulting in a denial of its existence. According to research by Rebecca Barnes from the University of Derby in 2010, ‘the rejection of heterosexuality was viewed by lesbian feminists as the only means of escaping male domination and female subordination, particularly in domestic and sexual spheres’ (Barnes, 2010, p.234). As a political strategy, woman-to-woman solidarity was considered fundamental to achieving feminist goals of dismantling patriarchy (Barnes, 2010). Accounts of women who claimed lesbian identities and who were involved in lesbian communities during lesbian feminism’s heyday indicate that, for many, lesbian feminism lived up to its promise and transformed many women’s lives by creating possibilities which had in previous eras been implausible. Lesbian feminism has had a monumental impact in challenging assumptions of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980) and in reconceptualizing sexuality as an ‘arena where women can make choices and experience sexual and political self-realization’ (Barnes, 2010, p.233). However, lesbian feminism was founded upon a vision of a “lesbian utopia” which overlooks the potential for woman-to-woman relationships – sexual or otherwise – to be potentially unequal, exploitative, or even violent. In turn, women who were and are inspired to live by the values and principles of lesbian feminism, but who then experience abuse from a female partner, have largely been ignored or silenced (Barnes, 2010). Publicly addressing the issue of lesbian battering, while necessary, is done with the recognition that we still live in repressive times. The hard-won gains of the civil rights movement, women’s movement, and gay and lesbian rights movement over the past decades have been met by increasing resistance and setbacks. Many lesbians are understandably reluctant to air issues related to lesbian battering for fear of triggering homophobic attacks on our communities. In a society where there has been no acceptance of lesbian relationships, the fears are legitimate. By discussing these issues openly, these

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relationships risk further repression. Yet our only alternative is one of silence, a silence that traps battered lesbians into believing that they are alone and that there are no resources available to them (Ristock, 2002, p.14).

This research acknowledges that “lesbian feminism”, and feminism in general, offered women new ways of being in an intimate relationship ‘which promised the release from subordination and instead relationships characterized by democracy, equality, and non-violence’ (Barnes, 2010, p. 237). However, the lesbian feminist vision sets idealistic expectations for woman-to-woman relationships, which in practice have been difficult to live up to. To admit that woman-to-woman relationships may potentially be oppressive and violent is difficult and painful because it ‘shakes the very foundations of the lesbian feminist project’ (Barnes, 2010, p.237). This contradiction is reflected in the gulf between a now somewhat nostalgic lesbian feminist literature and the growing woman-to-woman partner abuse literature; ‘this gulf has significant consequences, not least leaving women who were drawn to the lesbian feminist vision but who subsequently experienced abuse feeling isolated, silenced, bereft of explanations, and questioning what they did wrong’ (Barnes, 2010, p.237). This research also acknowledges that lesbian feminism and feminism in general can still play a key role in generating in-depth knowledge and understandings of the nature, the dynamics, and the impact of intimate partner abuse for queer women. Despite its shortcomings, I will argue that a queer standpoint perspective can be utilized to help bring attention to the ways in which intimate partner abuse can be experienced by queer women.

### Queering the Gothic

Many writers have moved between genres of horror/gothic, science fiction and speculative fiction to examine ideas about gender, sex, and sexuality. For instance, Anne Rice and Angela Carter’s gothic depiction of vampires reflected the debates on gender and sexuality that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. The “vampire” in this context became an important metaphor for ‘the desires and fears concerning sexual liberation, related respectively to feminists’ and homosexuals’ claims for sexual freedom’ (Carvalho, 2009, p.2). Imagining alternative worlds and possible futures, feminist writers have highlighted the elements of women’s experiences that have long been ignored or misrepresented. Machado relies heavily on tropes of horror and science fiction writing which work perfectly to help describe what often seems impossible: the ways in which individuals experience trauma and how it shapes us in the strangest, most terrifying, ways.

Homes are expected to be places of safety and sanctuary; that’s what makes it so terrifying when they turn on you. Machado utilizes the symbol of the home brilliantly throughout her memoir as an effective analogy to represent the collection of horrors that happened to her during her time in an abusive relationship with a woman. The home is central to Machado’s fantasy of her future life with the woman from the Dream House. A place of promise and hope, happiness, and security: ‘the dream house was never just the dream house. It was, in turn, a convent of promise (herb garden, wine, writing cross the table from each other’ (Machado, 2019, p.82). But soon the fantasy of the home as a symbol of sanctuary crumbles, and along

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with it, the future the author had hoped for. The Dream House became a haunted house, a prison and finally, ‘a dungeon of memory’ (Machado, 2019, p.82). In the 1982 autobiographical novella ‘*The Yellow Wallpaper*’, Charlotte Perkins Gilman uses the conventions of psychological horror tropes to critique the position of women within the institution of marriage. The confined setting of Gilman’s summer vacation home plays a crucial role in the narrator’s ultimate demise. Similarly, The Dream House is where Machado, literally and figuratively, experiences the worst of abuse, behind closed doors, inside the so-called safety and intimacy of her relationship, deep inside the personified space they share together.

I always thought the expression “safe as houses” meant that houses were safe places. It’s a beautiful idea; like running home in a late-summer thunderstorm huffing down your neck. There’s the house waiting for you; a barrier from nature, from scrutiny, from other people... But house idioms and their variants, in fact, often signify the opposite of safety and security. Safe as houses is something closer to “the house always wins”. Instead of a shared structure providing shelter, it means that the person in charge is secure, everyone else should be afraid (Machado, 2019, p.88).

Reading Machado’s memoir, you watch as the optimism of a new relationship turns into something horrible and as what you would expect to be a place of safety ‘becomes a site of anguish and hysteria’ (Lesperance, 2019, para.9). ‘The spectre of abuse, the pain and shame of it, lurks around every corner in *Dream House*’ (Lesperance, 2019, para.9). Machado cites studies of abuse between queer women, using objective research along with providing insight into her own experience. Machado exposes something that we don’t talk about within the queer community, something we rarely look at directly and thus ‘If the house is queerness, then queer abuse is our monster in the house’ (Lesperance, 2019, para.10). The abuse illustrated in *The Dream House* is hard to witness, like most abuse is, but it insists on being acknowledged. Like Gothic literature and horror forces us to look at things we’ve long avoided in our own lives and in the world, the Gothic memoir ‘marries the toughest moments of personal and universal experience’ (Lesperance, 2019, para.11). ‘*In The Dream House*’, with its ‘hauntings and descents into trauma’, informs us that there is nothing more Gothic than our own memory (Lesperance, 2019, para.3). The point of a memoir at which we confront the worst parts of our memory is the ‘ultimate descent: into trauma, into the bottom floors of our minds, into madness’ (Lesperance, 2019, para.4).

The haunted house is the most recognizable Gothic trope throughout the memoir. Horace Walpole’s ‘*The Castle of Otranto*’, written in 1764 and often referred to as the original Gothic novel, introduced the haunted house as a symbol of cultural decay. Since then, several authors continued using the haunted house as a setting for their writings including Shirley Jackson, Stephen King and recently Ali Smith. Through Machado’s fears and anxieties, The Haunted Dream House is incarnated and serves as a character as well as a place that haunts and is haunted. To marry the Gothic and the memoir is the perfect way to illustrate the harsh realities of abuse because abuse rarely feels linear; in an abusive relationship, a source of comfort becomes strange and unfamiliar, a secret monster. ‘By moving in and out of time and manipulating tropes, Machado creates an uncanny and unsettling portrait of how a once loving and exciting relationship can decay and self-destruct’ (Lesperance, 2019, para.9). According



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to Machado, the Gothic can be conducive to suppressed voices emerging, like the voices of queer women who have been abused at the hands of another woman. At its core, the Gothic drama is ‘fundamentally about voiceless things—the dead, the past, the marginalized—gaining voices that cannot be ignored’ (McCombs, 2019, para.6).

Paulina Palmer’s *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic* (2012) offers new insights into contemporary literary representations of queer sexuality ‘by convincingly demonstrating the interrelation between queer theory and the uncanny, a ubiquitous element of Gothic literature’ (Rubóczki, 2015, p.472). Palmer’s book focuses on how Queer Studies ‘penetrate, as well as enrich critical readings of the Gothic by recasting its conventional motifs from queer perspective in an innovative and subversive way’ (Rubóczki, 2015, p.472). The various narrative strategies of the selected contemporary queer novels illustrate that in these works, the utilization of the Gothic is not merely atmospheric and contingent but consciously deployed vehicles to portray, negotiate, and challenge the ambivalences of queer experience (Rubóczki, 2015, p.472). Palmer argues that motifs belonging to the Gothic genre are “inextricably” bound to queer studies (Palmer, 2012). *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic* (2012) makes a significant and indispensable contribution not only to Gothic but also to queer studies and can explain why several authors, such as Julia Armfield (*Salt Slow*, 2019; *Our Wives Under The Sea*, 2022) and Alison Rumfitt (*Tell Me I’m Worthless*, 2021), still utilize Gothic motifs and tropes throughout their writing to navigate queer life experiences.

### Myths, Fairy-tale and Feminism

The prologue for Machado’s memoir, appropriately called ‘Dream House as Prologue’, is where Machado first introduces the concept of “archival silence” to the reader. “Archival silence” is also called “violence of the archives” by Saidiya Hartman in her essay *Venus in Two Acts* (2008), which Machado cites in her opening paragraph. “Archival silence”, a phrase that captures the idea that certain histories – in this case, the history of queer intimate partner violence – never enter the cultural records and that at best, victims of such violence find themselves telling their stories in a vacuum; at worst, they remain silent. If those primarily responsible for record-keeping share a majority experience, then the minority experience will, by default, be inadequately recorded.

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. (Machado. 2019, p. 2)

Machado delves into narratives surrounding queer abuse, starting with her own, thus building scholarship around stories which still are deemed impossible. Both the personal narrative and academic elements of *In the Dream House* focus primarily on the theme of domestic abuse within queer relationships. The text highlights the relative invisibility of that experience, especially compared to representations of heterosexual intimate partner violence, throughout its entirety. *In the Dream House* is written into the silence surrounding violence in queer relationships, the silences around emotional and psychological abuse. While combining

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academic research on the subject with her own experiences, she demonstrates just how crucial an adequately documented past is to the experience of the living. The invisibility of same-sex intimate partner violence can—and has—led people to believe that abuse is a problem that the people in same-sex relationships (especially lesbian relationships) do not need to worry about. Throughout the narrative, Machado candidly shares her own experience as an abused partner—a danger for which, she notes, she was never prepared. However, in the absence of a social precedent through which she might better understand her lived experience, Machado likens her own experience to well-known fairy tales, tales that involve narratives of silence and voicelessness and that also demonstrate power imbalances in intimate relationships. Machado's writings produce themes relevant to female survival and resistance under patriarchy and heteronormativity, similar to the works of Margaret Atwood, in that sense. Many readers may be familiar with the stories she chooses and thus can offer missing context to her experience. Besides, fairy tales are in many ways about the making and breaking of taboos, which make them a perfect metaphor for talking through an abusive relationship. Over the last number of years, story or myth re-tellings/re-visions have become vastly popular among readers; a version of an older story. Sometimes, a fairy tale or myth may be reimagined with a modernized setting or retold from a minor character's perspective. The revision of canonical texts through retellings has been done effectively by many writers and in recent times, there has been many publications of many women authors who retell western classics. Madeline Miller's *'Circe'*, (2018), Natalie Haynes's *'A Thousand Ships'*, (2019) and *'Silence of the Girls'*, (2018), by Booker Prizewinning Pat Barker are critically acclaimed novels, published recently, which retell Homer's epics, subverting the Odyssey and approaching the epics through the lens of women (Devi & Khuraijam, 2020). This type of work rethinks the position of women who appear only as footnotes or bit players in a man's work. The women authors who have revisited classics often write with a motivation to give voice to previously silenced female characters because women in epics tend to function as plot devices for the hero's journey (Devi & Khuraijam, 2020). Authors such as Angela Carter and A.S Byatt have long been using myth in their stories and although commonly seen in fiction writing, authors like Marina Warner are well-known for their non-fiction books relating to feminism and myth. According to research by Al-Hadi (2010), novels reveal women's entrapment within social myths, particularly by giving prominence to the voice of previously marginalized, and often victimized or monsterized, female figures. Machado herself has often included retellings of well-known stories throughout the canon of her work. The term re-vision is grounded in feminist poststructuralist thought and indicates the author's agency in creating a new vision of possibility; given the oral tradition of fairy tales and its connection with women, it is apt that women now reclaim fairy tales in an attempt to disrupt binary gender construction and to re-vision possibilities for women and men (Devi & Khuraijam, 2020). It can be argued that Machado consults myths as ways of reviving powerful mythic female figures which stress female ability and glorify assertive female sexuality and/or as a way to possibly expose women's entanglement within the cultural narratives of womanhood (Al-Hadi, 2010).

'Part of what makes Machado's relationship with the woman in the *Dream House* so poisonous is that since they are both women, it does not align neatly with our culture's ideas about abusive relationships' (Grady, 2019, para.9). Machado doesn't have a vocabulary for talking about

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what is happening to her. Dominant heteronormative discourses have resulted in the absence of talk about violence in lesbian relationships and excluded queer women's experience of violence. This exclusion works both 'to create and maintain the invisibility of violence in lesbian relationships' (Irwin, 2008, p.206) and simultaneously to constitute domestic violence as only a heterosexual issue, which then limits opportunities available 'to acknowledge or interrogate violence in lesbian relationships, further reinforcing its invisibility' (Irwin, 2008, p.206). As these heteronormative discourses interacted with discourses idealizing lesbian relationships and discourses of femininity – constituting women as passive, gentle and loving but certainly not violent – they further erased the possibility of violence (Irwin, 2008). Machado's memoir is not only a 'harrowing and enchanting journey into her past but is an attempt to address the absence of stories about abuse between same-gender partners' (Marshall, 2019, para.4). Machado acknowledges the reasons that these stories have been silenced throughout her memoir and aims to 'enter into the archive that domestic abuse between partners who share a gender identity is both possible and not uncommon' (Reference). She writes at the start of the book 'that it can look something like this' (Machado, 2019, p.6). I argue that *In The Dream House* itself is a retelling of sorts, dispelling myths surrounding queer intimate partner abuse, while mapping out the individual complexities surrounding the issue from a queer perspective. According to a thesis by Jamie Wallen Berrien (2018), storytelling is not only a way for humans to share their experiences with one another as a form of empowerment and resistance to oppression, it can also assist in research analysis which can further shed light on complex issues such as intimate partner abuse. 'Creating a space for a woman to tell her lived experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and the intersections of their personal identities, through artistic means of story-telling, can constitute personal healing and can ignite solidarity collective resistance to the mistreatment of women' (Berrien, 2018. p.10). Machado has said that, due to the silence surrounding this issue, she had to research to find other stories like hers—'but once she starts looking, they are everywhere, story after story about the abuse of queer women by other women' (da Costa, 2019, para.12). In the end, she finds that the story of her abuse is 'common, common as dirt' (da Costa, 2019, para.12). But Machado's telling of this particular story is anything but common: it's compassionate, thoughtful and achingly honest. Most of all, *In the Dream House* is a generous book. It is generous to all the readers of the future who might find themselves in a '*Dream House*' as Machado did. And so that they don't have to make up their own language to make sense of what is happening to them, it offers itself up, bare and vulnerable (Grady, 2019, para. 11).

I imagine that one day, I will invite young queers over for tea and cheese platters and advice, and I will be able to tell them: you can be hurt by people who look just like you (Machado, 2019, p. 266).

## Conclusion

Upon surveying previous and current research, it is apparent that personal narratives and life writing continue to lend themselves to feminist research. More specifically, life stories written by those less dominant in our society continue to generate deep and specific understandings about certain aspects of the social world. *In The Dream House* speaks into the silence

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surrounding queer abuse between women while dismantling dangerous and misguided myths about queer love. Additionally, I argue that queer standpoint theory still offers effective ways for authors to present themselves in ways they wish to be seen. Furthermore, by exploring life narratives, feminism in general can still play a key role in generating in-depth knowledge and understandings of the nature, the dynamics, and the impact of intimate partner abuse for queer women.

This research was absorbed with understanding the broader contexts that influenced Carmen Maria Machado's subjective experiences and the literary tropes that the author utilized to communicate her experience with readers. Machado writes not only to ameliorate self-suffering but also to drive attention to the realities of queer intimate partner abuse. Woman-to-woman abuse has historically failed to be acknowledged appropriately and often, victims who report abuse of this kind are ignored or remain silent. Throughout her memoir, Machado acknowledges the consequences these systems of silence have on victims and works to create adequate language so that abuse of this kind can be more easily recognised in the future. Machado attempted to reclaim and subvert narratives surrounding queer abuse and to reclaim a queer woman's story from the mainstream heterosexual narratives that continue to silence the voices of women. *In The Dream House* retold the myth of a "Lesbian Utopia", thus allowing women to question dominant ideologies that make them socially marginal characters in history and texts.

The development of further studies with queer and feminist narrative theoretical approaches will only further illuminate the corners of the literary canon. 'These texts not only serve as an opportunity for representation of marginalized peoples, but also to provide those who may or may not identify with the characters the opportunity to experience lives and identities unusual to their own' (Jackson, 2020, p. 65). Normalizing the experiences of marginalized people, advocating for their lives as just as important as those who don't fall under these oppressed categories, and providing a space for critical reflection and commentary can forever change the way we see LGBTQIA+ peoples. The future of feminist and queer narrative theory is promising, and proposed applications of critical race theory, intersectionality, and postmodernist theory suggest that there is much left to learn about what these stories do and the potential they hold (Jackson, 2020).

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**About the Author**

Sinéad Spelman grew up in Galway and studied at NUI Galway for her undergraduate studies. She received a BA Honours degree in History and Psychology and then went on to continue her studies at the University of Limerick, graduating with an MA Honours in Psychology. Sinéad has just completed her Masters in Gender, Globalisation and Rights from NUI Galway and graduated in April 2022. She hopes to pursue a PhD in the near future.

**Author Contact Details:** [sr.spelman@gmail.com](mailto:sr.spelman@gmail.com)