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Horror of Personality:

Exploring the gothicisation of mental illness in American fiction of the long 1950s

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PhD English Literature

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed: Victoria M. Madden

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the gothicisation of mental illness — specifically, disorders of personality — in American fiction, as illustrated through four popular novels written in the long 1950s. In so doing, this thesis aims to demystify not only the complex intersections between American history and literature, but also the nation's ambivalent relationship with psychiatry and its fascination with psychological explanations for deviance and evil. While previous research has explored depictions of psychopathology in literature with limited scope, this thesis offers a detailed study of the ways in which contemporary history, popular culture, and concurrent psychiatric developments within the United States coalesce to shape depictions of personality disorder in fiction with particular consideration to the close-knit relationship between the American gothic and Freudianism and the implications of gender in post-war society.

The first chapter explores national anxieties concerning communism and homosexuality, which converge in the figure of the sexual psychopath, embodied within Robert Bloch's novel *Psycho* (1959) by the Bluebeardian figure of Norman Bates. The second chapter reads Shirley Jackson's novel *The Bird's Nest* (1954) against Corbett Thigpen and Hervey Cleckley's psychiatric study *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) in order to examine the symbiotic relationship between fictional gothic texts and contemporary psychiatric texts centring on what was previously termed multiple personality disorder. Both chapters find that the pervasive use of gothic language in contemporary psychiatric and cultural documents describing psychopathy and multiple personality disorder, respectively, underlines a lack of understanding concerning severe forms of mental illness, resulting in the marginalisation and villainization of those afflicted with disorders of personality.

Chapter three examines the depiction of what might now be termed borderline personality disorder in Henry Farrell's novel *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1960). This chapter argues that the novel's subversion of the Bluebeard gothic offers a counternarrative to

the classic Woman in Peril plot that nonetheless underscores the folly of patriarchal culture and concludes that texts like *Baby Jane* help to expose the gendered nature of concepts such as normality and deviance within western culture. Finally, chapter four analyses the depiction of child psychopathy in William March's novel *The Bad Seed* (1954). This chapter finds that by focusing on the role of genetics in the formation of psychopathology, March's novel poses a challenge to the dominant psychoanalytic framework of 1950s American psychiatry and exposes the gothic undercurrents of American suburban social structures.

By studying these texts as a collection, this thesis confronts the driving factors behind why the gothic remains such an integral part of American culture at large. It ultimately concludes that a long history of female marginalization and androcentrism within both medical and popular culture continues to feed the gothicisation of mental illness within fiction of the United States.

LAY SUMMARY

This thesis examines the ways in which mental illness and, specifically, disorders of personality, have been depicted as gothic in American fiction of the 1950s and early 1960s, leading to lasting misconceptions about the nature of psychological disorders. Using four popular American novels as examples, this thesis aims to interpret not only the complex intersections between American literature and history, but also the nation's fraught relationship with psychiatry and its fascination with psychological explanations for deviance and evil. While previous research has explored depictions of complex mental illnesses in literature with limited scope, this thesis offers a detailed study of the ways in which contemporary history, popular culture, and concurrent psychiatric developments within the United States work together to shape depictions of personality disorder in fiction. Additionally, this study gives particular consideration to the close-knit relationship between the American gothic and Freudianism, as well as the implications of gender in post-war society.

The first chapter explores national anxieties concerning communism and homosexuality, which converge in the figure of the sexual psychopath, embodied within Robert Bloch's novel *Psycho* (1959) by the character Norman Bates. The second chapter reads Shirley Jackson's novel *The Bird's Nest* (1954) against Corbett Thigpen and Hervey Cleckley's psychiatric study *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) in order to examine the complex relationship between fictional gothic texts and contemporary psychiatric texts centring on what was previously termed multiple personality disorder. Both chapters find that the persistent use of gothic language in contemporary psychiatric and cultural documents describing psychopathy and multiple personality disorder, respectively, underlines a lack of understanding concerning severe forms of mental illness, resulting in the marginalisation and villainization of individuals afflicted with disorders of personality.

Chapter three examines the depiction of what might now be termed borderline personality disorder in Henry Farrell's novel *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1960). This chapter argues that the novel's destabilisation of the subgenre known as the "Bluebeard gothic" offers a counternarrative to the classic Woman in Peril plot that nonetheless underscores the folly of male-dominated society. This chapter further concludes that texts like *Baby Jane* help to expose the gendered nature of concepts such as normality and deviance within western culture. Finally, chapter four analyses the depiction of child psychopathy and the treatment of motherhood in William March's novel *The Bad Seed* (1954). This chapter finds that by focusing on the role of genetics in the formation of psychopathy, March's novel poses a challenge to dominant psychoanalytic theories prevalent in 1950s American society while exposing the gothic undercurrents of American suburban social structures.

By studying these texts as a collection, this thesis confronts the driving factors behind why the gothic remains such an integral part of American culture at large. It ultimately concludes that a long history of female marginalization and androcentrism within both medical and popular culture continues to feed the gothicisation of mental illness within fiction of the United States.

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With all that said, I'd like to dedicate this thesis to Calum, who reminds me daily what true kindness looks like; to Dad, who gave me his passion for knowledge; and to Mom, who taught me resilience.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPD	Borderline Personality Disorder
DID	Dissociative Identity Disorder
DSM	*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*
MPD	Multiple Personality Disorder

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INTRODUCTION

The Haunting of the American Mind

> One need not be a chamber — to be Haunted —
> One need not be a House —
> The Brain has Corridors — surpassing
> Material Place —
>
> LXIX, Emily Dickinson

Since its inception, American gothic fiction has distinguished itself from its European predecessors through a chief concern with mental apparitions rather than physical ones. In the absence of stereotypically gothic settings found in British and continental texts, gothic fictions set in the New World frequently turn inward, placing the locus of uncanny occurrences in the ordinary family home and, perhaps even more disturbingly, within the diseased mind itself. Beginning with the very first novel written by a professional American writer, Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), and continuing with the paradigmatic short stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne through to contemporary horror narratives, the American gothic has continually centred upon psychological terror and the relationship between madness and monstrosity, effectively gothicising depictions of mental illness and locating evil within the abnormal human psyche. By examining various representations of personality disorders — the most pronounced signifiers of deviant psychology — in popular American gothic fiction of the long 1950s, this thesis will attempt to elucidate not only the complex intersections between American history and literature, but also the nation's ambivalent relationship with psychiatry and its fascination with psychological explanations of evil.

In *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1966), Leslie Fiedler argues that American fiction is "not merely in flight from the physical data of the actual world, in search of a (sexless and dim) ideal . . . it is, bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic fiction, non-realistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic — a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light

and affirmation" (29). Here, Fiedler not only hints at the uncanny nature of American fiction but also highlights the uneasy relationship between American writing and sexuality, a point that becomes even more significant when viewed in light of both medical and popular cultures' marginalisation of women — a point that will be discussed in more detail subsequently. Perhaps more pressingly, however, Fiedler here suggests that the fiction of the United States often exposes as myth prevalent cultural ideas centring on America as the Promised Land, focusing instead on how the "land of light and affirmation" has become corrupted. Indeed, over the last two hundred years, the American national narrative has continually struggled to repress not only the country's bloody, war-torn inception and old-world European heritage, but also much later traumas such as the Great Depression (1929-1939), the two World Wars of the twentieth century (1914-1918; 1939-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), the War in Vietnam (1955-1975), and the long-running Cold War (1947-1991).

These repeated historical traumas have given shape to what Mark Seltzer, in his influential cultural study *Serial Killers* (1998), terms America's "wound culture": a culture based on the "collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (1), which operates on "atrocity exhibition, in which people wear their damage like badges of identity . . . " (2). In other words, despite clinging to the dominant national myth of the United States as an ahistorical Edenic paradise, modern American society exhibits a paradoxical Freudian death drive and morbid fascination with the grotesquery that stems from both collective and individual trauma. This perhaps partially explains not only why psychoanalytic concepts lend themselves so well to the analysis of American gothic fiction, but also, more importantly, why so many American writers have chosen to depict central characters suffering from psychological disorders — especially those exhibiting violent tendencies — in order to draw attention to the gothic proclivities embedded within America's wound culture, for the abnormal psyche embodies one of the clearest and most enduring signifiers of past trauma.

David Punter, in his 1998 study *Gothic Pathologies*, also frames something akin to Seltzer's wound culture in suggesting,

> [W]e confront in Gothic and its traces glimpses of the hidden narrative of abuse; and perhaps that should be a major contemporary focus for a critique of the Gothic. For abuse has become the stage on which a mighty battle is being played out; it is a battle for the nature of memory, and it is also a battle in which we can see defined two opposing notions of culture [:] . . . the culture of horror and the culture of therapy. (15)

It is interesting that Punter should associate the gothic with two cultural categories — "horror" and "therapy" — so closely tied to psychiatry for, as this thesis will address shortly, the historical treatment of America's mentally ill constitutes an overtly gothic narrative in itself. Punter's use of the term "abuse," like Seltzer's "wound culture," not only further hints at the gothic history of American psychiatry but also connotes a psychoanalytic trauma narrative, in which society collectively gathers around an atrocity if only to repress the memory of said atrocity later on, for surely there could be no place for violence or devastation in "the land of light and affirmation" (Fiedler 29). That the fiction of the United States remains deeply rooted in the gothic even to this day, however, suggests not only a fundamental inability to reconcile repeated socio-historical traumas with the principles of American exceptionalism, but also, perhaps more importantly, that the United States, too, has its demons, however well-hidden they may be.

Indeed, gothic stories centring on outwardly "normal" individuals whose minds have become corrupted by disease serve as dark reminders that horror, rather than springing forth from otherworldly entities, might lurk beneath even the most ordinary surfaces. Moreover, such tales call attention to two seemingly incompatible undercurrents within American culture: first, the enduring lack of understanding that surrounds the nation's mentally ill and the consequent mistreatment and repression of such individuals — a phenomenon which has spawned several key examinations, including Gerald N. Grob's *The Mad Among Us* (1994) and Robert Whitaker's *Mad in America* (2002) — and second, the contradictory impulse to sensationalise and mythologise persons exhibiting severe psychological disorder, such as serial killers and mass

murderers — an impulse that has inspired at least as many critical studies, including Seltzer's *Serial Killers* and Richard Tithecott's *Of Men and Monsters* (1999). This thesis will attempt to shed light on the interplay between these two opposing drives, as well as the reasons behind each, by examining mid-century depictions of three psychological disorders that impact one's sense of self and identity — namely, psychopathy, borderline personality disorder (BPD), and multiple personality disorder (MPD)[1].

While this thesis will employ the term "personality disorders" to describe these illnesses — which feature prominently in mid-century American fiction and share the commonality of generating a profound impact on a person's behaviour and sense of identity — in shorthand, it is important to note that this designation is purely for the sake of literary discussion and in fact is something of a misnomer. Psychiatric professionals have encountered numerous difficulties when classifying personality disorders, and the definitions of these illnesses vary across multiple revisions of the DSM. Especially considering the notable distinction between dissociative disorders such as MPD and cluster B personality disorders described in the fifth and current edition of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5, 2013)[2] as dramatic, emotional, or erratic[3], it would be unscientific to lump these disorders together in any clinical setting or psychiatric investigation. Indeed, it is important to note that this author does not purport to be an expert in psychology, and this thesis does not purport to be a scientific analysis of clinical mental illnesses, but rather, a literary study

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[1] Since the publication of the DSM-IV in 1994, multiple personality disorder has been formally renamed dissociative identity disorder. This thesis will, however, employ the term multiple personality disorder to reflect the terminology of the 1950s.

[2] Despite this thesis's focus on 1950s American fiction, the current fifth edition of the DSM provides an interesting framework for categorising the kinds of mental disorders examined herein as "dramatic, emotional, or erratic," a designation that had not yet emerged when the DSM-I was published in 1952.

[3] This cluster comprises antisocial personality disorder (the closest clinical diagnosis to psychopathy listed in the DSM), borderline personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder. While histrionic personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder lie outside the scope of this thesis, it is also important to note at this point the significant overlap in clinical symptoms associated with each of the cluster B personality disorders listed in later editions of the DSM from the fourth (1994) onward (Douzenis Tsopelas, and Tzeferakos 398). These overlaps blur the boundaries between each distinct condition and adds to the difficulty of both diagnosing and understanding complex mental illnesses even in the twenty-first century.

of the ways in which psychological disorders are depicted in fiction. The purpose of this dissertation is not to provide theoretical psychiatric diagnoses for fictional characters, but rather to examine the intersections between the popular literature of the "long" 1950s and contemporary psychiatric theory. With this end in mind, the psychiatric texts quoted herein function in the same way as cultural texts: by indicating medical attitudes towards diseases of the mind, which in turn inform social attitudes towards mental illness.

Taking into account these interactions between various forms of text, this thesis specifically focuses on works published between 1946 and 1964, which historian M. Keith Booker dubs the "long" 1950s (5). This period connotes a time during which the intersections between American gothic fiction, a set of markedly turbulent social and historical conditions, and changing psychiatric attitudes, all contributed significantly toward not only American sociocultural anxieties but also the unfavourable ways in which mental illness was, and continues to be, perceived within the United States.

In order to analyse the gothicisation of personality disorders and mental illness in general, this thesis will examine the following texts: Robert Bloch's *Psycho* (1959), which will be supplemented with a brief reading of Bloch's subsequent novel *American Gothic* (1974) in order to examine the concept of psychopathy and American masculinity; Shirley Jackson's *The Bird's Nest* (1954); Henry Farrell's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1960); and William March's *The Bad Seed* (1954). These texts are particularly relevant to the topic at hand as each constitutes a notable work of popular fiction, showcasing the general public's appetite for macabre tales centring on outwardly imperceptible psychological abnormalities and human monstrosity. As such, these novels also go a long way in illustrating the ways in which fictional depictions of personality disorder reflect greater anxieties within American society, as well as how popular literature might in turn influence public perceptions of mental illness. The prolific nature and sheer popularity of these particular narratives among the American public — indeed, each text

has inspired at least one equally well-known cinematic adaptation, with all but Jackson's text spawning at least two screen adaptations — uniquely qualifies them as key cultural texts, rather than simply literary works in the same vein. By studying these texts as a collection, one might thus begin to identify certain patterns that illuminate not only the extent to which the gothic is ingrained in both American society and fiction but also the driving factors behind why the gothic remains such an integral part of American culture at large.

Furthermore, studying these popular fictions in conjunction with seminal psychiatric texts of the same period, such as the revised second edition of Hervey M. Cleckley's *The Mask of Sanity* (1950)[4] and Corbett H. Thigpen and Cleckley's *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), inevitably raises the question of whether cultural representations of "madness" have an ability to inform medical understandings of mental illness and personality disorders, rather than simply functioning as reflective models of such maladies. Indeed, the blurring of the distinction between popular fiction and ostensibly scientific texts, as exemplified by the case of *The Three Faces of Eve*, Thigpen and Cleckley's study on multiple personality disorder upon which the Academy Award-winning film of the same name (1957)[5] is based, suggests that representations of madness in popular gothic fictions might in fact assert some reciprocal influence over the language of psychiatric texts, especially considering that Thigpen and Cleckley's original study was rushed into publication and the rights to the film immediately sold in order to capitalise on the growing public interest in multiple personality disorder following the publication of Jackson's overlooked gothic novel *The Bird's Nest* just a few years before.

It is also important to take into account the relationship between the four primary texts under scrutiny in this thesis and contemporaneous popular cultural documents that might inform the fiction of the long 1950s, as well as the larger cultural history that informs the fiction of the

[4] While there are six editions of Cleckley's *Mask of Sanity* in existence, this thesis will primarily focus on the second edition of this text given the historical framework of the 1950s.
[5] Thigpen and Cleckley also co-wrote the film's screenplay with director Nunnally Johnson (*Three*).

gothic. Indeed, while *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* ostensibly lacks the same self-conscious references to psychoanalysis and Freudianism that characterise *Psycho*, *The Bird's Nest*, and *the Bad Seed*, Farrell's text's reflection of cultural critiques such as *Generation of Vipers* (1943), Philip Wylie's treatise on the dangers of "Momism," cannot be ignored. Similarly, while *The Bad Seed* features a character well-versed in Freud, the text's reliance on overtly gothic criminological theories popular during the late nineteenth century plays a key role in the text.

As will be discussed at length subsequently, the relationships between, on the one hand, each of the distinct spheres mentioned previously — literature, social history, popular culture, and psychiatry — and on the other hand, Freudian psychoanalysis, which reached its peak "popularization and prestige . . . in the United States in the 1940s-1960s" before losing momentum and fading from prominence altogether in the early 1990s (Burnham 4), are particularly worth investigating. As John C. Burnham argues, "the impact of Freud's ideas in the United States, for good or for ill, was indeed a major historical event of the twentieth century" with far-reaching implications for "all of the major cultural movements" of the decades immediately following the Second World War (3, 1). Psychoanalysis might thus be considered the one unifying element that binds together each of the varying factors that shaped the ways in which the American public came to regard mental illness and deviant psychology in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Indeed, Burnham posits, "One need only review scholarly writings produced in the 1950s era to see the remarkable extent to which intellectuals in anthropology and kindred disciplines, not to mention literature and the arts, explicitly invoked psychoanalytic thinking in their work" (5), indicating that psychoanalysis had become ingrained in numerous aspects of American culture by the mid-twentieth century. Despite the decline in the clinical popularity of psychoanalytic theories following the introduction of anti-psychotic drugs such as Thorazine just a few years later, however, Freudian ideas on psychopathology continued to hold currency in

American popular culture at least until the late 1970s (Menand "Why Freud Survives"), as evidenced by the continued reflection of Freudian ideas in contemporary American horror and thriller cinema, which still frequently attributes adult criminality to childhood trauma and abnormal psychosexual development.

Yet despite the nation's fascination with Freudian psychology during the long 1950s, it is important to note that the texts under scrutiny in this thesis are not only "haunted" by the spectre of psychoanalysis, but also by a pop culture version of Freud, who is frequently invoked to provide expedient explanations for deviant behaviour in the most rudimentary sense. What these texts in fact betray is thus a co-optation of Freudianism, the era's main "scientific" authority, designed to lend credence to narratives that might otherwise be considered unbelievable. In other words, to ground the gothic occurrences depicted in these tales in some semblance of reality, *Psycho*, *The Bird's Nest*, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, and *The Bad Seed* explicitly call upon Freudian explanations for deviant behaviour to ensure that these narratives hit home in an uncanny[6] way for the purposes of inducing fear and dread. While there remains some scope for genuine psychoanalytic readings of the texts examined herein, the main purpose of this study is thus to interpret instead the often overly self-conscious invocations of Freud, psychoanalytic concepts, and childhood trauma in the explanation of various forms of psychopathology.

At this point, it is important to note, as Jeffrey Bullins does in "Know Your Killer: Changing Portrayals of Psychosis in Horror Films" (2014), that depictions of so-called deviant psychology in both fiction and film has been "historically used . . . to identify antagonists as bad or evil" (36), which definitively associates mental illness with monstrosity and indisputably contributes to the persistent misunderstanding and, indeed, gothicisation of such psychological maladies. As discussion of the four primary texts under scrutiny in this thesis will reveal, the

[6] The concept of the uncanny will be further addressed in relation to the American gothic shortly.

equation of "madness" with "badness" plays a key role in gothic fictions of the long 1950s, as questions of sanity become conflated with questions of morality, and indeed, monstrosity.

Interestingly, criticism seeking to demystify the fascination with mental illness and human monstrosity in the United States has tended to overlook the literary works that have inspired some of America's most iconic horror films in favour of their big screen counterparts. For example, while much has been written about Alfred Hitchcock's critically and commercially acclaimed adaptation of *Psycho* (1960), analysis that centres on the film's literary source, as well as Robert Bloch's writing in general, is curiously lacking. While more critics have engaged with William March's *The Bad Seed*, a disproportionately large amount of analysis focuses on Mervin LeRoy's Oscar-winning film adaptation of March's novel (1956), which perhaps comes as no surprise given that the cover of the Vintage Books edition of *The Bad Seed* (2015) refers to the novel as "the basis for the classic movie starring Patty McCormack and Nancy Kelly," having published the text under the Vintage Movie Classics imprint of "novels that inspired great films."

The body of research that engages with Jackson's *The Bird's Nest* and Farrell's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* is even more limited. Though a handful of critics have commented on Robert Aldrich's film adaptation of *Baby Jane* (Shelley, Fisiak, Chivers, Shary and McVittie), Farrell's source text has been almost entirely shut out of both literary and popular culture critiques despite the continued afterlife of Aldrich's film, which recently inspired the FX limited series *Feud: Bette and Joan* (2017). Similarly, scholarship engaging with either *The Bird's Nest* or its film adaptation, *Lizzie* (1957) proves virtually non-existent barring an exceptional essay by Marta Carminero-Santangelo in her study *The Madwoman Can't Speak, or Why Insanity is Not Subversive* (1998) and a few rudimentary mentions that tie the film to its literary source in the context of Shirley Jackson's oeuvre as a whole. The dearth of criticism directly engaging with Jackson's novel and its film adaptation most likely results from their overshadowing by the much more critically and commercially successful Thigpen and Cleckley-penned big-screen adaptation

of *The Three Faces of Eve*, directed by Nunally Johnson, on which several critics have written (Lloyd and Johnson, Hyler, Wahl). Still, few have commented on the significance of Thigpen and Cleckley's novelised study of multiple personality disorder, on which Johnson's film is based.

Returning to the original literary and psychiatric source texts that inspired some of Hollywood's most iconic films featuring psychologically unstable central characters offers much needed insight into the reasons behind why the diseased mind, especially when paired with excessive violence, has become synonymous with the American gothic. Due to the limited critical material available for many of the texts under scrutiny, however, this thesis will engage heavily with studies of gothic and horror cinema in order to elucidate why the American public remains drawn to such morbid tales of insanity even in the twenty-first century.

It is also important to point out that this thesis is very much a study on the intersecting subgenres that these popular gothic texts embody. From the psychological thriller to the domestic noir, the precise generic boundaries of these texts are often difficult to define, not only recalling Maggie Kilgour's assertion that the gothic is a shadowy and nebulous genre, as difficult to define as any ghost, but also mirroring the indefinability of the psychological disorders presented in each text. What results is a study on liminality – on the anxiety of borders and of classification.

HORROR OF PERSONALITY

With that in mind, this thesis borrows its title, "horror of personality," from a term coined by Charles Derry in his comprehensive study on the modern horror film, *Dark Dreams 2.0: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century* (2009). The primary texts discussed in this thesis all fall within Derry's conception of "horror of personality," in which horror is manifested as insanity and in which man, "specific, nonabstract, and [needing no] metaphor" is figured as the greatest threat to humanity (24). Derry notes that psychological explanations of monstrosity enabled audiences to distance themselves from the

horror they saw onscreen despite the fact that "Freudian explanation seems to make almost no sense," highlighting the overwhelming influence of psychoanalysis upon American popular culture: "How many people have come out of *Psycho* reassured, saying: 'It was about a crazy man who thought he was his mother,' rather than: 'It was about a man who seemed to be just about as normal as you or me, but really wasn't'" (24).

Derry, however, fails to acknowledge that this latter point also pertains to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, for what is truly frightening about mental illness is that it creates a human "other" that cannot be readily distinguished from the rest of normative society. Consequently, in American popular cinema and literature, humans afflicted with personality disorders and other diseases of the mind are often portrayed as creatures of the uncanny, defined by Freud as that which was once familiar to the psyche, now estranged (*Unheimliche* 148), for such individuals look just like everyone else, yet their actions betray a definitive otherness — a deviance from the norm that characterises the central figures within the horror of personality subgenre. The sense of dread produced by such immediately recognisable Freudian components as the Oedipal conflict in Hitchcock's *Psycho* thus pale in comparison to the uncanny horror "of the commonplace, the usual — when given a turn or two out of alignment" (Peeples). This thesis will revisit Freud's concept of the uncanny further below, as it constitutes an integral component of the American gothic genre.

Derry also identifies a crucial shift in the focus of American horror cinema in suggesting that, beginning with *Psycho,* the 1960s horror of personality film made way for accounts of monstrosity and evil where "[v]iolence and horror were not explained in terms of science or religion, but in terms of psychology": "Since the symbolic schizophrenia of the classic horror film had now become a literal insanity, it was necessary for a whole new basis of explanation to be applied" (24). Tellingly, Derry links the changing face of American cinematic horror to the sociocultural conditions of the sixties, arguing,

> It was . . . during the John F. Kennedy years . . . that the country began to be racked by violence. Crime went up greatly, and suddenly there were riots in the streets, which many people just could not understand. And perhaps more importantly, senseless serial killers or mass murderers (Richard Speck, the Boston Strangler, Charles Whitman, et al.) were constantly in the headlines. (24)

While the horror of personality film might have emerged in the wake of 1960s social turbulence, however, psychological explanations of crime and deviance have characterised American gothic fiction since the genre was first imported to the New World. In order to situate the texts under scrutiny in this thesis within this wider gothic tradition, as well as to understand why so many American writers have chosen to employ and adapt gothic conventions to shed light upon contemporary sociocultural concerns, one must first trace a brief historical progression of the genre.

GOTHIC ORIGINS

Punter argues that, "In a literary context, 'Gothic' is most usually applied to a group of novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s" (*Literature* 1), suggesting that the official origins of the gothic novel can be traced back to canonical British texts such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). It is crucial to note, however, that recognisably gothic elements appear in even earlier works. William Shakespeare's[7] *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1593), for example, concerns not only the eponymous Goths — a tribe of people frequently associated with excess, a crucial characteristic of gothic fiction — but also a particularly uncanny climax in which Tamara, Queen of the Goths, unwittingly feasts upon her own sons. *Macbeth* (c. 1606) features prominent supernatural themes and a protagonist who is driven mad by the weight of past sins. Thus, even the origins of the gothic are shrouded in

[7] Several studies have in fact examined the gothic elements in Shakespeare's works, including John Drakakis and Dale Townshend's *Gothic Shakespeares* (2008) and Linda Charnes' article "Shakespeare and the Gothic Strain" in Susan Zimmerman and Garret A. Sullivan's *Shakespeare Studies, Vol. 8* (2010).

uncertainty. Despite the ambiguity of where the gothic truly begins, however, over the last two centuries, the genre has taken on a life of its own, especially across the Atlantic.

As a starting point, it would be useful to gauge how critics have previously attempted to outline the parameters of the genre, although as Punter stresses in his seminal study *The Literature of Terror* (1980), when it comes to the gothic, "almost nothing can be assumed, not even the limits of the field" (18). Despite an overwhelming lack of critical consensus, Punter suggests that there is "one element which, albeit in a vast variety of forms, crops up in all the relevant fiction, and that is fear" — a fear that is "not merely a theme or an attitude, [but] also has consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of the texts" (18). In a similar vein, Louis Gross comes close to establishing a working albeit imprecise definition of the gothic in his study *Redefining the American Gothic: From Wieland to Day of the Dead* (1989), arguing that "Gothic fiction is first and foremost, literature where fear is the motivating and sustaining emotion . . . . The gothic thus examines the causes, qualities, and results of terror on both mind and body" (1). This characterisation, however, by no means accounts for the hefty and peculiar baggage that accompanies all gothic fictions. Indeed, these vague definitions only serve to highlight the intangibility of the literary gothic: despite its extensive history, the gothic remains impervious to any kind of official definition.

In an effort to explain this resistance towards classification, Maggie Kilgour suggests,

> [O]ne of the factors that makes the gothic so shadowy and nebulous a genre, as difficult to define as any gothic ghost, is that it cannot be seen in abstraction from the other literary forms from whose graves it arises, or from its later descendants who survive after its demise . . . . The form is thus itself a Frankenstein's monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past. (3-4)

Gothic writing might thus be understood as a form haunted by its own development: a product of both the cultural and literary past that depends not only on a text's specific historical context but also a set of inherited literary conventions, even if these conventions are ultimately upended. Curiously, Kilgour's statement also implies that the gothic novel proper is an extinct form that,

despite its influence on notable generic offshoots such as the detective novel and the modern horror film, has already reached an end. This thesis argues, however, that, as a genre without a definitive origin, the gothic also cannot possibly possess a definitive endpoint. It would thus be more accurate to describe the gothic as an inchoate, undead form that constantly shifts depending on its cultural setting and the precise historical moment during which it is resurrected. Some critics suggest that in eighteenth-century England, for example, the Gothic[8] novel arose in response to anxieties over the French Revolution (Paulson), while at the *fin-de-siècle*, the British gothic shifted to address concerns over moral decay and degeneracy in response to emerging social, medical, and evolutionary theories (Buzwell). In post-World War II America, the gothic yet again turns towards a new set of anxieties that will be addressed further below. In other words, the gothic is very much "alive" today although its shape has changed considerably since its inception.

Anne Williams's conceptualisation of the gothic in her comprehensive study *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995) hints at this constant state of flux. Williams refuses to consider the gothic — a "something" that she believes transcends the "merely literary" — as simply a "mode," a tradition or a set of conventions (23). Instead, she argues, "Perhaps like the Freudian concept of 'unconscious,' Gothic implies a phenomenon long present but until recently not described," and suggests that the term "gothic," rather than describing a discrete genre, actually modifies the term "complex," which "denotes an intersection of grammar, architecture and psychoanalysis" (23-24). This formulation seems highly appropriate, as the multiple meanings of "complex" as both adjective and noun mirror the countless ways in which critics have attempted to define the gothic. Interestingly, as a psychiatric term designating "a connected group of repressed ideas that compel characteristic or habitual patterns of thought, feeling, or action" (23),

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[8] Within this thesis, the term "Gothic" with a capital "G" will be used only to denote the specific "group of novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s" that Punter delineates above, its usage within secondary quotations notwithstanding.

Williams's notion of the gothic complex recalls Leslie Fiedler's conception that "the whole tradition of the gothic is a pathological symptom[9] rather than a proper literary movement" (135). According to both Fiedler and Williams, then, the gothic is best understood as a corollary of repression, necessitating psychoanalytic interpretation.

Indeed, a large number of critics, especially ones concentrating on the American gothic, have tended to fall within two camps: those who read the gothic in psychoanalytic terms, and those who prefer a historical reading, although these two methodologies are by no means exhaustive[10]. While for decades, psychoanalysis provided the dominant lens through which academics examined the gothic, beginning in the 1980s, critics like Punter called for the gothic to be historicised in order to address the interplay between gothic texts and the sociocultural conditions surrounding them[11]. As Louis Gross has recognised, however, combining these two differing approaches provides a particularly apt and complementary analysis of the gothic, especially within an American context. Crucially, there exists one particular link that binds these two seemingly disparate perspectives together: the notion of the uncanny.

In his highly influential essay "*Das Unheimliche*" (1919), Sigmund Freud posits that the uncanny, a psychoanalytic concept that "evokes fear and dread," is "actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through

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[9] Fiedler is likely using the term "symptom" in its psychoanalytic sense to denote a "sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance" and "consequence of the process of repression" (Freud "Inhibitions" 20.91).

[10] Critics have in fact analyzed gothic texts from a wide range of perspectives, including feminist, such as Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* (1976) and Juliann Fleenor's *Female Gothic* (1983), Marxist, e.g. Wylie Sypher's "Social Ambiguity in a Gothic Novel" (1945), theological, such as Alison Milbank's "God and the Gothic" (2007) and Maria Purves's *The Gothic and Catholicism* (2009), and postcolonial, e.g. Tabish Khair's *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness* (2009).

[11] It is interesting to note that while the need to historicise the gothic might seem obvious in the context of current criticism, especially given Kilgour's analysis above, Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (1980) was one of the first texts to underscore this necessity. Other pioneering texts arguing that the gothic must be read in sociocultural terms include Ronald Paulson's "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution" (1981), Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), and William Patrick Day's *In the Circles of Fear and Desire* (1985). Curiously, the trend to historicise is an even more recent development within criticism of the American gothic, perhaps due to the fact that "[m]ost specialists in American literature have accepted the idea that in the absence of history (or a sense of history) as well as a social field," American fiction "has consistently taken an ahistorical, mythical shape..." (Baym 427).

being repressed," citing Schelling's definition of the uncanny as "everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (123, 132). According to Freud, then, the return of the repressed forms the crux of the uncanny. While critics have struggled to arrive at a unified definition of the gothic, it is generally agreed that gothic writing confronts readers with the deepest recesses of the human psyche, giving voice to those unspeakable memories and desires that should by all accounts remain "secret and hidden" (132). This fuses the uncanny to the gothic, revealing the two as analogous concepts. The uncanny is not, however, merely concerned with bringing to light long-buried individual drives and dark personal pasts, but also with the repression of history on a broader scale, making this concept especially pertinent to the American gothic.

Certainly, on a surface level, the entire concept of an "American gothic" appears to be based on a paradox, for there could surely be no place for "a literature of darkness and the grotesque" in the United States, a brand new nation founded upon "the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and 'the pursuit of happiness,' a country that supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims" (Fiedler 29; Savoy "Rise" 167). This incongruity between the basic nature of the gothic and "America's self-mythologization as a nation of hope and harmony" is in itself nothing short of uncanny (Goddu 4). Indeed, as this thesis has previously suggested, the American Enlightenment narrative has continuously found itself at odds with the myriad socio-historical traumas that have plagued the country since its foundation. As Teresa Goddu clarifies, however, "[T]he gothic tells of the historical horrors that make national identity possible yet must be repressed in order to sustain it" (10). One of the primary functions of the American gothic is thus to bring to light all those unsavoury historical chapters that have been repressed by the nation's collective unconscious. It is thus no wonder that gothic fictions set within the New World repeatedly return to not only personal and familial pasts, but also the national past in order to unsettle the dominant narrative of progress and enlightenment, for as Eric Savoy argues in

American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative (2009), the "failure of repression and forgetting" is "a failure upon which the entire tradition of the gothic in America is predicated" (4). This also goes a long way in explaining why "the writing of the uncanny is the field — or, more precisely, the multivalent tendency — of American gothic" (4). Perhaps then, Freud's definition of the uncanny also goes some way in providing a working definition of the gothic form in America.

At this point, another nexus must be mentioned, namely that which links the uncanny, the Gothic, and women, as this nexus is at work in all four of the works studied in this thesis. Lloyd-Smith specifically links these three elements in *Uncanny American Fiction: Medusa's Face* (1989): Partly because the Gothic mode has "always implicitly involved sexual sadism" and the victimisation of women (52), and partly because "the position of woman in [Western] culture is always 'off to the side', and is, therefore, productive of the uncanny" (74), the presence of woman effectively fuses the uncanny to the Gothic. Furthermore, "[m]ale and female difference creates a pattern of the-same-but-other" (9), indicating that woman, defined from a patriarchal perspective, is uncanny because she is "other" and therefore unknowable to man. It is thus from an androcentric essentialist perspective that women, regardless of age or occupation, are viewed as physiologically uncanny and, often, psychologically uncanny as well.

Returning to the question of definitions, in her comprehensive study *Gothic America* (1997), Goddu contends, "Just as *gothic* unsettles the idea of America, the modifier *American* destabilizes understandings of the gothic," suggesting once more that American gothic writing constitutes an entirely different genre than its European antecedents — one that "depends less on the particular set of conventions it establishes than those it disrupts" (4). Indeed, while various national gothic strains certainly share distinctive features, chief among them "an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, . . . prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense"

(Punter *Literature* 1), the American gothic is often demarcated by a specific emphasis on elements of psychological terror, which partly accounts for the proliferation of psychoanalytic readings. Recurring themes such as guilt, trauma, madness and, most notably, repression characterise the fiction of the United States, beginning with *Wieland*, the first major work by Charles Brockden Brown, the man often credited as America's first professional novelist.

Wieland, aptly subtitled *The Transformation: An American Tale,* was inspired by the true story[12] of James Yates, a New York farmer who murdered his wife and four children after hearing a "voice" that convinced him this was God's will. In Brown's novel, Theodore Wieland, the son of a fanatically religious German immigrant, is similarly compelled to murder his own family under the influence of mysterious spiritual voices. Narrated from the perspective of Theodore's psychologically vulnerable sister, Clara, the novel highlights the utterly destructive nature of an uncanny return of the repressed past as Theodore Wieland's inheritance of his father's religious mania ultimately destroys his own bloodline. Significantly, by focusing on the similarly tragic fates of both the elder Wieland and his American-born son, Brown's novel emphasises the impossibility of breaking with the past, "point[ing] to a much darker account of history" than the one offered by the dominant enlightenment narrative of the newly formed American Republic: one in which the sins of the fathers – "their excesses, their violence and abuses, their predispositions toward the irrational – are visited upon their children, who, despite their illusions of liberty, find themselves in the ironic situation of an intergenerational compulsion to repeat the past" (Savoy "Rise" 172). *Wieland* thus illustrates precisely the disastrous consequences of the "failure of repression and forgetting" upon which rests the entire American gothic tradition (Savoy *American* 4).

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[12] Curiously, American culture's fascination with "true crime" has continued throughout the two centuries since *Wieland*'s publication, as demonstrated by the large number of contemporary gothic novels that purport to be based on a true story. This is especially true of serial killer narratives, as will be discussed further in chapter two, with reference to Robert Bloch's *Psycho*.

Equally significantly, Wieland's rapid "transformation" from benevolent family man into a grotesque murderous monster highlights the fragility of America's self-made man archetype, for "in a land where identity is wholly self-constructed," it is "therefore also open to instantaneous dissolution" (Gross 90). Indeed, the instability of personal identity constitutes a key theme that runs throughout American gothic fiction from *Wieland* to Poe's short fictions to the specific texts addressed in this thesis. This instability of the self most often manifests itself in questions of sanity and mental hygiene. Clara's tortured and often-incoherent narration in *Wieland,* for example, implores readers to question her sanity in addition to that of her brother's, as for all her declarations of rationality, even she must admit that her narrative "may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion" (147). Indeed, Clara's state of mind is perhaps the most interesting mystery in Brown's novel and, as a clear predecessor to Poe's many half-crazed narrators, she presents an interesting point of comparison with subsequent protagonists ranging from Poe's Fortunato to Patrick Bateman, the protagonist of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991).

Strangely, while "insanity and the disintegration of the self" comprise long-running themes within the American gothic (Fiedler 129), little has been written about the gothicisation of depictions of mental illness in post-war era American fiction, particularly with respect to abnormal psychology and personality disorders. While several critics have explored depictions of psychopathology in literature, with Jane Caputi, Philip Jenkins, Richard Tithecott, Mark Seltzer, and Philip L. Simpson leading this movement, more research is still needed into the ways in which not only contemporary history but also concurrent psychiatric developments within the United States have shaped fictional depictions of personality disorders and vice versa, especially considering the close-knit relationship between the gothic and psychoanalysis, the dominant perspective from which diagnostic criteria and treatments for mental illness were developed in both the years leading up to and the years following the Second World War.

Perhaps it is the circularity of the topic that has impeded critical engagement thus far. While psychoanalysis provided the dominant method through which critics engaged with American gothic literature for decades, and remains a popular critical framework even to this day, it is crucial to recognise that Freud, the single greatest influence on American psychoanalysis, wrote extensively on art and literature and conceptualised several of his theories on the basis of gothic fiction, most notably his notion of the uncanny. Furthermore, if Kilgour is correct in affirming that psychoanalysis is itself "a late gothic story" (221), this surely calls into question the validity of psychoanalysis as a psychiatric methodology despite the discipline's "claims to scientific status" throughout the majority of the twentieth century (Hale 158). From the publication of the APA's first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1952 up until the release of the DSM-III in 1980, however, psychoanalysis undeniably provided the dominant perspective from which diagnoses of mental illness were determined. Furthermore, the impact of psychoanalysis, and particularly Freudian ideas, extends far beyond psychiatry, permeating the entire "American cultural landscape" of the Cold War era (Burnham 3). In order to comprehend both the meteoric rise and lasting influence of psychoanalysis in the United States, a brief look at the historical diagnosis and treatment of America's mentally ill is required, for it is only by understanding that the origins of American psychiatry constitute a gothic story in their own right that one might begin to probe the interplay between contemporary psychiatric models of personality disorder and the ways in which these disorders are portrayed in the nation's fiction.

GOTHIC MEDICINE

As previously argued, the origins and history[13] of American psychiatry are shrouded in notably gothic terms. Up until the eighteenth century, it was widely believed that "mental diseases, along

[13] This thesis necessarily offers a simplified overview of the complex history of American psychiatry in order to concentrate on the gothic elements running through this history. For a comprehensive history of psychiatry in the

with other forms of illness, [were] supernaturally induced" (Deutsch ch. 1), recalling instantly one of Punter's archetypal features of the gothic: the presence of the supernatural (*Literature* 1). In his seminal study *The Mentally Ill in America* (1937), Albert Deutsch explains, "From time immemorial, the confounding of mental illness with demoniacal possession has existed" and, consequently, before the advent of psychiatry, sickness was often "cured by exorcising the demon from the person possessed, through incantation and prayer, through propitiation, cajoling, and even threats" (ch. 1). Deutsch's repeated use of gothic language in describing archaic attitudes toward both the explanations and treatments for mental illness reveals a longstanding societal pattern of not only dealing cruel corporeal punishments to those afflicted but also of conflating madness with monstrosity and evil, a pattern that has continued unabated into the current era.

According to Deutsch, when early European colonists immigrated to the New World in the seventeenth-century, leaving behind a continent that was "being racked by religious wars, political upheavals and profound economic changes," they brought with them to America "even harsher and more ignorant attitude[s]" toward mental illness than in centuries past (ch. 1). Ultimately, the equivalence of mental illness with demonic possession in colonial America reached a culmination of sorts in the Salem witch trials, one of the most gothic chapters in American history. During this infamous period, any deviations from normal human behaviour were treated with suspicion, and the "causes of strange or irregular conduct (such as a mentally ill person might manifest) were sought in the supernatural," with the answer "commonly found in demoniacal possession" (ch. 2). Only when the moral panic surrounding the witch trials finally began to die down and a certain degree of stability was restored to these early communities did the American public begin to recognise that abnormal behaviour might have causes other than

United States from the colonial era to the late twentieth century, see Gerald N. Grob's *The Mad Among Us* (1994) or Robert Whitaker's *Mad in America* (2002), which also covers the early twenty-first century.

supernatural intervention (ch. 3). Accordingly, alternative measures to contain and possibly cure the mentally ill were finally sought.

Significantly, the first professional attempts at treating mental illness did not begin until the mid-eighteenth-century when in 1751, Benjamin Franklin and Dr Thomas Bond, recognising the need to care for the increased number of "lunaticks" roaming the streets of Philadelphia due to the city's recent population boom, co-founded the Pennsylvania Hospital. Upon opening its doors to the public in 1753, the hospital contained a small number of rooms specifically designed to house and restrain the mentally ill through the use of shackles attached to the walls. Increased demand for such dedicated facilities would eventually lead not only to the addition of a psychiatric ward but also to the creation of the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane in 1841 (Sudak). Throughout most of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, treatments for mental illness in the United States remained limited to methods of confinement inherited from earlier times, wherein sufferers were predominantly hidden away in medical institutions and jailhouses, out of sight of the public and on the margins of society.

Thirty years after the opening of Pennsylvania Hospital, the election of doctor Benjamin Rush to the hospital's staff resulted in crucial reforms in early American psychiatric care. Rush was the first physician in the United States to officially suggest that mental disorder was the corollary of a diseased mind rather than otherworldly forces. Deutsch writes that Rush was "able to cut away thick layers of superstition, hearsay and ignorance, and to raise the study and treatment of mental diseases to a scientific level for the first time," creating an "original systematization" of psychological disorders (ch. 5). Although Rush placed great emphasis on recreational therapies and "humane" treatment of patients, however, he also mistakenly believed that mental illness was an arterial disease caused by the inflammation of blood vessels in the brain (Rush 183). Accordingly, the treatments Rush engineered included such archaic practices as bloodletting, active purgation with mercury chloride, and a device of his own invention dubbed

the "tranquilizer," a chair in which patients were confined in order to "reduce the pulse through lessening the muscular action and motor activity of the patient's body" (Deutsch ch. 5). In other words, Rush's methods for alleviating the symptoms of mental illness were, at least from a modern standpoint, quintessentially gothic. Deutsch clarifies that, "[k]indly and humane though he was, Dr. Rush accepted without question the necessity of coercion by mechanical restraint and of certain forms of corporal punishment, even advocating whippings in extreme cases" (ch. 5). This not only indicates that Rush's methods were considered standard practice for the era, but also highlights the extent to which gothic rituals had already been ingrained in American psychiatric treatments, for Rush's "innovative" techniques were scarcely an improvement upon previous methods of punishment for "demoniacal possession," which included "the scourge, the rack" and "the stake" (ch. 2).

In 1812, however, Rush published what was undoubtedly his greatest contribution to the psychiatric profession: *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, a textbook that would be used in the treatment of psychological disorders for the next fifty years. Tellingly, Rush's text, in which he sets out to "[lessen] a portion of some of the greatest *evils* of human life" (7, emphasis mine), again employs distinctly gothic language straightaway in describing the symptoms and causes of "derangement," a term he uses to "signify the diseases of all the faculties of the mind" as well as "every departure of the mind in its perceptions, judgments, and reasonings, from its natural and habitual order; accompanied with corresponding actions" (9). It is interesting to note that despite setting forth this clear definition of "derangement," Rush frequently substitutes for it the terms "madness" (12, 33, 51, etc.) and "insanity" (43, 50, etc.) interchangeably, indicating the imprecise nature of psychiatric nomenclature, an issue that persists even in current psychiatric textbooks[14].

[14] Indeed, the imprecision of modern psychiatric nomenclature can be seen in the continued lack of disambiguation surrounding the terms "psychopathy," "sociopathy," and "antisocial personality disorder," which are frequently used interchangeably. This point will be addressed in further detail subsequently.

In meditating upon the causes of "general intellectual derangement," Rush muses,

> [I]s madness induced by the ingratitude or treachery of friends, or by the unjust calumnies of the world? The conversation and conduct of the patient indicate a coldness or hostility to the whole human race. In this state of mind, the walls of a cell, and even darkness, are welcomed, to protect the miserable sufferer from the sight of the supposed monster — man. (154)

This passage not only illustrates Rush's sustained use of gothic language in describing the aetiology of derangement, but also indicates that Rush may have experienced patients suffering from personality disorders, despite the lack of formal terminology available to describe such disorders in the early nineteenth century. In particular, the description of a patient exhibiting "coldness or hostility to the whole human race" reinforces this possibility, as it brings to mind not only the DSM-I's description of individuals suffering from sociopathic personality disturbance, antisocial reaction, a precursor to antisocial personality disorder, as "callous" (38), but also J. Reid Meloy's description of the psychopathic personality as one typified by "diffuse" rage and "hostility" (81). The subtle emergence of concepts relating to later DSM diagnoses of mental illness thus further highlights the historical importance of Rush's text.

Continuing his pattern of employing gothic language, Rush also writes at length about the nature of fear — Punter's one unifying element that "crops up in all the relevant fiction" of the gothic (*Literature* 18) — and its role in the development of derangement: "There are so much danger and evil in our world, that the passion of fear was implanted in our minds for the wise and benevolent purpose of defending us from them" (323). Rush separates objects of fear into two kinds: reasonable fears, including death and surgical operations, and unreasonable fears, including "Thunder, darkness, ghosts" and "certain animals, particularly cats, rats, insects and the like" (323) and argues that unreasonable fears frequently lead to abnormal behaviour, such as "great talkativeness," "moping stillness" or "constant motion" (324), indicating also that the threshold for transgressing what was considered normal behaviour was low in Rush's time. Rush's catalogue of irrational fears further underscores the extent to which the vocabulary used to

describe the origins of mental abnormalities at the start of the nineteenth century continued to find its roots in the language of the gothic, a point also strengthened by Rush's claim that in the madman, "[a]ll sense of decency and modesty is suspended, hence he besmears his face with his own excretions, and exposes his whole body without a covering. When he roams at large, or escapes from a place of confinement, lonely woods, marshes, caves, or graveyards, are his usual places of resort, or retirement" (148). This description of the madman and his eerie hiding place instantly recalls the kinds of grotesque villains and desolate settings found within classic gothic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, undermining to an extent the credibility of Rush's textbook as a thoroughly scientific work.

Curiously, Rush further undercuts the scientific validity of his own text by relying on analysis of the psychological afflictions of fictional characters in a move that anticipates the writings of Freud. Just as Freud frequently refers to the characters within E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" in elucidating his notion of the uncanny, for example, Rush not only examines the "diseased state of perception" in Sophocles' Ajax (145), but also repeatedly invokes Shakespeare's King Lear in discussing the markers of mental illness (92, 148, 157, 217, 245, 296, 357), arguing, "The reader will excuse my frequent recurrences to the poets for facts to illustrate the history of madness. They view the human mind in all its operations, whether natural or morbid, with a microscopic eye, and hence many things arrest their attention, which escape the notice of physicians" (158). What Rush fails to recognise, however, is that in relying on Shakespeare's illustration of "the encroachment of intellectual madness upon the moral faculty" in King Lear (Rush 157), he in fact derives his model of derangement from a work of literature with overtly gothic undertones, thus providing the first hint that fiction might indeed possess the power to influence medical understandings of mental illness, a point that will be revisited in chapter two in relation to Thigpen and Cleckley's *The Three Faces of Eve*.

Undoubtedly, to twenty-first century readers, Rush's textbook now represents more of a cultural text symbolising the state of American psychiatry in the early 1800s than a scientific work. At the time, however, Rush's text provided critical advancements in the ways American physicians conceptualised mental illness. Despite Rush's various contributions to the field of psychiatry, as well as those of his contemporaries and fellow advocators of moral treatment in Europe, Philippe Pinel and William Tuke, it was not until 1840 that the Bureau of the Census finally began to classify and quantify the recurrence of psychiatric disorders in the United States. The 1840 sixth national census, however, recorded just one category of mental illness, "idiocy/lunacy," grouping all those exhibiting signs of psychological abnormality under one universal classification (Gilman 112). The results of the census showed the "total number of insane and feeble-minded to be over 17,000[15]" (112) but provided no further distinguishing information. Forty years later, the 1880 United States census sought to improve statistics on mental illness by differentiating between seven distinct categories of mental illness: mania, melancholia[16], monomania, paresis, dementia, dipsomania, and epilepsy (Thompson 191).

By this time, seventy-five public psychiatric hospitals were in operation across the United States, owing in large part to the advocacy efforts of Dorothea L. Dix, who led "the movement to make asylums the foundation of public policy" between the 1840s and the 1860s (Grob 46). The tremendous increase over the past few decades in the number of public asylums for the insane necessitated further psychiatric reform, including the direct gathering of statistical data and the standardisation of diagnosis criteria across all American institutions. Shadia Kawa and James Giordano argue, "Uncertainty surrounding the etiological bases of psychopathology, and

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[15] The census also revealed that of these 17,000 individuals, 3,000 were black. Gilman explains, "The census purported to show that the incidence of mental illness among freed Blacks was eleven times higher than for slaves and six times higher than for the white population," information that was used to arm anti-abolitionists with "major 'scientific' proof that Blacks were congenitally unfit for freedom" (112), thus contributing to a similarly longstanding gothic narrative of racial prejudice within the United States.

[16] "Mania" and "melancholia" were also two subtypes of derangement listed by name in Benjamin Rush's *Inquiries* (140, 72).

psychiatrists' contention that abnormal behavior involved complex, variable, and often obscure interactions of internal and external factors, compelled formulation of a uniform nosological system of acknowledged clinical utility" (2). Thus, in 1918, the American Medico-Psychological Association (now the American Psychiatric Association), under the joint supervision of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene and the Bureau of the Census, devised the first official attempt at a uniform classificatory system for psychiatric disorders in the United States: the *Statistical Manual for the Use of Institutions for the Insane.*

This direct predecessor of the DSM featured twenty-two diagnostic categories of mental disorder and reflected a biological approach consistent with the dominant psychological perspective of the time. As a large number of American psychiatrists of the interwar period believed that mental diseases were the result of somatic ailments, all nine subsequent editions of the *Statistical Manual* also reflected this stance, offering "relatively broad categorizations of mental disorders" that were "of limited diagnostic utility" (2). The subsequent dramatic popularisation of psychoanalytic ideas particularly surrounding the Second World War would, however, generate yet another wave of psychiatric reform with far-reaching consequences for American culture at large throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.

FREUD, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND COLD WAR AMERICA

While critics frequently pinpoint Brockden Brown's 1798 novel *Wieland* as the starting point for American gothic literature*,* the origins of psychoanalysis in the United States might be traced back to 1909, the year in which Freud gave a series of five lectures at Clark University in Massachusetts. Prior to this point in time, few Americans had heard of Freud's writings, "not even his publications about innovations in psychotherapeutic technique," argues Burnham (2). Over the next few decades, however, psychoanalysis quickly took root in the United States, contributing to the "complex historical process that scholars have often referred to as the

'psychologization' of America" (1). Despite the claims of historians like Burnham and Ernst Falzeder that Freud himself was not particularly fond of American culture (Burnham 15), Nathan G. Hale contends in his comprehensive study, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States* (1995)[17], that even before the United States entered World War I, "the popularization of psychoanalysis [in America] had reached far beyond literary circles . . . " (74). Indeed, owing largely to "[p]ublicity in mass magazines and popular books," which had "begun around 1915 and reached a peak in the early 1920s," Freudian ideas regarding various aspects of American culture, from criminology to education to attitudes toward sexual behaviour, enjoyed widespread consumption (74), indicating the American public's eagerness to embrace psychoanalytic concepts.

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, several key factors further contributed to the growth of psychoanalysis within the U.S., chief among them the need felt by a large number of psychiatric professionals to replace somaticism with a less speculative alternative approach to mental health and the public's perception that psychodynamic treatments for mental disorders represented the forefront of cutting-edge new medicine based on the rigorous, systematic training and scientific expertise of its practitioners (Hale 158). Moreover, the rising demand for psychiatric services beyond institutional care due to the devastating effects of the Great Depression's long-lasting economic downturn, which affected a staggering percentage of the American population, necessitated an expansion of the profession as a whole (158). Thus, after slowly building both a steady following in the psychiatric community as well as a solid reputation in the popular press, psychoanalysis emerged as the "major American medical psychology" of the interwar period (158), a singular discipline that provided the American people with not only a means with which

[17] Curiously, Hale's account of the rise and subsequent decline of psychoanalysis in the United States marks the only comprehensive study on this subject. Few other texts have addressed the effects of psychoanalysis within a specifically American context in the same level of detail, including John Burnham's edited collection *After Freud Left* (2012) and Orna Ophir's newly published *Psychosis, Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry in Postwar USA* (2015), which mostly reiterates the same points Hale first raised in 1995.

to assuage growing anxieties, but also a new "scientific" vocabulary with which to analyse the malaise of such deeply fraught times.

The success of psychoanalytic therapy — "the talking cure" — in the treatment of military servicemen during and after the Second World War only further cemented the discipline's lofty new status among both American psychiatric professionals and the general public, ushering in what Hale refers to as the "golden age of psychoanalysis" (276)[18]. In the "popular writing about the war neuroses," Hale explains, the "healing effects of the recall and catharsis of traumatic experiences, the importance and relevance of dreams, the benign and powerful role of the therapist, and above all the unshakeably scientific standing of psychoanalytic conclusions were repeated time and again" (277). In other words, what psychoanalysis offered, in the popular view, was not only an effective form of therapy, but also, much more importantly, the chance for those recovering from the war to seek a normal, happy life. The complete cultural fascination with psychoanalysis during this period might thus be attributed to the discipline's ability to reaffirm the attainability of time-honoured American ideals, a notion reiterated in publications as varied as *Psychology Today*, *Science Digest*, *Life*, *Time*, *Home and Garden*, and even *Vogue* (Hale 280-283). Everywhere one looked from 1945 onward, thus, psychoanalysis was touted as a success story, one that bolstered the dominant American national narrative and gave hope that, even after the traumas of war, every individual could progress towards a happy, well-adjusted life.

This unquestioning belief in the healing powers of psychoanalytic therapy undoubtedly owed much to the mass media's portrayal of the discipline as "natural and understandable" to the average American reader (Hale 276-277), illustrating also the popular press's tendency to sensationalise everything from the everyday benefits of psychoanalysis to its status as the answer to all of American psychiatry's shortcomings. Hale elaborates, for example, that during this

[18] Most critics, such as Hale, Dorothy Ross, Louis Menand, and Orna Ophir, seem to be in agreement that the "golden age" of psychoanalysis in the United States extends from 1945 to 1965.

period, writers, "like psychoanalysts themselves, tended to inflate the influence and achievements of Freud and to let them stand for an entire, complex cultural development, such as 'modern psychiatry'" (276). Given this context, one might understand how psychoanalytic ideas came to thoroughly dominate the post-war American cultural imagination, saturating multiple social milieus, including the home, the school, and the workplace, for "[a]lready psychoanalysis was vouchsafing enlightenment about different cultures, art, and literature and soon could be expected to throw light on social relationships and group behavior" (282). Such overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards psychoanalysis naturally continued into the start of the Cold War era.

It is thus no wonder that, by the time the first edition of the DSM was published in 1952, psychoanalysis had reached peak popularity in the United States, with the large majority of American psychiatrists having adopted the psychodynamic approach (Burnham, Ross). As a direct result, the DSM-I relied heavily on psychoanalytic concepts, as illustrated primarily through its pervasive use of the term "neurosis" to describe various psychological disorders (12, 25, 74). In stark contrast to the first edition of the American Medico-Psychological Association's *Statistical Manual*, the DSM-I featured descriptions of one-hundred-and-six separate psychological disorders, referred to as "reactions," a term coined by Adolf Meyer, the president of the American Psychiatric Association from 1927 to 1928. Contrary to mainstream opinions of his time, Meyer rejected Freud's emphasis on the role of the unconscious in the development of personality in favour of a "psychobiological view that mental disorders represented reactions of the personality to psychological, social and biological factors" (Ellis, Abrams, and Abrams 184). The DSM-I thus also reflected to a limited extent this alternative perspective on the aetiology of psychological conditions even as it discussed the role of "[u]nconscious internal conflicts" in the formation of psychoneurosis (47). Perhaps what is most significant about the language of the DSM-I, however, is its claim that the "chief characteristic of [psychoneurotic] disorders is 'anxiety'" (31), for this singular statement perfectly encapsulates the Cold War

climate that produced not only the first four editions of the DSM, but also the myriad popular texts under scrutiny in this thesis.

Despite the twenty-first century tendency to look back upon 1950s America with a misplaced sense of nostalgia, for, as M. Keith Booker elucidates, "There were more 'golden ages' in the 1950s than in any other decade" (5), the decade in truth remains one fraught with countless anxieties both social and political. In his insightful study on Cold War era American science fiction, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War* (2001), Booker further argues, "The 1950s are also widely remembered as the Golden Age of nuclear fear. Indeed, nostalgic visions of the American 1950s as a decade of peace and prosperity notwithstanding, it is clear from the perspective of half a century later that one of the central experiences of the decade was fear, and not just of nuclear war" (5). Booker's characterisation of the beginning of the Cold War era as a time of fear instantly recalls Punter's one uniting element present in all gothic fictions: a fear that "has consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of the texts" (*Literature* 18), for certainly, it could be said that the overwhelming presence of fear in 1950s America generated profound effects both on social relations during the period and on the style of fictional texts produced in this era. It could be said, then, that early Cold War America also constitutes a gothic period in its own right.

In support of this argument, one might first turn to Hale's characterisation of World War II, in which he claims, "No other war had subjected men to such intense bombings, to such fiendish levels of noise, to such new and unpredictable tactics" (278), essentially situating late-1930s to mid-1940s America in a gothic age already. More importantly, however, after the Second World War, the United States was meant to have emerged from this gothic era stronger than ever, but, as in all archetypal gothic narratives, the weight of the past continued to exert a powerful influence over the present. Indeed, no sooner had the U.S. emerged from one war than it entered another, as the declaration of the Truman doctrine in March 1947, less than two years

after the end of World War II, "committed the United States to opposing internal and external threats to free societies" (Meynand 191), thereby also committing the nation to a new war encompassing the ever-present threat of nuclear catastrophe that would last until the end of the century.

Taking into account this persistent insidious threat of radiation and nuclear destruction, which was greatly compounded by the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Louis Menand also pinpoints anxiety as the primary marker of the post-World War II era, and goes on to suggest that "one reason for the 'fit' between Freudianism and postwar American culture had to do with what might be called the Cold War discourse of anxiety, which Freudianism formalized" (190). Menand's point regarding the discourse of anxiety shared between Cold War culture and psychoanalysis, however, only represents the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, in the complex relationship between these two central factors, both of which combined to influence the fiction of the 1950s in tandem. Also integral to this gothic period, as my first chapter will discuss, was the constant threat of the imperceptible monster, equally in the forms of the communist and the psychopath.

The conflation of these two types of "deviants" will form the basis of my argument in chapter one, which examines Robert Bloch's novel *Psycho* and its Bluebeardian central character Norman Bates. After discussing the sociohistorical conditions that gave rise to the gothicised depiction of Norman as a "pseudopsychopath" who confuses several distinct psychiatric diagnoses, this chapter will conclude with a supplementary examination of Bloch's later novel *American Gothic* and its deployment of the Bluebeard constellation. This chapter will begin to understand the ways in which the prescriptive gender roles of the 1950s impact fictional depictions of psychological disorder.

Chapter two reads Shirley Jackson's novel *The Bird's Nest* against Corbett Thigpen and Hervey Cleckley's psychiatric study *The Three Faces of Eve* in order to examine the symbiotic

relationship between fictional gothic texts and contemporary psychiatric texts centring on what was previously termed multiple personality disorder, now known as dissociative personality disorder. This chapter will also continue to elucidate the ways in which the rigidity of 1950s gender roles inform both popular and psychiatric texts of the period, both of which emphasise the marginalisation of women within phallocentric western culture. Moreover, both chapters one and two confront the ways in which the pervasive use of gothic language in both contemporary psychiatric and cultural documents describing psychopathy and multiple personality disorder, respectively, underlines a lack of understanding concerning severe forms of mental illness, resulting in the social ostracisation and villainization of those afflicted with disorders of personality.

Chapter three examines the depiction of what might now be termed borderline personality disorder in Henry Farrell's novel *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1960). This chapter argues that the novel's subversion of the Bluebeard gothic offers a counternarrative to the classic Woman in Peril plot that nonetheless underscores the folly of patriarchal culture and concludes that texts like *Baby Jane* help to expose the gendered nature of concepts such as normality and deviance within the culture of the United States while delving into the novel's invocation of psychoanalytic themes.

Finally, chapter four analyses the depiction of child psychopathy as a throwback to nineteenth century gothic fiction in William March's novel *The Bad Seed* (1954). This chapter finds that by focusing on hereditary explanations for deviance rather than psychoanalytic explanations popular in the 1950s, March's novel in fact voices contemporary concerns regarding juvenile delinquency while resisting a straightforward Freudian narrative and examining the prescriptive nature of American suburban social structures.

The threads that bind these novels together as a collection can essentially be boiled down to two main strands: anxiety — over national security, neighbourhood security, and the

breakdown of socially constructed gender roles — and trauma — national, sexual, and familial. By studying these texts as a collection, this thesis interrogates the driving factors behind why the gothic, which ties together these two strands, remains such an integral part of American culture at large, and how it has seeped into narratives that centre on trauma and mental illness.

CHAPTER ONE

Going Psycho: Horror of Personality in the 1950s

"The only idea more overused than serial killers is multiple personality."

Adaptation (2002)

1000 DEVIANTS

In discussing Robert Bloch's novel *Psycho* (1959) and the genesis of the horror-of-personality as a subgenre of gothic literature in the 1950s, it is crucial to consider both the social and historical context of mid-century America, as well as concurrent psychiatric understandings of personality disorder. Despite the twenty-first century tendency to look back upon the 1950s with a misplaced sense of nostalgia, a phenomenon that both Stephanie Coontz and Mary Caputi have discussed at length[19], the decade in truth remains fraught with countless anxieties both social and political – anxieties that generated countless gothic fictions in the Cold War era. As previously mentioned, Booker characterises the 1950s as a period consumed with "fear, and not just of nuclear war" (5). It is precisely this pervasive experience of fear that Bloch exploits in his writing, for, as the author himself describes the driving force behind his unique brand of horror fiction: "Fear is the main thing. Only it has to be a fear that is close to reality, something that people can recognize as part of the world around them. The more familiar, the stronger it is" (qtd. in Szumskyj 9). Bloch's novel, *Psycho,* as this thesis will strive to demonstrate, thus relies heavily upon the invocation of particular anxieties plaguing the United States in the early stages of the Cold War, namely, the threat of the imperceptible monster.

[19] See Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (1992) for a dismantling of the romanticised nuclear family of the 1950s and Mary Caputi's *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (2005) for a full discussion of the mythicisation of 1950s politics.

This unique threat manifested itself equally in the forms of the communist, a political deviant, and the psychopath, a social deviant, often resulting in the conflation of these two distinct figures, both of whom were routinely characterised in gothic terms. Indeed, one need look no further than J. Edgar Hoover's description of the U.S. communist party to observe the perceived association between political deviance and monstrosity: "In the beginning it seemed little more than a freak. Yet in the intervening years that freak has *grown* into a powerful monster endangering us all" (53, emphasis mine). In other words, communism was viewed as a mounting evil, one that was not only gaining more and more traction, implying the threat of contagion, but also one that was all the more sinister for being invisible, for its dangers lay purely within an individual's belief in corrupt, un-American ideologies. Such dangerous individuals bore no ostensible markers of their inner perversity, making it impossible to separate the normal from the abnormal, the treacherous communist from his conventional neighbours. Political deviants were thus capable of "passing" as normal members of American society, thereby collapsing traditional distinctions between "same" and "other," resulting in fundamentally uncanny beings that were at once familiar, yet somehow alien.

Equally important during this period was the association between political deviance and sexual deviance. According to Robert Genter, the Hiss-Chambers case, tried in 1948, was instrumental in solidifying this association in the media. While standing trial for Soviet espionage, former State Department official Alger Hiss claimed that his accuser, Whittaker Chambers, was mentally unstable due to his former membership in the communist party, and enlisted the counsel of psychiatrist Carl Binger to help prove his claim. Binger testified that Chambers exhibited a classic "psychopathic personality" in demonstrating the combined symptoms of "paranoid thinking" and "abnormal emotionality" (Conklin 1). Despite the fact that Hiss was later convicted of perjury in 1950, his testimony had already influenced public perceptions of deviance for, as Genter suggests, "Whispers about Chambers's odd sexual behaviours, including

alleged homosexual encounters, helped to link the image of the psychopath to sexual deviance as well" (143).

Indeed, according to Fiona Paton, the 1950s, a decade which produced such allegedly "science-based" best-sellers as *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?* (1956) and *1000 Homosexuals* (1959), is remembered as "the era when fear of communism and fear of homosexuality merged within the Gothic register of monstrosity and disease" (50). In other words, political deviance was so often equated with sexual deviance that the two became indistinguishable in the mainstream, prompting ordinary citizens to write to the *New York Daily News* with claims that, "The homosexual situation in our State Department is no more shocking than your statement that 'they are uncertain what to do about it.' . . . Democrats or Republications – we must rid our Government of these *creatures*" (qtd. in Johnson 19, emphasis mine). The pervasive use of gothic language in describing the alleged political/sexual deviant thus also becomes clear – rather than viewing this figure as simply abnormal, this particular type of deviant was seen as monstrous and inhuman, posing a direct threat to society while being able to hide behind a mask of normality.

Naturally, such anxieties associated with the political deviant were consistently echoed in the widespread fear of the social deviant, exemplified by the psychopath – particularly, the *sexual psychopath*. Posing perhaps an even greater threat to American society, the psychopath as understood in the 1950s was characterized by what Genter describes as "a stunted psychological development that produced sexually chaotic behaviour, including excessive masturbation and homosexuality, and by morally deficient behaviour ranging from petty crimes to excessive violence" (140). Genter's use of the word "chaotic" is especially interesting, as it implies a deep-seated desire for order, regulation, and perhaps even homogeneity. More importantly, however, the specific mention of homosexuality as a marker of psychopathy also suggests a widespread conflation of sexual deviance with social deviance, which in turn leaves room for the conflation

of social deviance with political deviance, as the indicators for each type of perceived abnormality were similarly defined during this period. Indeed, Estelle B. Freedman notes that the "frequent overlap in use of the terms sex criminal, pervert, psychopath and homosexual raises the question of whether psychopath served in part as a code for homosexual at a time of heightened consciousness about homosexuality" (214). This indicates not only a lack of clarity in the terminology used to describe so-called "deviants" in general, which only fuels anxieties concerning such poorly defined individuals, but also a curious emphasis on sexual deviance as particularly threatening in an age of "heightened public awareness of sexuality in general," and particularly, of "sexual abnormality" (Freedman 213).

What is also clear from Genter's description of psychopathy, as well as the specific connection between psychopathy and homosexuality, then regarded as a specifically male affliction, is the overt association between psychopathy and men. Indeed, the language used to describe psychopathy has been notably gendered since the disorder first came to prominence after the Second World War. In 1947, for example, former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wrote an article for *American Magazine* entitled "How Safe is Your Daughter?," clearly framing women as the victims of sexual violence and sex-crazed males as "degenerate sex offenders . . . more savage than beasts" (32). Hoover's article capitalised on growing anxieties across the nation regarding the perceived rise in sex crime, particularly rape and sex-related murder. Following the publication of Hoover's article, numerous criminal justice agencies also began producing materials designed to educate the American public about the dangers of sex crime, particularly for females. For example, the St. Paul, Minnesota, Police Department produced a stop-motion film highlighting their role in helping "girls or women who have been molested by sex perverts," in which the film's narration is accompanied by the image of "dirty male hands" removing petals from a "pristine red rose" (St. Paul Police Department, qtd. in Leon 40), clearly illustrating the threat that male "sex perverts" posed to women throughout the country. During this period of

social anxiety, law enforcement officers thus positioned themselves as "defenders of feminine virtue, with the 'masher' or 'sex pervert' as the demon to be slayed" (Leon 40), alluding to the idea of male sexual deviants as otherworldly, gothic creatures who had to be forcibly exorcised for the good of society.

Crucially, sex offenders were not merely viewed as criminals, but also lumped into the broad category of "psychopaths[20]" regardless of the severity of their crimes, underlining a psychological basis for sexual perversity as well as a lack of distinction between violent or predatory sexual offenders and those who had committed non-violent infractions, such as consensual sex with a minor (statutory rape) or sodomy[21]. According to Chrysanthi Leon, in fact, psychoanalytic psychiatrists such as J. Paul de River contributed heavily to the "'bogeyman' view of sexual offending" by constructing "sexual criminals as horribly violent and deviant others," in addition to his role in helping to "secure the place of psychiatric expertise in public and policy debate about sex offenders" (40). With both law enforcement officials and psychiatrists promoting the image of the so-called sexual psychopath as a mad, inhuman beast, it is no wonder that the popular literature of this period often perpetuates these very images.

Unsurprisingly, growing fears over the dangers posed by sexual deviants led not only to many states and cities establishing investigative commissions, but also to the creation of specific sexual psychopath laws even while the most sophisticated studies contested that "the number of sex crimes was nowhere near as great as had been alleged, that the raw statistics were misleading and had been used to exaggerate the amount of predatory or violent sex crime, and that offenders were far less persistent and compulsive than was commonly believed" (Jenkins 65). In other

[20] Despite the overwhelming association in the post-war era between psychopathy and masculinity, Philip Jenkins reminds readers, "In the early twentieth century, much American writing on the psychopath concerned the sexually immoral woman, whose mental disorder rendered her incapable of controlling her lusts" (39). It would appear, thus, that despite this notable gender reversal, psychopathy has consistently been associated with sexual deviance in the American imagination.

[21] Sodomy laws in the United States, which outlawed a variety of sexual acts, effectively made homosexuality illegal and contributed greatly to the equation of homosexuality with psychopathy.

words, it mattered little that mainstream perceptions of the sexual psychopath "epidemic" in the United States were severely hyperbolic; the official narrative remained fixed on the unparalleled threat of violent sexual offenders, ultimately leading twenty-six states and the District of Columbia to pass legislation calling for the "indefinite civil commitment of so-called sexual psychopaths" between 1937 and 1967 (Rice Lave 549). Under these laws, sex offenders were singled out from the larger class of criminals and degenerates and put forward for psychiatric evaluation and treatment.

Indeed, Philip Jenkins stresses the vital role psychiatry played in post-war constructions of sexual psychopathy, explaining that after 1945, "psychiatrists and psychologists dominated the investigative commissions charged with formulating responses to the sex crime problem, and their language and assumptions heavily influenced representatives from other professional groups, including lawyers, judges, police, and clergy" (73). This explication goes a long way in accounting not only for the emphasis placed on psychiatric evaluation for sex offenders post-World War II, but also the broad use of psychiatric terminology in both criminal proceedings as well as media coverage of these proceedings. David G. Wittels's comments in the December 1948 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*, for example, emphasise the centrality of psychological dysfunction in explanations of criminality. Wittels begins, "Most of the so-called sex killers are psychopathic personalities . . . . No one knows or can even closely estimate how many such creatures there are, but at least tens of thousands of them are loose in the country today" (30). Here, Wittels mixes gothic language with psychiatric language, describing sexual psychopaths as "creatures" while simultaneously underlining the frequency of such fiends within American society. In the same article, Wittels also wrote,

> On the morning of January 7, 1946, six-year-old Suzanne Degnan was missing from her bedroom. Later in the day, parts of her body were found in near-by sewers. The whole city and much of the country was aghast. The Chicago City Council voted to add 1000 policemen to the force. That was laudable, but it would have done better to hire 500 policemen and 50 psychiatrists, even if it meant paying for the training of young medical students for the jobs. (66)

This not only hints at the sensationalised nature of fears concerning sexual psychopaths ("The whole city and much of the country was aghast"), but also suggests that these types of offenders constituted a different breed of criminal altogether, one that the police simply could not handle on their own. More than a prison sentence, the so-called sexual psychopath also required extensive psychiatric rehabilitation and was thus viewed as doubly problematic for society.

Not all experts, however, agreed with the popular conceptualisation of the sexual psychopath, or with the way in which lawmakers and criminologists sought to handle such individuals. Dr Benjamin Karpman, for example, states in his 1954 book *The Sexual Offender and His Offenses*, "the term 'sexual psychopath' and 'sexual psychopathy' have no legitimate place in psychiatric nosology or dynamic classification" (478), highlighting once again the slipperiness of psychiatric terminology despite the weight that this kind of language carried in both criminal proceedings as well as in the media. Morris Ploscowe echoes Karpman's sentiment in his criticism of the sexual psychopath laws: "The basic difficulty is that the sex-psychopath laws are trying to get a category of individuals — psychopaths or psychopathic personalities — who may be abnormal, but who are elusive even to the psychiatrists" (212). Ploscowe's final point is crucial, for a key dimension of psychopathy is indeed the lack of clarity surrounding the definition and diagnosis of this particular disorder.

Despite the overwhelming emphasis placed on deviant sexuality and the propensity for sex crimes in 1950s conceptualisations of psychopathy, however, psychopaths were not solely defined by these traits. Genter, in fact, goes on to describe several additional differentiating features for psychopathy, claiming that "the psychopath was distinguished from the ordinary criminal due to a lack of guilt and a failure to commit crimes for definable reasons" (140). In other words, while the psychopath's reasoning capabilities generally remain uncompromised, his actions often lack any kind of motivation, making diagnoses of psychopathy extremely difficult even for trained psychiatrists, as subjects remain highly functional, allowing these dangerous

individuals to blend in seamlessly with the rest of normative society and aligning these individuals with similar threats such as communists.

Indeed, despite first coming to the attention of the American public in the early stages of the Cold War, the psychopath continues to perplex psychiatrists to this day. *The Mask of Sanity*[22] (2nd ed., 1950), Hervey M. Cleckley's seminal tome on the nature of the psychopathic personality, immediately betrays how little psychiatrists understand about the causes of and potential treatments for individuals displaying severely maladaptive and antisocial behaviours. In rationalising this lack of understanding, Cleckley suggests that "[m]uch of the difficulty which mental institutions have in their relations with the psychopath springs from a lack of awareness in the public that he exists" and goes on to refer to the psychopath as the "*forgotten man of psychiatry*" (31-32), suggesting that it is the elusive nature of the psychopath that complicates understandings of such individuals. Cleckley is, however, quick to clarify that psychopathic behavioural patterns are "found among one's fellow men far more frequently than might be surmised from reading the literature" (34), indicating not only that the psychopath deserves further scrutiny but also, disturbingly, that the incidence of psychopathy in the general population is potentially much higher than one would think, underscoring the possibility that anyone could harbour hidden psychopathic tendencies — an anxiety which, like the widespread fear of the secret communist, was particularly prevalent in the early stages of the Cold War.

Cleckley goes on to remind readers that "[s]ome time after the period during which it was generally assumed . . . that abnormal behavior resulted from devil possession or the influence of witches, it became customary to ascribe all or nearly all mental disorder to bad heredity," and that "[e]ven in the early part of the [twentieth] century this practice was almost universal" (28). Indeed, prior to the popularisation of Freudian ideas, the psychopathic personality was

[22] The first edition of Cleckley's *Mask* was published in 1941. The "new and much larger" second edition (1950), to which quotations in this section will refer, was followed by a third edition in 1955, and a fourth in 1964. 1976 saw the publication of a substantively expanded fifth edition of Cleckley's work, and a sixth and final edition was published in 1984, shortly after Cleckley's death.

frequently studied in relation to "criminals and delinquents" and regarded as the result of certain "inborn deficienc[ies] or hereditary taint" (Genter 140; Cleckley 28). Cleckley's invocation of times in which deviant behaviours were ascribed supernatural explanation or else attributed to genetic flaws within one's character not only suggests that these seemingly medieval times are not as far in the past as one would like to think but also goes some way in situating psychopathy within the realm of the gothic, especially considering the persistent inability of science to offer adequate explanation for a disorder which Cleckley describes as "more baffling and fascinating than any other" (29). Cleckley's inadvertent attribution of preternatural abilities to the psychopath in suggesting that such individuals are not only "distinguished by [their] ability to escape ordinary legal punishments and restraints," but also, that although the psychopath is "often arrested, perhaps a hundred times or more . . . he nearly always regains his freedom and returns to his old patterns of maladjustment" (35-36) only bolsters the mystical properties of psychopathy, which remains "far less clearly understood than either the well-defined psychoses or the neuroses" (29).

In fact, it was only after the Second World War that the psychoanalytic community, greatly influenced by Freud's theory of personality development, even attempted to "provide a proper classification in terms of behaviour and symptoms for the psychopathic personality" (Genter 140). Despite Karpman's suggestion that by the 1950s, the term "psychopath" had become "an over-cluttered wastebasket" (524) — a catch-all category for, as Cleckley puts it, "a wide variety of maladjusted people who cannot by the criteria of psychiatry be classed with the psychotic, the psychoneurotic, or the mentally defective" (29), psychoanalysis provided abundant and significant contributions to the study of personality disorders, chief among them the theory that disruptions during childhood psychosexual development could in turn lead to seriously maladaptive behaviours in adulthood.

The prevalence of psychoanalytic concepts in American culture during the early years of the Cold War is hardly surprising. After slowly building both a steady following in the psychiatric

community as well as a solid reputation in the popular press, psychoanalysis emerged as the "major American medical psychology" in what *Newsweek* affirmed was "without a doubt the most psychologically oriented, or psychiatrically oriented nation in the world" (Hale 158; "The Mind" 59). In particular, psychoanalysis provided the American people with not only a means with which to assuage growing anxieties, but also a new "scientific" vocabulary with which to analyse the malaise of such deeply fraught times. The success of psychoanalytic therapy — "the talking cure" — in the treatment of military servicemen during and after the Second World War only further cemented the discipline's lofty new status among both American psychiatric professionals and the general public, ushering in what historian Nathan Hale refers to as the "golden age of psychoanalysis" (276). Indeed, by the time the first edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the DSM-I, was published in 1952, psychoanalysis had reached peak popularity in the United States, with a large majority of American psychiatrists having adopted the psychodynamic approach (Burnham, Ross). Indeed, Bloch's *Psycho*, published in 1959, offers a clear illustration of the decade's fascination with psychoanalytic rationalisations for deviant behaviour, highlighting the extent to which Freudian concepts had embedded themselves not only within American psychiatry, but also within American popular culture.

NORMAN BATES: PSEUDOPSYCHOPATH

While most critics agree that Hitchcock's 1960 film adaptation of *Psycho* marked a significant milestone in horror cinema, curiously little has been written about Bloch's original novel apart from a few selected essays in Benjamin Szumskyj's recent edited essay collection *The Man Who Collected Psychos* (2009). Consequently, this chapter will seek to demystify some of the issues surrounding Bloch's original text, beginning with the novel's often confused depiction of psychopathy and its conflation with dissociative identity disorder, which reflects not only the

general lack of understanding surrounding these two distinct disorders, but also the consequent gothicisation of personality disorders as a whole within American popular culture. Curiously, while the vast majority of critics writing on both *Psycho*-the-film and *Psycho*-the-novel have centred their discussions on the themes of family (Wood), constructions of masculinity (Tharp), sexual deviance (Genter), and even the monstrous-feminine (Creed), the text's relation to contemporary psychiatry has largely been ignored — an egregious oversight, considering how heavily Bloch's story borrows from Freudian ideas.

In fact, Bloch himself admits in his autobiography, *Once Around the Bloch* (1993): "My title derives, of course, from *psychotic*[23] and also from *psychology* and *psychoanalysis*. It was from the latter sources that I sought rationale for my protagonist — or more precisely, an irrationale . . . . " (229). The latter part of Bloch's statement suggests that the author himself was, at least to an extent, aware of his novel's often precarious psychological basis, especially in its overreliance upon psychoanalytic explanations for deviant behaviour. Bloch's dependence on psychoanalytic themes is most apparent in the relationship between the novel's central character, Norman Bates, and his mother, Norma. Norman is consistently depicted as an infantilised "Mamma's Boy" and even gestures towards the story's overtly Freudian undertones himself at the outset of the novel when explaining why he had "talked so dirty" to Norma: "'It's what they call the Oedipus situation," reasons Norman, marking the first instance of many in which he acts the role of amateur psychologist (Bloch 10, 9). Indeed, Bloch's choice to pinpoint the Oedipus complex as the chief reason behind Norman's psychological disorder appears to reflect Freud's own belief that "the nucleus of all neuroses as far as our present knowledge of them goes is the Oedipus complex" (*Totem* 74). As previously discussed, however, psychopathy differs substantially from neuroses, indicating that Norman's psychopathology cannot simply be reduced to something as

[23] It is crucial to note that Bloch claims he derives his title from the word *psychotic*, which is not to be confused with *psychopathy*. Psychosis, unlike psychopathy, refers to an umbrella term describing the mental state of losing touch with reality, and is commonly associated with schizophrenia, a point which will be explored in greater detail below.

commonly experienced as the Oedipal conflict. Bloch's use of this rationale thus merely stresses the decade's obsession with sexual deviance as a marker of the psychopathic personality.

While Bloch refrains from specifically using the term "psychopathy," Norman displays several tell-tale signs of this disorder, specifically as it was conceived in the 1950s. First of all, Norman is portrayed as a psychologically stunted man who murders at least four people in cold blood, including a young woman, a private detective, as well as his own mother and her lover. In regard to this latter double murder, Norman is able to get away with his crimes by forging a suicide letter in his mother's handwriting (Bloch 180). Similarly, Norman, although convinced that his mother had perpetrated the crime, murders Mary Crane after spying on her naked body – in other words, engaging in scopophilia, one of Cleckley's hallmark "erotic deviations" (326) – through a peephole, adding a specifically sexual dimension to his crime, which aligns him with post-war constructions of the sexual psychopath, defiler of feminine virtue. Norman then "calmly[24]" disposes of Mary's body (53) and easily concocts a cover story that throws the county sheriff off his scent when people begin to look for Mary (129), indicating a highly developed capacity for deceit. He also envisions himself as "a grown man, a man who studied the secrets of time and space and mastered the secrets of dimension and being" (Bloch 93), indicating that he suffers from grandiose delusions, a trait commonly associated with psychopathy (Cleckley 267). Furthermore, Norman is also an alcoholic prone to drunken blackouts and a misogynist who frequently indulges in novels described as "pathologically pornographic" (166), indicating additional traits that in the 1950s surely would have led to his classification as a social deviant and sex pervert. Most bizarrely of all, however, Norman displays exceedingly maladaptive behaviour by dressing up as and assuming the identity of his own dead mother, effectively fashioning him

[24] Bloch makes a point of emphasising just how calm Norman remains through this process by repeating the adjective "calmly" three times: "Calmly, he tossed his clothes into the hamper. Calmly, he took an old oilcloth from the table.... Calmly, he went back upstairs...." (53).

into a grotesque caricature of the 1950s sexual psychopath. This where the psychology underpinning Bloch's novel truly begins to falter.

Reflecting the lack of definition surrounding the concepts of personality disorder at the start of the Cold War period[25], Bloch conflates psychopathy, and indeed, psychosis, too, with what was known at the time as multiple personality disorder (MPD), now referred to as dissociative identity disorder. This confusion of entirely separate mental illnesses, which each features its own set of symptoms, reveals a preference for sensationalised accounts of individuals suffering from outlandish psychological maladies that only perpetuates outdated and damaging assumptions regarding mental illness in general. Moreover, popular narratives such as Bloch's *Psycho* only serve to further obfuscate the ways in which psychological illnesses and particularly disorders of personality are perceived by the American public, feeding into the insidious gothicisation of mental illness. It is precisely this point, in fact, that forensic psychiatrists Samuel J. Leistedt and Paul Linkowski highlight in their article "Psychopathy and the Cinema: Fact or Fiction" (2014), in which they detail findings from a comprehensive study of 126 fictional psychopaths in film.

Leistedt and Linkowski claim, "Early representations of psychopaths in film were often created with a poor or incomplete understanding of psychopathic personalities" and as a result, psychopaths in popular culture were "often caricatured as sadistic, unpredictable, sexually

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[25] Even today in the twenty-first century, vagueness continues to surround the definition and diagnosis of personality disorders. W. John Livesley argues that when it comes to personality disorders, "Theory and classification are somewhat unrelated and contemporary taxonomies are increasingly recognized as inadequate and poorly supported by empirical research" (3). The study of personality disorders, as a discrete field, constitutes a relatively new development even though interest in human personality can be traced back at least to ancient Greece (4). Livesley explains, "[T]he concept of personality disorder as used today did not take shape until early in the 20th century" (4), dating the origins of contemporary studies on personality disorders to around the genesis of psychoanalysis. Ribot (1890) and Kraepelin (1913) were influential in their early theories on personality disorder. Robert F. Bornstein suggests, "Although the nosologies of Ribot, Kraepelin, and others were based on unique assumptions and descriptive terminologies, these models generally conceptualized personality pathology in terms of more basic, underlying traits that combined to form recognizable patterns of dysfunctional interpersonal behaviour....The 2nd major early influence on PD theory and research came from Freud and other psychoanalysts (e.g., Abraham, 1927; Fernichel, 1945; Horney, 1937), who focused primarily on the internal dynamics of problematic personality styles" (Bornstein 339-340).

depraved, and emotionally unstable with a compulsion to engage in random violence, murders, and destruction, usually presenting with a series of bizarre mannerisms . . . ." (168). Furthermore, Leistedt and Linkowski claim that the public's "overall unfamiliarity with mental illness [and] psychological disorders led them to accept this depiction and even perceive it as almost 'realistic'", which led to conventional depictions of psychopaths as "genre villains, such as gangsters, mad scientists, super villains, serial killers, and many other types of generic criminals" (168). In other words, because those suffering from genuine personality disorders were practically invisible in the real world, the public perception of these individuals was shaped almost entirely by fictional depictions in film and literature, despite these depictions lacking any basis in science. Referring to Hitchcock's film adaptation of *Psycho*, for instance, Leistedt and Linkowski argue that Norman Bates, a clear example of the "socially functional misfit with a . . . sexually motivated compulsion to kill" (a nod to the decade's fascination with sexual psychopathy, no doubt), should in fact be classified as a "pseudopsychopath" (170-171), for despite the character's strong association with psychopathy within the American popular imagination (Grixti 92), he betrays just as many psychotic traits even though researchers have found the rate of comorbidity between these two distinct psychiatric disorders to be relatively low (Leistedt and Linkowski 172; Nedopil, Hollweg, Hartmann, and Jaser). While this thesis argues that Norman is neither a true psychopath, nor psychotic, his status as a "pseudopsychopath" cannot be denied.

Returning to *Psycho* the novel, Bloch's conflation of multiple personality disorder with psychopathy was most likely shaped by two discrete factors, the second of which will be discussed further below, in relation to Thigpen and Cleckley's *The Three Faces of Eve*. Firstly, however, as Scott D. Briggs asserts, Bloch's conceiving and writing of *Psycho* was heavily influenced by the tale of Ed Gein[26], a Wisconsin farmer who made headlines in 1957 not only for the brutal murder

[26] Interestingly, Leistedt and Linkowski also pinpoint the Ed Gein case as the reason why "the portrayal of psychopaths in film was rerouted into an almost separate and exclusive film genre: horror," whereas previously, psychopaths had been "genre villains, such as gangsters, mad scientists, super villains, serial killers, and many other types of generic criminals" (168).

and dismemberment of two women, but also for exhuming several female corpses from their graves and fashioning their bones and skin into macabre trophies and garments (Briggs 105; Grixti 92). Like Norman Bates, Gein also maintained an obsessive relationship with his mother, described by Harold Schechter as Gein's "only friend and one true love," and was left traumatised by her death (30-31). Perhaps more importantly, Gein is remembered, too, as one of the "early models of the modern definition of the 'serial killer' decades before the term was coined" (105), as although the term "serial killer" did not enter general usage until the 1980s (Bentham 204), Gein's tale of terror was the first of its kind to capture the American imagination in the post-war era. After registering the public's interest in lurid tales of social/sexual deviants such as Gein, Bloch, who was living "only 29 miles from Plainfield, Wisconsin, where the infamous . . . crimes were discovered" (Leming 3), quickly capitalised on the simultaneous national fascination with and fear of the sexual psychopath. As Schechter notes, "The Gein story was everywhere. It dominated not just the news media but daily discourse as well" (140). In other words, Ed Gein effectively made psychopathy visible to the public, for

> Here was a real-life horror story far more grisly than anything ever dreamed up by Lovecraft. A story that featured the darkest acts of depravity, all performed by a shy, bland, completely harmless-looking bachelor driven to his abominations by his pathological attachment to a tyrannizing mother who continued to dominate her son's existence years after her death. (Schechter 141)

The incongruity between Gein's outer appearance and demeanour and the deeply disturbing nature of his crimes was thus nothing short of uncanny and, naturally, "the chilling discrepancy between Ed Gein's public and private life," as *Life* magazine put it ("House of Horrors" 26), became a fixation of the media. By piquing the morbid curiosities of the American public, thus, Ed Gein not only became something of a celebrity serial killer, but also fed into contemporary anxieties over the imperceptibility of psychological deviance.

Despite the national fascination with the Ed Gein case, Bloch did take some artistic license in telling his own version of the story — a version that took the American media's most

lurid accounts of Gein's illness and sensationalised them further. Indeed, while a team of psychiatric professionals including Dr Edward Schubert, head psychiatrist at the Central State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, concluded that Gein was most likely schizophrenic, leading the court to find him mentally incompetent and unfit to stand trial for his crimes, psychiatrists around the country continued to weigh in on Gein's psychological dysfunction without any personal contact with Gein himself. Some, most notably Dr Edward Kelleher, chief of the Chicago Municipal Court's Psychiatric Institute, surmised that Gein was indeed a sexual psychopath and possibly also homosexual, transsexual, or a transvestite, too (Sullivan 43), though in the 1950s, these terms were practically synonymous. Kelleher went on to offer the *Milwaukee Journal* a complete armchair analysis of Gein's psychological profile in an article entitled "Obsessive Love for His Mother Drove Gein to Slay" (1957), stating that Gein was "obviously schizophrenic," and that this condition was "created by a conflict set up by his mother" (qtd. in Schechter 134), a theory echoed in Bloch's novel through Norman's obsessive relationship with Norma.

In fact, it is highly likely that Bloch was familiar with Kelleher's analysis of Gein's condition, as comments made by the fictional Dr. Steiner at the conclusion of Bloch's novel closely mirror those made by Kelleher. While Kelleher asserted that the violently misogynistic attitude towards women that led Gein to murder was the result of ideas instilled in him by his mother, Augusta, — "whenever a mother hammers away at an abnormal attitude toward other women, it affects her children" (qtd. in Schechter 178) — Dr. Steiner, relays to Sam that Norman's malady "started way back in Bates's childhood, long before his mother's death. He and his mother were very close . . . and apparently she dominated him" (Bloch 177). Moreover, in Bloch's novel, Steiner "suspect[s] Norman was a secret transvestite long before Mrs. Bates died" (177), an explanation lifted directly from Kelleher's theory that Gein's pathology was the result of a rare combination of transvestism, fetishism, and voyeurism (Schechter 134).

In paraphrasing Kelleher, however, the *Milwaukee Journal* also falsely defined schizophrenia as a "split personality" (192), not only contributing to popular misconceptions regarding distinctions between psychotic disorders and personality disorders, but also potentially influencing Bloch's decision to characterise Norman Bates as dissociative as opposed to psychotic. Bloch's Norman, however, is bestowed with not only two but *three* distinct personalities: Norman-the-child, Norman-the-adult, and Norman-As-Mother. Describing the first two of these personalities, Bloch writes,

> It was like being two people, really — the child and the adult. Whenever he thought about Mother, he became a child again, with a child's vocabulary, frames of references, and emotional reactions. But when he was by himself . . . he was a mature individual. Mature enough to understand that he might even be the victim of a mild form of schizophrenia, most likely some form of borderline neurosis. (94)

First, Norman's tendency to regress and assume a childlike persona appears to echo contemporary psychoanalysis's belief that adult psychological deviance results from fixations developed during childhood and disruptions to normal psychosexual development in early life. Furthermore, as mentioned briefly above, Norman himself enjoys playing amateur psychologist, claiming that "he *did* know a few things about psychology and parapsychology too" (94). Unfortunately, Norman's knowledge of psychology does not prevent him from completely misjudging the nature of his illness and misdiagnosing himself as "the victim of a mild form of schizophrenia." This point is crucial, for, given the false association between schizophrenia and "split personality," an association frequently perpetuated in American popular culture, where the two have become synonymous with each other, it is unsurprising that Norman should mistake his dissociative identity disorder for schizophrenia, just as the *Milwaukee Journal* falsely conflated these disorders in reference to Gein.

In reality, schizophrenia, a psychotic disorder that Neil Carlson argues is "probably the most misused psychological term in existence" (453), is generally characterised by delusions as well as auditory and visual hallucinations. Dissociative identity disorder, on the other hand,

constitutes an exceedingly rare trauma-based condition marked by such severe levels of identity confusion and alteration that affected individuals appear to have multiple personalities residing in one body (Foote and Park 217). Given this distinction, it is clear that Norman's behaviour is indicative of dissociative identity disorder, although neither this illness, nor psychopathy, for that matter, are ever referred to by name in Bloch's novel. Instead, Dr. Steiner, too, diagnoses Norman as "psychotic" in the novel's concluding chapter (Bloch 182), further obfuscating the nature of his illness by throwing the weight of psychiatric authority behind this not entirely accurate diagnosis two pages after Bates is referred to as "a multiple personality" (180). Thus, it becomes clear that while Bloch was at least vaguely aware of his character's primary affliction, the novel still makes little effort to differentiate between distinct mental illnesses, portraying the characteristics of each as interchangeable and providing only the blanket, gothicising statement, "Then the horror wasn't in the house . . . . It was in his head" (181), which likens Norman's disturbed psyche to a haunted house, another staple of the American gothic, and associates him with the prototypical gothic haunted house stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Bloch's psychologisation of the classic American haunted house story thus in fact replaces the haunted house with the haunted mind, thereby shifting the site of uncanny occurrences inward and emphasising the gothic nature of Norman's mental illness in particular.

Consequently, Norman is once again deliberately situated in the realm of the gothic beyond being portrayed as merely abnormal. By associating Norman's mind with a haunted house, the novel thus underlines not only the gothic nature of the Bates Motel itself, but also establishes house and proprietor as mirrors of each other. The fact that the Bates house is routinely described as "dark" ("If only it wasn't so dark! All at once that was the most important thing — to get out of the dark" [54]) and outdated ("Usually, even when a house is old, there are some signs of alterations and improvement in the interior. But the parlor . . . had never been 'modernized' . . . . [28]), thus merely reflects Norman's own "dark" state of mind as well as his

inability to progress. That his own bedroom is "singularly small, singularly cramped, with a low cot more suitable for a little boy than a grown man" while his mother's room is somehow "*still alive*" despite its outdated décor reemphasises Norman's stunted psychological development and foreshadows that Mother will eventually dominate Norman's personality completely, as Norman's mind continues to be corrupted by his mother's necromantic influence in classic gothic fashion (164, 167).

The association between the Bates Motel and Norman's disturbed psyche is, however, far from the only instance where Norman's ties to the gothic are elucidated. Norman's specific mention of "parapsychology" alongside "psychology" in his self-diagnosis further indicates a curious conflation of two distinct disciplines and hints that Norman's condition might actually be situated entirely beyond the bounds of clinical psychology proper. In fact, the novel specifically mentions that in addition to reading about psychology, Norman also reads about "modern mystics like Aleister Crowley and Ouspensky" (93), directly associating him with the occult and thereby portraying him as a distinctly gothic being with more ties to the supernatural than to psychoanalysis. This association is reemphasised at the conclusion of Bloch's novel, when Sam, paraphrasing Dr. Steiner, tells Lila that Norman "was able to pretend sanity, but who knows how much he really knew? He was interested in occultism and metaphysics. He probably believed in spiritualism every bit as much as he believed in the preservative powers of taxidermy" (Bloch 181). This assertion marks a deliberate attempt to associate Norman with the non-scientific and the supernatural in order to further gothicise him, thereby also associating Norman's psychological condition with the gothic and feeding into the insidious stigmatisation of mental illness that certain gothic texts perpetuate.

At the same time, the first part of Sam's statement, "he was able to pretend sanity," recalls Cleckley's claim that psychopaths wear a "mask of sanity," hiding "[b]ehind an excellent façade of superficial reactions that mimic a normal and socially approved way of living" (92). Indeed,

Norman is able to maintain precisely this kind of façade, passing himself off as a reclusive but ultimately harmless boy next door, leading the county sheriff to defend him when Sam and Lila begin to suspect foul play: "'He's kind of an odd one in his way, not too bright, or at least that's how he always struck me. But he certainly isn't the type who'd ever pull any fast ones'" (Bloch 132). Indeed, especially when viewed against his mother's obvious psychological malady and incessant verbal abuse, Norman initially appears to be simply the victim of a traumatic, prolonged adolescence; that this experience has no doubt primed him for dissociative tendencies does not become obvious until the novel's conclusion, where his multiple personalities are revealed. Thus, unbeknownst to the reader, Norman could in fact be referring to himself when he justifies "Mother's" murderous actions by reasoning, "She was sick. Cold-blooded murder is one thing, but sickness is another. You aren't really a murderer when you're sick in the head" (50), the irony being that Norman will eventually "be placed in a State Hospital, probably for life" for the crimes he has unwittingly committed (182).

Norman's ability to "pass" for ordinary, especially when positioned against his mother, therefore serves as a reminder that perceptions of what is considered abnormal are relative, made possible only through the exaggeration of difference (Douglas), a point which highlights the arbitrariness of social constructions of deviance. Norman's distinction between "murder" and "sickness," on the other hand, serves to further complicate constructions of and consequences for deviance, as despite the implied lack of criminal motive involved in "Mother's" transgressions, life-long incarceration is nonetheless conferred for crimes committed by mentally ill individuals. Ultimately, thus, despite Norman's justification that "[y]ou aren't really a murderer when you're sick in the head," it appears the mentally ill are treated no differently than criminals, essentially equating the two, only the "sick" are locked away in an asylum rather than a prison, which also, ironically, confirms Norman's earlier suspicion, "Better the house than an asylum" (Bloch 97).

Finally, in order to understand the it is also crucial to note that Bloch's novel repeatedly emphasises that Norman's greatest hobby is reading. Norman not only delights in quintessentially gothic books on occultism and spiritualism, however, but also, as previously mentioned, psychology, a point which reemphasises the weight placed on psychiatric texts and psychological terminology in post-war America. Given the "'psychologization' of America" and the extensive popularity of Freudian ideas in the United States (Burnham 1), it is unsurprising that Norman returns time and again to the psychological ideas he has read. Crucially, Norman clings to the knowledge he has absorbed from books in order to make sense of everything happening around him despite Norma's contention that the "things" Norman reads while "hiding . . . up in [his] room" are "filthy" and not really psychology after all: "Psychology he calls it! A lot *you* know about psychology" (Bloch 9). Norma's words mark a self-conscious attempt to discredit all of Norman's ideas about psychology and mental health that also foreshadows just how wrong his self-diagnosis truly is, hinting at the dangers of an overreliance on psychiatric ideas, for despite the weight these ideas carried throughout post-war America, it was still possible for even the most diligent amateur psychologists to get things wrong. Perhaps equally importantly, however, reading — the process of acquiring knowledge — is an activity that is historically regarded as a privilege reserved for men. This point becomes even more important when viewed in the context of Norman as an offspring of the mythological character Bluebeard, a theme worth exploring here in greater detail.

BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE REDUX: PSYCHOPATHIC *HOMMES FATALS*

Shades of Charles Perrault's classic fairy tale "Bluebeard" can be found throughout numerous gothic texts, from Charlotte Brontë's classic novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) to the myriad American gothic, or paranoid, woman's films of the 1940s, as Mark Jancovich terms them. Bluebeard might, in fact, be regarded as not only the original fictional serial killer, but also the original

fictional psychopath: the prototype for countless villains to come, including Norman Bates and G. Gordon Gregg of Bloch's subsequent novel *American Gothic*. The designation of Bluebeard as not only a psychopath but also, more specifically, a sexual psychopath, is not unprecedented. In his study on American villain-types, Orrin E. Klapp puts Bluebeard in the same category of "Monster" as "Jack-the-Ripper, . . . psychopath[s], queer[s], degenerate[s]" and "sadist[s]," not only defining all these characters as villains "whose acts and motivation are beyond the ordinary range of human comprehension and whose stature approaches the demonic" (337), but also hinting at a specifically sexual dimension to this particular brand of monster. In their article "The Sexual Psychopath and the Law" (1949), sociologist James Melvin Reinhardt and lawyer Edward C. Fisher similarly underscore Bluebeard's association with sexual psychopathy, asserting, "The 'Blue Beard' of tomorrow is not immutably visible in early sex abnormalities. There are danger signals, but it is when the 'monster of murder castle' breaks loose that we know what we have had all along" (734). Reinhardt and Fisher's specific reference to sexual psychopaths as "Blue Beard[s]" highlights the strength of this association in the American cultural imagination.

It is important at this point to trace a brief historical trajectory of the Bluebeard mythos as it pertains to gothic fiction, focusing on the elements that gothic writers have selectively adapted from Perrault's original fairy tale (1697) — namely, the psychopathic patriarchal villain, the psychologically oppressed heroine, and the locked room that holds a terrible secret — in order to highlight the ways in which Bloch utilises and indeed, subverts, these tropes in both *Psycho* and *American Gothic*, both of which feature overtly Bluebeardian psychopaths who prey upon young women threatening to unearth the skeletons in their closets. By scrutinising both these central antagonists as well as the spaces that they inhabit, this section will not only underline the ways in which depictions of fictional psychopaths are rooted in the gothic tale of Bluebeard, but also highlight anxieties concerning shifting gender roles in the post-war era, especially in regard to masculinity. Viewing Norman and Gregg as modern day Bluebeards thus enhances our

understanding of the cultural functions these characters serve as overtly pathologised post-war versions of one of literature's first serial killers.

In recent years, a growing body of criticism has emerged focussing on what Heta Pyrönen identifies as the "Bluebeard gothic": a distinct genre of gothic tales featuring identifiable elements inherited from the Bluebeard fairy tale. By now, the tale of "Bluebeard" is familiar to most: a young, innocent woman marries a rich but "frightfully ugly" (Perrault 38) older man with an eponymous blue beard whose several previous wives have all mysteriously disappeared ("nobody ever knew what became of them" [38]). Before leaving on business, Bluebeard gives his wife keys to his entire castle, but tells her there is one room she may never enter. Eventually, her curiosity becomes "so strong she could not overcome it" (40), and she unlocks the forbidden chamber only to find the bloodied and mutilated corpses of Bluebeard's previous wives, whom he had "married and murdered one after another" (41). She then drops the key, staining it with blood[27]. Upon his return, Bluebeard sees the bloody key, recognises that his wife has betrayed him, and prepares to kill her. However, the wife's brothers arrive just in time, rescue their sister, and kill Bluebeard, thus ending his reign of terror and leaving his young wife free to "[re]marry herself to a very worthy gentleman, who made her forget the ill time she had passed with Blue Beard" (45).

In Perrault's story, Bluebeard's solitary motivation for murdering his wives appears to be their disobedience; he gives his wives the key to his forbidden chamber knowing that the temptation to enter will eventually lead them to defy his law. As Maria Tatar states, "The enunciation of a prohibition" thus "inevitably turns into an invitation to engage in a transgression" (26). It is this element of transgression, as well as the ensuing punishment for transgressing implied moral and sexual boundaries, that places the tale of Bluebeard soundly in the realm of

[27] Most critics read the blood-stained key as a symbol of either lost virginity or marital infidelity, both of which highlight the expectation of female purity both within and outside of marriage (Tatar, Pollock, Anderson).

the gothic. Griselda Pollock elucidates the overtly sexual connotations of "Bluebeard," reading the bloody chamber as "a metaphor for the hidden interior and sexuality of woman," and the key as "a masculine sign, the phallus that the woman should not herself insert to gain knowledge" (xxvi). What is truly at stake in the tale of Bluebeard, then, is power, for if knowledge is power, granting a woman access to knowledge, both sexual and otherwise, would put her on equal footing with men. Gothic narratives following the Bluebeard formula thus simultaneously reflect and perpetuate the belief that qualities unbefitting of females, such as curiosity and tenacity, must be repressed in order to maintain stability within an essentialist patriarchal world. The proliferation of Bluebeardian elements in American popular fiction — for example, in the 1940s Bluebeard cycle[28] of paranoid woman's films and later, in the 1970s and 1980s slasher film[29] — highlights the extent to which these gendered ideologies have become ingrained within the American popular imagination.

As Victoria Anderson indicates, "in terms of framing Perrault's Bluebeard as the inaugurator of a genre, it is important to note the specificities of the tale within its contemporary context; that is . . . against a highly specific backdrop in terms of the public and private status of women at the time and of their access to language, the production of meaning and their active participation in society" (4). In other words, Perrault's "Bluebeard" must be read as a product of a time in which woman's access to knowledge was severely restricted by her marginalised social status. As Pyrönen reminds readers, however, stories of female transgression in pursuit of forbidden knowledge have "circulated orally from time immemorial, as the biblical story of the Fall and the myths of Pandora and Psyche illustrate" (8), which not only suggests that men have

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[28] As the Bluebeard mythos constitutes a key recurring theme within the works under scrutiny in this thesis, I have discussed this cycle and its implications more fully in chapter three, in reference to Henry Farrell's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*. See footnote 57 for a non-exhaustive list of films commonly listed in the Bluebeard cycle, as well as the critics that have discussed these films in their work.

[29] This thesis argues that the Final Girl, a staple of the American slasher film, represents a clear descendent of the classic Bluebeardian gothic heroine on the following page.

continually punished women for seeking knowledge and, thus, empowerment, but also reinforces the significance of such metanarratives throughout western cultural history.

What separates Perrault's Bluebeard fairy tale from its precursors and secures its place as the definitive "inaugurator of a genre" (4), as Anderson puts it, is the endurance of its central motifs, as well as the adaptability of these central elements. According to Maria Tatar, "Bluebeard's" "transformative energy" has indeed, "guaranteed its survival but it has also led to a cultural afterlife that takes the form of repression, for the story often flashes out to us in nothing more than bits and pieces — a barbaric husband, a curious wife, a forbidden chamber, a blood-stained key, or corpses in a hidden chamber" (16). It is worth nothing that each of these remnant elements is classically gothic. Indeed, it is curious that "Bluebeard," which Tatar describes as "more horror story than fairy tale" (15), has inspired no shortage of gothic adaptations, and yet critics have only recently begun to study the tale in conjunction with its gothic progeny. While horror tropes such as the Final Girl — the last character left alive who is either rescued, usually by a man, or left to defeat the villain by her own ingenuity (201) — a figure made famous in Carol J. Clover's study *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1992) — are clearly indebted to the tale of Bluebeard, for example, little scholarly attention has been paid to exploring this connection. Clover herself, in fact, omits any mention of Bluebeard in her study, reinforcing Tatar's claim that the tale has continually been repressed by society's collective unconscious. Just as Bluebeard conceals his dead wives in a locked chamber, then, so too have readers locked away any memory of this cautionary tale.

Yet the same tropes are found time and again within the fiction of the gothic, imbuing Perrault's fairy tale with the same spectral quality as Bluebeard's dead wives. The story's recognisable elements continually haunt later gothic texts, including both *Psycho* and Bloch's later novel *American Gothic* (1974), bolstering Kilgour's claim that the gothic is itself a "necromantic form" haunted by its own development (220). Anderson, in fact, postulates that

there is "no denying the close correlation between 'Bluebeard' and the general trajectory of the Gothic novel" (111), indicating that Perrault's tale in fact provides an archetypal blueprint for subsequent gothic fictions — one that hinges upon both domestic tensions and skeletons in the closet. Over time, these skeletons have become less literal; the gothic heroine, or Final Girl, has been given more agency — to a degree, at least — and Bluebeard, originally bearing a hideous literal blue beard to signify his inner perversity, has morphed into a slightly more nuanced character, due in large part to the influence of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and its prototypical depiction of the Byronic hero, Edward Rochester. Indeed, the modern iteration of Bluebeard, as depicted in Bloch's novels, bears little physical resemblance to the original, taking the form of a sympathetic if not overtly attractive *homme fatal* figure.

Indeed, Bloch's novels both overwhelmingly reflect growing anxieties concerning shifting gender roles in American society. Anna Snoekstra argues that the Bluebeard gothic, which she terms the "domestic noir," experienced a powerful resurgence in western society beginning in the 1940s. As men returned from war, they resumed many of the jobs that women had taken up in their absence, once again driving females out of the workforce and back into the home. A renewed emphasis was placed on the nuclear family, and women were expected to act as full-time nurturers to their children and submissive, doting wives to their husbands, re-enacting the popular Victorian image of "the Angel in the House." Naturally, this reversion to an outdated social hierarchy in which women were inferior to men prompted severe backlash, ultimately leading to the women's liberation movement and the sexual revolution of the 1960s. It is against this particular sociohistorical backdrop that this thesis will read Bloch's novels.

Indeed, Kevin Corstorphine suggests that *Psycho*'s central character, Norman, "is himself a victim of societal gender roles. Through his failure to individuate and take control over his own life, he becomes not so much a human subject as a creature of his own environment, driven by forces unrelated to rationality or social norms" (160). In other words, Norman's inability to

perform the stereotypically male role assigned to him from birth has led to a severe crisis of identity. Despite his ultimate characterisation as a modern day Bluebeard, and indeed, despite Alfred Hitchcock's casting of the tall, handsome and brooding Anthony Perkins in his 1960 film adaptation of Bloch's novel, Norman, depicted in the novel as a fat, bespectacled man of entirely benign appearance, in fact relinquishes many of the traditionally masculine traits associated with the Bluebeard archetype, such as dominance, wealth and power, thus highlighting the fragility of socially constructed hallmarks of masculinity. In refusing to perform the role of Bluebeard as it was originally conceived, however, Norman is also effectively feminised in many ways, a point reinforced not only by his mother Norma's characterisation of Norman as a "Mamma's Boy" who "[n]ever had the gumption to leave home. Never had the gumption to go out and get [him]self a job, or join the army, or even find [him]self a girl" (Bloch 7, 10), all distinctly masculine activities, but also by the novel's most famous plot twist: that Norman frequently assumes the persona of his long-dead mother, going as far as to impersonate her voice and dress in her clothing.

While Norman's crossdressing surely constitutes yet another detail inherited from the Ed Gein case, it is nonetheless crucial, for as K.E. Sullivan notes, motive for serial killing in popular fiction is often "attributed to perceived gender deviance, in particular, to men coveting or assuming the mantle of femininity through gender identification or homosexual object choice," which effectively queers murderous rage to the point where "queerness becomes the privileged signifier for psychotic violence" (47). Norman's unconscious desire to assume Norma's identity thus feeds into the same insidious "queering" of both psychopathy and psychosis, for the two have become virtually indistinguishable in the popular imagination. Moreover, as previously mentioned, constructions of psychopathy in the 1950s relied heavily upon the conflation of non-heteronormative sexuality with mental illness; Dr. Steiner's characterisation of Norman as a "secret transvestite" (Bloch 177) thus, again, merely serves to

augment these damaging associations, which have continued unabated throughout the twentieth century, reinforced by real life serial killers such as Jeffrey Dahmer and John Wayne Gacy and resurfacing in well-known fictional characters such as Buffalo Bill from *Silence of the Lambs*.

Norman's crisis of identity is, however, further complicated by both his and Norman-as-Mother's shared deep-seated hatred of women, which mirrors the misogynistic nature of Perrault's Bluebeard. In Bloch's free indirect discourse narration, Norman frequently refers to women as "bitches," and claims, "That's what the bitches did to you, they perverted you, and she was a bitch, they were all bitches, Mother was a — " (45-46), suggesting that Norman blames his overt mental dysfunction on the women in his life, particularly his domineering mother. This reinforces Griselda Pollock's assertion that "[t]he *fatality of women*," one of the most "powerful cultural *idée fixe* of the phallocentric imaginary," "often returns in disguise as the ultimate cause or source for the derangement that produces the aberrant *homme fatal*" (100-102). The novel's self-conscious decision to have Norman pinpoint an unresolved Oedipal conflict between him and Norma as the source of his disorder, as well as Norman's loaded assertion to his mother "'You make me sick![30]'" thus once again highlights patriarchal culture's distrust of the feminine (Bloch 10, 6). According to Pollock, "Woman will thus still be ultimately to blame: fatal indirectly to the other woman whom the Bluebeard murders through a chain of harm in which the Bluebeard figure becomes a victim-turned-executioner" (103). This is certainly true in *Psycho*, as Norman, in both the mind-set and guise of his mother, murders the nubile Mary Crane ostensibly to protect Norman-the-Man from her feminine wiles. As it is Norma's overbearing parenting that has so corrupted Norman's mind, turning him into a monster, it is still she who is ultimately responsible for Mary's death.

[30] There is, however, one interesting clue in Bloch's text that would destabilise this assumption. Responding to Norman's accusation that she has made him sick, Norma retorts, "'No, boy, *I* don't make you sick. You make *yourself* sick'" (7), implying that Norman's psychological dysfunction is the result of innate biological faults rather than environmental factors. This crucial point is, however, quickly forgotten amidst the novel's self-conscious overstuffing of psychoanalytic references and ideas.

While Mary, or Marion in Hitchcock's film, is initially portrayed as an archetypal Bluebeardian gothic heroine, or Final Girl, however, Bloch soon overturns this assumption by killing Mary forty-five pages into his novel. Considering readers are presented with Mary's perspective early on in *Psycho*, providing a distinct point of identification, her death is rendered all the more shocking and horrific, as Norman-as-Mother, enacting the role of Bluebeard, murders his female counterpart before she is even allowed the chance to discover his secret, let alone outsmart the villain — her only crime being her overt femininity and sexual allure, highlighted in Norman's thoughts: "she had been killed because she was evil. She had flaunted herself before him, she had deliberately tempted him with the perversion of her nakedness" (Bloch 62). Mary is thus killed for tempting Norman with her "evil" sexuality and for simply being a woman, betraying Norman's (and Mother's) paternalistic belief in the abject power of femininity.

That Mary, in fact, represents a self-sacrificing, capable woman who has been her family's sole support for "eight years" (15), however, adds an additional layer of complexity to Bloch's novel. As Mary's first "opportunity to marry disappeared at twenty-two" (14), she is now desperate to marry her boyfriend, Sam Loomis, though his father's debts have prevented their union for two years already. Mary arrives at the Bates Motel only because she is on the run, having stolen forty thousand dollars with which she intends to pay off Sam's debts in order to speed up their nuptials. It is significant that Mary here is portrayed as a strong-minded, financially self-sufficient woman, ahead of her time in her ability to care for herself, for in the culture of 1950s America, prescriptive gender roles dictated that those who failed to conform to the expectation of marrying and bearing children were punished through ostracisation and, indeed, pathologisation. The characterisation of women as socially and, indeed, psychologically deviant for failing to assume their place in the all-important nuclear family construct represents a running

theme in all the texts under examination in this thesis and will be addressed at length in the following two chapters.

Upon Mary's death, however, readers are offered a new Final Girl in her place: her younger sister, Lila. Like Mary, Lila is strong-willed and persistent in her desires. She is determined to uncover the truth behind Mary's disappearance at all costs, which leads her, along with Mary's former lover, Sam Loomis, to the Bates Motel. Lila thus assumes the role of Bluebeard's final wife, the one who will ultimately uncover his secret, which, in Bloch's text, takes the form of a literal skeleton in Norman's closet: the corpse of his long-dead mother, who has heretofore taken the blame for his psychopathic murders. Immediately after unearthing Norman's secret, however, Lila requires Sam to rescue her from a psychotic Bluebeard-Norman in order to avoid punishment for her boundless curiosity. Having narrowly evaded the same fate as her sister, Lila is thus free to pursue the only purpose women might serve in phallocentric society: to marry Sam, as hinted at the end of Bloch's novel and confirmed in Bloch's 1982 sequel, *Psycho II*. By unceremoniously ending his novel with a marriage plot, Bloch thus draws additional attention to the limited options available to women in the early post-war era, once again highlighting the imbalanced gender power structures at play within American society of the 1950s.

One final point to address before delving into a brief examination of Bloch's *American Gothic* is the way in which *Psycho*'s setting, the Bates Motel, functions as an extension of its proprietor. Not only is the Bates House the last incongruous estate in a now secluded area just off the old highway, but parts of the house, namely, the parts housing Mother, the catalyst that brings out the Bluebeard in Norman, in other words, are depicted as being strangely "alive" (Bloch 167), illustrating a quintessentially gothic trope in which patriarchal spaces remain complicit in the horrors perpetrated by the master of the house, concealing all sorts of dastardly deeds and indeed, facilitating these deeds, as is the case in *American Gothic*. Bloch's 1974 novel

in fact opens with a gothic description of antagonist G. Gordon Gregg's, purpose-built murder castle: "The castle stood in shadows. Millie stared up at its towering turrets . . . [a]nd the castle stared back. Two eyes opened and glared down at her from the topmost turret" (1). While this description immediately highlights the gothic features of Gregg's home, Millie, one of his unfortunate wives, is quick to point out on the next page that the castle also resembles "something out of a fairy tale for children" (2), self-consciously drawing attention to the novel's Bluebeardian source from the very beginning.

American Gothic, in fact, represents a far more faithful adaptation of Perrault's original "Bluebeard" fairy tale compared to *Psycho*, with its various narrative innovations primarily centring on the pathological psyche of Norman Bates. Bloch even sets this later novel, written after the sexual revolution had already entered full swing, in 1880s Chicago, recalling an earlier period of American history wherein socially constructed gender roles were even more prescriptive than they were at the beginning of the post-war era. Just as Perrault's "Bluebeard" is said to have been inspired by Gilles de Rais, a French knight who was accused of sadistically torturing and murdering between 140 and 800 children as well as murdering six of his seven wives, Bloch also adapts his *hommes fatals* from history, having been inspired to write *Psycho* after reading about the serial killer Ed Gein, and basing his depiction of the villainous G. Gordon Gregg in *American Gothic* on one of America's most emblematic serial killers: H. H. Holmes, proprietor of a real-life "Murder Castle," in which authorities speculate he may have killed as many as 200 people, most of them female.

What is striking about the methods of both Holmes as well as his fictional surrogate, Gregg, is the level of brutality inflicted upon female victims. Although Gregg claims at the end of Bloch's novel that his murders were merely "a business matter," perpetrated in order to gain "working capital" to build his castle (230), it is clear throughout the novel that he also takes a great degree of sadistic pleasure in killing and dissecting his victims, betraying a strong

undercurrent of both misogyny and psychopathy. Unlike Norman, however, Gregg's abnormal psyche is reflected in his cold, calculating demeanour; his insistence that his murders were merely a means to an end emphasises his complete lack of empathy. His specific use of the term "working capital," moreover, reinforces a long-standing association between capitalism and psychopathy for, as Joan Swart argues, "capitalism at its most ruthless rewards psychopathic behaviour as a rule with a requisite glibness, cunning, manipulation and lack of empathy. As such, capitalism, with its inherent remorselessness, is the material manifestation of psychopathy" (74). Swart also adds that a capitalist culture such as the United States "celebrates a predatory spirit and fearless attitudes in life, which are probably part of the widespread fascination that psychopathy holds for consumers in fiction" (74). Minor details throughout Bloch's novel, such as Gregg's recollection that he used to "cut off . . . puppydog's legs" (186), also highlight Gregg's psychopathic tendencies. His handsome outer appearance and solid reputation as "an eminent physician and benefactor of humanity" (5) have, however, equipped him with what psychiatrist Hervey M. Cleckley would describe as "a mask of sanity." Tellingly, no man suspects that Gregg has committed any crimes even after he files a ten-thousand-dollar insurance claim on his deceased wife who died rather improbably in a house fire ignited by Gregg himself, illustrating once again the power afforded to men by charm, good looks, and a good reputation. It is only when Gregg crosses paths with Crystal, an ambitious female reporter, that he comes under suspicion.

For all that the male characters in Bloch's novel attempt to "lock a little sense" into her (110), Crystal remains the only one wedded to "facts and figures" (11). A prototype for the New Woman, Crystal consistently rejects the feminine stereotypes thrown her way by the novel's male characters. When her fiancé Jim attempts to police her language, stating, "'I wish you wouldn't talk that way. It's not becoming of a lady,'" Crystal merely responds by reminding him, "'I'm not a lady. I'm a reporter'" (Bloch 25). Crystal also fervently rejects Jim's assertion that "'A woman's

place is in the home'" (28), going as far as to impersonate Gregg's niece in order to infiltrate his castle and obtain proof that Gregg has been killing off his various lovers. Thus, Crystal represents the ultimate curious female: an investigator who will stop at nothing to uncover the truth. She is, however, less subversive than she initially appears. Though brave and relentless in her pursuit of knowledge, she is nonetheless partially motivated to expose Gregg because she believes she has cost Jim his job by asking him to investigate Gregg's insurance claim. "'But it was all my fault,'" (104), claims Crystal, echoing Pollock's assertion that women are always the ones at fault within phallocentric society. The fact that Crystal continues to blame herself for Jim's misfortune suggests that she, too, has internalised this narrative.

Despite her proto-feminist attitude, however, Crystal is ultimately cast in the same role as all the naïve women who came before her: as Bluebeard's last wife, suggesting an inherited uncontrollable repetition compulsion that plunges the narrative further into the realm of the uncanny. Although Crystal initially resists Gregg's advances, she finally concedes, "Hadn't she known all along, even from the first time she saw him, that this was what she wanted? Wasn't that the . . . real reason she'd kept coming back? Not to save those other women but to be one of them" (Bloch 217). Crystal's final revelation signifies that for her, as for countless Bluebeard's wives before her, it is female sexual curiosity that is viewed as most hazardous to women within patriarchal society. In almost giving into her desire for Gregg, Crystal nearly signs her own death warrant. Fortunately, she, too (like Lila in *Psycho*), is rescued by a man at the conclusion of Bloch's novel: her editor Charlie, yet again hinting at a different, fortuitous marriage in her future.

That *American Gothic* repeats the same narrative told by Charles Perrault in the seventeenth century hints that while times may be different, curiously little has changed regarding women's roles within society. Bloch cleverly echoes Perrault's original lesson, "You surely know that this tale/ Took place many years ago. No longer are husbands so terrible" with his own "post-mortem" epigraph: "But all this, of course, was long ago and far away. Mass murderers . . . and

secrets burials . . . belong to the dim and distant past. Today we live in more enlightened times. Don't we?" (246). Given the staggering quantity of Bluebeard gothic fictions produced to this day, which include several texts examined in this thesis, the answer is perhaps more grim than contemporary readers would allow themselves to admit.

The ending of *American Gothic* speaks to the particular expectations placed upon women in the post-war United States. As my next chapter will illustrate, Shirley Jackson tackled the anxieties over post-war gender roles in her gothic fiction head-on. *The Bird's Nest*, after all, constitutes yet another Bluebeard narrative, in which a woman is trapped within the prison of androcentric culture that would see her as other. At the same time, like *Psycho*, *The Bird's Nest* centres on multiple personality disorder, but with two salient differences: First, the novel explicitly confronts multiple personality disorder in women. Second, rather than employing *Psycho*'s "Surprise DID" plot structure (Marcus 39), in which the revelation of the killer's psychological dysfunction becomes a plot twist (itself a gothic narrative strategy still widely used today), in *The Bird's Nest,* the main character's multiple personality disorder is revealed early on, allowing a deeper and more detailed psychological exploration.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sex Which Is Not One:
Multiple Personality Disorder as Female Malady in *The Bird's Nest*

> "Each sex has a relation to madness. Every desire has a relation to madness. But it would seem that one desire has been taken as wisdom, moderation, truth, leaving to the other sex the weight of a madness that cannot be acknowledged or accommodated."
>
> Luce Irigaray, *Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother*

THE BEAST WITHIN

The seemingly incompatible patterns of the enduring lack of understanding and consequent misrepresentation and mistreatment of mentally ill individuals, on the one hand, and the simultaneous impulse to sensationalise and mythologise individuals exhibiting severely abnormal psychology, on the other, continue to inform contemporary popular media, as evidenced by twenty-first century films such as M. Night Shyamalan's psychological thriller *Split* (2017). In *Split,* Kevin Wendell Crumb, a zookeeper diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder (DID)[31], who displays twenty-three distinct personalities or "alters," kidnaps three teenage girls in order to offer them as a sacrifice to an emergent twenty-fourth identity known as "the Beast," an entity endowed with supernatural capabilities such as enhanced strength, speed, and agility. At the film's conclusion, Kevin is established as a real-life supervillain whom the press dubs "the horde," in reference to his multiple personalities, and who can only be defeated by another uncannily resilient superhero character introduced in a previous Shyamalan film. While *Split* goes out of its way to posit that "people who have been shattered and different" — in other words those who have suffered trauma and now display symptoms of psychological disorder — are not "less than," but rather "*more* than" the average human in terms of their capabilities, the film ultimately

[31] In 1994, the *DSM-IV* renamed multiple personality disorder (MPD) dissociative identity disorder (DID), by which this disorder is currently known.

participates in the same gothicising narrative strategy that for centuries has painted sufferers of mental illness as malevolent gothic beings.

To begin, it is interesting to note how closely *Split*'s narrative aligns with Mark Seltzer's conception of America's "wound culture." In focusing on two central characters who have both endured intense trauma, *Split* in fact presents a narrative that centres on "shock, trauma, and the wound" (1) — a narrative that also engages with "atrocity exhibition, in which people wear their damage like badges of identity" (2). For example, when Kevin sees the self-harm scars on his would-be victim, Casey's, body, his "Beast" persona proclaims, "The broken are the more evolved!" and he ultimately chooses to spare her life based on her presentation of specifically physicalised trauma. In doing so, Kevin not only acknowledges his and Casey's shared history of childhood physical and mental abuse but also decrees that such trauma has endowed them with abilities that surpass normal humans, placing them further along in the evolutionary chain.

One of the film's chief pitfalls, however, is its failure to delve deep enough into the sources of trauma for both these characters — while it is heavily implied that Casey has been sexually abused by her uncle since childhood, Kevin's personal history recalls *Psycho*'s Norman Bates in a single scene that reveals that, as a young boy, he had been abused by his mother — and, as a result, the audience is left with yet another pseudoscientific narrative positing that deviant psychology results from childhood trauma, and yet glosses over the details of this trauma. This type of narrative, however, essentially establishes a teleological account of how one becomes mad and thus oversimplifies Freudian notions regarding the link between childhood trauma and deviant behaviour, merely rehashing outdated popular plots like the one found in *Psycho* and once again adding to the continued mystification of mental illness.

In fact, Kevin's therapist, Dr Fletcher — superficially a more positive representation of a psychiatric professional than several others under scrutiny in this dissertation — makes numerous far-fetched and potentially damaging assertions regarding patients with DID. In response to a

colleague who rightly recognises that she speaks of her patients "as if they're supernaturally gifted. Like they have powers or something," Fletcher claims that patients who have been through trauma might be "capable of something we're not," citing dubious evidence that "DID patients have changed their body chemistry with their thoughts"[32] (Shyamalan). While presenting her case studies at a national psychiatric conference, Fletcher even goes as far as to ask her audience, "Have these individuals through their suffering unlocked the potential of the brain? Is this the ultimate doorway to all things we call unknown? Is this where our sense of the supernatural comes from?" Instead of taking steps to demystify and destigmatise psychological disorders such as DID, Dr Fletcher further obfuscates both mental illness itself and those afflicted with such disorders by blending fact with fiction and associating the traumatised mind with that which is unknown and therefore terrifying. Indeed, by locating the source of "our sense of the supernatural" within the diseased psyche, and positing that DID patients have "unlocked the potential of the brain," Fletcher not only recalls Freud's notion of the uncanny as "actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" (*Uncanny* 148), but also thereby configures mentally ill individuals as gothic others who are simultaneously mythologised and dehumanised through the process of defamiliarisation.

While the assertion that DID patients can "change their body chemistry with their thoughts" seems to depict these individuals as superhuman, the subsequent claim that the brains of DID patients represent the "ultimate doorway to all things . . . unknown" and the supernatural also recalls Norman Bates's delusion in Bloch's *Psycho* that he is "a man who studied the secrets

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[32] Interestingly, while this assertion appears far-fetched, Dr Simone Reinders, a neuroscientist studying DID at King's College London in association with universities in the Netherlands, finds that *Split's* notions regarding altering body chemistry do, in fact, align with her own research findings: "With some of my patients, I asked two identity states to listen to a text, and my research has shown that in one state, the blood flow in the brain is different to the other identity state in response to this text. So it is true that the neurobiology is dependent on the identity state that the patient is in" (qtd. in Rose). The extent to which Shyamalan's film relies on this concept, however, indicates a great deal of potentially damaging creative license.

of time and space and mastered the secrets of dimension and being" (Bloch 93). This characterisation thus further aligns Kevin with one of the most enduring gothic representations of DID in American popular culture, a comparison that is made all the more explicit through the portrayal of one of Kevin's chief alters, Patricia. As Patricia, Kevin cross-dresses, wearing high heels and a series of conservative, matronly skirts, instantly recalling Norman's "Mother" persona and its depiction in Hitchcock's film adaptation of *Psycho*. Just as in Hitchcock's film and Bloch's source novel, however, Kevin's adoption of a feminine persona is portrayed as deviant, underscoring not only the transphobic undertones of Shyamalan's film, but also just how little perceptions of deviance have evolved over the past few decades. In harking back to *Psycho* and other similarly damaging and transphobic narratives such as *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Split* thus effectively undermines any attempt at a deeper understanding of mental illness in the twenty-first century, reverting instead to the outdated popular gothic narrative of the DID patient who is at once ultra-violent and both socially and sexually deviant.

The revelation of Kevin's "Beast" persona as a mishmash of the various zoo animals that surround his subterranean lair further cements the film's gothic depiction of mental illness. By imbuing Kevin's supernatural abilities with traits of various zoo animals, the film pushes his character into the realm of what Kelly Hurley refers to as the "abhuman": a "liminal, admixed, nauseating, abominable . . . not-quite-human" subject "characterized by its morphic variability" and "continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (9, 3-4). The abhuman, a concept closely aligned with Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, is frequently invoked as a gothic narrative strategy which "function[s] maximally to enact the defamiliarization and violent reconstitution of the human subject" (4). Put differently, the abhuman subject elicits dread and revulsion as an amalgamation of the recognisably human and the nonhuman, drawing attention to the animalistic traits within mankind. This effect is nothing short of uncanny, as the abhuman is at once familiar and yet undeniably other, thereby collapsing traditional distinctions between

these two dichotomous categories. Works of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century American gothic such as *Split* can thus be seen as analogous to *fin de siècle* British gothic in the sense that works of this genre appear to be "aroused by the prospect of a monstrous becoming" (Hurley 4). The proliferation of such narratives, which ultimately underscore the ease with which human identity might fracture, becoming something unmistakeably "other" and bestial, highlights particular American anxieties associated with the stability and *definability* of identity, a concept explored at great length in one of the best known *fin de siècle* gothic texts and progenitor of the "split personality" narrative in fiction: Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), a text which holds crucial significance for the study of dissociative identity disorder — or, as it was previously known, multiple personality disorder — a point that will be discussed further below.

FEMALE JEKYLL-AND-HYDE LIVED THREE STRANGE LIVES!

The continuing fascination with multiple personalities in contemporary American popular culture easily dates back to the 1950s, as does the popular media's fixation on the psychopath. Between 1954 and 1957, multiple personality disorder (MPD) [33] captured the American imagination as never before, generating myriad fictional representations within fiction and film, several of which remain deeply embedded in popular perceptions of this condition, as evidenced by recent works such as *Split*. This section hopes to go some way in illuminating the extent to which Shirley Jackson's fictional characterisation of MPD in her paradigmatic gothic novel *The Bird's Nest* (1954) might be viewed not only as a protest against the restrictive gender roles of the post-war era, but also as an imperfect protest against the ways in which the male-dominated

[33] It is important to note at this point that the existence of MPD, or DID, has often been contested in the field of psychiatry, with F.W. Putnam noting in 1984 that the question of whether MPD is "real" is "extremely difficult to answer based on physiologic data because, to date, there is no physiologic measure or combination of measures that can reliably establish the existence of any psychiatric diagnostic category" (31).

institution of psychiatry has continually demonised this disorder, as well as women's mental illness more generally.

Published in 1954, *The Bird's Nest* coincides with Corbett Thigpen and Hervey Cleckley's first account of their renowned psychiatric case study on "Eve White[34]," "A Case of Multiple Personality[35]," and anticipates its novelisation, *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), which was rushed into print and adapted for the screen the very same year in order to capitalise on the growing national interest in multiple personality. The public's hunger for tales centring on peculiar psychological disorders was no doubt influenced by both the continued fascination with Thigpen and Cleckley's study and the positive reception of Jackson's novel (Schwarz 232), which was adapted into its own film, *Lizzie*, the same year as the much more critically and commercially successful *Eve*. Jackson herself was reportedly unimpressed with her novel's film adaptation, calling it "Abbott and Costello meet a multiple personality" (Franklin 353). The film's ties to the gothic and horror genre were further bolstered by its ill-conceived tagline "Female Jekyll-and-Hyde lived 3 strange lives!" – a detail which hints at the centrality of the Jekyll and Hyde configuration in popular portrayals of MPD while highlighting the insidiously gothic nature of these portrayals, especially in relation to female patients.

Jackson's source novel offers a more nuanced, albeit equally gothic, approach to MPD compared to its film adaption. Heavily influenced by the American psychologist Morton Prince's once famous study *The Dissociation of a Personality* (1906), *The Bird's Nest* offers what Marta Carminero-Santangelo calls a "reimagining of Prince's account," one which highlights "the violence his rhetoric inflicts on his subject, Christine Beauchamp, in the service of the (re)production of gender" (103). Put differently, Jackson's novel, like Prince's case study before it, as well as Thigpen and Cleckley's after it, effectively underscores the gendered expectations

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[34] This was the pseudonym given to Chris Costner Sizemore, who revealed her true identity to the *Washington Post* on May 25, 1975, and eventually published her own memoir titled *I'm Eve* in 1977. Previously, Sizemore had written *Strangers in My Body: The Final Face of Eve* (1958) under the pseudonym Evelyn Lancaster.

[35] Published in *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (1954), vol. 49, no. 1, pp.135-151.

placed on women in post-war era America. In direct contrast to these two male-authored studies, however, Jackson's explicitly gothic approach foregrounds both the sinister nature of psychological texts concerning female MPD patients as well as the language used to describe such rare disorders in general.

The Bird's Nest tells the story of twenty-three-year-old Elizabeth Richmond, who lives a lonely, isolated life with "no friends, no parents, no associates, and no plans;" in fact, she is "not even interesting enough to distinguish with a nickname," for "where the *living*, engrossed daily with the fragments and soiled trivia of the disagreeable past, or the vacancies of space, kept a precarious hold on individuality and identity, Elizabeth remained *nameless*" (Jackson 7-8, emphasis mine). As Julian Wolfreys notes, naming is especially significant within the fiction of the gothic, for "[n]ames, conventionally applied, fix the limits of an identity" (xi). Elizabeth's lack of a nickname in the novel's opening thus highlights the instability of her identity, which shifts each time one of her varying alters, each bearing a different name, takes hold of her. It is also key that despite ostensibly having a name, it is Elizabeth, the presumed "original" identity of Jackson's protagonist, who "remained nameless" (Jackson 8) while her alters are each distinguished through nicknames. This suggests that Elizabeth's additional personalities are in fact more "alive" than Elizabeth herself, as it is they, not she, who are more in tune with the "soiled trivia" of Elizabeth's "disagreeable past" (7).

From the very start of the novel, Elizabeth is thus characterised not by what she possesses, but by that which she lacks, teeing up Jackson's text as one particularly ripe for psychoanalytic interpretation, despite several overly self-conscious attempts on the part of the novel's central male authority character, Elizabeth's psychiatrist, Doctor Victor Wright, to distance her story from such a reading. Upon introduction, Elizabeth is also thus defined by her blankness, as a woman devoid of any memorable features, something on which Wright immediately picks up: "Colorless was a word came to my mind when I looked at her" (32), he claims, and makes it his

implicit mission to "colour in" Elizabeth's personality in a way that appeals to his own outdated patriarchal ideas regarding proper femininity. The fact that Doctor Wright's initial diagnosis constitutes a physical diagnosis rather than a mental one, however, immediately situates Elizabeth under the male gaze, which becomes synonymous with the scientific gaze in Jackson's text.

Interestingly, Thigpen and Cleckley also describe the matronly "Eve White" identity of their MPD-stricken patient in the same fashion, pronouncing her "colorless and limited" in both their initial case report and *The Three Faces of Eve* ("Case" 145, *Eve* 119). Just as the "limited" Eve White manifests additional personas, Elizabeth's lack of a clear sense of self similarly results in the alters Beth, Betsy, and the more elusive Bess, which might be read as an eruption of all that which Elizabeth attempts to repress, including both undesirable character traits as well as traumatic memories. When viewed in light of Luce Irigaray's conception of female sexuality in *The Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), the implications of Elizabeth's MPD also reveal a specifically gendered dimension to this uncanny eruption.

Irigaray proposes that woman is "*neither one nor two.* Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two," for female sexuality, on the basis of which womanhood is defined, is "at least double" and "goes even further: it is *plural*" (28). In other words, Irigaray rejects Lacanian and Freudian ideas of female sexuality based upon lack — the very same framework upon which Elizabeth's identity is conceptualised in Jackson's novel — instead emphasising the multiplicity of woman, which, in *The Bird's Nest*, manifests as distinct competing personalities. Indeed, each of the three personalities Elizabeth initially exhibits under Doctor Wright's hypnosis might be read in explicitly Freudian terms, with "R1," the original, "colorless" Elizabeth representing the ego, Beth, or "R2," who clearly represents Wright's feminine ideal, operating as the superego, and the "fiendish," "coarsened" Betsy, or "R3," signifying the pleasure-seeking id, a configuration that only highlights the prevalence of psychoanalytic notions of the self in post-war era America (Jackson 54). That each of these

aspects of Elizabeth's personality have become estranged from one another to the point of dissociation suggests that she has failed to reconcile the various pressures exerted on her not only by society, her family included, but also by the weight of her own past, a point that will be discussed in further detail subsequently.

The idea that woman is "indefinitely other in herself" is not in itself a novel concept (Irigaray 28), however, as it has appeared time and again in gothic narratives centred on female madness through countless iterations of female doubling in the form of doppelgängers, ghosts, and pregnancy, most notably in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classic short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). Gilman's text not only likewise centres on a female protagonist's struggle with a dissociative disorder, but also similarly critiques contemporary psychiatric treatments for female "nervous condition[s]" (Gilman 9, Jackson 32), the common name given to the illnesses from which both Gilman's unnamed narrator and Elizabeth Richmond suffer by men in the medical profession despite the more than sixty years that separate these two texts. It is thus no wonder that Irigaray claims, "Female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (23), for, although both Gilman's narrator and Jackson's Elizabeth appear to be suffering from genuine psychological conditions resulting in rather shocking behaviours, their treatments are invariably prescribed by male doctors with their own tacit agendas and preconceived notions regarding the limits of female identity and selfhood as they were specifically defined for white, middle-class women.

For an image of the feminine ideal towards which a woman of Elizabeth's particular social background might strive in post-war America, one might look no further than Betty Friedan's 1963 polemic *The Feminine Mystique*. According to Friedan, journalists, educators, advertisers, and social scientists of the post-war era all contributed to the "ideological stranglehold," to borrow a term from historian Joanne Meyerowitz (229), of the "housewife-mother": the one role that, according to Friedan, could bring "fulfilment as a woman . . . for American women after 1949"

(Friedan 38). This repressive ideal held that women could "find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" (37). As a single woman who traumatically lost her mother at a young age and who also works to support herself, however, Elizabeth's personal circumstances obviously preclude her from such a prescriptive role, a fact that is further complicated when her alternate personas begin to manifest.

At the same time, however, Meyerowitz argues that in the period between 1945 and 1960, during which both *The Bird's Nest* and *The Three Face of Eve* were published, the role of woman was, in fact, changing — something that critics often ignore — for while women of this era were, as she puts it, "less captivating than women workers during World War II or political activists of the 1960s," they still "provided a coda to the saga of Rosie the Riveter [and] a prelude to the story of 1960s feminists" (2). Thus, roles for women in this period must be viewed as in a state of flux, a fact that generated a specific type of social anxiety embodied by characters such as Doctor Wright: an anxiety over what Carminero-Santangelo characterises as the threat women posed when filling multiple roles in post-war society as wives, mothers, and professionals. Seen in this light, multiple personality "intimated a vague threat to the sexual contract which was the cornerstone of 1950s domestic life" (10) for a specific subset of society: men, and, in particular, men in male-dominated professions such as psychiatry. Unfortunately, Elizabeth's psychological malady necessitates that she is left under the care of one such individual, who, in a parody of his real-life psychiatric counterparts, most notably Prince, Thigpen and Cleckley, projects only his own anxieties onto his patient, leading Elizabeth's Betsy persona to refer to him continuously as "Doctor Wrong" (Jackson 55).

THE CURIOUS CASE OF DOCTOR WRONG

Daryl Hattenhauer, in fact, points out that Doctor Wright "classifies his profession as exclusively male" (121). His anxieties as Elizabeth's therapist relate most often to the challenges she, as well

as her aunt, Morgen[36], pose to his masculinity and accompanying sense of self. When Elizabeth's "impertinent" fourth persona, Bess, whom Wright likens to "another dragon" he must slay in order to cure Elizabeth, cuts Wright off and declares to him and Morgen, "I am going to tell you both, finally and flatly, that I do not need anything from either of you. I . . . am going to get along very much better without you two," he responds by stating, "I had been insulted in my profession, my manhood . . . " (Jackson 186-187). This statement specifically ties Wright's gender to his occupation and collapses the distinction between these two categories as Bess in fact makes no specific attack upon Wright's "manhood," highlighting the fragility of Wright's construction of his own masculine authority and thereby undermining his supposed clout as a man of science as well. Wright concedes, however, that he is "a man deeply afraid of failure," insinuating that his success in treating Elizabeth is contingent upon maintaining the upper hand over his patient, directly reflecting the patriarchal order. The fact that Bess has dared silence Wright, thereby denying him "speech" (186), thus constitutes a usurpation of Wright's male authority role for, up until this point, it is Wright who has maintained a tenuous control over which of Elizabeth's personalities is allowed to speak and for how long, ensuring that she is never able to claim a cohesive subjectivity for herself.

Despite Wright's ultimate admission that he is "a villain" for having "created wantonly" — an allusion to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) which will be discussed in further detail subsequently — and "a blackguard" for having "destroyed without compassion" (Jackson 188), he remains blind to his true failure as a therapist: his refusal to listen to a woman whom he views as his inferior, as exemplified by his drink-fuelled assertion:

> you will not speak again in my presence unless it be an apology; consider that it is only through my misguided sufferance that you continue to exist at all. This temporary power, this brief and insecure dominance, will not endure . . . (187)

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[36] Wright claims that Morgen has "unmanned" him when she attempts to direct their conversation (176).

True to the role that Wright has cast himself in — that of man exorcising Elizabeth's demons — the language he employs here frames Bess's existence within Elizabeth's body as a temporary possession — one that he simply "will not endure" (187). It is also key that Wright prohibits Bess, and thus Elizabeth by extension, from "speak[ing] again" here, specifically associating speech with existence and, furthermore, with "temporary power," revealing his opposition towards Elizabeth or any of her alters gaining a sense of voice or agency.

Paralleling Thigpen and Cleckley's treatment of Eve White, Doctor Wright hopes to "cure" Elizabeth's condition not by integrating her multiple personalities, as he later claims — "'My intention is not to choose among you, but to coax you all back together into a whole person again'" (Jackson 144), he tells Betsy — but by drawing out the one that most perfectly fits his notions of femininity, in other words, by choosing the personality that most closely adheres to his own romanticised patriarchal ideals. Given his limited options between "Elizabeth the numb, the stupid, the inarticulate, but somehow enduring . . . ; Beth, the sweet and susceptible; Betsy, the wanton and wild; and Bess, the arrogant and cheap"[37] (Jackson 145), Wright obviously favours Beth, who "although weak and almost helpless, was at least possessed of a kind of winsomeness, and engaging in her helplessness" and fills Wright with "a strong impulsive regret for the person Miss R. might well have been" (142; 53). Wright's fondness for Beth, the most compliant and traditionally feminine of Elizabeth's personalities, reveals more about his own character than Elizabeth's, as Wright figures himself a white knight tasked with "setting free a captive princess" (53), a drastically different approach to the one he takes with either Elizabeth, to whom he thinks of himself as "fatherly" (46) or Betsy, "a demon whose evil seemed at first almost unconquerable" who represents to him "a fresh dragon to slay" "in the course of bringing his true princess home" (56). Wright's casting of himself in the role of Elizabeth's saviour as opposed to her doctor thus

[37] Elizabeth's four personalities listed here obviously correspond to Prince's characterisation of his patient Christine Beauchamp's four personalities: The Woman, The Saint, The Devil, and The Idiot (Prince 8), highlighting the intertextual nature of Jackson's novel.

underscores not only his own megalomania but also Elizabeth's helplessness under Wright's romanticised patriarchal regime.

As Hattenhauer suggests, Wright's "incompetence as a psychologist is largely a result of his paternalism, which is at best condescending" (122). More than condescension, however, Wright's different attitudes towards each of Elizabeth's personalities also highlight his startling unprofessionalism. Indeed, despite Wright's frequent assurances that he is an "honest" man (Jackson 31, 32, 33, 40), his own prejudices towards Elizabeth and "[her] sisters" frequently influence his account of his patient's illness (146). He not only feels the need to shield Beth from Elizabeth's other personalities, Betsy and Bess, but also finds Beth the most attractive *physically*, referring to her as his "pretty one" (54). Later, Wright admits that upon seeing Beth with her eyes open in a non-hypnosis induced state, he "grow[s] clums[y]," claiming "there is a world of difference between a wraith-like shadow and a real girl" (136), indicating the extent to which Beth, as a distinct entity capable of seeing Wright for herself, unnerves the doctor. The way that Wright describes Beth's manifestation as a distinct persona in the "real" world here further implies that she has realised some higher level of female potential by assuming the role of an agreeable, hyper-feminine woman — an ideal that Elizabeth on her own has never been able to fulfil. In the same way that Kevin reaches his hyper-masculine potential only through assuming his "Beast" persona in *Split*, Elizabeth's multiplicity is here described as affording her a curious dose of added allure that only serves to further mythologise her condition.

In his study, *Multiple Personality and the Disintegration of Literary Character*, Jeremy Hawthorn claims that in tales concerning multiple personality, "very often when a male investigator is describing the difference between two personalities of a woman, one will be described as clearly prettier, which gives food for thought concerning the extent to which sexual attractiveness is exclusively physical" (8). In other words, Wright's descriptions of Beth as the most attractive of Elizabeth's personalities despite these identities co-existing within the same

body, follows a long trend of psychiatrists assessing not only the psychological states of their subjects, but also their physical demeanour. Within the context of a doctor-patient relationship, however, the level of a woman's sexual attractiveness is surely inconsequential, yet these details are nonetheless frequently invoked even in medical literature. Thigpen and Cleckley, for example, describe the differences between their patient's "wantonly" Eve Black persona and her emerging Jane persona in explicitly sexual terms, highlighting the extent to which their own male fantasies have coloured their feelings towards their patient:

> Everything about Eve Black seemed designed specifically to attract . . . attention. Though many polite eyes were likely to note with appreciation Jane's progress along any sidewalk, even a fool would automatically restrain his impulse to whistle. There was about her no flaunting whatsoever of erotic charm, but dull indeed would be the man who would not on second glance surmise that here was an authentic potentiality for what is naturally sensuous. (126)

It is interesting to note that Thigpen and Cleckley specifically align Jane, a name that instantly recalls the Jane Doe moniker given to anonymous females, with restraint, stating explicitly that she does not "flaunt . . . erotic charm" despite her sensuousness, suggesting that a woman should be confident in her appearance but not to the extent that she begs for attention. This underscores the extent to which male psychiatrists have historically allowed their personal feelings to cloud their professional judgement, just as Wright exemplifies in Jackson's novel. Even more problematically, however, it is precisely these types of personal judgments, recorded recklessly by men in the medical professional, that specifically delineate the limits of socially acceptable behaviour, ensuring that the bounds of decorum are marred by an insidious yet deep-seated sexism.

In Doctor Wright's case, however, his complete lack of self-awareness extends further than merely expressing a preference, and indeed sexual desire, for Elizabeth's Beth persona. Despite his reluctance to align himself with "your psychoanalytic fellows" (43) — a reference, perhaps, to Prince's veiled attempt to distance *The Dissociation of a Personality* from "the

psychoanalytic school"[38] (qtd. in Schwarz 104) — the language Wright utilises to discuss Elizabeth's disorder nonetheless frequently calls attention to the influence of psychoanalytic concepts upon his own practices. He describes, for example, "creep[ing] manfully down a sewer pipe" to plumb the depths of Elizabeth's murky psyche (43), an overtly psychoanalytic metaphor, and uses hypnosis, a method of psychotherapy closely aligned with psychoanalysts Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud, as his primary means of treating Elizabeth in the first half of the novel. Indeed, Hattenhauer claims that Wright "never realizes the etiology of his patient's condition because he is squeamish about Freudian reductionism" (121), indicating that his ironic resistance towards psychoanalytic methodology has blinded him to the obvious root of Elizabeth's disorder: her childhood sexual abuse at the hands of her mother's lover, Robin (Jackson 88, 115). This wilful myopia towards his own practices reveals that Wright in fact lacks the strength to "point that high-powered perception at [him]self," to quote Clarice Starling of *The Silence of the Lambs*. Consequently, though he refuses to allow Betsy to open her eyes and enter the world by claiming sight, it is ironically Doctor Wright who is truly blind. Jackson's novel thus not only mirrors the author's lived experiences as a woman who was unsuccessfully treated by a series of inept psychiatrists[39], but also offers a subtle yet powerful indictment of the institution of psychiatry through Wright's utter incompetence as a medical professional.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the novel heavily hints that the cause of Elizabeth's psychological disorder might be traced back to her fraught relationship with her mother as well as the sexual abuse she endured as a young girl. Unlike the rudimentary treatment

[38] Prince wrote of his study: "I remember that in 1906, when *The Dissociation of a Personality* was published, the work done outside the psychoanalytic school was so little read that I determined I would, if possible, at least make 'them' read. So in writing the *Dissociation* I purposely, with 'malice after-thought', constructed it [sic!] in the form of a dramatic story of great length, 563 pages. As a scientific account it might well have been condensed within the compass of fifty pages. I think my little ruse was successful" (Schwarz 104). Prince's characterisation of his own work as a sensationalised "dramatic story" thus partially accounts for not only Wright's adoption of a similarly convoluted method of storytelling in Jackson's novel, but also Wright's resistance towards psychoanalytic reductionism.

[39] Hattenhauer writes in his study, *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*, that Jackson's doctors prescribed her "pain pills, diet pills, antidepressants, and tranquilizers" to treat her own mental illness, all without effect (122). When she died, Jackson's doctor, James Toolan, instructed her daughter to phone an ambulance, and then went back to napping, revealing the extent of his apathy towards his patient (Hattenhauer 122; Oppenheimer 269).

of these complex issues in *Split*, however, *The Bird's Nest* provides key, albeit brief, glimpses into Elizabeth's experiences in order to illustrate the effects of her past on her present, chiefly through her adolescent persona, Betsy. Indeed, the novel's third chapter is focalised entirely through Betsy, who runs away to New York in search of her deceased mother, Elizabeth Richmond (née Elizabeth Jones), unaware that Bess had already killed her years ago. Despite Doctor Wright's misinterpretation of Betsy as a malicious, even demonic presence — a point that will be discussed in further detail subsequently and which again exemplifies Wright's limitations as a psychiatrist — Betsy, in fact, merely represents a young woman yearning for her mother's love and guidance.

Specifically denoting her regression to a period of adolescence, a fundamentally uncanny life station that effaces the boundary between childhood and adulthood, Betsy describes herself as "about sixteen years old" (Jackson 98). In light of the age she gives, the entrapment of Betsy's teenage persona within Elizabeth's fully matured twenty-three-year-old body is rendered all the more unsettling, as her physical appearance lies in direct contrast to her inner naivety. Lisa Sainsbury further illuminates the link between adolescence and the uncanny by arguing that "adolescence is frequently perceived as a time of dislocation; as a phase in which new-found self-consciousness leads to a reassessment of the familiar world, rendering it unfamiliar" (126-7). Both time and identity thus become confused for the adolescent, caught up in a chaotic period of transition during which one's physical body and one's mind often progress at different rates. Trapped within this liminal space, Elizabeth simply cannot reconcile the various aspects of her identity and her fragile sense of self fractures into Betsy, the child (for Betsy was, in fact, the name Elizabeth's mother called her when she was a girl [89]), and Elizabeth, the adult, with Bess, the long-buried Electra-like matricidal figure, threatening to resurface and take control, and Beth, representing the idealised self, left almost entirely out of this chapter. Seen in this light, Elizabeth's multiple personalities might thus be read as a psychological manifestation of the

bifurcated self struggling at various stages of psychosexual development, yet again intimating the persistent influence of Freudian and Neo-Freudian conceptualisations of identity in mid-century America.

It is telling that when Betsy stands in front of her hotel room mirror, she is struck by the frantic urge to:

> rip herself apart, and give half to Lizzie and never be troubled again, saying take this, and take this and take *this*, and you can have *this*, and now get out of my sight, get away from my body . . . . Lizzie could have the useless parts, the breasts and the thighs and the parts she took such pleasure in letting give her pain; Lizzie could have . . . the stomach so she could always be able to have cramps; give Elizabeth all the country of the inside . . . and leave Betsy in possession of her own. (99)

This passage not only illustrates the extent to which Elizabeth's self remains split, with Betsy wishing she could "rip herself apart, and give half to Lizzie," allowing each to live independently of the other, but also further hints at Elizabeth's past history of sexual abuse. It can be no coincidence, for example, that the "useless parts" of which Betsy wishes to rid herself — "the breasts and the thighs" — are the most overtly sexualised parts of the female body as well as being markers of sexual maturity. Moreover, the "parts she took such pleasure in letting give her pain," for which an adolescent Betsy lacks the specific vocabulary to name, further intimates specific connotations of sex and shame, with the mixture of pleasure and pain hinting at not only the loss of virginity but also something forbidden. Finally, Betsy's desire to leave Lizzie with "the stomach so she could always be able to have cramps" and "all the country of the inside" reveals the desire to cast aside her own abject female anatomy and procreative abilities, pushing the pain of both sex and the potential for bearing children onto her adult self, whom she clearly views as monstrous.

Given Betsy's aversion to Elizabeth's womanly body and her classification of this body as a site of abjection, it is no wonder Elizabeth becomes estranged from her own form, perceiving it with horror: "Elizabeth, looking for a moment out of her own eyes, saw herself standing naked

in a strange room before a long mirror, and, turning to cower fearfully against the mirror, she began to cry, and clutched at herself, and looked with horror into the room" (99). Elizabeth's failure here to identify "the body which had so frightened her" as her own hints, literally, at Lacan's mirror stage (99), suggesting that Elizabeth's ego remains split and she has failed to enter the imaginary order and cannot claim a solid subjectivity for herself, necessitating that she continue to share one with the adolescent Betsy.

Hattenhauer further describes the Betsy persona as "pre-oedipal" (123), pinpointing Elizabeth's unresolved personal feelings towards her mother as the chief cause of her repeated regression to a younger self. Indeed, Betsy's obsession with finding her mother often leads to a conflation of her self with her mother, Elizabeth Richmond, after whom she is named, and whom she physically doubles as well, as evidenced by Aunt Morgen's frequent insistence on the similarities between the two. "'You're your mother's own daughter, mud up to the neck'" (Jackson 16), Morgen tells Elizabeth, and as her mother's uncanny doppelgänger, Elizabeth is furthermore, according to her aunt, doomed to replicate her mother's wanton, unladylike persona: "'My God, she looks like her mother . . . . All these years I've been trying to make her see what her mother was like, and now she *looks* like her'"[40] (Jackson 186, emphasis in original). According to Claire Kahane,

> For women . . . the struggle for a separate identity is not only more tenuous, but is fundamentally ambivalent, an ongoing battle with a mirror image who is both me and not me. Not only does the girl's gender identification with her mother make it more difficult for her to grasp firmly her separateness, but her mother frequently impedes that process by seeing in her daughter a duplication of herself, and reflecting that confusion. (48)

[40] It is important to note here that Aunt Morgen says this to Elizabeth while she is under the control of her Bess persona – the same alter that had killed Elizabeth's mother and for whom time has stopped shortly after this act of murder.

It can thus come as no surprise that Elizabeth struggles to claim a solid subjectivity for herself that is separate from her mother's, as Morgen, the only maternal figure left in her life, only ever sees in Elizabeth a mirror image of her mother.

As if struggling to cobble together a sense of her own identity through pieces of her past, Betsy states to herself as she is journeying alone through New York, "my name is Betsy Richmond, Elizabeth Jones before *I* was married. 'Betsy is my darling,' my mother used to say, and I used to say 'Elizabeth is my darling,' and I used to say, 'Elizabeth likes Robin best'" (Jackson 89, emphasis mine). This notable pronoun slippage, in which Betsy briefly claims her mother's maiden name, Elizabeth Jones, as her own, occurs again several pages later when Betsy essentially repeats the same disjointed sequence of thoughts: "My name is Betsy Richmond. My mother's name is Elizabeth Richmond, Elizabeth Jones before *I* was married. Call me Lisbeth like you do my mother, because Betsy is my darling Robin" (100, emphasis mine). In both instances, Betsy's identification with her mother before she was married (and thus before Betsy was born) is immediately followed by both the assertion that Betsy was her mother's "darling" as well as the mention of Robin, the gender-ambiguous name of her mother's lover, with whom it is implied Betsy formed a sexual relationship as a girl, resulting in the childhood trauma that underlies the grown Elizabeth's mental illness. What is immediately clear from these passages, too, is Betsy's desire to be close to her mother and the wedge that Robin drives between them, teeing up a potential female Oedipal complex[41] that fashions Betsy and her mother as romantic rivals.

While Jackson omits the details of Betsy's relationship with Robin, the novel's third chapter reveals, "Thinking of Robin always made her very nervous" and Betsy explicitly associates Robin with "bad things to remember" (90), indicating that she has all but repressed the memory of what Robin did to her, though it is clear that she still fears him. When asked why

[41] The concept of the female Oedipal complex — Freud's term for what Carl Jung referred to as the Electra complex — is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, in reference to the relationship between Baby Jane Hudson and her father.

Robin eventually abandoned both Betsy and her mother, Betsy replies, "Because I said I'd tell my mother what *we* did" (115, emphasis mine), implying not only that Betsy and Robin had committed a forbidden sexual act but also that Betsy believes she is equally to blame for "what [*they*] did" (115). In the latter half of the twentieth century, psychiatric research has shown time and again that the trauma of childhood physical and sexual abuse has produced "deleterious effects" on psychological growth and development, producing well-known associations with "a variety of later psychiatric difficulties, including depression, anxiety, affect dysregulation, identity disturbance, social isolation, self-destructive behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, and various physiological changes" (Chu & Dill 887). Furthermore, multiple authors within the psychiatric community have "linked abuse experiences specifically with the development of dissociative disorders"[42] (887). It is thus reasonable to deduce that Elizabeth's condition stems directly from her traumatic sexual relationship with Robin.

The fact that in the two years over which Jackson's novel takes place, Doctor Wright never once discusses Elizabeth's childhood sexual abuse with her, failing to unearth the issue altogether, does more, however, than merely reinforce Wright's incompetence as a psychiatrist. In burying the obvious root of Elizabeth's condition, Wright also effectively mirrors Freud's treatment of his own seduction theory: just as Freud originally located the cause of pathological states such as hysteria within the trauma of childhood sexual abuse in his 1896 essay "The Aetiology of Hysteria" only to abandon this theory sixteen months later in favour of a revised notion that both real *and* imagined traumatic sexual events might equally underlie psychological dysfunction (Triplett 647), so too does Wright overlook the cause of Elizabeth's illness in an

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[42] Putnam et al., for example, found that 97% of 100 patients diagnosed with multiple personality disorder had histories of childhood abuse (285). See also van der Kolk, BA, ed. *Psychological Trauma* (American Psychiatric Press, 1987); Braun, BG, ed. "Towards a theory of multiple personality and other dissociative phenomena" (*Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, vol. 7, 1984, pp. 171-193); Kluft, RP, ed. *Childhood Antecedents of Multiple Personality* (American Psychiatric Press, 1985); Putnam, FW, JJ Guroff, EK Eilberman, et al. "The clinical phenomenology of multiple personality disorder: review of 100 cases" (*Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* vol. 47, 1986, pp.285-293).

uncanny reflection of the ways in which psychoanalysis and an overreliance upon Freudian concepts in American culture have obfuscated understandings of complex psychological conditions such as MPD for decades. Doctor Wright's realisation that "the final personality of Miss R. could only be one which was fully cognizant of Miss R.'s life and experiences, full and entire" (149) is thus loaded with irony, as he fails to even register her childhood sexual abuse and thus can offer no help to Elizabeth in reconciling this trauma. Moreover, as Hall Triplett suggests, it wasn't until the 1980s that Freud's original theory on the aetiology of hysteria was resurrected in support of the recovered memory movement,[43] indicating that in the immediate post-war period, the dominant school of thought on the underlying causes of abnormal psychology continued to discount the primacy of childhood sexual abuse, fixating instead upon less quantifiable theories such as the Oedipal and Electra complexes.

Anticipating the Oedipal dynamic between Norman and his mother, Norma, in *Psycho*, Elizabeth's relationship with her own mother-double is similarly fraught with psychosexual undertones, including the implied competition between the two for Robin's affections. Just as in Bloch's novel, then, the text's absent mother figure is ultimately blamed for the central character's psychological dysfunction – a pattern repeated in both *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* and *The Bad Seed*, as discussed in chapters three and four of this thesis. The assignment of blame to Elizabeth's mother in Jackson's text here again recalls Pollock's assertion that "[t]he *fatality of women*," one of the most "powerful cultural *idée fixe* of the phallocentric imaginary," "often returns in disguise as the ultimate cause or source for the derangement that produces the aberrant *homme fatal*" (100-102). In *The Bird's Nest*, however, the "aberrant *homme fatal*" is replaced by an aberrant *femme fatale* whose murder of her own mother comes as just as much of a shock to the reader as Norman's, given both Elizabeth and Norman's similarly meek primary

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[43] See also Frederick Crews's *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (The New York Review of Books, 1995), and Richard Webster's *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis* (The Orwell Press, 1995), especially "Afterword: Freud's False Memories," 511-527.

personalities and their shared tendency to repress traumatic events. In both texts, as in Shyamalan's much later film *Split*, an unresolved conflict with one's mother is located as the primary cause of psychological dysfunction, an explicitly Freudian explanation that once again illustrates the centrality of psychoanalysis and, particularly, the Oedipus/Electra complex, in the post-war popular culture model of psychological disorder.

Ultimately, it is Elizabeth's realisation that her own Bess personality killed her mother that forces her to confront her multiple alters. At the novel's climax, Elizabeth's domineering aunt, Morgen, reveals that she shielded Elizabeth from this truth, thinking:

> once my sister was gone, all her badness would go with her; I was afraid of what was happening to my niece because she loved her mother. I suppose . . . you've heard about this fellow Robin, Doctor Wright. That was entirely her mother's fault, keeping a child around the two of them all the time, letting her see and hear things she shouldn't, until she got herself in trouble. (Jackson 230)

Morgen thus also solely blames Elizabeth's mother for causing her dysfunction despite invoking Robin in the same sentence, missing his impact upon Elizabeth's psyche almost completely and locating Elizabeth's psychological fault within the "badness" she inherited from her mother, intimating a different kind of gothic inheritance[44] than the great fortune Elizabeth's similarly absent biological father has left her, which Bess guards fiercely throughout the novel. At the same time, Morgen reveals herself as having internalised the same patriarchal order and paternalistic disdain for improper, unladylike behaviour that Doctor Wright reflects. Her desire to "lock [Elizabeth] up forever" thus stems not only from her unwillingness to confront what she perceives as her own failure in raising Elizabeth correctly, but also from her greater anxiety, like Wright's, at having lost control over her ward (230). In depicting Morgen as a different kind of monstrous mother figure, Jackson's novel thus once again hints at western society's ambivalence towards women and motherhood and the resulting gothicisation of mother-child relationships that

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[44] The idea of a gothic biological inheritance will be discussed more fully in chapters three and, especially, four, in relation to *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* and *The Bad Seed*, which foregrounds the idea of a "badness" gene passed down specifically through the maternal line.

proliferates within American popular culture. This gothicised relationship will be further explored in chapters three and four, in relation to Henry Farrell's novel *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* and William March's novel *The Bad Seed.*

GOTHIC TREATMENTS FOR GOTHIC HEROINES

At the end of Jackson's novel, Elizabeth's fractured personalities all appear to vacate her body, including the "original" Elizabeth that had sought Doctor Wright's help in the first place: "I am going to close my eyes now and you will never see me again" (232). Having absorbed, or "eaten," all of her previous identities, she is left with little to distinguish her other than the designation of "heiress," as indicated by the final chapter's title, "The Naming of An Heiress" (233), and must thus adopt a new name to denote a brand new personality: "Victoria Morgen." Elizabeth's shedding of one name for another once again highlights the importance of naming in Jackson's text, recalling Punter's assertion in his essay "Gothic, Theory, Dream" that "Gothic is often a drama of names: who has the real title deed, who is entitled to this name, who is constantly usurping the name of another?" (24), only in this case, Elizabeth's new name signifies her complete relinquishment of individuality, as she does nothing more than adopt the names of her oppressors.

Elizabeth, or Victoria Morgen, might thus be viewed as a classic gothic heroine whose fortune and psychological frailty work in tandem to attract a domineering patriarchal figure who ultimately traps her within the prison of androcentric culture, only in Jackson's text, Doctor Wright is not only paid by Elizabeth, presumably, but also licensed by his psychiatric profession to prescribe her punishment. Jackson's text thus anticipates Ira Levin's suburban gothic novel *The Stepford Wives* (1972), a rewrite of Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique*, in concluding with an "empty vessel" version of the novel's central female character, who, after repeatedly enduring the violence that patriarchal culture has inflicted upon her, is left as nothing more than an

uncanny automaton at the conclusion of her tale. Victoria Morgen's final declaration, "I'm happy . . . I know who I am"[45] (Jackson 256) is thus rendered all the more disturbing given that she is just as much of a blank slate or, indeed, "colorless" (32), as the Elizabeth who opened Jackson's novel.

As her new name clearly denotes an amalgamation of the feminised version of her doctor Victor Wright's name and the name of her equally tyrannical aunt, the resulting Victoria Morgen may also be read as a kind of Frankenstein's monster created by both the mad scientist character that Wright represents and also, to a lesser extent, Aunt Morgen, who typifies not only an old-fashioned, female voice that similarly safeguards idealised notions of womanhood but also the archetypal domineering matriarch, à la *Psycho*'s Norma Bates. It is important to note here that Morgen, having failed live up to expectation placed upon women in the 1950s to procreate, also occupies the role of the childless shrew within Jackson's text, similar to the subject of my next chapter, Baby Jane Hudson. This point further emphasises Morgen's own role as a Frankensteinian figure who must fashion for herself a surrogate daughter out of the raw materials her niece provides.

Jackson's novel, in fact, explicitly invites a Frankensteinian reading, as Doctor Wright freely describes his own methods for treating Elizabeth:

> I saw myself, if the analogy be not too extreme, much like a Frankenstein with all the materials for a monster ready at hand, and when I slept, it was with dreams of myself patching and tacking together, trying most hideously to chip away the evil from Betsy and leave what little was good, while the other three stood by mockingly, waiting their turns. (Jackson 143).

This statement further reveals a moral dimension to Doctor Wright's treatment: in "trying most hideously to chip away the evil from Betsy and leave what little was good," he truly believes that

[45] This exact phrase is repeated almost verbatim in William March's *The Bad Seed* when Christine Penmark uncovers her true parentage as an adult and says to herself, "I know who I am now" (162). The repetition of this particular sentiment across both texts not only implies the existence of a single authentic self but also that individuals can only find true happiness once they assume this specific identity. This idea will be discussed in further detail in chapter four.

he is saving Elizabeth's soul by exorcising the evil within her Betsy persona. Just like Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Wright thus casts himself as a God-like figure, the only man capable of rescuing the possessed Elizabeth from herself.

Carminero-Santangelo argues, however, that Wright ultimately reveals himself as "more a Pygmalion than a Frankenstein, fantasizing an object of desire sculpted from his own hands" (112), a metaphor that corresponds with Wright's own description of "chipping away" Betsy's evilness. Of course, Wright himself clearly lacks the perceptive abilities to distinguish between these two creator figures and thus fails to recognise the role that his own masculine fantasies have played in his patient's destruction, though his inflated ego does lead him to compare himself to Shelley's famed mad scientist outright:

> We are all measured, good or evil, by the wrong we do to others; I had made a monster and turned it loose upon the world and — since recognition is, after all, the cruellest pain — had seen it clearly and with understanding; Elizabeth R. was gone; I had corrupted her beyond redemption and in the cool eyes which now belonged entirely to Bess I read my own vanity and my own arrogance. (188)

As argued previously in this chapter, while Wright thus concedes that it is his own hubris that has doomed Elizabeth, he ultimately fails to register the ways in which his chronic chauvinism has affected his patient. Despite this admission of guilt, which, paired with his earlier assertion that he is a "man deeply afraid of failure" (186), seems engineered to appeal to the reader's sympathies, the fact remains that Wright has missed the point entirely: he is not a genius whose reach simply exceeds his grasp, but rather, a fool whose inner prejudices and emotions constantly get the better of him. This characterisation of Doctor Wright points directly to the god complex of real life psychiatrists such as Prince, Thigpen and Cleckley,

It is also important to note that the shades of Frankenstein in Jackson's text not only correlate with the novel's gothic genre, but also bear striking similarities to the ways in which Friedan characterises the "feminine monster" created by the Frankensteinian writers and editors of mass-circulation magazines in the years immediately following World War II (58-59),

suggesting that although Elizabeth's illness might be a highly unusual occurrence, her fate is a disturbingly familiar one. As this conclusion would appear to undermine the subversive potential of Elizabeth's madness as a means of protest against the prescriptive gender identities to which she ultimately conforms, it is important to further scrutinise the gothic elements of Jackson's novel, in particular, the extent to which contemporary psychiatry, in its efforts to define and treat such rare conditions as multiple personality disorder, relies upon a seemingly culturally ingrained language of the gothic, a genre that traditionally confronts readers with the deepest recesses of the human psyche, giving voice to those unspeakable memories and desires that should by all accounts remain "secret and hidden" (Freud "Uncanny" 132).

At the time, the DSM-I, published just two years before *The Bird's Nest* in 1952, defined multiple personality disorder vaguely under the broad category of psychoneurotic disorders, in which anxiety is either "directly felt and expressed or . . . unconsciously and automatically controlled by the utilization of various psychological defense mechanisms" (31). Characterised simply as a "dissociative *reaction*[46]" rather than by the name "multiple personality disorder," the DSM-I described this specific psychological malady as "a type of gross personality disorganization" produced by "a threat from within the personality," for example, "by supercharged repressed emotions, including such aggressive impulses as hostility and resentment" (31-32). Such a characterisation thus emphasised the centrality of repression, a chief tenet of Freud's conception of the uncanny, in the formation of personality disturbances. Furthermore, the symptomatic expressions of this so-called dissociative reaction were listed in the DSM-I as "depersonalization, dissociated personality, stupor, fugue, amnesia, dream state," and "somnambulism" (31), each of these symptoms also being a common motif in the fiction of the gothic. In the face of such poor definition surrounding "dissociative reactions" — indeed, one

[46] Aunt Morgen, in fact, uses this terminology to describe Elizabeth's migraine when it first manifests as a "'reaction of some kind'" (Jackson 10).

must recall that at the time the DSM-I was published, the "development of a uniform nomenclature of disease in the United States [was] comparatively recent" (APA v) — the psychiatric community perhaps unsurprisingly turned to gothic fictions for clues on how to better understand such an extraordinary phenomenon. In particular, medical practitioners writing specifically on MPD refer repeatedly to one of the most prolific works of gothic fiction in existence: none other than the aforementioned *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

In his 2002 summary of the history of MPD, Robert W. Rieder contends,

> The popular literature of the . . . nineteenth century flooded the minds of the public with fascinating macabre psychological novels that dealt with various aspects of mind, brain and stories about human beings' moral problems, including sanity and identity. The most popular of these novels . . . Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* [sic] . . . had a formidable impact on the reading public. Something was clearly in the air that would manifest itself straight through from the scientific literature to pop culture and back again. (4)

Rieder's analysis intimates a symbiotic relationship between "scientific literature" and popular culture, in which popular literature functions not only as a reflective model of concurrent psychiatric concepts, but also as a point of reference *for* psychiatric theory, at least where rare conditions such as MPD are concerned. Indeed, a 1944 study conducted by W.S. Taylor and Mabel F. Martin on multiple personality deduced a list of characteristics detailing the "Jekyll-Hyde differences between the personalities" of affected individuals, differentiated through "propriety or good behaviour" (289), implying the acceptability of the use of terminology derived from gothic fiction in a scientific study on a documented, real-life phenomenon. Thigpen and Cleckley's reliance on Stevenson in illuminating their patient Eve's condition goes even further, as the two psychiatrists devote their entire fifth chapter to a detailed discussion of *Jekyll and Hyde*, acknowledging that while in Stevenson's "gifted hands," the subject of MPD "[takes] on sinister and eerie overtones," the work nonetheless offers "a texture of plausibility, a thread of reality that cannot be dismissed forthwith as mere supernatural moonshine" (47-48). This suggests a belief that despite the status of Stevenson's text as a work of fiction, it remains

nonetheless worthy of the psychiatric community's attention, and also shows that Thigpen and Cleckley are at least partially aware that gothic texts such as *Jekyll and Hyde* have coloured medical understandings of MPD in damaging ways, through the association of this condition with the "sinister" and the "eerie." It is thus no surprise when Thigpen and Cleckley evoke the language of the gothic in describing their own subject, who has developed her own Hyde-like alter-ego, Eve Black, a "creature of . . . passion and erotic potentiality and inclination" (167) who is at once dehumanised and reduced to her physical body.

It is precisely this strange introduction of bestial language and gothic associations into a clinical setting that Jackson parallels so well in *The Bird's Nest*, in which Doctor Wright similarly evokes *Jekyll and Hyde* repeatedly. For instance, Wright's description of Betsy bearing the "face of a fiend" and his recollection of glancing at her and seeing "only in her face the shadow of a grinning fiend who had laughed at [him]" (Jackson 50) instantly recall Stevenson's usage of this term to describe Jekyll's alternate persona, Edward Hyde:

> It was already bad enough when the name was but a name of which he could learn no more. It was worse when it began to be clothed upon with detestable attributes; and out of the shifting, insubstantial mists that had so long baffled his eye, there leaped up the sudden, definite presentment of a fiend. (Stevenson)

The emphasis on Hyde's "name" in this passage also reiterates the importance of naming in the gothic, for it is only through the connection of Hyde's "detestable attributes" with his name that this separate identity crystallises.

The shared prominence of naming in both Stevenson's and Jackson's text further evokes the importance placed on names in gothic possession narratives, in which righteous characters often attempt to exert power over demons through the use of their name. In William Peter Blatty's novel *The Exorcist* (1971), for example, Father Damien Karras repeatedly asks the demon possessing the body of Regan MacNeil to reveal its name (222-228), only to have the demon state "Nowonmai" (227), or "I am no one" backwards, in defiance. James Wan's film *The Conjuring 2* (2016) takes this motif one step further as the spiritualist Lorraine Warren

(Vera Farmiga) is only able to exorcise the demon, Valek, from the body of the adolescent girl he has possessed after she remembers his name: "Your name gives me dominion over you, demon, and I do know your name! . . . In the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy spirit, I condemn you back to hell!"

It is no coincidence, however, that the emphasis on naming in Jackson's text bears striking similarity to possession narratives, for Doctor Wright also employs the kind of gothic language commonly associated with spirit possession in his description of Betsy:

> . . . as I watched her in horror, the smile upon her soft lips coarsened, and became sensual and gross, her eyelids fluttered in an attempt to open, her hands twisted together violently, and she laughed, evilly and roughly, throwing her head back and shouting, and I, seeing a devil's mask where a moment before I had seen Miss R.'s soft face, thought only, it cannot be Miss R., this is not she. (Jackson 49)

This overt attempt at identifying Betsy and, indeed, Elizabeth, a woman suffering from a psychological disorder, with an individual possessed by an evil spirit, not only harks back to a time when the concept of mental illness did not yet exist, and the "preferred explanations" for deviant behaviour "blamed evil spirits, demons, or satanic forces which had somehow corrupted and controlled the helpless humans who committed inexplicable acts of violence" (Butterfield and Kelleher 209), but also, more curiously, parallels Prince's use of the metaphor of exorcism when describing his treatment of Christine Beauchamp in *The Dissociation of a Personality*:

> Putting my finger to her forehead, I made her believe I had the power of exorcism. The effect was remarkable. She shrank from me as the conventional Mephistopheles of the stage shrinks from the cross on the handle of the sword, at the same time complaining that it made a 'terrible' painful sensation run through her body. (137)

Both Wright's and Prince's employment of language commonly associated with possession and exorcism illustrates the danger of invoking gothic language in a clinical setting, for by doing so, one risks collapsing the distinctions between discrete categories — in other words, between the fictional and the real, the arcane and the knowable — thereby invoking the uncanny and obfuscating any attempts at a deeper understanding of mental illness, contributing instead to the

same vicious cycle of othering that mentally ill individuals have experienced for centuries. When viewed against Betsy's subsequent characterisation as more of a lost child journeying through her own traumatic past, Doctor Wright's deliberate attempt at gothicising her appears especially pernicious.

One must, however, recall that Jackson's text remains a work of fiction, one that has taken great pains to establish Doctor Wright's male medical authority figure as an incompetent hypocrite who attempts to distance himself from psychoanalytic practitioners, disparaging "your head doctors with their dreams and their Freuds," while simultaneously "misconstru[ing]" Elizabeth's case in the same way he worries that others will through none other than blatantly psychoanalytic treatment techniques and repeated descriptions of unconscious mental processes (Jackson 31). While this irony might further elucidate Jackson's decision to lean into the various gothic devices at her disposal, this chapter argues that this narrative strategy ultimately problematizes the text, putting it in the category of popular fiction works which depict the "sinister" and "eerie" side of multifaceted mental illnesses such as MPD.

Such gothic images are, however, certainly disturbing, and the true power of the gothic has always lain in its ability to disturb — to offer no tidy resolutions to the complex questions that it raises. *The Bird's Nest* invites us to question not only the effectiveness of institutionalised structures such as the previously male-dominated institution of psychiatry, which often relies on the authority of "science" to pass moral judgments on individuals, but also the ways in which lasting conceptions of femininity *and* masculinity are constructed. Perhaps even more importantly, however, such complex narratives beg us to examine the specific language with which we discuss mental illness, drawing attention to the ways in which a synergy between the medical profession and popular culture has often impeded understanding of disorders that to this day in many ways remain relegated to the realm of the gothic.

THE THREE FACES OF EVE: A GOTHIC HORROR TALE

This chapter will conclude with an examination of the ways in which *The Three Faces of Eve* has been framed not as a straightforward psychiatric study but rather as a gothic horror text in its own right within the American popular imagination. Indeed, the Secker & Warburg edition of Thigpen and Cleckley's text begins with an inscription that immediately invokes the language of the gothic. In describing their patient, Eve White, Thigpen and Cleckley state, "a second personality came to *possess* her body so that there were two distinct women competing for control over her mind" (1, emphasis mine). The use of the term "possess" recalls not only Jackson's description of the emergence of Elizabeth's alternate personality Betsy in *The Bird's Nest*, but also similar applications of the word in Benjamin Rush's *Medical Inquiries* — for instance, Rush recalls that Dr Thomas Bond once confronted a patient who believed "he was possessed of a devil" (13) and goes on to discuss the effect of torpor taking "possession of the brain" (250). Furthermore, the term "possess" specifically harks back to archaic beliefs that deviant behaviour was the result of demonic, otherworldly forces (Deutsch ch. 1; Butterfield and Kelleher 209). Hinting at their book's rushed publication, Thigpen and Cleckley also state in the preface of the Secker & Warburg edition, "It is impossible to hit, in a short notice such as this, at the extraordinary outcome to these events. The book must tell its own *strange* story in the words of the two doctors who cured her" (1, emphasis mine). This statement not only implies that Thigpen and Cleckley were able to cure Eve's disorder through psychiatric treatment, a fact that Chris Costner Sizemore, the real Eve, refutes in her memoir, but also, perhaps more importantly, recalls yet again *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, an association bolstered by Thigpen and Cleckley's lengthy discussion of Stevenson's novel in chapter five.

In fact, the New York Popular Library edition of *The Three Faces of Eve* (1976) replaces the aforementioned inscription with a foreword by former American Psychological Association president J. McVicker Hunt, which directly invokes Stevenson's text, claiming,

> In his celebrated Beauchamp case, Morton Prince, founder of the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology,* presented the phenomena of multiple personality in good case reporting and attempted to explain them . . . with mentalistic concepts. Shepard Ivory Franz did this again in his book. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* Robert Louis Stevenson built a literary classic on [the theme of multiple personality], but the phenomena were imaginary. (vi)

It is strange that Hunt should list a fictional narrative such as *Jekyll and Hyde* alongside two seminal scientific studies on multiple personality, suggesting at once the significance of Stevenson's text within the study of this particular disorder while simultaneously drawing attention to the text's "literary" status and aligning *The Three Faces of Eve* instead with two earlier psychological texts: Prince's *The Dissociation of a Personality* (1906) — the same text upon which Jackson based many of the descriptions of multiple personality disorder in *The Bird's Nest* — and Franz's *Persons, One and Three: A Study in Multiple Personalities* (1933). It is not until one takes into account *Eve*'s status as a popular text rather than a strictly scientific one that this peculiar admixture of scientific and literary texts makes sense, a point that becomes all the more clear when scrutinising the various paratextual elements of the Popular Library edition of Thigpen and Cleckley's study.

In this edition, the text's opening page describes it in all capital letters as "A BESTSELLING BOOK," "AN ACADEMY AWARD WINNING FILM" and "A RIVETING STORY OF MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES!" (Popular Library i), highlighting not the scientific nature of a case study performed by two renowned psychiatrists, but rather the study's popular draw for both literary and cinematic consumers. The first page of this edition further includes three respective quotes written about the text from reviews in the Kansas City Star, the Indianapolis Star, and the Chicago Tribune:

> ONCE IN A BLUE MOON A BOOK HITS YOU LIKE THIS ONE. It is the fantastic true story of a young housewife who was three women in one body . . . more fascinating and suspenseful than most novels. AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE. (i)

This quotation from the Chicago Tribune, for example, highlights the "fantastic" and "suspenseful" elements of Thigpen and Cleckley's text while simultaneously attempting to distance it from the category of fiction; it intimates the sensational nature of the text's content while insisting upon its status as a "true story." Perhaps even more telling, however, is a quote from the *Indianapolis Star* included on the back cover of this edition: "A Gothic horror tale could scarcely bring more chills to the spine." Despite the text's earlier assertion that *The Three Faces of Eve* tells a "true story," then, the paratextual elements of this particular edition ultimately frame the narrative as a "Gothic horror" story in no uncertain terms, once again underscoring the extent to which the very language used to describe rare mental disorders derives straight from the gothic.

Thigpen and Cleckley proceed to further obfuscate the nature of MPD in their fifth chapter by drawing comparisons between the disorder and mythological creatures, stating, "The psychiatric manifestation called *dual personality* has been extensively discussed over several decades. So too have the unicorn and the centaur remained figures familiar, in a sense, over thousands of years" (47, emphasis in original). In drawing a parallel between "dual personality" and creatures such as unicorns and centaurs, Thigpen and Cleckley underscore the "fantastic" nature of this mental disorder, effectively mythologizing it while simultaneously dehumanising the afflicted individual. This constitutes exactly the same process at work in Shyamalan's *Split*, in which Kevin Wendell Crumb effectively transforms into a mythical "Beast" as a result of his psychological dysfunction. It is thus clear that despite the decades that separate the release of *The Three Faces of Eve* and *Split*, American popular culture continues to employ the same gothicising narrative strategies that characterise both literary fiction and medical literature in the 1950s in order to pique the interests of the American public.

The next chapter will examine a different method through which ordinary American people suffering from psychological disorder have been gothicised in Henry Farrell's *What Ever*

Happened, a text that bears several striking similarities to *The Bird's Nest* in its depiction of a uniquely female malady: Borderline Personality Disorder. This chapter will continue to elucidate the gendered ways in which popular culture has upheld punitive frameworks through which to view individuals suffering from mental disorder.

CHAPTER THREE

Grand Dame Guignol: Monstrous Disability in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*

"People ought to be one of two things: young or dead."

Dorothy Parker

PSYCHO-BIDDY, QU'EST-CE QUE C'EST?

When thinking of psychologically unstable women in American popular culture since the Second World War, few images prove as evocative as that of Bette Davis in Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* (1962). With her grotesquely made-up face, girlish blonde ringlets and incongruously doll-like costumes, Davis offers a walking embodiment of the "psycho-biddy" subgenre of horror cinema, which finds in *Baby Jane* its point of origin (Shelley 5). Also known as the Grande Dame Guignol, hag horror, or hagsploitation, Peter Shelley defines this peculiar subgenre of popular film as the "amalgamation of two key and seemingly contradictory concepts – the grande dame and Grand Guignol," suggesting that hag horror combines the graphic violence, shock value, and gothic melodrama of French Grand Guignol theatre with the "cultural and literary archetype" of the "grande dame," an "older woman of great dignity and prestige . . . usually portrayed as a flamboyant woman prone to extravagant and eccentric fashion" (1). By fixing the locus of horror on the aging female, the Grande Dame Guignol thus confronts audiences with societal fears associated with women, aging, senescence, and obsolescence.

Like Hitchcock's *Psycho* two years earlier, *Baby Jane* was marketed as a terrifying psychological thriller set in a sinister gothic mansion – one with a shocking final act that was sure to hold audiences in "total suspense"[47] ("What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? [1962] Official Trailer). The film is credited with revitalising the declining film careers of bitter Hollywood rivals

[47] This kind of marketing, which taps into audience appetites for shock-horror, was also used in promotional materials for Mervyn's LeRoy's film adaptation of *The Bad Seed* (1956) – the subject of my next chapter.

Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, who had passed their heydays as "screen goddesses" and were struggling to find work due to their advancing age (Fisiak 44). Bolstered, no doubt, by Davis and Crawford's real-life competition, Aldrich's film proved to be an instant hit, recouping its production costs within eleven days of its release and earning a Best Actress Academy Award nomination for Davis, amongst other accolades (Shelley 30-31).

In the years that followed, the film took on a life of its own, not only spawning a made-for-television remake in 1991 but also a slew of similar gothically inclined horror films starring aging actresses in "psycho-biddy" roles[48], thereby cementing its legacy within the American popular imagination. More than half a century later, the film is perhaps best remembered for its on-set drama, having recently inspired the critically acclaimed FX series *Feud: Bette and Joan* (2017), which chronicles the filming of *Baby Jane* as well as the aftermath of its release. *Feud* sees both Davis and Crawford taking on more roles in hag horror films in the hopes of repeating *Baby Jane*'s success but instead finding their credibility under siege due to the hagsploitation genre's growing association with camp, lowbrow culture and the B horror movies of William Castle. That *Baby Jane* and its legacy continue to fascinate the American public to this day, however, attests to the enduring power of the text's portrayal of aging women, mental instability, and the markedly gendered relationship between the two.

Interestingly, Shelley asserts that *Baby Jane*'s film adaptation "has the distinction of being a beloved gay[49] iconic title, which can be seen as both a compliment and perhaps something of a burden for film theorists, since a cult following suggests quality neglected by the mainstream, but also the derogatory implication of camp appreciation" (22). This suggests that despite the film's

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[48] See *Dead Ringer* (1964), *Strait-Jacket* (1964), which also starred Joan Crawford, *Lady in a Cage* (1964), *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964), also starring Davis and based upon a story by Henry Farrell, *Die! Die! My Darling!* (1965), *The Nanny* (1965), which starred Davis once again, *What Ever Happened to Aunt Alice?* (1969), *Trog* (1970), also starring Crawford, *What's the Matter with Helen?* (1971), and *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?* (1971) amongst many other psycho-biddy films produced between 1962 and 1997 (Shelley vii-viii).

[49] Shelley's assertion also hints at a certain queerness that underlies both Aldrich's film as well as Farrell's novel, a point which will be discussed further in the latter half of this chapter.

contemporary success, as well as its afterlife in American pop culture, it has nonetheless been relegated to the wastebasket of campy genre fare, which perhaps accounts for the dearth of critical explorations into both Aldrich's film and especially Henry Farrell's original source novel (1960), which fell out of print sometime after 1991[50] before being resurrected by Mullholland Books (London) and Grand Central Publishing (New Year) in 2013 ("Formats and Editions"). Indeed, *Baby Jane*'s status as both a cult classic film and a camp thriller hints not only at the "disposable" nature of aging actresses such as Davis and Crawford, similarly relegated to the waste bin of Hollywood in their later days despite their status within contemporary pop culture as screen legends, but also the longstanding association between non-hegemonic sexualities and deviant psychology, a concern which is foregrounded not only in Aldrich's film but also the novel on which it is based. Like *Psycho* before it, *Baby Jane* interrogates the construction of a fractured psyche, highlighting the kinds of heavily gendered psychodynamic explanations for abnormal behaviour that have remained widespread even decades after the decline of Freudian psychoanalysis.

The "psycho-biddy" designation itself raises numerous red flags over the genre's treatment of both mental illness and gender, as the term *biddy* conjures up images of nagging elderly women exacerbated by the term *psycho*'s associations with Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho* and its prototypical domineering matriarch, Norma Bates. Taken together, the phrase *psycho-biddy* thus establishes the expectation that the grandes dames featured within this genre are all violent psychopaths, invoking the "wastebasket" diagnosis for "maladjusted people" (Karpman 524; Cleckley 29) and leaving very little room for accurate, let alone nuanced, portrayals of mental illness. This demonization of older women as gothic figures feels particularly egregious considering Shelley's assertion that the psycho-biddy genre has no male equivalent:

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[50] The same year that *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* was remade for television as *Whatever Happened to...*, starring sisters Lynn and Vanessa Redgrave in the roles originated by Davis and Crawford.

> That there was no male version of the Grande Dame Guignol tells us that such an idea is less believable . . . . The grand dame as victimized protagonist is not necessarily unstable to begin with, though her mental state deteriorates as she is terrorized. She is the Woman in Peril at her most vulnerable, since youth has lessened her strengths, though having a star actress playing such a role gives her an automatic advantage over a non-star. (Shelley 8)

According to Shelley's characterisation, then, the Grande Dame Guignol, which overlaps significantly with adjacent subgenres such as the Domestic Noir[51] and the Female Gothic[52] in its focus on the home and strained familial relationships, centres specifically on individuals patriarchal culture would rather repress. The psycho-biddy might thus be regarded as yet another iteration of the gothic heroine: hounded by paranoia, her mental disability is viewed as the result of trauma, aligning her with younger characters suffering from psychological disorders such as *The Bird's Nest*'s Elizabeth Richmond. Yet, the psycho-biddy is crucially distinguished through her advancing years — her age signals that she is doubly susceptible to psychological dysfunction due to enduring associations between old age and mental deterioration. Indeed, Tomasz Fisiak posits that, "due to their age and poor mental health," characters that fit the psycho-biddy model are forced to "live outside society, marginalized and, in effect, deprived of their rights" (44), indicating that such figures assume a doubly spectral presence within an androcentric culture that already positions women as "off to the side" and "therefore, productive of the uncanny" (*Uncanny* 74), as Allan Lloyd-Smith suggests.

By focusing on the shattered psyche of aging females, the psycho-biddy genre, which certainly owes a debt to Farrell's gothic novel, thus, like Jackson's text in the previous chapter, examines the social expectations placed upon women in the post-war era, in addition to the lack of psychological support available to those members of society that have already been written off.

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[51] Julia Crouch, who coined the term Domestic Noir in 2013, describes it as a subgenre that "takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants" (*Genre Bender*).

[52] A term coined by Ellen Moers in her landmark feminist study *Literary Women* (1976) which describes a "politically subversive genre articulating women's dissatisfaction within patriarchal structures and offering a coded expression of their fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body" (Wallace & Smith 2).

Jane Hudson thus represents what lies in store for young women like Elizabeth Richmond, whose traumatic upbringings and resulting psychological dysfunctions complicate their ability to fit into socially defined roles for their sex, compelling patriarchal society to forcibly repress them. Despite the lack of critical attention paid to both Aldrich's film and especially to Farrell's novel, I argue that *Baby Jane* thus deserves further scrutiny as a text that not only highlights social attitudes towards mental illness in aging women but also subverts the formula of the Bluebeardian gothic, offering instead a counternarrative to the Woman in Peril plot that nonetheless underscores the folly of patriarchal culture.

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY AND "BAD" WOMEN

Farrell's novel *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* centres on two aging sisters who live together in a crumbling gothic mansion that reflects their deteriorating psychological and corporeal states. Baby Jane Hudson, a former Vaudevillian child star, tends to her physically disabled sister, Blanche, once a beautiful and successful Hollywood actress who has been reduced to "[a]n invalid for more than twenty years now, loathing increasingly the helpless, wasted old woman she had become" (Farrell 13). Blanche's bodily frailty stands in contrast to her sister's mental collapse, as it is established early on by the pair's housekeeper, Edna Stitts, that Jane "is not a well woman" (27). Despite Mrs. Stitts's warnings, Blanche fails to seek psychiatric help for Jane, who becomes increasingly abusive towards her, locking her away in her room and tormenting her psychologically before murdering Mrs. Stitts when she threatens to expose Jane's cruelty. Ultimately, Jane's descent into madness sees her kidnap Blanche and take her to the beach in an effort to evade the police and return to the last place in which she remembers being happy, before the death of her parents at a young age and the failure of her own show business career as an adult. The novel concludes with the police confronting Jane on the beach, where she

regresses to a childlike state and begins to dance for the crowd that has gathered as Blanche lies dying nearby, marking Jane's complete psychological breakdown.

Unlike Norman Bates and Elizabeth Richmond, Jane does not appear to be suffering from a case of multiple personality disorder. Her condition, while not explicitly stated in the novel or its film adaptation, in fact closely resembles what might now be termed Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)[53], a disorder "applied predominantly to women and, in particular, to survivors of childhood sexual abuse" (Shaw and Proctor 483), though BPD did not enter the official psychiatric lexicon until 1980[54], when it first appeared in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* the DSM-III (Fee 145). Nonetheless, the parameters of the borderline concept as it was understood from a post-war psychoanalytic perspective — as one of "three forms of personality organization, to be differentiated from sicker patients, who had *psychotic personality organization*, and healthier patients, who had *neurotic personality organization*" and which was "characterized by a failed or weak identity formation, primitive defences (namely, splitting and projective identification), and reality testing that transiently lapsed under stress" (Gunderson, *Clinical Guide* 3; see also Robert P. Knight, 1953 and Otto Kernberg, 1967) — might be useful in understanding Jane's psychological dysfunction and her depiction in Farrell's novel as an uncanny liminal entity.

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[53] The parameters surrounding Borderline Personality Disorder remain difficult to define for clinicians to this day. Marsha M. Linehan (2018) lists the following primary characteristics of the borderline patient: "emotional dysregulation," "interpersonal dysregulation," "behavioral dysregulation," "cognitive dysregulation" and "self dysfunction" (13). She also emphasises the BPD patient's lack of a stable identity, noting, "It is not unusual for a borderline individual to report that she has no sense of self at all, feels empty, and does not know who she is. In fact, one can consider BPD a pervasive disorder of both the regulation and experience of the self" (11), which perhaps goes some way towards explaining why the disorder has been featured so prominently in gothic fictions.

[54] It is worth noting here, however, that the term "borderline" was first employed by Adolf Stern in 1938 to describe "a large group of patients" who "fit frankly neither into the psychotic nor into the psychoneurotic group" and who were "extremely difficult to handle effectively by any psychotherapeutic method" (467). In this article for the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly,* Stern also described ten clinical symptoms exhibited by borderline patients: "1. Narcissism, 2. Psychic bleeding, 3. Inordinate hypersensitivity, 4. Psychic and body rigidity — 'The rigid personality,' 5. Negative therapeutic reactions, 6. What looks like constitutionally rooted feelings of inferiority, deeply imbedded in the personality of the patient, 7. Masochism, 8. What can be described as a state of deep organic insecurity or anxiety, 9. The use of projection mechanisms," and "10. Difficulties in reality testing, particularly in personal relationships" (468), several of which Jane exhibits in Farrell's novel.

While Dana Becker asserts that BPD remains "among the most theoretically complex and clinically challenging of the personality disorders" to this day (xii), the borderline concept was even more elusive at the time of *Baby Jane's* publication and adaptation for the big screen. In his 1953 article "Borderline States," Robert P. Knight, one of the first clinical researchers to theorise the borderline concept, claimed that "the label 'borderline state,' when used as a diagnosis, conveys more information about the uncertainty and indecision of the psychiatrist that it does about the condition of the patient" (1), adding that the "unsatisfactory state of our nosology contributes to our difficulties in classifying these patients diagnostically" (2). This indicates that the borderline label was not only particularly nebulous at the time of *Baby Jane*'s publication due to the unstable boundaries surrounding its definition, but also that psychiatrists frequently applied their own set of assumptions to patients diagnosed with this disorder. John Gunderson further claims, "Use of the term *borderline* for atypical, clinically troubling cases staggered along in the periphery of psychiatric thinking without notable progress until developments in the late 1960s" (*Clinical Guide* 3). Gunderson's assessment, like Knight's decades earlier, suggests that in the years immediately following the Second World War, the borderline descriptor functioned as more of a catchall diagnosis for "difficult" patients and a "psychoanalytic colloquialism," given that the designation "first arose in an era when the psychoanalytic paradigm dominated psychiatry and our classification system was [not only] primitive" but also tied to "analysability" (Gunderson "Ontology" 530). Unsurprisingly, just as critics have described psychopathy as a "wastebasket" diagnosis useful only for "personality disturbances that do not neatly fit into other categories" (Banay 1634; see also Halliwell 74 and Karpman 524), borderline personality disorder has also been defined as a "wastebasket diagnosis" meaning "different things to different people" (Aronson 209). While this is certainly troubling from a psychiatric perspective, gothic portrayals of individuals afflicted with such poorly defined disorders, such as Jane's "psycho-biddy" depiction in both Farrell's novel and Aldrich's film, only serve to further marginalise and

demonise mentally ill individuals — a process already observed in both *Psycho* and *The Bird's Nest*.

In centring its narrative on aging females, however, *Baby Jane* differentiates itself from both these earlier texts by studying a subset of society hinted at but as yet unexamined in this thesis — a subset often relegated to the "wastebasket" of society due to the disquieting perception that ageing women are "for the most part entirely dispensable" (Horner and Zlosnik 185), an idea commonly confronted in classic gothic texts and exacerbated by the fact that both central characters within Farrell's novel have failed to reproduce. Considering Miller, Moen and Dempster-McClain's assertion that the long 1950s actively "encouraged the exclusive investment of women in motherhood" (565), both Farrell's central characters have thus failed to fulfil their biological destiny. In *Baby Jane*, however, old age and spinsterhood are directly associated with both mental and physical disability through the opposing figures of Jane and Blanche, who underscore society's willingness to repress the "helpless, *wasted* old wom[en they have] become" (Farrell 13, emphasis mine), for these women function merely as reminders of "wasted" female potential — cautionary tales that warn against deviating from social expectations for women in the post-war era. Moreover, in emphasising the monstrous nature of Jane's abnormal psyche in contrast to Blanche's physical disability, *Baby Jane* further underlines the sexist nature of "wastebasket" diagnoses such as BPD, a disorder that, in addition to affecting a disproportionate amount of women in the real world compared to men (Baker 56), is also gendered almost exclusively female and frequently gothicised within American popular culture[55].

In keeping with the term "borderline," Charlotte Baker emphasises the troubling liminal status of females diagnosed with BPD, asserting, "Women who fit into neither the mad nor sad categories are generally placed into their own 'badness' category, borderline personality disorder"

[55] See other notable representations of BPD in American popular culture, such as *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Single White Female* (1992), *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *Borderline* (2002), and *Ingrid Goes West* (2017), all of which revolve around unstable female characters with violent or criminal tendencies.

(56), indicating that BPD in fact operates more as a moral diagnosis rather than a strictly medical one. Jane's criminal streak in Farrell's novel, which sees her imprisoning Blanche in her room, starving her, forging her signature, impersonating her voice and, eventually, committing murder, paired with Mrs. Stitts's assertion that Jane's actions are "wicked — criminal!" (Farrell 112), all indicate a certain "badness," which comes to define her character. Throughout the novel, her actions become increasingly depraved and, in direct contrast to both Norman Bates and Elizabeth Richmond, Jane does not commit her crimes in a state of dissociation, a point which further stresses her apparent "badness" and disregard for morality.

Fittingly, Baker notes that, "epidemiologically BPD is diagnosed predominantly (about 75 per cent) in women" (56), and, furthermore,

> it has been suggested that those patients (usually female) who do not fit into the 'mad' category and are therefore given the 'badness' category of personality disorder are not well-liked by psychiatry, due to issues of treatability and behaviours seen as difficult, such as self-harm or violence to others . . . . (56)

To understand BPD as a woman's malady thus underscores the gendered nature of psychiatric diagnosis and treatment as well as the lack of mental health support available to women in the post-war era. Moreover, Baker's categorization of BPD sufferers as not being "well-liked" by psychiatry, a point reiterated by medical professionals Linah Al-Alem and Hatim A. Omar who similarly describe BPD as a diagnosis "used for over 30 years to label patients who are 'hopeless', those who get therapists upset" (395), perhaps goes some way in explaining the lack of a psychiatric voice in Farrell's novel: unlike in *Psycho* and *The Bird's Nest*, *Baby Jane*'s narrative is not punctuated by the analysis of a therapist or psychiatrist figure. In fact, when faced with Jane's rapidly deteriorating mental state, the absence of a medical practitioner becomes all the more conspicuous.

Despite Blanche's attempt to contact hers and Jane's physician, Doctor Shelby, her pleas to have him examine Jane are quickly thwarted after Jane telephones him impersonating Blanche. Tellingly, when the real Blanche tries to persuade Doctor Shelby to come to the house,

Doctor Shelby asks, "'has there been some sort of accident?'" (Farrell 77), suggesting that acute physical trauma might be the only reason to call out to the sisters at such short notice, highlighting the primacy of physical illness over mental illness. Exasperated, Blanche responds, "'No . . . no, you don't understand. It's — not physical. She'd never come down there — not voluntarily. And I'm helpless . . . . '" (78), implying that Jane would never willingly seek treatment for herself as she has no reason to believe she is ill. Finally, Shelby asks if Jane's condition might be an "emotional disturbance" and questions if she is "violent," indicating that the "emotionally disturbed" Jane might only require urgent attention if she presents a threat to others (78). The ease with which Doctor Shelby is convinced to drop the issue altogether — indeed, Shelby responds only with a tone of "thinly disguised irritation" after Jane, using Blanche's voice, tells him that she is now under someone else's care only moments after Blanche's initial distraught phone call (82) — indicates just how seriously he treats Jane's "emotional disturbance" and, by extension, mental health in general. His willingness to brush aside the issue parallels the scientific community's disregard for borderline patients who destabilised psychiatric diagnosis by failing to fit into either neurotic or psychotic categories.

Unsurprisingly, Doctor Shelby disappears from the narrative altogether after this episode and no further attempts are made by any characters to seek psychiatric care for Jane, indicating perhaps that, unlike the youthful Elizabeth Richmond in *The Bird's Nest*, the elderly and immoral Jane is already beyond treatment — a lost cause unworthy of medical attention. Indeed, the prospect of psychiatric evaluation appears only once more in the novel: toward its very end, when Blanche finally confides in Jane that it was really she who injured herself while attempting to hit Jane with her car. Racked with guilt and facing death, Blanche tells Jane:

> 'They told me later — when they found you — that you had gone into shock and didn't remember. And then, when I found out what everyone thought — I just decided to let them go on thinking it. They told me you needed help — but I said I couldn't subject you to the shame of a mental analysis.' (Farrell 201)

This admission indicates that Blanche's reluctance to seek psychiatric care for Jane is rooted not only in her desire to hide the true cause of her debilitation from the world but also in her outdated belief that mental illness elicits "shame" — a belief hinted at earlier in the text when Blanche contemplates Jane's escalating cruelty and feels "the panic rise again within her, suddenly, sharply. In an effort to hold it back, she told herself that must not let herself be *hysterical*" (45, emphasis mine).

The use of the term "hysterical" here instantly calls to mind hysteria, "the classic female malady," according to Elaine Showalter (*Female Malady* 18), and Blanche's effort to distance herself from this label indicates the extent to which she shuns the concept of mental illness altogether, which partly accounts for her repression of Jane's disorder throughout the narrative. It is worth noting here, too, that although Blanche and Jane display contrasting behavioural patterns within Farrell's text, hysteria and borderline personality disorder share a similar history in terms of both the symptoms exhibited by each disorder as well as the markedly gendered psychiatric attitudes towards each, as noted by several feminist critics (Becker, Jimenez, and Wirth-Cauchon[56]; see also Stone). Mary Ann Jimenez, in fact, argues that "[t]he similarities between the diagnoses of borderline personality disorder and hysteria are striking. Both diagnoses delimit appropriate behavior for women, and many of the criteria are stereotypically feminine" (163). Blanche's invocation of hysteria thus not only hints at the unfavourable moral judgement that accompanies psychiatric diagnoses traditionally associated with women — which perhaps gives her another reason to shield Jane from a "mental analysis" (Farrell 201) — but also suggests that she and Jane might share more in common than she is willing to admit, thereby subtly collapsing the distinction between the two sisters.

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[56] Janet Wirth-Cauchon notes that "what characterizes the use of borderline disorder and what makes it similar to hysteria is the expansion of symptoms into a catchall or wastebasket category, a flexible diagnosis for a variety of stereotypically female behaviors" (70), confirming again the idea advanced earlier in this section that BPD operates as a "catchall or wastebasket category" and indicating that hysteria functions in a similar fashion.

Despite this indirect blurring of boundaries, however, Farrell's novel takes great pains elsewhere to depict Blanche's disability as tragic and Jane's condition as monstrous, signalling to readers where their sympathies should lie. The difference between the sisters in fact parallels Jimenez's assertion that "[w]hat distinguishes borderline personality disorder from hysteria is the inclusion of anger and other aggressive characteristics, such as shoplifting, recklessness, and substance abuse" (163). Jane exhibits almost all the "aggressive" traits that Jimenez lists in one way or another as she psychologically abuses Blanche, drinks to excess, and commits various reckless crimes, seemingly confirming Jimenez's contention that "[i]f the hysteric was a damaged woman, the borderline woman is a dangerous one" (163). Farrell's text thus remains, despite some of its intricacies, guilty of passing the same kind of moral sentences upon its central characters that women have continually experienced at the hands of psychiatry, which ultimately forces Jane into the role of the villain and Blanche into the role of her victim, thereby establishing the makings of a classic Bluebeardian gothic plot.

THE FEMALE BLUEBEARD

Reinforcing Jane's role as the novel's antagonist, Farrell's text repeatedly highlights her horrifying mental state. Mrs Stitts, for example, warns Blanche about Jane's psychological instability multiple times, explaining, "'Your sister is not a well woman, Miss Blanche . . . [She] needs — well, she needs some kind of — attention . . . . When she gets into these sulks — of hers, I just don't know how you stand it. She gives me the shivers" (Farrell 27). Mrs Stitts's statement here frames Jane as a gothic figure as she claims there is something shudder-inducing about Jane's behaviour. Jane herself also appears to pick up on the disturbing nature of her own mental state towards the novel's end, admitting, "She must not let herself think, not any more, for when she tried to think she got terribly muddled and it frightened her" (202). As was the case with Mrs

Stitts's earlier characterisation of her, then, Jane also begins to see her thought processes as something to fear.

Contrary to the mounting evidence that her sister is mentally unwell, however, Blanche repeatedly attempts to convince herself otherwise. Despite the fact that Jane, "having terrorized her, had also made her into a prisoner," for example, Blanche maintains, "There was nothing . . . really to fear," for "Jane wouldn't hurt her, wouldn't do her physical violence . . . Jane would never do anything, surely, to increase the awful burden of guilt she had borne all these years since the accident" (44), suggesting, as Doctor Shelby does, that the absence of "physical violence" undercuts the severity of Jane's symptoms. In repressing Jane's illness, however, Blanche fails to realise that the threat of violence is ever-present in the gothic mansion they share — a setting that immediately recalls not only the "Woman in Peril" narratives of classic Gothic literature, but also what Maria Tatar identifies as the Bluebeard film cycle of the 1940s[57] and what Mary Ann Doane refers to as the "paranoid woman's film," characterised by the "formulaic repetition of a scenario in which the wife invariably fears that her husband is planning to kill her" and wherein "the institution of marriage is haunted by murder" (Tatar 93; Doane 123).

[57] Though this thesis cites Tatar and Doane in discussing a body of Hollywood films produced in the 1940s modelled on the Bluebeard plot, including *Rebecca* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Dark Waters* (1944), *Gaslight* (1944), *Jane Eyre* (1943), *Experiment Perilous* (1944), *Jane Eyre* (1944), *Spellbound* (1946), *Dragonwyck* (1946), *Bluebeard* (1944), *Notorious* (1946), *The Two Mrs Carrolls* (1947), *Love from a Stranger* (1947), *Secret Beyond the Door...* (1947), and *Caught* (1949), it is worth noting that multiple critics have analysed the same subset of films using different terminology, indicating the malleability of the genre these films occupy. I have chosen to cite Tatar and Doane specifically here as their understandings of these films help elucidate themes central to Farrell's novel and its film adaptation. Thomas Elsaesser's analysis on the same film cycle, which he terms "Freudian feminist melodramas" (82), will be discussed later in this chapter. For other examples of critics discussing these films, see Andrew Britton, "Blissing Out: The Politics of Reaganite Entertainment," *Movie 31/*32, 1986, pp.1-42; Lucy Fischer, "Two-Faced Women: The 'Double' in Woman's Melodrama of the 1940s', *Cinema Journal* vol. 23, no. 1, 1983, pp.24-43; Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Cycle* (I.B. Taurus, 2007); Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the* Movies (1974; New English Library, 1975); Karen Hollinger, "The Female Oedipal Drama of *Rebecca* from Novel to Film," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 14, no. 4, 1993, pp. 17-30; Mark Jancovich, "Bluebeard's Wives: Horror, Quality and the Gothic (or Paranoid) Woman's Film in the 1940s", *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* vol. 12, no. 1, 2013, pp.20-43; Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton, *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Tania Modleski, *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982; London: Routledge, 1988); Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (1973; Peter Owen, 1975); Diane Waldman, "'At Last I Can Tell It to Someone!': Female Point of View and Subjectivity in the Gothic Romance Film of the 1940s", *Cinema Journal* vol. 23, no. 2, 1984, pp.29-40; Andrea Walsh, "Films of Suspicion and Distrust: Undercurrents of Female Consciousness in the 1940s', *Film and History* vol. 8, no. 1, 1978, pp.1-8; and Andrea Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience, 1940-1950* (Praeger, 1984).

While *Baby Jane* clearly owes a debt to these films, however, it also flips the script on Doane's formula by recasting a Grande Dame in the role of the domineering patriarch who psychologically torments his innocent young wife, who has similarly been replaced by a physically disabled older woman constantly mourning for the ingenue she once was. In addition to gesturing towards American culture's exaltation of youth and ambivalence towards aging, *Baby Jane* further hints at non-normative sexualities through the cohabitation of these two aging spinster sisters, one of whom (Jane), at least, appears to be both psychologically and sexually stunted. In Farrell's novel, then, it is not the institution of marriage that is haunted by murder, but rather another cornerstone of post-war American identity: the nuclear family, here perverted by Jane and Blanche's socially dysfunctional co-dependent relationship.

In place of the (older) husband and (younger) wife dynamic traditionally found within Bluebeardian gothic texts, *Baby Jane*'s central relationship, as stated previously, revolves around two sisters, both of whom are husbandless and childless. The institution of marriage is thus conspicuously omitted from Farrell's text, at least where older characters are concerned[58]. Indeed, both Jane's and Blanche's spinster statuses contribute to their depiction as gothic figures in the vein of Charles Dickens's Miss Havisham, and the pairing of two such characters living together in isolation only further disrupts the nuclear family-centred domestic ideology of 1950s and 60s America. In elucidating the period's "rekindling of family values," which saw marriage and fertility rates within the United States soar between 1946 and 1963, resulting in the famous "baby boom" (137), Linda Eisenmann suggests that "the unprecedented insecurities of the Cold War prompted Americans to envision the home as the one safe place in a world at risk" (134). The nuclear family thus became the lynchpin of post-war American identity, a point reflected in the era's new media: television, which often reinforced stereotypes such as the "bemused but

[58] The only presumably married couples mentioned in the text – the young couple with two children that Blanche spies at the beach and Paul and Kath, the couple who phone the police about Jane and Blanche – do not appear until the novel's final two chapters. In both instances, the text emphasises the youthfulness of these couples, a point that will be discussed in more detail shortly.

knowledgeable father, devoted mother, and mischievous but good-hearted children" through shows such as *Father Knows Best* (137). In Farrell's text, however, just as in *Psycho* and *The Bird's Nest*, stable father figures are notably absent and in place of the "devoted mother" and "mischievous but good-hearted children," the text substitutes Baby Jane: an unmarried and highly reluctant female caregiver who not only frequently regresses to an infantile state but also co-opts the traditionally male role of head of household, thus offering a monstrous perversion of all three ideals of father, mother and child.

Although she is forced to care for Blanche, Jane's attitude towards her sister is anything but nurturing. In fact, it is Jane's jealousy, described in patently gothic terms, that underlies their dynamic from the novel's start: "The old jealousy was there no doubt, the old smoldering envy that, through the years, had only slumbered and never, never really died" (Farrell 15). Over the years, this insidious envy has only led to the putrefaction of Jane and Blanche's already strained relationship after the car accident that disabled Blanche decades prior — an accident readers are led to believe, until the very end of Farrell's novel, that Jane caused out of resentment over Blanche's thriving film career. Blanche even goes as far as to pinpoint Jane's enviousness as the root of her dysfunction, claiming, "*Janie's so crazy with jealousy she doesn't know what she's doing*" (25, italics in original), which instantly pathologises Jane's behaviour and works in tandem with Blanche's previous assertion — "*She may be your own sister, honey, your own flesh and blood, but you've got to face it, deep down inside she hates you like poison and nothing would please her more than to see you get it right in the neck*" (25, italics in original) — to villainise Jane, attributing her violent tendencies to a bitterness that has resulted in psychological instability.

Indeed, Farrell's text continually highlights Jane's function as a Bluebeardian villain similar to Gregory Anton (Charles Boyer), the devious husband in George Cukor's notable paranoid woman's film *Gaslight* (1944), who famously attempts to drive his wife, Paula (Ingrid Bergman), to doubt her own sanity through psychological manipulation. Whereas Anton, who

had previously murdered Paula's aunt, Alice, isolates Paula and convinces her that she is yet another borderline woman — a paranoid kleptomaniac who is only imagining the gaslights in the house flickering — in order to have her institutionalised so he can steal her inheritance, Jane's motive for manipulating Blanche proves more complex than simple greed, though she does initially act out of financial provocation. Co-opting the Bluebeard role, Jane seizes control of Blanche's fortune, helping herself to the money in Blanche's bank account by forging her signature and using the cash to pay an accompanist so that she might revive her stage career (Farrell 110). More disturbingly, however, Jane confines Blanche to her room and slowly drives her mad through extended psychological torture, exemplified when she kills Blanche's pet bird and serves it to her for dinner and when she sprinkles "fine, white sand" over another one of Blanche's meals (Farrell 44, 58), "creat[ing] in Blanche so strong a terror of what she would find on the trays at mealtime that she would not dare to go near them" (46). Jane thus enacts the role of the deranged patriarch of the 1940s Bluebeard cycle by inciting such a feeling of profound terror in Blanche that she doubts her own sanity, ensuring Jane's dominance over Blanche just as when they were children. In the absence of their deceased father, who had continually treated Blanche as if she were inferior to Jane due to Jane's success as a child performer and her early role as the family breadwinner, Jane essentially subsumes "Daddy's" role, having internalised both his authoritarian attitude as well as his abusive behaviour — a point which will be discussed further in the final section of this chapter.

Similarly, Blanche, too, has internalised her father's repressive family hierarchy and views herself as a hindrance to Jane due to her own physical disability:

> She refused to believe that Jane's *spells* were beginning to be dangerous. For one thing they weren't really so very frequent; Blanche had come to accept them as a kind of *infirmity* that she must put up with just as Jane put up with her *invalidism*. Of the two of them, Jane had gotten all the worst of it; imprisoned all these years with a *helpless, cheerless cripple* performing the duties, really, of a servant. (28, emphasis mine)

This passage underlines the novel's central dichotomy between "dangerous" mental illness, which threatens others, and "helpless" physical disability[59], which paralyses oneself, thereby othering both conditions at once. Blanche's use of the term "spells" in describing Jane's conduct only serves to gothicise her, as it invokes the language of the occult in describing pathologised behaviour. Blanche also implicitly links Jane's "spells" with old age through language associated with the elderly, referring to these spells as a kind of "infirmity," which belies the fact that she and Jane are presumably similar in age. Curiously, however, Blanche does not present herself as a persecuted innocent, but rather as *Jane's* captor, even as Jane has locked her away, illustrating the extent to which Blanche's resentment for her own "invalidism," exemplified through her emphatic self-description as a "helpless, cheerless cripple," has deluded her understanding of the power dynamics between her and Jane. Despite her recognition of Jane's psychological "infirmity," Blanche continues to make excuses for Jane, claiming, "Of the two of them, Jane had gotten all the worst of it" (28) for having been pushed into the caretaker role, which not only presents physical disability as more of a hindrance than mental illness – a point that is contradicted several times throughout Farrell's novel – but also betrays Blanche's own guilt over burying the truth about the night of her accident. In allowing Jane's trauma to fester, Blanche thus unwittingly turns her sister into precisely the crazed villain she had led everyone to believe she was.

While Jane is thus both victim and villain, Blanche's attempt to repress Jane's trauma sees her adopting a Frankensteinian role as the originator of Jane's dangerously unstable persona. However, unlike Doctor Wright in Jackson's *The Bird's Nest*, who happily assumes this title in his egotistical quest to play God, Blanche downplays her part in the construction of Jane's disorder, realising too late that she has exacerbated Jane's already fragile psyche, which, after the

[59] Indeed, the term "helpless" is used frequently to describe Blanche throughout Farrell's text (see pages 13, 28, 44, 62, 78, 109).

loss of her parents and the failure of her film career, was already primed to fracture. Like Bloch's *Psycho*, then, Farrell's text betrays a similarly misogynistic undercurrent that reinforces the idea advanced in previous chapters that when it comes to plots modelled on the Bluebeard myth, as well as gothic plots concerning mental illness as a result of trauma, women are depicted as ultimately to blame for creating the oppressors that threaten their sex. Women like Mrs Stitts, "whom the Bluebeard murders through a chain of harm in which the Bluebeard figure becomes a victim-turned-executioner" (Pollock 103), are thus nothing more than collateral damage — fated to die because of another woman's reckless actions.

Blanche might thus be seen to parallel Norma Bates, whose corpse Norman keeps hidden away in their gothic home—she is the secret in Bluebeard's bloody chamber responsible for Jane's murderous rampage. In this sense, Blanche occupies a dual role in Farrell's text: not only is she the damsel in distress that must be rescued from her cruel oppressor but she is also, simultaneously, the madwoman in the attic, signalling her own psychological instability and thereby once again collapsing the distinction between the two sisters. Blanche and Jane are merely two sides of the same coin, both psychologically unstable to varying degrees because they are haunted by the same traumatic event. In burying the truth about the cause of her own disability, Blanche thus instigates a cycle of trauma and repression that not only traps herself but also dooms Jane to a life of villainy, to which she finally admits at the conclusion of Farrell's novel: "'I threw your life away, Jane. Without the guilt, the false guilt I've given you — with the competition between us ended — you could have had a happy life — even a husband perhaps — and children. But it was all finished for me, and I wanted it to be finished for you, too . . . . '" (Farrell 201).

Tellingly, Blanche describes the same essential conditions for achieving "fulfilment" as an American woman in post-war society that Friedan criticised only three years later in *The Feminine Mystique*: "finding a husband and bearing children" (6). Blanche's false belief that her

disability has disqualified her from the same aspirations is also foregrounded here: "it was all finished for me" (201), she claims, and her resentment over this fact becomes her driving motivation for allowing Jane's misplaced guilt to consume her as well so that both sisters end up alone and unloved, even by each other. In *Baby Jane*, then, both physical and mental disability are presented as major obstacles for women in terms of fulfilling their biological imperative. As a result, both Blanche and Jane are portrayed as incomplete women doomed to a shadowy half-life, highlighting the pressures placed on females in the 1950s and 60s to conform to a rigid set of social expectations or else face punitive ostracization and, indeed, gothicisation.

MOMMY DEAREST

Despite the text's ostensible valorisation of family and motherhood, however, the chief mother-child bond presented in the novel between Edwin Flagg, Jane's would-be accompanist, and his mother, Del, complicates this reading, hinting instead at a curious double bind for women in post-war America while shedding light on specific social pressures facing men. That Edwin and Del's dysfunctional dynamic bears striking similarity to the relationship presented between Norman Bates and his "mother" in Bloch's *Psycho* suggests not only that Edwin and Norman are analogous figures, but also that motherhood is a particularly thorny mantle to shoulder in post-war American gothic texts. Perhaps due to the notable absence of Jane's and Blanche's own mother throughout the narrative, Farrell's foregrounding of the relationship between Edwin and Del appears especially strange in a text that centres on two aging, childless actresses. Upon closer inspection, however, Edwin's characterisation and feelings towards Del help to further elucidate the text's treatment of not only masculinity but also women and motherhood, aligning *Baby Jane* with both *Psycho* and Jackson's *The Bird's Nest* as a text that locates the origin of a character's psychological dysfunction within a fault of their mother's — a pattern repeated in *The Bad Seed*, the subject of my next chapter.

Edwin is introduced in Farrell's text as the illegitimate son of yet another absent father and an overbearing mother described as "poor, simple-minded, impoverished, blindly adoring Del" (Farrell 86), immediately establishing a fractured home environment akin to the one Bloch's central character occupies in *Psycho*. Like the murderous Norman, who is portrayed as a "big, fat, overgrown Mama's Boy" suffering from grandiose delusions (Bloch 10, 93), Edwin is shown as "fat and awkward, pale and soft-looking" with an inflated sense of his own intelligence ("If . . . Edwin failed to realize any profit from his musical compositions, it was only because his was the kind of genius not appreciated on the commercial market"), an unhealthy dependence upon his mother, who unquestioningly provides for both of them, and, above all, an intense "hatred for all womankind which had its roots in his hatred for Del" (Farrell 87-88). Thus, although Edwin lacks the violent and dissociative tendencies that characterise Norman's dysfunction, both men are depicted as equally stunted in terms of their psychosexual development and similarly deficient in traditional masculine qualities, as evidenced by their lack of financial independence, submission to their mothers, complete incompatibility with the opposite sex and, indeed, by their "soft" bodies. The resulting feminisation of both Edwin and Norman constitutes a pathologised portrait of masculinity in crisis, reflecting one of the chief anxieties of mid-century America.

According to historian James Gilbert, "Whether men actually suffered an identity crisis — or crises — during the 1950s, there were many observers who strongly believed that . . . men were afflicted by an increasingly feminized world" in which "aggressive women, the fluid uncertainties of modern society, the cost in esteem of adjusting to centralization, and modern bureaucratic control of the workplace" colluded to grind men down to a uniform state (62). In other words, social critics of the time feared that both the destabilisation of traditional gender roles and the conformity demanded by modern mass society had an emasculating effect on the male population — an analysis which, according to cultural commentators such as Arthur M.

Schlesinger, Jr., was confirmed specifically through psychiatric evaluation of the American male: "'Every psychoanalyst knows,' writes one of them, 'how many emotional difficulties are due to those fears and insecurities of neurotic men who are unconsciously doubting their masculinity'" (qtd. in "Crisis"). Armed with this kind of "proof," Schlesinger lamented what he saw as "an age of sexual ambiguity" in which women frequently usurped traditionally masculine functions, taking over "more and more of the big decisions" in each household, filling high-powered jobs as "lawyers, bank cashiers and executives," and "seizing new domains like a conquering army," while the male role in contemporary society had sadly "lost its rugged clarity of outline" ("Crisis"). In reiterating this kind of patriarchal "separate spheres" ideology, Schlesinger thus suggests that women's gains in western culture came at the great expense of men sacrificing their individual identities and giving up their rightful place at the top of the social hierarchy — a process that triggered a host of social ills.

Indeed, in a 1958 article for *Esquire* entitled "The Crisis of American Masculinity," — published the same year as *Look* magazine's series on "The Decline of the American Male" — Schlesinger bemoans the "castrated" "modern heroes" of the theatre — "that faithful mirror of a society's preoccupations" — citing the male protagonists of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *Look Back in Anger* (1956), both of whom, according to Schlesinger, were incapable of "dealing with the wom[e]n in [their lives]" and ultimately "reject the normal female desire for full and reciprocal love as an unconscionable demand and an intolerable burden." That these men were unable to assert their dominance over the opposite sex, in a way not entirely unlike Edwin and Norman, signalled to Schlesinger a compromise in masculinity and a softness of character that tended towards homosexuality: the very "incarnation of sexual ambiguity." Schlesinger thus equates a lack of machismo with nonnormative sexuality, which suggests that men must be aggressively masculine to be men or else risk pathologisation, at least from a mid-century American standpoint. It is thus no wonder that Edwin and Norman are depicted as sad and oddly

menacing misfits in a society that critics like Schlesinger feared had already "unmanned the American man" ("Crisis"), leading to heightened anxiety regarding homosexuality, which, as discussed in chapter one, was also tied up in the converging fears of political deviance (communism) and psychological deviance (the sexual psychopath).

The casting of gay actor Victor Buono as Edwin in Aldrich's film adaptation of *Baby Jane* thus proves an especially interesting choice given the novel's veiled portrait of nonnormative sexualities. That Buono would go on to play the titular antagonist, Leo Kroll, a sadistic serial killer whose abhorrence for women stems from his love/hate relationship with his domineering mother, in Burt Topper's *The Strangler* (1964), a film inspired by the then unsolved murders of the Boston Strangler, also surely defies coincidence. In both outward appearance and sexual orientation, Buono typified precisely the kind of man Schlesinger warned was the corollary of a feminised American society: an overweight homosexual whose obituary in the New York Times (1982) stated that he was "known for portrayals of villains," indicating the roles available to men who had failed to display the traditional masculine characteristics associated with, or perhaps worthy of, onscreen heroes. Indeed, Buono's performances as mother-fixated, psychologically stunted men in both *Baby Jane* and *The Strangler* exploited his deviation from masculine norms – his "unmanly" mannerisms were often played for laughs, driving home, perhaps, the era's pathologisation of both perceived effeminacy and homosexuality. As William J. Mann contends, however, "this wasn't *gayness* he was playing, at least not any gayness recognized; it was *perversion*. It was the same schizoid view of homosexuality that had long existed in Hollywood . . . ." (348). In portraying Leo Kroll and Edwin Flagg as deviants, Buono thus inadvertently reinforces widespread concerns regarding the era's alleged crisis of masculinity.

Interestingly, Buono's overweight appearance perfectly matches the ways in which both Edwin and Norman are described in their respective novels – as "big, fat, overgrown Mama's Boy[s]" whose outer "softness" signals their social and psychological deviance (Bloch 10). In a

1945 study entitled "The Relationship Between the Masculine Component and Personality," in fact, Harvard anthropologist Carl C. Seltzer examined possible correlations between male body types and personality traits through psychiatric evaluations, ultimately arguing that more "feminine" male bodies — in other words bodies that were "rounder, softer, broad-hipped" and "less well muscled" (33) — exhibited weaker "masculine components" and corresponded with weaker personal "vitality," indecisiveness, and "an enjoyment of participation in literature and the arts" (36-39). Put differently, the more effeminate a man looked, the more likely he tended towards those interests traditionally reserved for females — a belief echoed in Norman's love of books and Edwin's pursuit of a career in music (Bloch 166, Farrell 88). Furthermore, members of Seltzer's sample group with "weakness of the masculine component" were also found to exhibit higher levels of anxiety and sensitivity compared to their more manly counterparts while this more "feminine" group also presented a "higher frequency of cases of individuals whose personality structures are 'less-well integrated'" (46), suggesting that more effeminate men often presented less stable identities and were thus more likely to experience personality disturbance. According to this logic, Norman and Edwin's potential for deviance is thus written on their very bodies, dictated through inferior biology. Ultimately, while Seltzer's terminology, methods, and analysis are clearly questionable by today's standards, revealing, perhaps, more about the prejudices of those researchers involved, his study illustrates the extent to which dubious generalisations were made in the 1950s concerning the correlations between physical form and mental capacity. Even more importantly, the fact that Seltzer's study relied on psychological profiling showcases the extent to which psychiatry was weaponised in post-war era popular culture for the purposes of reinscribing traditional gender norms.

In situating the potential for deviance along a pseudoscientific physical-psychological continuum that privileges masculine toughness over feminine "softness," both in terms of body and mind, Seltzer's study also draws attention to a peculiar "polarization of images" — "hard"

and "soft" in particular — that Daniel Bell warned characterised American politics during the height of the Cold War (67-70). In fact, in his 1955 essay on the "radical right," Bell suggests, "presumably, one is 'soft' if one insists that the danger from domestic Communists is small," while one is "hard" if one holds that "no distinction can be made between international and domestic Communism" (67). As K.A. Cuordileone suggests, the American political culture of the long 1950s thus "put a premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation" (516). Accordingly, "soft" males, such as Edwin and Norman, who failed to exhibit traditional masculine traits, betrayed a particular type of deviance not only associated with homosexuality but also communism at a time when the Cold War was escalating. Considering the homegrown nature of these "perversions," however, the threat that men like Edwin and Norman exuded was interpreted as particularly disquieting, as their presence suggested that the United States was not only under attack from foreign powers but also already compromised from within.

Unsurprisingly, then, while Edwin and Norman are pathologised based on both their outward appearances and their psychological abnormality, the origin of their dysfunctions is inevitably traced back to their formative relationships with domineering mothers and the absence of their fathers, which combine to arrest their psychosexual development at the phallic stage in a conspicuously pop Freudian fashion that also confirms Schlesinger's views. Unable to resolve their Oedipal feelings or learn "proper" male behaviour, Edwin and Norman thus serve at once to reinforce the importance of an intact nuclear family and caution against the dangers of excessive maternal influence, recalling Schlesinger's assessment that "[a]s mothers, [women] undermine masculinity through the use of love as a technique of reward and punishment" ("Crisis"). At the same time, Edwin and Norman's emotional and financial reliance on their mothers and confused senses of individuality further reinforce the worst nightmares of critics like Schlesinger: that "American males had become the victims of a smothering, overpowering,

suspiciously collectivist mass society — a society that had smashed the once-autonomous male self, elevated women to a position of power in the home, and doomed men to a slavish conformity not wholly unlike that experienced by men living under Communist rule" (Cuordileone 522-523), suggesting that one of the biggest threats to national security was in fact something that existed in every, or at least, the "ideal" American household.

Faced with Norma, who "dominated" Norman and "deliberately prevented him from growing up," according to Dr. Steiner (Bloch 177), and Del, who coddles Edwin by continually making excuses for him and apologising for *his* lack of success (Farrell 87), both men are in fact smothered by women who have assumed masculine roles after being abandoned by their husbands, thereby enacting Freud's conception of the castrating phallic woman, outlined in his essay on "Fetishism" (1927). In the absence of masculine role models, Norman and Edwin are, in effect, doomed to identify only with their phallic mothers, which, according to both Freud and fellow psychoanalyst Robert C. Bak, leads to the development of defensive abnormal behaviours in the form of fetishisms, or perversions, such as homosexuality: "Perversions are acted out in various, more or less dominant forms, through identification with the phallic mother . . . . If one considers the main defensive position in the perversions to be the reinvestment of the fantasy of the phallic woman, fetishism is the basic perversion" (Bak 16). Ultimately, thus, just as Blanche is depicted as partially responsible for creating Jane's Bluebeard persona, Del and Norma are found liable for rearing emasculated, psychologically-dysfunctional man-children incapable of forming healthy adult attachments, having not only fostered home environments that preclude normal psychosexual development but also passed down their own neuroses to their sons.

Considering, in particular, Dr. Steiner's suggestion that "'Mrs. Bates hated men ever since her husband deserted her and the baby, and this is one of the reasons why she treated Norman the way she did'" (Bloch 178), and the revelation that "[w]hen, at Edwin's birth, Del had foresworn any further association with men, she had renounced sex as sinful and bad and

expected the world at large to renounce it, too" (Farrell 91), sexuality is treated as taboo within both the Bates and the Flagg households, ensuring that Norma and Del's fraught relationship with heterosexual intercourse in particular is duplicated by their offspring. Moreover, adult men are not to be trusted largely due to their inherent carnal urges, according to both women, which further accounts for their infantilization of their sons. It is no wonder, then, that "Mother" tells Norman, "'You hate *people*. Because, really, you're *afraid* of them, aren't you?'" (Bloch 9, emphasis in original), and Edwin is said to be "frightened of all men, including those younger than himself," while women "disliked him instinctively" (Farrell 88), since sexuality, from a psychoanalytic perspective especially, constitutes a fundamental aspect of human identity that both sons are emphatically denied.

The shared aversion to sex displayed by both Del and Norma hints at their own pathologisation, for, as Freud writes in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905):

> The character of hysterics shows a degree of sexual repression in excess of the normal quantity, an intensification of resistance against the sexual instinct (which we have already met in the form of shame, disgust and morality), and what seems like an instinctive aversion on their part to any intellectual consideration of sexual problems. (164)

According to Freud, then, both Norma's and Del's aversions to sex betray an hysteric affliction. Thus, Norman and Edwin's psychological maladjustments might be construed as hereditary — an idea that is not only advanced in Rush's *Diseases of the Mind* — in which Rush posits that for a number of patients treated at Pennsylvania Hospital, "a predisposition to the disease was hereditary" (47) and in which he insists that doctors study the inherited nature of mental illness, for "[t]here are several peculiarities which attend this disease, where the predisposition to it is hereditary, which deserves our notice" (51) — but has also pervaded American gothic texts[60] since Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, in which Theodore Wieland inherits his father's mania.

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[60] Indeed, the topic of hereditary mental illness will be explored at length in my next chapter on *The Bad Seed*.

Given their mothers' sexual repression, Norman and Edwin's failure to reach sexual maturity appears preordained, as does their psychological dysfunction. That both the Bates and Flagg families struggle to reconcile adult sexuality recalls Leslie Fiedler's claim in *Love and Death in the American Novel* that "[p]erhaps the whole odd shape of American fiction," which tends towards the gothic and the uncanny, "arises simply . . . because there is no real sexuality in American life and therefore there cannot very well be any in American art" (30). Significantly, then, Edwin and Norman's arrested development points to a collective failure to negotiate mature sexuality and thus come of age that characterises American national identity during the post-war era, accounting, perhaps, for the country's obsession with not only youth but also a popular version of Freudianism that constantly looked backward towards childhood experiences for explanations of deviance.

As Kathleen M. Woodward notes in her study on Freudian attitudes towards old age, *Aging and Its Discontents* (1991), "Freudian psychoanalysis, with its discoveries of infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex, is pre-eminently a theory of childhood" and "due in great part because of its emphasis on infancy and youth . . . has subtly reinforced our culture's devaluation of age" (26). Given this cultural view on aging, which clearly privileges youth over old age, it is perhaps unsurprising that Del and Norma — and, indeed, Jane — are continually pathologised purely for failing to conform to strict social pressures for how older women, and especially mothers, should behave — a point which will be discussed in further detail in the next section. This "emphasis on infancy and youth," as Woodward puts it (26), also goes some way in explaining why so many popular texts of the post-war era trace the origin point of one generation's ills back to faults within the previous one, leading in turn to complex questions concerning child-rearing.

Indeed, the depiction of both Edwin and Norman as men who have been effectively neutered by their mothers underscores a preoccupation in post-war era USA with what Philip

Wylie describes as "Momism" — the corollary to America's cult of motherhood. In chapter eleven of his bestselling jeremiad *Generation of Vipers* (1942), which critiques numerous cultural institutions including science, modern medicine, and Christianity, Wylie links Momism with several other well-known "isms," — namely, communism and fascism — positing that self-centred upper and middle-class viragos were responsible for raising an entire generation of weak American men incapable of rising up against the myriad threats to both national security and identity plaguing the United States during the mid-twentieth century. Alternating between biting sarcasm and complete contempt, Wylie chastises American culture's fanatical obsession with mothers:

> [M]egaloid mom worship has got completely out of hand . . . . Mom is everywhere and everything and damned near everybody, and from her depends all the rest of the U.S. Disguised as good old mom, dear old mom, sweet old mom, your loving mom, and so on, she is the bride at every funeral and the corpse at every wedding. Men live for her and die for her, dote upon her and whisper her name as they pass away, and I believe she has now achieved, in the hierarchy of miscellaneous articles, a spot next to the Bible and the Flag, being reckoned part of both in a way. (529-530)

According to Wylie, then, mothers constitute the core of not only the nuclear family but also the American way of life, much to the detriment of the national character, which eroded under constant maternal cossetting.

Unsurprisingly, Wylie also invokes Freud in his discussion of "mother-love-in-action," claiming that "[u]nfortunately, Americans, who are the most prissy people on earth, have been unable to benefit from Freud's wisdom because they can *prove* that they do not, by and large, sleep with their mothers. That is their interpretation of Freud" (520). Wylie, like Fiedler, thus underlines America's fraught relationship with both psychoanalysis and sex, suggesting that "prissy" Americans are in fact too prudish to come to terms with a mature sexuality and thus incompatible with Freud — in fact, "The subject of sex is still envisioned by the American public as one which belongs in the realm of private conversation rather than the realm of natural law (and, therefore, science)" (Wylie 173). Unlike Fiedler, whose reading of American fiction is

deeply rooted in psychoanalysis, then, Wylie self-consciously denounces Freudianism as having no place in American society precisely because of its emphasis on human sexuality (445), though he eventually concedes that "[t]he work of Freud and Jung has, of course, become more widely understood since [his] words were set down" (507). Thus, like Doctor Wright's commentary in *The Bird's Nest*, Wylie's critique of Momism might be interpreted as highly ironic, considering just how closely his othering of the American mother aligns with Freud's consideration of the role of women and maternal influence in human psychosexual development and the constant dichotomising between male dominance and female inferiority in terms of both physical anatomy and mental capacity within contemporary psychoanalysis.

Wylie's condemnation of the American mother perhaps goes some way in accounting for Farrell's depiction of competing yet similarly pathologised ageing women. Between Del, the bad mother who refuses to let go of her son, and Jane, the "psycho biddy" who has failed to fulfil her biological imperative to marry and bear children, it appears that in the post-war era, motherhood constituted an impossible role that women were at once expected to fulfil and yet at which they were almost certainly doomed to fail, especially without the aid of a husband. Both these portraits of womanhood are equally punishing, revealing the extent to which blatant sexism, given credence not only through cultural critiques written by contemptuous men but also reinforced through the wanton application of allegedly impartial yet unfalsifiable psychiatric "evidence," dictated the confines of normality within this specific cultural moment, leading time and again to the pathologization and gothicisation of women and mothers.

AGING DAMES AND UNCANNY LIMINALITY

Given the fluctuating sociocultural conditions surrounding the Second World War and the decades that followed, Wylie's positioning of "Mom" as a mid-century American invention born out of troubled times is particularly interesting and implies both a resistance towards change as

well as a nostalgia for a romanticised past in which men were men and women were what men wanted them to be. Sadly, as Wylie claims, twentieth-century Mom is, rather, "something new in the world of men," for

> Usually, until very recently, mom folded up and died of hard work somewhere in the middle of her life. Old ladies were scarce and those who managed to get old did so by making remarkable inner adjustments and by virtue of a fabulous horniness of body, so that they lent to old age not only dignity but metal. (522)

This characterisation implies strict parameters surrounding how women in America are allowed to age — a point briefly touched upon in previous sections of this chapter. Jane, Blanche and Del have all clearly failed to meet the criteria Wylie sets forth for women to survive into old age, turning them into uncanny creatures who have outlived their use-by date and are, in fact, more dead than alive as both Jane and Blanche have failed to reproduce in the first place — as Wylie states earlier, once "time has stripped away [a woman's] biological possibilities and poured her hide full of liquid soap," the "machine has deprived her of social usefulness" (523) — and Del is unable to let go of her son. Blanche, especially, fails Wylie's criteria simply for being disabled, as only "a fabulous horniness of body" would equip one to handle the strains of old age (522). All three women thus represent a new generation who, emboldened by a feminised American society and its calamitous tolerance for working women, become a burden to the nation and must be cast out lest they continue to "stamp and jibber in the midst of man, a noisy neuter by natural default . . . all tongue and teat and razzmatazz" (523). While Del is pathologised for displaying excessive maternal coddling, then, according to Wylie, there is something about Jane's and Blanche's careers in show business that makes them particularly grotesque — a point to which I will return shortly.

It is worth noting, at this point, that Aldrich's film adaptation of *Baby Jane* further emphasises the theme of motherhood by reimagining the first chapter of Farrell's novel, which features a conversation between Jane and Blanche's next door neighbour, Mrs Bates, and her similarly middle-aged friend Harriet Palmer, as a conversation between Mrs Bates (Anna Lee)

and her teenage daughter, Liza (played by Bette Davis's own daughter, B.D. Merrill). This change further emphasises the childlessness of both Blanche and Jane by contrasting them with Mrs Bates, who has fulfilled her biological destiny and appears to have a stable relationship with her daughter, suggesting perhaps, that mothers in the long 1950s were better equipped to raise girls rather than boys. That Jane and Blanche still wind up as psychologically unstable spinsters can thus be traced to less a fault of their mother's than a fault within themselves, in direct accordance with Freudianism's archaic view on female inferiority.

In contrast to Aldrich's film, the first chapter of Farrell's novel underscores instead the advancing age of not only Mrs Bates and Harriet Palmer, two women "both in their early fifties," but also of Jane and Blanche, who Mrs Bates figures "must be at least fifty by now'" (9). Considering the fifty-one-year gap between the novel's prologue in 1908, in which both Jane and Blanche are children, and the novel's chief setting in 1959, Mrs Bates's assessment appears accurate, though the novel's assumption that all four women are past their prime, echoed in the casting of fading Hollywood stars Davis and Crawford, who were also merely in their fifties at the time Aldrich's film adaptation was released, is deeply disconcerting. Considering steady increases in life expectancy in the United States since the 1950s (World Population Review)[61], a woman in her fifties would by today's standards be considered middle-aged, a point reflected in the casting of sixty-eight-year-old Jessica Lange and seventy-one-year-old Susan Sarandon as *Baby Jane* era Joan Crawford and Bette Davis in FX's *Feud.* In 1960, however, the expectation established by popular texts such as *Baby Jane* and *Generation of Vipers* was that women in their fifties, who were past child-bearing age, would quietly fade into obsolescence — a trajectory that Jane adamantly refuses.

[61] The World Bank estimates that the average life expectancy in the United States was 69.77 years in 1960, compared to 79.77 in 2019 (World Population Review).

Referring to Aldrich's film adaptation, Timothy Shary and Nancy McVittie argue in *Fade to Gray: Aging in American Cinema* (2016) that in direct contrast to Blanche, whom Crawford portrays as "a figure of ultimate vulnerability, dependent on the kindness and intervention of other, younger people, and in constant danger because of her physical limitations, isolations, and status as someone easily forgotten about by the larger community" (82), Jane is represented as "the true psycho biddy: psychotic and unpredictable, a nightmare vision of a woman refusing to pass quietly into the proper performance of senescence" (83). In other words, Jane's psychological disorder, in both Aldrich's film and Farrell's novel, distinguishes her as an unnatural figure: juxtaposed against Blanche, who, due in large part to her physical disability, embodies Wylie's vision of an older woman who "fold[s] up" and readies herself for death (522), Jane's mental instability causes her to act out in age-inappropriate ways that undermine traditional distinctions between child, adult and geriatric. The resulting gothic figure, immortalised through Davis's performance as a crazed old woman with incongruously girlish blonde ringlets and a face caked with pale makeup and finished with a drawn-on heart-shaped birthmark, is thus rendered all the more uncanny precisely because of the disjunction between Jane's aging face, body and, indeed, voice, and her naïve, childlike behaviour and oddly infantilised language — particularly, her constant reference to her father as "Daddy," which anticipates Sylvia Plath's famed poem "Daddy" (1965) and the poet's statement that the work is "about a girl with an Electra complex" (qtd. in Scott 8), hinting at Jane's own unresolved feelings towards her father.

Jane's uncanniness, as mentioned briefly in the previous section, is thus inextricably bound to the idea of performance and showmanship, or, as Wylie puts it, "razzmatazz" (523), and to her confusion over how to act her "proper" role in society, as exemplified in Mrs. Stitts's assertion regarding Jane's stealing of Blanche's letters: "But it's not a normal thing for someone to do — *not for a person her age* — and with her starting to *act up* again" (Farrell 25, emphasis mine). Especially contrasted against Blanche's acquiescence to quietly and privately fading into

obsolescence, as a woman of her age should, Jane's attempted usurpation of parts that are specifically too young for her — namely, child, lover, and star — and her audacity to perform these roles in full view of others, imbues her with a sense of gothic eeriness. As she attempts to stage a reproduction of her glory days, Jane thus in fact creates what Sally Chivers, borrowing a concept from Mary Russo, characterises as the "scandal of anachronism": non-conformance, typically on the part of older women, to normative ideas of age-appropriate behaviour, which "expos[es] the female subject, especially, to ridicule, contempt, pity, and scorn" (Russo 21). In Jane's case, Chivers argues, "[a] visibly aging woman attempting a child's stage antics provides a juxtaposition worthy in Hollywood's terms only of a horror film" (218), and thus, Jane's attempt to assume a role from her youth is unequivocally gothicised.

Though Jane tries to reason that "[a] lot of the old-timers were coming back into the business," it is telling that the first two names that spring to her mind are Ed Wynn and Buster Keaton, two male comedians whose careers managed to stand the test of time, suggesting, as Russo, Chivers, and Wylie do, that there is something particularly unacceptable about females making a public show of aging (Farrell 70). The third and last name Jane invokes, Fanny Brice, further reinforces this point, as Brice was famous for performing the role of Baby Snooks, an infant some forty years younger than the actress that played her in a radio persona reminiscent of the one Jane adopts albeit with one crucial distinction: Brice was a comedienne who intentionally played a baby for laughs, aware that her "precocious worldly wisdom and uninhibited selfishness would have been obnoxious in an adolescent or a young adult" (Goldman 157). Capitalising on the humorous rather than disquieting incongruity between her mature years and her innocent baby-isms, Brice's Baby Snooks persona also (almost) successfully bypasses uncanniness because infancy and middle age are two distinct life stations separated by a long period of girlhood and young adulthood, ensuring that it is harder to blur the lines between these stations in a way that collapses the distinction between them. Jane, by contrast, is rendered

uncanny precisely because her own coming-of-age has been strangely arrested by her preoccupation with the success she earned as a child star, ensuring that she is never able to move beyond girlhood psychologically. As a result, Jane's depiction in both Farrell's novel and Aldrich's film as an aging dame who wears shapeless, childlike dresses and "preposterous bow[s] nested in her garish curls" confuses the discrete categories of child and adult (Farrell 35), creating instead a gothic liminal entity that confounds traditional categories of stable human identity.

Farrell's text repeatedly draws attention to the unacceptability of Jane's liminal nature, particularly through Edwin's perspective. Upon first meeting her, in fact, Edwin characterises Jane as "the old girl" three separate times within the span of three pages (96-98), emphasising yet again the dissonance between Jane's age and her mannerisms. Jarred by the incongruity between her elderly appearance and her "girlish enthusiasm," Edwin immediately concludes that Jane is "ludicrous beyond all imagining, beyond reality itself" (98-99), writing her off due to not only her age, but also her apparent psychological instability. Moreover, Edwin is repulsed by what he interprets as Jane's romantic advances towards him, proclaiming her a "ridiculous old trull" who reminds him of his own mother (97), suggesting that there is something horrific about an older woman's pursuit of a younger man and amplifying both Jane's "scandal of anachronism" as well as the resulting generational tension presented in the novel.

This tension resurfaces at the conclusion of the text, when Jane and Blanche encounter several bastions of youthful femininity at the beach: the "young mother" attending to her two children, the "three girls in their early teens, dark-skinned and smiling" (192), and Kath, the woman with the "bright young face" whose husband, Paul, reports seeing Jane and Blanche to the police (198). Tellingly, much emphasis is placed on describing these women as beautiful, which only serves to reinforce Jane's opposing characterisation as a washed up crone with no further use to society, highlighting yet again the dichotomy between idyllic youth and dreadful old age. Indeed, looking into the gathering crowd as she is confronted by the police in the novel's

final scene, Jane sees only a mass of "young faces" and "old ones" with nothing in between (205), revealing the extent to which this damaging dichotomy continues to preoccupy her mind. Within the public space of the beach, Shary and McVittie argue, the threat of Jane's anachronism is diminished and "she is made powerless and disgraceful" (83). This suggests, however, that occupying a liminal space between childhood and old age previously granted Jane a modicum of power, which belies the fact that she is given very little agency from the outset of Farrell's novel.

Indeed, Jane's lack of control over the ways in which her persona is construed is emphasised from the text's epilogue, which describes a young Jane in the same kind of uncanny terms with which she is associated as an adult: "It was also said of Baby Jane that she was really just a midget dressed in child's clothing. A spiritualist group in Philadelphia claimed she was possessed of the spirit of a deceased actress, who used the child as an instrument through which to project her talents from The Great Beyond" (2). Even as a child, Jane's persona, which lacks the silliness that underlies Brice's performance as Baby Snooks, thus tends towards the gothic, prompting comparisons to the disabled body of a dwarf and, indeed, to accusations of spiritual possession that come straight out of a horror text. Moreover, Jane's failure to outgrow her liminal status by the end of Farrell's novel only pushes her further and further into the realm of the Bakhtinian grotesque.

In *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Bakhtin describes the grotesque body as "not a closed, completed unit" but rather, "unfinished," as it "outgrows itself" and "transgresses its own limitations" (26). In other words, the grotesque body is one that is open and porous, that leaks and protrudes – its boundaries are unstable and, thus, like Kristeva's notion of the abject and Hurley's conception of the abhuman, the grotesque body continually exudes the threat of "becoming other" (Hurley 4). Furthermore, Bakhtin finds the grotesque embodied in Kerch terracotta figurines of "laughing" "senile pregnant hags," who represent "pregnant death, a death that gives birth" for they "combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new

life, conceived but as yet unformed" (Bakhtin 25-26). What is particularly notable about this description of the grotesque is the discordant juxtaposition of pregnancy and old age, which suggests yet again that motherhood and old women are incompatible and, beyond that, that there is something particularly abhorrent and carnivalesque about the idea of old mothers and, perhaps, aged women in general.

Also significant is Bakhtin's emphasis on the suggestion of pregnancy created by the protrusion of a "potbelly" (26), which carries clear implications for Jane, whose own "spreading shapelessness" is frequently emphasised in Farrell's text (74): her "spreading," engorged appearance and "dumpy" physique (38), as well as the description of her as a "squat pudding of a woman" (33), serve only to exacerbate her grotesque factor, especially considering her portliness — similarly highlighted in Aldrich's film through a succession of ill-fitting shift dresses — risks creating the illusion of pregnancy. This grotesqueness of body coalesces with the uncanny amalgamation of Jane's girlish features and aged face to further frame her in villainous terms: "The contours of the face, underscored by the shadows, seemed not so much softened with age as *swollen* by it, so that the *sagging* flesh threatened, greedily, to *swallow up* the once pert and childlike features embedded within its folds" (Farrell 14, emphasis mine). In accordance with Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the grotesque, Jane's visage is described here through classically gothic language as exhibiting a multitude of protrusions and struggling to contain itself, virtually imploding under the weight of her uncanny disruptions of both youth and old age.

Farrell's text repeatedly emphasises the grotesquery of Jane's outer appearance as a reflection of her inner perversity — particularly, through her aging face. Sitting "as a child would sit" in front of the wall-length mirror in a room Blanche had intended as her rehearsal space[62], Jane recites lines from her girlhood and observes her own reflection as "[h]er sagging, child's face

[62] Blanche's room "had remained, through the years, almost totally untouched" (34), just like Norma's bedroom at the Bates Motel, further emphasising the novels' shared gothic themes of arrested development and disruptions of time.

took on an expression of frowning, contracted evil. She wagged her head back and forth in a show of pert defiance, and the twin wattles of her jowls loosely echoed the absurd motion, as did the preposterous bow nested in her garish curls" (35). In this scene, which recalls a similar incident in *The Bird's Nest* where Elizabeth confronts her own reflection and is struck by the sudden urge to "rip herself apart" (Jackson 99), the disjunction between Jane's "child's face" and her aged "jowls" underscores her complete inability to reconcile the disparate facets of her personality. Like Elizabeth, whose failure to identify with her own body reflects her inability to claim a stable identity for herself, Jane's confrontation with her own mirror image reveals a similarly split subjectivity, further emphasised when she "addresse[s] her mirrored self with a look of round-eyed enquiry" (Farrell 35). Preoccupied with reliving her childhood, Jane struggles to recognise the elderly face staring back at her and her violent reaction to this visage — "wagg[ing] her head back and forth" (35) — suggests a great degree of self-loathing.

That both Jacksons's novel and *Baby Jane* feature such analogous scenes where female characters confront their own uncanny mirror images further points to a tendency within American gothic fiction to literalise Lacan's conception of the mirror stage and, particularly, woman's inability to claim a stable subjectivity and enter the imaginary order. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, this precise confrontation is reduplicated in countless gothic fictions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including films such as *The Unborn* (2009), *Oculus* (2013) and *Look Away* (2018), in which women gaze at a reflection they struggle to register as their own. Significantly, a large number of gothic fictions featuring such mirror scenes, including the aforementioned films, are also possession narratives, which further emphasises the fragility of female subjectivity through woman's apparent susceptibility to the control of otherworldly evil influences. Considering the outdated attribution of mental illness to demonic possession, it is hardly surprising that these narratives should overlap, yet these continued associations are clearly damaging to women, as these fictions often reveal.

Indeed, in Farrell's novel, Jane's physical outburst in front of the mirror is paired with the sudden change in her countenance to an expression of "frowning, contracted evil" (35), recalling similar descriptions of the emergence of Elizabeth's Betsy persona in *The Bird's Nest*, in which Doctor Wright recounts, "she laughed, evilly and roughly, throwing her head back and shouting" (Jackson 49). Both portrayals employ language and imagery commonly associated with exorcism, underscoring the allegedly sinister nature of both Jane and Betsy while implying that the evil within these women must be forcibly cast out. Jane's psychological abnormality is thus explicitly linked to the gothic and supernatural, further obfuscating the fact that she is a woman who has endured significant trauma and requires the aid of a therapist rather than an exorcist.

DADDY, DEAR OR, FAMILY FIRST

Whereas older female characters such as Norma Bates, Del Flagg, and even *The Bird's Nest*'s Aunt Morgen are held accountable to a degree for producing the psychological dysfunctions of key characters in their respective texts, *Baby Jane* uniquely examines the perspective of aging women living in isolation, focusing on the effects of repression and guilt on mental health. As mentioned previously, however, Farrell's novel simultaneously reverts once more to Freudian explanations for psychological maladjustment in not only pinpointing Del's influence as the cause of Edwin's neurosis, but also tracing the cause of Jane's disorder back to her unresolved erotic feelings towards her father and the traumatic accident that resulted in Blanche's disablement when they were young women. In other words, estranged family dynamics lie at the centre of Farrell's text, suggesting, in the tradition of the American gothic, that horror often stems not from ghostly revenants, but from "within the family, a dysfunctional and traumatic product of internal tension" (T. Williams 15). Farrell's text, like *Psycho* and *The Bird's Nest* before it, thus offers a deconstruction of the nuclear family concept, exposing the violence that often underlies patriarchal domestic structures.

Unlike in Aldrich's film, Jane's and Blanche's backstory in Farrell's novel is revealed gradually, through mini flashbacks from the perspectives of each sister. While Jane's flashbacks typically highlight her closeness with her father, Blanche's reveal his abusive side, indicating that "Daddy" might in fact be a source of childhood trauma for both sisters. In a scene from their early years where a desperate and neglected young Blanche joins Jane onstage during a performance, diverting attention away from her sister with an embarrassing impromptu dance number, their father physically assaults her: "in the next instant, retribution befell her; a hand struck her stingingly across the face, and another caught at her hair and pulled it so hard that she was thrown to the floor" (Farrell 51). Daddy then couples this attack with verbal abuse as he tells Blanche, "'You can't dance, you dirty little fatty! Who ever said you could!'" (52). This episode not only traces the rivalry between Jane and Blanche to their father's pitting of the two sisters against each other, effectively pinpointing "Daddy" as the ultimate cause for Blanche's self-disablement in her attempt to dispose of Jane, but also suggests that Jane's abusive attitude towards Blanche might in fact have been learned from observing their father, for it is precisely this image of the overbearing patriarch that Jane usurps in her Bluebeardian treatment of Blanche years down the line. *Baby Jane*, thus, in contrast to *Psycho* and *The Bird's Nest*, pinpoints the father as an equal source of psychological trauma as the mother.

While Blanche's trauma results in her fixation on her lost glory days as a Hollywood star, cut short by the accident that disabled her, Jane, on the other hand, appears to be stuck in a fantasy of her own childhood, having romanticised her time as a child star and the apple of her father's eye. Thinking back to her time in the limelight, Jane recalls an incident where an audience member approaches her father and tells him, "*By jings, mister, I sure bet you're a proud man to have a little girl like that,*" after which "Daddy put his arm around her and drew her close in a modified bear hug, and you could tell from the way the man smiled that he thought they made a fine picture there together" (121). After establishing this picturesque image of

fatherly devotion, however, the narrative reveals that "Daddy hugged her tight, so tight he almost squeezed the breath right out of her, and then he let her go" (121-122), injecting the threat of violence into Jane's relationship with her father, as well as hinting at an inappropriately sexualised relationship between the two.

Indeed, as briefly mentioned previously, the pop Freudian overtones of Jane's relationship with her father are further emphasised by her continual reference to him as "Daddy" even as an adult, as well as the strange juxtaposition between Jane's memories of her father — "Quickly Jane squinted her eyes again . . . trying to make the ocean come back . . . and the warm feel of the sun . . . and Daddy . . . " (122) — with the song she sings about the "Oriental couple,/ Making love in Japanee":

> *Said the Oriental boy,*
> *To his Oriental spouse,*
> *We will be so happy,*
> *In our rice-paper house . . .* (Farrell 122).

Jane's fantasy of the perfect family thus adopts overtones of Freud's female Oedipal complex, or what Carl Jung termed the Electra complex[63], as she associates a spousal and, indeed, sexual relationship with memories of her father. Although psychoanalytic texts seem to have less firm a grasp on the implications of the Oedipal/Electra complex for female sexuality, Jill Scott argues in *Electra After Freud* (2005) that "[m]ore interesting than the passing references to the Electra complex, whether by Jung or Freud, are the associations and assumptions connected with it and its manifestations as a trope in popular discourse and cultural production" (8). Indeed, unresolved Oedipal feelings between a woman and her father pervade popular American gothic fictions from Roman Polanski's neo-noir film *Chinatown* (1974) to more overtly horror-themed material such as Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (1987), the 2005 independent suburban gothic thriller

[63] Freud rejects Jung's term in his essay "Female Sexuality" (1931) on the grounds that it "seeks to emphasize the analogy between the attitude of the two sexes" when "[i]t is only in the male child that we find the fateful combination of love for the one parent and simultaneous hatred for the other as a rival" (229). This statement reveals the lack of thought given to female psychological development in Freud's work, which often relegates the feminine to "a mere afterthought on his primary project" (9), as Jill Scott puts it.

The Quiet (2005, dir. Jamie Babbit), and 2018's *Look Away* (dir. Assaf Bernstein), which similarly features an adolescent female protagonist who continually refers to her father as "Daddy." This trend yet again points towards a collective failure within American society to reconcile mature adult sexuality, which arrests psychological development and results in mental disorder. Jane's uncomfortable relationship with her father thus constitutes merely one instance in a long tradition of American gothic tales that utilises pop-Freudian psychology to explain a woman's mental deviance and pathologise female sexuality.

Scott further argues that the "Oedipus complex is still historically entrenched in a quest to discipline the family into a set of scientifically condoned structures" (9), indicating that the ideal of the intact nuclear family, which gives children the only opportunity they have to outgrow their Oedipal attachments, continues to govern the trajectory of gothic narratives in the post-war era. Explicitly connecting Freud to the centrality of the gothic family in mid-century American fictions, Thomas Elsaesser claims in "Tales of Sound and Fury" (1972), his influential essay on Hollywood family narratives of the 1940s and 1950s, that "[t]here can be little doubt that the postwar popularity of the family melodrama in Hollywood is partly connected with the fact that in those years America discovered Freud . . . . [T]he connections of Freud with melodrama are as complex as they are undeniable" (81). While an in-depth psychoanalytic reading of these complex family dramas is thus obviously possible, it is perhaps unsurprising that these narratives are simultaneously haunted by a pop culture version of Freudianism that centres entirely on psychoanalytic concepts such as the Oedipus complex, which have trickled down into the American mainstream due to their lurid implications.

To this end, Elsaesser adds that "Hollywood tackled Freudian themes in a particularly 'romantic' or gothic guise, through a cycle of movies inaugurated possibly by Hitchcock's first big American success, Rebecca" (81), referring essentially to same cycle that Tatar and Doane identify as modelled on the Bluebeard plot. At its core, *Baby Jane* thus operates as a "family

melodrama" in the same vein as the films Elsaesser lists, albeit with crucial elements of the household conspicuously missing. The implication of both Jane's and Blanche's simultaneous villainy and victimhood is thus that family is paramount to normal psychological development and without it, one is doomed to a gothic existence. Indeed, devoid of a father, mother, or children of their own, Jane and Blanche's faulty family unit only serves to highlight the inadequacy of sibling relationships in providing psychological fulfilment, anticipating the same gothic narrative trajectory that sees the Blackwood sisters, Merricat and Constance, shunned by their community at the conclusion of Jackson's final novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962).

Finally, it is worth considering Elsaesser's comments on the capacity of the family melodrama, as a specific subgenre of fiction, to challenge the "linear trajectory of self-fulfilment so potent in American ideology" (86). In the family melodrama's exploration of masochism and violence, as well as the ways in which texts within this genre "present *all* the characters convincingly as victims" (86, emphasis in original), Elsaesser argues:

> The critique — the question of 'evil,' of responsibility — is firmly placed on a social and existential level, away from the arbitrary and finally obtuse logic of private motives and individualised psychology. This is why the melodrama, at its most accomplished, seems capable of reproducing more directly than other genres the patterns of domination and exploitation existing in a given society, especially the relation between psychology, morality and class-consciousness, by emphasizing so clearly an emotional dynamic whose social correlative is a network of external forces directed oppressingly inward, and with which the characters themselves unwittingly collude to become their agents. (86)

In other words, melodramatic texts like *Baby Jane* reveal less about the psychology of elderly women like Jane and Blanche than they ultimately do about the social structures that continue to pathologise them. In doing so, such texts in fact demonstrate how institutions like psychiatry and the patriarchy work in tandem to determine not what makes people mentally ill, but rather, what kind of behaviour we as a society deem offensive enough to warrant treatment. The true power of the family melodrama thus lies in the genre's ability to expose just how thin the line is

between normality and deviance, and how these concepts are specifically gendered within western society – an idea my final chapter on March's *The Bad Seed* will continue to explore.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Wicked Daughter: Childhood psychopathology in *The Bad Seed*

> "One of the comforts of having children is knowing one's youth has not fled, but merely been passed down to a new generation."
>
> *American Horror Story: Murder House* (2011)

BREED IS STRONGER THAN PASTURE

While emotionally disturbed children have become something of a mainstay in American gothic and horror fiction[64], perhaps no text has proven as influential upon popular culture as William March's *The Bad Seed* (1954). Adapted into a long-running Broadway play by Maxwell Anderson the same year that March's novel was published, an Academy Award-nominated film directed by Mervyn LeRoy in 1956, and again as made-for-television movies in 1985 (dir. Paul Wendkos) and 2018 (dir. Rob Lowe), March's novel about a psychopathic eight-year-old girl named Rhoda Penmark has left so deep an impression[65] that even the most recent American entry into the "evil child" subgenre at this time of writing — Nicholas McCarthy's film *The Prodigy* (2019) — follows *The Bad Seed*'s original narrative trajectory almost exactly. Indeed, despite the sixty-five years that separate them, both tales centre on white, academically gifted

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[64] For some key examples of works within this genre, see *The Twilight Zone* episode "It's a Good Life" (1961, dir. James Sheldon); Shirley Jackson's novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962); William Peter Blatty's novel *The Exorcist* (1971) and its film adaption (1973, dir. Wiliam Friedkin); Richard Donner's film *The Omen* (1976) and its remake (2006, dir. John Moore); Stephen King's short story "Children of the Corn" (1977), which was adapted for film in 1984 (dir. Fritz Kierch) and spawned eight sequels and a remake between 1992 and 2018; Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* (1980); King's novel *Pet Sematary* (1983) and its film adaptations in 1989 (dir. Mary Lambert) and 2019 (dir. Kevin Kölsch and Dennis Widmyer); Joseph Ruben's film *The Good Son* (1993); Lionel Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) and its film adaptation (2011, dir. Lynne Ramsay); Gillian Flynn's novel *Sharp Objects* (2006), as well as its television adaptation (2018, dir. Jean-Marc Vallée); Jaume-Collet-Serra's film *Orphan* (2009); and *The Prodigy* (2019).

[65] Even the long-running American adult animated series *South Park* (1997-present) models its child psychopath character, Eric Cartman, after Rhoda Penmark. As evidenced in season six, episode three, "Freak Strike" (2002), Cartman attempts to manipulate his mother by repeating, "Oh, I have such a pretty mother, such a wonderful mother!" a line adapted straight from one of Rhoda's most iconic quotes in March's novel and LeRoy's film: "Oh I've got the prettiest mother! I've got the nicest mother!" (March 136).

eight-year-old children[66] from well-to-do families who display abnormal behaviour eventually culminating in murder. Although *The Prodigy* follows a young boy, Miles, who is literally possessed by the spirit of a Romanian serial killer, — a plot point which harks back yet again to archaic explanations for deviant behaviour while hinting at March's novel's "twist" — both texts essentially tell the same story: that of a mother frantically tracing the gothic origins of her child's "monstrous" psychology and in the end assuming responsibility for not only bringing "evil" into the world but also failing to cast it out again.

Yet like *The Prodigy*, *The Bad Seed* is ultimately less a story about an uncanny child than it is about the uncanny child's mother. Indeed, while previous texts discussed in this thesis centre on the individualised psychology of socially ostracised characters suffering from severe mental illness, March's novel does not provide a window into Rhoda's mind. On the contrary, the text delves into the psychology of Rhoda's mother, Christine Penmark, making it the only text examined herein to present a mother's perspective rather than that of her offspring and thereby, perhaps inadvertently, highlighting the impenetrable nature of a psychopathic psyche. In doing so, *The Bad Seed* also gives voice to mid-century anxieties concerning juvenile delinquency through the other characters' comments about Rhoda. As March's novel foregrounds Christine's experiences of navigating her suburban milieu, as well as the trauma that Rhoda's psychological dysfunction inflicts on Christine's psyche, the text also works to expose the limits of both American suburban social structures and contemporary psychiatry.

Like *Wieland* and countless other works of American gothic, including those already addressed within this thesis, *The Bad Seed* first and foremost centres on a family in turmoil, harking back yet again to Anne Williams's assertion that "Gothic plots are family plots" (22). The text's particular focus on a seemingly typical white, middle-class suburban American family also

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[66] *The Prodigy* self-consciously emulates *The Bad Seed* to the extent that the protagonist Miles Blume's parents send him to a school for gifted children named Penmark Academy — a direct nod to Rhoda's surname.

bears significance, partly as it recalls Elsaesser's characterisation of the melodrama in "Tales of Sound and Fury":

> Melodramas often use middle-class American society, its iconography and the family experience… as their manifest 'material,' but 'displace' it into quite different patterns, juxtaposing stereotyped situations in *strange* configurations, provoking clashes and ruptures which not only open up new associations but also redistribute the emotional energies which suspense and tensions have accumulated, in *disturbingly different* directions. (82, emphasis mine)

Elsaesser's description of the American melodrama immediately evokes Freud's definition of the uncanny as "actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" (123). This suggests that the melodrama, as a genre, reproduces the experiences of the average American family to distinctly uncanny effect, rendering both the concept of family, as well as each constituent member of a household, disquietingly strange. Indeed, both March's novel and LeRoy's film adaptation frame the American family as a site rife with gothic possibility.

Christine, as a child of adoption, disrupts the traditional nuclear family construct even before Rhoda's birth. No matter how perfect Christine's new family is, she thus cannot outrun the spectre of her own broken home and traumatic past. As in the traditional American gothic formulation, March's novel thus reiterates a familiar story of the sins (or wounds) of a previous generation being visited upon future generations. Rhoda's psychopathology thus manifests potentially as Christine's punishment for her mother, Bessie's, transgressions, and for burying her own traumatic past.

Despite its introspective focus on Christine's struggles, however, March's portrait of motherhood remains a pathologised one, in which Christine repeatedly blames herself for Rhoda's abnormality, having bequeathed her daughter a tainted "inheritance" through her own faulty DNA (March 161). As Christine digs through her past and discovers that her biological mother was in fact a notorious serial killer named Bessie Denker, the text repeats the same pattern found in *Psycho*, *The Bird's Nest* and *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*: tracing the

origin of psychological abnormality to a fault of the mother's — only in March's text, this fault is strictly biological, rather than "bad" parenting. Amplifying themes merely hinted at in the previous texts under scrutiny, *The Bad Seed* thus echoes the same gothic plot outlined nearly two centuries ago in Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) in suggesting that madness operates like a family curse, inevitably passing down from one generation to the next — a point to which this chapter will return.

In zeroing in on biological explanations for deviant behaviour, however, *The Bad Seed* functions not only as a throwback to early American gothic texts such as *Wieland*, but also to naturalist texts popularised during the late nineteenth century, as Robert Singer, Herry Warfel, Perin Gurel and Elizabeth Wesseling have all noted (177; 278; 135; 65). As Allan Lloyd-Smith reveals in *American Gothic Fiction* (2004), "insight into economics and social conventions, as well as biological science" at the end of the nineteenth century, also known as the *fin de siècle*, coalesced to produce naturalism, an offshoot of realism (111). Lloyd-Smith further elucidates,

> The new scientism of the period undermined notions of free will, presenting human life as subject to larger forces than any within the consciousness, which at their extreme promoted cruelty, a drive for survival at all costs, and an inability to adhere to conventional morality if put to severe test. (111)

This definition highlights naturalism's emphasis on Darwinism, biological determinism and fatalism, putting the central tenets of the mode directly at odds with American ideals such as Emersonian self-reliance and "the faith that America guaranteed all men the free and just pursuit of self-fulfillment and of the good life" (Pizer 3). Paired with the fact that "most American naturalists were committed socialists and either mocked or completely ignored religion," Gurel claims that naturalism came to be viewed as distinctly "un-American" (136), making it a particularly suspect literary form for the 1950s, a period during which McCarthyism heightened public anxieties regarding activities that might be construed as "un-American."

As a result, Randall Stewart proclaimed in 1958, just four years after the publication of *The Bad Seed*, "Naturalism in American fiction is now about as dead as the well-known dodo"

(116), confirming the mode's unsuitability for mid-century readers. As Don Graham notes, however, naturalism had by this point already "died of natural causes" in the United States multiple times "around 1914, 1939, or 1945, depending upon which authority one cites" (1), making it a curiously *undead* literary form not entirely unlike the gothic. Given the American readership's alleged shunning of naturalism by the 1950s, *The Bad Seed*'s status as an "instant sensation" upon its publication only begins to make sense when viewed in light of the text's blending of naturalist themes with the gothic (Showalter, "Introduction" v).

Like naturalism, the American gothic, as this thesis has already suggested, repudiates the dominant national narrative of progress and enlightenment in its focus on the dark side of American life, making the two modes of writing an ideal fit for each other in many key respects. Indeed, Charles L. Crow argues that "[w]ith its insistence on the powerlessness of the individual when confronted with a universe of force, and its willingness to confront taboo subjects such as sexuality, addiction, and disease, naturalism easily blended with the Gothic" at the end of the nineteenth century ("Encyclopedia" 18), resulting in numerous works of what Monika Elbert and Wendy Ryden have termed American "Naturalist Gothic" in their edited collection *Haunting Realities: Naturalist Gothic and American Realism* (2017). Yet, Elden and Ryden's collection posits that generic marriages between naturalism and the gothic are mostly localised to texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, again marking March's novel as something of an anomaly for its time. Furthermore, despite *The Bad Seed*'s confrontation of distinctly American issues, such as the post-war suburban landscape and the popularity of Freudian psychology, both of which will be discussed shortly, the text specifically evokes the *fin de siècle* British gothic in not only pinpointing the cause of Rhoda's psychological dysfunction to an innate biological fault but also portraying the child herself as a genetic reversion to a primitive state.

Influenced by the fledgling science of criminal anthropology, which Kelly Hurley notes is "most commonly associated with the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso" (92), *fin de siècle*

gothic fictions commonly illustrated anxieties concerning atavism and degeneration. Accordingly, works such as Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) all feature villains who, in one way or another, revert to a primitive state of being, or at least exude the threat of regression. Such fears are reiterated in both March's text and, even more conspicuously, in LeRoy's film adaptation, in which Reginald Tasker (Gage Clarke) queries his stance in the contemporary nature/nurture debate by stating:

> Some fellow criminologists, including some behaviour scientists, have begun to make me believe we've all been putting too much emphasis on environment and too little on heredity. They cite a type of criminal *born* with no capacity for remorse or guilt. No feeling of right or wrong. *Born* with the kind of brain that may have been normal in humans fifty thousand years ago. (Emphasis mine)

Tasker's thoughts on the nature of criminals in March's novel are similar: "The simplest way to understand the type was to regard them as the normal human beings of fifty thousand years ago, before man began his task of civilizing himself, or built his code of axioms into the moral codes that govern us all" (143). Both these passages, which clearly allude to the roots of Rhoda's abnormality, not only suggest that, to Tasker, criminals represent a reversion to primitive, amoral man, but also frame criminality as an innate trait, harking back to Lombroso's theory of the "born criminal," elucidated in his seminal text *Criminal Man*[67] (1876).

In the third edition of *Criminal Man* (1884), Lombroso employs the term "born criminal" for the first time in an analysis of offenders he argues are predisposed to deviance based on physiological features such as cranial capacities and facial structures (214). Criminal tendencies, for Lombroso, are thus the result of an individual's inherently atavistic physical biology first and foremost, aligning Lombroso's views with Reginald Tasker's in *The Bad Seed*.

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[67] Lombroso's text was first published in 1876 as a single slim volume and later revised five times before the final edition was published in four volumes between 1896 and 1897 (Gibson and Rafter 1). It is also interesting to note that while numerous critics, like Hurley, have cited Lombroso's work, the first scholarly translation *Criminal Man*, by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter, did not materialise until 2006.

It is significant too, that Lombroso's discussion of the roots of atavism in the third edition of *Criminal Man* includes a chapter entitled "Moral Insanity and Crime among Children," in which he draws a link between moral insanity, a concept that calls to mind Cleckley's conceptualisation of the psychopath in *The Mask of Sanity*[68], and behaviour inherent in "man's early life" (188). Here, Lombroso suggests that children intrinsically possess many of the same tendencies found in primitive people, born criminals and adults who are morally insane, such as violent tempers, jealousy, a desire for revenge, lying, vanity, cruelty, and a lack of both moral sense and affection[69] (188-191).

Throughout March's text, Rhoda exhibits several of these traits, which overlap significantly with both Cleckley's hallmarks for psychopathic personality (see footnote 5), as well as the DSM-I's classification for "antisocial reaction," a precursor to antisocial personality disorder, which describes individuals who are "frequently callous and hedonistic, showing marked emotional immaturity, with lack of sense of responsibility, lack of judgment, and an ability to rationalize their behavior so that it appears warranted, reasonable and justified" (38). Indeed, even before the events depicted in *The Bad Seed*, Rhoda has already murdered an

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[68] In fact, Cleckley briefly mentions Lombroso's concept of "moral insanity" in *The Mask of Sanity* in a passing reference to "the erratic man of genius," a figure of extraordinary intellect whose maladjusted thought patterns nonetheless denote psychopathic personality (Cleckley 328). Interestingly, this citation marks the only instance where Cleckley specifically invokes the Italian criminologist in his study despite the fact that Lombroso's frequently ill-conceived notions of moral insanity anticipate Cleckley's formulation of psychopathy in a few notable ways. Just as Cleckley's clinical profile for the psychopath in *The Mask of Sanity* describes indicators such as "[s]uperficial charm and good 'intelligence,'" "[u]ntruthfulness and insincerity," "[l]ack of remorse of shame" and "[p]athologic egocentricity and incapacity for love" (355-356), Lombroso suggests that "[c]lassic cases of moral insanity reveal a cluster of characteristics resembling those of the born criminal" (213). These include intelligence unimpeded by deficient emotions or affections, tendencies towards "lying" and "cunning," a lack of "moral sense" (for the morally insane "are born to savor evil and commit it") and an incapacity for "affection" or "family life," among other less convincing indicators such as "physiognomy" and "tattooing" (216-218). The similarities between Cleckley's and Lombroso's markers for psychopathy and moral insanity, respectively, suggest that despite the sixty-six years that separate the publication of *Criminal Man* and *The Mask of Sanity*, these texts, to an extent, posit analogous explanations for deviant behaviour. It is interesting, thus, that while Lombroso's theories have largely been discredited as "a particularly frightful example of bad science" (Gibson and Rafter 1), Cleckley's study has gone on to influence Robert D. Hare's Psychopathy Checklist, a clinical evaluation tool still used today to measure psychopathy (Hart and Hare 380), implying perhaps an oversimplification of Lombroso's ideas within academic debate. Even more importantly, however, the commonalities between 1950s conceptions of psychological disorder illuminated in Cleckley's text and *fin de siècle* explanations for "moral insanity" suggest that Rhoda Penmark in fact fits the mould for two different frameworks for conceptualising deviance from decades apart.

[69] It must be said, however, that Lombroso also included traits such as "alcoholism" and "gambling" in this list, undermining the credibility of his own theory (191).

elderly woman purely to gain possession of an opal pendant, and has defenestrated a puppy after losing interest in caring for it despite begging for the creature in the first place (March 75, 63). She then murders her classmate, Claude Daigle, after the Fern School's penmanship medal she so desperately desires, and feels she deserves, is awarded to him (128), kicking off the main events of March's text. Next, she burns Leroy Jessup, the neighbourhood janitor, to death for threatening to expose her misdeeds (184). Each act in this brief litany of Rhoda's crimes shares one common element: they are all motivated, essentially, by acquisitiveness and greed. Rhoda thus, in fact, constitutes a creature whose materialistic urges compel her to pursue her most basic wants at all costs, resulting in a monstrous perversion which in the simplest Freudian terms might be said to be all id and ego, with a complete lack of superego to govern her urges.

Rhoda's obsession with material things can also be seen through her exchange with her next-door neighbour and landlord, Mrs. Monica Breedlove, at the beginning of March's novel: when Monica proposes giving Rhoda her locket and offers to replace her own garnet birthstone with a turquoise for Rhoda, the child simply asks, "'Can I have both stones? . . . Can I have the little garnet, too?'" (11), thus revealing her willingness to pursue the things she wants while ignoring the rules of social decorum despite her mother's protests (11). Even Rhoda's signature exchange with her own father, Kenneth, who is absent for the novel's key events, projects her insatiable "predatory spirit" (Swart 74): "'What will you give me, if I give you a basket of kisses?'" (47)[70], she queries, indicating her demand for a beneficial transaction even from a parent.

At a metaphorical level, Rhoda's callous and single-minded pursuit of her desires invites a comparison to American capitalism. As noted in chapter one, in reference to G. Gordon Gregg of Bloch's *American Gothic*, "capitalism at its most ruthless rewards psychopathic behaviour. . . with a requisite glibness, cunning, manipulation and lack of empathy," according to Joan Swart,

[70] This catchphrase is repeated, in variation, on pages 98, 99, 129, 204, and 205 of March's novel, emphasising Rhoda's persistent greed.

which leads to a function of capitalism as "the material manifestation of psychopathy" (74). Even more so than Gregg, perhaps, Rhoda's embodiment of this merciless drive evokes fear and dread, for Rhoda, as a child, and especially the child of a stable, white, middle-class family, represents the future on which post-war American society has pinned its hopes and dreams. In this sense, Rhoda not only represents a perversion of capitalism but also evokes 1950s fears concerning juvenile delinquency and youth crime.

Woodson aptly notes the contrast underlined in *The Bad Seed* between the innocence of childhood and Rhoda as the eponymous "bad seed" who defies her young age: "*Bad Seed* highlights childhood as a time of innocence and dependency — a space that must be protected — positioning Rhoda as a 'chillingly inhuman' character as perceived against this phenomenological space" (35). Indeed, by centring on a prepubescent girl, ostensibly the very picture of innocence. as a source of evil, *The Bad Seed* calls attention to American culture's obsessive yet ambivalent relationship with youth and childhood, but also plays upon fears that, despite the American belief in human perfectibility, some individuals are simply born rotten. These themes would have held an immediate relevance to mid-1950s American readers, who were increasingly aware of the relatively new and ever-widening problem of juvenile delinquency in America.

As Jason Barnosky illuminates, "Throughout the 1950s, juvenile delinquency received a great deal of attention. Newspapers and magazines published report after report describing horrifying instances of youth crime, and the number of articles on the subject increased dramatically" (320). The media coverage surrounding the figure of the juvenile delinquent elicited widespread panic, and "[m]ost agreed that something needed to be done" due to the worry that "youth crime was growing more violent" and infiltrating even "rural areas and the suburbs" (321) — a point that is particularly important to *The Bad Seed*, and which will be addressed in the next section of this chapter. As Rachel Devlin, Ramona Caponegro and Deborah Blythe Doroshow have all noted, however, the issue of female juvenile delinquency was

curiously ignored at the time despite heightened anxieties concerning youth crime in general (150, 312, 111). As Devlin elucidates, "General histories of juvenile delinquency have not considered the female delinquent as a separate (and different) category, and have enhanced the sense that juvenile crime was almost entirely male by limiting their discussion to the sociological perspective" (150). In this cultural context, Rhoda would appear to be even more frightful, as the threat she exudes is effectively that of the uncanny: the disjunction between a pathological interior masked by the innocuous exterior of a well-bred eight-year-old girl.

Whereas the American public of the 1950s associated the image of the juvenile delinquent directly with the teenage male central characters of films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) (Camponegro), Rhoda's characterisation within Bloch's text as a "tidy" (March 5), "immaculate" (6), "self-possessed" (6), "obedient" (11) little girl hardly calls to mind the image of deviance, though there are suggestions in her appearance that hint at her inner perversity. From the very outset of March's novel, for example, Rhoda is pinpointed as something of a mystery even to her mother:

> When speaking of her daughter, the adjectives that others most often used were "quaint," or "modest," or "old-fashioned"; and Mrs. Penmark . . . smiled in agreement and wondered from what source the child had inherited her repose, her neatness, her cool self-sufficiency. (5)

In other words, Rhoda's otherness, especially compared to Christine, is her defining feature. Whereas Christine is "blond, almost flaxen" (5), Rhoda is literally something darker: a child with "dark, dull brown" hair "plaited precisely into two hangman-nooses" (6), invoking gothic imagery from her very introduction. As her outer appearance differs so drastically from her mother's, the question of Rhoda's lineage is also thus raised early on in the text, hinting that heredity will play a key role in her designation as "other." At the same time, in depicting Rhoda as dark-haired and Christine as light-headed, March's text plays into centuries of gothic tradition that figures physical

lightness as pure, and darker colouring as its corrupt opposite[71]. Ellen Tremper, for example, argues, "By conventions of Romance, the dark-haired woman is the tempting, exotic, and *forbidden* object of the hero's outbound quest, while the blonde is the haven (as is his nation) to which he returns" (9, emphasis mine). This pattern is reiterated in numerous gothic texts, most notably Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), in which Lucy Westenra's once light hair literally turns dark after she succumbs to vampirism, signalling the morphing of her "purity" into "voluptuous wantonness" (180), and, indeed, in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, in which, contrary to Aldrich's film adaptation, Blanche's purity of soul is denoted through her "waxen-faced blonde[ness]" (Farrell 195), whereas Jane's curls are "dark" (100), denoting, like Rhoda, an element of "forbiddenness" to her demeanour (Tremper 9).

Mrs. Monica Breedlove also refers to Rhoda "an *outmoded* little girl" (March 6, italics in original), adding

> She reminds me of the way children looked when my grandmother was young. Now there was a colored print in my grandmother's house that I've always remembered; it was a little girl skating — oh, such an immaculate, self-possessed little girl with flowing hair, striped stockings, laced boots, and a fur toque that matched a little fur muff . . . (6)

Monica's description of the little girl who reminds her of Rhoda unsurprisingly emphasises the calculated, immaculate nature of her wardrobe while honing in on the quaintness of it. Rhoda, Mrs. Breedlove implies, embodies something from a bygone era; she is someone who does not belong in the modern world but rather, appears to be a throwback to her own old-fashioned grandmother. Despite being a product of the 1950s, a time during which "genetic explanations for juvenile crime" were unpopular (Gurel 136), March's text thus continues to highlight Rhoda's explicitly atavistic nature throughout, marking her as an artefact of the past that has no place in the middle-class suburban society she occupies.

[71] This point has wider implications for *The Bad Seed*, which, like other works within the suburban gothic oeuvre, depicts the struggles of white, middle-class families exclusively, problematically positing whiteness as the norm against which all other races and ethnicities are measured.

Indeed, Christine notes on three separate occasions, for example, that there is something "primitive" about Rhoda that disturbs her: first when Rhoda makes "little primitive, animal sounds" while flying at her mother when confronted about the shoes she used to kill Claude Daigle (March 126), again when Christine muses, "*Rhoda has some strange affinity for the cruelties of the Old Testament. There's something as terrible and primitive about her, as there is about them*" (167, italics in original), and finally when she concedes that "Rhoda had the same primitive instinct for avoiding danger, the same ability to sniff out and avoid the set trap, that animals possess" when pondering ways to kill Rhoda in order to put an end to her murderous streak (199). Taken together, these quotations underline Rhoda's uncanny difference, harking back yet again to Lombroso's turn of the century theory that children possess many of the same immoral traits as primitive man, which he reiterates in "Criminal Anthropology Applied to Pedagogy" (1895):

> Now when the child becomes a youth, largely through the training of his parents and of the school, still more so by nature itself, when inclined to the good, all this criminality disappears, just as in the fully developed foetus the traces of the lower animals gradually disappear which are so conspicuous in the first months of foetal life; we have genuine ethical evolution corresponding to the physical evolution. (56)

Here, it is of note that, according to Lombroso, children eventually outgrow their criminal tendencies only partially through socialisation and mostly "by nature itself, when inclined to the *good*" (56, emphasis mine). The key significance for *The Bad Seed* is that Rhoda, who is of school age and has "*been given love and security from the beginning*" (March 80, italics in original) has, in fact, failed to outgrow her innate primitivism despite the positive influences of a loving home and good education. Her resistance to "ethical evolution" is instead depicted as a genetic inevitability given her lineage as the biological granddaughter of "*the unrivaled Bessie Denker*," "*who had a built-in icebox for a heart, a steel rod for a spine, an instrument as accurate and impersonal as a comptometer for a brain*" (144, italics in original). According to the novel's hereditary framework, Rhoda's nature has thus, in fact, never been "inclined to the good," but

has rather, always tended towards evil, indicating the text's complete disregard for the concept of mental illness when it comes to Rhoda's dysfunction in particular.

Indeed, despite the self-conscious invocation of Freud and psychoanalysis primarily through Mrs. Monica Breedlove, most of the adult characters in March's novel fail to register Rhoda's abnormality, indicating that she wears her "mask of sanity" well, for the most part, by hiding "[b]ehind an excellent façade of superficial reactions that mimic a normal and socially approved way of living" (Cleckley 92). Furthermore, in his article "Little, Violent, White: *The Bad Seed* and the Matter of Children" (2000), Chuck Jackson suggests that "Rhoda gets away with murder because of the way she looks" (68), implicitly tying the success of Rhoda's "mask" to her inherent "whiteness," which exemplifies the norm for her suburban milieu, allowing her to blend in seamlessly with the rest of her (white) suburban community based on appearance alone. Rhoda thus, like Norman, exemplifies 1950s fears concerning the imperceptible monster, indistinguishable from the rest of the neighbourhood on the surface.

This commonality, however, is not the only shared trait that aligns Rhoda with Norman, for Rhoda's psychopathic traits also bear similarities to those exhibited by Norman. Indeed, both Rhoda and Norman are described in their respective texts as "calmly" pursuing their criminal activities (March 112, 126, 179; Bloch 53) – *The Bad Seed*'s explanation for Rhoda's deviant behaviour differs significantly from the explanations for psychological disorder offered in *Psycho*, *The Bird's Nest* and *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, all of which rely on environmental disturbances and formative childhood trauma. Instead, Rhoda's innate propensity towards wrongdoing calls attention to the role of genetics in the creation of personality disorder, an idea so mystifying that researchers such as Frederick L. Coolidge, Linda L. Thede and Kerry L. Jang have only begun to unpack it in the twenty-first century[72] (33). The mounting sense of dread that

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[72] See Coolidge, Thede and Jang's "Heritability of Personality Disorders in Childhood: A Preliminary Investigation" (2001), as well as Thomas J. Bouchard and John C. Loehlin's "Genes, Evolution, and Personality" (2001), two articles from the early twenty-first century which mark the beginnings of genetic research into the nature of personality and personality disorder.

Christine feels as she slowly pieces together the truth about Rhoda's misdeeds is dwarfed by the horror she feels when she realizes the ultimate cause of Rhoda's behavior: she has inherited Christine's own evil genetic makeup, a fate which not only cannot be changed, but which moreover is itself shrouded in mystery, eluding scientific explanation. Such a cause is thus quintessentially gothic for, as Anna Jackson argues in her essay "Uncanny Hauntings, Canny Children" (2013), "It might make sense . . . to understand the uncanny as that which cannot be understood cannily; as those events, situations or phenomena that do not allow for a knowing, sagacious, shrewd, and astute reading of them" (158).

That psychoanalytic and scientific theories popular during the 1950s fail to account for Rhoda's condition, in turn, labels her not as a mentally ill person, but rather as an evil person, the root of whose deviance is much more troubling. As mentioned previously, gender stereotypes in mid-century American society made it particularly shocking, indeed, unfathomable, that a female child could be inherently evil. In an atmosphere in which *Popular Science Monthly* could still publish an article in 1958 on why female juvenile delinquency rates were so much lower than male (Robbins and Robbins 158-61), a murderous girl fit squarely in the category of the uncanny.

March's text thus also offers a departure from what John Neill describes as the prevailing "environmentalist or 'nurture' bias" that dominated American psychiatry in the mid-twentieth century (499). As Neill explains, "Psychoanalytic theory in its various modifications held that 'the child is the father of the man' in the sense that early childhood experiences determine the resultant adult personality" (499), implying that juvenile trauma disrupts normal psychological development, resulting in deviant behaviour. Yet Rhoda, as the only child of two loving, middle-class parents, has not endured the same kind of familial trauma that characterises the early years of Norman Bates, Elizabeth Richmond and Baby Jane Hudson. Thus, the roots of her deviant psychology cannot be explained through popular psychoanalytic discourse despite the proliferation of references to Freudian psychology within the text.

PERFORMING AND PATHOLOGISING SUBURBAN AMERICA

On the surface, Rhoda would seem to represent the post-war American ideal: a white, middle-class girl from a loving home who is polite and always immaculately presented. Her precise, calculated nature might, in fact, be read as a reflection of the suburban landscape she occupies, an environment which Robert Beuka suggests "emphasized the prospect of perfectibility through its precise, meticulous plotting and architecture" (5). Beuka further elucidates that

> the suburban landscape . . . stands as the material counterpart to specific drives and tendencies in American culture apparent from the postwar years onward: a massive expansion of the middle class, a heightened valorization of the nuclear family and consequent reification of gender identities, a trend — both utopian and exclusionary in nature — toward cultural homogenization, and a collapsing of the distinction between public and private spheres. (2)

Indeed, the post-war American suburbs that Beuka describes play a central role in establishing a binary distinction not only between "public and private spheres," which indicates the "Rhoda problem" cannot be contained to within her own family (as Christine would like), but also between ideas of normality and deviance. As I have previously argued in "'We Found the Witch, May We Burn Her?': Suburban Gothic, Witch-Hunting, and Anxiety-Induced Conformity in Stephen King's *Carrie*" (2017), Mary Douglas's conception of pollution behaviours and taboo provides a useful framework through which to view the American suburbs and their role in the formation of American identity, particularly within the context of the suburban gothic, a genre that Bernice M. Murphy defines as "a sub-genre of the wider American Gothic tradition which dramatizes anxieties arising from the mass urbanization of the United States and usually features suburban settings, preoccupations and protagonists" (*Suburban* 2).

Though Murphy's definition necessarily simplifies many of the issues at stake in the suburban gothic, a tradition to which I argue *The Bad Seed* belongs given the repressive social conditions described within the text, it provides a useful jumping off point for discussion. As Beuka argues, "Arriving as it did in a period of economic optimism and celebratory nationalism,

suburbanization constructed a new type of landscape, complete with its own set of symbols and iconography, which served as the visible manifestation of the American 'way of life'" (5), suggesting that the post-war suburbs functioned as an idealised space in which Americans could seek the comforts of "the good life." *The Bad Seed*, however, actively refutes this romanticised construction of suburbia by rendering it almost as uncanny as Rhoda, for the neat suburban landscape to which Christine and her family have relocated in fact acts as a cover to conceal not only the lingering wounds of national trauma, as evidenced subtly through the invocation of the neighbourhood's postman, "whose son was missing in Korea[73]" (March 101), but also the murky pasts of its shady residents.

Before going into detail, however, I turn to Mary Douglas's anthropological study *Purity and Danger* (1966), which examines how different cultures throughout time distinguish between categories of the sacred, clean, and unclean, for a few clarifications. Douglas suggests that all "matter out of place" is considered dirt: substance which is impure, contaminating, and must therefore be removed. More importantly, however, "Where these is dirt, there is system," as "[d]irt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (44). In the American suburbs, a place where uniformity and, indeed *con*formity, is key to establishing a sense of community, "inappropriate elements" constitute anything or anyone who sticks out by failing to conform to community standards, thereby threatening community cleanliness. Social taboos thus exist to maintain a sense of order, and thus, to break taboo is to not only risk contaminating the entire community, which places an emphasis on the performativity required to navigate suburban spaces, but also to risk being pathologised by the rest of society. In order to survive, one must thus repress one's darker impulses (which Rhoda fails to do) and act the part of a good Samaritan or else one risks

[73] LeRoy's film adaption of March's novel re-emphasises the spectre of war that haunts the margins of quiet American suburbia, as Rhoda's father, Kenneth, is re-imagined as an army colonel, as opposed to a businessman, to explain his absence from home.

being deemed deviant, suggesting that everyone in suburbia in fact wears a mask of normalcy, not entirely dissimilar to Rhoda's mask of sanity.

Significantly, Douglas notes that pollution "involves no special distinction between primitives and moderns: we are all subject to the same rules. But in the primitive culture the rule of patterning works with greater force . . ." (50). The ease with which Douglas's theories apply to depictions of the American suburbs in fiction, however, suggests that suburban culture remains, to an degree, "primitive," which, when extended to *The Bad Seed*, loads March's text with irony, for Rhoda is repeatedly classified as "primitive" (March 126, 167, 199) in a society which itself operates based on primitive ways of distinguishing between the categories of clean and unclean, and normal and deviant — a feat mostly achieved by exaggerating difference and applying a level of social control to all constituent members of a social group.

Rhoda and Christine's suburban town constitutes a kaleidoscope of the opposition between the dirty and the clean, with everyone, except Christine, trying to conceal their shady past, their obscene thoughts, and their dirty inner world through a veneer of cleanliness. This effectively operates as a metaphor for the fundamental deceitfulness of adult society. Indeed, from the first scene in which Leroy appears, hosing down the street (March 13), March offers a succession of symbols for the valuing of neatness and the attempt to expunge filth and dirt, replicating Douglas's pattern for establishing order almost exactly. The novel's requisite overbearing mother, Mrs. Daigle, also tidies up her son Claude, — the boy who wins the penmanship award, an example of superficial neatness, and who is also clearly destined to become yet another feminised man-child as a result of his mother's excessive coddling — "dabbing at his face with a handkerchief" (23). Children, in their innocence, are thus temporarily exempt from established rules of cleanliness until they begin to grow up. Rhoda, however, is the exception. Christine intimates to Octavia Fern that she and her husband had found Rhoda "something of a riddle" since birth, and that "there was a strangely mature quality in the child's

character which they found disturbing" (24). "Rhoda never gets anything dirty," Christine tells Mrs. Breedlove, "although I don't know how she manages it" (13) — the irony here being that Rhoda's outward tidiness hides an innate filth.

Indeed, one of the only characters in the text to see through Rhoda's immaculate exterior, however, is the psychiatrist at her last school, who considers

> . . . Rhoda the most precocious child he'd ever seen; her quality of shrewd, mature calculation was remarkable indeed; she had none of the guilts and none of the anxieties of childhood; and of course she had no capacity of affection, either, being concerned only with herself. But perhaps the thing that was most remarkable about her was her unending acquisitiveness. She was like a charming little animal that can never be trained to fit into the conventional patterns of existence . . . . (35)

This passage indicates that despite Rhoda's thin veneer of normality, her behaviour has, in fact, impeded her assimilation into the white middle-class suburban society in which her parents have raised her. Moreover, as Cleckley states in *The Mask of Sanity*, "The psychopath's symptoms have been said to be primarily sociopathic" (38), indicating that it is Rhoda's inability to "fit into the conventional patterns of existence" set out by her suburban community that ultimately leads to her expulsion from school — a space designed to educate children in the ways of the world. While she gets away with murder, then, Rhoda is punished publicly only when she fails to conform to her own age group or "class[74]," just as happens in *The Bird's Nest* and *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane.* In other words, Rhoda's mental illness only becomes a problem in her suburban milieu when she fails to perform her role as a child.

Perhaps tellingly, the only other character, apart from Christine, to sense Rhoda's psychopathology in her new suburban community is Leroy, who himself betrays symptoms of psychological dysfunction, the chief indicator of which is his unconscious desire for the eight-year-old Rhoda: "He would have been surprised to know that, in a sense, he was in love with the

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[74] Douglas explains that, in general, "the underlying principal of cleanness in animals is that they shall conform fully to their class. Those species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class itself con- founds the general scheme of the world" (69).

little girl, and that his persecution of her, his nagging concern with everything he did, was part of a perverse and frightened courtship" (March 52). The narrator's characterisation of Leroy's feelings for Rhoda here marks an overly self-conscious Freudianisation of psychopathology, which thus renders moot any genuine effort to interpret March's text psychoanalytically — a pattern that the novel repeats chiefly through the character of Monica Breedlove.

DIAGNOSIS: FREUD, OR, THE FAILURE OF REPRESSION

Of the primary novels under scrutiny in this thesis, *The Bad Seed* is perhaps most akin to Bloch's *Psycho* in its self-conscious reliance on psychoanalytic themes. While Norman Bates prides himself on "know[ing] a few things about psychology and parapsychology too" (Bloch 94), it is Mrs. Breedlove who assumes the role of the pseudo-psychoanalyst in March's novel. Monica takes great pride in her understanding of Freudian theory, boasting that she was once examined by "Professor Freud" himself. Monica breaks a social taboo by recounting intimate details of her psychoanalysis to Christine, and takes every opportunity to psychoanalyse those around her (March 36). But for all her years of diagnosing those around her, and despite having a layman's command of the jargon of psychoanalysis, Monica is at best a dilettante in that art, having accumulated too shallow an understanding of Freudianism to understand its nuances or apply its theories to herself[75]. Indeed, as Mrs. Breedlove notes regarding Leroy Jessup:

> [I]n the past, she had thought of him as emotionally immature, obsessed, torn by irrational rages and, in a sense, a bit on the constitutional psychopathic side; but now . . . she wondered if her diagnosis hasn't been too mild; she thought now that he was definitely a schizophrenic with well-defined paranoid overtones. (15)

[75] Hilariously, March has Freud himself decide to pass Monica off onto a colleague, probably aware that she is a hopeless case and, in any case, an annoying American woman.

This surface-level analysis of Leroy's pathology is purposefully designed to mimic a psychiatric diagnosis that effectively gives little insight into Leroy's character, marking just one example of Mrs. Breedlove's function as the text's pseudoscientific voice of Freudian "reason."

Thus in some ways, *The Bad Seed* seems to thumb its nose at psychoanalysis: first, as evidenced by the fact that Monica, the novel's chief psychoanalytic voice, actually remains entirely oblivious to Rhoda's dysfunction throughout the novel; and second, by implying that psychoanalytic theories fail to account for the pure evil which exists in man, whether that evil is determined by genetics or other factors. Indeed, the novel's fatalistic framework appears at odds with the many psychoanalytic musings of both Monica and Christine.

Nevertheless, repression, a key feature of Freud's theory of the uncanny, remains a prominent theme throughout the novel. In particular, repression fails to work to the benefit of its main characters: Rhoda, on the one hand, utterly lacks a superego and is completely unable to repress aggressive thoughts. Christine, for her part, completely lacks self-awareness, having apparently repressed all memory of her adoption and her original family. Indeed, while March's novel repeatedly hints at something dark in Christine's past, the true origin of Rhoda's dysfunction is not revealed until three quarters of the way through the novel, when Christine finally remembers that she is the daughter of serial killer Bessie Denker, having repressed the memory of her early years up until this point. March's novel in fact frames Christine as her own gothic double when Reginald reveals that the name of Denker's youngest child "'was Christine, the same as your own," and adds, "apparently she was just as pretty as you are, too" (March 152). This creates a split between Christine, the happy middle-class housewife with a husband and child of her own, and Christine, the sole survivor of her mother's murderous rampage.

It can be no coincidence that when Christine finally recalls her past life, she says to herself, "'I know who I am now'" (153), repeating almost verbatim Victoria Morgen's final sentiments in *The Bird's Nest*. Where Victoria exclaims, "'I'm happy.... I know who I am'"

(Jackson 256), however, Christine's realisation of her "true" identity is marred by sadness, as she indicates, "'I can't delude myself any longer'" (March 153). The failure of her repression is thus what ultimately characterises March's novel, recalling Savoy's assertion that the "failure of repression and forgetting" is "a failure upon which the entire tradition of the gothic in America is predicated" (4). Rhoda's pathologised and gothic character might, then, be read as an eruption of Christine's uncanny past, haunting her in the present, which only serves to underline the pathologisation of the repressive tendencies that characterise American culture.

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CONCLUSION

Mind-Haunter: Horror of Personality's Legacy in the Twenty-First Century

"There it is! Mental illness, clear as day! Hereditary!"

Steven Crain, "Two Storms," *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018)

"Is it just me or is it getting crazier out there?"

Arthur Fleck, *Joker* (2019)

Between October 2017 and January 2018, two separate American series, *Mindhunter* (Netflix) and *The Alienist* (TNT), debuted on the small screen to critical acclaim[76]. Despite being set nearly ninety years apart, with the events of *Mindhunter* kicking off in the late 1970s and *The Alienist* taking place during the last years of the nineteenth century, the two period thrillers follow a strikingly similar trajectory, in which two (white) men and one (white) woman band together to use "ground-breaking" contemporary criminal psychology to solve ongoing cases of serial murder. Similarities between the two shows include heavily fictionalised accounts of true crime and a focus on misunderstood protagonists whose methods and, indeed, sanity, are repeatedly questioned by those around them. Both also feature numerous psychopathic serial killers whose traumatic experiences have played a role in the formation of their pathology, underscoring the persistent public hunger for thrillers that offer psychological explanations for deviance and evil, as well as the need for an "origin" story in the creation of human monstrosity. Significantly, both programmes are set in the past, putting just enough distance between these narratives and viewers to imply that the modern world has a better grasp on the concept of mental illness and its effects on society than it did decades ago.

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[76] While review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes puts the first season of *Mindhunter* at 97% for favourable critical reviews and 95% for favourable scores from audiences at large, indicating universal acclaim, *The Alienist* sits slightly lower at 65% for favourable critical reviews and 78% for audiences at home, still suggesting a mostly positive reception.

In the years leading up to and immediately following the genesis of this project in late 2015, tales of not only persons afflicted with rare personality and dissociative disorders, but also members of the medical profession tasked with evaluating these individuals, have saturated modern media. Perhaps buoyed by the rise of wellness culture, which advocates self-improvement and empowerment through mental and physical good health (Blei), American popular narratives have increasingly confronted the topic of mental illness in what might be interpreted as an effort to destigmatise psychological disorders and encourage those affected to seek help. Yet, despite mainstream efforts to change the nature of the conversation, a significant number of recent texts have struggled to overturn the damaging assumptions regarding the relationship between mental illness and the gothic that inform the primary texts under scrutiny in this thesis. In any case, if the recent boom in gothic and horror films, television shows and novels that continue to attribute uncanny occurrences to an individual's psychological disorder provides any indication, it appears that modern American society is still grappling with how to frame mental illness in non-gothic terms.

Indeed, the continued popularity of narratives modelled on the same plot progression as *Psycho*, *The Bird's Nest*, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, and *The Bad Seed* in the twenty-first century cannot be chalked up to mere coincidence. In the nearly sixty years since the publication of Farrell's novel, the latest primary text discussed in this thesis, gothicised depictions[77] of fictional psychopaths, socially discarded women, and even children who commit murder have abounded, indicating that the United States remains in many respects a gothic locale for those suffering from psychological disorders. As Norman Dain states, "Mental disorder, whatever its origins, is still with us; American society is still dealing with the consequences of deinstitutionalization; psychiatry, though changed, is not endangered; and chronically ill patients

[77] Otto F. Wahl's *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness* (1995) offers an extensive catalogue of films, television shows and novels offering lurid and often damaging depictions of mental illness released between 1980 and 1995 while Sharon Packer's edited collection *Mental Illness in Popular Culture* (2017) tackles many of the same issues at stake in this thesis, including social attitudes towards mental illness, in more recent popular texts.

are still neglected" (Dain 439). While the nation's mentally ill may no longer be subject to the demoralising treatments and corporeal punishments administered in Benjamin Rush's time, popular cultural images of mental illness, such as those presented in *Split* (2017), *The Bad Seed* (2018), *Mindhunter* (2017-), *The Alienist* (2018-), and countless other twenty-first century works, continue to feed the stigmatisation and ostracisation of individuals suffering from complex disorders to this day.

The introduction to this thesis referred to Mark Seltzer's concept of America as a "wound culture" (1) fascinated by collective and individual trauma. Indeed, Peter Coviello asks, "Is it possible anymore to imagine the shape and substance of American nationality, and of the bonds that comprise it, in the absence of visions of trauma, woundedness, suffering, and bereavement?" (439). Perhaps this goes some way in accounting for the emphasis placed on trauma in the texts under scrutiny in this thesis, whether that trauma is national, sexual, or familial. Most conspicuously, the four texts examined herein all deal with trauma surrounding central characters who commit murder, who have absent fathers and bad mothers, and who are damaged children, doomed, perhaps, to wound others in return. In stark contrast to the "golden age" concept of 1950s American society, with its emphasis on the nuclear family, a return to family values, and the importance of maintaining a complete household that one can always turn to for love and support, these four narratives overturn these notions, with the damaged family becoming instead an uncanny source of anxiety and dread.

At the same time, these stories highlight the imbalance of power between binary constructions of male and female that still largely informs contemporary depictions of psychopathology, as well as American society in general. Because the American family of the 1950s is the patriarchal family, and the fathers in these narratives are conspicuously absent, the families in all four novels start out without a "suitable" male influence to help them navigate society and thus exist solely on the margins of patriarchal culture. Moreover, as a result of this

failure to conform to socially constructed familial norms, society punishes these incomplete families as well as the children that grow up in them by pathologising behaviours and individuals that have been determined deviant based on an exaggeration of perceived difference. The continued proliferation of American texts that centre on the pathological children of broken homes thus suggests that the nation's views on family have changed surprisingly little since the "heyday" of Momism and Freudian pop psychology.

Given the turbulent sociohistorical conditions Americans have weathered in the past sixty years, however, it is perhaps unsurprising that the landscape of American gothic fictions centring on mental illness has remained so unchanged. Since 1960, the United States has continued to endure repeated national traumas, including the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Vietnam War (ending in 1975), the September 11 attacks (2001), the war in Iraq (2003-2011), the global financial crisis (2007-2008), and more than a hundred mass shootings[78], to name but a few key events. In the face of such widespread, large-scale trauma, it is no wonder the United States continues to grapple with its own "wound culture" more than twenty years since Mark Seltzer coined this term in *Serial Killers* (1). While the primary texts examined in this thesis are undoubtedly products of a specific historical moment, the fact that many of the same issues confronted in these texts remain relevant today suggests strong similarities between the socio-political climate of the 1950s and the United States today.

Indeed, when the forty-fifth President of the United States, Donald Trump, has been repeatedly called a narcissist, sociopath and psychopath by the American news media (Ashcroft 217), and the country appears more divided than ever in a way that corresponds with how people have responded to this assessment of the Commander-in-Chief, it is perhaps unsurprising that

[78] Jonathan M. Metzl and Kenneth T. MacLeish note in "Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms" that, in the aftermath of mass shootings, the assumption frequently arises that "mental illness causes gun violence" (240), yet the authors contend that "notions of mental illness that emerge in relation to mass shootings frequently reflect larger cultural stereotypes and anxieties about matters such as race/ethnicity, social class, and politics" (240). This conclusion further reflects the punitive nature of American society, which often "oversimplifies links between violence and mental illness" (241).

the United States finds itself stuck within a prolonged gothic age, or another "age of anxiety," to quote March's *The Bad Seed* (29). Given the gothic language of witch-hunting and containment that Trump routinely employs in the late 2010s, renewed tensions with Russia and China, and the dangerous rhetoric of the far right, which often purports to advocate a return to "family values," it is certainly not difficult to see the parallels between contemporary America and the United States of the 1950s.

In terms of advancements in psychiatry, the American Psychological Association continues to revise the diagnostic criteria for both personality disorders and dissociative disorders in the DSM, currently on its fifth edition, in the hopes of aiding mental health professionals in their research and clinical practice. Yet, a new study in *Psychiatry Research* conducted by Kate Allsopp, John Read, Rhiannon Corcoran and Peter Kinderman and published in July of 2019 concluded that the "inherent heterogeneity in a wide range of psychiatric diagnoses . . . undermine[s] the model of discrete categories of disorder" currently employed in the DSM-5 (15). This indicates that the current model of psychiatric diagnosis employed in the United States remains deficient, having failed to place enough weight on either the "role of trauma" in the formation of specific psychological disorders, or the "individual experiences of distress" felt by those affected (21). In other words, despite the progress made by mental healthcare professionals since the 1950s, the diagnostic tools used to assess psychiatric disorders still fall short of their purpose to demystify mental illness in many key respects.

Sadly, however, as Norman Dain posits, "The problem that brought psychiatry as a profession into existence, insanity, is 'solved' by disregarding it or by defining it away" through the use of these same diagnostic tools, "But the sufferers do not go away" (440). I argue, however, that the "problem" that "insanity" poses in American culture extends even further than this. As a society, the United States simultaneously represses mentally ill individuals while mythologising them. Because Americans are drawn to the morbid and the salacious, and are entertained by

stories of abnormal psychology, there exists within the culture of the United States a tendency to misdiagnose, mistreat, and mislabel mentally ill individuals all in the name of telling a good story. Indeed, as much as certain individuals may wish to deny that mental illness exists at all within western culture, American writers have continued to write about the "monsters" that make it visible — monsters that often take the form of the psychopath.

Over the past sixty years, however, research into the nature of psychopathy has also been plagued by various limitations associated with evaluating the disorder. As Jennifer E. Vitale and Joseph P. Newman note, "the assessment of psychopathy has a complicated history — and present. Although there has long been consensus regarding certain core features of the syndrome, there has been less agreement regarding the best methods for assessing these features" (586). This indicates that while tools such as the Hare Psychopathy Checklist[79] (1980) have given psychiatric professionals a better grasp on the common indicators of psychopathy in the twenty-first century, the condition remains perhaps just as difficult to diagnose in the general population as it was in Cleckley's time. Indeed, despite advances in both medical science and technology, it would appear that American fiction remains fixated on repeating the same narratives popularised in the 1950s when it comes to depicting personality disorders, ignoring much of the research that has been conducted in the years since. Popular narratives continue to weave the same stories as the primary texts examined in this thesis — stories of deviant men preying upon innocent young women, abetted by a mask of normalcy; of women demonised for daring to flout social convention; of washed up Grande Dames terrorising younger generations; and, perhaps the most "shocking" of all, of killer kids[80] showing a complete lack of remorse.

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[79] In 1980, Canadian psychiatrist Robert D. Hare developed the Psychopathy Checklist, a Research Scale for the Assessment of Psychopathy based on Cleckley's original conceptualisation of the psychopath. This checklist was revised in 2003 to offer more clarity for assessing psychopathy, resulting in the PCL-R. Though not without its controversies, the PCL-R has been used extensively in psychopathy research conducted in the twenty-first century in the United States and elsewhere (Vitale and Newman 586).

[80] *Killer Kids* is the name of a Canadian documentary series that aired in the US on The Biography Channel (season one) and Lifetime Movies (seasons two to four) that dramatizes various crimes involving juvenile murderers and assigns them differing motives, including an obsession with the occult, psychopathic tendencies, and family turmoil.

THE AFTERLIFE

In the continued afterlife of Robert Bloch's *Psycho*, which inspired two literary sequels and five films released between 1960 and 1998, Universal Television introduced the pseudopsychopath Norman Bates to a new audience by way of the American TV series *Bates Motel* (2013-2017). While this updated series, which was met with overwhelmingly positive critical reviews ("Bates Motel"), focuses on the teenage years of Norman Bates (Freddie Highmore), leading up to the death of his mother, Norma, and the original events of Bloch's *Psycho*, trauma remains a central focus of the narrative throughout, as does, unsurprisingly, the gothicisation of Norman's illness. Whereas Norman in Bloch's novel exemplifies Philip Wylie's worst fears of the American "Mamma's Boy," still perpetually suckling at his ghastly mother's teat even after her demise, teenage Norman is a handsome outsider negotiating his own coming of age while struggling to cope with his mental illness.

The series' blending of the horror of adolescence with the horror of living with a psychological disorder marks a mercifully more thoughtful approach to mental illness compared to Bloch's text, and the humanisation of Norma Bates through a strong performance by actress Vera Farmiga and a narrative of her own constitutes a particularly welcome change given the original Norma's status as an undead presence that haunts the margins of Bloch's text with no voice of her own. While new Norma's characterisation as a single mother attempting to escape her own traumatic past and carve out a space for herself where she can find happiness and independence invites comparisons to the depiction of Mary Crane in Bloch's *Psycho*, however, this character also remains pathologised, to a large extent, as she is still ultimately responsible for Norman's psychological dysfunction in a conspicuously Oedipal sense. Furthermore, Norman's tendency to dress in his mother's clothing and his portrayal as a Bluebeardian figure who punishes women by murdering them, lifted directly from Bloch's text, indicates that *Bates Motel* still largely relies on Bloch's original plot points to spin a gothicised tale of living with a

dissociative disorder. Indeed, Norman's repression of murdering his mother and his admission, "I don't even want to think about it, it was so horrible" ("The Cord"), further indicate that contemporary American society continues to deal with trauma by forcibly burying events that cause emotional distress, which will only lead to problems further down the line, as evidenced in all the primary texts discussed in this thesis. Norman's decision in the finale of *Bates Motel* to force his half-brother to end his life thus suggests that there is still no place for people suffering from DID in the real world, especially not when others can only conceive of these individuals as gothic.

In a strikingly similar vein, the sequel to M. Night Shyamalan's sleeper hit *Split*, *Glass* (2019), further pushes its depiction of DID into the realm of the gothic as it examines an institutionalised Kevin Wendell Crumb as a fully realised supervillain named the Horde with twenty-four individual personalities dwelling inside him. Like Norman Bates, the Horde might be read as yet another Bluebeardian psychopath who kidnaps young women and keeps them locked up before killing them to appease "the beast within." Yet, Kevin, the Horde's "original" sheepish identity who is largely subsumed by his more "colourful" alters, still recalls Jackson's Elizabeth's Richmond more than he does the sexualised murderer Norman, especially in his interactions with a corrupt psychiatrist with ulterior motives (Sarah Paulson). Ultimately, however, *Glass* predictably ends with Kevin's death, for American society could never allow a person with twenty-four different identities to survive after escaping institution, indicating yet again that the choices for DID sufferers remain severely limited in the twenty-first century.

DID, in fact, remains one of American popular culture's most overused gothic plot points. Narratives that follow what Marcus refers to as the "surprise DID plot structure" (39), wherein characters suffering from dissociative disorders commit crimes under a different personality unbeknownst even to themselves, continue to saturate mainstream media, as seen in films of the last ten years such as *The Uninvited* (2009), *The Ward* (2010), *Silent House* (2012),

and *The Secret of Marrowbone* (2017). Perhaps rivalling the prevalence of DID-as-gothic-twist texts in contemporary popular culture is also the vast proliferation of Bluebeard-inflected domestic noir, which includes Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006) and *Gone Girl* (2012), each with its own representation in visual culture[81], as well as Caroline Kepnes's *You* (2014), which was adapted into its own TV series by Lifetime (2018) and will continue streaming on Netflix starting in 2019. The critical and commercial success of these popular texts signifies the Bluebeard gothic's continued popularity in American popular culture despite the subgenre's reiteration of troubling gender dynamics that would seem to have no place in an allegedly "postfeminist" age.

On a similar note, nearly sixty years since the publication of *Baby Jane*, American culture remains fascinated by the figure of the psycho-biddy, as evidenced by several recent horror films that confront the spectre of old age[82] in the form of murderous Grande Dames. The character actress Lin Shaye has, for example, witnessed a career resurgence playing psycho-biddies in a slew of genre films[83] since starring as the parapsychologist Elise Rainier in James Wan's *Insidious* franchise while Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk's over the top gothic anthology series *American Horror Story* features several Grande Dames each season, all played by veteran actresses such as Kathy Bates, Frances Conroy, Joan Collins, and Jessica Lange, who, as mentioned, went on to portray Joan Crawford in *Feud: Bette and Joan.* In 2019, acclaimed actresses Isabelle Huppert and Octavia Spencer each tackled psycho-biddy roles in *Greta* and *Ma*, respectively, raising the profile of the hag horror genre for new generations.

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[81] *Sharp Objects* was adapted by Marti Noxon for HBO as a limited series in 2018 while Flynn herself adapted *Gone Girl* for the big screen in 2014.

[82] See also Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper's edited collection *Elder Horror: Essays on Film's Frightening Images of Aging* (2019) for additional discussions of aging in contemporary gothic fiction, although this collection makes merely a passing mention to the psycho-biddy.

[83] See *The Final Wish* (2019, dir. Timothy Woodward Jr.), *Room for Rent* (2019, dir, Tommy Stovall), *Gothic Harvest* (2018, dir, Ashley Hamilton), *The Black Room* (2017, dir. Rolfe Kanefsky), *Jack Goes Home* (2016, dir. Thomas Dekker) and *Ouija* (2014, dir. Stiles White), among others.

Indeed, the psycho-biddy's recent iteration in the guise of Oscar-winning actress Helen Mirren in Michael and Peter Spierig's *Winchester* (2018) prompted Anna Billson to proclaim in an article for *The Guardian* that "horror's obsession with older women" had returned. Inspired by the true story of Sarah Winchester, widow of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company treasurer William Wirt Winchester and majority shareholder of the company after his death, Mirren portrays a medium who repeatedly builds additions to her sprawling mansion, allegedly under the instructions of the spirits of people killed by Winchester firearms. Since Sarah's "mind is as chaotic as the house itself," drawing conspicuous attention yet again to the parallels between haunted minds and haunted houses, the Winchester company hires Dr Eric Price to perform a psychological evaluation on her with the express purpose of declaring her mentally unsound and wresting control of the company (Spierig). Dressed in a long black gown and veil characteristic of the Victorian gothic and wielding a shotgun while possessed by a particularly violent spirit, Mirren certainly looks and acts the part of the psychologically unstable Grande Dame, although her performance is admittedly a great deal more subdued compared to her predecessor Bette Davis's in *Baby Jane*. Perhaps more interesting than Mirren's turn as a Grande Dame in *Winchester*, however, is the film's all-too-conspicuous blurring of the lines between mental illness and the supernatural. At the film's climax, it is revealed that Dr Pride's wife, Ruby, had shot him and then committed suicide while suffering from a "delusional disorder" that made her hear voices. Ruby even states that Price does not believe her because "[s]omeone like you never will," positioning Price as a male authority figure similar to several psychiatrists examined in this thesis — namely, Prince, Thigpen, Cleckley, and the fictional Doctor Wright — a "man of science" whose beliefs in fact cloud his judgement.

The idea that mental illness, especially in extreme cases that impact personality and impede social function, runs in the family, as it does in *The Bad Seed*, continues to haunt American popular culture, manifesting in a slew of recent gothic and horror texts that centre on

families in turmoil. Notably, the infamous psychopathic psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter toys with his nemesis, FBI agent Will Graham, by suggesting that he chose "a ready-made wife and child to serve [his] needs," as he wanted a family but not the risk of imparting his own personality disorder onto a child: "A stepson absolves you of any biological blame. You know better than to breed. Can't pass on those terrible traits you fear the most" ("And the Woman . . ."). Similarly, the main character, Annie, in Ari Aster's critically acclaimed horror film *Hereditary* (2018) recounts her family's long history of mental health struggles at a grief support group meeting after the death of her eccentric mother, stating,

> [My mother] had DID, which became extreme at the end. And dementia. And my father died when I was a baby from starvation, because he had psychotic depression and starved himself.... My older brother had schizophrenia, and when he was sixteen, he hanged himself in my mother's bedroom and of course his suicide note blamed her, accusing her of putting people inside him.[84]

As viewers come to realise towards the end of Aster's film, however, the tragedies in Annie's family are less the result of hereditary mental illness than they are of her mother's dangerous obsession with occultism. It is strongly implied, too, that Annie's brother's accusation that his mother was "putting people inside him" is to be taken literally, indicating yet another dangerous conflation of mental illness with the supernatural that collapses the distinction between the two.

Even beyond the realm of gothic horror texts, the troubling association between trauma and madness continues to feature prominently within contemporary American popular culture in specifically gendered and, indeed, gothicised ways. The final season of HBO's critically acclaimed medieval fantasy series *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) sees its central protagonist, Daenerys Targaryen, descend into visceral, seething madness just as she perches on the cusp of assuming the throne she believes is her birth right. After seven seasons of following Daenerys's growth as a leader and folk hero in spite of her traumatic formative years, the show ultimately

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[84] Significantly, Annie ends her monologue by stating, "And then I realize that I am to blame. Or not that I'm to blame, but I *am* blamed," signifying American popular culture's continued fascination with pinpointing mothers as the source of familial trauma.

concludes that she, like Rhoda, cannot outrun her own gothic DNA: due to a family history of madness, she is fated through heredity to follow in the footsteps of her father, the "Mad King," suggesting that in the year 2019, mental illness remains as shadowy and gothic a topic as ever, enabling its use as a plot device in one of the most popular television series of the twenty-first century. Perhaps even more vexing, however, is the suggestion here that women are more likely to succumb to mental illness when confronted with the prospect of power, for, as this thesis aimed to show about the 1950s, women in many ways remain marginalised to this day within a culture that is still by and large androcentric.

While this project initially arose out of my love for the gothic and my fascination with abnormal psychology, examining the intersections of these two topics has taught me to question my own role in the cultural machinery that continues to gothicise mental illness. The past four years of study have forced me to confront my own assumptions and unconscious biases, some of which remain so deeply rooted that they require further efforts to dismantle. While it is my hope that, as American society strives for progress and understanding, representations of mental illness will eventually become more balanced, in the interim, further research in the medical humanities remains necessary, especially when psychological disorders remain gothicised in insidiously gendered ways.

While this thesis has potentially raised more questions than it has answered, as the gothic tends to do, it is also my hope that the work here has elucidated some key issues at stake in the gothicisation of mental illness in the works examined. It will now be up to future researchers to explore such questions as the role of race and ethnicity in relation to narratives centring on disorders of personality, as well as the similarities and differences between depictions of psychopathology on an international scale. Especially given the prevalence of gothic themes in popular world cinema, examining the ways in which different countries conceptualise personality disorders in popular fiction would be a first step.

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