

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

Spring 2023

The Feminist Gothic Journeys of Shirley Jackson

Grace Sanko

grace.sanko@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sanko, Grace, "The Feminist Gothic Journeys of Shirley Jackson". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2023.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/1054>

TRINITY COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

The Feminist Gothic Journeys of Shirley Jackson

Submitted by

Grace Sanko '23

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

2023

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to the Trinity College English Department for the opportunity and experience of writing this thesis. Many thanks to all who have supported me along this journey, but especially to Kate Bergren and Dan Mrozowski. I would like to acknowledge Christopher Hager, my fellow English classmates, and thesis writers. Lastly, to my family, especially my Mom and Dad - their belief in me and my abilities has kept my spirits and motivation high throughout this process.

Words cannot express my gratitude for all encouragement and support I received throughout this process, and I am forever grateful for this journey.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1: The Woman Alone: The Gothic Feminist Journeys of Shirley Jackson's Short Fiction	17
Chapter 2: <i>The Haunting of Hill House</i>: The Uncanny Feminist Journeys of the Incessant Domestic Home	43
Conclusion	69
Bibliography	73

Introduction

Introduction to the Traditional European Gothic

The Gothic tradition began in the 18th century to explore transgressions in the European social landscape. Through illustrating a landscape in which cultural anxieties are typified as Gothic monsters and tropes, the Gothic genre quickly popularized as a form to address social concerns through their dramatization.¹ For example, Mary Shelley's quintessential Gothic novel *Frankenstein* (1818) emerged at a time of scientific advancement when questions of female bodily autonomy were discussed as a moral issue. Similarly, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) uses the vampire as a signifier of morality, or lack thereof, to explore Victorian sexual desire. The story is not really about Dracula, but his victims for whom he preserves his libidinal impulses. *Dracula* inspired the popular revival of the vampire and is widely considered the most famous Gothic novel. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Gothic literary tradition continued to evolve with notable works including Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*.

The aesthetics of the Gothic is characterized by darkness, suspense, and elements of horror that can include the supernatural.² Its defining features are constructed in a way that creates a sense of unease and suspense in the reader. For

¹ Punter, David. "22: Gothic and Recent Fiction: Fears of the Past and of the Future." *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2019, pp. 321–331.

² Smith, Lloyd Allan. "Chapter Eight: Glossary." *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, Continuum, New York, NY, 2004, pp. 173–176.

example, the atmosphere of gothic literature is often characterized as gloomy and stormy to create an eerie ambiance.³ Beyond that, its characters are typically expected to be mysterious and haunted by the dark secrets of their past.⁴ As a result of these ornamental and foreboding factors, Gothic literature often explores themes of death, decay, and mortal interactions with supernatural creatures.⁵

While the Gothic genre is difficult to define narrowly, it is best understood as existing within the dualities and limitations of reality and the fantastical. Furthermore, the extremities and uncanniness of Gothic texts correlate with social fears and macabre. The Gothic gives the cultural “other” a voice in which they can articulate the terrors of their every day experiences.⁶ The Gothic tradition’s combination of terror and sublimity evokes the uncanniness of our modern landscape and its governing systems.⁷

The Gothic Form

Traditional Gothic literature emerged in the 18th century following the Age of Enlightenment and British Romanticism. The European Gothic literary form was inspired by rapid expansion and revolutions in Europe. At the time, the sentiment was that excess knowledge of scientific progress has the potential to lead to disaster. The

³ Groom, Nick. “Chapter 8: The Descent into Hell.” *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 76–86.

⁴ Groom, Nick. “Chapter 10: The Gothic Dream.” *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 100–121.

⁵ Bloom, Clive. “Epilogue: Further Thoughts on the Gothic.” *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 291–297.

⁶ Kahane, Claire. “15: The Gothic Mirror.” *The (M)Other Tongue*, Cornell University Press, pp. 334–351.

⁷Smith, Alan Lloyd. “Chapter Five: Major Themes in American Gothic.” *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2004, pp. 65–127.

duality of progress as positive creation and a threat is what makes these topics essentially Gothic in nature. The genre originated as a way to allegorically comment on economic, social, and political disenfranchisement in Great Britain, and was popularized in the 19th century as the form migrated west to the Americas. It is characterized by themes of escapism, and despair, and seeks to address subculture. Furthermore, the genre is often associated with aesthetics and is known for projecting feelings of 'otherness' onto a body that society deems as 'different.'⁸ The contemporary Gothic evolved as a form of expression that abandons cultural norms and carries the core tropes and issues of the times.

Through its environments and settings, the Gothic puts visual form to fears of the self through distorted images of reality that turn into grotesque.⁹ While the traditional European Gothic and its American counterpart have drastically different cultural origins, they share many common themes and motifs. In the American context, the Gothic focuses on mundane sources of terror, such as poverty and madness to explore issues of human nature.¹⁰ The Gothic tradition has always focused on the macabre, but the main difference in the modern form from the traditional is a more realistic and rational approach to commenting on modern society.¹¹

The value of the Gothic story lies in its use of aesthetics. Foreshadowing and restriction to the short story form is essential to enforcing the claustrophobic effects

⁸ Hogle, Jerrold E., et al. "Chapter 7: Unsettling Feminism: The Savagery of Gothic." *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2020, pp. 129–146.

⁹ Bloom, Clive, and Manuel Aguirre. "Narrative Structure, Liminality, Self-Similarity: the Case of Gothic Fiction." *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 226–247.

¹⁰ Mambrol, Narsullah. "Analysis of Shirley Jackson's Stories." *Literary Theory and Criticism*, 24 Apr. 2020.

¹¹ Wooley, Christine A. *Haunting Realities: Naturalist Gothic and American Realism*, UNIV OF ALABAMA PRESS, S.I., 2022, pp. 1–13.

of the Gothic tale¹². Furthermore, the Gothic short story has the capacity to address social inequalities and injustices in a semi-realist setting. Other Gothic authors known for featuring the protagonist's psychological deterioration were Poe in *The Fall of the House of Usher* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*- both of which are famously praised in the American Gothic canon. All of these examples show that the short story form might be the ideal mode for expressing the Gothic because it enables the use of diffusing haunting and alienating contexts. The short story gives form to the Gothic story and means of expressing the world's everyday horrors as the reader is brought into the story as an accomplice and presents physical proximity to the story's danger as a form of horror.¹³

The traditional Gothic is also known for transforming the feared monster into a hero through positive identification with those who are typically 'othered' by society. Through this romanticization of traditional villains and heroes, feminist authors gained traction through the Gothic as they began to write dramatic and emotional stories that featured female madness through persecution.¹⁴ I am interested here in how the Gothic presents the ways in which women are disciplined through gender performance meant to appease the male gaze. The first Gothic writers were quick to exploit their contemporaries' horrified fascination with the madhouse, and a modern reader can see that the forms of insanity are usually gendered in early Gothic fiction.

As theories of multiple personalities, new interpretations of hysteria, and the

¹² Nagel, James, and Lawrence Graver. "The American Short Story Cycle." *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story*, edited by Blanche H. Gelfant, Columbia University Press, pp. 9–14.

¹³ Ilott, Sarah. "23: Gothic and the Short Story: Revolutions in Form and Genre." *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*, edited by David Punter, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2019, pp. 332–345.

¹⁴ Easton, Martha. "Feminism." *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 33, no. Medieval Art History Today, 2012, pp. 99–112.

dissemination of the Freudian concept of the unconscious emerged, new levels of urgency were brought to the investigation of psychology through the Gothic.¹⁵

The exploration of ‘psychiatric Gothic’ has been most strongly represented by female writers, and has had a significant influence on contemporary popular culture and horror literature.¹⁶ The American Gothic shifted toward psychological horror, a sense of alienation and paranoia, and an exploration of the dark side of American culture and society through realist narratives. Following the end of World War II, the American Gothic form reflects the anxieties and tensions of a society evolving from high levels of conformity, social control, and lack of individual freedom.¹⁷

Context of the American Gothic

The early American Gothic features an application of the traditional European model to perceptions of the American government and founding ideologies. By emulating the mood and aesthetics of the European Gothic, the American Gothic evolved into a perversely anti-Utopian and urban landscape. Stories in this modern inflection of the Gothic tradition, such as Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (1798), reflect on poverty and shame through deliberately macabre detailing. *Wieland* is particularly notable in the American Gothic canon because its narrative craft enhances a new model for thinking about the world and its evils without a religious framing.

Written during a time of cultural and political instability, *Wieland* explores early

¹⁵ Smith, Lloyd Allan. “Chapter Six: Key Questions.” *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, Continuum, New York, NY, 2004, pp. 133–162.

¹⁶ Antoszek, Patrycja. “Haunting Feelings: Shirley Jackson and the Politics of Affect.” *Women’s Studies*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2020, pp. 850–867., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1814292>.

¹⁷ Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. “Coda: The Decline of the American Female Gothic.” *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 194–198.

American philosophies of freedom in a Republican utopia. This text is highly regarded as the first distinctly American Gothic novel. Like its European counterpart, the early American Gothic was highly concerned with the aesthetics of sublimity but differed greatly in its expression of cultural and political stresses. Instead of focusing on the unknowable and menacing history of castles and estates, the focus shifted toward destabilizing circumstances and ideologies that undermine conventional understandings of modern society.

In the contemporary American context, the Gothic continues to be popular, particularly in the horror genre. From Herman Melville to Stephen King and Anne Rice, modern writers continue to explore Gothic themes of madness and the grotesque. The contemporary American Gothic continues to feature supernatural elements such as ghosts and haunted houses, particularly in the horror genre.¹⁸ It expands on the European Gothic by incorporating modern societal anxieties and fears within the uniquely unsettling atmosphere of the traditional Gothic landscape.

Shirley Jackson's America

After the surge of feminist activism during World War II, American women who had entered the workforce were pressured to return to domesticity.¹⁹ Americans struggled to readjust to their respective roles in the private and public spheres after the war, and authors began to explore the sentiments of feminine anxiety and

¹⁸ Smith, Andrew, and Charles L. Crow. "3: American Gothic and Modernism." *History of the Gothic*, Univ. of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2009, pp. 122–144.

¹⁹ Beliveau, Ralph. "Shirley Jackson and American Folk Horror." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofier, Peter Lang Group, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2021, pp. 21–34.

confusion through literary art.²⁰ As such topics became relevant to the mainstream discussion, depictions of women's imperiled situations through Gothic literature extended the reach of feminist discourse. The featuring of the 'mad woman' as a protagonist places female grief at the center of a Gothic cultural analysis and creates an essentially female Gothic mode. Gothic representations of feminine struggles show the complications of existence beyond the domestic sphere, and the traditional patriarchal order – an issue Shirley Jackson would later come to explore through her modern American rendition of the female Gothic.²¹ Gothic feminism is concerned with the cultural tensions that contribute to a shift in or loss of identity. As both an emerging writer and a mother, Shirley Jackson's identity was divided across the many roles she assumed in her life.²² To this extent, Jackson explores female desire and expression in her stories as a means of attaining agency in her own life. Furthermore, Jackson's new American female Gothic features protagonists whose personalities disintegrate in their attempt to navigate their identity and role in the world.

Amongst her short stories, Shirley Jackson's bio-fiction domestic horror comedies like "Life Among the Savages" (1953) and "Raising Demons" (1957) have received less attention despite their profoundly relevant depictions of American family life. The playfully ironic titles of these stories suggest that they encounter the daily sagas of domestic and family life. However, what is different about these is that they are a collection of interrelated short stories rather than one with a complete plot.

²⁰ Hague, Angela. "A Faithful Anatomy of Our Times': Reassessing Shirley Jackson." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2005, pp. 73–96., <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2005.0025>.

²¹ Cohen, Gustavo Vargas. "Shirley Jackson's Literary Horizons and Historical Reception." *Cadernos Do IL*, no. 45, 2013, pp. 191–208., <https://doi.org/10.22456/2236-6385.28054>.

²² Kay Hansen, Michelle. "Move Your Feet, Dear. I'm Conga-Ing': Drawing Circles around Domesticity in Shirley Jackson's Cartoons." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2021, pp. 111–127.

The autobiographical nature of Jackson's work reflects her feelings of subjectivity as a housewife and mother that she metabolized through the trappings of the Gothic genre. Her biography provides insight into her social and psychological contexts that define the expectations she explores in her stories. By exploring the conditions of the housewife, Jackson highlights the cultural and social terms that define and limit the 'self' explored in her stories.²³ And, through these stories, Jackson tries to capture the pressures haunting the housewife and blocking her from discovering herself.

Categorized as both fiction and memoir, her domestic horror comedies are episodic accounts of suburban family life. Her later fictitious short stories and novels build on the sentiments of her domestic horror comedies – particularly the ways in which femininity is exploited and used to oppress others.

Initially written and released as magazine segments, Jackson's early stories demonstrate her ability to infuse comedy into depictions of everyday occurrences. Like her other short stories, these family sagas subvert classification as they combine realism and satire. Written in 1953, "Life Among the Savages" describes the daily challenges she endured as a housewife in Vermont. Jackson uses a comedic style and tone to make horrific moments ironically humorous. As early as the second page, Jackson comments that she

cannot think of a preferable way of life, except one without children and without books, going on soundlessly in an apartment hotel where they do the

²³ Parks, John G. "Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson's Use of the Gothic." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1984, p. 15., <https://doi.org/10.2307/441187>.

cleaning for you and send up your meals and all you have to do is lie on a couch.

(Jackson, LAS, 2)

Wishing for a less predictable daily life, Jackson welcomes us into her thoughts unlike in her other stories. Here again, Jackson plays with an uncanny doubling in her rhetoric of inside/outside the house and with/without children and chores. These pairings signify the emotional boundaries and the tensions between fears and desires that Jackson finds herself confronting in these stories and her life. In admitting what the life she has grown accustomed to looks like, she reveals the life she truly desires - which, of course, she is not supposed to want, according to the conditioning enforced by her cultural background. Unlike most mothers willingly admit, Jackson had a strained relationship with her kids. Beyond admitting that she wishes she did not have children, her family chronicles reveal further anxieties about familial relations and the destructive effects on her as a housewife. Jackson's described reality in the private domestic sphere offers an unmodulated reflection on her house-bound identity in which her individual identity is compromised. Her language emphasizes the lack of control she has in her life and the ways in which she is trapped in her role as a mother and housewife. It is interesting that she expresses her imaginative wish of living an alternate life without the elements that confine her to the constitutive dimensions of her role in the home. Jackson uses the female gothic to pivot on her anxieties by imaginatively replicating them in her narratives. Through this interpretation, we can view Jackson as a passive participant in her life pretending to be happy with the reality of her situation. She uses the Gothic to process the struggles she encounters in her life as a female writer, and it uniquely allows her to present sexist double standards

through the tension between the private and public spheres. As opposed to other forms of literature, the Gothic affords Jackson the opportunity to explore the darker aspects of human nature and the hidden anxieties and fears that lurk beneath the surface of everyday life.²⁴ Furthermore, the Gothic mode enables Jackson to infuse the narratives of strong and complex female protagonists with a sense of urgency in the face of danger. In her confrontation of the limitations and injustices of modern American society, Jackson underscores the high stakes of challenging the status quo and its effects on the female mind.²⁵ Overall, Jackson's use of the Gothic mode allows her to explore complex emotions and themes in a way that is both unsettling and deeply resonant with the female experience of the 1950s.²⁶

Jackson and her characters appear normal in and of themselves, but it is the house that they live in that haunts them and drives them to disharmony. In this way, the house functions as a reflection of the mother that haunts her throughout the narrative.²⁷ Such haunting heightens Gothic moments of haunting and emphasizes the presence of the uncanny in these stories. As previously discussed, Jackson's entrapment within domestic expectations and structure haunts her and her identity as a woman, housewife, and individual.²⁸ "Life Among the Savages" delves into these

²⁴ Groom, Nick. "Chapter 7: The Sixties." *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 65–75.

²⁵ Świca, Alicja. "The Spectral Presence of (Un)Dead Mother in Shirley Jackson's Short Stories." *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio FF – Philologiae*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2020, p. 191., <https://doi.org/10.17951/ff.2020.38.2.191-203>.

²⁶ Wilson, Michael T. "Eating in the Fiction of Shirley Jackson." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 35–45.

²⁷ Banks, Emily. "Erotic Envy and the Racial Other in 'Flower Garden.'" *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 199–208.

²⁸ Million, Rebecca. "Living an Aporia: Notes on Shirley Jackson's Home Books." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 159–170.

social expectations and uncovers the tension between Jackson's subjectivity and the panoptic nature of the house. She insists that

sentimental people keep insisting that women go on to have a third baby because they love babies, and cynical people seem to maintain that a woman with two active healthy children around the house will do anything for ten quiet days in the hospital; my own position is somewhere between the two, but I acknowledge that it inclines somewhat toward the latter. (Jackson, LAS, 57)

Basically, Jackson is saying that the outside world does not see her as more than a housewife or a mother and that as a woman she should want to have more children. As depressing as the condemning reality of motherhood may seem under this lens, this response is where Jackson finds humor.²⁹ The bitterness implied by these lines is crucial, and is evidence of the Gothic in their uncanny delivery and meaning. Through this language, Jackson asserts that women are more than baby-making machines, and that the expectation to continue reproducing ignores the need for relief from the pressures of motherhood.

In describing the chronicles of her daily life, Jackson highlights the self-sacrifice, subjection to domesticity, and the disintegration of feminine personality as sources of terror.³⁰ Similarly, she focuses on darker emotional responses that were not socially permissive for mid-20th-century femininity. While there are no ghouls or hauntings in these stories, the horror value lies in the

²⁹ Walker, Nancy. "Humor and Gender Roles: The 'Funny' Feminism of the Post-World War II Suburbs." *American Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1985, p. 98., <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712765>.

³⁰ Lloyd, Robert. "What's Haunting Shirley Jackson? the Spectral Condition of Life Writing." *Women's Studies*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2020, pp. 809–834., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1822840>.

underscored expectation for Jackson to sacrifice her individuality for motherhood.³¹ Her unconventional and comical exploration of family life is underscored by the ‘savage’ and ‘demonic’ characterizations of her family. Jackson mediates her culturally-improper emotions and thoughts through the screen of the Gothic mode.

Implications of Jackson’s Work on the Contemporary Gothic

By exploring the themes of social death and everyday horrors, Jackson uses the Gothic mode to provide readers with a unique perspective on the female experience of her times. Through her exploration and adaptation of the Gothic, Jackson guides readers to better understand their fears and desires in the American cultural landscape.³² Her use of Gothic themes and imagery reflects the anxieties and fears in the cultural and historical contexts of suburban life of the 1950s.

As previously mentioned, a careful analysis of the Gothic genre reveals cultural concerns of authority over the body and mind – particularly for women. In investigating how Shirley Jackson puts form to her concerns about femininity in the 1950s, I plan to highlight how she employs conventions of the Gothic to explore the psychological concerns of the ‘new American woman.’ In my first chapter, “The Woman Alone: The Gothic Feminist Journeys of Shirley Jackson’s Short-Story Fiction,” I discuss the ways in which Jackson’s protagonists subvert traditional gender roles and defy societal norms for the sake of individual benefit. Through my

³¹ Eunju Hwang. “‘Writing Is the Way out’: Shirley Jackson’s Domestic Stories and We Have Always Lived in the Castle.” *Feminist Studies in English Literature*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2009, pp. 103–129., In <https://doi.org/10.15796/fsel.2009.17.2.004>.

³² Kasper, Daniel. “‘What a Complete and Separate Thing I Am’: Introduction to Rethinking Shirley Jackson.” *Women’s Studies*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2020, pp. 803–808., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1814291>.

analysis of “The Tooth” and “Louisa, Please Come Home,” I propose that Jackson employs psychological horror to reflect the struggles and demanding expectations of the modern American woman. Jackson’s stories demonstrate haunting as a psychological, rather than physical, threat as her protagonists confront their fears and past traumas. Additionally, I postulate that Jackson explores the domestic Gothic through her incorporation and featuring of the nuclear family and the domestic home. As we can see from her domestic horror-comedies and short stories, these topics are of great importance to Jackson as she struggles to come to terms with societal expectations of housewives and her own identity beyond the home. My second chapter focuses on the most famous novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and the ways in which she asserts the setting of the domestic Gothic to explore female oppression. I consider how she expands on the traditional Gothic to tell a story of modern haunting in which the protagonist’s worst anxieties take over her mind. I propose that Jackson discusses the dark side of domestic life to explore familial dysfunction in the idealized ‘nuclear family.’ By analyzing how she combines aspects of her domestic-horror comedies with the feminist Gothic journey, Jackson infers the real-life terrors that plague American women. Jackson is notorious for her ambiguous endings that leave the reader with uncertainty. As Stephanie Patnychuk Bowers recounts in her dissertation, while Jackson leaves the meaning of her stories open to interpretation, she suggests a feminist undertone through her depiction of the haunting and signification of the supernatural. Jackson’s interjection of feminism with the Gothic is not something new that she invented, but she shapes the functions of the Gothic in a particular way that enhances feminine fears in all readers regardless of gender identity. I propose that

Jackson's interpretation and rendition of the feminist Gothic highlight the cultural tensions that contribute to a loss of identity in the contemporary American woman.

Chapter 1:

The Woman Alone: The Gothic Feminist Journeys of Shirley Jackson's Short Fiction

Shirley Jackson in the Domestic Sphere

Shirley Jackson infused Gothic elements into realistic descriptions of everyday life to describe the invisible forces that symbolize the confinement of the patriarchy as a housewife and mother. Jackson's vision of American femininity was a response to the postwar uncertainties that empowered a greater understanding of feminine struggles. The Gothic form allows Jackson to recreate familiar settings in which our preconceived notions of gender and power roles are bent to expose the harsh conditions of women's realities.³³ In many of Jackson's works, the journey of the female protagonist can be seen as a feminist gothic journey, in which she confronts the dark patriarchal forces that seek to control and silence her. By creating protagonists who challenge the norms of patriarchal tradition, Jackson explores the forces that suppress female voices and experiences. Furthermore, the application of European Gothic aesthetics and techniques to contemporary feminist issues enabled Jackson to give form to social attitudes toward women who sought to defy the patriarchal order. Her rich descriptions of her characters' emotional distress are

³³ Hattenhauer, Darryl. "Shirley Jackson and Proto-Postmodernism." *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*, State University of New York Press, Albany (N.Y.), 2003, pp. 1–13.

conveyed through her use of horror and invocation of anxiety in her readers. Jackson's use of the traditional Gothic mode to expose the underlying fears of the female experience embodies the psychological damages of the overbearing patriarchal society.

While she is best known for *The Lottery*, a highly anthologized story taught to show corruption in early America through depictions of everyday evils, Jackson's greater collection of work uniquely captures the housewife's neglected life in the private domestic sphere. Jackson's authorial position as a stylist is praised for curiously showing various skewed perspectives to seemingly simple everyday events in "normal" environments. Stephanie Bowers mentions how Jackson's strained relationship with her mother growing up deeply affected her and made her normalize her anxiety about rejection. Struggling to fit in socially, Jackson's mental health suffered during her young adult years. Frustrations and anxieties from her life manifested as themes in her work as she developed her craft as a writer.

With this being said, it is clear that the themes of Jackson's writing are deeply personal in that they imaginatively engage with essentially feminine conflicts to which she was particularly sensitive. In more recent scholarship efforts to bring recognition to Jackson and her skillfully creative and impactful stories, scholars have praised her duality as a comedic and horror writer. Published early in her career, "The Tooth" confronts female identity and mental instability in a more compassionate way than other writers. Rather than putting the 'madwoman' at the focal point of the story, Jackson demonstrates the horror in the conditions that drive women to insanity. In "Louisa, Please Come Home," the titular character realizes that she has

been running away from her feelings and her past and that she needs to confront them in order to move with her life. The story ends with Louisa forced to reconcile with her past and those she left behind, and reflects the lack of social mobility and the rigid dimensions of American feminine identity.

“The Tooth”

Shirley Jackson's “The Tooth” explores psychological deterioration and disintegration of self through the experience of a woman swarmed with anxiety through her journey alone in the big city. In “The Tooth,” Jackson recreates a realistic narrative in which a woman with a toothache escapes the comfort of her home in order to address the pain of her toothache. With this in mind, we can understand “The Tooth” to be about far more than a toothache and a casual trip to the dentist; Jackson eloquently and strategically crafts a Gothic narrative that reveals the realities of her lived experience as an American woman. Through this narrative, Jackson describes the psychic emptiness of women who are bound to the household. She suggests that their lack of identity and individuality causes them to crumble outside of the home. Jackson shows psychological deterioration and disintegration of self - distinctly Gothic qualities - through her formal and aesthetic choices throughout her stories. Jackson's use of defamiliarization in Clara's narrative is uniquely Gothic in that her character's journey relies on the discovery of self as an individual separate from the patriarchy. With this technique, Jackson takes seemingly normal habitual stories and shows the awfulness existing underneath them. These themes are relevant through Jackson's writing practices as she primarily uses the restrictive short story form to enhance the

claustrophobic effects of her narratives and uses traditional Gothic tropes to foreshadow looming terror.³⁴ It is essential that we understand the Gothic as not necessarily horror or fantasy, but more of a psychological mode of viewing the past from a fearful yet nostalgic perspective. “The Tooth” features Gothic horror in the panoptic paranoia caused by the restrictive pain of a toothache. In this way, Jackson’s iteration of the female Gothic focuses on the short story form as the ideal mode for expression because it enables the use of diffusing haunting, and alienating contexts and individuals. By focusing on the anxieties prompted by everyday experiences, Jackson presents a uniquely feminized perspective of daily life in modern American society. In other words, Jackson capitalizes on the real horrors underlying American culture and society by using the Gothic to try and understand the dark underbelly of human nature.

A template that Jackson frequently reuses as the characterizing backbone of her stories is the use of the family to represent a microcosm of American culture and society. In “The Tooth,” Jackson recreates a realistic narrative in which a woman with a toothache escapes the comfort of her home in order to address the pain of her toothache. By carefully embedding Gothic tropes into modern settings, Jackson immerses her readers in the contours and depths of feminine anxieties of modern America. Feminist scholars praise Jackson’s reimagined way of looking inside the female mind and recreating her characters’ psychosis and paranoia to be experienced by her readers. In uncovering the root of Clara’s anxieties, it becomes clear that the recurring theme of fear of oppression is far too familiar to Jackson personally. Clara’s

³⁴ Bloom, Clive, and David Punter. “Contemporary Shivers.” *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 178–197.

lack of emotional stability reveals her lack of sense of self, and we can see that her environment of the home does nothing but disempowers her role within the patriarchal system. Seemingly lacking a genuine and understanding relationship with her husband, Clara's discomfort arises from her husband's assumptions of her. When he effectively downplays her pain and tells her not to worry, he is effectively underestimating Clara's condition as well as her sense of self.

By viewing the Gothic as a mode to reveal real horrors underlying American culture and society, we can then interpret the role of Freud's *das unheimlich* (the uncanny) not only in *The Tooth* but also in Jackson's overall ability to create a seemingly rational societal order. The uncanny, as popularized by Sigmund Freud, is a sensation combining strangeness yet familiarity towards something - almost like nostalgia.³⁵ In *The Tooth*, the monster is a piece of the narrator herself: her tooth. The discomfort brought to Clara by the pain of her tooth confines her to a restricted life in which she is paralyzed in discomfort. Early in the story before getting on the bus, Clara states that she feels "so funny...light-headed, and sort of dizzy" to which her husband responds in a patronizing tone that there is "nothing very serious about a toothache." (Jackson, 504) At this moment, the tooth symbolically castrates her ability to speak up for herself, hindering her independence. While underestimating her condition, her husband's words reinforce her dependence on him and do not give her the opportunity to consider her life without emotional and physical pains and limitations. Jackson shows dissolution against the backdrop of the patriarchy in her use of the Gothic.

³⁵ Bloom, Clive, and Sigmund Freud. "3: In the Dark." *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, p. 100.

Simplistic on the surface, *The Tooth* describes a woman's defamiliarization as she comes to terms with her confused sense of self during her journey to get her tooth and the pain it causes removed. As Clara actively loses her sense of self and will throughout her tooth extraction journey, she frees herself from the binds of societal expectations and enters a fantastical world within her imagination. Jackson is intentionally ambiguous about Clara's ultimate mental stability and how this journey reflects on her overall well-being, yet she implies that freedom from the household presents an opportunity for self-discovery. This interpretation of the tooth itself representing the limitations on women's freedom suggests that its removal allows Clara to act confidently as a free agent with her own will. The tooth is a symbol of a kind of castration to which Clara is painfully bound. Under this reading, we can see the tooth as limiting and restrictive of Clara's individuality and agency. Alternatively, tooth extraction can be symbolized to reflect a loss of savagery as coveted by our primal instincts. Under this reading, to lose her bite is to lose herself.

The story begins with Clara's husband taking her to the bus stop so she can see a dentist for her toothache. She has become obsessed with her toothache as she worries whether it will fall out, and nothing seems to calm her. Up until she leaves to go to the doctor, Clara appears passive in her own decision-making. Once encouraged to seek treatment for her ailment, she is forced to confront the immobilizing effects of her toothache. In this regard, the discomfort of her toothache paralyzes her within the rigid binds of the traditional housewife archetype. By living under her husband's condescending direction, Clara is disillusioned as to who she is when left alone in a space outside of the home. After departing her home, Clara finds herself falling asleep

almost everywhere she goes; first, the bus, next to the store, the bus stop again, and at a restaurant. Her time on the bus is characterized as a “silent motion through the darkness so positive a shock that it woke her stunned, and it was a minute before the ache began again.” (“The Tooth” 507) Here Jackson raises questions about Clara’s physical and emotional stability through her contrast between the silence and darkness of the bus and the fear and pain associated with the toothache. Up until she gets her tooth extracted, Clara struggles to stay awake to cope with her pain. She heavily sedates herself with sleeping pills to distract herself from the pain, but describes her state on the bus as feeling “closed in alone with the toothache.” (“The Tooth” 508) Leaving the comfort of what she knows in the home, Clara’s empty feelings inside arise on the bus as she realizes how little agency she has in her own life.

The alienation and isolation described in *The Tooth* are recurring sentiments in Jackson’s work that she resolves through the feminist gothic journey. Soon after getting on the bus and leaving her husband, Clara realizes her discomfort outside of the home as she acknowledges that “inside the bus, traveling on, she was nothing...being carried along without effort of her own.” (Jackson, 508) Too weak to move on her own, she feels invisible and needs to be carried by others to get where she needs to go. Using a traditional Gothic technique Jackson personifies the bus as a visualization of Clara’s comfort zone. This moment of Clara’s in-between state of being awake enough to not fall asleep but conscious enough to keep herself awake is representative of Jackson’s intentional use of duality in line with the Gothic. Under this interpretation, we can understand Clara’s perception of the bus as a place where

“people [are] isolated together in some strange prison” to reflect her fear and difficulties coping with her discomfort. (“The Tooth” 507) Her comfort zone, then, is unstable, always moving and never inactive. The dichotomy between viewing the bus as a physical comfort zone and prison is an example of Jackson employing Freud’s concept of the uncanny to reflect repressed anxieties and fears.

By emphasizing the uncanny within the Gothic, we can open our eyes to a darker perspective of seemingly rational societal order. Considering Jackson hated the dentist herself, it makes sense why Jackson would center the story around attempted coping with fear. The phenomenon of dentist appointments, essentially a consensual violation of one's comfort zone, causes many patients to lose autonomy, power, and control as they anticipate their visits. In considering her hesitance to get on the bus, scholar Robert Haas reads Clara’s moments before departure as evidentiary of “her fear of dentistry and her uncomplaining nature: she has repeatedly chosen not to interrupt her daily life, or the intended mutual happiness of her honeymoon, just because she was in pain.” (Haas, 138) Under this reading, we can view the allegory of Clara’s toothache as a limitation on her independence and individuality – a motif that recurs throughout this story and Jackson’s other works. Furthermore, by understanding how and why Clara has isolated herself we can also consider how she represents the Gothic trope of the woman alone. The narrative descriptions on the bus make Clara appear less than human as she views herself as “nothing...stirred uneasily without knowledge” and allows her identity to be consumed by the pain of her toothache. (“The Tooth” 508) Across the wide array of interpretations available to

"The Tooth", most can agree that Jackson effectively portrays a realistic portrayal of imaginative coping behaviors following dental surgery.

Her fear of being alone, fending for herself, and thinking on her own behalf is reflective of the American female experience of societal blockages to individuality in which women were shamed and labeled as delirious in their attempted autonomy. Throughout her dental procedure, Clara insists "I'm not afraid" to assure herself that she is in control of her pain rather than her hysteria. ("The Tooth" 516) By claiming that she is not afraid, Jackson uses the traditional Gothic mode to expose this fear underlying the female experience and embodies the psychological damages of the overbearing patriarchal society. Jackson accomplishes this through her rich and detailed descriptions of her characters' emotional distress. Her detailed aesthetic incorporates horror to invoke that same level of anxiety in her readers.

The Gothic elements of this story reflect the social and cultural pains experienced by women in post-war America. The alienation and isolation felt by Clara appear strangely familiar in her narrative and reflect the repressed fears and anxieties of the female experience. Her fixation on her tooth reveals larger psychological issues:

Her tooth, which had brought her here unerringly, seemed now the only part of her to have any identity. It seemed to have had its picture taken without her; it was the important creature which must be recorded and examined and gratified; she was only its unwilling vehicle, and only as such was she of interest to the dentist and the nurse, only as the bearer of her tooth was she worth their immediate and practiced attention. (512)

Clara has a passive role in her life until she accepts and confronts her feeling of loss and confusion within herself. Jackson's deliberate word choice of Clara as an "unwilling vehicle" is reflective of the feminine burden of childbirth and the loss of individuality women are expected to desire and enjoy. In understanding the toothache as obsessive anxiety over bodily autonomy, we can see why the allegory of a toothache is conducive to a larger feminist reading. Jackson uses the toothache to represent the haunting exploration of fear and anxiety triggered by bodily changes. Clara ventures beyond the socially acceptable boundaries prescribed to women as she leaves her old life at home. She challenges societal expectations around health and wellness as she resists medical attention for her toothache. The dramatization of dental surgery is essential to the feminist reading that her bodily integrity is majorly invaded by others. After the procedure, Clara tells the nurse "God has given me blood to drink" to which she is instructed, "Don't rinse your mouth or it won't clot." ("The Tooth" 517) This backhanded advice is exactly why Clara doesn't trust the doctors with her body, she is afraid of being sent back to the doctor. Clara does not want the help of others, she wants to live freely and independently. Her determination to take control of her body and health rather than rely on the norms of medical treatment shows her refusal to accept the limitations society places on her. In defining her own independence, she discovers her individuality. This defined independence and individuality reveal Clara's self-reliance in the face of marginalization. Despite the ways in which she is ridiculed for deviating from societal norms and expectations, Clara finally has the confidence to live life on her own terms.

Jackson's typical narrative vocalizes a fundamental Gothic trope: female characters who feel isolated from the community, and hence vulnerable to all forms of predation and psychic anguish. The Gothic, as a form, tells us that female individuality appears to exist within a vacuum that can only be accessed through disconnection from reality. In the doctor's office before the procedure, Jackson emphasizes that Clara's "tooth, which had brought her here unerringly, seemed now the only part of her to have any identity." ("The Tooth" 512) The toothache itself consumed her identity by limiting her expression of individuality and muting her. By establishing a civic atmosphere in this story, Jackson blurs the seemingly realistic story with fantasy as she lures her reader into Clara's facade. Jackson's critique of individuality is the reality that women in her time were not socially permitted to navigate their identities within the overbearing patriarchal order.

As Clara actively loses her sense of self and will throughout her tooth extraction journey, she frees herself from the binds of societal expectations and enters a fantastical world within her imagination. Jackson is intentionally ambiguous about Clara's ultimate mental stability and how this journey reflects on her overall well-being, yet she implies that freedom from the household presents an opportunity for self-discovery. This interpretation of the tooth itself representing the limitations on women's freedom suggests that its removal allows Clara to act confidently as a free agent with her own will. The tooth is a symbol of a kind of castration to which Clara is painfully bound. Under this reading, we can see the tooth as limiting and restrictive of Clara's individuality and agency. Alternatively, tooth extraction can be symbolized to

reflect a loss of savagery as coveted by our primal instincts – so, to lose her bite is to lose herself.

A more optimistic reading of the toothache as a symbol is to view it as a kind of pain she has to sacrifice to become the woman she wants to be (and becomes in the end). The symbol of the tooth is significant because it represents growth and regrowth. As a child grows up and loses their teeth, they learn how to control their pain as they develop into individuals with permanent teeth. The concept of a toothache and its surgical remedy is reflective of female struggle because it suggests that the pain and fear of patriarchal oppression can be resolved by focusing on individual rehabilitation and regrowing strength. In other words, the symbolism made possible by placing significance on the tooth and the pain it causes is its extractability – when extracted from the confines of the home and expectations of the housewife, women are able to forgo their anxieties and discover their true desires and identities. In this way, Jackson is screening psychological deterioration through her exploration of the Gothic genre. Furthermore, Jackson uses the Gothic to explore psychological instability through expressions of the uncanny. Such explorations of Jackson's narrators and the 'new American woman' reveals real-life horror and psychological damage against the backdrop of the patriarchy.³⁶

There are two potentially seductive readings at the end of the story: a realist reading that is largely negative and suggests that she is purely mad, and a feminist Gothic reading that is more positive and that suggests she has found freedom through that madness. A reading of "The Tooth" that combines Gothicism and feminism is

³⁶ Heller, Zoe. "The Haunted Mind of Shirley Jackson." *The New Yorker*, 17 Oct. 2016.

more compelling because it creates the potential for the heroine in which she can emancipate herself from the patriarchal binds as a housewife and discovers herself as an individual. Conversely, a realist interpretation focuses on the mundane aspects of contemporary everyday life. It makes more sense to consider the Gothic rather than a realist logic for “The Tooth” because that would suggest that there is only one potential reading of the story. More simply, a Gothic reading allows for a more inclusive and less distinctive interpretation. Jackson applies the Gothic to the social and psychological problems faced by housewives to convey otherwise muted expressions of feminine repression in a patriarchal world. A feminist Gothic reading not only accepts both feminine freedom and female madness at the same time but celebrates their dichotomy. Once her tooth had been extracted, she frantically asks the nurse where her tooth went and is told that it is “all gone, Never to bother you again.” (“The Tooth” 517) To this response, Clara cries at the finality of this loss. While the tooth was the source of her pain, she had grown accustomed to living uncomfortably and was not emotionally prepared for its removal. The ability to live a life free of disruption is unknown to her, and this may be the most terrifying aspect of Clara. The Gothic plays with these seemingly stable but paradoxical terms, and interpreting “The Tooth” with the uncanny at its core allows for a sense of ambivalence. A feminist version of Uncanny presents Clara’s final state as a liberation.

Other critics' interpretations of Clara's final state vary greatly from temporary delusion to full-on insanity. Some even suggest that Jim is a fantasy and that running away with the demon lover offers liberation from the constrictions of her small-town life. In viewing Clara's awakening after the procedure as a rebirth, we can view the

story as a dreamscape in which Clara wrestles with control in patriarchy. A feminist interpretation of the story's ending highlights Clara's ability to liberate herself from the oppressive forces of the home. Haas' analysis assumes that Jim is imaginary, a kind of guided imagery, and that the ending could be a dream. Jackson often begins her stories with the setting alone, which she does in "The Tooth" and *The Haunting of Hill House*. As Clara sits alone on the bus, the toothache is raging and parasitic. Throughout the story, it is clear that Clara is afraid to give in to her pain. Up until the last moment before her surgery, Clara remains fearful asking "will it hurt?" ("The Tooth" 515) Such questions worsen her fears and reveal her helplessness.

What she fails to consider, however, is that the pain of the toothache disconnects her from others. The isolating effects of the pain shrink her identity down to an aching pain that interrupts her entire life - a sensation that Jackson continues to describe in her novel *The Haunting of Hill House*. The closer she gets to the extraction, the more her anxiety suffocates her. She describes her experience taking an x-ray as though "there was nothing in her head to stop the malicious eye of the camera, as though the camera would look through her and photograph the nails in the wall next to her." ("The Tooth" 512) Using panoptic imagery, here Jackson invokes an ironic dramatization of surveillance paranoia similar to Poe's fear-driven and obsessed Narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart."³⁷ Clara is different from Poe's gothic narrator because she is optimistic in the end despite the anxieties that previously held her back. Clara's mind is euphoric in the end as she is liberated from the restrictive confines

³⁷ Poe intentionally crafted the horror of "The Tell-Tale Heart" to evoke anxiety and paranoia in the reader as described and felt by the Narrator. Furthermore, the famous American gothic short story focuses on its narrator's potential mental illness as a reflection of the growing concerns of a surveillance society.

imposed on her by her toothache.³⁸ These Gothic choices are important to emphasize because they provide an alternative and often repressed view of the American experience.

“Louisa, Please Come Home,” and “The Tooth” share a lot of thematic overlap in their discussion of lost identity and a diminishing sense of self through isolation. Both stories feature women who willingly leave the comfort of their homes and end up lost and helpless. While Jackson does not directly address the sources of fear leading to emotional repression in her characters, their deterioration of self reflects the psychological reality of the female experience. As she explores these cultural and gendered tensions, she enters uncharted territories in her confrontation of the sources of anxiety and confusion for modern American women. Furthermore, by embedding her own frustrations with a male-dominated society in her writing, Jackson is able artistically to express the forces repressing her in a socio-political sense. Jackson's use of the Gothic motif of the woman alone reflects her personal anxieties about motherhood and female subjectivity to marriage and motherhood. By incorporating her embodied feelings in her writing, Jackson reshapes the Gothic into a distinctly feminine and American invocation of horror. While the type of horror she incorporates does not feature traditional ghosts or other horrific tropes, it does raise undiscussed anguish and despair raised by the patriarchal culture oppressing modern American women. The kind of fear Jackson confronts so closely in her work can uniquely be understood as a feminine concern with the patronizing forces attempting

³⁸ Haas, Robert. “Shirley Jackson’s ‘The Tooth’: Dentistry as Horror, the Imagination as a Shield.” *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2015, pp. 132–156., <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2015.0003>.

to guide their sense of individuality and general life course as expected mothers and housewives.

“Louisa, Please Come Home”

Another theme Jackson touches upon in several of her works is the quickness for women to abandon identity. In doing so, she explores the anger, hopelessness, and general frustration experienced by women in the 1950s. In “Louisa, Please Come Home,” Jackson's narrative emphasizes the fluidity of identity outside and within the home, producing a lost sense of self. This short story features a teenage girl who ran away from home, “carefully strategizing so as not to be discovered...to avoid suspicion.” (Franklin, 400) “Once a year. On the anniversary of the day I ran away” her mother desperately calls for her daughter to return home. (“Louisa, Please Come Home,” 46) However, three years after hearing her mother on the radio begging for her to return, she returns only to learn that her family no longer recognizes her. In response to her family’s refusal to believe that she is the real Louisa, she tells them that she “hope[s] your daughter comes back someday.” (“Louisa, Please Come Home” 60) Using dramatic irony, Jackson highlights Louisa’s feelings of urgency and hopelessness and transfers that onto her readers to convey a story about the definition of the self. Louisa’s gothic feminist journey does not end in freedom, but it propels her out of the home and towards a new life that she has the power to control.

Louisa’s offering of condolences to her parents is a devastatingly courteous way of acknowledging the distance she has forced into their relationship. Furthermore, their inability to recognize her reflects that they are not Louisa’s chosen

family and that their relationship is contingent on their kinship. Louisa's chosen mother figure is Mrs. Peacock, the kind and caring owner of a rooming house in a neighboring city to Louisa's hometown. Upon their meeting, Louisa fabricates an imaginary family from upstate as part of a cover story to explain why she needs housing. While doing so increases Mrs. Peacock's comfort with Louisa, it is completely based on lies. Louisa is excited about the potential of a new life on her own, "Before I had been away from home for twenty-four hours I was an entirely new person." ("Louisa, Please Come Home" 54) In making this comment, Jackson urges us to praise Louisa's ambitions in starting a new life. While the home represents a comforting place of belonging, family, and security, Louisa desires a new home where she can be more than permitted within the confines of the traditional familial structure. Most readers focus on Louisa's devastating reality at the end of the story while overlooking why they do not recognize their daughter when she is right in front of them. If her parents cannot recognize her for the person she has become rather than the person that they remember, then they would be able to truly see her. But, they will never regain the person they believe they lost because they are bound to the idea that the Louisa they knew cannot change. The paradoxical issue of not having enough stability and having too much stability is a contrast that Jackson continually discusses in her work.

Considering the post-war culture in which Jackson lived and wrote, we can view her feminist Gothic adventure stories as a reimagined way of looking inside the female mind by focusing on psychosis, paranoia, and anxiety in her narrators. In realizing that Jackson's characters' instability stems from their lack of clear purpose and

identity, we can understand her characters' anxieties as reflective of her recurring implementation of personal themes like fear of oppression. Through this short story, Jackson highlights the reality of what independence can look like for women. She asks if female independence necessitates a lack of family and if the desire to be more than a housewife makes women antithetical to family life. In "Louisa, Please Come Home," Louisa's frustrations in not being recognized by her family reflect a sense of feminine anger. Feminine anger is a kind of deep resentment uniquely felt by women because of the social situations they are subjected to due to their gendered roles that disregard their personal aspirations and desires. We can understand this particular kind of feminine anger as a product of the untenable stasis between too much stability and too much fluidity that social and cultural factors afford women. Women inherently experience this kind of anger in a way that men cannot because of gender stereotypes, discrimination, and societal expectations placed upon them. So, Louisa's parents' inability to recognize their daughter at the end of the short story exposes the hopelessness experienced by American women - fear of lacking identity and individuality as well as fear that one has changed so much that they will be unrecognizable to their own family.

By analyzing Jackson's depictions of the home as a transformative, frightening, and unpredictable environment, we can better understand her attitudes towards suburbia and her life as a housewife as self-induced anxiety of living up to the perfect "housewife" model. While Louisa is not a housewife, she has the realistic potential to become one if she does not take control over the direction of her life. Feminist theory tells us that "subjectivity is so thoroughly produced 'from the outside in.'" (Kurs, 54)

This means that the housewife's lack of objective reality stems from the high-pressure social standards set by the patriarchal public sphere. However, housewives are told that they should never attempt to exceed these standards within their designated role in the private sphere of the home. Her mobility is limited by her subordination to men, and the result is paranoia and social isolation to potentially debilitating extents. Philosopher Michele Foucault's panopticon theory expands on this feminist theory of social spheres by suggesting that those in the private sphere suffer from self-induced internal surveillance.³⁹ Panopticism is the quintessential form of hierarchal observation in which an inmate's subjection to the guard's gaze leads them to self-police. Building on the theory developed by Judith Butler, the body can become a substitute for the psyche as the site of transformation of the self. Through the construction of a gendered disciplinary matrix, it becomes clear how the patriarchal panopticon invalidates and dismisses women's anger. Louisa's world does not acknowledge or validate women's experiences beyond the surveillance of bodily performance. Because Louisa does not have the opportunity to express her anger in a way that is constructive and empowering within a patriarchal society, she leaves the home to create a space in which she can effectively channel her emotions.

There are gendered differences to power subjection, as confronted by the masculine gaze motif, that reflects the institutional dimensions of recognizing privilege. Understanding this hierarchal observation pushes us to recognize that men and women are socially distinct groups. The male gaze, like panopticism, is one that can't be reciprocated. Kurks discusses a shame of self that develops from this gaze as

³⁹ Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism" from 'Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.'" *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1-12.

inmates come to surveil and judge themselves. These self-discipline and surveillance practices produced by the panoptic gaze are learned by young women as they become socially equipped.⁴⁰ Women know they are condemned by their sex, and shame remains the primary structure of the female experience. The modern-day backlash against women's greater autonomy invokes increasingly direct coercion through the state.

Jackson never explicitly specifies why Louisa chose to leave her old life with her parents, the matter is left up for the reader's interpretation, but she returns when she claims to have gained a sense of freedom and independence. Despite having heard her mother's pleas for her return on the radio for three years, Louisa appears to feel no remorse for having left her parents. She admits that "each time [she] heard it [she] was frightened again, because between one year and the next [she] would forget what [her] mother's voice sounded like." ("Louisa, Please Come Home" 46) Louisa's trauma-induced response to the sound of her mother's voice is a reminder of the life she left, and what she later discovers to have lost. Louisa's fears lie within the Gothic tension between returning and forgetting. This fear is produced by the potential danger of losing the comfort of the home she thought she had, and is directed towards the reader as we are left feeling unsettled by the story's lack of resolve.

While it has not been that long since she ran away, that life seems so distant as she immerses herself in her new life. By removing herself from one version of the domestic sphere and forgetting her mother's sound, she gives herself agency to be her own maternal figure. Her choice to run away from her family was a calculated one, and

⁴⁰ Kruks, Sonia. "2: Panopticism and Shame: Foucault, Beauvoir, and Feminism." *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2001, pp. 52–75.

she acknowledges that she “always knew that I was going to run away sooner or later, and I had made plans ahead of time, for whenever I decided to go.” (“Louisa, Please Come Home” 46) This certainty makes clear that Louisa is disturbed by the predictability and restrictive nature of suburban life. Her willingness to relocate reflects her desire for freedom, which is why she hung onto her return ticket back home after running away. She says: “I did keep the return-trip ticket quite a while, as a matter of fact. I used to carry it in my wallet as a kind of lucky charm.” (“Louisa, Please Come Home,” 48) The decision to hold on to the return ticket when running away implies that she had plans to return back one day, and it acts as a reminder of the life that she left. Louisa keeps the ticket as a reassurance that she can go back to the life that she had, and also to motivate her on her journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Her decision to leave was not abandonment, but a decision to prioritize her desires and individuality without the influence of her family. By choosing to subvert traditional gender roles and expectations, Louisa empowers her free spirit as she chooses adventure and personal desire over societal norms.

Louisa seems content with the new life she made for herself until she sees her old friend Paul who reminds her of her old life and pushes her to reconsider returning home. This decision puts Louisa in another position where she could challenge traditional gender roles and expectations that women are supposed to be passive and emotional rather than proactive and rational. However, in an effort to disguise herself to get away from her parents and define herself individually, Louisa unknowingly created a breeding ground for loneliness. In other words, Louisa ends up lonely even though gets exactly what she wants by removing herself from the home. Paul’s

entrance specifically provokes Louisa to reconsider coming home because he represents the stability and security that she yearns for but ultimately cannot attain as a woman alone in the patriarchal world. Paul's character provides a contrast to Louisa as his stable sense of normalcy directly opposes her impulsivity which pushes her to run away in the first place. At first, Louisa doesn't notice the intensity of her lost sense of belonging until she is blatantly disregarded as a stranger by her family. Jackson employs the gothic trope of a lost sense of time to signify the fear of developing an independent identity outside of the family and then being so removed from them that they do not recognize her. It isn't until they fail to recognize her that she realizes that her fears have been actualized; she thinks, "It wasn't going to be any good. I ought to have known it." ("Louisa, Please Come Home, 58) Jackson proves that feminine anger is debilitating as Louisa is left stunned at the end of the story and unsure how to continue the life she made for herself when she knows the permanence of her losses. Rather than focusing on the pride she should feel from successfully starting her own independent life, she is overridden with the shame of failing to meet societal expectations. Louisa loses all hope that she could go back to her old life when she is told to "go back home where you belong" and to "go back to the people who love you." ("Louisa, Please Come Home, 59) When her family rejects her, she realizes that she is not the same person that she used to be when she lived with them. If Louisa's own family insists that she is not who she says she is, then we can understand why she questions her identity too. In her effort to pursue a new identity and life, she mistakenly abandons the person that she thought she was - the most horrific realization of all.

Jackson is known for turning seemingly ordinary events into shocking tales by using family life to emphasize bizarre situations and the shock and terror of unpredictable life events. We can understand those feelings of shock and terror through the Uncanny effect - a blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality. Analyzing Louisa's anxiety about the home reveals a feminist story of self-agency in which her choice to leave frees her from the societal confines of gendered expectations. Louisa's feminist gothic journey empowers her to leave the home, and her denied entrance upon returning is a very uncanny and gothic ending to the story. Her family not recognizing her reflects that she is a newly independent woman capable of making decisions on her own behalf. Previously underestimated as a young woman, the experienced reality of the woman alone is terrifying but freeing in the possibility of positive experiences.

The Home as a Prison for the Modern American Woman

The role of the conventional home is significant in this story as the term suggests a place of belonging and safety.⁴¹ For Louisa, however, the home is a place of confinement and repression. Under a Gothic Feminist reading of "Louisa, Please Come Home," we can understand the setting of the home to function as a Gothic prison. As a result of this reading, many scholars regard the Gothic home to be representative of female suffering and subordination within the domestic sphere. Louisa explains: "I had to get away fast on the first thing that came along, so I just ran for the bus and left Paul standing there." ("Louisa, Please Come Home, 47) The sense of Louisa's urgency

⁴¹ Shotwell, Alexis. "No Proper Feeling for Her House': The Relational Formation of White Womanliness in Shirley Jackson's Fiction." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2013, pp. 119-141.

to escape her old life reflects the suppressive nature of the traditional family home. Furthermore, the Gothic functions as an appropriate mode for conveying the concerns of the modern, or “new”, American woman in a patriarchal society. Jackson's use of the modern Gothic functions means enabling a conventionally feminine heroine on a journey in which she discovers her true resilient nature. An essential feature of the Gothic is its reliance on duality. In “Louisa, Please Come Home” duality is a crucial element that contributes to the suspense that is typical of the Gothic. For example, Louisa’s childhood home is a symbol of comfort and family while also acting as a place of horror when she returns as an adult. By contrast, the new home life that she creates with Mrs. Peacock represents a new life that Louisa chooses for herself. Another point of duality in this short story is Louisa’s identity as the complicit girl her family knew her as and the new independent woman that she leaves to become. These two identities do not coexist but are confounded by Louisa’s biggest fear: having an identity that has changed too much and having no sense of identity at all. The modern female Gothic picks up on the traditional Gothic motif of miscategorization and confronts the dilemma of feminine existence as an "other" in a man's world. Through this reading, we can understand the female Gothic as a subversive genre in which the repetition of uncanny occurrences represents the terrors repeatedly encountered by women. As for Louisa, her journey is prompted by her desire to be something more than an “other” in a man’s world.

While its ending may not contain as many optimistic interpretations of the narrator’s final status as “The Tooth”, I still classify “Louisa, Please Come Home” as a story reflecting the female Gothic journey. Mid-twentieth-century writers like

Jackson developed the American female Gothic journey as a subgenre of the American Gothic mode that incorporates feminism and psychology with traditional Gothic. The new American female Gothic has emerged as a genre that can effectively reflect the feminist journey of navigating feminine pains in the landscape of the woman alone in a man's world. Jackson's focus on her characters' psychological conditions highlights the exclusion of feminine reality in her personal life. Narratives are important to analyze because they embody the ideology, philosophy, authorial position, intention, and purpose of the text. Therefore, extrapolating themes from recurring motifs allows us to uncover the narrative's purpose. Jackson's strategic narrative choices focus the reader's gaze on the central actions to create and encourage a profoundly haunting and chilling interpretation. Critics liken "Louisa, Please Come Home" to a variation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Wakefield" in which a man disappears from his life and returns to discover that life has gone on without him. The moral of Hawthorne's short story reflects that a man gone too long is lost and that such indecision leads to a decision of its own. We can apply Wakefield's resolution to Louisa's story by viewing her parents' failure to recognize her as a result of her having been gone too long, and that they had begun life without her. While Louisa didn't think that anything would have changed since leaving, she learns that she has outgrown the identity of who she was within the domestic sphere and that her parents are too fixated on who she used to be to see her for who she has become.

Empowering the Gothic Heroine

Jackson's new American female Gothic emerged as a genre that can effectively reflect the feminist journey of navigating pain in the landscape of the woman alone in a man's world. Jackson uses the traditional Gothic form to show us the landscape of America in the 1950s through a female counternarrative that presents the female perspective differently than recounted by history. It is evident that the subjects explored in Jackson's writing are intimately tied to her personal experiences, particularly her sensitivity toward feminine conflicts. The trope of the woman alone is central in both Jackson's fiction and the traditional Gothic mode, and she continues to explore how the woman alone can be empowered as a Gothic Heroine in her novel *The Haunting of Hill House*. Shirley Jackson illuminates the struggles of the singular women of the 1950s through conventions of the feminist gothic journey: by challenging gender stereotypes, exploring female psychology, and emphasizing female agency in her protagonists.

Chapter 2:*The Haunting of Hill House: The Uncanny Feminist Journeys of the Incessant Domestic Home***The Role of the Home In Jackson's Times**

Considering that many of her stories feature houses or mention the home, a deeper examination of the home and traditional familial structures is required to fully understand the environment Jackson writes about. One of her most famous stories that even recently got its own Netflix adaptation is *The Haunting of Hill House*, the story of a young woman's stay at an investigation of a haunted house. Eleanor joins a selected group - Luke, Theodora, and Dr. Montague, that functions as a disjointed, non-traditional family within the confines of this disturbing home that mimics and critiques the idealized structures of the American nuclear family that arose out of the fully-industrialized 20th century.

The nuclear family in Jackson's time of writing during the 1950s reflected social and economic changes that valued the patriarchy as the primary social structure, despite women's recent contributions during World War II. In the aftermath of the war, women were tacitly shoved back into the domestic sphere, with the expectation that they should adapt to a relatively isolated suburban lifestyle centered almost entirely upon the private home. The drive for domestic containment in American society was meant to encourage "social conformity, political consensus,

and stricter gender roles” (Gordon, 219). This new reality for women reinforced a dynamic in which the men would go to work while the women maintained the home, despite their wartime success in more active roles in the labor market. This version of the family was idealized with the ‘white picket fence,’ but it took a huge toll on women’s mental health and prompted a rise in the feminist movement. With men placed at the head of this family dynamic, women were left to clean up for and manage the house for the ‘success’ of their families outside of the home. The result was stereotypically bored women left unsatisfied with the role they were diminished to in the only space they were allowed to exist - the home.

As we consider the traditional home structure and who it is meant for in modern America, we can see how the notion of the nuclear family in American art and media became a container for fears about feminine autonomy and power. In this way, it is helpful to analyze *The Haunting of Hill House* as a metaphor for feminine trauma within the domestic household. By viewing Eleanor, Theodora, Luke, and Dr. Montague as an unconventional nuclear family we can understand its dissolution as a direct opposition to the expected household structure of Jackson’s times. When Mrs. Montague and Arthur arrive at Hill House to try to go outside to observe the premises, Luke informs them that they “have a positive policy against going outside after dark” to which he is told he “ought to be ashamed...in front of the women” (HH, 134). This comment contributes to a gendered stereotype that men should be okay with putting themselves in danger while disregarding potential risk and their fears. Luke insists that “the women are just as much as afraid” as he is - suggesting the weaknesses of the imposed social order within the House’s spatial and spiritual influences (HH, 134).

As this example demonstrates, Jackson's work subverts the power structures of the patriarchy as she experiments with its detrimental costs to feminine well-being and gender equality.

Eleanor and the Nuclear Family

Having also expressed a desire for belonging within the traditional family structure in her own journals and family chronicles, Jackson channels this sentiment onto Eleanor in her narrative.⁴² When we consider Hill House as a place existing outside of human sociality, we can analyze it as a sort of purgatory. By viewing their time at Hill House as a type of limbo-state between life and death, the house becomes a utopian space where the characters can explore themselves while removed from the rules of society. Under this kind of reading, the supernatural elements haunting the characters illuminate the real-world anxieties and issues influencing Jackson beyond the page. Hill House's isolated location allows the characters to interact freely without the imposed social structures of outside society. By placing this novel within a non-normalized setting, Jackson is able to explore and express issues of white womanliness through conventions of the haunted house.⁴³ Furthermore, Hill House is an analogy for the horrifying prison that the home becomes for women who are not allowed beyond its confines.

With these two literary analyses in mind, Hill House is a place of entrapment that inspires powerlessness and invisibility in its tenants. Early in their stay, the

⁴² Bailey, Dale. "3: June Cleaver In The House Of Horrors: Shirley Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House." *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1999, pp. 25–45.

⁴³ Sederholm, Carl H. "Stephen King's Literary Dialogue with Shirley Jackson." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofert, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2021, pp. 59–71.

doctor notices that when he and Luke are outside and everybody else is “‘imprisoned inside, doesn’t it begin to seem’ - and his voice was very quiet - ‘doesn’t it begin to seem that the intention, is somehow, to separate us?’” (HH, 99) As the house separates them from the world, it also fabricates a distance between its inhabitants like the nuclear family’s home. The nature of the house is to impose the traditional familial structure which means the women are kept within and the men are pushed out into the world. Furthermore, the isolated nature of Hill House makes it a catalyst for self-discovery and expression that enables a fear of the self. In the introduction to the 2006 edition, Laura Miller states that “the gothic house can stand for any number of things, depending the interpretative inclination of the observer: sexuality, the female body, the family, the psyche” (HH, xiv). With this in mind, Hill House becomes a microcosm representing the shortcomings of modern society and the nuclear family. As its inhabitants explore themselves through its spaces, they have the choice to either abandon the cultural norms of the outer world or conform to the gendered stereotypes of the nuclear family. When the guests of Hill House choose to apply the societal rules and expectations from their lives to this new environment, they prevent the potential for self-exploration and expression as individuals. In other words, while all of the characters have space in Hill House to abandon their prescribed social roles, Eleanor is the only one who chooses to forgo her old identity and discover a new side of herself.

As previously mentioned, Jackson’s placement of the haunted house at the center of the novel creates an avenue for her to explore the complications of familial relations. While Eleanor is never completely alone in Hill House, she feels alone in her

pain. Early in her narrative, she explains that “without ever wanting to become reserved and shy, she had spent so long alone, with no one to love, that it was difficult for her to talk, even casually, to another person without self-consciousness and an awkward inability to find words” (HH,3). The House has the capacity to transform Eleanor by displacing her from the painful limitations of her old life and introducing her to a space where she can emotionally connect to her feelings. Eleanor is chosen to participate in Dr. Montague’s study of supernatural occurrences at Hill House because of her experience with a poltergeist as a child. Her past traumas and vulnerabilities make her susceptible to the house’s repressive forces as she begins to experience hallucinations and terrifying visions throughout her stay. After the loss of her father and the destruction of her old house, “Eleanor had been waiting for something like Hill House. Caring for her mother...Eleanor had held fast to the belief that someday something would happen.” (HH,4) Having spent so much of her life tending to her sickly mother, Eleanor is estranged from making decisions on her own behalf. Eleanor chooses to accept the invitation to Hill House because it presents the possibility of a happy and purposeful existence. While she was forcibly removed from her previous living situation, Eleanor’s decision to go to Hill House is an opportunity for her to escape her old life.

However, Eleanor later discovers something far more terrifying than the monotony of her old life – her own mind. She is shy, introverted, and very sensitive to the house’s manipulative and malevolent calls to her. In contemporary gothic, escape is a prevailing theme that raises the subject of despair. As another form of escape, Eleanor repeatedly daydreams a fantasy in which she is more comfortable than

experiencing her reality. For example, during the paranormal investigation when the Montagues are trying to figure out why the House has been trying to connect to Eleanor she thinks: “what I want in all this world is peace, a quiet spot to lie and think, a quiet spot up among the flowers where I can dream and tell myself sweet stories” (HH, 143). This kind of disassociation from her reality allows her to process the world in a more manageable way. When seeking comfort, she dreams of a more childlike version of peace. In her introduction, Miller notes that “Eleanor is drifting in and out of a dream state before she arrives at Hill House, endlessly taking apart and reassembling bits of fantasy and experience to fashion the imagined life she hopes to eventually live.” (HH, xvii) However, by escaping her reality she also abandons her sanity. With this being said, her thoughts are not a product of Hill House, she has deeply internalized anxieties that come to light as her vulnerabilities are provoked.

Uncanny Doubling as a Trope for Recurring Anxiety

Throughout their stay at Hill House, all of the tenants experience uncanny disturbances and encounter supernatural forces. One morning, Luke says: “I found myself *telling* myself what happened last night; the reverse of a bad dream, as a matter of fact, where you keep telling yourself it *didn't* really happen” (HH,101-102). While everybody seems to have strange experiences at Hill House, nobody internalizes their confused feelings to the extent that Eleanor questions herself. Dr. Montague affirms Luke’s fears when he explains that “we cannot say, ‘it was my imagination,’ because three other people were there too” (HH,103). It is interesting how when Luke expresses his worries that the others listen to and affirm his feelings, but they do not

extend the same treatment to Eleanor. In this way, she is unique in her experience of the house as nobody believes her when she expresses fear, nor do they affirm her calls of distress. In other words, Eleanor's fears and concerns are dismissed and invalidated until the group decides to reject her as a 'madwoman.' Eleanor is often accused of attention-seeking when expressing her fears which undermines her condition as she appears to deteriorate. When they find "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME" written on the walls, Theo is quick to suggest that "maybe you wrote it yourself." (HH,107-108) By suggesting that Eleanor had to have written on the walls, Theo blames her rather than recognizing her genuine fear. The repetition of the phrase 'help Eleanor come home' is an example of Jackson employing uncanny doubling - the message becomes clearer as the house repeatedly calls to Eleanor.

The gothic symbol of madness is continually raised in ghost stories to push our psychological perceptions of self and identity. Madness in Jackson's stories is often the result of her female protagonists choosing to deviate from the social norms of the 1950s. In this way, Jackson pushes on the assumptions and generalizations of what women are capable of doing beyond the domestic sphere. This feminist reading of Jackson's protagonists, particularly for Eleanor, reveals the freedom gained from embracing 'madness' and defying the traditional patriarchal order. With that being said, Eleanor's freedom in Hill House comes at the cost of her life. She refuses to go back to her old life because she does not want to forgo her newfound freedoms and lose the woman that Hill House pushed her to become. Part of what Eleanor learned in her feminist gothic journey is that she has to stay true to her "cup of stars" or what she wants most in life - to find and receive the love she lacked in her childhood. Early

in the story, Eleanor recounts a time when she saw a little girl beg her mother for her little cup with stars on it. This episode recurs throughout the story as Eleanor reminds herself of an important moral: “Insist on your cup of stars; once they have you trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again; don’t do it.” (HH, 15) This story is important to Eleanor’s character transformation because she learns that conformity destroys individuality. She learns that she has to insist on her desires in order to be seen and heard by others. However, what she insists on is Hill House, and that is what she ultimately gets...forever. Furthermore, because Hill House becomes her cup of stars, she appears crazy. Eleanor’s feeling that she has ‘lived a lifetime’ in this house does suggest to the reader that we cannot fully trust her narrative because part of her believes that she is already living in this alternative life. When she says “I can’t picture any world but Hill House,” we start to wonder whether she is a prisoner experiencing Stockholm syndrome or truly loves Hill House. (111)

Although I grant that Eleanor’s narrative appears untrustworthy especially as it becomes intertwined with the house personified, I still maintain that Eleanor is a heroine in the mode of the feminist gothic journey and acts as an example of the familial domestic comedy but also as a protagonist of Jackson’s third category of realistic horror.

In regards to the source of the haunting at Hill House, the fact that we never actually see what haunts the house makes the house a gothic monster. The act of haunting in and of itself is a characteristic of the traditional European Gothic as it threatens an environment’s capacity for peace. Furthermore, haunting functions as a

depiction of both rational and irrational anxieties.⁴⁴ The horror lies within the scope of the unknown - if we could understand what haunts us then it would not produce such intense anxiety.⁴⁵ In terms of *The Haunting of Hill House*, Laura Miller describes the prevailing mood as both a “psychic claustrophobia” as well as a physical feeling. (HH, xv) What makes this kind of haunting truly horrifying is that the characters seem unable to escape many repeated uncanny disturbances. Eleanor explains this sensation best when describing her fears and emotions to Theo: “the oddest part of this indescribable experience was that Theodora should be having it too.” (HH,95) Here Eleanor makes it known to the reader that she feels alone in her experience and that she needs validation from others to know that she is not ‘going crazy.’ When she does not receive that kind of compassion, her feelings of connectedness to Hill House become uncontrollable. One morning Eleanor describes this sensation:

Suddenly, without reason, laughter trembled inside Eleanor; she wanted to run to the head of the table and hug the doctor, she wanted to reel, chanting, across the stretches of the lawn, she wanted to sing and to shout and to fling her arms and move in great emphatic, possessing circles around the rooms of Hill House; I am here, I am here, she thought. (HH,104)

Describing this experience as “sudden” and “without reason,” Eleanor is compelled by the house to lose herself in her emotions. The repetition of “I am here” suggests that Eleanor finds comfort in being able to identify her emotions as she grounds herself in her environment. However, as the language suggests, her emotions are moving more quickly than she can process them. This instance alludes to and foreshadows the later ‘manic episodes’ that drive her to end her life. During her first

⁴⁴ Pascal, Richard. “Walking Alone Together: Family Monsters in the Haunting of Hill House.” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2014, pp. 464–485., <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2014.0072>.

⁴⁵ Antoszek, Patrycja. “Shirley Jackson and the Politics of Enclosure.” *Shirley Jackson*, Peter Lang Group, Oxford, 2021, pp. 75–85.

manic episode in the last chapter she “could not remember who they were (had they been guests of hers in the house of the stone lions?” and refers to her housemates as “so small, so ineffectual” as she runs up the tower and away from them. (HH, 172) As she comes to believe that she is the house, her memories get confused with its historic legacy, and she loses her individual sense of self. The shift in the language of the narrative makes clear her dissociation from herself and integration with the house as her true identity. As a whole, *The Haunting of Hill House* is concerned with Eleanor’s continuously shifting identity as she attempts to find ways to express herself and be seen by others.

Part of what makes the uncanny effect feel so familiar yet uncomfortable in Eleanor’s journey is her sense that she has lived in Hill House before. Unexplainable to anyone who tries to understand, Eleanor is alone in this strange yet comforting sensation that Hill House provides. Before ever stepping foot inside she thinks, “time is beginning this morning in June, she assured herself, but it is a time that is strangely new and of itself; in these few seconds I have lived a lifetime in a house with two lions in front.” (HH,12) Here, uncanniness lies within the feeling that she is returning home to a place she has never been. Eleanor’s inability to understand this sensation and the possibility of an existing relationship with Hill House creates an underlying anxiety that prevents her from being able to emotionally ground herself. This creeping sensation constantly looms over her head as she continues to be confused by the illusion of familiarity. She tells herself, “I’m sure I’ve been here before, in a book of fairy tales, perhaps” in an effort to convince herself she is experiencing *deja vu*. (HH,37) But as we come to learn, this uncanniness is grounded in Gothic aesthetics

that Jackson uses to insight the same level of terror that Eleanor experiences onto the reader. Jackson's ability to bring the uncanny experience of the feminist Gothic journey to her readers is made possible by the compelling qualities of the Gothic.

Eleanor is the Haunting of Hill House Through Her Subversion of Gender

Expectations

Jackson's strength in conveying a feminist gothic journey lies within her ability to manipulate the audience's emotions and comfort levels through the duality of fear and safety. As she drives up to Hill House for the first time she considers going back when she thinks, "I'm being given a last chance. I could turn my car around right here and now in front of these gates and go away from here, and no one would blame me." (HH, 21) In this moment of foreshadowing Eleanor's decision to stay at Hill House forever, her self-questioning places an eerie feeling on the reader as we watch her go through with her visit to Hill House despite her intuition telling her to drive away. When she decides to proceed she is met with another warning sign as the gatekeeper tells her that she "won't like it" and will "be sorry I ever opened that gate." (HH,21) These warnings should be clear indicators that Eleanor should not go to Hill House, but Jackson's implementation of dramatic irony at this moment illustrates the critical weary sensation that the readers will soon become increasingly acquainted with. We come to know exactly how Eleanor feels as the narrative follows her anxious thoughts as she thinks, "What am I going to do? What *am* I going to do?" (HH, 132) During these moments of self-questioning Eleanor's narrative voice carries intensely anxious

emotions that are transferred onto the reader as we share her confusion and frustration.

Personality disintegration is another recurring Gothic trope that Jackson routinely employs. A story that is famous for its use of personality disintegration as a means to explore femininity through the gothic is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." (1892)⁴⁶ Jackson expands on Gilman's incorporation of feminism and the gothic in *The Haunting of Hill House* by empowering her heroine to rebel against the confining expectations of her regular life. When she reveals her role in her mother's death, Theo shows little compassion in her response when she states that "if it hadn't happened you would have never come to Hill House." (HH,157) In showing the ways that the other members of the faux-nuclear family dismiss and neglect Eleanor's emotions, Jackson demonstrates how women bound to the house face neglect and humiliation. As a woman bound to the house herself, Jackson lived by the social expectations set for women and revealed her true feelings through her literature. Just as Eleanor struggles to aspire beyond the world and life she knows, Jackson also struggled to balance her outward identity with her personal goals for herself as a writer. These aspects of Jackson's biography seep their way into the text as Eleanor navigates her way through her feminist gothic journey. For example, at the end of the story when everybody is trying to make Eleanor leave Hill House before her final manic episode, all she can say is "'Walled up alive.' Eleanor began to laugh again at their stone faces. 'Walled up alive,' she said, 'I want to stay here.'" (HH,177) This moment requires further analysis because the audience can understand both sides of

⁴⁶ Delamotte, Eugenia C. "Male and Female Mysteries in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Legacy*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1988, pp. 3-14.

the argument - by finding humor in their disbelief, Eleanor appears crazy because she cannot see why the others disagree with her and fail to understand her. Laura Miller explains that Eleanor undergoes “a negotiation with the absolute reality of her own isolation, and the slow process of dissolving into the fabric of Hill House.” (HH,xxii) On the other hand, her confidence in her decision reflects the strength she has grown to make a decision on her own even if it defies societal expectations. So, while Hill House does change Eleanor’s sense of perception, it also helps her clarify her individual desires.

Reading Eleanor’s Continually Shifting Narrative

Textual elements such as motifs guide our thinking about the theme as it relates to allegorical narratives. Narratives are important to analyze because they embody the ideology, philosophy, authorial position, intention, and purpose of the text. Therefore, extrapolating themes from recurring motifs allows us to uncover the narrative's purpose. A phrase that recurs throughout the novel and encourages Eleanor to search for her ‘cup of stars’ is ‘journeys end in lovers meeting.’ The phrase originates from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, "Journeys end in lovers meeting" followed by "in delay there lies no plenty." (Pascal, 477) Pascal interprets this phrase to suggest that Eleanor has set out to find herself the love she did not receive as a child. Eleanor craves any form of love, even parental. So, in this sense, the "journey's end" may as well be the meeting of parent and child, Eleanor, and the maternal forces of Hill House. Under this reading, Eleanor is the child of the house, and of the nuclear family. Without the presence of parental guidance, Eleanor does not have the tools or

strength to save herself from herself. Very gothic in its effect, this phrase is repeated to underscore one of the novel's central questions: who *are* the lovers meeting? Eleanor discovers the answer during her final manic episode as she starts the car right before she ends her life: "so now I am going. Journeys end in lovers meeting. But I *won't* go, she thought, and laughed aloud to herself; Hill House is not as easy as *they* are; just by telling me to go away they can't make me leave, not if Hill House wants me to stay." (HH,181) Eleanor's decision to stay at Hill House is the result of it being the only true home she has ever really known. This is something that the other summer tenants of Hill House cannot understand.

Before arriving at Hill House Eleanor was already insecure, but she grows further unstable in her relationships throughout her stay. Early on we learn that Eleanor feels insecure in interactions with authority because she views herself as inferior. When speaking with the man who tends the gate at Hill House she thinks, "what superiority have I...she was so afraid of being ineffectual." (HH,20) Eleanor's fears and insecurities regarding authority reveal her willingness to relinquish her autonomy in the face of pressure. She later tells Theo "it's *embarrassing*. To think about being afraid" in a moment of vulnerability that reveals how her insecurities prompt feelings of shame. For this reason, she begins to lose her sense of self as she describes her fears throughout her stay at Hill House. We see the house infiltrate her mind and her thoughts scatter as she continues to ask herself, "what did I *say*?" (HH,118) One instance that precedes her manic episodes is particularly interesting to analyze within this context - when she thinks she is holding Theo's hand in the middle of the night. Afraid of the darkness, Eleanor grabs Theo's hand to try and

comfort herself. This fear of the dark can be explained by Freud's Uncanny in that the "darkness itself is an image of this experience that exceeds perception and refers to nothing." (Schlipphacke, 169) At this moment she tells herself,

I am scared, but more than that, I am a person, I am human, I am a walking reasoning humorous human being and I will take a lot from this lunatic filthy house but I will not go along with hurting a child, no I will not; I will by God get my mouth open right now and I will yell I will I will yell 'STOP IT,' she shouted, and the lights were on the way they had left them and Theodora was sitting up in bed, startled and disheveled... [Eleanor says,] 'whose hand was I holding?' (HH,120)

Jackson crafts the narrative here in a way that makes us believe that what she is experiencing is real, but then we learn at the end that it was just a manic fever dream. The quickness of Eleanor's narrative reflects her racing thoughts as she attempts to justify her fears. Nobody ever said anything about hurting a child, but Eleanor's mind goes to those extremes because her conscious is upset with the unmet needs of her inner child. Eleanor feels like the hurt child as she is ridden with guilt for not having saved her mother. In other words, what Eleanor is really hearing is her inner child externalized.

As previously mentioned, Eleanor's strained relationship with her mother guides her journey to and throughout her time at Hill House. Furthermore, Eleanor's goal (while she does not initially realize it) is to find the love she did not receive as a child. Jackson begins the story with Eleanor alone on her way to Hill House in which she describes "the journey itself was her positive action, her destination vague, unimagined, perhaps nonexistent...she might take it into her head to stop just anywhere and never leave again." (HH,11) This passage foreshadows her eventual decision to stay at Hill House as well as accurately captures Eleanor's journey to come

- she does not know where she is going at first, but she made an active choice to seek out 'positive' change in her life by going to Hill House. Scholar Claire Kahane distinguishes the House as a functioning image of Eleanor's mother in which the supernatural occurrences within serve as a recognition of her past. Under this reading, Eleanor is the house's child. When approaching the nursery door during the Montague's investigation, Eleanor hears a "little babbling murmur which [she] remembered; Am I doing it? she wondered quickly, is that me? And heard the tiny laughter beyond the door, mocking her." (HH,149) The empty nursery with a stereotypical cold spot in front of it represents the house's apparent loss and need of a child, and the voices Eleanor hears are the subconscious fears of her inner child as she looks for her guiding maternal figure. Theo describes the nursery as a locus of "pure love" that foreshadows Eleanor's eventual identification with Hill House and her perceived madness that comes with that fusion. Through the house's adoption of Eleanor as its own, the narrative language begins to shift in a way that combines the intrusive nature of the house's ability to infiltrate her mind with her introspective thoughts. In this way, Eleanor and Hill House are destined for each other - they are the lovers meeting at the end of a journey.

How the characters define fear informs us of what they perceive as threats to their well-being. Dr. Montague describes it as "the relinquishment of logic, the *willing* relinquishing of reasonable patterns. We yield to it or we fight it, but we cannot meet it halfway...I think we are only afraid of ourselves" (HH,117). This definition has an interesting connotation for Eleanor's fears because it suggests that she chooses to forgo her sanity when she submits to her fears. I contend that this interpretation of

fear is limiting in that it does not allow for the trauma-based fears from which Eleanor suffers. For this reason, I believe that it would be more appropriate to understand fear as an inability to rationally understand ourselves and radically accept how we feel.

Under this definition, we can also understand why Eleanor seeks validation of her emotions - to avoid the shameful feeling of being alone in her emotions. She comes into Hill House so self-conscious that her anxiety and self-doubt lead her to find comfort in the house's adoption of her. Eleanor wants to stay at Hill House because it is the only true home - a place that wants her and accepts her as she is- that she has ever known. While this desire for belonging is what gives Eleanor comfort and gives her purpose at Hill House, her desperation leads to a level of paranoia that appears as madness to the other tenants. This potential for madness is also visible to the reader if they choose to read Eleanor's transformation in that way. Of several instances where the question of Eleanor's sanity is left to the reader, there is one instance where Eleanor's narrative is clearly intertwined with that of the house:

Eleanor, rocking to the pounding, which seemed inside her head as much as in the hall, holding tight to Theodora said, 'They know where we are'... the knocking, Eleanor told herself, pressing her hands to her eyes and swaying with the noise, will go on down the hall, it will go on and on to the end of the hall and turn and come back again, it will just go on and on the way it did before and then it will stop and we will look at each other and laugh and try to remember how cold we were, and the little swimming curls of fear on our backs; after a while it will stop. (HH,147-148)

Here we see Eleanor's identity shift as she finds a sense of belonging with the house as it incites chaos in its guests. One can read this episode as Eleanor losing her sense of self and control of her thoughts, but we also get the impression that this is a moment of clarity for Eleanor as she is the only person who seems aware of what is happening.

The fusion of her identity with the house is a cause of horror for the others in the house as they begin to feel more disconnected from Eleanor. Their increasingly estranged relation to and understanding of Eleanor makes her shifting identity appear as though she is becoming the gothic madwoman trope.

Additionally, here Jackson expands on the uncanny duality of the gothic as paradoxical themes of freedom and confinement are raised. By pointing out the house's inescapability as a point of horror, Jackson highlights dissatisfaction within familial structures to illuminate Eleanor's newfound sense of purpose that she discovers for herself at Hill House. During her final manic episode, Eleanor looks for the house's creator, Hugh Crain, so she can ask "will you come and dance with me?" and admits that she "felt her hands taken as she danced." (HH, 171) Eleanor's carefree attitude here indicates her liberation from the confines of the patriarchy as she gives in to the freedom of expressing herself the way she chooses. In this episode, she feels the most connected to the house and the gothic mother than ever before. Her character development or un-development is most evident at this time as she states, "I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come inside. I am home, she thought, and stopped in wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought." (HH, 171) While this moment can be read as her final descent into madness, it is also when she feels the greatest clarity in her desire to stay at Hill House. The duality of Eleanor's interconnectedness with the house as condemning as well as liberating highlight Jackson's implementation of the Gothic as both readings can be read as true despite holding opposite meanings.

In the same way that it becomes difficult to distinguish whether the story's events are attributable to Eleanor's imagination or real, gothic duality also challenges our assessment and interpretation of Hill House. As Eleanor becomes increasingly inseparable from the house, the dichotomy between themes of domesticity and monstrosity is also raised.⁴⁷ Such can be analyzed through the described imagery of the house and its rooms. The emotions that follow unsettling experiences are translated architecturally through the house's physical damages that add dimension to its history.⁴⁸ The description of Hill House and its surroundings are very reminiscent of the European Gothic:

the gate was tall and ominous and heavy, set strongly into a stone wall which went off through the trees. Even from the car she could see the padlock and the chain that was twisted around and through the bars. Beyond the gate she could see only the road continued, turned, shadowed on either side by the still, dark trees. (HH,19)

The mention of intricate detailing and decorative castellation in the architecture reflects a dark and complicated history beyond what we are told in the novel. We get this sense from the outside of the house that it has been neglected and locked away from the outside world - like Pandora's Box, hidden for the protection of others but is later uncovered and its dangers are explored. The house's isolation from mainstream society creates an eerie feeling that help is inaccessible in the event of an emergency. Jackson expands on this stereotypical Gothic description with "Gothic spires and gargoyles; nothing was ever left undecorated. Perhaps Hill House has a tower, or a secret chamber, or even a passageway going off into the hills" (HH,23). We can

⁴⁷ Hennelly, Mark M. "Framing the Gothic: From Pillar to Post-Structuralism." *College Literature*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2001, pp. 68–87.

⁴⁸ Vidler, Anthony. "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomoely Houses of the Romantic Sublime." *Assemblage*, no. 3, 1987, p. 6., <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171062>.

understand the tower as a symbol of permanence and long-lasting legacy. These details hail from the European Gothic as the grotesque illuminates the unlimited possibilities of what the inside the house could contain. Scholar John G. Parks theorizes that Hill House functions like a nesting doll as Eleanor and the audience's anxiety raise we get closer to the heart of the house - the nursery. The interior architecture features concentric circles that are maze-like in their effect. This feature reflects Eleanor's eventual trapping within the house as she gets lost in its maze. When describing the nursery Eleanor comments that it was "considerably colder" and "deliberate, as though something wanted to give me an unpleasant shock." (HH, 87-88) This language within a Gothic context implies that coldness is equal to vengeance. By viewing the coldness of the nursery as a warning sign of evil, we can understand the reading of the house adopting Eleanor to fulfill its desire of having children. Just as the house needs Eleanor to fill the role of the neglected missing child, Eleanor needs Hill House to address and soothe the pain of her inner child.

At this point a critical question of interpretation is posed to the reader: does the house take Eleanor hostage or does she have the agency to choose to stay? Viewing Hill House as a representation of the Gothic mother suggests the paradoxical duality of upholding symbolic order yet destruction. The mother figure acts as a Gothic symbol in Jackson's work as it embraces the dichotomy of birth and death.⁴⁹ As another point of uncanny doubling, the mother has the capacity to both protect and reject, comfort and expose, and create and destroy its child. The house fills the role in Eleanor's life of someone she lost and feels guilty about - the death of her own

⁴⁹ Bobiy, Mikaela. "Home Is Where the Heart Is(N't): The House as Mother in Jackson's House Trilogy." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofert, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2021, pp. 185-196.

mother. A recurring theme in Jackson's work is the failure of answering a mother's call, and given Eleanor's history with her mother we can view Hill House functioning as a matriarch. She feels she could have saved her mother when she says, "It was my fault that my mother died" and that "I ought to have brought her the medicine; I always did before. But this time she called me and I never woke up...It was going to happen sooner or later, in any case, But of course no matter when it happened it was going to be my fault." (HH,156) Eleanor's blaming of herself for her mother's death is Jackson's illustration of how female guilt can drive one to madness.⁵⁰ The connection between Eleanor, the mother figure, and Hill House reveals why Eleanor submits to the house's apparent calls to her - because she believes in the possibility to redeem herself for her role in her mother's death. The house appears to consume Eleanor as its own after the Montague's seance when:

Somewhere there was a great, shaking crash as some huge thing came headlong; it must be the tower, Eleanor thought, and I supposed it would stand or years; we are lost, lost; the house is destroying itself. She heard the laughter overall, coming thin and lunatic, rising in its little crazy tune, and thought, NO; it is over for me. It is too much, she thought, I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all; whatever it wants of me it can have. (150)

Under the reading that she becomes a madwoman, we can understand this passage as the house mirroring Eleanor's emotions and reactions through the physical destruction of the house. If we believe that Eleanor does not initially enter the house 'mad,' then we can interpret this dissenting spiral as her internal struggle to distinguish her desires from the social expectations that limit her autonomy. This dichotomy is evident in the passage - the tower crashing represents Eleanor's

⁵⁰ Vinci, Tony M. "Shirley Jackson's Posthumanist Ghosts: Revisiting Spectrality and Trauma in the Haunting of Hill House." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2019, pp. 53-75., <https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2019.0020>.

self-destruction and eventual identification with the house. Regardless of whether we interpret Eleanor's narrative shift as the result of hallucination or expression of extreme paranoia, Hill House functions as a mirror and a physical manifestation of her subconscious fears.⁵¹

As Eleanor grows to find comfort at Hill House, she convinces herself that she has no place in the outside world. In addition to her insecurities about herself, there are moments when she is accused of putting herself at the center of everyone's attention and is then ignored by the group. This child-like tendency comes from her need for validation that she didn't receive as a child. Furthermore, this makes Eleanor appear increasingly needy throughout the story – like a reverse bildungsroman, structurally speaking. During her first manic episode when she runs up the tower, Theo accuses Eleanor of making herself the center of attention as she compels the to chase her throughout the house. But what if these attention-seeking moments are a cry for help? When Theo says “I suppose you had to do it Nell” she is effectively underestimating the level of help Eleanor expresses that she needs by ‘acting out.’ (HH, 175) This reading yields a negative connotation of Eleanor's mental health and suggests the weakness of the nuclear family bond. In her second and final manic episode in the car she gets carried away with the thrill of being chased; “with what she perceived as quick cleverness she pressed her foot down hard on the accelerator; they can't run fast enough to catch me this time, she thought, but by now they must be beginning to realize; I wonder who notices first?” (HH, 181) At this moment we get a vivid sense of Eleanor's thoughts during her last moments and what drives her to

⁵¹ Ashton, Hilarie. “‘I’ll Come Back and Break Your Spell’: Narrative Freedom and Genre in the Haunting of Hill House.” *Style*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2018, pp. 268–286., <https://doi.org/10.1353/sty.2018.0034>.

drive off to her death. We see Eleanor acting faster than she can think as the passion and excitement of what she is about to do gets ahead of her before she can save herself from herself. Jackson infuses this moment with emotion to convey the rashness of Eleanor's decision to end her life here at Hill House in this way.

Jackson's deepest comments about women's fate in the mid-twentieth century rest in the uncanny duality of Hill House and Eleanor's struggles. At the end of the novel, the other members of the household try to send Eleanor away from Hill House as a way to contain her and prevent her from exploring the side of herself that she is estranged to: "She must be allowed to forget everything about this house as soon as she can; we cannot prolong the association. Once away from here, she will be herself again; can you find your way home?" [the doctor] asked Eleanor, and Eleanor laughed." (HH, 177) The other members of the house see forcing Eleanor out of Hill House as a necessity to save her rather than encouraging her to develop into the new person that she has expressed she wants to become. The faux nuclear family wants to contain Eleanor within a version of herself that they can understand and feel comfortable with. She cannot stay with the nuclear family because her mentality poses a risk to the nuclear family structure. She tries to explain to the others that she "wasn't afraid" when she was climbing the tower and that she is "fine now. I was happy...happy." (HH,178-179) Overtaken with emotion, Eleanor's insistence on staying at Hill House leaves the others convinced of her mania as they pity her seemingly frantic condition. They hope by sending her back to her previous environment she will 'realize' that she cannot have the new life that she wants for herself and revert into the person she was before entering Hill House. However, that

also suggests that Eleanor is not allowed to want anything outside of what society tells her she should want. The central choice Jackson poses to her readers is whether Eleanor should conform to the standards and expectations of the nuclear family and risk the destruction of her individuality or follow her personal desires to find her sense of purpose. Eleanor struggles to make a decision and even questions herself in her final moments after choosing to stay at Hill House indefinitely. In the Gothic tradition, death represents an escape or a state of grace and is not seen as a sacrifice.⁵² However, the cost is that the escape requires complete loss of everything – Eleanor cannot give up one anxiety or one fear about her life without giving up the rest of everything that she is. While “turning the wheel to send the car directly at the great tree at the curve of the driveway, [she thinks] I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really really really doing it by myself.” (HH,181-182) Here Eleanor has pride in the agency she has in her decision to stay and does not attribute that choice to Hill House’s control over her. Additionally, she finally disassociates from the group and demonstrates strong opposition to the nuclear family. Despite being unaccepted by others in the end, her ultimate decision to drive into the tree represents her newfound self-acceptance and disinterest in others’ opinions of her. Jackson uses Hill House to expose issues of conformity and domesticity within the American social sphere as she highlights the misguidedness of humanity.

⁵² Groom, Nick. “Chapter 2: The Ascent to Heaven.” *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 12–23.

Hill House Never Ends

Throughout the duration of her time alive at Hill House, Eleanor tries to befriend Theo because she embodies everything Eleanor wishes she could be: a strong independent woman. Eleanor is a ‘failed woman’ by the standards of her time - she has no husband, no kids, and no place to call home - and her frustrated reactions to Theo’s strong sense of self reflect how afraid Eleanor is of embracing the struggle to be heard as a woman.⁵³ Eleanor has learned to put herself down and allow others to make decisions for her up until she goes to Hill House. As the other housemates provoke her weak perception of self, Eleanor turns to Hill House for comfort and comes face to face with the only place that accepts her for how she is.

The repeating history of Hill House is another point of uncanny doubling that Jackson employs to highlight the house’s haunting nature and the way it divides families. We learn early on that the house was originally built for a family with two young girls. Eleanor and Theo act as doubles of those girls in their faux-nuclear family.⁵⁴ The more we learn about Hill House’s history, the more we realize that history is repeating itself. Hill House’s unknown history is a classic gothic trope because the unknown create obscurity. The mystification of the house reflects the possibility of unquantifiable consequences in the house’s history and secrets - something that is constantly looming in Eleanor’s mind. Even the opening phrase of the novel is repeated at the end: “Hill House itself, not sane, stood against its hills, holding darkness within...silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill

⁵³ Stone Gordon, Rebecca. “Reading Theodora.” *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 219–232.

⁵⁴ Hattenhauer, Darryl. “Chapter 9: The Haunting of Hill House.” *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2003, pp. 155–173.

House, and whatever walked there, walked alone.” (HH,1 & 182) This passage is particularly eerie reading it at the end of the novel after we learn that Eleanor gets the exact fate that she most feared and desired. She ends up exactly where she is meant to be, caught within Hill House as she becomes it. As the novel loops back on itself, Jackson reminds us of the seemingly endless crisis of the suburban housewife caught in the rituals of the home. She makes a feminist statement about the lack of movement for the feminine housewife as Eleanor damns herself to the house at the end of the novel. Jackson’s damnation of Eleanor reflects the lack of agency afforded to the ‘new American woman’ and the draining psychosis that accompanies personality disintegration and loss of individuality. A feminist reading of *The Haunting of Hill House* does not bring peace to Eleanor’s story, but instead creates and defines the home as a site of horror. With this in mind, it is evident how the novel’s recursiveness profoundly captures the maddening non-journey of the housewife caught within the domestic space.

Conclusion

The Gothic is considered a potent mode of critique because of its ability to delve into the subconscious and reveal hidden truths about society and human nature. The feminist Gothic is important for contemporary literature because it continues to evolve and adapt to new cultural and political contexts. As social norms and power structures change, feminist writers are finding new ways to use the Gothic to critique and challenge those norms. While the Gothic genre has historically provided a space for exploring fears and anxieties about gender roles, sexuality, and the body, feminist writers have used the Gothic to subvert patriarchal norms and offer new perspectives on the challenges women face. The feminist Gothic journey is particularly important because it dramatizes how women might reclaim agency and autonomy over their bodies and identities, while accentuating the anxieties and agonies of these kinds of transformations.

The Gothic mode is essential to Jackson's storytelling as she uses traditional tropes to explore the struggles of women in a patriarchal society. She was known for her wry wit and inclusive social commentary, which often provided a counterpoint to the horror and darkness of her stories. Her work draws on her own personal experiences and anxieties, particularly related to her relationship with her mother and struggles with social acceptance. She conveys these experiences through female protagonists who challenge the norms of traditional gender roles to offer a unique

perspective on the neglected lives of housewives. Through her bio-fictitious domestic horror comedies, “Life Among the Savages” and “Raising Demons,” she highlights the pressures and anxieties of the housewife. While these stories have received less attention despite their relevance to American family life, her use of humor makes horrific moments ironically funny. Recent scholarship has recognized Jackson’s ability to skillfully blend horror and humor, with “The Tooth” and “Louisa, Please Come Home” being examples of her approach to exploring female identity and mental instability. Jackson’s work has been celebrated for its subversive qualities, particularly in its use of humor and irony to challenge established norms and expectations.

Shirley Jackson’s ‘new American woman’ of the female Gothic genre effectively reflects the feminist journey of navigating pain in a man’s world. She uses the traditional Gothic form to present a female perspective different from that of history and explores how a woman alone can be empowered as a Gothic Heroine. Through challenging gender stereotypes, exploring female psychology, and emphasizing female agency in her protagonists, Jackson illuminates the struggles of singular women in the 1950s using conventions of the feminist Gothic journey. She challenges the idealized American nuclear family structure of the 1950s, which places men in positions of power and women in domestic roles, in her writing, particularly in *The Haunting of Hill House*. This novel serves as a metaphor for feminine trauma within the domestic household and a subversion of the power structures of the patriarchy.

Jackson’s use of the female Gothic can be understood as a reaction against the dominant male-centered narratives of the American Gothic genre, which often depict male protagonists grappling with the dark and supernatural forces that threaten their

sense of self and stability. By centering her stories on female characters, Jackson subverts these traditional narratives and highlights the experiences of women who are often relegated to the margins of society. In this way, Jackson's use of the female Gothic can be seen as an expansion of the American Gothic genre, providing a new perspective on the themes of horror, madness, and societal decay that are central to the genre. Her works offer a powerful critique of the patriarchal structures that underpin American society and provide a new lens through which to view the Gothic tradition as a whole.

Shirley Jackson's work has been adapted for film and television several times, with varying degrees of success. The 1963 film adaptation of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, known as *The Haunting*, is considered a classic of the horror genre. The film deviates from the novel's initial story as it focuses on a group of researchers spending the night in a haunted mansion as opposed to the nuclear family. The film is known for its innovative use of sound and cinematography to create a sense of dread and psychological terror. In 2018 Netflix adapted the novel into a television series that was also loosely based on Jackson's novel despite sharing the same title. The series intends to update the story for a modern audience and follows a family, the Crains, that moves into a haunted house and are haunted by their experiences there for the rest of their lives. While the series retains the basic premise of the novel, it diverges from the source material in significant ways. In addition to expanding the number of main characters and introducing new plotlines and subplots that were not present in the book, it also uses a nonlinear narrative structure to tell the story. The series was critically acclaimed for its strong character development and innovative storytelling.

Some critics also noted that the series was more of a character-driven drama than a horror series, as it focused heavily on the emotional trauma experienced by its characters. Overall, while not all the adaptations of Shirley Jackson's work have been successful, her stories continue to captivate audiences and inspire filmmakers to bring her unique brand of horror to the screen.

Jackson's legacy is significant and far-reaching as is widely regarded as a pioneer of the horror and suspense genres since her work often deals with the psychological impact of supernatural events. Jackson's work has been highly influential on subsequent generations of writers including Stephen King and Neil Gaiman. Additionally, Jackson's work has been lauded for its exploration of women's experiences, particularly the experience of being an outsider or outcast. Overall, Shirley Jackson's contributions to the American Gothic tradition lie in her ability to combine elements of horror, suspense, and social critique to create stories that are both unsettling and thought-provoking. Her work has had a lasting impact on the genre and continues to be celebrated and studied by scholars and fans alike. She has been the subject of numerous critical studies and biographies, and her work continues to be adapted for film, television, and stage. Shirley Jackson's work has been influential in shaping the modern horror genre, with many of her themes and motifs appearing in later horror stories and films. My thesis contends that much of this enduring power, exemplified in adaptations and acknowledged influence, stems from Jackson's feminist Gothic journeys.

Bibliography

Antoszek, Patrycja. "Haunting Feelings: Shirley Jackson and the Politics of Affect." *Women's Studies*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2020, pp. 850–867., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1814292>.

... "Shirley Jackson and the Politics of Enclosure." *Shirley Jackson*, Peter Lang Group, Oxford, 2021, pp. 75–85.

Ashton, Hilarie. "'I'll Come Back and Break Your Spell': Narrative Freedom and Genre in the Haunting of Hill House." *Style*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2018, pp. 268–286., <https://doi.org/10.1353/sty.2018.0034>.

Bailey, Dale. "3: June Cleaver In The House Of Horrors: Shirley Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House." *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1999, pp. 25–45.

Banks, Emily. "Erotic Envy and the Racial Other in 'Flower Garden.'" *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 199–208.

Beliveau, Ralph. "Shirley Jackson and American Folk Horror." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang Group, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2021, pp. 21–34.

Bloom, Clive, and David Punter. "Contemporary Shivers." *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 178–197.

Bloom, Clive, and Manuel Aguirre. "Narrative Structure, Liminality, Self-Similarity: the Case of Gothic Fiction." *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 226–247.

Bloom, Clive, and Sigmund Freud. "3: In the Dark." *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, p. 100.

Bloom, Clive. "Epilogue: Further Thoughts on the Gothic." *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 291–297.

Bobiy, Mikaela. "Home Is Where the Heart Is(N't): The House as Mother in Jackson's House Trilogy." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2021, pp. 185–196.

Bowers, Stephanie Patnychuk. "Magic, Madness, and 'The Judicious Administration of the Bizzare': The Forgotten Fiction of Shirley Jackson." *The Florida State University College of Arts and Sciences*, Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2002, pp. iii–15.

Cohen, Gustavo Vargas. "Shirley Jackson's Literary Horizons and Historical Reception." *Cadernos Do IL*, no. 45, 2013, pp. 191–208., <https://doi.org/10.22456/2236-6385.28054>.

Delamotte, Eugenia C. "Male and Female Mysteries in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Legacy*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1988, pp. 3–14.

Easton, Martha. "Feminism." *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 33, no. Medieval Art History Today, 2012, pp. 99–112.

Eunju Hwang. "'Writing Is the Way out': Shirley Jackson's Domestic Stories and We Have Always Lived in the Castle." *Feminist Studies in English Literature*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2009, pp. 103–129., <https://doi.org/10.15796/fsel.2009.17.2.004>.

Fahy, Thomas Richard. *The Philosophy of Horror*. University Press of Kentucky, 2012.

Foucault, Michel. "'Panopticism' from 'Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.'" *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1–12.

Franklin, Ruth. *Shirley Jackson a Rather Haunted Life*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.

Groom, Nick. "Chapter 10: The Gothic Dream." *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 100–121.

... "Chapter 2: The Ascent to Heaven." *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 12–23.

... "Chapter 7: The Sixties." *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 65–75.

... "Chapter 8: The Descent into Hell." *The Gothic a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 76–86.

Haas, Robert. "Shirley Jackson's 'The Tooth': Dentistry as Horror, the Imagination as a Shield." *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2015, pp. 132–156., <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2015.0003>.

Hague, Angela. "'A Faithful Anatomy of Our Times': Reassessing Shirley Jackson." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2005, pp. 73–96., <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2005.0025>.

Hattenhauer, Darryl. "Chapter 9: The Haunting of Hill House." *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2003, pp. 155–173.

... "Shirley Jackson and Proto-Postmodernism." *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*, State University of New York Press, Albany (N.Y.), 2003, pp. 1–13.

Heller, Zoe. "The Haunted Mind of Shirley Jackson." *The New Yorker*, 17 Oct. 2016.

Hennelly, Mark M. "Framing the Gothic: From Pillar to Post-Structuralism." *College Literature*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2001, pp. 68–87.

Hogle, Jerrold E., et al. "Chapter 7: Unsettling Feminism: The Savagery of Gothic." *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2020, pp. 129–146.

Ilott, Sarah. "23: Gothic and the Short Story: Revolutions in Form and Genre." *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*, edited by David Punter, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2019, pp. 332–345.

Jackson, Shirley, and Laura Miller. *The Haunting of Hill House*. Penguin Books, 2018.

Jackson, Shirley. *Life among the Savages*. Penguin Books, 2015.

... *Louisa, Please Come Home*. Ms. O'Mara - Language Arts - HMS, https://msomaralanguagearts.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/7/6/38769037/louisa_please_come_home.pdf.

... *Raising Demons*. Penguin Books, 2015.

... "The Tooth." *The Hudson Review*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1949, p. 503.,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3847813>.

Kahane, Claire. "15: The Gothic Mirror." *The (M)Other Tongue*, Cornell University Press, pp. 334–351.

Kasper, Daniel. "'What a Complete and Separate Thing I Am': Introduction to Rethinking Shirley Jackson." *Women's Studies*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2020, pp. 803–808.,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1814291>.

Kay Hansen, Michelle. "'Move Your Feet, Dear. I'm Conga-Ing': Drawing Circles around Domesticity in Shirley Jackson's Cartoons." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2021, pp. 111–127.

King, Stephen. *Danse Macabre*. Gallery, 2010.

Kruks, Sonia. "2: Panopticism and Shame: Foucault, Beauvoir, and Feminism." *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2001, pp. 52–75.

Lloyd, Robert. "What's Haunting Shirley Jackson? the Spectral Condition of Life Writing." *Women's Studies*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2020, pp. 809–834.,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1822840>.

Mambrol, Narsullah. "Analysis of Shirley Jackson's Stories." *Literary Theory and Criticism*, 24 Apr. 2020.

Million, Rebecca. "Living an Aporia: Notes on Shirley Jackson's Home Books." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 159–170.

Murphy, Bernice M. *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*. McFarland, 2005.

Murphy, Patricia. *New Woman Gothic: Reconfigurations of Distress*. University of Missouri Press, 2016.

Nagel, James, and Lawrence Graver. "The American Short Story Cycle." *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story*, edited by Blanche H. Gelfant, Columbia University Press, pp. 9–14.

- Parks, John G. "Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson's Use of the Gothic." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1984, p. 15., <https://doi.org/10.2307/441187>.
- Pascal, Richard. "Walking Alone Together: Family Monsters in the Haunting of Hill House." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2014, pp. 464–485., <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2014.0072>.
- Poole, W. Scott. "6: Haunted Houses." *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX, 2018, pp. 177–203.
- Punter, David. "22: Gothic and Recent Fiction: Fears of the Past and of the Future." *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2019, pp. 321–331.
- Schlipphacke. "The Place and Time of the Uncanny." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2015, p. 163., <https://doi.org/10.5325/pacicoasphil.50.2.0163>.
- Sederholm, Carl H. "Stephen King's Literary Dialogue with Shirley Jackson." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2021, pp. 59–71.
- Shotwell, Alexis. "'No Proper Feeling for Her House': The Relational Formation of White Womanliness in Shirley Jackson's Fiction." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2013, pp. 119–141.
- Skal, David J. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. Faber & Faber, 2001.
- Smith, Alan Lloyd. "Chapter Five: Major Themes in American Gothic." *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2004, pp. 65–127.
- Smith, Andrew, and Charles L. Crow. "3: American Gothic and Modernism." *History of the Gothic*, Univ. of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2009, pp. 122–144.
- Smith, Lloyd Allan. "Chapter Eight: Glossary." *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, Continuum, New York, NY, 2004, pp. 173–176.
- ... "Chapter Six: Key Questions." *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, Continuum, New York, NY, 2004, pp. 133–162.

Stone Gordon, Rebecca. "Reading Theodora." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 219–232.

Vidler, Anthony. "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime." *Assemblage*, no. 3, 1987, p. 6.,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3171062>.

Vinci, Tony M. "Shirley Jackson's Posthumanist Ghosts: Revisiting Spectrality and Trauma in the Haunting of Hill House." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2019, pp. 53–75.,
<https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2019.0020>.

Walker, Nancy. "Humor and Gender Roles: The 'Funny' Feminism of the Post-World War II Suburbs." *American Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1985, p. 98.,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2712765>.

Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. "Coda: The Decline of the American Female Gothic." *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 194–198.

Wilson, Michael T. "Eating in the Fiction of Shirley Jackson." *Shirley Jackson*, edited by Kristopher Woofter, Peter Lang, Oxford, UK, 2021, pp. 35–45.

Wooley, Christine A. *Haunting Realities: Naturalist Gothic and American Realism*, UNIV OF ALABAMA PRESS, S.l., 2022, pp. 1–13.

Świca, Alicja. "The Spectral Presence of (Un)Dead Mother in Shirley Jackson's Short Stories." *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio FF – Philologiae*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2020, p. 191.,
<https://doi.org/10.17951/ff.2020.38.2.191-203>.