

“Swallowed Whole by A Monster”
The Abject in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill
House*

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Introduction

The Female Gothic genre has been the target of many acclaimed critics of British and American Gothic fiction in the past few decades. The upsurge of interest in the Female Gothic has resulted in a diversity of views and approaches and has relocated this neglected genre in the center of academic discussion. Diana Wallace, Diane Hoeveler, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Anne Williams, and many other critics have started to reread the genre focusing on the female experience and women's literary contribution to Gothic literature. By re-reading romances of early British and American Gothic fiction, all these critics agree that the distinction made between the male and female gothic formula seems to be more complex than criticism previously believed. The concept of the Female Gothic was first introduced into literary criticism by Ellen Moers, who wrote in her analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) that the Female Gothic is "... to transform the standard Romantic matter of incest, infanticide, and patricide into a phantasmagoria of the nursery" (12). Female authors such as Anne Radcliffe and Mary Shelley popularized the Gothic genre in the early 19th century that helped women contextualize their anxiety of domesticity and sexuality that later snowballed into a "twisted" expression of finding female identity in the patriarchy, gender dysphoria, the topic of postpartum depression and many other issues that women still face to this day. The Female Gothic is a subgenre of Gothic fiction that needs to be discussed first to investigate the development and changes of the former one.

Elements of gothic literature have been found throughout various literary genres but the first author to combine these elements and create what we now consider gothic was Horace Walpole who wrote *The Castle of Otranto* and published it in 1764. The Gothic mode was soon adopted by American writers and despite some common features in British and American Gothic works of fiction the American Gothic considerably deviated from its origins. Elements of the British genre can be separated into three main key factors: a "damsel in distress" who represents purity and innocence amid evil and comes from an aristocratic bloodline, a hero who is courageous, challenges the aristocratic villain and saves the maiden from harm. The setting is either an antiquated castle or a church/monastery that shares a mysterious past and emphasizes the dark, twisted nature of the genre. The American Gothic, however, focuses more on the literal meaning of darkness because the night journeys and settings reflect the historical/cultural backgrounds where the stories take place such as forests, caves and cottages. The guilt of the nation of the genocide of the Native Americans and slavery manifests in these stories because of the suppression of their violent history. The genre has a major preoccupation

with the past as it is hidden or disregarded – the utopian vision is transformed into a dystopian one, it is the nightmare of the American Dream. The role of the human psyche endowed with evil qualities also is of great importance due to the overshadowing presence of the “madness” of humanity and the fear of the unknown. Gothic fiction in general includes an eerie setting, an unsettling mystery, and hidden secrets from the past.

The term Female Gothic was first defined by Ellen Moers, who claimed that the only difference between the two genre is the gender of the writer. Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that the gender of the writer is not a criterion in distinguishing between male and female gothic fictions and later explains the thematic preoccupations such as the adventures of the maiden in Radcliffe, and the anxiety over giving birth in Mary Shelley. After Moers, many literary critics found ground for research and discussion about the female experience delineated in within the Female Gothic. The debates between critics vary, some argue that there is no need for distinguishing, some argue that the feminist interpretations of these literary pieces are controversial and unnecessary, and some argue about the definition of the genre. Those critics who support the validity of the female gothic focus on the approach to analyzing these literary pieces. For example, Claire Kahane suggests a psychoanalytical reading of these texts, Juliann Fleenor puts emphasis on the female identity in her literary research from the 1980s and Suzanne Becker whose research has emphasized the importance of the narrator’s gender since the late 1990s. Nonetheless, all the research and critics are valuable because the diverse approaches and interpretations of the genre has much more to offer than critics previously believed, and the various approaches allow for the analysis of many authors and works which previously may not have been categorized as female gothic. As mentioned before, the Female Gothic shares these elements with its male counterpart, however, it foregrounds the female experience. The male Gothic oppresses women from its world and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock claims in *The Gothic World* (2014) that it “. . . dramatizes women’s disempowerment, the mode that highlights the forces of explicit and implicit violence used against women to coerce their submission and critiques female oppression” (34). Writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe, make their female characters either absent, murdered, or monstrous only to later come back to haunt the male protagonist as a cruel, ghostly reminder that they must perform within the boundaries of domesticity. The female experience is not just limited to the ability of reproduction but also to the gender-based oppression of women; the heroines of such stories are often tasked to face their mothers whose internalized misogyny creates a monster. The female gothic also differs from its male counterpart in that the narration is always voiced from a female point of view. Other than female-centric motifs, the Female Gothic differs in the paranormal and supernatural

theme as well in which the threatening, unexplainable horror is deemed explainable. According to Roberta Rubenstein in the *House Mothers and Haunted Daughters: Shirley Jackson and Female Gothic* (1996), the Female Gothic entrails the following:

Thus, in these narratives authored by women and focusing on female protagonists, traditional elements of the Gothic genre are elaborated in particular ways, notably through the central character's troubled identification with her good/bad/dead/mad mother, whom she ambivalently seeks to kill/merge with; and her imprisonment in a house that, mirroring her disturbed imaginings, expresses her ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection (311-312).

However, critics argue that these motifs limit the understanding of many female authors within the genre who wrote about, for example, male protagonists facing similar issues partaking in domesticity and many argue that labeling a subgenre based on gender would cause more harm than good since the approach to these books is biased. They also argue that the definition created by Ellen Moers does not entirely fit the modern version of the genre. The popularization of female authors in the US were brought up by second-wave feminists whose aim was to give voice to long lost 19th century authors who were more able to voice their contemporary struggles with the world in an era when participating in literature as a woman was shunned upon. Ellen Ledoux in “Was there ever a “Female Gothic”?” notes that “[i]n the broadest sense, I am suggesting that, for pragmatic reasons, second-wave feminists were required to define narrowly women’s contribution to Gothic writing. They did not have the luxury, early on, of questioning what it meant to be female or to choose an obscure author as their champion” (3).

Nonetheless, even within these limitations, the genre encompasses many significant authors, such as the authors mentioned before and many more. It can be argued, however, that the most outstanding author of the last century within the genre was Shirley Jackson. She is probably the most significant author of the American Female Gothic fiction, and one of her most famous novels, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), is the focus of this thesis. She is known to have written more than two hundred short stories, one of the best known is “The Lottery” (1948) and six other novels such as *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962). Jackson published her more critically acclaimed works during the 1950s which means that her novels were not immune to the social and cultural issues of her time since she was personally touched by the depravities of suburban life. After finishing her university studies, she became a wife and mother of four children. Her husband’s low income, however, made her start publishing her short stories. Eventually, after the success of “The Lottery”, Jackson became the breadwinner for the family, yet she was still forced into a domestic role. Many also consider

her a feminist – although, she would not consider herself as such – because most of her fictions have female protagonists who face issues exclusive to women and her non-fiction works are about motherhood. The American Gothic relies heavily on the human psyche, especially mental illnesses which Jackson honors but also usually interprets them as the paranormal events of her stories. Jackson’s clever twists are not only represented in her stories but also in her writing style; her way of writing plays with the reader’s state of mind, which adds a different, special layer to the genre. Jackson’s other notable trait is her ambivalent duality within the stories themselves. She does not present a traditional one-way story; she touches upon two or sometimes more plotlines that can be interpreted in many ways. As Patrycja Antoszek claims in her article about the politics behind Jackson’s work “[i]n the 1950s, perpetual celebration of motherhood and traditional female roles, Jackson probes the unspeakable – the dark, repressed undercurrents of female subjectivity, where motherhood is inherently related to feelings of guilt and reproach, and her vision of white middle-class family life is ambivalent at best” (2020). Unfortunately, Jackson developed an acute agoraphobia towards the end of her life, and she was also suffering from anxiety, depression, and substance abuse such as alcohol, tranquilizers, and amphetamine. Her untimely death came at the age of 48 in 1965. Her literary accomplishments, especially in the horror genre, are still considered to be one of the greatest that was produced in the mid-20th century and her works enjoyed a revival and has been the target of interest ever since, *The Haunting of Hill House* was adapted on screen in 1999 and in 2018, Netflix launched a series adaptation.

The story itself merits academic inquiry, not merely because of its graceful treatment of heavy topics, but also because of its artful capability to keep readers intrigued and terrified to this day. The story follows a group of individuals who enter the allegedly haunted Hill House through the invitation of Dr. Montague, an anthropology professor, to find evidence of the existence of paranormal. The omnipresent narrator tells the tale through the point of view of Eleanor Vance, a young woman whose goal of the journey of Hill House is to find her place in the world and belong to a group of people who she can consider a family. After her mother’s passing, Eleanor is struggling with her identity or rather, the lack there of, and she makes constant remarks of what and how she wants to be. Her actions, however, are shown to be the opposite. For example, she craves human interaction, yet she fantasizes about living the rest of her life alone. The novel, however, is not just a ghost story. It employs classical ghost story motifs and themes of the typical ghost stories to give an outlet for suppressed psychological trauma. For example, certain paranormal events described as the aforementioned traumatic experiences resurfacing like the bloody messages written on the wall ushering Eleanor to go

home to her dead mother. The story also dwells into the oppression of femininity and sexual desires, interpreted from the paranormal event of one of the female character's rooms covered in blood which can be depicted as menstrual imagery. Overall, the hauntings of Hill House do not give proof of the existence of the paranormal but that was never the purpose of the story. It rather shows a twisted, tainted mirror of contemporary society and its treatment of women.

One of the ways to analyze the novel can be approached from Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. Kristeva is a prominent 20th century psychoanalyst and literary critic and in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) she theorizes that the abject is a factor in one's identity formation and a part of one's subjectivity. Noelle McAfee wrote the following about Kristeva's work: "*Powers of Horror* takes the reader back to the brink of how subjectivity is constituted in the first place, that is, to how a person comes to see him- or herself as a separate being with his or her own borders between self and other" (45). The abject is everything that is repulsive and poses a threat to our identity; it is meant to create borders between self and the other. Kristeva claims that "'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself" (3). To have a fully formed identity, the subject must distance itself from everything that is a danger to it and Kristeva argues that the abject starts within the early developmental ages of childhood. She uses Jacques Lacan's and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theories to further develop her argument. Freud in his essay of "The Uncanny" (1919) defines the emotion as such ". . . that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1) which Kristeva heavily relies on and elaborates that the once known is the mother's body. Freud's theory of 'the return of repressed' where the repressed are those desires that had to be denied for the subject to develop and the return of these desires can and should be avoided is also used by Kristeva. However, she takes this idea further and she states that abject (the repressed) is something that we cannot avoid as it is a continuous part of life that defines who we are. Lacan's theory argues that identity formation starts in the infant phase when a toddler (subject) sees its reflection for the first time that breaks the universal unity of oneness and starts to differentiate itself from the mother. Kristeva agrees and adds that the abject does not stop on an individual level, it has the power to shape culture and society; it is most notable within religious rituals whose purpose is to purify or cleanse from everything that is outside or against the religious group. Kristeva argues that all mothers are abject since without the symbolic separation of infant and mother, identity formation cannot start. Kristeva writes extensively about the role of the mother in early

developmental stages which will be discussed thoroughly in the first chapter. The reason I have chosen her theory to present my argument is because Kristeva believes that this phenomenon is perfectly presented in literature.

This thesis will argue that Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is a prime example of the female gothic literature that can be examined through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. The thesis is divided into four chapters. The Introduction is followed by the first chapter which discusses the abject as a tool to construct an identity, and the female protagonist's, Eleanor's, struggles to establish her identity and separate herself from the spirit of the dead mother. In the second chapter, the focus shifts onto to the societal aspects of the abject represented through the social interactions between Eleanor and the research group throughout the novel. The third chapter dives into Eleanor's abjection towards herself which is manifested in Theodora that is based on [Eleanor's] rejection of her femininity and sexuality. The fourth chapter the house will be analyzed as the embodiment of the monstrous mother – as opposed to the traditional gothic trope – the house as the symbol of patriarchal oppression, in Jackson, the house stands for the monstrous m/other and how the abject wins over self-realization. The thesis will finish with the Conclusion.

Chapter 1: Eleanor's Homecoming - Return to The Motherhouse

This chapter intends to explore the abject as it is used for constructing an identity, and the child must abject the who created it, the mother. Eleanor could not establish her identity because of her mother's controlling nature, and her physical and symbolic separation from her mother could not be realized before her arrival in Hill House. She lost her father when she was a little girl and spent most of her adult life caring for her invalid mother. The lack of father figures in Eleanor's life is significant. Kristeva was concerned about the role of the father even though she considers it a key factor in early identity formation because the father is needed for the child to be separated from the mother for the identity formation to start. Using Freudian developmental theories, Kristeva constructs the concept of 'the imaginary father' and argues that it is the mother's love itself. Kelly Oliver explains this as "[k]risteva's 'imaginary father,' is a combination of the mother and the father. It has no sexual difference. (1983, 26) It has the characteristics of both masculine and feminine. (1983, 40) Kristeva calls it the 'fathermother conglomerate.' (1983, 40) The identification with this conglomerate is the vortex of primary identification within what Kristeva calls the 'narcissistic structure'" (77). However, we cannot identify the father figure in its classical sense. Kelly Oliver also writes that:

Kristeva's notion of the imaginary father undermines the maternal/paternal dualism. It challenges the priority given to the paternal function in traditional psychoanalytic theory. The imaginary father undermines the authority of Lacan's stern Father of the Law. Kristeva's imaginary father is not a "race back into the arms of the law"; rather, it is a race back to the outstretched arms before the Law. Kristeva develops her notion of the imaginary father in order to explain how a human being becomes a speaking being. She maintains that the stern oedipal Father with his castration threats is not enough to compel the child to leave the safe haven of the maternal body. She develops an account of the narcissistic structure that includes an imaginary agent of love that allows the child to negotiate the passage between the maternal body and the Symbolic order. (69)

Her mother, however, controlled every aspect of her life, and all attempts of Eleanor's self-expression was forbidden. Eleanor remembers these times as "the kitchen was dark and narrow, and nothing you cooked there ever had any taste or color" (Jackson 121), she was not allowed to wear bright colored clothing or makeup. Her days with her mother were repetitive and mundane, "lifting a cross old lady from her chair to her bed, setting out endless little trays of soup and oatmeal, steeling herself to the filthy laundry" (6), she was stuck for eleven years, and

she unwillingly became dependent on her mother as well. Kristeva in *Tales of Love* (1983) theorizes that the mother must love the child because of the father and if the father is not present, the mother will demand all the love from the child but does not reciprocate it and thus become the narcissistic mother. This could be an interpretation as to why Eleanor's mother behaved in an abusive, controlling manner. Kristeva also argues that all mothers are abject for the sake of self-realization, however, the abject does not stop haunting the subject "[b]ecause, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it-on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (9) and in this case, Eleanor's mother or rather, her haunting presence is what drives Eleanor to reestablish her identity from time to time.

Therefore, the mother threatens the child's development with clinging and seducing the child into staying with the mother. Thus, the abject simultaneously attracts the child into staying inside the mother's nurturing love and hinders the subject from establishing its own boundaries. Noelle McAfee explains this struggle in the following quote: "The child is in a double-bind: a longing for narcissistic union with its first love and a need to renounce this union in order to become a subject. It must renounce a part of itself – insofar as it is still one with the mother – in order to become a self" (48). This poses a threat on the maternal love since the overbearing control of the mother is viewed as a maternal instinct, yet it keeps the child in an infantilized state. This creates trauma that disrupts the core belief of what a mother is supposed to be. In a patriarchal society, the job of the mother is to raise the child from infancy to adulthood, but Eleanor's mother created a fundamentally confusing and conflicting relationship by masking her dominating behavior as 'motherly love' as it is explained by Eleanor herself: "[s]he could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life; her years with her mother had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair" (Jackson 5). In this case, the mother is not necessarily abject because of her physical body and ability to reproduce but because of the absence of maternal behavior. This behavior is possessive, and it consumes Eleanor up in her struggle for separation from her mother. As stated before, abjection surfaces upon the infant's realization that it is a separate being from its mother but in the case of Eleanor, abjection only begins after the death of her mother. However, Eleanor feels suffocated under the guilt of subconsciously partaking in the death of her mother which means that she cannot escape the grasp of her mother even from beyond the grave. Patrycja Antoszek claims about Jackson's female protagonists that:

The motherless daughters at the center of Jackson's narratives are not only haunted by the maternal figures hovering at the brink of their consciousness, but they are also unable

to become individuals and assume a particular role in the structures of society. Instead, these female protagonists remain stuck in the mother-daughter dyad, and therefore controlled by affects and drives, which belong to the maternal realm. (7)

After the death of her mother, Eleanor moves in with her sister's family and their relationship is not on good terms: "The only person in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister." (Jackson 4). Here is where her self-realization truly begins, and this is where she also takes notice of it; she starts to realize that she is no longer one with her mother and that she has the capability to shape her own identity:

Always before, when she had her sister's permission to drive the little car, she had gone cautiously, moving with extreme care to avoid even the slightest scratch or mar which might irritate her sister, but today, with her carton on the back seat and her suitcase on the floor, her gloves and pocketbook and light coat on the seat beside her, the car belonged entirely to her, a little contained world all her own; I am really going, she thought. (15)

Kristeva uses the Lacanian 'Mirror Stage' to construct the abject and extends it by stating that it's not a stage in the child's formative years, but it is a lifelong process that shapes their identity. She argues that the Lacanian mirror stage is only just the beginning of abjection since we all form our identities not just by what we like, but by what we detest or find repugnant – either in their physical reality such as food, illnesses, a dead body, or in their psychological, symbolic one such as political affiliations or traumatic experiences which she explains as "A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture" (2). She agrees that the child must separate from the mother to become an independent and cognitive being, but this separation continues to haunt the ego. Eleanor is presented with an expected role for her to assume – wife and mother. Her views on wife- and motherhood were shaped by her traumatic experiences; her memories of femininity and maternity are tainted by the colorless and bland perspectives passed down by her mother that she associates with slow suffocation and the isolation of the self. Her sister took these roles by marrying early and becoming a mother, and by doing so, she does not see herself different than their mother and even says that "'I am sure Mother would have agreed with me, Eleanor'" (11). Rightfully so, Eleanor feels the same way towards her sister as she does towards her mother. Shortly, she receives a letter from Dr. Montague asking her to join a paranormal investigation team at Hill House and is described as a chance to escape from slowly becoming like her sister. While she seems happy to run away,

she is now facing a dilemma explained in Roberta Rubenstein's article "That dilemma is expressed through her ambivalent desires: on the one hand, to leave home to become an autonomous self and, on the other, to remain an unindividuated child within its protective but also consuming enclosure" (326).

She eventually decides to go, and on her journey to Hill House, the reader is presented with Eleanor's childlike behavior that is emphasized by her colorful imagination. She makes several stops on the way to admire the ruins or nature itself as if she is experiencing seeing them for the first time. After learning about her personal history, this her childish behavior, however, does not make the reader suspicious since she might be experiencing a type of cathartic freedom for the first time. She is playing with the thoughts of different identities that she could take:

She might wander till she was exhausted, chasing butterflies or following a stream, and then come at nightfall to the hut of some poor woodcutter who would offer her shelter; she might make her home forever in East Barrington or Desmond or the incorporated village of Berk; she might never leave the road at all, but just hurry on and on until the wheels of the car were worn to nothing and she had come to the end of the world.
(Jackson 17)

However, the reader must not forget that in reality, Eleanor is not a child anymore. The fact that she could not construct her own self delineates her as a somewhat naive character to the reader. This is further enhanced in her social interactions with the rest of the research group and through this, the societal aspect of the abject can be also observed which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Exclusions and Inclusions - Eleanor as The Other

The societal aspects of the abject is represented through the social interactions between Eleanor and the research group. Julia Kristeva argues that: “[o]n the edge of nonexistence and hallucination of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture” (2). The abject has the power to not only define the self but also social existence by creating social rituals based on inclusion and exclusion. Hill House triggers the abject within Eleanor; she fantasizes about her encounters within the house, but she is terrified and repulsed by the exterior of the house at the same time: “. . . Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once” (34) and she continues to detest the house up until she meets Theodora. Furthermore, the conversations that happen within the group makes Eleanor question her reality. She begins to experience the abject which is seen through the group’s interactions; those conversations that are not about the house, are about them laying down the boundaries and layers on which they will later operate on by playing fun introductory and guessing games about each other. Because Eleanor’s focal point in creating her identity is what her mother passed down, she cannot distinguish the abject from her core-self. In her mind she states what she likes and who she is, but as soon as she is reminded of her mother, she begins to point out what she dislikes or what makes her feel repulsed:

‘Anyway,’ Eleanor said, ‘I hate having things done to me.’

‘You’re about as crazy as anyone *I* ever saw,’ Theodora said cheerfully.

‘I don’t like to feel helpless,’ Eleanor said. ‘My mother—’

‘Your mother would have been delighted to see you with your toenails painted red,’ Theodora said. ‘They look nice.’

Eleanor looked at her feet again. ‘It’s wicked,’ she said inadequately. ‘I mean—on *my* feet. It makes me feel like I look like a fool.’ (128)

Due to this, Eleanor is infantilized by the other members of the research group and Eleanor does not oppose it.

Their first meeting in the novel is where they establish their boundaries of who they are. They make it into a playful game where they create fake identities to avoid mundane introductory talks but at the same time, they lay down their roles within the group. For example, Dr. Montague says to Luke “A clean-shaven man—you’ll excuse me, my boy—never looks fully dressed, my wife tells me” (64) and with this, he establishes his role as a father figure and sees Luke as a ‘son’. For the first time, Eleanor vocalizes her wish to belong to a group of people: “. . . because *I* am Eleanor.’ An Eleanor, she told herself triumphantly, who belongs,

who is talking easily, who is sitting by the fire with her friends” (67) but she still does not quite feel that she has a sense of who she really is as she continues to describe herself from a third person point of view. In Dany Cavallaro argues in *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear* about Kristeva’s theory of abject:

In fact, they replicate, at the level of the flesh-and-bone organism, anxieties concerning the protection of a culture’s boundaries that pervade the body politic in its entirety. In other words, the vulnerability and relative instability of liminal aspects of the organism mirror salient characteristics of all putative lines of demarcation. Cultural practices and customs designed to delimit the physical self could therefore be read as symbolic attempts to protect a whole culture from alien incursions. (200)

Their first interaction is also an indicator that they establish a family-like behavior, and it is also important to note that Theodora, Luke, and Dr. Montague are all perceived through Eleanor’s eyes which re-enforces her desperate sense of belonging and wanting a healthy, functioning family. Theodora and Eleanor at first act as sisters but as the story progresses the dynamics of their relationship changes which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Eleanor is subconsciously infantilizing herself and the others are adjusting themselves accordingly, she is viewed as a childish woman. Jackson first introduces the readers to Eleanor’s coping mechanism which is demonstrated in her escape into the realm of imagination. On the road to Hill House, she created different scenarios about her life that she now implements into her real life. She uses her fantasy to create an identity for herself as a sort of protection from her past but later tells bits and pieces of these stories – such as the cup of stars and the stone lions – to establish her agency and independence. This method of identity formulation backfires because the line between reality and imagination slowly blurs as her attempts are diminished not just by Hill House but the group as well.

Eleanor’s continuous attachment to her imagination poses a risk in her sanity as well since she fails to distinguish what is real and what is not. This is further enhanced by the three characters who seem to blur the lines of reality even more with their behavior by using laughter to mask their true feelings. Noelle McAfee notes on Kristeva’s theory of abject “[t]he subject finds the abject both repellant and seductive and thus his or her borders of self are, paradoxically, continuously threatened and maintained. They are threatened because the abject is alluring enough to crumble the borders of self; they are maintained because the fear of such a collapse keeps the subject vigilant” (49). The opening sentence of the novel is that sets the tone and mood of the novel is “No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream” (1),

which can be interpreted as existence in the real world cannot be achieved without the fear of madness and insanity. At first, Eleanor rejoices with them in laughter which can be interpreted as a “ritual” that links the group together and she finds pleasure in differentiating herself from the others: “. . . what a complete and separate thing I am, she thought, going from my red toes to the top of my head, individually an I, possessed of attributes belonging only to me” (89). However, as soon as she finds her roots in the group, her mother returns to haunt her. She cannot escape the guilt of her past and upon being reminded of her mother, the shared laughter turns into a mocking one as Eleanor thinks that this separates her from the group. She also starts to give voice to her negative thoughts; she criticizes herself like her mother would. Later, as the ‘hauntings’ begin, Eleanor seems to think that the group is actively excluding her and laughing at her for being childish or naïve.

Eleanor’s fear of isolation also haunts her. As a trait of the abject, her fear can also be described as a dual emotion: she is desperate to belong, yet she fantasizes about being alone. Her fantasies entail about her living a secluded, protected life surrounded by objects of significant importance and only to be cared for by a loving, old woman that progresses into a fear of the outside world and being persecuted by others and society. In *Helping Eleanor Come Home: A Reassessment of Shirley Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House* (2017) Brittany Roberts notes as follows “[i]ndeed, what is unnerving and disquieting about Hill House to the Hillsdale villagers and to Hill House’s other tenants proves a source of enchantment and comfort to Eleanor: its guarded isolation, its separation from the outside world, and its constant nonhuman presence, all of which is precisely what Eleanor’s fairy-tale reveries suggest she longs for” (12). Eleanor fails to recognize that her fairy-tale fantasy is replicated by Hill House and that is why she fails to be a proper member of the group. As the hauntings begin, the house singles her out, first from the men and later from Theodora was to be the perfect envisioned sister for Eleanor. The paranormal events start with Theodora and her hearing knocks on the walls, their doors but when confronted by Luke and Dr. Montague – who did not hear anything –, Theodora belittles the experiences, making Eleanor seem paranoid and being the scared one. The dynamic slowly changes from innocent family behavior to an unsettling sense of dread after the first haunting experience and even before it, Eleanor describes them as “. . . waiting in a dentist’s office and listening to other patients make brave jokes across the room, all of you certain to meet the dentist sooner or later” (135). She already seems to feel that she does not belong to the group, yet she attempts to put a façade on for them. They seem to mask their fear with laughter that furthers Eleanor’s distortion of reality. The second apparition is her name being written on the wall as “help Eleanor come home” (160), meaning that the house officially

singled her out from the group which she describes as “. . . I am outside, she thought madly, I am the chosen one, . . .” (161). Furthermore, it pushes a wedge between them since Eleanor, while trying to make sense of the writing, accuses her companions – especially Theodora – of being the culprits. The house does not wait to follow suit, Theodora’s room being covered in blood is the next paranormal event where the same writing has been found on the walls. A series of ghostly events occur that keep singling Eleanor out, such as the arrival of Mrs. Montague who claims to contact the ‘spirits of the house’ who spell out her name once again. Gradually, Eleanor loses her touch of reality and questions her own sanity while thinking that all these events happen in her head and somehow, the rest of the group experiences them as well. They stand utterly helpless around her, quietly judging her and fear for her safety, yet they condone her for having a childish personality “‘Really, child,’ Mrs. Montague said, dropping the papers on the low table, ‘I couldn’t *begin* to say. Although you are rather more than a child, aren’t you? Perhaps you are more receptive psychically than you realize, although’—and she turned away indifferently— ‘how you *could* be, a week in this house and not picking up the simplest message from beyond...That fire wants stirring’” (214). To conclude their total exclusion of Eleanor, they ignore her completely as if she did not exist. Brittany Roberts points out that “[a]ble to embrace neither Eleanor nor the nonhuman house that loves her, they highlight their limited understanding of human fragility and the human need for love, ultimately performing a complete rejection of both” (24). Eleanor’s wish of a fairy-tale ending seems to come to life as Hill House eventually provides her with the protective solitude of which she has dreamed of at the cost of her desire to gain a loving family.

The group members eventually fail their purposes from Eleanor’s perspective, but their behaviors are perfect examples for the works of the abject in the social context. Kristeva argues that “[a]bjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant or surviving matrilinear character. It takes on the form of the *exclusion* of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up” (17). Dr. Montague is to be a father figure for them yet fails to help Eleanor. Julie Ann Baker claims that “Dr. Montague also serves as a stand-in father in Eleanor’s self-identified makeshift family; while good-natured, likeable, and even henpecked by his domineering wife, he functions in the role of the father who provides rules and order” (3). As the person with authority, his words complete the exclusion of Eleanor since he is the one who makes the decision to send her away from Hill House. Luke is to be the lover that she is to meet at the end of her journey, but he was only looking for a mother substitute that Eleanor refused to fulfill: “He is altogether selfish, she thought in some surprise, the only man I have

ever sat and talked to alone, and I am impatient; he is simply not very interesting. ‘Why don’t you grow up by yourself?’ she asked him and wondered how many people—how many women—had already asked him that” (184). This rejection also is a part of her exclusion since upon presented with a choice, Eleanor chooses Theodora that does not fit into the traditional, heteronormative, and patriarchal society that they live in. Luke’s rejection and choosing Theodora over him can be interpreted as Eleanor’s repulsion of the role that her gender’s expectations would dictate many critics have discussed in the past and will be discussed further in the next chapter. Theodora also has the ability of a telepath, and she should have been able to sense Eleanor’s struggle but fails to help her. However, she seems to muse on Eleanor’s emotions and decides to mock her. Laura De La Parra Fernández argued in *Blowing Up The Nuclear Family: Shirley Jackson’s Queer Girls In Postwar Us Culture* (2020) that

... we can infer that she [Jackson] posited belonging as uncanny and disrupting for the self, who is constricted by external impositions. In breaking with the heteronormative fantasy of the heterosexual nuclear family and national belonging, Eleanor achieves a kind of freedom where she is not defined in relation to her place in society. Nevertheless, this alternative fantasy of solitude turns out to be death, which implies that it is impossible for Eleanor to become an adult woman in postwar America. (40)

Social exclusion has caused Eleanor a great struggle throughout her life that drove her to find solace in isolation from where she could not escape. Her attempts to form an identity could not be achieved within a group of people or a “family” that has prevented her from finding agency. Her exclusion is not only symbolic by her chosen family but because it is also an exclusion from the society that she lives in. In *The Performance of Normality: Changing Norms in the American Gothic of Shirley Jackson and Joyce Carol Oates* (2014) Andromachi Kikkinou concludes:

The “family” that has come together with a common purpose needs to expel the weakest person that threatens its unity. The image of family as a space of nurture and unconditional acceptance collapses completely in the key scene of the novel, in which Eleanor screams, “Whose hand was I holding?” (163). In fact, it is her own hand; she has been left completely on her own. Even her presence embodies failure and nobody wants to break their façade of normality and connect with her. She is readily expelled as the failure of this system. (22)

Eleanor fails to integrate, to appear as ‘normal’ and that threatens societal expectations as well. She simply rejects the role she is to embrace as the obedient daughter, wife, and mother whose

only purpose in life is to fulfill these roles and nothing more. However, Eleanor not only 'rebels' subconsciously against society, her abjection towards herself is also important to note.

Chapter 3: The Green Room - The Abjection of Femininity

Eleanor's abjection towards herself manifests as a rejection of her own femininity is shown through the character of Theodora. Theodora is described as an easy-going, bohemian, independent, beautiful, and highly feminine character. She is brought to Hill House by Dr. Montague because of her alleged clairvoyant powers. For her, Hill House is considered a vacation from her roommate whom she had a fight with prior to the journey. The roommate is unnamed and does not have a specified gender but is suggested that the person is another woman whom Theodora possibly shared a romantic or sexual relationship with as presented in the introduction Jackson wrote about Theodora:

Things were said on both sides which only time could eradicate; Theodora had deliberately and heartlessly smashed the lovely little figurine her friend had carved of her, and her friend had cruelly ripped to shreds the volume of Alfred de Musset¹¹ which had been a birthday present from Theodora, taking particular pains with the page which bore Theodora's loving, teasing inscription. (7)

Eleanor is drawn to her from the moment they meet and are inseparable throughout the story. It is clear from the beginning that their relationship is much deeper than with the other characters, it may seem like a sisterly bond, but a few critics argue that it is a forbidden romantic and sexual relationship. As mentioned before, Eleanor is yet to develop an identity which draws the conclusion that she has not come to terms with her own feminine side or on the contrary, she deliberately represses it. Theodora is the tainted mirror for Eleanor in this sense because Theo's flirty nature and open-minded approach to her is what makes Eleanor realize that she also possesses a feminine side. Theodora is also to be understood as the Gothic Double, who is the long-lost other half of Eleanor's identity. In one of the early drafts of the novel Jackson writes "Theo against Nell, of course: to each of us – if we are fortunate – is given one other person, the true doppelganger, the other half of the self, and the union here is sometimes star-crossed, sometimes illicit, always deadly; it is the moment of perception when the victim sees his murderer, the brother discovers his sister, beauty destroys [embraces] the beast" (qtd. in Lootens 163).

¹ Alfred du Musset was a French writer who was rumored to have published *Gamiani, or Two Nights of Excess* (1833), a lesbian erotic novel in which the heroine was modelled after his lover, Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin, whose pen name is also a masculine one (George Sand), just like Theodora's.

Theodora is the fragment of Eleanor's identity that focuses on femininity and womanhood, and she is also the self that Eleanor has never been allowed to become. Theo is determined to help Eleanor embrace this part of herself, but Eleanor rejects this sort of femininity. Eleanor's only form of connection to womanhood was through her mother whose views on femininity were based on conservative and Puritan ideology. Eleanor was not allowed to express or explore her feminine side because her mother denied all sorts of attempts. She was forbidden to wear colorful – especially bright – clothing, it is implied that she was only allowed to appear natural and express her identity in the least eye-catching way. Therefore, Theodora regards Eleanor as “woman of no color” (127) since she is not practicing her womanly powers as Theodora thinks she should: “‘Nail polish and perfume and bath salts,’ Theodora said, as one telling the cities of the Nile. ‘Mascara. You don't think half enough of such things, Eleanor’” (127). Theodora, on the other hand, is the exact opposite; she wears brightly colored clothes and embraces every form of being a woman. Andromachi Kokkinou argues that “[i]n fact, Theodora and Eleanor exemplify the conflicting images of the era about femininity. Theodora has disaffiliated herself from her family, does not use her last name anymore and signs her artworks with “Theo,” a gender ambiguous version of her first name. She laughs at Eleanor's question whether she is married and lives with her companion” (20). However, due to her upbringing, Eleanor is repulsed by Theodora's femininity as it can be seen during her “Shocked, Eleanor sat up and looked; her feet were *dirty*, and her nails were painted bright red. ‘It's *horrible*,’ she said to Theodora, ‘it's *wicked*,’ wanting to cry” (127). Their differences in femininity are also presented through their alleged psychic abilities – it is only the two of them to possess such powers – demonstrated in Theodora's clairvoyancy and Eleanor's telekinesis. Both these powers are deeply connected to emotions, clairvoyancy is sensitivity to other people's emotions and telekinesis is the manifestation of different emotions. In the subtext of the novel, it is implied that Theodora understands that Eleanor's anxiety over her past and loneliness but for her own selfish reasons, she refuses to engage with Eleanor more than she is supposed to. Due to this, their relationship is a turmoil of yearning for each other's company and utter denial of the other.

Theodora's queerness is also a key element of her character since she is presented as a potential lover for Eleanor. Theodora's sexuality is so much foregrounded that in almost all the adaptations of *The Haunting of Hill House*, she is presented as a queer woman. She is not openly recognized as a love interest, but the subtext clearly presents a queer coded character. Theodora lives alone with a roommate who is possibly a woman, and she decides to leave for Hill House after a fight or a “lover's quarrel” as quoted above. She is an artist who also signs paintings

with a masculine version of her name. She playfully flirts with Eleanor and since Eleanor has never been approached romantically before - not even by a man, let alone a woman -, her repressed sexual desires are awoken. As mentioned before, Eleanor's upbringing was based on religious beliefs that did not allow women to explore their sexual desires and during the 1950s, scientific theories entertained the idea of lesbianism as an extension of female friendships, but it was expected to be outgrown and later develop into heterosexuality. Eleanor's repressed sexuality is represented in the story through some of the paranormal events. The two women spend an afternoon together where they care for each other; Theodora paints Eleanor's toenails with a bright red – which is understood as the color of desire and passion – nail polish to which Eleanor's reaction is fear and disgust. Shortly after this event, Theodora's walks up to her room being covered in blood which is explained by Tricia Lootens in the following way: “The menstrual imagery seems unmistakable here: Hill House echoes and amplifies Eleanor's hatred of “dirty” female bodies, including her own. Theodora's bright clothes are trampled and soaked in blood. Even more significantly, she herself is bloodied — literally rendered a scarlet woman’, as though Hill House has passed judgment on Theodora's bright clothing” (96). The menses imagery collides with Kristeva's theory on the abject where she argues that the abject is most notable when it regards food or textures or bodily functions which in this case is menstruation blood. In *Powers of Horror*, she explains that:

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. “I” want none of that element, sign of their desire; “I” do not want to listen, “I” do not assimilate it, “I” expel it. But since the food is not an “other” for “me,” who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself.

(3)

Eleanor's visible disgust towards menstruation is a clear abjection against femininity and womanhood. In addition, the compering of proper bodies and dirty bodies — the subject and the abject —, figuratively and literally are a common focus in horror. “Jackson is known to have borrowed elements in the story from Shakespeare – “Journey's end in lovers meeting” which is a quote from his *Twelfth Night* comedy that explores aspects of gender identity and homosexuality. Eleanor ultimately chooses Theodora as a lover, but Theo gently rejects her advances which later contributes to Eleanor's downfall: “‘I never had anyone to care about,’ Eleanor said, wondering where she had heard someone say something like this before. ‘I want to be someplace where I belong.’ ‘I am not in the habit of taking home stray cats,’ Theodora said lightly” (229). Julie Ann Baker notes that “Eleanor's mother, and by extension Hill House,

have infiltrated Eleanor's own psyche and despite her best attempts to escape—whether that be through stories or through seeking out a relationship with Theodora—Eleanor will never be freed from life as she knows it” (35).

Theodora is the Gothic Double of Eleanor, and her idealized self. The Gothic Double is a part of the uncanny – the feeling of something familiar that is not – within another human. Ilana Shiloh in *The Double, the Labyrinth and the Locked Room* (2011) states that “The term ‘double’ primarily evokes a duplicated self, the existence of two individuals similar to the point of identity. Identity is an ambiguous concept, which may denote either a state of being the same as someone or something, or a state of being oneself or one thing, and another. Identity thus conflates the notion of sameness and of difference” (27). The purpose of doubling in the Gothic genre is also to highlight the fact that the status quo is not working orderly. Brian DeMars remarks that “[t]he invocation of uncanny doubling signifies that the character or situation has gone awry somehow, or that a familiar psychological or social convention is no longer functioning properly, because a set of doubles are able to simultaneously cohabit a space that should only accommodate one individual” (10). During their first time meeting each other, Theo echoes Eleanor's thoughts: “‘It's the home I've always dreamed of,’ Theodora said. ‘A little hideaway where I can be alone with my thoughts. Particularly if my thoughts happened to be about murder or suicide or- ’” (45). Their undeniable similarity is only heightened after Theodora's room found to be covered in blood when Theodora must wear Eleanor's clothes and she jokingly refers to herself as Eleanor: “‘I am Eleanor,’ Theo said, ‘because I am wearing blue. I love my love with an E because she is ethereal. Her name is Eleanor, and she lives in expectation’” (245). This only reinforces Eleanor's abjection towards herself since she now can see herself in Theodora like she is looking into a mirror. “Theodora was wearing Eleanor's red sweater” (262), the same red sweater in which Eleanor arrived at Hill House. On the one hand, Theodora possesses every trait that Eleanor wishes she would; she is independent, she has embraced her femininity, she is socially poised, and she is confident in her identity. Eleanor, upon realizing that Theodora plays her self-idealized version and how she could never “play” herself as such, ascends to madness. She completely gives up on becoming her true-self, she reverts into a child-like woman, and she embraces Hill House; the house that welcomes her as a monstrous mother and the house that will hold her in a warm tomb.

Chapter 4: Hill House - Merging with The Monstruous Mother

The events that take place in Hill House are examples of how the abject wins over self-realization and how Hill House becomes the monstrous mother for Eleanor, the one consumes the child. Dany Cavallaro argues in *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear* (2005) that: “Like the child described by both Kristeva and Chodorow, Jackson’s heroine feels simultaneously attracted to the maternal body in its literal and figurative configurations, as the potential provider of a pleasing sense of plenitude and threatened by its overpowering embrace” (92). From the very first sentence of the book, Jackson crafts a very peculiar picture of the house: “No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within” (1) and slowly, the house becomes the mother whose only goal is to engulf the child who enters its doors. This in fact is a common Gothic trope, ‘motherhouse’, presented as a haunted house that is a source for terror and pleasure, mimicking the mother-daughter relationship of the troubled heroine especially using the motifs of the destruction of identity, downfall of the psyche, fear of separation, and falling back into the mother’s body. Coming down the steps of the veranda to the lawn, Luke, the legitimate heir of the house, refers to the house as “mother house” (233), adding the following words: “‘a housemother, a headmistress, a housemistress. I am sure I will be a very poor housemaster, like our Arthur, when Hill House belongs to me’” (233). Eleanor desperately wants to find her place in the world but because she was held back and never forced to gradually enter adulthood, her options are limited. As a woman, she could enter adulthood through marriage but when both option is presented, she is repulsed by the idea, and she rejects it. Her refusal to accept the status quo of contemporary society keeps her in a paralyzed state in a figurative childhood that Hill House preys upon and lures Eleanor into a warm embrace which eventually leads to her death.

Although Hill House assumes both parental roles – both monstrous in their own rights – for Eleanor, it only signifies the monstrous mother. Nevertheless, Eleanor’s fear and fascination with the ‘mother house’ cannot be understood without interpreting how the house also assumes the role of the father. Kristeva argues that without the father, the mother poses a threat on the child; she [the mother] entertains an incestuous relationship with the child, not allowing them to enter adulthood. Kristeva states the following “In such close combat, the symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject, the more so if it happens to be endowed with a robust supply of drive energy, in pursuing a

reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject. Repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting” (13). Eleanor lacks a proper father figure in her life; her real father died when she was thirteen and she never mentions him again throughout the story. Dr. Montague assumes a paternal role, but he does not acknowledge Eleanor as a child; he only acknowledges her as a participant in his research even if Eleanor acts childishly. However, Hill House was built by Hugh Crain, a disturbingly conservative and religious man who projected his incestuous fantasies on his daughters that tainted the sanctity of their home. Mrs. Crain, the original mother of the house, had died before ever setting foot on the grounds of Hill House as the following quote explains “Hugh Crain's young wife died minutes before she first was to set eyes on the house, when the carriage bringing her here overturned in the driveway, and the lady was brought—ah, lifeless, I believe is the phrase they use—into the home her husband had built for her” (Jackson 80). This resulted in Hugh Crain excessively exercising his authority over their two daughters. His fatherly presence never left the house, and this knowledge offers a more in-depth insight on how the problems of the house are in a never-ending circle and this time, the victim is Eleanor. She faces similar issues as previous tenants did, for example, the Crain sisters destroy their relationship with each other over petty arguments just like Eleanor did with her sister. Sophia Crain who was tasked by her father to be the guardian of the house shares similar upbringings with Eleanor since both were raised in a strict, morally flawed household where any signs of self-expression brought punishment. Towards the end of the story, Eleanor hears little girls laughing during the night which can be viewed as Hill House welcoming her as another daughter since, for the girls, the house was a safe space away from the world, just like Eleanor envisioned her life to be on her own. The spectral presence of Hugh Crain is still relevant because he was obsessed with teaching his daughters the ways of a proper lady, similarly to Eleanor’s mother. His incestuous desires towards his daughters are shown through a scrapbook containing various biblical texts and imagery, to pressure the girls into maintaining their purity and chastity. Incest is a favored Gothic trope, and it is implied in the novel Eleanor’s relationship with her mother was incestuous. In various instances where Eleanor is confronted about her repressed sexuality, her first thought is her mother

‘I suppose I don't need such things,’ Eleanor said, almost apologetically. ‘There never was much excitement for me. I had to stay with Mother, of course. And when she was asleep I kind of got used to playing solitaire or listening to the radio. I never could bear to read in the evenings because I had to read aloud to her for two hours every afternoon. Love stories’—and she smiled a little, looking into the fire. But that's not all, she

thought, astonished at herself, that doesn't tell what it was like, even if I wanted to tell; why am I talking? (92)

In the end, Hugh Crain's warped fantasy of Hill House being a loving family home backfired. All his attempts to bring more heirs into the world failed — three mothers died in a series of unfortunate events throughout the history of the house. Even in its design, the house reflects its builder; the house is designed in a way where everything is off center. As Andromachi Kikkinou notes “. . . it is impossible to grasp [Hill House's] design because of its absurd symmetry: it has been built on patriarchal familial values of the past. In fact, it was meant to resemble Hugh Crain's mind, who indoctrinated his daughters in terms of a vengeful morality and dogmatism” (18) This resulted in a barren primary caretaker of the two girls, the house itself.

Hill House therefore assumes this role for Eleanor as well because the death of her mother subconsciously initiates a sense of homelessness as the following sentence illustrates “‘I want to be someplace where I belong’” (229) and which prevents the journey of self-realization within Eleanor. Only when it is too late, does she realize that in Hill House, her progress does not go forward but rather spirals back to the state of beginning, still unseparated from her mother. The house feeds from Eleanor's yearning for a home and a place to belong to, so it assumes the role of the archaic mother; just like it did for the previous female owners who all have drifted into insanity during their times in the house. The archaic mother is a Freudian term referring to the original mother, “the first nourisher and first seducer” (Freud, 1949 [1940]: 188), it is the pregnant mother. The archaic mother is a common gothic motif, and it is a monstrous figure who is attributed to the void, to the engulfing darkness and it either appears as a literal “mother monster” or as the darkness. The latter applies to Hill House as well since it is equipped with narrow, tangled corridors, doors leading nowhere, and lots of empty spaces that cannot be reached by the Sun. The narrowing, dark corridors are used to depict the choking hug of the mother and as Eleanor noticed, the house feels like a monster that swallows its small, insignificant prey as we see her thought process after settling in “When she stood still in the middle of the room the pressing silence of Hill House came back all around her. I am like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster, she thought, and the monster feels my tiny little movements inside” (43). Certain parts of the house trigger Eleanor's memory, especially the memories of her mother. The library is one such place and Eleanor avoids at all costs, she says “‘I can't go in there’ (112) and after smelling decay emitting from the room, she follows it with ‘My mother—’ she said, not knowing what she wanted to tell them, and pressed herself against the wall” (112). Relying on Kristeva's theory of subjectivity, the house can also be regarded as the semiotic chora which is the earliest stage of development, the infant state. In this state, the

subject cannot make the difference between itself and the mother; it does not know language, only needs, emotions and perceptions. According to Kristeva, this stage is where the subject operates solely on its primal drives and Lacan describes this as “the Real”, the true form where the subject experiences life without acknowledging boundaries and where all subjects want to return. The return to the semiotic chora means ego death, it is the complete abandonment of identity and agency. Noelle McAfee notes the following:

. . . in Kristeva’s view, is an illusion that it is possible to reject the symbolic order and return wholeheartedly to the undifferentiated semiotic chora, to the plenitude of that early time. No matter how untenable the symbolic order might seem, going back to this archaic state spells a complete breakdown of any kind of life. We should be wary of any communitarian “thirst for sleep and jouissance” (ibid.). This thirst can only be quenched with death (56).

Eleanor eventually succumbs into madness which is represented through the jouissance of abject which is the acquisition of the abject. The jouissance of abject is the overwhelming and painful fulfillment of the desire to become one with the abject. In Kristeva’s own words in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) “It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that ‘I’ does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence” (9). Eleanor has been beaten down to the point of break where she completely accepts the role of the child and offers herself to Hill House. In a childish, manic state she tries to take her own life to become one with the house. During her breakdown, she experiences the house under a new light “Gathered comfortably into the hills, she thought, protected and warm; Hill House is lucky” (Jackson 255). On her last night there, her first goal is to get a book from the library, the place where she physically could not bring herself to enter, and as she dances through the halls, she describes the corridors as “luxuriously warm” (252). Upon arriving at the library, she begins to look for her mother, she has convinced herself that she is alive but hiding in one of the rooms of Hill House which we can see here “What fools they are, she thought; now I will have to go into the library. ‘Mother, Mother,’ she whispered, ‘Mother,’ and stopped at the library door, sick” (253). The house now is acting like a womb; swallowing Eleanor into the void where she can no longer return from. In a deranged state, Eleanor passes the nursery, previously the room where anyone who entered felt a chilling breeze seemingly out of nowhere, where she remarks that “the cold spot was gone” (252) which suggests that Hill House prepared itself for her. Roberta Rubenstein describes this event in the following quote “Of all of Jackson’s protagonists, she is most literally consumed by the entrapping/embracing house that overpowers her even as she submits almost joyfully to it”

(318). Eleanor reenacts the first night's haunting; she starts banging on the doors as a very last, desperate attempt to call out to her fellow group members to notice her and quite literally open the doors for her to finally belong somewhere: "None of them will open their doors, she thought; they will sit inside, with the blankets pressed around them, shivering and wondering what is going to happen to them next; wake up, she thought, pounding on the doctor's door; I dare you to open your door and come out to see me dancing in the hall of Hill House" (Jackson 253). When they do not comply, Eleanor continues to happily dance around the house while the others start to look for her. She thinks of this as a game and runs from them. She eventually ends up at the stairway to the tower where she consciously – as circumstances allow – admits that she became one with the house: "No stone lions for me, she thought, no oleanders; I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come inside. I am home, she thought, and stopped to wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought; now to climb" (256). The others manage to find her as she is almost at the top of the staircase and as Luke begins to climb after her, she seems to be awoken from the spell, but she passed the point of no return: "I can't get out; the door's been nailed shut" (258).

After this incident, the group decides that it is no longer safe for Eleanor to stay in the house, so they send her back to her sister. Eleanor is shocked, she does not want to leave, and she cannot; Hill House has become her home, it "belongs to *her*" (271) where she can be the beloved child, sheltered from the world and live the rest of her life happily there. As she is being forced to leave, panic ensues inside her and decides to crash her car into a nearby tree resulting in her death. Her final thoughts are admiring that she is finally doing something out of her own free will, not being controlled by anyone yet she is in disbelief that the others are not stopping her: "I am really doing it, she thought, turning the wheel to send the car directly at the great tree at the curve of the driveway, 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" (271). The last page of the book does not seem to recognize her death, as if it did not matter; it is a short follow-up of what happened after. The very last sentence is the same as in the beginning "whatever walked there, walked alone" (272), implying a devilish, never-ending circle of cursed individuals meeting the same fate repeatedly.

Conclusion

The *Haunting of Hill House* is a twisted ghost story that uses the tools of ghost stories to delve into the human psyche and give the readers a tainted mirror about how contemporary society rejects those that are damaged and unable to fit in. I believe, Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject was the perfect approach to analyze this novel because it gives us a way to interpret the intricate psychological hauntings of Hill House and the protagonist, Eleanor. In the first chapter, I have elaborated how and why the abject starts with the mother. I have also pointed out one of the key conflicts in the novel which is the relationship between Eleanor and her mother and how it affected identity formation in her. Their relationship also fits into Kristeva's description of narcissistic mothers and children's development with such mothers which proves that abjection started within Eleanor after the passing of her mother. The second chapter analyzed the societal aspects of the abject. Through the interactions of the research group, it can be seen how the abject operates on a cultural scale and offers an explanation of why Eleanor could not fit into the group. Exploring the relationship of Theodora and Eleanor in the third chapter presented the abject towards one-self. Eleanor's inability to accept her own sexual desires and femininity, through Theodora, resulted in the rejection of herself. Hill House becoming the monstrous mother for Eleanor was the focus of the fourth chapter, and how the house ultimately caused the demise of Eleanor by pushing her into insanity. Eleanor's attempts at self-realization are slowly destroyed by the group, herself, her past and the house itself and in the end, she was not able to win over the abject. I believe that not only the novel should be the target of interest of this type of research but the recent Netflix adaptation of the story as well especially because it illustrates perfectly how Jackson's female characters can be translated to television and keep the integrity of the author. Overall, *The Haunting of Hill House* is a phenomenal story that is ought to be analyzed further to have a better understanding of how Shirley Jackson used her experiences as a wife, a mother, and a woman to write stories that captivates readers to this day.

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