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Shirley Jackson: Intertexts and Afterlives

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Special Issue: Shirley Jackson—Intertexts and Afterlives

Edited by Emily Banks and Alexis Finc

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Shirley Jackson: Intertexts and Afterlives

Emily Banks and Alexis Finc……. 3

FEATURE ESSAYS

Homes for Strange Children: Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Daisy Johnson's *Sisters* (2020)

Paige Allen ……. 11

Her Body and Other Ghosts: Embodied Horror in the Works of Shirley Jackson and Carmen Maria Machado

Jill E. Anderson …….. 31

The Forces of Darkness: Exploring *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" Through Shirley Jackson's "The Missing Girl"

Savannah Bly Richardson ……... 51

Gothic Inheritances: Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Carmen Maria Machado's "A Hundred Miles and a Mile" and *In the Dream House*

Carolin Jesussek …….……. 67

Murderers, Whores, and Thieves: Crime and Violence as Acts of Resistance in Selected Works of Shirley Jackson and Virginia Feito

Ibi Kaslik ……...……. 87

REVIEWS

***Player vs. Monster: The Making and Breaking of Video Game Monstrosity*, by Jaroslav Švelch (MIT Press, 2023)**

Prema Arasu ……. 104

***Queer for Fear: Horror Film and the Queer Spectator* by Heather O. Petrocelli (University of Wales Press, 2023)**

Karen Herland ……... 108

***Folk Horror: New Global Pathways*, edited by Dawn Keetley and Ruth Heholt (University of Wales Press, 2023)**

M. Sellers Johnson ……..112

***Gothic Things: Dark Enchantment and Anthropocene Anxiety* by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Fordham University Press, 2023)**

Naomi von Senff …….. 116

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MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

INTRODUCTION

Shirley Jackson: Intertexts and Afterlives

Emily Banks and Alexis Finc

Being a Shirley Jackson scholar can feel like being haunted. From her influence on Stephen King—and, consequently, everything in the horror genre that *his* work influenced—to contemporary authors like Carmen Maria Machado and Elizabeth Hand whose fiction is both explicitly and more subtly inspired by her, it would be difficult to overstate the continued relevance of Jackson's oeuvre. In recent years, of course, Mike Flanagan's Netflix adaption *The Haunting of House* (2018), Stacie Passon's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (2018), and Josephine Decker's *Shirley* (2020) have brought Jackson back into the mainstream public eye, generating new interest in her life and work.

Beyond these overt adaptions, reworkings, and references, though, more surprising moments of recognition often generate what Sigmund Freud might call an uncanny feeling of déjà vu ([1919] 1957, 238). Karyn Kusama's *Yellowjackets*, Nick Antosca's *Channel Zero*, and Iain Reid's *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (adapted in Charlie Kaufman's 2020 film), to offer just a few examples, *feel* Jackson-esque, whether their creators cite her as an influence (as Antosca does) or leave us to speculate. Her legacy is felt when domestic spaces are infused with an ambiguous terror, when lines are blurred between loving friendships and insidious mind control, when we are prompted to question the reality of selfhood and the nature of identity, and sometimes when our darkest impulses are made briefly permissible and disturbingly delicious.

As Darryl Hattenhauer details in his introduction to *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic* (2003), Jackson was, during her lifetime, "ranked among America's most highly regarded fiction writers" (1) regardless of genre. Anthologized alongside contemporaries like Langston Hughes, Arthur Miller, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright, and included with Albert Camus, Allen Ginsberg, J.D. Salinger, and Vladimir Nabokov on a 1958 contemporary literature reading list at the New School for Social Research, Jackson was understood to be an important new voice in American letters (Hattenhauer 2003, 1). Until a recent resurgence of Jackson scholarship stimulated by Hattenhauer's monograph as well as Bernice Murphy's *Essays on the Literary Legacy* (2005) and Melanie R. Anderson and Lisa Kröger's *Influences and Confluences* (2016), Jackson's work had fallen out of favour amongst critics who dismissed it with the dreaded label of "genre fiction."

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

Continuing this work, Melanie R. Anderson and Jill E. Anderson's *Shirley Jackson and Domesticity: Beyond the Haunted House* (2020), Kristopher Woofter's *Shirley Jackson: A Companion* (2021), and the newly inaugurated *Shirley Jackson Studies* journal have made progress towards solidifying Jackson's crucial place in the American canon, using contemporary critical lenses to unpack her commentary on gender, sexuality, race, disability, consumerism, McCarthyism, the Cold War, climate change, and other themes. Hattenhauer argues that Jackson deserves "recuperation not for her few works that readers have simplified as horror," but to be "included with many of the other canonical writers of her time" for the "number of forms and themes" (2) in which she excels. While she is undoubtedly a pivotal author of the American Gothic tradition, current scholarship insists that she be read in the tradition of authors like Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and William Faulkner, whose Gothic works have long been acknowledged as critical for our understandings of American literature and culture.

The lapse in critical attention to Jackson's work is part of what makes her influence feel so haunting. A reference to Poe or Hawthorne in a hit television series will hardly surprise us, but Jackson's relative obscurity in the academy makes her far-reaching influence feel uncanny when we encounter it. Outside the horror genre, Jackson resurfaces in unlikely places. In Jonathan Franzen's latest novel, *Crossroads* (2021), dissatisfied minister's wife Marion Hildebrandt's backstory is linked intriguingly to Jackson's in a manner that appears to suggest thematic overlap. Marion's sister is named Shirley, and their mother is "a fourth-generation Californian from a family whose once-extensive property holdings […] had largely been squandered" (140). Her mother rebelliously marries a Jewish man who is also "a self-taught architect" and often spends nights "alone with his drafting tools, forever redesigning an even bigger house" (140). These details correlate with Jackson's heritage; the mansions her great-great grandfather built for millionaires in California were the source of her family's wealth—Ruth Franklin quotes her as writing, "My grandfather was an architect, and his father, and *his father*"—and her parents initially disapproved of her marriage to the Jewish Stanley Hyman (2016, 14, 96–97).

Beyond these seeming Easter eggs, Jackson's influence comes into focus more clearly as Marion's character develops. Frequently designating people, including her mother and sister, as "need[ing] murdering" (Franzen 2021, 147, 162) and concealing from her family a mental breakdown in her early adulthood, she reads like the Jackson heroines whose hidden hatefulness and violent impulses are rendered uncomfortably sympathetic for readers as we spend time in her mind. Simultaneously unnerving and appealing, Marion's nonchalant cruelty recalls that of Merricat Blackwood in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, who fantasizes about seeing the

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

townspeople who mock her "lying there crying with the pain and dying" (Jackson 1962, 10), and Eleanor whom Jackson introduces with the matter-of-fact statement: "The only person in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister. She disliked her brother-in-law and her five-year-old niece, and she had no friends" (1956, 3). As Franzen's novel concludes and the Hildebrandt family regains an albeit-damaged version of its once-peaceful veneer, Marion's penchant for spite and revenge remains a lurking danger within the midwestern suburban pastor's home.

Similarly, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) seems at points to echo the apocalyptic absurdism of Jackson's *The Sundial* (1958). Though rarely spoken of in the same breath, the two apocalyptic novels bear striking similarities. Jackson's description of "A television set in Florida" that "refused to let itself be turned off until its owners took an axe to it" and "continued, on or off, presenting inferior music and stale movies and endless, maddening advertising" before dying "with the praises of hair tonic on its lips," (1958, 179) for example, could easily be mistaken for a passage from *White Noise*. In addition to their interest in postmodern anxiety about cataclysmic disaster from environmental, foreign, or even extraterrestrial sources, the two novels share a metafictional interest in sources of information, commodification's blurring of high and low art, and the possibility of marketing materials becoming our primary source of narrative. Hattenhauer classifies Jackson as a *proto-postmodernist* for her disunified characters and plot, unreliable narration, and intertextual style (2003, 3–5). Travis Snyder has expanded on the intertextuality that characterizes her work in his description of "meta-gothic parody" in *Hill House* (2020, 245). Jackson's characters are often attempting or failing to parse literary works; *Hill House*, *Hangsaman*, and *The Sundial* all feature literary scholars as prominent characters, which draws attention to our own attempts to disentangle reality from fiction within her fiction. It is unsurprising that Wes Craven abandoned a remake of *The Haunting* (1963) prior to creating *Scream* (1996), the first film in a franchise that has come to connote metafictional horror with characters keenly aware of the genre.

Jackson's influence on contemporary fiction, film, and television feels contiguous with her own writing practice. Her recently published *Letters* confirm the omnivorous nature of her own reading, and this is evident in the multitude of allusions that surface, overtly or otherwise, throughout her fiction. *The Sundial*, for example, alludes to Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" as well as Theodore Sturgeon's 1953 queer science fiction story "The World Well Lost," while *Hangsaman* references *Alice in Wonderland* and the 1908 pornographic novel *The Way of a Man with a Maid*, to name just a few. I have elsewhere discussed the Gothic effects of her unique use of allusion, arguing that she crafts referential webs which the well-read reader is drawn into as

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

we attempt to unpack the novel's secrets. For literary scholars, this reading experience aligns us with the Gothic protagonist as we find ourselves—or believe we find ourselves—uniquely capable of unearthing the deeper meanings of a fictional work (Banks 2022, 117). The Jackson scholar, then, is constantly pursuing allusions and references, both in Jackson's work and in the contemporary works in which we recognize traces of her hand.

For the decades following her death, Jackson's relative obscurity made her influence less legible to the majority of those encountering it. My students often remark that "The Lottery" (1948) reminds them of *The Hunger Games* (2012) or *The Purge* (2016), films that clearly borrowed something from the story, which once appeared on high school curriculums across the United States and is often recalled with a shudder by those who experienced it in that context. Even those familiar with *The Shining* (1977) typically fail to recognize its relationship to *Hill House*, despite King's good faith attempts to honour Jackson's legacy with direct reference in the novel. Interestingly, King both references *Hill House* explicitly and alludes to it *through* his repeated references to the fairytale *Bluebeard* (1977, 248), which Eleanor references when she first sets foot in the blue room and thinks, "Sister Anne, Sister Anne" (Jackson 1956, 27). This allusion through reference suggests that he is not only inspired by Jackson, but inspired by her inspiration; that is, the intertextual nature of her fiction has become a feature of her legacy.

In his introduction to "Rethinking Shirley Jackson," a special issue of *Women's Studies* published in 2020, Daniel Kasper discusses the "polyvocal" potentiality of Jackson's work through the example of the short story "Charles," published in *Mademoiselle* in 1948*, The Lottery and Other Stories* in 1949, and again as part of the memoir *Life Among the Savages* in 1953. That this one story could be "at once a piece for a women's magazine, a chapter in 'The Lottery' story cycle, and a small slice of domestic memoir," Kasper writes, "reflects the story's theme of multiple/imaginary personality as well as Jackson's ability to effortlessly shift between writerly poses and contexts" (2020, 806) With this in mind, he argues that "In order to understand [Jackson's] contribution to American literature […] we must first understand her works outside their post hoc relationship to the author-function" (806) of a Jackson pigeonholed by her authorship of "The Lottery." While Jackson's voice has undoubtedly shaped horror and the Gothic, her contributions to other sub-genres, such as memoir and domestic fiction, are rarely considered. To comprehensively approach Jackson's literary influence, it is necessary to consider her as an innovator across genres and modes—and, indeed, an innovator for literature that resists easy generic categorization.

This resistance is, in part, what makes Jackson's Gothic and horror fiction so chilling as it often wavers over the line between reality as we know

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

it and supernatural activity, portraying psychological disturbance and domestic entrapment as horrors of their own and leaving readers with something akin to "Hill House legs" (Jackson 1956, 78) as we seek to regain our footing in reality. In other words, if we don't know what sub-genre we're reading, we can never be sure what is possible within a fictional world. As Freud contends in "The Uncanny," the imaginative writer "can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases" ([1919] 1957, 250). Features like "wish-fulfilments, secret powers, omnipotence of thoughts, [and] animation of inanimate objects" are not, he explains, unnerving in the world of a fairy tale, but become disturbing "as soon as the writer pretends to move into the world of common reality" (250). Jackson enhances this uncanny effect by defying easy generic categorization, leaving open the question of whether we are in the world of common reality, fairy tale, folk horror, a ghost story, or even science fiction. Jackson's fiction has impacted writers and directors across genres, but has also contributed to the playful, irreverent engagement with genre now seen as a feature of postmodern and contemporary literature.

In this issue, we dip our toes into a project with seemingly infinite potential: tracing Jackson's influence on contemporary works of literature, cinema, and television. From direct adaptations to more oblique allusions, references, and inspirations, the articles collected here consider Jackson's work through its intertextual afterlives.

— Emily Banks

On This Special Issue

Complicated familial relationships and isolated houses are the focus of Paige Allen's "Homes for Strange Children: Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Daisy Johnson's *Sisters*." In this essay, Allen delves into the fraught dynamics between a pair of emotionally entwined sisters, July and September, and their single mother, Sheela, while also considering Jackson's influence on these relationships and the domestic uncanny. Allen argues that Jackson and Johnson both subvert the traditional understanding of the female Gothic by focusing on ambivalent experiences of motherhood and strong sister relationships. However, rather than domesticity representing confinement, as in Jackson's work, Johnson embraces embodiment, "a particular terror," where possession rewrites the typical haunted house story.

Jill E. Anderson also tackles the theme of embodiment in her exploration of Jackson's and Carmen Maria Machado's work. In "Her Body

and Other Ghosts: Embodied Horror in the Works of Shirley Jackson and Carmen Maria Machado," Anderson writes that both authors use embodied horror to articulate how women react to the profound, albeit less apparent, challenges of navigating their patriarchal realities. According to Anderson, for Jackson, embodying horror becomes a tool to manoeuvre through a world fraught with oppressive structures; for Machado, it becomes a method of resilience against past violence. Yet both authors offer strong pathways for women to express their lived experiences.

Moving away from the page, Savannah Bly Richardson considers a television episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in relation to Jackson's 1957 short story "The Missing Girl," two narratives that explore themes of female subjectivity and invisibility. Reading the televisual text within the context of Jackson's themes, Richardson notes that both narratives centre the struggle of young women to be seen by their peers and adults and explore what happens when women are psychologically and/or physically erased. Richardson argues that *Buffy* presents a third-wave feminist ending—one very different from Jackson's—where invisibility becomes a superpower, and ultimately something more transformative.

We return to Carmen Maria Machado's work in Carolin Jesussek's essay, "Gothic Inheritances: Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Carmen Maria Machado's 'A Hundred Miles and a Mile' and *In the Dream House*." Jesussek explores how both authors use fantasy and utopian imagination to create queer futures and suggests the term "gothic inheritances" to explore the transmission of knowledge among non-heteronormative women through storytelling and tangible objects. This transmission forms non-traditional, queer familial connections that pass on feminine wisdom, and these intergenerational bonds underscore a continual emphasis on envisioning potential queer futures across time and narratives.

Jackson's influence can be seen in another contemporary author's work, as Ibi Kaslik proposes in the essay, "Murderers, Whores, and Thieves: Crime and Violence as Acts of Resistance in Selected Works of Shirley Jackson and Virginia Feito." Kaslik dives deep into Feito's *Mrs. March*, about the wife of a famous novelist who suspects that her husband has humiliated her with the publication of his latest book. Kaslik connects Mrs. March's experience of fractured female selfhood to several of Jackson's female protagonists and argues that Feito expands on Jackson's distinctive exploration of identity's fragility, a common experience for women among the adversarial patriarchal frameworks of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Whether evoking or alluding to the work of Shirley Jackson, these creators are part of a continued dialogue with the unsettling (staying) power of Jackson's literary legacy. While the conversation is rich and ongoing, we

hope that this special issue of *Monstrum* will inspire further intertextual scholarship on Jackson's influence across genres, modes, and mediums.

— Alexis Finc

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Homes for Strange Children:
Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Daisy Johnson's *Sisters* (2020)

Paige Allen

Introduction

It is unsurprising that the work of Daisy Johnson, particularly *Sisters* (2020), has been compared to that of Shirley Jackson. Both Jackson and Johnson write psychologically complex stories shaped by an uncanny, Gothic sensibility that explore strange houses—and the weird women within them. While Johnson's collection *Fen* (2016) features a house as alive and unnerving as Hill House, Jackson's influence on Johnson is most apparent in *Sisters*, for which Johnson was deemed "the demon offspring of Shirley Jackson and Stephen King" (Preston 2020). Early in her career, Johnson made her mark on the literary world—her first novel was shortlisted for the Booker Prize—and she became part of a broad group of contemporary women writers who reimagine Gothic forms and aesthetics for modern and global contexts. Through her engagement with uncanny domestic settings, Johnson inherits and extends a tradition that Jackson responded to and shaped anew. As Johnson writes into the space carved out by Jackson, we can see how Jackson's ideas endure and are reimagined today.

Sisters follows siblings July and September after an incident at their high school compels them to flee with their mother, Sheela, to a remote house. The depressed Sheela spends most of the novel in bed while the reader witnesses the intense relationship between September and July and the strange happenings of the house around them. Eventually, July faces her repressed memories: after July was publicly humiliated at school, September demanded the bullies meet her on the tennis courts. That day, a storm hit, and September was struck by lightning. July once promised her sister that if only one of them could live, it would be September. Present throughout the novel from beyond the grave, September insists on July fulfilling her promise and succeeds in possessing her sister. *Sisters* positions Johnson within the long Gothic tradition, especially the "Female Gothic" and "Domestic Gothic" traditions that Jackson shaped in the mid-twentieth century.

Johnson explicitly names Jackson as one of her influences. Johnson intended *Sisters* to be "a love letter to the horror genre" but found, as the book took shape,

> the more obvious horror elements sort of melted away and what was left was a domestic menace. I think that was what I really wanted, which I suppose is stolen from Shirley Jackson; so that even as you're making a cup of tea or sitting and watching television, there's still that sense of tension. (quoted in Clark 2020)

This description evokes "domestic gothic," a term L. N. Rosales uses to describe Jackson's writings that "subvert the ordinary by uncovering the possibility of terror within the everyday domestic sphere" (2020, para. 1). Alongside this domestic menace, Johnson focuses on vexed family relationships and "trauma buried within those relationships and buried within the body" (Clark 2020). These themes reveal Jackson's further influence on Johnson. Both authors are invested in the connections between complicated families, the domestic uncanny, and bodily experiences—core Gothic concerns.

Johnson and Jackson engage with a Gothic formula dating back to the tradition's eighteenth-century origins: "woman-plus-habitation" (Holland and Sherman 1977, 280). This formula is especially foundational to the "Female Gothic," a debated term used to describe Gothic stories that focus on women's experiences and/or depict women in unhomely domestic spaces (Moers 1978; Wallace and Smith 2009). One common reading of the relationship between the woman and the Gothic house interprets the house as a "metaphor of mother-protection or mother-entrapment," staging how "daughters, feeling both the desire to merge with the mother and the fear of entrapment, can neither leave the house nor stay in it" (Hwang 2009, 121). As Johnson's July remarks, "it is impossible that we are here and it is impossible to stay" (2020, 13). However, Jackson and Johnson provide a twist on these formulations: the dual fears of loss and nonseparation are not presented as a daughter's toward her mother but rather as experienced *between sisters* and *by a mother toward her children*.

This paper explores Jackson and Johnson's Gothic intertextualities. As Susanne Becker writes, "feminine gothics are haunted houses, not only in the contextual sense of 'experience' but also in the intertextual sense of continuation and deconstruction of feminine textuality" (1999, 67). Through a close reading of *Sisters* alongside *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), *We Have Always Lived in the*

Castle (1962),[1] and Jackson's nonfiction writing, we can trace Jackson's legacy within Johnson's novel and examine how *Sisters* draws upon and extends ideas from Jackson's works by staging fraught familial relationships in a strange, shifting house. Specifically attending to embodiment, Johnson writes women's houses as bodies, emphasizing the unhomely terror, not of inhabiting an uncanny space, but of being uncannily inhabited. Examining Johnson's work alongside Jackson's writings helps us recognize the continued significance of Jackson's ideas and construct a lineage of writers who employ the Gothic to explore women's experiences and stage the domestic uncanny.

Weird Sisters

Jackson is known for writing weird women, and Johnson infuses a similar strangeness into July and September. Readers, one reviewer declares, "will not fail to be reminded of Merricat and Constance Blackwood" (Rose 2020). Just as Merricat narrates *Castle* with a distinctive, unreliable voice, July relates *Sisters* through a similarly untrustworthy perspective. Joyce Carol Oates describes Merricat as a "feral child, sulky adolescent, and Cassandra-like seer," "socially maladroit, highly self-conscious and disdainful of others" (2009, 147–48). July and September fit these descriptions; they are "different […] from the other children at school; clever but stunted, naive, happily young" (Johnson 2020, 95). Johnson's descriptions of July and September could easily apply to Merricat and Constance: they are "isolated, uninterested, conjoined, young for their age, sometimes moved to great cruelty" (94); they "held one another inside of childhood, arms around each other, clinging on" (95). While Constance is ten years older than Merricat, her fear of people prevents her from fully entering adulthood. She, too, belongs among Jackson's "isolated and estranged hypersensitive young female protagonists," alongside *Hill House*'s Eleanor (Oates 2009, 148). Like the Blackwoods, who hate and are hated by the townsfolk, and Eleanor, who grew up in a "feud with the entire neighborhood," July and September are outcasts, forced out of a hostile community (Jackson [1959] 2009, 7). After July's intense bullying and September's freak death, July and her mother escape to the Settle House.

July and September further mirror Merricat and Constance through their attempts at witchcraft, specifically protection spells. While Johnson's inclusion of folk magic reveals Jackson's influence, a comparison of magic rituals in *Castle*

[1] Hereafter, *Castle*.

versus *Sisters* helps us notice how Johnson both draws upon and differs from Jackson, particularly in her treatment of embodiment. Merricat focuses her magic on protecting her sister and the house they live in. She places "safeguards" around the property, nailing objects to trees and burying "treasures" in the ground, like a box of silver dollars (Jackson [1962] 2009, 41). Arriving at the Settle House, July digs in the dirt to find the house key and instead unearths coins, recalling Merricat's buried money. Merricat also chooses "three powerful words, words of strong protection" that will prevent change from coming to the house so long as they're never spoken aloud (44). Merricat eats these words, writing one in the jam on her toast and whispering another into a water glass before drinking. Like the treasures placed within the ground, Merricat buries the words inside her by consuming them. Her spells thus relate to the Blackwood property and her body. Her protection is focused as much on the house as it is on Constance, who never leaves the property; in fact, they are elided in Merricat's mind. When their cousin Charles arrives unexpectedly, Merricat thinks, "if I could re-seal the protection around Constance and shut Charles out, he would have to leave the house. Every touch he made on the house must be erased" (69). Protecting the house and protecting Constance are the same for Merricat; she could easily switch the nouns and say she wishes to re-seal the protection around *the house* and erase every touch Charles made on *Constance*.

Like Merricat, July and September perform protection rituals, but these acts are more embodied than those Jackson depicts. For example, July sees September spinning: "I close my eyes five times quickly so that she won't fall and if she does she will land like a cat" (Johnson 2020, 9). More dramatically, September leads a ritual to curse the classmates who bully July: "We crushed coffee beans with our fists and tore strips off the bottoms of our dresses, wound them around our bare arms, wet our hair and fingers so they dripped onto the wooden floorboards" (46). Both rituals—July's blinking and September's curse—are enacted by and upon the sisters' bodies. The most significant moment of witchcraft in *Sisters* is the blood promise July makes to September: "If there could be only one of us it would be you" (174). This magic is also bodily: after July accidentally cuts her thumb, September purposefully cuts hers. The open wounds emphasize the sisters' shared blood and the permeability of July's body, which September will eventually enter. This ritual also suggests Johnson's treatment of bodies as houses. The girls smear blood on their cheeks like paint on walls, and they make this promise in, significantly, the spare room: July promises to be the "spare" so that September may live. This is the ultimate

protection spell. While Merricat aims to reinforce the walls around Constance, September makes July more permeable.

The separation between September and July was always thin. Johnson writes their relationship as intensely codependent. Born only ten months apart (in September, then July), they function as twins; they are all but inseparable, "unfinished doppelgängers" (Johnson 2020, 96). Their codependence, however, is defined by September's control. More than mirror images, they are a girl and her shadow. The tentative, self-conscious July follows and concedes to the brash, manipulative September. September insists they share a cellphone—a "truly disquieting intimacy" (Wagner 2020) for twenty-first-century teens—and a birthday—of course, September's own. Johnson writes, "they were close as they'd ever been. September answering every question for her sister, their meals carefully divided sharing platters, their heads close together on the same pillow" (2020, 99). When describing the sisters' closeness, Johnson begins by noting how September speaks for July, signaling that what could be read as equal activities are in fact part of September's control tactics. Here, September is named, but July is only "her sister," a dynamic July recognizes: "I was an appendage. I was September's sister" (184). The sisters merge into one, but with September remaining central, July an extension of her sister.

Johnson's depiction of September and July reimagines typical elements of the Female Gothic, building upon Jackson's own innovations. Female Gothic heroines in unhomely houses often exhibit dual desires to escape and to stay in (and, in fact, become) the home. Roberta Rubenstein reads these desires as reflecting "a young child's urge to remain merged with the mother (who becomes emotionally identified with the 'home') and to separate from her, with the attendant danger of being lost" (1996, 309). Rubenstein argues that the Gothic woman's "imprisonment in a house […] expresses her ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection" (130). Similarly, Claire Kahane reads Gothic heroines as confronting the female child's "tenuous and fundamentally ambivalent struggle for a separate identity" from her mother that is haunted by the "fear of nothingness or nonseparation" (1985, 338). In other words, the Female Gothic often explores simultaneous fears: loss of identity through merger (with mother, with house) and loss of protection through abandonment/separation.

Jackson, and Johnson after her, explore these twin fears, but they reshape the tradition by exploring them through relationships between *sisters* rather than as a daughter's feelings toward her mother. In *Castle*, Merricat feels no guilt for killing her mother and cares only for her sister. While Ashleigh Hardin argues that Merricat seeks to contain and "promote Constance from older sister to

'Mom,'" the sisters do not follow those roles so clearly (2016, para. 9). Although Merricat does wish to control Constance's behavior, this stems in part from her own sense of parental protectiveness. Merricat fears Constance will separate from her and become the "lost" child Rubenstein describes: "Constance needed guarding more than ever before and if I became angry and looked aside she might very well be lost" (Jackson [1962] 2009, 79). Meanwhile, Constance considers with trepidation and curiosity what leaving the house would mean, feeling some guilt for trapping Merricat inside with her: "We should have faced the world and tried to *live normal lives*" (82; emphasis mine). Like Constance, Johnson's July realizes that she could live beyond the confines of the Gothic funhouse that is her intense relationship with September. Recognizing that September is dead, July is both horrified and thrilled at the prospect of life without her: "It is awful, all of this possibility. […] And buried between each word, each possible outcome, is this: I'll let you go. I won't keep you. I'll *live*" (Johnson 2020, 175; emphasis mine). But what is September's sister, September's appendage, without her? The anxieties surrounding separation and nonseparation, typically attributed to mother–daughter dynamics, are instead embedded by Jackson and Johnson in relationships between sisters.

In *Hill House*, Jackson directly reimagines the ambivalent relationship between female heroine and Gothic home as a sisterly one. Scholars have read Hill House as a maternal presence (see Rubenstein 1996; Reid 2020), and while these readings have merit, I argue that *Hill House* is as—if not *more*—interested in sisters than mothers and daughters. The novel is filled with strained sisterly relationships, including the daughters of the house's architect who quarreled bitterly over the house. The first piece of information Jackson reveals about Eleanor, other than her age, is that the "only person in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister" ([1959] 2009, 6). This line refocuses Eleanor's hatred from mother to sister, potentially indicating how Jackson reframes Gothic themes. Eleanor and Theodora also develop the intimacy and rivalry of a tense sisterhood. Shortly after meeting, the pair decide they "must really be related" (53). However, after Theodora accuses Eleanor of writing her own name on Hill House's wall and covering Theodora's clothes in red paint (or blood), Eleanor feels flashes of hatred toward Theodora even as she longs for her acceptance. Forced to share a room and clothes, Theodora remarks, "We're going to be practically twins" (158). Jackson describes the pair walking together: "Fear and guilt are sisters […]. Silent, angry, hurt, they left Hill House side by side, walking together, each sorry for the other" (172). Naming fear and guilt as sisters, Jackson emphasizes the importance of sisters to *Hill*

House. Eleanor's dual longings for separation and nonseparation are directed not toward a replacement mother but toward a surrogate sister.

This surrogate is, on one level, Theodora; on another, it is Hill House itself. When Eleanor questions if anything is real, Montague cautions her from "venturing far too close to the state of mind which would welcome the perils of Hill House with a kind of sisterly embrace" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 140). This advice comes the morning after Eleanor and Theodora, hearing inexplicable knocking on their door, embraced each other in bed. Eleanor hugs her surrogate sister, Theodora, to hold onto reality, but as this grip slips—when Theodora abandons Eleanor by rejecting her hopes that they might share a life together—Eleanor comes to cling to Hill House instead. Jackson's Gothic house thus reflects the fears of separation and nonseparation not (or not solely) in an ambivalent mother–daughter relationship but between ambivalent sisters.

In *Sisters*, Johnson builds on Jackson's revisions. Though July and September certainly resemble, respectively, the self-conscious Eleanor and charismatic Theodora, they also each recall Hill House. September shares Hill House's capricious, mischievous personality. Johnson could be describing Hill House when she writes: "[September] was so alive then that she stole living from those around her" (2020, 184). When playing September Says—a one-sided version of Simon Says in which September commands and July obeys—September instructs July to "write your name on the wall in permanent marker" (25), perhaps a nod to Eleanor's name written on Hill House's walls.

Johnson twists Jackson's precedent: while the Settle House is appropriately Gothic, the true entrapping force is the relationship between the sisters—and, eventually, July's body itself. Playing September Says, and prefiguring the later possession, September commands July to "pretend to be a house, and July makes her body a structure for September to reside within" (Johnson 2020, 27). In *Hill House*, the horror arises from the house appearing too human—through, for example, the "icy little curls of fingers" Eleanor feels (Jackson [1959] 2009, 130). In *Sisters*, these fingers become September's pressing into July's face and breastbone as she sleeps, and the horror arises from the human treated as home, from July becoming a space for September to invade. By the novel's end, July is like Hill House, home to her ghostly inhabitant; she feels September "shift[ing] inside me" (Johnson 2020, 184). This line recalls when Eleanor imagines herself as a "small creature swallowed whole" by Hill House: "the monster feels my tiny little movements inside" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 42). This shift reveals how Johnson innovates upon Jackson's work: rather than exploring how her characters merge with the house around them, she imagines bodies as houses to be inhabited.

Johnson and Jackson further revise Gothic tropes in their treatment of feminine doubling. Reading *Sisters*, Madison Lacy points out how "the doubled sisters and the oppressing non-presence of September" evoke the "angel/monster" (2023, 63) dichotomies in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). September, like Bertha and Rebecca, haunts July with a cruelty and power that July both fears and envies. Yet, Lacy argues, by choosing sisters as Gothic doubles rather than first and second wives, Johnson foregrounds "a relationship completely independent of men" (2023, 64). Even a mother–daughter relationship implies paternal involvement. Johnson builds upon Jackson, who also writes sisters as doubles and, at least in *Castle*, involves men only as an outside threat to that bond rather than as a necessary factor in it. Lynnette Carpenter identifies Merricat and Constance's "replacement of heterosexual romance with sisterhood as their central emotional bond" (1984, 35). While doubled wives, and mothers and daughters, are common in the Gothic tradition, Jackson and Johnson reimagine those dynamics through sisters.

In *Sisters*, we can best see the primacy of the sisterly bond, alongside the fears of abandonment and nonseparation, when men threaten to impact September and July's relationship. When July secretly texts her crush, Ryan, she is "set through with guilt at doing anything – let alone this – without September" (Johnson 2020, 52). As she prepares to send Ryan a topless photo, July "could already taste September's fury. There wasn't anything we didn't do together and yet here I was" (57). July fears separation from September, yet she wishes to create her own identity—and relationship with Ryan. On the beach near the Settle House, the sisters meet and have sex with a young man, John; when he comes to the Settle House and kisses July without September's involvement, the angered September compels July to knock him out. Ryan and John parallel *Castle*'s Charles, another male interloper who threatens the sisterly relationship but is ultimately expelled. Both *Castle* and *Sisters* conclude by reasserting the dominance of sisterhood and reinscribing its power dynamics. July declares, "John is gone […]. There has never been anyone but September. There has barely even been me" (167).

While both Jackson and Johnson depict sisterhood as a central emotional bond, Johnson writes this bond as explicitly bodily. July thinks, "I know September's body better than I know my own. Often – looking down at myself – there is a great mass of confusion and in the mirror there is a shock at seeing my own face looking back rather than hers" (Johnson 2020, 30). The bond between the sisters is expressed through bodily knowledge. While September has sex with John, July experiences the same bodily sensations: "We lost our

virginity together" (108). Even during intercourse, the bond of sisterhood usurps, or at least exists alongside, heterosexual attraction. Speaking together, September and July describe the extent of their physical bond:

> When one of us speaks we both feel the words moving on our tongues. […] It would have surprised neither of us to have found, slit open, that we shared organs, that one's lungs breathed for the both, that a single heart beat a doubling, feverish pulse. (6)

If the sisters were conjoined before September's death, her undead nature allows them to truly merge. This physical bond culminates with September possessing July, the two sharing one body.

The intense sisterly relationships depicted by Jackson and Johnson are haunted by dual longings for separation and merger, and eventually one sister must give in to nothingness or nonseparation via replacement or possession. July gives herself up so September may live through her. Similarly, Constance sacrifices herself to protect Merricat; while Merricat is the true murderer of the Blackwood family, Constance takes on this identity. The sisters speak the truth only once, and Constance insists they will "never talk about it again" (Jackson [1962] 2009, 130). As Constance acknowledges complicity and re-affirms her sacrifice, we understand that "in her heart, she *was* and *is* the Blackwoods' murderer, and not Merricat; that is, not only Merricat" (Oates 2009, 157). To the world, and even to the sisters themselves, Constance is the murderer: she has taken Merricat's place. As Karen J. Hall writes, Constance and Merricat "are distinct, but they collude in their silence and the boundaries between them blur" (1993, 116). If *Castle* ends with Constance "succumbed to Merricat entirely: the 'good' sister […] yielded to the 'evil' sister" (Oates 2009, 157), then *Sisters* literalizes this surrender through bodily possession. As September takes over July, she forces July to repeat the words "Iloveyou" (Johnson 2020, 182). These words echo Merricat's refrain: no less than six times she tells Constance "I love you," and although Constance usually responds in kind, Merricat always initiates. While Merricat dreams of the safety and solitude of the moon, Johnson chooses a different celestial motif: an eclipse, "the obscuring of light from one celestial body by the passage of another" (172). In her fantasies of the moon, Merricat isolates Constance from the world, but September enacts an eclipse, passing in front of July so only September is visible.

Eleanor's choice to stay in Hill House also engages themes of self-abdication. Eleanor lets go of her identity to truly "come inside": "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" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 232, 204). July echoes this language when she promises to abdicate to September: "I am a shape cut out of the universe […] and she is the creature to fill the gap I leave in the world" (Johnson 2020, 79). *Sisters* ends with July relinquishing herself: "I lay it out now. Here is everything I have" (184). Both Eleanor and July give over their lives.

While Constance and Merricat remain inseparable within their house, and Eleanor stays forever in Hill House, July becomes the house within which she is isolated. July describes her brain as a house "with many rooms," and she is trapped in the basement while September "lives in every single one" (Johnson 2020, 183). July becomes her own prison, the madwoman in the attic of her mind. Johnson departs from Jackson by depicting the horrors of what the body itself can house, writing July as both Gothic heroine and Gothic house. In the next section, I further explore how Johnson blurs the boundaries between house and body through the strange contours of the Settle House and her depiction of motherhood.

Strange Homes

Just as July and September are inspired by Jackson's weird sisters, the Settle House is influenced by Jackson's strange homes. Both authors trouble the domestic, familial, and familiar through unhomely spaces. The Settle House inherits Hill House's architectural disorder. Johnson's Settle House is "rankled, bentoutashape, dirtyallover" (2020, 9); its "layout […] feels wrong, unintuitive" (2020, 13). In Jackson's Hill House, "every angle is slightly wrong" ([1959] 2009, 105); it is "a little bit off center," "disjointed," filled with "tiny aberrations" that produce "a fairly large distortion in the house as a whole" (105–07). Both the Settle House and Hill House have no permanent occupants; they are rented by people "who do not know where else to go" (Johnson 2020, 11). These tilted, transient homes keep their readers and temporary residents from getting too comfortable.

Jackson writes ambivalent, alive homes that fluctuate between protecting and imprisoning their inhabitants, and the Settle House inherits this complexity and consciousness. Like Hill House and the Blackwood home, the Settle House feels more organic than object, a shifting creature that enters into relationships with the women inside it. Hill House is a "live organism" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 3), and the Settle House has "roots in the earth" (Johnson 2020, 170). Hill House "watches every move you make," "settling and stirring with movement

that was almost like a shudder" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 85, 92). Johnson describes the Settle House similarly: the house watches the conception of September and July's father, and its "walls shudder, do not turn away" (Johnson 2020, 85). Jackson describes Hill House's agency over its own construction: it "seemed somehow to have formed itself, flying together into its own powerful pattern" ([1959] 2009, 35). In an homage to *Hill House*, Johnson writes the Settle House reflecting on its own construction: "The Settle House is built though it hasn't yet found its name. […] [T]he build stutters, nearly fails, grinds on. This sandy earth consumes buildings like that. Yet it stands and people come and go from inside its walls" (2020, 85).

While the Settle House certainly recalls Jackson's infamous Hill House, it also resembles the protective Blackwood home, which has its own aliveness. Merricat feels "guarded by the house" (Jackson [1962] 2009, 50). After Charles' arrival, she hopes that "the house, injured, would reject him by itself" (78). Returning after the fire, Constance believes the house "ought surely to recognize the touch of her hand," and it "seem[s] to shiver" as they enter (113). The protective nature of the Blackwood's "castle" is what Sheela seeks in the Settle House: "the house would cocoon them, would protect them all" (Johnson 2020, 101–02). The Settle House is both a place to "settle," to rest, and a place still settling, still unsettled—fighting the sand that threatens to consume it. Johnson constructs the Settle House as somewhere between the fickle, fiendish Hill House and the shielding, subtle Blackwood house; she emulates Jackson's approach to homes as *living* spaces and leans into the ambivalence of Gothic homes as both entrapping and protecting.

The Settle House's aliveness helps heighten Johnson's exploration of bodies as houses. Johnson writes Sheela and the Settle House in parallel: Sheela "has always known that houses are bodies and that her body is a house in more ways than most," while the Settle House "is, more than any other, a body" (2020, 89). Understanding Sheela and the Settle House as connected through these core themes helps us track the intertextual valences between Johnson and Jackson's works. Susanne Becker writes that haunted houses can be "bodies that are, in de Beauvoir's sense, not born but *becoming women*" (1999, 20). While Jackson explores these ideas through the walls of literal structures, Johnson shows us how women's bodies, or bodies becoming women, can be haunted houses.

Johnson likens the Settle House to a body, evoking Jackson's treatment of Hill House and the Blackwood home. Johnson describes the Settle House "[s]quatting like a child," its "top floor sunk down onto the bottom like a hand curved over a fist" (2020, 7, 8). The house "groans," "releasing air" (29) as

though it has lungs to breathe. Its "rooms are like organs, trembling a little under the flow of blood" (Johnson 2020, 42). Similarly, Jackson writes of the "heart of the house" in both Hill House and the Blackwood home ([1959] 2009, 119; [1962] 2009, 55). Merricat imagines fire "running through the bones of our house" ([1962] 2009, 104), while Eleanor regards the "amused, certain face of the house, watching her quietly" ([1959] 2009, 240). For this paper's purposes, again, the most significant bodily description of Hill House (as discussed earlier) occurs when Eleanor thinks, "I am like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster, […] and the monster feels my tiny little movements inside" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 42). This image of Eleanor as a "small creature" making "tiny little movements" inside another creature's belly evokes pregnancy. Jackson even uses the same term, "small creature," to describe a baby in an essay for new mothers (1960a, 112). Reading *Hill House* alongside maternal metaphors in architectural descriptions, Luke Reid argues that the house—both Hill House and houses in general—is a "replacement for the womb" (2020, para. 7). Johnson weaves this same comparison into *Sisters*; she highlights conceptions and births within the Settle House and describes how "Sheela dreams of her unborn children in the house, sees them as tiny smudges of charcoal on the walls" (2020, 87).

These descriptions return us to the ambivalent Female Gothic house and its interpretation as representative of the mother. Critics tend to read the house as representing the daughter's desire for mother-protection and fear of mother-entrapment. While Johnson explores mother–daughter relationships, it is not in this typical formula. Reconfiguring the fears of loss and nonseparation, Johnson gives voice to the mother's fears: Sheela both struggles to understand her children and is unsettled by the feeling that they wish to inhabit her. Building upon the connection between inhabited house and pregnant body, Johnson departs from a tradition of matrophobia in Gothic fiction and scholarship focused on haunted houses. Examining the body as a house, Johnson explores fear not of mothers but of motherhood.

For Johnson, pregnancy and motherhood reveal the body as a house. During Sheela's first stay in the Settle House, her pregnancy—being "filled up with September"—allows her to understand that "the house was like her, a shifting and changing thing, awkward in its flesh, sometimes welling and bloating out from its own walls, sometimes growing so warm the sweat pooled in her eyes" (Johnson 2020, 90). Johnson switches between the pronouns "her" and "it," blurring Sheela and the house as subjects. Rather than fearing the house and/or mother, Johnson asks us to see and sympathize with their changing forms. Johnson describes Sheela's early years of motherhood: "She'd

never had so many hands on her, feeling like her skin could wear away like thin material" (92). She feels like the Settle House's "white walls […] streaked with mud handprints" (8). Sheela is sometimes convinced her daughters "wanted the very foundations of her, wanted to break the bricks of her body apart and climb back in" (92). Here, Johnson explicitly presents nonseparation as a mother's fear; rather than centering the daughters' desire for mother-protection through merger (or fear of mother-entrapment), Johnson centers the horror of being the object of that need.

Johnson introduces pregnancy and motherhood as core to understanding bodies as houses, describing how pregnant bodies and mothering bodies are inhabited. However, Sheela experiences her body as a house for more than literal children. Johnson writes,

> She had housed those beautiful daughters, hadn't she, and she had housed depression all through her life like a smaller, weightier child, and she housed excitement and love and despair and in the Settle House she houses an unsettling worry that she finds difficult to shake, an exhaustion that smothers the days out of her. (2020, 89)

Through Sheela, Johnson draws attention to the many things people carry inside—children, mental illness, emotion—and explores the difficulty of being "filled up with noise and pain" while also carrying the weight of motherhood (2020, 162). Sheela has often felt "her body did not belong to her" (162); like many women, she is treated as an object of use, first by her daughters' father, then by her children. The truth and terror of motherhood (if not womanhood), for Sheela, is that she is transformed into a house, an everyday object. As July remarks, "she is just a mother to us and she is in rooms the way chairs and tables are" (32). Johnson aims to write mothers who "might be struggling to fit themselves into too rigid a categorization, or might be managing alone – or might even, like Sheela, find themselves frightened of their child" (Clark 2020). Uncanny, frightening children are features of the Domestic Gothic (Rosales 2020). Rather than exploring these struggles through a house in which Sheela is confined, Johnson highlights Sheela's ambivalent experience of her own body as a house.

While *Hill House* and *Castle* feature characters struggling with their role as caretaker (Eleanor caring for her mother, Constance caring for Merricat and Uncle Julian), these works do not focus on motherhood. However, Jackson's nonfiction domestic writings are invested in the complexities of motherhood that Johnson describes. Jackson infuses her nonfiction writings with a Gothic

sensibility to explore these ideas. The titles of *Life Among the Savages* (1953) and *Raising Demons* (1957), Jackson's collections of life writings, convey a sense of being overwhelmed and even frightened of one's children to which Sheela could relate. Within Jackson's witty remarks and humorous anecdotes, one detects Gothic elements—her daughter hears a faraway voice singing to her at night; her son writes a treatise on their house's poltergeist. Jackson writes, "Sometimes, in my capacity as a mother, I find myself sitting open-mouthed and terrified before my own children, little individual creatures moving solidly along in their own paths…" ([1953] 2019, 164). Here, Jackson engages with the "uncanny characters" of the Domestic Gothic "who grotesquely distort our expectations […] frequently (and most perversely perhaps) in the figure of one's own child" (Rosales 2020, para. 1). Jackson reimagines the Female Gothic fear of separation—not as a child's fear of abandonment or a mother's fear of losing her child, but as a mother's fear of alienation from her child. In *Special Delivery* (1960), a guide for new mothers, Jackson reimagines Gothic entrapment. Jackson writes, "No caged bird, singing its sad sad song of captivity and beating its little wings against the bars, is more poignant than the mother of a new baby looking out at the vast, unattainable world beyond the nursery windows" (1960b, 91). Jackson reverses how fear of entrapment is traditionally depicted in the Female Gothic. Rather than the house representing the mother trapping her child, the mother is trapped by her child and motherhood: "Wherever the mother goes, the baby goes too" (91). By writing candidly about frustrating experiences of motherhood (fear, guilt, depression, anger), Jackson opens space for writers to explore the mundane horrors of motherhood—space into which Johnson steps.

Although Johnson highlights motherhood, the experience of one's body as a house is not limited to Sheela or to mothers. The dynamic between September and July, and July's ultimate fate as a house for September, denaturalizes the idea of "body as house" and reveals its uncanniness. In the epigraph, Johnson writes, "My sister is the end of the line my sister is the locked door […] My sister is the last house on the street" (2020, 1). Both July and September could speak these words—September seeking to break into and inhabit July, and July facing her final destination: possessed by her sister, trapped within herself. Speaking together, July and September begin the novel with the words "[a] house" and tell us "[t]his is the year we are haunted," "this is the year we are houses, lights on in every window, doors that won't quite shut" (5, 6). Although the epigraph speaks of a "locked door," the "doors that won't quite shut" remind us that the boundaries between the sisters are—like the boundary between life and death, and the boundaries of bodies—permeable.

Johnson juxtaposes Sheela's self-conscious articulation of the hardships of motherhood with the horror of July's possession, an extreme experience of becoming a house. Sheela lucidly reflects on "what it was like to house things inside her, how it was possible to be both skin and flesh and also mortar and plaster" (Johnson 2020, 162). July experiences this description as body horror. The skin on her arm becomes "dry like baking paper and rough, bubbled like the odd wallpaper in the old house" (124). July picks at the flesh of her arm like she picks at the Settle House's walls. In a dream state, she makes a hole in a wall, revealing a swarm of ants: "the softened wall gives, the hole widening against their small, tough forms" (125). In trying to discover what lurks with the Settle House's walls, July tries to locate what lurks within herself. July likens herself to a house when describing how she sees September in the mirror: "She gazes out of my coating, like a thief caught breaking into a building" (122). Side by side in *Sisters*, we find July forcibly inhabited by her dead sister and Sheela reflecting on ordinary experiences like grief and motherhood—both through the metaphor of body as house. July's uncanny bodily experiences, culminating in possession, cast the relatability of Sheela's experiences in a more disturbing light and reveal their underlying horror. By writing July's interactions with the Settle House as reflections of her bodily possession, and describing possession through the central idea of "body as house," Johnson differentiates *Sisters* from a typical possession story: she writes possession as a haunted house tale, rooting it in the Domestic Gothic and everyday uncanny.

Johnson both extends Jackson's legacy and shifts the valences of the final merger between body and house. Both Jackson and Johnson draw upon Female and Domestic Gothic tropes to explore the terrors that live within the home, the family, the body—what should protect us but so often traps us, what should be familiar but often feels alien. As Angela Hague argues, the pervading fear in Jackson's fiction is "the terror of what is unseen and unacknowledged; the enemy cannot be confronted because it inhabits a world that lies hidden but dangerously close by—often within the individual herself" (2005, 90). Locating the "enemy" within the individual is precisely what Johnson builds and innovates upon. While Merricat and Constance make their house their world, and Eleanor abandons her body to truly enter Hill House, July becomes September's home. Johnson's shift in focus is evident when we compare these passages from *Hill House* and *Sisters*. Jackson writes, "Nothing in this house moves […] until you look away, and then you can just catch something from the corner of your eye" ([1959] 2009, 110). Johnson describes July glimpsing September: "When I look from the corner of my eye I think I see something moving, *not out in the room but somehow inside me*, crawling beneath the surface"

(2020, 168, emphasis mine). Jackson writes alive and uncanny domestic spaces and characters who retreat into and merge with these homes. While Johnson also brings the Settle House to life, blurring the boundaries between it and its inhabitants, she does so to emphasize how the inhabitants *are also inhabited*. What is truly unsettling in *Sisters* is not that July and Sheela are confined by or undifferentiated from the house around them, but that they themselves are houses—that they can, and are even expected to, house difficult and terrifying things. Johnson extends the Gothic's connection between women and houses by focusing on bodies not as inhabiting uncanny spaces but as uncannily inhabited.

Conclusion

Alex Preston finishes his review of *Sisters* by calling it "a novel Shirley Jackson would have been proud to have written" (2020). While Johnson writes almost six decades after Jackson, Jackson's influence on Johnson's novel, conscious or not, is clear, and Johnson revisits and extends ideas found in Jackson's work. Both writers reimagine key Female Gothic and Domestic Gothic elements to explore complex sisterly relationships, unhomely and alive domestic spaces, and ambivalences toward motherhood.

For both Jackson and Johnson, houses, families, and bodies can become unhomely—especially for women. For Jackson, writing in mid-twentieth-century America, women's houses, families, and bodies are haunted by exacting domestic expectations: they must be kept clean, straight, and controlled. Jackson's strange houses, in her fiction and nonfiction, help her represent the difficulties of navigating those expectations and reveal how homes can never truly abide by those rigid lines. Writing in the 2010s, Johnson ought to face domestic expectations that are less imprisoning; yet our houses, families, and bodies are still haunted. By depicting women's bodies as houses, Johnson suggests that the threat may not always be imposed from the outside but, instead, may be something we carry inside us; that the demands upon us to deny and sacrifice ourselves are found burrowed within; that our bodies and minds can feel like funhouses and prisons; and that the capacity to carry so much, for better and for worse, is what it means to live—especially as a woman, but as anyone who carries emotions, experiences, relationships, and a body through this world.

Exploring *Sisters* as a house intertextually haunted by Jackson's work, we acknowledge a lineage of writers employing the Gothic to explore women's

experiences and to stage the domestic uncanny. Moreover, we recognize the rich and enduring nature of Jackson's literary contributions, which continue to influence the Gothic tradition today. Jackson's legacy and the Gothic genre, pushed forward by writers like Johnson, still have much to tell us about our families, our fears, our homes, and our bodies, and how they grow within each other.

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Her Body and Other Ghosts: Embodied Horror in the Works of Shirley Jackson and Carmen Maria Machado

Jill E. Anderson

> "The sight of one's own heart is degrading; people are not meant to look inward. That's why they've been given bodies—to hide their souls."
>
> — Shirley Jackson, *The Sundial*

> "Places are never just places in a piece of writing. If they are, the author has failed. Setting is not inert. It is activated by point of view."
>
> — Carmen Maria Machado, *In the Dream House*

In the foreword to *Dark Tales*, a 2017 collection of Shirley Jackson's short stories, Ottessa Moshfegh recounts a strange encounter with a woman she mistakes for her mother at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York. Moshfegh labels the incident as "a peculiar malfunction in the brain," which occurs when "something deeply familiar appears in a strange context" (Jackson 2017, vii). This "malfunction" can become "a new dimension of possibility" in which "paranoia is no longer a state of mind" (Jackson 2017, vii), but rather a real, felt, lived conspiracy against a person's sense of stability. Moshfegh labels these "occasions of failed recognition as Shirley Jackson moments" (viii), in which situations that at first seem benign and familiar morph into a tricky and half-occluded paranoic terror, uncanny horror in its truest sense. In these situations, paranoia and fear are mapped onto the real world rather than existing as imaginings trapped inside a person's mind. Those spaces once deemed comfortable and recognizable become awash with danger, forgetfulness, doubt, and failed understanding.

Jackson intertwines her domestic situations with the ludicrous horrors of everyday life, playing up the ways that ordinary household objects and domestic practices can harm or imprison women, causing them to viscerally dread even the most mundane of tasks. These existential insecurities compel Jackson's women into constant, insidious acts of

adaptation,[1] and their development of defence mechanisms can look like instability, dis-ease, insanity, malfeasance, and even criminality to an outside world. Whether it is Miss Strangeworth who, in "The Possibility of Evil," nonchalantly composes letters to send to her neighbours for the sole purpose of stirring up discord and fear; or Mrs. Smith who, in "The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith," placidly refuses to acknowledge her new husband might be a wife-murdering serial killer; or the townsfolk of Jackson's most famous short story, "The Lottery," who casually and unconscionably stone a neighbour to death—horror visits the most intimate spaces in Jackson's world. Her characters often miscalculate their interactions with the world since their perceptions are so distorted by the uncanny horror around them. The emotional and psychological malleability of the horror genre allows its authors to plumb the depths of the mind-body connection to uncover the insidious ways women are forced to cope with a discriminatory and dangerous world. Horror can remind readers of the ways society and domesticity are structured to oppress women and to force terrified responses to the resulting pressures. Navigating the world in the mind/body of a woman is always already horrifying.

Horror's malleability also speaks to Carmen Maria Machado, who, in a 2017 interview with the *Paris Review*, explains:

> When you enter into horror, you're entering into your own mind, your own anxiety, your own fear, your own darkest spaces. […] horror is an intimate, eerie, terrifying thing, and when it's done well it can unmake you, the viewer, the reader. That tells us a lot about who we are, what we are, and what we, individually and culturally, are afraid of. (Kane 2017)

Machado's description echoes the manner in which Eleanor navigates the world of Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*. In fact, Machado labels *Hill House* as both "the perfect novel" and her favourite book to reread, as she draws on similar themes to create characters forced to adapt to the horrific yet mundane vagaries of life as a woman. It is through this very ordinariness, the insidiousness of the ways the body is forced to adapt, that horror fully engulfs Jackson and Machado's women. These moments of horror—those slippages in perception and recognition, the ways characters adapt to their existential insecurity—illustrate that horror is not just an

[1] My use of the term "adaptation" does not refer to the ways one artistic medium is revised into another. Rather, I use the term to describe a more biological function, an adjustment to one's environment and to the conditions of the world around them or how they perceive those conditions.

external, monstrous, othering force but also a deeply embodied and felt experience for women in their various social and domestic subjugations.

Austin Lillywhite's concept of the "raw feel" is helpful here, as it describes "situated experience—not as a naïve refusal of a more real reality, nor as something falsely subjective, but rather as a mode of world-directed objectivity" (2022, 120). Lillywhite highlights a "phenomenology of feminine queer body experience, where knowledge of the world is directly in the body rather than in consciousness, and that the body produces unique types of spatiality in the ways that it is lived," emphasizing "the ways in which one's body copes with lingering gendered violations, and how this new understanding revises the psychological definition of raw feel as *qualia*" (120). It is the raw feel of paranoia, the way she is forced to adapt to her surroundings, that propels Miss Morgan in Jackson's "The Nightmare." Given the mundane task of delivering a package across town for her boss, she begins to feel like a hunted animal as she becomes the subject of a radio contest. Her physical description is broadcast for all to hear (blue gloves, red topcoat, carrying a large package), and even as she removes her gloves, alters her route, and changes the package she carries, she is still pursued by the sound truck touting her description. Forced to flee, she is finally caught in a parade going through Times Square peopled by children and men dressed like her, chanting, "Find Miss X, get all the checks" (Jackson 2018, 52). Readers are given no other explanation for what is happening here, why Miss Morgan is the subject of a radio contest or why it is frightening her so much, but she is finally whisked away by a mystery man who installs her in a hotel after saying, "We'll have to do it all again tomorrow in Chicago, this town stinks" (54). Miss Morgan is not this scheme's only victim. Instead, as the title implies, this mob-like, nefarious pursuit of young women attempting to go about a mundane task is a daily occurrence. Their bodies are always open to physical violence, and their minds always ready to react in fear and paranoia.

My readings of Jackson and Machado's work make note of the ways in which their characters adapt to the "raw feel," the horror inherent in their lives by seeking proof of and evidence for their past traumas. Writing horror brings it into existence, into the light, enlivening fears through the written word, so that the characters come to recognize the ways they have been groomed for disappointment and their macabre reality. This, in turn, forces them to find ways to cope with how these matters live inside their very bones. In what Robert Lloyd deems the "spectralization of identity," the act of writing, according to Lloyd, is an attempt at exorcism as the "loci of identity work in different ways to turn Jackson herself into a spectral presence, albeit one who haunts herself, or herselves, rather than an old room in the attic of the family home" (2020, 810). This spectralization is a

way for writers like Jackson to draw the embodied raw feeling from the realm of the occluded where it is hidden within the cells into the light to bear witness and provide evidence of those macabre realities. This spectral uncertainty and the embodied horror of being housewives, mothers, and merely *women* imbues Jackson and Machado's protagonists with a sort of second sight—one able to pierce the veil of normative expectations to see what the world is truly made of. Unable to act upon and change a fate, they are at least able to take note of it and either adjust their expectations accordingly or continue to mentally spin out in ways that manifest themselves physically.

The characteristic ambiguity of Jackson's work, her way of leaving the door open to the possibility of the supernatural (are they *truly* seeing what they are seeing? Is it a ghost or a figment of their imagination? Is it something that can psychologically or physically harm them?), enables many of her characters' adaptations to the physical environment to be expressed in outwardly strange and often isolating actions. For Machado, though, adaptation is absorbed into seeking proof of past horror and violence because of the historical erasure of so many queer narratives. Making trauma legible, writing it into the record and preserving it for others to share, becomes the primary mechanism of Machado's tales of horror and domestic violence. The difference between Jackson and Machado is the difference between ambiguity and defined survivalhood. For Jackson, embodying horror is just another way to navigate the vagaries of the world and the structural harms visited upon women in the mid-century; for Machado, it is how we learn to survive the violence of the past. Their texts, then, serve as evidence for and animation of these embodied horrors, which grant survivors a version of agency that, while not fully liberating, at least makes their experiences and feelings legible.

Horror, as a genre, excels at exposing dominant ideologies that are so insidious they are rendered unseen or deeply normalized as they govern our lived experiences. Body horror invites us to explore the ways characters adapt to and adopt those ideologies, thus rendering them part of a system that makes them either the monstrous other or a victim of it. Philip Brophy argues that contemporary horror films see the body as "a true place of physicality: a fountain of fascination, a bounty of bodily contact. If there is any mysticism left in the genre, it is that our own insides constitute a fifth dimension; an unknowable world, an incomprehensible darkness" (para. 15). Plumbing the depths of this unknowable world means also taking in account how body horror materializes around that which is seemingly unimaginable, exposing the certain unpleasant truths normally invisibilized by the status quo, and surfaces in unspeakable bodily functions and everyday realities of inhabiting the body of a woman. It also invites and forces us to confront

that which is not only deeply and extraordinarily traumatic but that which is lived-in, ever present, and normalized. The body is made alien by the environments around it, but then re-doubles as an alien being when reflected back to and felt by the subject of the story.

Put another way, body horror when "paired with the element of the supernatural or the uncanny […] is a statement, a place to experiment with and openly discuss what has for so long been hidden and viewed as taboo: the topic of women's bodies in all states, from puberty to sexuality to childbirth" (Rapoport 2020, 620). While body horror has, to this point, been critiqued primarily as a subgenre in film, taking on examinations of the extreme and grotesque, the disfigured, diseased, and mutilated, I claim body horror, or more specifically *embodied* horror, as a means of describing the psychosomatic reactions to the less immediately intense but still extraordinary ways women navigate the world. While much of body horror's goal is the spectacle of the transformed or mutilated body, embodied horror works from the inside out. That is, the audience witnesses the psychological transformations in characters before they even begin to manifest physically. Often characters seem stuck in a liminal space between the physical manifestation of horror and their own psychological activity. This constant flux, between outside and inside, often erodes their sense of security in the world, forcing them to undergo adaptations that can be deemed as monstrous. This not only leaves them susceptible to external forces, the violences of the everyday world, but also makes them accessories to their environments.

But the physical threat to women's bodies has long been a feature of Gothic horror, since the Gothic "as a form of experience, as a recognizable aesthetic, [is] one that relies on the susceptibility to being under attack or scared that is instinctive to us" (Reyes 2014, 2). The haunted castle or house features prominently in works of Gothic fiction as a physical container for the disempowered, trapped body. Though body horror builds on "anxieties surrounding transformation, mutation, and contagion" of the body and on a disgust that "is premised on the estrangement of the body via an exaggeration or transformation of its ordinary qualities or capacities," embodied horror is the nexus of those anxieties and exaggerations (Rapoport, 54, 56). What is crucial, though, is that body horror highlights victimhood and disempowerment at the same time it inscribes a terrifying agency to the haunted body. Bodies are taken over by external entities such as viruses, demons, experiments, and assaults. Barbara Creed's examination of horror film through the Bakhtinian carnival reveals that the body in horror

> mainly puts into play those oppositions that take place between the inside and outside of the body. This interplay between inside and

> outside implicates the entire body in the processes of destruction. Whereas carnival celebrated a temporary liberation from prevailing values and norms of behaviour, the cinema of horror celebrates the complete destruction of all values and accepted practices through the symbolic destruction of the body, the symbolic counterpart of the social body. […] The existence of the abject points always to the subject's precarious hold on what it means to be human. For the abject can never be fully excluded; it beckons from the boundaries, seeking to upset the already unstable nature of subjectivity, waiting to claim victory over the "human." (1995, 149–50)

Or, as Jack Halberstam argues, "[s]lowly but surely the outside becomes the inside and the hide no longer conceals or contains, it offers itself up as text, as body, as monster" as postmodern horror is all about the "immediate visibility" of the that which is monstrous (1995, 7, 1).

Embodied horror, I argue, is about validating objective experience and agential force by making those anxieties evidentiary and legible through the act of writing them into existence and articulating the physical manifestations of a horrified mind. It is a way of making the woman's body both victim *and* monster inhabiting Gothic stories

> as technologies that produce the monster as a remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body. The monster's body, indeed, is a machine that, in its Gothic mode, produces meaning and can represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative. The monster functions as monster, in other words, when it is able to condense as many fear-producing traits as possible into one body. (Halberstam 1995, 21)

Embodied horror, then, articulates the ways women's bodies are both open to abuse and monstrous in the ways that abuse can and does transform them, in their despair and in their physical forms. The narrator of "The Husband Stitch," Machado's modernized version of folklore's "Girl with the Green Ribbon," is just such a monstrous creature. Her husband is intrigued by the green ribbon around her neck, and despite their happy years together, he persists in wanting to touch it—"'A wife,' he said, 'should have no secrets from her husband.' […] 'The ribbon is not a secret; it's just *mine*'" (Machado 2017, 20). His final insistence that he take command over her ribbon does, indeed, cause her head to fall off so she is, in the end, not just a headless woman but also the victim of her husband's inability to believe her and maintain her physical and emotional boundaries. Her power is gone because those boundaries have been crossed irrevocably.

Jackson also creates characters who find it difficult to maintain power within their own boundaries. She utilizes Freud's concept of the uncanny (or *unheimlich*—meaning "unhomely"), which has domestic connotations but is also related to that which is secreted or hidden away, helpless, haunted, repressed, inexplicable. The uncanny references those moments in life that bring forth familiar visions or memories in ways our conscious minds cannot or will not fully recognize, thus cloaking them in an eerie or frightening sheen of half-truths not meant to come to light. Jackson's version of the uncanny forces her characters to scan their surroundings and map their perceptions onto the landscape within their own minds to get oriented (or close to some version of orientation), often resulting in deeply subjective paranoiac terror reflected in a seemingly dependable and safe external environment. Elsewhere, I have called these moments the mundane and ludicrous horrors of everyday life, and these mundane horrors dotted throughout Jackson's fiction come particularly to affect the women in her writing. That is, the women can appear stable and balanced to others as they go about their daily, monotonous tasks while internally experiencing existential turmoil. Their paranoia does not necessarily reveal something uncanny *within* their perceptions. Rather, it is just one way of processing the world, making it, at least for a moment, navigable and discernible. One need only look as far as Jackson's well-known domestic sketch, "Here I Am, Washing Dishes Again," in which she outlines all the ways her kitchen utensils are actively conspiring against her, ruining dinners and keeping her from other (paid) labour. The kitchen itself acts as a large magnet: "I feel the magnetic pull myself, the urge to flatten myself against the wall, and, until I am taken down for some practical purpose, lie there quiet, stilled, at rest" (Jackson 2015, 321). Jackson's uncanny, always within the context of seemingly mundane domestic situations, is steeped in the existential angst of being a (White) middle-class woman in the mid-century. What is important here is not that *some* of the threats to Jackson's women are, indeed, real but that these women filter all their perceptions through the lens of everything being a threat, a nuisance, or simply eerie and unreal. The gaps in their narratives appear between the way they embody their experiences and the way things actually are.

These narrative gaps can also serve another purpose—a method of inscribing missing evidence into stories of generational trauma. The survivor of the trauma, faced with having to fill in the gaps, has to reconcile with and attempt to name the ways that trauma surfaces in their life. Recalling the cup of stars from an early scene in *Hill House*, a shattered cup of milk haunts Lucy, the main character of Machado's "A Hundred Miles and a Mile" from the 2021 collection *When Things Get Dark: Stories Inspired by Shirley Jackson*. The cup of stars in *Hill House* appears while Eleanor is making her way toward

Hill House. She stops at a cafe and witnesses a young girl refusing to drink milk from the cafe's glass because she wants the cup of stars from which she drinks at home. Her mother's attempts to convince the girl to drink go stubbornly unanswered. This cup of milk represents the frightening and exhilarating potentiality of events past, as Lucy's haunted cup contains the constellation of Cassiopeia, the Queen and Goddess who is said to be trapped in the constellation as punishment for vanity. As the memory surfaces for Lucy, she not only hopes to "outgrow" it but also is forced to recall the ambiguity of the shattered cup with a very real, visceral psychosomatic response: "her pulse picks up, a fat bluebottle fly bumping around a lampshade, urgent and lost [, …] a string being pulled away from a guitar's neck [; …] she feels like she's drifting away, like she'd simply disappear if not for the inconvenience of her limbs and organs" (Machado 2021, 63). This "knowing-not-knowing" seeps into Lucy's lived experiences, and the embodied horror of this recollection traps her like Cassiopeia or like *Hill House*'s Eleanor, who telepathically warns the little girl

> Don't do it [; …] insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again; don't do it; and the little girl glanced at her, and smiled a little subtle, dimpling, wholly comprehending smile, and shook her head stubbornly at the glass. Brave girl, Eleanor thought; wise, brave girl. (Jackson 2006, 15)

The moment in Machado's story that we are certain that Lucy *is* the little girl from this scene in *Hill House*—grown up and still traumatized by the memory of the day of the silent message she received from Eleanor—is the moment we also realize that Eleanor's own disturbances have had reverberating and transcendent psychosomatic resonances. Unable to directly recall the memory or put an exact name to her fears, Lucy's emotional insecurity takes the form of this slippery recollection that comes to colour all her experiences, including the break-up of her almost-marriage with Peter and her subsequent relationship with Merideth, who is present for one of Lucy's psychosomatic episodes in which she visits the same café where Eleanor "spoke" to her. As she integrates these memories, they become more like "a mood than a fear; a sense of oncoming doom, like the seconds before death by drowning" (Machado 2021, 64). Here is her proof of past suffering, made manifest in both her body and her personal narrative.

Though the reader is privy to Lucy's memory slippages and her racing-heart reactions, nothing particularly sinister surfaces until Lucy lures a little girl from her mother at a department store. Like Eleanor before her, Lucy feels a certain urgent kinship with the child, wanting to warn her of

*some*thing. She manages, it would appear, to communicate this something to the kidnapped child, but in the process exhausts and further isolates her, and she fears she ultimately failed. Like for Lucy, the "sense of terror" that permeates *Hill House*, argues Sophie Gilbert, "comes instead from Eleanor's cloying, troubled mind—her feelings of isolation, her permanent state of unease, her sense of being awkwardly at odds with herself and everyone around her" (2018), and her inability to express herself in a way that makes her understood by others. *Hill House* itself reads as a prolonged panic attack that has no release or resolution until Eleanor drives her car into a tree, so that the "malignancy Eleanor senses in the house might actually come from her. That her darkest, most self-negating thoughts might actually be true," according to Gilbert (2018). In much the same way, Lucy cannot describe any particular reason for her feelings of unease and terror. Save the memory of her brief encounter with Eleanor, Lucy cannot articulate her anxieties but only *feels* them as a victim of some uncanny journey. It is hard to tell if Lucy is a kindred spirit for Eleanor or if there is some kind of psychic transference occurring here. Regardless, Lucy is transformed by this interaction and must learn how to adapt to her new awareness. Though the exact words Lucy speaks to the child are not known, we do know that Lucy "whispered the thing she needed to hear," and the trauma of that encounter seems to have been passed along as the little girl remembers Lucy as a monster: "a hulking, sorrowful creature—red-mouthed and sleek as an otter" (Machado 2021, 68). Thus, the urgency of the message—the fear of complacency and entrapment—gets transferred from one generation to the next, producing a form of intergenerational trauma. Eleanor has managed, in her own helplessness and terror, her own possession, to plant seeds of self-doubt into someone else, transforming a young girl into a hulking mess of a woman. Her paranoia is so great it cannot be contained within her own mind anymore; she has to make it manifest in the world. Machado's borrowing of this element of Jackson's story is significant too. Eleanor's suffering is made legible all over again, as Machado calls it back into existence, and legitimizes her position as the monstrous abused.

Seeking physical "proof" of uncanny, everyday horrors to quell the self-doubt of the monstrous can be just as disorienting as experiencing them mentally and physically. For Eleanor, the protagonist of *Hill House*, recollections of her loneliness and the way her life with her mother "had been built up devotedly around small guilts and reproaches, constant weariness, unending despair" (Jackson 2006, 3) cause anxieties to well up and manifest in the form of the ghosts that walk in Hill House. The house is decidedly "not sane," but Eleanor, despite the hope she has for her journey, integrates her self-doubt into the way she moves throughout the novel and in Hill House itself. She feels herself "like a small creature

swallowed whole by a monster […] and the monster feels my tiny little movements inside" (29) and she is both monster and victim. Her anxieties become mapped onto Hill House itself, enabling forces that rattle the doors and become ghostly beings that the others can see but by which she is also terrified and lured. Her interior life is literally written on the walls. Referencing the metaphysics of *Hill House*, Jody Castricano notes that the question of the novel "is not only how to think of the possibility of forms of non-human consciousness or 'supernormal phenomena,' but also how to think cogently about the relationship between telepathy, clairvoyance, haunting and the unconscious without resorting to psychopathology" (2021, 138). The novel depends on multiple modes of consciousness, Castricano argues, and those modes rely on synchronicity (the Jungian concept of psyche and matter) to express Eleanor's experiences. Thus, Eleanor's perceived telepathy finds physical manifestations in the hauntings at Hill House: "what cannot be accounted for takes the form of telepathy and clairvoyance, of the mysterious coincidence between psyche and matter" (Castricano 2021, 149). That Eleanor exists in this liminal space, between physical matter and what is crashing around not just in her head but also in house, is expounded by the doubling of her identities—that split between the Eleanor of her past domestic life and the Eleanor off on an adventure at Hill House.

But this split is also a coping mechanism of sorts. Recovering from the trauma of her past while simultaneously trying to carve out her own new life, Eleanor experiences changes in her being unimaginable anywhere else. Hill House enables these changes, gives her the power (albeit, a terrifying power) to witness and embody her own emotional and psychological turmoil made manifest in the hauntings. She cannot fathom her luck at being selected to come to Hill House, and after safely arriving, she takes an astonished inventory of her various body parts as well as how her body takes up space as she situates herself at Hill House:

> Eleanor found herself unexpectedly admiring her own feet. Theodora dreamed over the fire beyond the tips of her toes, and Eleanor thought with deep satisfaction that her feet were handsome in their red sandals; 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. I have red shoes, she thought-that goes with being Eleanor; I dislike lobster and sleep on my left side and crack my knuckles when I am nervous and save buttons. I am holding a brandy glass which is mine because I am here and I am using it and I have a place in this room. I have red shoes

> and tomorrow I will wake up and I will still be here. "I have red shoes," she said very softly. (Jackson 2006, 60)

It is a way to not just check on her own existence but also to note how they show up in the space of the mansion and relate to the others around her. She connects her physical attributes with her personality and habits, inventorying each proudly as a way of defining her self. But Eleanor's astonished *there*-ness at being in Hill House, the only time she feels truly enlivened, comes with external warnings. "I've never been wanted *anywhere*," Eleanor argues, but she soon begins to feel "walled up alive," seeing herself flying "in and out of the windows" (154). Dr. Montague's recollections about Hill House's history of familial trauma and abuse are cautionary tales of relying too fully on sensory experience: "We have grown to trust blindly in our sense of balance and reason, and I can see where the mind might fight wildly to preserve its own familiar stable patterns against all evidence that it was leaning sideways" (78). Using such words as "balance" and "leaning," the doctor invokes the physicality of Eleanor's mental disturbances as she finds herself often stumbling and crashing into things. The conscious mind is impervious to the uncanny, the doctor argues, but "the menace of the supernatural is that it attacks where modern minds are weakest, where we have abandoned our protective armour of superstition and have no substitute defense" (102). Even the doctor's use of the phrase "protective armour" references the physical body, causing a conflation—intended or not—between what the mind perceives and the body experiences. The difference between imagination and rationality, then, is fear, since it "is the relinquishment of logic, the *willing* relinquishing of reasonable patterns. We yield to it or we fight it, but we cannot meet it halfway" (117). This, seemingly, is Eleanor's downfall. She is able neither to fully yield to nor to fight her fear of the house and its ghostly messages, which leaves her mind and body susceptible to the embodiment of her own traumatic past.

Every physical sensation is met by Eleanor's increasingly intense self-doubt, but the ghostly hand-holding scene provides another perspective to her bodily manifestations. As Eleanor lies in bed with Theo seemingly gripping her hand and listening to Hill House's ghostly screams, she observes: "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" (Jackson 2006, 120). Her functioning human-ness, her mind and her body, is enough to seemingly will away her terror at the moment, but it does not alleviate the ambiguity of "whose hand was I holding?" That is, Eleanor's constant liminal status, both within her own psyche and within the house itself, provides evidence of her traumatic past. She appears to inhabit a

waking dream throughout, a sort of conscious sleep paralysis, one in which she is only partially aware and in control of what is occurring around her. Her dreams and her trauma are layered over her waking hours, causing her to feel the ghostly hand. Even as she is packed up in her car unwillingly and forced to leave Hill House, she manifests a voice which tells her: "Go away, Eleanor […] go away, Eleanor, we don't want you any more, not in *our* Hill House, go away, Eleanor, you can't stay *here*; but I can […] but I can; *They* don't make the rules around here. They can't turn me out or shut me out or laugh at me or hide from me; I won't go, and Hill House belongs to me" (181). There is no possibility for her outside of becoming part of the house. Hill House stands, in the beginning and end, as evidence for and amplification of Eleanor and her vulnerabilities. This is her final attempt to create the evidence of her own existence and to build a world of her own making, allowing herself to adapt in her own way.

But adaptations can sometimes take the form of monstrous transformations, however subtle or psychosomatic, resembling disease. Riffing on the quasi-feminist cliché "real women have curves," Machado's story "Real Women have Bodies" is a tale in which women begin to fade away, slowly turning transparent and wraith-like, for completely unknown reasons. The subtleties of these transformations are what drives the story. Here, the horror is connected to nothing that can be grasped in the physical world. The story, which appears in Machado's debut collection, *Her Body and Other Parties*, follows a woman as she and the world grapple with the mystery of the fading women. The cause of the fading is entirely unknown: "It's not passed in the air. It's not sexually transmitted. It's not a virus or a bacteria, or if it is, it's nothing scientists are able to find" (Machado 2017, 128). When the story's narrator, who works in a fashion boutique called Glam, discovers her girlfriend Petra's mother has been sewing these fading women into the dresses that are sold in Glam, she is shocked and horrified. It seems that these women have been flocking to Petra's mother in order to live on in their own way, but the narrator "cannot tell if they are holding on for dear life or if they are trapped" (137). Their ghostly presence within the garments is enough to spark terror and fear in the narrator, but it is further heightened by the seemingly meaninglessness of their existence. The fading women infiltrate electrical grids and computer servers to commit forms of incognito terrorism, imbuing themselves with agency and power. When Petra herself admits she is beginning to fade, the narrator feels like her "feet are trapdoors that have sprung open, and [her] insides are hurtling out of [her] body" (140). The story ends with the narrator's attempt to free the women trapped in Glam's dresses, who refuse to leave. This is not just an indictment of the fashion industry and its manipulation and abuse of women's bodies. Since all the women who fade are anonymous (save Petra), we are left to only

consider their presence in this environment and their attempts at adapting to their new conditions. No backstories and no causes for the fading means we have *only* their bodies as evidence of their existence, and those bodies are fading away.

Indeed, the story parallels a plotline in Machado's *The Low, Low Woods* (2019–20), her DC comic series, in the ways the characters are left to wonder how they are to embody their conditions in an unchanging world. In the comic, the coal mine in the town of Shudder-to-Think has a raging underground fire (like the real Centralia, PA, where an underground fire has been blazing since 1962). Though the men of the town experience the symptoms of mining-related illnesses, the women begin to experience "environmental dementia." As the fire rages beneath ground: "all that heat with nowhere to go. The earth splitting like the thickened skin on the back of your heel. Smoke filled the air like the edges of a dream" (Machado 2020). The town's women then forget their names, begin to wander around aimlessly, and finally disappear underground. Some of the women's bodies begin to reflect the rift in the earth itself, as vortex-like sinkholes open in their abdomens while they sleep. These supernatural elements—ghostly, fading women and women sucked into the earth while their bodies become black holes—serve as a reminder of how horror can erupt without explanation and reason. In their efforts to merely live their lives, they fall victim to an environment already victimized and violated by the abusive practices of capitalism and ecological pillaging. These women's bodies become the sites of violence and unease, the ultimate result of their violations of the status quo.

For some of Jackson's heroines, the embodied results of abuse and violence are just as inexplicable and uncomfortable. Recalling the Gothic imprisonment of the narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Jackson's short story "The Good Wife" features Mrs. Benjamin, a woman locked away in her bedroom by her husband who will not let her out until she admits to an affair with a man named Ferguson. Mr. Benjamin himself has invented the affair, crafting letters from Ferguson to send to his wife, as a way to coerce and gaslight her into isolation. Within her bedroom prison, Mrs. Benjamin is "always the same" and "not influential at all" within the household, though inhabiting the house, even in the short time before she was imprisoned, "she existed as a presence made up half of recollection and half of intention" (Jackson 2017, 153). Though Mr. Benjamin's description makes her sound like a ghost, her acquiescence to her imprisonment proves she is not only not a ghost but also a willing participant in her imprisonment. Falling into a "sullen indifference," Mrs. Benjamin seems impervious to promises of a return to her "normal life" (Jackson 2017, 155). In this way, she has come to inhabit and embody the horror of her

situation, absorbing it and physically fighting off any possibility of escape. Mrs. Benjamin's transformation from "normal" but seemingly bland wife to willing captive highlights the same sorts of embodied violence Machado writes of in her memoir. Participation becomes the mode for survival here, and though the story focuses on Mr. Benjamin's insidious deceptions, the reader is left to wonder why Mr. Benjamin chooses to abuse his wife in this manner and why she has come to accept it and reject any gestures towards freedom. Something has occurred in the gaps of the narrative, the untold parts of this horror story, to enable such a transformation in a seemingly "normal" young woman.

A similar paranoia and anxiety creeps in Margaret in Jackson's story "Pillar of Salt." The title clearly mirrors the Biblical story of Lot's wife who disobeys God by gazing back at the wicked city of Sodom. Margaret's wicked city is New York, much different from the slow, clean, quiet, rural New Hampshire town she's come from for two weeks' vacation with her husband, Brad. When we are first introduced to her, she appears as an ordered but anxious housewife and mother in need of time away, but the noises and crowds of the city begin to affect her mental orientation, much like Miss Morgan in "Nightmare." As she attempts to navigate a crowded sidewalk, she observes that everyone is rushing past and

> seemed hurled on in a frantic action that made every hour forty-five minutes long, every day nine hours, every year fourteen days. […] It's as though everything were travelling so fast that the solid stuff couldn't stand it and were going to pieces under the strain, cornices blowing off and window caving in. She knew she was afraid to say it truly, afraid to face the knowledge that it was a voluntary neck-breaking speed, a deliberate whirling fast and fast to end in destruction. (Jackson 2005, 243)

As the world around seemingly blows apart from the very speed at which New Yorkers live, the "solid stuff" that is Margaret's own body begins to crumble under her anxiety and disappointment. She sees everything as deplorably artificial, sometimes dangerous, and always a bit shabby and broken. True, that there is some real physical danger in the story: at one point Margaret and her husband are in an apartment building that has caught on fire, and there might just be a serial killer loose in the city leaving body parts scattered throughout. But Margaret's panic ("No sense worrying," is her constant, automated refrain) is not shared by the others around her. Everyone else, including Brad, seems nonchalant about the crushing speed and danger of the city. She seems to be the only one out of sync here, and the apathy from those around her further stokes her paranoia, causing her

to imagine walls crumbling, elevators moving too fast, all the windows broken, buildings shaking around her, and to dash into traffic for no apparent reason. The perceived danger of the city and its crowds of people propel Margaret's body into an automatic physiological reaction—the flight response of fight/flight/freeze. She sees evidence for her fear all around her but is still attached enough to social propriety to worry about being perceived as foolish. Those who might witness her body shivering apart, like the buildings and the streets, would see a woman on the cusp of becoming some monstrous but still vulnerable other.

Machado's aptly named 2019 memoir, *In the Dream House*, is, in all its incarnations and mutations, the site of world building, mythmaking, *and* personal struggle, much like Jackson's Hill House functions for Eleanor. Within the walls of the Dream House are the echoes of the violences committed against both Eleanor and Machado's narrator, and the houses become Gothicized containers of domestic abuse and past traumas. "Dream House" can also refer to the iconic Barbie Dreamhouse, the pink-washed site of Barbie's uncomplicated domestic routines and familial bliss, a playset marketed at young girls to perform controlled femininity and learn of their ideal futures. It is also a Dream House, too, because the narrator is in a kind of Eleanor-esque sleep paralysis throughout, aware of the abuses perpetuated against her but still going through the motions of being in a relationship. Machado's Dream House holds the "abused woman," a figure present throughout human history but, according to Machado, only acknowledged by academia in the last fifty years as a result of Second Wave Feminism's focus on the lived experiences of women. "What is the topography of these holes?" Machado questions the gaps in the archive, "How do we do right by the wronged people of the past without the physical evidence of their suffering? How do we direct our recordkeeping toward justice?" (2019, 5). The memoir, then, is both "act of resurrection" and a way for her to speak into the silence around violence against women. In this way, Machado argues, the Dream House functions as

> a convent of promise (herb garden, wine, writing across the table from each other), a den of debauchery (fucking with the windows open, waking up with mouth on mouth, the insistent murmur of fantasy), a haunted house (*none of this can really be happening*), a prison (*need to get out need to get out*), and, finally, a dungeon of memory. (2019, 72).

The sudden shift from a convent to a prison marks the quickness with which one's surroundings and, with it, one's emotional and psychological can upend. The explicit words of Machado's description juxtaposed with those

italicized and parenthetical phrases emphasize the tension between the physical space of the house and the way her body and mind are imprisoned. Elsewhere, Machado constructs the Dream House as a memory palace, combining recollections of past loves with the spatial elements she associates with them—"The bedroom: don't go in there" (2017, 17). The description also calls to mind Eleanor's half-agential experiences at Hill House, with the spaces she forbids herself, and just as Machado's memoir itself is proof of her experience, evidence of her past, and a way of reckoning with the guilt and shame around traumas, so is Hill House for Eleanor.

Likening her experience living in the Dream House to a haunted mansion rife with metaphors, Machado realizes she is a ghost in the home she and her partner share since "you don't need to die to leave a mark of psychic pain" (2019, 127). But because the memoir's chapters are divided into generic and thematic categories—prologue, musical, inventory, tragedy of the commons, the apocalypse, a surprise ending—*how* Machado's story is told—the language and the proof of how it inhabits her body—is just as essential as the story itself. A feature of domestic abuse, Machado points out, is the ways the victim/survivor makes excuses for the abuser, coming to see her as an ally in her physical and psychological isolation, and the shared domicile as a site of "dislocation." The "world building" involved in the Dream House is an act meant to confuse, overwhelm, and isolate Machado, and because "setting is not inert" (72) in writing, Machado's composition enlivens the spaces of her isolation, meaning she is composing her own proof of embodied horrors. Recollections of the past traumas of her abusive intimate relationship—like those experienced by Eleanor in *Hill House* with her mother—come in the form of ghost stories, demonic possessions, and the cosmic horrors pulled down into individualized, daily traumas. In fact, Machado invites the readers to experience these traumas themselves in the section of the memoir that touts itself as a "choose your own adventure" story. Like readers of *Hill House* who are set inside Eleanor's mind and taken along with her panic attack/fever dream of a reaction to being in Hill House, readers of *Dream House* are given options to various situations in Machado's life. Rather than an adventure, though, the options reveal not just the various imagined reactions Machado could have had to her partner's outbursts but also the repetition in the patterns of the abuse, forcing the reader to flip the pages back and forth and cycle through the trauma of the situations themselves, embodying the fevered and frustrated frenzy of Machado's situation. The scenarios only end with reiterations of self-doubt and recrimination for not reacting correctly in the moment, with Machado telling the reader that any attempt to escape the story or assert one's own agency is a fiction. But it is all a trick on her readers in the end. First, she gives her readers the agency to extricate themselves from the story, but then she scolds

them, "You shouldn't be on this page. There's no way to get here from the choices given to you. You flipped here because you got sick of the cycle. You wanted to get out. You're smarter than me" (Machado 2019, 167). Plopping her readers right back into reality immediately after this assertion, Machado confesses to fantasizing about dying because she had "forgotten leaving is an option" (177) further differentiating her stuck and imprisoned self from the reader who could simply close the book on Machado's story.

As Machado further recalls her partner's rage-filled outbursts, she begins to view them as a form of demonic possession, googling "memory loss, sudden onsets of rage and violence" as she is gaslit into thinking she is misremembering these incidents—her own "peculiar malfunction of the brain" (2019, 133), embodied by the past and written into the evidentiary record. But what words are sufficient to describe the characteristics of the person making you feel that you are forced to live inside a horror story? What is true inside a haunted house, a Gothic hellscape of entrapment and terror? Finding "evil" too strong a word to describe her partner, Machado settles for imagining herself powerless in the midst of a cosmic horror story. She finds the words "sick" and "disordered" are also insufficient labels for the partner since what these labels absolve her of responsibility for her actions. For Machado, trauma acts "like an ancient virus" and gets stored in her body—"[M]y nervous system remembers. The lenses of my eyes. My cerebral cortex, with its memory and language and consciousness. They will last forever, or at least as long I as do" (225). Seeking solid proof of the domestic abuse she has endured (much of it, as she points out in an earlier chapter, absolutely legal), Machado points out that "the court of the body" (225) while not meting out any justice that could be recognized as punitive, has given her a way of recognizing further dangers. Ephemera is evidence, a way of proving the fleeting moments of abuse now so deeply settled inside her body.

But emotion is evidence too. Machado argues that though the "the sharpness of the sadness has faded does not mean that it was not, once, terrible. It means only that time and space, creatures of infinite girth and tenderness, have stepped between the two of you, and they are keeping you safe as they were once unable to" (2019, 235). By personifying time and space, creatures that can protect and interact, Machado has palpable ways of imagining her body's response to terrible sadness. Later, Machado realizes this trauma has helped her to develop a sixth sense of danger, her "brilliant body's brilliant warning," manifesting in "physical revulsion that comes on the heels of nothing at all, something akin to the sour liquid rush of saliva that precedes vomiting" (238). Though these visceral responses serve as proof of Machado's survival, they also function as a way to recognize her body in transformation and flux. She adapts, however coercively or

reluctantly, both mentally and bodily. Her mind processes the trauma, and her body learns from it.

Jackson and Machado write women whose bodies create anxieties about our psychosomatic vulnerabilities while simultaneously experiencing supernatural components or mutilated (as in, changed) bodily functions and appearances. The horror these women feel is *real*, but just slippery enough, just beyond their recognition, so as to make self-doubt the most dreadful emotion of all. In the end, these self-possessed women become the possessed, subject to the infernal forces of everyday life. Their minds adapt to the horror around them to then seek physical evidence for their fear. They are not passive spectators in the horror uncovered each day; instead, they are active explorers, travellers unable to extricate themselves. In their respective houses, both Eleanor and Machado experience the dreadful self-doubt of being an abused and traumatized woman, both the object and subject of their respective horror stories. The evidence of their pain surfaces in the monstrous ways they must cope with the forces meant to oppress them. For Eleanor, it not only takes the form of her own paranoia but manifests alongside the physical crookedness of Hill House as she is knocked off-balance and holds ghostly hands in her attempts to right her mind. Machado populates the Dream House with the memories of her past abuses, choosing the inextricable link between mind and body to articulate just how she is forced to integrate her trauma in her daily living. Both writers use embodied horror to spell out the nefarious and varied ways women's minds/bodies are forced to participate in and be the subject of daily, oppressive iniquities of living as a woman.

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The Forces of Darkness: Exploring *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" Through Shirley Jackson's "The Missing Girl"

Savannah Bly Richardson

On December 1, 1946, Paula Welden, a sophomore at Bennington College, went missing. A posse was put together to search the area, and a reward was offered for any information leading to her whereabouts. Another in a stream of missing coeds, Welden was never found. For 76 years, Paula Welden's case has remained cold. As John Breunig states in a *Stamford Advocate* anniversary article, "The Girl Who Got Lost in the Woods will never be found, leaving behind a perpetual trail of terrors for those haunted by contemplation of her fate" (2020). As Breunig writes, the open-ended nature of this story is inevitably "haunting." As an expert in reworking the concept of hauntings and the haunted, Shirley Jackson, wife to Bennington College professor Stanley Edgar Hyman, drew inspiration from Paula Welden's story to write her 1951 novel, *Hangsaman*. However, it also served as inspiration for one of her lesser-known short stories, "The Missing Girl" (1957). In this story, a young woman named Martha Alexander goes missing at the Phillips Education Camp for Girls Twelve to Sixteen. Martha's case, much like Welden's, goes cold. Eventually, Martha's uncle decides to give up the investigation. He justifies this decision by reasoning that her mother has other children, and the missing girl is quietly swept from existence. Effectively, what is out of sight is placed out of mind.

Fast-forward fifty-one years, to the airing of the eleventh episode of season one of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, titled "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" (1997), on The WB Network. The show, now a hugely influential model for the teen-horror monster-of-the-week series, features Buffy Summers, a typical teenage girl with a supernatural secret: she is the Slayer, the one person on Earth who can prevent the forces of darkness from annihilating humanity. Buffy's home of Sunnydale, California, sits on a Hellmouth that attracts a seemingly endless variety of evil that goes beyond the titular bloodsuckers the Slayer is preordained to battle. To guide her on this journey and help her parse through a whole host of parapsychological demons is her Watcher, Giles, who also takes on the form of the high school librarian. Together, Buffy, Giles, and her two best friends, Willow and Xander, band together to combat the monstrosity of teenagedom

made literal. Along the way, Buffy wrestles with her own morality, a large part of which occurs through her romantic relationship with Angel, a vampire cursed with the burden of a human soul.

"Out of Mind, Out of Sight" includes several "firsts" for the series. For instance, Buffy's mentor Giles and Angel meet for the first time, the reference to Buffy's close friends as the "Scooby Gang" emerges through strategic costuming and dialogue choices, and Cordelia—the most popular girl at Sunnydale High—starts to express conflicting sentiments about her status as Sunnydale's queen bee. However, this episode is largely outshined by its follow-up, "Prophesy Girl." That is, the reason Giles and Angel meet in this episode is to exchange the *Pergamum Codex*, a document that prophecies Buffy's death at the hands of the Master. This episode is critical to the series because Buffy *does* die, and is brought back by Xander, an act that disrupts the Slayer cycle. But "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" is just as important for explorations of teenage anxieties that resonate through all seven seasons of the series. In some ways a standalone episode, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" treats the degree to which the stability of teenage identity relies on one's degree of popularity—one's degree of visibility. It is in ultimately turning invisible that Marcie Ross becomes the episode's monster-of-the-week, overshadowed by literally everyone around her.

A comparative study between the Jackson story and the episode reveals striking similarities in the explorations of female subjectivity despite the ostensibly disparate eras of the 1950s and 1990s. Jackson's short story, "The Missing Girl," and season one, episode eleven of *Buffy*, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," center the stories of young women who experience tangible and psychic erasure at the hands of others. To further uncover how this resemblance emerges, I look at the concept of naming and how this relates to the kinds of invisibility being explored in each piece. This investigation is accompanied by an examination of the role of adults in these narratives. Specifically, I look at how figures of authority contribute to the disappearance of both Martha and Marcie. This analysis concludes by looking at each narrative's ending as this is where a discernible dialogue emerges. While Jackson's work is more concerned with the ambiguous end of Martha Alexander (and the real-life Paula Weldon), "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" leans on *Buffy*'s third-wave feminist attitude to question false manifestations of empowerment and the exploitation of trauma. Ultimately, Marcie and Martha's stories mirror one another, but *Buffy* imagines a reality where missing women become something else.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a show of exaggeration where the mundanity of life is encapsulated in monstrosity. As a female viewer, it is easy to lean into the seemingly empowering narrative of the Slayer. But, as we watch Buffy struggle

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with the mandates of her position, the control and often-deceptive manipulation of male authority figures (embodied by institutional forces such as the Watchers Council), and the trauma of being both a teenager and a superhero, the show pushes viewers to ask why the Slayer is always a high school-aged girl. From the outset, it seems like the role of the Slayer is meant to subvert the male superhero. But, in many ways, the Slayer role reads as one of exaggerated female domesticity. Like so many of Jackson's women protagonists, Buffy is expected to assume this role without question, silently serving society in the shadows. What is more, the Slayer is a predestined position. This inevitably invokes feelings of imprisonment, and negotiating the pressure of this destiny is a large component of the show.

In essence, the Slayer echoes many of Jackson's female characters. These are women driven to highly intangible and emotionally complex breakdowns by society's expectations. In Jackson's world, both historically and literarily, women are meant to be wives, mothers, caregivers, housecleaners, and entertainers. Like Buffy, the predestined aspects of these roles leave no room for women to voice their opinions or concerns. This is the identity women are *destined* to have, so why would they ever challenge that understanding? Even if they do not want those responsibilities, it is understood that they will still step into the position and obey. While Jackson's work is more interested in the psychological impact of this complete loss of identity and pushes this sense of predestination until it festers, the character of Buffy Summers challenges the expectations of the Slayer by becoming the defiant center of a community fighting against the forces of evil. And while Marcie's fading from sight feels closer to characters in Jackson's world, such as the titular character of "Louisa, Please Come Home," a sense of defiance is mirrored in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" when Marcie is ultimately recruited by the FBI for the advantage invisibility gives her as an assassin. Marcie is taken by anonymous men in black suits to a secret classroom at FBI headquarters where, it turns out, other teenagers have experienced the same phenomenon. Like any typical high school classroom, a teacher asks them to open their textbooks to a specific page. The camera zooms in on the cover of their chapter, "Assassination and Infiltration," and together the audience and Marcie have the same realization. Rather than the total erasure that Martha experiences, *Buffy* is answering that unending question of potential and personhood in Jackson's short story by giving Marcie a new identity, serviceable and in-service.

Naming is intrinsically connected to identity, and Jackson uses this association to achieve her social critique in several ways. Her seemingly dismissive title "The Missing Girl" becomes very important after Martha's

disappearance is reported to the police. The story starts with Martha's roommate, Betsy, recounting the final night she saw her. Betsy, much like *Buffy*'s Cordelia, seems to be more concerned with status. While explaining to police Chief Hook why she does not know very much about her roommate, Betsy elevates her popularity by insinuating that she is only friends with older campers: "I mean, most of my friends are senior huntsman" (Jackson 2018, 7). While Martha's disappearance is not Betsy's fault, she seems to be motivated by a similar kind of social desperation for visibility as Cordelia. This need makes both characters seem cruel and self-absorbed to the point of supernatural ignorance, but it is just one of many ways that we see teenagers cope with the trauma of puberty and peer pressure. And, despite the apparent gulf in their social standing, it highlights the fact that characters like Martha/Marcie and Betsy/Cordelia are fighting the same battle: to be noticed. Nevertheless, after two summers of rooming together, Betsy cannot offer the investigation *any* information about Martha other than vague assumptions about her camp activities.

Eventually, everyone stops referring to Martha by her name. Even though Betsy clearly names Martha Alexander when reporting her missing, she is simply called "the girl" or "the missing girl" up until the point it seems her body is discovered. Taking away Martha's name comments on the expendability of women by creating an open-ended space for the names of other missing women to occupy. Dispensing with Martha's name is also an attack on her personhood; if she is just some "missing girl," the community does not have to acknowledge the loss. Though her actions are never explained, Martha tells Betsy on the night she disappears that she has "something to do" (Jackson 2018, 1). This is a vague statement that creates a gap for readers to wrestle with on their own terms, but the true nature of this decision is inevitably affected by Betsy then asking Martha, "Where? At this time of night?" (1). Martha may or may not have had something pressing to take care of, but Jackson influences our perception of her character's reputation by highlighting that she leaves under dubious circumstances.

During a time when the concept of a serial killer was unheard of, women like Paula Welden, represented by Martha Alexander, were configured as runaways, or, more specifically, their status as real victims was undermined by the impression that they should have "known better." In "The Missing Girl," Chief Hook eventually interviews someone who is believed to have witnessed Martha hitchhiking on the night she went missing. The woman interviewed is portrayed as a typical housewife who may have seen the victim while waiting for her husband to come home from a poker game. She subtly maligns Martha by

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

insinuating that she was wearing trousers, a seeming sign of promiscuity. Combined with the assumption that she was hitchhiking, this makes young Martha's choices susceptible to the community's judgment. That is, running away and hitchhiking equates to not taking proper precautions and questionable goals. The unacknowledged sentiment embedded within these choices is that she *deserves* whatever has happened to her. Eventually, the paltry witness statements taken by Chief Hook and his force are quickly dismissed for their unhelpfulness, and the investigation goes back to square one. Yet, the damage to Martha's personhood is complete. Including this component of the investigation is critical to Jackson's narrative because she is coaxing the reader into unintentionally siding (however uncomfortably) with Martha's uncle. She is creating a space where the reader starts to inhabit that same thought pattern, but they are eventually forced to confront the barbarity of abandoning the search for a missing young woman simply because there are other children to go around.

As in Jackson's story, the question of monstrousness is complicated in *Buffy*. "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" reverses the traditional saying "out of sight, out of mind" to reference the fact that Marcie Ross, a student at Sunnydale High, becomes invisible. Exacerbated by living on the Hellmouth, being willfully ignored by her peers and teachers (out of mind) results in Marcie literally disappearing (out of sight). Importantly, this monster-of-the-week is not seen or heard by those around her until she becomes invisible. As Marcie's retribution unfolds, seeking out her pound of flesh, Buffy and the gang eventually learn their mysterious adversary's name.[1] It is only when they learn her name that the Scooby Gang pieces together what the Hellmouth, and perhaps more so Sunnydale High, has created.

It is important to remember that what happens to Marcie is a literal translation of her reality. While Cordelia is Marcie's main target for vengeance, *everyone* contributes to her situation. Campaigning for the title of May Queen, Cordelia highlights Willow, Xander, and Buffy's outsider status at Sunnydale High, labeling them the "looney fringe vote" (Whedon 1997). Their position in this social pecking order means that they are more likely to know and remember Marcie. But, as the investigation unfolds, Xander and Willow realize that they signed Marcie's yearbook and took classes with her multiple years in a row but never really noticed her. Despite the solidarity that comes with the "fringes," they are guilty of the same form of bullying as Cordelia; she just wields it openly. The realization that Buffy, Willow, and Xander are just as much to blame

[1] Concerning names, "Marcie" and "Martha," are strikingly similar.

inadvertently speaks to the culpability of "teenagedom" in general, the unspoken monster of this episode.

This exploration of communal erasure of identity is the strongest connection between "The Missing Girl" and "Out of Mind, Out of Sight." In "The Missing Girl," the camp librarian "who was called Miss Mills when she was secretary to Old Jane, and the Snark when she was in the library," says "one girl is much like another, at this age. Their unformed minds, their unformed bodies, their little mistakes; we too were young once, Captain Hook" (Jackson 2018, 9). This seems to be the explanation for the lack of information concerning Martha. She did not stand out in any way, so there is nothing unique enough about her *to* remember. Situated within this passage is an important suggestion that lies outside its overall message. Cryptically, Miss Mills refers to "little mistakes." The implication, especially concerning "unformed bodies," invites readers to supply sexual undertones to her testimony. Again, this is one of the insidious moments in Jackson's story that steer the reader into participating in Martha's erasure because it implies that she may have been behaving outside of society's expectations regarding gender and morality, thus intimating her victimhood as a kind of punishment for transgression. However, the statement "we too were young once" is where Jackson's subtle critique of community manifests. It insinuates that the mistakes of youth are universal. If we are all making mistakes, why is it okay to let *insinuated* promiscuity mar our understanding of Martha's personhood? Perhaps it is because the conflation of femininity with sexuality calls upon a long tradition of damnation, and this heritage gives the community permission to justify the death of a young woman. Essentially, Miss Mills' statement acknowledges the fact that we supply these justifications *instinctually* and without question.

Another important component of Miss Mills' statement is the use of the phrase "at this age" because it ties the fear of invisibility to a very transitional, emotional, and terrifying time in the lives of young people. In "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," Marcie's plan to enact revenge on those who would willingly forget her culminates in her attempt to disfigure Cordelia, the May Queen, right before the spring dance. She says, "We all want what you have. To be noticed, remembered… To be seen" (Whedon 1997). While the idea of being "seen" would be especially important to Marcie, it is interesting that she prefaces her statement with the concepts of being noticed and remembered. Like "The Missing Girl," one of the challenging aspects of this episode's plot is figuring out who Marcie is as a person even though she clearly exists. She was reported missing by someone, she has records in the school database, and, as mentioned, Willow and Xander physically signed her yearbook. Yet, no one can remember

her. She has not simply disappeared; the Hellmouth seems to have erased her completely. It is not hard to imagine that Jackson's Martha would also feel completely erased from existence. She quickly goes from being a missing person to having her camp records rewritten to accommodate a false narrative about her "undesirable" character. She becomes a victim of revisionist history, effectively eradicating her actual identity. As the reader careens towards the end of the piece, the police, the local community, and even the reader are not sure Martha *ever* existed.

With Marcie literally becoming invisible, the question of her future existence remains uncertain as well. The fear of social erasure is an ever-present anxiety in *Buffy*. It reemerges in season three, episode five, "Homecoming," when Buffy misses school picture day. Not having that tangible representation of her image equates to a kind of social invisibility that being a teenager augments into total invisibility. Additionally with Buffy, this seemingly shallow fear is intimately tied to her secret identity as she is never recognized for the personal, emotional, and physical sacrifices she makes for her community daily. Regardless, one sees uncanny parallels to our current social climate where a popular following on social media, i.e., the right kind of visibility, directly correlates to self-worth. Though comedic in effect, the sea of generic "Have a great summer!" messages left in Marcie's yearbook underscores her lack of close relationships. As an emblematic totem of the high school experience, a yearbook full of impersonalized comments is the equivalent of total nonexistence. This effective nonexistence invalidates her identity and diminishes her personhood.

In "'Who Died and Made Her the Boss?' Patterns of Mortality in *Buffy*," Rhonda Wilcox writes, "In Buffy's world, the problems teenagers face become literal monsters. Internet predators are demons; drink-doctoring frat boys have sold their souls for success in the business world; a girl who has sex with even the nicest-seeming male discovers that he afterward may become a monster" (2002, 3). Ultimately, invisibility, and the concept of a girl so unnoticed by her peers that she *becomes* invisible, is an extension of this premise. However, one of the main principles of slaying is that the position necessitates invisibility. As one of the Watchers Council's mandates, keeping her identity a secret is a restriction deemed imperative to the safety of humanity and Buffy herself. In the opening credits of every episode, the narrator says, "She alone will wield the strength and skill to fight the vampires, demons, and the forces of darkness" (Whedon 1997). The word "alone" is especially important here. It is mirrored in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" when Buffy asks Cordelia why she works so hard to be popular: "Well, it beats being alone all by yourself" (Whedon 1997).

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

Throughout the entirety of the series, especially while they are still in high school, Buffy tussles with this *Slayer Handbook* commandment by prioritizing her friends, family, and whatever scrap of a social life she can maintain. It is long understood that insisting on community over solitude is how Buffy manages to triumph. However, it is not always straightforward. There are plenty of times when Buffy is doing damage control instead of focusing on her mission. Often, this comes as a result of her friends taking on her burdens or when Buffy directly contradicts her authority figures. It would be easier to be the Slayer in solitude because it means fewer people get hurt in the process, but, as the series loves to point out, this approach is not necessarily better. This is underscored in the next episode, "Prophecy Girl," when Buffy is saved by her friend Xander performing CPR after the Master does indeed fulfill the prophecy of killing the Slayer. It is arguable that the positioning of "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" as the penultimate episode of the season is not accidental. Though it seems like an in-between episode, it is no coincidence that Buffy faces someone who has, as Giles phrases it, "gone mad" (Whedon 1997) at the hands of loneliness and constant exile before she faces her biggest threat yet. We find further resemblance when, in the film *Shirley* (2020), Jackson's character (played by Elizabeth Moss) states, "What happens to all lost girls? They go mad" (Decker 2020). Accordingly, Marcie operates as a kind of warning for Buffy, one that is reiterated in the alternate reality of season 3, episode 9, "The Wish," when viewers are exposed to a hardened, cruel version of Buffy that embodies the solitary ideology of the Watchers Council. Importantly, this version of Buffy is killed in "The Wish," reiterating the expendability of the Slayer and many of Jackson's women.

That said, the "madness" in Jackson and "Out of Sight, Out of Mind" is more nuanced than outright mania. "Madness" subsumes the same dismissive attitude as the word "hysteria" when speaking about Jackson's work because, as Linda Trichter Metcalf argues, Jackson's women "[live] in anger, denial, and emotional estrangement… [Their] themes are punishment, invisibility, anger, and denial of emotion" (1987, 258). Given that Martha is, ultimately, a non-entity in "The Missing Girl," Marcie emerges as strikingly Jacksonian in her characterization. Forced to the fringes of Sunnydale High via the intentional and apathetic dismissal of her peers, Marcie becomes an angry soul on a mission to literally murder and disfigure both actual (Cordelia) and imagined (Mrs. Miller) bullies. In this way, the episode draws a parallel between Marcie and Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice*, the Shakespeare play being read in Mrs. Miller's classroom. This connection calls upon a specific reading of Shylock, one where his morality has been compromised by the cruelty and persecution

he experiences as a Jew. As Metcalf states, Marcie becomes so angry that it subsumes all other emotions. She is emotionally, mentally, and physically estranged from her peers (and family), and, of course, she becomes supernaturally invisible, both punisher and punished.

One of the darker aspects of these two stories is the role of adults. In "The Missing Girl," adults and their ineptitudes are on full display. Chief Hook's position in the community is described by his constituency as the product of nepotism. The narrator says, "No one doubted Chief Hook's complete inability to cope with the disappearance of a girl from camp" (Jackson 2018, 5). Will Scarlett, the camp nurse, literally locks herself in her office with barbiturates rather than deal with the situation. Old Jane, the Camp Mother, emerges as a character completely incapable of fulfilling her role of authority at Phillips Education Camp, which culminates in her eventually "[falling] down dead drunk" (12) as the investigation wears on. Regarding her title, the role of "camp mother" implies that she would have some understanding of who is at her facility, what their names are, and their daily routines. Yet, she mistakenly refers to Martha's surname as "Albert," she does not know where Martha is from, and she is not in the habit of enforcing the rules that would ensure all campers are accounted for, including attendance. Importantly, Jackson's characters cover up the attendance oversight rather than acknowledge it as a mistake. Again, this is a microcosmic example of a larger problem that persists in our reality. Systemic issues surrounding the investigation and prosecution of cases of murdered and missing women are often overlooked, unacknowledged, or deemed not pertinent, especially when they are minoritized women, which further echoes the idea of women as expendable.[2]

Another factor that contributes to the incompetence of these adults is this story's setting, a sleep-away camp. Consequently, all figures of authority have names that evoke a sense of fantasy—for instance, Will Scarlett, Old Jane, Little John, Tarzan, and Bluebird. Even Chief Hook is referred to as Captain Hook by the librarian. This is important because it creates a fairytale-like atmosphere around Martha's disappearance, and it seems to underscore the ineptitudes of these characters. As a result, these names also serve as a disturbing juxtaposition. Rather than a happily-ever-after ending, Martha's tale becomes a

[2] Criminologist Steven A. Egger defines these victims as the "less dead." Accordingly, the less dead "are considered less-dead because before their deaths, they virtually 'never were,' according to prevailing social attitudes. In other words, they are essentially ignored and devalued by their own communities or members of their neighborhoods and generally not missed when they are gone" (2002, 278). He posits that these victims are often marginalized members of society, like sex workers, people of colour, the homeless, the undocumented, people in queer communities, the impoverished, and even the elderly.

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

Grimm-style *warnmärchen*, or an unending warning, for other young women. But the logic is missing. All possible leads or explanations for Martha's disappearance are supplied via misguided assumptions about her personhood. The reader is never given any concrete details about who Martha is or what she was doing at the time of her disappearance. As with many of Jackson's texts, the "fairytale" embedded in this story is really more about the ways in which community fails those on the edges. As mentioned, they become dispensable, and, arguably, Paula Welden's disappearance had the same effect on the women of Bennington College, especially because she was never found.

Citing the use of fantastical elements as metaphor, emphasis on destiny, and the cycle of death and replacement, Kerry Boyles argues in "Witches, Mothers and Gentlemen: Re-Inventing Fairy Tales in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" that "Not only does *Buffy* use fairy tale elements as a basis for several monster-of-the-week episodes, the series as a whole can be examined as a modern-day fairy tale" (2019, 35). To that point, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" evokes Jackson's fairytale mode when it is revealed that Xander and Willow should know who Marcie is. Xander and Willow, as integral members of Buffy's community, are not supposed to be villainous, like the Master, or cruel, like Cordelia. But this episode uses the same moral lesson from Jackson's text to indict their passivity.

In "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," the role of the neglectful adult is assumed by Mrs. Miller,[3] an English teacher. In a flashback scene, the audience sees Marcie, Cordelia, Xander, and Willow in her class. Mrs. Miller is leading a discussion, and every character but Marcie gets to weigh in on the conversation.[4] It is at this moment that she notices her hand is disappearing. No one else is paying attention as the reality of her situation dawns on her. The reason this is disconcerting is that Marcie is clearly raising her hand to speak in class. To that point, in the episode's flashbacks, she is actively trying to be seen whether it be by participating in class or gossiping in the bathroom. Though her efforts

[3] Another naming connection—"Mrs. Miller" echoes "Miss Mills," the librarian at Phillips Education Camp for Girls Twelve to Sixteen.

[4] The flashback scenes in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" are reminiscent of Chapter Eight in *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) when Eleanor begins eavesdropping on the other residents at the manor. She listens to Theo and Luke discuss "The Grattan Murders," an old murder ballad; she spies on Doctor Montague attempting to navigate Arthur's boredom; and she finds Mrs. Montague helping Mrs. Dudley in the kitchen. Amidst Hill House's increasingly personal attacks, Eleanor finds herself wondering, "When are they going to talk about me?" (Jackson 2018, 162). Her eavesdropping reveals that none of the guests are interested in what is happening to Eleanor at Hill House, and her complete absence from their conversations seems to emphasize her increasingly spectral presence.

become increasingly pitiable, she is not content to let invisibility consume her. Like the adults in "The Missing Girl," there is the expectation that figures of authority will use the power they have to prevent Martha and Marcie's fate. Mrs. Miller, as an adult in Marcie's life, has a responsibility to ensure the visibility of every student in her classroom. As Buffy says in the library, "This isn't this great power that she can control. It's something that was done to her. That we did to her" (Whedon 1997).

In "Raising Her Voice: Stephen King's Literary Dialogue with Shirley Jackson," Carl H. Sederholm states that "Allusions help foster a greater awareness of the community of texts that make up a larger tradition […] Put another way, texts are potentially rich sources of understanding, connection, and dialogue" (2021, 62). Accordingly, this analysis has examined how "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" reflects similar representations of female subjectivity to Jackson's "The Missing Girl," despite the difference in the time of their creation. But, as Sederholm states, texts are also in dialogue. We have established that "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" echoes the themes and challenges in "The Missing Girl," but the dialogue between these texts begins at their respective endings. "The Missing Girl," in its efforts to critique a community that *allowed* a young woman to be erased, draws its dramatic and critical tension from the shame and pity of a thrown-away body. It must be acknowledged that *Buffy* is a relatively recent, long-form television series that has inevitably been influenced by the pressures and expectations that come from having an audience and a network. Keeping this dialogue in mind while answering those demands, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" asks, what if Jackson's Martha was reborn, and the invisibility inflicted on her by others was crafted into a component of her identity?

In "The Missing Girl," Martha's uncle concedes that the investigation is not working. He justifies calling it off by explaining that Martha's mother, a widow no less, has plenty of other children to keep her occupied. However, to be clear, her uncle never says this directly. He stammers, "Of course she loves Martha and all that, and of course *no* one would want to say anything about a girl like this that's missing, and probably had something horrible done to her…" (Jackson 2018, 15). A potential violent death for Martha is all insinuated, which makes it worse because it means they *know* abandoning the case is wrong. Calling off the investigation is the ultimate declaration of dismissal. Of course, this is exacerbated by the conclusion of this piece. Jackson writes, "A body that might have been Martha Alexander's was found, of course, something over a year later, in the late fall when the first light snow was drifting down. The body had been stuffed away among some thorn bushes, which none of the searchers had cared to tackle" (2018, 16). This passage is important for two reasons. First, the body

they found "might" be Martha Alexander's. Whether it was Martha and the cause of death are never clarified, though this mysterious corpse is buried as Martha. Second, she was not the victim of an unsolvable, seemingly supernatural, mystery. Though her body was discovered in a thorny location, she could have been found if anyone had "cared" enough to look. Again, this is Jackson's indictment of communal apathy, the idea that Martha (and Paula) are dispensable, likely deserving whatever fate fell upon them.

In response to Martha's uncle's declaration, Old Jane proceeds to wipe Martha from the camp's records. In a long speech, she says that Martha *applied* to attend the Phillips Education Camp for Girls Twelve to Sixteen, but that she was labeled as "possibly undesirable" (Jackson 2018, 16). Retroactively labeling Martha as "possibly undesirable" underscores the main objective of the communal narrative. "Possibly" pushes at the mystery behind her disappearance as Jackson has insinuated that *why* the girl went missing could be dubious in nature. Furthermore, the term "undesirable" highlights both how much energy was put into finding her, and how her uncle justifies calling off the investigation. Together, they represent both the tone of "The Missing Girl" and Jackson's objective. Old Jane then goes on to list all the classes, activities, and services offered by the camp that Martha "has not used" (16), including the infirmary and local church. She concludes by saying "our records are fairly complete," though the reader knows that "most of the counselors kept slipshod attendance records, and none of them could remember whether any such girl could have come on any given day" (8). This is a direct contradiction embedded within a cover-up.

What is more, Old Jane's revisionist characterization of Martha as an objectionable person comes easily. Despite his incompetence, Chief Hook is a representative of the law. He could certainly indict the education camp for its negligent practices. When that does not happen, it leads the reader to believe that this might have happened before, or, more likely, that it will happen again. Ultimately, neither the law nor camp authorities see this incident as a real issue because it speaks to a larger understanding of the expendability of young women. There are always more of them to go around. Similarly, *Buffy* calls on this attitude with the Slayer cycle. It is understood that these women will die young for a destiny they have no control over. But this is no real tragedy as another will always be called. This pattern is later challenged by the series' final season turning a cycle of manipulation and death into a communal source of female-centered power.

As mentioned, Marcie experiences an altogether different fate when she is finally caught. Rather than being vanquished or fixed by Buffy, Marcie is one

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

of the few "monsters" that is repurposed. This is a marked deviation from the Scooby Gang's general approach, and it also contributes to a more complicated argument on the Slayer's morality later taken up in "Bad Girls" when Faith, an alternative Slayer initiated by Buffy's temporary death in season one, mistakenly kills an innocent human being. In the end, the viewer watches as Marcie is taken by two male agents to FBI headquarters where she is put in a classroom with what seems to be other invisible teens and given a textbook about assassination and infiltration. The atmosphere of this scene does not indicate a peaceful resolution. The music is ominous, hinting at the conspiratorial agenda of the FBI, and her sardonic chuckle at the class's lesson plan indicates a dramatic shift in her personality. She is no longer an innocent band nerd from the suburbs, but an invisible assassin enticed by the possibility of violence.

Like the symbol of the Slayer, it is tempting to configure Marcie's story as representative of radical third-wave-feminist subversion, one where invisibility as a disability becomes Marcie's greatest strength. However, it is important to recognize that Marcie is a victim. The Hellmouth perceived her to be invisible because her community refused to acknowledge her. The real critique in "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" resides in the weaponization of this tragedy. Power, especially for women in the Buffyverse, comes with a price. We see this in the final two seasons of *Buffy* when our titular character struggles with the pressure of her community to continue saving the world even after her traumatic resurrection. In "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," the US government exploits a victim, and turns Marcie's trauma, both physical and mental, into a tool they can use to advance a secretive objective. Just as it becomes apparent that the Slayer is a tool of the patriarchal Watchers Council, the sentiments, expectations, and "madness" of women in Jackson's era may simply be wearing a new coat. While the ending of "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" moves beyond the total erasure of Martha's personhood, Marcie's ending does not truly reveal an advancement in the ways women are empowered by the structures purported to serve everyone equally. Instead, the dialogue between these pieces uncovers a critique of the true nature of empowerment. Speaking to Angel about this invisible girl terrorizing the school, Giles states, "By all accounts, it's a wonderful power to possess" (Whedon 1997). But, as the episode emphasizes, invisibility is not a superpower Marcie chooses and it does not free her from the emotional estrangement she experiences as a young woman trying to establish a connection with her peers. Instead, she is ultimately expected to wield her invisibility according to the demands of the government, further diminishing any agency she might have gained from the magic of the Hellmouth. Despite their different eras, characters like Martha Alexander act as a useful gauge with

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

which to examine figures like Marcie Ross (and Buffy Summers). The seemingly subversive roles Buffy and Marcie inhabit as Slayer and invisible assassin continue to reiterate the loss of identity that many of Jackson's female characters wrestle with while imprisoned in domesticity.

"The Missing Girl" and "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" are both tangible representations of the disempowerment and erasure of women. Martha and Marcie lose their personhood when they disappear from their communities. "The Missing Girl" seemingly falls through the cracks of Jackson's oeuvre, likely overshadowed by its companion novella, *Hangsaman*, which explores the impact of this phenomenon in a much more extensive way. Similarly, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight" comes right before the finale of the very first season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. This episode lays the groundwork for certain plot points to come, but it also explores one of the seemingly less "threatening" aspects of growing up. That is, the idea that young people "at that age" do not warrant visibility.

In "The Missing Girl," the reader experiences Martha's erasure second hand. Jackson coaxes the reader along to the point where they also find themselves buying into the apathy and resentment. She left her cabin without telling anyone where she was going, and the open-ended nature of this explanation allows the reader to supply the salacious details that create a whirlwind of unconscious spite. The inception of this thought underscores how easily people can be manipulated into feeling a false sense of superiority, even when they might have made the same mistakes, and how monstrous it is to stop looking for a missing person because society thinks women operating outside of prescribed expectations deserve violence.

In "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," the Scooby gang must confront the fact that Marcie became invisible at the hands of others. As Buffy concludes, invisibility is not a "power" that Marcie has been given. Rather, she became invisible because people intentionally and maliciously ignored her until it became routine. Throughout this episode, we see Marcie's characterization continue to emphasize the relevance of the experiences and emotional turmoil of Jackson's women, but it imagines an altogether different kind of fate for "The Missing Girl." While Martha experiences total erasure, Marcie is repurposed into an assassin for the government, further diminishing her personhood. Tapping into the uniquely feminine rebellion of community versus solitude that sets Buffy apart from the legacy of the Slayer role, what happens to Marcie sets up a greater critique of a largely patriarchal power structure that weaponizes tragedy and turns young women into tools. Despite the misconception that Marcie's story is unremarkable in the greater landscape of the series, this episode

encapsulates Buffy's eventual questions regarding fate, authority, and the true nature of empowerment.

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Gothic Inheritances: Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Carmen Maria Machado's "A Hundred Miles and a Mile" and *In the Dream House*

Carolin Jesussek

When Carmen Maria Machado submitted an early draft of the short story "The Resident" to a writer's workshop, its participants told her that the protagonist's drive to an artist's residency in the mountains reminded them of Eleanor's journey to Hill House in Shirley Jackson's foundational Gothic novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959).[1] In both stories, a strong sense of hope surges through the women during their respective journeys on which they encounter sites of welcome as well as hostility that set the eerie tone for their respective unfolding narratives. Eleanor's "solitary road trip [...] allows her to begin imagining a future outside the norm" (Banks 2020, 172) and a home of her own, while C–, the protagonist of "The Resident," fantasises about completing a novel at the residency. Both women bring invitations to the places they are going to and both encounter constellations of stars. In Eleanor's case, they appear when she stops at a roadside restaurant and witnesses a little girl refusing to drink from anything but her cup of stars at home. For C–, the constellation appears on the face of the adolescent clerk behind the counter of a gas station in the form of "pustules […] in the elliptical shape of the Andromeda galaxy" (Machado 2017c, 170). As becomes clear later in the story, C– previously has been to the mountains where the residency takes place, as a young girl in scout camp. In revisiting a lake, she somewhat reluctantly accesses a long-forgotten and suppressed memory. She recognizes that "knowledge was a dwarfing, obliterating, all-consuming thing, and to have it was to both be grateful and suffer greatly" (212). The conscious suppression of memories and the ambiguous feeling elicited by the knowledge acquired upon remembering it are equally crucial to Machado's short story "A Hundred Miles and a Mile"[2] from Ellen Datlow's edited collection *When Things Get Dark: Stories Inspired by Shirley Jackson* (2021).[3]

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[1] Hereafter, *Hill House.*

[2] Hereafter, "Hundred Miles."

[3] The collection itself is named after Jackson's short story "When Things Get Dark," published in *The New Yorker* on December 22, 1944 (https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1944/12/30/when-things-get-dark).

"Hundred Miles" merges the themes of "The Resident" with the narrative universe of Jackson's *Hill House*, as if to explore the connection Machado's workshop cohorts saw. Prior to this comparison, Machado was not familiar with *Hill House*. This is not necessarily surprising, as, with the exception of "The Lottery" (1948), most of Jackson's work has only recently sparked a noteworthy surge in scholarship and adaptations. Jackson's influence on Machado has since extended beyond *Hill House*, with her short story "The Tooth," collected in *The Lottery and Other Stories* (1948), also informing Machado's "Blur" (2017).

Jackson's work rises to new relevance with such contemporary responses and adaptations. As Datlow states in *When Things Get Dark*, which also includes stories by Joyce Carol Oates and Stephen Graham Jones, "Jackson's influence has filtered—consciously or subconsciously—into the work of many contemporary fantasy, dark fantasy, and horror writers" (2021, 1). Alongside two biographies, Judy Oppenheimer's *Private Demons* (1988) and Ruth Franklin's recent *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (2016), many of Jackson's fictional texts have been adapted for film.[4] *The Letters of Shirley Jackson*, edited by her son Laurence Jackson Hyman, was just published in 2021. Academically, Jackson's work has sparked studies such as Bernice M. Murphy's edited collection *Shirley Jackson: Essays on Literary Legacy* (2005), which includes Lynette Carpenter's "The Establishment and Preservation of Female Power in Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*" (1984). This essay, along with Emily Banks' "Insisting on the Moon: Shirley Jackson and the Queer Future" (2020), an examination of Jackson's work through the lens of queer futurity, have informed this article.

In line with the rising scholarly and cultural interest in Jackson, a closer examination of how her work inspires the contemporary writer Machado allows for new insights into Jackson's legacy. Machado's deviance from realism blurs the lines between memoir and fiction. Jackson blurs these lines in her autobiographically informed domestic fiction and her comedic family memoirs *Life Among the Savages* (1952) and *Raising Demons* (1957) as well (Franklin, 2016). She weaves real-life experiences into her Gothic fiction, representing her own difficult relationship with her mother through figures like Eleanor and her dead mother's haunting throughout *Hill House*. Machado works fiction into real-life experiences in her memoir *In the Dream*

[4] *Hill House* has been adapted for film twice, in 1963 and 1999, and has further become a Netflix series by Mike Flanagan (2018). Jackson's novel *Castle* has been made into a film (2018) as well (see Giannini in Woofter, ed., 2021). The thriller *Shirley* (2020) is a recent fictionalized account inspired by Jackson's life. For studies of *Lizzie* (1957), adapted from Jackson's novel *The Bird's Nest* (1954), and *Long Twilight* (1997), adapted from her story "The Bus," see Dodson and Woofter, respectively, in Woofter, ed., 2021.

House (2019)[5] by framing it as a queer(ed) Gothic text that relies on the haunted house trope. She also echoes Jackson's penchant for allusiveness, annotating the memoir using Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955–58) to point out parallels between her life story and classic fairy tales, reimagining her abusive queer relationship as the fairy tale in the chapter "*Dream House* as the Queen and the Squid" (232–35). This shared interest in merging reality and fiction, in part signalled by allusion, invites an examination of how Machado "inherits" and reapplies Jackson's legacy in her work.

This literary legacy is particularly visible in Machado's "Hundred Miles." The short story imagines what became of the little girl who insisted on her cup of stars in the brief but essential moment in Jackson's Gothic *Hill House*. In "Hundred Miles," the girl, now the adult Lucy, becomes the story's central figure. The narrative begins with Lucy and her fiancé Pete's visit to a wedding hall, where Lucy drinks tea from a cup that reveals the Cassiopeia constellation at its bottom, a direct reference to Jackson's cup of stars. The title "A Hundred Miles and a Mile" alludes to the above-referenced scene in the restaurant where Eleanor "stopped for lunch after she had driven a hundred miles and a mile" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 20). An obscure memory insistently tries to return to Lucy through objects such as the cup. The reemergence of suppressed knowledge is central to the Gothic, as is the materialization of fear and trauma through material artefacts.

At the wedding venue where Lucy first encounters the cup as an adult, it causes "nausea and panic," and a voice whispers, "*Once they have trapped you*–" (Machado 2021, 64) as a warning of the planned marriage. These are Eleanor's exact words from *Hill House* (Jackson [1959] 2009, 22). The intermissions in Eleanor's voice continue throughout the story (Machado 2021, 65). The nausea the protagonist experiences is linked to the recognition of "marriage as yoke" and "the realisation [that] no amount of ceremony could make Pete to Lucy's liking, not in the necessary way" (64). Lucy cancels the wedding and begins a relationship with Meredith that indicates her queerness. The cup is connected to a moment of realization for Lucy: "But why that moment in the wedding hall?" (64), she wonders. This moment reveals that Lucy does not want to marry Pete, and the cup of stars alerts her to it, extending the meaning of the cup from independence and indulging one's own desires in *Hill House* to more explicitly embracing queerness. Like Eleanor in *Hill House* and Merricat and Constance in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962),[6] Lucy distances herself from heteronormative familial bonds and remains unmarried. When Lucy's

[5] Hereafter, *Dream House*.

[6] Hereafter, *Castle*.

psychotherapist asks her: "Was it simply the reality of the wedding intruding on the fantasy?" or was it, "she said this carefully, pointedly – the cup" (Machado 2021, 64), she opens the possibility that it is the same cup that appears in Jackson's novel and points to the role attributed to the artefact in Lucy's decisions regarding her future.

While the cup has been imbued with hopes of independent futures in *Hill House*, its reappearance in Machado's story draws out the queerness in Jackson's text. Connecting the cup to imaginations of queer women's futures is the legacy that Machado inherits from Jackson and incorporates into "Hundred Miles." In drawing inspiration from Jackson, an intertextual lineage of connected stories, shared knowledge, and reappearing objects, which symbolize a continuous insistence on imaginations of queer(ed) futures in contemporary texts like Machado's, is created.

I. Legacy and Inheritance in Gothic Literature

Legacy and inheritance are common themes in Gothic literature that offer a way to explore the continuation of the past in the present as well as a possibility to criticize heteropatriarchal norms. Rebecca Munford outlines how "[f]rom its beginnings, the Gothic has been preoccupied with questions of dynastic ambition, wrongful inheritance, and ancestral guilt" (2016, 225). Anthony Mandal also sees inheritance as "one of the most central motifs of Gothic literature" and points to the Gothic's "varying configurations of inheritance—as property, as genealogy [and] as supernatural disturbance" (2016, 345) haunting its heirs. Mandal further states that "[i]t is no coincidence that the Gothic emerged during a period of massive transformation in the dispensation of wealth across social structures and within families. Property and legitimacy were fundamental to the construction of identity in Western society" (344). In this context, Horace Walpole's Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is an oft-cited example, as it addresses "illegitimate inheritance and aristocratic primogeniture" (Munford 2016, 225). In Walpole's novel, Prince Manfred's illegitimacy is rectified by reinstating Otranto's rightful heir Theodore. Anne Williams points to the Gothic's concern "with genealogy" (1995, 13), and elaborates on the meanings of "'house' as 'structure' and as 'family line'" (45), the linkage of property to the family inhabiting it. The family in Gothic tales acts as a "microcosm for broader social structures of patriarchal government" (Munford 2016, 225). Patriarchal structures deprive women in particular of the right to own property, instead isolating them in Gothic castles, as Kate Ferguson Ellis argues in *The Contested Castle* (1989). Machado's awareness of tropes such as the "madwoman in the attic" and the "lunatic lesbian"

becomes apparent in "The Resident," as writer C– resists recreating these tropes in her fiction and even embodying them herself (2017c, 202–03).[7] As Mandal states, "[t]he problematic manner in which property succession is imbricated with gender politics" (2016, 344) is evident in Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) as well. Radcliffe's texts "[r]epeatedly […] [confront their] readers with young, vulnerable women whose inheritances are forcibly sequestered" (344). In *Udolpho*, the character Montoni seeks to sabotage the heroine Emily's inheritance of her aunt's properties in Toulouse. Concerns about the preservation of the patriarchal family line and inheritance also remain pervasive in contemporary Gothic novels, such as Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* (2020).

In Jackson's fiction, inheritance and legacy are equally crucial. In "The Lottery," inheritance means the community continues the tradition of killing one of its own by lottery, despite that tradition's violence and oppression. Even the title of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* suggests the prominent position inheritance holds in the novel, as it indicates that the Blackwood estate has been in the family's hands forever, passed down from one man to another. Fittingly, Carpenter describes Merricat and Constance's father, John Blackwood, as "a man of property" (1984, 32) whose "power in his family and his community derived not only from his gender but also from his material wealth" (32). Women's inheritances, in turn, consisted of dowries brought to the husband's family. Carpenter states that in the novel, the women function as "the family preservers" who have built a "cellar legacy" (33) of "jars of jam made by great-grandmothers, […] and pickles made by great-aunts and vegetables put up by our grandmother" that "would stand there forever, a poem by the Blackwood women" (Jackson [1962] 2009, 42). This act of domestic archiving links the material legacy of the preserves with the textual one of the poem. Instead of "the legacy of the Blackwood men," Constance and Merricat "value [the] Dresden figurines [and] dishes brought to the house by generations of Blackwood brides" (Carpenter 1984, 35) brought into the family as dowries. Merricat's "poisoning [of her family] has resulted in a transfer of power from

[7] In *Dream House*, Machado further addresses the stereotyping of queer women in relation to her psychologically abusive partner: She feels "unaccountably haunted by the specter of the lunatic lesbian" and states that "I did not want my lover to be dogged by mental illness or a personality disorder or rage issues" (2019, 145). Due to the portrayal of the "insane homosexual" in the media, "villainy and queerness became a kind of shorthand for each other" (49), as shown, for example, in Disney's character Ursula. When Machado's partner manipulates her, she starts doubting herself: "[Y]ou begin to wonder if you'd exaggerated the events of that trip, whether perhaps you are remembering them wrong" (154), reminiscent of George Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944) that Machado references in her memoir as well (107). In the movie, Gregory uses gaslighting, a term derived from the film's title to mean psychological manipulation, to secure Paula's dead aunt's valuable possessions and to commit Paula to an asylum.

Blackwood men to Blackwood women" (32) and the "women's forceful establishment of power over their own lives" (32). With all potential male heirs deceased or unfit, the unmarried older sister Constance becomes the head of the estate, ending the patriliny. Carpenter states that women's "self-sufficiency, Jackson suggests, […] threatens a society in which men hold primary power and leads inevitably to confrontation" (32), as also portrayed by Montoni's interference with Emily's inheritance of her aunt's properties in Radcliffe's *Udolpho*. In *Castle*, Cousin Charles's appearance and interest in marrying Constance "would […] bring [the sisters] and their wealth back into the realm of masculine control and restore patrilineal inheritance" (34–35), but in the end, the matrilineal heritage of the Blackwood household wins out over this patriarchal lineage. After Merricat sets fire to her family's estate, "the preserves of the Blackwood women stand undisturbed in the cellar, emblems of the sisters' survival" (36). Merricat further inherits knowledge of poisonous plants from her sister Constance forging a "deeper bond between the two women" (33), showing how in addition to material artefacts immaterial knowledge is passed on between women as well, much like in Machado's "Hundred Miles." Constance and Merricat are self-sufficient and uninterested in continuing the patriarchally structured family line, replacing "heterosexual romance with sisterhood" (34), comparable to Lucy's and Eleanor's hesitant stance towards heteronormative marriage and their pursuit of queer relationships, in "Hundred Miles" and Jackson's Hill House, respectively.

With Jackson's depiction of women's inheritance in *Castle* in mind, Machado displays a similar understanding of legacy as both material, such as the canned goods in the Blackwood cellar or the mink coat that Lucy inherits from her mother in "Hundred Miles," and immaterial, such as in the form of knowledge passed down between women. To exemplify, Machado addresses women's inheritance in the collection *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017). In "The Husband Stitch," the opening short story, stories become cultural heritage passed on. The protagonist shares other women's folktales while telling her own tale, insisting that this "may not be the version of the story you're familiar with. But I assure you, it is the one you need to know" (Machado 2017b, 24). Her retellings show the divergent "intended lessons" (Hood 2021, 997) between the narrative women are told by society versus the knowledge they need to survive and which they share with one another. By telling her version of the tales, the protagonist creates an immaterial heritage, a Gothic legacy that she passes on to the reader as well as to her son, who is another recipient of her stories. The passing down of stories and experiential knowledge occurs not only between characters in the stories and between the narrator and its readers, who are directly addressed in "The

Husband Stitch," but also between writers, as Machado draws on Jackson in writing a continuation of Jackson's *Hill House* in "Hundred Miles."

Inheritance in its historical and literary senses lends itself to analysis through the Gothic lens, as it suggests the lingering of the past in the present through material artefacts. While women were historically excluded from inheriting fortunes and estates due to a patriarchal familial system, Jackson and Machado's texts suggest alternative systems of heritage consisting of knowledge imbued in objects and narrative. The intergenerational passing down of knowledge often seems to be tied to material artefacts in particular, indicating that there is haunting information passed on with inheritances beyond the artefact itself.

Inheritance and legacy hence often become both a source of power and a burden that characters must contend with. To describe the contradictory nature of the knowledge passed on between women, which encompasses hope for the future and experiential disappointment simultaneously and is transmitted verbally or through objects such as the cup, I introduce the term "Gothic inheritances." Such Gothic inheritances establish a continuity between women and their stories. They are therefore decidedly directed towards the future and bear out in Machado's continuation of Jackson's legacy. Fictional examples include Eleanor's knowledge transmission to the little girl in *Hill House*, a conversation between Lucy and her future mother-in-law, and the little girl that Lucy in turn implores in "Hundred Miles." This alternative heritage shows the hope for a queer future that is connected to the urge to pass on knowledge and continue storylines that diverge from traditional mother-daughter lineages. Alternative forms of inheritance and heritage further surface through Jackson's legacy in Machado's fiction and non-fiction. In both material and immaterial form, Gothic inheritances transmit the hope of queer futures and the burdensome realization that such futures are not here yet. This dynamic indicates that these inheritances and the women's epistemology embody hope and horror at the same time, denying an unambiguous resolution in a typically Gothic manner while maintaining an insistence on imaginations of queer futures.

With a focus on the intertext "Hundred Miles," I trace Jackson's influence on Machado's work, from the mode of psychological Gothic both engage to the stark contrast between fantasies of non-conformity and sobering reality that are central to Jackson's *Hill House* and *Castle* and reappear in Machado's short fiction and her memoir *Dream House*. Inheriting modes and themes from other writers creates not only intertextual narrative universes but alternative queer lineages that exist beside traditional patriarchal and heteronormative heritage systems. The passing on of knowledge is crucial to these queered familial bonds. Banks states that

"Jackson depicts a resistance to futurity—in Eleanor's death and Merricat's destruction of the family line simultaneously illustrates new possibilities for productivity that deviate from the standard of *re*productivity" (2020, 181). I see this productivity at work in the establishment of an intertextual lineage of connected stories by passing down the cup of stars from Jackson to Machado, which symbolizes a continuous insistence on imaginations of queer futures.

II. Machado's "A Hundred Miles and a Mile" as a Continuation of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*

The intertextual "Hundred Miles" consciously works as a continuation of Jackson's *Hill House*. The short story deals with the passing down of knowledge connected to the experience of being a woman in a heteropatriarchal world. Machado's protagonist Lucy suppresses painful memories and rids herself of their burden by bequeathing them to a young girl, echoing the scene in *Hill House* in which Eleanor, in her thoughts, implores a little girl to not give up her cup of stars. Both scenes establish fantastical imagination, whimsy, and desire as essential for ensuring hopeful futures in a dominantly heteronormative world that makes peripheral figures of women seeking queer(er) futures. In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz points to the insufficiency of the present and calls it "impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational' expectations" (2019, 27), which makes such conceptualizations of queer or queered futures vital. Muñoz further states that "a queer feeling of hope in the face of hopeless heteronormative maps of the present [is necessary] where futurity is indeed the province of normative reproduction" (28), suggesting a need for alternative conceptualizations of futures beyond the heteronormative one. In her story, Machado creates a parallel map of Eleanor's trajectory from houseless wanderer to Hill House in the novel, using a heteronormative setting as a starting point of the respective narrative, a confining family home in Eleanor's case and a wedding hall in Lucy's case, only to then move away from it and onto the open road, which provides distance from the normative places and engenders a sense of mobility. Both stories include stops at roadside inns and both feature an important moment of knowledge exchange between a woman and a young girl, showing how Machado traces Jackson's plotline.

In *Hill House*, the moment of shared experience between Eleanor and the young girl, whom she urges to insist on her own fancies, takes place at the roadside inn Eleanor stops at on her way to Hill House. Inside, she

witnesses how a young girl refuses to drink her milk from an ordinary cup. Eleanor overhears the mother's explanation to the astonished waitress that instead, the girl "wants her cup of stars" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 21). In her thoughts, Eleanor implores the girl to not give in: "Don't do it, […] insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see [it] again" (22). The girl gives Eleanor a "wholly comprehending smile" and continues to refuse the milk. Eleanor calls her a "wise, brave girl" (22) for holding on to her own desires and dreams before continuing on her journey to Hill House. In *Hill House*, the cup represents hopes of independent futures and its reappearance in Machado's story links it more strongly to queer(ed) futures beyond heteronormative expectations. The cup further seems connected to the simultaneous acquisition of potentially traumatic and disappointing knowledge, expanding its symbolic meaning from the stars as metaphors of a queer future (Banks 2020, 169). Queer futures represent existences beyond the norm and outside of the confines of heteronormative expectations for women, shown in Eleanor's imaginations of alternative concepts of life when she is by herself on the drive to Hill House. On this drive, she "[imagines a] life beyond the patriarchal domestic structure but also evokes the vision of a possible queer future, achievable only through the destruction of traditional concepts of lineage and production" (169).

Machado's Lucy does not want to recuperate horrific memories and thus decides to pass them on to another young girl before remembering them herself. Mary Angeline Hood discusses the passing on of knowledge through storytelling in *Her Body and Other Parties* as the creation of a "feminist epistemology" (2020, 1002).[8] The continuous transfer of experiential knowledge between women through intertextual storytelling creates alternative epistemologies and heritage systems alongside patrilineal forms of knowledge transfer and inheritance.[9] In these texts, the women do not have to be related to pass down experiential knowledge to one another, which also constitutes a queering of traditional familial bonds. The way Machado draws on Jackson's literary heritage indicates not only the intergenerational passing on of experiential wisdom from writer to writer but also within the literature.

[8] In the chapter "Feminist Epistemology" in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (2017), Helen Longino provides an in-depth discussion of the term.

[9] Hood examines how old wives' tales offer "alternative ways of knowing" (2020, 992). Making sense of the world and one's experiences through tales is an important element in Machado's short story "The Husband Stitch" as well.

III. Imaginations of Queer Futures

Muñoz theorizes queer futurity as "something that is not quite here" (2019, 7). He conceptualizes queerness as "an ideality" (1), making the argument that queer futures are still in the process of being created. This ongoing process links perfectly to the contradictory knowledge that the cup of stars holds in Jackson and Machado's texts. The intrusion of a future that is not here yet in the present in Jackson's *Hill House* constitutes a reverse Gothic sentiment, as it is usually the past that intrudes on the present. Muñoz states that "[q]ueerness is a [...] mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (1). His "theory of queer futurity […] is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present" (18). Working towards queer futurity by drawing on what lies in the past to engender transformation in the present, as Muñoz suggests, allows one to take Gothic inheritances into account when talking about queer futures (1). Potentiality, according to Muñoz, is "imbued within an object" alongside the object's past and "represent[s] a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening" (9). "[U]topian feelings," such as Eleanor's imaginations of non-normative futures on her drive to Hill House, are "indispensable to the act of imagining transformation" (9) and an invitation to fantasise, imagine, and indulge one's cup of stars. The "queer aesthetic" that Muñoz describes "frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity" and displays "an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1). This aesthetic is part of Eleanor's imagination of ideal futures grounded in the cup of stars.

Passing on knowledge to younger women is an act of hope that enables queer futurity as well. Juniper Fitzgerald states that "[q]ueerness means surviving and escaping the spaces we were not meant to survive or escape. *To answer death with utopian futurity*, [Alexis Pauline] Gumbs writes, *is a queer thing to do*" (2022, 76–77). While what is passed on contains the traumatic burden of feminine experience, the survival of characters like Lucy does point towards a potential future that was out of reach for Eleanor.

Material artefacts, such as the cup, are imbued with experiential wisdom or with societal norms. A counter-object to the cup that represents heteronormative societal norms is the mink coat that Lucy's mother has passed on to her daughter, indicating that she should follow in her steps to live a normative life. For Machado, the cup of stars in turn is "a reminder that you are allowed your own fantasies, the particular fancies of your own mind" (2017a). Eleanor indulges in these fancies of her own mind[10] on the

[10] Other queer(ed) futures Eleanor fantasizes about include driving to the end of the world, "until the wheels of the car were worn to nothing" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 17), imagining an entire lifetime

ride to Hill House and, once in Hill House, in her conversations about her (imagined) apartment with Theodora. As Banks outlines, Eleanor imagines collecting things and acquiring them for the home she pretends to have (2020, 181), telling Theodora how her own material heritage would be made up of "[w]hite curtains […] little stone lions on each corner of the mantel [with] my books and records and pictures" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 88). The apartment of her dreams is "exactly the way [she] want[s] it" (88). In her fantasy of it, she lives in it by herself. This apartment exists only in her fantasies, much like the "blue cup with stars painted on the inside" (88) she claims to have owned, showing her desire to have what the little girl at the roadside inn had: the ability to indulge her personal wishes. The cup of stars materially represents the fulfilment of Eleanor's dreams, the conceptualization of a functional feminine space of her own that does not follow societal expectations. When Eleanor tells Theodora about the cup, the latter promises to send one like that to Eleanor after their stay at Hill House (89). Eleanor imagines an alternative life with Theodora, although she constantly suppresses her feelings for her and does not act on them, as they would constitute a divergence from heteronormativity. On an exploration of Hill House's garden, they "each privately and perversely accused the other of taking, deliberately, a path they had followed together once before in happiness" (174). Eleanor continues to imagine life at Theodora's side, as she tells her "I […] am going to follow you home" (208). Eleanor's underlying queer desire to be with Theodora is conceived of as impossible: "Nothing irrevocable had yet been spoken, but there was only the barest margin of safety left them, each of them moving delicately along the outskirts of an open question, and, once spoken, such a question – as 'Do you love me?' – could never be answered or forgotten" (174). This "margin of safety" and the "outskirts of an open question" show how the outside spaces they are moving in allow for the imagination of a queer future.

While Theodora has her apartment to return to after the stay (87), Eleanor has no such option. She still asserts her right to a future: "I have a right to live, too" (173). When a family picnic epitomizing the heteronormative ideal appears to her on the grounds of Hill House, she spots "what might have been a broken cup" (177). While it contains Eleanor's hopes in the beginning, it is broken by the end, indicating that her dreams of forming a family outside the norm will not be fulfilled and will remain in the realm of imagination instead. According to Banks, the cup is imbued with "a fantasy only a child can truly believe in," in "the same way lesbian desire was, at the time, dismissed as immaturity" (2020, 178). Like Eleanor imagines creating an ideal home, Machado envisions an imaginary life in the

pass by in a house guarded by stone lions (18), and living a fairy tale life in a palace hidden behind poisonous oleander bushes (19–20).

Dream House, projecting her fantasy onto the material structure: "We have a beautiful home; the sort of home that has its own library" (2019, 57). She, too, imagines a life that diverges from the norms of heteronormativity, as she pictures "[e]xplaining to [her] children that other families may not look like [theirs], but that [this] doesn't mean something is wrong" (43). Machado becomes enamoured with domestic scenes of a heteronormative family when apartment-hunting. In one house, she imagines the "fantasy" of a polyamorous relationship and "catch[es] [herself] mourning already" (43), the daydream immediately halted by a sense of improbability. While Jackson's work depicts the reality of a queer relationship as impossible from Eleanor's viewpoint, Machado's imagined queer space cannot be made material due to her partner's psychological violence, rather than as a consequence of their queerness.

The impossibility of Eleanor's dreams of a queer home is further foreshadowed during her second stop on the drive to Hill House in Hillsdale, a parallel version of the scene at the inn. This much-less hopeful scene, occurring at a grim diner, is often neglected in analyses, but importantly underlines the argument of the contradiction inherent to the cup of stars. Eleanor tells the skeptical waitress behind the counter that Hillsdale seems like a place to which people would come to build or renovate a house of their own, while the woman insists that people leave Hillsdale and no one would think of building a house there (Jackson [1959] 2009, 26). As Eleanor drinks her unappetizing coffee from a cup without stars, her initial hope of creating a home in Hillsdale diminishes, foreshadowing that the expectations she connects to the cup of stars will not become a reality for her: Hill House does not become a home, a brief interest in its future heir Luke does not last, and her love interest Theodora already has "a friend with whom she shared an apartment" (9). The roommate's gender remains unspecified. Although not explicitly stated, it is insinuated that the roommate is her partner. Theodora states that "[w]e found an old place and fixed it up ourselves," and adds that "We both love doing over old things" (88), indicating that she has already fulfilled Eleanor's dream with another person while Eleanor's musings remain a fantasy. Eleanor's queer future remains out of reach as she cannot find a home for herself but instead dies on Hill House's grounds. While for Eleanor a life outside heteronormative norms does not seem possible, Theodora might have been successful to an extent. When Eleanor asks whether Theodora is married, she replies "No […] You're funny" (88), pointing to the fact that the possibility of queer marriage lies in the future in *Hill House*'s narrative universe. While queer relationships are possible for Lucy, her queer(ed) future seems to depend more on the success in passing on the memories she represses before having to remember them. She states that "[w]hen someone offers her milk" it "became less about broken

ceramics and dairy products and, inexplicably, quaint roadside restaurants" (Machado 2021, 63–64). While at first glance, this seems to indicate a return to a time in which the cup and the possibility of queer futurity are still intact, Machado complicates this notion by making the roadside inn the site where the unpleasant memory intrudes on Lucy the most persistently. At the end of the weekend trip with Meredith, Lucy finds herself in a restaurant like the one in which she communicated with Eleanor in Jackson's novel as a girl. Upon crossing the inn's threshold, she "realize[s] something [is] wrong, terrible" and goes on to touch several objects in her vicinity. She "held the napkin against her cheeks; she traced the velvety contours of the fork at her place setting" (65).[11] Lucy stares at the waitress with "naked *something*, not desire" (65), but potentially recognition, indicating the difficulty to escape the insistent memory. Lucy "ate in a daze (refusing milk, of course)" (65), like she did as a little girl in *Hill House*. Her therapist wonders "if there was something special about the inn, the table setting, the waitress" (65) and asks, "Perhaps you went there as a child?" (66), opening up the possibility that it was the same inn and the same waitress that threatened to set off her memory. "Nothing I put my fingers on," Lucy replies (65), showing that she still represses the memory even when therapy would be the place to recuperate it. Lucy's reluctance to remember, on the one hand, and the urge to pass on her knowledge to another young girl, on the other, comments on the slim chance for queer(ed) futures to become reality, reminiscent of Eleanor's fate in *Hill House*.

IV. Memory and Knowledge

For Lucy, memory appears to be passed on through objects. The places and objects in the story invite Lucy to access the intangible memories of the women before her who have passed on their knowledge to her: "When china shatters. When someone offers her milk" (Machado 2021, 63), moments that can be read in relation to the cup of stars. Even "[t]he sky was the colour of milky tea and scattered with a handful of stars" (66), as if it implores her to remember as well, with increasing urgency. These bouts of memory are connected to spells that turn into "[m]ore of a mood than a fear, a sense of oncoming doom, like the seconds before death by drowning" (64). In *Hill*

[11] Fascinatingly, in Mike Flanagan's Netflix adaptation of *The Haunting of Hill House*, Theodora's character wears gloves, as she can access the memories stored in things when she touches them. While this is a gift in her career as a children's therapist, it is also a burden, as she relives her patients' most traumatic moments. In Machado's story, Lucy looks at gloves at the Gimbels department store (67), so she might be looking for the gloves to shield the resurfacing of memory through touch as well.

House, Miss Crain's companion inherited Hill House, to the outrage of Crain's younger sister who felt she had a claim to it instead due to her family relation, unwilling to accept Miss Crain's decision. The companion is described as one of "those tenacious, unclever young women who can hold on desperately to what they believe is their own but cannot withstand, mentally, a constant nagging persecution" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 80). This "nagging persecution" describes the knowledge that queer futurity and the hope of a non-normative life in a patriarchally dominated world might remain a utopian fantasy.[12] Eleanor's experience proves to be similar. Lucy describes this state as "knowing-not-knowing" (Machado 2021, 63) and refuses to accept the intruding memory. She finds it to be persistent as it "twitches like something that won't die" (63). In Lucy's case, this suppression is depicted as a choice, but ultimately the character is haunted by the memory as it continues making itself present to her. The theme of choosing to know also features in Machado's graphic novel *The Low, Low Woods* (2020), where women can decide to remember a traumatic past or not by ingesting a potion. Remembering as an act of choice is a topic equally important to "Hundred Miles," in which the memories, knowledge, and their passing on can be a burden, on the one hand, and, on the other, are essential for Lucy to rid herself of the "nagging persecution" that Dr. Montague describes in *Hill House*. Lucy's insistence on oblivion seems necessary to survive in a Gothic world and is presented as a way for her to have a queer future.

While the story's settings, such as the wedding hall, are often steeped in heteronormativity, the car offers an alternative place imbued with the potentiality of freedom and independence. After her cancelled wedding, Lucy leaves behind the city and goes on a car trip with her new lover Meredith (Machado 2021, 65). They stay at a motel that is described as "lousy with honeymooners" (65), which shows the insistent presence of heteronormativity in Lucy's life even upon distancing herself from Pete. In *Hill House*, the car represents Eleanor's mobility and the ability to choose her own path. This freedom sparks the imagination of her future, which stands in contrast to the confinement of the domestic setting of her family home. The sense of hope she feels is at its height on the drive to Hill House, where she imagines all kinds of homes and how she would furnish them. She wishes for her imagined utopia to become reality but, in the end, cannot create it for herself. When Machado, her partner, and the partner's girlfriend at the time look for houses to move into, Machado indulges in a very similar version of Eleanor's musings: "[T]he three of you will be together" (2019,

[12] Heather Love underlines that "[s]uch utopian desires [of better futures] are at the heart of the collective project of queer studies and integral to the history of gay and lesbian identity" (2007, 3) as well.

43) she thinks while they are in the car and "[a]s farmland scrolls past you, you find yourself imagining a whole new life, a perfect intersection of hedonism and wholesomeness" (43). In the chapter "*Dream House as* Choose Your Own Adventure™," the car becomes a means of escape from the house that has turned from a queer fantasy into a haunted place. Machado provides an additional option to escape her circumstances by driving away, which is "not how it happened" (203) at the time of the incident: The "car keys are already in your hand and you drive away with a theatrical squeal of the tires, never to return again" (202). This made-up option shows how Machado blurs the lines between fiction and memoir, indicating a fictional option in which Machado left her partner at this point of the narrative, which constitutes a queering of narrative possibilities used in memoir.

The insistence upon fantasy and imagination as a counterpart to horrific everyday experiences is essential for queer futures in both Machado and Jackson's work. *Hill House* opens with the lines: "No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality" ([1959] 2009, 3). Machado states that "non-realism can be a way to insist on something different" (2017a), on experiences that feel surreal and can be grasped through a mode of unreality. In *Dream House*, Machado states that "[f]antasy is […] the defining cliché of female queerness" (2019, 124), indicating its importance for queer futurity. Muñoz argues that "queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be […] used to imagine a future" (2019, 1), which also seems to make the present more liveable. For Lucy and Eleanor, the key seems to be to indulge in fantasy and not live entirely in reality. Lucy decides to relieve herself of the burden of her memories and to deliver her message to a young girl that she encounters at a department store, questioning the practice of inheritance upon death. Lucy does not understand why "people choose to wait," stating that it is "unfair that inheritances so often hinged on death" (Machado 2021, 66). She criticizes heteronormative heritage practices and decides to pass on her memories to a young girl in an attempt to free herself.

Lucy reflects on the mink coat she is wearing, passed down to her after her mother's death (Machado 2021, 66). The mink coat signifies normative familial inheritance in terms of class position and femininity and makes Lucy resemble her mother visually. She tells herself that she was "technically an adult" when her mother died and "such things could not be helped" (66), rationalizing her grief. Lucy further compares herself to people "who wore their past miseries like a winter coat, subtly altering their shape" (66) and states that she is not like them. When Lucy tries to find a girl to pass her knowledge on to, she chooses one that wears a "smart white coat" that seems to set her apart from the ones who wear their "past miseries like a

winter coat" (67). As mentioned, the coat appears in the story as a traditional heirloom and a counterpart to the cup.

Lucy does not pass on a traditional object, but rather a message. In the department store, she lures a girl away from her mother, "whispering something frantically" (Machado 2021, 67) and "telling her something *urgent*" (67) that "she simply needed the little girl to understand" (68). The girl listens with "solemnity and intent her own mother would not have recognized" (67), indicating the moment's exceptionality. After the little girl has become an adult and remembers this moment, she describes Lucy as "a hulking, sorrowful creature – red-mouthed and sleek as an otter" (68), indicating that Lucy is not a regular woman anymore and instead a "creature" in a distant memory. While the story does not give answers as to what Lucy's life looks like after she has passed down the repressed knowledge, the possibility that she has freed herself of the burden exists. Lucy decides to pass on her knowledge and chooses oblivion for herself. However, she makes a point of transmitting her urgent message to another girl before forgetting it herself.

In "Hundred Miles," it is not her own mother the little girl thinks of as she gets older but Lucy and her message. While the creation of an alternative epistemology can lead to a sense of community and understanding among women, in Eleanor's and Lucy's case, the aspect of intrusion of reality on a fantasy they wish to uphold to survive is a crucial aspect as well. As an adult, the girl "would, on occasion, think back to her own past and come across the memory of the department store for reasons she did not fully understand. Her mother. The watch […] Only when she looked at it sideways would she remember that it held something else entirely: [Lucy] extending her hand and whispering the thing she needed to hear" (Machado 2021, 68), a line that rings familiar to "But I assure you, it is the [version of the story] you need to know" (Machado 2017b, 24), from "The Husband Stitch." "Looking at [something] sideways" suggests an uncommon perspective to unveil further details of the memory and a queering of memory, knowledge, and heritage.

The alternative to patrilineal and matrilineal legacy portrayed through the queer familial bonds between Eleanor and the little girl in *Hill House* can be linked to Jackson's challenging relationship with her own mother, whose frequent criticisms throughout her life led her to establish an alternative in her fiction (Franklin 2016). Jodey Castricano points out that mothers are "invasively present – even when deceased – in the daughter's life" (2009, 42–43) as insistent, haunting memories. The relational bond created between Eleanor and the little girl at the roadside restaurant reaches into the following generation when Lucy passes on her knowledge to yet another little girl, establishing a queer lineage. For Eleanor, the group at Hill House bears the "tantalising possibility that family may be created rather than inherited"

(Banks 2020, 173). In Machado's "Hundred Miles," such queer bonds are formed between Lucy and the woman who almost becomes her mother-in-law as well, when she admits to her that if not marrying had been an option for her, she would have made the same choice as Lucy: "I wish I could have done the same," her fiancé's mother says to Lucy (Machado 2021, 64). Their newly formed bond suggests mutual understanding and community between women through shared desires.

Conclusion

Machado's "Hundred Miles" is an intertext that continues Shirley Jackson's literary legacy. The short story thematizes the ongoing, albeit contradictory, knowledge that is passed on from woman to woman. As a reimagination of *Hill House*'s cup of stars scene, the transfer happens both verbally and through objects. This comments on how both the capacity to hope and the burden of intergenerational trauma are transmitted. The cup of stars connects *Hill House* and "Hundred Miles," representing utopian ideas that sometimes must remain a fantasy, in line with Muñoz's argument that queer futurity is not yet here. Therefore, Gothic inheritances embody hope and horror at the same time, maintaining an insistence on imaginations of queer futures alongside an awareness of queer women's often horrific everyday experiences of sexism, misogyny, and queerphobia. This alternative form of heritage between women who are not related further results in a queering of traditional familial bonds. Gothic inheritances hence establish a continuity between women and their stories and form an intertextual lineage between Jackson and Machado. Jackson's influence in Machado's work can be traced through her interest in the psychological Gothic, queer futures and familial bonds, the passing on of knowledge between women to create alternative epistemologies, and the realms between reality and fantasy. Jackson's legacy in contemporary literature indicates an intergenerational passing on of wisdom, both within and beyond women's literature.

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Murderers, Whores, and Thieves: Crime and Violence as Acts of Resistance in Selected Works of Shirley Jackson and Virginia Feito

Ibi Kaslik

Disarmingly uncanny, Shirley Jackson's body of work is expansive in its exploration of domestic horror, focused significantly on gender inequity. Jackson's work has also laid the groundwork for contemporary literature focused on women's gender-based body dysmorphia and dystopia. Her influence is evident in contemporary Spanish writer Virginia Feito's debut novel *Mrs. March* (2021). Feito, like Jackson, writes in a sardonic literary style, free of didacticism and the trappings of melodrama. Feito also incorporates generic horror and crime tropes relating to violence, murder, theft, and suicidal ideation, as does Jackson. Through parallel themes, characterization, plot, and writing style, Feito carries forward Jackson's trademark focus on the instability of identity and the fractured psychological and emotional states women characters experience as they navigate through the hostile patriarchal structures of twentieth- and twenty-first-century society, particularly within domestic and social contexts.

This paper will examine how various forms of theft, impersonation, and impulses towards self-harm and violence—in fantasy or otherwise—function within Feito and Jackson's characters' fractured identities, as well as how these activities are manifestations of the characters' fraught sense of feminine selfhood. The ways in which these criminal preoccupations manifest in *Hangsaman* (1951), *We Have Always Lived in a Castle* (1962),[1] and a small sample of Jackson's short stories, and the manner in which they are more thoroughly expanded upon and explored in Virginia Feito's *Mrs. March* (2021), reveal how fractured feminine identity results from internalized patriarchy, and the hatred and the aggressions women experience daily. Feito's novel, like Jackson's oeuvre, is mainly concerned with feminine identity, and the central characters of both authors' texts express their anguish and anxiety through acts of petty theft, real and imagined violence, and other indiscretions. Through such offenses the women of these texts enact a means of reprieve from the many personal injustices they suffer in a society designed to denigrate and defeat women.

Feito has disclosed her explicit goal to produce the same type of claustrophobic, dark domestic narrative of authors like Patricia Highsmith

[1] Hereafter referred to as *Castle*.

and Shirley Jackson.[2] Setting her book in a retro-future environment of New York City, Feito is successful in her attempt to write an updated domestic horror; her novel reads precisely like a slightly modernized and more nerve-wracking novelization of "The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith," a short story by Jackson published posthumously in 1996's *Just an Ordinary Day*. The short story begins *in medias res* with Mrs. Smith entering the grocer's, obviously having "interrupted a conversation about herself and her husband" (Jackson 2017, 41). Feito also begins her novel *in media res* with a statement about the protagonist's husband: "George March had written another book" (2021, 1). From this initial sentence, the reader follows the eponymous protagonist Mrs. March down the streets of New York's Upper East Side and to a bakery where, like Mrs. Smith, she orders food for herself and her husband. Mrs. March is disarmed when the cashier, Patricia, whom Mrs. March sees as beneath her own status, states that she has been reading George March's latest novel. She is unprepared for her husband's literary success to intersect with her cherished shopping rituals and is further upset when Patricia remarks on the similarities between herself and the main character of the novel, Johanna, a sex worker who, ironically, is so unattractive that no one wants to avail themselves of her services. Patricia's observation that Mrs. March must have been the inspiration behind the character of Johanna is the novel's first inciting incident, as the comment sparks Mrs. March's paranoia around George March's disloyalty and that she is the constant focal point of judgment and gossip.

Later, a found newspaper clipping in George's notebook ignites Mrs. March's suspicions that her husband may have murdered a young woman while away on a hunting trip. As in "The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith," Mrs. March's identity is immediately linked to her husband's, although Mrs. Smith is granted the first name of Helen, and readers learn her maiden name as well. Mrs. Smith's neighbour, Polly Jones, even insists on using Mrs. Smith's first name to talk to Mrs. Smith. Polly proceeds to outline the many reasons that Polly and the other neighbors find the entire marriage suspicious, openly telling Mrs. Smith that she doesn't "look like [she] belonged in this house, or in this neighborhood" (Jackson 2017, 47). Polly explains that Mrs. Smith and her husband stand out not only because they are older and wealthier, but because Mrs. Smith radiates a certain "ladylike" refinement (47). She insists that Mrs. Smith must indicate "some intelligence about this terrible business" (47)—the terrible business being that Mr. Smith is generally assumed to be the local serial killer, drowning unsuspecting women in the bathtub. As noted by Michael J. Dalpe, Jr., in "'You Didn't Look Like You

[2] "I love all these old sinister books and stories by Shirley Jackson and Patricia Highsmith and Ira Levin and Daphne du Maurier. Perhaps I thought the best way to read a new book reminiscent of this nostalgic style was to write it" (Feito 2022).

Belonged in This House': Shirley Jackson's Fragile Domesticities," the most unnerving part of the story is not the subtext that Mr. Smith is a murderer, but rather the horror that "Mrs. Smith's every action is subject to scrutiny and gossip" (Dalpe 2022, 45). Mrs. March's experiences are positioned in precisely the same way as Mrs. Smith's, as Mrs. March constantly feels dissected and scorned. Plagued by social anxiety and her overly self-conscious predisposition, even when she is alone and in her own home, Mrs. March anticipates being "greeted by an audience applauding her pitiful stupidity" (Feito 2021, 14). Like Mrs. Smith, who perceives threats, judgment, and mockery both within and without the domestic sphere, Jackson's women protagonists operate without a sense of fixed identity and occupy a liminal space where attempts to locate emotional and psychological safety are feckless (Angeloch 2021, 220).

The scenes that most significantly demonstrate Mrs. March's symbolic rebuttal to perceived personal transgressions revolve around the theft of objects or the destruction of objects belonging to others. Prior to committing her first public theft, Mrs. March, after learning from Patricia that she may have been the influence for the character of Johanna, desecrates and disposes of a copy of George March's novel in her own home. After she steals one from a box of books in George's study, Mrs. March reads "quickly" and "superficially" about the "whore from Nantes"—Johanna—who is "weak, plain, detestable, pathetic, unloved," and an "unlovable wretch" (Feito 2021, 16). Overwhelmed by the similarities between herself and the despicable anti-heroine, she thinks, as always, of what *others* will think: "the whole world would know or, worse still, would *assume*" (16). Again, this theme of an outsider view taking root in the protagonist's mind is prevalent in "The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith," as Mrs. Smith muses that "people are beginning to wonder too openly. Everyone is waiting…" (Jackson 2017, 51). Like Mrs. March, who is more concerned with being exposed by her husband's treachery than the betrayal itself, Mrs. Smith hopes to be promptly murdered—murder being preferable to further pernicious gossip. After the thought about her reputation, Mrs. March clutches the book to her breast, smashes it against George's desk, claws out George's eyes in the author photo and rips the novel to shreds. Realizing what she has done, she takes off her pantyhose and stuffs the desecrated text into her pantyhose in order to transport it to the kitchen garbage. Upon encountering Martha, their housekeeper, as she is surreptitiously disposing of the book, Mrs. March experiences fear. Mrs. March believes that Martha is the real "boss" of the household and that, in fact, Mrs. March "should be the one cleaning the apartment" (Feito 2021, 18). This scene not only contains Mrs. March's immature eruption of violence and then its guilty aftermath, but also underscores the lack of security and fixed identity that marks the start of the

slow trajectory towards Mrs. March's psychological breakdown. Feeling neither appropriately represented nor respected by George, nor the "boss" of her own household, Mrs. March resembles many of Jackson's characters. Natalie Waite's mother in *Hangsaman*, for example, warns Natalie about marrying a man like her own father who will strip her of her identity, and Merricat Blackwood in *Castle* is easily undone by her cousin's presence usurping her place in the household. Like Jackson's characters, Mrs. March's inability to connect to others reinforces her isolation. Mrs. March, also like Jackson's characters, feels terror in common, everyday environments, as they induce "the panic and paranoia that descend[s] upon them when they venture beyond the dubious safety of their domestic environment" (Hague 2005, 74–76).

After this private theft and destruction of George's novel, the next theft Mrs. March carries out is of a monogrammed cigarette case from a beautiful young woman at her husband's book launch party in their home. Through the possession of one of the young woman's personal items, Mrs. March hopes to glean some of the young woman's beauty and elegance. After the act, she hallucinates, for the first time, imaginary cockroaches—harbingers of her delusions of domestic corruption and filth—skittering over the tiles. And yet when Mrs. March observes Gabriella's "glossy golden mane," along with "her wine-colored dress—stunning in its simplicity and exquisitely draped over her thin frame" (Feito 2021, 46), Gabriella's beauty both attracts and repels Mrs. March. Specifically, Mrs. March, a self-described frumpy middle-aged woman, feels threatened by Gabriella's glamour and beauty and as she looks upon the young guest she shrinks, "feeling gauche and exposed," as she is perpetually aware of her sagging belly, stretchmarks, and sagging arms, in comparison to the more stylish and elegant women in attendance (46).

Her clothing and possessions also play a significant role in her skewed sense of self as Mrs. March feels deeply that her possessions do not reflect the idealized—and, to her, requisite—feminine image of sensuality, thinness, and glamour demanded by a heteropatriarchal and ageist society—demands that she has interiorized. In fact, Mrs. March strongly suspects that, although objectively her wardrobe is "tasteful and of good quality," the manner in which she dons her clothing makes them "come across as cheap and tacky" (39). She believes this of all her personal belongings; however, it is especially true of her unflattering clothes as "everything was either too tight or too short or it hung off her, shapeless and billowy—*she always appeared to be wearing somebody else's clothes.*" (39; emphasis mine)

Feeling like an imposter in one's own life is also a longstanding theme in Jackson's fiction, dramatically evoked in the short story "Louisa, Please Come Home." The story describes a young woman who, desperate to escape

the boredom of her middle-class future, leaves home then later returns to her parents, only to be rejected by her family who can no longer recognize their own daughter. In this short story, clothing plays a significant role as, while appropriating a new identity, Louisa simply picks out a suit and makes a few small adjustments and with "just one or two small changes like a different blouse or some kind of pin in the lapel," she "could look like whoever [she] decided to be" (Jackson 2017, 21). Unlike Mrs. March, whose physical appearance is overwhelmingly tied to her self-esteem and personality, Jackson indicates the ways in which accessories—a raincoat, a pin—can transform Louisa into looking like "a thousand other people" (21). One major difference between Jackson's characters and Mrs. March is that, despite their lack of integrated self, Jackson's characters contain whimsy and flexibility. Even a more intransigent character like Merricat from *Castle,* to whom this paper will return to later, has playful exchanges with her sister and adapts to different living situations, despite her initial hostility to life changes. Lacking in imagination and any shred of self-esteem, Mrs. March cannot improvise or be resourceful like Louise; Mrs. March can only borrow or steal the identity of others.

Prior to her cigarette case being stolen, Gabriella stubs out her cigarette on Mrs. March's carefully curated menu of caviar and crème fraiche blini. Mrs. March, though deeply offended, cannot decide whether or not to perceive Gabriella's obvious rudeness "as an insult to her hospitality," and is overwhelmed by "a desire to cry out about such a desecration" (Feito 2021, 48). This hesitation around searching for the appropriate response after a rude violation resonates as expressly Jackson-esque, since a similar moment occurs in *Hangsaman* when Natalie learns that Anne and Vicki—two peers with whom she is in a perverse, underhanded competition for her professor's affections—have ventured into Natalie's private dormitory room to snoop. Natalie, at first, cannot even comprehend such a violation—"I don't understand", she tells the girls, acknowledging that she does not even know how to react to this publicly (Jackson 2013, 89). Though inwardly Natalie concedes that the thought of the girls in her room is "abhorrent," she is confused by the "calm, guiltless [and] amused" manner in which the girls have confessed their violation, as if the two had "premised their visit on what must be a complimentary opinion of Natalie" (89). So depersonalized and disassociated is Natalie in confronting the event that, like Mrs. March, she struggles to locate an appropriate reaction of outrage, wondering if she should "show anger and demonstrate […] that she was not to be tampered with" (89–90). Natalie's sense of "being tampered with" refers to the violation of her private space, as well as her sense of self/identity and though she is unable to express this verbally to the violators, she does comprehend

that having one's things disrupted also disrupts the self, as Natalie's retaliatory actions later on in the novel demonstrate.

As Dominic Angeloch notes, there is in Jackson's work what French philosopher Roger Caillois describes as the "assertion of a nexus of disturbance between self-perception and spatial perception" (2021, 234). In Jackson's work, the uncanniness of feminine identity in relation to the outside world questions the state of a sense of home. Home is supposed to be, after all, a place of safety, the location where we "think, feel, locate ourselves in the space-time continuum, and this questioning is accompanied by a suspension of what we are talking about when we speak of 'I'" (233). Thus, in Jackson's body of work, conflict and certainty around women's identity is frequently bound up with ownership of or right to occupy one's space unmolested and undisturbed, particularly a domestic or, in Natalie's case, private space.

Therefore, when Mrs. March seizes Gabriella's cigarette case on the coffee table, compelled "by an unfamiliar impulse," and slips it into her bra, where the stolen object once again becomes wedged "uncomfortably against her left breast," her act of stealing is retaliation for Gabriella's breach of Mrs. March's self and domestic space (Feito 2021, 49). Breast to breast now with Gabriella's initials, her very name, if only through the symbolic talisman of the metal case, Mrs. March retreats to her bedroom and barricades herself there for the rest of the party. She smokes three of the stolen cigarettes and seethes over her belief that the unsavoury protagonist, Johanna, is based on her. She imagines the partygoers are "pitying her," believing that she is a woman "whose husband despised her so much that he based this dreadful character on her" (55). When Mrs. March finally decides to emerge from her bedroom, she imagines everyone at the party dead from poisoning. Though acknowledging that her unfounded desire for "some sort of revenge" has been assuaged through the theft of the cigarette case, she believes "they deserved worse," and plays out the fantasy of poisoning them all "with a dish of toasted cheese and opium" (56). In her imagination, Mrs. March watches them all dramatically collapse "all over her living room, then the silence, an odd peace after such a boisterous party, and herself stepping over the bodies in a stunned daze" (56).

This fantasy evokes the central—yet offstage—dramatic incident in Jackson's *Castle*, wherein Merricat Blackwood—a reclusive young woman who resides in her family's remote estate with her sister and invalid Uncle Julian—avoids the encroaching world through small rites and rituals. Merricat *has* poisoned her entire family—a fact that readers suspect but is not, in fact, revealed until the last act of the novel. Despite being a mass murderer of her own family, Merricat's alienation is conveyed acutely to readers, especially when it originates from the villagers, who scorn, taunt,

and abuse her on her weekly visits to town. Thus, it is understandable to readers when she reveals: "I would have liked to come into the grocery some morning and see them all, even […] the children, lying here crying with the pain and dying" (Jackson 2022, 20). As with Mrs. March's fantasy of poisoning a group whom she believes has treated her with contempt, readers can somewhat comprehend the generalized feeling of being targeted, as well as the misplaced desire for avenging some imaginary slight. This odd empathy is present in the reader both because of and despite the absurdly horrific yet comical tableau. This image of a person or group gagging and falling to the ground, frothing at the mouth, is a deliberate nod to early nineteenth-century sensation novels, wherein the then-new controversial poison plot, authored by and for women, was itself a crime (Helfield 1995, 163). While the poison plot scenario would continue to be a common plot device for genre writers in the mid-to-late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the women authors of poison plot texts, such as Agatha Christie, were accused of proliferating toxic messaging as both they and their texts' characters contradicted Victorian gender roles by creating titillating tales predicated on passion and poison.[3] The repeated image of families and communities keeling over from Merricat's poisonings in *Castle*, deliberately lacks any sense of horror or tragedy. As mentioned, if anything, readers identify with the poisoner rather than the victims.[4] This positioning of the woman poisoner as vindicated and righteous, along with the facetious tenor of these small vignettes, indicates that for marginalized women characters in Jackson's work, murder is a logical and fair means of survival, and not scandalous in a world where women are continually frustrated by thwarted attempts at independence.[5]

In terms of authorship, Uncle Julian endlessly recalls details and data—real or imagined—with regards to the event, all in an effort to write a book about the sensational case and to gain control over his experience of almost being murdered by his niece. As noted in "Speaking of Magic: Folk narrative in *Hangsaman* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*" by Shelley

[3] It is notable here also that Madame Emma Bovary completes suicide by ingesting arsenic and is the likely figure alluded to in the *Mrs. March* title. Flaubert's character study of the negative impact of popular cultural and feminine domestic entrapment are relevant insofar as Madame Bovary, like Mrs. March, is also grossly disappointed by her husband and her own lack of identity outside of patriarchal structures.

[4] See Susan Farrell's (2023) historical discussion of the links between poison and critique of domestic ideology in "Sugared Death: Poison and Gender in Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*."

[5] Though not a poisoning, there is a similar story of a young woman murdering her family in Jackson's *The Sundial* (1958). Harriet Stuart, an original resident of the site of the future Halloran estate featuring in the novel, is suspected of bludgeoning her entire family in a Lizzie-Borden-style axe attack.

Ingram, the latter novel reads as a deviant, inverted fable, where the absence of patriarchy, lack of community, and the presence of sharp class lines reinforce the generational imprint of isolation and entitlement on the Blackwood girls. Thus, the interpolation of the novel as a fairy tale is "beguiling," as it diffuses "much of the tension around the end of the novel and recoups a morally ambiguous narrative" (Ingram 2016, 70). This is relevant as at the core of both the real and the imagined poisoning scenes in *Mrs. March* and *Castle* is not only the signaling of other genres—such as the nineteenth-century sensational poison novels, true crime, and fables—but the overwriting of these genres in favour of new modes of reimagining women's violence and contempt. In the case of *Castle*, the overlaid genre is a complex folk tale, and, in the case of *Mrs. March,* it is the domestic gothic. In Feito's novel, Mrs. March's spiral into paranoia and ultimately violence is aligned with the domestic horror genre as the author utilizes domesticity in a way that reinforces gothic tropes of the "familiar-turned-terrible" (Dalpe 2022, 44). Mrs. March's descent articulates the uniquely "gendered urgency," which cannot be disregarded due to "its interruption of expected [domestic] order" (44).

This disruption, and the presentation of domestic horror as a series of performative acts, continues when Mrs. March steals a second item. In this scene, Mrs. March shops for groceries to an endless loop of "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy," while women move on "an invisible grid—never colliding, never regarding each other as they filed past" (Feito 2021, 130). Both comforted and discomforted by this ordered dance of homemakers, Mrs. March spies a cart in front of a gigantic Campbell's soup display. She peers into the unaccompanied cart, fearful that the other shoppers will tag her, resigning her to wander around the grocery store "lifeless, in their stead until she eventually tricked someone into replacing *her*" (130). Within, she sees food items, but also "shockingly cruelly" a copy of her husband's book (131). With the "red-and-white Campbell's walls closing around her," she again, like with the cigarette case, tucks it into her body—under her armpit this time—and promptly disposes of the shoplifted book outside the store (131).

This scene, stylized to reflect the glory and despair of American-style capitalism and the domestic Gothic, circa 1950, offers a glimpse into what occurs when domestic staging goes wrong. If Jackson and Feito's fictional works challenge expected performances by "showing what happens when the social rituals of 'polite society' break down" they also contain the scourge of betrayal, as patriarchy simultaneously undermines and ultimately fails to protect women, in both the domestic and public sphere (Ingram 2016, 54). George March's novel, which contains his unflattering depiction of his wife—at least to her mind—found in a shopping cart of all places, represents

a violation of both her private selfhood and her domestic role. Another example of this occurs in the bathroom at a restaurant when Mrs. March and George are out for dinner. Mrs. March hears an audiobook recording of George's book "erupting from the speakers louder, threatening—'We know you're in there, *Johanna*'" (Feito 2021, 69). Nearly urinating herself, Mrs. March cannot escape George's perception of her as the grotesque Johanna, even in the toilet. George appears to be everywhere at once, overwriting her existence. The fact that on both occasions of theft Mrs. March has tucked the item close to her breast is also significant in that she attempts to bury evidence that threatens and devalues her by enfolding it into her feminine form.

Moreover, George's explanation of his depiction of Johanna also makes a significant contribution to Mrs. March's increasingly fragmented identity and paranoia. After the party, Mrs. March wants to know "which lovely part of myself do I share with the whore?" (Feito 2021, 59). Wary and a bit surprised by her confrontational attitude, George defaults to the standard response given by fiction writers when deflecting accusations of unflattering portrayals of loved ones—he admits only that he has blended "a mixture of qualities from many different women" and fabricated a composite character (59). George balks at being told to sit down and write out the precise traits and iterates his claim that he cannot perform the exercise. Despairing at this lack of cooperation, she communicates her dwindling sense of selfhood and identity, posing the question to George: "Why does it feel like she exists and I don't?" (60). To further underscore the domestic horror, instead of recognizing his wife's mental fragility, George claims that they are both exhausted and vacates the bedroom to sleep on the couch, ending the argument in a domestic cliché. Alone in their bedroom, Mrs. March backs away from the door as if "bracing for someone to smash it with an ax," in a horror-movie tableau, indicating—again through an imagined violation—that she is fortunate *just* to be alive, even if she is simply a minor, composite character in her own life (61). Thus her husband's lack of understanding and support increases her insecurity and propels her mental breakdown. George's glibness towards Mrs. March is similar in its patriarchal archness to that of Arnold Waite's, Natalie's father in Jackson's *Hangsaman*, towards his wife. Though Mrs. Waite indulges Arnold in his weekly literary parties and her domestic pliability allows him to enjoy an unfettered intellectual life, he tells Natalie he "never could have found anyone else so unsympathetic as your mother, and so *helpful*" (Jackson 2013, 10; emphasis mine).

Further elaboration on the theme of stolen objects and their relationship to identity occurs when—as alluded to earlier—Mrs. March finds a clipping about a girl named Sylvia who was murdered out of state in

one of George's journals. This discovery prompts Mrs. March to travel to Maine to investigate as she suspects George murdered the young woman while on a hunting trip with his editor. With her paranoia and mania in full bloom, she connives and charms her way into Sylvia's grandmother's house to interview her best friend, Amy Grant, under the guise of being a journalist with the *New York Times* writing an article on the incident. She is pleasantly surprised at how flawlessly her plan works, even imagining herself in her New York apartment inviting a *New York Times* writer into her own home and, in a fantasy of inward domestic benevolence, "offering herself a macaroon from a dessert plate" (Feito 2021, 226). After posing invasive questions to both Sylvia's grandmother and Amy, her pride in her interviewing prowess continues to blossom to the point that she begins "to believe in the possibility of a real article" (230).

Mrs. March's fluid identity and lack of core self enables her to become another person when necessary, to slip into character with the ease of an experienced method actor. Natalie Waite is also skilled at close identification with others and is able to disconnect rapidly as she has "ill-formed identity boundaries; she can easily shift her identifications and associations because she is fragmented" (Hattenhauer 2003, 106). Her ability—to be both perpetrator and victim—comes to the fore when the women's student residence experiences a series of thefts in the girls' rooms. When her housemates ask whether any of Natalie's belongings are missing, we learn Natalie has not heard about the thefts but finds out all at once by "everyone […] talking to her as though they knew her, even though one girl did persistently call her Helen and another thought that she lived on the fourth floor" (Jackson 2013, 98). As the conversation continues, Natalie realizes that "it would not look well if she had not lost anything, and second, was she not an obvious thief?" (98). Natalie does not know if any of her belongings are missing because she does not, in fact, keep track of any items besides her jacket and her various books. At this juncture, Jackson's presentation of the event reads as if Natalie is fantasizing about committing the thefts, rather than remembering having committed them:

> silently into someone's room, looking smilingly over someone else's possessions […] fondling jewelry, discarding whatever did not meet her fancy […] slipping the roll of bills into her pocket, stuffing the book into the front of her sweater, flinging the real lace over her arm as though it belonged to her and coming softly out of someone else's room… (Jackson 2013, 99)

Natalie finally stutters out that she has had some change stolen to avoid being identified as the thief and then thinks: "what murder am I helping to

commit; why am I here […] pretending that someone else has stolen from *me?*" (100). As she did earlier in the novel when her father criticized her, Natalie here imagines herself into an alternative reality in which she is under investigation for a murder. Utilizing a deeply protective interiorized self-narrative of a detective story, this tic of Natalie's occurs when she feels threatened, interrogated, or bewildered. Like Mrs. March, who uses and acts upon the counter-narrative of her husband being a murderer to cope with the unsavoury truth that her husband and the world secretly despises her, Natalie also evokes a pulp detective narrative from earlier in the text to survive. Natalie betrays her own guilt in this final section through the quite specific phrase that she is "pretending that someone else has stolen from *me?*" (100). This clause not only implies Natalie is faking her role as the thief's victim but underscores the fact that there can be no "someone else"—because she herself is the thief.

These thefts occur within the context of a larger series of "peculiar events" at the college, including, in the room beneath Natalie's, a young lady who slapped people awake in a somnolent state and then is swiftly locked in a closet (Jackson 2013, 113). The following night, with the girl "safely in the infirmary—word of thievery again spread through the house," the young women, without any evidence, decide another young lady is guilty of the thefts (114). The accused thief quickly leaves the college. An alleged Peeping Tom—who is suspected to be the den mother's secret husband—is chased away and purged from the dormitory as well. Other events include a girl found to have a sexually transmitted disease, two other students in a different house attempting to overdose, while yet another nameless girl dies of an abortion. Meanwhile, the thefts in the dormitory continue, which, considering the degree to which Natalie dissociates, suggests that the person responsible for the thefts is indeed Natalie.

The reader must surmise this fact and, like the detective interrogating Natalie earlier in the text, must conduct a calculated process of deduction and textual fact checking, along with a refusal to be distracted by the "category of […] narratively indeterminate events [that] produce epistemological uncertainty within the novel" (Dobson 2016, 133). By wading through this litany of odd and sordid events narrated in a breathless rush, from a distant third-person narrator and nearly omniscient schoolgirl perspective, the reader filters the events through the fractured sense of identity and social isolation that Natalie experiences within the process of being institutionalized. Not only does Jackson withhold the important information that Natalie is the thief, but through narrative elision and oblique reference, she also reveals her contempt for the kind of college that Natalie attends, whose motto is "theory is nothing, experience is all" (2013, 49). That is, within the context of these goings on, Natalie's thefts are her

contribution to the overall depravity of the college experience. Theft, it can be argued as well, while being an indication of a lack of fixed identity as in *Mrs. March*, in Jackson's work, is also a metonym for deep grieving and loneliness.

For example, in Jackson's "Family Treasures," first published posthumously in the 2015 collection entitled *Let Me Tell You*, a student named Anne Waite, who shares the same last name as Natalie, is acknowledged by the other students only because her mother dies. Soon, Anne finds solace in the purloined items of others. After her mother's death, Anne withdraws "into the colorless girl on the third floor who lived alone, had no friends, and rarely spoke" (Jackson 2017, 113). Unlike Natalie, who steals clothing, cigarettes, and money, Anne steals items and trinkets specifically associated with the characteristics of each of the victims: an ankle bracelet gifted from a male suitor; a pen-and-pencil set gifted to the student voted most likely to succeed; a stuffed teddy bear taken from a girl with "great wit" (116). Anne begins to steal personal, valueless objects. She cannot use, display, or sell the items, so there is no monetary value to these objects, which Anne hides in her mother's trunk

> under her mother's books and papers and the ancient fur cape, which was of no value but had become Anne's in the disposal of Anne's mother's private things, during which the bank holding all of Anne's money had, with the air of an impersonal machine humanizing itself through a sentimental understand of a small detail, sent it in neatly wrapped to Anne as a memento. (114)

It is symbolic that the panoply of Anne's useless collected thefts are stored in her mother's trunk. Like the detail about the cape being wrapped in a "humanizing" gesture—a cloak for the afterlife—the trunk signifies a coffin and becomes a kind of living altar that Anne creates for her mother. That is, like items found in an Egyptian coffins and sarcophagi indicating the status of the dead, it is as though Anne, who is repeatedly described as drab and quietly "borrows" the charm, intelligence, and wit of the owners of the items, infuses herself with their personality traits and lays them down as offerings for her late mother. Mrs. March does the same when stealing Gabriella's cigarette case and later Sylvia's handkerchief—both items marked with the girls' initials, which underscores how very attached they are to the identity of the original owners.

While Jackson's characters steal to memorialize, participate in social rites, and as an expression of deep alienation and subtle mirroring, Mrs. March's attempts at theft are a bit more self-serving as, when Amy invites Mrs. March to see the dead girl's bedroom, Mrs. March seizes the

opportunity to take some kind of souvenir, which, ironically, is a habit of serial killers. As Mrs. March pokes around in Sylvia's bedroom, inspecting her bedspread and makeup—a scene reminiscent of Natalie's dorm room violations—Amy directs Mrs. March to Sylvia's favourite handkerchief, trimmed in lace and embroidered with her initials. After pointing out that the item was not on her friend the day she disappeared, Amy turns away and Mrs. March pockets the handkerchief—again stealing an item with another young woman's initials. Just as she snatches the handkerchief, Mrs. March also observes that Sylvia's bookshelves are lined with George's books and, with cinematic clarity, they "come into focus as keen as a whetted blade" (Feito 2021, 232). As with the earlier depictions of Merricat fantasizing about mass poisoning, and Natalie imagining being interrogated by a detective, "unable to account for the blood on her hands" as her father denigrates her literary efforts, Mrs. March also responds to perceived slights and threats by descending into violent fantasies (Jackson 2013, 12). The books cement Mrs. March's suspicion that there is a connection between George and Sylvia as, like in Jackson's fiction, narrative and the physicality of books are a springboard to meaning and identity.[6]

Prior to leaving, Amy asks for the handkerchief back. This request is a reversal of the ending of Jackson's "Trial by Combat," wherein a young lady named Emily Johnson arrives home to her furnished room to find "three of her best handkerchiefs missing from the dresser drawer" (1944). Knowing her neighbor collects and hides all her possessions in "a neat, small pile," in the top drawer of the same maple dresser Emily has in her own room, the story explores doubling through objects (Jackson, 1944). Instead of exposing Mrs. Archer or confronting her with the obvious evidence of the thefts, Emily excuses her presence in her room and claims she is looking for aspirin. Emily, seemingly satisfied by this "orderly" curation of her personal items outside of her room, returns to her own room. Conversely, Mrs. March's interaction with Amy over the stolen handkerchief is tense as Amy demands it back. Mrs. March tries to buffer Amy's implied accusation by claiming she believes the handkerchief to be her own. Finally, suspecting Mrs. March isn't a *New York Times* writer at all, Amy asks Mrs. March her

[6] From the opening of *We Have Always Lived in a Castle*, wherein Merricat is venturing to town on her weekly library trip, to the dark yet hilarious scene in *The Sundial* where characters are burning books from the extensive Halloran library to make room for more quotidian post-apocalyptic supplies, books—as personal items, as metonyms, as talismans, as protective shields for characters—populate Jackson's work in a variety of ways, yet are constant mainstays as both settings and metaphors. In the case of Natalie, who registers them as her only necessary possessions, writing a book (becoming a writer) is her driving objective, despite her overwhelming suicidal ideations. Similarly, in *Castle*, Merricat believes she can channel magic and protect her home by choosing special words and nailing her father's books to trees.

name—"Johanna," Mrs. March tells the young woman, finally inhabiting the persona that spurred the whole ill-advised trip to Maine.

After her return from Maine, desperate to shed her identity as Johanna, Mrs. March begins to assume the identity of the murdered Sylvia. In her husband's absence, she purchases a similar black headband to the one seen in a photo of the girl, her brand of perfume, a wig, and even acquires peaches precisely the same shape and hue as those in the picture of Sylvia. Again, cloistered away in her bedroom, she takes to "becoming Sylvia" (Feito 2021, 250). She eats peaches, smiles in the mirror, reads beauty magazines, lounges, and smokes the last of the stolen cigarettes, "tilting her hand the way Gabriella did" (250). By merging the personas of the two young women within her psyche—one an object of male desire and one a victim of violence—she regresses to the origin of her trauma, a rape that occurred on vacation when she was an adolescent, which she had preferred to recall "as having happened to someone else" (169). Natalie suffers a similar sexual violation at a party thrown by her parents, and also describes it in an elliptical way, referring to it as "the day when *that* happened" (Jackson 2013, 37). Natalie is also unable to claim her sexual assault and sublimates it, which causes her further psychological fracture and a suicide attempt. Both Natalie and Mrs. March repress the experience of sexual assault, only for it to later harm their already-fragile identities. The casual, dissociative experience in both texts suggests that sexual assaults and their concomitant incidental trauma are an unremarkable part of growing up as women.

From rape, to institutionalized abuse under systemic patriarchy in which the male writers and supposed allies in their lives categorically overwrite their intimate selves and experiences to erase and disempower them, Feito and Jackson's anti-heroines undergo private and public traumas of various degrees. The women cope, or attempt to, through petty acts of stealing, and, as their growing lack of integrated selfhood and psychological instability increases, they experience total personality collapse. That is, by incarnating their trauma into divided selves and through acquiring the identities of others through small crimes—stolen cigarette cases, pocket change and handkerchiefs—items meaningful only to their original owners, they attempt to control their lives and fates. Through these small contrivances, they search for individuation from their male counterparts, another way of being, another self, even if it is stolen. Within the repeated and recycled scenes of theft, violence, and ultimately murder—both real and imaginary—the intersections of domestic and public life reveal the perforation of the fragile feminine character, whose secret shames and exposed intimate relationships further fragment their already deeply compromised selves.

While Jackson's works were written over fifty years ago, in another century, Feito's novel articulates the same concerns of elusive selfhood for women that Jackson described at the height of post-war gendered domesticity. Though her novel is set in a nebulous retro-future, Feito uses precisely the same coded metonymy and the imagery of the domestic realm to express distress around women's autonomy. This suggests that concerns about body, autonomy, selfhood, and identity have seemingly gone relatively unchanged and unmitigated by the social transformations that have emerged through second and third wave feminisms. Feito and Jackson's texts reveal enduring systemic patriarchal structures, which continue to entrap and undermine women as they attempt to obtain body and existential autonomy in an antagonistic society centred around men.

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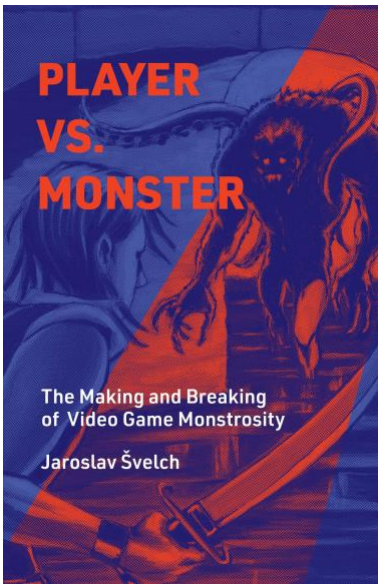

BOOK REVIEW

Player vs. Monster: The Making and Breaking of Video Game Monstrosity

By Jaroslav Švelch
MIT Press
2023

240 pp., $26.95 (h/c)

Jaroslav Švelch's monograph *Player vs. Monster: The Making and Breaking of Video Game Monstrosity* is a fruitful and much-needed analysis of ludic media guided by contemporary monster theory. While scholars such as Bernard Perron and Tanya Krzywinska have written extensively on the role of horror in gaming and the suitability of ludic media to sustaining horror, Švelch's work fills a gap that has been overlooked in the (albeit short) history of the field. Švelch's writing style is engaging and clear, demonstrating a deep appreciation for games as a media worthy of cultural analysis. As seems to be the trend with academic monographs now, the volume does not require a specialist level understanding of critical theory to appreciate its arguments, and the relevant theory is laid out with concision. *Player vs. Monster* is a valuable contribution to the fast-growing field of game studies but can also be appreciated by the non-academic special interest reader.

As a methodology, contemporary monster theory—first formally theorized in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seminal text *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1990) but with roots in Foucault's lectures on abnormality—broadly regards monsters as cultural products through which we might gain a contextual understanding of the anxieties of that culture. The meteorological sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis are the mythological embodiments of maritime dangers to the seafaring Ancient Greeks, while Frankenstein's monster is a corporealization of the humanist anxieties of Enlightenment Europe. By creating monsters, we not only externalize our fears, but also render them vulnerable to attack, and consequently, defeat. The pleasure in triumph forms the basis for many contemporary video games. But how did "killing monsters" become the default model for video games, where many other modes of playful interaction (now re-emerging in indie games) exist?

Švelch addresses this question by first looking back at the history of digital games. He suggests that Player vs. Enemy (PvE) gaming became the de facto mode of computer and console gaming in the 1980s, in part due to

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

the success of *Space Invaders* and *Dungeons & Dragons*. The PvE model also resonated with a power fantasy, which had particular relevance in the individualistic culture of Cold-War/postwar capitalism. Although fascinating, this historical background to the dominance of PvE reads as slightly truncated; its function in this volume is to set up the core argument about the monster. Readers interested in gaming history in the context of the Cold War may want to consult Švelch's extensive list of previous publications, including *Gaming the Iron Curtain: How Teenagers and Amateurs in Communist Czechoslovakia Claimed the Medium of Computer Games* (2018), also by MIT Press.

The PvE environment, argues Švelch, was suitable for emerging consumer practices at the time and made for a satisfying player experience. They maintain the flow of the game by providing obstacles that are overcome through persistence and thus reward players. Their annihilation is also psychologically gratifying. However, turning monsters into expendable antagonists trivialises their otherness, ultimately limiting creative possibilities. This leads to the question at the core of the monograph; the paradox at the heart of the video game monster: video-game monsters are there to be defeated. They are there to present a challenge that is difficult enough to grant satisfaction upon defeat but not so difficult as to impede flow. Their defeat comes with rewards: experience, new weapons, new armour. They may be "farmed" for their drops—the ultimate form of humiliation. How can the video game monster, therefore, be scary?

Švelch proposes that monstrosity is either "sublime" or "contained." Sublime monsters are those of myth, inherited and made indescribable in the works of H.P. Lovecraft, who emphasizes the monster's unnameable qualities. Contained monsters are those represented in attempts to understand and confine the monster, such as those described in the medieval bestiary. Video-game monsters are largely constructed in terms of containment as they are essentially lines of code that represent an achievable challenge: they are obstacles that are overcome by persistence, resourcefulness, player skill, or co-operation. Monsters therefore paradoxically embody a commodified form of otherness in that they are created to be defeated.

In setting up the historical context for the commodified containment of monstrosity in video games, Švelch's discussion of monstrous containment first addresses the consumption of monsters in the form of toys, figurines, and other mass-produced paraphernalia. He details the fascinating process of how 1950s and 1960s film monsters were repackaged as child-friendly toys. This process made monsters accessible and collectible, while at the same time, stripped them of their sublime qualities. Creature-collector games such as *Pokémon* commodifies and objectifies the monster:

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

Pokémon are multiple, expendable, reproducible. When caught, Pokémon are turned into code that can be transferred across devices and digitally, both in-game and in the real world; so that players can trade locally and online. Švelch compares the Pokédex (the player's personal catalogue of Pokémon, which fills out as they catch each type) to the Medieval Bestiary, as both are attempts to contain the monster through categorisation and systematic understanding.

This background to the cultural commodification of monstrous containment leads to Švelch's consideration of the possibility of sublime monsters in gaming. Arguing against a tendency in game scholarship to highlight the sublime quality of monsters without considering their extra-diegetic function, Švelch instead argues that there are very few instances of sublime monstrosity in digital games. Video-game monsters are designed with the aesthetic signifiers of monstrosity in mind, responding and reproducing our cultural ideas of monstrosity, but are turned into playthings within the context of ludic battle. Their defeatability contains them as lines of code within the game. Švelch's single example of a monster that comes close to achieving sublimity is in a description of his non-combat encounter with Ebretias in *Bloodborne*, who later becomes a defeatable boss upon acquiring the right item. As a Soulslike enjoyer, I am left wanting some further discussion as to how video-game monsters could be sublime, as this discussion falls short.[1] To me, as there are plenty of bosses in the Soulsborne games that, in my opinion, maintain a sublime quality through their lore, unique design, (sub)cultural iconography, music, and above all, extreme difficulty.

In his short conclusion, Švelch asks if gaming is moving away from "killing monsters." While PvE models still dominate the market, Švelch points towards recent scholarship surrounding a shift to PvP (Player versus Player) gaming due to the popularity of online multiplayer. He (perhaps setting up his next book) suggests that the two modes are likely to converge but does not elaborate—an almost impossible task at this point in time where the very definition of a digital game is under interrogation.

— Prema Arasu

Prema Arasu is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Minderoo-UWA Deep Sea Research Centre. Prema works alongside a team of scientists, utilizing creative and critical methodologies to investigate how the deep sea is constructed and reconstructed in the

[1] "Soulslike" describes a gaming subgenre with origins in *Demon Souls* (2009); it is characterized by dark fantasy, mystery, interpretation of cryptic lore, rich worldbuilding, and environmental storytelling.

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

scientific, literary, and cultural imaginations. This work is necessarily interdisciplinary, involving aspects of animal studies and environmental philosophy to ask questions about the deep sea, its inhabitants, and the people who study it.

- 2023 -

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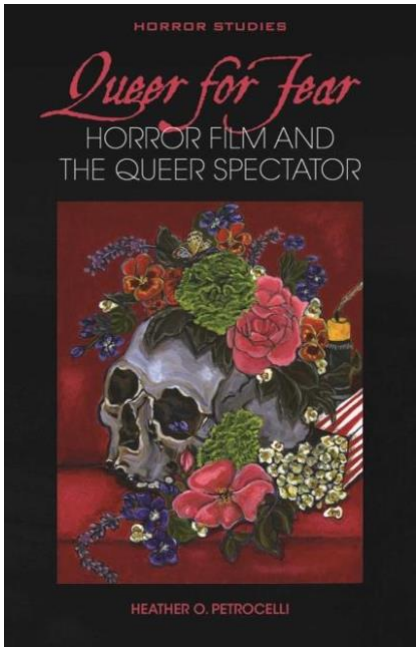

BOOK REVIEW

Queer for Fear: Horror Film and the Queer Spectator

By Heather O. Petrocelli
University of Wales Press
2023

308 pp., £60 (h/c)

The horror genre is having a queer moment. The pages of *It Came from the Closet* (2022) offer queer takes on horror classics—a theme explored in Shudder's four-part documentary series that debuted in time for Halloween 2022. Heather O. Petrocelli traces the relationship between film, horror and queer viewers in *Queer for Fear: Horror Film and the Queer Spectator* (the book shares its title with the Shudder series, although the research was completed in 2019). This exhaustive study—the first of its kind—into what makes queer horror fans tick combines the results of a 60+ question survey given to over 4,000 queer horror viewers with 40 more in-depth interviews. Petrocelli helmed the effort because "engaging queer horror spectators directly is imperative to understanding the importance of the horror genre to queer people and, in turn, to foregrounding queer voices in academic critique of the genre" (2).

Petrocelli places her own queer identity (and her love of horror) front and centre, framing the study as queer in both subject and methodology. She argues that being queer shapes queer spectators' attraction to the genre as well as their perspective. The first chapter lays out the connections:

> Indeed, both queer people and horror films are "punished" for their non-normative transgressions. Queers suffer personal abuses, institutional discrimination and anti-queer legislation, among other societal aggressions. Similarly, horror films are not only censored and banned at familial/community and national levels, but also considered by film scholars and critics to form a lowly genre. (10)

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

The book goes beyond this shared outsider status to consider how "insidious trauma" (per Laura Westengard, 2019) very specifically shapes queer viewers' tastes and relationship to horror. Taking Harry M. Benshoff's argument that the queer(ed) monster stands as a challenge to heteronormativity Petrocelli underscores how respondents' own experiences often align them with the monsters on the screen (26). As per one of the many quotes scattered through the book: "When what is threatened is a sort of heteronormative way of life or society, I'll tend to side with the monster" (34). While familiar with the ways in which Freud's theories have shaped horror theory, Petrocelli opts to consider horror more via the embodied than the unconscious, focusing on respondents' experience as audiences and their reactions to a range of horror films.

The second chapter focuses on common points amongst respondents. It explores the respondents' gender, sexual identity, and tastes in relation to horror films, arguing that being queer specifically shapes queer audiences' reading of the genre. "[T]his study privileges the collective community of queer horror spectators over the individual queer horror fan" (6). Petrocelli buries the assumption—laid out by Carol J. Clover and Linda Williams among others—that teen boys are the primary audience for horror films. Building on a similar audience study, Petrocelli carves out a space that is different from Brigid Cherry's late 1990s study of women horror fans and from queer theorists Benshoff and Darren Elliott-Smith who focus on a presumed male viewer. These interviews include a range of non-binary, trans, genderqueer, and agender horror lovers. This heterogeneity is harder to uphold when considering that while respondents claimed a range of racial and ethnic identities, they made up fewer than 15% of those surveyed. Given many queer horror lovers acknowledge the homophobia they may encounter among straight fans, surely race and ethnicity also offer a particular experience within fandom "indisputably, the queer community is certainly not devoid of racism, misogyny, classism and ableism, with race particularly informing intersectional perspectives and experiences. In other words, queer BIPOC horror fans are subject to society's, and certainly fandom's, white supremacist structures" (9).

Petrocelli has been counting down the 1,487 films named by respondents on a Queer for Fear Instagram account, discussing the wide range of favourites in the context of her research. She launched a countdown of the top 31 films mentioned through the month of October. Looking over the list, there is little to suggest that this is a "queer" selection—The *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Scream*, and *Friday the 13th* franchises are all featured, along with more recent films such as *Hereditary* (2018), *The VVitch* (2015), and *Get Out* (2017). Even divisive films that reinforce the 'murderous-man-in-a-dress' trope such as

MONSTRUM 6.2 (December 2023) | ISSN 2561-5629

Psycho (1960) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) make the list. It is Petrocelli's use of her research findings that contextualizes the list. For example, three out of four respondents mentioned that the presence of strong women influenced their appreciation of horror films. "The fact that horror is the only genre in which women are seen on screen more than men is, arguably, a concomitant reason why queer women love horror" (79). Respondents, regardless of gender identity, celebrated the strongest of strong women, the final girl "…who may be victim and monster but also neither" (76). Petrocelli adds that "Queers relate more to the act of survival than the passivity of victimisation" (76).

Survival shapes the two themes Petrocelli explores in depth in Chapter Three of the book. The first is trauma, often considered the therapeutic reason that horror fans are drawn to the stylized, distanced violence on the screen. Petrocelli's second theme, camp, is presented as the queer antidote to this trauma. "The queer community forges a camp relationship to culture and its artefacts as a survival tactic from the constant experience of queer trauma" (41). Ultimately, these disparate concepts mirror each other. The book's final chapter explores the construction of community solidarity through an investigation of cinema live events in which horror films are presented by drag performers for a default queer audience. It explores how these events make explicit the particular relationship queer audiences share with horror, by creating a space for that relationship to be celebrated.

Overall, there is a lot to dig into in this study, much of which couldn't fit in the book, leaving readers to wonder what else was left out. I was seduced by Petrocelli's chatty Instagram takes on the research, which fill in some of those blanks. Unfortunately, the book itself takes a more formal tone and I missed her asides. Petrocelli's insistence on the queerness of horror and the common experiences of horror fans may sometimes flatten and homogenize her analysis of the material. It is difficult to negotiate presenting a particular, shared identity in such a work, without erasing the impact of difference and diversity, especially when certain voices are not equally represented. Exploring the experiences of BIPOC horror queers is definitely a project worth pursuing.

— Karen Herland

Karen Herland fell in with a bad crowd with a taste for horror at a young age. She is a Co-Director of the Montréal Monstrum Society and sits on the *Monstrum* editorial board. She taught at the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies beginning in 2012. A lecturer in

popular/visual culture and sexuality studies at Concordia University, she will teach Queer Horror in January 2024.

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- 2023 -

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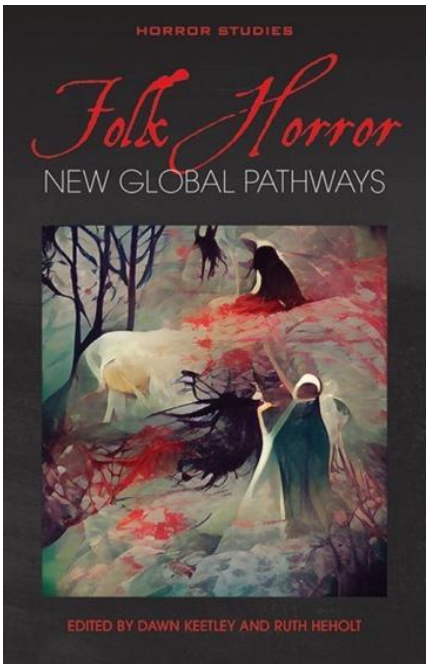

BOOK REVIEW

Folk Horror: New Global Pathways

Edited by Dawn Keetley and Ruth Heholt
University of Wales Press
2023

280 pp., $63 USD (pbk.)

In recent years, folk horror studies have experienced a resurgence of academic attention. Adam Scovell's 2017 monograph *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* has proven to be an exemplary text in a returning interest towards this subgenre; and while folk horror has been prevalent for well over a century in literature and film, it is now seeing a renewal of attention as an integral area of horror genre studies. In their edited collection *Folk Horror: New Global Pathways*, editors Dawn Keetley and Ruth Heholt expand this critical attention by tracing prevailing trends and exceptional perspectives on folk horror from a diverse group of scholarly contributors.

Folk Horror offers over a dozen essays that posit several unique contemporary critical addresses on folk horror from a variety of international vantage points. The text is organized into four major sections that subsequently detail the linguistic roots of folklore/folk horror, revisit canonical films from the first wave of folk horror cinema (approximately 1968–79), explore new and unexpected sites of supernatural occurrences, and furnish political critiques of folk horror tales across Europe, Asia, and North America. Keetley and Heholt also attend to various modes of folk horror media, from films and novels to short stories and even video games. While Britain is regularly privileged as a central locale in folk horror studies, *Folk Horror* shines light on international perspectives by hosting analyses on folk horror narratives from around the globe: Appalachia, Italy, Mexico, Thailand, the U.K., and Ukraine.

Scovell is regularly cited in most chapters here, and his important contributions to the definition of folk horror are conspicuous to this academic interest. His conception of a "folk horror chain" (1-2) is a guiding framework for many of the analyses herein. Representations of skewed belief systems, threatening landscapes, isolated communities in conflict with conservative belief systems of the larger world, and a

happening/summoning are all defining attributes that help us to locate folk horror on a global scale. Most contributors here use Scovell as a springboard for their own distinctive contentions, broadening the critical scope of folk horror and bolstering new pathways of thinking. And yet, it is their eclectic variety of case studies attending to the folklore of the past that augur new folk horror ideas for future study.

In Part One: Folk Horror's Folklore, Jeffrey A. Tolbert's opening chapter examines the semantics of the "folk" in folklore and folk horror. His study of the "folkloresque [and] folkloristics […] inaugurates a theme that runs through many of the subsequent chapters: folklore is not a static historical phenomenon, but an ongoing process in which we are all immersed" (7-8). Catherine Spooner's subsequent chapter questions the interaction of tourism, folklore, and community, asking "Whose folk?" She uses folklore surrounding the Lancashire Witches to determine that while regionalism might generate damaging mythologies, it can also reclaim vital local histories despite the blurring of fiction and reality—a theme that also underscores and contextualizes this collection. Lana Krys' next chapter shifts from Britain to Ukraine, to discuss the Ukrainian Gothic as a subversive mode for expressing national and political discourse. Ian Brodie's closing chapter for this section revisits the beloved cartoon *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* (1969–70) to consider capitalist ideology and the commercial popularization of folk horror on the U.S. silver screen, despite *Scooby-Doo* exhibiting markedly different aesthetics and generic conventions than other folk horror fare.

Part Two focuses on established canons of folk horror tropes, such as sacrifice and isolated communities, and looks at these themes from new perspectives. David Devanny examines typographic designs and the paratexts of different horror narratives, while Timothy Jones returns specifically to Britain to study the phenomenon of black magic stories and occulture. Bernice M. Murphy turns to North American folk horror literature from Shirley Jackson, Thomas Tryon, and Steven King, highlighting myths of human sacrifice associated with insular traditions, the Rural Gothic, and bountiful harvests (i.e., corn).

Part Three: Folk Horror in New Places expands beyond the typical canon of British folk horror and explores the alternative ways "in which landscape disarms human agency" (12). In her chapter "Sunny Landscapes, Dark Visions: E.F. Benson's Weird Domestic Folk Horror," Heholt studies the literary works of Benson, whose ghost stories occupy ostensibly safe spaces, where spectral encounters often occur in blinding daylight. In "Monsters in the Making: *Phi Pop* and Thai Folk Horror," Katarzyna Ancuta studies several *phi pop* films that present unique considerations of Thai folk horror through its regional folklore, modernization, animistic spirits, and

social hierarchies. As a local variation of a traditional understanding of folk horror, *phi pop* (as a classic figure in Thai horror cinema and folklore) highlights complications between the provinces and capital life and the rural/urban divide. Tanya Krzywinska's chapter helps to remedy a missing gap in critical attention towards folk horror and video games. She analyzes the concept of "'ludic' folk horror—that is, folk horror that is designed to be played, rather than watched, read or listened to" (186). Krzywinska posits a unique aesthetic tension in ludic folk horror, where the general lack of agency that usually underscores the subgenre converges with the active nature of gaming.

The final section, Part Four: Folk Horror's Politics, explores political perspectives from Marco Malvestio on *filone* films and nationalism in Italy, Valeria Villegas Lindvall's critique on colonialism and racialized bodies embodied in the Latin American tale *La Llorona*, and Keetley's final chapter on ecocritical "sacrifice zones" of Appalachia, where outsiders succumb to the malevolent agency of the land. While "reaching for a greater historical and global inclusivity" (1), *Folk Horror* understands that the subgenre's enduring connection to British texts and traditions warrants revised study from a more transnational pool of scholarship.

While chapters from Heholt, Jones, and Spooner reposition some of these British perspectives, contributions from Ancuta, Malvestio, and Villegas Lindvall address other global locales with their own individual histories, chronologies, and definitions. This anthology covers its themes and threads quite nicely, and the pithy chapters provide readers with spirited musings on varying topics of folk horror. Some chapters would benefit from additional analysis, but new ground has certainly been laid for these considerations to grow in their academic lore.

In this collection of essays, Keetley and Heholt offer new considerations of folk horror that extend beyond the foundations of Scovell's folk horror chain. From the animistic spirits of Thai *phi pop*, Italian *filone* films, ludic folk horror's paradoxical lack of agency in video games, and prevailing capitalist attitudes in the original *Scooby-Doo* series, *Folk Horror: New Global Pathways* presents diverse enlightening content that is equally fun and accessible. These contributors also range from working academics to doctoral candidates, proving the merit of such emerging genre studies.

Through thirteen lucky essays, this anthology furnishes brief (if, at times, restrained) chapters that chart curses, cartoons, uncanny diurnal spectres, Ukrainian witches, the aftermath of the Rapture, and more, through literature, video games, and films that maintain an interdisciplinary, discerning interest in the themes of folklore and folk horror. Digital evolutions and an AI presence (as is apparent on the cover of this book) may augur uncanny forces for the future, but our dark visions, bleeding insights,

and imaginative folklore will endure as something eerily human. In horror and humour, we remain the distinct "folk" of our own tales.

— M. Sellers Johnson

M. Sellers Johnson is an independent writer and editor whose research interests include French art cinema, transnationalism, historiography, and aesthetics. He received his MA from Te Herenga Waka (Victoria University of Wellington) in 2021 and his BA at the University of North Carolina Wilmington in 2018. His work has appeared in *Afterimage*, *Film-Philosophy*, *Film Quarterly*, and *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, among other outlets. He is the founding Citation Ethics Editor for *Film Matters*, and beginning in early 2024, he will serve as the incoming Book Reviews Editor for *New Review of Film and Television Studies*.

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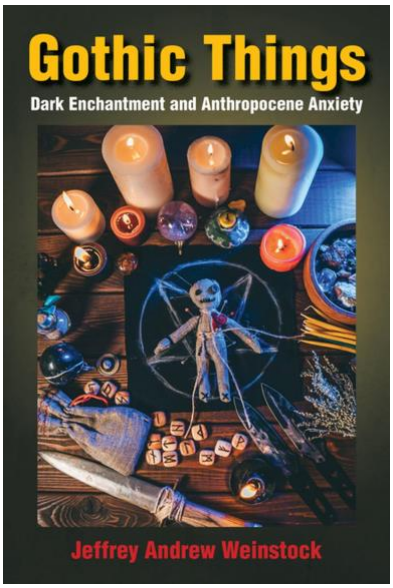

BOOK REVIEW

Gothic Things: Dark Enchantment and Anthropocene Anxiety

By Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock
Fordham University Press
2023

240 pp., $30 (pbk.)

Weinstock has created an original argument in relation to the application of Thing Theory and Materialism as new ways of viewing the Gothic. This work creates an innovative linking tool, encapsulating the arguments of scholars working within the field of Thing Theory and creating strong arguments for extending Gothic theory to incorporate the parameters set out within the theoretical framework. The work is well considered and is an excellent introductory text for those who are rethinking the theoretical framework that shapes their research. It is also an excellent listing of texts that may have flown under the radar, while making clear that it is neither pro- nor anti-Thing Theory. Rather, it uses it as a nexus from Gothic theory, despite the problematics relating to human anxieties expressed through human interaction with "Things."

This monograph is divided into six chapters discussing how the Gothic intersects with Thing Theory, referencing standard tropes from Gothic literature, such as haunted spaces, possession of people and objects, cursed books and the words contained therein, and the Gothicizing of the ordinary—how things take on a sense of enchantment or become a relic of fear based on their setting. The work is a deep dive into new ways of considering Gothic anxieties and tropes through a contemporary theoretical lens.

The first two chapters focus on elements of Gothic theory including "Dark Materialism" and the way that it intersects with more traditional Gothic theories of haunted or cursed spaces, people, and places. Chapter Three, "Body as Thing," and Four, "Thing as Body," discuss, respectively, the anxieties around the human body transforming into a thing, along with the "inverse" of this phenomenon: "the animation of things that become bodies exercising agency" (91). Chapter Five deals with books as things, receptacles, and devices capable of interacting with humans, while Chapter Six deals with "buildings" and the spectre of the haunted house—a space

not necessarily inhabited by ghosts, but by memories—and examines the "agency of place" (137) and the idea of houses that haunt, that act and feed and consume.

Weinstock discusses the ways in which the contemporary frameworks such as Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism are linked to the Gothic, particularly the ways in which humans interact with people, places, and objects. Part of this details the loss of control as humans work within society, with its anthropomorphic slant towards objects that are given human characteristics. Weinstock also considers the functionality of the Gothic trope as an uncanny interpreter of the new theories. He shows the use of storytelling as a coping method to deal with traumatic events, while ascribing values to "inanimate objects" or things. The book is well written and researched, providing an extensive bibliography for further investigation, and providing adequate scope for researchers that may be interested in this topic area. I suggest this work will be of benefit to scholars working in the Gothic studies field, as it provides links between the Gothic tropes and new theoretical frameworks that create collaboration and multi-disciplinary works.

Weinstock provides Nick Groom's (2012) theoretical framework for the Gothic, which features the use of geography (location and cultural place), weather patterns, and narrative structure, including folktales and the telling of rumours or stories within stories to create links to current or future events. Weinstock credits this as a linkage between things as objects and things as a Gothic modicum that allows the weather, a room, a locket, etc., to be inscribed with a layer of meaning that influences the viewer or reader's interpretation of how to relate to that object. Weinstock states in the introduction that his aim is to reorient the Gothic into the new theoretical frameworks of materialism and objects. Within this reorientation, we can view the horror caused by the reduction of the human experience into a series of things, with humans ultimately being viewed as a marketable commodity or a collection of parts rather than individuals with unique experiences.

Weinstock states in the introduction that he recontextualizes Thing Theory within the Gothic framework, while creating an understanding of the uncanny and anxiety which exist both in the Gothic and the new theories of Thing Theory and New Materialism. He specifies three tropes, "Spectrality, Monstrosity and Apocalypse" (20), creating a sense of Anthropocene anxiety. Drawing on the work of Derrida and spanning through to contemporary studies such as Tsing et al.'s *Arts of Living on a Damaged Llanet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (2007), he provides an excellent review of the principal theories of haunting and spectrality, relevant to current history tropes, bringing subjectivity to colonial viewpoints and occupation

of areas. This creates a new past that includes ecological history, forming a viewpoint that intermingles human and other histories. This includes a discussion of hyper objects, and consideration of whether humans are able to perceive the object or occurrence with their limited senses. It also touches on the theory of Anthropocene studies that shows how humans relate to others and the world they inhabit.

Monstrosity relates to an idea that human agency enables each individual to choose to become monstrous. Weinstock focuses on Derrida and Cohen's theses on the Monstrous, in which monstrous can only be defined within the boundaries of culture as an absence of conformity or normative behaviours within societal expectations. Apocalypse is the third of Weinstock's links to the Gothic, with the anxieties of the twentieth century of warfare and nuclear holocaust, re-emerging in the twenty-first century with pestilence, warfare, and a perception of impending doom brought about from ecological changes, creating an ongoing narrative of anxiety over the Anthropocene and human interaction. While Weinstock notes the Lovecraftian influence in literature, it can also be found in the surge of mass-market movies in the late-twentieth century that targeted geological and environmental disasters, such as *Armageddon* (1998), *Deep Impact* (1998), *The Core* (2012), and *Super Volcano* (2023). Moreover, dependent on where they are made, the movies also present a different level of cultural anxiety for what will happen to the human race if an extinction level event occurs or if humans bring about their own demise.

While Weinstock has focussed on critical theory, he raises the spectre of a new variation of the Anthropocene—that human interference and the ghosts of the ecological past are a constant reminder creating a haunted landscape in which humans dwell. This includes consideration of Timothy Morton's work on Dark Ecology, linking it with Gothic language. As part of this, Weinstock delves into Eugene Thacker's work on the philosophy of horror, creating a horror based on what the world would be like without the interference of people. This shows the role of Speculative Realism, and the influence of Lovecraft on the field of Thing Theory, despite the focus of anxieties being on creatures and human monstrosities rather than ecological anxieties.

I recommend Weinstock's *Gothic Things* as an innovative work that explains the links between the Gothic tropes and new theories, allowing Gothic scholars to reframe arguments in a contemporaneous manner, and provides principal authors for each theory along with reviews of fictional books and movies that create an extensive to-be-read/watched list for researchers. The work also offers a deep dive into other areas that may not immediately come to mind in relation to Thing Theory, New Materialism or

Gothic Theory, such as the role of economics in the commodification of humans and the hierarchical significance of the home.

— Naomi von Senff

Naomi von Senff is an operatic soprano and musicologist, currently singing with River City Voices. Her research interests include pop culture, Gothic and vampire studies, Egyptology, performance practice, costuming, fashion design, opera and politics, Weber's *Der Freischütz*, and depictions of the demonic and witchcraft in Opera and Libretti. Naomi is currently undertaking PLT and holds a BCrim/BLaws, BMus Hon Opera, BA Hon, BA Humanities, and Associate Diploma Music. She is also an Operational expert panellist for Assistant Coroners in NSW. She has presented to IASPM, POPCAANZ, GANZA, IGA, and MSA.

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