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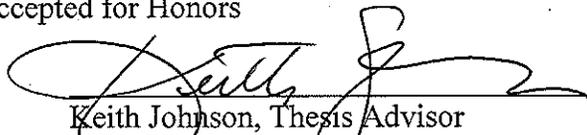
Haunted Housewives: Shirley Jackson's Domestic Gothic

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from  
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by

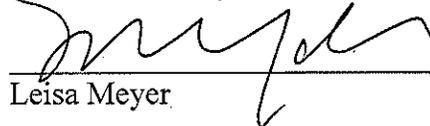
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## Introduction

At the same time that Shirley Jackson shook the reading public with her dark tale “The Lottery,” she was also penning domestic anecdotes and housewifely essays for women’s magazines. In these works, dishes were washed, clothes mended, meals cooked, and though many belongings were thrown around, it was never for the purpose of a public execution. In her novels, of which she published six, Jackson’s subjects grew steadily darker, displaced from the California suburb of her debut to the gothic ruins of her final masterpiece. Her last two books, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), in particular share a sense of claustrophobia that charge their settings with a hostile and oppressive air. Yet it is here, in the focus on the domestic space, that one can find a common theme in Jackson’s work, connecting the more lighthearted tone of her ‘women’s fiction’ to the gothic of her final novels. Indeed, the connection is even stronger than it first appears, for upon closer reading, what is rendered for comedic effect in the former easily tips into the horrific in the latter through a simple manipulation of tone. That the family home (specifically, in Jackson’s case, an American white, middle-class home) should so seamlessly parallel the terror-inducing tropes of gothic literature defines an often-overlooked aspect of social criticism within Jacksons’ oeuvre, work that presages many goals of second-wave feminism. By focusing on Jackson’s manipulation of setting and her creative rendering of reality, this study examines Jackson’s use of the gothic formula to confront assumptions of domesticity and femininity and to offer a possible solution to their contradictions. Together, *The Haunting of Hill House*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and her last unfinished novel *Come*

*Along with Me* form a gothic cycle that advances a new feminist vision in order to free the heroine from the oppression of the patriarchal castle.

This work begins with an overview of gothic literature, noting the major authors and evolutionary changes throughout its two-hundred-year history prior to Jackson. As she inherits a long legacy, these tropes and archetypes become the foundation for her updated interpretation. I will then discuss the female gothic, a sub-category and critical mode pertaining to feminist works within the genre, of which Jackson is a direct successor. In this section, I will also introduce the women's issues of Jackson's day, referring primarily to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published only a year after *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. As will be discussed, gothic strangeness becomes the perfect shadow for suburban conformity, which Jackson problematizes through layers of competing reality. Finally, in analyzing her texts, I will follow the nascent feminist dream as it emerges in the mind of Eleanor Vance, is realized in the violence of Merricat Blackwood, and is perfected in the freedom of Angela Motorman. The architectural motif reappears throughout, for, as Dara Downey writes, "In particular, the trend of [Jackson's] work overall is towards an attempt to solve the problem of an enclosed domestic space, to negotiate its tendency to vacillate between functioning as a refuge or a prison" ("Refuge" 290). Jackson employs the gothic to solve a specific ideological problem, to resolve the tensions between a woman and her home, and by her untimely death in 1965, it appears that she had nearly reached its logical end. So it is that the cycle ends optimistically, suggesting the possibility of women being at home, both in and outside of the house.

## History of Gothic Literature

Often considered to be the primary forebear of gothic novels, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) possesses a publication history that much resembles the genre tropes it helped establish. As early as 1765, in which the book's second edition was printed, the author seems aware of the compelling formula he had discovered. At the end of this second preface he writes, "I might have pleaded, that having created a new species of romance, I was at liberty to lay down what rules I thought fit for the conduct of it" (14). Indeed, this rings rather like the prophesy that begins the novel itself, which spells out an unorthodox process of bequeathing: "the Castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it" (15). Clearly, a preoccupation of the gothic was to be its *residences*—its castles—as well as the motif of *inheritance*—the method by which both property and personal traits are passed from one generation to another. For the castle to reach Shirley Jackson in 1962, it passes through many hands and undergoes many renovations, but it maintains an appropriately backward-looking eye to its literary heritage.

At the center of Walpole's novella is Manfred, the Prince of Otranto, who lives in fear of the aforementioned prophesy. The story begins when his only son Conrad—and therein his hopes of continuing his family line—is crushed by a ghostly helmet falling from the sky. Desperate not to lose his legacy, Manfred decides to abandon his wife and marry Conrad's fiancée Isabella himself. But as Manfred works for self-preservation, his claim to Otranto is revealed to be dishonest, and instead, a peasant named Theodore is the true heir to the estate. By the end, Manfred repents and Theodore and Isabella marry,

reinstating the princely line. Interestingly, Walpole's own relationship with the book follows a similar process of unmasking. Publishing the first edition anonymously, he left behind a short preface posing only as the translator. The text, supposedly, was an authentic medieval romance and to be read as such (Walpole 3). Only following the unexpected success of the work did he claim it as his own and relate his authorial intentions "to blend two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern" and combine the fancy of fable with the emotional honesty of the modern novel (9). For these similarities, Andrew Smith reads the prefaces and novella as complementary texts obsessed with legitimacy, writing that "as Walpole claims ownership of the text, so that text explores ownership of territory, land, political power, and the self" (20)

This notion of legitimacy is one that looks forward by looking back. The most obvious way is through the historically dislocated setting, which the first preface asserts is during the Crusades, a period typified by "ancient errors and superstitions" (Walpole 3). These beliefs and the feudal society that espoused them were both subject to much decay by the time of Walpole's Enlightenment, and in this way, through its twin appeals to memory and irrationality, the gothic immediately presents itself as a counter-narrative to the cult of Reason and empiricism of its day. For Fred Botting, extreme emotion in the absence of knowledge defines what he calls the "negative aesthetics" of the gothic in which the excess of the first destabilizes and exacerbates the dearth of the second; "Reason is overwhelmed by feeling and passion," he writes, "and signified as a horrified, paralyzing encounter with something unspeakable, [...] an experience too intense for words" (6). Such is the feeling when Manfred first beholds his son's broken body: "The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened,

and above all, the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the Prince's speech" (Walpole 17). The gothic refuses logic—and in this case, *logos* entirely—appealing instead to the untrained emotion of the reader. For this reason, Deborah Russell and proponents of the gothic identify these moments as creative rather than senseless (772). Instead of indicating a departure from contemporary issues, she writes “the very escapism and eccentricity of [Walpole's] text take on a political significance as it [...] problematizes a discourse of political closure” (772). So it is that, though set in the obscure past and abundantly fanciful, *The Castle of Otranto* resounds with eighteenth-century concerns of the declining aristocracy and the rights of ownership. Both were of critical relevance to the novella's author, an earl and a politician himself, who saw his way of life endangered by the changing times (Smith 22). By the story's end, this change is rendered architecturally in the gothic castle that gives the new genre its name, striking to the heart of the inheritance plot. The house, as the seat of lordship, determines both political order and individual success and thereby becomes an object of power and anxiety, physically bearing the signs of institutional decay. In ruins, the darkened landscape more visually articulates the gothic's role as the shadow cast by modern progress, creating a relationship of inseparable yet inverted meaning with the prevailing ethos.

Importantly, the female characters are caught in the center of such backward and forward signaling, for it is upon them that the male characters reluctantly depend for their lineage. Largely considered objects of male pursuit and fulfillment, they constantly run the risk of destruction or erasure. In this way, a man's desire for sons becomes a direct threat to the woman's life, as in the case of Manfred and Hippolita. “Hippolita is no

longer my wife,” Walpole’s Manfred declares, “I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by my unfruitfulness: my fate depends on having sons” (Walpole 23). Woman’s perilous state stems from the necessity of her body for heritage and the simultaneous exclusion of her person from inheritance itself. Primogeniture thereby becomes a basis for further female exclusion; says Manfred, “I do not use to let my Wife be acquainted with the secret affairs of my State; they are not within a woman’s province” (47). Thus perpetuates the divide between domestic and public, female and male, yet without any sense of security, for the woman has no guarantee to maintain her rights, possessions, or family. Yet whereas Walpole’s women yield to this helplessness, female writers quickly identify the paradox, and within a few years of *Otranto*’s publication, reapply these conventions in more female-centered narratives.

Clara Reeve’s 1778 novella *The Old English Baron* represents one of the first major female-written gothic fictions. Though her story bears many similarities to Walpole’s (in her preface, she employs the language of inheritance to label it “the literary offspring of the Castle of Otranto, written upon the same plan”), it stands an important intermediary in the genre’s development (2). Firstly, she tones down the supernatural mechanics of Walpole’s romance, which she believed “destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter” (3). With her second contribution, that of placing her story in the more familiar, more recent setting of “the minority of King Henry Sixth, King of England,” she asks her readers to consider the plot in a more serious and personal way (5). No longer displaced in medieval Europe, the novel further clarifies the gothic’s link with contemporary society. Diana Wallace credits Reeve with “mov[ing] the

‘Gothic’ further towards historical realism and the development of the historical novel,” which becomes the first step in inviting the gothic into the modern home (16).

The next great gothic following Walpole’s *Otranto*, Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), not only makes the idea of home its keynote, it is also the first gothic fiction to follow a female protagonist. Once again, the plot inches toward the modern era, now set in 1584, but the resonances to late eighteenth-century English domestic culture are heard in the first chapter’s epigraph. Quoting James Thomson, Radcliffe begins, “home is the resort / Of love, of joy, of peace and plenty, where, / [...] dear relations mingle into bliss” (1). Such was the contemporary ethos, which strictly dichotomized the worlds of home and business, cleanliness and uncleanness, along gendered lines. Women’s purity both ensured and was ensured by the purity of the home, whereas only men would dare venture into the “violence” of the outside world (Ellis 3-8). However, by relocating the gothic to a woman’s perspective, as Kate Ferguson Ellis points out, female authors necessarily relocate the danger as well, in proximity to their subjects. Rather than responding to external pressures, to usurpations and stolen titles, the female subject is under threat at home, which translates to a record of domestic violence and corruption. To distinguish the feminine and masculine gothic, Ellis writes, “In the feminine Gothic, the heroine exposes the villain’s usurpation and thus reclaims an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison. The masculine Gothic gives the perspective of an exile from the refuge of home, now the special province of women” (xiii). Thus the female gothic responds directly to the threat posed by the male gothic and articulates a narrative of defense against the erasure it threatens. The house, when gothicized, is no longer domestic bliss,

but an area of contest, as Eva Figes explains, “the house changes from being a symbol of male privilege and protection conferred on the fortunate female of his choice, to an image of male power in its sinister aspect, threatening and oppressive” (74).

Such is the reality of *Udolpho*'s heroine Emily St. Aubert, taken to live with her aunt and her aunt's new husband Montoni after the death of both her parents. Forced to leave behind her love interest Valacourt, she is confined within the crumbling castle of Udolpho. There she must fend off the sinister courtship of another Italian count, preserve her own inheritance from the greedy Montoni, and survive encounters with the supernatural. Once she manages to escape, she reunites with Valacourt, who has lost his wealth during the interval. However, Emily's own inheritance, including that of her aunt, restores them to comfortable and respectable domesticity, thereby escaping the gothic threat (Punter and Byron 185-6). For the first time, a female character leads the gothic, and the plot advances by *her* agency, as she explores the castle and indulges *her* curiosity. Yet Punter and Byron argue that “the strengths of *Udolpho* are less to do with suspense or narrative” than Radcliffe's subtle portrayal of character psychology and narrative unreliability (186). Through storytelling devices such as dreams and concentric tales that “constantly blur the boundaries of reality and fantasy,” she “sets the course for the future of Gothic” (186). These blurrings, Punter and Byron write, are “pressures that cannot even be accurately categorized as internal or external,” resulting in a state of doubleness or paranoia that is another hallmark of the gothic (188).

Recalling how women are needed in both *Otranto* and *Udolpho* for either their bodies or their money but are otherwise undesired, Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman relate the phenomenon of doubling to secret, unresolved, and even self-

destructive desires. The former praises the gothic for its authentic depiction of human feeling, claiming that the “literary works achieve part of their success by permitting us to work out both the wishing and fearing of a given event” (289). The latter describes a more unified sensation, arguing that:

Much of this dual potentiality comes from the symbolization of sexuality, overtly feared but covertly wished. Similarly, one may wish to solve the mystery yet fear what will be revealed. [...] In literents’ pairings of wish and fear, we may be seeing the psychological sense of the aesthetician’s “unity in diversity.” (289-90)

The resulting sentiment is one of ambivalence, in which, because of these polarized dichotomies, there is very little possibility of a harmonious end. Thus Theodore’s subverted happiness at the end of *Otranto*: “he was persuaded he could know no happiness but in the society of one with whom he could for ever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul” (116). In Walpole, the stress of embattled desires is largely an emotional dilemma, but as the gothic progresses in the hands of Charles Brockden Brown, the crisis becomes increasingly existential, eliminating the characters’ ability to trust their senses.

*Wieland* (1798) represents the beginning of an American gothic tradition that emerged from and in partnership with the British strand. Though utilizing many of the same mechanics, the American tradition naturally highlights a different set of cultural anxieties. *Wieland*, in particular, focuses on the struggle for definition and authority in a new nation, while considering the various philosophical and religious views that comprise it. The novel follows Clara Wieland, whose Puritan father, in an inexplicable event much like an enchanted helmet, dies from spontaneous combustion resulting from intensive prayer. Clara continues to live with her brother Theodore and his family, where

they spend their leisure time balancing their father's strict religion with debates on Enlightenment philosophy. Indeed, their home appears the New World utopia many colonizers imagined, until the arrival of Carwin the bilquist (a ventriloquist or "double-speaker") reunites them with their gothic legacy (Smith 34-5). Prompted by voices, which may either be religious visions or Carwin's projections, Theodore murders his wife, his children, and himself. The gothic ambivalence manifests in the uncertainty of Carwin's guilt, but also in the unresolved tensions of religion/philosophy, natural/supernatural, and reality/unreality. Fred Botting writes, "the force of delusion inspired by religious devotion still remains mysterious and inexplicable, and presents, not the victory of enlightenment, but a new and different type of darkness" (107). Brown's novel brings the gothic to contemporary America, but, of equal importance, it brings the gothic inside the mind. The character's experience is no longer just "something unspeakable," but rather something unstable or untrustworthy. This gothic fractures reality, and in doing so, is able more subtly to explore the experience of sensation upon the individual. Perhaps with the intention to develop a uniquely American mindset, this trend continues in later authors such as Edgar Allan Poe in his stories of madness, paranoia, and revenge. No longer confined to a set of staid conventions (popular as they continue to be), the gothic can instead refer individually to a character type or narrative style.

By the early nineteenth century, these familiar tropes had run their course in Britain, entering a period of decline after the gothic heyday of the 1790s. One of the first reactions was parody, such as the 1818 publications of both Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (Smith 160). Yet whereas the former deploys gothic conventions for sardonic effect, the latter investigates the genre

through a familiar mediator: the reader. Catherine Morland, the reader in question, is something of a student to the genre, and for this reason she is “in training for a heroine” and receives her education by “read[ing] all such works as heroines must read,” that is, Radcliffe and the like (Austen 8). However, her literary consumption only serves to indict the artifice of the gothic, revealing, through the act of reading, the formulaic and fictional nature of the genre. The omniscient narrator further dislocates the gothic, deflating Catherine’s hopes to find herself in such a story, and preventing any heightened emotion or supernatural occurrence from transporting the novel away from realism. Disappointed, Catherine eventually abandons the gothic, forming a new resolution “of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense,” by which the novel appears to critique the irrationality prevalent in the genre (256). Indeed, Austen would seem to be firmly on the side of anti-gothic empiricism, if not for Catherine’s unexpected exile from the Abbey, a gothic twist at the very end. For these reasons, Natalie Neill argues that Austen “legitimises Gothic literature” by correcting its faults with much needed logic and elevating a widely lowbrow genre to literary heights (199-200). Though used here for parodic effect, Austen’s objectivity is indicative of a reorientation within the genre, wherein the gothic no longer flees from the rational but confronts it with questions of its own.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, published the same year as *Northanger Abbey*, famously illustrates just such a confrontation, powerfully colliding epistemological opposites. As a work at the crossroads of several movements—the gothic, Romanticism, and early science fiction—it is fitting that the novel delights in subverting categorical expectations. The Creature is living/dead, natural/unnatural, human/inhuman, and,

importantly, gothic/scientific (Botting 94). Its construction, which relies both on modern electrical knowledge and the “chimerical” hypotheses of antique philosophers, is a process that conflates superstition and enlightenment (Shelley 23). In a powerful way, Shelley integrates the gothic into the contemporary world and so expands its cultural meaning. Whereas before the gothic had always voiced dissent by means of departure from the real, the rational and irrational in *Frankenstein* are so much intertwined as to negate delineation. That the gothic shadow can be found even on Romantic vistas and in halls of higher learning redefines its purpose; no longer merely a derivation or dichotomous other, it is a phenomenon present and possible in all things. So it is that this relocation also serves to magnify the genre’s capacity for social critique, as indicated by the Creature’s presence at private and public affairs. The novel can be read along gender lines, where monstrosity results from the erasure of women, and as a critique of “the distinctly masculine Romantic imagination” that promotes “excessive and exclusive aspirations to power and ideal unity” (Botting 95-6). Shelley gives significant attention to domestic life and childhood only to leave the impression open-ended, remaining a possible site for future hauntings.

Comparatively, Edgar Allan Poe’s gothic obsesses over these close domestic relationships and frequently returns to the home as bewildered site of refuge and imprisonment. His gothic is dependably breathless, taking the genre into psychological regions previously unexplored as, like Shelley, he integrates both science and pseudoscience into his fantasies. One of his most famous stories, “The Fall of the House of Usher” notably blends these dual fascinations, wherein the architecture itself becomes a psychological entity. Within “the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, the

ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows,” the narrator cannot help but identify a human aspect (Poe 317). The mansion’s sentience, along with its crumbling form, identifies it as a symbiotic extension of Roderick Usher’s mental state, which he describes as “enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted” (323). After a period of digression, Poe returns the gothic to its ancestral houses, but with the belief that homes and their inhabitants should act mutually on each other. In doing so, he creates something of a mental architecture, which serves, among his symbol-laden work, to illustrate “his fascination with irrationality and how to rationalise it away” (Smith 68). The home in “Usher” becomes a threshold of reality as the author makes an important connection between the inner life of the mind and the private life of the home.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the publication of several gothic and gothic-influenced texts from the sensationalism of Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* to Charles Dickens’ more sober-minded *Bleak House*. The Brontë sisters each had a taste for the gothic, and of them, Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre* becomes notable both for its generic elements and for its influence on feminist gothic criticism. In direct response to her novel, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar published in 1979 *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, their investigation into “a distinctively female literary tradition” (xi). Though not all the texts studied were fully gothic, they all shared the same gothic neuroses, such as “images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, [...] diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia” (xi). *Jane Eyre*’s double is of course Bertha Rochester, from whom Gilbert and Gubar’s book takes its

name, and whose madness correlates to the building anger and sense of injustice inside of Jane's character. As Jane's "criminal self," she "act[s] out Jane's secret fantasies" by fighting against her own imprisonment in her estranged husband's home (361-2). Though Bertha seems in many ways hostile to Jane with her violence against the governess and Rochester, it is really only the same violence that has been enacted on both women by a society that limits their opportunities and denies them independence. Indeed, they identify a common enemy, which is no less than that original patriarchal symbol: the manor house. Unable to suffer any longer under its painful roof, Jane takes flight from Thornfield Hall with her famous lines, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being, with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you" (Brontë 256). To the best of her ability, Bertha does the same, and sets the house alight, destroying it and herself in the process. In a reductive way, this mutual obliteration removes the remaining hindrances from Jane's romance with Rochester, allowing them to meet in "a remote forest, a wilderness even, in order to circumvent the strictures of a hierarchical society" (Gilbert and Gubar 369). But as much as it ensures Jane's happiness, Bertha's death also speaks to the perils of women's suppression and the self-risk entailed with seeking happiness inside an antagonistic gothic mode.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," issues a similar warning about the dangers of motherhood and the medical confinement frequently prescribed to willful or troubled women. The woman rebels with each word she writes in secret from her husband as she seeks physical, social, and literary freedom. Yet the tale is tragic, and like Bertha, she descends into complete madness from the treatment. From Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1886, to Oscar

Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1890, to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in 1897, the late nineteenth century enjoyed a gothic resurgence that focused particularly on social outcasts. The difficulty of abiding by communal regulations, of feigning obedience to civil norms, seemed to demand a revisitation to the divergent genre. As had been the case in its earliest forms, the gothic offered an imaginative alternative and provided the platform to illustrate and dissect prevalent social concerns. Yet from the isolated castles, formulaic plots, and stock characters there had developed a narrative mode that proved surprisingly adaptable. While still enjoying its shocks and horrors, gradually the gothic departed from Walpole's cumbersome hauntings and Radcliffe's irredeemable villains. The histrionic tropes mellowed, but as they did, they also became more personal and thereby more sinister. As authors like Shelley and Poe partnered the gothic with scientific advancements, these sensations became increasingly internalized, concerned with the scope and soundness of the human mind. By relocating the gothic within the familiar, 'haunting' became synonymous with corruption, and the need to exorcise these ghosts created a strand of social commentary within the genre, and one particularly attuned to women's issues. In the next section, I will introduce the distinct category of 'female gothic,' as both a narrative and critical method, in whose lineage I place Jackson's novels.

In America, the gothic became increasingly regionalized, and by the twentieth century, it was strongest in the South. Authors like William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor (a contemporary of Jackson's) enjoyed the genre's compatibility with the region's troubled history and isolated eccentricities. Jackson, in the Northeast, would frequently draw on the legacy of witch trials and Puritan austereness, while adapting the

gothic to her own needs. By the time she downsized the gothic castle to midcentury suburbia, the genre had become a coded language for the oppressed and the ostracized, making it a perfect medium to voice dissent from inside an otherwise complacent culture.

### **Female Gothic and Domesticity**

In many ways, Jackson's innovation within the gothic involved returning to its fundamental premise, for the notion of the *female* gothic is nearly as old as the genre itself. In a posthumous essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," Ann Radcliffe differentiates masculine and feminine effects. The former, she writes, is linked with mortal horror, and the latter with sublime terror. She explains, "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them" (Davison 209). The female, in Radcliffe's high terms, is more internal than the male, yet it also promises the hope of deliverance from current oppression. Recalling Ellis's definition, she furthermore contextualizes this in terms of the gothic castle: "In the feminine Gothic, the heroine exposes the villain's usurpation and thus reclaims an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison. The masculine Gothic gives the perspective of an exile from the refuge of home, now the special province of women" (xiii). The home and its possession have always been at the heart of gothic plots, from Manfred's usurpation to Emily's imprisonment, Usher's madness to Bertha's destruction, and moreover provide the theatre in which its inhabitants negotiate gender identity and politics.

To unpack Davison's differentiation, we must look to the social changes appearing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Urbanization and industrialization both increased concern for women's safety and reduced the need for middle-class women (the gothic's largest readership) to work outside the home. The solution came about in the emergence of "separate spheres," with the women occupied in the security of the family home and the men bravely venturing out into a world of vice and corruption. Safeguarded as such, women became symbols of absolute purity, and, consequently, sites of sexual anxiety. Novels, which women, in their leisure, read and penned in vast numbers, offered a reprieve from boredom and the possibility of community with other women outside their household. Yet they also posed a problem to their protected innocence: whether by unseemly subject or titillating romance, the stories contained in novels spoke of the corruption of the forbidden outside world. Thus, it is no surprise that women living lives of confinement should seek out novels as a means of temporary escape, nor that they would sympathize with the pure but oft-assailed heroines of the gothic, reading their own feelings of fear and powerlessness into the text (Ellis 10-17).

At a time when society wished women to be docile, silent, and pure, the female gothic presented woman-centered storylines filled with willful protagonists, whose mere narrative prominence could be considered a rebellious act. Approaching something of the taboo, the gothic furthermore depicted a domestic violence and danger that was supposedly out of reach of the middle-class home. For this reason, Kate Ferguson Ellis defines the gothic as "a set of conventions to represent what is not supposed to exist" (7). She continues, "The Gothic castle [...] is a site upon which the contradiction is explored and given an imaginary resolution, one that became popular precisely because it could

take in areas of social reality about which middle-class women were supposed to have no knowledge” (7). The home is antagonistic because it threatens erasure, and it is in conflict with this force that the female gothic seeks to redefine and recreate womanhood. From the beginning of the genre, inheritance plots excluded women or denied them autonomy, so the female-centric gothic is necessarily a defiant act of rewriting—of writing oneself *into* the narrative. The alternative, that which subordinates a woman to the service of patrimony, appears as a dungeon, a prison, and finally, a womb. For this reason, Claire Kahane identifies “the forbidden center of the Gothic” as a dark maternal energy, but one that specifically creates a crisis of self (336). The thing that haunts, she writes, is “the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront” (336). The mother figure, in that it represents both a woman’s past and her future, augurs an inevitable fate, and consolidates fears of inevitability, social restriction, physical confinement, and exclusion from inheritance.

Jackson, updating gothic forms for the twentieth century, consolidates this longstanding association of house and mother within a single contemporary figure: the housewife. In an era of idealized womanly devotion to home and family, the haunting mother figure was omnipresent, from television to women’s magazines to the faces down one’s suburban street. Betty Friedan paints a picture of numbing, rigorous similitude:

Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their stationwagonsful of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floors. (18)

Friedan describes this kind of motherhood (notably a white middle-class motherhood) as a kind of perpetual servitude that reduces a woman to the services she provides. She goes on to say that the woman “is trapped by the enormous demands of her role as a modern housewife” and that “her day is fragmented as she rushes from [chore to chore]” (30). Here, her choice of words to describe a woman as ‘trapped’ and ‘fragmented’ were no doubt written with a sociological mindset, yet nothing could be closer to the sense of imprisonment and erasure that the female gothic had long described. In constant comparison with what Dale Bailey labels the “June Cleaver ideology,” so named for the housewifely paragon of the television’s *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), many women found their individual identities become more and more precarious. Such expectations defined a narrow way of femininity that “placed the woman in the kitchen, highlighting her role as a domestic life-support system for family members who functioned largely outside the home” (Bailey 33). Outside of this (white, middle-class) model, there was little room for success, and those who challenged the model were considered “neurotic, unfeminine, [and] unhappy” by their peers (Friedan 16).

For this reason, the seemingly contradictory experience of agoraphobia was nearly epidemic among women after World War II, even as professional fields were slowly accepting female workers. Jackson herself suffered from this fear, along with other forms of anxiety and depression during the last five years of her life. Especially heightened during the three years she wrote *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, there were many days she was unable to leave her bedroom (Oppenheimer 236-47). The common cause was again unrealistic and antithetical expectations, for just as more women were leaving the home to fill much-needed roles in the war effort, the federal

government maintained the expectation that “Now, as in peacetime, a mother’s primary duty is to her home and children” (Jacobson 14). Psychological theorist Kirsten Jacobson summarizes the dilemma again in terms of place: “We are seeing the agoraphobic struggle of [women] not being able to secure a way of *being-at-home in-the-world*—whether for reasons of being ill-prepared, failing to find societal support for this outward movement, or, more likely, a combination of these” (14, emphasis my own). Between estrangement in private and exclusion in public, women faced an existential threat in either sphere and societal backlash when they tried to merge them.

Friedan personally criticizes Jackson for enforcing this divide, even as the latter found success for both her domestic and gothic writing. Instead, for this very reason, Friedan places her among a breed of “Housewife Writers” who downplay their careers to uphold the homemaker myth. “They implicitly deny the vision,” Friedan writes, “and the satisfying hard work involved in their stories, poems, and plays. They deny the lives they lead, not as housewives, but as individuals” (57). Certainly, Jackson’s literary career comprised two seemingly irreconcilable modes: one of witty domestic comedy and one of treacherous psychological gothic. And if one finds it surprising that the author of “The Lottery” also wrote articles like “What I Want to Know Is, What Do Other People Cook With?,” in which a housewife goes in search of a good fork, they may understand Friedan’s dissatisfaction. Yet Jackson’s two authorial lives—true literary doubles—mirror each other intimately, enough that S. T. Joshi would argue, “her entire work is unified to such a degree that distinctions about genre and classification become arbitrary and meaningless” (183). In his article titled “Shirley Jackson: Domestic Horror,” he identifies their common core, a “manipulation” of “the ‘proper conduct’ expected of her

as a middle-class housewife” (188). So it is that when *Life Among the Savages* describes furniture that seems to arrange itself and a “dark little room downstairs” that her husband could only “find [...] nine times out of ten,” the effect is comedic (Jackson 19-20). But when Dr. Montague describes Hill House as a “masterpiece of architectural misdirection,” with doors that close on their own, rooms that seem to disappear, and walls that are built “a fraction of a degree off in one direction or another,” this only adds to the frightful atmosphere of the piece (Jackson *Hill House* 105-6). For Jackson, reality, even mundane reality, could veer into the gothic by the slightest shift in perspective, as if the two shared some instinctive unity.

Indeed, it is always an external voice that enforces the divide between reality and unreality. Another episode in Jackson’s memoir recounts the birth of her third child, in which the hospital clerk forcibly strips her of her authorial status:

“Age?” she asked. “Sex? Occupation?”  
 “Writer,” I said.  
 “Housewife,” she said.  
 “Writer,” I said.  
 “I’ll just put down housewife,” she said. [...]  
 “Husband’s name?” she said. “Address? Occupation?”  
 “Just put down housewife,” I said. “I don’t remember *his* name, really.” (*Life Among the Savages* 65-6)

According to the clerk’s rather common worldview, motherhood and authorship cannot exist together, becoming a form of unreality. She then forcibly conforms Jackson to the “June Cleaver ideology,” thereby causing a false divide between her domestic role and her writing career, the very contradiction that Friedan criticizes. In literary terms, this can be seen as an attempt to parse Jackson into genres, by securely placing her essays, memoirs, and even her first novels within the realm of reality, while labeling her later works and stories like “The Lottery” as weird, fantastic, or untrue. To bridge this divide,

we must recall Kate Ferguson Ellis' definition of the gothic as "a set of conventions to represent what is not supposed to exist" (7). In this way, Jackson's gothic must be understood in the context of her realism (and to a larger extent, twentieth-century women's issues and the "feminine mystique"), because it is the insufficiency of reality that creates the need for the gothic. Jackson's supernatural 'departure' allows her to say what she cannot say in mundane terms, a language in which "writer" is automatically corrected to "housewife." For this reason, Jackson's gothic—especially the continuum formed by *The Haunting of Hill House*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and her last unfinished novel *Come Along With Me*—must be seen as her indictment and rejection of conventional reality. Together, they present an alternative within the supernatural and simultaneously attempt to eliminate the conflict that necessitated the generic divergence. That is to say, the gothic persists until the terror of Hill House can once again become the comedy of the Jackson household. Yet so long as the house remains haunted, it remains opposed to the accepted reality.

The home, therefore, must be understood as an 'institution,' both within the gothic and in society at large, where it plays a critical role in propagating a certain reality (Davison 208). As a status symbol and cultural icon, a refuge from and a mirror onto the world, a 'man's castle' and a 'woman's place,' it is fraught with symbolic tensions that mitigate relationships between inside/outside, familiar/unknown, and kindred/stranger. In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Merricat, the younger sister, establishes the dichotomy in her first description of the Blackwood house: "Blackwoods had always lived in our house, and kept their things in order; [...] and so our house was built up with layers of Blackwood property weighting it, and keeping it steady against the world"

(Jackson 1). By positioning it “against the world,” she acknowledges its aberration from the norm, a new Blackwood “order” that insulates the inhabitants from their hostile surroundings. Jackson’s account of the autonomously moving furniture speaks of much the same effect, as she writes, “After a few vain attempts at imposing our own angular *order* on things with a consequent out-of-jointness and shrieking disharmony that set our teeth on edge, we gave in to the old furniture and let things settle where they would” (*Savages* 18, emphasis my own). For the Blackwoods and the Jacksons, the interior exerts a certain pressure on the inhabitants, so that the homes “not only reflected the foibles of their original owners, who often had unusual tastes, but they also exerted a mysterious force of their own” (Friedman 104). The very physical structure of houses allows them to both contain and exclude, thereby creating a boundary—a threshold—of experience and reality.

In this regard, Jackson’s fictional houses both contain states of heightened or altered reality that buttress the gothic elements of the stories, though each for different effect. Hill House is said to embody “absolute reality,” yet it is this very fact that makes the home unwelcoming: (Jackson *Hill House* 3).

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood for eighty years and might stand for eighty more.” (Jackson *Hill House* 3)

A sort of linguistic puzzle, the introduction notably opposes ‘reality’ and ‘sanity,’ saying that the former is too awful for the latter to bear. Hill House, “not sane,” must then be assumed to perpetuate this “absolute reality,” which the novel further describes as a type of “darkness.” Emphasizing the novel’s social context, Dara Downey argues that

Jackson's invocation of 'reality' "operate[s] as a useful means of understanding the novels, not least because the conformity that is traditionally seen as characterizing 1950s America itself created a consensual notion of what constituted 'reality' (in other words, normality and a refusal to deviate from accepted forms of behaviour" (182). To summarize, Hill House's darkness and terrible reality, rather than being forces strange, aberrant, or cursed, are instead the undiluted norms of American society. The crooked angles, the puzzling floor plan, and even the hauntings themselves—deceptive though they may seem—are no less than the full truth of experience, as will later be discussed. "Not sane" therefore appears both as a critique and a symptom of the American domestic vision, the "June Cleaver ideology," whose limitations were neither coherent nor manageable by a majority of women. Yet madness can also be seen as retaliation to adversity, as Lynette Carpenter writes, "Within the context of feminist psychology, rage is the most appropriate response to oppression. In Jackson's time as now, it was also the most dangerous, the most likely to be labeled madness and treated by institutionalization" (209). Madness and insanity have deep gothic roots, most obviously returning to Bertha Rochester, the original "madwoman in the attic." Once again the home becomes a place of contest between the subjugated and the subjugator, and it is up to Eleanor Vance, Jackson's nervous heroine, as to which madness she chooses.

The rebellious madness of Bertha and other oppressed women is certainly the choice that Merricat makes in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Compared to Hill House's "absolute reality," the Blackwood mansion is a place of decided unreality, a "crazy house," according to cousin Charles, who wishes to take it for his own (Jackson *Castle* 92). Again, this psychological condition is manifested through the physical

boundaries of the home, which Merricat knowingly manipulates in order to repel Charles: “Charles would be lost, shut off from what he recognized and would have to concede that this was not the house he had come to visit and so would go away” (87). Merricat remakes the home, and in doing so, she hopes to alter its reality to one in which Charles, the patriarchal threat, has no place. In this way, Jackson’s final two novels use the gothic language of madness and unreality to vocalize the discontent felt by a large portion of American housewives. To them, the notions of reality and unreality were quite familiar, for, as Friedan writes, “There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform” (9). In Jackson’s works, this discrepancy takes on darker, even supernatural undertones, but the confrontation between women and the home remains the same. To repeat Downey’s critical observation, “The trend of her work overall is towards an attempt to solve the problem of enclosed domestic space, to negotiate its tendency to vacillate between functioning as a refuge or a prison” (290). Progressing from Hill House to the Blackwood manor, Jackson moves from confinement to liberation in search of a livable domestic reality. As with all female gothics, there is an element of violence within the undertaking, prompted by the dire circumstances in which the women act. Yet for Jackson, such destruction eventually proves creative, in finding a way to conquer through usurpation the limitations of the gothic.

### *The Haunting of Hill House*

The gothic paradigm awaits in the cryptic opening of *The Haunting of Hill House*, that, with its reversal of terms, opens the novel on unstable footing: “No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream” (Jackson 3). Such a statement prompts several conclusions, among them that dreams and “absolute reality” are in opposition, Hill House is characterized by a lack of dreams, and, finally, dreams provide an antidote or alleviation to the damaging effects of reality (Wilson 114). Having previously identified “absolute reality” with restrictive gender politics, the novel begins with a rather conservative outlook, suggesting that the only recourse to injustice is to pretend it does not exist. Yet a dreamer is precisely how the novel introduces its protagonist Eleanor Vance, whose diversions protect her from the drudgery of her own domestic reality: “Caring for her mother, lifting a cross old lady from her chair to her bed, setting out endless little trays of soup and oatmeal, steeling herself to the filthy laundry, Eleanor had held fast to the belief that someday something would happen” (7-8). When she is invited to Hill House, dreams make up the majority of her journey, as she fantasizes about both her own liberated future and the possibilities of the adventure to come.

The first of these comes as an inversion of her recent past, in which she toiled in the service of her ailing mother. In the dream, she has a house of her own guarded by two stone lions, where “A little dainty old lady took care of me, moving starchily with a silver tea service on a tray and bringing me a glass of elderberry wine each evening for my health's sake” (18). Quickly, the force of desire behind her dream is made apparent as the

old lady's actions parallel her own, and Eleanor relishes the idea of taking her mother's place. Indeed, the years she spent under her mother's authority feel stolen from her, and have made Eleanor unable to form an identity independent of her domestic role:

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. This was owing largely to the eleven years she had spent caring for her invalid mother, which had left her with some proficiency as a nurse and an inability to face strong sunlight without blinking. (6)

Now at the age of thirty-two, Eleanor occupies an indeterminate place between mother and child. Without a family of her own, she has nonetheless been forced into the role of caretaker, and thereby stunted in her own development. For this reason, she is doubly trapped within the woman's bind, "haunted by guilt as a mother over the neglected child within herself" (Newman 175). Despite her impulse for freedom, the experience has nonetheless left her with the sort of agoraphobia that women first feel when venturing outside the home. Her dream of the house with the stone lions reveals how overpowering the domestic vision is, for even as she hated her servitude, she can only imagine being reestablished within a similar system. In this way, Eleanor refuses to confront the unpleasant realities that her dreams obscure and so uses her fantasies as Michael T. Wilson defines them: "physiologically and psychologically necessary and restorative states of inaccurate perception" (114). Protecting her only so much as they deny true perception, her dreams make even Hill House seem like a welcoming embrace.

Yet early on, there is an implied danger in abandoning these dreamy alternatives. In a diner on her way to Hill House, Eleanor warns a little girl to "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" (Jackson *Castle* 22). For a moment, Eleanor sees clearly what she has

lost and cautions the next generation of women not to make the same mistake. Indeed, one of Eleanor's darkest moments of lucidity reveals a terrible secret. At Hill House, she confesses to Theodora that she may have assisted in her mother's death in order to ensure her own freedom, saying, "I've wondered ever since if I did wake up. If I did wake up and hear her, and if I just went back to sleep. It would have been easy, and I've wondered about it" (212). In this moment, the easy dreams she uses for distraction cannot conceal her unfulfilled desire for independence. The Eleanor underneath is revealed to be quite different from the awkward, inconsequential "Poor silly Nell" she presents, a woman who appears satisfied to be given little attention or respect (211). Rather, that persona is merely what she uses to survive in a world that renders her own aspirations impossible; it is a means of adapting herself (however poorly) to reality. As Bailey writes, *Hill House* reveals a "profound and particular alienation—the alienation of an ambitious woman torn between her loyalties to family and her personal dreams and imperatives in the circumscribed upper middle-class world of the 1940s and 1950s" (26). Insofar as her true desires conflict with those of Hill House, she denies the absolute reality of her incompatibility with life under its roof and thereby the threat it truly poses.

Hill House's own expectations come passed down from the hands of its original owner, who prescribed behavioral instructions to the female occupants. In a graphic scrapbook made by Hugh Crain for his daughter, Luke, another of Eleanor's party, finds a terribly moralizing and confining inscription:

Honor thy father and thy mother, Daughter, authors of thy being, upon whom a heavy charge has been laid [...] reflect, Daughter, upon the joy in Heaven as the souls of these tiny creatures wing upward, released before they have learned aught of sin or faithfulness, and make it thine unceasing duty to remain as pure as these. (168)

Not only does it require the servitude that Eleanor has recently escaped, it also reduces women to impossible angel-like figures that recall the oldest gothic archetypes of virtue. Yet not merely antiquated, Hugh Crain's book preaches a societal norm consistent with *Hill House's* publication. Particularly with the emphasis on father and mother, Crain paints a picture of the nuclear American family, nearly synonymous at this time with the American dream. However, the illustrations inside Crain's scrapbook reveal the dark underside of these national values as images of snake pits and hideous personifications of gluttony and lust appear alongside his sermonizing message. That high virtue is unattainable without an aspect of terror or coercion exhibits frankly the absurdity of these lessons. Furthermore, the discrepancy between the ideal and reality reaffirms that the American dream is, in fact, a dream itself, and therefore no more a part of Hill House than Eleanor's stone lions. Hill House may promise "everlasting bliss," but its absolute reality is much more in line with Crain's reminder that "Eternal damnation is the lot of mankind" (168). Yet, as seen earlier in Eleanor's dream of domestic "fairyland," the American dream was certainly a powerful myth that persuaded many to accept it as their own (20). Even Friedan writes, "This image—created by the women's magazine, by advertisements, television, movies, novels, [etc.]—shapes women's lives today and mirrors their dreams" (34). Such an image, she explains, had the power not only to make women believe they *should* want it, but to convince them that they actually did.

Jackson's best illustration of this inconsistency occurs when Eleanor and her friend Theodora have a shared supernatural experience in the garden. Wandering through a wooded area, they follow Hill House to its logical conclusion, or, as Jackson writes, "The path led them to its destined end and died beneath their feet" (*Hill House* 176).

Surprised, the women gaze upon the vision, which Eleanor describes as a family picnic with mother, father, children, and a puppy—in other words, a happy domestic scene. Theodora obviously sees another scene entirely, or at least in entirely different light, for she lets out a scream and cries “in a voice high with fear, ‘don’t look back—don’t look—run!’” (177). Even as they flee, Eleanor does not know why and remains entranced by the happy family, not wanting to crush the puppy underfoot. This scene, which Wilson calls the “ineffable moment,” marks an obvious difference between Eleanor and Theo, especially in their relationship to reality (116). He explains: “Eleanor and Theodora have a vision in the garden, but only Eleanor, a storyteller marked by terrible psychological damage, is able to escape the horror of that vision by telling herself yet another fairytale of pleasant picnics; Theodora, whose life up to Hill House has been quite pleasant, is forced to confront the House’s ‘absolute reality’” (122). Whereas Theo is able to recognize the reality as a threat, Eleanor once again resorts to delusion in order to ignore the dreadful truth of what she sees, and tellingly, she spins a story of a picture-perfect nuclear family. In order to protect herself from disappointment, she convinces herself to desire it instead.

That Eleanor craves a form of liberation is undeniable, to the point that she even assists in her mother’s death. Yet the force of cultural expectations proves equally powerful, reshaping her dreams into a veil of complacency and making it harder for her to realize her discontent. Citing a similar passage from Jackson’s memoir, we can see the same conflict arranged in even plainer terms:

I cannot think of a preferable way of life, except one without children and without books, going on soundlessly in an apartment hotel where they do the cleaning for you and send up your meals and all you have to do is lie on the couch and—as I say, I cannot think of a preferable way of life, but

then I have had to make a good many compromises, all told. (Jackson *Savages* 2)

Though written for comedic effect, the tension between traditional womanhood and a new way of life remains. Jackson's own narration much resembles Eleanor's, in that her thoughts escape into a sort of dream of freedom before she corrects herself with a message of female orthodoxy. By writing that "I cannot think," Jackson resigns herself to conformity and the limitations its reality prescribes. Only in the final qualification, "but then I have had to make a good many compromises," does she acknowledge the cost of such a vision and the sacrifices she has made to uphold it.

Eleanor likewise feels she has made her sacrifices in the years taking care of her mother, when she acted much like a mother herself. The role, besides prematurely aging her, isolated her from society to the brink of erasure, a fact that Newman explains psychoanalytically. "Girls," she writes, "in defining themselves as female, experience themselves as resembling their mothers, so that the experience of attachment fuses with the process of identity formation. [...] Women persist in defining themselves relationally, creating fluid, permeable ego boundaries" (171). In Eleanor's state of prolonged childhood/motherhood, she failed to extricate herself from her mother or motherhood more generally, and for this reason, she now treats the role with anathema. In search of freedom and her lost youth, she repeats a lyrical mantra to herself, "Journeys end in lovers meeting," which promises a future that, although conventional, allows her to temporarily take on a youthful 'lover' persona rather than that of the older matron (Jackson *Hill House* 36). When her companion Luke asserts that he sees her more as a mother figure than a love interest, she responds with corresponding anger. She thinks to

herself, “Is that all he thinks of me, his estimate of what I want to hear of him [...] No, she thought, you are not going to catch me so cheaply; I do not understand words and will not accept them in trade for my feelings” (166). With the use of the word ‘catch,’ it is clear that she views motherhood as a form of entrapment, but more importantly as a reductive term. “Is that all he thinks of me,” she asks herself, infuriated by his automatic expectation for her to “make herself responsible for me and make me be grown-up” (167). Like gothic women of the past, Eleanor’s identity is at risk of being absorbed by another, at risk of being reduced to merely the service she can provide. The constant expectation of motherhood or motherly behavior not only removes the freedom of the act; it also degrades the vocation itself, reducing it to a maternal stereotype and thereby denying the diversity of womanhood. Yet Luke is not the only threat of conformity that Eleanor encounters; rather, he is merely the most obvious, for such harmful expectations are woven into the absolute reality of Hill House itself.

From the banging at her bedroom door, to the message of Mrs. Montague’s planchette, to the final nightly encounter that nearly takes Eleanor’s life, every haunting at Hill House takes the shape of a mother. Yet these events cannot be merely ascribed to Eleanor’s guilty conscience; as is revealed, Hill House contains its own “maternal blackness” as well (Fiedler 132). Of Hugh Crain’s three wives, the first is carried “lifeless” through Hill Houses’ doors, the second dies inside, and the third expires shortly after leaving the premises (Jackson *Hill House* 75). When ownership passes to his eldest daughter, she also dies within, likely as the result of neglect, in much the same way that Eleanor’s mother passed. The caretaker then hangs herself in the library turret, creating a

rather morbid legacy. Importantly, these deaths also follow the classic gothic formula, in which discontinuity is a sign of deeper, more covert failing:

What does it mean for a house to be haunted? It means that the owner of the castle is trying to conceal a secret upon which his continued ownership depends. In consequence, the castle becomes a space where the next generation cannot be produced, or more generally, where the domestic activities over which women are beginning to 'rule' cannot be carried on. (Ellis 37)

Unto ruination, generational advancement relies so particularly on women that the failure of reproduction and inheritance can be linked directly with their endangerment.

Following the daughter's death, the house passes out of the Crain family and into the hands of their cousins, thereby destroying Hugh's original hopes for "a country home where he hoped to see his children and grandchildren live in comfortable luxury, and where he fully expected to end his days in quiet" (75). The generations cannot continue, and based on the scrapbook left behind, we can infer precisely what dark secret the home contains. As Eleanor describes upon arrival, "It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope" (34). Indeed, in this setting, there can be no chance of mothering without extreme peril or loss of self, as Eleanor knows from experience. In this way, domestic activities "cannot be carried on," either because women reject such a role, or participating in it results in their destruction. However, even though Eleanor is of the former category, her natural dreaminess—which we can now read as her susceptibility to the "June Cleaver ideology," the feminine mystique, or even the American dream—makes her an easy target for Hill House. Though her true instinct is to rebel, she has long been trained into submission and self-denial. Early on, Dr. Montague warns her not to trust the comforts of her imagination, saying, "You would be venturing far too close to the state of mind which would welcome

the perils of Hill House with a kind of sisterly embrace” (140). As the novel’s climax reveals, this “embrace,” which is really a type of absorption or a gothic enclosure, is exactly what Hill House offers, tempting Eleanor to become the haunted mother herself.

Through alternating temperatures, disruptive noises, and small acts of vandalism, the “haunting” moves gradually closer to Eleanor, until, driving her as if by intuition, it summons her from her bedroom on what becomes her final night in Hill House. Telling herself she wanted to retrieve a book from the library, she wanders the halls calling for, “Mother, Mother” (229). The library is, of course, where the last death in Hill House occurred, specifically that of another young caretaker, and previously Eleanor had only beheld it with a shiver of aversion and a loss of balance (103, 113). Now she enters the tower room, located in the very center of the house, and narrates the experience with metaphorically laden language. “Here I am inside,” she thinks to herself, “It was not cold at all, but deliciously, fondly warm. [...] I am home” (232). Figuratively in utero, Eleanor returns to the mother and is absorbed by her, and thereby succumbs to the gothic plot. For after all, the gothic space is a feminine space, as Fiedler explains: “beneath the haunted castle lies the dungeon keep: the womb from whose darkness the ego first emerged, the tomb to which it knows it must return at last” (132). In this deathly setting, the daughter is reunited with the mother, and in this way suffers twice: first in the loss of her own identity, and second, by incurring the persecution that both Hill House and contemporary society deals against mothers. Led astray by her protective dreaming, she falls for the illusion without realizing the cost of absolute reality. Thus, all of her ambitions disappear as she looks out the window, “past the magic oleanders and past the stone lions [...] Time is ended now, she thought, all that is gone and left behind” (Jackson *Castle* 232). Her

time certainly has come to an end, as Hill House tells her to leap from the height of the tower to her death below, and it is only by the intervention of her companions that she is preserved through the night. Yet the delusion remains with her, and when she is dismissed the following morning, she plots against their wishes: “But I *won't* go, she thought, and laughed aloud to herself; Hill House is not as easy as *they* are; just by telling me to go away they can't make me leave, not if Hill House means me to stay” (245). Again, Eleanor's own intuition is smothered by the illusory pull of the house towards absorption, and therefore, annihilation. Following the impulse once again, she ensures that she will never have to leave by driving her car headlong into a tree and so joins Hill House's family of ghosts. As Claire Kahane interprets, “Eleanor surrenders to the house, surrenders her illusory new autonomy to remain the child, dependent on the maternal, on Hill House as protector, lover, and destroyer” (342). She has accepted the dream as her own, believing that it solely can satisfy her. Yet only in her final lucid moments do we understand that this is at least partially involuntary as, “In the unending, crashing second before the car hurled into the tree she thought clearly, *Why* am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me?” (Jackson *Castle* 245-6).

Thus Jackson's novel ends on a rather pessimistic note, for as Bailey writes, “while the narrator does divorce herself from the masculine world, she develops no coherent alternative” (32). Indeed, it seems as though Eleanor—and, to an extent, Jackson in 1959, when the novel was published—sees the difference between personal dreams and societal pressures as simply unbridgeable. Doomed from the start, Eleanor's destruction can be read as the result of both reality and her rebellion against it. Yet this was not always the case, for as Ruth Franklin learns from reading Jackson's journals, the

original ending had Hill House rejecting Eleanor entirely, and she was able to escape with her life. Relating this to Jackson's own family life, Franklin writes, "But at some point in the writing process, Jackson realized that staying in Hill House was more frightening than leaving it. Like an abusive relationship—or an ineluctably entangled marriage of nearly twenty years—the house is both impossible to remain in and impossible to escape" (416). In her denial of a happy ending, Jackson reveals once more her nuanced understanding of the problem and the difficulty facing women who try to claim their independence. For, as enticing as that freedom is, the American dream is equally seductive, and writing within the gothic encourages a certain amount of ambivalence. Kahane summarizes, "As Jackson's novel insists, the female Gothic depends as much on longing and desire as one fear and antagonism. Yet if it frequently indulges some of the more masochistic components of female fantasy, representing the pleasure of submission, it also encourages an active exploration of the limits of identity" (342). However, if *Hill House* is indeed an indulgence in suffering, it cannot be seen as Jackson's final statement. Reading her next and final completed novel as her logical progression, the exploration of identity continues, as does the tension between reality and unreality, conformity and individuality. In the wake of Eleanor's defeat, the Blackwood sisters reclaim her dreams and likewise commandeer the gothic tropes that would confine them.

*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

In direct comparison with *Hill House*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* initially appears victorious, as Merricat and Constance enjoy the youth that was repeatedly stolen from Eleanor and live with relative security in a house they can call their own. Indeed, it would appear that Jackson had independently remedied all these previous obstacles to feminine safety if it were not for the preceding violence necessary for the sisters to achieve such a living. The novel opens with a callous introduction: “My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. [...] Everyone else in my family is dead” (Jackson *Castle* 1). If not evident at first, Merricat’s atypical family structure is of her own making, having poisoned the elder members at dinner one night. Such a cruel act is obviously shocking, but when we learn of Merricat’s motivation, the novel returns to the familiar territory of the gothic plot.

As Constance later explains to Cousin Charles, Merricat was frequently excluded from the rest of the family, as “a wicked, disobedient child,” who was “always in disgrace” (34). Once again, Jackson describes a precarious family situation, in which the female protagonist was in danger of disappearing into the home. That she was “disobedient” merely shows that she objected to the standing order, which as is revealed, was strictly gendered and hierarchical. Uncle Julian, the only senior family member to survive the poisoning, recalls their family dinners in a much different tone, nostalgically describing the patriarchal setting: “My brother, as head of the family, sat naturally at the head of the table, with the windows at his back and the decanter before him. John Blackwood took pride in this table, his family, his position in the world” (33). This final

remark, in context, is a rather telling one, for it is built upon many social expectations. The dining table, fulfilling Davison's gothic requirement of a "symbolically loaded, psychically resonant site," becomes an icon of masculine power, yet one that notably depends on female labor (206). Throughout the novel, cooking is identified as a uniquely feminine language, acting as the Constance's pastime, Merricat's weapon, the matriarchal legacy, and the townswomen's apology once the Blackwood house is destroyed. So it is that John Blackwood's next source of pride, his family, depends imperatively on what they can provide him through the table. Indeed, that Merricat, deemed undesirable and extraneous, is so often excluded from the table, and therefore the family as well, shows how self-serving the statement is, by which both 'table' and 'family' are reduced to mere status symbols that bolster John Blackwood's "position in the world."

Yet such an attitude appears only as a recent manifestation in the Blackwoods' longstanding history of sacrificial female identity. Merricat illustrates the family tendency when she describes a typical marriage: "As soon as a new Blackwood wife moved in, a place was found for her belongings, and so our house was built up with layers of Blackwood property weighting it, and keeping it steady against the world" (Jackson *Castle* 1). Like any typical gothic story, the house, the name, and the generational continuity (as shown in the habit of always marrying wives and never husbands) are strictly masculine, and, like the case of John Blackwood, masculinity is defined primarily by ownership. The opposite is true for women, for, when a "new Blackwood wife moved in," her previous identity disappears, and both her name and her belongings surrender to the Blackwood title. Such a system, though still applicable in Jackson's time, harkens back to eighteenth-century gothic novels and the

contemporaneous practice of coverture. E. J. Clery describes the ramifications of said system, including the loss of a mother's rights to her children and a total lack of legal authority. Of wedded women, she writes, "since her 'very being' was suspended, she no longer held property in her own person, Locke's minimum condition for civil rights. [...] Marriage meant what has been called 'a kind of civil death' for women" (78). In male terms, property is the only source of authority—indeed, the only source of *being*—without which women could be dismissed as easily as Merricat was from the family table. When 'civilly dead,' the house becomes a tomb, and so poisoning becomes not merely a vengeful act, but one of desperate defense, protecting the sisters from total disenfranchisement and those who would subject them to it.

Of their family, only Uncle Julian survives the dinner, but his own relationship with property places him curiously outside the male-female dichotomy. "I was the only brother with no knack for money," he admits to Charles, and the fact that he and his wife had been living in his brother's house was previously a point of anxiety (Jackson *Castle* 63). Careful never to eat too much and always to wash up after meals, Julian and his wife lived in constant obeisance to John Blackwood's wealth. Merricat therefore sees female ownership as the obvious solution to the sisters' problem and responds with anger to the many ways they have been denied it: "The Rochester house was the loveliest in town [...]; our mother had been born there and by rights it should have belonged to Constance" (3). That the house now belongs to a different family infuriates Merricat, believing that inheritance, and specifically matriarchal inheritance, has been obstructed. The name Rochester, of course, suggests an even longer literary legacy, alluding to Bertha Rochester of *Jane Eyre*. Denied access to the majority of her home, Bertha's plight

certainly resonates with the Blackwood sisters and creates for them a female-defined lineage to counteract the patriarchal system. When Merricat muses, “We should have had the Rochester house in the village, but that was lost to us long ago,” she regrets not just her own situation, but that more generally of women’s exclusion from the world, past and present (23). Within this statement, the desire for a female space is evident, as the sisters seek a refuge that is dominated not by patriarchal ownership but instead by a different feminine reality. In other words, they seek an antidote to absolute reality.

Following the death of their family, a female reality is precisely what Merricat and Constance attempt to establish. Removing the Blackwood patriarch and his only male heir, they are free to revise the domestic order as they see fit, and it is here that comparisons with Bertha become most apt. For once again, the contest of feminist and patriarchal ideologies becomes a site of competing realities, and that which is less widely accepted is labeled as madness or a “crazy house” (92). Much like Eleanor, Merricat begins by constructing her reality around ideas of escapism, the most common of which is a dream of living on the moon. “I am living on the moon,” becomes her protective chant as she walks through town, “I have a little house all by myself on the moon” (14). Just like Hill House or Eleanor’s house with stone lions, the home is again the center of the reality, indicating that, while it may often be a masculine symbol, the house is something that Jackson’s protagonists still desire. For, rather than obliterating the domestic female sphere, Merricat appears intent on reclaiming, fortifying, and even expanding its reality as one of idealized bliss. In contrast to the constant threat of disinheritance, the house on the moon belongs solely to Merricat, which furthermore disables the entire possibility of hierarchy. The moon as her chosen symbol, besides

being an ancient feminine motif, may relate back to novel's introduction, when Merricat laments, "I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf" (1). The accident of birth is an all too powerful reminder of Merricat's precarious position, for as "the middle child who was neither a useful daughter nor a male heir, [she] had no appropriate function in the family" (Carpenter 202). No more a son than she is a werewolf, Merricat insists that she should not be denied her place in the house for an arbitrary and altogether irrelevant reason.

Aware of her own injustice, Merricat is not content to live only in dreams, for she knows, unlike Eleanor, that they offer only a fragile sense of security. So, to make her vision manifest, she adopts two practices that together concede narrative and physical control into her hands. From the start, Merricat's bold first-person narration marks a strong contrast to the third-person of *Hill House*, which contributed to the effect of Eleanor's powerlessness. However in *Castle*, the opening sentence, "My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood," is as simple as it is effective, for more than an introduction, it is an act of claiming the narrative (Jackson 1). The text is embodied, so to speak, within Merricat herself and is therefore highly subjective, which rather than discrediting the narrative actually serves to strengthen her claims to reality. As a result, the novel exists within and is a product of her feminist vision, which through the process of reading incorporates its audience and makes the reality a shared experience. Words therefore become her wards, quite literally, against intrusive reality, as she believes certain locutions contain magical properties: "I decided that I would choose three powerful words, words of strong protection, and so long as these great words were never spoken aloud no change would come" (44). As a secret shared between only her and the reader,

the language creates a sense of belonging, which is critical to Merricat's success. In town, she uses language to mark herself as an outsider, rejecting affiliation with the villagers and their hateful words: "I was pretending that I did not speak their language; on the moon we spoke a soft, liquid tongue, and sang in the starlight, looking down on the dead dried world" (16). Looking down, or perhaps out from the windows of her house, Merricat's solution is separatist by nature. With language being the first and more internalized endeavor, she then turns to the structure of the mansion itself, physically barricading herself against her would-be oppressors and returning what was once a prison into a home (Ellis xiii).

As the house is indeed the locus of Merricat's covert resistance, she takes elaborate care to reinforce its domestic order. Its borders, too, become the threshold of reality, fortified by compulsive efforts: "All our land was enriched with my treasure buried in it, thickly inhabited just below the surface with my marbles and my teeth and my colored stones, [...] held together under the ground in a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us" (Jackson *Castle* 41). In this way, Merricat counters masculine ownership with a type of feminine nurturing or symbiosis that makes her not merely the proprietor of the land, but part of its natural rhythms. Yet Merricat only brings to the forefront a practice that has been occurring for generations:

All the Blackwood women had taken the food that came from the ground and preserved it, and the deeply colored rows of jellies and pickles and bottled vegetables and fruit, maroon and amber and dark rich green stood side by side in our cellar and would stand there forever, a poem by the Blackwood women. (42)

In their traditional role as caretakers, the women exhibit a deeper understanding of place, one that relies on harmony and preservation. Taking "food that came from the ground"

and returning it to the cellar creates a natural life cycle and an inheritance altogether separate from the economic legacy Charles comes to find (Carpenter 205). This conflict of interest further elucidates Merricat's motivation for killing her family, for it was not, as Charles might expect, to claim the wealth and title associated with the house. Rather, Merricat wants nothing of this male legacy at all, and readily sets it ablaze at the novel's end. To her, the "wealth and hidden treasure of our house" were domestic items of practical use: spoons, sugar bowls, and tablecloths (Jackson *Castle* 114). That she refers to the Blackwood preserves as "a poem" shows that she retains no hostility towards 'women's work' and instead only wants the security to continue practicing it of her own volition.

This reclamation of the domestic sphere becomes another one of Merricat's compulsive habits, so that she becomes the overseer of assiduous neatness. Returning to the novel's opening, Merricat describes how the sisters "always put things back where they belonged" so that the furniture was "never off place by so much as a fraction of an inch," and this served to strengthen their sense of home and place (1). In addition to paying homage to the Blackwood women before them, the practice again creates a charged experience, relating to Merricat's magic words and buried teeth. Later, as she and Constance begin their cleaning spree, she makes the explicit connection to spellwork: "When we had neatened the upstairs rooms we came downstairs together, carrying our dustcloths and the broom and dustpan and mop like a pair of witches walking home" (69). In this pivotal moment, the sisters straddle the line between normality and strangeness, much like the picnic scene in *Hill House*. For, in their actual activity, they behave like the most traditional of women, carrying out their domestic chores, yet at the

same time, by associating themselves with witches, they declare themselves to be other, using that term which for centuries has been used to convict women who defy convention. Carpenter defines the act as particularly rebellious, writing, “Merricat and Constance are seen as witches because they choose to live outside the boundaries of patriarchal society, because they choose to live with women rather than men, and because they have challenged masculine power directly by the poisoning” (204). Certainly, the sisters do use housework as a means to alienate unwelcome guests (particularly Charles, as will later be discussed), but it is only their intention that differentiates them from the stereotypical housewife. Witchcraft, rather than placing the Blackwood sisters in opposition to their fellow women, actually unites them ever closer and reveals the power women have always implicitly held.

Once more turning to Friedan, we see the image that Jackson is so carefully rehabilitating. When Friedan describes domesticity as “women whose lives were confined, by necessity, to cooking, cleaning, washing, bearing children,” she compares it to another form of ritual, “a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity” (43). In other words, domesticity cannot be enjoyed because it is a matter of coercion, not of choice, and furthermore makes the women complicit in their continued unhappiness because, “The homemaker, the nurturer, the creator of children’s environment is the constant recreator of culture, civilization, and virtue” (42). Yet hidden in this statement is the implicit power of domesticity, for, as Jackson has shown so far, the center of reality so often resides in the home. And with her domestic work, Merricat is not simply a “recreator” of accepted reality, but an innovator and original source of her own. Comparing *Castle to Hill House*, Downey elaborates by writing, “If sacred space

must be ‘hedged off’ and kept ritually pure, then absolute reality is in a sense created by the assiduous efforts of the housewife, who renders the home effectively sacred by preventing the intrusion of dirt” (“Riddle” 186). Through her physical maintenance of the house, Merricat can ensure that, unlike Hill House, it never becomes “a house without kindness” (Jackson *Hill House* 34). While it is likely an exaggeration to think Merricat has succeeded in creating a new absolute reality, this can be understood as the clear end to her efforts of renovating domestic reality.

Such a mindset resembles the description of Jackson herself, written by her husband Stanley Hyman. Submitted to her publisher Farrar, Straus before the release of her first book *The Road Through the Wall*, Jackson is presented as a writer, a housewife, and a witch all at once:

She plays the guitar and sings five hundred folk songs . . . as well as playing the piano and the zither. She also paints, draws, embroiders, makes things out of seashells, plays chess, and takes care of the house and children, cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc. She believes no artist was ever ruined by housework (or helped by it either). She is an authority on witchcraft and magic, has a remarkable private library of works in English on the subject, and is perhaps the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch, specializing in small-scale black magic and fortune-telling with a Tarot deck. . . . She is passionately addicted to cats, and at the moment has six, all coal black. . . . She reads prodigiously, almost entirely fiction, and has just about exhausted the English novel. . . . Her favorite period is the eighteenth century, her favorite novelists are Fanny Burney, Samuel Richardson, and Jane Austen. She does not much like the sort of neurotic modern fiction she herself writes, the Joyce and Kafka schools, and in fact except for a few sports like Forster and [Sylvia Townsend] Warner, does not really like any fiction since Thackeray. She wishes she could write things as leisurely and placid as Richardson’s, but doesn’t think she ever will. She likes to believe that this is the world’s fault, not her own. (Franklin 217-8)

Though Jackson certainly appears ambivalent about housework, the important connection between her career as a writer and her own practice of witchcraft distinctly mirrors

Merricat's own ambitions. Though she desires to write "placid" novels of a traditional sort—and here we must trust that Hyman's account is accurate—nonetheless Jackson feels that this is impossible entirely because of worldly conditions. These conditions are not presently elaborated, so instead they must be judged by the work they produce, that being "neurotic modern fiction." Considering the examples thus far examined, these can be understood as anxious, retaliatory gothic novels that bear signs both of an unsatisfactory reality and a woman's attempt to change it. Ellis defines the gothic as "a set of conventions to represent what is not supposed to exist," and indeed, it appears Jackson has chosen her literary mode for just such a purpose (7). That in doing so she also maintains a real reputation as a witch only further conveys her defiant, unconventional status and intensifies her relationship with the genre. As writing is Jackson's primary system, the gothic becomes her mode of renovation, just as housework becomes Merricat's method of exorcising the patriarchal threat of Charles.

Charles, coming to the Blackwood mansion to seize its wealth by whatever means necessary, naturally begins to court Constance, hoping to inherit the money through a marriage plot. Though Merricat maintains her distrust, Constance's resilience wavers, and she comes dangerously close to succumbing to his conventional reality. "We should have faced the world and tried to live normal lives. [...] We should have been living like other people," she says, and then tries to encourage Merricat to join her, "You should have boy friends" (Jackson *Castle* 82). As Charles is only interested in the money, the match is obviously a poor one, yet Merricat has an even stronger aversion to marriage. Of her father's signet ring, she says, "I would not touch the ring; the thought of a ring around my finger always made me feel tied tight, because rings had no openings to get

out of” (76). In this sense, Merricat’s being “tied tight” in marriage is similar to how Eleanor fears being ‘caught’ by Luke, knowing that it would undo all the progress she has made. The only male around whom Merricat feels comfortable is Uncle Julian, but due to his poor money skills, he little resembles the masculine model of ownership. It can be concluded that Merricat wishes to retreat entirely from the masculine world, forming a homosocial female reality with her sister. Carpenter explains, “[Constance’s] choice and Merricat’s of celibacy or homosexuality (the latter an option made less explicit here than in other Jackson novels), their replacement of heterosexual romance with sisterhood as their central emotional bond, makes them less vulnerable to sexual coercion by men and keeps their fortunes out of men’s hands” (34). Ridding their home of Charles and men more generally is therefore crucial to maintaining their fragile reality and, more specifically, Merricat’s place in the house. Realizing this, her next steps ensure that the sisters’ isolation is indeed permanent and that the question of the house is finally resolved.

As Charles reminds Merricat of a “ghost,” her banishment of him resembles nothing so much as an exorcism that makes use of the most obvious source of power: the house itself (Jackson *Castle* 61). Upon his arrival, Charles had moved into John Blackwood’s bedroom that, like the dining table, is another symbol of male authority. Because of the sisters’ fastidious care, the room has been preserved just as their father left it, thereby inadvertently perpetuating a male presence in the house. Consequently, removing Charles becomes a matter of overturning the male domestic space:

Eliminating Charles from everything he had touched was almost impossible, but it seemed to me that if I altered our father's room, and perhaps later the kitchen and the drawing room and the study, and even finally the garden, Charles would be lost, shut off from what he

recognized, and would have to concede that this was not the house he had come to visit and so would go away. (87)

Making the house unrecognizable as a symbol of male power becomes Merricat's final task and her last step in ensuring a feminine reality. For, if Charles cannot recognize the house as something desirable, something to be owned, he and all men will lose interest. Merricat begins remodeling the room, bringing about a chaotic female order: "The mirror over the dresser was already smashed; it would not reflect Charles. He would not be able to find books or clothes and would be lost in a room of leaves and broken sticks" (87). From Constance's garden to Merricat's hiding place by the river, nature has long been a place of female refuge, so now she invites it indoors, transforming the room into an exclusively feminized space. Furthermore, she destroys both the mirror and her father's watch, by which she removes Charles' ability to navigate and control the space. No longer able to see his own reflection, neither will the space reflect or bear any resemblance to Charles, becoming entirely inhospitable or 'unhomely.' The watch, which John Blackwood used to order time for profit, is now defunct, indicating that a new feminine order is beginning.

Yet Merricat's efforts are not fully realized until, as a result of her manic cleaning, the house itself catches fire, instigating a violent rebirth of the domestic space. When the villagers who come to extinguish the fire actually aid in destroying the house instead, there is finally nothing left for Charles to desire, and he makes his exit. The fire is certainly a drastic measure, and Merricat's action of sweeping the pipe into the waste bin can be read as both an accidental or purposeful action. However, the latter option is more convincing not only because of Merricat's history of impulsive violence, but because it permanently disentangles the female space from masculine authority.

Carpenter appears to reach the same conclusion, writing, “Yet, although she might wish to destroy Charles’s (and her father’s) room, she could hardly wish to destroy the house that she and Constance love so dearly, again unless she believes the sacrifice necessary to repudiate the material heritage of the Blackwood men and to exorcise her father’s ghost” (207). Indeed, that the house remains somewhat inhabitable—or, at least, that the sisters choose to inhabit it still—after the fire indicates that destruction was no real loss to them. Only the top two stories are completely lost, leaving the kitchen and the cellar full of preserves completely intact. This change can even be seen as a success, for as Honor McKittrick Wallace writes, “Deprived of its masculine ‘roof pointed firmly against the sky,’ the house no longer serves as testament to Blackwood prominence or as a storage place for the lineage of goods brought to it by Blackwood women. Instead, it is restructured to fit the sisters’ more modest needs” (181). The transformation is utterly feminine, freeing both the house and the sisters from male desire. Like Bertha Rochester’s own attic fire, which combined self-sacrifice and liberation in a single movement, the Blackwood sisters join in the “social text of the madwomen in the attic,” but theirs is a more victorious conclusion, as shown in their total reclamation of the domestic space (Hattenhauer 182).

When the sisters return to the house, it is truly a triumphant homecoming. Even gazing on the destruction, Merricat marvels, “The boards across the kitchen windows were ours, and part of our house, and we loved them” (Jackson *Castle* 145). The façade, now ruined, is ghastly to behold, and a heightened sense of fear keeps the villagers at bay—but this is just as the sisters always desired. In effect, as Downey argues, they have commandeered the gothic horror that formerly oppressed them, inverting the model into a

form of protection. “Because, from the outside,” she writes, “it appears to be very much a place of danger and dread, it is now, in Jackson’s terms, ‘a place of safety,’ precisely because its Gothic sneer is turned outwards towards intruders rather than, as in the case with *Hill House*, inwards towards anyone foolish enough to try to live there” (“Refuge” 301). Foolish or not, the sisters continue to live inside, and, surrounded by the fruit preserves and wedding china and Dresden figures, they find a reassuring sense of continuity. But more important is the novelty of a uniquely feminine space, and rather than an ending, the fire spells a birth narrative for Merricat’s enduring reality. “We are on the moon at last,” she whispers to Constance the morning after the fire, “it really happened” (Jackson *Castle* 112). Soon, vines begin to overtake the mansion, making it “barely recognizable as a house” and confirming the truth of the transformation (146). As feminine nature reclaims the home, its physical appearance finally matches its internal reality, creating an alternate, peaceful dwelling place.

The novel’s conclusion, then, is one of mediated optimism, for while a comfortable domestic setting is attainable, it is possible only in isolation. The sister’s communication with the village ladies through food offerings does hint at a possible development, but the Blackwoods are much more content to live in seclusion. As Carpenter writes, “The solution Jackson proposed in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is a self-contained community of women, however small—one that shuts out the violence of the surrounding patriarchal society but accepts the support of its women” (212). Though a much more confident attitude than that of *Hill House*, Jackson’s work has yet to reach a state of invulnerability in which there is not tension between a woman and her house. However, in *Come Along With Me*, the unfinished project that would have been

Jackson's next novel, the heroine ventures out of the gothic house, wholly rejecting its symbolic weight and threatening enclosure. As it may appear, the Blackwood sisters may have truly defeated the need for the gothic, freeing her next heroine to seek her own future.

## **Conclusion**

*Come Along with Me* is truly a story of reinvention, both in terms of subject and Jackson's career, following a three-year period of serious anxiety and creative block (Oppenheimer 260). As introduced by Jackson's husband Stanley Hyman, the novel-to-be comprises six chapters in varying levels of completion (Hyman vii). Yet even from this partial glimpse the trajectory of the novel appears very different from Jackson's previous gothic cycle, so far as to suggest a release from the genre's anxieties. "I sold the house for a profit," announces the soon-to-be Angela Motorman, indicating an escape from gothic confinement and a victory over its methods (Jackson *Come Along* 3). Whereas Jackson's two previous novels focuses almost claustrophobically on houses and their inhabitants—an interaction that invariably ends in a form of destruction—*Come Along with Me* abandons this formula of oppression just as easily as Angela walks away from her deceased husband and previous way of life. Mirroring Jackson's own departure from the gothic, Angela searches for reinvention with a newfound sense of confidence: "I got off the train with plenty of money; I needed a name and a place to go; enjoyment and excitement and a fine high gleefulness I knew I could provide on my own" (3). Though just as self-sufficient as the Blackwood girls, she exhibits a sociable side that both

Merricat and Constance lack. She even admits, “More than anything else, more than art movies or zoos, I wanted to talk to people; I was starved for strangers” (5). Overcoming the agoraphobia of the Blackwoods and many American housewives, she is wholly intent, to borrow Kirsten Jacobson’s phrase, on being at home in the world (14). Furthermore, with personal confidence and a social drive, her vision is public by nature, thereby revising the exclusionist Blackwood model. These early chapters indicate an ideological expansion, surpassing in scope both Eleanor’s nervous dreaming and Merricat’s defiant isolation. Instead, Jackson’s final heroine ventures into the world, resolving that her reality will no longer be at odds with the masses.

Like Merricat, Angela claims her identity through an act of naming, but rather than asserting a sense of familial allegiance, she contrives a new persona in opposition to heritage of any kind. “I thought of Laura,” she muses, “but Laura was my mother’s name. I didn’t want any more of Hughie and his names, and Bertha was my grandmother and who wants to be named Bertha, particularly after her grandmother?” (Jackson *Come Along* 9). Between its maternal pressure, patriarchal expectation, and literary allusion, this short passage essentially summarizes Jackson’s deliberations over her previous two novels. Remembering Eleanor’s fear of motherhood and Merricat’s fear of marriage, ‘Laura’ and ‘Hughie’ can both be read as familiar methods of erasure or entrapment. However, considering the female victory over these dangers in Jackson’s prior work, the two names appear to stand in for gender systems more broadly. ‘Hughie,’ in this way, becomes Hill House’s male-dominated absolute reality, while ‘Laura’ represents Merricat’s rival feminine reality. For Angela to reject both may then be read as an expression of complete freedom and the assertion of a final reality wherein neither male

nor female seeks to dominate or exclude the other. Such rationale would explain the similar disposal of 'Bertha,' which serves as a double reference to the imprisoned woman in *Jane Eyre* and Merricat's affinity for her. Recognizing both Bertha's madness and Merricat's impersonation of her as crucial steps in freeing oneself from systemic oppression, Angela nonetheless regards the method as outmoded. By first recognizing Bertha as her grandmother and then peacefully discharging her authority, Angela acknowledges her debt to gothic women while at the same time freeing herself of their psychological burden.

Having finally selected her new identity, Angela's first-person narration momentarily slides into the third person: "As she set her foot on the steps she put her shoulders back and took a deep breath: Mrs. Angela Motorman, who never walked on earth before" (10). The narrative change is certainly notable, and the temptation may be to read this sentence as merely a stylistic choice or even an unedited error in the early drafting process. However, when read in the context of Jackson's other work, both form and language reveal the victorious meaning behind these words. In *Hill House*, Jackson uses the third-person narration in order to more intentionally render the domineering concept of absolute reality, while in *Castle*, she introduces the idea of "living on the moon" to conceptualize Merricat's alternative vision. So when in *Come Along with Me* Jackson momentarily employs the third person to introduce "Angela Motorman, who never walked on earth before," the devices combine to assert the dawning of a new reality. No longer relegated to the moon, Angela walks on earth with established confidence, revealing a newfound harmony between her own sensibility and the world's. Looking to her surroundings, the cause of this harmony is evident, as both Eleanor's

desire for mobility and Merricat's longing for female authority come to fruition. Like Eleanor, Angela leaves her home for the sake of reinvention, but rather than finding Hill House, she meets the innocuous boarding house on Smith Street owned by Mrs. Faun. Thus the original inheritance plot comes to an end as true home ownership arrives in female hands, surpassing Merricat's violent usurpation in both architectural integrity and social acceptability. For, rather than an isolated colony, Mrs. Faun's house is a public space, including boarders both male and female.

Finally at home in the world, Angela's status as a blank state corresponds to Jackson's literary freedom as she departs from the gothic. Yet, as shown here, this is not to say her final work is incongruent with her major oeuvre. Instead, Jackson retains her favorite tropes, including architecture and witchcraft, while extricating them from the gothic shadow. In a tidy metaphor, Angela works as a clairvoyant, thereby serving as a lynchpin between the internal and the external, between reality and unreality, consolidating in one person the many facets of Jackson's literary life. Downey reaches a similar conclusion, writing, "While one can only speculate, it is tempting to see this novel as having abandoned the Gothic house altogether, in favor of an actual embodiment of the malevolent supernatural that would leave her female protagonist never bereft of a Gothic refuge and from which to exercise control over the world she inhabits" ("Refuge" 301). Though unfortunately incomplete, *Come Along with Me* suggests that it would have been Jackson's invitation into a literature beyond the categories of 'gothic literature' or 'women's fiction.' Here "housewife writer" is no longer an oxymoron, having redefined womanhood to incorporate both the domestic and the worldly. And without this tension, the gothic, which is used to "represent what is not supposed to exist," is rendered useless

(Ellis 7). Biographer Judy Oppenheimer necessarily sees this final work as a kind of self-acceptance, writing, “For the first time, her main character was exactly like herself—age and size both forty-four—a woman who was psychic, who ‘dabbled in the supernatural’” (260). Certainly, Jackson was as pressured and divided as her heroines, knowing firsthand the untenable expectations placed on women. But, like the resolution of her gothic cycle, her literary legacy is hopeful and empowering, dissolving the conflict between the domestic and the professional, the mundane and the supernatural, and thereby creating a more expansive vision of womanhood.

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