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Kashish Madan and Anna-Rose Shack

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Harriet Barton

Durham University

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In her final three novels, *The Sundial* (1958), *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), Shirley Jackson uses the Gothic space of the haunted house to locate ambivalent tales of women's identity and control in the atomic age. Balancing her Gothic women between entrapment/freedom and inside/outside, she blends whimsical Gothic convention and romance with more pressing, timely discourse on gendered psychological trauma as women in the late fifties and sixties consider the possibility of an un-domestic life.

Space for Jackson transcends the walls of the house, becoming also the figurative domestic sphere and the dislocated tropes of Southern Gothic that creep up the East coast to her New England beginnings. *Time* encapsulates tradition, inheritance, apocalypse, legacies, progress or lack thereof – and a being-out-of-time completely. Most commonly, the two are compounded and materialised for female protagonists as a shadowy, magnetised pull back to the normative. As Daryl Hattenhauer notes in his persuasive work on Jackson's legacy beyond the genre, 'her settings trap her characters not only in space but also in time. Haunting is Jackson's recurrent figure for the ever-present past'.[1] In these three novels, Jackson's women either live in the embers of the dead patriarch or are drawn back, through ostensibly supernatural force, to the domestic space after liberation. In her life, Shirley Jackson battled with her own conflicts regarding her love for her children and comfortable domestic life in opposition to both a respectable writing career, and what she regarded as the oppressive and elitist atmosphere of small-town life for a housewife. Today, she stands as the master of twentieth-century haunted house fiction, and through analysing her later works in the context of mid-century feminist concerns one can trace Jackson's personal movement

[1] Daryl Hattenhauer, 'Introduction: Shirley Jackson and Proto-Postmodernism', in *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

from an indulgence in the tradition of entrapment to an attempted escape of such pre-determinism.

"Two feet in our mother's old brown shoes": Classic Containment and Internalised Patriarchy

The tradition of women's entrapment and containment within the domestic house stretches nearly as far back as the Gothic genre itself.[2] Significant in Shirley Jackson's use of the entrapment motif is that it has all the classic Gothic symptoms – castles, tradition, boundaries – yet is missing perhaps the most critical: the oppressive patriarch. Why, Jackson appears to ask, are women *still* trapped in the home when the patriarch is dead? Why are her women doomed to be trapped in the domestic sphere when they are, for the most part, distinctly un-domesticated?

These questions pre-empt Betty Friedan's seminal text of second-wave feminism, *The Feminine Mystique,* published in 1963. Friedan explores why, after the triumphs of the first-wave feminists and the emergence of the *career woman*, women returned to the home in the forties and fifties and to troubles that lived much deeper than the surface-level shine of the housewife. Friedan defines the 'mystique' as 'graft[ing] on to old prejudices and comfortable conventions which so easily gave the past a stranglehold on the future,'[3] via an insistence that 'the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity'. It is this 'stranglehold' of the past that Jackson so easily weaves into her Gothic texts, the tight grip which freezes her heroines in the home – the only site wherein they can truly fulfil their own femininity. Yet, as Friedan suggests, it is vital to consider the difference between the women of the fifties and those of centuries passed. Now, women had the privilege of choice to remain as the genteel housewife or to begin a journey of self-realisation and identity and still many chose 'the old image: 'Occupation: housewife''[4] so as not to 'deny their femininity'. It would appear, then, that this choice is illusory for women: there is

[2] Notable examples include Perkins-Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and before that, the character of Bertha Mason in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847); both texts foreground female madness as a manifestation of uncertain identities as shaped by patriarchal restriction.
[3] Betty Friedan, 'The Happy Housewife Heroine', in *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 21-51 (p. 28). Further references to this page are given in the paragraph until stated.
[4] Ibid., p. 29. Further references to this page are given in the paragraph until stated.

something internalised and recast as a decision to self-contain that haunts the New Women of Jackson and Friedan's epoch.[5] In her final three house-novels, Jackson personifies this inescapable pull of tradition back to the epicentre of the home through both the figure of the oppressive matriarch and the powerful mother-house metaphor. Belonging, Jackson seems to suggest, even if within an oppressive feminised space in 'constant terror of the maternal knock,'[6] is preferable to being an outsider.

The aforementioned *pull* back to the domestic space after the death of the patriarch is evident from the opening line of *The Sundial.* Jackson writes: 'After the funeral they came back to the house, now indisputably Mrs Halloran's.'[7] There is a collectivism in returning to the home after trauma, yet the simple adjective 'indisputably' ironically establishes the conflict that will be made more overt in paragraphs to come. The dispute is seemingly spawned from the fact that the other women, who stand 'uneasily' and 'without any certainty' in their own home want to 'see Granny drop dead on the doorstep'. Immediately, without knowing that Mrs. Halloran has no blood claim to the Halloran legacy, we are aware of a discord surrounding the inheritance of the home, which transforms the space into the Freudian *Unheimlich*. The house is in their name, but not their blood. Despite the death of the patriarch, the next worst thing emerges – the oppressive matriarch, the pretender to the Halloran throne. Without Lionel Halloran as the next inheritor following the surely imminent death of the wheelchair-bound Richard Halloran, the control of the Halloran legacy has moved outside the bloodline to a woman simultaneously inside and outside of the domestic space. As Fancy notes, 'I know that it really belongs to Grandfather. Because it belongs to the Hallorans. But it doesn't really *seem* to, does it? Sometimes I wish my grandmother would die' (*Sundial*, p.17) – she explicitly excludes grandmother Orianna from the inner circle of the Hallorans whilst acknowledging her as the domineering force, steering the ship without any true claim. To reconcile this double trauma (control leaving the hands of the patriarch and the bloodline), Jackson has Aunt Fanny become the mouthpiece for her dead father. Aunt Fanny is a natural choice, with what Rubenstein calls her 'regressive desire for escape from

[5] For Jackson herself, her bourgeoning career did not mean a move away from the domestic. In fact, she was a devoted mother, 'a mother who tried to keep up the appearance of running a conventional American household (…) whilst making space for her own creative life' (Ruth Franklin, 'The Novelist Disguised as a Housewife', *The Cut* (Sept 2016)) – a balancing act between appearance and reality which would work its way into her creative sphere.

[6] Shirley Jackson, 'Autobiographical Musing', in *Let Me Tell You: New Stories, Essays, and Other Writings,* ed. Laurence Jackson Hyman and Sarah Hyman DeWitt (New York: Random House, 2015), pp. 191-193 (p. 191).

[7] Shirley Jackson, *The Sundial* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 1. Further references to this page are given in the paragraph until stated.

the world'[8] – sitting 'all night inside her dead mother's bedroom' (*Sundial*, p. 19), longing for the order of things as they were in her mother's time. It is this quasi-repetition of the mother's life and sensibilities that Friedan tabled as an altogether backwards-step for feminism in the fifties, and it is this same vulnerability to movement into the past that allows Aunt Fanny to preach her father's word as gospel.

Richard Pascal suggests that, in *The Sundial*, 'it is because of the challenge to patriarchy that apocalypse comes to seem imminent […] even desirable,'[9] yet Jackson's world is not necessarily so black-and-white. When Aunt Fanny first hears her father, he warns, 'Tell them, in the house, tell them, in the house, tell them that there is danger. […] Tell them in the house that there is danger' (*Sundial*, p. 26). The syntax is somewhat confused, yet the location of the 'danger' is nonetheless ambiguous to a reader. The apocalypse may be imminent, but there are warnings of a danger within the house that linger on the outskirts of Aunt Fanny's lucid interaction. The external apocalypse is ostensibly *pushing* the Hallorans (who may have been wont to leave after Mrs. Halloran has so evidently murdered Lionel) back into their home, but Aunt Fanny as the insider is the *pulling* force for the women to come back to the domestic space. Fanny is simultaneously internal and external, a woman without husband or children in the Halloran home who is so imbued with the patriarchy of the past that the Halloran clan are subject to an uncontrollable external force dictating their utter belief in the end of time altogether. Their only means of survival is to listen to Aunt Fanny who is 'completely subject to some greater power and […] could only become autocratic and demanding' (*Sundial*, p. 36).

Similarly, traumatic and ambiguous consequences of the dead patriarch are felt in *The Haunting of Hill House.* It seems, initially, a force for good – much more so than in the earlier *The Sundial*. Comparable apocalyptic scenes occur for a young Eleanor Vance when, '[her] father had been dead for not quite a month, [and] showers of stones had fallen on [her] house'.[10] The patriarchal tradition is reinstated and internalised by her sister Carrie's nuclear family who infantilise Eleanor. Carrie, the archetypical housewife, is resented by Eleanor as 'the only person in the world she genuinely hated' (*Hill House*, p. 6). Yet, times with her father are depicted as rosy – indeed 'she could not remember a winter before her father's

[8] Roberta Rubenstein, 'House Mothers and Haunted Daughters; Shirley Jackson and the Female Gothic', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* 15.2 (1996), pp. 309-331 (p. 312).
[9] Richard Pascal, 'New World Miniatures: Shirley Jackson's *The Sundial* and Postwar American Society', *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures,* 23.3 (2000), pp. 99-111 (p. 102).
[10] Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 7.

death' (*Hill House*, p. 15), which is highly suggestive of a more oppressive force than the patriarch in Eleanor's past.[11] Dr. Montague, the most significant male figure early in the text is described by Eleanor as 'confirmed, made infallible' (*Hill House*, p. 17), as 'moving her car with controls in his hands' (*Hill House*, p. 23) – directly contradicting Eleanor's earlier statement that the car is 'a little contained world all her own' (*Hill House*, p. 16). It appears that the safe pre-determination of Dr. Montague's male infallibility is something Eleanor takes great comfort in, despite the apparent freedom she enjoys from taking the car and escaping her sister's stifling apartment. The male patriarch – undiluted by a female character's internalisation – seems to be missed by Eleanor. Jackson has her protagonist running away not from an oppressive male figure out into the open world but from her sister who embodies 'what Mother would have thought best' (*Hill House*, p. 12). What appears to be a choice to be 'a new person, very far from home' (*Hill House*, p. 27) slowly reveals itself as the internalised patriarchal tradition to *return* home in another guise as Eleanor takes comfort in Dr. Montague's control and questions on the path, 'what superiority have I? […] I am *outside* the gate, after all' (*Hill House*, p. 29). It becomes increasingly important for Eleanor to belong, anywhere, even if the space is the oppressive Hill House. Her whimsical car journey was but a detour – a movement from one domestic space to another under what Carpenter identifies as 'illusions of choice'[12] in an attempt at freedom.

The entrapment that Eleanor experiences in Hill House is voluntary, an important 'joy […] that [she] [has] been waiting for […] for so long' (*Hill House,* p. 136) on her journey to self-discovery. Unlike the Halloran women, who self-contain so as to escape the external apocalypse, Eleanor inhabits the 'vile' house because it gives her a distinct sense of self as separate from the 'awful' (*Hill House*, p. 40) Hill House. Although, after the dream of her mother knocking on the wall/supernatural experience with Theodora this sense of 'I' slowly diminishes. Jackson moves Eleanor's narration from 'what a complete and separate thing I am' (*Hill House*, p. 83) to a self which 'dissolve[s] and slip[s] and separate[s] so that I'm living in one half, my mind, and I see the other half of me helpless and frantic and driven and I can't stop it […] if only I could surrender' (*Hill House*, p. 160): the motif of being driven and controlled returns. This change in self has been apparently prompted by the first haunting presence of her mother's memory within the walls of Hill House – the first depiction of the

[11] When considered alongside Jackson's earlier description that 'eleven years spent caring for an invalid mother' (p. 6) left her with 'an inability to face strong sunlight without blinking', a stark visual contrast is established and expresses Eleanor's resentment for the matriarch, so severe was her 'unending despair' as her carer.
[12] Ginette Carpenter, 'Mothers and Others', in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion,* ed. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 46-59 (p. 46).

mother-house. The morning after the encounter, she looks in the mirror and is 'unbelievably happy' (*Hill House*, p. 136) compared to her repulsion just two days prior at being within its confines. Jackson has Eleanor's hatred of the house dissolve along with her sense of self as the triangulation of Eleanor-house-dead mother begins to manifest in one self. This is what Rubenstein calls 'imprisonment in a house that […] expresses her ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection';[13] Eleanor is terrified to leave the house due to its symbolic weight of motherly protection and belonging, but also remaining in the house brings her face-to-face with an identity crisis she is barely ready to acknowledge.[14] It seems she is doomed to return to femininity as defined by her mother, in that she is trapped within a mother-house to elide her own sense of self with the safely defined mother-self. This happens even when Eleanor first steps foot inside, 'watching the wavering reflection of her hand going down and down into the deep shadows of the polished floor' (*Hill House*, p. 37) – the past life with her mother is what she always wanted, beneath the mask of Friedan's 'misinterpreted journey away from the home'.[15]

The proximity that the house demands in Jackson is at times both intimate and deeply claustrophobic. In *The Sundial*, the imposing nearness is cemented by the haunting refrain 'the path gets narrower all the time' (p. 25) that is passed between characters with no apparent meaning. For the Hallorans, the path is that which leads them to the outside world and towards the possibility of escape from the stifling Halloran tradition. It merges with time itself, which the Hallorans attempt to evade; it narrows and traps the family in the house, pushing its inhabitants together to face both themselves and each other. The path narrows with a formidable sense that 'something is going to happen' (*Sundial*, p. 220) but, of course, it never does. Jackson maintains that the structure will stay the same because of the power that the real-or-imagined voice of Mr. Halloran has had over them all. Space may distort, they may barricade themselves against the outer world, but time and tradition will endure. The motif of *tightening* is more overt in *Hill House*. A traceable journey is made through the language Jackson uses to describe nearness and intimacy. Eleanor firstly describes the

[13] Rubenstein, p. 312.
[14] Jackson poses a choice for Eleanor when she meets Theodora. Theo, the symbol for the fifties' New Woman, is brash and unapologetic, declaring '*Nothing* […] upsets me more than being hungry; I snarl and snap […]' (*Hill House,* p. 45) whilst also indulging in traditionally feminine pastimes like painting her nails. Yet Theo is a cruel, manipulative bully who repeatedly brands Eleanor a 'baby' because of her comparative un-womanliness. On the other hand, Eleanor can choose her sister Carrie as the docile housewife – which type of woman does she want to be? But this choice, as Friedan noted and as previously mentioned, is another trap in itself. Friedan writes that the choice is often between the 'fiery, man-eating feminist, the career woman, loveless, alone […] and the gentle wife and mother' (Friedan, p. 77), neither an attractive option.
[15] Friedan, p. 60.

house's veranda as 'like a very tight belt' (*Hill House*, p. 112), suggesting that there is something sinister to contain within Hill House, rather than be embraced and nurtured. Following this, Luke muses on the 'motherly' house's 'embracing chairs […] which turn out to be hard and unwelcome […] and reject you at once' (*Hill House*, p. 209), a warning which is forgotten when mistaking the house's apparent comfort for a homeliness. In some of the final, doomed passages of the text, Eleanor feels she is 'held tight and safe' (*Hill House*, p. 215) and begs the immaterial arms 'Don't let me go', but we see how soon she has forgotten Luke's words. The blurry juxtaposition is made even clearer, Jackson writing Eleanor is 'held so tightly in the embrace of the house, in the straining grip of the house' (*Hill House*, p. 231) – but which one is it? An embrace which is a straining grip, pulling the protagonist back into the past, back to her mother, back home.

Eleanor's disappearance 'inch by inch into [the] house' (*Hill House*, p. 201) eventually completes by her 'giv[ing] over willingly what [she] never wanted at all' (*Hill House*, p. 204) – this being an individualised sense of self apart from her mother. She has been propelled backwards by the 'straining grip' (Friedan's stranglehold of the past) which has been the real ghost haunting Hill House. In *The Sundial*, time was threatening to end, but Jackson confirms in *Hill House* that for Eleanor 'Time is ended now' (p. 232) – her journey has ended in meeting her mother-lover, and she is home once again like the feminine mystiques of the fifties. *The Sundial*, being earlier, was Jackson's rudimentary rumination on the potential of the woman outside-of-time, but as we see the end of time never materialises. Without time and tradition, the possibility of new legacies, would the Halloran house be so claustrophobic? Would others roam free, whilst the ghosts of past Hallorans haunted the halls? Both texts pre-empt the enduring sentiment in Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* that fate, once aligned, cannot necessarily be reversed. In the Gothic house, things will happen, and happen again, because its stories are dictated by the repressed.

'Can't it all be forgotten? There's no point in keeping those memories alive.': Southern Gothic legacies

> '[T]here appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones.'
>
> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839)[16]

Akin to the absence of the oppressive patriarch in Jackson's work is the absence of any explicitly Southern setting. Her houses and dynasties exist not in a distinctly Southern landscape but in more ambiguous locations, and yet her tales employ all of the elements of the Southern Gothic: alienation; pressures of the past upon the present; fear of the outside world; buried origin stories. These dislocated Southern tropes craft Jackson's liminal spaces (North/South, victim/predator, past/present) and are perfectly placed in the Halloran and Blackwood houses, both of which are indebted to the past. In her last novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Jackson imbues her female protagonists with her own sense of fear and alienation that flourished during her time in North Bennington, Vermont alongside a repressed past that scratches at the walls of the Blackwood house. The novel is more optimistic in its sense of re-establishing an order in the face of collapsed, problematic tradition than *The Sundial*, yet the two ultimately share the same verdict: the pressures of the past are too oppressive for the Gothic woman to change her fate.

Strangely, for novels written in an era as dense with social and political change as the fifties and sixties, *The Sundial* and *We Have Always Lived in The Castle* suggest that time and the actions of those existing within it are pre-determined.[17] Despite the apparent social revolution and the ability of women to claim a legitimate social position, established truths of the past weighed too heavily on Jackson's life for her to feel liberated – whether that be hostility towards outsiders, an insistence on keeping things the same, or just plain image-

[16] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, ed. David Galloway (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 90-110 (p. 93).

[17] From a biographical standpoint this can be easily linked to Jackson's own claustrophobia in an unwelcoming North Bennington community: 'After four years in North Bennington, she was still a newcomer in a village where most of the locals had grown up together […] she feared their scrutiny and their gossip' (Ruth Franklin, 'Notes from a Modern Book of Witchcraft: *The Lottery*: or, The Adventures of James Harris, 1948-1949' in *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, (New York: Liveright, 2016), pp. 248-271 (p. 267)). This, alongside her loveless mother who tormented her with spiteful letters around the time of *Castle*: 'Why oh why do you allow the magazines to print such awful pictures of you' (Shirley Jackson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Letters, September 1962, Box 2.)

obsessed femininity from her mother. It is natural, then, that a looming and indomitable power of a repressed past should manifest in Jackson's Gothic stories, a power that links them inexorably to the traditions of the Southern Gothic genre. Ringel suggests that this strand of New England Gothic, influenced by its Southern predecessors, focuses on the 'dying villages […] left behind by history'[18] and explicitly names the industrial town of Fall River, Massachusetts (the implied location of *Sundial* via its historical references to the Lizzie Borden murders) as one that began to move South by the 1920s. In *The Sundial*, Jackson drags the worst features of the South back with her, crafting a 'Northern version of Southern post-bellum Gothic, of family secrets, class warfare, decaying mansions; […] shunning, and resistance to change in local traditions'[19] to dictate the actions of the Hallorans – and this unshifting, parental control borne out of the past endures through to *Castle*.

Aunt Fanny, who wears 'her mother's diamonds everyday' (*The Sundial*, p. 43), is the personification of this 'resistance to change in local traditions' that haunts the Gothic South, localised in the Halloran house amidst a town 'untouched by time or progress' (*Sundial*, p. 73). Aunt Fanny and the Hallorans are doubly frozen, within the unchanging Halloran house and within a dying village whose inhabitants have their salaries paid by the Hallorans – the class division must, too, remain the same lest the whole system crumble. As mentioned, Fanny longs for the stability of her mother, and the chilling third-floor room where they once resided is described as the 'core' (*Sundial*, p. 158) of the home: the epicentre around which all life orbits, the pulling force that perpetuates the legacy.[20] For the Hallorans, the mini house-inside-a-house is a physical space that traps time and memory, and instils in Aunt Fanny an insistence on traditional order. She notes early in the text, 'We are in pocket of time […] a tiny segment of time suddenly pinpointed by a celestial eye,' (*Sundial*, p. 39) wherein the 'celestial eye' is the voice of her father and 'pinpoint[ing]' is, ultimately, controlling. Her willingness to lament the past and her vulnerability to her dead father's wishes keeps the Hallorans trapped in time and bound to the past like the forgotten towns of the South. Fanny has been inspired by the ghostly voice of her father that tethers her to tradition and leaves her telling her wiser self 'vaguely that [the room] was a kind of continuity, a way of establishing one direct line from the first Mrs. Halloran to Fancy' (*Sundial*, p. 163). But, like the

[18] Faye Ringel, 'New England Gothic', in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. Charles L. Crow, (Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2014), pp. 139-150 (p. 146).
[19] Ibid., p. 144.
[20] In *Hill House*, the 'heart' is in the library and in *Castle*, the kitchen – Jackson maintains this steady motif of order and potent history being the central force haunting her females.

'crumbling condition of individual stones'[21] in Poe's *Usher*, Jackson has the house's 'core' be 'a big doll house, but no dolls' (*Sundial*, p. 163) – a ghostly fallacy upon which Aunt Fanny rests her happiness and sense of family security.

Merricat Blackwood, the protagonist of *We Have Always Lived in The Castle*, has a similar inclination in her home of 'preserving its order exactly as [her] parents left it'[22] alongside her older sister Constance. Before this, though, it is useful to explore Merricat's self-imposed rules and her obsession with routine. After the death of the majority of the Blackwood family by arsenic poisoning, Merricat, Constance and their invalid Uncle Julian live a simple life in the vacated Blackwood home, set away from the 'village grime'.[23] Merricat muses that along with the house her mother was born in, 'the Blackwood house […] had been brought here perhaps accidentally from some far lovely country where people lived with grace' (*Castle*, p. 6). She visits the village strictly 'every Tuesday and Friday' (*Castle*, p. 7), the experience being so excruciating she must imagine the whole village is a gameboard – chastising herself to 'lose one turn' (*Castle*, p. 5) if she has to prolong her trip. Jackson has Merricat imagine a false order to create some power over that which is outside of her sanctuary. Yet these peculiarities do not stop when the domestic space is returned to – Merricat is never allowed to handle food, or tend to Uncle Julian, and obeys Constance faithfully. It seems that if the order is not already decided in the Blackwood home, if the wire fence is not checked, then the Blackwood girls are not safe. With such an unconventional domestic situation – two youthful sisters living alone in a mostly empty mansion, unemployed and caring for a wheelchair-bound uncle – it seems odd that Merricat and Constance should take such delight in preserving the deadened rooms of their home and filling the cellar with more food, contributing to the jars which 'would stand there forever, a poem by the Blackwood women' (*Castle*, p. 42). And yet they confine themselves through such preservation of the unused bedrooms and the cellar, making time for 'neatening' each week. The guilt that was absent in *The Sundial* is perhaps, if only latently, more apparent in *Castle*; Merricat disrupted the family order by poisoning the berries, and Constance covered for her, so the two guiltily preserve the appearance of how things used to be. The sisters live in a symbol of Nietzsche's 'eternal reoccurrence',[24] having their weekly lives be predictable without breaking the 'poem' of cellar preserves. They are doomed to hear the story of their

[21] Poe, p. 93.
[22] Franklin, p. 444.
[23] Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 3.
[24] Nietzsche's idea of the 'eternal reoccurrence' is explored in *The Gay Science* (1882) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885).

past every day due to Uncle Julian working on the manuscript of the Blackwood murder, yet as he notes 'a work like this is never done' (*Castle*, p. 60) because he repeatedly forgets what he has written the day before. The Blackwood tale cannot be written, locked away and repressed because Julian labours it in excruciating detail each day for the girls to re-live. Like Nietzsche's ever-turning hourglass, the story returns afresh each morning, and as Hoeveler suggests, 'history is presented as a pattern of repetitive violence from which there is no real escape'[25] – time is decided.

Crucially, though, Merricat stops time. The preservation of the *appearance* of things as they once were, is not enough to save things from progressing when Poe's crumbling individual stones are visible once more, this time by cousin Charles. Charles sees beyond the sisters' *feminine mystique* and as two vulnerable young women, sitting on a secret fortune ready to be claimed by a male descendant. Charles's penetration of the Blackwood's sacred space symbolises the collapse of the barrier between Merricat's idealised past and present and the reality of time, where things progress and change. The tightening motif seen in *Hill House* reappears when Charles arrives, Merricat saying 'I was held tight, wound round with wire, I couldn't breathe,' (*Castle*, p. 57) but rather than a comforting embrace she is arrested in the suffocating reality of the time she has tried so hard to suppress. To repair this chink in the preservation of an idealised space, Merricat wishes to 'erase' 'every touch he made on the house' (*Castle*, p. 69) which is initiated by stopping the ticking of her father's stopwatch, in turn stopping the ticking of the traditional order that Charles started and represents. She destroys the function of the watch so that 'he could never start it ticking again' (*Castle*, p. 86), so that the Blackwoods are out-of-time completely, living happily beside repressed truths that the sisters can control – even if their happiness is a mythic fallacy.

The mythic quality of the Blackwood family ties *Castle* to the Southern Gothic tradition furthermore. Although the true origin story of the Blackwoods as they are now is revealed towards the end of the novel, initially the sisters are characterised by the villagers as ambiguous other figures whose history is dark and shrouded. They are immortalised through the jeering child's song, 'Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep? / Down in the boneyard ten feet deep!' (*Castle*, p. 16), which Merricat suspects has been 'drill[ed]' into the village children. We never truly know why the villagers hate Constance so much, or why she 'never went past her own garden' (*Castle*, p. 2), and it is suggested that perhaps the villagers

[25] Diane Long Hoeveler, 'American Female Gothic', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic,* ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 99-114 (p. 109).

themselves do not necessarily know the source of their own hatred. When Helen Clarke and Mrs. Wright are at the Blackwoods' for an uncomfortable afternoon tea, Mrs. Wright speaks of Constance as though she were a character in a ghost story circulated through the village, despite being sat beside her, sipping the tea she prepared. She asks, 'But the great, unanswered question, is *why?* Why did she do it? I mean, unless we agree that Constance was a homicidal maniac–' before checking herself: 'I completely forgot. I cannot seem to remember that that pretty young girl is actually – well…' (*Castle*, p. 38). The Blackwood story has become disconnected from the girls themselves and immortalised in mythic stories. Wilson suggests that in Southern mythology, the 'stress on the social construction of the South has blurred lines between the categories of "history" and "mythology"'[26] and whilst Jackson does not endeavour to stress the 'social construction' of her Southernised Northern town, she does want to explore how the Blackwoods came to live their life as they do now: in complete isolation, shunned by the community. Like the mythology of the South, the Blackwood mythology treads an unclear line between fact and fiction. Perhaps, this is the most uneasy fact of the sisters – their story has been passed down and retold innumerable times over the past six years and has been subject to uncontrollable change. This, twinned with Merricat's unreliable, oftentimes murderous narration ('I thought about burning black painful rot […] hurting dreadfully. I wished it on the village' (*Castle*, p. 4)) makes certain the very uncertainty and mythic quality of the Blackwood sisters. If, like sisters of Southern Gothic, Merricat and Constance are 'neither explicitly monstrous nor explicitly Southern'[27] as well as not being explicitly real or fictionalised – then what are they? Time and myth have frozen them as liminal beings: impenetrable; stunted; hateful.

The aforementioned blind hatred that it is suggested some villagers harbour towards the Blackwoods culminates in the alarming fire scene, wherein the Blackwood house is ransacked, and their treasured possessions destroyed. The divorce of space (physical reality of the fire) from time (tradition and myth) has been so significant for the villagers that they cannot separate the mythicized picture of Constance and Merricat from the young girls cowering in the corner, 'covering [their] eyes with [their] hands' (*Castle*, p. 104). The people

[26] Charles Reagan Wilson, 'Myth, Manners and Memory', in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 4: Myth, Manners, and Memory*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) pp. 1-8 (p. 4).
[27] Kellie Donovan-Condron, 'Twisted Sisters: The Monstrous Women of Southern Gothic', in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, ed. Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 339-350 (p. 339).

crying to 'let it burn' are overtly more 'explicitly monstrous'[28] than the Blackwood girls and their otherwise quiet way of living; the destruction of the Blackwood property is an unprovoked attack on an already burning building. Ringel suggests that in Jackson's short story 'The Lottery', 'the character's willingness to follow old customs they no longer understand […] recalls Puritan history.'[29] This willingness is revisited by Jackson in *Castle*, cementing sectarian divides between the traditional norm and anything considered *other*, which will be attacked purely for its unorthodoxy. When the sisters continue to live in their crumbling castle, it is heavily implied that the myths begin once more – but now the villagers are fearful of their power, left leaving food offerings as if to ancient deities. The myth of the other, Jackson suggests, is fundamentally more damaging to those that re-tell it and believe its threats, than to those who are mythicized and reclaim power through their marked otherness.

The Halloran's seer, Gloria, predicts that the inhabitants of the Halloran house will become a story after the apocalyptic day in the same fashion as the Blackwoods. The house itself, it is suggested by Aunt Fanny, will be sanctified as a 'Garden of Eden' (*Sundial*, p. 108), a 'shrine' (*Sundial*, p. 109) that will be left for the future Halloran generations to 'worship' in. Gloria, however, says of the 'far-off people':

'They will walk very softly the way people do when they are walking in the footsteps of many many dead people […] I think they will not understand much of what they find in this house, but they will tell stories about it, and about us. I think it will be a sacred and terrible and mysterious place for them'. (*Sundial*, p. 110)

This quasi-soliloquy unveils hidden truths; the 'footsteps of many many dead people' easily recalls the truth behind the mythic portrayal by European advocates of colonisation of Southeastern parts of North America as a lush Garden of Eden. Jackson unearths the myth of America-as-God's-favourite through the Halloran home, wherein America is the ultimate myth, sacred and worshipped whilst being 'terrible and mysterious'. Jackson takes pointed aim at the exclusive communities in small-town America which she, evidently, did not feel accepted in yet did not necessarily desire to belong to. Perhaps, like Merricat and Constance

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ringel, p. 144.

locked in the Blackwood Castle, she wished to be feared and mythicized as *other* to channel some personal power. For Jackson, the ending of *Castle* seems to suggest, the ideal position would be Constance and Merricat's – happily listening to the scared villagers outside of her home warning, 'You can't go on those steps […] if you do, the ladies will get you […] might be watching […] see everything that goes on' (p. 146).

Southern Gothic's explorations of time, space, the repressed and the other easily and successfully fit into Jackson's entrapment narratives to haunt the houses with myth. These stories are both alluring and misleading for her un-domesticated women. With such an emphasis on myth, the new, reclaimed power of her women is quite overtly an imagined power with its foundations in legend and story. The end of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, whilst seeming like a sunny sorority, is also very clearly an unsustainable experiment – pointing to the limits of women's agency. Jackson's characters may appear psychologically strong, and as Franklin states 'even imaginary control is preferable to no control at all,'[30] but the more mythic and fantastical aspects of Jackson's novels appear at contention with the reality of the empowered woman. Genre troubles, for Jackson, may leave her women like herself: agoraphobic, and still being branded, 'Housewife'.[31]

"I already saw that the rules were going to be different.": Female Identity and Genre Definitions

> 'What arrested me on the spot – and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for – was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real.'
>
> Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)[32]

The question of what is to be perceived as supernatural and what is apparently real in Jackson's work provides perhaps the most significant contention to discuss. When accosted with the reality of her protagonists' psychological traumas – whether that is Merricat's murder of her own family or Eleanor's oppressive mother and inexistent sense of self – one

[30] Franklin, p. 449.
[31] From an anecdote after Jackson's third child was born in Franklin, p. 249.
[32] Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 24.

immediately questions the validity of the supernatural in Jackson's worlds. If Jackson's women do not have supernatural inclinations, if her houses are not truly haunted and if ritual does not work – then why include these features at all? Whilst this inability to categorise Jackson's work disgruntled some critics, it ultimately only goes to show the panache with which Jackson can cross boundaries and truly exploit what Todorov calls the Fantastic: the ambiguous presentation of seemingly supernatural forces that do not accept the dividing boundary as concrete.[33] *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, her final two novels, are heteroglossic explorations of women's identity and psychology *alongside* the traditions of the Gothic genre and all the aforementioned – the stifling house, the weight of tradition, experiments in time. Critically, supernatural manifestations in *Hill House* and *Castle* are terrifying facts of their protagonists' psychology and identity, and this correlative relationship applies also to Jackson's out-of-genre-ness. There cannot be one without the other: the feminized Gothic space is inherently both supernatural and psychological. Far from being a hazy sentiment stuck between two certainties without commitment, Jackson's final completed novel is confident in its, and the home's, liminality.

The irrevocable link between what is tormenting the women's inner world and what presents itself in the Gothic house and landscape is what plants Jackson's work firmly in the liminal space between genres and between realities. Eleanor's consciousness permeates throughout *Hill House* as an uneasy balancing trick. Ashton notes that in *Hill House*, the 'horror […] lies largely in the *space between* Eleanor's mind and the external world rather than in the direct appearance of horrific things,'[34] and it is this between space that not only is Jackson concerned with exploring, but is also happy to occupy. Jackson utilises what Ashton recognises as 'narrative slippage'[35] to establish her ability to 'slip' between the external world and the internal psychology of her female characters. In *The Sundial*, Jackson's narrative voice is decidedly detached and externalised: the threat is clearly from the outside. Returning to the domestic space here is justified when faced with a threatening outside world, a world that is pushing her women back. In *Hill House*, she compounds the narrator's external judgements with Eleanor's descent into psychosis to blend the traditionally separated genres. The narrative shifts from the initial declarative statements, 'Eleanor Vance was thirty-two years old' (*Hill House*, p. 6) to the internalisation of Eleanor's thoughts via the removal

[33] See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970).
[34] Hilarie Ashton, ''I'll Come Back and Break Your Spell": Narrative Freedom and Genre in *The Haunting of Hill House*', *Style*, 52.3 (2018), pp. 268-286 (p. 269), my emphasis.
[35] Ashton, p. 280.

of any signalling quotation marks, 'This time I am ready, Eleanor told herself' (*Hill House*, p. 155), to objective descriptions being filtered through her consciousness, not a narrator's – 'It was humiliating, disastrous. […] Theodora was wearing Eleanor's red sweater,' (*Hill House*, p. 237). The narrator has adopted Eleanor's identity as her psychosis progresses, and this adoption definitively shifts *Hill House* from a tale about imagined ghost-dogs and blood-stained walls into a claustrophobic psychological study on the power of traditional domesticity.

Dr. Montague's interest in parapsychology furthers this notion of duality; his intentions in Hill House are to see how those psychologically pre-disposed to supposed haunted locations further the study of the supernatural. Yet, despite the usefulness of the plain supernatural in Jackson's text to bolster atmosphere (one can hardly forget the haunting 'whatever walked there, walked alone' (*Hill House*, p. 3)), Jackson still appears to align herself with the criticism of the Gothic genre as having lesser value than literary works. Her characters, Hattenhaeur recognises, 'who appear to be in touch with the supernatural are either delusional or foolish.'[36] One need look no further than the Dr's wife, Mrs. Montague, as the overt contrast to his more rational thinking. The most comedic passages in *Hill House* are of Mrs. Montague's superstitious gushing: 'I am to be in your most haunted room, of course' (p. 181), 'in this area I have simply more of an instinctive understanding: women do, you know' (p. 185). Perhaps knowing parody, but Mrs. Montague is obviously the fanciful, Romantic, *feminised* personification of the supernatural, and Dr. Montague's personality is grounded in psychological realism: of planchette, he confesses, 'to *my* way of thinking the only intangible beings who ever get in touch through one of those things are the imaginations of the people running it' (*Hill House*, p. 187). But the indistinctness of just what Dr. Montague considers real evidence only functions to develop Jackson's enduring sentiment: even those on the empirical, psychological side of the boundary have the irrevocable links to the supernatural that cannot be truly severed. A study in psychology will find manifestations in blood on the walls of the haunted house, in whispered voices in the corridors. Hill House, of course, is 'not sane' (*Hill House*, p. 3), rather than *haunted*. Its bricks are 'neat', floors 'firm', doors 'sensible' (*Hill House*, p. 246), not like the crumbling Blackwood castle. It is a *serious* story. Yet, Jackson asks in *Castle*, what does it matter to an already damaged psychology if the external begins to match their internalities?

[36] Hattenhaeur, p. 10.

Egan suggests, 'that Jackson's worldview darkened as she continued to write may be suggested by the way in which she evokes terror – by treating her domestic vision absurdly and ironically, fantastically, Gothically'[37] – but this suggestion feels fairly obvious at this point. Instead, it can be raised that Jackson's darkened worldview is reflected in the certainty with which she executes the ambiguity and afflicted psychology of her final novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Merricat is the poster girl for the deeply disturbed; she wishes painful murder on the villagers, is stunted in her growth and appears much younger than her eighteen years and tries ardently to control everything about her living arrangement. And, critically, she murdered most of her family for reasons unknown and seems happy about the fact. She is by definition ambiguous, constantly slipping between victim and predator, but utterly certain of her own identity as a liminal other. Jackson, by her final novel, has unquestionably inhabited the sociopathic voice of indecision, beginning her story, 'My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf' (*Castle*, p. 1) – these are the facts of both her psychology *and* her genre within her darkened worldview; they are both young and old, both human and non-human. And, crucially, they are decisive in their ambiguous identity.

Jackson's generic ambiguity in *Hill House* is transformed, at least for herself, into confident certainty in *Castle*. In the final act of the text, Merricat's ideals are realised alongside Jackson's own. Contrary to Hill House's 'sensible' (*Hill House*, p. 246) interior, the Blackwood castle is literally crumbling away. The castle is an artefact of a place, frozen in time like Merricat's psyche and a location of marked wrongness that so suits the psychology of its inhabitants. The novel ends before any of our questions can be answered: what do the sisters do for food? What if it rains? How do they function? Hattenhauer reasons that these questions need not be answered because 'this novel is a fabulation'[38] – a critical word confirming *Castle*'s defiant reluctance to fit into traditional categories of either psychological realism or novelistic romance. A reluctance too, perhaps, for Jackson at this late point in her career and life to fit into the housewife archetype to still enjoy domesticity. The castle, and the sisters, cannot progress and *need* not progress, because they are comfortably frozen between states. Jackson was, comfortably, between the pull and the push.

[37] James Egan, 'Sanctuary: Shirley Jackson's Domestic and Fantastic Parables', in *Shirley Jackson: A Study of the Short Fiction*, ed. Joan Wylie Hall, *Twayne's Studies in Short Fiction 42*, (New York: Gale, a Cengage Company, 1993), pp. 157-162 (p. 161).
[38] Hattenhaeur, p. 179.

Merricat, for most of the novel, seems entirely ridiculous burying arbitrary objects and believing they are 'held together under the ground in a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us' (*Castle*, p. 41) yet in reality she is an incredibly dangerous murderer/arsonist in the guise of an naïve girl. Jackson fearlessly holds up the possibility of being both, neither, between – even if this powerful sense of identity is, ultimately, unsustainable. The final line of the text, 'we are so happy' (*Castle*, p. 146), is truly chilling. Merricat speaks for herself and Constance, after they have just spoken of eating children, and are currently squatting in the ruins of the former family dynasty. And yet, we believe, for a moment, they *are* truly happy – they have found their place in the middle.

Egan writes that this burgeoned 'Gothic sanctuary' is an example of Jackson's 'nihilistic denials of escape from the Gothic maze, or endless processions of destructive illusions'[39] and with this we return to Jackson's obsession with space and time. Between boundaries, between genres, little matters – like so Jackson is happy, trapped within the confines of the endless Gothic maze. Time will repeat in the Gothic world, an exercise in tormented psychology regardless of its being a 'destructive illusion' of happiness: Jackson has found a place wherein the housewife can be both writer and domesticated witch, and it is out of the confines of expectation entirely. Franklin raises that, still, critics quizzed – 'was *Castle* a whodunit, a horror novel, or a shocker?'[40] but it is likely that this no longer mattered for Jackson. Alongside *Hill House* it is not fully any of those, and yet is all simultaneously. Jackson was rewriting the rules for the Gothic, exposing the petrifying potential of the woman to embody the supernatural even as a mere projection or performance. In her final two novels, Jackson suggests that women may escape the deterministic confines of house and genre *within* the house and *within* the genre – who cares for the illusion?

Jackson's three haunted house novels reach far beyond the confines of their oppressive walls to comment upon the internal conflict of many women in the fifties, who were faced with the potential of domestic liberation but may have ultimately been comfortable at home. Jackson's women are trapped in the Gothic home by tradition and patriarchy but also trap *themselves* in the home to escape the often-scarier outside world and to take comfort in the familiarity of a past, near-mythic life. Sometimes oppressive, sometimes liberating, the Gothic house in Jackson is a definitively liminal location both tethering its women to the past and encouraging a new power in supernatural manifestations.

[39] Egan, p. 161.
[40] Franklin, p. 452.

A traceable journey is made from *The Sundial*, through *The Haunting of Hill House* and finally to *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*: one where the Gothic heroine flourishes and overcomes the ultimate tyranny of the status quo. Her women may finish self-contained in a crumbling ruin built on a mythic happiness, but in the same way that Jackson ended her days confined to her own home, they have finally regained a powerful sense of self: they have finally found themselves in the domestic.

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