THE MANY FACES OF THE HOUSEWIFE:

THE FEMALE GOTHIC IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S FICTION

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Introduction

> 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.
> - Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

What more was there to dream of for the suburban housewife in the 1950s than the reality of a husband, children, and a house? After the loneliness of war and confronted with the new threats of the atom bomb and the Cold War, young men sought to re-create a safe world within the home and women followed. In this cold, changing world many were drawn to the shelter of childhood. Especially for women, the idea that they could live through their children and husbands alleviated the anxiety and loneliness of a fast changing world. Little did they know that this domestic life could be a dangerous trap, at least according to Betty Friedan. However, some women sensed that beneath this mundane world there was a morass of contradictions and although their lives within their homes might make them safe for the outside world, it also held them captive and isolated them. They felt powerless and unable to relate to the world outside. So they retreated inwards, into a world of dreams.

In 1963 Friedan offered a devastating portrait of the American housewife in *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she expresses the dissatisfaction and the yearning many women felt. According to Friedan, there had been a silence for too many years. Books and magazines overwhelmingly had advised women to seek fulfilment in their roles as wives and mothers: "They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for" (Friedan 13). White, married, middle-class women were taught that to be a homemaker exclusively was the new norm. In her influential work, Friedan argues that the oppression many American housewives

felt came from the postwar feminine ideal. As a result of this ideal their lives were limited to the domestic sphere, leaving no space for the development of an individual identity. Many middle-class women felt that their suburban lives were devoid of purpose and developed all kinds of neuroses, or, in the worst cases, even psychoses. In the chapter "The Happy Housewife Heroine," Friedan accuses the writer Shirley Jackson, a highly popular author at the time, of being an accomplice in this conditioning of the American housewife. Jackson, according to Friedan, is someone who ignores her own "forfeited self" (Friedan 250).

Indeed, in some of her humorous domestic fiction that appeared in the magazines that dictated the feminine image of the time Jackson pictures herself as a housewife. Friedan saw this housewife fiction as a denial of the hard work and accomplishment involved in the writing of fiction. Friedan claims that writers like Jackson who satirise domestic life use their capabilities to ridicule those who could not write. "Do real housewives then dissipate in laughter their dreams and their sense of desperation? Do they think their frustrated abilities and their limited lives are a joke?" (Friedan 40)

Though Jackson regularly contributed to magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, she also published serious fiction at the same time. Although some of her work in popular magazines humorises domestic life, Jackson also investigates its contradictory pressures and resulting female anxieties. As Alexis Shotwell points out "Jackson's stories and novels should be read as theoretically sophisticated critiques of the very modes of normalisation used to minimise and dismiss her writing" (119). However, Jackson most clearly does this when she works outside the strict boundaries of realist fiction, namely within the Gothic genre. Lenemaja Friedman takes Jackson's ventures outside the world of

realism as a sign that entertainment is Jackson's primary goal and therefore concludes that she is not a serious writer (Friedman, 161). Friedman, like Friedan, thus fails to recognize that Jackson reshapes Gothic devices to reveal contemporary fears. Bernice M. Murphy writes that Jackson's underlying criticism of domestic ideology may not be overtly apparent at the outset, "but it is almost always present, perhaps most strikingly apparent in that terrible, pervasive sense of indefinable longing and gnawing dissatisfaction that infects many of her female characters" (Murphy 20). Most of Jackson's female characters feel that their potential is unfulfilled and long for change. Most of them are utterly lonely and live dull, constrained lives. As Thelma Shinn argues, Jackson chooses to "retreat inwards" and her characters, like those in the novels of J.D. Salinger, actually a close friend of Jackson's, "withdraw into illusory alternatives" (Shinn 75, 100). However, this "retreat inward" will only confront them with their emptiness.

Friedan sees a lack of identity as central to the dissatisfaction of the American housewife: "It's is my thesis that the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity — a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique (Friedan 68). Friedan argues that the "Feminine Mystique" keeps women in a state of almost childlike dependence, in which they are unable to make their own decisions. Those women are either uninterested in developing an identity or unable to do so. For Jackson, however, identity is the central theme in her work: "My most basic beliefs in writing are that the [sic] identity is all-important and the word is all-powerful" (qtd. in Oppenheimer 14). In her work it is the identity of the protagonist that is usually threatened, either by an invasion of her home environment or the protagonist's containment within that setting. If the character is able to escape the restraint of the place that binds her, she quickly finds herself in

another prison. Usually, it is fear that renders her characters vulnerable. Jackson writes in her diary: "Nothing has the power to hurt you which doesn't have the power to frighten" (qtd. in Oppenheimer 42). If the individual is fully developed and has achieved the means to protect his or her identity, the physical body is protected as well, but unfortunately this is not usually the case for her fragile protagonists.

In many ways, Jackson's fiction fits into a distinctively female literary tradition. Famously defined by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, this tradition includes "[i]mages of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles" operate as "asocial surrogates for docile selves" as well as "obsessive depictions of disease like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia" (Gilbert and Gubar xi). Jackson deploys all these images, which are also central to the Gothic genre, in her fiction. My analysis of Jackson's work will discuss the themes of enclosure, doubles, and the loss of agency as three interrelated Gothic tropes used by Jackson to convey her protagonists' sense of isolation, fragmentation, and mental illness. As Andrew Smith points out "many of the psychoanalytical implications of her work have clear resonances with the [Female Gothic]" (153). I will draw on psychoanalytic theory as well to explore the relationship between these Gothic tropes and the subject formation of Jackson's female characters.

Enclosure and escape are among the most frequently employed Gothic tropes. The Gothic castle, in American Gothic fiction replaced by the haunted house, was the major site of containment. Kate Ferguson Ellis, who has analyzed the Gothic preoccupation with the home, divided the Gothic into a masculine and feminine type. As Ellis argues, "the masculine Gothic gives the perspective of an exile from the refuge of home" (Ellis, xiii). In this thesis, however, my concern will be exclusively with the feminine Gothic, in which the home, according to Ellis, is an "enclosed space

that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison" (xiii). Ellis' study is concerned with the more traditional Gothic genre, in which the heroine is usually able to expose the villain and reclaim the home. In Jackson's more modern and in some ways darker Gothic, the heroine is no longer able to shape her own fate.

Claire Kahane has also studied the paradoxical nature of the home in Gothic fiction. According to Kahane, the heroine's exploration of the house in which she is confined "is also an exploration of her relation to the maternal body that she shares, with all its connotations of power over and vulnerability to forces within and without" (Kahane 338). The Gothic castle as substitute for the womb can be protective as well as suggestive of the power of the phallic mother, "[a] body, awesome and powerful, which is both our habitat and our prison … [a body] imaginatively linked to the realm of Nature, figuring the forces of life and death" (Kahane 337). In this way, the mother often appears as a figure of horror in Gothic fiction, "dangerous, suffocating, monstrous, attempting to lure the subject back to the womb, back to the imaginary time before the ego individuation of the mirror stage, back to death" (Bruhm 271-272). When the boundaries between the self and the maternal house break down and the heroine is absorbed in the house, the result can be madness or even suicide. Once Eleanor Vance, in Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), finally succumbs to the power of the haunted house and is then forced to leave, she is driven to suicide, since she can no longer find meaning or identity outside the house.

The idea that Eleanor Vance is unable to break from the maternal can be connected to Friedan's argument that American women of the 1950s remained locked up in an infantile state, unwilling or unable to develop mature, autonomous identities. Darryl Hattenhauer claims that most of Jackson's protagonists are thrown back into

what Jacques Lacan has called the Imaginary. In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory the child passes through a "mirror stage," in which the child identifies itself as separate from the mother, to enter the Imaginary order, a dimension of images that can be real as well as unreal, conscious as well as unconscious. The infant's sense of self makes an error in perceiving itself as self-creating. In the Imaginary, autonomy is therefore illusionary. The ego is alienated and therefore narcissistic. Jackson shows that her characters' internalization of conflicting identities contributes to their disintegration and therefore they "inconvenience notions of autonomous self-fashioning" (Hattenhauer 3). Because of their inability to transit to the world of the Symbolic, they remain narcissistic and lonely (Hattenhauer 3).

Another Gothic trope Jackson frequently makes use of next to that of the phallic mother is the double. Freud identifies the double as a major theme involved in the uncanny. Gothic images such as reflections in mirrors, shadows, and *doppelgängers* are all "a sort of insurance against the death of the ego, stemming from what Freud calls primary narcissism," writes Allan Lloyd-Smith in his *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (Lloyd-Smith, 137). Once the protagonist overcomes this primary narcissism, the double reverses its role and becomes a herald of death. The idea of the double is also closely related to that of repetition in Gothic fiction. According to Lloyd-Smith, "the compulsion to repeat, if unconscious, may lead to a sense of being driven by some other force, another self — a double — or it may produce an uncanny sense of inevitability" (Lloyd-Smith, 139). The double thus reinforces the idea of being driven by forces outside the self.

The idea that the individual is driven by external forces is of great importance to Jackson. It contributed to her own agoraphobia later in her life. For most of her life she felt controlled by forces outside herself: "like a Gothic victim, she felt powerless,

controlled from without, at the mercy of the Other" (Hattenhauer 22). Her Marxist beliefs contributed greatly to Jackson's perception of herself as a product of surrounding factors instead of as an agent. At a certain point of time she herself was so absorbed by domestic ideology that she completely lost the feeling that she was able to make her own decisions. She thought she was completely dependent on her husband Stanley. She writes in her diary:

> i know perfectly well that i have no control over what i think or say right now and that whatever comes from me is not made by my mind or the thinking part of me but by the small hysterical part which has taken over the whole system … stanley … stopped taking care of me and my security is gone … will he let them lock me up or will he start taking care of me again when it's too late … (Hattenhauer 22)

Jackson has almost literally become the madwoman in the attic. This passage in her diary reflects the paradox in Jackson's life that Ellis identifies also as central to female Gothic fiction. To Jackson, as well as to the Gothic heroine "any enclosed space" seems "to present this paradox, which links the 'safe' sphere of home inseparably to its dark opposite, the Gothic castle" (Ellis x). The home is a place of refuge at the same time as it is a prison. The Gothic novel, according to Ellis, when focussing on women, creates "a resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posts a sphere of safety for them" (Ellis x). Jackson also uses the Gothic to resist this imprisoning ideology. Most of her heroines are, however, unable to escape this prison. To do so, in Jackson's fiction, requires radical measures, as she shows in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), in which Merricat, the protagonist, succeeds in building her own castle, although this means she has to completely shut herself out of society and even has to kill.

It is in her characterizations that Jackson is most modern. The boundaries of her characters are continuously violated, either by authority figures, haunted houses, villagers or by fabrications of their own imagination. Hattenhauer contends that "[m]ost of her protagonists are decentered, estranged from Others even as they consist of conflicting introjected Others" (3). The fragmentation of Jackson's characters is usually signaled by the appearance of doubles, whether real or imaginary. Those doubles always contain some aspect of the protagonist. As William Patrick Day points out, the "other in the Gothic is always the self as well" (Day 18). In Rosemary Jackson's words, "fantasies structured around dualism … reveal the *internal* origin of the other" (Jackson 55). However, since Jackson's characters have no "*internal* origin," the double often signifies in her characters their unconscious desires or fears.

This breakdown of the boundaries between subject and object, between self and other, and between inside and outside, is what frequently causes the terror in Gothic fiction. The fragmentation of the character is often repeated in the form of the narration. Julia Kristeva describes this kind of narrative situation accurately: "[f]or, when narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first … its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompletion, tangles and cuts" (Kristeva 141). This fragmentation is characteristic of Jackson's fiction. Her divided subjects are portrayed through "nonrealist forms such as disunified characterization, discontinuous plots, absurd settings, illegible narrative point of view, and self-reflexive style" (Hattenhauer 2).

In my thesis I will analyze three works by Jackson, *Hangsaman* (1951), *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Jackson uses the

Gothic genre to undermine the perceived stable identity of the American middle-class woman. In this way Jackson's fiction actually epitomizes the problems Friedan describes. In these three novels, the protagonists are immediately characterized as lonely. These women cannot develop, remain in the Imaginary state and consequently their identities become fragmented. Like many women of the 1950s, Jackson's female protagonists suffer from mental illness. As Angela Hague puts it, Jackson's fiction reveals "how emotional instability flowers in the vacuum created by her characters' lack of sense of self, their disempowered role within patriarchal families, and, quite frequently, their subjection to male control and abuse" (Hague, 80). Jackson disinters the harmful effects of middle-class ideology and shows that the difficulties of conforming to an ideal can create psychoses, in particular agoraphobia, which is a disorder her female protagonists suffered from.

In *Hangsaman*, the protagonist's parents impose an identity upon her. The protagonist is punished by an authority figure for her attempt to establish her own identity and consequently develops a split personality. In *The Haunting of Hill House* the protagonist is a dreamer, who longs for adventure and a story of her own, but is unable to free herself from her mother's influence. The protagonists in these novels are isolated and delusional because of the repression of their identity. They fail in their quest for a self-constructed identity within the nuclear family. In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle,* her last novel, Jackson changes strategy by constructing a successful alternative nuclear family, even though this is only possible outside society.

As Kari J. Winter notes, "female Gothic novelists uncovered the terror of the familiar" (Winter 91). I will argue that Jackson uses the genre in a subversive, subtle manner by showing that the oppressor of the American housewife is not a supernatural force, but society itself and its ideology of the feminine ideal. Jackson

did not “laugh off” her discontent and isolation, as Friedan suggests, but examined it thoroughly in her fiction. I hope to show in my thesis how through an original use of feminine Gothic tropes, Jackson shows her female characters’ simultaneous failure to relate to the world outside and their inability to act autonomously, thus creating a psychological portrait of the women that Friedan describes in *The Feminine Mystique* and criticising the society that has created them.

Chapter 1: Natalie Waite's Insertion into *The Feminine Mystique* in *Hangsaman*

Although *Hangsaman* is the least Gothic of the three novels discussed in this thesis, it does employ the Gothic tropes of enclosure and escape, doubles, and the depiction of madness. The novel could be classified as Female Gothic, a mode that is different from the traditional Gothic, according to Carol Margaret Davison, because it concerns a girl's journey into womanhood and centers on "her ambivalent relationship to contemporary domestic ideology, especially the joint institutions of marriage and motherhood" (Davison 48). Feminist criticism tends to focus mostly on *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, because these novels protest domestic ideology more clearly. *Hangsaman* is more ambiguous about the possibility to escape the oppression of this ideology and focuses more on containment within it. Nonetheless, *Hangsaman* clearly illustrates those aspects of the feminine mystique that are concerned with the rite of passage into womanhood. Like other Female Gothic narratives, the plot involves the emotional growth, or rather stagnation of growth, of the protagonist, Natalie Waite, who is on the verge of adulthood. Natalie's exploration of her college campus is like a quest through the castle's maze, a journey towards self-discovery. She has anxieties about becoming an adult and changing places with her mother. She has a mounting fear that she has no internal self and as a result begins to fragment, resulting in schizophrenia and agoraphobia.

In *The Feminine Mystique* Betty Friedan argues that mothers recognized the emptiness of their existence as housewives and wanted to protect their daughters against making the same mistakes as they themselves had made. Urging their daughters to get an education, they cautioned them that a life tied to home was too

empty, but these daughters felt their mothers had themselves to blame: "that daughter, sensing that her mother was too frustrated to savour the love of her husband and children, might feel: 'I will succeed where my mother failed, I will fulfill myself as a woman,' and never read the lesson of her mother's life" (Friedan 54). These daughters recognized their mothers' unhappiness, but failed to understand the cause. Friedan came to see that women's adjustment to domestic ideology was caused by the fear of becoming like their mothers:

> On closer examination, I found that these girls were so terrified of becoming like their mothers that they could not see themselves at all. They were afraid to grow up. They had to copy in identical detail the composite image of the popular girl—denying what was best in themselves out of fear of femininity as they saw it in their mothers. (54)

Thus failing to recognize the cause of their mothers' frustration and unable to relate to their mothers, girls adjusted to the feminine mystique. To escape the fate of the mother, they sought romantic adventures in love leading to marriage, thus falling in the same trap.

At the same time, however, Natalie's mother unwittingly trains her daughter to conform to social expectations for women. Natalie's position as a girl is not biologically determined, but socially constructed. Just as Simone de Beauvoir wrote that "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman," Natalie is not "born a woman" but is instructed by her mother in proper womanly behaviour. This contributes to a destabilization of her identity, since Natalie's identity cannot be constituted from within, but is constructed from without. Friedan also points out that female identity was not biologically predetermined, but established by the dominant postwar ideology of proper feminine fulfillment. She investigates how many high-school girls stopped

their education prematurely, either because they married or because they felt too much education would hamper their marriage opportunities. As a result, these girls stopped their personal development prematurely.

Friedan criticizes the belief in the post-World War II era that the emotional distress felt by young women could be blamed on "discontinuity" in cultural conditioning. According to this theory women's role crises could be blamed on an education that prepared them for a life equal to boys. This theory gave educators the justification to consider that the only education proper for females was one that prepared them for their role as housewives and mothers. According to Friedan, this postwar theory was only partially valid:

> What if the terror a girl faces at twenty-one is the terror of freedom to decide her own life, with no one to order which path she will take? What if those who choose the path of "feminine adjustment"—evading this terror by marrying at eighteen, losing themselves in having babies and the details of housekeeping —are simply refusing to grow up, to face the question of their own identity? (Friedan 57)

Faced with all these contradictory pressures, Natalie suffers from an identity crisis. She fears the constrained, dull life of her mother, but her own college experience fails to offer her an alternative.

Natalie's relation to her maternal home is like that of earlier Gothic heroines to the castle. The maternal home figures as both a place of safety and of danger, of enclosure and escape. She struggles with growing up and separating from her mother, Charity. She feels trapped by her mother. Sympathizing with her daughter's anxieties, Charity repeatedly but unsuccessfully tries to warn her not to model a prospective

husband on her father: "'I keep telling you,' she said finally, sadly, 'I keep telling you to watch out who you marry. Don't ever go near a man like your father'" (44).

However, Charity feels that she is unable to make Natalie understand because she cannot offer her daughter a viable alternative. She cautions Natalie that:

> "[Marriage] starts like everything you've ever wanted, you think it's so easy, everything looks so simple and good, and you know that all of a sudden you've found out what no one ever had sense enough to know before—that this is good and if you manage right you can do whatever you want to. You keep thinking that what you've got hold of is power, just because you feel right in yourself, and everybody always thinks that when they feel right in themselves they can start right off fixing the world." (44)

This speech resembles Friedan's argument that daughters felt they could succeed where their mothers had failed. These young girls long for the power to determine their own lives and only later realize that marriage has, in fact, made them powerless. In *Hangsaman* the institution of marriage is a place of confinement and disempowerment as well.

Girls who seek power and fulfillment in marriage become powerless because they lack inner fulfillment, according to Friedan. Their marriage, their children, and their household duties hollow them out, leaving nothing but an empty shell. Similarly, Natalie's mother has been emptied out. Constantly put down by her husband, Mrs. Waite is not respected by her family as an adult individual. She feels more like a utility than as an equal within her household. As she tells Natalie,

> "All these years your father has been trying to get rid of me. Not rid of *me*—he doesn't care if I hang around the house, cooking and saying, 'Yes, sir,' when he opens his fat mouth. All he wants is no one to think they can be the

same as he is, or equal to him, or something. And you watch out—the minute you start getting too big, he'll be after you, too." (45-46)

Although Charity complains about the way she is being treated, she never rebels against her situation, but adapts. By sacrificing her autonomy to her husband, Charity sets the wrong example for her daughter. Colin Haines argues that the mother's vain warnings push Natalie even further towards her father: "Although never ceasing to subject her daughter to an endless litany of complaint, that complaint never provides Natalie with the sense of her father's injustice toward her mother" (Haines 82). Charity's halfhearted attempts to warn her daughter only serve to emphasize her own subjection to her husband. Despite her attempts to warn her daughter against a marriage like her own, Charity is also indoctrinated by the feminine mystique. She wants another life for Natalie yet at the same time is also preparing Natalie for a domestic future. Natalie and her mother spend Sunday mornings together in the kitchen, preparing for her father's guests because "Mrs. Waite thought of this as good training for her daughter" (20). It is thus implied that Natalie will follow in her footsteps.

As Natalie tells her father, her mother "makes the kitchen like a room with a sign saying 'Ladies' on the door'"(20). This signifies that the kitchen is an ambiguous space: on the one hand it becomes a trap for Natalie, on the other hand it is also a safe place, free from male influence. "The kitchen was, in fact, the only place in the house that Mrs. Waite possessed utterly" (20). This dual nature of the kitchen shows the predicament of Natalie's mother. It is a distinctly feminine space that simultaneously resists and reinforces the father's dominance. Although she wants to shield her daughter against the father's control, she also invites her daughter to copy her behavior:

> Perhaps, even, Mrs. Waite felt that in these hours that they shared the kitchen, she and Natalie were associated in some sort of mother-daughter relationship that might communicate womanly knowledge from one to the other, that might, by small means of small female catchwords and feminine innuendoes, separate, at least for a time, into women against men. (20)

The kitchen is a place of enclosure at the same time as it is an opportunity to escape. In trying to make her daughter an accomplice in the separation of the genders, Charity is an active participant in the feminine mystique. At the same time, however, she protects Natalie, for a while at least, from male influence.

Another ambiguous place is the garden, where Natalie wanders alone. Ellen Moers remarks that "a whole history of literary feminism might be told of the metaphor of walking". Moers writes that "for heroines, the mere walking was suspect." Besides being an outdoor activity, walking is suspect because it is connected to that time before puberty, "when walking, climbing, battling, and tumbling are as normal female as they are male activities" (Moers 130). Similarly, the trees in the garden were a place of refuge for Natalie when she was younger. Her father "had graciously permitted trees to grow unmolested" (28), which is a darkly ironic hint to Natalie's later abuse. That same evening Natalie is led away to these same trees and is indeed molested by a friend of her father. When she was younger Natalie "had delighted in playing pirate and cowboy and knight in armor among the trees" (28). While these childhood games are all tomboyish and refer to freedom, they also foreshadow violence. Furthermore, the garden is also a place chosen for Natalie by her father, because "it pleased her father to see her wandering morning-wise among the roses" (9).

Nonetheless, when Natalie is outside the reach of the window view, she uses the fields and mountains for her protection. Her moments alone in the garden are the only ones where Natalie's subjection to her parents is suspended. She regards the garden "as a functioning part of her personality" (28) and uses the fields and mountains as "carrier[s] of something simultaneously real and unreal to set up against the defiantly real-and-unreal batterings of her family" (29). Feeling abused by her family, Nathalie sees the garden as her sole protection. She calls the mountains twice "Sister, sister" (30), and imagines them responding to her. Natalie's loneliness and inability to identify with her family has left her to identify nature as her family. The mountains can offer her a better sanctuary than her parents can.

Seventeen years old, but "truly conscious only since she was about fifteen" (4), Natalie conceive a separate identity for herself, but because of her inability to relate to others she is not able to develop that identity. Alienated from her parents and without friends, she is stuck in what Lacan calls the Imaginary. Since her parents are incomprehensible to her, Natalie has retreated within herself: "She visited strange countries, and the voices of their inhabitants were constantly in her ear; when her father spoke he was accompanied by a sound of distant laughter, unheard probably by anyone except his daughter" (4). The only world in which Natalie feels comfortable is a fictional world. Jackson connects Natalie's desire to escape to an imaginary place directly with the desire to escape from her father. Natalie fights off his patronizing attitude with "the distant laughter" in her mind, but is unable to reject him aloud. When, on her only visit home from college, her father critiques her writing, Natalie cannot help but keep quiet while actually wanting "to pound on the desk before him and shout, 'What do you know?' walk wildly up and down the room,

pulling words from the very air to tell him about herself" (206). She is unable "to tell him about herself," however, because of her insecurities about her identity.

Arnold successfully tries to estrange Natalie from her mother by ridiculing Charity in front of her daughter. He is aware of Freudian theory and even boasts to Natalie of his psychoanalysis of the familial relations, reducing his wife and daughter both to case studies. Allan Gardner Lloyd-Smith explains that "the patriarchy of Freud's period could not afford to recognize an adequate psychological existence of the female, who must by definition remain immature, a child-person, politically and socially silenced" (Lloyd-Smith, *Uncanny* 6). Arnold has smothered his wife's identity, and tries to erase that of Natalie as well. Arnold projects himself, and his image of Natalie, onto his daughter. He determines what she reads and writes; telling his daughter "you are of course completely free to write whatever you please about me" (15), he makes himself the subject of her creative output. When she does write about him, he criticizes her for the product. The future he plans for Natalie is not an independent life, but for her to "become a profitable member of society" (204), not on her own terms, but on his. He ignores her unhappiness and jokingly tells her he would not like to deprive her "of the glories of the suicidal frame of mind" (205).

Arnold even eroticizes his relationship with Natalie on several occasions, but most openly in one of his letters to Natalie when she is in college. Here he portrays himself as a knight coming to rescue her:

> My dear captive princess,
>
> It is as much as any knight can do these days, to keep in touch with his captive princess, let alone rescue them … I am not quite sure, how to attack the dragon which guards your tower; does he ever sleep? Can he be bribed? Drugged? Enticed away? Or must I fight him after all? (176)

It is unclear if Arnold is aware of the irony of his own metaphor. Natalie is locked away in college, but he put her there and is in addition unwilling to rescue her. He even goes so far as to insinuate that Natalie *wants* to be a captive: "you know, that princesses are confined in towers only because they choose to stay confined, and the only dragon to keep them there was their own desire to be kept" (176). Although Arnold is manipulating his daughter here, he is right on a certain level. Indoctrinated by the dragons in her life—Arnold, and later in the novel her abuser, Arthur, and Tony —Natalie craves their protection as much as she wants to escape them.

The educators in *Hangsaman* seems to be following the doctrine of education as a means of preparing adolescents for a proper place in the adult world: "education, the youthful founders of the college had told the world blandly, was more a matter of attitude than of learning. Learning, they had remarked in addition, was strictly a process of accustoming oneself to live maturely in a world of adults" (59). The college Natalie is sent to by her father does not give a fair representation of the adult world, however, because the "founders had thought they were cutting their problems in half, originally, by eliminating the men from the student body and women from the faculty" (60). The college seems to be a typical postwar college, where females were trained for their roles as women. College turns out to be just a displacement of Natalie's home. Instead of a place where she can broaden her mind and find sisterhood among her fellow students, she remains alienated and is still unable to enter the world of the Symbolic.

Natalie finds a temporary role model in her English teacher, Arthur Langdon. Her admiration for him, however, quickly ceases when Natalie sees how Arthur resembles her father and instead comes to identify herself with Langdon's wife Elizabeth. Elizabeth is a double of Natalie. Elizabeth was also once a student of

Arthur's. As a married woman, Elizabeth accidentally has almost put herself on fire. Natalie prefers imagining "the sweet sharp sensation of being burned alive" (12) to the thought of being "afflicted with children of her own" (11). This motif of fire refers probably to the burning of witches. Witches were the independent women of their age, refusing to conform. The idea that she would be "afflicted" with children underscores her sense of loss of agency. Likewise, Elizabeth has lost agency in her life and is dependent on Arthur.

Natalie fails to see the resemblance between herself and Elizabeth and at certain times even regards Elizabeth as a burden. The symbolic bond between the two women becomes literal when Natalie has to take a drunk Elizabeth home. Elizabeth becomes like Natalie's own unconscious entrapping her: "how dreadful and horrifying it is to have no choice at all about the swinging arms and legs that enwrap you, how sickening to be aware and to know that the unconscious one does not even see that it is you she is embracing" (169). Natalie is unaware that it is a part of herself that is suffocating her. It is not Elizabeth who is unable to recognize Natalie, but Natalie herself. Natalie fears an intrusion of her own mind by Elizabeth's unconsciousness. She thinks: "I suppose that any mind like mine, which is so close, actually, to the irrational and so tempted by it, is able easily to pass the dividing line between rational and irrational and communicate with someone drunk, or insane, or asleep" (167). Her weak identity boundaries begin to dissolve.

Natalie's ill-formed identity boundaries allow her to identify with different people. Sometimes she willingly puts this to use to strengthen herself. While Natalie drags Elizabeth along, she is thinking about the trees: "of the trees ahead, of how she and Elizabeth could go from tree to tree across the campus, holding onto each one until they recovered themselves" (171). Hattenhauer suggests that Natalie is focused

on the trees, because she "associates them with the sexual assault earlier" (Hattenhauer 106). Then she lost control of herself, being led away by the arm, but now she regains that self-control by imagining herself to be Arthur, thus placing herself in the male, dominating position: "suppose just the touch of her shoulder under my arm, so strong and firm across the weak flesh" (172). When Elizabeth asks if they are "nearly in bed," Natalie's mind wanders more irresistibly to that moment of the sexual assault: "in the darkness and in the night and all alone and under the trees, suppose that here, together, without anyone ever to know, without even so much as a warning, suppose in the darkness under the trees…" (173).

In fact, Natalie's fluid identity contributes to the creation of a fantasy friend, Tony. This girl is not only a double of Natalie, but the product of her growing schizophrenia. Jeanette Foster argues that Tony "[an] alter ego whose allure [Natalie] finally recognizes and fights off, proves actually to be only the other half of her own split personality. In other words, the drama in *Hangsaman* is that of an abnormally sensitive girl's narrow escape from schizophrenia" (Foster, 332). Tony, who has an androgynous name, represents Natalie's split into assaulter and victim. Tony's most attractive character trait is her power. Natalie is afraid of the other college girls, but "Tony again went almost silently to the door, opened it, and with a large and menacing gesture drove away the girls outside" (230). According to Diane Long Hoeveler, "when a psychological trauma occurs, it is very typical for the victim to process the event by splitting into two figures, one 'good' and one 'bad'" (Hoeveler 273). Natalie, then, regains some power by splitting herself and identifying one part of herself with the aggressor.

However, it is not immediately clear that this is Tony's function. When Tony first appears to Natalie she is nude and is leading Natalie through the dark dormitory

corridors to hear small children. The two girls dine together, passing "bits of food to one another" (242). They comb each other's hair and take showers together, "washing one another's backs and trying to splash without sound" (232). In short, Tony's emergence is like the birth of the sister Natalie has long longed for. Natalie solves her alienation not by making a real friend, but by inventing one that is consequently part of herself. Thus, Natalie remains in a state of narcissism with only the illusion of autonomy.

Tony is the typical asocial double of feminine Gothic literature. However, she is not hidden in the attic, but functions as Natalie's only friend and protector. They both deviate from the common image of young, popular girls:

> They sat together at the counter, looking at each other and at themselves in the mirror facing them. Natalie on the right (the one on the right *was* Natalie?) looked very thin and fragile in the black sweater; Tony (on the left?) seemed dark and saturnine in blue. Neither of them looked at all like the girls in bathing suits who lounged colorfully in the soft drink ads over the mirror. (239)

By looking into the mirror Natalie subconsciously recognizes that Tony is part of herself by confusing their figures, but does not realize this fully.

The companionship between the two girls soon begins to show some fractures. When they walk past a movie theater, Natalie is fascinated by a poster with a villain, on whose nature the girls are unable to agree. Natalie thinks it is a werewolf, while Tony argues that it is "one of those hidden personalities" (246), alluding to her own identity. Both argue that the villain is double-sided. Natalie continues: "It's got hold of some girl. Girls who get caught by werewolves always look surprised, did you notice?" Tony replies: "She'd have reason to be surprised if she knew anything about

werewolves" (246). Tony has got hold of Natalie, and the reason for the surprise, as Tony hints, is not the werewolf, but its nature. For the werewolf is another symbol of the asocial side of human nature and Tony is the werewolf side of Natalie.

Natalie invents Tony's power but cannot integrate it. Her own alter ego even starts to suppress her attempts at self-empowerment. Natalie contemplates refusing "to join up with all my dull ordinary folk," and thinks of a way to resist the pressure of society: " 'I would invent for each one a single antagonist, who was calculated to be strong in exactly the right points" (261). Tony laughs at her and retorts, " 'so you invent someone smart enough to destroy your enemies, you invent them so smart you've got a new enemy'" (261). Tony shows her cards here, but Natalie does not catch on. Natalie has invented Tony to conquer her private demons, but this alter ego has now turned into a new enemy.

Natalie's attempt at self-empowerment has thus failed. She realizes this when she is overcome with agoraphobia on a bus trip with Tony to Paradise Park. It becomes clear to her that she never had another choice and that autonomy was an illusion:

> She had done so much to preserve herself from this kind of captivity and had taken inevitably one of the many roads which would lead her to the same torment; she was helpless among people who hated her and showed it by holding her motionless until they should choose to release her. All her efforts to become separate, all Tony's efforts, had brought Natalie to this bus. (257)

Natalie feels that her fate is determined by the hostile people surrounding her. She has incorporated her parents' values so that even her own mind betrays her and leads her back to the same path, something Tony will do as well eventually.

Tony takes Natalie by the arm into the woods, again a repetition of her abuse. Although Natalie has repressed this trauma, she recognizes the similarity: "it then occurred to her that she was expected here" (272). Natalie's double becomes the dangerous other now, and Natalie's only means of defense comes from her childhood games: "perhaps there might be a small remembered joke which could unlock the chains, bribe the guards, press the hidden panel" (273). Hattenhauer argues that "Natalie's ostensible escape from the dormitory into nature with Tony turns out to be a regression back along the chain of surrogates to her childhood home" (Hattenhauer, 115). Just as college was a fake escape from home, Tony is another demon that tries to seduce Natalie back into compliance. Tony says, "If you want to run home, nobody is going to keep you *here*" (275). Tony has already brought Natalie to the point of wanting to go home, so her task is complete.

Natalie is thus in the end unable to shake the influence of her parents. Even when she returns from the woods and contemplates suicide, she thinks of her mother: "Mother won't care if I scuff [my shoe] now; it will be lost before it wears out" (279). However, Jackson gives a glimpse of hope in the final paragraphs of the novel. Natalie is stopped from jumping in the river by a man she thinks she recognizes as the one-armed man. This man is a symbol for the Tarot card of the Hanged Man. In his *Pictorial Key to the Tarot* Arthur Edward Waite explains that "the figure, as a whole, suggests life in suspension" (Waite, 116). Keeping in mind Natalie's last name, which is identical to the writer Waite's, the card, and indeed the title of the book, could point to her passive way of living. However, the Hanged Man can also imply unconventional behavior. When Natalie returns to campus she is "alone, and grown-up, and powerful, and not at all afraid" (280). This final line remains ambiguous; however, Jackson has shown often enough that Natalie is divided, and this final

version of her cannot be viewed as a person without contradictions. In the same way the title of the book is ambiguous, suggesting both life in suspension and the world turned upside down. If Nathalie then is like a 'hanged man' or 'hangs a man' remains to be questioned.

Although the success of Natalie's autonomy and her insertion into the Symbolic remains undecided, her ambivalent relation with the institution of marriage is clear. The thought that she will become like her mother is "nauseating" to her (11), but at the same time she is afraid to act autonomously and is attracted to "the idea of having [her] mind taken away from [her]" (138). Like many of the girls Friedan describes, Natalie is frightened by the notion of making her own decisions. This feeling is intensified by her lack of proper role models and her inability to connect with people. Natalie shows schizoid behavior in misinterpreting her identity, "for the multiple personality," as Marta Caminero-Santangelo argues, "completely misrecognizes the self as an other—a distinction crucial to subjectivity—and thus negates the essential precondition of effective agency" (Caminero-Santangelo, 71).

Chapter 2: Eleanor Vance's Entrapment in *The Haunting of Hill House*

In *The Haunting of Hill House* the main character Eleanor finds herself traveling on Dr. Montague's invitation to Hill House. Being disconnected from the world taking care of her bedridden mother for a long time, Eleanor lives in her own fantasies. She is intoxicated by a sense of adventure and hope of finding new friends, even perhaps a lover. Being without friends and hating her only sister and her mother being dead, she is utterly alone in the world. She has never met this Dr. Montague but, having nowhere else to go, accepts his invitation. As will become progressively clear in the novel, she is entrapped in domestic ideology as well as in her own mind. *The Haunting of Hill House* is firmly set in the Gothic tradition and Jackson uses the same conventions as she does in *Hangsaman*. The ambivalent attitude towards domestic ideology is expressed through enclosure and escape, doubles and mental disease. The haunted house format lays emphasis on horror, which makes the critique on domestic ideology less overt, but it is still present. Bernice M. Murphy recognizes this "in that terrible, pervasive sense of indefinable longing and gnawing dissatisfaction" (Murphy 19). Having never been able to develop her own sense of identity, Eleanor has a childish longing for romance and adventure and is so used to living in her infantile fantasies that she is unable to look outside herself, which makes her one of Jackson's many trapped, narcissistic characters. Eleanor's struggle for autonomy and simultaneous longing for symbiosis forms the central conflict of the novel.

In *The Haunting of Hill House* Eleanor quickly meets her double. One of the other three guests of Dr Montague, Theodora, or just Theo, represents a new kind of woman. Eleanor first admires this independent figure, but becoming more and more trapped by the house, eventually comes to hate her fiercely. The two female characters

represent the problems of female identity in the 1950s. Betty Friedan writes in *The Feminine Mystique* that the image of woman has been split. If traditionally women had either been represented as Madonna or as prostitute, the 1950s according to Friedan saw a new kind of fissure in image, namely between "the feminine woman, whose goodness includes the desires of the flesh, and the career woman, whose evil includes every desire of the separate self" (Friedan 31). Both old and new image play an important role in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Jackson uses the "good, pure woman on the pedestal and the whore of the desires of the flesh" (Friedan 31) to situate her novel in the eighteenth-century gothic convention. The man who originally built the house 80 years ago, Old Hugh Crain, filled Hill House with all kinds of warnings to keep his daughters from the desires of the flesh. Also, Montague reads Richardson's *Pamela*, "which features a protagonist like Eleanor who is victimized by a cat like Montague" (Hattenhauer 156). Eleanor and Theodora represent the new split in image. Eleanor longs to have a separate identity like Theodora, but cannot free herself from her upbringing to be the "feminine woman" and adheres to Hugh Crain's teachings in the house to finally become part of his temple of virtue. Friedan argues that "[being] forbidden independence, [women] are finally swallowed in an image of such passive dependence that they want men to make the decisions even in the home" (Friedan 34). Jackson portrays this literally in the female characters. Theodora, who is able to live independently, will eventually return to live with her female roommate, with no male influence, while Eleanor, forced by Montague's decision that she must leave Hill House, kills herself to remain with the house that stands for repressive patriarchy.

Eleanor remains more infantile than Theodora. She is not able to make her own decisions and depends on others for initiating her actions. Eleanor longs for

independence and sometimes diverges from the path that is chosen for her, but almost always regrets it instantly. In his letter with directions, Dr Montague warns them not to stop at the nearby village, stressing the inhabitants' dislike of Hill House. Nevertheless she decides to have some coffee at the local café, but sitting there she only wants to leave: "I will have to drink this coffee because I said I was going to, Eleanor told herself sternly, but next time I will listen to Dr. Montague" (24). She also depends on Theodora's guidance to direct her toward a different kind of behavior than she is used to. However, this assumed attitude collides with the one prearranged for her by her mother. Her mother condemned everything flashy or emancipated. Eleanor is entranced by Theo's emancipation, but when her toenails are painted red and she looks at them, Eleanor is disgusted with herself because she has adopted her mother's disapproval. This makes her susceptible to Hill House's atmosphere of traditional virtuousness. Although she still possesses a longing for independence and emancipation, she has become dependent on the norms that keep her imprisoned in domestic ideology. In his analysis of *The Haunting of Hill House* in *Danse Macabre,* Stephen Kings compares Eleanor's being stunted by her mother's upbringing to the "old Oriental custom of foot binding—only it is not Eleanor's feet that have been bound; it is that part of her mind where the ability to live any sort of independent life must begin" (King 301).

Disrupted familial relations mark the history of Hill House. "Hugh Crain's young wife died minutes before she first was to set eyes on the house" (75), is what Dr. Montague tells his guests, and she was brought "*lifeless*" into Hill House, "the home her husband had built for her" (75). Jackson not only connects her novel to the Gothic tradition in this sentence, but also criticizes Montague's misuse of the word "lifeless," implying that Mrs. Crain was never alive to begin with. In this novel, as for

many of the traditional female gothic heroines, the institution of marriage means death in life.. The house "her husband had built for her" is not a place of protection but one of confinement in passivity and dependence. The other relationships within the Crain family are also distorted. In true gothic convention, the Crain sisters, for example, disagree over who owns the title to the inherited estate, just as Eleanor argues with her sister over a car of which she owns half. That her own situation mirrors that of the Crain sisters foreshadows Eleanor's fate in Hill House.

Dysfunctional family ties also mark Dr. Montague's other guests. For example, Theodora is only referred to by her first name, the absence of a last name suggesting a deliberate break with her family. Luke, another guest, says that he "never had a mother" (166) and seems to placate his aunt only in order to inherit her fortune. Dr. Montague himself arrives at Hill House without his wife. All the guests have different reasons to come to Hill House, but they are all without ties and free to come to Hill House to participate in Montague's investigation of the paranormal, for which they are invited. Hill House, then, becomes a home to an alternative family. The members of the group seem to achieve an instantaneous intimacy. Immediately upon meeting for the first time, Theo calls Eleanor her cousin.

In her notes, Jackson writes that the haunting in Hill House is the "statement and resolution" of its 'inhabitants' insoluble problems (qtd. in Lootens 151). The reader is only informed about the problems of Eleanor, for whom the situation is worse than for the others because she has nowhere else to go, but all the characters cherish the feeling of belonging together. Domestic bliss, however, is only an illusion because Hill House separates people. In her notes Jackson writes:

> the house wants to separate them and drive them away, the people want to stay together in the house; where the others want to stay because they are afraid to

> be alone in to house Erica [sic] wants to stay with them because she is afraid to be alone anywhere, anytime; her life will be indicated as a pattern of loneliness which she is trying to break. (Lootens 155)

John G. Parks applies Irving Malin's theory on new American gothic to another one of Jackson's novels, *The Sundial*: "In new American gothic the family is frequently used as a microcosm and is the source of the members' disfiguring love. The family tends to stunt the full development of its members, who become arrested in narcissism and are unable to grow up" (Parks,"Waiting," 85). Hill House's guests in fact are already stunted in their emotional development before they arrive at the house and all are "arrested in narcissism". That is why nobody is able to respond to Eleanor's pleas for love and belonging.

The two single women in the house are carefully set off against the two married women in the novel. These women, Mrs. Dudley and Mrs. Montague, are both caricatures and function also as comic relief in the novel. They are both defined by their last names, in fact their husbands', contrary to Eleanor and Theodora, who are using their first. James Egan comments that "the gothic normative sharpens Jackson's irony and intensifies her vision of a flattened, empty world" (Egan, 46). Mrs. Dudley's only pleasure seems to be to frighten the guests by mechanically repeating phrases like "In the night … In the dark" (45). She is an obsessive housekeeper, "yet she gave an indefinable air of dirtiness" (36), and is defined by her laconic conformity. While Mrs. Dudley barely makes a sound moving through Hill House, Mrs. Montague "plays the compulsive babbler, rude, intrusive, intent on dominating any conversation she enters" (Egan 48). Mrs. Montague brags that she is able to understand ghosts, although she is obviously ignorant about the true nature of the haunting of Hill House. Pretentiousness is the common character flaw of these two

characters. This is emphasized by the instantaneous friendship between Mrs. Dudley and Mrs. Montague, both driven by their desire for domestic order. “It’s a shame,” Mrs. Montague says, “the way children grow up these days knowing everything. There should be more mysteries for them, more things that belong rightly to grownups, that they have to wait to find out” (213). Having no children of her own, Mrs. Montague is referring here to Eleanor and Theodora. Mrs. Dudley, who is also childless, replies: “Then they find them out the hard way”. Apart from the dramatic irony at work here—the two ladies have no more knowledge of life than Eleanor and Theo do—there is another ironic layer to this conversation, for they are also unknowingly right in perceiving that Eleanor and Theodora are childlike and will have to mature “the hard way”.

The home itself, designed for oppressive patriarchy, is also symbolic for the phallic mother. “Warped to fit the mind of its vicious patriarch,” Tricia Lootens argues, “it is furnished with symbols of the destructive power of motherhood” (Lootens 155). Luke, for example, identifies the house as “motherly,” “Great embracing chairs and sofas which turn out to be hard and unwelcome when you sit down, and reject you at once” (209). Although this is Luke’s own definition of motherly, it fits the intuitive thoughts of the other guests, so no one disagrees with him. The “heart of the house” (119) is fittingly a nursery, which is described as a “tomb” (118). The house, then, becomes the classical gothic symbol for phallic motherhood.

The home functions as a place of confinement. *The Haunting of Hill House* dramatizes the power of a home to entrap its female occupants and render them powerless. Creating the illusion of providing security, it threatens to destroy the autonomy of women. At first Hill House is a place where Eleanor can escape from the

influence of her sister. Obedient in nature, but for the first time making a choice for herself, Eleanor drives toward Hill House, "going docilely along the street, following the lines of traffic, stopping when she was bidden." Eleanor thinks, "I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step" (15), claiming her own identity by repeating the personal pronoun "I". However, she is following a path chosen for her, obedient to Dr. Montague's instructions. The moment she arrives at Hill House it is clear the house takes over: "Hill House came around her in a rush; she was enshadowed, and the sound of her feet on the veranda was an outrage on the utter silence" (36). Hill House, thus, immediately tries to silence Eleanor, to envelop her in submissiveness. But Eleanor is not willing to give up her newfound autonomy and brings "her hand up to the heavy iron knocker that had a child's face, determined to make more noise" (36). Eleanor refuses to be silent and actively tries to knock the child out of herself.

This surge of self-affirmation turns out to be an illusion, for Eleanor has brought her own demons to Hill House. The house only functions as a symbol of the inability to act autonomously. Elaine Showalter, in her book *Sister's Choice,* quotes Claire Kahane's definition of the female gothic. "In the Female Gothic," Kahane argues, "the heroine is imprisoned not in a house but in the female body, which is itself the maternal legacy". Kahane calls the Gothic castle "the house of the dead mother" (qtd. in Showalter 128). This is literally the case for Eleanor, who associates the smell of mold and earth in the house with her mother (103). Eleanor thinks she is in Hill House at Dr. Montague's request, but she is really coming to terms with her feelings of guilt towards her mother. Kahane's description of the heroine's quest for the secrets of feminine existence almost literally fits Eleanor:

> Within an imprisoning structure, a protagonist, typically a young woman whose mother has died, is compelled to seek out the center of a mystery, while

> vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness. Following clues that pull her onward and inward—bloodstains, mysterious sounds—she penetrates the obscure recesses of a vast labyrinthean space and discovers a secret room sealed off by its association with death. In this dark secret center of the Gothic structure, the boundaries of life and death seem confused. (Kahane, qtd. Showalter 128)

Jackson uses this basic gothic structure for her narrative, but makes a few changes. The powerful male figure are Dr. Montague and Hugh Crain, but Eleanor is not sexually threatened by them, nor is there a husband or an inheritance waiting for her in the end. Nevertheless, Eleanor is pulled inward, and writes in blood: "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR" (155). In her notes, Jackson writes "*Leaving house = betrayal of mother*" (Lootens, 112). Even though her mother is dead, Eleanor feels that to leave the house is to betray her mother. This is why the haunting addresses her personally, because it has appealed to her weakness. The secret room is the nursery, sealed by a cold barrier. When the first ghosts appear in Hill House, Eleanor fears her deceased mother is coming to haunt her. "It is only a noise, and terribly cold," she tries to reassure herself, "it is a noise down the hall, far down the end, near the nursery door, and terribly cold, *not* my mother knocking on the wall" (127). Eleanor is more threatened by her mother than an unknown phenomenon. "The boundaries between life and death" are furthermore obscured because the mother and the nursery are both associated with cold, mold and earth, which are all symbols of death.

Eleanor is searching for a new identity. She is attracted to the independent way of life of Theodora, which is "not at all like Eleanor" (8). Like Tony in *Hangsaman*,

Theodora is in fact Eleanor's mirror image, or more precisely the projection of Eleanor's desires, the woman she wants to become. The difference between Eleanor and Theodora is crystallized early in the novel. Dr. Montague invites Eleanor to Hill House because of her past experiences with the paranormal. In her childhood showers of stones plagued her home, just after her father had passed away. Theodora, reacting to this story, recounts how she once threw a brick through a roof and "remembering the whipping but remembering also the lovely crash"; she "went out and did it again" (73). Eleanor sees herself as a victim, a passive player in her story. Theodora, on the other hand, already as a young child delighted in doing things she was not allowed to do. When they arrive at Hill House, Eleanor has a fleeting thought about running down the housekeeper, but it is Theodora who actually does. Eleanor is therefore essentially the violated, while Theodora is the violator, but Jackson keeps this division ambiguous. Never disclosing why the rains of stones hit Eleanor's house, Jackson suggests that Eleanor might have done it herself. Likewise, the reader never knows if Theodora actually aimed her car at the caretaker, since it is only from Theo herself that we hear the story. It might have been made up, just as Eleanor makes up stories about her past.

Theodora is the antisocial double of Eleanor. In earlier drafts of the novel, Jackson had included a passage that is very similar to the argument Tony and Natalie have in *Hangsaman* about antagonists. In one draft Theodora says:

> to each of us—if we are fortunate—is given one other person, the true doppelganger, the other half of the self, and the union here is sometimes star-crossed, sometimes illicit, always deadly; it is the moment of perception when the victim sees his murderer, the brother discovers his sister, beauty destroys [embraces] the beast." (qtd in Lootens 116)

Perhaps Jackson thought this passage was too explicit about the relationship between Eleanor and Theodora and probably did not use this passage in order to keep the relationship between the two women more ambiguous. If Jackson had included this passage, it would have been evidence of Eleanor's delusions, just as Natalie is imagining Tony. However, this passage clearly shows Jackson was very aware of the Freudian notion of the Doppelgänger and created the two women as dangerous doubles. Moreover, the exchangeability between "destroy" and "embrace" is remarkable, pointing again to the destructiveness of nurturing bonds.

Like all Doppelgängers, Theodora becomes increasingly seductive and more aggressive. When Theodora paints Eleanor's toenails red, she mocks Eleanor's earlier fantasy of being a famous courtesan. Eleanor is horrified at the sight of her bright red nails: "it's wicked," she says and adds, "I don't like to feel helpless" (17), which is, of course, exactly what she is. She immediately thinks of her mother again, which Theo shrugs off by saying, "your mother would have been delighted to see you with your toenails red" (117). But to be a "woman of some colour," Eleanor would have to be a "different person" (116). It would mean Eleanor has to reject the notions of proper womanhood her mother and Hugh Crain taught her. "Either such self-indulgence is wicked," Lootens writes, "or she has been played for a fool" (Lootens 164).

Eleanor's association of the red toenails with the dirtiness of her feet, suggests her anxieties about her sexuality. Eleanor's repression and hatred of "dirty" female bodies finds an outlet when Theodora's room is found smeared in a red substance, seeming to be blood. However, Eleanor, barely reacts to the blood, but instead keeps thinking of Theodora as "beastly and soiled and dirty" (158). By thinking in this way about Theo, Eleanor is reaffirming her identity. At this point, it is clear the reader cannot trust Eleanor's judgment. The horror of the room itself and the fact that her

name is written in (menstrual?) blood on the wall is not frightening to Eleanor; "it's like a joke that didn't come off," she says (156). She is delighted to discover what she thinks is an outward manifestation of Theodora's filthiness. She says to Montague, "I keep remembering Theo putting red polish . . ." and laughs. Here Jackson suggests that Eleanor herself might have been the one who smeared Theodora's room with blood. To her disappointment, however, Eleanor now has to share her room and clothes with Theodora, making them "practically twins" (158). Eleanor has not exposed Theodora's dirtiness, but has let out her own repressed self, or expressed her sexual anxieties, bringing her ultimately closer to Theodora. Whereas Eleanor first was charmed by Theodora's assertion of kinship, she now feels confined by it.

Hill House creates the illusion of belonging, making its inmates believe that there is someone to hold your hand in the night. During another ghostly manifestation, Eleanor is lying in the dark desperately holding on to Theodora's hand. The moment Eleanor realizes Theodora is on the other side of the room, Eleanor screams her famous line: "whose hand was I holding?" (163). In her notes Jackson marks this line as the most important in the book (see Lootens 159; Hattenhauer 163), but its meaning is unclear. If Eleanor is holding someone else's hand it has to be her own, and she was imagining herself to be the other, signifying her disturbing fragmentation. But if it is Hill House extending a comforting hand, the seduction is complete because Eleanor really believes someone is there. Perhaps the thought that there is no one to hold her hand is the thing most frightening to Eleanor. Jackson obviously deemed it important to keep the meaning ambiguous, uncertain, like Eleanor's inner life.

Eleanor's irresolvable ambivalence, her simultaneous desire and loathing for Theodora, makes her resemble one of Julia Kristeva's abjected subjects. As Kelly

Hurley explains in *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siecle*, Kristeva defines abjection as

> the ambivalent status of a human subject, who, on the one hand, labors to maintain (the illusion of) an autonomous and discrete self-identity, responding to any threat to that self-conception with empathic, sometimes violent, denial, and who on the other hand welcomes the event or confrontation that breaches the boundaries of the ego and casts the self down into vertiginous pleasures of indifferentation. To be thus "outcast" is to suffer an anxiety often nauseating in its intensity, but to embrace abjection is to experience *jouissance*. (Hurley 4)

The process of "abjection" involves feeling sickened, but when it is embraced, as Eleanor does in the end with Hill House when she invites Hugh Crain to "come and dance" (231), is to feel joyful. Jackson connects Eleanor's violent reactions to others with the image of stones, creating intertextuality with her own short story "The Lottery". In this story the 'winning' of the yearly lottery does not reward the winner with a price, but with a stoning. When Theodora says, "We're going to be practically twins," Eleanor thinks she "would like to batter her with rocks" (158). Eleanor repeatedly reacts to Theodora with violent or nauseated thoughts. Because Theodora is her mirror image this is a reaction to her own confused identity. Eleanor's strange behavior increasingly alienates her from the other guests. Realizing she is actually becoming an "outcast," being thrown out of this newfound community, she turns to the house itself to rescue her. She surrenders herself completely and literally gives herself to the house, going into a state of "indifferentation."

Jackson was clearly aware of Freud's theories, which were very popular in the 1950s. Jackson appropriates his theory on doubles as protection against the destruction of the ego. Eleanor's doubling in Theodora is a way to protect herself

against extinction and stems from her primitive narcissism. Her double reverses its function as Eleanor is beginning to mark off her ego and Theodora becomes more dangerous. Although Jackson builds her narrative on these Freudian premises, she also places Freud's patriarchal psychoanalysis[1] in a broader psychoanalytical framework and adapts his theory to a female perspective. Judie Newman argues that feminist analysts like Nancy Chodorow, "have shifted the focus from the oedipal to the preoedipal stage," looking to account for psychosexual differences in the bond between the mother and the infant. According to Chodorow, the father is seen from the beginning as separate, while the mother is not. Because the experience of unity with the mother, the mother is both seductive and terrifying. "Unity is bliss; yet it entails total dependence and loss of self" (Newman 170).

Although Jackson suggests that infantile complexes are haunting Eleanor, the reader never knows what her childhood traumas exactly consist of. Eleanor's identity is strongly influenced by her mother, but how is not clearly explained in the text. It seems to be a more general, preoedipal condition Eleanor is suffering from. "Female gender identity is . . . threatened by separation," Newman argues, "and shaped throughout life by fluctuations of symbiosis and detachment from their mother" (171). Eleanor's immersion in the house, which seems to her a liberation from, is, in fact, a reabsorption by her mother. This reabsorption brings both fear and joy to Eleanor; hence her mixed reactions to the haunting. In this light, Eleanor's attachment to Theodora could be interpreted as an "attempted reproduction

[1] Freud bases gender on the possession or lack of the phallus. Judie Newman writes, "In the Freudian paradigm, the male achieves adulthood by passing through the Oedipus complex, which fear of castration by the father induces him to overcome" (170). This fear, then, helps to make the male accept the prohibition of incest, encouraging the superego to form in agreement with social norms. Because the female, in a parallel process, discovers the lack of the phallus, she comes to see her mother as inferior and abandons her in favor of the father, to form the oedipal relation, "which is," writes Newman, "the necessary precursor of adult heterosexual relationships—always the Freudian goal" (170).

of the symbiotic bond through close female friendship" (Newman 172). Eleanor seeks to recapture some aspect of the bond with her lost mother in befriending Theodora, but is simultaneously frightened by the annihilation of her newly found ego.

Eleanor's anxieties, thus, seem to spring from the process of abjection. Eleanor has never lived without her mother being in close proximity and has never completely separated from her. At the moment Eleanor takes the car she separates herself for the first time and here she starts to clear out a space for herself. Eleanor is touched by a little girl in the restaurant who refuses to drink her milk from a regular glass, and insists on drinking from her "cup of stars." "Don't do it, Eleanor told the little girl; 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" (22). Eleanor admires the girl for her resistance, and copies the "cup of stars" in her own fantasies, but will never be able to establish such a forceful identity.

For Kristeva "abjection begins when this proto-subject, very tentatively begins to clear out a space on which the ego will be constructed and from which an 'I' will emerge" (Hurley 43). During her first night in Hill House, Eleanor begins to be very conscious of herself for the first time and tries to emerge as an ego, although she is only able to do so in relation to the others. " 'And you are Theodora,' Eleanor said, 'because *I* am Eleanor.' An Eleanor she told herself triumphantly, who belongs" (61). Eleanor thus fosters an illusionary autonomy, since her identity is only created by splitting parts of herself into the identities of others. Eleanor fantasizes about autonomy and individuality, but is at the same time afraid she does not belong; she is "always afraid of being alone" (160).

According to Kristeva, the process of abjection is terrifying, like the process of birth, "the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from

another body in order to be" (10). The ambivalent subject, Eleanor, is furthermore not directly willing "to relinquish the state of being purely constituted by the fierce, directionless energies of the id" (Hurley 43). In this light, the manifestation in Theodora's room takes on another function, a kind of reversed birth, signifying Eleanor's desire for a state of indifferentation. The attack is focused on the destruction of Theodora's colorful identity. Furthermore, the message "HELP ELEANOR PLEASE COME HOME ELEANOR" suggests, certainly if Eleanor wrote it herself, that she longs for symbiosis with Hill House. Jackson wrote in her notes, "*Leaving house = betrayal of mother.* Eleanor does not belong anywhere. Betray mother by being born—taking away part of the mother" (qtd. in Lootens 158). The message tells Eleanor she has to reverse her betrayal by undoing the birth of her identity. "The entire sequence," Newman writes, "culminates in an admission from Eleanor of her own fear of disintegration" (Newman, 177). This admission takes place when Theodora wears Eleanor's sweater, again confronting her with another self-image: "There is only one of me, and it's all I've got. I hate seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate so that I'm living in one half, my mind, and I see the other half of me helpless . . . and I could stand any of it if I could only surrender " (160). Eleanor is subconsciously aware that the autonomy she desires is only illusionary, since half of her will remain "helpless". Newman argues that "Forming a close relationship with Theo, constituting Theo as 'other half,' are strategies that culminate disastrously in the replication rather than the repudiation of the symbiotic bond, and a desire to surrender autonomy altogether" (Newman, 177-78).

The haunting in Hill House is obviously related to ambivalent mother bonds. Eleanor's relationship with her mother is complicated though her feelings of guilt, manifesting in Eleanor's imagining it is her mother who is knocking on the wall. As

Newman argues, “Eleanor’s internalization of both the ‘unmothered child’ and the ‘neglected mother’ images is reflected in the double mother-child nature of the haunting” (Newman, 175). While Eleanor tries to escape the authoritarianism of the house and of her mother, she is afraid to do so as well. “Most of the characters of new American gothic,” Parks paraphrases Malin, “are isolates who are unable to belong to the world outside their family or home. While they would like to be a part of the big world, they are too afraid to leave the little world” (Parks, 85). Eleanor is frightened to leave Hill House and again betray her mother. In the end, she is too afraid to claim her own identity and surrenders to the process of abjection. In a final effort to become one with the mother, she kills herself, making *The Haunting of Hill House* the most pessimistic of the three novels discussed.

Chapter 3: Merricat's Independence in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

Jackson's last finished novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, features one of her few first-person narrators: Mary Katherine Blackwood. Mary Katherine, nicknamed Merricat, is also one of the few protagonists Jackson created with a strong, independent character. She is not victimized, but on the contrary, having killed all her family members but two, a violator. Living only with her sister, Constance, and Uncle Julian, Merricat's world is secluded. Her worst days are when she has to venture into the village to get supplies. The plot evolves around the arrival of Cousin Charles, a typical Gothic intruder, who wants to marry Constance and take possession of the Blackwood manor. Jackson returns here to the use of Gothic tropes, although in a different manner. In this novel, Jackson inverts and parodies Gothic conventions. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is the only novel discussed in this thesis in which the protagonist succeeds in overcoming the Gothic intruder, and save her independence. In the end, Merricat will create her own sphere by stepping outside ideology and history into her own fantasy world. Although she thus remains in the Symbolic, she manages to stay independent and happy, without having to forfeit her own identity.

In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle,* the house, again, plays a prominent role. John G. Parks accurately describes the function of the gothic house in Jackson's novels "not just as the focus of action or as atmosphere, but as a force or influence upon character or a reflection of character" (Parks "Chambers" 243). Blackwood manor is the reflection of generations of Blackwood women, both defining and defined by Merricat and Constance. "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" (1).

Domesticity is defined by belongings, but they function not as property, but as protection. When Cousin Charles arrives it is clear that he is pursuing the possessions of the sisters. However, Merricat tries to rebuke him by destroying those things Charles wants so dearly.

The castle is in the traditional sense a place of protection. The traditions and the manner in which the family members live conforms to the ideology of separate spheres. In this ideology the man was supposed to encounter all the dangers of the outside world. Colin Haines argues that women in these divided spheres "were to sustain men by supplying that comfort, healing, and moral fortitude otherwise lacking in the world outside" (Haines 135). Constance, for her part, perfectly adheres to her role. She cooks and cleans in the manner all the Blackwood wives did, and provides comfort and healing for the invalid Uncle Julian. The Blackwood house is a true shelter for the Blackwood family against the villagers, who "have always hated" the Blackwoods (4).

However, Merricat defies her feminine role. She is the one who goes into the village and exposes herself to the verbal violence of the villagers. For the ideology of separate spheres, "it was imperative then, that women *not* engage in the world outside the home, for doing so could invite the danger of the world back in" (Haines 135). Merricat is not happy to go into the village, but does so in order to protect Constance and their way of life. When Merricat at one time returns from the village, she is chilled when Constance remarks that she might one day follow into the village. Merricat is aware of the danger this could bring to the house and actively tries to keep Constance within the house, thus usurping the role of the man. When danger comes to the house in the form of Cousin Charles it shows exactly what Merricat is afraid of: the possibility that Constance will marry and their independence will be gone. Also,

when the sisters are visited by a few of the people that still dare to come to the house, one of these visitors says to Constance: "It's spring, you're young, you're lovely, you have a right to be happy. Come back to the world" (27). She thereby shows that Constance is an eligible bachelorette, even though once accused of killing her whole family.

Jackson parodies Gothic convention in more ways than one. As Kate Ferguson Ellis says of the gothic heroines of the traditional Gothic, "By acting like Pamela, they can purify the fallen aristocratic castle and make it into a home worthy of the name" (Ellis 8). Likewise, Constance is purifying the Blackwood name by repeating her mother's domestic rituals. The house then, again, becomes a symbol of the mother. However, this mother was intentionally killed by her daughter Merricat, and Constance, by protecting her sister in this act, has been accessory to this murder. The matricide protects the sisters from the ultimate traditional goal of the gothic heroine: marriage. The question then becomes who in this novel is the heroine and who is the villain. By giving the point of view to Merricat, Jackson makes the reader sympathetic to a mass murderer. Merricat is, as Hattenhauer contends, "generally more male-identified. She plays the husband's role by taking her sister as her partner" (Hattenhauer 177).

The villain in this novel is Cousin Charles, the gothic intruder. He comes to the house seeking Constance as an obedient wife and the money that is supposedly hidden within the house. He directly takes up his role as patriarch by sleeping in the dead father's bedroom and wearing his watch and chain. He also noticeably tries to give Constance the role of the mother by making her wearing her mother's jewelry. He constantly lets Constance cook for him and it seems like he does not do anything else than eat while complaining that Uncle Julian "likes to be waited on" (117), while

this is exactly what he wants for himself. Unconsciously he hereby repeats the behavior of the father before his death. Uncle Julian tells:

> My brother sometimes remarked upon what we ate, my wife and I; he was a just man, and never stinted his food, so long as we did not take too much. He watched my wife take sausage that morning, Constance. I saw him watching her. We took little enough from him, Constance. He had pancakes and fried eggs and sausage but I felt that he was going to speak to my wife; the boy ate hugely. (48)

Eating takes on a dramatic symbolic role in this novel, for while indulging so greatly in the food prepared by Constance, the father often sent Merricat to her room without supper as punishment for disobedience. This also seems part of the reason Merricat put arsenic in the sugar thereby killing the whole family except Constance, who never takes sugar, and Uncle Julian, who only takes little. While Natalie in *Hangsaman* only fantasizes about murdering a male 'lover' and thereby opposing 'normal femininity,' Merricat actually does so.

Merricat is rightfully afraid of Charles as someone who has come to change her perfect, unchanging world. He has come to bring back the past and her dead relatives. Symbolically enough, she destroys her father's watch, trying to stop time and thereby the change the intruder threatens to bring about. Jackson, however, not only inverts Gothic traditions in this novel, but also the oedipal process. Neither Merricat nor Constance long for their mother or their father. They also do not seek marriage, the idea of a boyfriend is ridiculous to Merricat (82). It is the man, Charles, who desires Constance. He himself wants to secure his position as patriarch. As Haines argues, Oedipus is not "the trajectory of infantile identification and/or desire, but the trajectory of *paternal* desire, indeed of patriarchal culture itself" (Haines 62).

Kari J. Winter writes:

> Female writers of Gothic fiction fear the unchecked power of men and therefore explore the possibilities of resistance to the patriarchal order. Female Gothic plots usually center on women trying to escape from decaying family estates and perverse patriarchs. (Winter 21-22)

We Have Always Lived in the Castle reverses this traditional plot of the female gothic. Instead of trying to escape the estate, Merricat tries to preserve it, even by burying or destroying family heirlooms. Instead of escaping the perverse patriarch Charles, she tries to expel him. Merricat hereby becomes the patriarch herself. As Hattenhauer argues, "Jackson puts the feminine and masculine Gothic in dialogue by having the home destroyed partially and having one of those responsible, Merricat, roam the ruin while the locals wander the larger arena" (Hattenhauer 185). The house, indeed, is from top of destroyed when Merricat starts a fire. Like Mrs. Rochester in Jane Eyre, she wanders into the room of the patriarch and lights a fire. However, it is not Mr. Rochester who remains at the castle but the madwoman in the attic herself. Jackson consciously made an intertextuality link with Charlotte Brönte's famous novel. A couple of times in the novel Merricat refers to one of the other old mansions in the village, namely the Rochester house: "the Rochester house and the Blackwood house and even the town hall had been brought here perhaps accidentally from some far lovely country where people lived with grace" (6). Although the Rochester house was supposed to belong to Constance, being the birthplace of their mother, they have lost their claim to it, probably because it belonged to the female side of the family. Anyhow, in the end, they remain in the Blackwood manor, the name of which already foreshadows its fate.

The castle from the title is obviously the Blackwood home, but the house is not referred to as a castle, though it is a grand estate, until it burns down. The ruin, then, resembles a castle in Merricat's eyes. Michael Sadleir has pointed out that the ruin is an expression of rebellion: "a ruin expresses the triumph of chaos over ruin, and the Gothicistic movement was, in origin at least, a movement toward freedom and away from the control of discipline" (qtd. in Fleenor 13). The ruin also symbolizes the stereotypical image of disorder attributed to women according to Juliann E. Fleenor, or it is used to create an atmosphere of disease. "The ruin metaphor joins two contrasting meanings—of rebellion and of the female herself—into an ambivalent symbol" (Fleenor 13). The Blackwood castle is such an ambivalent symbol. The ruins stand as a reminder to the villagers of the resistance of the Blackwood sisters against the influence of the villagers. At the same time, the two women hiding amongst those ruins are not mentally healthy. However, by focalizing from inside the ruins, Jackson makes clear that the two sisters are not incapacitated by their mental state. They are happy and pity the villagers who come to look at the burned house. The apparent disorder of the ruins has become a new order, a new way of living, for the sisters.

As argued before, the gothic castle often becomes a prison for the female occupants. Ellis argues:

> The foregrounding of women as subjects through which the experience of Salvation is conveyed raises contradictions about the enclosed space she "rules." A space where "terror, doubt, and division" cannot enter is a place where innocence cannot be undermined by the "rough world" outside it. But walls that cannot be penetrated become a prison. A castle turned into prison and reconverted into a home (or destroyed so that its prisoners can establish a home elsewhere) is the underlying structure of

feminine Gothic. (Ellis 44-45)

The Blackwood mansion is in the end set on fire by Merricat herself. The villagers arriving on the scene first do put an end to the fire, only to start destroying the house from within afterwards, "together we watched the great feet of men stepping across our doorsill, dragging their hoses, bringing filth and confusion and danger into our house" (102). This shows Constance the true male principle that was before invisible to her. Although Merricat needs to board and lock the place up, the sisters reconvert the house into a new home just for the two of them, outside patriarchal ideology. This novel thus shows, in contrast with the two previous discussed novels, a successful female gothic narrative. Finally Merricat's fantasy of living on the moon has become reality. Although this end may seem not too happy, two maidens living in a half destroyed house, they are actually happy. Merricat says: "I am thinking that we are on the moon, but it is not quite as I supposed it would be," upon which Constance replies: "It is a very happy place, though" (133). She hereby lets the reader know she is now content with living outside society and never marrying.

As discussed before, when Cousin Charles arrives at the house he takes up the room of the dead father. He also takes up the role of the man in the household. After his arrival Constance urges Merricat to now stay inside: " 'Merricat, dear, I think if Charles doesn't mind it, it might be a good idea. I never feel quite comfortable when you're away in the village' " (72). Merricat does pretend to stay at home, but secretly follows Charles to the village where she sees him sitting down with the other men from the town, precisely those men who have tormented her most. For Merricat, it thus immediately becomes clear that Cousin Charles is one of the villagers. It is in Charles' room that she starts the fire, although it is not entirely clear if she means to do so. When the fire starts, Charles immediately runs to the village, only yelling to

Constance to not try and carry the safe. After the destruction of the house he will never get back in, because Constance has now seen, what Merricat saw before: "She knew now that Charles was a ghost and a demon, one of the strangers" (143). Cousin Charles is forever banned from the Blackwood estate after the fire.

The hatred of the village against the Blackwoods increased after the murders. Before, they hated in silence, but after the Blackwood estate came into the hands of the Blackwood girls, the villagers started to dislike them openly. The people of the village apparently cannot accept that the sisters are living self-sufficiently. Karen J. Hall argues that they "must be represented in a way which will serve a function in the patriarchal system; they become witches, monsters used to frighten children by day and adults by night back into the boundaries of acceptable, obedient behavior" (Hall, 118).

Precisely because of this, the plot needs to lead up to a confrontation, namely the attack, literarily a stoning, of the house. Sarah Salih explains that Judith Butler has pointed out

> that the desire to kill someone for not conforming to the gender norms by which subjects are supposed to live means "life" itself requires the norm, while living outside the norm involves placing oneself at risk of death—sometimes actual death of delegtimation and non-recognition (Salih 11)

After the stoning of Blackwood manor, the villagers call the Blackwood sisters no longer girls, but ladies and accept their place on the outside of the system.

Merricat, who "with any luck at all … could have been born a werewolf" (1), enjoys the role the villagers gave her to play. She puts it to use to keep them at bay and distinguish herself from them. She also turns it around, she *abjects*. While in the village, Merricat continuously wishes "rot" on the village: "I always thought about rot

when I came toward the row of stores; I thought about burning black painful rot that ate away from the inside, hurting dreadfully. I wished it on the village" (6). This is a way to distinguish herself from the village, to create a boundary between her and the village.

While Constance is still considered as a woman who could one day be married, Merricat seems to be asexual. Judith Butler argues that:

> the fall from established gender boundaries initiates a sense of radical dislocation which can assume a metaphysical significance. If human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside established gender is in some way to put one's very existence into question (Salih 27)

This also seems to happen with Merricat. The villagers want her gone, to be nonexistent. But also within the household Merricat is invisible. Uncle Julian never acknowledges her existence. When he has finally died because of the damage of the arsenic during the attack on the house, Merricat only momentarily feels sorry: "I sat by the creek, wishing that I had been kinder to Uncle Julian. Uncle Julian had believed that I was dead, and now he was dead himself; bow your heads to our beloved Mary Katherine, I thought, or you will be dead" (111).

Furthermore, when Merricat's parents were still alive she was often ignored or sent upstairs. When Helen Clarke visits and posits the idea of marriage to Constance, she even, for a moment, forgets the existence of Merricat: "I stood up and spoke directly to Constance and she looked around at me, almost surprised" (27).

Constance adheres to the norms that are accepted of her. As is ready apparent in her name, she is constant, repeating her mother's norms and values. Butler sees this "reiteration of a norm or set of norms" (Butler, 12), as a way of performing one's gender. This is not by choice, but rather, the person is "interpellated," called by the

existing gender norms (Butler 12). Constance does not choose to follow the norms that are expected of her, but has been taught to do so by her mother.

In Butler's view, agency lies in the failure to repeat the norms: "those iterations that, failing to cite the norm fully or conclusively, call it into question, subvert or undermine it, by bringing its contingent status to the fore" (qtd. in Haines 37). This is exactly what Merricat does and where her behavior deviates from that of Constance. While wanting to keep things the same, Merricat is the one able to take agency and thereby protect the sisters from interpellation. When she feels the pull of interpellation at Constance and sees herself disappearing, she walks to the kitchen and smashes the good milk pitcher: "it had been our mother's and I left the pieces on the floor so Constance would see them. I took down the second-best milk pitcher, which did not match the cups; I was allowed to pour milk, so I filled it and took it to the drawing room" (27). In this way, Merricat ultimately does what she is expected to do, but only after first rebelling; she does not "cite the norm fully". Furthermore, by leaving the pieces on the floor she also makes this and herself visible to Constance.

Merricat fantasizes over her dead parents, imagining them as she would have liked them to be. In these fantasies she is overtly present: "Our beloved, our dearest Mary Katherine must be guarded and cherished. Thomas, give your sister your dinner; she would like more to eat" (96). Thus, she makes herself visible. She appeals to the power they had over her. She nails her father's notebook to a tree in order to protect the land against outsiders. In this way, she uses the respect the villagers had for her father to keep them away. Furthermore, she makes extensive rules for herself, thereby creating her own norms.

While Merricat thus empowers herself, it means she places herself outside society. Already eighteen years old, Merricat continuous to exist in a sort of fantasy

world. The childhood games have become a reality. Jonathan Lethem, in his introduction to *We Have Always Lived,* accurately describes Merricat as "an archetype of the feral, presexual tomboy. Merricat is far more disturbing, though, precisely for being a grown woman; what's sublimated in her won't be resolved by adolescence" (*Castle* x). He remarks very pointedly that Merricat will never grow up. She will always remain in her own Symbolic world.

However, after the fire and the stoning of the house, the relationship of the sisters with the outside world changes. The sisters will never be seen again by anyone, existing as a sort of legend or myth. In penance for their crime, the villagers bring offers of food to the sisters. They truly have become the witches in the gingerbread house: " 'You can't go on those steps,' the children warned each other; 'if you do the ladies will get you'" (146). The villagers have become afraid of the sisters. First encouraging their children in their mocking of the sisters, they now apologize: "we found on the doorsill a basket of fresh eggs and a note reading, 'He didn't mean it, please'" (146). Hattenhauer argues that "Jackson subverts myth by rooting it not just in personal fantasy—private demons—but in traces of the public. Indeed Merricat announces right away that her favorite genres are not just fairytales, but also history" (Hattenhauer 186).

The persecution of the sisters, the fire, the stoning all reminds the reader of the persecution of witches. Jackson, who also wrote books about witches, was very familiar with the subject and the images of fire and stoning reappear again and again in her work. Elizabeth Janeway argues that "the witch role permits the woman to imagine that she can exercise some sort of power, even if its evil power" (qtd. in Carpenter "Establishment," 203). The Blackwood sisters have found in their role the

freedom to take control over their own lives: to choose to live together in stead of marrying.

Haines has likened the Blackwood sisters to Butler's Antigone. He explains that :

> Certainly, she [Antigone] does not achieve another sexuality, one that is *not* heterosexuality, but she does seem to deinstitute heterosexuality by refusing to do what is necessary to stay alive for Haemon, by refusing to become a mother and a wife, by scandalizing the public with her wavering gender, by embracing death as her bridal chamber. (Haines 223)

This is what literally happens in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Both sisters now refuse the call of the world. Several people come to knock on the door, asking them to come out, "to come back into the world" (27), to follow the path of feminine adjustment. But the house now "looks like a tomb" (140), and the sisters will never answer. Finally accepted in their role outside society, they have become a legend, a tale to spook the children. And while this may seem a sad ending, for the Blackwoods it is not: " 'I am so happy,' Constance said at last, gasping, 'Merricat, I am so happy.' 'I told you that you would like it on the moon'" (145).

Conclusion

In recent years, Shirley Jackson's Gothic fiction has deservedly received new critical attention. No longer just recognized for her domestic writing, she has finally been given more acknowledgment than Betty Friedan seemed fit to give. Jackson used Gothic motives to explore the horrors she, and other women, faced in her own time, or as John G. Parks says: "Jackson's gothic fiction is an effective mode for her explorations of the violation of the human self—the aching loneliness, the unendurable guilt, the dissolution and disintegrations, the sinking into madness, the violence and lovelessness" (Parks "Chambers" 249). Certainly, madness, violence and "lovelessness" play important parts in *Hangsaman, The Haunting of Hill House,* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.

The three novels discussed in this thesis focus on the psychologies of three very different protagonists, who are haunted by the same demons of the ideology they live in. Perhaps with the exception of Eleanor Vance, these are young women, who struggle in their development. Or, as Lynette Carpenter describes the typical Jackson protagonist:

> She is a social misfit, not beautiful enough, charming enough, or articulate enough to get along well with other people, too introverted and awkward. In short, she does not fit any of the feminine stereotypes available to her. (Carpenter "Domestic" 145)

Natalie Waite is a lonely girl, adaptable to the influence of her father and teacher, but clearly aware she will never be a girl like the other girls at college. Eleanor longs for romance, but has been secluded for so long from a social world by taking care of her mother that she is no longer able to look outside of herself. Finally, the sisters

Blackwood are the ones who are resolved to keep their role at the outside, while actually adhering to a stereotype: that of the witch.

One of the primary Gothic tropes Jackson uses is the house, or the Gothic castle. The house as a symbol of the self, or the mother. A place of protection but also confinement. Juliann E. Fleenor describes the castle in female gothic as: "the image of interior space, which could be a symbol of reintegration, is used to suggest repression, segregation, and dichotomy" (Fleenor 15). She goes on arguing that

> the Female Gothic does not establish any new definitions of female sexuality, though they are sadly needed. That is beyond its scope; it does, however, challenge assumptions about the nature of the Gothic by revealing that the central conflict is with the mother and not with the husband/lover/father. It also offers the opportunity to see literature and the world through the eyes of a woman. (15)

For the protagonists in these novels it is impossible to step outside what is expected from them, with the exception of the sisters Blackwood. However, in order to do so, they have to step outside sexuality, burying themselves to never be married. Furthermore, the conflict often seems to evolve around the mother in Jackson's work. Although the father takes an important role in *Hangsaman*, the person Natalie most rebels against is her mother. In *The Haunting of Hill House* it is the dead mother who haunts Eleanor and in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Constance still feels the presence of her dead mother by keeping up with what was expected of her.

Together, the three novels discussed could be seen as forming a kind of female life cycle. The first, *Hangsaman*, is about a young girl, indoctrinated by her father and abandoned by her mother. Unable to function according to what is expected from her, she splits herself and creates her own double, Tony. This double is her only friend and

seems for a moment to give her a means to escape, only to turn out to be her most dangerous opposition. In the second novel, *The Haunting of Hill House,* the protagonist is somewhat more mature, at least in age. But she has never been able to develop a clear identity and still lives in the shadow of her mother, escaping in childish fantasies. The last novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, however, the heroines succeed in happiness and independence, only because they have chosen not to follow the path of feminine adjustment.

Colin Haines argues that "the house, with its patriarchal vision of heterosexuality and procreation for women 'calls out to'—or 'hails'—this individual, in an attempt to reconstruct her identity in its own normative image" (Haines 63). This is certainly true for all three novels. Natalie is called out by her college environment and Eleanor by Hill House itself. Even in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Merricat remarks after Charles has moved into her father's room: "Almost as though in the house of her life there had always been a room kept for Cousin Charles" (64). Thus, while Friedan criticized Jackson because she felt Jackson was advertising the role of the housewife in her fiction, clearly in these three novels Jackson saw the devastating influence these houses had on their female occupants.

The house functions both as a symbol of the dominant ideology as well as the psychology of the protagonists. Fleenor argues that "as a psychological form, [the house] provokes various feelings of terror, anger, awe, and sometime self-fear and self-disgust directed toward the female role, female sexuality, female physiology, and procreation" (Fleenor 15). Jackson dramatizes this self-fear or self-disgust is shown by Jackson by the creation of doubles and the process of abjection. Natalie is disgusted by her family role, linking it to the feeling of being burned alive. Eleanor is the protagonist most obviously disgusted by herself, but projects it in her abhorrence

of Theodora. Merricat, finally, has already placed her terror outside of herself, abjecting herself by projecting this feeling onto the villagers.

In her own life, Jackson herself also resisted her interpellation into the dominant ideology. As Hattenhauer writes, she

> resisted socialization based on these two models of adulthood and this scene of maturation by becoming an introvert and social outcast. She simultaneously tried to fit in and yet cultivated her sense of self as Other. She spent most of her time in a room of her own, writing. (Hattenhauer 25)

Like Merricat and Constance, Jackson did not refute the rumors she was practicing witchcraft and the paranormal. However, although she makes use of these elements in her work, she always keeps the role of the supernatural ambiguous and clearly connects it with the absurdities of reality itself. She said:

> I have had for many years a consuming interest in magic and the supernatural. I think this is because I find there so convenient a shorthand statement of the possibilities of human adjustment to what seems to be at best an inhuman world and the wickedness of human behavior. (Oppenheimer 125)

She uses the paranormal to show how unstable identities can be forced to adhere to the myths of a dominant culture and how it can destroy them.

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