

## CHAPTER NINE

# *The Haunting of Hill House*

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Published in 1959, just one year after *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House* relinquishes the dark humor and cultural satire of its predecessor. Instead of continuing the dialogue with myth and myth criticism, it resumes the dialogue with Gothic. For *The Haunting of Hill House* is Shirley Jackson's most Gothic novel. It features her fullest development of the house as a metaphor for the disunified subject. To that end, it returns to the theme of language as the means of subject formation. It returns to the psychological fabulation of *Hangsaman* and *The Bird's Nest*, maintaining their theme of interpellation through the family.<sup>1</sup> It also resumes a radically unreliable narrative point of view by focalizing through a delusional character. And it leaves some plot developments undecidable.

John Montague, an anthropology professor investigating an allegedly haunted house, is another satiric parody of Stanley Edgar Hyman. "Round" and "bearded," Montague is "a little man both knowledgeable and stubborn" (60). Full of himself, John Montague talks down to people as if he is lecturing. In Jackson's notes, he is the "voice of knowledge scholarship learning."<sup>2</sup> Yet in other ways, Montague is Hyman's mirror opposite. Jackson tweaks Hyman by having her narrator and characters almost always call Montague "Doctor," rubbing in the fact that Hyman had no doctorate. Similarly, she gives his parodic twin the last name of the anthropologist Ashley Montague, who was known as one of Bennington's most effete faculty members.

John Montague's patina of empiricism and objectivity deflect any penetrating view of his underlying commitment not to investigate reports of ghosts but to endorse them. He not only believes in poltergeists, but also ascribes motive and agency to them. He says, "Poltergeists like to turn people out of bed violently" (141). Another of Jackson's comic proponents of the supernatural, he reveals that he believes that Hill House is

literally haunted. He says, "The evil is the house itself" (82) and "We have only one defense, and that is running away. At least it can't *follow* us, can it?" (124). This belief in ghosts is a trace of his youth: "He had been looking for an honestly haunted house all his life." As such, it was not anthropology that led him to this belief. Rather, it was this belief that led him to anthropology: "In this field he might come closest to his true vocation, the analysis of true manifestations" (4).

His obsessive celebration of the rituals of rationality and empiricism is a reaction formation. He has an irrational fear of irrationality and fear. Appropriately, he stays in the yellow room. He says, "Fear . . . is the relinquishment of logic, the *willing* relinquishing of reasonable patterns" (159). Besides endorsing the belief in the self-creating subject, this statement exemplifies the relinquishment of logic. As Jackson's oeuvre maintains, evil exists, and those who deny it relinquish logic, mystifying the logic of absurdity. For Montague, to uphold reasonable patterns is to keep doing the same thing even when logic dictates otherwise. He is possibly justified in sending the protagonist, Eleanor Vance, away when she grows increasingly incoherent, but he does so with such a punishing alacrity and dutiful insensitivity that it belies his hysteria. Like Hyman, in trying to contain the irrational, he becomes the container. And just as he is oblivious to his hypocrisy, he is oblivious to his treachery. To relieve his insomnia, he reads *Pamela*, which features a protagonist like Eleanor who is victimized by a cad like Montague. If he would handle her anxiety with less of his own, she would not kill herself in the end. But he has to rid Hill House of this foul contagion of irrationality, no matter how irrationally he does it. In making the supernatural and ghosts the specialty of such an academic, Jackson continues to push the margins of ritual, myth, and symbol into the text.

Montague's wife is his helpmeet in researching the spirit world. She makes no pretense of academic rationality. As Jackson's mother introduced her daughter to planchette, so Montague's wife introduces it in this novel. A device for contacting ghosts, it records the writing made when two people push around a small contraption that holds a pencil. When his wife arrives spouting nonsense about the spirit world, her ignorance and irrationality defeat his erudition at every turn. She is even more self-important and cocksure than Montague, with even less reason to be so. Like Aunt Morgen in *The Bird's Nest*, she is "dragon rampant" (236). Arriving a couple of weeks after the others, she displays her apparent cuckolding of Montague by bringing along Arthur, who obsessively displays his masculinity. For example, he patrols the house at night with a revolver. Mrs. Montague is another of Jackson's phallic mothers, though the most comic one.

Luke is the nephew of Hill House's owner. The narrator says, "Luke Sanderson was a liar. He was also a thief. . . . His dishonesty was largely confined to taking petty cash from his aunt's pocketbook and cheating at cards" (9–10). Apparently a gigolo, he also sells the watches and cigarette cases given him by his aunt's friends. In Jackson's notes, she describes Luke as "the voice of cynicism." Retrieving Eleanor, who has run uncontrollably up a rickety spiral staircase, he threatens to shove her back down. When she thanks him for saving her, he tells her he would not do it again.

Eleanor is a socially maladroit loner. At thirty-two, an appropriate age for one on the verge of martyrdom, she has spent the last eleven years caring for her invalid mother, who finally died three months before the start of the plot, after which Eleanor has slept on a cot at her sister's apartment, undoubtedly unwelcome. Inheriting only a pittance, Eleanor has lost her early adulthood and the chance at a career and permanent home while her older sister escaped caring for the mother and started her own family. Small wonder Eleanor cannot "remember ever being truly happy in her adult life" (6). In a restaurant, she sees a child who will not drink her milk because it is not served in her usual cup, which has stars on the bottom so that she can see them as she finishes drinking. Eleanor identifies with the child and silently urges her to resist. Thus Eleanor lives in her childhood world of fairy tales, imagining enchanted gardens as she drives through the country. She also lives in adolescent romances, imagining handsome males rescuing her from homelessness. Eleanor, then, is a *puer aeternus*. But more importantly, she recuperates the victimized heroines of eighteenth-century sentimental novels. Jackson says in her notes, Eleanor is the "voice of honor." As Elizabeth MacAndrew and David H. Richter argue, the sentimental heroine is not the simplistic stereotype that scholars such as Leslie Fiedler make her out to be, and she is central to the development of Gothic fiction.<sup>3</sup>

But Eleanor is not pure innocence. She hated her mother and hates her sister. She is morbidly self-conscious, deploring her clothes, wrinkles, dishpan hands, awkwardness, and penury. Her incipient paranoia emerges from her grandiose assumption that romance is waiting for her behind every tree, and from her assumption that others persecute her. Each assumption is a reaction formation to the fact that others barely notice her. In recounting the places she drove through to get to Hill House, she reconstructs the journey so that she is the instrument of great agencies. She thinks, reminiscent of the Hallorans in *The Sundial*, "I am the one chosen" (147). She projects her hostility onto the waitress and onto the customer in Hillsdale, and onto the caretakers at Hill House, as if all of the quirks of these simple folk are emblems of their hostility

toward her. She stops romanticizing Luke as soon as he whines that he never had a mother.

Much of Eleanor's depressive paranoia is bound up with her guilt. She blames herself for her mother's death. She says her mother died because she slept through the mother's knocking on the wall for help. But if Eleanor knew that her mother was knocking and if Eleanor did not help, Eleanor could not have been asleep. On the other hand, if Eleanor slept through her mother's death, how would Eleanor know that her mother had been knocking? Her account of the mother's death may be a fantasy of blameworthiness—of the kind that several of Jackson's characters exhibit. Fantasies of blameworthiness in her other characters often accompany compensatory fantasies of empowerment, which deny weakness. Eleanor could be a survivor of child abuse. She has a dream that suggests a trace of resentment over being the victimized child by featuring herself as the rescuer of the victimized child. In the dream, she believes she hears a child crying and that she will intervene: "I will not go along with the hurting of a child, no, I will not; I will by God get my mouth to open right now and I will yell I will I will yell 'STOP IT'" (163).

There are some moments when she believes her behavior to be a willed choice, for example, when she and Theodora, her double, are fleeing the forest: "She felt every slow step as a willed act, a precise mad insistence upon the putting of one foot down after the other as the only sane choice" (175). Other times she feels that her body will not obey her mind, for example, when she is tempted to investigate the horrifying noise outside her bedroom: "Eleanor knew that, even if her feet would take her as far as the door, her hand would not lift to the doorknob" (130). Sometimes she will repress content and blame it not on her mind but on the content, for example, when she cannot remember the rest of the words that come after "Present mirth hath present laughter": "She was sure that the rest of the words must be most unsuitable, to hide so stubbornly from her memory, and probably wholly disreputable to be caught singing on her arrival at Hill House" (32). More typically she wonders why she said something but she does not blame some Other: "'I'm thirty-four years old,' Eleanor said, and wondered what obscure defiance made her add two years" (137). (She denies her anxiety about approaching the age of Christ's martyrdom.) Similar fractures occur: "'I am learning the pathways of the heart,' Eleanor thought quite seriously, and then wondered what she could have meant by thinking any such thing" (164). Her usual sense of agency is that it is Other and hostile. She says of the house, "It wanted to consume us, take us into itself, make us a part of the house, maybe—oh, dear. I thought I knew what I

was saying, but I'm doing it very badly" (139). At moments like that, she distances one part of herself from another part of herself.

For Eleanor is another of Jackson's disintegrating protagonists. Losing control, she tells herself that she is presiding over her own dissolution: "I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all; whatever it wants of me it can have" (204). Soon she is hearing voices that no one else hears, and she believes they are real. She says of the "chairs and tables and windows," "When I am afraid I no longer exist in any relation to these things" (159). As her condition worsens, she says, "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 frantic and driven and I can't stop it" (160). As she kills herself in the end, she applauds herself for doing so but then immediately wonders why she is doing it: "I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really doing it by myself. . . . *Why* am I doing this? *Why* am I doing this? *Why* don't they stop me?" (245–46).

Cruelly, Eleanor's final dissociation arises from the others' frustration of her desire to associate with them. She is heartened by the sense of belonging that she feels at first: "Eleanor thought, I am the fourth person in this room; I am one of them; I belong" (60). In a placid moment, she thinks, "You are happy, Eleanor . . ." (137). After Luke spurns her, she tries to get close to Theodora,

each of them moving delicately along the outskirts of an open question, and, once spoken, such a question—as "Do you love me?"—could never be answered or forgotten. . . . They could only wait passively for resolution. Each knew, almost within a breath, what the other was thinking and wanting to say; each of them almost wept for the other. (174–75)

Eleanor says she wants to go home with Theodora, but Theodora also spurns her.

Although the house estranges her, it gives Eleanor an uncanny shock of recognition because it is a figuration of her.<sup>4</sup> Jackson wrote in her notes, as if she discovered this point while rereading her drafts, "Eleanor *IS* house." Likewise, Jackson wrote in her notes that Eleanor is "*ALL DISTORTED LIKE HOUSE.*" By the end of the novel, the identification of Eleanor and the house are clear. It turns out that the house's foundation and construction allegorize Eleanor's psychological foundation.

The development of that motif is gradual. When Eleanor first enters the house, she sees her reflection, although not in a mirror. Instead, she sees the reflection of her hand as it appears to sink below the floor into

the foundation and basement. Entering, she is “watching the wavering reflection of her hand going down and down into the deep shadows of the polished floor” (37). The house, then, is both a mirror reflecting Eleanor and a window in which she sees herself in the depths of the house. That vertical image doubles a horizontal image of the self in the recesses of the house. Some rooms contain other rooms. More importantly, the first-floor rooms comprise a series of concentric circles; the inner rooms have no windows. As a result, she cannot see the inner self from the outside; she must go there. And getting there is problematic because the passageways do not go to places where they appear to be going. That is because, as Montague says, “Angles which you assume are the right angles you are accustomed to, and have every right to expect are true, are actually a fraction of a degree off in one direction or another” (105). The result is that walking through a series of rooms leads to an unexpected place. Also, the doors and windows are off-center, so that they can open or close on their own.

On the other hand, while the foundation is fixed, the top is structured haphazardly, in effect, unfinished just as Eleanor's induction into the Symbolic is unfinished. Eleanor perceives the house's tenuous construction: “She had a quick impression of the builders finishing off the second and third stories of the house with a kind of indecent haste, eager to finish off their work without embellishment and get out of there, following the simplest pattern for the rooms.” What started as Victorian rococo ended in a heteroglossia of architectural voices, the “clashing disharmony that marked Hill House throughout” (38). Appropriately, the unbalanced Eleanor occupies an unbalanced room: “It had an unbelievably faulty design which left it chillingly wrong in all its dimensions, so that the walls seemed always in one direction a fraction longer than the eye could endure, and in another direction a fraction less than the barest possible tolerable length.” Of course the color of her room is blue. In addition to blue wallpaper with blue flowers, there are “blue dimity curtains, . . . and a blue figured rug on the floor, and a blue spread on the bed and a blue quilt at the foot” (40).

Eventually Eleanor begins to splinter. For example, at the end the house dances, and the formerly repressed Eleanor follows suit: “Hill House went dancing” (205); Eleanor goes “dancing in the hall” (229). But in redesigning Eleanor, the house robs her of her self as she is constituted at the start of the plot: “When she tried to speak, her voice was drowned in the dim stillness” (37). Ultimately the house draws her out of herself in a way she does not need. She desublimates but returns to the place of domestic interpellation. Domestic ideology makes her

believe she is free when in fact she is trapped: “I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come inside. I am home, she thought, and stopped in wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought; now to climb.” She climbs the tower where an earlier resident hanged herself. She erases the past while keeping it in the present, and she keeps the past in the present by forgetting the present: “Time is ended now, she thought, all *that* is gone and left behind” (232).

The house also figures Eleanor’s mother. Jackson wrote in her notes, “leaving house = betrayal of mother.” Hugh Crain built the house for his wife, who died early, just like Eleanor’s mother. When Eleanor cannot bring herself to go into the library, she is repelled. She is repulsed by the “cold air of mold and earth which rushed at her.” Faced with these aggressive signifiers of death, Eleanor cannot speak—or even think—about her association with the mother: “‘My mother’—she said, not knowing what she wanted to tell them” (103). As Judie Newman argues, Eleanor associates the library (because her mother forced her to read to her) and the nursery—the two rooms most significant to Eleanor—with her unmothering mother and herself as an unmothered child.

The mother is one of Jackson’s obsessive themes. In *The Road Through the Wall*, Harriet Merriam’s mother is phallic. In *Hangsaman*, the mother is feminized. In *The Bird’s Nest*, Elizabeth Richmond’s multiple personality derives from maternal doubles, her feminized mother and phallic aunt, both of whom are too present in some ways and too absent in others. In *The Sundial*, the phallic mother is a murderess who kills her own son. And in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Merri-cat has killed her mother (and father and aunt) just to be closer to her sister. Newman recognizes the problematics of mothering in *The Haunting of Hill House*:

The source of both the pleasures and the terrors of the text springs from the dynamics of the mother-daughter relation with its attendant motifs of psychic annihilation, reabsorption by the mother, vexed individuation, dissolution of individual ego boundaries, terror of separation and the attempted reproduction of the symbiotic bond through close female friendship. (123)

For Newman, the inchoate postmodernism of this novel lies in its “anticipation of revisionist psychoanalytics” (133).

Newman’s analysis is also relevant to Jackson’s relationship with her phallic mother. Jackson’s mother was the father she never had. Moreover, her father was the mother she never had. As Newman states, the too-absent or feminine father plus the too-present or masculine mother problematizes the daughter’s subject formation:

Daughterly individuation may be inhibited by paternal absence and by overcloseness to mothers, who tend to view their daughters as extensions of themselves.

Conversely, coldness on the mother's part may prevent the loosening of the emotional bond because of the unappeased nature of the child's love. (122)

In Jackson's notes she said of Eleanor, "betray mother by being born." (Jackson's mother told her that Jackson was a failed abortion.) On Eleanor's journey in which she can only go home again, she imagines homes in which a maternal figure cares for her.

Theodora is her double. As Jackson wrote in her notes, "theo is eleanor." When they are about to share not only a room but also clothes, Theodora says, "'We're going to be practically twins'" (158). She wears Eleanor's clothes. When Mrs. Montague arrives, she thinks Theodora is Eleanor.

More importantly, Theo knows what Eleanor is thinking, as if Theo is inside Eleanor's mind, which, allegorically, she is—like Tony in *Hangsaman*. For example, Theo tells her, "You're afraid everyone's going to laugh at your clothes" (46). Similarly, when Mrs. Montague arrives and Eleanor thinks to herself, "I wonder how long she is going to stay," Theodora whispers to Eleanor, "I wonder how long she is going to stay?" (184). Theo also apparently divines that Eleanor had an uncle like Jackson's Uncle Clifford: "Did you used to have a comic uncle?" (53). Theo is the first to posit that it is Eleanor who has written the mysterious messages on the wall. She is also the only one with whom Eleanor apparently shares a supernatural experience. In a deserted forest at night, they stumble across children at a sunlit picnic: "The path led them to its destined end and died beneath their feet. Eleanor and Theodora looked into a garden, their eyes blinded by the light of sun and rich color; incredibly, there was a picnic party on the grass in the garden. They could hear the laughter of the children" (176).

The house allegorizes Theodora as Eleanor's double. In a letter to Hyman and Jackson, Burke wrote, "the behavior of your House scenically parallels the relationships btw. Theodora and Eleanor (as though it were expressing what in them is left somewhat latent)." Theodora's room connects with Eleanor's through their bathroom. They are at their closest figuratively when they are at their closest literally, sleeping in the same room in adjoining beds. When Eleanor dreams she is holding Theodora's hand but then awakes alone and too far from Theo to have been holding Theo's hand, Eleanor asks, "Whose hand was I holding?" (163).<sup>5</sup> The answer is that if she was actually holding someone's hand, it had to be her own. It is impossible that she could have been holding any-



one else's. In her notes, Jackson deemed this line the most important one in the novel. And it is, for it allows us to follow the connection of her right hand (traditionally the side associated with rationality, consciousness, and light) across to the left hand of darkness.

As Eleanor's double, Theodora is also Eleanor's mirror opposite. Theodora expresses Eleanor's repressed feelings. Jackson's notes say that Theodora is the "voice of emotion." Theo says people fear knowing what they "really want" (160). Theodora knows what Theodora desires and pursues it. She is also sensuous. She likes colorful clothing and flamboyant grooming. She says she wants "to look as bright as possible" (47). She shows Eleanor how to paint her toenails bright red. She strokes Eleanor's cheek and presses her own cheek against her hand.<sup>6</sup> However, in her sensuousness she is self-centered. In Jackson's notes, her last name is Vane. Eleanor is correct when she recognizes Theodora's "iron selfishness" (147). As the narrator puts it, "Duty and conscience were, for Theodora, attributes which belonged properly to the Girl Scouts" (8).

In her selfishness, she can be cruel. When Eleanor tells her desperately that she wants to go home with her, Theodora asks, "Do you *always* go where you're not wanted?" (209). Even before that, as Eleanor disintegrates and is absorbed into the house, Theodora relishes the thought of Eleanor's destruction. Theodora says that her role in Hill House is destructiveness. The house, she says, is "a little hideaway where I can be alone with my thoughts. Particularly if my thoughts happened to be about murder or suicide or—" (43).

Thus Theodora is the projection of Eleanor's denied self. As Eleanor's alter ego, she embodies Eleanor's repressed eroticism and assertiveness. Eleanor is very uncomfortable with Theo's bright clothing. She recoils when Theodora tries to paint her toenails. And she apparently smears menstrual blood on Theodora's clothing and then blocks out any memory of doing so. Theodora is also a projection of Eleanor's denied assertiveness. Knowing Eleanor's disempowering unconsciousness of Eleanor's agency, Theo says, "We never know where our courage is coming from" (50). Like many of Jackson's decentered subjects, she experiences motivation as arising from without. What little courage Eleanor has comes from Theodora. But Theodora also figures Eleanor's self-destructiveness. This demon turns against her as surely as the demon lover turns against Jackson's other protagonists, and as surely as Tony turns against the similarly suicidal Natalie in *Hangsaman*. Small wonder, then, that Eleanor thinks of Theo as "someone whose anger would be frightening" (49).

Theodora and Eleanor as a pair are doubles of two other pair of sisters, Eleanor and her older sister, and the Crain sisters. In her notes,

Jackson wrote "THEO = SISTER." Just as the Crain sisters disagree over who owns the house, so Eleanor and her sister disagree over dividing their mother's estate. Eleanor's sister, who is older, corresponds to the older Crain sister.

When everyone else rejects her, Eleanor finally gives in to the seduction by this novel's oldest character: Hill House. At first she resists the siren call of the house, which appears written on the walls, first in chalk, later in what is apparently menstrual blood: "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR" (155). But the more dislocated she becomes, the more she wants to stay there. (Jackson wrote in her notes that Eleanor is "ALL DISTORTED LIKE HOUSE.") The house, then, is another of Eleanor's dark doubles, another siren ostensibly promising assistance but actually calling her to destruction.<sup>7</sup>

As she often does, Jackson uses the Gothic convention of giving the house human attributes. First, it looks like a human. It has a "face," a cornice like an "eyebrow" (34), and a "dormer like a dimple." Second, it has physical power. For example, the narrator states that this house "seemed somehow to have formed itself" (35) and that the tower is "held . . . tightly in the embrace of the house, in the straining grip of the house" (231). The house also has the power to grip Eleanor. By using metaphors ambiguously, Jackson suggests that the power is literal: "Hill House came around her in a rush; she was enshadowed" (36), and "the house had caught her" (35).

The house also has attitudes. Montague says the house has a cold spot at its "heart" (119). When Eleanor feels the cold spot in the hall, she says, "It doesn't seem like an *impartial* cold. . . . I felt it as *deliberate*" (120). The house also has suspicious intent. For example, Dr. Montague says it "watches every move you make" (85). Montague thinks the house wants to isolate Eleanor: "Doesn't it begin to seem that the intention is, somehow, to separate us?" (135). As a result of such perceptions, Eleanor quickly evaluates the house as diseased and "vile" (33). The third-person narrator, taking on Eleanor's bias, reports that the house is "evil" (an anagram of "vile") (34) and "arrogant and hating" (35).<sup>8</sup>

Jackson (apparently unconsciously) inscribes herself into the house. Her several sketches of the two-storey house exhibit traces of her body (SJP Box 22).<sup>9</sup> The front view of the house exaggerates the round front porch so as to make it look like teeth (several years earlier, she had all of her upper teeth pulled). In addition, the roof looks like the rounded top of a skull with a hair on top—the same single strand of hair she used in many drawings of herself. This single strand of hair reappears in some of her sketches of the top view of the second storey. If the viewer turns

up the right side of such sketches and looks at the sketch with the right side as the top, the *W* for west looks like the single strand of hair atop her head.

But more important, the top views register further traces of anxiety about her orality—her dental problems, overeating, obesity, and colitis. With the top views turned right end up, the general outline of the house resembles a blockishly stout person with the tower now looking like a round head. Furthermore, the top view of the floor plan shows a hallway that suggests her esophagus and digestive tract; this hallway even makes a right turn (like the large intestine coming out of the stomach) and goes past the “nursery” (the womb) and exits the building through a bottom-rear outlet she labeled *back stairs*. Jackson felt a personal connection between this house and herself. After deciding to use a magazine picture of an old California house as her model for Hill House, she asked her mother to get information about it and found out that her grandfather, an architect, had designed the house. Like Eleanor, Jackson was erasing yet also reinscribing representations left by her patriarchs.

Like her other novels, *The Haunting of Hill House* features writing about writing. But the setting of this one is more suffused with precise genres (e.g., fairy tales and didactic primers) and specific texts. The result is not just more allusions, for Jackson’s allusiveness is not an end in itself but rather a means for leading to larger discursive practices. Where in *The Sundial* the allusions connect with America’s master narratives, here they connect with subject formation, as they did in *Hangsamen* and *The Bird’s Nest*. The difference between the allusions in those two novels and in *The Haunting of Hill House* is that here subject formation issues from not just the prison house of language in general but from specific texts in particular. This strategy suggests that Jackson came to regard the role of discourse in subject formation and interpellation as not just a general process but rather a very precise one, in which not merely language in general but genres and even just a few specific texts directly determine much of the subject.

The destabilizing event that begins the plot is Dr. Montague’s use of writing to assemble a team of fellow investigators. In search of volunteers, he combs “the records of the psychic societies” and “the back files of sensational newspapers” (5). Eliminating from his list the names of people who are dead, he contacts the rest by letter. After assembling a team of four, Montague learns by telegram that one is backing out. Montague tells the remaining members that the burden of their activity will be not so much on detecting alleged haunted activity, but on comparing events in the house to stories about the house: “The purpose of their stay, the letters stated clearly, was to observe and explore the various unsavory

stories which had been circulated about the house" (5). And although Montague says "a deranged house is a pretty conceit" (70–71), and that as for secret chambers, "no such romantic devices exist here" (66), he believes what he calls "stories" (69).

The story that Montague wants to explore is the traditional ghost story. What he knows of the house's alleged haunting he gets from an old newspaper account, which certainly amounts to a paucity of documentation, thereby making his story more of a legend. Two sisters named Crain inherited a family estate and, in a Gothic convention, disagreed over who owned the "title" to it. After the younger sister got old, she was displaced by the older sister's friend, who had designs on the title.

Montague finds Eleanor through a newspaper story that claims that her childhood home was peppered for three days by an inexplicable shower of stones (7). When Eleanor tells her sister that she wants to go to Hill House, the sister reads Montague as a villainous mad scientist, installing him in a mad-scientist narrative: "Perhaps Dr. Montague—if that really *was* his name, after all—perhaps this Dr. Montague *used* these women for some—well—*experiments*. You know—*experiments*, the way they do" (8).

Once Eleanor begins her journey, writing continues to be a central part of the plot. A road sign foreshadows what will be her fatal attempt to compensate for her marginality; it is a billboard advertising "daredevil" car races, but the second *d* is missing (19). Eleanor will dare evil and the vile devil, and she will see through the veil, but she will not live to tell about it. Another foreshadowing occurs when Mrs. Montague says that spirits often appear around books: "Books are frequently very good carriers, you know. Materializations are often best produced in rooms where there are books" (186). When Eleanor finally succumbs to the house's seduction, it is in the library. Indeed, when Eleanor is caught frantically roaming the house at night, she uses the library as a pretext, a cover story: "I came down to the library to get a book" (237).

Allusions are also frequent. For example, Theodora wonders if Dracula lives here (48). Theodora's mate has ripped up a volume of Alfred de Musset, which had been a birthday gift from Theodora (9). Dr. Montague has brought *Pamela* and *Sir Charles Grandison*. After some reflection, he proffers the obvious: "A Fielding novel . . . would never do for very young children. I even have doubts about Sterne—" (90). Dudley looks to Eleanor like a "sneering Cheshire cat" (32). Oscar Wilde's "Canterville Ghost" is a favorite of Montague's, and the doctor's Shakespearean name suggests fatal family repressiveness. Also, Eleanor's thoughts, returning obsessively to Shakespeare's ballad "O Mistress Mine," dwell on the line "Present mirth hath present laughter,"

which seems to be another of Jackson's allusions to architecture in New England writers, in this case Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth* (*Twelfth* 2.3.42). Probably the most tongue-in-cheek allusion is to Theodore Dreiser: Eleanor's sister's name is Carrie.

It is not just for Montague that Eleanor lives in a text. On her journey to Hill House, she daydreams several narratives about herself. For example, when she sees a "tiny cottage buried in a garden" (22) she inserts herself into the setting for this scenario: "People will come to me to have their fortunes told, and I will brew love potions for sad maidens; I will have a robin . . ." (ellipses in original 23). She rehearses the classic tale—a staple in her dominant culture—that she is a lonely wanderer, a pilgrim reborn by escaping: "I am a new person, very far from home" (27). She knows herself well when she says, "What I want in all this world is peace, a quiet spot to lie and think, a quiet spot up among the flowers where I can dream and tell myself sweet stories" (194–95). The story she rehearses, then, has a burial plot.

The textual form that dominates her ruminations is the fairy tale. On her way to Hill House, Eleanor stops and walks into oleander groves and imagines castles, magic spells, stone lions, jewels, kings, and princesses, all of which constitute her "soft green picture from a fairy tale" (20). Romantic love is one of the fairy tales she imagines. For example, she pictures herself wandering in the woods. She imagines that she will wander, "chasing butterflies or following a stream, and then come at nightfall to the hut of some poor woodcutter who would offer her shelter" (17). Eleanor's fairy tale of desire reinscribes Hill House "into a fairyland." She wonders,

Once I have stepped between the magic gateposts, will I find myself through the protective barrier, the spell broken? I will go into a sweet garden . . . and find one path . . . and it will lead me directly to the palace which lies under a spell. I will walk up low stone steps past stone lions guarding and into a courtyard where a fountain plays and the queen waits, weeping, for the princess to return. . . . The enchantment is ended and . . . we shall live happily ever after.

No . . . once the palace becomes visible and the spell is broken, the *whole* spell will be broken and all this countryside . . . will return to . . . a soft green picture from a fairy tale. Then, coming down from the hills there will be a prince riding, bright in green and silver with a hundred bowmen riding behind him, pennants stirring, horses tossing, jewels flashing. (20)

But the true nature of her journey—that the lovers meeting are women who will meet in death—is foreshadowed in her imaginary fairy tale in

the house she is driving past: "A little dainty old lady took care of me. . . . I dined upon a bird, and radishes from the garden, and homemade plum jam. . . . When I died . . ." (ellipses in original 18). She doesn't finish this fairy tale. But she does continue to respond to actuality from her position within fairy tales. For example, "This is where the princess comes to meet the magic golden fish who is really a prince in disguise" (52).

The fairy tale is closely associated, of course, with the dream text; both are narratives of wish fulfillment. Sometimes the narrator describes Eleanor's fairy tale reveries as if they are dreams. It is in the sense of dream as the encoding of desire and the Imaginary that Jackson not only opens the novel but also closes it. She uses the opposition of reality and dream in the first sentence: "No live organism can continue to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within" (3). The use of "sane" in the second sentence seems inconsistent with its use in the first. But the apparent contradiction is only that. The first sentence is consistent with the dominant culture's romantic dream that one needs to dream for sanity (dream deprivation was a hot topic in the 1950s). But what Jackson adds is that just because dreams are necessary for sanity does not mean that they are sufficient. It is not just Gatsby's dream that is puerile but his whole life. Moreover, if dreams are necessary, then sanity requires estrangement (although again it is not sufficient).

Eleanor's inscription into the social text issues from the book of instruction that Hugh Crain assembled as a collage, "MEMORIES, for SOPHIA ANNE LESTER CRAIN; *A Legacy for Her Education and Enlightenment During Her Lifetime From Her Affectionate and Devoted Father*, HUGH DESMOND LESTER CRAIN; *Twenty-first June, 1881*" (167-68). The recursiveness interpellating Eleanor surfaces from the year of publication; a palindrome, 1881 goes back to its origin. The construction of this book is literally intertextual; it is a collage made from other representations. The father has assembled prior texts in the form of prints and plates of paintings, etchings, and illustrations, plus original drawings perhaps his own. Under them are carefully hand-printed maxims that are possibly plagiarized, but even if they are his original words they are not his original ideas. He and his wife have let the Symbolic speak for them. One aphorism figures his daughter as a text that her parents have written: "Honor they father and thy mother, Daughter, authors of thy being, . . . that they lead their child in innocence and righteousness." To that romantic innocence, he adds Calvinist natural depravity. Under a color plate of a snake pit this adage appears: "Eternal damnation is the lot of mankind; neither tears, not

reparation, can undo Man's heritage of sin." He enjoins her to remain a virgin. Under a Goya etching he writes, "Reflect, Daughter, upon the joy in Heaven as the souls of these tiny creatures wing upward, released before they have learned aught of sin or faithlessness, and make it thine unceasing duty to remain as pure as these" (168). Elsewhere he writes, "Daughter, hold apart from this world, that its lusts and ingritudes corrupt thee not; Daughter, preserve thyself" (168–69). Part of a page is burned away with the following explanation: "Daughter, could you but hear for a moment the agony, the screaming, the dreadful crying out and repentance, of those poor souls condemned to everlasting flame! Could thine eyes be seared, but for an instant, with the red glare of wasteland burning always!" (169). This primer goes on with illustrations and quotations regarding the seven deadly sins. Hugh Crain has written the last page in blood. After all of this fear and guilt, he admonishes her: "Fear and guilt are sisters" (172).

Eleanor's introjection into the house as text surfaces in writing. When some unknown agent writes the message "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR" on a wall twice (155), Eleanor's identification with a prior resident of the house (probably the sister cheated out of the estate) surfaces as she goes downstairs to get a book. As with many of Jackson's characters, her unconscious surfaces in association with sleeping and continues with rationalizations by the conscious mind that obscure the fact that the unconscious is directing the behavior:

She had awakened with the thought of going down to the library, and her mind had supplied her with a reason: I cannot sleep, she explained to herself, and so I am going downstairs to get a book. If anyone asks me where I am going, it is down to the library to get a book because I cannot sleep. . . . She went barefoot and in silence down the great staircase and to the library door before she thought, But I can't go in there; I'm not allowed in there—and recoiled in the doorway before the odor of decay, which nauseated her.

"Mother," she said aloud, and stepped quickly back. "Come along," a voice answered distinctly upstairs, and Eleanor turned, eager, and hurried to the staircase. "Mother?" she said softly, and then again, "Mother?" (228)

She then starts her frantic scramble about the house and grounds.

The writing about writing makes this a heteroglossic novel. The reader reports regarding an early draft of the novel show how little the editors of the time understood the intertextuality. One wrote, "I can't figure out what she wants to do with the story. Mystery? Spoof? Psychomystery? Gothic horror?" The answer, of course, is all of these, plus

fantasy, fable, dream, myth, and fairy tale. It is also, as Tricia Lootens points out, a ghost story, but it is also a parody of the ghost story (for reasons that you will see later). At this point it is enough to note that just as Jackson wrote about witchcraft without taking it literally, she wrote about ghosts without taking them literally. In her letter to her editors, she says that she is writing against "the truly incredible notion that there are ghosts." When the book appeared, Maxwell Geismar's review objected that it did not conform to any preceding genre: "The author is not altogether fair with us. After the crime tales of a William Roughed, or the mystery tales of Henry James himself, we are bound to expect a 'rationale' of even the supernatural." Geismar, unprepared for nascent postmodernism, sees form as timeless, ahistorical; if he had been a contemporary of James he would have said that his work did not conform to precedent. For Geismar, the rulebook is constant, and we are "bound" by it. He also provides a taxonomy of genres that places what he calls "supernatural" as a "restricted and peculiar medium" (31).

In addition to engendering anxieties about genre, Jackson also alienated some by destabilizing dominant modes. Another reader report objected to indeterminacy: "Beware of suggesting symbolism. . . . Great danger this will baffle people, as her last book did, by not making clear what to look for." One example of indeterminacy that troubled the publisher's editorial readers was the "symbolism" of giving two females androgynous names. In the early drafts of this novel, the protagonist and her double were named Theodora and Erica, but Jackson changed the name "Erica" to "Eleanor." She also dropped Theodora's last name of Vane, possibly because someone did not appreciate how it doubled Eleanor's last name of Vance.

Those enforcing hegemonic codes of realism as an apology for the dominant culture also miss the satiric parody of the realistic novel of manners. In his review of this novel, Geismar misreads Jackson's use of Gothic to defamiliarize. Privileging realism, Geismar concedes that she is sometimes capable of approaching it: "The opening sections seem almost . . . familiar. . . ." Geismar complains that Jackson is usually outside of the familiar: "If Miss Jackson is proficient in describing the alarums and excursions of human pathology, she is correspondingly weak on the 'normal' world of human relationships, or even of ordinary social gossip" (19). Of course, Jackson does not subscribe to the opposition of the normal and the pathological. As Joanna Russ notes, Jackson transcended realism "because conventional forms simply will not express the kind of experience she knows exists" (xiii).

In addition, by complaining about the "excessive glibness of the principals," the publisher's reader misses the satiric parody of the dia-



logue of romantic love. Jackson's dialogue is stilted because these characters are pretentious. They inflate their diction. And this stilted quality comes from interpellation in modes other than realism and in genres other than the novel of manners. The characters sense that they are characters constituted by prior texts. For example, Theodora tries to appear witty by saying that there is a "witch in the tower, and a dragon in the drawing room" (142). And Luke bows "as befitted one off to slay a giant" (144). In a conversation between the four principal characters, they all try to be witty and charming and ironic by posing as stock fictional characters. Eleanor tells Luke, "I live a mad, abandoned life, draped in a shawl and going from garret to garret." He responds by asking, "Are you one of the fragile creatures who will fall in love with a lord's son and pine away?" Montague's contribution to this attempt at wit is that he is a "pilgrim" and "wanderer," and Luke's is that he (conditioned by the Ernest Hemingway mystique) is a bullfighter (62).

After rehearsing roles from melodrama and romance, they shift their lame repartee to another genre. Theodora says, "What a good time for a ghost story" (69). In this comic parody of the unfunny, Jackson must present enough of the quotidian to interest readers conditioned by realism, and yet establish a subtext of these characters as twits—all without undermining reader interest. Audiences are now used to such galleries of absurd antiheroes, but as Geismar and the editors exemplify, satiric parodies of the absurd in an intertextual relationship with the novel of manners were too dialogic for many in the 1950s.

Undecidability of narration helps achieve undecidability of genre and mode. One reason for the third-person narrator's unreliability is, of course, that the point-of-view character is fragmented. Her basic perceptions are wrong. By sometimes reporting from outside of the viewpoint character, the narrator is clear that Eleanor is misperceiving. For example, she is not really holding Theodora's hand but "*perceiving* that she was lying sideways on the bed in the black darkness, holding with both hands to Theodora's hand" (163). Other times the narrator reports not that something happened but that Eleanor sees or feels it. When she moves toward a stationary object, the narrator reports the action as if the object is moving toward Eleanor, for example, as she drives along: "Hillsdale was upon her before she knew it" (23). Similarly, as she makes her entrance at Hill House, she thinks, "Hill House likes to make an entrance" (27). Reports sometimes reflect her confusion of inner and outer: "It was warm, drowsily, luxuriously warm" (228). Part of that dissociativeness is that she confuses herself with the house. For example, she projects much that the narrator reports. When she notes, "They made houses so oddly back when Hill House was built" she is also

remarking on herself (32). Another reason is that the narrator's omniscience is so limited that it cannot know some things. For example, the narrator does not know what has become of several people: "To his dozen letters, Dr. Montague had four replies, the other eight or so candidates having presumably moved and left no forwarding address, or possibly having lost interest in the supernatural, or even, perhaps, never having existed at all" (5).

Yet at other times, the omniscience is so unlimited that the narrator reports on things far away. For example, within two paragraphs the narrator reports on what the doctor is doing in his room, then what Luke is doing in his room, then what Mrs. Dudley (the servant) is doing six miles away, then what the owner is doing three hundred miles away, and finally what Theodora's friend, the doctor's wife, and Eleanor's sister are doing in different cities. Another reason is that the narrator can, like a narrator in classic fantastic, believe in the marvelous. As a result of this guileful narration, it is undecidable whether a haunting actually exists—whether, for example, Eleanor frightens the other characters with her pounding and giggling, or whether there is a ghost who haunts Hill House—because the narrator cannot or will not say.

But of course the undecidability about the marvelous cannot hold. In the modern fantastic, the referent is not a ghost but the unconscious. The mode, then, is allegorical. There is no haunted house; Eleanor haunts herself, or rather the traces of history make one part of herself haunt the Other part—the conscious being Other to the real home of the subject: the unconscious.

Like the unreliability of the narration, the indeterminacy of the plot further contributes to the multivocality of genre and mode. Jackson said in her report to the publisher, "I absolutely refuse to include any rational explanation, like an escaped lunatic, or a gang of international jewel thieves." This novel finally emerges as a parody of ghost stories when the wise helper turns out to be Montague's literal-minded wife. It is impossible to take the supernatural seriously when this *alazon* is the guide to the spirit world.

Similarly, the plot parodies the archetypal hero journey. At first, the plot adheres to the archetypal events analyzed in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (which Viking once promoted along with *The Lottery* in a display advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review*) but slowly undermines them (SJP Box 22). When Eleanor first hears the call to adventure, she has to overcome her sister to make the journey. Then a seemingly crazy warning figure appears, a crone on the street who says she will pray for Eleanor. But she is a parody of a witch. She calls Eleanor "dearie" (14). An old woman on the streets of an

American city would not call someone “dearie” no matter how many times she had seen *The Wizard of Oz*. True to the archetype, Eleanor gets past the guardian of the gate, the figure who tries to prevent the questing hero from entering the kingdom or arena of trial. But the guardian of the gate here is comic and literal. It is the bumbling Dudley, a parodic name for a melodramatic villain.

So in this novel, Jackson has two stories going at once: the manifest text (a parody of the Gothic ghost story) referring to the latent text (a parody of that manifest text that replaces it with a Gothic allegory of the uncanny).<sup>10</sup> When the narrator says that Hill House is “hiding its mad face in the growing darkness” (56), Eleanor is also hiding her mad face (as well as her mad interior). When Eleanor says, “I am disappearing inch by inch into this house, I am going apart a little bit at a time” it is into her Imaginary that she sinks. The bicameral nature of the story is implicit when Eleanor says of the threatening nocturnal sounds, “How can these others hear the noise when it is coming from inside my head?” (201).<sup>11</sup> On the manifest level, the others cannot hear what is in her head. This whole text comes from her head. As for the psychological referent of her allegory, Jackson wrote to her editor, “The ghost promotes a consummation (sic) deeply desired by the percipient.” And as for the nonrealist form of this novel, she added, the “ghost is a statement and a resolution of a problem that cannot be faced or solved realistically.” As such, she reveals her true ideas about the supernatural. In addition, she once again anticipates not only Roth’s and Barth’s claims that realism cannot represent reality, but also Oates’ claim that Gothic can.

So *The Haunting of Hill House* focuses on intertextuality, in particular the conventions of Gothic and the role of language in subject formation. As a psychological fable of interpellation through the family, it explores gender more than class. Indeed, this novel has attracted more feminist criticism than any of her other works. And the next novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, finishes a strong second. The increased focus on gender in these two novels accompanies a decreased focus on class. For although *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* problematizes class more than *The Haunting of Hill House* does, these two novels simply do not sustain the theme of class established in *The Sundial*. Indeed in the final analysis, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* reveals the cracks in Jackson’s Marxist foundation, which was not solid in the first place.

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