

# The Haunted House in E. A. Poe's The Fall of the House of Usher and Shirley Jackson's Haunting of Hill House/Ukleta kuća u Padu kuće Usher E. A. Poea i Prokletstvu kuće Hill Shirley Jackson

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“Some days in late August at home are like this, the air thin and eager like this, with something in it sad and nostalgic and familiar” (William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*).

## **Abstract**

This paper deals with the portrayal and role of the haunted house in Gothic literature, specifically in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. The idea of the paper is to introduce the haunted house as a prevailing Gothic element that can obtain the role of a central character in the literary text and therefore simultaneously appear as an object and its personified form. Even though Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* share the dominant idea of a house as a central character, the authors treated this concept in a different manner that greatly contributed to the complexity of the narrative and correlation with other Gothic elements. Following a theoretical explanation of Gothic literature as a literary genre that conjoins elements such as fear, tragedy, love, and the uncanny, the detailed analysis will elaborate on the use of haunted houses in Poe's and Jackson's work, in order to show that Poe's haunting experiences are not directly connected with the characters' past and include the use of the uncanny elements, whereas Jackson's hauntings stem directly from Eleanor's trauma.

Keywords: Gothic elements, Edgar Allan Poe, Shirley Jackson, haunted house.



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## Introduction

Gothic literature appears in the late eighteenth century predominantly as a consequence of the architectural movement called “Gothic Revival” and Romanticism as a dominant literary genre of the period. Horace Walpole was the first literary author who used the term “Gothic” as the subtitle of his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, which is nowadays known as the first Gothic novel (Matek, *English Literature in Context* 51-52). In its adjectival use, the term “Gothic” is applied to something dark, uncanny, mysterious, or estranged. As a part of medieval revival, Gothic literature stems from the Romantic movement that emphasises subjectivity, art appreciation and an idyllic unity with nature as the main topics of the genre that translate to Gothic literature in a dark and estranged manner. The main focus of Gothic literature is to evoke the sublime and terror among the readers, while telling the mundane story with an unexpected twist or ending. In a way, Gothic literature conjoins the expected mundane environment and protagonists with the unexpected and disturbing outcome (Botting 13-14).

Literary progression from the mundane and relatable to the uncanny and tragic is executed with a plethora of Gothic elements that are embedded in the story to provoke strong emotional response among the readers. Among many Gothic elements, the reader can observe the central role of the setting and its atmosphere. Usually, the estranged and uncanny setting evokes a primary change of emotions in the characters, whereas other elements, such as curses, dark secrets, sublime scenery, and supernatural entities shape the action of the story and compel an intense and tragic resolution (Hogle 29-30). Nevertheless, the aim of Gothic literature is not only to scare but rather to give an insight into horrors of the human mind and soul that can lead to madness and loss. As such, Gothic literature allows readers to experience the disturbed human inwardness that is usually the primary source of terror and fear (Hogle 30-31).

In their style and writing, Edgar Allan Poe and Shirley Jackson, present readers with different approaches to Gothic fiction. This paper will show that Poe conjoined the influence of Romantics with the diversion and abundance of newly explored Gothic motifs that introduce the grotesque side of the human mind to the everyday setting. Poe’s imagination and understanding of the deeply troubled human psyche reveal the fragility of the human soul and inability to escape the horrors of mind. In contrast to Poe, Jackson introduces readers with modern and contemporary Gothic fiction that is focused on the blurry division between reality and imagination, accompanied with a troubled mind that creates its own misery and decadence. The remarkable sense and care for details and slow revelation of one’s primary trauma allow

Jackson to form a narrative of subjectivity and horror that overpowers her characters and leaves an open ending.

The aim of this paper is to explore and exemplify the use of the haunted house as a central character that shapes the action and possesses the duality of animate and inanimate character. The first part of the paper explains the detailed origin and characteristics of Gothic literature alongside its progression from the eighteenth century to modern Gothic literature. Incorporated in this, different Gothic elements are explored, as well as their use in creating a specific atmosphere in the Gothic narrative. In conclusion of the first part of the paper, the motif of the haunted house will be explored theoretically and exemplified chronologically, in line with the gradual development of Gothic literature. The second part of the paper focuses on Poe's and Jackson's use of the haunted house as a central character of their narrative, whereas the paper closes with a detailed comparison of Poe's and Jackson's use of the haunted house in their works "The Fall of the House of Usher" and *The Haunting of Hill House*, followed by the concluding remarks.

## 1. Gothic Literature

I will live in the past, the present, and the future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me.

—Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

According to David Punter, Gothic literature can be described as a literary pattern that focuses on exploration of terror and the sublime, alongside with estranged emotions, behaviour, and entities located in a relatively familiar and mundane territory (2-3). Gary Tombleson suggests that “‘Gothic’ is applied indiscriminately to any literature in which horror abounds. The horror, or terror, can come not only from the supernatural but also from the bizarre or even violent, regardless of architectural setting or historical period” (83). The origin of Gothic literature can be traced to the European Romantic movement called *Sturm und Drang* that produced the predecessors of Gothic fiction in Europe who will heavily influence the prominent American authors, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and others (Smith, “American Gothic” 2). Linguistically observed, the term “Gothic” originally implied barbaric connotations or something “deriving from the Middle Ages” (Raškauskienė 11). Although the term went through cultural and literal transition, its negative connotation remained, setting focus on something estranged and abnormal. Gothic literature, as a sub-literary movement of the Romantics, rises from the dominant architectural “Gothic revival” that aspires to restore medieval style and incorporate it into the existing era. Wilhelm Worringer explains the impact strength and dominance of “Gothic revival” by ascribing human characteristics to it that will be explored and cherished in typical Gothic writings: “we are met . . . by a vitality which appears to be independent of us, which challenges us, forcing upon us an activity to which we submit only against our will. . . . [it] appears to have an expression of its own, which is stronger than our life” (qtd. in Tombleson 84).

In the light of “Gothic revival,” Horace Walpole’s novel *The Castle of Otranto* presents the first Gothic novel that intertwines the topics of medieval narrative with modern. Walpole’s deliberate use of the term “Gothic” as the subtitle of his novel foreshadows a retreat from the expected and presents readers with a blend of the traditional and the unknown that evokes unexpected feelings and emotions:

It was an attempt to blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the later, nature is always

intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if, in the latter species, Nature has cramped imagination, she did not take revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. (Walpole 7)

Even though Gothic literature is deprived of one unique description, one can say that it is based upon estrangement, novel understanding of the world, and sublime experience that the narrative evokes. Similarly, Botting suggests that: “‘Gothic’ signified the lack of reason, morality, and beauty of feudal beliefs, customs, and works” (13). In its contradiction to the real and mundane understanding of the world, Gothic literature impacts inward turmoil in readers and produces the sublime and terror as two main Gothic characteristics. Another dominant characteristic of Gothic literature is the ability to divide terror from horror. As Anne Radcliffe suggests, the main difference presents itself in the area that the emotion impacts: “the first [terror] expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other [horror] contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (149).

In its core, Gothic literature tends to originate from trauma accompanied with uncanny experiences that overpowers reason and starts manipulating one’s understanding of reality. In his work *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past*, Michael Roth suggests the following:

The concept of trauma has come to perform some of the same functions that negative utopia or dystopia once did. Trauma . . . designates phenomena that cannot be properly represented, but one characterized by radical intensity. A widespread longing for intensity has come to magnetize the concept of trauma, giving it a cultural currency far beyond the borders of psychology and psychoanalysis. Trauma has become the dystopia of the spirit, showing much about our own preoccupations with catastrophe, memory, and the grave difficulties we seem to have in negotiating between the internal and external worlds. (90)

It can be said that trauma and Gothic literature produce an unbreakable bond because “both are characterised by disruption and excess” (Nadal 179) that evoke fascination and fear simultaneously. Traumatic response to the past is usually connected to “violence, fear, hauntedness, stasis, entrapment, memory and the past” which emphasize the involuntary role

of unconsciousness (Nadal 180). It is one's inability to cooperate with traumatic past experience that reflects on present experiences and action. Derrida and Prenowitz suggest that the troubled mind usually seeks origin of the trauma in its attempt to overcome it:

We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives. . . . to be *en mal d'archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness . . . : It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. . . . It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. (57)

Having that in mind, one must observe the role of the uncanny in Gothic literature. The uncanny in Gothic serves as a medium that compels the protagonist to retrace the possible sources of trauma in order to confront it. In its origin, the word uncanny derives as a direct translation of the German adjective '*unheimlich*' that stems from the word '*home*' (*das Heim*) and is negated with the use of the prefix *-un*. In the essay "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The "uncanny")," Helene Cixous interprets Freud's understanding of the uncanny:

There is something "savage" in the *Unheimliche*, a breath or a provocative air which at times catches the novelist himself off guard, overtaking him and restraining him. Freud and the object of his desire (i.e., the truth about the *Unheimliche*) are fired by reciprocal inspiration . . . Nothing turns out less reassuring for the reader than this niggling, cautious, yet willy and interminable pursuit (of "something" – be it a domain, an emotional movement, a concept, impossible to determine yet variable in its form, intensity, quality, and content). Nor does anything prove to be more fleeting than this search whose movement constitutes the labyrinth which instigates it; the sense of strangeness imposes its secret necessity everywhere. (525)

The term uncanny in Gothic literature embraces the human understanding of unexpected estrangement among the typicality of the commonplace. The uncanny signals the departure and rupture in logical explanation and understanding of something, therefore leaving the protagonist with troubled psyche and inability to reconstruct the course of events. The role of the uncanny can emphasize the fleetingness of existence and its paradoxical impact on

individuality and uniqueness, somehow defeating the idea of *living in the present moment* and therefore showcasing an individual determined by a composition of memories and prior experiences. According to Punter, it is inevitable to disintegrate from the past, because it is in one's primal nature to be influenced and determined by it:

The uncanny comes to remind us that there is no obvious beginning, to life or to thought, that we are composed of prior traces, some of them available for conscious memory but most of them sunk in a primal past which is not recoverable by conscious means but which continues to influence, and perhaps even determine, our sense of our place in the world. (qtd. in Nadal 180)

The hazard of the uncanny to the human soul can be equalized to trauma itself. Nadal suggests that trauma and the uncanny share a similar variety of common features, such as fear, haunting, possession, repetition, and the dominant conflict and tension between the known and the unknown – the familiar and unfamiliar, *heimlich* and *unheimlich* (180). Furthermore, Punter notes the sensation of the uncanny as a reaction to natural disturbance in the realm of known and estranged: “If we have a sense of the uncanny, it is because the barriers between the known and the unknown are teetering on the brink of collapse” (qtd. in Nadal 181). In his long essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, H. P. Lovecraft acknowledges the role of fear and terror as the oldest and most dominant emotions that can occur in one's inevitable collision with the uncanny: “THE OLDEST and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (1). By emphasizing and capitalizing the adjective ‘*THE OLDEST*’, Lovecraft urges the reader to reconsider one's own ability to provoke terror through imagination and the mind's ability to elude readers by involuntarily crossing the barrier between the irrational and rational. Indeed, the trauma that arises alongside the *unhomely* experiences epitomises the duality in human consciousness. It can be said that the final dilemma of the soul and mind rises from one's desire to simultaneously reveal the source of the trauma and shield oneself from it.

Undoubtedly, one can conclude that early Gothic literature and a novel style of writing shaped modern understanding of horror and trauma in literature. As such, Gothic literature managed to merge entirely opposite topics of the era in one functional unity that contributed toward development of literary history and overall understanding of complexity within human soul and psyche:

No other form of writing or theatre is as insistent as Gothic on juxtaposing potential revolution and possible reaction – about gender, sexuality, race, class, the colonizers versus the colonized, the physical versus the metaphysical, and abnormal versus normal psychology – and leaving both extremely sharply before us and far less resolved than the conventional endings. (Hogle 40)

### 1.1. Gothic Literature in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century American Literature

This inhuman place makes human monsters.

—Stephen King, *The Shining*

Gothic, “as an ethnic and a cultural concept” (Cornwell 64), originates in Europe, from which it gradually transitioned to America. The writings which are classified as “Gothic,” “together with the allied phenomenon of ‘graveyard poetry,’” originate from England, where they experienced rebirth in themes and topics of interest (Cornwell 64). As Sade suggests, Gothic literature rose as a response to the turmoil of revolution and a counterpart of earlier literary works. Since the people were affected by the rapid changes in all major fields of life, it was necessary to produce something, with which one could identify in times of trouble: “it was therefore necessary to call upon hell for aid in the creation of titles that could arouse interest, and to situate in the land of fantasies what was common knowledge, from mere observation of the history of man in this iron age” (qtd. in Clery, “Sade, Donatien Alphonse” 204).

Gothic literature in America appears in the nineteenth century inspired by the prolific English and German writers that inaugurated the Gothic style of writing. The establishment of Gothic literature in America is marked by America’s relatively poor feudal past and the inability of creating historically inspiring scenery: “Without a feudal past and those relics so convenient for the European Gothicism, castles and monasteries and legends, the American landscape seemed an unlikely place for such fictions” (Smith, “Nineteenth-Century American Gothic” 163). Nevertheless, America’s “the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism” (Smith, “Nineteenth-Century American Gothic” 163) present the dominant topics for further Gothic writing. According to Smith, Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe are some of the most influential Gothic authors (“Nineteenth-Century American Gothic” 163), whose legacy will be further explored in this chapter.



Charles Brockden Brown is considered “as a sort of Aristotelian ‘prime mover’ of American fiction, the ‘Father of the American Romance’” (Weinstock 2) due to his innovative narrative that established the profound bond between the Gothic romance and the American ground: “American settings were the first in a tradition adapted by two of the greatest early American authors, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne” (“Charles Brockden Brown”). Critics consider *Wieland*, *Ormond*, *Edgar Huntly*, and *Arthur Mervyn* as Brown’s most important and influential works that contributed towards shaping of his literary successors: “Brown’s novels exploited a Radcliffean vein of explained supernaturalism, using ventriloquism, somnambulism, and the charnel scenes of plague to create his Gothic effects” (Smith, “American Gothic” 3). Therefore, many critics proclaim that Brown “arguably inaugurated the Gothic novel in America and its narrator, Clara Wieland, presents us with the first case of an unreliable narrator in American literature” (Weinstock 3). In the novel *Wieland*, the readers can observe that it is “a novel with a German title, almost all the characters are Germans; (either natives or of German descent). They [the characters] speak German, and reflect, though unconsciously, German tendencies of thought of the homeland” (Frank 347). This profound attachment to German Gothic is visible in Brown’s topics of interest – religion, the supernatural and the tragic. However, since the setting and the characters are placed on the American ground, the unexplored sorrows and *Heimweh* (homesickness; longing for home) will change the potentially quintessential surroundings:

Schuylkill was here a pure and translucent current, broken into wild and ceaseless music by rocky points, murmuring on a sandy margin, and reflecting on its surface, banks of all varieties of height and degrees of declivity. These banks were chequered by patches of dark verdure and shapeless masses of white marble, and crowned by copses of cedar, or by the regular magnificence of orchards, which, at this season, were in blossom, and were prodigal of odour. (Brown 36)

As John G. Frank notes, “in spite of the fact that their surroundings were so pleasant, and although they could enjoy the best of German culture also in America, the lot of the members of the Wieland household was a tragic” (347). The gradual development in the story’s plot unveils the characters’ (in)ability to overpower bodiless voices that try to control them. The final resolution reveals that “seemingly supernatural events are explained as the products of mental delusion” (Smith, “Nineteenth-Century American Gothic” 165). The literary and psychological pattern of ascribing possessions to the spectre of mental illness has been further

analysed by Brown's successors, such as Edgar Allan Poe ("The Tell-Tale Heart"), Steven King (*The Shining*), Shirley Jackson (*The Haunting of Hill House*), and many others. The infinite dualism between rational and irrational, real and imaginative has shaped Brown's narratives and conjoined the European Gothic foundations with yet unexplored American domestic and psychological topics:

For Brown the grounds of human decisions are inevitably imperfect, the effects of human actions are always unpredictable, and moral behaviour usually conceals selfish motives. Brown is a rationalist with little faith in the power of reason, . . . . His is a world where sensory evidence is misleading and inferences from such evidence are frequently mistaken, a world in which optimistic rationalism becomes disturbingly irrational. Brown's novels show good producing evil and the rational giving rise to the irrational. (Lustig 31)

Another famous example of Early American Gothic literature is Washington Irving's short story "The Legend of the Sleepy Hollow," published in his essay and short stories collection called *The Sketch Book* (Bowen 175). Irving's *The Sketch Book* serves as a representation of his travel memoirs and folklore to which he was exposed. In the short story "The Legend of the Sleepy Hollow," Irving's protagonist, Ichabod tries to unveil the mystery of the Headless Horseman, whose body had been buried in the cemetery but "the ghost rides forth to the scene of battle in nightly quest of his head, and that the rushing speed with which he sometimes passes along the Hollow, like a midnight blast, is owing to his being belated, and in a hurry to get back to the churchyard before daybreak" (Irving 7). The similar pattern of corpse or headless rider can be found in German ballads "Lenore" and "Der wilde Jäger" written by Gottfried August Bürger. In "Lenore", Bürger's character notes that the rider is a ghostly-undead figure that cannot linger and urges to take Lenore to their final resting place: "Ich darf allhier nicht hausen. / Komm, schürze, spring und schwing dich / Auf meinen Rappen hinter mich!" (125 – 127). The rider emphasises his estrangement from the world of living by repeating the following lines: "Sieh hin, sieh her der Mond scheint hell. / Wir und die Toten reiten schnell" (134 – 135). However, in the poem "Der wilde Jäger," Bürger portrays the macabre of the ghostly rider and profound malice that his apparition evokes: "Er rafft sich auf durch Wald und Feld, / Und flieht lautheulend Weh und Ach; / Doch durch die ganze weite Welt / Rauscht bellend ihm die Hölle nach, / Bei Tag tief durch der Erde Klüfte, / Um Mitternacht hoch durch die Lüfte (199-204). Nevertheless, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" emphasises the domestic history and the trauma from it. The Headless Horseman is said to be

“the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon-ball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary War, and who is ever and anon seen by the country folk hurrying along in the gloom of night, as if on the wings of the wind” (Irving 7). In conclusion, Michael Hurst suggests: “Ichabod Crane’s quest for Katrina Van Tassel restages the dramatic conflict between the domesticity and capital portrayed earlier in the book, but it does so in an American context that links the market to the frontier and domesticity to mobility” (659).

Following the previous two Gothic authors, Nathaniel Hawthorne is known as a representative of Dark Romantics. Dark Romantics indulged into exploration of otherworldly creatures and entities: “the Dark Romantics adapted images of anthropomorphized evil in the form of Satan, devils, ghosts, werewolves, vampires, and ghouls as emblematic of human nature” (Thompson 6). Thompson explains further the main characteristics of Dark Romantics, as a divergent genus of the Romantic movement that transgressed into Gothic literature:

Fallen man’s inability fully to comprehend haunting reminders of another, supernatural realm that yet seemed not to exist, the constant perplexity of inexplicable and vastly metaphysical phenomena, a propensity for seemingly perverse or evil moral choices that had no firm or fixed measure or rule, and a sense of nameless guilt combined with a suspicion the external world was a delusive projection of the mind. (5)

Hawthorne’s famous works include *The Scarlet Letter*, the novel that discusses (im)morality and consequences of sinful behaviour, and *The House of Seven Gables*, which due to its topic is considered to be the prime example of an early haunted house narrative (Reynolds 30). Smith claims that Hawthorne truly “adopted the tone of comic Gothic” (“Nineteenth-Century American Gothic” 170) in *The House of Seven Gables* due to some of the main motifs: “a witch’s curse; a mystic picture; as well as Mesmerism, Hawthorne’s up-to-date version of mental invasion” (Miles 110). The novel’s setting takes place in Salem, in a family house with a disturbing history. According to Smith, “the *House of Seven Gables*, itself erected on a shameful rotting corpse, is thus a version of the Gothic haunted castle” (“Nineteenth-Century American Gothic” 170) which is located on the American ground. The reader can note that in the novel, the house does not act as an individual character, but rather serves as a memorandum of past negative experiences and source of terror and malice to its owners. Nevertheless, Hawthorne integrates his narrative of a haunted house with the inclination towards deeper exploration of one’s psyche. Considering this, Dillingham claims that “despite the superficial

motif of an inherited curse, the real theme concerns the necessity of man's participation in what Holgrave terms “the united struggle of mankind” (60) that is visible in characters’ constant struggle and concern over two opposite extremes, such as the present and the past, youth and age, greed and unselfishness, isolation and companionship, and similar (Dillingham 60). Due to Hawthorne’s innovative use of family curses and corrupted grounds, the readers can note a widespread use of these topics in the works of contemporary horror storytellers, such as Steven King in his works *Pet Sematary*, *Salem’s Lot* and others. Castiglia simultaneously describes Hawthorne’s understanding of Gothic in literature and the main topics of his Gothic novel *The House of Seven Gables*:

*The House of the Seven Gables* is obsessed with law. In his preface, setting out the distinction between novels and romances, Hawthorne associates the former with realism, in which imagination, denied the possibility of fanciful transformation, becomes enslaved to “the probable and ordinary course of man’s existence. (186)

Alongside Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe is known as “poet, short story writer, and critic” (Ljungquist 7), whose controversial and innovative perception of Romantic literature formed the modern understanding of Gothic literature and horror fiction. Poe’s fundamental idea “that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul” (*Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, Volume 1*) shapes his works and encourages the reader to understand that the greatness of Gothic literary works was never due to the place of its origin but rather from the understanding of human inwardness that causes fear and terror greater than any setting or entity. In light of this, Fisher remarks that “he [Poe] contended that those who perceived only “German” (i.e. facile Gothic) substance in his tales overlooked his subtle modifications of terrors to function as credible psychological states” (30). Focused on the complexity of human soul and mind, Poe composed multiple eminent poems, short stories, and essays. In his works, Poe “uses Gothic machinery . . . to symbolize states of mind in characters tormented by intimations of death, insanity, and other forms of annihilation and chaos that lead to no rational reconciliation” (Unrue 114). Fisher synthesises Poe’s literary opus as:

Whatever the particular features of Gothicism Poe may have employed in a given work, the development of disorder or the creation of a frisson is not necessarily the actual aim, but is instead a means to demonstrate that terrors originating within an individual’s mind, unassisted by supernaturalism and intoxicants, are

as frightening, or more, than those circulated by writers of sleazy tales intended merely to stimulate a tightened gut or cold chills in readers. (57)

Despite everything, it is inevitable to note that Poe was greatly influenced by his contemporaries in Europe and America. It is to note that “the American narrative art has modified mood-invested space by enriching it with psychological and moral factors, causing it to assume symbolic character” (Hoffman 2). The sole genesis of Poe’s creation lies in his imaginary that uniquely correlates and builds a terrifying atmosphere on the ground of ordinary objects that in their unity possess the power to create disturbance in the readers’ mind:

the fact that to some extent relatively normal objects, the expressive value of which the observer seeks to fathom by means of singling them out, but which he must experience as equally mood-invested and therefore as being atmospheric unity, call forth an uncommonly strong reaction. (Hoffman 4)

In light of this, the reader can perceive that Poe’s scenery can produce the unspeakable and ghastly effect due to its complexity of singular objects that simultaneously overpower the narrator and the reader. Hogle suggests that in a profound analysis of Poe’s most notable works, one can observe historical and literary circumstances that surrounded the author and the influence that he obtained from European *Sturm und Drang* movement, alongside with rising Gothic literature in America:

The conflicted positions of central Gothic characters can reveal them as haunted by a second “unconscious” of deep-seated social and historical dilemmas, often many types at once, that become more fearsome the more characters and readers attempt to cover them up or reconcile them symbolically without resolving them fundamentally. (Hogle 30)

In the universal complexity of his main topics, Poe aims to achieve a unified effect that can be described as “the effect striven for may be one of horror, mystery, beauty, or whatever the writer’s mood dictates, but once the effect is hit upon, everything in the story . . . must work toward this controlling purpose” (Holman 181). Poe’s attentive choice of topics reminds the reader that life is fleeting, whereas beauty and emotions have power to continue beyond the grave. Since Poe explored the topics of love, death, burial, and afterlife, it can be said that he contextualized the universal concept of identifying with the characters. Despite everything, even though not literally, Poe’s readers can feel the narrator’s emotions because they reflect

their primary emotions of sorrow and remind them of tragedy and inevitable departure of loved ones. It can be concluded that:

Poe's ceaseless memory of those he loved and lost – and, indeed, our own unending memory of our own lost loved ones. Although there may be no “surcease of sorrow,” this poem does help to create, over time and around the world, a community of shared sorrow. (Kopley and Hayes 195)

Twentieth-century American Gothic literature does not differ greatly in the choice of dominant topics and themes, still focusing on the unsolved trauma from the past that directly shapes present and future condition of the main protagonists. However, the major shift occurs in the choice of setting in the narrative. The change of setting in the narrative occurs in the late nineteenth century, as Gothic writers try to modernize and bring the story closer to the reader:

While earlier Gothic fictions are usually distanced in both time and space, late nineteenth-century Gothic tends to insist, Kathleen Spencer has observed, on “the modernity of the setting – not on the distance between the world of the text and the world of the reader, but on their identity.” (Byron 188)

Protagonists in the modern Gothic narratives usually suffer from concealed and unclear sources of trauma on which the present hauntings flourish and sprout. In order to comprehend the perplexity of twentieth century Gothic fiction, one should regard the choice of topics and motifs in works of the dominant authors of the century – Stephen King, Toni Morrison, and Shirley Jackson, all of whom use Gothic motifs in their works.

Stephen King is widely recognized as one of the most famous American storytellers. In King's horror fiction, the author uses motifs of trauma, repatriation from beyond the grave, domestic violence, and coming of age. As Bruhm notes, “Gothic has always played with chronology, looking back to moments in an imaginary history, pining for a social stability that never existed, mourning a chivalry that belonged more to the fairy tale than to reality” (284). The same author uses Stephen King's contemporary novel *IT* as a famous example. In the novel, King transcends from the lines of reality and imagination to simultaneous projection of past and present relationships and exchange of events. Since the novel focuses on the coming of age theme, the reader can observe that King implements the motifs of domestic violence, troublesome past and loss, alongside typical horror elements, such as fear, terror, and paranormal encounters. The perplexity of the time and setting intertwines with change of time periods, that is, childhood and adult life, with culmination of events in the novel: “Stephen

King's *IT* . . . weave(s) in and out of the distant past in order to comment on the state of contemporary American culture" (Bruhm 284). It can be argued that King's works project the problems of American society and demons from the past to shed light on the present situation. Tony Magistrale comments that "*The Shining, The Stand, The Talisman, and IT* are fictions that present a macrocosmic view of postmodern America, providing the reader with a journey to the center of a post-Watergate heart of darkness" (16). To fully prove that King blends the imaginative with the real, the reader should observe King's choice of setting for *IT*. He sets the action in a fictionalized town called Derry that greatly resembles the real town of Bangor. As Magistrale remarks, there is a vivid correlation between Derry's and Bangor's structure, topography, landscape, and famous monuments (28). However, it should be emphasized that King does not proclaim America's soil as utterly corrupted or evil, but rather "all places where evil thrives in King's narratives [are corrupt] because most of the neighbours and civic-minded citizens lack the moral courage to stand up" (Magistrale 28). As many critics and authors suggest, Stephen King's entity of terror, the shapeshifting alien called Pennywise, actually embodies the lack of consciousness, morals, and common empathy among Derry's residence: "Derry and Pennywise share a reciprocal corruption: that the monster is the town, and the town is the monster" (Magistrale 64). The novel closes as King's characters symbolically transition to the world of grownups and break the bond with their childhood. To emphasise this notion, the author hints that once again, the protagonists will gradually and fragmentally forget Derry as soon as they leave it:

He awakens from this dream unable to remember exactly what it was, or much at all beyond the simple fact that he has dreamed about being a child again. . . . he thinks that it is good to be a child, but it is also good to be grownup and able to consider the mystery of childhood . . . But it's nice to think so for a while . . . that childhood has its own sweet secrets and confirms mortality, and that mortality defines all courage and love. To think that what has looked forward must also look back, and that each life makes its own imitation of immortality: a wheel. Or so Bill Denbrough sometimes thinks on those early mornings after dreaming, when he almost remembers his childhood, and the friends with whom he shared it. (King 1376)

Toni Morrison is another household name when it comes to contemporary American literature. She is considered to be one of the most famous African American Gothic authors and a first African American female author who "had been selected to receive the world's highest

honor for a writer—the Nobel Prize in literature” (Kramer 7). In her works, Morrison brings a new dimension to the typical Gothic writings. Heavily influenced and fascinated by Poe’s style of writing, Morrison manages to conjoin the typical Gothic elements with new and yet unexplored topics. As Morrison suggests, “no early American writer is more important to the concept of African Americanism than Poe” (qtd. in Savoy 207), due to his ability to create writing that nowadays serve as “profound meditations upon the cultural significance of ‘blackness’ in the white American mind” (qtd. in Savoy 207). In her most famous novel, *Beloved*, Toni Morrison blends the typical Gothic themes, such as ghost stories, family tragedies and death, with novel topics concerning racism, injustice, and struggle. As such, Morrison’s story circularly relapses from typical Gothic novel to the narrative of slavery and trauma. Helen Moglen observes that in *Beloved*, “Toni Morrison significantly reconceptualizes the psychological dynamic of differentiation and the social consequences of othering by radically interrogating the fantastic tradition within which she also writes” (17). The concept of sorrow and pain explored in *Beloved* marks the novel as universal, since Morrison with her protagonists delves into the era of common oppression and sadness, proclaiming it as the community of universal history and sorrow. In the novel, Morrison argues that “individual memories exist in the world as fragments of a historical memory, then, by extension, the individual process of recollection or rememory can be reproduced on a historical level” (Krumholz 395). Having that in mind, the reader can observe that Morrison’s characters heal universally and throughout the paranormal encounters attempt to relive and accept their past. The collective repression and inability to coexist with the past serve as a source of the hauntings in the family. In light of that, it can be said that Morrison’s characters do not experience the real and physical hauntings, but rather emotional and psychological:

Beloved’s story is a story of personal and collective loss: the deprivation of home, abandonment by an enslaved mother, the erasure of a disinherited father, the alienation of her body in rape and of her mind in the shattering of the mirror of identity. If *Beloved* speaks to the inadequacies of memory in its efforts to retrieve a personal and collective past, she speaks even more powerfully, through her mediations, to the risks and dangers of forgetting. (Moglen 24)

Lastly, Shirley Jackson is an influential American Gothic writer, whose narratives combine typical Gothic elements with psychological and moralistic aspect of the genre. Ruth Franklin remarks that placing Jackson within an American Gothic tradition alongside Hawthorne and Poe proves “her unique contribution to this genre came from her focus on



‘domestic horror’” (2). In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Jackson presents the readers with a nameless terror that is not physically manifested but rather a product of psychologically tortured and unstable characters: “. . . her (Jackson’s) narratives trap characters inside worlds in which illusions expand rhizomatically, driving her characters to death, suicide, abdication of agency, and/or resignation to a cosmos of Kafkaesque entrapment” (Vinci 59). As a basis for her hauntings, Jackson presents trauma as an ultimate trigger for action development. When observing Jackson’s “most Gothic novel” (Hattenhauer 155), *The Haunting of Hill House*, the reader can observe that the author cyclically closes the story by gradually revealing and revoking the source of terror. Even though *The Haunting of Hill House* can be understood as a ghost story, Tony Vinci offers a different understanding of the story: “Jackson employs the conventions of the ghost story and literary modernisms to do more than register the psycho-social problems associated with the gothic trope of the fragile damsel who disintegrates into madness” (53). It can be remarked that Jackson’s ghosts cannot be named or objectified but rather they serve as a representation of characters’ trauma and inability to cope with it. As Bruhm explains: “Trauma collapses the ability to render experience in a narrative... [and] destroys what Pierre Janet calls ‘narrative memory,’ the ability to apply principles of coherence and analytical understanding to one’s life events” (295).

Jackson’s immense contribution towards modern Gothic fiction is visible in her choice of the dominant topics and protagonists. The readers can observe that Jackson puts “her primary focus on women’s lives” (Franklin 13). Having that in mind, one is free to interpret Jackson’s idea of haunting the domesticated area as Jackson’s urge to investigate “more deeply the kinds of psychic damage to which women are especially prone” (Franklin 13) in today’s world. It can be observed that the house was historically usually attributed to women, whereas men were portrayed as care-providers. In light of this, one can understand that “the house . . . is haunted only in the way that all houses are haunted: with the memories created by the family who call it home, along with the faint impressions left by those who have gone before” (Franklin 298). Despite many notable role models who contributed to her choice of topics and style of writing, Jackson was mostly inspired by her own lifestyle. For her last journal notes, the reader can recognize the impact of true horror that lived within her and was present in her works: “Only way out is writing please god help me please help me and do not show to anyone do not show to anyone someday please god help me do not show to anyone because locked” (Jackson qtd. in Wilson 122).

In conclusion, the presented overview of the prominent authors and narratives serves to demonstrate a gradual transition in Gothic literature from the tangible and objective to the psychological and subjective. The authors mentioned above greatly influenced and changed the perspective of the typical narrative by shattering and deconstructing previous norms and patterns. It can be said that the tackling of relevant social and psychological problems made Gothic fiction more common and approachable to the readers. It is the ability to identify with the narrative that stands as a ground of the modern horror fiction:

What makes the contemporary Gothic particularly contemporary in both its themes and reception, however, is that these unconscious desires center on the problem of a lost object, the most overriding basis of our need for the Gothic and almost everything else. That loss is usually material (parents, money, property, freedom to move around, a lover, or family member), but the materiality of that loss always has a psychological and symbolic dimension to it. (Bruhm 288)

## 1.2. Gothic Motifs and Elements

I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

When exploring Gothic literature, one can notice an endless number of elements and motifs that can be attributed to the term “Gothic.” Nevertheless, it is said that a typical Gothic narrative consists primarily of elements encountered in Horace Walpole’s novel *The Castle of Otranto*. As Clery identifies, Walpole introduces the elements of “a tyrant, a prophecy, and ghosts demanding vengeance” in his Gothic romance (“The Genesis of ‘Gothic’ Fiction” 56). Alongside with the gradual development of Gothic literature, many primal Gothic elements and topics have been subverted to alterations and expansion. Despite everything, Robert Harris proposes ten common Gothic elements that originated from Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and integrated themselves into modern Gothic fiction. Firstly, the reader can note that “the setting [is placed] in a castle of an old mansion” (Harris 1). Usually, the setting of the novel accommodates the atmosphere of the narrative. The setting in the old and ruined place allows the writer to evoke fear and terror, as well as to propose that the final decadence of the protagonists reflects the state of the building:

Within the mood-invested nature scene, within the setting featuring the ruin, subterranean passages, labyrinths and corridors, and within the pattern of orientations above and below, outside and inside, these authors developed a firm topography and a system of place relationships, which by means of certain constants of expression facilitated the creation of atmospheric and symbolic form in the individual work. (Hoffmann 2)

Alongside the setting, the reader should sense “an atmosphere of mystery and suspense” (Harris 1). The author aims to provoke “threatening feelings [and] a fear enhanced with the unknown” (Harris 1). The combination of the setting and atmosphere commonly provokes utter fear and discomfort within the readers. In his essay “Horror Fiction: In Search of a Definition,” Bloom defines the impact of settings and atmosphere on the readers: “What is left is a series of

images, stark, eldritch displays of the beyond which remain with the atmosphere of haunted places” (219). The atmosphere in Gothic narratives usually changes rapidly, depending on the viewpoint of the protagonists, tone of the action and proximity to the resolution. As Lovecraft suggests, “A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces . . . a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature” (6).

Furthermore, Harris sheds light on the importance of “an ancient prophecy” (2) in Gothic fiction. It can be noted that an ancient prophecy can either be connected to the past or future events. As such, an ancient prophecy can strongly influence or crystallise the course of action in the narrative. According to Harris, a typical Gothic prophecy is usually “obscure, partial, or confusing” (2), leaving the reader and the protagonist nervous and disturbed until the role of the prophecy is fulfilled.

In addition to prophecies, it is expected to experience “omens, portents, and visions” (Harris 2) in Gothic narratives. As such, omens and visions have a foreshadowing effect that serves as a warning or an implication of a fixed event that will occur in the future. Depending on the context, the foreshadowing elements can be understood as positive or negative. It is common that the protagonists will “accept” the positive notion, whereas the negative dreams will be cast away and considered as unimportant and irrelevant to one’s reality. Freudian interpretation gives insight into the correlations between dreams and Gothic literature:

the “final solution” to the enigma of the meaning of dreams, in fact submits the reader to a repetition effect of horrific dreams of compounding grotesqueness alternated with disorientating absurdity. Meanwhile the elaborate “interpretations” of the dream return the reader to apparent normality and rationality – and yet as they become more and more complicated and far-fetched, it seems more and more as though their function is to turn the most banal dream text into the realm of the absurd and fantastic. The reader is increasingly impressed by the author’s extraordinary skill in transforming the most recalcitrant material of apparently banal dream-text into an ingeniously elaborated interpretation. (Young 20)

Another main feature of Gothic literature is the use of a “supernatural or otherwise inexplicable event” (Harris 2). The supernatural in Gothic literature symbolises the inability to differentiate with certainty imaginative aspects with reality. In its core, the use of the supernatural in literary purposes suggests the presence of “an objectified phenomenon without

rational explanation” (Partch Mehl 12). As such, the primary role of the supernatural is to scare and terrorize the protagonists of the narrative directly or indirectly (Partch Mehl 3). As science progressed, the use of the supernatural changed. At first, the readers believed in de-humanized forms, such as vampires, werewolves, witches, and warlocks, whereas nowadays the real monsters are invisible and prey on one’s inwardness and sanity. Due to the close bond between the Gothic fiction and the supernatural, Hogle claims the following:

Gothic fictions generally play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural . . . often siding with one of these over the other in the end, but usually raising the possibility that the boundaries between these may have been crossed, at least psychologically but also physically or both. (2)

Despite everything, one can note that Gothic literature is fundamentally based on emotions. Even though emotions in the narrative have many different uses and can be divided between positive and negative emotions, all of them can be categorized as “high, even overwrought emotions” (Harris 2). The oscillations of emotions within the protagonists reflect themselves upon the readers with the evocation of the sublime in the narrative. Edmund Burke defines the sublime as “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger,” including the threat of “death” and the dissolution of the self, by “operat[ing] in a manner analogous to terror” to produce “the strongest emotion of which the mind is capable” (qtd. in Hogle 41). Driven on the high emotions, Gothic characters usually oscillate between unexplained positive emotions that shortly decay into their negative counterpart, fear.

The elements concerning female characters in Gothic literature can be presented alongside with fear. Harris’ notion of “women in distress” and “women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male” (3) offers a focus on Gothic literature through a dominantly female perspective. A woman in distress is a common Gothic motif that presents the readers with a heroine who needs protection and is in grave emotional distress. As the narrative continues, the emotions of the heroine replicate the current situations in the novel and soon become a central part of it. Despite Cornwell’s suggestion that in “Classical Gothic” the authors will produce an ending in which “the heroine will be saved, the villain unmasked, and the supernatural phenomena dispersed (explained or confirmed, as the case may be)” (66), the reader can come across the other, more modern variants of salvation and revelation. As a consequence of inadequate historical roles of males and females, the readers can note that some Gothic works revolve around an oppressed and unhappy female figure who is voiceless and

subjected to male tyranny. As the story progresses, the readers develop compassion and empathy for the protagonist, whose ending is usually tragic but liberating.

Finally, the vocabulary used in Gothic narratives has become a Gothic element on its own, common to all similar narratives. Harris contributes linguistic aspects of Gothic narratives to three categories – “the metonymy of gloom and horror,” “the vocabulary of the Gothic” and “hyperbolic phrases” (4). The use of metaphorical expressions, alongside with *dark* vocabulary, stimulates the Gothic atmosphere and draws the reader into the narrative. The use of adjectives intensifies the readers’ experience of the situation and provokes corresponding visualisation to the author’s desires. It can be said that appropriate and attentive use of linguistic elements and structures forms a narrative of horror that impacts the readers and compels them to question the limit of reality and imagination.

To conclude, the development of the Gothic narrative implies variations in its elements and topics of interest. As such, the interests of Gothic literature prolong itself and change gradually, but the authors’ fascination with human behaviour as the ultimate source of terror will remain the genre’s staple:

Its plot elements and setting may change, but its plots still remain exorbitant, piling incident upon incident for its own sake, and its settings are still overcharged with a fearsome and brooding atmosphere. The nature of social transgression may differ from one era to another, and clinical understandings of mental disorder shift as well, but the Gothic still shows a fascination with extreme behaviors and derangements of human subjectivity. (Hurley 219)

### 1.3. The Use of the Haunted House in Gothic Literature

One need not be a chamber to be haunted, / One  
need not be a house; / The brain has corridors  
surpassing / Material place.

—Emily Dickinson, “One Need Not Be a Chamber  
to Be Haunted”

Gothic literature thrives on the use of the haunted house as the most dominant literary trope. The origin of the fear of haunted places, especially houses, rises because of one’s primal feeling of comfort and security behind the walls of his/her home. As such, haunted houses in literature have the ability to provoke ambiguous and dual feelings amongst the readers. At first, the readers are usually petrified and confused with protagonists’ desire to linger in the haunted area, whereas as the action progresses, the readers start identifying with the protagonists and become aware that any building, including their home, can become haunted. According to Sylvia Ann Grider, “[w]e humans have an incredibly powerful psychological attachment to our houses—our sanctuaries—and the intrusion of a threatening, otherworldly force in that otherwise safe setting is terrifying to consider” (143).

Haunted house in literary history reappears and gains ground simultaneously with the rise of Gothic literature. Nevertheless, throughout literary history, the role of haunted house has varied, depending on the context and its actual role. For example, early Romans, specifically Plautus, Pliny the Younger, and Lucian focus on the haunted house [castle] as a disturbing setting of the paranormal (Felton qtd. in Grider 144), whereas innovative Gothic authors present the readers with a haunted house as a metaphorical expression for trouble that simultaneously arises from the mind as a reflective image of the physical terrors. As the setting, “a haunted house is the site/sight upon which collective anxieties converge” (Cavallaro qtd. in Round 339). In its description, all the haunted houses are presented as secluded from other houses, decaying, uninhabited, and evoking unpleasant emotions. Grider suggests that the urge to create a haunted house rises from it being a direct counterpart to the fairy-tale enchanted castle, established by the Brothers Grimm. As such, haunted house distorts the traditional folkloric elements and adds depth to the one-dimensional fairy-tale characters:

Both the enchanted castle and the haunted house of literature and oral tradition are generally set apart from mundane, quotidian reality by being isolated high

up on a hill, but there the similarity ends. The enchanted castle is bright and shining; the haunted house is dark and brooding. The enchanted castle is filled with music and laughter; the haunted house contains evil and frightening, mysterious noises. The lines of the enchanted castle are geometrically precise, and the perspective is reliable; the haunted house is skewed and out of focus. The inhabitants of the enchanted castle are radiant, shining, and joyful. Dark, vague, ephemeral creatures and apparitions drift through haunted houses. (Grider 149)

It can be said that the need to establish the haunted house in literature rises as a necessity, due to coming of age and abandonment of the childhood stage within the readers. The common fairy-tale-like setting promotes childhood innocence and belief that the good always defies the bad, whereas Gothic literature produces the opposite. As such, Gothic literature brings depth to the idyllic narrative and imitates the complexity of human characters. Indeed, “the two settings are diametric opposites or, to use folktale imagery, the haunted house is the evil mirror image of the enchanted castle” (Grider 149).

Nonetheless, haunted houses can obtain the role of the character in the story, rather than serve as a mere location or setting of it. The duality of a haunted house – being a character and setting simultaneously, arises in literature as a signalization of one’s state of mind that replicates the deteriorating and frightening conditions of the house (building). According to Crow, the ultimate rebirth of a haunted house “evolves in innovative ways in late nineteenth century American fiction” (388). As such, haunted houses in literature became the epitome of derangement and instability in one’s persona. In their retrospective approach towards literature, Crow and Grider agree on the importance of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne towards the development of the haunted house literature and its subsequent popularity, as well as the rise of the haunted house from a setting into the protagonist. Grider claims:

Popular literature has brought the literary innovation of the haunted house as character to unexpected heights of psychological terror. The unseen supernatural inhabitants of these haunted houses assume the role of supporting characters who are seemingly controlled by the house itself. Instead of functioning as a *deus ex machina*, the haunted house *is* the *machina*, completely outside of human control. (157)



Undoubtedly, the experience within the haunted house surpasses one's ability to logically understand or explain the situation. As such, the reader can note that the action can only culminate when the protagonists accept the unrealistic and affirm the inexplicable paranormal encounters. As the house progresses from the mere location into the vivid character, its domain of power changes. Suddenly, the house does not only scare due to its grotesque vanity, but rather controls the events and entities within it. According to Bailey's *American Nightmares*, "the contemporary haunted house rarely serves merely to contain the unquiet spirits of past human inhabitants. Rather, . . . the house itself usually takes on an actively antagonistic role, to which any apparitions, if they exist at all, become subordinate" (58). As a consequence of this, the house as the dominant entity aims to seclude the protagonist(s) and deprive them of the real world imposing its own reality on them. In its climax, the haunted house narrative can resolve in two possible manners: Firstly, the protagonists can successfully defeat the evil and escape from it, as the house destroys itself, or, secondly, the protagonists can escape but the house and the evil in it will continue its existence (Bailey 56). The role of the house as a central character simultaneously affects the readers and the protagonists. It can be said that the irrevocable loss of a homey feeling evokes distortion and fear among the protagonists who have inattentively identified themselves with the setting, making it a replica of their own home. In light of this, Žižek comments on the strength of Poe's Gothic narrative that has influenced other authors, creating the similar effect among the readers:

The spectator is supposed to view [the scene] from close up so that he loses his "objective distance" toward it and is immediately "drawn" into it. [The text] neither imitates reality nor represents it via symbolic codes [;] it "renders" the Real by "seizing" the spectator. (qtd. in Savoy 206)

In contemporary Gothic fiction, the role of the haunted house has been slightly modified. According to Gounelas's article "Anachrony and Anotopia: Spectres of Marx, Derrida and Gothic Fiction," since Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* "the genre has remained fixated on anotopias, the repetition of other forms of this house, as well as of its contents: its villains, incestuous relationships, disembodied parts, and above all, the buried secrets of its origins" (127). Nowadays, in American literature, the contemporary Gothic fiction indicates "post-Freudian awareness, that the haunted house is the place where trauma occurred, but also, and subsequently, the projection of traumatized and haunted psyche itself" (Michlin 3). It can be said that the contemporary Gothic authors present the idea that "the troubling ghosts of past traumas were not restricted to architectural locales but made the mind itself a kind of prison"

(Spooner 18) from which the protagonists cannot easily escape, since it has become the crucial part of them:

As Emily Dickinson, a poet with a frequently Gothic awareness, wrote, “One need not be a chamber – to be haunted”: in twentieth-century film and fiction, the troubling ghosts of past traumas were not restricted to architectural locales, but made the mind itself a kind of prison. Thus, Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* (1988) presents its freed and escaped slaves as liberated from physical bondage but still imprisoned by their psychological scars, while, as several critics have noted, one of the favourite tropes of contemporary Gothic is the repressed memory of childhood abuse, as in Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977). Just as Edgar Allen [sic] Poe’s “House of Usher” ultimately crumbles into the tarn at its foot, so these psychological prisons characteristically disintegrate under repeated mental strain, terminating in madness and breakdown. (Spooner 18)

All in all, it can be said that contemporary Gothic literature aims to reflect the troubled state of mind caused by a repressed trauma. As such, it has the ability to reflect and replicate one’s state of mind and express it as the behaviour of a lifeless entity, most commonly the Gothic trope of the (haunted) house. By implementing the haunted house as the object and omnipotent character, the author indirectly conflicts the protagonists with the uncanny, but most importantly, with themselves as the ultimate source of terror. In fact, Gothic literature with focus on haunted locations raises its popularity in literature and film and is ingrained in American popular culture:

Their [the haunted houses’] iconic status and ubiquitous offspring in the popular realm testify to our persistent fascination with the perversities of the American home and the dark side of everything within. And whether we dream, snicker, or shiver in the presence of such places, their capacity to stir our emotions has hardly faded. Even today, they continue to haunt the imagination with undiminished power. (Burns 23)

## 2. The Haunted House in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?

—Edgar Allan Poe, "The Premature Burial"

Edgar Allan Poe wrote the famous short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" in late 1839 and published it in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, where he secured editorial work (Fisher 6). In 1840, Poe revised "The Fall of the House of Usher" and issued it in his collection *The Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque* (Bracken). The critics note the importance of Poe's short story about the Ushers as: "carefully structured, with the interpolated (and previously published) poem, "The Haunted Palace," positioned appropriately in the middle to function as a *mise en abyme*, a miniature of the story that contains it" (Peeples 179). According to an unsigned review in *Graham's Magazine*, it is "a story of horror and gloom, in which the feeling of supernatural fear is represented with great power" (qtd. in Walker 191). In his *The Gothic Vision: The Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear*, Dani Cavallaro expresses the importance of Poe's short story: "'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839) can be said to have generated a matrix for the exploration and portrayal of haunting situations as locations inseparable from their inhabitants' mental states" (87). Considering Cavallaro's words, one should note that Poe's understanding of the haunted house serves as a turning point in differentiating the physical from psychological hauntings.

Before reading "The Fall of the House of Usher," the author presents the readers with a perplexed question concerning the title and topic. The ambiguity and duality of the title suggest almost limitless interpretations. In light of this, Spitzer indicates that "our story is, as the title indicates, that of 'the House of Usher' (a 'quaint equivocal appellation', as Poe tells us, because it embraces both the family and the mansion of the Usher)" (352). Prijo Lyytikäinen suggests the following:

"The Fall of the House of Usher" contains a key word that helps to set the tone and a horizon of expectations affecting the emotional response – "the fall" creates suspense and possible excitement. A story of decay or destruction can be assumed: the fall of a house may be understood literary, or it may allude to the extinction of a whole family line because the family name is mentioned. (255)

At the beginning of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the reader should note the detailed description of the scenery. The narrator, who is nameless, does not disclose his whereabouts or specifics of his trip but rather suggests the strong impact and the sublime effect that his surroundings evoke:

DURING the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. (Poe 299)

It can be said that Poe as “a painter of ideas, not men and things” (Walker 366) embedded the idea of distress and an unexplained sorrow, by only describing the melancholic scenery that replicates the narrator’s initial emotional response to the readers. Emerson’s *Nature* (1836) further explores and explains the subjective and transcendental response to nature:

For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population. (9)

In this, both Emerson and Poe continue the English Romantic tradition of seeing nature as either divine or a way toward the divine, as well as a channel of and for one’s emotions, as did W. Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge and P. B. Shelley (Matek, *English Literature in Context* 30-31; 37-38; 45-46). As such, the setting in Poe’s works prepares the reader for future events by setting a specific tone, which creates a combined effect of an intellectual and emotional response that is unique and individual:

“tone”, as Poe himself called it, . . . regulates the psychic proximity or distance between the narrator and the event. Thus the “tone” considered with the reader’s

psychology in mind, also has a synthesizing effect; it affects simultaneously the intellect (“the reason”), the heart (“passion”), and the soul, and creates in the “tales of effect” that “vividness” which in Poe’s terminology is the result of a detailed rendering of emotional reactions and observational data. (Hoffmann 3)

Furthermore, the reader can understand that the description of the nature corresponds vividly to the decaying state of the house of Usher. The house, seen as an object, is located on the terrain with simple landscape and a tarn. As such, the house does not possess any disturbing qualities, but rather its correlation to the rest of the scenery provokes Poe’s unity of objects and the effect they provoke. The unity of objects in Poe’s works can be acknowledged as:

the fact that to some extent relatively normal objects, the expressive value of which the observer seeks to fathom by means of singling them out, but which he must experience as equally mood-invested and therefore as being an atmospheric unit, call forth an uncommonly strong reaction: “the mere house,” “the simple landscape feature,” “a few rank sedges,” “a few white trunks.” In various ways, the inexplicability of the emotion is emphasized, by which the narrator feels overpowered. (Hoffmann 4)

When the narrator arrives in front of the house, he acknowledges the simple components of the house that in their combined state provoke “an utter terror of soul” (Poe 299):

there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression. (Poe 299)

According to Crow, Poe’s idea of “The Fall of the House of Usher” is to present a “ruined plantation house of the declining, or decadent, southern aristocracy” (388). As such, the narrator sees the house of simple construction with “the bleak walls” (Poe 299), “the vacant eye-like windows” (Poe 299) surrounded with “the simple landscape features” (Poe 299) and “a few white trunks of decayed trees” (Poe 299). It is to acknowledge that the primary role of Poe’s haunted house is to simultaneously provoke melancholy and fright with its antique appearance and lack of vividness around it:

The landscape has produced an effect, and the narrator, a confirmed rationalist, cannot account for this effect, given the commonsense basis of association theory. The response se-overwhelming melancholy-is totally disproportioned to the stimulus-the “mere house” and its admittedly simple, empty, blank environment. (St. Armand 35)

Upon entering the house of Usher, the narrator observes that the decaying state of the house reflects the physical and psychological state of its inhabitants. The owner of the house, Roderick Usher suffers from “acute bodily illness – a mental disorder which oppressed him” (Poe 300), whereas his sister, lady Madeline Usher, suffers from “a settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character” (Poe 304). The narrator is fascinated with the knowledge that “the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variations, so lain” (Poe 300). Considering this revelation, the narrator implies that the maladies of the Usher family stem from their continuous incestuous relationships that marked the family name and identified with the mansion in which they reside:

It was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the “House of Usher”—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion. (Poe 300)

Nevertheless, the narrator shifts its focus from the deranged family history to the fear that starts captivating him since he entered the house. Before describing the source of his terror, Poe’s narrator declares that all sentiments have terror in its basis, which allows them to constantly evoke fear:

Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy—a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity—an

atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the grey wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued. (Poe 300)

Lyytikäinen suggests that Poe’s narrator has the ability to impose emotions on the readers, since the readers experience the story throughout his eyes. As such, Poe’s horror experience revolves around the unreliable narrator that carries out the entire story: “Poe’s narrator in his character-role also functions as a proxy for the audience by seeing the objects that affect the audience. The audience feels the awe and horror mainly via the objects witnessed by the experiencing protagonist” (Lyytikäinen 257). It can be argued that the narrator can translate the emotions that the author desires to evoke: “What the narrator-protagonist fears and loathes is supposed to have a similar effect on the audience” (Lyytikäinen 257).

As the story progresses, the narrator concludes that the entire house of Usher, as well as its simple surroundings create “an atmosphere of sorrow” (Poe 302) with “an air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom [that] hung over and pervaded all” (Poe 302). After the extensive description of the objects in the house, the narrator shifts to Roderick. The first impression that can be derived from Roderick’s physical appearance is that he is equally decayed as the house. The narrator suggests that his friend “had never before so terribly altered in a so brief period” (Poe 302). To emphasise Roderick’s state, the narrator dissects the grotesque features of his friend:

A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, . . . ; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, . . . ; a finely-moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; . . . The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity. (Poe 302)

Even though the narrator defines some of Roderick’s features as extremely rare, remarkable, and beautiful, the overall impression still revolves around the macabre setting that compliments Roderick’s cadaverous appearance. As it is suggested, the narrator “gazed upon him [Roderick] with a feeling half of pity, half of awe” (Poe 302). During the initial

conversation with Roderick, the narrator finds out that Roderick is afraid of his family mansion because it is a source of “a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy” (Poe 303) before it gradually started overtaking him. Consequently, the house provoked maladies that made Roderick incapable of leaving the mansion: “He could wear only garments of certain texture; the odours of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light” (Poe 303). According to Hill: “the House and the atmosphere both within and without are so intensely gloomy that, given time, they bear down upon the spirit of the narrator himself, just as they have born down upon the spirit of Roderick Usher” (397). It can be said that “the dark, depressing atmosphere is indicative of evil” (Hill 397) that will eventually devour the inhabitants and the house, causing its inevitable collapse. The dominance of the house upon its inhabitants is visible in Roderick’s self-fulfilling prophecy: “‘I shall perish,’ said he, ‘I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results . . .’” (Poe 303). As a result of everything, Roderick believes that the house dictates his moves and influences his behaviour:

He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth—in regard to an influence whose supposititious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be re-stated—an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit—an effect which the physique of the grey walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the morale of his existence. (Poe 303)

Nevertheless, the pragmatical dominance of the house over the Usher family is visible in Roderick’s relationship to his twin sister Madeline. According to Fisher, “The Fall of the House of Usher” innovatively promotes the motif of the twins, “in this case a brother and sister whose existence is bound up in each other and with their ‘house’ – the stone mansion and the concept of house as a people/family or mind” (77). Roderick admits that Madeline was his “sole companion for long years, his last and only relative on earth” (Poe 303). As such, “‘her decease,’ he [Roderick] said, . . . ‘would leave him the last of the ancient race of the Ushers’” (Poe 303). The sudden death of lady Madeline can be described as “an artistically well-timed death, for it supplies an apparent reason for Roderick’s melancholia” (Hill 399) and falls into the spectre of Poe’s fascination and aesthetic value in the death of a beautiful young woman. In his essay, “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe argues that “the death then of a beautiful



woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.” Even though Roderick and Madeline were not lovers, they “loved with a love that was more than love” (Poe, “Annabel Lee” 9) because they were together from the creation and shared the same womb. Martindale suggests that even though “the house symbolises a psyche in the process of disintegration” (9), the Ushers and their house as a building share a common soul which binds them and the doom of one reflects on the others (Hill 399). As the narrator proclaims, “she [Madeline] succumbed to the prostrating power of the destroyer; . . . the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more” (Poe 304), the readers can note the change in Roderick’s behaviour and the narrator’s inability to cheer him: “the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom” (Poe 304). It can even be suggested that sadness and melancholy are embedded in the house of Usher, as well as in the Usher family. As such, the house has identified itself to its master. Gary E. Tombleson explains the unbreakable bond between the house and the owner(s) as:

Usher the Gothic structure not only has an “expression of its own,” but it becomes a prison. Usher is “enchained” (2:403); the “master” has no control over his house as “object.” He is subservient to it as usual conditions are reversed. In the world of Usher “illusion” has become “reality.” (86)

Another key aspect in the house’s pervading dominance over Roderick is his artistic expression. It can be said that the house simultaneously provokes chaos and feeds from its inhabitants’ gloomy feelings. Roderick’s paintings, as well as his poetry, describe the inevitable destruction of the family and compels the narrator to conclude the following:

If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher. For me at least—in the circumstances then surrounding me—there arose out of the pure abstractions which the hypochondriac contrived to throw upon his canvas, an intensity of intolerable awe, no shadow of which felt I ever yet in the contemplation of the certainly glowing yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli. (Poe 304)

One can say that as the house deprived Roderick of Madeline, his insanity became his *modus operandi*. Nadal suggests that in Roderick’s eyes, Madeline stood “for the uncanny, the twin, the double, the Other, the grim phantasm and [finally] fear” (187). In retrospective, one

can say that the readers encounter Roderick who is “tottering on the brink of insanity” (Hill 399), whereas after Madeline’s tragic death, Roderick “fell into the abyss” (Hill 399), and this is an abyss of solipsism and isolation, which cannot be remedied even by art:

After that, even though Roderick is an artist who should therefore be engaged in exchange by means of his art, what he creates are works that either constitute mirror images of himself (“The Haunted Palace”) and the House (the weird painting the narrator describes) or are not transmittible by the only channel he still has open for communication with the rest of the world, the narrator, who thrills at Usher’s paintings, . . . Usher’s art serves to allow him to hold converse with himself, rather than to establish any relation with another. (Wasserman 34)

In fact, the strongest point of Roderick’s artistic expression is his poem “The Haunted Palace,” which testifies to his mental state: “Being Roderick Usher’s creation, it is, with its phantasmic quality, a manifestation of mental disturbance; because of its referential character it is also a sign of the sensitivity and clairvoyance of its author and of his truly amazing intuitive insight into his inner situation” (Hoffmann 7). It can be said that the poem “The Haunted Palace” presents “a miniature of the story” (Hayes 179) in which it is contained. As such, the “The Haunted Palace” can be noticed as the turning point, from which the narrator and Roderick start to experience the house’s full potential and dominance over everything that inhabits it. Since the poem replicates and gives an insight into Roderick’s disturbed mind, the reader can understand that the poem revolves around the unretractable happiness that was replaced with utter sadness. By identifying Usher with the house, one can conclude that “Usher, who is at once agent and victim of his own fate, a self at once enchained and enchaining itself” (Tombleson 92). According to Wasserman, the description of the palace in the poem has the qualities that can be applied to humans, more specifically to the Ushers:

Usher’s face is like the façade of the House that is mirrored in the water; the poem Usher composes, “The Haunted Palace,” describes a house whose facade is like Usher’s face and the whole of which is, in fact, Usher’s head; finally, the face of the Lady Madeline shows “a striking similitude” (p. 288) to Usher’s. In his House, with his sister who has been “his sole companion for long years” (p. 281), Usher is surrounded by reflections of himself and establishes relations only with a pseudo-Other, with another so like him as to be practically indistinguishable from him. (34)

Furthermore, one should emphasize Roderick's belief in "the sentience of all vegetable things" (Poe 307). Poe's sentience can be described as Roderick's unity with everything in the house. Due to the sentience that dominated over the house and its inhabitants, the Ushers suffered terrible consequences:

The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones—in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many fungi which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around—above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn. . . . The result was [the] influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made him what I now saw him—what he was. (Poe 307)

According to Spitzer, Roderick Usher's world defies the human logic and typical structural hierarchy of objects and its effect:

In Roderick Usher's world the differences between the human (animal), vegetable, and the mineral kingdoms are abolished. Plants and stones are sentient, human beings have a plant or animal quality (the influence of plant life on him seems to be reflected by his silken hair - "as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not ... connect its arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity"), and Madeline's youthful body is buried by her brother among the stones of the vault. Life and tomb, death and fall, are one in that strange world. (357)

In the final part of the story, the narrator and Roderick bury Madeline in the tomb "with intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight" (Poe 308). The tone in the story, alongside with the "gloomy furniture of the room" (Poe 309), dictates Roderick's and the narrator's emotional state. Considering this, the readers can note that the narrator became fully subjected to the house: "It was no wonder that his condition terrified—that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions" (Poe 309). As the story gradually reaches its climax, Poe's characters experience unworldly encounters. Nevertheless, depending on the readers imagination, the first encounter can be attributed to Roderick's mental illness, as the narrator fails to witness it: "'And you have not seen it?' he said abruptly, after having stared about him for some moments in silence—'you have not then seen it?—but, stay! you shall'" (Poe 310).

During “a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular its terror and its beauty” (Poe 310), Poe signalises the final resolution of the story. It can be said that Poe prepared the atmosphere for “‘an adumbration of the ‘enshrouded’ figure of Madeline,’” for another the desperate struggle of the house against Roderick’s resistance: as well as a ‘tumult of natural elements impotently opposing the silent and sullen powers which in that hour assert dominion over the House of Usher’” (Hoffmann 7). As the narrator starts reading Sir Launcelot Canning’s “Mad Trist,” the house starts mimicking the sounds from the story, culminating in Madeline’s arrival from the tomb. During his final monologue, Roderick confesses that Madeline was the source of his madness, as he and the narrator entombed her alive. Even though Roderick’s confession can be understood both literally and as the product of his ill imagination, Poe’s story has taken an unexpected turn: “‘Not hear it?— yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long—long—long—many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it—yet I dared not— oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am!—I dared not—I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb!’” (Poe 313). The final appearance of lady Madeline as an apparition with “‘blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame” (Poe 313), allows subjectivity in interpretation concerning her demise. Nevertheless, it can be said that Roderick’s death was necessary, as he and Madeline were meant to function as a unity. As Tombleson suggests:

Death is at hand; it is like a return to the preworldly existence of the rhythmically secure womb. Death is an escape from civilization and its discontents. It is a re-merging with the lost original environment, the return to oneness and unity out of which all originally came. Usher and Madeline at one time shared the same womb, and their birth split them asunder in addition to separating the pair from their original “home.” (95)

In conclusion, Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” indicates the house as an object and protagonist which is equally strong in evoking fear with its appearance and serving as an ultimate source of terror. As Madeline reunites with Roderick, the house collapses and disappears, leaving the frightened narrator to question the reality of everything.

### 3. The Haunted House in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*

To learn what we fear is to learn who we are. Horror defies our boundaries and illuminates our souls.

—Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* appeared in 1959 and was received as an assemblage of Jackson's personal trauma and interests (Franklin 356). Ruth Franklin suggests that Jackson reflected the miseries of her own private life in her writings focusing directly on "an unhappy, unmarried woman with a secret trauma; the simultaneous longing for a mother's love and fear of its control; the uncertain legacies handed down by previous generations; and finally, the supernatural as a representation of the deepest psychic fears and desires" (356). In 1959, Edmund Fuller wrote a detailed review of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, published it in *The New York Times* and suggested the following: "Shirley Jackson proves again that she is the finest master currently practicing in the genre of the cryptic, haunted tale. To all the classic paraphernalia of the spook story, she adds a touch of Freud to make the whole world kin" (4). According to Cleaver, Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* cannot be easily categorized because it emerged from typical Gothic elements used in an innovative manner:

Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* stands halfway between the haunted house tales of Poe and Hawthorne and the psychological ghost story as practiced by James and Wharton. In many of its particulars—its depiction of a tortured family, its presentation of a sentient house, its thematic focus on a central social issue of the twentieth century—*The Haunting of Hill House* clearly anticipates the mature formula of the 1970s and later. However, it avoids the visceral supernatural imagery we associate with such novels, instead emphasizing the interplay of personality and subtle shadings of motivation common in the psychological ghost story of the late nineteenth century. (25)

Before reading *The Haunting of Hill House*, the author presents the readers with an impactful paragraph that describes Hill House. Even though the readers could not geographically juxtapose the house or acquire knowledge about its history, the description of it provokes involuntary visualisation and utter fear:

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill

House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (Jackson 22)

According to Pascal, her novel echoes Shirley Jackson's understanding of primal dysfunctionality in a [American] home presented through the Gothic narrative:

In conformity with Gothic narrative convention, the "whatever" appears to be unidentifiable, even with regard to whether or not it is a single entity or a plurality - or somehow both. "Walking alone" connotes isolation, yet it may be what the "whatever" does in oxymoronic togetherness, or by way of some bizarre familial pact arrived at by disparate clashing wills. . . . Certainly, it [the Hill House] is haunted by ghosts, the liminal undead traditionally endemic to Gothic narrative; but its undead are [the] undead who constitute, in effect, an unfamily. Together they do walk alone, attempting to impose their personal fantasies and demands upon the communal domain. (465)

In the first few chapters of the novel, Jackson introduces the readers to the protagonists of the novel. As Dr. John Montague, Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke were introduced, the reader can note that their dysfunctional background and inability to adapt in the modern world made them the perfect inhabitants of Hill House, which is "detached from the rest of the world, set back and seemingly different from all that surrounds it" (Junker 9). According to Roberts, the isolation in *The Haunting of Hill House* plays a crucial role: "Taken together with Eleanor's longing for a home, a safe space, and isolation, Jackson's novel offers a discourse in which the family is rotten, but the home is safe, and in which enclosure, seclusion, and isolation surface as strategies for happiness and safety" (77).

In order to fully understand Eleanor's motivation to visit Hill House, Jackson gives the reader a glimpse into her childhood. Eleanor compares her unbothered childhood as the summer of her life that abruptly ended with her father's death: "she could not remember a winter before her father's death on a cold wet day" (Jackson 24). After that, Eleanor "could not remember ever being happy in her adult life" (Jackson 24). The spiteful and hateful relationship between Eleanor and her mother made Eleanor indifferent to the "cross old lady's" (Jackson 23) death and served as an encouragement to her to experience freedom for the first time in her adult life:

“Her years with her mother had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair” (Jackson 24). As a constant servant to her domineering mother, Eleanor failed to experience growing up with a motherly figure, which left an undiscovered trauma that will serve as the premise of the novel and Eleanor’s hauntings in Hill House: “the mother’s absence becomes a haunting presence that bears directly on the daughter’s difficult struggle to achieve selfhood as well as to express her unacknowledged rage of her sense of precariousness in the world” (Rubenstein qtd. in Vinci 60). This is only exacerbated by her strained relationship with her sister, who perceives Eleanor as dependant and weak. Eleanor’s desire to emancipate and break her family’s norms, represents an idea of freedom and attempt of control over her fate. As such, Eleanor’s idea of freedom will unfortunately remain just an idea, since the newly established freedom will be shattered by the ghosts of the past and trauma.

Before embarking on a journey, Eleanor’s encounter with an old lady foreshadows the frightening events that will occur later because it seems that the old lady senses the evil surrounding Eleanor, which makes her offer her prayers to Eleanor: “I will be praying for you, dearie” (Jackson 29). Eleanor’s reaction to this acknowledges that she is alone, not only on her journey to Hill House, but rather on her journey throughout her life: “Well, Eleanor thought, staring after the taxi, there’s one person, anyway, who will be praying for me. One person anyway” (Jackson 29). According to Jackson, Eleanor’s “journey was her positive action, her destination vague, unimagined, perhaps nonexistent” (30). It can be said that Jackson uses the adjective “nonexistent” (30) not only to describe the fear that the invitation to Hill House was a hoax but also to emphasise Eleanor’s nature as a dreamer: “she might never leave the road at all, but just hurry on and on until the wheels of the car were worn to nothing and she had come to the end of the world” (30). Throughout the journey, Eleanor creates imaginary romanticized tales of the places she sees and her domestic role in them. Inspired by her “joyful loneliness” (Jackson 33), Eleanor starts creating scenarios that are cast away as soon as she sees something new that occupies her attention and prolongs her dreaming: “Will I, she thought, will I get out of my car and go between the ruined gates, and then, once I am in the magic oleander square, find that I have wandered into a fairyland, protected poisonously from the eyes of people passing?” (Jackson 32). In light of this, Roberts suggests the following:

This blending of paranoia about other people and an increasingly pronounced desire for isolation and a space of her own — often indexed through inanimate, nonhuman items — are characteristics that come to define Eleanor. Her paranoia

introduces gothic imagery into the domestic fairy tales that she weaves for herself, such as the ‘poisonous’ oleander trees that will protect her domestic space. It is through this mixture of literary genres and modes and the elaborate assortment of nonhuman items above that Eleanor fashions her ideal fantasy self: a nurturing and secluded woman nurtured by her isolation. (80)

Having in mind Eleanor’s newly acquired freedom, the reader should note the essential importance of the encounter at a country restaurant. There, Eleanor witnessed the scene in which a small child refuses to drink milk because it is not contained in her “cup of stars” (Jackson 33), which is actually a baby bottle that “has stars in the bottom” (Jackson 33). In an instant, Eleanor perceives the little girl as her mirror image. One can conclude that Eleanor hates her life because she always feels obliged to meet other people’s needs and neglect her own. Therefore, the faultiness of her life lies within her inability to insist on her “cup of stars” instead of quietly accepting what everyone imposed on her: “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; don’t do it” (Jackson 33).

Before finally arriving to Hill House, Eleanor makes an unplanned and quick stop at Hillsdale. During the conversation with the waitress and unfriendly locals, Eleanor receives a warning about the nature of the area, especially her destination: “The man rose, taking change from his pocket and spoke for the first time. ‘People *leave* this town,’ he said. ‘They don’t *come* here’” (Jackson 36). Nevertheless, Eleanor decided to continue her journey under her mantra “[j]ourneys end in lovers meeting” (Jackson 42), and because “in delay there lies no plenty” (Jackson 34). As she arrives at Hill House, Eleanor describes the house and its surroundings:

The tree branches brushed against the windshield, and it grew steadily darker; Hill House likes to make an entrance, she thought; I wonder if the sun ever shines along here. At last, with one final effort, the car cleared a tangle of dead leaves and small branches across the road, and came into a clearing by the gate of Hill House. Why am I here? she thought helplessly and at once; why am I here? The gate was tall and ominous and heavy, set strongly into a stone wall which went off through the trees. Even from the car she could see the padlock and the chain that was twisted around and through the bars. Beyond the gate she could see only that the road continued, turned, shadowed on either side by the still, dark trees. (Jackson 37)



At this point, for the first time, Eleanor starts seriously questioning her decision to arrive at Hill House. However, it seems that any reality and outcome are better than going back home, as her journey to Hill House represents her emancipation and freedom from the tyranny of both her mother and sister. According to Dale Baily, Eleanor manages to overpower her fear of Gothic scenery because “fantasy functions as her primary coping mechanism . . . Eleanor’s separation from the workday world – the ease with which she slips out of reality and into fantasy – is . . . remarkable, even shocking” (qtd. in Wilson 121). Furthermore, the prophecy of malice in Hill House is once again noted with the caretaker’s words: “‘You won’t like it here,’ he said. ‘You will be sorry I ever opened that gate’” (Jackson 39). Eleanor’s ability to romanticize the horror made her “blind to what it [the house] represents” (Wilson 118):

Over the trees, occasionally, between them and the hills, she caught glimpses of what must be the roofs, perhaps a tower, of Hill House. They made houses so oddly back when Hill House was built, she thought; they put towers and turrets and buttresses and wooden lace on them, even sometimes Gothic spires and gargoyles; nothing was ever left undecorated. Perhaps Hill House has a tower, or a secret chamber, or even a passageway going off into the hills and probably used by smugglers—although what could smugglers find to smuggle around these lonely hills? Perhaps I will encounter a devilishly handsome smuggler and . . . (Jackson 40)

However, in the rare instances of reality, Eleanor’s fantasises get shattered and she realises the true state of events but ignores it nevertheless: “The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once” (Jackson 40). The raw description of Hill House suggests its vicious nature and promotes Jackson’s formula that “the true horror lies not just safely within the House, but within the world outside the House, and outside the novel itself” (Wilson 114):

No Human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice. Almost any house, caught unexpectedly or at an odd angle, can turn a deeply humorous look on a watching person; even a mischievous little chimney, or a dormer like a dimple, can catch up a beholder with a sense of

fellowship; but a house arrogant and hating, never off guard, can only be evil. This house, which seemed somehow to have formed itself, flying together into its own powerful pattern under the hands of its builders, fitting itself into its own construction of lines and angles, reared its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity. It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope. Exorcism cannot alter the countenance of a house; Hill House would stay as it was until it was destroyed. (Jackson 41)

Despite everything, Eleanor and the others are so accustomed to the dysfunction that they understand the House's threat as "purely physical rather than existential or spiritual" (Wilson 118). For example, even though Eleanor feels like "a small creature swallowed by a monster" (Jackson 45) in the House, she is not disturbed by a sudden emotional rush which she experiences upon entering the house: "She thought that her deep unwillingness to touch Hill House for the first time came directly from the vivid feeling that it was waiting for her, evil, but patient" (Jackson 42).

The geographical location of Hill House indicates that the house aims to isolate its inhabitants and itself from the rest of the world: "Except for the wires which ran to the house from a spot among the tress, there was no evidence that Hill House belonged in any way to the rest of the world" (Jackson 50). To the rest of the world, Hill House was "blessedly hiding its mad face in the glowing darkness" (Jackson 55), unbothered by everything besides its own existence. As the group found itself in the dark corridors of the house, they understood the vast space surrounding them that appeared limitless. Considering this, Jackson uses the ineffable in description of the house, as it is unbearable to comprehend its dominance over the individual: "Jackson's use of the ineffable . . . falls within this tradition of characters overwhelmed by their glimpse of the ineffable or numinous encounter with the preternatural, with the House itself offering the unbearable vision" (Wilson 115). It can be said that "the House itself slips in and out of ineffability, with its 'walls [always] a fraction longer than the eye could endure [and] a fraction less than the barest possible tolerable length,' as the House's physicality embodies and expresses its spiritual nature" (Wilson 115). When observing the House's design and room placement, the reader should note that the house is designed to elude the residents with its corridors and hidden rooms: "A ordinary house would not have had the four of us in such confusion for so long, and yet time after time we choose the wrong doors, the room we want eludes us" (Jackson 85). In her article "The Architecture of Evil: H. P. Lovecraft's 'The Dreams

in the Witch House' and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*," Matek acknowledges the disproportion of the house, its unique sense of balance and massive impact that it has on the story development: "Jackson describes Hill House as 'a masterpiece of architectural misdirection' where everything is 'off centre' and 'disjointed' (2013: 105–6) and where people get literally lost as the rooms are set in strange, impenetrable, concentric circles which defy traditional architecture" (417). Having this in mind, Matek concludes that:

the confusing disjointedness of Hill House is consistent with what Punter and Byron recognise as the lack of stability of the map in contemporary horror, which suggests an unsettling lack of coherence and logic: "No point on the map is exactly where or what it seems; on the contrary, it opens into other spaces, and it does not even do that in a stable fashion. What might have been an opening last night into another world may now be closed, absent, terrifying in the quality of its unyieldingness" (2004: 50-1). (Matek 418)

In contrast to Hill House evoking fear in its physical form, the readers should observe the psychological impact of the house on its occupants. During the initial conversation with the rest of the group, Eleanor remarks the following: "I don't think we could leave now if we wanted to" (Jackson 66) because "perhaps it has us now, the house, perhaps it will not let us go" (Jackson 66). From this moment on, Eleanor's strong desire to find a fairy tale home, even in something haunted, made her the ideal prey for the house: "Instead of unitary mind bound by an ostensibly human body that, together denote a comprehensive identity, Nell slips in and out of her body, through the very boards of Hill House and into the surrounding landscape" (Vinci 53). In a sense, Eleanor alone senses the strong influence of the House on her: "it might be the darkness and oppression of Hill House that tired her so . . ." (Jackson 76). As the action starts developing, Eleanor and the others start experiencing supernatural occurrences. The Doctor was the first to acknowledge the psychological threat that the House imposes on its inhabitants: "I think that an atmosphere like this one can find out the flaws and faults and weakness in all of us, and break us apart in a matter of the days" (Jackson 97). Therefore, he made everyone, especially Eleanor, promise to leave as soon as the House starts corrupting and consuming them: "Promise me absolutely that you will leave, as fast as you can, if you begin to feel the hose catching at you" (Jackson 97). Despite everything, Eleanor is unable to detach herself from the haunting of the house, as the house and action in it replicates her relationship with her dead mother: "This is primarily conveyed by the symbiotic nature of the relationship which the character [Eleanor] develops with Hill House as a substitute mother or substitute

womb” (Cavallaro 92). The motherly impact of the House is so overwhelming that even Luke on one occasion names the house as “a mother house” (Jackson 152).

Moreover, the initial hauntings in the house occurred in the form of Eleanor’s nightmares about her mother: “‘Coming, mother, coming,’ Eleanor said, fumbling for the light. ‘It’s all right, I’m coming.’ Eleanor, she heard, Eleanor. ‘Coming, coming,’ she shouted irritably, ‘just a minute, I’m coming’” (Jackson 99). The haunting experiences were accompanied by the change of room temperature, knocking, and strange piercing sounds that could not be located. However, not all of the characters could experience the same hauntings, as the house repeatedly separated them: “‘When Luke and I are called outside, and you two are kept imprisoned inside, doesn’t it begin to seem’—and his voice was very quiet— ‘doesn’t it begin to seem that the intention is, somehow, to separate us?’” (Jackson 104). The need to separate the tenants from one another likely follows the “divide and conquer” philosophy, as they are all weaker alone than as a group, Eleanor in particular.

Ultimately, every haunting becomes a threat to Eleanor’s psyche. Even when she discusses her feelings with others, they cannot quite understand her, because, to them, the hauntings were purely physical rather than psychological: “The sense was that 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” (Jackson 107). According to S. L. Varnado, “The haunted castle, in fact, is a fitting symbol for the concept Mircea Eliade calls ‘sacred space’ – the numinous realm primitive man set aside for encounters with the *mysterium*” (32). As such, it presents the readers and protagonists with “the realm of existence that lies hidden behind the world of material reality” (Wilson 115), and suggests “that death is not the end – the ‘end’ is actually something *worse*, and worse in a way that seems not solely restricted to traditional Christian ideas of hell” (Wilson 116). To Eleanor, the hauntings of Hill House were not hauntings from the present with the aim to scare and/or force them to leave the premises; her hauntings were rooted in her past trauma and have been an integral part of her persona. According to Eugenia C. DeLamotte, Jackson’s ghosts come from the past with the aim to torment the present: “Ghosts . . . are repetition: they are what has been lost but will not go away; what can neither be retrieved from the past nor exorcised from the present” (qtd. in Hattenhauer 206).

Since the nature of Eleanor’s hauntings is trauma, it can be said that she is paradoxically both a hostage of the house and the house itself. To her, the house simultaneously presents the motherly figure and the source of trauma. When Eleanor says “‘I can’t picture any world but

Hill House” (Jackson 114), the readers can note that she has already metamorphosed into the house, making herself “an assemblage of minds, non-human organisms, and even objects” (Vinci 53). According to Vinci, “Nell offers access to ghost’s ‘life world’, which, for Avery Gordon, is a spectral realm in which distinctions between actual and imaginary, past and present, and inside and outside become suspect” (57). In fact, everything that the house presents to the investigators is Eleanor-oriented. For example, “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR” (Jackson 116), which was “written in shaky red letters on the wallpaper” (Jackson 116) suggests the house’s desire to take over Eleanor’s soul. As stated in Kavka, “Eleanor is also the chosen victim of the monstrous house itself; not only does she say of the house, ‘it’s alive,’ but the house selects her personally, as though it were her mother, by producing a . . . message on a wall: ‘Help, Eleanor, come home’” (223). All further events from this have aim to seclude Eleanor from others, making her trauma invisible, and herself overly vulnerable to bear everyone’s company. The house has transferred Eleanor’s hatred from her mother to Theo: “She had never felt such uncontrollable loathing for any person before” (118), and “I would like to watch her dying” (119). When observing Eleanor gradually transitioning to becoming a part of the house, it becomes clear that: “it is not ghosts that are to be feared, as more formulaic gothic novels regularly proposed, or haunted houses, or castles; reality itself constitutes the ultimate threat to human existence and sanity” (Wilson 120).

Finally, it can be concluded in Jackson’s own words that “Eleanor IS house” (qtd. in Hattenhauer 159) and she is “ALL DISTORTED LIKE THE HOUSE” (qtd. in Hattenhauer 159). Symbolically, “the house’s foundation and construction allegorize Eleanor’s psychological foundation” (Hattenhauer 159). It can be said that Eleanor’s gradual transition to becoming the house is equally romanticized as her beloved fairy tales: “‘I’m sure I’ve been here before,’ Eleanor said. ‘In a book of fairy tales, perhaps’” (Jackson 52). It can be said that Eleanor’s constant struggle between remembering and forgetting, alongside with the personality of “the wounded dreamer” (Wilson 118) provokes her ultimate downfall. As the reality becomes too harsh for her, Eleanor decides to give herself to the house, as a desperate attempt to become part of the fantasy:

“Look. There’s 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 frantic and driven and I can’t stop it, but I know I’m not really going to be hurt and yet time is so long and even a second goes on and on and I could stand any of it if I could only surrender—”

“Surrender?” said the doctor sharply, and Eleanor stared.

“Surrender?” Luke repeated.

“I don’t know,” Eleanor said, perplexed. (Jackson 120)

In the end, Eleanor and the house have metaphorically destroyed themselves to metamorphose into each other. In the unity, Eleanor lost her sanity, and symbolically reunited with her mother and found her home:

Somewhere there was a great, shaking crash as some huge thing came headlong; it must be the tower, Eleanor thought, and I supposed it would stand for years; we are lost, lost; the house is destroying itself. She heard the laughter over all, coming thin and lunatic, rising in its little crazy tune, and thought, No; it is over for me. It is too much, she thought, I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all; whatever it wants of me it can have. (Jackson 147)

Eleanor’s romanticization of the house will continue until the very end. In an instance, she proclaims herself a part of the house, its owner and everything in it: “‘Here I am,’ she said aloud. ‘I’ve been all around the house, in and out the windows, and I danced –’” (Jackson 165). Due to a lack of reason and sense of reality, Eleanor felt invincible, at last reunited with the mother in the house of her dreams: “I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come inside. I am home, she thought, and stopped in a wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought” (Jackson 166). According to Vici, Eleanor’s unity with the house signifies her transgression from unity of an individual into the unity of collectiveness promoted by the house:

Nell, erased from the category of the human, perceives the world through a profoundly non-anthropocentric optic. In an effort to obliterate, at least imaginarily, her pain, her history, her untold traumas, she submits to a subjective state in which the borders of personhood are removed. (71)

Finally, in the last moments of her earthly life, Eleanor experiences the reality that overwhelms her: “Her magical flowers turn to weeds, her lions decay to half-buried stones, her cup of stars to trash” (Vinci 70). As Wilson suggests, “she is killed by her vulnerability to the House’s seduction, or her eagerness to embrace the love it seems to offer, but she is *destroyed* by her final awareness that this is what is occurring” (121). Ultimately, Eleanor retells the encounter with the old lady: “‘Someone is praying for me,’ she said foolishly. ‘A lady I met a

long time ago” (Jackson 172). Nevertheless, it is up to the reader to decide whether Eleanor’s suicide is a beginning of the never-ending fairy tale or a decision of a mad-driven woman who is over-possessed by her trauma. Despite everything, the romanticization and self-assurance fail: “I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last: this is me” (Jackson 174), and Eleanor is consumed by reality: “*Why* am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don’t they stop me?” (Jackson 174).

To conclude, it can be said that Eleanor became part of the house, just like all other women before her did. Eleanor’s trauma and misery will fulfil the hallways of Hill House and in its solitude echo for eternity:

Hill House itself, not sane, stood against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, its walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (Jackson 175)

#### 4. The Comparison of Poe's and Jackson's Use of the Haunted House

In forgetting, they were trying to remember.

—William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* present the narratives that revolve around the haunted house and its impact on the protagonists. Despite revolving around the same main topic, both narratives suggest a different approach. From the beginning, Poe's narrative revolves around present emotions and characters that are already subordinate to the house, whereas Jackson's characters gradually become subjected to the house. To exemplify, Poe's Roderick Usher has at once been "a man, music, and a house" (Tomblason 94), whereas Jackson's Eleanor "becomes at last what some fragment of her being has always wanted her to be, quite literally the woman of the house" (Clever 43). The striking similarity, however, rises in Poe's and Jackson's portrayal of the house. Both authors describe a purely Gothic mansion, placed in a secluded area and relinquished of other human contact rather than its present inhabitants. According to Matek, the horror of haunted houses in literature rises from the hauntings that occur simultaneously psychologically and physically, leaving its mark on the protagonists:

The horror effect of a haunted house arises primarily from the fact that 'the dialectics of outside and inside' is shattered because evil intrudes into domestic space, perverting safety inside 'the space we love' and bringing alienation from what is seen as good or acceptable (Bachelard 1994: 211–31, xxxv). The dimension of safety is countered by an 'overshadowing malevolence' (Lovecraft 2008b: 1072). The house's evil nature is reflected in its external and internal appearance and construction, as well as in its effect on the people who live inside. ("The Architecture of Evil" 412)

For Poe's characters, even the house's macabre appearance evokes fear: "There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of imagination could torture into aught of the sublime" (Poe 299). On the contrary, Jackson's characters were impressed with the architecture of the house and unaware of the evil that resides in it: "if last night a true measure of Hill House, we are not going to have much trouble; we were frightened . . . yet I cannot remember that I felt in any *physical* danger"



(Jackson 106). Furthermore, the role of the narrator is different in Poe's and Jackson's work. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the narrator obtains the role of the main character, as the story is told throughout his point of view. With that said, the readers can either believe the first-person narrator or not. In her work, Wasserman comments on the role of Poe's narrator: "Within the plot, the narrator functions as a mediator between the House of Usher and the world on the other side of the tarn" (34). As such, Poe's narrator allows the audience to "oscillate between the experience of the character immersed in the scenes remembered and the narrator, safely from the strange world of the House of Usher, reflecting afterwards upon the events that occurred there" (Lyytikäinen 256). In contrast to Poe's, Jackson's narrative is led by a third-person narrator, who is relinquished from subjectivity and is not portrayed as an actual character in the story. According to Hattenhauer, the role of Jackson's narrator is extremely complex, as it simultaneously has to present multiple actions that occur at the same time. Due to that, the narrator occasionally fragments points of view that sometimes focus on pure emotion rather than actual explanation of the event (171-72).

Moreover, the hauntings in Poe's and Jackson's works are explained and presented differently. In Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" all characters experience hauntings and are equally affected by it. Hill suggests that the House provoked both Roderick's and the narrator's madness: "His aberrant mind may choose what it wishes to believe, for in unreality are all things real" (401). Alongside with this, by the time Madeline was dead, "the narrator has so succumbed to the gloom of the House of Usher" that he believes he was infected by Roderick's madness (Hill 401). In contrast, even though all of Jackson's characters are exposed to hauntings, they are not equally dominated by them. Out of the whole group, Eleanor is the only one who succumbs to the house's impact and ultimately willingly gives her soul to it: "She smiled brokenly up at the house, looking at her own window, at the amused, certain face of the house, watching her quietly. The house was waiting now, she thought, and it was waiting for her; no one else could satisfy it. 'The house wants me to stay'" (Jackson 171). To others, the hauntings were physical, and according to some scholars, provoked exclusively by Eleanor's trauma:

The "supernatural" of Hill House is actually not "supernatural" at all; it is the "truly natural" of that "absolute reality." Hill House's relentless opposition to such ameliorative dreaming is made clear through its relentless attempt to seduce and then destroy Eleanor, a character defined by her dreaminess just as the House is defined by its lack of dreaming, although it does so, in a supreme act

of cruelty, by encouraging her dreams until the last moment of her life. (Wilson 116)

Another relevant aspect is the history of the two haunted houses and their previous owners. In Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," the reader does not get a full insight into the history of the house, but rather the narrator and Roderick explain the ill fate of the house and the family by pointing to numerous incestuous relationships from the past:

By refusing to enter into relations of exchange and reciprocity with the world of others, by engaging only in pseudo-exchange with mirror-images, the Ushers have attempted to escape the process of resolution of the opposition between self and others: they have interrupted the chain of obligations that binds men among themselves and transgressed the rule that defines them as human and, incidentally, guarantees their survival. The end result is not, as Usher thinks, a humanization of nature, but the destruction of culture. (Wasserman 34)

On the other hand, the entire history of Hill House suggests tragedy and demise: "Hill House has an impressive list of tragedies connected with it" (Jackson 69). As the doctor confirms after retelling the story of Hill House, "the evil is the house itself, I think. It has enchained and destroyed its people and their lives, it is a place of contained ill will" (Jackson 71). Due to its complicated history and some similarities to Eleanor's own life of solitude, misunderstanding, and tragedy, Eleanor successfully identifies herself with the ghosts of Hill House. According to Hattenhauer, the tragedy makes Eleanor misjudge the dangers that the house imposes:

The house . . . is both a mirror reflecting Eleanor and a window in which she sees herself in the depths of the house. . . . [T]he 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. (qtd. in Roberts 85)

Conclusively, the readers should compare the endings of the stories. In "The Fall of the House of Usher", the ending is provoked and channelized by lady Madeline's death, and Roderick's inability to outlive the separation from his twin. As Spitzer suggest, "Roderick fears the death of Madeline because 'this would leave him (him, the hopeless and frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers'" (354). In Poe's work, the death of a beautiful young woman is

presented as an ultimate cathartic experience for everyone. As such, it not only reunites Roderick with Madeline, but rather conjoins the owners with their house for eternity. On the contrary, Eleanor's death does not provoke cathartic experience for anyone but, rather, confirms the House's ill nature. Ultimately, it is debatable whether the company does not have time to prevent Eleanor from killing herself or whether they simply accept that darkness has taken over her.

In spite of everything, the open endings of both stories allow the readers to make a final judgement. In the ending of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," the house collapses in a purgatoric manner, leaving the narrator shocked but relieved: "With the union in death comes the dissolution of the whole personality and its sinking in of the house into the black tarn" (Martindale 10). Even though Hill House stays unchanged, Jackson's hauntings bear a deeper and more personal message. Eleanor's tragic fate and need for emancipation sheds light on the female perspective of the story emphasizing the idea of an unhappy woman that is determined not to give up on her "cup of stars" (Jackson 13), at whatever cost. Ultimately, Eleanor's death, solitude, and the collective tragedy of her existence can be compared with Jackson's immense sorrow that inspired her writings:

we are afraid of being someone else and doing the things someone else wants us to do and of being taken and used by someone else, some other guilt-ridden conscience that lives on and on in our minds, something we build ourselves and never recognize, but this is fear, not a named sin. then it is fear itself, fear of self that I am writing about . . . fear and guilt and their destruction of identity. . . . why am i so afraid? (Jackson qtd. in Franklin 394)

## Conclusion

All things considered, haunted house narratives have become the staple of Gothic literature since Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole introduces the readers with the newly coined term "Gothic" that will mark the genre and lead the readers into the world of the macabre. Since Gothic literature aims to evoke the sublime and terror, a careful use of Gothic elements allows writers to activate emotional response within its readers. In a Gothic world, horror simultaneously arises from the haunted setting and the troubled psyche. From the beginning, haunted house narratives provoked intense emotions because they symbolise the trespassing of the uncanny into the realm of the familiar and of home. As such, those narratives rise the levels of identification and empathy between the readers and protagonists. Due to the premise that every house can be haunted and that not all hauntings are physical, the reader starts questioning the safety within their home. The great interest in haunted house narratives has been noted in popular culture with numerous screenings inspired by literary work.

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* have been recognized as key texts for understanding haunted house narratives. "The Fall of the House of Usher" introduces the readers to Roderick Usher's world of madness, incestuous relationships, and death, whereas *The Haunting of Hill House* presents the story of a troubled woman whose hauntings stem from her unresolved past. From the beginning of the narratives, both writers present the readers with a detailed description of an old decaying family mansion, which thrives in its solitude for years.

In Poe's work, the House operates as an active character, whose actions determine the plot. As such, the House gradually takes over all of its inhabitants making them the marionettes of its will. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe subjects all of his characters to hauntings and makes them unable to resist the House's impact. On the other hand, in *The Haunting of Hill House*, Jackson presents the readers with psychological hauntings whose physical manifestation is dubious. Moreover, Jackson's haunted house dominates the weakest character, whereas the others are free to rationalise the potential hauntings. Nevertheless, "The Fall of the House of Usher" and *The Haunting of Hill House* share the same formula of the house primarily haunted with memories and past.

All things considered, Edgar Allan Poe's and Shirley Jackson's innovative style of writing allows the readers to experience primordial fear within the safety of their own home. In

their works, the authors presented the readers with the topics that defy both human mortality and logic. The brilliance of Poe's and Jackson's writing lies in the fact that "The Fall of the House of Usher" and *The Haunting of Hill House* can still repeatedly and memorably evoke fear and the sublime. Poe's Roderick and Jackson's Eleanor emphasise that the owners loved their home so deeply that they became an essential part of it, causing and participating in the ultimate self-destruction.

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