

# Historicisms and Hauntings Within the Context of Haunted Houses

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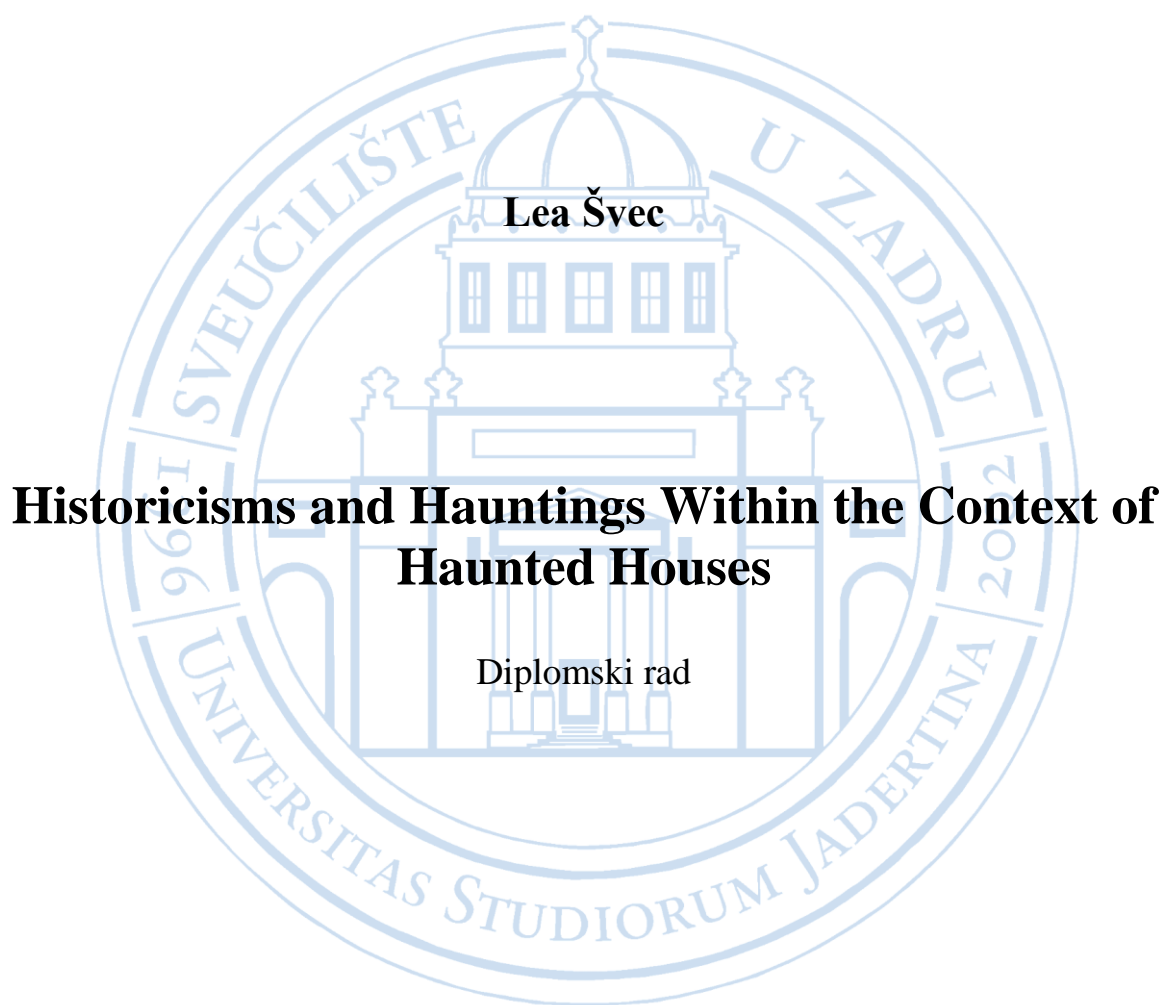
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Odjel za anglistiku  
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Lea Švec

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Historicisms and Hauntings Within the Context of Haunted Houses

**Diplomski rad**

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Zadar, 2022.



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## 1. Introduction

According to Gallup's research, three out of four Americans believed in something that was of paranormal nature at the beginning of the twenty-first century; some examples include: mental telepathy, ghosts, communicating with the dead, haunted houses, astrology, clairvoyance, reincarnation, witches, etc. (Goldstein et al. 4). Indeed, there is no scientific evidence to prove that any of the previously mentioned ideas are real, but that does not stop us from wondering. Although no one is certain whether any of these paranormal entities actually exist, people still continue to visit haunted houses, write ghost stories, and make films about them. Contrary to past tendencies, ghost stories are no longer told through word of mouth and folklore, but are incorporated into various books and films that make them available for larger and more diverse audiences. Folklore is represented by traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community that are passed from one generation to another through word of mouth. Therein lies the interconnection between folklore and popular culture, where popular culture reproduces folklore and modernizes it according to contemporary concerns and language while at the same time staying true to the original themes and motifs of the traditional ghost story (Goldstein et al. 5). Some examples include movies such as Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), television series such as Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk's *American Horror Story* (2011-present), but also children's cartoon films such as Seymour Reit's *Casper the Friendly Ghost* (1945-1959).

Depending on a person's belief system and whether they depend largely on science or not, the answer to the question "Do you believe in ghosts?" can vary due to the fact that science does not approve of ghosts because there is no physically confirmed proof of their existence. All we have are stories. Still, these stories are important because they offer an insight into a particular culture and its anxieties, fears, and beliefs in general. Therefore, "supernatural narratives directly

or indirectly tell us about culture” (Goldstein et al. 30). Ghosts are nothing more than mere “projections of memories and fears” coming to life with the help of some “optical device” for people who do not believe in them (Curtis 91). Still, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when science was working on new ways of explaining reality, the fascination related to the afterlife and the “returning dead” was stronger than ever before as it influenced a number of writers to incorporate these unexplained notions into their writing (91).

Bachelard writes about the idea of images of space and how they relate to their creator (the writer) and the recipient (the reader). His theory is based on “topoanalysis”, also described as the “systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (Bachelard 8). Bachelard’s analysis is solely focused on the “spaces we love” that are known to each person as a place that offers protection and positivity, and are always related to the notion of a childhood home (35). The main advantage of the childhood home is that it ensures a safe space for daydreaming, as it encourages the individual to dream peacefully (6). As the opposite of the childhood home, he also shortly mentions the “hostile space”, described as a place of “hatred and combat” (36). Bachelard also explains one of the main themes that connect the house with the notion of stability that usually attracts the individual and makes them feel safe and welcome in it. On the contrary, the hostile space would therefore be represented by a lack of stability of space, causing fear and anxiety for those who reside inside it. Moreover, he explains the theme of verticality by explaining the cellar-attic polarity. To illustrate, the cellar is the lowest, subterranean part of the house which also makes it the house’s darkest part. Psychoanalyst C. G. Jung explains the cellar-attic duality with the goal of analyzing the fears that reside in a house: “Here the conscious acts like a man who, hearing a suspicious noise in the cellar, hurries to the attic and, finding no burglars there decides, consequently, that the noise was pure imagination. In reality, this prudent



man did not dare venture into the cellar” (Bachelard 19). Therefore, the man chose to face the fear in the attic in order to find evidence for his courage while unconsciously avoiding the real, more prevalent fear in the cellar. This is because fear can be rationalized in the attic that sees the light of day, but it is not as easily done in the cellar as it is always covered in darkness. What is more, the man knows that the walls of the cellar have nothing but earth behind them and that the staircase is the only way out, while the attic can be broken through, there is life and the outside world behind its walls. Bachelard describes the house as a “psychic state” that implies intimacy, and Minkowska’s exhibition proves this point as it introduces the “motionless houses” drawn by children who survived the Second World War; their houses were noticeably dark, cold, narrow and guarded by straight trees surrounding them (72). What is more, “houses have a particular relationship to memory and the ways that previous generations have lived in them and transformed them” (Curtis 14). This means that every family that has lived in a particular house leaves a trace on it that further affects the way that the house is viewed by others depending both on its architecture as well as the stories people tell about it. For example, a house that is known in the neighborhood as a place where something dark had happened (e.g. murder or suicide) will consequently be viewed as a negative space with bad energy.

Evidently, the house can have either negative or positive connotations, with positive connotations relating to the childhood home ensuring a safe space for daydreaming and the motionless house representing the cold, dark, unsafe space. I will further be relating the motionless house with the haunted house that “relates to the mysteries of projection and animation – a blurring of the distinctions between the living and the dead, the organic and the material” (Curtis 29). Such unsafe space is also incorporated in various haunted house stories in books, movies and television series with ghosts and the cold, dark places they haunt functioning

as metaphors for various themes such as “loss, memory, retribution and confrontation with unacknowledged and unresolved histories” (Curtis 10). A large quantity of haunted house stories is focused on some outside malevolent force ostracizing a family home as it portrays how the family reacts to it and how they decide to fight against it. However, one of the crucial elements of narratives about hauntings is the moment of discovery and excavation of the source of evil. By knowing where this evil comes from and how it came to existence, the family is able to find ways to fight it and banish it from their property (Paquet-Deyris 1).

Furthermore, Curtis suggests that the recent interest in ghost stories, both in literature and cinema, might be connected to the need to recognize what has always been ignored in the process of building up the contemporary world, such as slavery and the frontier myth (10). The American frontier was relevant between the 17th and the 20th century as European Americans colonized and expanded across North America, and this period of time became romanticized and idealized in literature and art to form a myth of the frontier conquering America and its Native American tribes. To illustrate, many haunted story narratives explain the nature of a haunting to have been the result of a house being built on ancient Native American burial grounds, and seeing how European Americans took the land of the Natives and brutally killed most of them, the idea of death and tragedy can easily be incorporated into a ghost story narrative.

In addition, ghosts embody various fears of a nation, such as the fear of death and what comes after it. Some people find comfort in believing in the after-life because in doing so, they reduce the fear of death as the final end of everything by believing that their souls will continue living outside of their body, hence the notion of ghosts being nebulous images, an apparition of a deceased person. Spiritualism put ghosts under the limelight during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it focused on widening knowledge of undiscovered spiritual realms and provided people with a set of rules

for contacting the dead (Curtis 27). Spiritualism also strongly affected Gothic literature, with American Gothic writers portraying their own versions of the isolated and haunted castle in symbolizing an insecure nation by putting an emphasis on themes of loneliness, social and psychic disorder, self-terror, homelessness, and disintegration of families (Lucia Solaz qtd. in Izquierdo 36). Furthermore, the Gothic genre was also easily recognizable for its use of ruins as “sites for the contemplation of transience and loss and evidence of the destructive power of time and the inevitable return of nature and the forces of decay and predation” (Curtis 107). Gothic traditions prevailed even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by leaving the focus on evil powers, places of traumatic happenings, as well as dark places and eerie ambience.

As this thesis will be dealing with the subject of haunted houses in literature with the focus on Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977), and Jay Anson’s *The Amityville Horror* (1977), the aim of my research will be to discuss each writer’s idea of what a haunted house may pertain.

## **2. About the Gothic and Horror Genre**

Horror developed as a genre during the end of the eighteenth century and it holds a close relation to the Gothic literary genre. Lucia Solaz theorizes that the reemergence of the Gothic genre came as a response against the Enlightenment, which was led by the thought that humanity could achieve “true knowledge and harmonious synthesis” through reasoning, thereafter claiming bliss and integrity (qtd. in Izquierdo 9). Gothic terror can be traced back to Anglo-Saxon roots, considering it was also a reaction to Rationalism (9). The Gothic and Horror genre are represented by romantic settings such as dark forests, shady landscapes, crypts, medieval castles and ruins, passages filled with ghosts, skeletons, and unexplainable noises. What is more, they are also recognizable for their portrayal of a damsel in distress who is usually forced by the

tyrannical father, husband or king to marry or to succumb to some sinister action. The Gothic genre is intriguing because it opens up a universe where every character has a hidden dark past or some kind of a secret. These previously unknown facts come to light due to certain “nocturnal forces” such as dreams, unpredictable situations and a “sequence of apparitions” that the characters have to confront (10). What is more, if the characters want to rid themselves of the haunting, first they must discover its nature and origin by doing research in the local newspaper, library archives, or family photographs and journals.

The Gothic and Horror genre have the following aspects in common: the location is usually an old castle, the atmosphere is eerie and mysterious, the characters fight some kind of uncontrollable and strong emotions (they suffer panic attacks that are usually the cause of unhealthy love, jealousy, depression, paranoia, etc.). Additionally, there is usually some mention of a curse having been thrown on a whole village and its inhabitants, as well as ancestral prophecies, etc. (Izquierdo 10). However, the main aspect that is prevalent in these genres is the notion of fear. Fear being “the oldest and most intense emotion of humanity” that never leaves the minds of the characters, and therefore also has a strong effect on the reader (Lovecraft qtd. in Izquierdo 10). Newman answers the question of why humans are attracted to seeking out experiences that would make them fearful by quoting H. P. Lovecraft and stating that this is due to the “human fear of the unknown” (120). He also offers Freud’s theory of the “uncanny” (*unheimlich*) as being the opposite of “homely” and “familiar” (*heimlich*) by associating the uncanny with “fear of the unknown”: “the experience of the uncanny arises either when primitive animistic beliefs, previously surmounted, seem once more to be confirmed or when infantile complexes, formerly repressed, are revived” (120). Therefore, the uncanny could be defined as anything that is unfamiliar and unknown to a person, but also as something that is unconsciously

relevant to something the person is familiar with but it can also be defined as something that used to be familiar that later became a “source of fear and dread” (Matek 408).

Similarly, the haunted house narrative is influenced by the Gothic genre due to the architecture which makes the general ambience of the house rather eerie and unwelcoming. Curtis states that Gothic elements can be recognized in literature, drama and the social world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as some of them include optical illusions, tricks and toys which were believed to have had a connection to magic (80). Moreover, the interest in ghosts and mysterious dark places was noticeable in the early years of cinema due to the fact that they were portrayed in a variety of ways (e.g. Disney’s *The Skeleton Dance* from 1929). Still, the ghost story originates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century Gothic novels and it became significantly more prominent during the late Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century mostly in America and Britain (Curtis 84). These novels were largely focused on depicting the space and the ambience of the haunted castle which made it easily imaginable that some kind of a supernatural being would reside there (e.g. Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* from 1764, known as the first true English-language Gothic). Curtis explains that the reason why people were so preoccupied with the supernatural might have been due to the fact that funerals were held without the deceased body present at the time, therefore allowing “a kind of melancholia” to persist in believing that the dead were “never laid to rest and instead persisted as omnipresent ghosts” (84).

The main element of haunted house narratives is the notion of the past disturbing the present (Curtis 84). To signify, Victorian houses were in fact built to reflect the past during the Gothic Revival period (an architectural movement that began in the late 1740s England) by putting a significant focus on reviving elements of medieval Gothic architecture, such as various decorative patterns, hood moulds, lancet windows, and finials. Still, houses were built to also

reflect a feeling of domesticity and it is this blending of the “humble” and the “grandiose” that made Gothic architecture a composite of both “historicism” and the “fantastic” (86). Therefore, it can be said that the haunted house as a Gothic building has the ability to “bind time and condense historical narrative in ways that intensify and distort spatial perceptions” because they are based on notions of history and ancestry (87).

In regards to the origin of the ghost story, it was during the post-Reformation period when the existence of purgatory was denied that left less space for belief in ghosts. Fear of the dead remained and spiritual and unexplainable apparitions were considered to have been related to the devil. Moreover, ghosts were believed to have been a “product of Catholic magic” or a “remnant of older folkloric beliefs” and Catholic rituals for exorcizing haunted places inspired the Gothic melodrama to incorporate such practices into fiction writing (Curtis 89). Consequently, this made the ghost story seem more familiar to the general public, who had already been familiar with some of the Catholic exorcizing practices (89). Human fascination with death can also be recognized in the earliest images ever developed in printed books, which were in fact images of the afterlife and skeletons. These images also prevailed and inspired the later-developed world of cinema which focused on delivering their audiences with something they were familiar with, including various images of death and “resurrection” (90).

Furthermore, the Gothic genre is different from other genres because it contrasts them by focusing on depicting space as dark, scary, ugly and unwelcoming while expressing it as lacking beauty and harmony. Evidently, the Gothic genre counters the usual norm of the moral, good, and beautiful by presenting the reader with the immoral, evil, and ugly, consequently “testing the limits of what is tolerable in art and experience” (Matek 407). Stemming from this, the house also contrasts the usual norm as it becomes an eerie, dark and unwelcoming space filled with

secrets and dark corners, recalling memories of tragic and traumatic events that happened within its walls. Here it is important to consider Bachelard's view which states that "there is ground for taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul" because by stating this he establishes a relationship between the spiritual and the spatial (36). Taking this into consideration, the goal of horror fiction is to elicit fear, to cause uneasiness by "testing the reader's tolerance for deviance" (Matek 411). Lovecraft explains the importance of the setting for horror fiction by stating that the environment shapes and invokes people's emotions and instincts, and it is according to this that they react (qtd. in Matek 411). Therefore, the early British Gothic places the main character in old ruined castles and depicts "claustrophobic" dungeons, catacombs, and dark secret passages in order to invoke the feelings of fear and uneasiness within the reader. However, the American Gothic and Horror literature took a different perspective in depicting the haunted place by concurring it with the "nexus of evil" (412). The place that is usually recognized as safe and homely is now turned into something dark, unsafe, and evil which is further accentuated by the building's architecture and the effect it has on those who reside inside it.

### **3. Haunted Houses in Literature**

According to Goldstein et al, the oldest ghost stories date back to Roman literature, and it can be said that Plautus, Lucian, and Pliny the Younger were some of the first writers who wrote about ghostly hauntings. Although their works featured a house as the place of haunting by ghosts who seek revenge for their death, it was simply a passive setting that signified the place of interaction between humans and ghosts. It was during the time of Romantic literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century that Gothic novels featured haunted houses as active settings invoking feelings of fear and uneasiness (144).

After the Great War, Freud published his essay “The Uncanny” which was inspired by Moberley’s ghost story titled “Inexplicable”; he recognized a fear related to the family home which anyone could easily identify with, especially during wartime. To specify, Freud introduced the notion of the “uncanny” (unheimlich) as “the inevitability of a house incorporating traces of the dangers and unease it has been constructed to protect its users against” (qtd. in Curtis 108). Evidently, he introduced the notion of fear that changes the notion of one place a person would always feel safe in by turning this very building into a place of fear, evil and dread. Stemming from this, a haunted house can be described as a “disrupted architectural space”, meaning that the place that used to invoke feelings of comfort, warmth and safety now causes the person to feel afraid, unwelcome, and uneasy when they are near it (Curtis 101).

Curtis claims that the fact that houses are not human but are in fact involved with humans might cause a type of anxiety called “the architectural uncanny” where a sense of intimacy is confronted with serious feelings of anxiety, denoting a space where the notion of time is disturbed (12). For example, Shirley Jackson’s 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* deals with a house that is “chillingly wrong in all dimensions”, marking it as an architectural deviation that becomes awakened upon the arrival of a character with a troubled past (Jackson 17). Another example of the uncanny is the fact that windows, doors, cupboards and drawers, as well as electrical devices such as telephones and televisions all act on their own as they open and close or turn on and off on their own will (Curtis 111).

Moreover, Freud explains the meaning of the word “haunting” as something that is unfamiliar and cannot be fully comprehended, as well as something that was “repressed”, “unacknowledged”, and “forgotten”; it can also relate to signifying “a disruptive event that has



left a dimensional trace” (qtd. in Curtis 24, 13). Moreover, the whole nature of the haunting is left to be uncovered and brought to light by the new inhabitants, but this unearthing of the past brings the risk of awakening something dark and vile and putting the lives of those who awakened it in danger (110).

Interestingly, haunted house narratives are usually explored by young women who are expected to solve the problems of the haunting by researching and discovering the nature of the haunted place’s past. This is a theme that repeats in all three of the novels used in this research, with Eleanor being the protagonist and the one who built the strongest connection with the haunted house in Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, then again in King’s *The Shining* where Wendy Torrance is expected to save her son from his father and her husband, as well as in Anson’s *The Amityville Horror* where Kathy Lutz seemed to attract the paranormal as she was the one to have had most contact with it, along with her young daughter Missy. Therefore, it can be said that the female characters are one of the key elements of the haunted house narratives as they usually establish the closest connection with the haunting by having various experiences with it. These experiences include situations where they feel a touch on their shoulder, a presence standing near them or hugging them or holding their hand, and even levitating above their beds as a cause of paranormal influence.

What is more, haunted house narratives hold as one of their main themes a family that moves into their new home which was bought for a suspiciously favorable price. Throughout the story they learn the real reason as to why their new home was so easy to acquire and why the neighbors never welcomed them into their neighborhood. In addition, the new inhabitants of the haunted house are most often in some kind of conflict between each other, making them more vulnerable and perceptive to the haunting elements of the house. For example, in Jackson’s novel

Eleanor is a woman who had lost her mother to illness and has a bad relationship with her sister, whereas King's Torrance family had suffered through abusive alcoholic fathers both in Jack's and Danny's childhood. Interestingly, Anson's the Lutzes had a good relationship until they moved into their new home, starting a series of fights and miscommunications among all of the family members. Furthermore, the family is usually either unaware of their new home's tragic past (being the place where murders and/or suicides took place) or one of the parents had been familiar with the background of the house but decided not to believe in it as they keep this secret from the rest of the family. As a result, the family moves into the new home where they become witness and victim to various forms of paranormal activity. As Curtis states, "houses are constructed of dreams and anxieties", meaning that the house's structure and ambience are influenced by the events that have occurred inside it, as well as by all of its previous and current inhabitants (32). Stemming from this, houses offer places for "self-realization" as they are affected and haunted by "memories, by the history of their sites, by their owners' fantasies and projections" (Curtis 34). These places are haunted by a loss that happened in the past and demands for attention and resolving in the present (34). Therefore, it can be said that the haunted house is "a place where the past is still alive and capable of making temporal connections that appear as spatial coordinates", meaning that it is a place where the past overpowers the present (40).

The idea behind every haunted house narrative is represented by a tragic event that had happened in the past and the effect it had on the space where it happened, portraying how a traumatizing incident can leave an imprint by consequently deforming the place and thereafter causing harmful circumstances to its future inhabitants (Curtis 63). Similarly, Stephen King compares the haunted house to a "psychic battery" which would mean that the house assimilates

emotions and is strongly affected by them (67). This would mean that the house and its inhabitants exist together in a form of symbiosis due to the fact that they both have an effect on each other, the emotions that the humans feel can affect the house, and so the ambience of the house can affect the humans residing in it.

### ***3.1. Architecture of the Haunted House***

The image of the haunted house is embedded into every person's mind as it has specific characteristics that differentiate it from other "normal" houses. For example, anyone would imagine a haunted house to be guarded by tall dark trees and surrounded by a tall fence, preventing people from seeing it as a whole from the road. It is recognized in the neighborhood as a "troubled place, marked by neglect, strange habits and failed rituals of order and maintenance" that calls for "childhood fears, tentative new beginnings, dramas of inheritance and the return of the repressed" (Curtis 31). It is also detached from the rest of the neighborhood or it is situated in the countryside, guaranteeing privacy and seclusion for whatever supposedly dwells inside (203). The spatial relations of the haunted house co-occur with the feeling of time standing still which is very often represented in Gothic fiction by sudden lowering of temperature (61).

According to Curtis, the early 18<sup>th</sup> century was the first time that single-family homes became more popular as the people were affected by "new attitudes to property, individuality and identity" (41). During those times the people had a desire for privacy and wanted to focus more on their families which were dependent on the patriarch of the house. The houses were therefore built with the goal of satisfying the growing need for privacy and were characterized by independent bedrooms, separate staircases and hallways in order to minimize "casual contact" (42). Separate spaces were also built for servants, as they were supposed to use staircases built specifically for them and their rooms were secluded inside the house so as not to disturb the

house owners. Therefore, the servants play an important role in a number of haunted house narratives as they retain various ordeals and sufferings of the past, including the memories of previous owners of the house (42).

One well-known example of a haunted house is the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California. Although this place is not in fact haunted nor were there any recognized ghost sightings there (aside from the ones experienced by Sarah Winchester), the space is organized in a confusing way which causes an unsettling feeling for those who step inside it. The whole building makes no sense, with doors and staircases leading nowhere in particular, and counting 160 disjointed rooms, odd inconsistencies of scale, blind hallways and flamboyant decorations. The reason why the architecture of the Winchester house is so peculiar is because it had been built over a span of 37 years without pause. The construction of the house began in 1884 and was overlooked by Sarah Winchester, a widow who inherited the house along with the profits from the sales of the Winchester rifle. The construction of the mansion came to an end after Sarah Winchester died. According to the story, after the early death of her husband and her child, Sarah contacted a medium who told her that she was haunted by the victims of the Winchester rifle that secured her all of her riches and therefore cursed to always be in their company. The medium advised her, if she wished to calm the spirits, to start construction of a house that would never be finished. Goldstein et al. claim that this might have had some relation to the old folk belief that in order to stop a haunting it is necessary to confuse the ghost by constantly altering the house's interior, and the Winchester house did just that; "she created a house that could confuse anyone, living or dead" (97). Today this house is proclaimed as "America's most haunted house" as a group of private investors renovated it during the 1970's and it can be visited today for a fee of 40 euros which includes a one-hour tour of 110 out of 160 of the mansion's rooms (98).

In regards to the architectural design of the haunted house, the settings for early English novels were usually old gloomy castles and ancient ruins, but considering the lack of such buildings in America, American literature decided on the “dowager Victorian and Second Empire mansions that were popular (...) during the Gilded Age of the nineteenth century” (Goldstein et al. 146). Because these extravagant mansions were owned by the wealthy social classes, many Americans never actually had the opportunity of seeing these houses’ interior, consequently earning these buildings a sense of “other-worldliness, anonymity, and mystery analogous to that of ruined European castles” (146). However, after the financial crisis that emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of these rich and enormous mansions were abandoned and began to fall apart. Their new ambience consisted of boarded up doors and windows, disintegrated walls and roofs and overgrown lawns, attracting those who were curious as to what was hidden behind the thick walls of once rich and glittery mansions. As a result, such houses soon had a dark story to follow them, local legends told stories of hauntings and other odd and unexplainable things happening on the grounds of these old places that today only remain as ghosts of the past.

As stated by Grider et al., ghost stories usually emphasize the importance of the basement, attic, or the connecting staircase for the center of the haunting because these places are brimming with “psychological symbolism of isolation and evil” (qtd. in Goldstein et al. 152). Furthermore, the staircase serves as the “metaphoric vehicle of ascent and descent” as it is situated at the center of the house with the front door across from it; “The staircase mediates the distribution of space, connecting public to private, evident to secret” (Curtis 60). The staircase also allows the characters to “move vertically between the levels of horror within the haunted house”, as it connects all stories together, including the attic and the basement (Goldstein et al. 152, 153).

Considering that the attic and the basement are the most obscure and distant areas of the house, they are the “farthest away from reality” (153). Basements can also be compared to torture chambers and castle dungeons because of their dark, dirty and dusty ambience, making it far more frightening than the attic which is in fact often used as a safe haven (155).

### **3.2. *The Sentient House and Claustrophobia***

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ghost stories mostly spoke of demons or ghosts, the building itself was given no particular relevance. However, this changed after the Second World War when the sentient or evil house took its place in many ghost story narratives (Pallejá-López 117). This new addition into the Gothic and horror fiction could be credited to increasing gender-specific fear of “spatial restriction” (117). To specify, genetic research has shown that experiences of fear and the proper response to such stimuli can be hereditary, which would serve as proof to how humans have managed to survive and evolve as much as we did. These “encoded fears” helped our ancestors survive various animal attacks (118). But to be more specific to the subject of haunted houses, “inherited fears” towards which women showed more recognition are those of “spatial restriction”, with fear of the dark and claustrophobia being the most common among them (118, 119). Pallejá-López illustrates how the relationship between the woman and the house has been a rather “complex” and “traumatic” one as they were known to always stay inside the house and had no right to vote or work nor were they allowed to have an income of their own (119). Ghost story narratives are agreeable with these “gender-conditioned fears” because male writers portray the house in a significantly contrasting way from the female writers’ portrayal (119). To specify, male writers put more focus on “graphic violence, demonology or sexual perversion as the genesis for their hauntings”, whereas female writers rely on the portrayal of

“claustrophobia and psychological dependence on buildings”, once again proving to the bigger amount of fear of the dark and claustrophobia in women (119, 120).

Therefore, the trend of the sentient house theme could be explained by how the position of women in society changed after the Second World War, as the spatial control of women weakened, the use of the sentient house theme increased in female writers' work. This resulted in the development of the “evil house” during the 1950's (Pallejá-López 120). Still, Shirley Jackson was the female writer who brought the notion of “intelligent sentience” to life in her 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* as “the sentient house arrives at the point when women's awareness of the house's destructive potential meets the impossibility of escaping it” (120). Jackson was inspired by the current situation in society, as men came back from the War and women were forced to leave their workplaces which had kept the country from falling apart and to go back into their suburban homes.

Inspired by Jackson, many other writers created their own versions of the sentient house, but male writers show evident contrast in the way they portray their haunted house due to the constant focus on satanic and demonic elements along with themes of severe violence (Pallejá-López 121). For example, writers such as Stephen King and Jay Anson, both of whom will be discussed later, focus more on demons, invasion of Native American burial grounds, and traumatic past of the house as the origin of their hauntings. To specify, Jay Anson's 1977 novel *The Amityville Horror*, that was inspired by a true story of a family massacre, targets themes such as Satanism, animal sacrifice, a haunted cemetery, as well as ghosts and demons, and their attacks on the Church. Similarly, Stephen King showed respect for Jackson's portrayal of the sentient house and decided to mirror it in his own fashion (122). His 1977 novel *The Shining* places the story in the Overlook Hotel and, similar to Jackson's Hill House, the hotel creates the

impression of an alive entity with malicious intentions as King demonstrates how the building slowly takes over the mind of Jack Torrance and convinces him to murder his whole family. Still, similar to Anson, King also puts emphasis on the dark past of the building by introducing the graphic story of murders committed by the mafia. In contrast, Jackson being the only female writer that is included in my research evidently portrays her sentient house as something that came to life on its own for no apparent reason: “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 (...)” (Jackson 14). Therefore, the main difference between male and female writers of my research is the fact that King and Anson focus largely on portrayals of ghosts and demons and how they haunt the families who move into their sentient houses, whereas Jackson gives life to her sentient house and puts no significant emphasis on ghosts or demons, it is as if her house is the ghost itself.

#### **4. Representation of the Haunted House in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959)**

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 1)

Shirley Jackson’s 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* was proclaimed by Stephen King himself as “one of the only two great novels of the supernatural in the last hundred years” (Flood, “‘Textbook terror’: How *The Haunting of Hill House* rewrote horror’s rules”). Jackson’s



story has been used in film twice so far, with Robert Wise's 1963 version and Jan de Bont's 1999 version, and it has also been used by Netflix in its 10-episode portrayal of the story, with the television series being watched by a large audience and praised for its great cinematic and story value. The novel's story is based on a scholar of the occult Dr. John Montague and his three recruits as they explore the "vile" and "diseased" haunted house (Jackson 14). The main character, Eleanor Vance is a lonely woman who has cared for her ill mother her whole life and had no sense of freedom or privacy because of the role she was expected to play in her family. Following the death of her mother, Eleanor is described as somebody longing for a home of her own, a place where she would have peace and quiet from the outside world. Montague gathers his three assistants inside the walls of Hill House with the goal of uncovering the truth behind the local legend of the house. For this purpose, he specifically invited people with some sort of special ability, Eleanor for her power of telekinesis and Theodora for her clairvoyant abilities, while Luke Sanderson was attendant solely because the family lawyer did not allow the house to be rented without the presence of a member of the family who owned it (2, 3).

Hill House frightens its inhabitants with a number of odd noises, unexplainable events and bloody writings on the wall along with an eerie feeling and fear of getting lost due to its uneven and peculiar architecture. "Somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair", meaning that the house was designed in a way to make anyone feel out of place due to its marginalization of space (Jackson 14). The architecture of the house is altogether described as "Victorian", similar to the common idea of what anyone would imagine a haunted house to look like, holding on to the spirits of the past even in its design (22). What is more, the house is arranged in such a confusing manner that one would need a map to be able to move around due to a large quantity of small

and big rooms and a number of doors that confuse Jackson's characters as they try to find their way through Hill House:

“Some of these rooms are entirely inside rooms,” the doctor said from ahead of them.

“No windows, no access to the outdoors at all. However, a series of enclosed rooms is not altogether surprising in a house of this period, particularly when you recall that what windows they did have were heavily shrouded with hangings and draperies within, and shrubbery without.” (Jackson 29)

What is more, the reason why everything inside Hill House feels “disjointed” and “off center” is because “every angle is slightly wrong, (...) angles (...) are actually a fraction of a degree off in one direction or another (Jackson 49, 50). One scene in the novel shows Eleanor leaning over the veranda hoping to see the top of the tower without realizing she was actually “standing almost sideways” (53). Another incident was described by Theodora when she said that she felt “as though I was walking up the wall” in the morning (53). Eleanor also explains that her bedroom had “an unbelievably faulty design which left it chillingly wrong in all its dimensions, so that the walls seemed always in one direction a fraction longer than the eye could endure, and in another direction a fraction less than the barest possible tolerable length” (17). As to why the doors would not stay open and kept closing behind the characters, Dr. Montague explains that by calling the house a “masterpiece of architectural misdirection”:

(...) the doorways are all a very little bit off center—that may be, by the way, the reason the doors swing shut unless they are held. Of course the result of all these tiny aberrations of measurement adds up to a fairly large distortion in the house as a whole. Theodora cannot see the tower from her bedroom window because the tower actually stands at the

corner of the house. From Theodora's bedroom window it is completely invisible, although from here it seems to be directly outside her room. (Jackson 49, 50)

The malevolent, dark, and overbearing ambience of Hill House greatly affects the behavior and emotions of its inhabitants as Eleanor unknowingly tried to walk quietly upon her arrival into the house, “as though stillness were vital in Hill House” (Jackson 17). Eleanor recounts she felt as though she was “a small creature swallowed whole by a monster”, further pointing to the evil ambience of the building (17). Jackson conforms to various Gothic themes by introducing her own version of what Stephen King named the “exotic Bad Place” through portrayal of a Victorian house buried deep within the hills and hidden behind trees (qtd. in Rasmus 10). Jackson slowly introduces Hill House by describing Eleanor’s view from the car:

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 (...). (14)

Due to its Gothic architecture, Hill House instantly intrigues Eleanor because it reminds her of houses in Gothic fiction. However, Eleanor’s mood quickly changes as she comes to fully face the building, being “overwhelmed by the house’s tangible aura of evil” (Rasmus 21). Dr. Montague further explains the notion of the effects a place can have on a person by mentioning places that have an “atmosphere of holiness and goodness” around them by also emphasizing probable existence of contrasting places that are “born bad” (Jackson 32). He states that the nature behind Hill House’s evil aura is unclear: “whether its personality was moulded by the

people who lived here, or the things they did, or whether it was evil from its start are all questions I cannot answer” (32). Still, he introduces his guests with the legend of a family curse surrounding the estate: all three wives of Hugh Crain, the house’s architect, passed away unnaturally sometime after arriving to the house. Following these tragedies, the house also brought suffering to both of Crain’s daughters after the estate was signed over to the older sister following their father’s death. The oldest sister moved into the house with a girl from the village as her companion but died of pneumonia due to neglect; there were rumors that the young companion did not care for the elder Crain sister as she was too busy “dallying in the garden with some village lout” (35).

After the death of old Miss Crain, the young companion inherited Hill House but she never had any peace living in it considering that old Miss Crain’s younger sister felt cheated out of her inheritance. The younger sister would break into the house at night and steal things which she considered belonged to her as the next heir of the Crain bloodline. This and many other occasions of the younger Crain sister ostracizing the young companion lead the young woman to commit suicide as she saw no escape from her current situation. According to gossip, “she hanged herself from the turret of the tower” (37). Jackson’s use of the tower as the place of suicide coincides with Bachelard’s definition of the tower as a space that “reflects intimacy at its center” as it is the refuge of a young girl who is “haunted by memories of an ardent ancestress” (Bachelard 24). The tower is described as the ghost of the past, being “the creation of another century” as it “stands high and alone, keeping watch over the past in the same way that it dominates space” (24). Consequently, the house was signed over to her cousins, the Sanderson family, who were also abused by the younger sister before they officially started to settle into the

house, after which Miss Crain “insisted (...) she had not, would not, come into this house at night, to steal or for any other reason” (Jackson 37).

Dr. Montague explains that the story of the nightly intruder, although there were no significant things reported to have been stolen, “did a good deal to enhance Hill House’s further reputation” (Jackson 37). This rumor created the legend of a haunted house in the hills, and it also contributed to the notion of the “dark animalistic form seemingly endowed with a will of its own” (Paquet-Deyris 3). Interestingly, the Sanderson family never really lived inside their newly inherited mansion because they packed their things unexpectedly and moved to the city due to some “urgent business” (Jackson 37). After them, the house had no one living inside it for longer than a couple of days, although “it has been on the market, for sale or rent, ever since” (37).

Jackson’s representation of Hill House as an alive entity is significantly more fortified after it possesses Eleanor, consequently connecting the two. Eleanor is all of a sudden able to hear sounds coming from all rooms of the house, she finally feels that she belongs somewhere, she suddenly feels safe in the space she used to be terrified by and wanted to escape: “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 14). Hill House therefore becomes more alive by each chapter of the novel, portrayed as “a live organism” that has a significantly stronger effect on Eleanor as its protagonist (Paquet-Deyris 7). According to Castricano, the reason why Eleanor is the character who is most affected by Hill House is because her past experiences are rather similar to the history of the house; the eldest Crain sister died of pneumonia and was rumored to having been neglected by her young companion, similar to Eleanor ignoring her mother’s painful pleas before she died (7). Another parallel between Eleanor and the house is the notion of suicide, considering that the young companion took her own life, as did Eleanor at the

end of the novel, both of whom were driven by guilt (7). Dr. Montague describes how the young woman felt obligated to kill herself, adding to the idea that her death was never in fact “of her own doing”, similar to Eleanor’s death as well (8). Therefore, it can be said that Hill House strongly affects and connects with those who feel guilty or have some unresolved issues with themselves as it is obvious how Eleanor subconsciously tries to avoid any thought and/or space that reminds her of her dead mother.

Hill House presents itself as a new mother figure that Eleanor desires for, it offers her peace and isolation which she daydreamed about on her way to the mansion at the beginning of the novel. Rubenstein and Newman explain the occurrences that happen at Hill House as “Eleanor’s desperate attempt both to break away from and to retrieve a pre-oedipal, symbiotic unity with her demanding mother, who has given Eleanor’s life its sole purpose, and without whom Eleanor does not know how to live” (qtd. in Roberts 68). This also puts more light on the complex relationship Eleanor had with her mother, as much as she depended on her she also longed for freedom to live the life of her own choice. In the end, Eleanor crashes her car into a tree outside the house and dies, which can be considered as a “suicidal sacrifice to the embracing and consuming mother/house” (qtd. in Roberts 68). This was also Eleanor’s response to the rest of the group casting her away from the house for her own safety. Eleanor, always feeling as the odd one out, decides to confront and oppose to their appeal for her moving out by dying on the Hill House estate, marking her new forever home. Roberts suggests that by doing this, Eleanor reaffirmed the conventional patriarchal view of women and their ties to domesticity as she surrendered herself over to the “imprisoning familial structure that she sought to escape at the novel’s opening” (69, 70).

Most scholars have so far been focused on the nature of the haunting in Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and the ill intentions of the house by signifying the bad influence the house had on Eleanor and the rest of the characters of the novel. However, Roberts offers a different analysis where Eleanor meets Hill House at the time of need as both the house and the young woman "accommodate one another's needs" in a relationship of "mutual fulfilment" (Roberts 70). Hill House is a secluded house hidden away within hills and situated outside of a small village, offering its inhabitants solace, peace, silence and isolation, which are the main elements Eleanor is focused on from the beginning of the novel as she daydreams about a space of her own. Eleanor is constantly focused on attaining "joyful loneliness" which she would guarantee for herself by living in a "tiny cottage buried in a garden":

I could live there all alone (...). No one would ever find me there, either, behind all those roses, and just to make sure I would plant oleanders by the road. (...) I will raise white cats and sew white curtains for the windows and sometimes come out of my door to go to the store to buy cinnamon and tea and thread. (Jackson 9)

Objects described in Eleanor's inner monologue such as poisonous oleander trees and white curtains serve as means for protecting her and confining her from the outside world (Roberts 78). By offering the reader with such descriptions of an almost desperate need for isolation, Shirley Jackson offers Eleanor with a Gothic version of what she had been looking for all her life. Hill House is also isolated and hard to approach due to its large gate and high trees surrounding the estate. It is also dark and menacing from the outside, ensuring that not many would voluntarily enter inside its walls.

The mansion came to Eleanor at a pivotal moment in her life, she no longer had her ill mother depending on her and she also rebelled against her sister by taking her car and driving off

to the unfamiliar village of Hillsdale. She was invited to stay inside a rumored haunted house and discover the true nature behind its haunting with a group of two other young people guided by a “doctor of philosophy” who was interested in “supernatural manifestations” (Jackson 1).

Eleanor is presented by Jackson as a young woman with no place to call home, considering that her older sister avoided having to care for their sick mother after marrying and having a family of her own. Therefore, the care for their sick mother was automatically transferred to Eleanor, which is also how she has spent most of her adult years; she had to withstand being bullied by her own mother while also doing many house chores to ensure that the house was clean and well-kept. This notion of being entrapped within one’s own home also relates to the domestication of women after the Second World War, as they were no longer needed as a work force after their husbands came back from war and were sent back into their houses to continue doing house chores and caring for their families. Considering that the novel was published ten years after The War, its effects on the writer can be seen in her portrayal of Eleanor. What is more, this also holds proof to the idea presented earlier in the thesis, with female writers focusing more on depicting a haunted house as a place of confinement and with a life of its own, along with the effect it has on the female protagonist. Furthermore, Shirley Jackson suffered with agoraphobia during her later years, as she was noted to have been “unable to leave the house; she was unable, for much of the time, even to leave her bedroom” (Oppenheimer qtd. in Roberts 77). This is an important detail that should be considered while reading *The Haunting of Hill House* because by doing so, the reader realizes that the mostly targeted theme by Jackson is in fact the “fantasy of isolation”, as Hill House delivers Eleanor with what she desires for the most, “seclusion, security, and a space of one’s own” masked behind the walls of a “macabre Gothic home(s)” (Roberts 77).



Roberts recognizes *The Haunting of Hill House* as a novel that combines “Gothic tropes, fairy-tale narrative structures, and domestic fantasies” and “presents social isolation — perhaps even agoraphobia — not as a tragedy, but as a potential alternative route to female happiness and liberation” (73). Therefore, even though Hill House has been read by many as a place of death and ill intent, if it were read considering Eleanor’s past and her hopes for the future, it is a space of comfort and need, an “enchanted kingdom” that she never has to leave because of all the love and attention it offers her (74). Hill House becomes a sanctuary the moment when it becomes “unheimlich” or uncanny for the outside world (75). This means that as the legend of Hill House became darker following the death of the young companion within its walls, it began to be described as an evil place that drives its inhabitants mad. However, by nurturing this legend of a haunting, the mansion consequently became a place of ultimate privacy, tranquility, and isolation, becoming the place Eleanor fantasizes about at the beginning of the novel. Still, due to the house’s rugged exterior and eerie ambience, she instantly deems it as a space she does not want to be in. Only after residing within the house’s walls for a matter of days does she realize the friendly and motherly nature that Hill House is ready to offer to her.

One of the most important examples of Hill House’s inclination toward Eleanor is in the chapter where it turns against Theodora. Theodora and Eleanor’s relationship begins as a friendly one but as the novel continues, Theodora turns her back against Eleanor by mocking her because of her needs, desires and fears related to having a family of her own, all of which she is fully aware of due to her telepathic abilities. As a result, Theodora’s bedroom walls are smeared with blood along with her colorful clothes; as she reaches for her ruined clothes, Theodora herself gets dirtied with blood “- literally rendered a scarlet woman, as though Hill House has passed

judgement on Theodora's bright clothing" (Roberts 87). This causes Eleanor to smile, further deepening her relationship with Hill House.

Moreover, the reader learns of Eleanor's love for fairy-tales from the beginning of the novel as she loses herself in her imagination of perfect homes where she sometimes lives in a small cottage and other times in a "vast house" (Jackson 7). In her descriptions of a home of her own there is a significant focus on elements of seclusion, isolation, and privacy with mentions of "stone lions" guarding the house, a place that is "pillared and walled, with shutters over the window" (7). According to Roberts, Hill House comes to Eleanor as a "Gothic double to the enchanted kingdom of her fantasies", as it attempts to make her fantasy come true by accommodating its space to her and for her (80). To discuss the elements of Eleanor's fantasy home in relation to Hill House, as she desires for privacy, isolation, and seclusion, Hill House, standing on its own six miles away from Hillsdale makes it the perfect "sanctuary" from the outside world, "a protected fortress that will keep those inside safe from the judgmental eyes and hostile questions of the small-minded villagers" (Roberts 81). What is more, Hill House indeed is the Gothic version of Eleanor's fairy-tale fantasy home:

The "thick, oppressive trees" are the doubles of her oleanders; the gate, "tall and ominous and heavy [and] set strongly into a stone wall which went off through the trees" is reminiscent of her pillars; and the "dark and unwelcoming" Mr Dudley, the caretaker of Hill House, functions in just the same way as the stone lions, posted at the entrance to keep out interlopers. (Jackson qtd. in Roberts 81, 82)

Still, Eleanor does not instantly recognize that Hill House is the place she has always dreamed of. Although one of her greatest fantasies was focused on keeping the outside world as far away as possible, she does not make the connection that Hill House offers her this seclusion

and privacy she had always hoped to attain. Therefore, her reaction to the mansion is rather similar to the reactions of Theodora, Luke, and Dr. Montague, all of whom felt uncomfortable and uneasy being within its walls. If we consider the history of the house as well, it was initially built with good intentions, Hugh Crain wanted to build a place where his family could “live in comfortable luxury” (Jackson 34). What is more, Roberts suggests that Hill House might have been built only for children (83). This might be the case due to the fact that all three of Hugh Crain’s wives died after encountering the house, the first wife died “when the carriage bringing her here overturned in the driveway”, the second wife “died of a fall”, and the third Mrs. Crain died of illness (34, 35). Therefore, Roberts claims that Hill House “jealously guarded its role as primary caretaker” of the Crain daughters, both of whom were sent to live with their mother’s cousin, spending the rest of their adult lives fighting over Hill House after their father’s death (83). The younger sister married while the older sister never did, similar to Eleanor and her sister’s situation.

Eleanor and Sophia, the older Crain sister, share another similarity, the fact that they both wish to live alone away from society, almost isolated in a way, which could be connected to Jackson’s experience with agoraphobia. Eleanor grew up isolated from the outside world because her mother did not want to “mix” with their neighbors (Jackson 34). Similar to the Crain sisters, Eleanor was also secluded from civilized society and raised “within the same ideological moral code as Sophia Crain” (Roberts 84). Roberts also compares Eleanor to Hill House, with Luke’s introduction to the manor: “nothing in it touched, nothing used, nothing here wanted by anyone any more, just sitting here thinking”, to which Eleanor adds: “and waiting”, showing how she already identified with the house by seeing herself in the same way as Luke described the manor (Jackson qtd. in Roberts 84). “Eleanor has longed for her own home, and the home has longed

for someone like Eleanor to fill it. Indeed, ‘ever since her first memory, Eleanor had been waiting for something like Hill House’” (Jackson qtd. in Roberts 84).

The final wish that Hill House brings to life is Eleanor’s ultimate death. She showed a desire for “a quiet spot up among the flowers where I can dream and tell myself sweet stories”, which the manor delivered within its own walls (Jackson 94). By dying, Eleanor binds herself to the house as her final resting place, an isolated home which allows her to “walk alone” (119).

### **5. Representation of the Haunted House in Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977)**

“Whatever walked in Hill House walked alone, but you wouldn’t be alone in the Overlook, oh no, there would be plenty of company here.” (King 192)

As Shirley Jackson was recognized for her great ability to create the notion of the sentient haunted house, Stephen King was acknowledged for successfully depicting “the most disturbing aspects of daily life”, as well as for testing his writing skills not only in horror fiction, but also in science fiction and the fantasy genre (Izquierdo 17). Critics from all around the world consider Stephen King as the “master of terror” (Izquierdo 20). King is known for his use of the stream of consciousness technique which aims to portray to the reader what the character feels depending on the sinister environment he is in (Izquierdo 21). He is also known for his realistic endings because indeed not all of his novels have a happy ending, such as *The Shining* for example. The novel has a sad ending due to the fact that Wendy and Danny Torrance lose their husband and father to the hotel after he tries to kill them as the result of the Overlook possessing him. *The Shining* was so famous when it first got published that it was soon adapted for a movie in Stanley Kubrick’s film of the same name in 1980, with Jack Nicholson’s acclaimed portrayal of Jack Torrance.

Considering King's inspiration for *The Shining*, he was quoted saying that he decided to change the scenery of his third novel (as both of the previous novels' stories happened in small towns), and he decided for the city of Boulder, Colorado. King and his family vacationed in the Stanley Hotel located nearby the Rocky Mountains National Park. Similar to his representation of the novel's Overlook Hotel placed within the mountains and isolated from civilization which allowed for a number of paranormal experiences, the Stanley was also very close to closing for low season, as the King family booked it for October 30, 1974. Due to low season, the Kings were the only guests staying at the hotel on their first night, and similar to the Torrance family, they dined alone in the vast Dining Room, further adding to the Hotel's empty and lonely atmosphere. After waking up from a nightmare where his son was chased by a fire hose in the corridors of the Stanley, King remembers that he: "got up the bed, light up a cigarette, sat in a chair staring at the Rocky Mountains, and by the time the cigarette was already consumed, I had the argument of the book firmly set up in my mind" (Izquierdo 28). The following quote emphasizes the secluded location of the Overlook Hotel and the effect it has on Danny upon first impression:

Beyond the playground there was an inconspicuous chain link security fence, beyond that the wide, macadamized drive that led up to the hotel, and beyond that the valley itself, dropping away into the bright blue haze of afternoon. Danny didn't know the word isolation, but if someone had explained it to him he would have seized on it. Far below, lying in the sun like a long black snake that had decided to snooze for a while, was the road that led back through Sidwinder Pass and eventually to Boulder. The road that would be closed all winter long. He felt a little suffocated at the thought, and almost jumped when Daddy dropped his hand on his shoulder. (King 47)

The plot of King's novel revolves around the Torrance family who spend the winter in the Overlook Hotel working as its caretakers. It serves as a "refuge from a troubled present and a place where Jack, the father, hopes to rediscover himself" (Curtis 172). The Hotel is promptly introduced as a place with a dark past: "the Donner Party had become snowbound and had resorted to cannibalism to stay alive", and Grady, the previous caretaker of the Hotel murdered his family before committing suicide, along with some criminal activities of the mafia inside its walls (King 42, 8). Furthermore, the Overlook is described as a large complex building built in 1907 to 1909 with a white porch, "which ran the length of the hotel, a beautifully manicured lawn (...) sloped away to a long, rectangular swimming pool" with a playground and a topiary of various animals (6, 46).

The "most immense kitchen Wendy had ever seen in her life" astonished her with surfaces "coaxed to a high gloss"; King describes the kitchen as so big it had an "intimidating" effect on anyone who stood in it with a "breadboard as big as their Boulder apartment's kitchen table" (King 49). After living in the Hotel for a while and upon Jack's discovery of Grady's journal that featured newspaper articles of various illegal deeds done inside the Overlook, some including murder in the room 217, along with Grady's personal notes, it becomes evident how Jack slowly starts to fall under the Overlook's control. Still, the pivotal moment when he loses his mind is during his conversation with Grady, the bartender who offers him gin and, although he is a recovering alcoholic, Jack accepts it and starts drinking again. During this time he is surrounded by a large party of people only visible to himself that were dressed in a fancy manner, as he was reliving a party that was once held inside the walls of the Hotel. Grady acts as the Overlook's messenger as he informs Jack that the Hotel needs his son for his ability to "shine":

“Of course you know,” Grady said, leaning confidentially over the cart, “your son is attempting to bring an outside party into it. Your son has a very great talent, one that the manager could use to even further improve the Overlook, to further ... enrich it, shall we say? But your son is attempting to use that very talent against us. He is willful, Mr. Torrance, Sir. Willful.” (King 240)

Most of the novel’s plot is presented through the Torrance family’s 5-year-old son Danny’s point of view as it follows his relationship and experiences with the space of the Hotel. The reason why Danny has more experiences with unexplained and seemingly haunting events happening in the Overlook is partly due to him still being a child. Curtis explains this idea by stating that “it is as children that we have the most intense relationships to spaces and their mysteries and are deeply fascinated by the unknown” (205). Therefore, children are almost always present in ghost stories and are in fact the ones who have most experiences with them and even manage to achieve a form of communication with the paranormal entities. Danny’s “shining” ability is explained by the cook, Dick Halloran, who describes it as an ability that allows him to communicate telepathically, read people’s thoughts, and feel the presence of paranormal beings, along with seeing the future (King 54). By adding this gift into the novel’s plot, Stephen King offers another element of the Gothic, therefore maintaining the horror genre of the novel (Izquierdo 31). However, Danny’s psychic ability is guided by Tony, who is first introduced as his imaginary friend. Tony alerts Danny of the malevolent nature of the Overlook before he even knows his father would be working there in the first place:

Across the room was a mirror, and deep down in its silver bubble a single word appeared in green fire and that word was: REDRUM.

(...)

The Shape advancing on him, reeking of that sweet-sour odor, gigantic, the mallet head cutting across the air with a wicked hissing whisper, then the great hollow boom as it crashed into the wall, sending the dust out in a puff you could smell, dry and itchy. Tiny red eyes glowed in the dark. The monster was upon him, it had discovered him, cowering here with a blank wall at his back. And the trapdoor in the ceiling was locked. (King 23, 24)

Throughout the novel Tony is sending Danny various visions showing him that the Overlook is a place where gruesome events occurred and would continue to occur if nobody stopped it. Soon the reader learns that Tony is not Danny's imaginary friend but is in fact a part of him, the shining part placed "deep down" in his mind (287).

*The Shining* is a novel that puts great emphasis on family disintegration, loneliness, self-terror, and social disorder, all of which are in fact elements mentioned previously in the thesis as the main themes of American Gothic fiction (Lucia Solaz qtd. in Izquierdo 36). To illustrate, family disintegration is evident due to the underlying tensions between Wendy and Jack Torrance, which were later explained by mentions of domestic violence and alcoholism. Moreover, loneliness is mostly recognized in the portrayal of Jack Torrance, who feels neglected and villainized by his own family as Wendy shows clear signs of mistrust due to his past troubles with alcohol. Self-terror could be said to cause social disorder, considering that Jack Torrance's fall could be ascribed to him taking alcohol offered by the Overlook and consequently leading to social disorder where a family is ripped apart by the father trying to violently murder his wife and son.

Jack Torrance accepting gin from Grady's ghost was also him unknowingly allowing the Overlook to possess him. The night he meets Grady posing as his bartender is in fact the night his family starts to lose him as his mind begins to be overtaken with the mind of the Overlook.



The Overlook uses Jack's past against him in order to manipulate him, Jack's trouble with alcohol was indeed influenced by his childhood trauma. In fact, Jack's father was also a violent alcoholic as he used to beat and threaten his wife and children (King 153). Evidently, the element of childhood is present in a number of novels about hauntings, with special focus on "experiences of abuse" and "memories of fear" (Curtis 44). Due to the fact that childhood trauma has a way of coming back, especially when it had not been resolved by the individual, it oftentimes confuses the person's idea of safety and identity. Such is the case of Jack Torrance, who grew up with an abusive alcoholic father and became one himself. The Overlook turned his past against him and decided it would also be his future and his final ending. By the end of the novel, Jack loses his mind to the Overlook and tries to brutally murder his wife and son, showing no emotion toward them whatsoever, to which Danny notes: "You're not my daddy. (...) You're a mask," Danny said. 'Just a false face. The only reason the hotel needs to use you is that you aren't as dead as the others. But when it's done with you, you won't be anything at all. You don't scare me.'" (King 292). Jameson suggests that Jack's possession differs from other similar events as his is of historical nature, Jack was possessed "by the American past as it has left its sedimented traces in the corridors" (120). This relates to the notion that the history of the Overlook and its beginnings was so dark and vile that it took on a life of its own, with noted influences of mafia members and their disturbing parties and murders decorating the Hotel's estate and putting a dark veil over it. Relating to this, Mr. Halloran is noted saying that those who had the shining ability could see the evil past that happened within the walls of room 217 and advised Danny to stay away from it for the same reason. However, due to his childish curiosity, Danny enters the forbidden room and encounters the ghost of a dead woman who committed suicide and attempts to chase after him (King 149).

Due to the fact that one of Stephen King's notorious techniques is the use of the stream of consciousness, he successfully depicts a man literally losing his mind during his stay in a place stained with a dark past. He "blends" Jack's delusion with elements of the paranormal by depending on his past troubles with alcoholism and their relation to the "oppressive effect of the building's environment", along with the horrible occurrences happening inside it (Izquierdo 30). According to Izquierdo, it was the "feeling of failure" that caused the oppressive effect on Jack's mind, he felt as if he had failed as a father, husband, and as a professor (he was fired from his job because he physically attacked a student), and he also had to fight the constant urge to return to his old drinking habits (31). The Torrance family sees the short-term move to the Overlook as a chance for a new beginning, as Jack would finally have more time to finish writing his play and Wendy and Danny hoped to spend more time with their husband and father in order to fix the family bond and become happy once again.

However, the Overlook turns out to be the place that would consequently rip the Torrance family apart. The real reason behind Jack going mad was not the alcohol he seemingly started drinking again, it was the influence of the Hotel itself. He reenacts Grady's destiny by also attempting to murder his whole family during a raging psychopathic episode which ended with him burning to death and his family escaping (King 297). According to Ullman, "cabin fever" provoked by claustrophobia and "too much cheap whiskey" is what led Grady to killing his family (7, 8). Similarly, Jack was also influenced by the Overlook's empty and large dark rooms that provided an "almost suffocating atmosphere and strange appearances", and combined with his knowledge of the dark history of the Hotel, it came as no surprise he lost his mind by the end of the novel (Izquierdo 32). "The feeling of claustrophobia is externalized as dislike for the people you happen to be shut in with. In extreme cases it can result in hallucinations and

violence — murder has been done over such minor things as a burned meal or an argument about whose turn it is to do the dishes” (King 8). In this quote, Ullman explains the effects that claustrophobia and cabin fever might have on an unstable individual without knowing that Jack has an unsettling past of his own with a violent drunk father. In addition to suffering through domestic abuse as a child, Jack himself once physically hurt his own son during a fit of rage, which had a detrimental effect on the relationship with his wife. Wendy lost trust in her husband but never stopped hoping they would fix their family back together, and the Overlook seemed like the perfect place for them.

The Torrances never imagined they were moving into a place stained with violent murders and suicides. Due to the Overlook’s dark past and present, the Hotel itself came to life, contaminated with the spirits of those who died violently within its walls. King never explains who the “manager” of the place is, but the reader is informed that he is the most powerful entity residing in the building, as it rules over Grady and soon takes over Jack’s body trying to take Danny with him to “enrich” the Overlook (King 240). The entity of the manager takes over Jack’s body and King portrays this possession by writing: “It laid its Jack Torrance hands on the valve, unmindful of the burning smell which arose or the searing of the flesh as the red-hot wheel sank in, as if into a mudrut” (297). In this quote, it is evident that Jack lost all control over his body and now acts as a marionette of the powerful Overlook entity. González Ferrín claims that Jack’s loss of sanity is evident in the following quote where he is ready to fulfill the hotel’s goal, being fully aware of what it entails:

The thought rose up from nowhere, naked and unadorned. The urge to tumble her out of bed, naked, bewildered, just beginning to wake up; to pounce on her, seize her neck like the green limb of a young aspen and to throttle her, thumbs on windpipe, fingers pressing against the

top of her spine, jerking her head up and ramming it back down against the floor boards, again and again, whamming, whacking, smashing, crashing. Jitter and jive, baby. Shake, rattle, and roll. He would make her take her medicine. Every drop. Every last bitter drop. (King qtd. in Jusup 14)

*The Shining* is a novel that bases its haunting foundations on the dark and overbearing atmosphere of the estate of the hotel, further identifying it as a Gothic novel. This is because King emphasizes the vast, dark, and empty areas of the Overlook as crucial factors that affect the mood and relationship of the Torrance family. Following this, insanity and isolation play an important role in building up the plot of the novel, considering that the family is placed in a large complex building that is completely isolated from the outside world. King uses this setting to cause characters (especially those with past traumas such as Jack Torrance) to “become less mentally stable due to the repetitiveness and the immutability of their everyday life” (Jusup 1). After losing his mind, Jack becomes “more susceptible to outside and/or supernatural influences” as he eventually loses control over his body and mind and goes on a killing spree (1). Isolation and insanity are interconnected due to the fact that isolation is based on confining the characters and forcing them to focus on their past shortcomings, influencing struggles that eventually resurface and affect the character’s behavior. Isolation thereafter causes insanity after the character faces his/her past trauma. Therefore, it can be said that “isolation and insanity shape and influence the character’s psyche, simultaneously degrading and deteriorating it until the character’s persona is completely changed” (Jusup 27). This is evident in the case of Jack Torrance who loses his sanity upon being isolated for three months in a place already contaminated with a dark past. The dark past of the Hotel brings back Jack’s traumatic past and makes him relive it until he eventually gives up and allows the Overlook to take control of him,

similar to how Jackson's novel also ends with its protagonist dying after giving herself away to the haunted house.

## **6. Representation of the Haunted House in Jay Anson's *The Amityville Horror* (1977)**

“They reportedly told of strange voices seeming to come from within themselves, of a power which actually lifted Mrs. Lutz off her feet toward a closet behind which was a room not noted on any blueprints.” Reporter Steve Bauman had heard of their claims. After doing some background research on the house, he discovered that tragedy had struck nearly every family inhabiting the place, as well as an earlier house built on the same site. (Anson 8)

Jay Anson's novel *The Amityville Horror* was published in 1977, the same year when King's novel *The Shining* was also released. And in the same fashion, Anson's story gained quite an impressive amount of attention. Part of the reason for this was the fact that he wrote a novel based on a real-life story. The entirety of the novel is based on the Lutz family and the priest's recollection of events as they experienced them. The story was soon after adapted for a film of the same name in 1979, gathering even more public attention. Considering the sudden popularity of the Lutz family's story, believers and sceptics alike proclaimed their opinions. Some people doubted the truthfulness of the Amityville story, calling it a “hoax”, while others found themselves convinced with the story of the haunting (Tucker 27).

*The Amityville Horror* is a story about a haunting that reportedly happened in a private Dutch colonial house on Long Island located in the town of Amityville. George and Kathy Lutz thought they were taking “the deal of a lifetime”, considering the size of the house and the low price of \$80,000 ascribed to it (Curtis 48). The house was described as a “6 bedroom Dutch Colonial,

spacious living room, formal dining room, an closed porch, 3-1/2 baths, finished basement, 2-car garage, heated swimming pool and large boathouse” (Anson 11). The reason for such a low price of a seemingly valuable property were the recent dark events that had happened within its walls. George and Kathy Lutz were aware that a family massacre had happened in their newly purchased home, but they did not care for the “tragic history of 112 Ocean Avenue” as they believed this was the perfect home for them (13). However, their dream house soon turned out to be the last place they wanted to be in, considering how they “fled in terror” twenty-eight days after moving into the infamous Dutch Colonial (9).

Prior to the Lutz family owning the house, it belonged to the DeFeo’s. They were a seven-member family who moved into the house in 1965. However, nine years later the whole family was found murdered in their sleep, all of them lying “on their stomachs with their heads resting on their arms” (Anson 12). The culprit was the eldest son Ronald Jr., called “Butch” (Sullivan and Aronson 1). However, Butch did not take full blame for his actions, pleading for insanity during his trial and claiming he had “heard voices” and assumed it was God speaking to him (Anson 13). Nevertheless, he was “convicted of murder and sentenced to six consecutive life terms” (13). According to Sullivan and Aronson, the DeFeo family lived in fear of the father, Ronald Sr., who was claimed to have beaten his eldest son Butch on multiple occasions due to his unpredictable temper (41). As a result, Butch’s temper became worse than his father’s when he grew up. Proof of this is the fact that he was asked to leave Amityville High School at the age of 17, after which he was reported to have started using LSD and heroin (Sullivan and Aronson 29). Although the relationship between the eldest DeFeo son and his father was strained, Ronald Sr. decided to help Butch by employing him to work for his dealership. Still, their relationship never improved and as Butch got older, their fights became more physical and more brutal. In the

end, Butch's temper overruled, consequently killing his whole family in their beds with a .35 caliber Marlin rifle, both of the parents were shot twice and each of the children once (1). Ronnie Butch DeFeo, twenty-three years of age at the time, woke up that night "at about 4:00 a.m. (...) shaved, showered, dressed and went to work apparently oblivious to the carnage behind him" (1). After the police found the bodies, Butch blamed one of his ex-friends Falini for the murders, but as the police continued with their investigation and learned more about Butch's fascination with guns, along with his temper and previous misconduct, they were sure they found their culprit (39). Throughout the investigation and during his trial, Butch would constantly alter his story, from claiming that Falini was the murderer, to stating that he committed the murders in self-defense after first blaming his mother, then his sister, to saying that voices told him to kill his family (180). Psychiatrist Daniel Schwartz confirmed the theory of voices guiding Butch after diagnosing him with an antisocial personality disorder which would cause him to feel disconnected from the actions of murder, experiencing them as an outsider (302). Ronald Jr. DeFeo was sentenced to six consecutive sentences of 25 years to life and died in prison on March 12, 2021.

After such gruesome murders stained the house on 112 Ocean Avenue, it became a struggle to sell it due to the fact that everyone knew about the tragedy that had befallen the DeFeo family. For example, the Lutzes noticed how the neighbors tried to block their view onto the infamous Amityville house in the following quote:

Evergreens grow around the narrow grounds, partly blocking off the neighbors on either side, but their drawn shades can be seen easily enough. When he looked around, George thought that was peculiar. He noticed the neighbors' shades were all drawn on the sides that faced his house, but not in front or in the direction of the houses on the other side. (Anson 11)

As previously mentioned, houses hold memories, no matter whether they are positive or negative, and such memories can have an effect on the house's ambience, and thereafter on the people residing in them. The Lutz family did not believe that the past affected the present as largely as it actually did. There are many sceptics claiming that the Lutzes moved into the infamous murder house with the goal of using its commercial value and selling a story of a haunted house to the public. Nevertheless, this analysis will solely focus on the story written by Jay Anson and based on his conversations with the Lutz family and their priest in order to further analyze their version of a haunted house.

There are people who attribute the dark history of 112 Ocean Avenue to the fact that Shinnecock Indians used the aforementioned property land as a place where they would leave their sick and dying tribe members to die "of exposure" (Anson 116). Still, the Shinnecock Indians did not use the same land for their burial grounds because "they believed it to be infested with demons" (116). Anson also notes that John Catehum, a settler who was chased out of Salem, Massachusetts for "practicing witchcraft" lived near 112 Ocean Avenue where he supposedly continued his devil worshipping rituals; he was also said to have been buried on the Amityville property (117). Similar to how King's Overlook was possessed by the past of the hotel and the dark events that occurred there, Anson's Amityville house can also be said to have been haunted by the property's past. 112 Ocean Avenue was marked with many Indians dying on those grounds and various accounts of demonic presence taking residence on the estate. What is more, many ghost stories base the origin of the haunting to settlers taking over the land of the Native Americans and desecrating their holy burial grounds. This results in vengeful ghosts returning to the land of the living and causing fright and terror to those who dare stand and build on their holy grounds. Curtis mentions this issue by stating that there are "houses that belong as



much to the dead as the living” (48). Therefore, such places should either be left alone and empty for the safety of the living, or they should be seized from their previous owners through “rituals of re-conceptualization and redecoration and by the vitality of the new owner/occupants” (65).

Usually, the way of ensuring that a house is safe to be moved in again is done by inviting a priest to bless the space and chase away any remnant spirits of the past. However, the dark spirits of the past that reside within Amityville’s walls are far stronger than a priest’s blessing. This becomes evident in numerous accounts throughout the novel that follow Father Mancuso, a priest who suffers through illness from the moment he leaves 112 Ocean Avenue. He soon becomes aware that he is under the effect of something demonic and refuses to return to the Lutz family home. However, it remains a mystery why Father Mancuso decided not to inform the Lutz family of his experience of blessing their house, when he claims to have heard a “disembodied voice” telling him to “get out” (159). Some of the issues that follow Father Mancuso after visiting the Amityville house include blisters and a high fever, along with being unable to reach George through telephone and successfully explain the situation of their evidently haunted home. For example, when he tries calling George to warn him not to enter the room on the second floor which once belonged to Marc and John Matthew DeFeo and was now planned to be used as Kathy’s sewing room, the call is interrupted by static (57).

Moreover, one of the most horrifying rooms of the house is located in the basement. The Lutzes were not informed about the existence of this room prior to buying the house, it was the bartender at The Witch’s Brew that told George about it:

You take a look behind those closets and you’ll find something that’ll really shake you (...)  
A room, a little room. I found it that night I was down in the basement. There’s this plywood closet built up beside the stairs. I’m using it to ice beer in, see? When I bumped a keg against

one end of the closet, it seems the whole wall is loose. You know, like a secret panel, something out of an old movie. (Anson 150)

The bartender describes “this weird little room, all painted red”, after which he tells George that he had nightmares of people “killing dogs and pigs in there and using their blood for some kind of ceremony” after his encounter with the secret room (Anson 151, 152). This quote adds to the notion of sacrifice rituals that could be related to something demonic, and might draw a connection to the story of John Catehum who was believed to have been practicing witchcraft near the Amityville grounds. Also, upon discovering the room, Kathy is noted saying it smells like blood (Anson 96). Moreover, what makes the red room all the more important in understanding this novel’s depiction of a haunted house is the fact that it is located in the basement. As mentioned previously in the thesis, basements in ghost stories are usually used as spaces that hold “psychological symbolism of isolation and evil” (Grider qtd. in Goldstein et al. 152). This means that Gothic writers implicate to the importance of the basement or the attic, either of the two most distant and isolated places of the house, by focusing on their ability to seize forces of dark and evil. Therefore, the basement and the attic are the two spaces of the house that are most distant from reality (Goldstein et al. 153). In addition, the whole notion of the basement as a room confined by walls with no windows and no way out but the single staircase makes it the one place that causes feelings of discomfort, fear, and anxiety of many who find themselves inside it. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the basement does not offer enough room for escape, considering its walls are surrounded with earth, which is why it can cause feelings of claustrophobia with certain individuals. Anson uses the space of the basement to signify a “portal to a malevolent underworld”, as it is the part of the house that is closest to the ground and it also contains a secret unexplained room (Curtis 54). George Lutz tries to find an

explanation for the discovered room, however he finds none: “But in spite of all he had read in the past two days, George was no closer to a solution of what the mysterious red room was used for or who built it. There was no record of any improvements being made to the house that resembled the addition of a basement room” (Anson 117).

Some of the main rooms in the Amityville house are recognized as spaces that cause a shift in emotion or temperature of those who enter them. These rooms include the basement, the sewing room, the playroom, and the kitchen. Initially, the sewing room is significant because it is the first room in the house that is recognized as evil and is therefore proclaimed forbidden by Father Mancuso as he claims to have felt an evil presence while blessing it (Anson 57). There was also a disturbing fly incident that happened in the sewing room, with “hundreds of buzzing flies” on the window of the room in spite of the freezing cold of December (42). Additionally, the playroom was also recognized as an unwelcoming space when Aunt Theresa, a former nun, refused to enter the room: “‘No,’ she said, ‘that’s another bad place. I don’t like it.’ (...) ‘There’s something bad in here, Kathy,’ she said, looking about. ‘I must go now.’” (91, 92). Evidently, the former nun felt uncomfortable and unsafe upon walking inside the playroom, signifying toward its evil nature. The playroom was also distinct for its sudden temperature changes: “When Kathy checked in there, she was struck by the freezing chill in the playroom. No windows were open, yet the room was ice cold. It certainly wasn’t uncomfortable in Danny and Chris’ bedroom, nor in the hallway. She felt the radiator. It was hot!” (73). Another important space in the house is the kitchen, the only place where Kathy felt “secure” (61). The main reason for this feeling of security was the fact that she felt a presence comforting her there, a “woman’s soft hand resting on her own (...) The touch was reassuring, and had an inner strength to it. Kathy was startled, but not frightened; it was like the touch of a mother giving comfort to her daughter” (38). But

even her safe space is later invaded after she feels another presence fighting over her body in the kitchen:

She had just finished putting fresh cases on her pillows and was plumping them up when she was embraced from behind. She froze, then instinctively called out, “Danny?”

The grip around her waist tightened. It was stronger than the familiar woman’s touch she had experienced in the kitchen. Kathy sensed that a man was holding her, increasing the pressure as she struggled. “Let me go, please!” she whimpered.

The pressure eased suddenly, then the hands released her waist. She felt them move up to her shoulders. Slowly her body was being turned around to face the unseen presence.

In her terror, Kathy became aware of the overwhelming stench of the same cheap perfume.

Then another pair of hands gripped her wrists. Kathy says she sensed a struggle going on over possession of her body, that somehow she had been trapped between two powerful forces. Escape was impossible and she felt she was going to die. The pressure on her body became overwhelming and Kathy passed out. (Anson 146, 147)

As already mentioned in examples related to the playroom, Anson puts great emphasis on the importance of temperature for signifying the presence of an unknown entity. For example, George struggles with coldness from the moment he moves into his new home because no matter how many logs he puts into the fireplace, it is impossible for him to get warm: “Even though the thermostat read 75 degrees, he couldn’t seem to get warm” (Anson 35). He would complain that “the house was like a refrigerator” and warming it up was the only thing on his mind (36). In the final comments of the novel, Anson explains this issue by pointing to the notion of “cold spots” that are often connected to people’s experience upon visiting a haunted house and feeling a

sudden “chill”; he also explains the nature of such spaces: “Occultists speculate that a disembodied entity may draw on thermal energy and body heat to gain the power it needs to become visible and move objects” (296).

Another aspect that Anson puts great emphasis on throughout his novel is the notion of “retrocognition”, also described as an experience where “an emotionally-charged site apparently manages to transmit images of its past to later visitors” (297). One of the most frightening instances of retrocognition include the sleeping positions of the Lutz family mirroring the positions of the DeFeo’s when they were all found dead lying on their stomachs. There are several accounts of all of the members of the Lutz family sleeping on their stomachs, drawing a bizarre similarity to the dead bodies of the DeFeo’s:

Kathy glimpsed the form of Missy lying on her stomach. “Missy?” Kathy whispered, leaning over the bed. Missy whimpered, then turned over onto her back. Kathy let out a sigh of relief.

(...) Danny and Chris were sleeping soundly. Both were on their stomachs. “Later, when I thought about it,” Kathy says, “that was the first time I could ever remember the children sleeping in that position-particularly all three on their stomachs at the same time. I even remember I was almost going to say something to George, that it was kind of strange.”

(Anson 47, 48)

What is more, the family noticed a sudden change in their emotions upon moving into their new home, as the children became unexplainably disobedient, George stopped shaving and showering and suddenly he always had a bad temper and was easily annoyed. The following quote showcases how the family relationships suddenly changed for the worse, mirroring the relationships of the DeFeo’s:

Ever since the move, they seemed to have become brats, misbehaved monsters who wouldn't listen, unruly children who must be severely punished.

When it came to the children, Kathy fell into the same mood. She was tense from her strained relationship with George and from the efforts of trying to put her house in shape before Christmas.

On their fourth night in the house, she exploded and together with her husband, beat Danny, Chris, and Missy with a strap and a large, heavy wooden spoon. The children had accidentally cracked a pane of glass in the playroom's half-moon window. (Anson 36, 37)

Other examples of the Lutzes experiencing retrocognition include Kathy's dream of "illicit lovemaking" between Louise DeFeo and her lover, an affair she was not familiar with prior to having this dream (Anson 297). Furthermore, George Lutz would wake up every night at the same time, 3:15 a.m., which was also around the time when Ronald DeFeo Jr. had committed the gruesome murders (Sullivan and Aronson 17). "The damage to doors, windows and banister, the movement and possible teleportation of the ceramic lion, the nauseating stench in the basement and Rectory" are relevant examples that relate to the presence of "poltergeists", also known as "noisy ghosts" (Anson 297). All of the previous examples made it impossible to live in peace in the Amityville house. Consequently, there are many instances where Kathy and George feel like they have to "get out of the house" in order to clear their heads and calm down (102). Similar to King's Overlook, the house itself was stained with dark events that occurred there and left a mark on its ambience. As a result, the Lutz family moved out of their home after staying there for only twenty-eight days (9).

## 7. Conclusion

Although there is no scientific proof to the existence of ghosts, they have been an inevitable constituent of many cultures throughout time, resulting in various ghost stories being told through generations. Ghost stories offer an understanding of a specific culture's fears, anxieties, and beliefs. Therefore, it can be said that ghost stories represent notions of fear and anxiety of a culture that they originate from. Gothic literature is focused on portraying themes of social and psychic disorder, self-terror, homelessness, loneliness, and dissolution of families. All of these themes are present in the novels analyzed for the purpose of this thesis, with Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* representing themes of social and psychic disorder evident in Eleanor's relationship with other participants of the experiment, and also themes of homelessness and loneliness due to the fact that she has no family to care for her, nor a warm place to call home. Furthermore, King's *The Shining* carries notions of self-terror, social and psychic disorder, loneliness, and dissolution of families, which is also the case with Anson's *The Amityville Horror*.

Taking Gothic literature and its focus on depiction of haunted buildings into consideration, haunted buildings are described as places that are still affected by the past, causing feelings of fear, anxiety, and claustrophobia with those who stay inside their walls. The whole idea of the haunted house is based on Freud's element of the uncanny, when the place that should invoke feelings of safety becomes a place that causes nothing but dread, fear, and anxiety. One more similarity between the three novels is the fact that they all feature houses that have a detrimental effect on its occupants as a result of retrocognition of dark past events that happened inside them. This means that the present occupants of the house tend to mirror the behavior of its previous owners. To illustrate, Hill House was infamous for the suicide of a young woman that occurred

inside it, which was later recreated by Eleanor after she refused to leave the house. Also, after becoming possessed by the Overlook Hotel, Jack Torrance attempts to murder his family in the same way that the previous hotel caretaker murdered his own family. Lastly, the whole Lutz family was reported to have slept on their stomachs, the same position that the DeFeo family was killed in.

Furthermore, the origin of a haunting is based on disturbing occurrences that are believed to have happened and left a stain on a place. In that way, haunted buildings exist as remnants of the past as they reflect upon their dark memories of brutal murders and suicides and disrupt the lives of their new occupants. Haunted house narratives are usually based on the notion of a family moving inside them and experiencing its dark past all over again while also trying to uncover the origin of their troubles in order to free themselves of the evil that haunts them. For example, Hill House is filled with odd unexplainable noises and events such as bloody writings on the wall, including feelings of discomfort and anxiety. Similarly, the Overlook Hotel is a large complex building that also causes the fear of getting lost in it, along with odd noises and a dark history that becomes uncovered as the plot moves forward.

What is more, buildings written by Jackson, King, and Anson all have an evidently strong effect on their characters' emotions. For example, Eleanor tried to walk as quietly as possible when she first arrived in Hill House, as though not to disturb it, while both the Torrance and the Lutz family showed clear signs of sudden mood swings and fights after moving into their haunted buildings. Also, Hill House and the Overlook both successfully possess Eleanor and Jack in order to fulfill their goal of making them stay inside their walls for all eternity after committing some kind of a violent crime.



On the whole, the three Gothic novels portray their writer's own version of a haunted house, drawing some similarities but also some differences between them. Considering that the similarities have already been discussed, I will further focus on their differences. Jackson, being the only female writer among the chosen works for this research, bases her description of the haunted house and the effects it has on her characters solely on feelings of claustrophobia and confinement. She does not focus on portrayal of brutal murders or suicides as she provides insight into how Hill House slowly becomes one with Eleanor. On the other hand, King is largely focused on depictions of insanity, violence, and stories about mafia murders which consequently possess Jack Torrance. Therefore, although Eleanor and Jack both become possessed by the buildings they once feared, the origin behind their possession is different, with Eleanor turning herself over to the house in search for a home, and Jack allowing the Overlook to overcome him as a result of his past troubles with alcohol and childhood trauma getting the best of him. Lastly, Anson's narrative differs from the previous two because the Lutz family manages to escape the house's power with no significant instances of the past coming to life and killing one of their members.

Even though ghost narratives have been a significant part of our society for a while now, it is interesting to see how the focus on fear of ghosts changes over time. For instance, we have seen the rise of the haunted house narratives as the effect of the end of the Second World War and the return to the confinement of women which resulted in representations of the house as a space of evil and anxiety. Therefore, it can be said that the current social situation has a strong effect on the writers and their understanding of the notion and origin of fear and the way they portray it in their works. Stemming from this, presently there is a new trend of portrayal of ghosts possessing technology, with films such as *One Missed Call* (2008) *Unfriended* (2014), *Friend Request*

(2016), *Countdown* (2019), and *Host* (2020) to name a few. All of these films' storylines are based on death threats sent through the means of technology such as mobile phone applications and laptops which cause feelings of fear and anxiety toward said technology, similar to the fear of the haunted house. Therefore, it is interesting to note and discuss how social fears and anxieties are implemented within the context of Gothic fiction and how they remain to attract large audiences that relate to such fears throughout time. As our society changes, so do our fears, allowing for the growth of literary fiction and its depictions of reality.

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## **8. Summary and Key Words: Historicisms and Hauntings Within the Context of Haunted Houses**

This diploma thesis analyses three novels that deal with the subject of haunted houses and the effect they have on their occupants. The thesis is focused on the origin of haunted houses as an important part of contemporary ghost stories and is based on theories of space which mention the existence of good and bad spaces and how they affect their inhabitants. The theory of space is further implemented in the analysis of the following novels: Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977), and Jay Anson's *The Amityville Horror* (1977). These novels were chosen for the purpose of comparing how each writer portrays their own version of a haunted space.

Key words: hauntings, theories of space, Bachelard, haunted house, ghosts, Gothic literature, *The Haunting of Hill House*, Shirley Jackson, *The Shining*, Stephen King, *The Amityville Horror*, Jay Anson

## 9. Sažetak i ključne riječi: Historicizmi i opsjedanja unutar konteksta ukletih kuća

Ovaj diplomski rad analizira tri romana koji se bave tematikom ukletih kuća i utjecajem koji imaju na njihove stanare. Rad je usmjeren na uklete kuće kao sustavni dio suvremenih priča o duhovima i temelji se na teorijama o prostoru koje spominju postojanje dobrih i loših prostora te kako oni utječu na njihove stanare. Teorija prostora dalje je implementirana u analizi sljedećih romana: *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) Shirley Jackson, *The Shining* (1977) Stephen Kinga i *The Amityville Horror* (1977) Jaya Ansona. Ovi su romani odabrani u svrhu usporedbe načina na koji svaki pisac prikazuje svoju verziju ukletog prostora.

Ključne riječi: opsjedanja, teorije prostora, Bachelard, ukleta kuća, duhovi, gotička književnost, *Prokletstvo kuće Hill*, Shirley Jackson, *Isijavanje*, Stephen King, *Amityville Horror*, Jay Anson