UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

MIND OF MATTER:

CRAFTING GOTHIC TRADITION

IN *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*

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For Professor Megan Stephan, whose guidance and support extend beyond the classroom.

ABSTRACT

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Gothic storytelling, the grandmother of all horror, has endured for centuries because we recognize that specters, blade-wielding killers, folk monsters, and the infected are not nearly as terrifying as when our private wounds—our most intimate traumas—return as living hauntings, viciously determined to devour us. Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* marks the turning point in this tradition. Her protagonist Eleanor suffers a psychological decline that culminates in collapse, as Hill House emerges as a hungry entity, the only presence aware of her repressed guilt—her private pain made tangible as an apparition. Later adaptations, most notably Mike Flanagan's Netflix series, amplify this cruelty by fracturing Eleanor's core traits. Her fragility, delusion, denial, disorder, sensitivity, and guilt are splintered into the Crain family, with Hill House attuned to an entire household's deepest wounds rather than a single psyche. In this dispersal, hauntings act as heirlooms. For Eleanor, her mother's death is the haunting catalyst, while Flanagan transposes this role onto Olivia, whose death binds the Crain family together through her maternal nature inverted. This paper situates Jackson's novel and Flanagan's adaptation within the Gothic tradition that precedes them, tracing a consistent though evolving through-line. Castles become houses, houses become psyches, psyches become families, and families become ghosts—yet the terror they stage still manifests as horror. Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is the hinge of this evolution, proving that Gothic fear does not arise from monsters outside but from pain within.

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"That hour inspires the mind with pensive tenderness and elevates it to sublime contemplation."

— Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

"No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality."

— Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

The Gothic Roots: Before Arriving at Hill House

Approaching the Threshold

Gothic fiction unsettles both characters and readers, turning architecture into an active presence where the line between externalized terror and internalized horror dissolves. From its earliest stone castles to its modern corridors, the tradition has been less about fixed trappings than about its capacity to evolve. The genre shifted dynamically, turning inward toward psychology while sustaining the outward hallmarks of the strange and unnatural. Across centuries, its adaptability preserved a through line of emotional intensity and potential for the supernatural. Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) gathers these threads, reshaping the Gothic for a mid-twentieth-century audience increasingly familiar with the complexities of madness. Where earlier Gothic often rationalized the supernatural as superstition, Jackson refuses explanation, making the hauntings tangible occurrences of threat and dread. She concentrates them in Eleanor alone, who bears the full weight of Hill House's torment. This section, *The Gothic Roots: Before Arriving at Hill House*, traces the genre's lineage—its psychological framing, its disrepute, and its hybridity—to show how Jackson fuses old conventions with new sensibilities, and how Hill House becomes the stage where centuries of Gothic obsessions converge.

Inheritance Rework

Since its late eighteenth-century origins, the Gothic has been an ongoing conversation. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), considered the first Gothic novel, and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), another cornerstone of the genre's traditions, codified its signature features: labyrinthine halls, crumbling castles, and dread suspended in time. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817) playfully critiques these conventions, filling its abbey

with an empty chest and false scares to expose the genre's predictability. By parodying Radcliffe and Walpole, Austen shows how Gothic imagery had already become recognizable shorthand. In her novel, the narrator steps back to address readers directly: "I will not adopt the ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers" (Austen 22). This "custom" of apology enacts a double gesture. First, the claim defends novels as a serious medium. Second, it exposes a core irony: narrators who apologize for the very story they are telling produce prose that undermines their author's own hand, as if story and storyteller were in a quarrel, rendering the entire plot inconsequential. In this regard, Austen inadvertently enters a discourse about a genre motif that takes contradictions and blends them into uneasy accord—different strands woven into the same fabric. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1986), this motif appeared as sensational excess, framed as possible supernaturalism, only to be retracted with rational explanation. The Gothic, while not always explicitly apologetic, nonetheless carried these inhibitions.

Alongside its early meta self-awareness in apologetic narrators, the genre developed an inward turn. Authors increasingly probed the mental complexities of characters, joining a broader literary trend. *Psychological Realism in 19th Century Fiction* (2019) notes that writers began to "express a preference to portray the 'inner' or the psychological life of their characters" (Sen). This marked a decisive shift from earlier fiction, where suffering might be shown but the inner questions—*What are you feeling? What are you thinking?*—almost never received answers in prose, much less deep exploration. Gothic fiction, however, began to portray mental instability in its characters and in the spaces they inhabited. The haunted house emerged as the stage for this tradition, translating human fears into tangible form while personifying consciousness in external structures. For example, the climax of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

(1839) sets inner life and outer habitation in direct parallel. Madeline bursts from the tomb and collapses against Roderick, "heavily inward upon her brother… bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (Poe), sealing the death of both siblings and the end of their bloodline. Roderick's "anticipated terrors" expose the process of haunting Radcliffe defined as twofold: terror, the dread of what darkness may come, and horror, the collapse that follows. This dual distinction shapes the dark catharsis that claims Roderick's life and points explicitly to his internal experience, or rather "inner life." As the siblings fall, the mansion itself splits apart: "the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher'" (Poe). Poe's title thus works twofold: the ruin of a family lineage, an intangible asset, and the ruin of its physical house bestowed upon its heirs, collapsed together. In turn, the fall Poe imagines foreshadows the hauntings endured by Jackson's protagonist Eleanor, where incorporeality and materiality extend the Gothic's architectural past to its psychological future. Collectively, these strands show the genre turning closer toward the individual's internal experience with fear. Gothic inheritance rests on structures symbolizing intangible characteristics of the human condition. The following section will trace how these environments generate spectacle, sensationalism, and instability while returning to psychology as one of the defining traits of the genre's modern evolution.

From Disrepute to Respectability

Gothic narratives that stitch together opposites function as both a central motif and a defining feature of the genre's disrepute. The act of merging contradictions is not itself the problem; rather, it is the particular elements brought into collision that provoke this effect. In *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Sedgwick describes this process as "incoherence," a condition in which unlike elements are bound together—secrecy with revelation, excess with explanation,

the supernatural with the rational. Paradoxically, such illogical pairings generate a peculiar coherence. These contradictions, far from undermining the genre, operate as its cornerstone, though they do so within a sensational register. For example, a decaying edifice and even a ghost embody this dichotomy as figures of the past suspended in partial form within the present. Walpole makes this impulse explicit in the preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, describing his work as "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" (Walpole). Here, the emotional intensity, imagination, and self-reflection associated with Romanticism collide with the devastation of horror. The castle enacts this blend: a relic of the old world collapsing into the story's present, its former grandeur reduced to ruin. Likewise, apparitions embody lingering remnants of an earlier life; in *Otranto*, they even appear as literal ancestors, as when Manfred beholds "the portrait of his grandfather" (Walpole) come to life. In this sense, the fusion of past and present produces the uncanny affect that unsettles characters and readers alike—a process that might be termed the *Gothic Dichotomy*, both the source of its sensationalism and the contradictions that later authors and mass audiences reshaped into respectability.

Alongside its tangible forms, Walpole's novel also reveals the *Gothic Dichotomy* in the aims of its protagonist. Manfred, the would-be father-in-law of Isabella turned unwanted suitor, pursues her through Otranto's dark and ancient halls—a structure that, like the House of Usher, collapses by the end. This dichotomy emerges in the logic he asserts: after his son Conrad's sudden death, he attempts to force Isabella into marriage, even if it requires entrapment. The castle, the transfer of lineage, and even the manuscript itself—falsely presented as a medieval relic—all gesture toward chivalric ideals. Yet concepts of honor, virtue, and order twist into grotesque transgression as Isabella flees into the dungeons, a descent that symbolizes Manfred's violation and nods to the fairy-tale maiden imprisoned in a tower. Here, the *Gothic Dichotomy*

takes two forms. On one level, Manfred casts his actions as duty, attempting to preserve his line in a way consistent with chivalric precedent; on another, his pursuit shatters those very norms, reducing them to coercion and violence. Like a true antagonist who imagines himself the hero, he rationalizes his offense as obligation. His capacity for reason surfaces again when he sees the portrait of his grandfather stir and quickly dismisses it as "the workings of his fancy" (Walpole). This denial can be read as his refusal to acknowledge ancestral disapproval. More broadly, it reveals the *Gothic Dichotomy* at work: Manfred is capable of rational thought, yet his logic is so distorted that it blinds him to the violation he enacts upon Isabella. He holds rational and irrational ethics at once, even though they are mutually contradictory. The genre's sensationalism does not stem merely from surface-level shocks but from an underlying process of merging unlike elements to generate fear. This strategy set a pattern of hybridity for the genre at large: part Romantic exploration, part horror spectacle, part suspense and pursuit, part moral inquiry, and part ghost story—one of the oldest narrative forms with potential origins in classical antiquity. In fusing these disparate traditions, the Gothic forged a hybrid identity that was both its strength and the reason for its disrepute.

The genre's disrepute was part of an ongoing conversation that Austen would later join through *Northanger Abbey*. A small window into this debate appears in *The Monthly Review* (1794), where Samuel Taylor Coleridge praised Radcliffe's "genius in the art of mysterious terror," yet dismissed her "extravagant flights of fancy" as indulgence. His backhanded compliment acknowledges Radcliffe's skill but frames it within a form regarded as unserious, suggesting its precarious status. Another glimpse comes from *The British Critic*, which condemned Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) for its "lascivious descriptions" and "excessive horrors," reinforcing the Gothic's association with moral ambiguity and low-brow sensational

appetite. As collected in the Norton Critical Edition of *Northanger Abbey*, such reviews capture the genre's double-edged reputation: praised for its thrills yet dismissed as frivolous or offensive. It is into this contested landscape that Austen deploys her narrator and heroine. Once more, the *Gothic Dichotomy* resurfaces: while Catherine articulates a defense, the narrator intermittently mocks or undermines her, even adopting tones that echo skeptical voices through free indirect discourse. This contradictory strategy produces a seemingly biased critical voice. At the novel's opening, the narrator undercuts Catherine's credibility: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine" (Austen 5). Rather than presenting her as a figure of promise, the narration frames her as an anti-heroine from the start. This skepticism continues with the sly comment that she had an "inability to learn or understand anything before she was taught" (Austen 6). Such remarks not only create a distancing effect in voice but also align with the conventions of the bildungsroman: she begins deficient in knowledge and wisdom, her arc defined by the need to learn from naiveté. This is typical coming-of-age fare, yet the opposition creates an odd problem: how could the narrator be so apprehensive toward their own character? As the story progresses, Catherine does gain a voice—ironically, one that aligns with the narrator's own opinion of the novel form as valuable. When Henry Tilney teases her for her devotion to Radcliffe, she replies, "The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid" (Austen 102). Catherine speaks as both character and critic, defending the form against the very cultural dismissal that placed novels—and the Gothic in particular—into disrepute. The meta-conversation flows through the voices of Austen's protagonist and narrator together, forming a shared chorus of defense. This exemplifies the *Gothic Dichotomy*, where even unlike elements can paradoxically generate coherence. The genre thus became a conversation about its own

worth—an art form obsessed with secrecy, taboo, and exclusion, while simultaneously embodying that exclusion in reputation. In other words, the Gothic inhabited its own disrepute.

As seen with Walpole and Austen, the genre never rested on a single trait but consistently merged unlike elements, revealing its hybridity. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) marks a checkpoint in this evolution, turning the Gothic inward toward psychological states. Hawthorne draws on Romanticism's investment in emotion and imagination but channels it into the Gothic's macabre elements—inner hauntings that culminate in disturbing death, conveyed through secrecy and transgression. Instead of overt supernatural terror, he presents a world where "ghosts" are metaphorical—mysteries and taboos relocated into haunted thoughts. Sedgwick reminds us in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* that the genre thrives on motifs like "claustrophobic spaces, unspeakable secrets, live burials, forbidden desires." Hawthorne seizes "unspeakable secrets" and "forbidden desires" to sustain a Gothic atmosphere. Through Miles Coverdale, readers see the narrator's fascination with Zenobia become illicit: "I sat watching her… with a kind of slow fascination, as if a bird had been gazing at a serpent" (Hawthorne). The animal imagery—specifically zoomorphic—transforms ordinary observation into dark attraction. Yet the dynamic is unsettled. Zenobia is not figured as a defenseless mouse but as a "serpent," a creature of danger. Her radical, proto-feminist independence thus becomes threatening, even scandalous, within Hawthorne's cultural moment. Additionally, Coverdale invokes classic iconography from nature where birds fly off with snakes before devouring them, obscuring who is predator and who is prey—a tension that mirrors the Gothic's fascination with unstable opposites. The love triangle among Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla reduces passion to spectacle, with Coverdale's voyeuristic narration at the margins yet psychologically entangled, and it culminates in Zenobia's drowned body: "Her arms had grown rigid in the act of

struggling… one hand grasped at the air. Thus she floated to the shore" (Hawthorne). This climax takes the object of his unrequited affection and renders her a corpse. The body's "rigid" appearance implies rigor mortis, while the "act of struggling" sustains ambiguity—a death that could implicate multiple characters, the narrator included. Here, Gothic themes persist without ghosts. Repression may even culminate in murder. For Hawthorne, haunting originates in the mind rather than the external world. His novel marks a decisive shift in the genre's trajectory: terror no longer depends on the supernatural but can arise from passions lurking within the psyche. In this sense, the Gothic begins to mirror the intangible recesses of human experience, unveiling a potential path out of disrepute.

The Gothic's path from disrepute to respectability was not a clean ascent but a transformation visible in the works and their readers. From Walpole's collapsing castle to Austen's parody and Hawthorne's psychological hauntings, each checkpoint revealed hybridity—fusing unlike elements into something both disreputable and enduring. This quality, the *Gothic Dichotomy*, ensured that even as critics scorned its extravagance, mass audiences legitimized the form through sheer popularity. Pulp mediums such as Penny Dreadfuls in Britain, Dime Novels in America, and the outré *Weird Tales* carried Gothic hallmarks into lurid, hybrid forms, proving that "the people" secured respectability. These stories, consumed in cheap serials or anthologies and often devoured by candle or flashlight after parents said, "time for bed," ensured the genre's survival through popular appetite. From this soil emerged H.P. Lovecraft, forging *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) and another hybrid sub-genre we now call "cosmic horror"—a descendant of the Gothic. His narrator describes R'lyeh, Cthulhu's domain, as "the geometry of abnormality, where an angle which was acute behaved as if it were obtuse." This bending of reality dramatizes the mind's inability to comprehend the alien. For Lovecraft, terror arises from

the collapse of cognition; knowledge itself becomes inaccessible. Jackson extends this architectural metaphor. Hill House unsettles its inhabitants through “doors all a little off-center” and “angles… a trifle wrong,” its spaces mirroring fractured psyches while foreshadowing its hunger as “a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in.” Where Lovecraft externalizes incomprehensibility, Jackson turns architecture into a lexicon of psychological haunting. Both suggest that Gothic structures and monsters are mirrors, staging the collapse of perception or the consuming weight of terror. With Jackson, the lineage culminates in Hill House, where respectability arrives not through critical decree but through the genre’s adaptability: where external architecture emblematizes fear.

The Gothic Stage: On Page and Screen

Framing the Architecture of Fear

Hill House is far more than a structural residence; its terrors manifest as intangibles given haunted form. Beyond external fear mechanisms, the house selects its victims, metabolizing their inner suffering—fragility, delusion, denial, disorder, sensitivity, and guilt—then regurgitates them as supernatural events, leaving some inhabitants to walk its halls forever. Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* distills this process into a single consciousness: Eleanor, whose vulnerability makes her both prey and source of the haunting. Radcliffe’s distinction between terror and horror, introduced earlier, finds its most striking embodiment in her decline—dread saturating her every perception until collapse consumes her entirely. Mike Flanagan radicalizes this design in his 2018 Netflix series adaptation by fracturing Eleanor’s core traits across a family ensemble, dispersing terror into a mosaic of ancestral Gothic horror. Nell inherits fatal fragility, Luke is framed as delusional, Steven retreats into isolating denial, Shirley clings to false order, Theo bears unwanted sensitivity, and Hugh shoulders the weight of guilt as their father.

Binding them all together is Olivia, the maternal inversion of Eleanor's own mother, her protective instinct twisted into filicide. What Jackson distills into Eleanor as the singular source of Hill House's haunting, Flanagan fragments into a communal heirloom that terrorizes its inheritors, showing how Gothic horror evolves from the individual to the familial.

Individual and Familial Hauntings

Maternal Inversion

When compared, the maternal arcs of the novel and series invert one another. Eleanor's tragedy is inseparable from her mother: years of caregiving culminate in the fatal ghostly knock on the wall, a burden of dependency she never escapes. Her haunting is thus colored by the fear that she committed matricide—carrying her mother's voice and demands into death. Olivia's tragedy reverses this arc. Consumed by delusion and the house's influence, she turns to filicide, seeking to "save" her children by killing them. If Eleanor is trapped by her mother's life and death, Olivia becomes the mother who twists nurture into terror, attempting to trap her children within Hill House forever. Both arcs distort the maternal archetype: one binds a daughter to endless obligation, the other transforms motherhood into murder. Jackson and Flanagan collapse love and horror into the same space, using the maternal bond as the framework of haunting. For the Crains, the defining trauma is the climactic night their mother tried to kill them. For Eleanor, it is the moment she seemingly allowed her mother to die. Haunting here is not spectacle but inheritance: trauma transmitted through what should be the most sacred and intimate bonds—between mother and child, between siblings, and between the self and its own past. Whether embodied in Eleanor's claustrophobic collapse or the Crains' collective dispersal, Hill House stages haunting as the very architecture of grief.

Nell

The most devastating echo of Eleanor's fractured characterization emerges in Nell, who inherits her fragility. Yet Nell is not passively weak. She makes desperate pleas—countless calls for help that go unheard until Hill House lures her to ruin. In the final episode of Flanagan's series, she tells her siblings with haunting clarity, "I'm a small creature swallowed whole by a monster" (Ep. 10), a posthumous revelation that casts her fragility in terms of scale. Though poised as prey in the metaphor, Nell's position in Hill House is more complex: in death she still exerts influence, briefly freeing her siblings even as she acknowledges the house's insatiable predation, a power that manifests apparitions from fractured memory. By contrast, Eleanor's collapse in Jackson's novel lacks the elegiac resonance Flanagan grants Nell. Her ending blurs autonomy and coercion, leaving it unclear whether she chooses death or is compelled by Hill House. Where Nell's arc allows for bittersweet reunion, Eleanor's ends in silence: the novel closes the moment her life ceases. Her last words, "Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me?" (Ch. 9), sharpen the terror of watching herself surrender to a death at once willful and compelled. The result is a brilliant Gothic ending that collapses psychological realism into supernatural possibility, leaving no definitive answers. Read side by side, both arcs show Hill House twisting warm desire into cold death. From this inheritance, Nell's haunting unfolds.

Nell's letters capture her longing to be heard. From childhood Christmas wishes for her siblings to monthly requests of news about them in adulthood, these all appear selfless. In truth, they reveal fragility rooted in a desperate desire to be seen in the face of neglect. In the open-casket sequence at her funeral, filmed as a single continuous shot, Hugh recalls her "Puffalope" letters—a name given by Olivia, whose shadow lingers even in reminiscence. The recollection serves two purposes. First, it sparks the family's eruption, the circling camera tracing the flow of their argument, visually conveying how grief compounds into continual conflict. Second, it

exposes the core of Nell's fragility: her lifelong efforts to reach out were met with responses too faint or absent, leaving her pleas unanswered until death. The sequence culminates in the devastating final frame, as the camera lingers on Nell's casket and her own ghostly form beside it—the Bent-Neck Lady—while her childhood voiceover insists, "I was right here the whole time. None of you could see me. Nobody could see me" (Ep. 6). Her fragility, once inscribed in letters, becomes a haunting cry against erasure; Nell mourns being unseen by the ones she loves most, as grief and horror create a dreadful melancholy, her ghost visible only to the audience.

On the other hand, Eleanor's psyche bears tension between imagined futures—mantras that drift into hopeful daydreams—and a reality that denies them. These unmet desires generate instability that drives her toward collapse. Jackson's third-person sympathetic narration sharpens this decline: readers remain close to her mind but never gain full access. Instead, fragments emerge in scattered thoughts that repeat with the insistence of mantras yet accrue the weight of maxims. For example, Eleanor quotes Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: "Journeys end in lovers meeting" (Ch. 1). The line begins as innocent comfort but grows into a guiding principle, reappearing in her final chapter (Ch. 9) and linguistically marking her downfall. At times, these would-be private dialogues slip into speech, as in the bedroom scene when she blurts to Theodora, "We could have a house of our own… we could live there together" (Ch. 4). The outburst exposes the intimacy she craves, echoing her earlier sense that meeting Theodora was destiny: "It was like coming home, she thought; it was as though she had been waiting for her all this time" (Ch. 3). Such moments reveal expectations too high to be sustained. These hopes collapse under Theodora's amused response: "Don't be silly. You can't just go and live with someone you've only just met" (Ch. 4). The dismissal undercuts her most vulnerable gesture. Fragility here is not simple longing but a process: unmet desire breeds instability, leaving her

open to Hill House's predation. Fantasies of intimacy are twisted into compulsions, culminating in her refusal to "ever leave" through death on the estate grounds. One of the novel's most sorrowful moments captures this collapse: "Nell who? Eleanor Nellie Nell Nell" (Ch. 9). The repetition reads as dissociation, her identity fracturing into nicknames—forms of address usually reserved for affection. The loss of self is entwined with longing: the very language of closeness becomes her death knell.

Together, Nell and Eleanor embody two variations of the same condition. Their instability lies not only in unreciprocated yearning for closeness but also in the layered decline those failed attempts produce. Both arcs circle back to their origins in a recursive pattern: Nell's childhood voice returns with the Bent-Neck Lady mourning being unheard, while Eleanor is trapped within fantasies that once promised escape and the guilt that never leaves her. This is the multilayered terror that separates the Gothic from typical modern horror: it is not enough for a supernatural message to appear on the wall, it must also strike at the core of the character. Jackson makes this explicit in the chalked message "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME" (Ch. 7), an unmistakable supernatural intrusion that attacks Eleanor's heart shortly before her demise—her longing to live intimately with Theodora and the guilt she carries over her mother's death, used antagonistically. Nell's fate mirrors this same kind of terror. Her own ghostly mother, Olivia, both sees and hears her but does so only to entrap, compulsively whispering, "It's time to wake up, sweetheart" (Ep. 5), which lures Nell to take her own life and functions like the novel's "come home." Both moments could be read as accidental suicides: Nell coerced into a hanging, and Eleanor possessed into driving her car into a tree. These climactic moments sustain Gothic tradition by twisting gestures of affection into terror and horror. Hill House uses maternal voices as lethal snares. Each woman's fragility unfolds through a process rather than a single flaw: intimacy

desired, intimacy denied, and finally, Hill House exploiting those vulnerabilities to consume them amid their decline. The difference lies in the aftermath: where Eleanor's haunting ends in silence, Nell's death becomes the gravitational center that pulls her family back to Hill House. From here, Eleanor's Gothic inheritance fractures into another shard. Luke, bound most closely to Nell, mirrors her fate as he is dismissed and left unheard.

Luke

The second key shard of Eleanor's fractured characterization emerges from delusion, her habit of cloaking every indication of danger in daydream. In the novel, she receives a formal letter from Dr. Montague inviting her to Hill House because of her childhood poltergeist experience, phrased in terms of participating in an investigation. Eleanor bends this into a fantasy of escape, imagining the trip to be an adventure, a new beginning, perhaps even the promise of love. On the drive over she murmurs, "Journeys end in lovers meeting" (Ch. 1), as though it were a talisman strong enough to overwrite the letter's implication of risk. What begins as innocent imagination becomes deadly delusion: she clings to this false idealization until the end of the novel, when her fantasy curdles into a sinister joke. Her "journey" ends not in a lover's embrace but in psychological collapse and death, consumed by Hill House. By contrast, Luke in Flanagan's adaptation inherits this impulse differently. Eleanor's delusion comes from deceiving herself with false fantasies; Luke's delusion is imposed upon him by others who misperceive his truths as fantasy.

As mentioned previously regarding Gothic tradition, hauntings are often bound to inner struggles. As a child, Luke's parents, Olivia and Hugh, dismiss his companion Abigail as nothing more than fantasy, invalidating him with the lines, "She's not real, sweetie," and, "He's got a hell of an imagination" (Ep. 2). These words brand Luke as fanciful and leave him defenseless before

disbelief, even as he remains steadfast in his conviction that Abigail is real. The irony is that she proves to be not only real but flesh and blood, not a ghost at all—though the series often frames her with eerie music or at a distance, casting her in spectral tones, until the twist reveals she is the Dudleys' daughter. Luke's delusion, then, is not self-deception like Eleanor's, but a misperception imposed on him by others, establishing the wound later exploited by Hill House. This dismissal becomes the mechanism for his hauntings as an adult: his struggle with addiction is turned into the tool that reopens the wound first inflicted in childhood. Even from a distance—while he is away from Hill House—the hauntings manifest as withdrawal symptoms—sweats, tremors, panic—as the looming childhood ghost, the Hat Man, stalks him (Ep. 1, 6). These attacks occur while he is sober but make him appear under the influence, which Steven misreads as a relapse—replaying the disbelief first etched into Luke in childhood. Just after Nell's death, Luke is clean and sober, yet Steven again refuses to believe him. In the same conviction he held as a boy, Luke responds with clarity, defying Steven's rationalization that Nell "committed suicide," answering simply, "No, Steve. She wasn't" (Ep. 7). His broken grammar underscores his conviction: Nell was not lost to suicide but consumed by Hill House.

Luke is steadfast, insisting on the truth of what he perceives even as others deny him. His refusal to surrender perception marks him as one of the strongest characters in the series. Eleanor, by contrast, collapses into self-deception. Their arcs, however, diverge sharply in how they confront Gothic terror and horror. Rather than recoiling from the ominous chalked message "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME," Eleanor responds with strange elation, treating it as a personal sign of intimacy—as though Hill House had chosen her, even insisting the message was "meant for her." This indulgence binds her to the fate she imagined: a desire not to leave but to stay at Hill House forever. Luke, by contrast, never cloaks his torment in delusion. His bleak

"fearless moral inventory," confessed to Joey during the fourth step of his rehabilitation program, lays out his shame with unflinching clarity:

> "I've burned Shirley for thousands of dollars. Um, lied to Theo like it was my job. Stolen from Steve on countless occasions. I broke Nellie's heart. Missed her wedding. I've even robbed my asshole of a father, though that one doesn't exactly keep me up at night… I've done some shitty things, Joey" (Ep. 4).

Despite the heaviness in these admissions, Luke retains a strikingly lucid view of himself—an unusually layered trait for a character struggling with addiction. Flanagan deliberately assigns this clarity to the sibling most morally compromised, not the one who inflicted less overt harm. There is no romanticization in Luke's self-assessment, only blunt recognition. The lone exception—his half-dismissed remark about Hugh—can be read as the result of being too young during the family's initial trauma to fully recall the lengths his father went through to keep them safe. Yet even here, the confession underscores his difference from the others. Luke's shame functions as a whetstone. Instead of dulling him to the supernatural, it sharpens his conviction. He knows himself and because of that, he knows the truth about Nell and the ghosts that haunt them. Unlike Eleanor, his arc leads not to remaining within Hill House but to the opposite impulse—a desire to burn it down and escape its hold. Their arcs stand inverted, yet still Gothic in nature; Eleanor undone by indulgence, Luke scarred but enduring through defiance. Both reveal that hauntings inflict terror and horror regardless of stance. Together they expose the double-edged nature of Gothic inheritance within its larger tradition: Hill House exploits vulnerabilities and survival rests on how each confronts delusion. Steven, however, introduces a third mode—survival not through indulgence or resistance but through denial, refusing to believe even when the evidence is undeniable.

Steven

Steven's haunting begins with denial—another fractured shard inherited from Eleanor in Jackson's novel. While Eleanor oscillates between belief, disbelief, and outright denial, Steven hardens into absolute rejection, and it is this rigidity that Hill House exploits. He even insists on calling the unexplainable "preternatural" rather than "supernatural," a linguistic dodge meant to strip away any suggestion of otherworldly phenomena. Both Jackson and Flanagan remain faithful to Gothic tradition: the house cuts to the heart of a character, attacking the weakness that defines them. In the novel, Dr. Montague describes ghostly disturbances with pseudoscientific and metaphysical lectures that rationalize the supernatural. Flanagan echoes this tendency in Steven, who takes on the same rationalist role by insisting flatly, "I've never seen a ghost… And not in Hill House" (Ep. 1). This flimsy declaration becomes armor—if one has never seen ghosts, they must be impossible. Yet the series later reveals this is a false defense, since Steven did see ghosts in his childhood but buried the memory beneath his chosen skepticism. He makes disbelief his novelist persona, but his family rejects the books as both exploitation of their mother's death and proof he never believed their hauntings were real. For Steven, skepticism becomes protective and corrosive: it distances him from the house's supernatural terror, but it also erodes his family relationships, drawing him closer to Hill House instead of his loved ones.

In this skeptical posture, Steven hardens into rejection, leaving him vulnerable in isolation. However, Eleanor oscillates between extremes which creates instability—at times insisting "this is real" to anchor herself and at others deflecting with "it was not my fault." Both characters illustrate the Gothic in modern form, where hauntings exploit intangible traits. The series makes this clear from the start. In the first episode, Steven returns to his apartment to find Nell standing silently in the corner. While on the phone he learns the devastating truth from

Hugh: “Nell’s dead” (Ep. 1). Right after the line is delivered, he turns back and she is nearly inches away, screaming and decaying. The camera cuts to Steven collapsed on the floor, his denial shattered. The Gothic here works not through any cheap surprise from a jump scare but by dismantling a character’s rational defenses, leaving Steven literally and figuratively sprawled on the ground in horror. Despite witnessing his sister’s apparition, Steven continues to insist the encounters are facades. At the funeral home, he glimpses a ghost in the aisle—arms raised toward him, blurred but likely Olivia—yet leaves the room, refusing to accept even the most undeniable evidence. This pattern culminates at the graveside service. After Luke is pulled into Nell’s casket by Olivia’s ghost and sees Nell hanging as the Bent-Neck Lady, he panics and turns to Steven. Still entrenched in denial, Steven replies, “I’ve seen things this week too. It wasn’t real. None of it’s real” (Ep. 6). Instead of supporting his brother, he reframes the vision as delusion, dismissing Luke’s terror as nothing more than a trick of the mind. In the Gothic, no defense is safe because every response to haunting is twisted into terror.

Together, these moments define Steven’s Gothic inheritance: denial of both the supernatural and his family’s truths. What begins with Nell’s scream swells into the final episode’s crescendo, when Hill House throws his disbelief back at him in full. Hugh bestows the house upon him—a literal haunted estate as an heirloom—and as he leaves, nearly every ghost the audience has seen surrounds him, a poetic refutation of his lifelong denial. The moment underscores both his isolation and the inescapable truth that he is heir to the source of his family’s supernatural incursions. Eleanor is undone in solitude, unseen and unheard until her final collapse. Steven, by contrast, is forced to walk through a community of the dead, his denial shattered even as he refuses to turn back and face them directly. In both arcs, Hill House seizes upon their weaknesses—her oscillation, his rigidity—and turns them into the blunt instruments

of their haunting. Where his disbelief collapses under the weight of its own rigidity, Shirley's facade of control will be the next to give way.

Shirley

Shirley's work as a mortician and funeral director most clearly expresses her compulsion for order—a shard inherited from Eleanor that, like her siblings, traces back to childhood. One might say it is ironic that the sibling who manages the appearances of death shares her name with Shirley Jackson, yet the parallel works: both shape Hill House's victims, one through ritualized appearances, the other through prose. Eleanor and Shirley alike fashion identities externally, but beneath the surface each conceals unresolved sorrow. For Eleanor, Jackson uses free indirect discourse to capture her voice imagining renewal: "Hill House would be home, and she would be a new person" (Ch. 2). Dr. Montague's invitation becomes the springboard for this fantasy. The letter is never treated as eerie or threatening; Eleanor recasts it as an escape from guilt. Shirley, by contrast, insists on preparing Nell's body herself despite family objections, relying on cosmetics rather than open mourning. This impulse carries a paradox. When Theo remarks that people often say the dead look as if they are sleeping—adding that Nell does not—Shirley replies, "Most of what people say at a funeral is a wish" (Ep. 6). Yet she continues combing Nell's hair, enacting the very wish she dismissed. Like Eleanor, who tries to soothe turmoil by weaving fantasies, Shirley displaces pain by imposing order. Both refuse to confront loss directly, and Shirley's defense soon bleeds into her relationships.

Flanagan roots Shirley's career in her mother's death, her core wound of disorder. Seeing her mother's corpse for the first time plants the seed of her vocation: approaching the casket, she whispers to the mortician, "You fixed her" (Ep. 2). From the start, Shirley's pursuit of order is not merely self-preservation but the urge to mend what she perceives as broken. Yet Hill House

weaponizes that instinct. As Shirley finishes Nell's makeup, she murmurs, "I'm sorry" (Ep. 2), her facade slipping into grief. Almost immediately, a beetle writhes from Nell's lips—echoing the shoebox of dead kittens from childhood. The grotesque intrusion corrupts what seemed like a private confession, destabilizing her fragile control. The hauntings escalate: leaving the morgue, Shirley glimpses her ghostly mother grotesquely decayed, clutching the same box of kittens. Jackson establishes the same dynamic in the novel. When Eleanor and Theodora are trapped by furious pounding on the walls, Eleanor clings to composure: "It was inside. She had a mad hope, perhaps, that if she did not hear it she could control it" (Ch. 6). Yet the sound only intensifies, closing in on every wall. Her defense collapses. Both Shirley and Eleanor show the same pattern: Hill House attacks not with external spectacle but by turning their defenses against them. Eleanor's fantasies and Shirley's rituals are exposed as illusions ripe for exploitation. Where Shirley hides behind appearances, Theo turns to repression, burying the emotions that haunt her.

Theo

Theo embodies Eleanor's repressed desire for intimacy. The gloves she wears to dull her empathic abilities become her defining motif—a flimsy barrier against the flood of emotions triggered by touch. Her guardedness dramatizes how defenses collapse under Hill House's pressure. This repression recalls Eleanor's fraught relationship with touch: in the middle of the night, she clutches what she thinks is Theodora's hand, only to realize it is not—even though they are the only two in the room. Her desperate question, "Whose hand was I holding?" (Ch. 5), turns comfort into dread, echoing the suffocating grip of her mother's dependence years earlier. Even before arriving at Hill House, Eleanor has already learned to fear intimacy. Flanagan mirrors this moment when young Theo feels a strange hand close around hers in bed and repeats the same chilling question. For her, repression is not just a moment but a condition. She

describes her gift starkly: when she “touches things it all comes out” (Ep. 3). Whether innate or trauma-shaped, her sensitivity makes connection indistinguishable from violation. She reflects a shard of Eleanor’s fractured characterization, but also embodies the Gothic paradox where closeness itself becomes destructive.

This paradox is most vivid in the morgue scene when Theo touches Nell’s body and her defenses shatter. Instead of the usual flood of feeling, Hill House inverts her ability, overwhelming her with “nothingness”—the most terrifying sensation. She collapses to the floor, undone not by excess but by absence, a Gothic inversion as intimacy turns void. The breakdown parallels Steven’s haunting when Nell appears at his apartment, where he too collapses as disbelief fractures. For both siblings, Nell is the catalyst: one undone by inverted empathy, the other by denial. Each carries Eleanor’s legacy of vulnerability in distinct yet equally Gothic forms. Guardedness cannot shield Theo from hauntings inscribed into her body, even when her defining gift is stripped away. Her repression mirrors Eleanor’s but also sets the stage for Hugh, whose defense takes another shape. Where she hides behind gloves, he hides behind lies—both revealing how protection itself collapses into vulnerability, because no family member is safe from the Gothic influence Hill House deploys.

Hugh

Hugh’s conscience is etched by protective lies, unraveling into self-recrimination. His instinct mirrors Eleanor in the novel, who relies on small fabrications to sustain denial and shield herself from the supernatural. She invents a story about her apartment, “a little place of my own, with two stone lions at the door” (Ch. 4), to impress Theodora and disguise being her mother’s failed caretaker. For her, lying is not only protective but fictive: where Hugh bends reality into evasions, she constructs entire false narratives. Both instincts tie to how the supernatural

unearths secrets—the private memories they would rather suppress. To admit the haunting is to admit the past, particularly guilt bound to failed caregiving. Within Hill House's logic, this reluctance becomes an Achilles' heel. After something pounds on the walls and a voice calls Eleanor's name, she insists to Dr. Montague, "Nothing happened to me. I didn't hear anything" (Ch. 6). By denying the event, she denies the inner struggles it exposed. In shielding herself through lies, she leaves the door open for the house to exploit her—the same problem Hugh faces, though his is from a parental stance.

His lies are seen in both practice and philosophy, all aimed at reshaping his children's perception. The morning after Olivia's death, Hugh sits beside young Nell outside their motel room, waiting for the police. Disheveled and bloodstained, he answers her fearful glance with, "She's okay now. It's just paint" (Ep. 5). Yet Olivia is neither "okay" nor absent; she is both dead and already a ghost fractured into memories—something he witnessed before returning to the motel. The lie only shields Nell momentarily; it offers no lasting protection. His guiding philosophy comes into focus in his confession to Olivia's ghost during the final episode:

> "I was holding a door closed. I had my back against it and my arms out wide because I knew there were monsters on the other side, and they wanted what was left of our family. And I held it so hard I didn't have arms left for the kids. The monsters got through anyway" (Ep. 10).

Here duty is revealed. While "monsters" remain vague, Olivia herself had become one of them—a vessel of Hill House bent on consuming her children. His evasions echo the parental cliché of lying "for your own good," but in this context they fail: Hill House exacts its price. No matter what he tried, the monsters "got through anyway," claiming him rather than the children. His

efforts succeed only by inversion—not by keeping the horrors out, but by stepping through the door himself, taking their place within.

What Eleanor deploys as fragile denial becomes, in Hugh, a paternal code. Yet this philosophy calcifies into guilt, embodied by visions of Olivia. Whether she comes from his own imagination or is a ghost fractured across time, the effect is the same: she becomes the specter of his deception, essentially guilt incarnate. Both Eleanor and Hugh lie to shield against truth. For her, denial surfaces in the refrain, "It was not my fault. I couldn't help it" (Ch. 2), a fragile defense distancing her from intrusions that prey on her private wounds. For him, lying becomes a parental veil. In both cases, the words offer temporary shelter but yield lasting scars. Eleanor's denial cannot erase her guilt; Hugh's lies cannot undo the trauma his children inherit. Lies may shield in the moment, but they wound in the aftermath, leaving fractures in their wake. Hugh admits as much when he confesses to Steven, "I still see her. I still talk to her" (Ep. 10). No longer lying, he accepts Olivia's ghost and embraces the cost. His surrender spares his children and appeases the house's appetite. The result offers a brighter conclusion than Eleanor's, but the core theme remains: Hill House always takes a victim. Hugh sought to shield his children from monsters—spectral and maternal—and in the end his sacrifice binds him to Olivia in communion. Protector and threat are tethered together in their "forever house," in a fate both hopeful and doomed. Olivia and Hugh's journey ends, fittingly, in lovers meeting.

Olivia

Olivia stands as the matriarchal figure of communal haunting, Hill House's chief vessel. While the rest of the Crains mirror fragments of Eleanor, she reflects Eleanor's mother—the catalyst whose love suffocates rather than protects. In her, the Gothic reveals its darkest paradox: intimacy transfigured into terror, warmth collapsing into murderous horror. At first glance, Nell

appears to be the family's natural tether. Her ghost dismantles defenses, her death reunites the siblings, and in the Red Room, she implores them to reckon with their legacy. Yet beneath the surface lies a deeper current: Olivia, not Nell, is the hidden tether. Nell may be the visible thread, but Olivia is the hand that weaves it—the root cause of Nell's death, the maternal voice ensnaring Hugh in his final sacrifice, and the presence that draws every Crain back to Hill House. More than a tether, she is the voice of the house's hunger, architect of a dark heirloom.

The episode aptly titled "Screaming Meemies" stages Olivia's seduction into this role. Her encounters with opposing ghosts expose the house's manipulative force and the unsettling possibility that spirits retain fragments of agency. Poppy delivers a manic warning disguised as care: "They'll suffer, you know. Out there. The world's a horror, a dangerous place for children" (Ep. 9). The rhetoric grooms by inversion: maternal instinct is manipulated into fear, presenting Hill House as sanctuary while masking its design to cause filicide. Poppy's form mirrors her lies. First, she appears in glamorous flapper attire, then later as a corpse-like specter, the mask slipping only for the audience. By contrast, Hazel arrives already in decay, her blunt warning—"She lies" (Ep. 9)—stripped of allure. One cloaks corruption, the other exposes it, together creating the central question: are Hill House's ghosts autonomous or merely puppets? Hazel's dissent suggests residual agency, even if it cannot alter the outcome. The result is quintessentially Gothic: unknowns are preserved rather than solved. With Poppy's logic taking root and further apparitions pressing in, Olivia ultimately converts to filicidal resolve: "I need to keep them safe" (Ep. 9).

Hill House goes to great lengths to achieve its ends—even to the point of violating its own rules. Flanagan first establishes the relationship between ghosts, time, and memory through Nell's haunting as the Bent-Neck Lady. As a child, she sees her future self, trapped in the

moment of her accidental suicide. The device plays with the Gothic convention of ghosts tethered to unresolved issues upon death, but here it is recursive: part memory, part phantom, forcing Nell to relive her worst moment as her own specter. In this logic, ghosts distort time only insofar as they remain bound to the manner of their death. Olivia's morgue vision seems to break this mold. She sees her children as adults—Luke, overdosed, and Nell a corpse with her mouth wired shut, which she slices open to scream, "Mommy!" (Ep. 9). At this point both are still alive and still children. Luke, moreover, never dies at all. Two readings emerge. The first: the rules bend. Olivia mistakes Luke for dead when he is merely unconscious, while Nell is allowed speech because she will eventually become a ghost. This still strains Flanagan's logic, since Olivia is not witnessing memory but a fabricated vision. The second: the rules break. Hill House manipulates time outright, projecting adult corpses of living children solely to corrupt her maternal instincts. Either way, the implication is the same: the house will even overturn its own temporal logic to feed. In contrast to the Bent-Neck Lady, where time distortion is anchored in death and memory, Olivia's vision reveals a darker function—apparitions animated like puppets, divorced from memory, designed only to ensnare. The morgue scene therefore marks not continuity but escalation: proof that Hill House will twist memory, time, and even its own rules to satiate its appetite.

Olivia's conviction represents the logic of Hill House. No matter how well intentioned, even maternal devotion can be corrupted, becoming an accursed tether at the root of the Crain family's haunting. Yet the question remains: how much agency do characters truly retain under the house's influence? When she lures Nell, her compulsive stare suggests she is not entirely in control, drawing her daughter toward death. This tension between free will and possession is not only a family inheritance but also a meta-inheritance, carried from novel to series. Eleanor's final

drive into the tree may be read as suicide, yet it also carries the troubling impression of supernatural coercion. In both mediums, terror emerges not merely from specters preying on intimate struggles but from the collapse of agency itself. Yet whether by choice or coercion, each act serves the same end: to satisfy Hill House's hunger. The Red Room is "not a heart, but a stomach" (Ep. 10), consuming both intangibles and individuals, while Olivia becomes its voice. When Hugh pleads with her ghost to release the children, she responds, "We're all safe now. This is our forever house" (Ep. 10). The phrase inverts maternal idealism: "safe now" is not life preserved but death enshrined, and the "forever house" is a tomb binding the family as ghosts within its walls. Hugh bargains in reply: "I will make a promise to you that I will keep forever" (Ep. 10). In echoing her corrupted wish, he appeases the house's appetite. Olivia becomes the tether that binds, the hand that weaves, and the architect of a dark heirloom whose design is cyclical horror: the house consumes inner struggles, regurgitates them as hauntings, and finally lures its victims to death, their spirits fractured into echoes of themselves, with shards left half-trapped in memory. Her arc thus becomes the hinge of Gothic evolution: what began in Jackson as an individual haunting ends in Flanagan as a communal one. By turning maternal love into Hill House's chief instrument, the Gothic tradition is reborn in the modern age.

The Final Conclusion

Shadowed gargoyles crouched on medieval cathedrals and caverns in crumbling castles of obscure origin share Gothic resonance, even if they do not share a direct lineage. The pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and vast stained-glass windows of Gothic architecture overwhelm those who enter, producing an effect that anticipates the internal Gothic experience: awe laced with dread, the sublime born from human scale dwarfed by stone. That same eeriness lingers in their histories, as in Cologne Cathedral, begun in 1248 and left unfinished for centuries after plague

and war, abandoned with tools scattered as if its builders had vanished. Such images reveal how the Gothic always exceeds a single form, carrying meta-elements that bleed beyond architecture into narrative space and, later, into film. Not because the lineage is exact but because its traits—grandeur, darkness, the uncanny—are instantly recognizable, unsettling norms and forcing us to feel fear as characters do. From these foundations, Gothic literature built its signature spaces. Castles in decline, dynasties collapsing, and monumental structures steeped in terror became the template that Shirley Jackson and Mike Flanagan later reframed as psychological and familial hauntings. This paper has traced how Jackson compressed centuries of Gothic motifs into Eleanor's inward collapse and how Flanagan dispersed that inheritance outward into the Crain family's shared trauma. The Gothic's renaissance in film, both in recent years and decades past, proves that its survival depends on both mutability and homage. Its hereditary inheritance sowed the seeds from which modern horror now blooms.

Architecture in the Gothic tradition embodies the core wounds under exploration. These structures are on the verge of collapse, mirroring the mental decline of their inhabitants, as inexplicable encounters with the supernatural unfold within their walls. This is why Hugh Crain could never restore Hill House. His hopeless talisman, "I can fix this," was delusional. The house bred black mold that clung to both stone and spirit, conjured storms, and devoured every effort at repair. The decay and rot of the Gothic cannot be altered by mortal hands. Jackson's Hill House reveals the same principle at a psychological level. She makes inner life her stage, in line with literature's nineteenth-century shift toward the mind. Her terror arises not from monsters outside us but from fractures within, making resistance futile, for these attacks strike at the character's own heart—the very place no talisman of repair can reach. With Jackson and Flanagan, the Gothic extends into familial legacies of repression, alienation, and instability, while the Crains

collectively embody Eleanor's fragmented burdens. In both novel and series, apparitions born from memory and pain render the supernatural itself a Gothic antagonist. In essence, an antagonist thwarts a protagonist's deepest goals. In Jackson's novel, the supernatural does so by fastening itself to the inner life of a character, consuming hidden pain and regurgitating it as terror, horror, and finally death. The Gothic thus reveals its unnatural logic: its monsters are never wholly external but emerge from private wounds. By reshaping what was set by past monoliths of the genre, Jackson seems to enter a conversation with Ann Radcliffe herself—like a granddaughter passing notes to her grandmother about their shared legacy, petrifying us with external terror and internal horror made into inexorable presences. That is Hill House. That is the conversation Flanagan eavesdrops on.

Modern horror evolved from the Gothic, consistently returning to women's lives. This continuity is no coincidence. Women were not only the primary readers of Gothic fiction but also among its most enduring authors, from Radcliffe to Jackson. The lineage is direct: Gothic terrors were often filtered through domestic, psychological, and maternal spaces, and contemporary horror inherits that focus. Six films in particular illustrate how modern cinema carries forward this legacy. *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) transforms paranoia and maternal ambivalence into domestic horror, staging the haunting question: what if a woman birthed Satan's son? *Possession* (1981) pushes marital collapse into grotesque spectacle, where loneliness and desire manifest as a wife's affair with her husband's otherworldly double. *The Babadook* (2014) externalizes the struggles of motherhood as an uncanny antagonist, dramatizing shifting power between mother and son. *The Witch* (2015) reframes female coming-of-age through repression and seduction, its infamous invitation—"Wouldst thou like to live deliciously?"—casting empowerment as both liberation and blood-soaked transgression. *The Hole in the Ground* (2019) intensifies maternal

estrangement by turning a child into something uncanny, asking what it means when a mother no longer recognizes her own son. Finally, *Nosferatu* (2023) returns to its roots, exposing the historical inability to diagnose mental illness, particularly in women, where horror becomes inseparable from domesticity. Together, these films confirm Jackson's legacy: the Gothic no longer requires castles or cloisters—its survival lies in mutability and homage, the twin engines driving evolution. Domestic space stages the backdrop for living nightmares. Fear finds us in the place thought to be safe. It haunted us in our homes, clutched in mother's arms. Fear found us among siblings and beside loved ones. Wherever Gothic horror creeps, our hearts are butchered to undo our minds. Love becomes death. Nurture becomes horror. Affection becomes terror. Gothic is an heirloom intimately afflicted.

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