

DOMESTIC ENTRAPMENT AND SUPERNATURAL PROTECTION: MAPPING THE
AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE SUBJECT AND DOMESTIC
SPACE IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S "HOUSE NOVELS"

by

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ABSTRACT

Shirley Jackson's three "house novels" offer new ways of understanding the tensions between women and their domestic spaces in the post-World War II American society. Studying *The Haunting of Hill House*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and *The Sundial* through the lenses of Gothic literature and spatial theory gives literary critics and scholars valuable insights into Jackson's representation of women and how they interact with and form relationships to their public and private spheres. This paper will apply Robert Tally's mapping concept to consider each of the houses represented within Jackson's novels as a map portraying the ambiguous relationship between female subject and domestic space.

Introduction

As literary critic Angela Hague notes, “History has not been kind to Shirley Jackson” (73). Often left out of the American literary canon, Shirley Jackson’s collective body of work has been largely ignored by scholars and critics alike. Despite being a talented author whose “stories and novels have earned her a reputation as a ‘literary sorceress’” with a “peculiar talent for the bizarre” as a “master of effect and suspense” (Ragland 161), Jackson’s work is seldomly included within conversations surrounding American literature of the 1950s and 60s. When Jackson’s work is analyzed, however, Bernice Murphy writes that, “the vast majority of specific work on Jackson centers around just two specific works: the influential and supernatural novel *The Haunting of Hill House* and the classic short story ‘The Lottery,’ both of which have invited more attention individually than the rest of her work combined” (4). Despite publishing numerous novels, short stories, and even a children’s book, Shirley Jackson remains shrouded in obscurity, with the exception of a select audience of readers and scholars. In particular, her two novels *The Sundial* (published in 1958) and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) are relatively unknown in the literary world when compared to *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). While critical scholarship surrounding *The Haunting of Hill House* and “The Lottery” provides valuable insight into Jackson’s authorial intellect and ability, a vast void of scholarship and criticism remains concerning her other works. Why does this vast void exist? Why is Jackson not recognized as a central 20th century American author? Murphy explores these questions, writing: “Jackson’s neglect can be attributed to a number of factors. Foremost among these is the fact that critics have not quite known what to make of her, a problem caused by the fact that she operated in two popular and yet frequently marginalized genres: those of horror and the gothic and the so-

called domestic humor that appeared in women's magazines during the 1950s" (11). The question of classification plagues Shirley Jackson – the variety of her work rejects categorization, preventing Jackson as being recognized as a master of a single genre. Domestic humor and gothic horror are on opposite ends of the literary spectrum, and Jackson's ability to write both genres simultaneously proved to be a curse rather than a skill worthy of recognition. Jackson's collective works attract a diverse audience, but her lack of focus on one particular genre makes her an anomaly when studied by literary critics and scholars. Thus, her duality as an author has left scholars unable to box her work into one single genre representative of 20th century American literature.

This duality, however, has recently been noted by scholars seeking to reclassify Jackson as an American author worthy of increased critical attention. For instance, Ruth Franklin is making such an attempt in her recent biography of Shirley Jackson's life, *A Rather Haunted Life*. Franklin writes that while Jackson was an "important writer," she also "happened to be – and embraced being – a housewife, as women of her generation were all but required to do so" (5). These two opposing roles – public author and private housewife – created tension "both internal and external, based simultaneously in [Jackson's] expectations for herself and in the expectations of her husband, family, publishers, and readers" (Franklin 5). Significantly, Franklin notes that "[t]his tension animates all of Jackson's writing. And it makes her perfectly representative of her time" (5). Shirley Jackson's personal and professional life are closely linked, as Franklin paints Jackson as a woman facing an identity crisis: she was Shirley Jackson, acclaimed American author, but also Mrs. Stanley Hyman, devoted American housewife. These dueling roles manifest themselves not only in her writing, but also, as Franklin notes, "makes

[Jackson] perfectly representative of her time.” As an author publishing works during the 1940s-1960s, Jackson wrote at a time of social change for women, this social change due to the aftereffects of America’s involvement in World War II. During the war, an unprecedented number of women had entered the professional workforce. Upon the war’s end in 1945, male veterans returned to America expecting to see their mothers, sisters, and wives waiting patiently at home for their arrival. This, however, was not the case – the introduction of women into the professional sphere had transformed the American workforce, as the exodus of women from the home and into the workforce resulted in a destabilization of traditional cultural norms. Marta Caminero-Santangelo writes, “As veterans rushed to seek stability in an idealized image of domesticity, women’s wartime occupation of traditionally male jobs needed to be suppressed in the service of male employment and a stable, secure, already nostalgic vision of family life” (52-53). In an attempt to return to a “stable” idea of American culture, women were forced back into the home to return to their traditional role of housewife. The idea of a woman working both inside of the home and outside in the professional sphere resulted in what Caminero-Santangelo coins “the image of a divided or multiple women” (53) who could perform many roles at once. This image “was used to suggest a potential threat to the precarious sense of social order, and to the traditional gender relations that provided a domestic haven from the atrocities of war” (Caminero-Santangelo 53). Women such as Shirley Jackson, a professional author outside of the home but also a devoted housewife and mother inside of the home, experienced significant pressure from society to revert solely back to their roles inside of the home in an attempt to “restabilize” American cultural norms.

A Brief Introduction to Jackson's Three House Novels

The Sundial, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* are commonly known as Jackson's "house novels" due to the major significance that each text places on the houses themselves. These novels suffer a critical lack of scholarship in proportion to Jackson's most famous work, "The Lottery." While "The Lottery" greatly increased Jackson's readership due to its unconventional plotline, the short story has remained the main focus of critical scholarship regarding Jackson's works. The consequence of this limited range of scholarship means that Jackson's more complex works, such as her house novels, remain in obscurity. *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* all employ eccentric storylines as compelling as that of "The Lottery," but their status as novels rather than short stories allows Jackson to increase their complexity and scope – because the plotline extends past just a few pages, Jackson can further develop her characters and settings. "The Lottery" paints the setting and characters in broad strokes instead of minute detail, while in the house novels, the setting (often the house itself) is clearly defined with well-developed characters. Thus, the novels hold layers of complexity that "The Lottery" cannot. This added complexity makes the argument for an increased critical focus on Jackson's house novels.

Recognizing the house's role in each plot is essential in understanding the significance of Jackson's work. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor, the protagonist, has been invited to participate in a supernatural study taking place within Hill House. During her time there, Eleanor is subjected to unexplainable frights, as doors shut for no reason, writing appears on the wall, and loud banging noises travel from the nursery wall to her bedroom door. Despite these horrors, Eleanor finds herself growing closer and closer to the house as the story goes on, convincing

herself that she and the house are becoming one. She believes that she has finally found a home within Hill House. Subsequently, Eleanor begins to roam the house alone (breaking Doctor Montague's primary rule), and is forced to leave Hill House. Eleanor, however, believes that she is truly at home in Hill House, so instead of willingly leaving the house, she crashes her car into the trees surrounding the house in an act of suicide. Fear and psychological entrapment are the core components of *The Haunting of Hill House*, a radical difference from the stability that grounds *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.

Merricat and her beloved sister Constance are the last surviving female members of the Blackwood family in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. The sisters live in the secluded Blackwood house with their Uncle Julian, who is severely disabled after ingesting arsenic that was in the sugar at the family dinner table. Merricat and Constance's mother, father, brother, and aunt all perished from arsenic poisoning, and the townspeople believe that Constance is the murderous culprit. However, it was Merricat who killed her family, and in defense against the hatred of the villagers, she buries "magical talismans" around the property in a makeshift layer of protection. The house, enriched by the magical protection of Merricat's talismans, is grounded in the stability of family heritage, as the house has been passed down through the multiple generations of Blackwoods. The family was hated by the town even before the murders, and the villagers make no effort to disguise their intensified hatred of the sisters. Cousin Charles Blackwood's arrival threatens the relationship between Merricat and Constance, as Charles seeks to convince Constance to reenter society with him. In retaliation, Merricat sets the house on fire, and when the fire department is called to extinguish the fire, the townspeople turn the rescue into chaos as they destroy the Blackwood home. Merricat and Constance retreat further into the now

charred and twisted “castle,” as Merricat terms it, never again to leave the Blackwood property. The house is a safehouse for the sisters, just as the Halloran manor in *The Sundial* serves as an apocalyptic bunker.

Three generations of Hallorans live in the Halloran manor in *The Sundial*. The book opens on the day of Lionel Halloran’s funeral, with his widow, referred to as “young Mrs. Halloran,” insisting that Orianna Halloran, Lionel’s mother, pushed Lionel down the stairs to his death. Orianna Halloran desires to inherit the Halloran manor and its riches, though she is only a Halloran by marriage to Richard Halloran, Lionel’s father. Richard and Orianna Halloran are the first generations of Hallorans, the deceased Lionel and his wife “young Mrs. Halloran” are the second generation, and their daughter, Fancy Halloran, is the third generation of Hallorans. Fancy stands to inherit the house upon her grandmother Orianna Halloran’s death, but for now, she is content with an exact doll house replica of the manor. To cement her control over the house, Orianna Halloran is preparing to evict the other members of the household: family members, the hired help – notably, Essex, the bookkeeper and Miss Ogilvie, Fancy’s governess – and Mrs. Willow and her daughters, visitors to the house. However, Richard Halloran’s sister, Francis Halloran (referred to as “Aunt Fanny” for most of the novel), receives a warning from her deceased father (the original Mr. Halloran, Lionel’s grandfather) that a storm is coming that will end the world as they know it. The Halloran manor will be the only structure preserved, meaning that the family must remain inside of the house if they wish to survive. Aunt Fanny relays this message to the inhabitants of Halloran manor, and they spend time accumulating necessary survival resources and bidding their nearby villagers goodbye. During this time of preparation, readers learn that Aunt Fanny takes special care to preserve her family’s small

apartment rooms replicated within the attic of the Halloran manor. Aunt Fanny's childhood apartment replica is a prison of memories which she cannot escape. The day of the storm arrives and that morning, Orianna Halloran mysteriously falls down the stairs to her death. The house inhabitants lay her body outside, and the novel ends with the family awaiting the apocalyptic storm in a house they have transformed into a bunker.

Reading Jackson Contextually Through a Spatial Lens

There arises a strong argument to read Shirley Jackson's work in a cultural context when considering the time period in which she wrote: post-World War II America was a tumultuous time of social change for women. Franklin argues that "The themes of Jackson's work were so central to the preoccupations of American women during the postwar period that the Plath biographer Linda Wagner-Martin has called the 1950s 'the decade of Jackson.' Her body of work constitutes nothing less than the secret history of American women of her era" (5-6). Hague seconds this notion, adding, "In her fiction, Shirley Jackson depicted her unique version of the subterranean undercurrents of the 1950s, and reading her contextually provides new insights into her contributions as a writer" (74). In reading Jackson contextually, scholars and critics can begin to understand her significant contributions to 20th century American literature, contributions that focus specifically on understanding the trials and tribulations that post-war society inflicted on women. A contextual reading of Jackson's work, specifically her fiction, has the potential to unlock new understandings of "the secret history of American women" that Franklin hints at.

But how can scholars and critics go about understanding how Jackson constructed this “secret history” in her works? The answer lies in challenging the theoretical lens used to read Jackson’s work. Traditionally, most “critical work approaches Jackson from either an overtly feminist or psychoanalytical angle, or in the case of ‘The Lottery,’ has hinged upon the symbolism of the notorious tale,” meaning that “Despite the efforts of recent critics...to establish her importance, there still persists the view in some quarters that Jackson, though unquestionably talented, was at heart a minor writer” (Murphy 4-5). Approaching Jackson’s work through a theoretical lens other than feminism or psychoanalytic offers scholars and critics the opportunity to recognize Jackson as a “major writer,” a writer who has a statement to make about her status as a woman in the 1950s.

In particular, spatial theory offers a complementary approach to feminist and psychoanalytical theory when studying Jackson’s works. Reading the texts through the lens of spatiality enables scholars to look critically at the spaces within the novels, and these spaces’ significance in relation to the main characters – the characters initially studied through feminist and psychoanalytic lenses. As evident in Jackson’s house novels, the space in which her characters exist is just as important as the characters themselves, making the argument that spatiality is a crucial lens to consider when studying Jackson’s works.

The theory of spatiality experienced a resurgence in literary studies alongside the shifting cultural norms in mid-century America. Robert Tally’s *Spatiality* offers a look at the rise of spatial considerations in literary theory, and his work provides a unique lens through which to study Jackson’s work. Tally writes that “after the Second World War, space began to reassert itself in critical theory” (3), and names this movement the “spatial turn.” Tally defines this

movement as an increased attention to matters of space, place, and mapping in literary and cultural studies (3). Viewing writers as mapmakers paying particular attention to the use of space in their works provides authors with “a tool by which the world may be changed or other worlds imagined” (Tally 48), as Tally explains:

The act of writing itself might be considered a form of mapping or a cartographic activity. Like the mapmaker, the writer must survey territory, determining which features of a given landscape to include, to emphasize, or to diminish; for example, some shadings may need to be darker than others, some lines bolder, and so on. The writer must establish the scale and the shape, no less of the narrative than of the places in it. (45)

Tally theorizes that authors act as cartographers: when writing stories, the author is, in essence, creating a map for readers to follow. Just as physical landmarks orient one reading a map, allowing them to reach their destination, the author creates notable “landmarks” in their stories, choosing to emphasize key scenes, plot lines, and characters to offer the reader clues to the story’s deeper meaning. Likening storytelling to cartography, Tally notes, “the very act of telling a story is also a process of producing a map. And this operates in both directions, of course: storytelling involves mapping, but a map also tells a story, and the interrelations between space and writing tend to generate new places and new narratives” (46). The “interrelations between space and writing” that Tally identifies creates a space for reader interpretation to “generate new places and new narratives,” meaning multiple layers of interpretation and significance can be gleaned from a singular story.

Readers, therefore, take on the crucial role of interpreters. As the author “maps” the complexities of the themes and ideas their text displays in a way in which readers can easily

follow, the reader is asked to act as a geographer interpreting the map. Acting as a geographer, the reader “is never simply a passive receptacle for the spatial messages transmitted by the map or text” (Tally 79). Rather, the reader “actively determines the open shifting and transient meanings to be found in the map” (Tally 79). Tally writes that the reader’s active role in discovering meaning turns the critical reader into a “kind of geographer who actively interprets the literary map in such a way as to present new, sometimes hitherto unforeseen mappings” (79). When viewing the reader as a geographer interpreting the map the author has provided, the reader takes an active role in discovering a story’s meaning. Just as the blank spaces between notable landmarks on a map offers the map-reader an opportunity for discover unmarked features of the land, the gap between authorial intent and reader interpretation creates space for sometimes “unforeseen” connections. Stories, therefore, can act as maps leading from authorial intent to reader interpretation – just as cartographers decide what landmarks to include as identifying factors in their maps, authors emphasize and create specific instances in their writing that are designed to lead readers to multiple layers of constructing meaning and understanding. It is the reader’s job as geographer to both understand and interpret the map that the author, the cartographer, has provided.

When applying these ideas to Jackson’s writings, her fictional works transform into a map depicting the experience of mid-century American women in the wake of World War II and the subsequent cultural shifts in the United States. Reading Jackson’s work through this lens of spatiality, specifically with a focus on spatial mapping, allows critics to understand her work in the cultural context of the time in which she lived and wrote. In her attempt to map white, middle class women’s experiences, Jackson pays special attention to the relationship between female

subjects and the domestic spaces they inhabit in order to explore the effects of societal expectations concerning women in the domestic and public spheres. As both an acclaimed author and housewife, Jackson possesses the necessary position to offer a glimpse into the tension between domestic and public spheres – a stance the literary world has yet to credit her with. Jackson’s ability to capture the complexities and contradictions of women’s everyday domestic lives has been overlooked when considering her contributions to American literature in the 1950s and 60s. Scholars can begin to investigate Jackson as a cartographer of mid-century women’s experiences by studying her representation of domestic spaces and the relationship female subjects hold with these domestic spaces.

Classifying Jackson as a Gothic Author

A key element of understanding Jackson’s role as a cartographer mapping the complexities of domestic spaces and female subjects is the consideration of genre. Tally notes that “literary cartography necessarily involves a question of genre” (55), writing that in “determining the elements of a story or map, by choosing which elements will be prominent and which can remain in the background, and by arranging the elements in a way best suited to the intended effects that writer or cartographer wishes the work to have upon the reader, the author is also determining what *kind* of narrative or map this will be” (55, emphasis in original). Genre becomes an important part of Tally’s mapping theory, as the elements of the story the author chooses to include helps to shape the type of map the story will function as. This is applicable to Jackson’s house novels as well. Concerning Jackson’s ability to write both humorous depictions of her life as a housewife while also crafting serious fictional works, Franklin writes, “Critics

have often been puzzled by the question of how one writer could work simultaneously in two very different genres: literary suspense and domestic comedy” (4). Franklin’s words return scholars to the question of classification – Shirley Jackson’s diverse collection of works refuses to be boxed into a single genre that she masters. Despite their differences, however, Jackson’s works of literary suspense and domestic comedy are, in fact, closely linked. Franklin continues, stating, “these two aspects of Jackson’s writings are profoundly interconnected. Her horror stories, which always take place primarily on a psychological level, are grounded in the domestic: in *Castle*, an entire family is poisoned at the dinner table; in *Hill House*, the nursery, referred to as ‘the heart of the house,’ is one of the sites of greatest terror” (4-5). In coining the phrase “horror grounded in the domestic,” Franklin demonstrates not only the link between Jackson’s vastly different genres, but also provides a unique way to classify Jackson as an author: an author of domestic horror.

This “domestic horror” allows Franklin to establish Jackson as a Gothic novelist. Franklin writes, “Jackson’s brand of literary suspense is part of a vibrant and distinguished tradition that can be traced back to the American Gothic work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Henry James” (Franklin 3). In likening Jackson’s fiction with that of other major 20th century American authors, Franklin makes the argument that Jackson herself deserves to be reclassified as an American Gothic author. The Gothic genre itself acts as “a metaphor for the less tangible anxieties and traumas of the human condition” (Groom 72), as it “liberated and empowered American writers of fiction, providing them with a flexible and adaptable mode capable of asking a wide range of challenging questions about life” (Bendixen 41). This definition holds true for Jackson’s three house novels: she uses each story as a map for the

anxieties and traumas of women in post-war America, exploring and questioning the relationships between female subject and domestic space.

Jackson places her female characters at the forefront of her novels in order to speak to the experiences of women in 20th century America. In relation to the Gothic genre itself, Franklin argues that Jackson's "unique contribution to this genre is her primary focus on women's lives" (3). Instead of occupying their traditional role as supporting characters, female subjects become the main focus of the story in Jackson's refiguring of the Gothic genre. Significant male characters are largely absent from Jackson's novels, as Jackson instead cedes the Gothic spotlight traditionally reserved for male characters to the female subjects in her novels. As John Parks writes, "the gothic mode serves Shirley Jackson's purpose to explore the depths and contours of female violation in the modern world" (247). Viewing Jackson's work as Gothic allows Jackson to display "in pathological terms the position of many women in the 1950s" (Hague 74) as she addresses the cultural anxieties surrounding the relationship between women and their domestic space. This consideration of space is what makes Jackson's house novels' classification as Gothic so significant. Downey writes that "the trend of [Jackson's] work overall is towards an attempt to solve the problem of enclosed domestic space, to negotiate its tendency to vacillate between functioning as a refuge for prison" (290). The house's function as a refuge or a prison means that "Jackson's work articulates the fear that the spaces inhabited by her female protagonists" (Downey 290), as these spaces become places that exist outside of the women's control. These spaces, therefore, can begin to "[control] these isolated, beleaguered women" (Downey 290), rendering the female subject powerless in her domestic space. Significantly, Downey notes that "[i]t is in this spatial dialect that the Gothic nature of Jackson's

regrettably slight body of fiction can be identified” (290). Jackson’s attempt to “solve the problem of enclosed domestic space” in a Gothic spatial dialect brings together the theory of spatiality and the nature of the Gothic genre to address cultural anxieties. Andrew Hock Soon Ng, in *Women and Space*, argues that considerations of space and the Gothic house are firmly linked, as the “the house can bear oppositional connotations (subjugation/entrapment versus empowerment/emancipation) in Gothic works,” allowing for the house’s identification as “more than just a stage for [the] narrative unfolding” (Ng 5). In each of Jackson’s three house novels, the house is not just the stage upon which the narrative unfolds, it is the central character in the novel. Readers see the oppositional connotations of the houses as Jackson works to establish them as places of horror and safety. Both the space inside of the house and the grounds outside of the structures themselves become crucial landmarks in Jackson’s attempt to map the relationship between domestic space and female subject.

Developing a New Understanding of Jackson’s House Novels

Viewing Jackson’s house novels as Gothic works that function as a spatial map for women’s experiences in mid-century America allows readers and scholars to develop an understanding of the significant implications of *The Haunting of Hill House*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and *The Sundial*. When considering these novels within both the context of the Gothic genre *and* through the theory of spatiality, scholars are given a unique set of lenses through which to consider how the relationship between domestic space and female subjects can offer new insights of Jackson’s works. The Gothic genre offers readers a lens through which to view Jackson’s works as representative of the cultural anxieties during a time of post-war social

change, as the representation of “less tangible” cultural anxieties is a key element of the Gothic genre. A spatial lens is of equally crucial importance, as Downey remarks that Jackson’s goal is to “attempt to solve the problem of enclosed domestic space” (290). Viewing Jackson’s houses as Gothic spaces that attempt to work through cultural anxieties due to the “problem of enclosed domestic space” means that readers can view the descriptions of each house, and the subsequent relationship between the house and female subject, as Jackson’s attempt to communicate the complexities of the relationship between domestic space and female subject in the 1950s and 60s.

This is seen most clearly through applying Tally’s theory of mapping to Jackson’s work. In doing so, scholars can view Jackson as a cartographer striving to communicate this complex relationship. In order to convey this relationship, Jackson transforms each house into a map meant to guide her readers towards an understanding of the domestic space as a place of entrapment, protection, or a middle ground in relation to its female subject. She creates this map through the metaphorical construction of the house itself. Specifically, Jackson employs a layering effect in order to investigate the relationship between female subjects and the domestic spaces they inhabit. Each respective house is constructed from layers that arise from the house’s description through the novel, and the layers build upon one another in the same way notable landmarks do in a map. Each layer guides the reader towards a deeper understanding of the relationship between domestic space and female subject that Jackson is portraying, just as landmarks on a map lead the viewer to the intended destination. Jackson’s “intended destination,” however, is an understanding rather than a physical location – the “destination” that Jackson leads readers to is an understanding that the relationship between domestic space and

female subject is not a consistent, universal experience. Rather, this relationship can look vastly different. The domestic space might be a place of entrapment, a place of protection, or a place of both entrapment *and* protection. Jackson utilizes multiple kinds of layers in the constructions of her houses in order to showcase the variations in the relationship between female subject and domestic spaces, meaning that this relationship is portrayed differently in each novel. By establishing these layers of construction in a similar manner to that of landmarks on a map, Jackson gives readers a comprehensive map of the varying experiences women had with their domestic spaces in mid-century America.

In order to create this map, Shirley Jackson paints the relationship between female subject and house in radically different lights in each of her three house novels. These houses are the centerpieces of each novel; they are the fulcrum on which the entire plot hinges. The significance that Jackson places on the homes is a recognizable trait, as Angela Hague writes, “Home is a disturbing signifier throughout Jackson’s fiction, a fact that reflects the ambiguous role of home and domesticity in the 1950s” (83). In order to reflect the “ambiguous role of home and domesticity” that she lived through in the 1950s, Jackson carefully constructs each home differently: she establishes Hill House as a house of fear, reinvents the Blackwood house as a castle of stability, and creates in the Halloran manor a portal from past to future. Each house is built upon by both reader interpretation and authorial intent, as readers observe Jackson paint a vivid picture of each house through the lens of Gothic fiction and spatial theory.

Application to Novels: *The Haunting of Hill House*

Each house's significance increases dramatically throughout the novel as the relationship between house and female subject develops and shifts. Thus, the house becomes as much of a main character as the protagonist is. This notion of the house acting as a character is most strongly seen in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Throughout the novel, Hill House looms over its inhabitants, influencing the mood of the entire plot. In the novel's introduction, Laura Miller writes:

The prevailing mood of *The Haunting of Hill House*, the spell of the book that so many readers have found so hard to shake, is one of physical and psychic claustrophobia. The surrounding hills bear down on the house, the doors and windows refuse to remain open, some rooms are entirely encased in other rooms and, as Theo puts it, the decor was designed by Victorians, who "buried themselves in folds of velvet and tassels and purple plush." (xv)

Hill House itself is a malicious entity: using the spell of "physical and psychic claustrophobia" that Miller identifies, it attempts to confuse its residents with dark and twisting hallways. The house acts as a prison of fear, subjecting its residents to a realm of supernatural terror the moment they approach the house's gate. This terror is reminiscent of the horror found in Gothic houses, and Jackson's characterization of Hill House as a prison of fear signifies her desire to discuss the cultural anxieties surrounding women's entrapment within the home during the mid-1900s. When first introducing residents to the house, Jackson writes, "Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within" ("Hill House" 1). Immediately, she begins to personify and characterize Hill House with the declaration that it is "not sane" and

“stood by itself against its hills.” The insane solitude that Hill House possesses is the reader’s first clue that something is amiss in this eerie setting. Most striking, however, is the statement that Hill House “hold[s] darkness within.” Not only does Hill House stand alone and removed from society, giving it an aura of dark solitude, but it also contains that same darkness within the walls of the house. No matter the outside appearances, houses are generally warm places inside, lit by lamps, fires, and the people inside of them. It is clear through Jackson’s description that readers can expect no such warmth in Hill House.

It is important to note that this initial description of Hill House occurs before the protagonist, Eleanor, even arrives at the house. By providing readers an early introduction to Hill House’s nefarious qualities, Jackson begins to build the layers of fear that she uses to construct Hill House as a map of the imprisonment that women faced during the time of the novel’s construction and publication. Superstition surrounding the house forms the base layer of construction, and Jackson’s layering continues as Eleanor approaches the house. Readers see that, “Eleanor’s little car stumbled and bounced, reluctant to go farther into these unattractive hills” (Jackson, “Hill House” 19), hinting at the trials Eleanor will encounter at Hill House. Jackson allows readers to hear Eleanor’s thoughts as she approaches the house as she writes, “The tree branches brushed against the windshield, and it grew steadily darker; Hill House likes to make an entrance, she thought; I wonder if the sun ever shines along here” (“Hill House” 19). The “unattractive hills” and thick tree cover (a cover so dense that Eleanor questions if “the sun ever shines along here”) contribute a layer of dark oppressiveness on top of the layer of suspicion. These two layers, constructed before Eleanor and readers “officially” meet Hill House, allow Jackson to lay the groundwork for the troubled relationship that Eleanor and Hill

House will have. The layers form the base landmarks in Jackson's map, and establish as Hill House as a malicious entity in its own right – a place in which Eleanor will find herself imprisoned.

This imprisonment officially begins at the estate's gate. In a somber tone, Jackson describes the gate as "tall and ominous and heavy," with a padlock and chain "twisted around and through the bars" ("Hill House" 19) in a clear message to visitors: they are not to enter this ominous landscape. Readers, however, find themselves pulled into the scene with Eleanor as Jackson writes that "[b]eyond the gate [Eleanor] could see only that the road continued, turned, shadowed on either side by the still, dark trees ("Hill House" 19). This continuous road invites the reader to travel forward despite the dark mood that Jackson established with her opening description of the gate and grounds. Readers see that the gate is not only "ominous and heavy," but also is "so clearly locked – locked and double-locked and chained and barred" (Jackson, "Hill House" 19). Clearly, this a gate that is not easily entered, with readers seeing Jackson's humor peak through the grim tone: "Hill House, [Eleanor] thought, you're as hard to get into as heaven" (Jackson, "Hill House" 21). The difficult nature of entering the gate holds true for its inverse – it must be as hard to get *out* of the gate as it is to get *in* the gate. With this acknowledgement, Jackson adds another layer to Hill House's construction: a layer of imprisonment.

Hill House's ability to entrap its residents is felt throughout the novel, adding to the physical claustrophobia that Miller identifies in the novel's introduction. Eleanor in particular is affected by Hill House's strange spell, as "she is most literally consumed by the entrapping and embracing house that overpowers her even as she submits almost joyfully to it" (Rubenstein

137). Eleanor's "joyful" submission to the house happens later in the novel, but her entrapment begins the moment she pulls into the driveway. Readers observe, "She turned her car onto the last stretch of straight drive leading her directly, face to face, to Hill House and, moving without thought, pressed her foot on the brake to stall the car and sat, staring" (Jackson, "Hill House" 23). At first glance, Eleanor finds herself immediately placed under the house's spell. The phrase "moving without thought" becomes a clear signifier of Hill House's influence on Eleanor – she instinctively stops all movement to observe it. Jackson phrases Eleanor's reaction in a way that leaves readers with the impression that Eleanor has no control over her reaction to Hill House, further developing the layer of imprisonment that the estate's gate established. Later in the novel, Doctor Montague informs his subjects that, "Hill House has a reputation for insistent hospitality; it seemingly dislikes letting its guests get away. The last person who tried to leave Hill House...was killed at the turn in the driveway" (Jackson, "Hill House" 48). Once an inhabitant enters Hill House, they are expected to stay – the house's imprisoning nature gives them no choice.

With the layer of imprisonment from the gate and initial impression of Hill House, Jackson builds onto the layers of suspicion and oppression already established in the novel to further develop her map of imprisonment. These three base layers allow Jackson to complete the construction of Hill House with the most prevalent and significant layer: a layer of fear. Fear defines the relationship between Hill House and Eleanor, as Jackson uses this emotion to showcase the negative relationship that female subjects can have with their domestic spaces. Describing Hill House to readers, Eleanor states, "The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is deceased; get away from here at

once” (Jackson, “Hill House” 23). Jackson uses both present tense and past tense to describe the house as vile, saying the house “was vile” and “is vile.” Doing so showcases the constant vileness of Hill House – it is not just vile when Eleanor meets it. Rather, its vileness is connected to its status as a domestic space. Describing the house as “vile” and “deceased” creates unease in the reader, and Jackson utilizes that uneasiness to introduce fear into the novel. Moving her car out of the driveway for the other inhabitants, Eleanor remarks that, “it would be a pity, she thought grimly, for anyone to get a first look at this house with anything so comforting as a human automobile parked in front of it” (Jackson, “Hill House” 25). Eleanor’s desire to erase “anything so comforting as a human automobile” before the other members of Doctor Montague’s study arrive seems contradictory to human nature, as humans seek out the company of others. Eleanor’s inclination to give her fellow housemates the fearful impression of Hill House that she received once again points toward the spell Hill House has begun to weave around Eleanor – because she was afraid, others must be afraid too.

This layer of fear is further developed by the descriptions of Hill House itself. Readers learn that, “somehow a manic juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because of the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice” (Jackson, “Hill House” 24). Jackson’s personification of Hill House adds to its manic persona, further convincing the reader of its maliciousness. The depiction of Hill House is aimed at increasing the fearfulness of its inhabitants, and Jackson tells readers that it is “a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope” (Jackson, “Hill House” 24). Existing as a house “without kindness” and as a place “never

meant to be lived in” means that Hill House acts in opposition of the traditional role of a house – a house is meant to contain a family that fills the atmosphere with kindness, hope, and love. The house, traditionally, is not meant to be a place of fear. Fear, however, dominates Hill House’s descriptions throughout the rest of the novel, just as the haunted houses in Gothic fiction. The hallways are described as having “dark wood” with “weighty carving[s],” and “dim under the heaviness of the staircase” (Jackson, “Hill House” 26), implying a heavy and oppressive tone to correspond with grounds’ landscaping. As for the doors, Eleanor remarks that “all the doors she could see in this house were closed” (Jackson, “Hill House” 26), and her room “had an unbelievably faulty design which left it chillingly wrong in all its dimensions” (Jackson, “Hill House” 29). Even the room she will live in contributes to the sense of unease and terror of the house with its status as “chillingly wrong.” These details become landmarks on the map Jackson is constructing, as Jackson uses these detailed descriptions to add depth to the layer of fear she is creating. This fear, in turn, dominates the relationship between Eleanor and Hill House.

Hill House and Eleanor’s relationship is a dark map of the possible relationship between female subject and domestic space, and representative of the cultural anxieties that Gothic fiction explores. Because Jackson so clearly established Hill House as a place of fear, Eleanor becomes imprisoned in the house. However, readers see Eleanor become a willing prisoner – Hill House’s dark spell has won her over. Eleanor’s relationship with Hill House has taken on a more intimate nature, as readers see that “[u]nder her feet the stone floor moves caressingly, rubbing itself against the soles of her feet” as “the soft air touched her, stirring her hair” while also “coming in a light breath across her mouth” (Jackson, “Hill House” 171). Running up the dark and unsteady tower, Eleanor is convinced that she has “broken the spell of Hill House” as she has “somehow

come inside” (Jackson, “Hill House” 171) its impenetrable fortress. In reality, however, Eleanor has not “broken the spell” – she has succumbed to it. She repeats “I am home, I am home” (Jackson, “Hill House” 171) in a chant-like manner, as if to convince both herself and Hill House. By this point in the novel, Eleanor has spent enough time in the malicious house that it has transfixed her, convincing her that she is in fact truly home – despite this being a house “never meant to be lived in” and “not a fit place for people” (Jackson, “Hill House” 24). She has recklessly gone up into the unsteady tower, a place any sane person would avoid, and as a result, Doctor Montague orders her to leave the study. However, Hill House has Eleanor fully in its grasp, as she insists, “‘I can’t leave,’ Eleanor said, laughing still because it was so perfectly impossible to explain” (Jackson, “Hill House” 176). She is unable to explain the feeling of imprisonment that she is experiencing, instead gleefully accepting her fate to forever dwell in a house that is “not sane.” Eleanor believes that the house is “waiting for her; no one else could satisfy it” (Jackson, “Hill House 178). Hill House’s layers of suspicion, oppression, and fear come together to create a fortress of imprisonment that Eleanor knows she cannot escape. Her only option is to dive further into the insanity of the house, convincing herself that she is the only being who can satisfy the house’s insatiable need.

Eleanor’s situation is reminiscent of many women’s situations in the 1950s. Just as Eleanor’s is trapped in Hill House, women were confined to the home as housewives and mothers in the 50s, responsible for trying to fulfill the insatiable duties of running a home. Thus, Jackson uses the relationship between Hill House and Eleanor as a map showcasing the situation that many women in Jackson’s time faced – a situation that Jackson was certainly familiar with as a housewife herself. In constructing Hill House out of layers of suspicion, oppression, fear,

and imprisonment, Jackson explores four negative aspects of the relation between female subject and domestic space: suspicion surrounding the role of a housewife if she dared work outside of the home, the oppressiveness of the role itself along with the imprisonment inside of the home, and the fear that this lifestyle would be all consuming and strip a woman of her identity outside of the home. As both a published writer and devoted housewife and mother, these are emotions that Jackson would have struggled with in her own life.

These emotions represent significant cultural anxieties of the time, opening the door to consider Jackson's text in the Gothic context. Viewing *The Haunting of Hill House* through a Gothic lens serves as a way for Jackson to explore the potential of an imprisoning relationship between female subject and domestic space, and gives her the opportunity to portray the dark insanity that can come with this entrapment: rather than willingly leave Hill House, Eleanor commits suicide, showcasing her commitment to remain with Hill House. While suicide may not have been a concrete reality for a majority of 1950s housewives, Jackson uses Eleanor's story to showcase the serious effects that the imprisonment of women in the home could have. Jackson's construction of Hill House through the layers of suspicion, oppression, fear, and imprisonment allows her to use the layers as landmarks on a map, emphasizing the negative elements that work together to map out and showcase the psychological imprisonment that women experienced in the 1950s.

Application to Novels: *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

In comparison to Hill House in *The Haunting of Hill House*, the Blackwood sisters' house in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* serves the opposite purpose: it is a refuge from the

wickedness of the villagers and the outside world. Jackson begins to construct the Blackwood home with a layer of stability brought forth by the Blackwood family's tendencies, as Merricat informs readers that, "We rarely moved things; the Blackwoods were never much of a family for restlessness and stirring. We dealt with the small surface transient objects, the books and the flowers and the spoons, but underneath we had always a solid foundation of stable possessions. We always put things back where they belonged" (Jackson, "Castle" 1). Jackson clearly demonstrates that the Blackwoods prize constancy, and this consistency introduces a layer of stability to the Blackwood property. This layer of stability is further solidified by Merricat's explanation of her house's history: "Blackwoods had always lived in our house, and kept their things in order; as soon as a new Blackwood wife moved in, a place was found for her belongings, and so our house was built up with layers of Blackwood property weighting it, and keeping it steady against the world" (Jackson, "Castle" 1). The layering of Blackwood belongings that keeps the house "steady against the world" begins to establish a firm base for Jackson's construction of the Blackwood house as an establishment of protection – here begins the base layer of the map that Jackson is constructing, using a layer of stability as the first landmark. Specifically, this construction begins with the Blackwood wives' belongings, establishing the importance of the female subject in relation to the Blackwood domestic space. Unlike Eleanor's relationship with Hill House, initially introduced as relationship of uncertainty due to the suspicion surrounding the house, the surviving female members of the Blackwood family form an initially stable relationship with their house, as it is their collective belongings that anchor the house in its society.

Establishing this layer of stability so early on in the novel allows Jackson to establish the next layer of the Blackwood's house's construction: a layer of separation. Because of the house's established stability, it allows for the house to stand alone from society. Readers learn that the Blackwood house is sanctioned off from the rest of the town by a gate, as Merricat describes, "the gate was a simple padlock and any child could have broken it, but on the gate there was a sign saying PRIVATE NO TRESSPASSING and no one could get past that" (Jackson, "Castle" 18). This gate establishes the separation between the town and the Blackwood estate, allowing the estate property to act as a barrier between the family and the rest of the village. It is interesting to note that in Merricat's world, the words themselves give power to the gate, rather than the physicality of the gate. She states that because there is a "PRIVATE NO TRESSPASSING" sign, no one can get past "that" – the "that" referring to the sign itself rather than the gate. It is only once the padlock is "securely fastened" behind Merricat that she is safe, as the sign prevents the villagers from entering the property. Jackson uses Merricat's reliance on the words themselves for protection instead of the physicality of the gate to further establish the layer of separation she is introducing – Merricat has separated the meaning of the gate's sign from the physicality of the gate itself. This separation between meaning and physicality through Merricat's reliance on words helps to firmly establish the layer of separation that Jackson is introducing. With this separation, the Blackwood house provides Merricat and Constance protection from the people in the village, a group of citizens who "have always hated" (Jackson, "Castle" 4) the sisters.

Because of the house's layers of stability and separation, Jackson's final layer in the construction of the Blackwood house is a layer of protection. This protection comes from two

different places: from the physicality of the fence surrounding the property and from Merricat's belief in her magical safeguards. Merricat informs readers that "[a]lways on Wednesday mornings" she goes around the property and check the fence, as it is necessary for her "to check constantly to be sur that het wires were not broken and the gates were securely locked" (Jackson, "Castle" 41). She notes "it was a pleasure to know, every Wednesday morning, that we were safe for another week" (Jackson, "Castle" 41). The fence helps to separate the Blackwood estate from the town, ensuring protection in that separation. When the gate is securely locked, and the fence is intact, Merricat and Constance are safe from the villagers and the village's influence.

Merricat's weekly ritual of checking the gate helps to maintain the layer of protection that Jackson has built with the physical barrier surrounding the Blackwood estate. The other barrier that builds a layer of protection for the sisters is one of Merricat's own creation. As readers have seen from Merricat's description of the gate, she values the meaning behind a protective barrier rather than the physicality of the barrier itself. Therefore, Merricat has created her own symbolic layer of protection through the use of "magical" safeguards. Jackson narrates through Merricat, "On Sunday mornings I examined my safeguards, the box of silver dollars I had buried by the creek, and the doll buried in the long field, and the book nailed to the tree in the pine woods; so long as they were where I had put them nothing could get in to harm us" (Jackson, "Castle" 41). These safeguards ensure that "nothing could get in to harm" the sisters as long as they remain where Merricat had placed them. Merricat believes that, "All our land was enriched with my treasures buried in it, thickly inhabited just below the surface with my marbles and my teeth and my colored stones, all perhaps turned to jewels by now, held together under the ground in a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us" (Jackson, "Castle" 41). This

“powerful taut web” that holds “fast to guard” the sisters is a significant form of protection in Merricat’s eyes. Merricat’s belief in her magical web enables the house to take on a role of protection for the sisters, firmly allowing Jackson to construct it as a domestic space of protection. Each night, the sisters “sit warmly together in the kitchen where [they] were guarded by the house” (Jackson, “Castle” 50), establishing a positive and protective relationship between the female subjects and domestic space.

By constructing the Blackwood house as a palace of protection, Jackson offers readers a different view of the female subject-domestic space relationship than she does in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Jackson shows the sisters “look[ing] at the house with all the richness of love [they] contained” as they acknowledge that “it was a good house” (Jackson, “Castle” 97). The sisters value their domestic space because of the protection it offers: the house serves as a stronghold against what they view as the wickedness of their society. In spite of society’s attempt to burn down the sisters’ stronghold, the house’s protection only intensifies with its transformation at the end of the novel. After Jim Donnell leads the villagers in the burning of the Blackwood house, Jackson redescribes the house, writing, “Today the house ended above the kitchen doorway in a nightmare of black and twisted wood; [Merricat] saw part of a window frame still holding broken glass...[the sisters] moved together very slowly toward the house, trying to understand its ugliness and ruin and shame” (Jackson, “Castle” 113). The house has been transformed into a burned and ruined structure, one that Merricat declares is “a castle, turreted and open to the sky” (Jackson, “Castle” 120). Jackson informs readers that “all the strangers could see from outside, when they looked at all, was a great ruined structure overgrown with vines, barely recognizable as a house” (Jackson, “Castle” 146). The house has undergone a

radical transformation, changing into an unrecognizable space. However, because of its layers of stability, separation, and protection, it retains its status as a safehouse for the sisters. Jackson asks readers to track these layers throughout the story in an attempt to establish a map depicting the protection that domestic space can offer women. Dara Downey remarks, “Indeed, as a house, the Blackwood house in a sense no longer exists, but has been replaced by a Gothic castle, externalizing both the fear that the villagers have always attached to it and the defensive nature that its inhabitants seek more than ever to convey” (300-301). The house, transformed into a physical manifestation of the villagers’ fears, retains its defensive nature. It becomes the Blackwood castle, offering even more protection to its subjects than it could as the Blackwood house. Merricat’s “new magical safeguards were the lock on the front door, and the boards over the windows, and the barricades along the sides of the house” (Jackson, “Castle” 145-146). The sisters barricade themselves in the house, seeking refuge inside its burned and ruined walls. They choose to remain with their domestic space just as Eleanor chose to remain with Hill House. For the Blackwood sisters, however, they are not under a malicious spell, they choose to remain out of love for the house. Merricat remarks, “The boards across the kitchen windows were ours, and part of our house, and we loved them” (Jackson, “Castle” 145), showing the sisters’ devotion to their home.

This loving relationship between female subjects and domestic space occurs because of the level of protection that the domestic space offers its subjects. Thus, Jackson uses *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* to demonstrate the inverse of the female subject-domestic space relationship that she explores in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Hill House’s relationship to Eleanor is one of fear, but the layers of stability, separation, and protection allow the Blackwood

castle to form a relationship of privacy and protection for its residents. While the sisters are confined to the house, just as many women in mid-century America, Jackson repurposes the relationship between domestic space and female subject to show love replacing fear, demonstrating the comfort that comes from maintaining the household and from the family members that inhabit it. The close relationship between Merricat and Constance is reminiscent of Jackson's devoted and loving relationship with her children, and the comfort that Jackson sought in her role as a wife and mother. Likewise, the Blackwood castle is a refuge from the villagers, paralleling Jackson's house's status as a shelter from the scrutiny of neighbors and readers. Just as she used Eleanor's relationship with Hill House to explore the negative effects of the domestic space on its female subjects, Jackson utilizes the Blackwood castle to examine the positive attributes that the home offered women in the 1950s. The layers of stability, separation, and protection act as landmarks on the map Jackson creates to guide readers towards an understanding of the domestic sphere as a protective space.

Application to Novels: *The Sundial*

Unlike the Blackwood castle and Hill House, in *The Sundial*, the house's role in relation to its female subjects is much less straightforward. Downey notes that *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* explore two fundamentally different responses to the problematic relationship between domestic space and female subjects, writing:

Hill House graphically imagines the ability of a house to tyrannize over its occupants, first seducing and then destroying Jackson's heroine, but refusing to permit her to make it her home. Castle, on the other hand... eventually allows the central female characters to

transform their home into a place of privacy, warding off intruders with its fearsome reputation” (295).

While critics such as Downey have focused on the different responses that *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* offer, little scholarship surrounds *The Sundial*, making its inclusion in the consideration of women and space an intriguing discussion. *The Sundial* offers a much less straightforward view of the relationship between female subject and domestic space. For the inhabitants of the Halloran manor, the house serves a different role for each female subject, and the relationships between the characters and the house allows Jackson to build the layers of the house. Instead of constructing layers based off of the house’s physical description, Jackson creates layers for her readers through the relationships her female subjects have with the domestic space. These layers work together as landmarks to create a map through which Jackson attempts to convey the complexities of the relationship between domestic space and female subject.

The layered construction of the Halloran mansion begins with Orianna Halloran, whom Jackson refers to as “Mrs. Halloran.” For Orianna Halloran, the house represents agency and power. In the very first line of the novel, readers learn, “After the funeral they came back to the house, now indisputably Mrs. Halloran’s” (Jackson, “Sundial” 1). Jackson introduces readers to the house before the characters, characterizing the house immediately as “indisputably Mrs. Halloran’s.” Bringing in the theme of ownership introduces the house’s fluidity in the novel – now, it belongs to Orianna Halloran, but previously, it belonged to someone else. Unlike the Blackwood house or Hill House, both of which have belonged to their respective families for generations, the Halloran mansion begs the question of ownership from page one of the novel.

Thus, Jackson's construction of the Halloran manor notably lacks the stability that Hill House and the Blackwood house possess – the Halloran manor's construction begins with a layer of fluidity arising from the question of the house's ownership. Readers see Orianna Halloran's delight in her newfound ownership of the manor, as Jackson writes that she, "caressed with her soft steps the fine unyielding property she walked upon," as Mrs. Halloran muses, "this is all mine, she thought, savoring the sweet quiet stone and earth and leaf and blade of her holding" (Jackson, "Sundial" 11). The ownership of the mansion gives Orianna Halloran a feeling of power and agency, soothing her anxieties about her place in the family into which she married.

Her claim on Halloran mansion is not, however, concrete – she is not the only family member with a reasonable claim to the house. This introduces a layer of uncertainty into the house's construction. Jackson informs readers that the mansion was created by the first Mr. Halloran, the father of Aunt Fanny and Richard Halloran, Orianna Halloran's husband. By rights, the house should be passed down to Richard Halloran, and then his son Lionel Halloran, Fancy's father. Lionel, however, has died after his mother, Orianna Halloran, allegedly pushed him down the stairs. Fancy's mother, "young Mrs. Halloran," encourages her daughter to remember how her father died, and delights in Fancy's statement, "'Granny killed my daddy...She pushed him down the stairs and killed him'" (Jackson, "Sundial" 1-2). After the death of her father, the ownership of the house should naturally fall to Fancy. Fancy, however, seems to be content with her dollhouse. She states, "'I have my doll house,' Fancy said suddenly... 'I have my beautiful little doll house with real doorknobs and electric lights and the little stove that really works and the running water in the bathtubs'" (Jackson, "Sundial" 17). As a young child, Fancy is happy with her dollhouse, a real life imitation of the Halloran mansion with "real doorknobs," a "little

stove that really works,” and “running water.” However, Fancy acknowledges that ““When my grandmother dies,’ she said, ‘I am going to smash my doll house. I won’t need it anymore”” (Jackson, “Sundial” 18), demonstrating her understanding that the house should, and eventually will, belong to her. Fancy’s existence is a threat to Orianna Halloran’s ownership of the house, allowing Jackson to introduce a layer of uncertainty onto the existing layer of fluidity. This uncertainty builds when readers take into account any claim that Aunt Fanny might have upon the house. While she never seeks to take ownership of the house herself, Aunt Fanny does revert to viewing the house as belonging to her father, the original Mr. Halloran, after her visions in the garden. Jackson writes, “Those few people gathered in Mrs. Halloran’s house, which Aunt Fanny now seemed to believe was her father’s house, would be safe” (Jackson, “Sundial” 35), further establishing the layer of uncertainty being used to construct the Halloran mansion. Does the house actually still belong to its builder, Mr. Halloran, as he is speaking from the grave? The question of ownership looms throughout the novel, straining the three main female subjects’ relationship with the house.

Out of these three female subjects, Aunt Fanny’s connection with the manor is the most significant relationship. This mansion is Aunt Fanny’s childhood home – she grew up roaming the grounds and passing through childhood in the big house long before Orianna Halloran or Fancy entered the scene. For Aunt Fanny, the house both acts as both a refuge and a prison: while it is a literal safehouse for the coming apocalypse, it also contains rooms that trap Aunt Fanny in memories of her childhood. Jackson shows readers that in the manor’s attic, Aunt Fanny “had, quite by herself, reestablished the four-room apartment where she had been born” (“Sundial” 157). Aunt Fanny, “astonished at her own memories,” has reconstructed the

“furniture and even ornaments into a pattern almost agonizing in its growing familiarity” (Jackson, “Sundial” 158). In her reconstruction of her childhood home, Aunt Fanny finds herself trapped in the memories of her upbringing. Readers are told that “Aunt Fanny scrubbed regularly the oilcloth on the kitchen table where she had sat for meals with her mother and father and brother” (Jackson, “Sundial” 160), demonstrating her commitment to preserving the remnants of her past life. For Aunt Fanny, the Halloran mansion is anchored by her mother’s material possessions, echoing the role of the possessions in the Blackwood castle. This anchoring giving the house a history that only Fanny and her brother can understand, enabling Jackson to place a layer of history over the house. This establishes a connection to the past – a past before Mrs. Halloran took ownership of the house. Jackson acknowledges that Aunt Fanny “loved the big house,” and “had always known somehow that the core of it was in the big attic room” (Jackson, “Sundial” 157). Fanny’s belief that the preserved attic room is the very core of the Halloran mansion allows the house to become a portal to the past for both Jackson’s characters and readers. The house’s existence as a portal to the past would not be possible without the historical anchoring of the attic through Aunt Fanny, meaning that in this case, the relationship between domestic space and female subject is one of entrapment, just as Eleanor’s relationship with Hill House. Though this entrapment lacks the negative connotation that Eleanor’s imprisonment carries, it remains that Aunt Fanny cannot escape her childhood memories in her commitment to preserve the attic space. The attic is a prison of memory for Aunt Fanny, and Jackson acknowledges that, “If Aunt Fanny had cared to, she might have dropped from sight altogether into this apartment in the big house, might have left the others behind and gone into the apartment and closed the door, and stayed” (Jackson, “Sundial” 162). The attic offers a safe

haven for Aunt Fanny, an area that “Mrs. Halloran had never visited, though she knew of its existence” (Jackson, “Sundial” 157), meaning an area outside of Orianna Halloran’s scrutiny.

As much as she may have liked to, Aunt Fanny is not permitted to simply shut the door to the little apartment and stay. Instead, Jackson tasks Aunt Fanny with retelling her father’s warning about the coming apocalypse to her family members. Mr. Halloran speaks from the grave, saying, ““Frances, there is danger. Go back to the house. Tell them, in the house, tell them, in the house, tell them that there is danger. Tell them in the house that in the house it is safe. The father will watch the house, but there is danger. Tell them... Tell them in the house that they will be saved. Do not let them leave the house”” (Jackson, “Sundial” 26). The constant refrain “in the house” signals to the reader that Jackson is beginning to construct another layer of the Halloran mansion: a layer of safety. Just as the manor is permitted to act as a portal to the past for Aunt Fanny, the house will serve as a portal to the future for its current residents.

Similar to the Blackwood castle, Jackson establishes the Halloran mansion as a place of safety and security during what is sure to be a time of transformation for the house’s inhabitants. Aunt Fanny’s father makes it clear that as long as the inhabitants remain “in the house,” they will be safe. Mr. Halloran makes an “appearance” again to Aunt Fanny later in the novel, insisting that “the children may not go outside” (Jackson, “Sundial” 99), once again stressing the importance of remaining inside of the house. The house **grows** in significance as the novel progresses, as it becomes a place in which the inhabitants begin to gather and store the supplies they believe they will need to survive in the post-apocalyptic world. When considering the status of the house after the “great storm,” Essex asks what will become of the house, to which Aunt Fanny replies “this house will become a kind of shrine, for our children and for *their* children”

(Jackson, "Sundial" 109, emphasis in original). The house will become a relic of the past, as the children "will have no thought of houses," and will even take on a religious connotation, as Aunt Fanny speculates, "a roof will become to them synonymous with an altar; we may yet live to see our grandchildren worshipping in this house" (Jackson, "Sundial" 109). Aunt Fanny hints at a world that no longer requires shelter, alluding to a type of Eden, or paradise that will be instituted after the apocalypse. Thus, the house will once again serve as a historical relic, a portal to the past. The only way to this Eden, however, is to remain in the house. The portal to the past must also become a portal to the future, adding a final layer to the house's construction: a layer of permanence and relevance. With this layer, Jackson firmly establishes the house's significance in this novel. While the house may not reside in the title of the book, such as with *The Haunting of Hill House* or *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, *The Sundial's* Halloran mansion functions as a pivotal entity within Jackson's novel.

Despite its established significance, readers are left to assume the house's status as the apocalypse approaches. On the fated day of the apocalypse, Jackson's characters note that during the night, "the wind rose," with a "strong sense of thunder in the air," and by "a quarter to seven the rose garden was swept bare, and the hot wind carried with it a freight of bruised and torn rose petals" (Jackson, "Sundial" 205). Clearly, the storm is coming, but readers never see it come to fruition. Rather, the novel ends with Orianna Halloran's death, Fancy's coronation, and Mrs. Willow's acknowledgement that "It's going to be a long wait" (Jackson, "Sundial" 222). Jackson leaves both her readers and characters in the dark: does the storm hit? Does the world end? Does it revert to its original, paradisaical state? Do the Halloran mansion inhabitants survive? All are questions that Jackson leaves unanswered. Jackson purposely uses the ambiguity of *The*

Sundial's ending, as well as her construction of the Halloran mansion, to once again make a commentary on mid-century America's women and their domestic spaces. There is no one experience that women will have in relation to their domestic space – some women feel imprisoned, as Eleanor and Hill House demonstrate, and some feel protected, as with the Blackwood sisters and their castle. The Halloran manor is significant to the “house novels” collection in that Jackson uses it as a map to show the ambiguity of domestic spaces: the domestic sphere can be a place of entrapment *and* protection, a place of fear *and* stability. Jackson uses *The Sundial* to offer a middle ground when examining the relationship between female subject and domestic space, a center-point on her map depicting the experiences of women in mid-century America. Jackson's construction of the Halloran manor uses multiple layers – fluidity, uncertainty, history, safety, and permanence/relevance – as a testament to the complexity of the relationship between the domestic space and its female subjects. The landmarks she establishes with these layers guide readers through a map depicting the middle ground between the domestic space as a place of entrapment and protection. As a woman who interacted in both the public sphere as an author and in the private sphere as a housewife, Jackson's use of the Halloran mansion's construction as a midpoint could be seen as reflecting her own experiences as she understood both the layers of entrapment and protection that her home offered her. In the time of cultural shift that Jackson wrote in, the relationship between domestic space and female subject was also shifting as women experienced life outside of their domestic sphere, leaving the protection it offered while also recognizing the threat of entrapment for women who were forced out of the public workforce and back into the home.

Conclusion

A haunted house with a tragic heroine, an overgrown castle with sister witches, and an apocalyptic safehouse with a seer aunt: these three relationships between domestic space and female subject make a strong argument for Shirley Jackson's status as central American Gothic novelist. Downey argues that, "it is vital to recognize the extent to which Gothic tropes are employed in [Jackson's] fiction as a means of giving graphic form to the way in which the external, material world interpolates women into the confinement and exploitation of rigidly domestic roles" (292). Utilizing the Gothic genre allows Jackson to explore the cultural anxieties surrounding women and domestic space, as she uses *The Haunting of Hill House*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and *The Sundial* to demonstrate the differing relationships women in mid-20th century America had with their domestic spaces. This is seen most clearly by considering Jackson's house novels as maps of these differing relationships, as each house is constructed in a way that leads readers to a deeper understanding of the complexities of these relationships. Using the Gothic house's ability to "bear oppositional connotations" (Ng 5), Jackson constructs Hill House, the Blackwood Castle, and the Halloran Manor in such a way as to reflect the challenges and implications of domestic spaces in post-war America. Layering suspicion, oppression, imprisonment, and fear, Jackson constructs Hill House as a prison of fear in a dark representation of the entrapment that women found within their domestic spaces. She uses the Blackwood Castle to contrast this view, using layers of stability, separation, and protection to establish the Blackwood house as a castle of stability, making it representative of the protective shelter from society that women found in their domestic spaces. And with the Halloran mansion, Jackson builds layers of fluidity, uncertainty, history, and safety to create a

portal from past to future; a house representative of the shifting and ambiguous definitions women attached to their domestic spaces.

Viewing these houses through a spatial lens allows scholars and critics to recognize Jackson as a cartographer of women's experiences post-World War II – a time of cultural shift and growing anxieties surrounding the public and domestic spheres. Jackson's house novels showcase the ambiguous relationship between subject and space, as each house is used to explore the implications of the female subject's close relationship with her domestic space. Exploring the complexities of this relationship leads scholars to the understanding that there is no singularly defined relationship between female subject and domestic space: it is a relationship of fluidity. As shown in *The Sundial*, this relationship can have both positive *and* negative effects on the female subject, and even within the same domestic space, the relationship between space and subject can change if there are multiple female subjects. This fluidity, this ambiguity, mirrors Jackson herself as a writer: her identity as a writer – as an author of horror, comedy, or Gothic literature – is fluid and ambiguous. Shirley Jackson's works resist categorization, just as her personal life does: she is both a public author *and* private housewife.

Recognizing the personal experience that Jackson brought to her novels as both an author in the public sphere and a housewife in the domestic sphere, it is therefore necessary to read Jackson's work in a cultural context. Layering the Gothic genre on top of this cultural context and spatial theoretical lens enables scholars and critics to “position Jackson as a quintessential writer of the 1950s whose work dramatizes the concerns and fears of that decade in ways that are not always immediately obvious” (Hague 74). Thus, just as Jackson constructs her houses in layers in order to make her point, scholars and critics must view Jackson's work in layers as

well. Understanding Jackson's work in the layers of cultural contextualism, spatial theory, and the Gothic genre allows us to reclaim Shirley Jackson as an essential 20th century American author – a position history has long denied her the right to claim.

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