

Ghostly Substance: The Evolution of Spaces, Minds, and  
Narrative in the Haunted House Novel

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# **Ghostly Substance: The Evolution of Spaces, Minds, and Narrative in the Haunted House Novel**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project looks at three haunted house novels over a wide span of time: *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson, and *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters. The investigation will seek to understand how the haunted house novel has evolved over time, by looking at three similar themes between the novels. The chapters examine the physical space of the haunted house, the inclusion of female protagonists as a method of propagating the haunting, and the reliance on ambiguity as a storytelling technique. The findings will show that the houses have drastically changed over time, with the house as a physical space starting as a relatively unimportant aspect of the narrative, and eventually evolving into a more prominent component of the haunting. A constant among the narratives was the presence of a female protagonist, who was in some way shaped by loss, deprivation, and unlucky romance. All three novels also relied heavily on ambiguity, through the use of unreliable characters or narrative technique, as a way of masking the true nature of the haunting. This project seeks to demonstrate how these three themes have functioned in haunted house literature and how these three novels can be put into conversation with each other.

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## Introduction

I have always been drawn to the world of gothic fiction. The idea of fear and what can provoke it, and what tools and methods authors use to do so, is fascinating. Writers have found a multitude of ways to instill fear or anxiety within their readers, using everything from morally-questionable science experiments to zombies to men with axes.

For this project I chose one of the most common settings in horror literature: haunted houses. The house has consistently been featured in literature and film alike as a staple location for paranormal activity. But I was curious: has it always been this way, and if so, how has the depiction of the haunted house changed over the course of the years? I'm writing this thesis as an exploration of how the haunted house has evolved. I will consider both the actual, physical, brick and mortar building, but also think about and investigate the spaces inside that the characters occupy, and the types of characters that are drawn into the haunting of the house.

For my investigation, I decided to look at three novels that focus on a haunted house, and I chose novels that stretched out over a fair amount of time. The first novel I chose, *The Turn of the Screw*, was published by Henry James in 1898, and is one of the earliest haunted house novels. The second, *The Haunting of Hill House*, was published by Shirley Jackson in 1959, sixty-one years after *The Turn*. The final novel I selected is recent, only published in 2009: *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters. These novels are by no means the only specimens worth looking at and considering in a study of the gothic, but they are spaced out enough over time that I feel as if they give a look into different eras of the genre. They also share several commonalities: all focus on a house, but they also have prominent female protagonists and interesting narrative structures. By having

these commonalities, it made it possible to see how these particular aspects have evolved and shifted over the course of the years.

In my first chapter, I look at the use of the house as a physical space. I am interested in how the appearance of the haunted house has changed conceptually, and what different authors have visualized as they create their stories. It seems as if this has shifted over time, especially when comparing *The Turn of the Screw* with the two later novels. James' concept of a haunted house was a normal house of its time, and is only set apart from other houses by the presence of ghosts. This is vastly different by the time we arrive at Jackson's novel. Hill House, as featured in *The Haunting of Hill House*, is an evil entity, and seems to factor into the haunting far more deliberately. And by the time *The Little Stranger* delivers Hundreds Hall to us, the haunted house has evolved to more closely fit the stereotypical haunted house of present-day, characterized by physical deterioration, grime, and unsightliness.

My second chapter turns the focus to the characters that are entering the realm of the house, and examining three main female characters within the worlds of these novels. In all three books, there is a central female character who is extremely involved in the haunting. *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Haunting of Hill House* both use women as their primary focus. *The Little Stranger*, while narrated by a man, has a female character who is actually far more involved in the haunted house than the narrator, since it is she and her family that are living in the haunted home, and not him.

In my final chapter, I travel even farther inward, into the minds of the characters. This chapter seeks to examine the credibility of the stories as they are given to us, by thinking about the way that information is passed to the reader, and by whom. *The Turn*

*of the Screw* is a framed narrative, but most of the story is supposedly the manuscript of the governess who experienced the haunting at Bly. All of the information of the haunting comes from this manuscript, and the novel seems to be asking its readers to take it with a grain of salt. *The Haunting of Hill House* briefly introduces its several characters at the beginning, but the vast majority of the novel is through the third-person limited perspective of Eleanor. And *The Little Stranger* is a first-person account of Dr. Faraday, a doctor who frequently visits the haunted house and the occupying family, but does not live within that space. In all three novels, I found that there was a prominent trend of ambiguity—none of the three presented the facts of the haunting as undeniable or irrefutable. In fact, all three seem to invite the reader to question every bit of information they are given.



## Chapter One: The Physical Spaces of the House

Houses have consistently been pointed to as a place of ghostly or supernatural activity. The haunted house has taken on a significant role in the gothic landscape, and has continued to inspire fear in people. In modern times, the haunted house is a staple part of horror films and literature, but it has also been shaped into an activity—visiting a haunted house on Halloween or for other recreational purposes has become normal. It has become a symbol that is easily recognized, and there are definite trends in the way this symbol manifests. An internet image search for “haunted houses” yields hundreds of similar images: abandoned homes, isolated from other buildings, with faded exteriors and broken windows, overgrown yards with leafless trees, archaic architecture, ominous weather, and so on. This is the modern day representation, created by the minds and imaginations of recent years. But has the haunted house always looked the same?

The haunted house as a whole is not a new concept, but that does not mean it has always manifested in the same ways, appeared the same, or had the same powers or abilities. In fact, after some research, and by analyzing three novels that span a wide range of years—*The Turn of the Screw*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *The Little Stranger*—it became clear that the conception of the haunted house has actually changed quite drastically since it first began to appear in literature.

In modern times, a haunted house is unlikely to be newly-built, well-kept, and located in the middle of suburbia or a city. The trend of the haunted house, wherever it manifests, is that its appearance matches its phenomena. It is characterized by age, decay, and/or an inexplicable *wrongness*. But it does seem that over time, this notion has become exemplified with more and more extravagance. The earliest novel being

examined in this thesis, *The Turn of the Screw*, has a house that is old, but relatively well-groomed, and it doesn't really seem to have a great influence on the haunting. By the time we get to *The Haunting of Hill House*, however, the story has changed drastically: Hill House is an evil thing in itself, and seems to control the manifestations and haunting itself. Hundreds Hall, of *The Little Stranger*, seems to more closely relate to the trends carried forth from Hill House; while not an evil entity itself, Hundreds Hall is in shambles, and seems to be closely woven in with the haunting.

In the rest of this chapter, I will examine how the houses are described in each of the three novels, and use their descriptions as evidence for how the physical manifestation of the haunted house has evolved in literature over time. I will also look at what role the house plays in the haunting that takes place there, and its involvement.

### **The Victorian Legacy**

To contemporary readers, one word can sum up what almost all haunted houses have in common: Victorian. Victorian houses, once very fashionable, have evolved into a symbol of fear as they have fallen out of style. When they first became popular, the elaborate styles of the Victorian house became "social signs of wealth for the upwardly mobile during this period" (D'Costa). They appeared during a time of growth in the Northern states following the Civil War, but this was also a period of strife: the Southern states were economically ravaged; survivors were plagued by the memories of the war and the dead; and the industrial revolution was gaining momentum, which brought many immigrants to the Northern states to seek job opportunities. These immigrants were poor, and this became a period of particular class divide. These "disparities made wealth a very

visible experience” (D’Costa). The Victorian houses of the Americas were symbols of this experience, making them both luxurious and problematic. As critics began to point to the class disparities of the time, these houses changed into a symbol of monetary corruption. Following the shift in attitude toward Victorian houses, Americans returned to colonial-style homes in the 1930s and 1940s. But the Victorian houses, for the most part, remained standing; public opinion toward them continued to spiral downward. Artists of the time “drew them as seemingly empty shells that signified decay and danger; they imbued them with their own psychological angst” (Blakemore) and various photographers captured decaying houses on film, and these darker images began to intertwine with the imaginations of the public until Victorian houses and haunted houses were synonymous.

Due to their complex and elaborate designs and interiors, Victorian houses were hard to keep up. The Victorian area was known for its decadence, and “rooms were also so crowded, ornate, full of fancy furniture and ornamental objects, that they seem hard to keep up, so easy for them to get cobwebs, dust, the sorts of things that we associate with haunting” (Shapiro). The outsides of the houses quickly fell into disrepair as well, once the houses started to be abandoned as they fell out of favor. Due to the lack of repair and upkeep, these houses began to be the unattractive “spooky old house on the hill” types of buildings (Shapiro). These buildings were shunned and avoided by the communities; now they were an ugly manifestation of an unwanted past and symbolized an era of extreme social divide.

One of the reasons that the paranormal is thought to be so emotionally charged is the purpose of homes and houses prior to the shift away from the Victorian structures.

Victorian houses have also become linked to the traditions of the time, particularly in associations with death and mourning. Prior to the rise of funeral parlors, the deceased were brought home to be mourned. Bodies would be laid out on display for their families and friends to view and mourn together. As society moved on to new trends, they began to think of these practices as somehow wrong, and their associations with Victorian houses were just another reason to dislike that particular style of architecture (D'Costa). But people had been living in these houses for a long time, and continued to live in them even after they lost their popularity, so these houses were not only associated with death, but they were homes that saw several generations of life as well. Although "these homes were gradually abandoned, they held a legacy of life within them. Families moved in and invested their histories within those walls, and then moved out and the cycle repeated itself" and there was a history in these homes that new houses lacked (D'Costa). The Victorian house became the prime place for a haunting "because—with its dark crannies and cobwebbed attic—it harbored the shadows of past lives, memories that refused to die" (Burns 10). These houses were saturated with all variety of memories, good or bad:

“...the Victorian house became home to psychological demons. Each house was a vessel, a lid clamped down on a stew of powerful emotions, both personal and cultural—fear, dread, trauma, anxiety, disgust, repulsion, grief, guilt—meant to be shoved to the back of a dark closet and forgotten. What the house contained, though, always threatened to seep out, no matter how strong the desire to subdue and repress it. Like Pandora's box, it exerted a perverse allure, roused the irresistible impulse to raise the lid, peer inside, discover the secret, penetrate the mystery. What haunted these houses were memories that refused to die.” (Burns 15-16)

Part of the reason that these houses had this build-up of memory was simply the fact that they were old. By the time society began to turn their favor away from Victorian architecture, the houses were several decades old. They “held a legacy of life within

them” (D’Costa), and those lives were a series of experiences and memories and emotions that stained the house—stains that, as mentioned above, “refused to die” (Burns 16).

We see a wide shift in focus regarding the houses in *The Turn of the Screw* and the latter two novels because they straddle this shift in opinions about the Victorian house. James was writing during the Victorian era, when Victorian houses were just houses, and their architecture was still the height of elegance, fashion, and taste. The fictional house in his novel, *Bly*, is not in itself menacing because it was a structure of and for the time. But by the time we get to *Hill House* and *Hundreds Hall*, public perception of Victorian houses has shifted. If we assume that Shirley Jackson’s novel takes place in her own time period—and there is no evidence to say it does not—then *Hill House*, built 80 years prior to the beginning of the novel, was built somewhere around the 1870s. And *Hill House* is nothing if not an exaggerated Victorian home. Theodora, one of the participants of Dr. Montague’s study, even comments on the house’s Victorian appearance. “‘It’s altogether Victorian,’ Theodora said. ‘They simply wallowed in this kind of great billowing overdone sort of thing and buried themselves in folds of velvet and tassels and purple plush. Anyone before them or after would have put this house right up there on *top* of those hills where it belongs, instead of snuggling it down here’” (Jackson 50). The house is constantly described as ‘wrong,’ which is often how Victorian houses were described, and for the same reasons—an unsightly vision of wrong angles and irregular proportions that trigger unease and anxiety.

Of the three novels, *Hundreds Hall* is the only one not set in America; it takes place in England, yet the social changes affecting the shift in attitudes in America were

similar in England, as we can see from the novel—there were sweeping changes in the way people felt about class structure, particularly about the presence of an elite class. Hundreds Hall also falls into the era in which Victorian architecture had lost its appeal, and it is a perfect example of this change in perspectives, since the novel focuses heavily on the fall of an elite family and the growing rise in middle class. Hundreds Hall, a home that has stood for generations, is thought of as outdated and beastly in the time period in which the novel focuses: the 1940s. This decade parallels the period of change in America, and the novel demonstrates the growing discontent with the wealthy classes and their physical manifestations of wealth. In fact, these warring perspectives are fuel for many of the conflicts within the novel, with characters in opposing classes often at odds.

### **To Haunt is Human**

What emerges from this discussion is that haunting is a very human experience. Not simply because ghosts and specters are often believed to be deceased humans, but because haunted houses themselves get psychically charged by the build-up of human memories, emotions, imaginations, and anxieties. In some horror fiction, this is due to a single violent or horrific event such as a murder in the house, but in some cases, the houses become pathways to the paranormal simply because they are old and many things have happened within their walls over the span of their lifetime. The house becomes a blender, taking in various experiences and churning them together until the mixture combines to create something new. Houses are “obviously the centre of hauntings because it was where people slept and dreamed of the dead, or where people lay drunk, drugged or hallucinating in their sickbeds. The theory of ghosts as residual

electromagnetic impulses left behind by the strong emotions of the deceased, emphasizes the dampness and enclosed environment of buildings required to retain this residual memory” (Davies 47). Memories, built up over the years in a residence, seem to be a huge influencer on how susceptible the building is to the paranormal.

This also means that houses are susceptible to emotions. Victorian houses were filled with mourners due to societal traditions, so they became associated with death and sadness. And when a character in a horror movie or novel brings their own emotions and traumas and fears into the space of the house, those things become fuel, adding additional layers into the experiences the house has already accumulated. This is not to say that every house is haunted just because it is old and has harbored a lot of human life. Instead, the experiences simply make it easier for a spirit to take hold. There still needs to be at least one event to really trigger the appearance of a ghost, something either very violent or very sad. But the groundwork of human experience acts like a lighter fluid, and the violent event is the spark. When a ghost is left behind as a result of a violent action, it is “in effect a stain” (Davies 48), and it stays tethered to the house.

Examples from the novels help to support these concepts. In *The Turn of the Screw*, the reader is given very little information about the governess’s life outside of Bly and her past. But she does give us brief pieces of information that can be illuminating. At one point in her narrative, the governess is reflecting on her time so far at Bly, and says, “Of course I was under the spell, and the wonderful part is that, even at the time, I perfectly knew I was. But I gave myself up to it; it was an antidote to any pain, and I had more pains than one. I was in receipt in these days of disturbing letters from home, where things were not going well. But with my children, what things in the world mattered?”

(James 19). The reader is not told exactly what the disturbing letters contain, only that they exist, and yet from this information we can glean that the governess is experiencing emotion distress—or as she phrases it, “pains.” Due to this state of unhappiness, the governess throws herself into the world of Bly as a means of escape. This is similar to the case of Eleanor of *The Haunting of Hill House*—always unwanted, always unhappy Eleanor. Her traumatic past leads her to consider Hill House as a refuge from a previously dull, monotonous existence. Both the governess and Eleanor have brought all of their outside traumas and problems with them to their respective houses, and are occupying those houses in states of distress. For Eleanor, this is not the first such occasion that her emotions have had influence on a residence. When she was a child, “shortly after her father’s death, a rain of stones fell intermittently on her house for three days. The rain of stones is presented as a classic poltergeist manifestation, centering on a pubescent girl during a time of emotional turmoil, and there is some speculation in the novel that Eleanor herself triggered the event” (Bailey 34). Eleanor’s emotional reaction to the death of her father was a triggering point for the haunting that took place in her home.

Hundreds Hall of *The Little Stranger* provides further evidence. The house might have always remained an ordinary decaying relic of a house if there had not been a child’s untimely death, but at the same time, the child’s death might have not caused a paranormal experience if the house had not been filled with the angst and mourning of the family members in the years that followed—after all, the ghost took nearly thirty years after its death to appear.



These examples help to demonstrate that hauntings are tied to the emotional states of the characters occupying the haunted house. The course of the novels could have been entirely different without the experiences described above; Eleanor and the governess seem to be magnets for the supernatural because of the traumas they bring with them to the houses, and Hundreds Hall has been steeping in unhappy emotions and experiences for decades. All three novels appear to be experiencing a cause and effect relationship between triggering periods of emotional distress and the paranormal entities that are triggered in response.

### **Early Portrayals: Bly is Not the Focus**

In the case of *The Turn of the Screw*, the house is not the most important part of the haunting. It is simply a backdrop, filling a need for a setting, because the real focus of the haunting is on the people and the ghosts. The governess describes Bly as “a big, ugly, antique, but convenient house, embodying a few features of a house still older, half-replaced and half-utilized, in which I had the fancy of our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship” (James 9), but it doesn’t seem to be a building that instills fear or anxiety within the governess. These facts of the house are listed as basic observations, as opposed to compiled reasons as to why the house is frightening. This is confirmed by the fact that just before this, the governess says, “I had a view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all color out of storybooks and fairytales” (James 9). To be fair, these observations are first impressions, and come before she realizes there is something paranormal happening. But this can be contrasted with the first impressions of

Hill House; when Eleanor first arrives, she says that the house “is vile, it is diseased” and that sets an immediate tone that the description of Bly doesn’t (Jackson 33). Besides the initial description, the governess never really even seems to touch on the house again. Hill House, and Hundreds Hall for that matter, both stay a prime focus of the haunting and the text.

Despite the fact that Bly is not treated as the primary focus of the novel’s haunting, it still fits the earlier formula I described, in which a house typically needs both a foundation of human experience and triggering events to create a ghostly presence. Bly might not be remarkable in itself for the time, since the house was still in fashion, but it is described as old and “half-replaced,” which tells the reader that the house has been occupied for decades. In addition, neither one of the ghosts—Peter Quint or Miss Jessel—actually died at the house. Miss Jessel “left it, at the end of the year, to go home” and never returned, for she died while she was away (James 13). Quint had also left the house before he passed (James 24). But despite both of these figures dying away from the house, their ghosts are still drawn back to the property, which shows that it was not their deaths that caused the haunting, but the actions they took while still living at the house. Whatever they did with each other and with the children, the memories of those events became both the build-up of experience and the triggering events.

### **New Perspectives: Hill House as an Entity**

The Hill House, of *The Haunting of Hill House*, pushes the boundaries that James set. The house is definitely old—around eighty years old, specifically—but Jackson created the Hill House as its own sort of entity, capable of possessing evil in its very

being. This is drastically different from the haunted house as portrayed by James, since the haunting of *The Turn of the Screw* is solely about the spirits occupying it, and not about the evil of the brick and mortar itself. Jackson leaves no doubt that the *house* is the evil being of her novel. The novel sets this tone from its very first page, saying that “Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within.... [...] silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone” (Jackson 3). The evil of Hill House starts with the very essence of its creation, and the novel later goes on to say,

“No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice. Almost any house, caught unexpectedly or at an odd angle, can turn a deeply humorous look on a watching person; even a mischievous little chimney, or a dormer like a dimple, can catch up a beholder with a sense of fellowship; but a house arrogant and hating, never off guard, can only be evil. This house, which seemed somehow to have formed itself, flying together into its own powerful pattern under the hands of its builders, fitting itself into its own construction of lines and angles, reared its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity. It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope. Exorcism cannot alter the countenance of a house; Hill House would stay as it was until it was destroyed.” (Jackson 35)

We see in this passage that *The Haunting of Hill House* is the story of a haunted place, as opposed to the ghosts that we see or read about in *The Turn of the Screw* and also in *The Little Stranger*. And yet, Hill House is also personified. It has a “face,” an “eyebrow,” it can have expressions and emotions, and it “reared its great head.” Despite the fact that the novel emphasizes the haunting of a place, there still seems to be something very distinctly *human* about this haunted house. But unlike the earlier discussion about how older houses absorb human experience in order to become haunted, Hill House displayed

odd behavior from the very time it was built, before it even had people living in it. Therefore, the part that makes Hill House so human must have come from the way it was formed and crafted, and the way Hugh Crain, its designer, poured his oddities into its design. As Dr. Montague says, Hugh Crain “made his house to suit his mind” (Jackson 105), so the design of the house was very heavily tied in with who Hugh Crain was as a person. This explains why the house is itself the evil entity, as opposed to simply harboring spirits. The strangeness was sewn into every odd angle, uneven line, and abnormal spacing. Most other haunted houses become haunted gradually, or at the very least after they have been lived in at least once, because they were not built with strange intent. Hill House is the exception because it was contrived to be different. All of this adds up to mean that Hill House is more than just a building, and can actually be “regarded as a protagonist rather than a mere, passive setting for the novel’s events” (Matek 419). Hill House is not just a house, it is a character, and because of this, it has the ability to shape the narrative.

Because the house is an entity, it has the unique ability to control its own haunting, in a way that Bly and Hundreds Hall cannot. Dr. Montague, the man leading the investigation at Hill House, tells his companions what he has discovered about Hill House’s history prior to arriving at the site. In an account of events preceding their arrival by several decades, he mentions a situation in which one occupant accused a former occupant of sneaking in to steal from her. Dr. Montague mentions that he believes this to be “the first hint of Hill House in its true personality” (Jackson 79), and this personality emerges, over the course of the tale, to be something manipulative and intelligent. Despite being isolated and therefore being unable to see how the rest of the world operates, the

house has some sort of awareness of how to haunt effectively while also remaining hidden. Dr. Montague mentions that “it is really unbelievably difficult to get accurate information about a haunted house” and this has largely been due to the fact that the people who experience the haunting do not pass on the information (Jackson 72). He explains “not one of the former tenants could bring himself to admit that Hill House was haunted” and that all of the former tenants “made an effort to supply a rational reason for leaving, and yet every one of them has left” (Jackson 72). No doubt the tenants were simply trying to spare themselves the embarrassment of sharing their version of events with other people who would have scoffed at it, but the tenants simply would not have the evidence to back up their stories even if they tried to share it publicly. Hill House has a way of covering its tracks. While Dr. Montague’s group is staying there, they experience many different things: banging on walls and doors, windows and doors close on their own, Theodora’s room becomes covered in blood, and so on. But none of these things actually leave traceable evidence. There are no marks or cracks in the walls and doors after the banging, the blood vanishes from Theodora’s room, and the rest are small things that would not leave evidence unless somehow captured on camera. And sometimes, not even a camera would help; often, the characters articulate strange feelings that cannot be traced back to a specific experience. For example, Dr. Montague tells the group that the house “watches every move you make,” but then promptly adds, “My own imagination, of course” (Jackson 85). The characters are affected by thoughts and feelings that they often second-guess, which might be part of Hill House’s manipulation tactics; the house creates feelings of anxiety, and this allows it to effectively haunt without leaving a trace.

To add on to this, Hill House appears to know that Eleanor is the most vulnerable, and knows how to take advantage of her. It accomplishes this by testing out the group to get a sense of them. On one occasion when the house is creating a banging noise in the hall, the noise pauses, and then resumes “as though it had been listening, waiting to hear their voices and what they said, to identify them, to know how well prepared they were against it, waiting to hear if they were afraid” (Jackson 130). The house is searching for weak spots within the group, and finds one in Eleanor. It grasps onto someone of flimsy mental stability and forges a connection with her that allows the house to act through her. Dr. Montague himself claims that “the menace of the supernatural is that it attacks where modern minds are weakest, where we have abandoned our protective armor of superstition and have no substitute defense” (Jackson 140), and these are the exact methods the house uses against Eleanor, by preying on her weakened mind. By the end of the novel, the rest of the group has become involved with Eleanor and her descent into insanity. The house then proceeds to use her as a distraction to consume the attention of the others, and it is trying to create tension between the group members. Part of Eleanor’s new thought process after being consumed by the house is that Theodora, another woman of the group, is “wicked” and Luke, the future owner of the house, is “a selfish man” (Jackson 158;617). What ultimately drives the group from the house is in fact Eleanor’s death, so if the house is really as intelligent as it seems, it would have been aware that this would be an effective method of driving them all out.

In addition to Hill House’s ability to prey on Eleanor, it also appears to fuse with her to the point where she is actually a part of the house. The story is ambiguous enough to allow for a reading in which Eleanor is not so much insane as changed, and this change

is characterized by her becoming one with the house. During her wild nighttime adventure toward the end of the novel, Eleanor thinks, “we trick them so easily” (Jackson 230). The “them” is the rest of her companions, staying in the house with her. But the “we” is less certain; Eleanor herself is one piece of the puzzle, but the suggestion here is that the house is the other component of the “we.” Soon after, the narrative tells us Eleanor “touched a kitchen door as she passed, and six miles away Mrs. Dudley shuddered in her sleep” (Jackson 231). This is not a moment in which the narrative tells us that these are Eleanor’s thoughts—it is stated as a fact of the story. Not long before that, Eleanor “sat, looking, down at her hands, and listened to the sounds of the house. Somewhere upstairs a door swung quietly shut; a bird touched the tower briefly and flew off. In the kitchen the stove was settling and cooling, with little soft creakings. An animal—a rabbit?—moved through the bushes by the summerhouse. She could even hear, with her new awareness of the house, the dust drifting gently to the attics, the wood aging” (Jackson 223). Again, the narrative does not frame this experience as a moment inside of Eleanor’s head, but instead as facts of the novel.

If it can be believed that Eleanor has indeed become an actual part of the house in some way, then this is a unique capability on the house’s part that not every house shares. Neither Bly nor Hundreds Hall had this level of cognitive relationship with their occupants or even their ghosts, as far as the reader knows. Still, the house’s motivations for this relationship with Eleanor remain unclear. For most of the novel, it appears as though Hill House wishes for Eleanor to join it, and yet by the very end, the reader is told that “whatever walked there, walked alone” (Jackson 246), suggesting that either Eleanor’s connection to the house died with her, or she was so fully absorbed into the

house that she *was* the house. The novel does not explain this, however, and the reader is left to wonder.

### **Present Depictions: Vestiges in Hundreds Hall**

The house of *The Little Stranger*, Hundreds Hall, seems to better fit the more 'modern' concept of a haunted house. It is aging and decaying, and this is something that the narrator obsesses over. Hundreds Hall is haunted by its past, not just its possible ghost, since it is a shadow of its former self. The house is a "focal point for fractured identities and frustrated desires" (Heilmann 40), and that is reflected in its fading potential and growing irrelevance to social standing. What's left of the grounds outside of the house is overgrown and unkept. The house itself is poorly lit and often seems dirty, thanks to the lack of staff to clean it. Dr. Faraday, the narrator, also notes that while there are still some valuables left, there are also "darker squares and oblongs where pictures had obviously once hung" (Waters 18). Clearly the family has had to resort to stripping the house of its wealth in order to get by. What's interesting in the case of Hundreds Hall is that the memories of its days of grandeur always intertwine with its present degeneration. Dr. Faraday has a very rosy, glorified view that stems from his memories of visiting the house as a child, and now those views are blending or conflicting with what he witnesses as a grown man, and his observations of the house are usually comparisons to what the house once was. Comments such as "the essential loveliness of the room stood out, like the handsome bones behind a ravaged face" demonstrate that the house is not in total ruins, but it is suffering (Waters 19).



That being said, *The Little Stranger* still seems to carry on elements from its predecessors, particularly in giving a sort of life force to its house. Caroline in particular seems to personify it, for instance by telling Dr. Faraday, “Do you remember what I told you about this house, when I showed you round it? It’s greedy. It gobbles up all our time and energy” (Waters 152). It doesn’t appear as if the house is quite the same as the living entity that is Hill House, but it certainly leaves the impression on its inhabitants of having some sort of power and influence. But whereas Hill House was apparently evil from its very beginnings, Hundreds Hall is mostly powered by the sheer depth of memories and emotions tied in with the building, which have built up gradually over time. This likely also ties in with why the ghost that manifests within Hundreds Hall is more personal; it is (possibly) a deceased child, the eldest of the current Mrs. Ayres. Hill House’s manifestations might very well stem from people who actually occupied the house at one point, but this is never confirmed or denied. There is still ambiguity over the ghost of Hundreds Hall as well, as it is never actually seen as far as Faraday, the narrator, is aware. But the family members of the house seem to believe it is the child, especially since Mrs. Ayres has some sort of supernatural encounter in the room where the child died, and the child’s name is found etched in the walls in various places in the house. Those etchings might also simply be leftover from when the child was alive, which coincides with the fact that the house is full of ties to its former inhabitants. The imprints of the child on the house could easily be the cause of the haunting, but also could be influenced by whatever other experiences have taken place in the building in the course of its history.

### **Going Beyond: Spaces Outside of the House**

Something interesting that *Turn of the Screw* and *The Haunting of Hill House* have in common is that the reach of the house, and whatever may or may not be causing the haunting, seems to extend onto the grounds or surrounding land, which is a trait that is more or less lacking in Hundreds Hall of *The Little Stranger*, whose ghosts only seem to occupy the actual building (which is interesting, since this story actually leads the reader farthest away from its haunted house, often focusing on the surrounding town and countryside). In Hill House, there are a lot of oddities gathered around the driveway leading up to the house. After the house was built by Hugh Crain, his first wife died on the driveway before she'd even seen the house, "when the carriage bringing her here overturned" (Jackson 75). It is also the place where Eleanor takes her life at the very end of the novel, where she turns "the wheel to send the car directly at the great tree at the curve of the driveway" and fatally crashes (Jackson 245). Eleanor and the wife were not the only ones to die there, either. Dr. Montague, who orchestrates the investigation at the house that Eleanor attends, mentions "the last person who tried to leave Hill House in darkness—it was eighteen years ago, I grant you—was killed at the turn in the driveway" (Jackson 67). Soon after, another member of the group mentions that when the doctor was first driving them both up to the house, "I thought he was going to send the car into a tree" (Jackson 75). The driveway is therefore not only a place where the house exerts control, but it is a place of violence, where many gruesome deaths have occurred.

Plenty of other things take place on the rest of the grounds, as well, including an instance when an alleged dog leads Dr. Montague and Luke outside and "into the garden" where they "lost it somewhere back of the house" (Jackson 75). Eleanor and Theodora

seem the most prone to these experiences, since their walks on the paths surrounding the house often lead to odd things happening. On one strange occasion, the girls are walking when they come across a picnic. They hear “the laughter of the children and the affectionate, amused voices of the mother and father” and a child is playing with a puppy (Jackson 176). It’s described as a happy scene, but it immediately strikes fear in Eleanor and Theodora, who proceed to run away. What these scenes demonstrate is that not only does the house have influence over the grounds and surrounding area, but the influence is strong—strong enough to create an entire illusion. The path that leads them there even seems to be “taking them somewhere, willfully” (Jackson 176), so the house appears to have the ability to guide people, whether it’s through a dog leading people astray, or whatever is at work with the path.

Similar to Hill House’s favoring of the driveway, *The Turn of the Screw* also has a favored part of the grounds where things occur near Bly: the lake. When the unnamed governess narrator sees the ghost of her predecessor for the first time, it is at the lake (James 28-29). Later in the novel when she loses track of the young girl in her charge, she suddenly knows with absolute certainty that the girl has gone to the lake to be with the ghost of Miss Jessel, the predecessor, and indeed that is where she finds them (James 66-67). In the case of Hill House, the extension of the haunting into the grounds makes it seem as if the house has a power that expands that far. But in the case of the lake with Bly, it adds to the idea that the house is not the real focus. Since Bly itself is not the key part of the haunting, and is lacking the personified qualities of Hundreds Hall and Hill House, its ghosts are not limited to just that one space.

## Chapter Two: Female Leads and Unsatisfied Love

In all three novels, a female protagonist stands at the center of the haunting. *The Turn of the Screw* is primarily focused on the manuscript of a young governess. *The Haunting of Hill House* is driven by the story of Eleanor. *The Little Stranger*, while told through first person point of view by a man, relies on Caroline to provide a lot of the information and the details for the story since Dr. Faraday, the narrator, never witnesses the paranormal activity himself. At first this might seem insignificant; women protagonists in the gothic genre are not new or unusual. All three women are actually rather similar. They are all relatively poor, lacking in both money and possessions to some degree. All of them have acted as caregivers, either to family members or someone else. They are all lacking in love and romance. And, most importantly, all have essentially sacrificed themselves and their identity to help or work for others.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the actual physical spaces of houses can gather human experiences and emotions to culminate into a haunting. This chapter shifts focus to the specific female characters that are part of the novels' haunting, to discuss how some *people* can also have the right set of ingredients to become haunted, or to influence a haunted house. Just like some houses seem to contain just the right components to attract ghosts and manifestations, there are some formulas for people that make them more likely to be affected by the paranormal.

### **Why Women?**

In 1880, a physician named Jean-Martin Charcot was the first to medically describe the condition known as hysteria, a condition that women were prone to

(McVean). Hysteria was a set of symptoms that varied greatly depending on the patient and the diagnosing physician. It included, but was certainly not limited to:

“...edema or hyperemia (congestion caused by fluid retention, either localized or general), nervousness, insomnia, sensations of heaviness in the abdomen, muscle spasms, shortness of breath, loss of appetite for food or for sex with the approved male partner, and sometimes a tendency to cause trouble for others, particularly members of the patient’s immediate family. The disorder was thought to be a consequence of lack of sufficient sexual intercourse, deficiency of sexual gratification, or both.” (Maines 23)

Charcot lectured on this pathology for several years at medical universities. One of his students was Sigmund Freud, who developed the ideas even further. Freud “believed that hysteria was a result, not of a physical injury in the body, but of a ‘psychological scar produced through trauma or repression.’ Specifically, this psychological damage was a result of removing male sexuality from females...” (McVean). Freud’s thoughts on the condition changed over time, and he eventually decided that “hysterics suffered not from sexual deprivations but from ‘lesions in consciousness’ caused by childhood trauma” and he decided that these “lesions” were caused by childhood “thoughts and fantasies of sexuality” (Maines 44). While Freud’s paradigm was dominant, other thinkers continued to lecture that hysteria was due to lack of sexual gratification (Maines 45).

Hysteria was considered a prominently feminine condition, and the usual recommendation for treatment was marriage and frequent sexual intercourse; if marriage wasn’t an option, the other favored technique was vaginal stimulation. Entire clinics were born to combat this growing condition, and female patients would essentially go to appointments at the clinic to be given orgasms (McVean). Although treatments such as this eventually fell out of favor, the condition of female hysteria remained a medically diagnosable disorder until 1980. Hysteria as a label “was basically the medical

explanation for ‘everything that men found mysterious or unmanageable in women,’ a conclusion only supported by men’s (historic and continuing) dominance over medicine, and hysteria’s continued use as a synonym for ‘over-emotional’ or ‘deranged’” (McVean).

This is only some of the most recent history, but ideas and concepts about females experiencing particular conditions due to their anatomy dates back as far as Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Roman times (McVean). Women have long since been attributed conditions associated with their uteruses or lack of maleness, and the treatments have most often revolved around marriage and intercourse to relieve the symptoms. Overall, the concept of hysteria as a condition is deeply rooted in sexuality, and it was a condition used to explain away a wide range of emotions and behaviors. Women were thought to be prone to irrational, anxious behavior and were often considered a nuisance, especially to their families.

There are many connections to be drawn between these ideas and the female protagonists, the governess, Eleanor, and Caroline. They all have behavior that could be considered irrational and strange. None of them are sexually gratified or married. In the case of Eleanor, there is a situation in which she is considered a “trouble for others,” particularly her family as well as her companions at Hill House. So although none of these women are outright labeled as hysterical in the novels, there are certainly ways to associate them with this line of thinking. Women were thought to be overemotional and prone to weird behaviors and insanity. In my next chapter, I discuss the ways in which emotions are linked with haunting, but for the purposes of this chapter, it’s certainly useful to keep this in mind: women are often associated with haunting, such as in these

novels, because there seems to be at least some connection between women, emotions, and sexuality that makes them more prone to haunting.

At the very least, it makes their accounts easier to dismiss. Following Caroline's death, a trial is held to determine causality. Betty, the maid of Hundreds Hall, confesses to the presence of a ghost. The lawyer who is questioning her at the time asks her if Caroline had also believed in this ghost. When Betty answers in the affirmative, he replies: "You have thrown a good deal of light, I think, on Miss Ayres's state of mind" (Waters 497). Caroline's emotional state becomes the primary focus of the trial as the lawyer begins to question Dr. Faraday. Many things are discussed—Caroline's desire to move, her unhappy relationship with Faraday, her belief in the ghost—all culminating in the decision that Caroline must have had "an unbalanced state of mind" and a "case of inherited family madness" which led to her suicide (Waters 502). The trial revolves around discussions of her unsatisfied love life and her mental decline, both of which share connections and similarities with ideas of hysteria.

### **A Nameless Problem**

Two of the novels, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Little Stranger*, take place in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In this time period, there was a growing unrest amongst married women who were expected to live a domestic life that revolved around being wives and mothers. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* articulated this unrest, which Friedan called "the problem that has no name." Propaganda of the time told women that true femininity meant being good mothers and wives, and that tending to their families and houses should be the only satisfaction they needed in their lives. Unsurprisingly, many

women of the time found that this wasn't enough, and they struggled with the *why* of it in a world that didn't provide the vocabulary for such things. It's not hard to see how these concepts might apply to the novels being focused on in this thesis—even *The Turn of the Screw*, which takes place several decades earlier. The three main female characters of these novels are not married, and they are not mothers, but their lives revolve around the care of a home and family. A large part of “the problem” was also that women were discouraged from having careers and other aspirations. Neither Eleanor nor Caroline have careers, and while the governess has the career of being a governess, it is a job that essentially involves adopting the roles of motherhood.

The essential problem within the “problem that has no name” is suppression—of identity, of freedom, of sexuality, and so on. Suppression of self and identity seems to lead to a deeper, more involved range of interactions with the paranormal. By entering the space of the haunting, the characters that are more suppressed and vulnerable are projecting themselves into the haunting and influencing the way the haunting occurs.

“... haunting may also suggest problems suppressed by official discourses, be it private or public, which yet resurface in a spectral form to mark the trace of that which has been silenced and eliminated—as in, for instance, Gothic literature which strongly emphasises culturally suppressed and unwanted notions. In the latter case, spectrality and haunting may be and are often interpreted psychologically, as a literary strategy to mark the processes of suppression and the subsequent return of variously unwanted psychological content. Sexuality, trauma or loss feature prominently in spectral literature, with haunting signalling the return to that which has been suppressed, unrealised, lost or too painful to confront openly. This return, as psychoanalysts suggest, may perform several functions, which range from coming to terms and confrontation with painful experience, through mourning, nostalgia and remembering, to restorative processes. The obsessive return is usually linked by psychologists to trauma and seen as an attempt to work through it via incessant repetition.... Spectrality, then, may be seen as an empowering strategy of confronting and dealing with harm and loss.” (Klonowska 172)



This logic is crucial to understanding the three novels of this thesis. Eleanor, Caroline, and the governess all experience issues of sexuality, trauma, or loss. Their sexuality is underdeveloped or unsatisfied, typically absent of romantic or physical connections. Caroline and Eleanor have each lost family members, and the governess has lost one of the children in her care by the end of the novel. And the trauma they experience manifests in many ways: the governess isolates herself in a way that could very well be affecting her mental health. Caroline is burdened by a disturbance in the class system as well as things like caring for her brother's life-altering injuries, and Eleanor is still being affected by the years she spent devoting her life to her mother. Due to all of these things, these women have a stronger influence on the supernatural occurrences at their given house, because they themselves are emotionally charged and the world of the paranormal is deeply affected by emotion.

### **The Governess and the Sacrifice of Freedom**

In the case of the governess of *The Turn of the Screw*, she is a young woman from a poor family, and the money she is offered for the position of watching over two children is more than she can pass up (James 4-5). But this means that, at only the age of twenty, she has agreed to devote her time to living in another person's home and watching over someone else's children. She is not even given a name—her life has now been donated to the care of the children at Bly, and her own identity therefore suffers.

The governess exists in a time period before the age in which Friedan was writing, and the culture and society she was a part of were very different. But the governess is experiencing a lot of the same dilemmas, emotions, and so on associated

with “the problem that has no name.” She was the “youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson” and “at the age of twenty” she decided to take on her first teaching role (James 4). And her very first job at this young age is immediately taking on a motherly-type role to two young children, something she has no experience for. Douglas, the man reading the governess’s manuscript some years later, tells us she “was young, untried, nervous: it was a vision of serious duties and little company, of really great loneliness” (James 5). She only takes on the job for the salary and for a misguided love she felt toward her employer. But the idea of the job made her rather miserable; she did not want to go live alone with a few children and staff that she barely knew, and be isolated at Bly, where she could succumb to “great loneliness.”

Knowing all this creates ambiguity about what occurred while she was at Bly. Those who are lonely and isolated are more susceptible to haunting, such as with the case of Eleanor, who was very lonely indeed. This holds true with the governess, who perhaps was the only one able to see the ghosts because of this particular state of mind that she was in. It’s also possible that the ghosts were hallucinations, brought on by a declining mental state. Or perhaps, more wildly, the entire haunting was a rouse she stirred up in order to generate more excitement in her life. Life at Bly was routine and dull, and although she cared about the children she was tending to and had a budding friendship with Mrs. Grose, another staff member, she might still have been very lonely and perhaps was finding it hard to keep herself entertained. Maybe making up a story about ghosts in which she is a heroine was her way of combating this, and the entire story is fiction masquerading as a true account of events.

The love that the governess feels toward her employer adds further complications. Despite only meeting him in person twice, the governess falls in love with her employer, and this greatly influences her decision to take the job he is offering (James 6). However, the love that the governess has for her employer seems to be completely one-sided, or at the very least the reader is never allowed to know the employer's opinions on the matter. The only important thing that the reader knows is that the employer has forbidden any contact after these initial meetings; he tells the governess that "she should never trouble him—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything; only meet all questions herself, receive all moneys from his solicitor, take the whole thing over and let him alone," and after this proclamation, "she never saw him again" (James 6). Along with Eleanor and Caroline, the governess' romantic life at the time of the haunting is therefore characterized by rejection; the man she loves does not love her in return, and he has no desire to even converse with her.

### **Eleanor and the Struggle for Identity and Connection**

Eleanor is utterly miserable with her life before arriving at Hill House. The vast majority of her adult life was devoted to caring for her sick mother; she cared for her mother for eleven years, and at the time of the novel, she is only thirty-two (Jackson 6). The first introduction to Eleanor in the novel tells us not only this, but also that she "could not remember ever truly being happy in her adult life; her years with her mother had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair" (Jackson 6). Meanwhile, her sister is permitted the opportunity to get married and start a family. Her sister had already escaped their family home and had

started her own family before their mother needed such serious care, since the sister was around six years older than Eleanor, placing her in the vicinity of twenty-seven years old when Eleanor first started caring for their mother (Jackson 6-7). So to the mother and sister, Eleanor as caretaker might have seemed like the most logical choice. But this logic seems to have been little consolation to Eleanor, since she came to strongly dislike them both—in fact, she “genuinely hated” them (Jackson 6). This means that Eleanor, despite constantly being at her mother’s beck and call, felt extremely alone. She loved no one, and had no one love her in return, be it a significant other or even a friend. In this vulnerable state, it seems that she was susceptible to Hill House in a way that her companions were not. The house seems to crave and desire her, things that she has never experienced before. It constantly produces the words “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” in variations, and at first, Eleanor is terrified by this particular sense of desire, since being wanted by anyone or anything is a foreign concept for her (Jackson 146). The house is somehow able to sense that she is the most vulnerable of the group, and although its true motivations are never revealed, it is able to worm its way into Eleanor’s thoughts and feelings more effectively than it probably could with the other characters.

A possible reading of the novel is that Eleanor’s relationship with Theodora, another member of the group brought in to investigate the house, plays with sexual and romantic desires. And this is certainly a possibility, as Eleanor has never had the chance to love romantically before, and it could very well be that Theodora is her first romantic experience. However, it seems just as likely that Eleanor is craving *any* sort of close, connected relationship with another human being. She hates her family and has never had friends. It is entirely possible that Eleanor at first tries to mold Theodora into a better

version of a sibling, and this could be why she later begins to think of Theodora more negatively—she has come to hate her other family, after all. Her thoughts toward Theodora begin to seem more conflicting and inconsistent, but in the second half of the novel, she begins to think of Theodora as “wicked” and “beastly and soiled and dirty” (Jackson 158). Eleanor’s only experiences with family are negative, and if she had unconsciously tried to place Theodora into a family role, it’s quite possible that her mind began to associate Theodora with negative things as a result. A third possible reading, aside from romantic or familial, is that Eleanor was so drawn to Theodora because she had never had a friend before in her adult life. Assuming that their relationship *must* be romantic takes away from the fact that friendship is a pivotal, meaningful role that Eleanor lacked and craved, and that platonic love is just as essential as romance.

The history of Hill House, as described by Dr. Montague in the novel, is that it was designed and built by a man named Hugh Crain. After Crain’s death, following a series of unfortunate events that drove him to live abroad and abandon his children, his two daughters “spent the rest of their lives quarreling” over the house (Jackson 77). At some point, it was decided that the eldest sister would live there, and after a number of years of living in seclusion, “she eventually took a girl from the village to live with her, as a kind of companion” (Jackson 77). The eldest sister eventually died, and after a series of court battles with the surviving sister, the house was left to the companion. The town believed the companion to be a scheming opportunist, and the companion spent the rest of her life being harassed by the surviving sister and the townspeople, until she eventually killed herself (Jackson 80). All of this historical information is relevant for these two reasons: firstly, the two young sisters and the companion were both portrayed

as having miserable lives; secondly, the sisters and companions are mentioned several other times throughout the novel. The two young daughters of Hugh Crain went through several mother figures, all who died in various horrible ways. In response, Hugh Crain remained abroad where his third wife had passed, and where he himself died soon after, and the daughters were raised by other relatives. Years later, the companion went through years of emotional torment and was treated horribly by the surviving sister and the townspeople, who all “were delighted to believe that she was dishonest” and a “scheming young woman” (Jackson 80). Dr. Montague conveys all this history in one sitting, filling in his companions on the background of Hill House. But over the course of the novel, this history is hinted at several more times, and all with notable reactions: Theodora almost always sympathizes with the young sisters, and Eleanor almost always sympathizes with the companion. Eleanor herself points this out. “You keep thinking of the little children,” Eleanor tells Theodora, “but I can’t forget that lonely little companion...” (Jackson 103). From the way that Eleanor favors the companion, I believe that this demonstrates Eleanor’s true desires. She is not completely void of sympathy for the sisters, but the sisters model a relationship that Eleanor already knows too well: toxic rivalry between siblings. But the companion is someone that Eleanor can relate to: devoid of friends, isolated in her home, and left behind by someone who has died. But the companion is also a notion that Eleanor holds dear because she is a *companion*—a friend, a housemate, a bonded person to the sister. Eleanor is drawn to the idea of a friend, because a friend is what she wants most.

The most important thing that Eleanor has been deprived of is her own identity. It’s important and meaningful that she does not have people in her life that care about her

or that she cares about, but her life so far has still revolved around the lives of other people. As a result, her grasp on her own self has become stunted, and much of the earlier parts of the novel are simply about her experiencing true freedom for the first time and being allowed to explore the world as she hasn't before. Much of this has been a sign of the time she is living in, since many women of the period "felt trapped within domestic spaces and unable to develop a model of identity that was independent of family life" (Smith 152). Eleanor's case was extreme, since her life was so deeply devoted to the care of her mother, and this undeveloped 'model of identity' was something she particularly struggled with, which becomes even more evident in the way that the house begins to consume her. Eleanor struggles to keep her identity separate from the house, before eventually succumbing to its pull.

She is at a vulnerable place during her stay at Hill House, and it's clear that she was trying to establish herself as a person while she was there. The house became a space for her to experiment, but her experiments were lies that provide insight into the life she wishes she had lived. While talking to Theodora about what their lives are like outside of Hill House, Eleanor tells Theodora:

"I have a little place of my own,' she said slowly. 'An apartment, like yours, only I live alone. Smaller than yours, I'm sure. I'm still furnishing it—buying one thing at a time, you know, to make sure I get everything absolutely right. White curtains. I had to look for weeks before I found my little stone lions on each corner of the mantel, and I have a white cat and my books and records and pictures. Everything has to be exactly the way I want it, because there's only me to use it; once I had a blue cup with stars painted on the inside; when you looked down into a cup of tea it was full of stars. I want a cup like that.'" (Jackson 88)

This story she weaves contains clues to her ideal life. Eleanor imagines living alone, free of her repressive family, where she has a say in every object in her living space. She doesn't lie and create a fictional husband or children; her ideal life is one in which she is

independent. But interestingly, she borrows details from other people's lives as well. The cup "full of stars" is a detail she took from a young girl she witnesses on the drive to Hill House (Jackson 21). Eleanor is absorbing experiences and trying them on like hats, trying to imagine herself in different scenarios. This could add to why she is so susceptible to Hill House's draw. The house is providing her with idealized fantasies—a happy picnicking family, a room to call her own, and a say in how she spends her time. By feeding into her vulnerabilities, the house is shaping Eleanor's identity as it forms.

### **Caroline and the Broken Class System**

Caroline of *The Little Stranger* had unfortunate timing; she was born into a dying class of elites who were no longer the most powerful social group. Instead of living a life of wealth and luxury, she is cleaning her own home regularly because the family can now only afford one maid. And instead of having a home that was as magnificent and splendid as her ancestors experienced, the version of Hundreds Hall that she occupies is a skeleton of what it once was. Her family has become poor and isolated with few friends or connections. And on top of this, society treats her as if she is an unwanted spinster, even though she's only in her late twenties.

Although the novel was published in 2009, it is set in a similar time period as *The Haunting of Hill House*, and Caroline was experiencing the same struggle as Eleanor of finding an identity outside of the domestic space. As with the way she missed out on a life of luxury, she also missed out on having a long-term career, something that seems to have meant a good deal to her. She spent time in the Women's Royal Naval Force—more commonly called the 'Wrens'—in World War II (Waters 263). It seems Caroline has



always enjoyed a life of being active, which has carried over into her life at home, where she always seems to be on the move. When Dr. Faraday asks Caroline if she misses being in the Wrens, she replies,

“Badly, at first. I was good at it, you see. That’s a shameful thing to admit, isn’t it? But I liked all the mucking about with boats. I liked the routines of it. I liked there being only one way to do things, only one sort of stocking, one sort of shoe, one sort of way to wear one’s hair. I was going to stay on at the end of the war, go out to Italy or Singapore. But once I was back at Hundreds—“ (Waters 263)

The reason that Caroline left and returned home was to care for her very injured brother, and from there she never was able to get free again. Instead of continuing the life she had started to build for herself in the military, she had to spend her time caring for a sibling. And although she’s never openly resentful of this, we can see in brief exchanges like this that she missed out on something profound, which was independence for herself.

In addition to the difficulties with maintaining a career, Caroline has also been unlucky in her love life. At nearly thirty years old, she is unmarried and childless. She’s thought of as a “notoriously plain girl” and Dr. Faraday is initially embarrassed to have his “name romantically linked” to her (Waters 272). At a dinner party earlier in the novel, Caroline attempts to gain a suitor in the form of Mr. Morley, a man of similar age and class. Throughout the exchange, she is “oddly self-conscious, raising her hand to her hair in an uncharacteristic, feminine gesture” (Waters 90). Dr. Faraday’s narration implies that flirting and seduction are new, unfamiliar things for Caroline. Another guest soon tells Dr. Faraday that the whole thing was arranged by Caroline’s mother and the guest’s sister, but the guest says, “I saw in two minutes how that would turn out. Tony’s an ugly little brute, but he does like a pretty face...” (Waters 98). Over and over, Dr. Faraday’s narration provides us with the impression that he and other people around Caroline all

consider her looks to be mediocre, and this is often used to justify her lack of marriage so far.

The only romance that Caroline is given in the novel is with Dr. Faraday, who essentially takes advantage of her distress and coerces her into a relationship. The relationship is very unbalanced, with Dr. Faraday clearly having more interest in the romance than Caroline. Faraday is actually relentless in his pursuits, and constantly brings up the idea of marriage. Meanwhile, Caroline is often more occupied with caring for her ailing mother, which Faraday shows little sympathy toward. At the funeral for Caroline's mother, when Caroline is still grieving, Faraday continues to press the issue. He insists on a time frame for the wedding, pressuring her to a date six weeks from then; her reply is resigned and unenthusiastic (Waters 447). Unperturbed by her lack of interest, Faraday enters the "brightest" period of his life (Waters 447). Caroline, on the other hand, understandably grows more miserable after her mother's death. Faraday notes that "now that the first phase of grief had passed, her spirits had sunk a little; with no more letters to write, and no funeral arrangements absorbing her, she grew aimless, and listless" (Waters 448), and Faraday seems convinced that a wedding and honeymoon will cure her. Their relationship throughout the novel is filled with examples like this; Faraday continues to pressure Caroline, and her response is almost always lack of interest or enthusiasm. So this one sole romance that the reader sees for Caroline is characterized by depression, mourning, and lack of desire.

Eventually, toward the end of the novel, it emerges that Caroline only entered the relationship because she was unhappy, and needed an escape; she thought Faraday was as unhappy as she was, and that he also wished to escape (Waters 457). For this, Caroline is

set apart from the other female protagonists. She has spent her adult life being shunned in romance, but instead of settling for the romance offered by Dr. Faraday, she decides she is better off alone. She also tells him, "I'd just be swapping one set of duties for another. I'm tired of duties! I can't do it. I can't be a doctor's wife. I can't be anybody's wife. And most of all, I can't stay here" (Waters 458). By freeing herself from the obligation of longing for romance, and from wishing to escape her mold, Caroline is punished. The house, or whatever is in it, kills her. It seems that a lonely woman always seeking love and affection is an essential aspect of a haunted house, and by trying to break away from that role, the house decided Caroline was unnecessary and discarded her.

### **Chapter Three: An Investigation of Haunted People and Ambiguity**

In all three novels—*Turn of the Screw*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *The Little Stranger*—the reader is left with ambiguity about what actually took place during the haunting. These novels utilize various methods to achieve this: characters who are mentally unstable, narrators that are removed from the story, and so on. The purpose of these tools is to create confusion so that by the end of the novel, there are more questions than answers.

Because the existence of the supernatural is not a universal belief, there is often, if not almost always, a question of credibility regarding the haunting in a novel. At least one character is usually questioning whether or not ghosts even exist, let alone whether a ghost could be the culprit behind whatever strange happenings are taking place. The character offers alternative suggestions, insists there has to be a ‘reasonable explanation,’ or otherwise just tries to apply their concept of reality to the situation. But in some novels, like the three under scrutiny, the question of credibility is never resolved. There is no sweet relief for the characters or reader to know with absolute certainty that ghosts, or some other form of spirit have haunted the mansions, or even whether or not a human could be behind the problem. In *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Little Stranger*, the reader is not even given a glimpse of a physical representation of an entity. The characters seem to experience *something*, whether it’s objects moving around the house or noises of some kind, but in these two novels, no entity is actually witnessed, at least not by the narrators of the story.

These novels want their readers to constantly question whether a haunting is even taking place, or at least to what degree. Is there an actual supernatural disturbance, is it all

in the head of the characters, or is there some sort of combination at work? All three novels raise these questions in various ways: *The Turn of the Screw* is a framed narrative, with all the ghostly haunting being told through the reading of a manuscript; *The Haunting of Hill House* provides us with an unreliable protagonist of questionable mental stability; and *The Little Stranger* is told from the perspective of someone who never sees any of the haunting for himself and only learns of it from other characters who claim to have experienced it.

It seems as if this is a common set of questions to be raised in haunted house novels, at least as exemplified in these three texts. That in turn leads to another set of questions worth thinking about and exploring. What is at work when an author chooses ambiguity over explaining what the cause of a haunting is, or if a haunting is really taking place at all? Henry James himself seems to have wanted to explore this question intentionally in *The Turn of the Screw*, and seems to have believed that the best way to create anxiety in the readers was to allow their imagination and experiences to help fill in some of the gaps; the reader “must be then horrified by the ghosts of the tale but, in fact, the text must be ambiguous enough, so fear originates in the reader’s mind: ‘Make him *think* evil, make him think for himself.’ Terror rises thus from the ambiguity of the tale; that is to say, terror rises from uncertainty” (Gualberto Valverde 99). Ambiguity allows for a more personal experience, where the reader is allowed to insert a part of themselves into the text by supplementing their own anxieties into the gaps, and by doing this, the horror of the novel becomes more genuine and real for them because it is tailored to them.

The question of who is really haunted—the house or the people?—doesn't seem to be new in the world of gothic fiction discourse. In fact, it is safe to say this question is a characteristic of the genre, and one of the benefits of looking at a set of texts that span over the course of a wide range of time is that they are examples of an evolving theme. The question of where the real haunting lies has changed as the gothic genre has developed. *The Turn of the Screw* was written in the very late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but even before that, “a crucial feature of the new sensibility of the late eighteenth century was, quite literally, a growing sense of the ghostliness of other people,” so there was already a shift happening in the way readers and society viewed haunting (Castle 125). By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when *The Haunting of Hill House* was written, this shift was already pretty much finalized, and “we are used to the metaphor of the haunted consciousness—indeed hardly recognize it as metaphoric. Often enough, we speak colloquially of being haunted by memories or pursued by images of people inside our heads” (Castle 125). This movement consists of society becoming more willing and able to see people as possible mechanisms of haunting, as opposed to needing the building or inanimate object as the only source. We see this clearly in *The Turn of the Screw* in which we have a house that could be characterized as an innocent bystander or unwilling accomplice; the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel and the children, Miles and Flora, are the sole focus, and things like moving objects or odd sounds in the house are absent from the haunting. The change in focus, of where the haunting originates from, seems to correlate with changes in social structures:

“The belief that ghosts and specters are only products of imagination—that they come from within the mind itself—is in fact...a relatively recent notion, one that has emerged in a definitive form in Western Europe only over the past two hundred and fifty years. In earlier times popular thinking held that most

apparitions were supernatural in origin: messengers from an invisible world of spirits—either angels or demons in human guise, or, more frighteningly and atavistically, the wandering souls of the dead. After 1700, however, with the breakup of traditional communities, the growing challenge to religious orthodoxy, and the popularization of new scientific attitudes, a more skeptical and mechanistic view gradually came to prevail: that ghostly apparitions were “things of the mind”—figments, or phantasmata, produced by a disordered or overwrought brain.” (Castle 170)

So for whatever reasons, related to evolving religious or scientific understandings or something else, one of the aspects of society that changed over time was that people were starting to think of themselves as influencers of the supernatural. And it suggests that that influence is not intentional, and is actually almost due to a sickness of the mind, since it is associated with minds that are ‘disordered’ or ‘overwrought.’ Overall, it appears to go hand in hand with humans beginning to realize what their minds were capable of, and that not all their capabilities were beneficial.

This new mentality and treatment of ghosts also comes deeply into play with characters who may be haunted by their pasts and are therefore more susceptible to being affected by the haunting of the house—the minds who are ‘disordered’ or ‘overwrought.’ Sometimes, it is “hard to establish who is being haunted and who is doing the haunting” because the characters who are haunted become so woven in with the house’s supernatural experiences (Cavallaro 72). The effect of this is essentially that the lines of the haunting become blurred for the reader as well as the characters. It becomes more difficult to say whether it is the house or the people who have caused a manifestation or a set of paranormal activities, and more difficult to establish what is real or imagined. The minds of characters are susceptible to influence from their imaginations as well, and show that they are “filled with ghostly shapes and images, that we ‘see’ figures and scenes in our minds, that we are ‘haunted’ by our thoughts, that our thoughts can, as it

were, materialize before us, like phantoms, in moments of hallucination, waking dream, or reverie” (Castle 143). So essentially, many of the haunting experiences that readers are exposed to could, at least in part or combination, be a product of imagination due to experiences, fears, and beliefs brought forth by the characters.

### **Haunted People**

The idea of people as haunted appears in all three novels, in varying degrees. This is most obviously occurring in *The Haunting of Hill House*, where readers are able to witness a decline in Eleanor’s mental state. Eleanor was already in a vulnerable state of mind when she arrived at Hill House. The vast majority of her adult life revolved around the care of her mother, her relationship with her sister is toxic, and she doesn’t seem to have any friends. In Hill House, she can find things that fill the voids in her life—she finds friends, freedom, and adventure, all previously absent for her. “The horror in the novel lies largely in the space between Eleanor’s mind and the external world (and the people in it) rather than in the direct appearance of horrific things,” and that space between seems to be a space inside her self and identity, created by years of restriction (Ashton 269). But it’s almost as if there was not enough “Eleanor” left in her person, and the voids that the house fill begin to outweigh what is left of her. Her mental stability drastically declines as this happens, and with it, the reader can start to question her sanity. At the novel’s climax, Eleanor is seeing, hearing, and feeling things that nobody else can. She fancies herself to be so aware of the rhythms of the house, and she “could even hear, with her new awareness of the house, the dust drifting gently in the attics, the wood



aging” (Jackson 223). While she is pondering this new “awareness,” the characters around her mill about as if nothing has changed.

Soon after this, she seems to break with her previous sense of reality completely, and goes on a midnight run around the house, leading her companions in a wild chase. But in the early stages of this scene, while she is still waking up her companions by more or less taking on the actions of the haunting herself, she thinks something extremely worth noting: “Poor house, Eleanor thought, I had forgotten Eleanor...” (Jackson 229). The end of this statement is fascinating. If Eleanor has forgotten Eleanor, what does that say about her mental state? The part of her now consumed with the identity she created at this house is what is in control, but this identity, like Hill House itself, is “not sane” (Jackson 246). There are many paranormal experiences in this novel that are witnessed by more than just Eleanor, so we cannot reasonably hold her sanity to account for everything that happens. And yet, knowing that she does go insane, it starts to create a cloud of uncertainty around any scene in which Eleanor is alone, because it becomes impossible to say if it is happening in her head because as a person she is insane, or if it is indeed a paranormal experience that has possessed her. It is also, of course, worth thinking about this in terms of Eleanor’s final living moments. As she takes her own life by driving into a tree, she “thought clearly, *Why* am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don’t they stop me?” (Jackson 246). It’s important to note that the novel tells us she thought this “clearly.” If the house truly had some sort of paranormal possession over her, this might be a signal that that control has been lifted. But Eleanor’s sanity and grasp on reality seems to fluctuate, and she simply could have been experiencing a temporary moment of clarity. Either way, it is an eerie reminder that Eleanor, to some degree and for at least

some part of the novel, is not in control of what is happening to herself. And if she is not in control, it is hard to say whether her experiences were real or a figment of her imagination.

In a previous chapter, I discussed the way in which Eleanor and Hill House seem to intertwine. Eleanor is certainly having some sort of mental crisis, but it appears as if the house, a sentient being in its own right, is having a large influence on her. While it is filling the aforementioned voids in her life, and affecting her new sense of identity, it also seems to be combining her identity with its own. Eleanor begins to think and act in ways that suggest she is being fused with the house, by suddenly being able to hear, see, feel, and smell things that happen. She knows that “a little eddy of wind gathered itself and swept along the floor, carrying dust” and “in the library the iron stairway swayed” (Jackson 242). She also appears to be in tune with the house’s desires, noting “Hill House watched, arrogant and patient” (Jackson 242). Instances such as these demonstrate Eleanor’s growing inability to separate herself from Hill House. This provides interesting complications for the narrative, namely because this relationship is never fully explained. The novel never tells the reader how exactly this bond is possible, or what becomes of it. The very end of the novel, after Eleanor has died, notes that “whatever walked there, walked alone” (Jackson 246), despite Eleanor seeming to believe that she is joined with house.

Eleanor is not the narrator of the novel, and so we cannot accuse *The Haunting of Hill House* of having an unreliable narrator. But the state of Eleanor’s sanity invites the reader and gives permission to question any moment in which they are given insight into Eleanor’s thoughts. Any time the narrative tells the reader what Eleanor is thinking, or

demonstrates her thought process, the novel allows the audience to question the reliability of the information that Eleanor believes to be true. In addition to this, her odd relationship with the house is never fully explained. Although we cannot accuse the narration of being unreliable due to it being third person, the reader is still left with many questions and few answers about what exactly took place at Hill House, due to the fact that so little is explained. The novel does not allow us to know what the exact nature of Eleanor's relationship to the house is, and especially does not know to what degree the house is affecting what Eleanor perceives. And by the very end, it is still completely unclear what has become of Eleanor after her death, and if she is still a part of the house.

There are other characters as well who raise a question of credibility based on their possible insanity. While it is possible to make a case that any of the three members of the Ayres family in *The Little Stranger* are haunted by a crumbling past and a failing future, it is probably easiest to examine Roderick, since his sanity seems to fluctuate the most. Roderick is the first of the family to start experiencing things that he cannot explain, and although it takes him some time to confess what has happened, his distress becomes obvious to everyone around him. After Roderick tells Dr. Faraday about a possible haunting experience, Faraday immediately decides that Roderick must be going mad. And this is a reaction that Faraday continues to have throughout the novel toward anyone who mentions the supernatural to him. But in Roderick's case, it certainly seems at first that this might be an explanation that Faraday is *forcing* upon Roderick as well as the readers. However, as the novel continues, it is even harder to discern. Roderick's mental state continues to decline throughout the novel, and eventually he is committed to an upscale institution, where if anything, he appears to worsen, with random fits of rage

and a complete refusal to engage in thought about Hundreds Hall. As the reader nears the end of the novel, it becomes more and more clear that Roderick has experienced some sort of mental break. But as that becomes easier to acknowledge, it also begs the question of how early this break began, and if we can believe Roderick's accounts of the supernatural earlier in the novel.

It's also not always so extreme a case as with Eleanor and Roderick; there isn't always a question of a full collapse in sanity. In *The Little Stranger* in particular, we also see something much more common affecting the members of the house: grief. Many of the occurrences of the house happen in relation to tragic death, which is fitting if it can be believed that the house is haunted by the eldest sibling, Susan, who died tragically at a young age. One of the best examples of this actually comes with the family's dog, who is euthanized as a result of his biting a child who had been visiting the house. After the dog has passed, the members of the house recount instances where they thought the dog was still in the house. The matron of the family, Mrs. Ayres, was "quite convinced that she could hear the dog pattering about upstairs" and although it turned out to actually be something as mundane as dripping water, it's still an important moment that suggests some of the things that the family hears might be due to their minds projecting their heavier emotions (Waters 135).

### **Narrative Techniques**

In addition to these characters that are possibly experiencing shifts in sanity, these texts also use various narration techniques to achieve similar goals, which are essentially to raise questions about how real the paranormal experiences really are. The framing

technique of *The Turn of the Screw* is very interesting, particularly in the way that it exists in the beginning of the novel, but not the end. The novel opens with a group of friends exchanging stories, one of which comes from a man named Douglas, who provides a manuscript that later becomes the rest of the novel. This manuscript is, “A woman’s. She has been dead these twenty years. She sent me the pages in question before she died” (James 2). Everything the reader knows about the story that follows comes at the word of either Douglas or this woman. There really isn’t that much information about her, except for a few background pieces of information provided by Douglas, and whatever we might learn from her manuscript. This novel is creating layers between the story and the reader that cause a sort of fogginess, making it so the reader is not fully immersed in the haunting so much as just a distant spectator. It may seem a stretch, but we cannot prove, beyond all doubt, that the entire story is not a fabrication. It may all simply be a lie told by this Douglas, or if this woman really existed, there’s no way to know with absolute certainty how reliable she was. She might have woven her story purely from fantasy, or it could have all been hallucinations. In any case, she’s conveniently been departed for two decades, and so is not around to speak for herself about the story’s accuracy. The issue is further complicated by the fact that the frame narrative does not resume after this woman’s manuscript has ended. It would have been interesting to see if Douglas’s companions accepted this story as truth, or if they too had questions.

Even if it’s possible to move past the problems raised by the frame narrative structure and focus solely on the content of the manuscript, and the description of events as told by the unnamed governess, there are still questions to be raised about the

governess's reliability. It is not new in scholarship to suggest that the governess might be unreliable, or perhaps even insane. But setting aside the possibility that she could be grouped with the likes of Eleanor and Roderick on the slippery slope of sanity, there are many other reasons to doubt her version of events. The entire story reads as modified—as in the governess, in her telling of the events that took place at Bly, has painted the facts differently from what actually may have occurred. In her manuscript, she paints herself as a sort of glorified detective, trying to get to the bottom of the spooky mystery. And she's a very good detective—*too* good, in fact. On many occasions throughout the novel, the governess simply knows too much; she knows things she could not know unless she were somehow capable of reading minds or seeing the future. For example, toward the end of the novel, one of the children in her charge has mysteriously vanished. The governess announces that the child must be outside, and must be with one of the ghosts, and the other child must certainly be with the other ghost (James 66). Yet she has no real evidence for these claims, and miraculously she finds the girl just where she predicted. On several occasions she makes assumptions that the children can see the ghosts and are hiding this from her, but again, she has no real proof of this and it is all 'intuition.'

Another prime example is when the governess encounters the ghost of Peter Quint for the second time, and knows with surety that he was not looking for her. "He was looking for little Miles.' A portentous clearness now possessed me. 'That's whom he was looking for'" (James 25). She comes to this conclusion despite the fact that the ghost of Peter Quint said nothing to her, and she was alone when she saw him. The governess might very well be an intuitive person, but it becomes dangerous when she takes her intuitions

and operates as though they are fact. Examples like these mentioned here are littered consistently throughout the novel.

The overall effect of this is that the governess has created herself as the hero of her story, as someone who is capable of knowing the truth, even if she cannot use it to save the children. It's possible that the governess has created this elaborate version of the story to paint herself in a better light because she did something wrong, or maybe even harmed the children. Even if this is not the case, and even if there were really ghosts at Bly that were haunting the children, there is no way to say for sure exactly what took place. And therefore "the reader is scared by the *possibility* that ghosts might be haunting Bly and disturbing the two innocent children whom the governess must protect. The true cause of terror is then *suspicion*" (Gualberto Valverde 99). But possibility and suspicion are very intangible things, and easily created. It certainly lends to the idea that none of the governess's story or information is very concrete.

The story of *The Little Stranger* is told from the perspective of Dr. Faraday, a character who does not even regularly inhabit the haunted house in question. The novel "draws its greatest narrative force from the fundamental indeterminacy of events and the invisibility of the agents of disruption" (Heilmann 42), and it thrives on this ambiguity by establishing a narrator who is uninvolved with any of the haunting experiences taking place at Hundreds Hall. He is simply an outsider who occasionally gets to look in, and every instance of a weird occurrence or possible haunting is experienced solely by the occupants of the house. Therefore, everything that Dr. Faraday knows about Hundreds Hall and its possible haunting comes from secondhand stories passed onto him from the Ayres family members or their live-in maid, Betty. On some occasions, his sources of

information come from even further along the grapevine, as he refers to hearing stories from his patients, who have heard it from friends and so on. In fact, Dr. Faraday often has long bouts of absence from the house, either due to arguments with the Ayres family members or because his friendship with them is not always particularly close. In one sequence, while Caroline Ayres and her mother are at Hundreds Hall experienced strange sounds and writings on the wall, Dr. Faraday is “altogether away for almost two weeks” (Waters 301). Everything that follows from this announcement is supposedly recounted to him after his return, and although the account is told in vivid enough detail that the reader might forget the novel is in Dr. Faraday’s perspective, it is still passed through word of mouth after the events have already taken place. In fact, the house almost appears to be actively avoiding him. As Caroline Ayres says to him, “Whenever you go away, something happens here” (330). If there is indeed a haunting taking place, whatever is haunting the house is excluding Dr. Faraday with intent.

To top it off, Dr. Faraday is the aforementioned type of character to always be trying to rationalize away any strange behavior that could be considered supernatural, and he clearly does not believe there is actually a ghost or other entity. When the youngest member of the family, Roderick, tries to confess his supernatural experiences, Dr. Faraday concludes that Roderick is mentally ill (which is complicated by the fact that over time, Roderick does indeed seem to have less of a grip on his sanity). Faraday has a very low tolerance for any mention of the supernatural, and on the many occasions a character tries to bring something odd to his attention, he imposes his beliefs rather bullishly by insulting or putting down anyone who points to the supernatural. He says things such as, “This is nonsense. You know it is. It’s a fairytale!”, and to this particular



statement, Caroline replies, “But you don’t live here. You don’t know” (Waters 374).

This is a case of the novel itself raising a very good point: Faraday is removed from the haunting, and so he cannot possibly be the best source for information on what is going on. And yet, he is the perspective we are dealt.

It doesn’t help that Dr. Faraday is a very unhappy person, who projects his emotions and opinions onto the other characters, as he projected his need for a non-paranormal explanation onto Roderick.

“Faraday is the first-person narrator of the novel and his point of view shapes the narrative and the information it provides. Well-mannered, rational and nice, Faraday, however, gradually reveals some of his darker emotions: anger and bitterness connected with his lower social position, disappointment with his life spent on hard work, the feeling of failure of his dreams, and the occasional hatred and envy of his neighbours.” (Klonowska 176)

This adds even more layers of complication over the information that the reader is given. Since Faraday is our narrator, everything about him as a person helps to shape the novel, especially as it is told in his first person point of view. It is also possible to draw connections between Faraday’s more unhappy moments of the novel and what happens with the haunting. It’s possible that his influence on the haunting is great than what is visible on the surface, with him never being present.

“Interestingly, the dramatic visitations of the house and their disastrous results usually succeed episodes particularly unpleasant for Faraday: his feeling of being a second-class acquaintance during the party, his anger at Roderick’s insults during the official dinner, or the rejection of his advances by Caroline. The fictional Faraday is constructed as a character too polite to express his anger and outrage openly; instead, his accumulated and suppressed hatred resurfaces within the narrative as a lethal energy which, through haunting and ghosts, wreaks havoc within the Ayreses house.” (Klonowska 176)

It’s possible that the house may very well be feeding off of Faraday’s suppressed anger and negative emotions. But it also might simply be that he is stirring up problems for the

Ayres family by wreaking havoc on their emotions as well, or because they are coincidentally experiencing something similar. He was indeed angry at Roderick at the dinner, but Roderick got extremely angry in return. Faraday was feeling like a second-class citizen, but the Ayres family was feeling embarrassed by their friends seeing their decline in wealth and status. And while he was feeling angry about the rejections from Caroline, Caroline had been suffering with feelings of being unwanted because of her 'plain' looks for years. So while Faraday may have some sort of influence, it seems more likely that he is simply very good at riling the Ayres family up, or is just coincidentally experiencing similar emotions.

To further complicate things, Dr. Faraday has a very odd relationship with Hundreds Hall, which is as complex as his relationship with the people. The novel opens with the line, "I first saw Hundreds Hall when I was ten years old," and is an account of his earliest memory of the house when he was a child (Waters 1). It's nearly thirty years later when he revisits, but he still has a romantic nostalgia about the house and its former glory. Its crumbling, decaying quality is a source of consistent stress for him. The thought of it being fully abandoned and deserted is almost more than he can bear. He clings to the house far harder than the actual family, to the point where after Caroline ends her relationship with him, Faraday still attempts to prevent her from selling the house. Overall, it becomes clear over the course of the novel that Faraday had a fantasy of marrying Caroline so that he could occupy the house of his desires, and the destruction of this fantasy, this tear between him and Hundreds Hall, is a far bigger loss to him than any of the Ayres members, or indeed than any of the Ayres family was to him. It might be a sweet relief to him at the end of the novel, when the family falls away and he's able to

visit the empty home. And as the novel concludes, “Faraday and the house stand alone, deserted, the true lovers from the beginning to the end of the story” (Braid 138). If Faraday and the house are indeed the real relationship of the novel, the “true lovers,” then it puts an additional layer of complication on his narration. Hundreds Hall is a building he cannot stand to see tarnished, so it’s entirely possible that Faraday becomes an unreliable narrator through this lens. He might be refusing to accept that the house is haunted because he cannot stand to think poorly of it. Perhaps he is subconsciously trying to rid the house of those he thinks are responsible for its downfall, and that is why he has Roderick committed to an institution. At the very least, he hopes to someday become master of the house by marrying Caroline, and this overshadows almost everything else. The reader very well may be blocked out of the haunting more than they realize because it is not Faraday’s primary focus. And his love for the house and desire to protect it may affect the information he is giving us.

Overall, the effect of having Dr. Faraday as our narrator means that the reader is experiencing all the haunting through the perspective of someone who has never himself seen the occurrences firsthand. With the reader so far removed from the haunting of Hundreds Hall, all of the information is filtered and therefore questionable. Especially since along the whole journey, Faraday himself is casting doubt and trying to rationalize away any strange behavior. He has a few moments where he seems to waver in his surety—especially at the end, when he consistently returns to Hundreds Hall after it has been abandoned, in hopes that he “will see what Caroline saw, and recognize it, as she did” (Waters 510). But these moments in which Faraday becomes unsure of his convictions, even if only slightly, only lend to the overall idea that despite his bluster, the

narrator of the story does not *really* know what is going on, and therefore neither can the reader.

## Conclusion

### **Houses Have Drastically Evolved**

The haunted house, as seen through the views of *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *The Little Stranger*, has undergone several changes over the years as the haunted house novel as evolved. The most common architecture that seems to appear is Victorian style, and the complicated societal relationship with these homes has turned them into symbols of fear and disgust. While they were once emblems of wealth and class, society began to think of Victorian homes as manifestations of social divide that symbolized an era of extreme poverty juxtaposed with obscene wealth. This style of architecture fell out of favor in the 1930s and 1940s, and the homes were often abandoned and left to rot, creating the haunted house archetype that we see today. These houses were also places of concentrated emotion, where several generations of people had lived and died. And that death was another interesting part of Victorian culture, because the deceased were usually brought home for mourning; this lead to the association with Victorian homes as places of death.

The shift in opinion toward Victorian homes is evidenced in the three novels. The earliest novel, *The Turn of the Screw*, features a home that was Victorian, but the house was of and for the time. The novel does not treat it as evil, or consider it to be a primary contributor to the haunting. James was simply writing about a house of his own era, before connotations toward the architecture had really become negative. This evolved over time, and in the span of decades separating this novel with *The Haunting of Hill House*, public opinion had changed. Hill House was still Victorian, but it was now thought of as evil and vile. But the unnatural creation of Hill House had partially led to its

evil nature; it was intentionally designed to be strange and different, so although the house was Victorian, it seemed to be odd even by Victorian standards. This is also a novel where we see the house as a cognitive being, with direct influence over the haunting, which is an ability that Bly lacked. Hundreds Hall of *The Little Stranger* was a little different: the novel does not take place in The United States, so the historical background is not the same. However, the house is very similar. The novel takes place in the 1940s, but the house is far older, and like Victorian houses in America, it was a place where several generations had come and gone. And as with Victorian homes as haunted houses, Hundreds Hall was a home that had degraded over time and now was an ugly, rotting semblance of its former self.

These novels showcase a change in society's opinions toward architecture, and due to this change, the haunted house evolved over the years into a place of disrepair and isolation. Haunted houses became associated with archaic practices like mourning the dead within its walls. They were places where people had gone to mourn, fear, live, and die. By creating this atmosphere, they were seen as places where ghosts might also stain the building, in the same way as emotion. Ghosts were associated with powerful surges in emotion and violence, something often overlapping with architecture. The overall effect of this is that haunted houses became known to modern readers as old, archaic buildings where memories, and the ghosts spawned from them, refused to fade.

### **The Archetypical Woman of the Haunted House**

These three novels demonstrate a trend in gothic fiction: female leads at the center of a haunting. All three novels—*The Turn of the Screw*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and

*The Little Stranger*—feature a female protagonist, even if their narration does not always center on these characters. In addition, all three women have several similarities: they are unlucky in love, perhaps even downright deprived; they have stressful family relationships; they are somehow trapped; and their careers are non-existent or sometimes unfulfilling. This type of female protagonist has managed to span over a century between these three novels.

Women are historically thought to be irrational and overemotional, characterized by their moodiness and unlucky anatomy, as well as their sexuality. In the time in which Henry James was writing *The Turn of the Screw*, hysteria as a condition was very much on the minds of the medical community, and thrived as a diagnosis for several years after. Women with hysteria were believed to be sexually deprived, leading to a tendency for trouble-making and exaggerated moods. Although not as common in the 1940s and 1950s when *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Little Stranger* took place, hysteria was still a possible diagnosis and very much discussed in terms of women's issues. It wasn't until 1980 that the diagnosis was officially struck down. But during this span in which it was a medical paradigm, women continued to be treated as overemotional beings. In the realm of gothic, this is crucial information, as haunting is very closely tied to emotional wellness, as I will discuss more in the next chapter.

In my findings, I realized that the three women have quite a lot in common. They are all unmarried and childless, all have sacrificed some aspect of their life and time, and all lacked true independence. These realizations drew me to the likes of Betty Friedan, who in her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, sought to articulate the issues of satisfaction and identity that many women of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were suffering from.

Friedan's main focus seemed to be on how women married young and immediately began having children because that is the ideal of femininity that society imposed on them, and the unnamed governess, Eleanor, and Caroline—the three primary female characters of the three novels—seem to be failed attempts at this model, since they are unmarried and have yet to have children. They are part of a culture that was likely telling them that they were failures as women. But like the married women described in Friedan's book, these three women still seem to experience the same crises. Their lives are unsatisfactory, providing them with little opportunity for independent growth, careers, or identity. And although they do not have husbands and children, they all have at least one person in their lives who they have been expected to care for and tend to.

Overall, there was a lot of discussion through these decades on what it took to keep women happy, and the truth was that they often weren't. The three female protagonists of these novels were usually miserable and unsatisfied, and these complicated emotions seem to have been a toxic combination when a haunted house was added to the equation. The novels are therefore very much stories of women who are deprived of identity and joy, and their sadness is what feeds into the paranormal.

### **Ambiguity as a Necessity**

A prominent aspect of these three texts has been their reliance on ambiguity. None of these novels are willing to reveal all of their secrets, and usually the reader is left without all of the pieces to the puzzle. For *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Little Stranger*, much of their process for ambiguity relied on narrative technique. The governess of Bly was long since dead by the start of the novel, and the novel's frame narrative as well as



the scarce information given on the governess creates vagueness regarding the story's credibility. It becomes impossible to say for sure just what the governess's motivations are and if her story can be believed in any way. For the latter novel, the entire story is given through the perspective of a skeptical family doctor, Faraday, who is far enough removed from Hundreds Hall that he does not actually witness any of the ghostly haunting. *The Little Stranger* also makes use of a second technique, which is to source information through a family who has possible issues of insanity. The initial haunting allegedly comes to light with Roderick, a character who then apparently goes insane. But the novel and Dr. Faraday raise the question of if Roderick actually saw something paranormal, or if he was hallucinating. Roderick was a war veteran with a troubled life, and it's not a far stretch to assume the haunting was all in his mind.

Over the course of several decades, society began to believe in the possibility of a haunted person. Roderick was haunted by his past as well as his failing present and future, and in the novel the reader sees him experience some sort of mental break. His entire family was part of a dying social class, and it's entirely possible that the source of the haunting was simply their slipping hold on reality. Due to the novel being narrated by a character outside of the family, who is never at the house when the supposed haunting is taking place, the reader cannot be exactly sure of what happens at Hundreds Hall. In the case of *The Haunting of Hill House*, the novel provides a protagonist who is also losing their sanity. In Eleanor's case, her sanity is already unstable when she arrives at Hill House, and it steadily declines over the course of the novel. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Eleanor is also experiencing an odd, unique relationship with the house that is affecting her mental health. These are all cases that show a shift in focus,

from a haunted house full of specters to haunted *people* who are plagued by emotions, hallucinations, and their imaginations.

These novels demonstrate a continued reliance on ambiguity in the way gothic narrative functions. By making the reader question pieces of the haunting—through the use of narrative technique, unreliable characters, and so on—the novels create mysteries that are never solved and never fully explained. Readers of *The Turn of the Screw* will never be fully certain what happened at Bly, and if the ghosts truly existed or were a figment of a trouble governess's imagination. *The Haunting of Hill House* will never reveal the exact nature of the house, and its exact capabilities, and what was happening to Eleanor's mind and sanity as the novel progressed. Did the house really want her to be part of it, or did it simply use her? There's no clear answer. And there is no way to be certain if a ghost really did exist in Hundreds Hall, or if *The Little Stranger* was simply about the mental decline of a formerly elite family. By raising questions, and then refusing to answer them, the novels are denying their readers closure, and creating lasting feelings of confusion and discomfort.

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