Housewife Horror: Reconciling Contrasting Depictions of the Domestic in the Works of Shirley Jackson

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Abstract

Shirley Jackson is most known for her haunting fiction, but her memoir works, which brought her the most success in her lifetime, are often overlooked due to their status as "housewife humour" books. Readers often find it difficult to reconcile these lighthearted family memoirs with the uncanny fiction that Jackson's name has been associated with in the years since her death. I argue, however, that these memoir works portray a more sinister home beneath their surface, and that Jackson's fiction and memoir works are much more similar than they first appear. My study analyses Jackson's two memoirs, *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons*, along with her final three fiction novels, *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, in order to reconcile the two seemingly contrasting depictions of the home and argue that the home in her warm memoirs and the home in her haunting fiction is, in fact, one and the same. In order to do this, I read Jackson's work against their genre — reading her memoirs for horror, and her fiction for the warm, affectionate sentiment expressed towards the domestic in her memoirs. I conclude that Jackson's refusal to adhere to categorization of any kind allows her to create an honest depiction of the home as a place of simultaneous comfort and terror.

Précis

Shirley Jackson est meilleur connu pour ses romans d'horreur, mais ses mémoires, qui ont l'apporté le plus de succès pendant sa vie, sont souvent négligés à cause d'être des livres pour les femmes. Les lecteurs de Jackson souvent trouvent que c'est difficile à réconcilier ces mémoires humoristiques avec la fiction d'horreur que Jackson est souvent associé avec. Cependant, je soutiens que ces mémoires représentent une sphère domestique plus sinistre qu'il paraît, et que les mémoires at les romans d'horreur de Jackson sont beaucoup plus similaires que les lecteurs pensent. Ma thèse analyse les deux mémoires de Jackson, *Life Among the Savages* et *Raising Demons*, ainsi que ses troix derniers romans d'horreur, *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, et *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, avec l'objectif de reconcilier leurs representations de la sphère domestique et soutenir que la maison dans ses mémoires et ses romans d'horreur est la même. Pour faire cela, j'analyse les travaux littéraires de Jackson contre leurs genres — alors, je trouve les aspects d'horreur dans ses mémoires, et de l'affection dans ses romans d'horreur. Je conclus que, en refusant d'adhérer à aucune categorisation, Jackson est capable de représenter une sphère domestique capable de comfort et de terreur au même temps.

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Introduction

Shirley Jackson is heralded as a master of horror — Stephen King writes in *Danse Macabre* that "there are few if any descriptive passages in the English language that are any finer than" *The Haunting of Hill House*'s introductory paragraph (267), and "The Lottery" is an often-used example of the horrific twist in the short story. Jackson's fiction often centres the home and frequently reveals the terrors that lurk beneath the surface of what is meant to be a warm and comforting space. Yet Jackson's ability to fashion the home into a breeding ground for terror, often acting with its own agency, contrasts starkly with her earlier works: her two memoirs, *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons*, which detail her warm, if comically chaotic, domestic life as a housewife and mother to four children. Though these two genres seem to stand at odds with each other, they are two sides of Jackson's perception of the home. The reality of Jackson's domestic lies somewhere in the middle; the home is a place of both comfort and terror, and in fact this dialectic appears across her body of work — even in the genres ostensibly dedicated to one side or the other.

In *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, Ruth Franklin notes this contrast and attempts to reconcile these two seemingly conflicting depictions of the home: "How could she simultaneously write the dark, suspenseful fiction that would define her legacy … and the warm, funny household memoirs that brought her fame and acclaim in the 1950s but have largely been forgotten since?" (Franklin 304). Jackson's husband, Stanley Hyman, said upon her death: "Shirley Jackson wrote in a variety of forms and styles because she was, like everyone else, a complex human being, confronting the world in many different roles and moods" (Franklin 498). Jackson's domestic is complex because her experience of it, just like everyone else's, is multifaceted. My thesis will explore Jackson's domestic and how it captures a multivalence to

the home not found in other works that centre the home. This will begin with a foundational outline of theory important to this analysis; this includes theory of the uncanny, horror, comedy, and the axis upon which they all operate — category violation — in addition to theory of space and domesticity. Following this chapter are readings of Jackson's works against their grain. This entails reading Jackson's horror works for what I will refer to as "homeliness," as well as comedic aspects, and reading her two warm memoirs for aspects of horror. This section will focus on Jackson's two memoirs as well as her final three novels: *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. I have chosen to focus on these three novels partly in order to preserve the scope of this study — an analysis of all of Jackson's work would require much more space — as well as because these three novels feature the home most predominantly. Their placement in relation to each other, without any other works published in their genre by Jackson during their four-year span, also makes tracing a timeline of the evolution of Jackson's fiction an easier task. This analysis will allow me to break down the seemingly rigid barrier between these two depictions of the home, forming an understanding of how these two sides to Jackson's home make up a single complex image of the domestic.

A possible explanation for Jackson's seemingly drastically different depictions of the home is that her "housewife humour" memoirs sold much better, and writing a happy depiction of the home would be more profitable than an unsettling domestic horror. While this may likely have been a factor, as Jackson was often the predominant breadwinner of her family (her husband, Stanley Hyman, was a struggling academic), her memoirs are not a mask for a harboured hatred of the domestic, as one might think were they to interpret Jackson's horror novels as a true depiction of her view of the home. Neither of Jackson's two genres consists of a "true" perception of the home. This is evidenced, I believe, by Jackson's own complex

relationship to the domestic sphere. While Sarah Hyman, Jackson's daughter, describes her mother's pride in being a housewife, Jackson often adopts a self-deprecating tone in her memoirs when detailing her duties as a housewife. This may indicate that while Jackson strove to be the ideal American housewife of the midcentury, she occasionally fell short in her own eyes. Though Jackson was certainly not the "perfect" American housewife, her memoirs are cozy depictions of her home life; while she describes many moments of frustration, the books are peppered with heartwarming familial scenes, such as the Christmas gathering depicted near the end of *Raising Demons*, in which the Jackson-Hymans all stand around the tree after decorating it. Ruth Franklin quotes a review from Jean Campbell Jones, who views Jackson's memoir works as a stop below her level: "somehow one expects more of Miss Jackson, who has after all, in her pre-Little League days, done some memorable short stories" (qted in Franklin 369). To reduce Jackson's genuine (albeit embellished), warm accounts of her home life to a cheap sell to vapid housewives, however, is to do these works a disservice. *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons* detail a rich, complex domestic life that reveals Jackson's love for her home life, despite its challenges. I will be treating these works with equal consideration to Jackson's more critically acclaimed works of fiction, as I believe they are just as revealing of Jackson's philosophy of the domestic — and in fact prompt a partial rereading of her horror fiction.

Chapter 1

An exploration of Jackson's domestic will require an understanding of the concepts of "uncanny" and "comedy," as well as definitions of "horror" and basic theories of the domestic. Definitions of the uncanny will be drawn from Freud's "The Uncanny" as well as Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny*, while definitions of comedy will be influenced by Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai's edited issue of *Critical Inquiry*, which focuses on comedy theory. While Jackson's fiction is broadly defined as "horror" fiction, this kind of horror can be described with a more specific term — that of the uncanny. The uncanny constitutes a type of horror meant to unsettle rather than terrify, and has significant ties to the home — the atmosphere which is crucial to all of the works discussed in this study. This first chapter will establish definitions of both comedy and the uncanny, and examine how the two interact. These interactions are largely based on the common theme of category violation, upon which both comedy and the uncanny depend. This analysis will allow for an understanding of how Jackson is capable of writing works that so closely walk the border between these seemingly opposing characteristics.

Todd McGowan emphasizes the role of opposing characteristics in comic effects *in Only a Joke Can Save Us: A Theory of Comedy*:

> Almost every theory of comedy includes an acknowledgment of a confrontation occurring between disparate elements. In a comedy, two elements that seem unrelated to each other become necessarily connected, and the unlikely nature of this connection produces the comic effect. G. W. F. Hegel contends, for example, that comedy emerges with the conjunction of nonsense and self- assurance. He states, "What is comical . . . is a personality or subject who makes his own actions contradictory and so brings them to nothing, while remaining tranquil and self- assured in the process." The comic effect

> emerges out of the encounter between an ordered personality and the chaos that this personality produces. Though other theorists place the emphasis elsewhere, they follow Hegel in their understanding of the fundamental dynamic at work— the act of connecting what appears to be disparate. (McGowan 5)

This "fundamental dynamic" — connecting two seemingly opposing concepts — is central to this project. My thesis will engage in an act of synthesis, which unites the seemingly opposing genres that Jackson's works are written in. This will reveal that a reading of both Jackson's novels and Jackson's memoirs forms a more complete vision of the home as portrayed and experienced by Jackson. In reading just one or the other, it is easy for a reader to assume that either her memoirs or her novels represent her "true" perception of the home — their opposite representing some falsified perception in order to fit genre requirements, or make the book more marketable towards certain audiences. My thesis will show, however, that one can only understand Jackson's experience of the domestic as a complex one of both comfort and terror by reading both her "positive" and "negative" depictions of the home — which, as my reading will reveal, cannot be reduced to simply positive or negative depictions at all.

Robert Pfaller discusses the fine line between the comic and the uncanny in "The Familiar Unknown, the Uncanny, the Comic," noting that the two are governed by many of the same principles — namely, "the *occurrence of symbolic causality*, *success*, *repetition*, and *double*" (Pfaller 202, emphasis author's). In "The Uncanny," Freud explains that the uncanny is experienced when the barriers between signifier and signified become unclear; the uncanny is characterized by "when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes" (Freud 606). Similarly, Pfaller

remarks that the comic and the uncanny are both marked by "the rule 'fun turns deadly serious,' or 'representation turns into what is represented'" (203). Comedy can be uncanny when experienced by others, and vice versa; "What is comic for us, because it includes an illusion to which we do not succumb, is uncanny for others who are unprotected and naïve" (Pfaller 209). This precarious balance between the comic and the uncanny means that Jackson's seemingly opposing works are not as contradictory as they may seem at first — they are rather situated on opposite sides of the boundary between comic and uncanny, and subject to movement depending on how they are read. The works analyzed in this study oscillate between a triangle of the comic, the uncanny, and the homely, containing varying levels of each. Reading Jackson's memoirs for horror — and her horror novels for homeliness and comedy — reveals how closely linked these concepts are. *The Sundial*, for example, contains many aspects of comedy and horror, but virtually no homeliness. *The Haunting of Hill House*, however, has very few comedic aspects but contains many elements of both horror and homeliness. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, *Life Among the Savages*, and *Raising Demons* all contain elements of all three. My study will analyze Jackson's works according to this triad, revealing how these elements all bleed into one another as well as how Jackson's works can be placed along a spectrum according to their varying degrees of horror, homeliness, and comedy.

As noted by Pfaller, comedy and uncanny horror are both characterized by category violation. Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai observe this in "Comedy Has Issues": "Comedy's pleasure comes in part from its ability to dispel anxiety, as so many of its theoreticians have noted, but it doesn't simply do that … its action just as likely *produces* anxiety: risking transgression, flirting with displeasure, or just confusing things in a way that both intensifies and impedes the pleasure" (Berlant and Ngai 233, emphasis added). As Berlant and Ngai observe,

comedy is equally concerned with alleviating and producing anxiety, as both of these actions require category violation in order to produce the desired result. Category violation is at work in transgression, confusion, and eliciting displeasure; transgression violates the category of what is "appropriate," confusion violates the viewer's expectation that they will be presented with material that they can comprehend, and eliciting displeasure violates the viewer's expectation of enjoyable material. Anxiety-inducing comedy can be found in situations that are funny to watch, but one wouldn't want to find themselves in — moments that cause secondhand embarrassment, for example. The adoption of a self-deprecating tone in *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons* allows Jackson to harness the effects of anxiety-inducing comedy and category violation. Jackson herself criticizes her own abilities as a housewife and mother, which allows her audience to laugh at them in turn. During an era in which women were expected to be capable homemakers and little else, Jackson transforms something that would normally be frowned upon — an incapable housewife — and creates a character that audiences are encouraged to laugh at by experiencing her embarrassment secondhand. Jackson violates the category of "housewife," which produces a comedic effect.

In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noël Carroll emphasizes the importance of category violation in horror, explaining that human fascination with that which deviates from the norm is what draws us to forms of art and entertainment that intentionally scare us: "anomalies are also interesting. The very fact that they are anomalies fascinates us. Their deviation from the paradigms of our classificatory scheme captures our attention immediately … One wants to gaze upon the unusual, even when it is simultaneously repelling" (Carroll 188). Here, too, as in the uncanny, the notion of paradox is crucial. Horrific things are repulsive, but it is their deviation from a norm that causes us to continually gaze upon them, even if doing so causes a kind of

psychic damage. Horror is often caused by transgression and category violation, just as with comedy: "In her classic study *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas correlates reactions of impurity with the transgression or violation of schemes of cultural categorization … Things that are interstitial, that cross the boundaries of the deep categories of a culture's conceptual scheme, are impure" (Carroll 31-32). This impure, hybrid quality causes things to become horrifying. Because Jackson's work does not adhere to one genre — the qualities of one bleeding in to the other — it creates discomfort, its readers incapable of placing it in one category or the other.

Theories of spatiality are also crucial to a study of Jackson's treatment of the home. Gaston Bachelard praises the house as a space in which not only the body but also the mind can wander. For Bachelard, the home is a place of imagination, where one encounters the universe that lies beyond the home; Richard Kearney writes in his introduction to *The Poetics of Space* that "*The Poetics of Space* is about hide-and-seek places where the mind can go on holiday for a while and think about nothing — which means everything. Havens where the soul can pause, in silence, and free itself to dream. And let things be … Without such nooks and crannies to muse and mope, to linger and loiter, there is nowhere to begin anew. No place for rapt attention" (Bachelard xviii). For Bachelard the house is not only a place for living, but a place for thinking. The spaces that we inhabit influence the thoughts we have, and the house exerts an influence upon those that inhabit it. Bachelard additionally thinks of houses as having a memory, and cites Carl Jung's description of the mind as a house in order to emphasize this comparison:

> how can secret rooms, rooms that have disappeared, become abodes for an unforgettable past? … With the house image we are in possession of a veritable principle of psychological integration … On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house

> image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being. In order to give an idea of how complex is the task of the psychologist who studies the depths of the human soul, C. G. Jung asks his readers to consider the following comparison: "We have to describe and to explain a building the upper story of which was erected in the nineteenth century; the ground floor dates from the sixteenth century, and a careful examination of the masonry discloses the fact that it was reconstructed from a dwelling-tower of the eleventh century. In the cellar we discover Roman foundation walls, and under the cellar a filled-in cave, in the floor of which stone tools are found and remnants of glacial fauna in the layers below. That would be a sort of picture of our mental structure." Naturally, Jung was well aware of the limitations of this comparison (cf. p. 120). But from the very fact that it may be so easily developed, there is ground for taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul. (Bachelard 20-21)

Bachelard's description of the house's topography as a map for the human mind calls to mind the image of the house as a face, such as that described in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," with its "eye-like" windows (199). Jackson's Hill House, too, is anthropomorphic, "rear[ing] its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity" (Jackson 30). The house's similarity to the construction of the human mind — or perhaps vice versa — offers a partial explanation of how we are so heavily influenced by the spaces we inhabit. In "Happy Objects," Sarah Ahmed discusses the affective quality of objects that pass on through generations of family, such as houses:

> To preserve the family you must preserve certain things. Simone de Beauvoir describes how: "The ideal of happiness has always taken material form in the house . . . Within its walls the family is established as a discrete cell or a unit group and maintains its identity

> as generations come and go; the past, preserved in the form of furniture and ancestral portraits, gives promise of a secure future." (Ahmed 45-46)

For Bachelard, Ahmed, and de Beauvoir, the house retains the memories of what transpires within its walls. These memories, in turn, exert their influence over the generations to come that occupy the house. This resemblance between the home and the mind, and the home's ability to retain memory, are crucial concepts in the study of Jackson's works; Jackson's novels and memoirs alike detail homes that retain the memory of their past, and occupants that are influenced by this collective memory.

Freud's uncanny relies heavily on the concept of the home, as the German term, *unheimlich*, comes from *heimlich*, or "homely." Definitions of *heimlich* in German begin with the homely: "belonging to the house or the family, or regarded as so belonging" (Freud 594). Varying definitions of the *heimlich* eventually meander towards what seem to be its opposite according to the first definition: "Concealed, kept from sight … eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear" (595). In observing this, Freud notes that "[w]hat interests us most … is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What *is heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*" (595-596). A concept central to this study is that of the unsettling being inextricably linked to that which is comforting: "*Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*" (596). The home in Jackson's works is distinctly uncanny, as the synthesis of comfort and terror is central to its essence. The simultaneity of the uncanny is essential to Jackson's work, which depicts a home capable of being many different things at once.

Chapter 2

Jackson's memoirs contain foreshadowing aspects of her horror novels, both in references to her other works and in comic experiences that, under slightly different circumstances, become uncanny. When driving her daughter to a birthday party in a rich neighbourhood, Jackson notes "a sundial and what may have been a swimming pool" on the front lawn (Jackson 202). This house anticipates the Halloran mansion in *The Sundial*, which has (as implied by the title) a sundial and a pool on its front lawn. In *Life Among the Savages*, Jackson describes an instance in which her children are putting on a play with some of their friends. This play involves a bowl of poisoned candy, which brings to mind the poisoned sugar bowl in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. *Life Among the Savages* predates both *The Sundial* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, with the memoir being published in 1953 and the two novels being published in 1958 and 1962, respectively. This indicates that rather than hiding references to her horror novels in her memoir work, Jackson likely was inspired to write parts of her horror novels as a result of certain aspects of her own domestic life. While these aspects — a sundial on a lawn, and an innocent game of pretend — are not sinister in their own right, when presented in a slightly different context, they become so, and in this way indicate the latent potential for horror in even her lightest accounts of the domestic.

A game between Jackson and her children seems to foreshadow the poisoned sugar bowl in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Two of Jackson's children, Laurie and Jannie, and a neighbour, Stuart, put on a play, where a candy dish in the living room serves as a dish of poisoned candy in their make-believe scenario. Jackson is about to take a piece of candy before remembering the suspension of disbelief inherent in the children's play: "I started to take a piece of candy, remembered in time that it was poisoned, and drew back my hand" (Jackson 53).

Robert Pfaller states that "Just as in the comic, the uncanny is also based on the suspension of illusion, on 'I know quite well, but nevertheless…' … the illusion must not turn back on oneself — it must remain the illusion of others" (Pfaller 210). In refraining from eating from the candy dish, Jackson suspends the illusion of the candy being poisoned not only for herself, but also for the children putting on the play. Pfaller further elaborates on the relationship between the comic and the uncanny: "*the comic is what is uncanny to others*. In the comic, we laugh about those who are unable to elude the illusion of the comic, and who therefore are defenceless, at the mercy of the effect of the uncanny" (Pfaller 212, emphasis author's). When the children get up after being "poisoned," the effect is comic, as the suspended disbelief (that the candy is poisoned) is not considered to be reality. Were Jackson to believe the candy truly were poisoned, however, the children "[getting] up and dust[ing] themselves off" as if nothing happened would be an uncanny experience, rather than a comic one (Jackson 53). *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* depicts the alternative outcome of this event — Uncle Julian, who consumes the poisoned sugar, somehow survives and uncannily defies circumstances that should cause his death. In detailing incidents that produce uncanny effects under differing circumstances and hiding foreshadows of her horror novels in her memoirs, Jackson hints at the potential for horror within the seemingly jovial home.

From the moment she enters the familial manor in *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor Vance is influenced by the physical structure that she is living in. The house seems to be alive, thinking for itself — the first description of the manor describes it as incredibly human-like:

> 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 … 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. (Jackson 30)

The Jackson-Hyman family home in Jackson's memoirs does not have such an ominous presence, but is similarly described as life-like. Upon moving into the Fielding house at the beginning of Jackson's first memoir, *Life Among the Savages*, Jackson and her husband soon give in to the house's influence on their furniture arrangement:

> After a few vain attempts at imposing our own angular order on things with a consequent out-of-jointness and shrieking disharmony that set our teeth on edge, we gave in to the old furniture and let things settle where they would. An irritation persisted in one particular spot in the dining room, a spot which would hold neither table nor buffet and developed an alarming sag in the floor when I tried to put a radio there, until I found completely by accident that this place was used to a desk and would not be comfortable until I went out and found a spindly old writing table and set a brass inkwell on it. (Jackson 18)

Similarly, Jackson refers to how one bedroom in the house "chose the children" (Jackson 19) — here, as in *Hill House*, the occupants of the home give in to the house's influence. While the house's sentience in *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons* is depicted as a lighthearted, non-threatening one, the border between the comic and the uncanny becomes blurred here. While these anecdotes are defined as comic through their inclusion in a "housewife humour" novel, the sentient home in Jackson's memoirs would fit in just as well in one of her horror novels.

Near the end of *Life Among the Savages*, Jackson experiences pregnancy as horror as she awaits the arrival of her fourth child. News of childbirth becomes inescapable:

> I took my coffee into the dining room and settled down with the morning paper. A woman in New York had twins in a taxi. A woman in Ohio had just had her seventeenth child. A twelve-year-old girl in Mexico had given birth to a thirteen-pound boy. The lead article on the woman's page was about how to adjust the older child to the new baby. I finally found an account of an axe murder on page seventeen, and held my coffee cup up to my face to see if the steam might revive me. (Jackson 210)

Jackson uses humour to describe this waiting period — a comical tale about swallowing castor oil in an attempt to induce labour lightens the period of dread — but childbirth looms over her wherever she turns. Her remark about finding relief in "an account of an axe murder" is delivered in Jackson's biting wit, but conveys a hint of the fear and aggression she experiences in the face of childbirth. Jackson's contemporaries were producing art that portrayed motherhood as horror — Flannery O'Connor's "A Stroke of Good Fortune," for example, details the terror a woman feels upon discovering she is likely pregnant. The fear of motherhood here resembles that depicted in O'Connor's 1949 short story, which depicts a young woman climbing the stairs of her apartment complex and reaching the looming conclusion that she is pregnant. The horror felt in "A Stroke of Good Fortune" is bodily — Ruby is filled with dread at the thought of carrying a child — but extends beyond childbirth. Ruby remembers the toll that motherhood took on her own mother, and considers the fact that she does not like children. Her mother "had always looked sour" (O'Connor 70), and Ruby attributes this to motherhood: "All those children were what did her mother in — eight of them: two born dead, one died the first year, one crushed under a mowing machine. Her mother had got deader with every one of them. And all of it for what? Because she hadn't known any better. Pure ignorance. The purest of downright ignorance!" (70). Just like Jackson, Ruby dreads the act of childbirth, which she perceived as

excruciating when waiting for her mother to deliver Rufus, her younger brother. She recalls the long wait, and the pain it seemed to have caused her mother, and considers the end result, a baby, to be a pitiful reward: "All that misery for Rufus" (70). Both O'Connor and Jackson detail a horror specific to motherhood that threatens their individual well-being in order to prioritize that of the (as of yet non-existent) child. Maternal horror can be split into three separate categories — pregnancy as horror, childbirth as horror, and motherhood as horror. Each of these is present in Jackson's memoir works, with the above passage from *Life Among the Savages* depicting a bit of the first two simultaneously.

Sarah Arnold writes in *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* that "Motherhood is often deemed as incompatible with independent desire (in a way that fatherhood is not)" (Arnold 22). Arnold later describes the depiction of pregnancy and motherhood as horror in films from 1960, noting that these films mostly depict motherhood as a disruption of the self: "The pregnant woman is represented in terms of motherhood, in terms of caring for another and not, for example, herself … The pregnant body disturbs the border between self and other and, therefore, identity itself" (Arnold 154). While the horror looming over Jackson as she awaits the birth of her fourth child is in large part a bodily horror, as childbirth is an excruciating process, the horror experienced in Jackson's novels is often a disturbance of the self in favour of the child. In a chapter of *Life Among the Savages*, Jackson describes telling hospital staff her occupation — "writer." The staff responds: "I'll just put 'housewife'" (Jackson 66). Here, Jackson experiences a loss of self to motherhood — she has her own career as an author, but since she also has children, her primary occupation in the view of others is that of housewife. While this is described as a humorous encounter in a lighthearted memoir, Jackson is experiencing the kind of loss of self that Arnold describes. Franklin writes that "[Jackson]'s

devotion to her children coexists uneasily with her fear of losing herself in domesticity" (Franklin 9).

The responsibility of motherhood is another source of anxiety present in Jackson's memoirs. Victoria Garland writes in "Existential Responsibility of Motherhood" that "From a physiological perspective, giving birth to a child transforms a woman into a mother, but from an existential perspective, it is the acceptance of responsibility for that child that represents the foundational step into motherhood" (Garland 59). Garland explores the existential repercussions of motherhood, as it entails taking responsibility for another human that cannot fully take care of itself: "The transition to motherhood can be conceptualized as an existential voyage, from a life before motherhood where the woman is responsible for her own existence, to life as a mother where she must accept the responsibility for another (her child)" (Garland 59). Garland speculates that the anxiety of mothers is one of death — "Death is a primordial source of anxiety which new mothers experience when faced with the fragility of their children, the possibility of loss and the experience of responsibility for their children's survival" (Garland 60) — but the broader danger of more general harm is also one that mothers fear when considering the responsibility they carry for their children. Garland's description of the beginning of motherhood as a defamiliarization makes the experience an uncanny one in itself:

> it could be argued that the journey to motherhood begins with defamiliarization, in which women are dislodged from the place of "at-homeness" (Heidegger 1962). Their relationship with the familiar world is profoundly shaken, and the everyday guidelines are suddenly stripped away; new mothers suddenly lose their sense of knowledge of the world, when the world that previously protected them from the anxiety of existential givens dissolves. Heidegger (1962) uses the term "uncanny" (*Unheimlich*) to denote this

> experience of having lost contact with one's existential situation and the resulting feeling of not "being-at-home-in-the-world." (Garland 62)

This uncanny feeling begins with pregnancy, when the body becomes a host to another being, but does not end with childbirth. Motherhood after pregnancy entails an altered state of being in which the mother's mindset is forever altered in order to accommodate for an awareness of her children: "the mother becomes existentially aware of her responsibility for the life and death of her children, and through this experience mothers enter a mindful or ontological mode of being" (Garland 62). A Wikipedia description of Jackson's character in *Life Among the Savages* demonstrates her irreplaceability in the household: "Despite several attempts to hire domestic help, she is invariably the only force that can make her family's gears mesh smoothly" ("Life Among the Savages"). This echoes a sentiment expressed in Garland: "the weight of a mother's responsibility is such that no-one can completely take her place" (Garland 63).

Jackson details the horror felt when she realizes that her children are entities of their own, whom she is responsible for, although they are capable of acting on their own:

> Sometimes, in my capacity as mother, I find myself sitting openmouthed and terrified before my own children, little individual creatures moving solidly along in their own paths and yet in some mysterious manner vividly reminiscent of a past which my husband and I know we have never communicated to them. (Jackson 164)

The horror felt by Jackson here is brought on by the realization that her children are entirely capable of acting on their own, even though she, as a mother, must somehow protect them from harm at all times. Compounding that horror is the realization that her children are an unconscious amalgamation of all that has come before them. In *The Weird and the Eerie*, Mark Fisher

describes Freud's preoccupation with psychic returns to a prehistoric, predetermined state of being:

> Throughout his work, Freud repeatedly stressed that the unconscious knows neither negation nor time. Hence the Escheresque image in *Civilisation and its Discontents* of the unconscious as a Rome "in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest ones" (Fisher 35-36)

Freud emphasizes the latent nature of many human habits; the uncanny, for example, is something that we all experience when presented with the familiar in a strange, unfamiliar way. It is a resurfacing of repressed anxieties — the dredging up of the unconscious — but is also something experienced by all humans, despite never being taught to do so or, for some, being aware of the phenomenon at all. Here, Jackson's children perform the uncanny act of behaving like their ancestors despite never having this behaviour outlined or taught to them. This raises questions of their agency, somewhat opposing Jackson's horror at her children's capability of acting on their own. Fisher states that "Radical Enlightenment thinkers such as Spinoza, Darwin, and Freud continually pose the question: to what extent can the concept of intentionality be applied to human beings, never mind to the natural world?" (Fisher 83-84). Here, the children's automatic action is eerie at the same time that their independence terrifies Jackson. It is this sense of paradox that is essential to the uncanny; just as the familiar becomes unfamiliar, agency is also rooted in predetermined ways of thinking and behaving.

An anecdote in *Raising Demons* details an instance in which Jackson is terrified when her children act of their own accord. On a morning when Jackson's morning alarm does not go off, she wakes up in a panic at 10:30, with her children nowhere to be found within the house.

Jackson describes her escalating fear as she scours the house for indications of where they might have gone:

> Now, I do not believe that my children will pack up their little clothes and their small treasures in colored bandanas and set off, trudging sadly down the road out into the cold world — I do not really believe that my children will run away from home if Mommy is not up in time to give them breakfast, but this morning the house was suspiciously quiet, and when I cried out "Laurie?" and then "Jannie? Sally?" there was not even an echo to answer me. My husband stirred uneasily and I snarled at him, rolling out of bed and racing into the girls' room, saying "Jannie? Sally?" in a voice which became more urgent as I perceived that they were not there, but that they had most certainly been there for some space of time after arising; the toys were out of the bookcase and a fort of some kind had been built with dresser drawers in one corner of the room … As a last heartbreaking touch — a tender gesture for Mommy, no doubt, and probably performed just before the final exit into the world — both beds had been made, crookedly and with the sheets hanging, but still made, with the spreads put on. (Jackson 41-42)

The moment of disorientation Jackson experiences when she awakes two and a half hours before she has meant to escalates quickly into panic as she realizes that her children are nowhere to be found in the house. In this moment, the house becomes eerie: "constituted by a *failure of absence* or by a *failure of presence*" (Fisher 61, emphasis author's). The indications of the children's activity — toys strewn about the room, clumsily made beds — are reminders of their terrifying absence. Their attempt at making the bed before their "final exit into the world" — a "last heartbreaking touch" — is a reminder of their lack of preparation before leaving the home and exiting the "real" world (Jackson 42). This is a small-scale representation of the mother's

anxieties when bringing up her children; she fears that, even after eighteen or so years of raising them, her children will depart into the world ill-equipped for the challenges they will face. Here, Sally and Jannie's inability to make the bed properly reminds Jackson of their lack of preparation for what they might encounter outside of the home without her guidance. Upon finding Sally, her youngest daughter, Jackson asks where the other children are:

> "Where is Jannie? Laurie?"
>
> "Laurie is on his bike. Jannie got eaten by a bear, eaten."
>
> This was so close to my guilty expectations that I went nervously to the kitchen door and looked out; there were no bears but at least part of Sally's general appearance was explained by the impressive line of mudpies on the back step. (Jackson 44)

Sally's wild imagination becomes a hypothetical reality for Jackson in this moment; her anxiety is so heightened in the absence of her children that she believes, momentarily, that Sally's assertion might be true. Without any evidence to indicate otherwise — until Jackson locates Jannie — this absurd scenario has the potential, in her mind, to be a reality.

Even everyday tasks in the Jackson-Hyman household can veer into horror. On a pleasant morning, Jackson loads her children into the car for a drive to pick up the Sunday paper. On the way there, the car strays into the path of an oncoming vehicle, resulting in a minor crash. Jackson attempts to keep her calm, but scolds the other driver upon realization that nobody has been seriously hurt: "'What,' I said, snarling, 'do you think you are doing? Coming around a turn like that at that speed on a slippery road and we all could have been killed?' My voice began to quaver suddenly, and I stopped and counted ten. 'At that speed,' I said, through my teeth" (Jackson 81). Jackson cannot help but catastrophize; though they have escaped the incident without harm, she continues to think about what might have happened if the event took place

differently and yells that they "all could have been killed." This stands in contrast with an earlier remark in *Life Among the Savages*, in which Jackson notes that "I did not, after all, want to communicate to a small child my fears" (Jackson 170); here, Jackson has become so unsettled that she breaks this promise to herself. A happy Sunday afternoon swerves into horror, brought on by a simple wrong turn. Jackson's deep concern for her children's wellbeing surfaces in other instances, veiled by humour; when asking her husband for grocery money, Jackson paints a picture of her children dying of starvation. Taking inventory of her pocketbook, she notes: "In my pocketbook I had three single dollar bills and twenty-six cents in change, and a check for fifty dollars, wrung from my husband that morning by a series of agile arguments and a tearful description of his children lying at his feet faint from malnutrition" (Jackson 102). In the simple act of asking her husband for grocery money, Jackson evokes a disturbing image of her children starving for lack of food. In addition to providing a haunting look at Jackson's fear as a mother, this serves as a reminder that while Jackson is tasked with providing her children with sustenance, she can only do so with the financial assistance of her husband.

An episode in *Raising Demons* further reveals the anxiety Jackson feels regarding the care of her children. Planning a weekend away with friends, she entrusts her husband with their care, who insists: "I am perfectly capable of running this house … Perfectly capable. You just leave a list of things the baby eats, and so on. And who to call if someone gets sick" (Jackson 72). Never mind the fact that Jackson's husband — who is never named in her memoirs, but is clearly heavily based on Hyman — should know what a baby can and cannot eat, and what to do if someone is sick (Jackson responds drily: "I usually call the doctor" (Jackson 72)); Jackson leaves a long, disorienting list of what he should do in her weekend of absence (which I have included in full in order to emphasize its length):

SATURDAY, I wrote, and then thought. A simple chronological outline seemed best suited to my husband's particular requirements, so I drew a line under SATURDAY and continued: Give Barry chopped vegetable soup and a bottle of plain milk, warmed, for lunch; Sally will have lunch at home (peanut butter, etc., on kitchen table); Laurie lunch at Rob's, Jannie at home. Milk in refrigerator. Sally to play with twins one o'clock, for dinner, home by bedtime. Jannie at Jennifer's, including dinner, home by bedtime, Laurie riding lesson three o'clock, home for dinner, movie evening with Oliver. Barry in playpen 3-5, supper casserole to go in oven 5:30, oven 375 degrees. Barry rice and liver soup and peaches for supper, bottle bedtime. Feed cats, dog. Laurie knows where dog food is. Laurie right to bed after movie, Sally, Jannie jellybeans at bedtime. SUNDAY: Sally home till 3:30, then Pat's party (do not forget birthday present, wrapped, on desk). Sally wear shoes to party, pink party dress (white socks in top left dresser drawer, if none there, blue will do). Comb hair. Bath if possible. Check neck. Laurie at William's, after lunch, ICE SKATES, William's for supper, home bedtime; school night, check homework, early bed. Jannie at Jennifer's, Sunday afternoon, supper, fudge, ICE SKATES, SWEATER. Home bedtime, school night, check homework, jellybeans. Barry Sunday breakfast cereal, bottle, lunch applesauce, cats milk Sunday morning, milk in refrigerator, did you leave casserole in oven Saturday night? Barry Sunday noon chopped vegetable soup, bottle, nap outdoors if weather clement, Barry Sunday supper chopped vegetable and bacon soup, bottle, pudding, feed cats and dog. Do not wait up for me. Cube steaks in refrigerator if you care to cook them, otherwise leftover casserole; jar in refrigerator labeled Mayonnaise is extra coffee to heat up. Bread in breadbox. Leave note for milkman Saturday night DOZEN EGGS, LB. BUTTER, COTTAGE CHEESE. Cover

> all children 10:30 Saturday night. SALLY PAJAMAS TO ELLEN'S, TOOTHBRUSH. Salad. Do not let Jannie forget extra sweater going to Jennifer's, scarf. Check Sally Sunday morning for sniffle. Add note milkman ½ PT. SOUR CREAM. Thirty-five cents in change on top of refrigerator in case Laurie needs money for movies. Six jellybeans is plenty. (Jackson 75-76)

Jackson's detailed note is met with a response from Hyman upon her arrival; the house is quiet but the kids are not in bed as they should be — rather, Hyman has taken them to the movies. The note he leaves is comically short in comparison to that which she left him, as if the length corresponds to the level of responsibility:

> SUNDAY, it said. Barry and/or dog ate all directions. Have taken all children incl. Barry to hamburger stand for dinner, movies. Barry fond of movies, went yesterday too, also fr.fr. potatoes. Don't wait up for us. Casserole on kitchen table, cats not fed. Milkman left two dozen eggs. Jannie says six jellybeans is not plenty. Leave front door unlocked. Jar in refrigerator labeled Mayonnaise was mayonnaise. (Jackson 77)

While Jackson's children and husband have managed relatively successfully in her absence, most of her instructions have not been followed — she must now, for example, purchase the butter, cottage cheese, and sour cream that the milkman was not notified about. Here, Hyman has taken the role of "fun dad" for the weekend, whereas Jackson must tend to matters of discipline and vital house tasks. Hyman criticizes Jackson's capabilities as a mother and housewife — in an earlier chapter, he mutters "Horrible … Way to bring up children" (Jackson 47) as Jackson is still scrambling to recover the household routine after accidentally sleeping too late. Hyman, of course, has been asleep this whole time as well, but only Jackson takes the blame for her

children's antics. While Hyman criticizes Jackson's child-rearing ability, he, of course, cannot do any better, as evidenced by the note left for Jackson after her weekend away.

Notable in this episode, too, is the fact that Jackson's weekend away from home is not depicted at all, and the book's narration picks up upon her return to the house after her visit. The only account of Jackson's social life is a throwaway comment, prefacing her return to the domestic: "We had a moderately pleasant weekend, although it snowed all the time and I lost another button off my gray suit and everyone seemed to have aged noticeably" (Jackson 76). As she is depicted in these memoirs, Jackson does not have a life of her own outside of the home — she does not describe her trip away, or even name the friends she is meeting. This recalls a remark Jackson makes about the duties of a faculty wife: "She is presumed to have pressing and wholly absorbing interests at home, to which, when out, she is always anxious to return and, when at home, reluctant to leave" (Jackson 147). Jackson's life revolves her home and her children, and the only time the narration of her memoirs leaves the scope of the home it is when she and Hyman take all of their children on a trip to New York. As she is often tasked with taking care of the children and the home, this trip would have been considered an anomaly worth detailing, but instead it is reduced to a single sentence before returning to Jackson's depiction of her domestic life. Perhaps this foreshadows her later agoraphobia — what goes on outside of the house becomes unimportant as Jackson's life revolves increasingly around the home.

Jackson harnesses horror in order to illustrate what happens when the mother is no longer present. In "Children of the Night: Shirley Jackson's Domestic Gothic," Andrew Smith highlights one Female Gothic trope central to *The Haunting of Hill House*: "the novel is … concerned with absent mothers in ways which do suggest points of contact with the Female Gothic" (Smith 153). Ruth Franklin notes that "[a]ll the heroines of [Jackson's] novels are

essentially motherless — if not lacking a mother entirely, then victims of loveless mothering" (Franklin 25). Franklin attributes this to Jackson's own mother, and claims that "Jackson's awareness that her mother had never loved her unconditionally — if at all — would be a source of sadness well into adulthood" (Franklin 25). Eleanor's visit to Hill House shortly follows the death of her invalid mother, whom she has been taking care of for the past eleven years. Eleanor is an example of what happens to a child raised by an incompetent mother — at 32, she lives with her sister's family, and yearns for a home to call her own. Eleanor's fate, discussed in more detail in the following chapter, is perhaps an illustration of the anxiety Jackson possesses regarding her own children, and the broader phenomenon of motherhood as horror — an incapable mother leaves their child incapable later in life as well. In the end, Eleanor kills herself when she is forced to leave Hill House. The horror in *The Haunting of Hill House* does not stem from the menacing house itself, but rather the trauma and poor coping skills Eleanor is left with following her mother's death. Hill House is merely an environment in which Eleanor is finally confronted with her trauma, as a result of finally being free from her mother and sister, as Smith emphasises: "The promised freedoms of the house are ultimately challenged by her unconscious projection of her mother which suggests that she is unable to free herself from the past" (Smith 154). Here, the Female Gothic trope of the absent or dead mother works to illustrate the fears of the mother rather than those of the child — the mother's fear that she may not be able to raise her child correctly materialises here, as Eleanor is not provided with the skills to take care of herself once her mother is gone. Eleanor serves as a manifestation of Jackson's fear of neglecting her children.

The title of Jackson's second memoir, *Raising Demons*, brings to mind the trope of children's susceptibility to being possessed. Jackson's daughter, in fact, insists that she hears "a

faraway voice in the house which sang to her at night" (Jackson 20-21). In another instance, Jackson recalls a "chilling" remark from her younger daughter, Sally:

> "In my river," Sally remarked once, chillingly, "we sleep in wet beds, and we hear our mothers calling us," — giving me a sudden terrifying picture of my own face, leaning over the water, wavering, and my voice far away and echoing; "The water is probably *extremely* cold," I told her, and shivered. "In the river, Sally said, no one ever comes except *us*." (Jackson 168)

In a short story, Jackson's narrator muses on the tendency for ghosts to haunt homes with children in them: "I have never liked the theory that poltergeists only come into houses where there are children, because I think it is simply too much for any one house to have poltergeists and children" (qted in Franklin 304). On one level, the title operates as "housewife humour" by intentionally exaggerating the children's unruly behaviour with hyperbole. If one were to read *Raising Demons* and *Life Among the Savages* with horror in mind, however, they would note that the titles are somewhat accurate — though the horrors of motherhood are narrated with Jackson's sharp wit and thereby softened with humour, they are horrors nonetheless.

Raising Demons details a moment of unsettledness in the interim between houses. As Jackson and her family move into a larger home, they await the delivery of their furniture, which has been stored away while they waited for the new house to be vacated. A frustrating exchange with the owner of the storage company reveals that they have not sent out the family's furniture, and so the company delivers a fraction of the Jackson-Hyman household's furniture to tide the family over while they await the rest of the delivery. This results in the family living in a half-filled house, with furniture in rooms where it doesn't belong:

> In our new living room, then, we had perhaps sixty cartons of books, the piano bench, the coffee table, and the carton of piano music. In the dining room were the music box, another forty cartons of books, and the silver fruit dish. In the kitchen were four barrels of dishes, and a carton with the waffle iron, the electric broiler, and the dog's dish. Upstairs in Sally's room were her toy box and a barrel of toys, unpacked. The guest room had two bed tables. In what was going to be the new study was the odd leg off something and my husband's coin collection, which he had brought in out of the car, and another fifty cartons of books. In the front room where we planned to put the television set were another fifty cartons of books and the picnic hamper. In my husband's and my bedroom was a carton, sent by me from our summer home, which held half a dozen wet bathing suits wrapped in aluminum foil, three plastic sandpails, Sally's blue sunbonnet, and Laurie's collection of shells. (Jackson 63)

In a haunting image, Hyman "put our big silver fruit dish in the middle of the dining room floor where the dining room table was going to be" (Jackson 63). The silver dish on the floor, out of place without a table to sit on, is a reminder of what should be there but is not; it is Fisher's eerie, marked by a failure of presence. The family makes do in their new, eerie house, void of furniture, and the countless stacks of boxes of books serve as a reminder of their transitional period. Elaine Scarry notes in *The Body in Pain* that "[i]n western culture, whole rooms within a house attend to single facts about the body" (Scarry 39). In this transitory period, the rooms in the new house cannot function as they are meant to; there is no dining table to sit at, no desk to write at in the study. Jackson uses rooms in objects within the house for purposes they are not meant for:

> I heated Barry's baby food and his bottle in the hot water from the kitchen sink, fed him sitting on the piano bench with a carton labeled Miscellaneous Non-Fiction for a tray, cleaned him as well as I could, and changed him into his pajamas. I opened a can of dog food and fed Toby on a newspaper in the kitchen floor, and Ninki in the top of an old mayonnaise jar I found in the pantry. (Jackson 63-64)

The family lives in deep discomfort for several days as they await the rest of the furniture that will make living in their new house more bearable. The rooms are not able to perform their designated functions — the dining room cannot be used for eating, as there is no table to eat at, and the living room cannot function socially as it is void of any furniture besides a piano bench. As they do so, the movers take some liberties of their own, and Jackson keeps some of their decorating choices: "Freddie told us confidently that he had figured out where everything went, and some of his arrangements were so tasteful and judicious that we left them" (Jackson 64). The new house has a kind of agency of its own, imposing its own decisions on how it is decorated: "We had to leave the buffet in the television room because the men had brought it in through the front window and Freddie said he was pretty sure they couldn't get it out again and anyway there was more room in there than there was in the dining room, with the table and all them cartons of books" (Jackson 64). This is reminiscent of Jackson's house in *Life Among the Savages*, which stubbornly refuses Jackson and Hyman's efforts to decorate it as they please: "After a few vain attempts at imposing our own angular order on things with a consequent out-of-jointness and shrieking disharmony that set our teeth on edge, we gave in to the old furniture and let things settle where they would" (Jackson 18). In both instances, Jackson relinquishes control over the decoration of her domestic space, and leaves it up to other forces — both the movers and the house itself. Gaston Bachelard speaks of the ability to "read" a room in *The Poetics of Space*

"since both room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy" (Bachelard 59) — here, the house is insisting on how it should be read. If the house and its rooms can be read, like a book, it must have a natural flow, as sentences do. Despite Jackson's efforts to compose her own arrangement, her house has a natural manner of being lived in. The house insists on being read in a certain way, enforcing its own manner of flowing.

A 1977 Fawcett Popular Library edition of *The Haunting of Hill House* depicts a woman running up a staircase with a candlestick, a grim skull figure looming behind her. The book cover follows in the design tradition of many pulp horror novels, such as those discussed by Grady Hendrix in *Paperbacks from Hell: The Twisted History of 70s and 80s Horror Fiction*. A 1994 edition of *Raising Demons* depicts the Jackson-Hyman family home in the background, with a green lawn and playing children taking up much of the foreground. These two covers seem in stark contrast with one another — one is what one would expect from a haunted house book cover, while the other is almost eerily cheerful for a novel that has the word "demons" in the title. In considering Fisher's eerie, "constituted by a *failure of absence* or by a *failure of presence*" (Fisher 61, emphasis author's), the *Raising Demons* cover is most certainly eerie. Jackson's title, *Raising Demons*, posits the presence of supernatural beings within the home. The cover art for the memoir, however, depicts a cheery suburban scene. The eerie thus manifests itself in the anticipation of horror — while demons are mentioned, they are nowhere to be seen.

Figures in both Jackson's memoirs and Jackson's horror novels are subjects of haunting as children. *The Haunting of Hill House*'s Eleanor recalls a three-day period during her childhood when her house was pelted with rocks, implying that she was subject to a kind of haunting as a child. *The Sundial*'s Fancy is an unsettling child, obsessed with her dollhouse,

which serves as a substitute for the very real house she stands to inherit after her grandmother's death. Merricat from *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is a similarly offputting child, who is overly protective of her older sister Constance and poisons most of her family by putting arsenic in the sugar bowl at dinner. Jackson's novels frequently contain disturbing child characters — and these characters share traits with her own children as they are portrayed in her memoirs. Fancy's obsession with her dollhouse parallels Sally's obsession with a fictional house she has created — when angry with family members, she tells them, "*You* can't come to *my* house!" (Jackson 167). Jackson's other daughter, Jannie, has a series of imaginary friends with quite a complex backstory:

> The former Mrs. Ellenoy — I have this straight from my daughter — was a lovely woman, mother of seven daughters, all named Martha, and she and Mr. Ellenoy used to be very angry with one another, until one day they grew so very angry that they up and killed each other with swords. As a result my daughter is the new Mrs. Ellenoy and has inherited all the Marthas as stepdaughters. When she is not named Jean, Linda, Barbara, Sally, and so on, but is being Mrs. Ellenoy, her daughters are allowed to assume these names, so that there is a constant bewildering shifting of names among them, and it is sometimes very difficult to remember whether you are addressing Janey Ellenoy or a small girl with seven daughters named Martha. (Jackson 107-108)

This anecdote of little Jannie, with seven imaginary daughters, presents a multitude of uncanny doubles — the imaginary daughters are all named Martha, but are sometimes named Jean or Linda or Barbara, and are always confused for one another by Jackson and her family as Jannie is the only person capable of seeing them and, thus, telling them apart. In one instance, Jackson asks her daughter: "What are you doing in that mud?", prompting an amused answer from

Jannie: "'*This* is Mrs. Ellenoy,' she said. "*I*'m over there.' And she pointed" (Jackson 109). Here Jannie separates from herself, referring to herself in the third person and assuming the identity of one of her many uncanny doubles. The tale of Mrs. Ellenoy is, also, one of disturbing domestic violence — she and her husband fight so violently that they "kill … each other with swords" (Jackson 107). It is difficult not to view the Ellenoys in parallel to the Jackson-Hymans, who had a tumultuous marriage of their own — it's possible that the late Mr. and Mrs. Ellenoy represent a worst-case scenario of Jackson's own marriage. The backstory of Jannie's imaginary friends, seemingly whimsical, has a hint of domestic terror in it. The lightheartedness with which Jannie tells this story adds a haunting aspect to it — its delivery as an aside does not match the gravity of its content. A husband and wife who have grown to hate each other so strongly that they have killed one another with swords become the backstory of a child's game of pretend.[1]

Jannie reports hearing voices in the house — Jackson implies that she could be a child susceptible to poltergeist haunting. The title of Jackson's second memoir, *Raising Demons*, implies, of course, that her children are the "demons" in question. The implication is, on the surface level, a self-deprecating, June Cleaver-style "housewife humour" joke about how horrifying it is to raise children, but reveals a deeper horror when read in conjunction with the haunting, inexplicable actions of her children detailed in the book. Several of Jackson's horror works contain creepy child characters — *The Sundial*'s Fancy being one, in addition to *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*'s Merricat and even T*he Haunting of Hill House*'s Eleanor, who believes herself to have been the subject of a poltergeist haunting in her childhood. These characters are dark reflections of Jackson's own children, whose actions are sometimes

[1] The tumultuous nature of Jackson and Hyman's marriage likely resulted from several varying factors, some of which might have included Hyman's jealousy of Jackson's success and his open infidelity.

hauntingly inexplicable. While the actions of Jackson's children are chalked up to a child's imagination in her memoirs, characters in Jackson's horror novels exhibit very similar behaviour.

Jackson's tendency to slip into the unnatural even in her memoir works lends a fantastical, otherworldly characteristic to certain moments in her domestic life. In *Raising Demons*, Jackson describes an instance in which she must deal with a woman buying their house in order to return it to her family, to which the house previously belonged for generations. Jackson has a negative perception of Mrs. Ferrier from the moment she first meets her, claiming that "When Mrs. Ferrier stepped inside our front door at one minute before three that afternoon it was perfectly clear to me without hesitation that we were not going to become fast friends" (Jackson 14). This slightly unpleasant woman develops into a fairytale villain not ten pages later, when Jackson describes an imagined scenario in which the family fights her off using the children's toy weapons: "we began to think nostalgically of how, as a family, we could have held Mrs. Ferrier at bay, armed with our swords and our spears and our horsewhips and our red parasol" (Jackson 24). The ability to create a fantastical scenario in an everyday setting is not unique to Jannie and her imaginary friends; Jackson, too, slips into this childlike manner of thinking.

Jackson's memoirs are written from the point of view of a mother who is constantly dealing with one domestic issue or another — almost always rising from one of her four rambunctious children. The Jackson in *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons* seems like the kind of woman who would never have time to sit and write. While Stanley has his own study, Jackson does not appear to have her own space to write — even though she has, supposedly, written two memoirs while also dealing with all of the events that take place within them. Stanley appears possessive of his study, not even allowing Jannie to call her room her "study":

"Jannie wanted to call [her room] a Study so she could study there, but my husband said that *he* had a study, and two studies would be confusing" (Jackson 60). When the children walk through his office, Hyman exclaims frustratedly: "This is a study, not a thoroughfare" (Jackson 207). Though Hyman highly values the space designated to his academic pursuits, Jackson speculates that Hyman is not nearly as productive in his study as he makes himself out to be. In one chapter of *Raising Demons*, Jackson voices this suspicion: "The distant, unwilling sound of a typewriter from the study made it sound as though my husband was working, although I sometimes believe that he has a device (perhaps a woodpecker?) which taps the typewriter for him while he sleeps on the study couch" (Jackson 155). Franklin notes this omission of any mention of Jackson's writing process; she notes that in *Raising Demons*, Jackson makes a small reference to sitting in her study, and this small note "is the only hint that she will use the extra time [with her children out of the house] for work" (Franklin 369).

Franklin begins her biography of Jackson with a detailed history of the houses built and lived in by her family:

> Houses — one of her lifetime obsessions and the gravitational center of much of her fiction — were in Jackson's blood. "My grandfather was an architect, and his father, and *his* father," she once wrote. "One of them built houses only for millionaires in California, and that was where the family wealth came from, and one of them was certain that houses could be made to stand on the sand dunes of San Francisco, and that was where the family wealth went." (Franklin 13)

This first chapter of Jackson's biography, aside from an introductory chapter, is aptly named "Foundations." After writing two books about her own domestic life, Jackson pivoted to fiction that centred the home; *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *We Have Always Lived in*

the Castle were all written after Jackson's two memoirs. These three novels all reveal Jackson's fascination with the home, and in analyzing them in conversation with her memoirs, one can identify the comforting aspects of the house to be found in her otherwise unsettling fiction.

Chapter 3

I.

Eleanor Vance, the protagonist of *The Haunting of Hill House*, has a complex relationship with the home. Eleanor is repulsed by Hill House at first: "The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once" (Jackson 29). Eleanor eventually finds Hill House to be a place of comfort. Having no home of her own, Eleanor panics when Dr. Montague informs her that she must leave. Theodora offers that Eleanor will now be able to return to "[her] own little place, [her] own apartment, where all [her] things are" (226), and Eleanor resists: "I haven't any apartment … I made it all up … I haven't any home, no place at all" (226). She insists, several times, that she has "no home" and that she "can't leave" (226). Having no home of her own to return to, Eleanor has found a home in Hill House and has succumbed to its influence. "I am disappearing inch by inch into this house," Eleanor tells herself — slowly, she becomes one with Hill House (189-190). Towards the end of the novel, her perception of Hill House varies drastically from her first impression of the mansion: "She stood with her back against the door, the little mists of Hill House curling around her ankles, and looked up at the pressing, heavy hills. Gathered comfortably into the hills, she thought, protected and warm; Hill House is lucky" (218). Rather than being eager to leave once the house has exerted its influence on her, she finds its presence in her mind to be a welcome one.

As a single woman in her early thirties, Eleanor struggles with feeling as if she has a home of her own. She lives with her sister, who is married with a baby — which serves as a reminder of her lack of a domestic life of her own. When residing in Hill House, she fantasises

about the domestic life she could live there. In "June Cleaver in the House of Horrors: Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*," Dale Bailey writes:

> Though [Eleanor] chafes against the restrictions imposed by the gender role she has absorbed from fairy tales (among other sources), she can envision emotional fulfilment only through the patriarchal assumptions of the same tales. This paradox finds expression in the fantasies she indulges during her journey to Hill House. Most of them involve home and homemaking. When she sees a mansion guarded by stone lions, she envisions herself sweeping the porch and "dusting the lions each morning" (18). Shortly thereafter, she dreams of breaking the enchantment that binds a fairy-tale castle — in short, restoring the home to order, as a good housewife should — and marrying the handsome prince who lives there (19-20). Later still, she imagines the life she could have in a roadside "cottage buried in a garden" (22), sewing curtains and serving love potions to lonely maidens who also seek the fairy-tale consummation of happy marriages. (Bailey 36)

Eleanor dreams of a happy domestic life, and projects this fantasy onto Hill House. "Journeys end in lovers meeting," she tells herself repeatedly throughout the novel, and she imagines this lover to be Luke, though she also forms a suggestively close bond with Theo that ends, somewhat suddenly, in her hatred of her.[2] This desire for the idyllic domesticity that she has been

[2] Jackson was always insistent that Eleanor and Theo, and the other close female friendships in her novels (such as Nathalie and Tony in Hangsaman) were not lesbians — upon discovering that Hangsaman was described as "an 'eerie' novel about lesbians," she responded: "i happen to know what hangsaman is about. i wrote it" (Franklin 63). Her anger at the accusation, however, coupled with her frequent portrayal of such close female friendships, may indicate a frantic denial of her own sexuality. Jackson had a very close female friend of her own from university, Jeanne Marie Bedel, who Jackson affectionately referred to as "Jeanou." While Franklin does not believe that Jackson's friendship with Bedel is evidence of her potential lesbianism, she notes that "[Jackson's] description of the friendship merits a close look" (62) as a preface to a quote in which Jackson states that she "wanted to write stories about lesbians and how people misunderstood them" and that a man "sent [her] away because [she] was a lesbian" (62).

told she must strive for throughout her life eventually leads to her finding comfort within the home that she was, at first, repulsed by. Eleanor's comfort in Hill House is a twisted version of Jackson's own domesticity in *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons*. Like the unnamed narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," Eleanor becomes one with the house, giving in to the influence of the physical structure she is living in. Just like in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the only way for Eleanor to be free is to break totally from the patriarchal expectations she has, up to this point, done her best to adhere to. Gilman's narrator goes insane, creeping along the walls of the home that serves as her prison, while Eleanor creeps in Hill House's tower and eventually crashes her car while leaving the house, killing herself when forced to leave.

Eleanor's breakdown in *The Haunting of Hill House* resembles that of one of the novel's Feminine Gothic ancestors, "The Yellow Wallpaper." The madness the unnamed narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" eventually experiences anticipates Eleanor's breakdown in *Hill House* — both protagonists escape the haunted home in an episode of madness, unable to free themselves from the influence of the haunting domestic spaces they occupy in any other manner. For both Gilman and Jackson, the home can be deadly to a woman. All of the people who die in Hill House are women — Hugh Crain, the original owner of the mansion, does not die in the familial mansion, but rather "somewhere in Europe" (70). The house appears to prey specifically on Eleanor — Theodora finds "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR" written in what appears to be blood above her bed (145). Dale Bailey observes that Eleanor's fantasies of Hill House before her arrival "involve home and homemaking … When she sees a mansion guarded by stone lions, she imagines herself sweeping the porch and 'dusting the lions each morning'" (Bailey 36). The horror that both Gilman and Jackson's protagonists experience is one related to the domestic, and aspects of the home serve as reminders of the horrors of womanhood: the

narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is imprisoned as a part of her rest cure for post-partum depression, and Eleanor's domestic vision quickly sours in the few days she spends at Hill House. While Gilman's domestic serves as a vessel for haunting — her protagonist is driven mad by the eponymous wallpaper, but this is a symptom of a larger imprisonment within the house as a woman — Hill House is what haunts Eleanor. The protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper" sees a woman in the wallpaper, but Eleanor doesn't encounter the ghosts of any of the Crain women, and is rather tormented by the nonhuman entity of the home.

The introduction to the Penguin version of *The Haunting of Hill House* compares Jackson's novel to Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and includes James' novella on a list of further readings related to *Hill House*. Laura Miller asks: "Is the house [the governess] presides over haunted by the ghost of brutish Peter Quint and his lover, her predecessor, the sexually degraded Miss Jessel? Or is it haunted by some half-formed, half-desired alternate version of the nameless governess herself?" (Jackson xv). Both of these presented possibilities centre the human — or perhaps rather the spectral — in the haunted house narrative. While the house is, itself, haunted, it is the possibility of ghosts that usually make it so. *The Haunting of Hill House* appears to follow in this tradition of ghost story at first, when Eleanor, Theo, Luke, and Dr. Montague discuss the history of the home and its many deaths. The doors of the house close on their own unless propped open, disorienting its occupants and leading them to believe that it is occupied by a paranormal presence.

The reason for the doors slamming is later revealed to be due to the house itself; Dr. Montague observes that "the doorways are all a little bit off center," attributing their eerie slamming to the construction of the house (Jackson 98). Jackson's exposition of the "ghosts" that haunt Hill House provides the backstory for a house that retains the memories of its former

occupants. While Hill House is not directly haunted by the ghosts of the women who have perished in the home, the house retains the memory of the tragedy that has occurred within it, and Eleanor is particularly sensitive to the house's memory. On the television adaptation of the novel, which revises Jackson's novel and adds more explicit, human ghosts, Sophie Gilbert writes that "[t]he dark shadows in the corners of Hill House's corridors start to feel more ominous than the white-faced walking corpses that actually appear" (Gilbert). These "dark shadows," while not occupied by any kind of spectral appearance, are haunted by the memories of the atrocities that have taken place in Hill House. Gaston Bachelard notes that "the house of memories becomes psychologically complex. Associated with the nooks and corners of solitude are the bedroom and the living room in which the leading characters held sway. The house we were born in is an inhabited house" (Bachelard 36). Here, Bachelard describes a house that becomes inscribed with the events that take place within it. Hill House has retained the memories of its awful past, and it is the house, not the dead Crain women, that haunts Eleanor. The house is the mother that haunts Eleanor; Luke refers to Hill House as "motherly" (197) and a "mother house" (199), and Eleanor ties the house to motherly duties, such as sweeping the entryway and having a happy marriage to a handsome man. Hill House's ties to motherly figures are what make her so susceptible to its haunting.

The haunting that Eleanor experiences stems in part from her inadequate upbringing, but also in part from her desire — and inability — to live in the domestic bliss she has always been told is what she should strive towards. Thirty-two and unmarried, Eleanor is already viewed as a failure by a society that expects women to be married with children by their mid-twenties. She fantasises about a domestic life:

> During the whole underside of her life, ever since her first memory, Eleanor had been waiting for something like Hill House. Caring for her mother, lifting a cross old lady from her chair to her bed, setting out endless little trays of soup and oatmeal, steeling herself to the filthy laundry, Eleanor had held fast to the belief that someday something would happen. (5)

Eleanor believes, momentarily, that she could envision this kind of life with Luke. Luke is a prime example of the kind of man she believes she should be drawn to — he is the heir of Hill House, which she is inexplicably drawn to, and is conventionally handsome. While Eleanor attempts to convince herself that she is romantically drawn to Luke, her bond with Theo is much stronger.[3] The two share clothing and maintain close physical touch with one another. In a moment of fear Eleanor puts on Theo's robe for comfort, and when Theo's clothes become ruined, she begins to wear Eleanor's clothing. Eleanor and Theo even huddle in a bed together, comforting each other in the face of the horrors of Hill House. They move as one in the face of perceived danger: "They perceived at the same moment the change in the path and each knew then the other's knowledge of it; Theodora took Eleanor's arm and, afraid to stop, they moved on slowly, close together, and ahead of them the path widened and blackened and curved" (164). Eleanor's "spinster" lifestyle — unmarried at 32, and living with her sister, who has a husband and a baby of her own — is likely not a result of her inability to attract a husband, but rather her inability to feel attraction towards any potential husband. While Eleanor attempts to convince herself that she can envision a future with Luke, this is an act of compulsory heterosexuality, in

[3] Theo is vaguely implied to be a lesbian herself; she lives with a partner of an unspecified gender, and her close friendship with Eleanor indicates what may be slightly stronger than mere platonic attraction. An earlier draft of *Hill House* made Theo's lesbianism explicit, but Jackson omitted this detail in the final version of the book. Even after omitting the explicit detail, Jackson still left enough ambiguity in the final version of the novel to leave Theo's sexuality up to interpretation.

which she attempts to project feelings onto a "viable" man as the future envisioned with him is one which her marriage-focused society would approve of. Adrienne writes of compulsory heterosexuality that

> the advice given American women by male health professionals, particularly in the areas of marital sex, maternity, and child care, has echoed the dictates of the economic marketplace and the role capitalism has needed women to play in production and/or reproduction. Women have become the consumer victims of various cures, therapies, and normative judgments in different periods (including the prescription to middle-class women to embody and preserve the sacredness of the home-the "scientific" romanticization of the home itself). (Rich 633-634)

Eleanor has been told for her entire life that a heteronormative domestic life is one that she should aspire to, as it is what is most profitable to a heterosexual, capitalist, patriarchal society. As her bond with Theo grows, Hill House continues to haunt her. Even after a rift grows between them, she continues to be haunted by the home as a reminder of the domestic life she will never be able to achieve. Eleanor's shifted emotions towards Theo are indicative of a resentment — of Theo's growing bond with Luke as opposed to her previous bond with Eleanor, and of the heteronormative future Theo appears to be pursuing with him. Eleanor has lost a friend who did not shun her for her abnormality at first — Theo has become just like the rest. While Eleanor is terrified of the house's haunting at first, she eventually finds comfort in it. This resembles one possible trajectory of newly-out lesbians; at first frightened by the fact that the future in store for them will not resemble that which they had planned on, and that had been expected of them their whole lives, they may then grow to embrace their divergence from heteronormative culture.

Part of Eleanor's attachment to Hill House lies in the sense of belonging it grants her. Having never previously being able to conform to what the lifestyle of a woman of her age is meant to look like, she finally feels a sense of belonging with the makeshift family that takes up residence in the old house. The group consisting of herself, Theo, Luke, and Dr. Montague forms a family out of a group of strangers in the face of the horrors of the house. This "family" is a bit of an unconventional one — Dr. Montague obviously operates as the "father" figure, but Eleanor's feelings for Luke and her relationship with Theo paint the supposed "sibling" relationship between the three of them with an incestuous hue. This pseudo-incestuous dynamic contributes to the Gothic atmosphere that the house already sets up. Eleanor's refusal to leave Hill House stems from her desire for the sense of belonging that she has only found in the random group that she has occupied Hill House with. Despite the fact that Eleanor's friendship with Theo is now ruined, the dynamic of the occupants of Hill House is the closest to a functional family that Eleanor has ever encountered. When Theo insists that Eleanor can go back to "[her] own little place, [her] own apartment, where all [her] things are" (226), Eleanor cries: "I haven't any apartment … I made it all up … I haven't any home, no place at all" (226). When Eleanor is forced to give up the only true family she has ever known, she decides that she would rather kill herself than abandon it. The final sentence of the novel hints at Eleanor's failed merging with the house in this final act: "whatever walked there, walked alone" (233). Eleanor does not become part of the house, as she so strongly wishes to; rather, the house stands by itself, indifferent to her ever having existed at all.

II.

Merricat Blackwood, the protagonist of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, finds comfort in her familial home and, even though it is haunted by the ghosts of her murdered family members, does not want to leave it. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is a classically Gothic novel, echoing Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" with its crumbling ancestral home and incestuous undertones. In an article for *The New York Review*, Joyce Carol Oates calls the novel "a Gothic parody of the comical self-portraits Shirley Jackson created for the women's magazine market in the 1950s" as a result of its emphasis on the domestic and, especially, the kitchen, with its repetition of food imagery throughout the novel (Oates). Oates draws parallels between the domestic of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* and Jackson's own domestic life — or, rather, death:

> In such best-selling books as *Life Among the Savages* (1953) and *Raising Demons* (1956), a housewife-mother's frustrations are transformed by a deft twist of the wrist into, not a grim account of disintegration and madness, still less the poisoning of her family, but light-hearted comedy. (It's ironic to note that Shirley Jackson died at the age of forty-eight, shortly after the publication of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, of amphetamine addiction, alcoholism, and morbid obesity; negligent of her health for years, she is said to have spoken openly of not expecting to live to be fifty, and in the final months of her life suffered from agoraphobia so extreme she couldn't leave her squalid bedroom — as if in mimicry of the agoraphobic sisters of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.) (Oates)

Oates discusses the recurring food imagery in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* — Constance, Merricat's older sister, is the woman of the house, and prepares elaborate meals that are

described in great detail. Constance's role of housewife is a parody of that of the typical midcentury housewife — while she performs all of the domestic tasks required of the woman of the house, she voluntarily confines herself *only* to the house, which is also the scene of her entire family's murder. Merricat takes on the "outside" roles of the house, leaving the property to collect groceries and library books. Constance and Merricat take on the roles of a married couple, and Oates even describes the fairytale quality to the novel's ending, which results in the two living peacefully together: "*We Have Always Lived in the Castle* ends on an unexpectedly idyllic note, like a fairy-tale romance in which lovers have found each other and even the villagers, repentant of their cruelty, pay the Blackwood sisters homage by bringing food offerings to them, left at the ruins of their doorstep" (Oates). The novel ends with the two living in domestic bliss, but the incestuous nature of Constance and Merricat's relationship adds a Gothic twist to this household fairytale. Jackson's preoccupation with what happens to children with no mother, or no adequate motherly figure, shows in Merricat's replacement of her own mother — even though she has intentionally killed her own mother, Merricat still seeks a motherly figure and cannot function without one. Merricat is so obsessed with Constance, one wonders what she might do if something were to happen to her — if Constance were to run away with Charles after all, or if she were to meet some terrible fate, what would Merricat do then? Her dependence on Constance and incestuous obsession with her make her ill-equipped for a life without her.

Merricat's violent temperament contributes elements of both horror and comedy to *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Merricat is extremely possessive of her older sister, becoming extremely wary of their cousin Charles, who comes to visit in search of the family fortune. When Constance appears to take a liking to Charles, Merricat becomes extremely jealous and attempts

to make Constance see him for who he truly is and do away with him. Merricat is revealed early on to be violent and volatile; she fantasises about seeing the villagers that taunt her writhing in pain, and poisoned her entire family at age eight, sparing her beloved older sister. Like Fancy in *The Sundial*, Merricat is an unnervingly precocious figure who makes casual, chilling statements. An afterword by Johnathan Lethem in the Penguin edition of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* remarks that Merricat, though she is eighteen years old, sounds much younger through her narration: "Despite declaring her eighteen years in the first paragraph, Merricat feels younger … Merricat is far more disturbing, though, precisely for being a grown woman; what's sublimated in her won't be resolved by adolescence" (Jackson 150). Merricat's juvenile quality adds to her unsettling nature; she is an example of arrested development, a case which maturity into adulthood cannot resolve. She is another instance of what could be; just like Eleanor Vance, she is an example of what happens to children when their mothers are absent or inadequate. All three of the horror novels in this study contain instances of unsettling children or maladapted adults formed by inadequate parenting — to Jackson, the child unprepared for adulthood is terrifying. Walking into town, Merricat imagines the village in pain: "I always thought about rot when I came toward the row of stores; I thought about burning black painful rot that ate away from inside, hurting dreadfully. I wished it on the village" (Jackson 6). At the grocery store, she thinks spitefully of the owners while they prepare her order:

> I wish you were all dead, I thought, and longed to say it out loud. Constance said, "Never let them see that you care," and "If you pay any attention they'll only get worse," and probably it was true, but I wished they were dead. I would have liked to come into the grocery some morning and see them all, even the Elberts and their children, lying there crying with the pain and dying. I would then help myself to groceries, I thought, stepping

> over their bodies, taking whatever I fancied from the shelves, and go home, with perhaps a kick for Mrs. Donell while she lay there. (Jackson 8-9)

These statements, not ten pages in, establishes Merricat's chilling interiority, and the opinion she has of the outside world — encompassing everyone who isn't her beloved older sister. The ending of the novel, in which Constance and Merricat live happily in their haunted, mostly ruined home, is one in which Merricat finally receives what she truly wants: her sister, all to herself. The final line of the novel asserts its happy ending: "'Oh, Constance,' I said, 'we are so happy'" (Jackson 146). Merricat's violent thoughts, however, are not only unsettling — they are also comedic.

Merricat walks the line between the uncanny and the comic. Here, her violent remarks can be interpreted as comic by avid readers of Jackson who understand the author's sense of humour. For the new reader who picks up *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* as their first Jackson read, however, her comments can be perceived as jarring or offputting. Pfaller describes this phenomenon: "What is comic for us, because it includes an illusion to which we do not succumb, is uncanny for others who are unprotected and naïve" (Pfaller 209). Berlant and Ngai elaborate on dark humour and its relation to other forms, particularly tragedy. They note that "it is no longer clear what the 'opposite' of comedy is. The go-to foil used to be tragedy (Berlant and Ngai 238). This makes it difficult to tell when something is comedy if it does not appear to be the "opposite" of tragedy: "If it can sometimes be hard to tell if or how comedy is comedy, this might be because some people think a comedy without pleasure or laughter violates itself more extremely than, say, porn that does not produce a desired arousal or a weepie that doesn't make us cry" (Berlant and Ngai 239). Merricat's violent thinking is the kind of humour that exemplifies Jackson's domestic, and especially its depiction in her horror; the comedic and

horrific aspects of Jackson's writing walk the line between the comedic and the uncanny that Pfaller illustrates.

Merricat has an interest in witchcraft, and associates meaning to certain words and benign objects that resembles obsessive-compulsivity. Her black cat, Jonas, is her familiar, and she uses the natural elements that surround the Blackwood home to conduct kinds of magic. Jackson's daughter, Sally, also exhibits an interest in magic — so much so that Hyman implements a ban on her witchcraft in *Raising Demons*. Though an earlier account of Jackson's life, written by Judy Oppenheimer, emphasises the importance of witchcraft in Jackson's life, Franklin's biography of the author insists that this was mostly a running joke and, at times, a marketing ploy to sell more of her books. Merricat and Sally's mutual interest in magic and witchcraft, however, reveals another permeable barrier between the cozy atmosphere of her memoirs and the Gothic atmosphere of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. While Sally's magic appears to simply be the harmless interest of a young girl, one incident in which she concocts a spell seems to result in the fridge door coming off its hinges:

> [Hyman] made a dramatic wide gesture of opening the refrigerator door, which came completely off the refrigerator and fell against him, so that he backed up across the kitchen floor, staggering, with the refrigerator door in his arms.
>
> "Dig *that*," Laurie said in admiration.
>
> "*Jeekers*," Sally said, eyes wide. "I went and unstuck the wrong *side*." (Jackson 161)

Hyman's ban on magic appears not to be a restriction due to the household chaos it produces, but rather a rule born out of Hyman's genuine apprehension regarding Sally's use of witchcraft. In one episode, Hyman appears uneasy when Sally begins using magic, and Sally must reassure him:

> "Now wait a minute here," my husband began.
>
> "It's all right," Sally said, opening one eye. "I'm just pretending. This is only sand."
>
> "We're just untending," Barry explained reassuringly. "Bleaker and sneaker and weaker and deaker."
>
> They filed out. My husband studied the floor morosely. "That certainly looked like magic to me;" he said, "and I don't like it. Going to have footwear popping up all over, right through the floor, probably wreck the foundations." (Jackson 276)

Sally's antics are treated largely by Jackson as the mere pretending games of a child, but Hyman is genuinely afraid of their effects. Jackson urges Sally not to bring up magic in front of her father for fear of his reaction. In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* Merricat's interest can be read as a childish obsession, whereas in *Raising Demons*, Sally's practice of witchcraft is presented as a potential cause for genuine concern.

The importance of food in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* creates a homey atmosphere in the Gothic Blackwood mansion. Constance is the motherly figure, always in the kitchen preparing some kind of delicacy. Merricat makes frequent reference to the food consumed in the house, which frames both her day-to-day activities and the narrative of the novel. The murder of most of the Blackwood family occurs during dinner; food frames most of the Blackwood family life. In the basement, a collection of preserves serves as a reminder of past generations of the Blackwood family:

> The entire cellar of our house was filled with food. All the Blackwood women had made food and had taken pride in adding to the great supply of food in our cellar. There were jars of jam made by great-grandmothers, with labels in thin pale writing, almost unreadable by now, and pickles made by great-aunts and vegetables put up by our

> grandmother, and even our mother had left behind her six jars of apple jelly. Constance had worked all her life at adding to the food in the cellar, and her rows and rows of jars were easily the handsomest, and shone among the others. (Jackson 42)

Family is carried on through food; even the sugar bowl, through which Merricat delivers the poison that kills most of the family, is "a family heirloom" (Jackson 36). Food's strong ties to memory make it a suitable tool for storytelling. Beth M. Forrest and Greg de St. Maurice explain food's link to conceptions of the self: "Food is ubiquitously used in the process of identity formation … Food is also ephemeral, really only physically existing in the present; but because of the mind and shared cultural forms, food can also occupy the past and the future" (Forrest and St. Maurice 3-4). In a study analysing the link between nostalgia and food consumption, Alexandra Vignolles and Paul-Emmanuel Pichon note the importance of family to food nostalgia:

> Nostalgia establishes a symbolic connection with people or events from the past, and consumption objects are significant evidence of the past (Belk, 1991), even if the past is experienced indirectly (Stern, 1992). These consumption objects, such as family recipes or specific food products, can stir up nostalgic emotions and memories. Baker et al. (2005) have described the nostalgic responses and associations related to various consumers' favorite recipes. The results show that these recipes are associated with rituals performed on feast days, significant events, birthdays, new seasons or recovery from illnesses. Recipes contribute to structuring families and support the intergenerational transmission of the know-how. (Vignolles and Pichon 229)

Vignolles and Pichon further add that "Nostalgic links and memories can be conveyed by food practices, whose symbolic function contributes to shaping families, increasing intergenerational

links, strengthening selfhood or transmitting rituals" (Vignolles and Pichon 229). Many of the subjects of Vignolles and Pichon's study cite nostalgia for home or family as reasons for which they consume certain foods; for example, one woman explained that "Upon seeing marshmallows in a supermarket, I felt a mixture of joy and sadness" (Vignolles and Pichon 231).

Vignolles and Pichon conclude that "[food-associated] memories may also convey time spent in the family, more particularly with the mother or the grandmother" (231). Food functions in life narratives as a tie to the home; Forrest and St. Maurice explore links between motherhood and the kitchen in life writing. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*'s emphasis on food functions similarly — Merricat's warm memories are tied to food, as she associates its consumption with Constance, her beloved older sister and motherly figure. In the absence of their mother, whom Merricat has murdered, Constance takes on the role of the motherly figure, which is emphasised by her culinary skill. The home, and especially the kitchen, are strong feminine spaces in the Blackwood mansion; though Uncle Julian lives with them, his incapacitation means that he is not a threat to the feminine space of the home. Constance does not only cook out of necessity, but even excels at it; Merricat notes that of all the preserves stored in the cellar, Constance's are "easily the handsomest" (Jackson 42).

A *New Yorker* article on Ruth Franklin's biography explains the personal cost for Jackson of writing this novel: "Shortly after the publication of 'We Have Always Lived in the Castle,' in September, 1962, Jackson suffered a nervous breakdown and a prolonged bout of acute agoraphobia that prevented her going outside for half a year. 'I have written myself into the house,' she said" (Heller). How did Jackson write herself into the house — was it a fear of the outside, or a comfort in the home that drove her inside? The "evil" in Jackson's stories often came from the outside, rather than from within the home, as opposed to her Female Gothic

predecessors, who depicted the home as a prison — think of "The Yellow Wallpaper," or Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, which depicted womanhood and the home as a prison. Jackson's writing shows a level of comfort found within the home not present in her predecessor's works. Perhaps it was fear of the outside — the impending doom of an apocalyptic *Sundial* chain of events that defined the Cold War era. Or perhaps Jackson began to identify with her Female Gothic ancestors and imprisoned herself within the home, reflecting her personal imprisonment — her marriage to Hyman — with a more literal confinement. Like Eleanor, Jackson finds comfort in the home despite its haunted quality — or, in fact, because of it. Penning *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* was an act of writing herself into the house — after years of exploring the home in her fiction, Jackson finally became one with it. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* was Jackson's final published novel. In the years when she began to overcome her agoraphobia Jackson began to write a novel, *Come Along With Me*, that was still in progress when she died in her sleep in 1965. The book featured a woman leaving her husband — perhaps a reflection of Jackson's own troubling marriage to Hyman. In an undated letter to Hyman, Jackson wrote: "you once wrote me a letter … telling me i would never be lonely again. i think that was the first, the most dreadful, lie you ever told me"[4] (Franklin 257). Jackson died before being able to write herself back out of the house.

While Jackson's attachment to home was strong, there was plenty of reason for her to fear the outside as well. Ruth Franklin comments on the state of the world that shaped Jackson's depiction of the home in her works:

> The American midcentury was a time of both unprecedented prosperity and profound uncertainty, with the shadow of the war that had just ended — a war unlike any other —

[4] Jackson wrote all of her correspondence and drafts in all lowercase letters.

> lingering uneasily in the background. The women who had entered the workforce to replace their enlisted husbands and brothers were balking at being urged back into the home — even a home stocked with gleaming new appliances, in a safe suburban neighbourhood. The House Committee on Un-American Activities sought Communists lurking in the halls of U.S. government institutions and at home in those cozy suburbs. Both America and the Soviet Union tested nuclear bombs of unprecedented power and danger. And a massive social transformation, kick-started by the desegregation of public schools, was under way. All these tensions are palpable in Jackson's work, which channels a far-reaching anxiety about the tumultuous world outside the home even as it investigates the dark secrets of domestic American life. (Franklin 6)

We Have Always Lived in the Castle can be read as a Cold War metaphor — it is a depiction of a frightening outside world, and the comfort that its characters find within the home that protects them from it. The ending of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is a gruesomely happy one, in which Constance and Merricat live in solitude, finally sheltered from the horrible outside world. It is unsurprising that Jackson penned this novel shortly before retreating into her own home for years on end. The Blackwood family home is an unsettling one, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is by no means an account of the cheery domestic bliss that a midcentury housewife would aspire to. Still, however, Constance and Merricat live peacefully in it, away from the villagers who so despise them. Of all Jackson's works, however, it is *The Sundial* that can be read most obviously as a Cold War metaphor, since the Hallorans prepare the family mansion to serve as a shelter during an oncoming apocalypse. As opposed to Constance and Merricat's happy, Gothic fairytale ending, *The Sundial* ends on an uncertain, unsettling note, mirroring the uncertainty and fear of the Cold War era.

III.

The Sundial's horrific experiences are received as comic due to the characters' social position. The Halloran family are a caricatured depiction of an upper-class American dynasty, unaware of their own absurdity. While the apocalypse the family is awaiting does not arrive within the scope of the novel, it can be assumed that the apocalypse is not really arriving at all, and the Halloran family's actions are all based on a false prophecy. Aunt Fanny meanders into the garden and receives news of the upcoming apocalypse from the ghost of her late father, in a parody of Hamlet's vision of Hamlet, Sr. informing him that he has been murdered. Just like the Shakespearean character, Aunt Fanny receives the prophecy immediately following a funeral — in her case, it is that of her brother. Aunt Fanny believes that her late brother has been murdered, just like Hamlet, Sr. — it is a common speculation among the family, accepted as fact. Essex references the play within the first chapter of the novel: "The king, thy murdered father's ghost," he recites, before asking, "Where are the funeral baked meats?" (Jackson 2). With this allusion to Hamlet's bitter remark that "The funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (Shakespeare 1.2.179-180), Essex heavily implies that Lionel Halloran was murdered (by Mrs. Halloran, as it is commonly speculated amongst the family), and Mrs. Halloran is as unfeeling as Gertrude. This allusion, uttered within the first few pages of the novel, sets up *The Sundial* as a comic reflection of *Hamlet*, in which a murder and a vision of a late father lead to a group psychosis. *The Sundial* transforms the tragic situation first seen in Hamlet into a comic one, in portraying a family sent into a flurry of apocalyptic preparation upon the direction of their loopy aunt.

The Hallorans' socioeconomic status makes them subjects of ridicule on the reader's behalf. The familial mansion is comically large, even containing an exact replica of the apartment in which Aunt Fanny and her brother grew up before the mansion was built. The house is adorned with quotations that the original Mr. Halloran found inspiring, but the house's current inhabitants roll their eyes at these statements. The sundial from which the book takes its title is placed haphazardly on the front lawn, ruining the symmetry of an otherwise well-planned home. The mansion that he built to serve as the Halloran family's legacy fails; these attempts to impose a regal quality upon the home fall comically short. The novel discusses the methodical manner in which the first Mr. Halloran planned out his house and its surrounding estate in great detail:

> There were twenty windows to the left wing of the house, and twenty windows to the right; because the great door in the center was double, on the second floor there were forty-two windows across and forty-two on the third floor … On either side of the door the terrace went to the right for eighty-six black tiles and eighty-six white tiles, and equally to the left … The lawn swept precisely around the blue pool — which was square — and up in a vastly long lovely movement to a summer house built like a temple to some minor mathematical god … (Jackson 9)

This long description is followed by a comically short description of the sundial's placement: "Intruding purposefully upon the entire scene, an inevitable focus, was the sundial, set badly off center and reading WHAT IS THIS WORLD?" (Jackson 10). The eponymous sundial, prized by the first Mr. Halloran, skews the estate's otherwise perfectly planned symmetry. The estate, in addition, has its own small lake, and a cave in which Aunt Frances takes shelter. The house's

construction is comically exorbitant, the haphazardly-placed sundial serving as the crooked cherry on an otherwise pristinely decorated cake.

The interactions between the Halloran family members, and those with their staff, are full of sharp humour and wit. Conversations in *The Sundial* are snippy and dry, and those between Fancy, the youngest Halloran, and her other family members, are often shockingly funny. The first conversation in the novel occurs between Fancy and her mother, Maryjane, with the latter eyeing Mrs. Halloran with disgust: "Maybe she will drop dead on the doorstep. Fancy, dear, would you like to see Granny drop dead on the doorstep?" (Jackson 1). Fancy replies unflinchingly: "Yes, mother." Not long after, she escalates: "Shall I push her? … Like she pushed my daddy," she asks her mother, seemingly without emotion at all (Jackson 1). Fancy's quips are comical due to their severity, and the fact that they are uttered by a young child. They are a darker reflection of the comical statements Jackson's own children make in her memoirs. Jackson recalls a moment in time during which her daughter, Sally, invents an imaginary home for herself. Fancy has a similar preoccupation with a house of her own: her doll house. Maryjane and Arabella find one of Fancy's dolls — "an old lady doll," as described by Arabella — left on the sundial with pins stuck in it, like a voodoo doll. This image serves as the inspiration for the cover illustration of a Penguin edition of the novel. "Of course, it's Fancy's grandmother doll," replies Maryjane. She is upset at the idea of someone sticking pins in the doll — "Fancy *loves* those dolls," she insists (Jackson 105). The elder Mrs. Halloran, Orianna, frequently tells Fancy that she will inherit the familial mansion — and the rest of the world, with the impending apocalypse — after her death. Fancy loves her dollhouse, but claims that once she inherits the estate, she will destroy it as she will no longer have any need for it: "When my grandmother dies … I am going to smash my doll house. I won't need it any more" (Jackson 18). Aunt Fanny takes

Fancy up to a life-size replica of the apartment she grew up in, insisting on playing a game of life-size pretend: "it's my doll house," she says of the rooms (Jackson 162). Fancy appears largely unamused, and is hesitant to play along, resulting in a quip that, while on one level exposes the Halloran family's lack of warmth towards one another, is also remarkably funny:

> "I want to play with the toys now."
>
> "Later, dear. We are a very happy family and we love each other dearly. Don't we?"
>
> "I guess so," Fancy said uncertainly. (Jackson 163)

It is perhaps the fictional aspect of Jackson's novels that make Fancy a more frightening character than the children in the novel; since Jackson's children are real people, who can be assumed to grow up into functional human beings, their remarks are simply brushed off as children acting strangely. As Fancy is a fictional character, however, the possibilities regarding her actions in the future are endless, and she could prove to be a much more sinister character than Jackson's real-life children.

The events of *The Sundial* are all in anticipation of the apocalypse that Aunt Fanny predicts, but the novel ends on the day the world is supposedly meant to end, never revealing whether or not Aunt Fanny's vision is correct. A GoodReads review of *The Sundial* from October 2021, giving the novel a two-star rating, reads:

> It started like it might be spooky. Big house. Crazy old lady. Giant maze outside to get lost in while "warm" marbled statues reach out and touch her … But spookiness was run down and tackled by silliness before long. Crazy old lady is visited by her dead father, who warns her of the impending end of the world and tells her that the ancestral home is the only place to survive … There is no explanation for this and many other things. Will the house float in case of flood? Is it fireproof in case of fire? Does it have nuclear

> warhead deflector shields in case of some fool ass pressing a button? ("Ken's Review of *The Sundial*")

All of these seemingly unanswered questions are, in fact, indicators of the Halloran family's group delusion. Of course Aunt Fanny's prediction seems ridiculous — not so much the apocalypse itself, which is all too imaginable during the Cold War, but that the Hallorans, in particular, should be exempt. The Halloran family's preparations are impractical, and the subject of the joke throughout the novel. They tear their absurdly expensive house to shreds in anticipation of a new world based on the delusions of their elderly aunt. While certain individual events of the novel are unsettling — Fancy's disturbing remarks, and Julia's frightening experience with a cab driver — the novel functions as a comedy from the start, poking fun at the group psychosis of an aristocratic family.

Although the Hallorans have an unspeakably large mansion at their disposal, they seem indifferent to it and, at multiple occasions, make remarks about how they are looking forward to when they are no longer confined to the walls of a physical house. They are very exclusive of who may join them in the family house in anticipation of the end of the world, but they assume that, once it arrives, they will no longer have any need for the familial mansion. Miss Ogilvie tells the young man working at the drugstore counter about the impending apocalypse, but insists that he and the rest of the villagers are not permitted to wait in the Halloran mansion with them, even though, given its size, there would be plenty of room: "I suppose it's very hard for you to picture it, but there will be simply nothing; we will look out of the windows — that's all of us, in the big house, not you, I'm afraid, and I am really terribly sorry. But we will all look out the windows and in all the world there will be nothing but drying earth, with the grass beginning to grow" (Jackson 84). Essex questions this philosophy, and Aunt Fanny responds in religious

terms: “It has seemed to me that this house will become a kind of shrine, for our children, and for their children … a roof will become to them synonymous with an altar; we may yet live to see our grandchildren worshipping in this house” (Jackson 109). While the family obsessively prepares their house for the incoming apocalypse, they insist that once the new world begins, they will have no more use for it. This stands in parallel to Fancy’s dollhouse, which she insists she will discard once she inherits the real Halloran mansion. To Orianna and the rest of the adult family members, the mansion is the dollhouse, and the outside world is the true prize — once they inherit the earth, they will have no use for it anymore.

The horrific episodes of *The Sundial* feature women getting lost — Aunt Fanny trying to find her way out of the maze, Julia trying to find her way back to the house after a terrifying experience with a cab driver. Aunt Fanny’s episodes are instances in which she loses herself in her own home, experiencing the unfamiliar within the familiar that Freud would describe as *unheimlich*. The Halloran mansion’s comically decadent quality lends itself to defamiliarization more easily. The grounds are so large that even Fanny, who has lived there her entire lifetime, manages to get lost within it. Meanwhile, the construction of the replica apartment within the mansion, and Fanny’s consistent return to it, indicates a yearning for a space that truly feels like home, as opposed to the vast, unfeeling Halloran estate. When Aunt Fanny becomes lost in the garden, the whole world becomes frightening and dangerous, even though she is only in her own backyard.

Vivian Sobchack notes the gendered aspect of being lost: “Women … tend to inhabit space tentatively, in a structure of self-contradiction that is inhibiting and self-distancing … As a consequence, women in our culture tend not to enjoy the synthetic, transparent, and unreflective unity of immanence and transcendence that is a common experience among men” (33). In her

attempt to leave the estate, Julia encounters an acute form of this problem. She gets in a taxi that is meant to take her to the city, encountering an unsettling cab driver who tells her stories of all the animals he has killed. When they near a thick fog, Julia asks the cab driver if he knows his way around:

> "Are you sure you know the road?"
>
> "Do it blindfold." He chuckled. "*Doing* it blindfold," he said. (Jackson 132)

Julia is on his territory, and soon a threat of sexual assault emerges, amplified by the fact that the driver knows his way around the space they are in, and she does not. Sobchack relates womanhood to being an object in space: "more often than men, women are the objects of gazes that locate and invite their bodies to live as merely material 'things' immanently positioned in space" (32). When Julia jumps out of the car to escape the driver, she finds herself lost in the fog.

At the same time, the overall shape of Julia's movements corresponds to another aspect of Sobchack's argument, a spatial pattern derived from an experience Freud recounts in "The Uncanny" of finding himself again and again in the same street: "Freud's experience suggests one shape to being lost — and it is *round*. Indeed, in the vernacular we call it 'going round in circles" (Sobchack 23, emphasis author's). Julia's departure from the Halloran mansion ends up taking this circular form. After stumbling through the blinding fog, she is ready to give up hope when she somehow finds herself back at the mansion: "this is really more than I can endure, she thought deliberately, and fell unendingly, wracked and bruised, lying against the great iron gates with the elaborate H worked into the scrollwork on either side" (Jackson 137). In making this discovery, she shifts from not knowing where she is to knowing all too well, converting the whole harrowing episode into an uncanny way of going nowhere.

One can view *The Sundial* as the closest to a synthesis of Jackson's seemingly opposing genres — equal parts humour and horror. *The Sundial* takes a different tone than the other two novels covered in this study. *The Sundial* is more of a black comedy, with moments of horror scattered throughout. The events of the novel can be horrific — Gloria's glimpses through the mirror and Julia's attempt to escape the mansion are moments of true fear — but *The Sundial* is much more comedic than the other Jackson novels explored in this study. On a scale that ranges from most humorous to most horrifying, then, and placing Jackson's work along it, *The Sundial* would sit nearest to the middle. My analysis of Jackson's work has largely revolved around the triad of comedy, homeliness, and the uncanny, all of which can, to varying degrees, be found in the works of Jackson. While *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* and *The Haunting of Hill House* most prominently feature the uncanny and the homely, I present *The Sundial* as a bridge between Jackson's two kinds of works in this study, not because it is the most balanced between the horrific and the homely, but rather because its darkly humourous tone more closely resembles the voice found in Jackson's memoirs. Viewing *The Sundial* as a bridge between genres allows for a reading of Jackson's works along a continuum, rather than the opposed categorization that has previously been applied to them. Placing *The Sundial* at the midway point on this scale illustrates the malleability of genre in Jackson's work. Jackson refuses to see the home in any one way, and this is how she is capable of exemplifying the home. She experiences the home as both horrific and comforting — as is its true form — and her works thus depict a very human understanding of the home in its full complexity.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this study, I noted that while money and publishing were, of course, factors in Jackson's writing, I do not believe that she wrote her memoirs purely to have something marketable to housewives after the June Cleaver style of writing. Nor do I believe that her horror novels are an exaggeration of her view of the home as a haunting entity. Rather, I believe that only in reading in both of Jackson's genres can one form a cohesive image of Jackson's domestic. The domestic in Jackson's memoirs is not the overly sweet, picturesque domestic sold to American citizens as propaganda. It endures challenges — both in the comical escapades of Jackson's children and the horrors she finds in her everyday domestic life. Jackson challenges this American ideal, testing it through her own lens; one that is capable of finding the horror that lurks in the home, twisting the familiar and comforting into something that becomes unrecognizable. Jackson produces a restored homeliness — one that is imperfect, tested by Jackson's capability to see the harsh and terrifying that exists within the home. Jackson's work thus shows the strength of the home; even when tested by the vision of someone who can so easily see the horrors that breed within the domestic, the home prevails.

Jackson resisted categorization of all kinds. In Chapter 3 I briefly discuss the lesbian undertones to *The Haunting of Hill House*. Jackson very clearly hints at Theo's lesbianism in *Hill House*, but refuses to name it outright. Ruth Franklin speculates that this is because Jackson, in every way, did her best to avoid categorization. Her husband's book, *The Armed Vision*, was an outline of critical approaches to literary theory, outlining rigid categories of the kinds of critic one could be. Jackson, on the other hand, resisted giving any work of hers any specific label. She was not a housewife or a writer; she was somewhere in between. Her horror novels, even, are not really horror in the sense that one would often define the genre — they are part horror, part

psychological thriller, part comedy, and, as we have seen from my analysis, all contain a hint of uncritical, genuine love for the house. The house in Jackson's work, too, resists any kind of categorization.

Jackson's work is a response to the midcentury American propaganda of the home. This is clear in her horror fiction; the home comes alive in malicious ways, functions as a prison, and serves as a place of death in her final three novels. Even in her June Cleaver-style memoir works, she challenges the American ideal of what the perfect wife and household must be; she is vocal about her shortcomings and does not portray her life as a housewife and mother as perfect by any means. Jackson's children are not perfectly obedient — she even refers to them as "demons." Even so, her domestic life is not an explicit horror, and *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons* both end on touching, familial notes. While Jackson resists the artificial image of the home perpetuated in the midcentury, she does not show disdain for the home; her memoirs show a genuine love for her home life, and she clearly takes pride in her role as both a housewife and mother. Jackson is a constructor of the domestic; she views the home in a way other theorists and authors are not capable of expressly because of her refusal to adhere to categories. The home in Jackson's work is uncanny in the Freudian sense — it is both homely and unhomely, and it is difficult to tell at one time whether it is one or the other.

I return to Stanley Hyman's statement upon Jackson's death: "Shirley Jackson wrote in a variety of forms and styles because she was, like everyone else, a complex human being, confronting the world in many different roles and moods" (Franklin 498). Jackson's depiction of the home is complex and confusing because the house is complex and confusing. Her portrayal of the house in "a variety of forms and styles" reflects the vast spectrum of experiences that await us in the houses we occupy. Here I choose to emphasise Hyman's qualifier of "like

everyone else." Jackson's complex portrayal of the domestic in her writing is unique, but her experience of the domestic is not. By this I mean that while Jackson's domestic is an intriguing topic of study because it is rare in literature of its kind, it is actually a very common human experience of the domestic and the home. Jackson's domestic is so intriguing because it captures the very human essence of the home.

My project has aimed to explore how Jackson's works bleed into one another, creating an amorphous image of the home capable of all kinds of affective qualities. The house can comfort, terrify, and unsettle — sometimes all at once. Jackson conveys the paradox of the *unheimlich* by refusing to confine herself through medium or genre. In reading her works against their genre, I have demonstrated their flexibility. As her memoirs can function as horror, and her horror can function as "homely" or comic fiction, Jackson's seemingly opposing genres are, in fact, much more closely interrelated than they appear. In forming a conception of Jackson's *oeuvre* as a spectrum of homely experiences, I posit that Jackson's work illustrates the home in the purest form. Jackson's skepticism of American mid-century propaganda of the home could very well have led her to only write the eerie, haunting fiction she is most known for, in which the home torments its occupants. Even in her horror fiction, however, Jackson's home has a trace of the warm and welcoming — Eleanor finds herself at home in Hill House, Merricat and Constance live happily in the Blackwood Mansion, and the Halloran mansion still, at the end of the day, functions as a shelter. Her memoirs, while embellished, are genuine, warm recountings of her home life, but are still vaguely haunted by the uncanny. It is through her work that we encounter a home that refuses to be seen in any one way. Jackson's works are not only mirror images of themselves, as I claim in my introductory chapter, but also mirror images of the domestic that we, her readers, encounter. Jackson presents us with a complicated domestic that challenges our

perceptions of the house; its contrary, contorting image, never remaining one thing, is what makes it *home*.

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