



Ghosts and Cultural Hauntings

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The *Digital Literature Review*

The Digital Literature Review is a journal showcasing undergraduate student work in literature and cultural studies. The journal is produced by undergraduate students at Ball State University who are involved in the Digital Literature Review immersive learning project. Our goal is to provide a forum where undergraduate students can showcase their research projects and disseminate their valuable contributions to ongoing academic conversations.

The Digital Literature Review is published annually in the spring. The deadline for submissions is in early January. We welcome original articles relating to each year's theme. Articles should range from 3000-5000 words; every article is reviewed by undergraduate students on the journal's editorial team. Notification of initial decision is in February. All authors receive constructive feedback concerning submissions.

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Fear Itself, or Fearing Ourselves: The Literature of Ghosts and Cultural Hauntings

Dillon O’Nail, *Editor in Chief*

*“What is even worse, our lack of insight deprives us of the capacity to
deal with evil.”*

—Carl Jung, (53)

We are a culture of fear.

Since our inception (and I use the collective deliberately), the United States has equipped this useful system of fear to control, suppress, influence, and protect. The failure of Reconstruction, for example, and the subsequent rise of Jim Crow tyranny were not the products of White fear over the fabricated mythos of innate Black male violence because, of course, that was a narrative constructed to justify White acts of terrorism against Black communities and life. No, Jim Crow was instead an outgrowth of White fear over the possibility of losing White hegemony. By indulging in this heinous narrative, White America asserted aggressive force to suppress Black success and equality while protecting White control through the use of fear. Our culture has not changed, as evidenced by the propagation of a narrative of urban danger and resultant avoidance (“Make sure to stay away from that neighborhood!”), the continuous acquittals of individuals committing acts of police brutality (“I feared for my life”—even when the innocent victim was unarmed), and

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the backlash against the Obama Era manifested through the Trump Administration. Perhaps the clearest expression of fear can be found in the War on Terror and the surrounding discourse created to justify the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and to garner support for those campaigns.

Fear controls us.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 in which we all currently live perfectly demonstrates these enduring ghosts of fear and hatred. The fear I speak of when I mention COVID-19 is not our worry about leaving our homes. Instead, I mean the resurgence of xenophobia against Chinese people. The emergence of this lethal, frankly terrifying disease has provided the perfect excuse for racist individuals to justify their hatred for Chinese citizens and anyone who appears Asian more generally. People are afraid of COVID-19, and they utilize that fear to their racial benefit.

Simply look at the films and literature we enjoy. A plethora of horror films about ghosts and hauntings maintain their vast audience, from the timeless legacy of *Ghostbusters* (1984) to the immense success of *The Conjuring* (2013-2020) series. Simply put, we love to be scared. Some films, such as *A Ghost Story* (2017), accomplish similar work to this year's edition of the *Digital Literature Review*, elevating a simple haunting to a profound position that sentimentally explores love, loss, reconciliation, and, perhaps most iconic of all ghost stories, peace. Novels such as Shirley Jackson's 1959 *The Haunting of Hill House* have enjoyed a resurgence of cultural relevancy as a result of Mike Flanagan's 2018 reimagined Netflix series, and Stephen King's 1977 *The Shining* dares audiences to wonder what is truly more frightening: strange apparitions of twins at the end of hotel corridors or the gripping, destructive ghost of alcoholism? Apparently, ghost stories are more than jump-scares and ensuring the audience cannot sleep at night. Like any tale, ghost stories offer an intimate meditation on culture and the individual.

The *Digital Literature Review* has thus turned our focus towards the paranormal this year. Literature of ghosts and hauntings offers a medium through which we can better understand ourselves, our culture, and our experiences. Ghosts can remind us of past injustices by blurring the division between history and the present, such as in LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* (2001) when Auda Billy, through the influence of her ghostly ancestor Shakbatina, repeats history by planning to murder the Choctaw Chief Redford McAlester for corruption and greed. Ghosts can comfort, as we can see in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991), when Ethel Rosenberg's ghost sings Roy Cohn a lullaby on his deathbed or the titular Angel helps Prior Walter find solace as he struggles with HIV. Ghosts can disturb, like those in the aforementioned *The Haunting of Hill House*, when Eleanor Vance, a woman desperate for affection and community, believes herself to be holding a hand in the isolating darkness—only to find no one was there. Some ghosts, such as the titular

one that haunts the residents of 124 Bluestone in Toni Morrison's magnum opus *Beloved* (1987), can accomplish all three. While encountering Sethe, Denver, and Paul D's traumatic experiences with slavery and its aftermath, everyone—character and reader alike—finds remembrance, disturbance, and somehow, despite it all, comfort by the end of the novel. Ghosts are manifold, and to neglect serious academic inquiry into the genre is to neglect the deepest aspects of human existence. Tales of ghosts and cultural hauntings force us to face our nightmares head on, offering insights into past and current evils. Through these insights, we gain the ability to exorcise and lay to rest that which haunts us—whether it be colonization, the AIDS Crisis, familial trauma, or slavery. As Carl Jung implies, these evils persist until we finally engage in serious, critical reflection with them and their legacies.

To help break ground into this excavation, the *Digital Literature Review* spent ample time studying useful theories that help us understand the world of ghosts and cultural hauntings. Sigmund Freud's conception of the uncanny offers perhaps the most direct entrance into understanding our fascination with fear, ghosts, and hauntings. Freud describes the uncanny as an overlapping of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, which translates to homey, or familiar, and strange, or unfamiliar, respectively. We experience animated dolls like Chucky, for example, or *déjà vu* as uncanny because something about these instances ring as simultaneously familiar and strange. We know dolls are not human, of course, but they sure do *look* like humans, and their movements at least mimic those of humans; we see ourselves within them but know they are not us and we are not them. Likewise, *déjà vu* leaves a person confidently aware they have never experienced this moment before yet equally as confident that the moment is familiar—*too* familiar. Ghosts and hauntings often embody the uncanny, as some of the essays within this edition discuss, and to understand why these apparitions are strange we must understand why they are simultaneously familiar and vice versa. The uncanny allows us to understand not only why we are drawn to ghosts and hauntings, but what they reveal about us—even though we may not be ghosts, we see ourselves in them. As Avery Gordon posits in her essay “her shape and his hand,” “The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course” (8). Ghost stories and hauntings humble us, revealing just how little we truly know about ourselves; our “well-trained eyes” are not as vigilant as we would like. Ghosts also, however, imbue people, places, and events with the dignity and agency they were denied in life, now able to assert their undeniable presence “in [their] own way.” In these ways, ghosts are educational, ghosts are healing, and ghosts are respectful in ways the living often is not.

A discussion of ghosts and cultural hauntings must not neglect an inclusion of trauma. Ghosts are perfect embodiments of trauma, physically symbolizing the ways in which past people and experiences linger on in the present. Like trauma, ghosts make peaceful living an impossibility. They throw pots and pans, stare back from a darkened room, and hide under your bed. Ghosts invade the home. Trauma likewise invades the home, or the self. Healing remains a disembodied goal until trauma has been laid to a peaceful rest. The literary analysis of ghosts and cultural hauntings thus offers practice in addressing and handling trauma, culturally or personally. In sum, ghosts are an intimate, yet terrifying, relationship between the self and the community, between how we construct our own fantasies and the reality in which we live. To tie these ghosts back to Freud, “the uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred” (150). Ghosts bring us closer to and makes us more aware of ourselves and our nation.

Starting this edition of the *Digital Literature Review* is Eliza O’Donnell’s essay, “Hauntings of Bodies, Selves, and Houses: A Comparative Reading of Three of Emily Carroll’s Short Horror Comic Series.” Instead of exploring how ghosts are disconnected from the body, the author understands them as predatory forces attempting to *reconnect* with the body. Through analyzing several of Emily Carroll’s publications, O’Donnell’s essay ties the cultural to the personal, exploring how cultural ideologies of femininity and domesticity entrap women in Carroll’s texts. Addison Paul’s “Haunting the Body: An Exploration of Scars as Ghosts” that further grounds us within the embodied self by exploring the physical impact of trauma. The author analyzes Gillian Flynn’s *Sharp Objects* (2006) and the HBO 2018 miniseries adaptation to understand how self-harm, trauma, and hauntings all are interconnected, while also questioning the exploitative representations of female self-harm in entertainment.

Paul’s essay leads us directly to the next couple essays, written by Isabel Parham and me, respectively. Parham’s essay, “Peace at Last: Grappling with Ghosts and the Family Structure in *The Sixth Sense* and *The Haunting of Hill House*,” furthers our study of the self’s response to trauma and gender by connecting ghosts and hauntings to the heterosexual family. The author analyzes the main characters of the primary sources to better understand how the characters embrace the uncanny to defy or accept nuclear family structures, ultimately allowing them to reconcile with their traumas and find peace at last. My essay, “‘Outside the Gate’: Family, Selfhood, and Post-Traumatic Growth in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*,” unites the previous themes of selfhood, trauma, and cultural issues of familial structures to illuminate the complexities of familial trauma as well as the nuances of post-traumatic growth (PTG). With these two essays, our journal shifts focus from the self back to the culture.

Ashley Burns's "Political Polarization and Demonic Possession: How American Culture is Haunted by its Own Fascination with Good and Evil" explores how films about possession and exorcism reflect political polarization. The author provides a critical framework with which to understand how cultures become possessed. The following four essays analyze various facets of cultural hauntings more broadly. Clare Nee's "The Haunt of Injustice: Exploring Homophobia in Vampire Literature" looks at Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to analyze the ways in which homophobic violence haunts societies past and present. Jacob Garrett, in "Taking a Look in the Mirror: The Inversion of Middle-Class Fears of Urban Decay and the Representation of Racial Violence and in Bernard Rose's *Candyman*," posits that Rose subverts horror film tropes to force audiences to grapple with the enduring presence of classism and racism. "Stolen Spirits: The Appropriation of the Wendigo Spirit in Horror Literature," by Kallie Hunchman, reads Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1983) and Algernon Blackwood's "The Wendigo" (1910) to demonstrate how Native American culture—and the windigo figure in particular—faces continuous exploitation and appropriation by Anglo-Americans. Adam Ladner's "The American Midwestern Haunting: The Asylum Lives On" explores the histories, similarities, and differences in stories of "haunted" Midwestern asylums to elucidate fears of mental health patients, gradually bringing the journal back to the focus on the individual.

From these, we move to the last set of essays, beginning with Brooke Lilek's "Horrors of Society: The Reflection of Societal Fears in American Horror Films." The author argues that *Polytergeist* reflects how technology haunts us, using the differences between the original film (1982) and its recent remake (2015) to demonstrate how our relationship with technology has (and had not) evolved over time. This edition of the *Digital Literature Review* concludes with Erin Goff's "Death in the Digital World," bringing us back to modern day and the self. Goff explores a new, unique phenomenon deserving of attention: how technology such as social media morphs our individual ability to grieve and mourn.

The structure of the journal intends to guide you, the reader, through that back-and-forth relationship between the self and the community. By beginning with a focus on the self, evolving into an exploration of culture at large, and eventually returning to the self, this journal's structure is intended to leave you with a better understanding of how we all are haunted, personally and culturally, and how our ghosts influence one another; we are haunted because of society, and society is haunted because of us. Literature of ghosts and cultural hauntings helps us see clearly, even if we must peer past shimmering, translucent specters to reach these revelations.

Do not be afraid. Look under your bed. You will be amazed by what you find.

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Hauntings of Bodies, Selves, and Houses: A Comparative Reading of Three of Emily Carroll's Short Horror Comic Stories

Eliza O'Donnell, *Loyola University*

This essay examines how the themes of domesticity, gender, and the function of bodies within the horrific realms of haunted domiciles function in three of comic and graphic novel author Emily Carroll's short graphic horror stories. The essay discusses the short digital horror comic "All Along the Wall" (2014), as well as the short horror comics "A Lady's Hands are Cold" and "The Nesting Place," both published in Carroll's 2014 collection *Through the Woods*. Each of these stories presents the reader with a ghost and/or haunting that has an unconventional relationship to corporeality, as well as with a female protagonist who is preyed upon in a domestic setting.

Definitions of ghosts vary widely across cultures, epochs, and scholastic theorizations, but the basis of these definitions and the pursuits of categorization they entail identify that ghosts are entities without bodies, and moreover, that ghosts often covet a corporeal form in some way. The severing of the connection between the spirit and the flesh begets ghosts—but what comes about when that connection is not quietly severed by death, but is instead shaped and consumed by desire and monstrosity? Comic artist and graphic novelist Emily Carroll explores the ghastly possibilities of corporeal existence for ghosts in many of her comics, in both digital and print media. Her 2014 digital horror comic "All Along the Wall" presents a metanarrative of an adolescent girl telling a child a scary story with an

unsatisfying (but implicitly sinister) ending while they both hide away from a Christmas party in the adolescent's English country home. The story and characters in this short story comic

precede those of the final comic in Carroll's original short horror comic collection *Through the Woods* (2014), titled "The Nesting Place." "The Nesting Place" follows a teenage girl who, shortly after her mother's death, visits her older brother in his fiancée's country home and quickly becomes embroiled in a game of cat and mouse with an eldritch body-snatching parasite. The themes of preyed-upon bodies and the ghosts of the past selves they produce also direct the plot of another story in *Through the Woods*, "A Lady's Hands are Cold." Carroll's aptitude for troping fairy tale motifs shines in this story of a young aristocratic woman whose male-dictated marriage to a rich widower leads to a deadly discovery when she acts upon the pleas of the mournful song that she hears from the walls of her new home each night. Here I argue that each of these works presents the reader with a haunting by a ghost defined not by a broken connection to body and place, but by a corrupting usurpation of that connection by predatory forces that share a home with the ghost in bodily and architectural domiciles. Carroll's use of domesticity guides this predatory, corrupted ghostliness, and also makes space in her stories' houses for a transformative characteristic of ephemerality present in not only the ghostly subject of each of the three stories' hauntings, but also the object(s) of the hauntings—which, of course, share domestic space with that which haunts them.

Understanding the nature and function of the type of ghosts that define the hauntings in these three stories prompts an exploration of the presence of more traditionally defined ghosts, as well as how each of them expresses and incorporates the quality of ephemerality. Ghosts that are spirits dispossessed of bodies come up explicitly only in "All Along the Wall," wherein a child frames the metanarrative by asking for a ghost story and noting the distinct absence of ghosts in the story told to her. While the other two stories do not outright mention or depict ghosts of this type, both contain qualities of haunting and spiritual presences. "The Nesting Place" brings in a variety of supernatural and/or paranormal creatures, the most relevant of which certainly possess haunting qualities and distinctly bring up the question of how spirits or souls figure into their existence. The feature creature of "A Lady's Hands are Cold" seems at first to be a ghostly presence, and although the twist reveal of the story complicates that, the creature and the girl it desires both retain a certain ghostly ephemerality. While identifying the presence of more conventional ghosts in these stories is a complex endeavor, each story plays upon aspects and ideas central to ghosts and ghostliness in order to present its own ideas on hauntings and monstrosity.

With "All Along the Wall," Carroll constructs a textual entry point for these three stories of domestically twisted hauntings, succinctly tying her ghostly monster to the characters' domestic interior. The three-page digital comic follows Lottie, a child of about ten, as she sneaks upstairs

from a Christmas party hosted in a lavish countryside house. She steps curiously into a darkened bedroom, and its owner—Rebecca, the young teenage daughter of the party’s hostess—soon discovers her. Lottie promptly requests a ghost story, a Christmas Eve tradition, and Rebecca gladly tells her a “just like you/[...] just like this one” story of a girl in a house frightened at night by a crawling, scuttling creature that creeps along her bedroom walls, ending with the reveal that the creature took over the girl’s body from right under her mother’s nose (1-2). The story dissatisfies Lottie, who says it was not truly scary and asks, “Where was the ghost?” to which Rebecca calmly replies, “There was no ghost” (3). Both girls are correct in the absence of the traditional type of ghost Lottie visualizes, but as Lottie tells Rebecca that she knows she went missing last summer, getting lost in a cave in the nearby woods for three days—“YOUR mother told [my mother] ALL about it”—Carroll makes only the reader aware that the enfleshed, ephemeral being from Rebecca’s story took over her body (3). Rebecca is the girl who has been preyed upon in her own bedroom, under her mother’s not-watchful-enough eye, but what made Rebecca’s body its home is not even human. Moreover, the way Carroll depicts this creature unfurling and arching over Lottie’s cross-legged form in a stretching web of red threads indicates its predatory intentions, showing that it now wants to extend that home into another girl’s body (3). The presentation of the scary story narrative and its metanarrative twin, the twist reveal of what truly happened to Rebecca, both integrate an element of domestic horror, tinged with simultaneous ephemerality and ghastly realness, into the story.

As with all three of these stories, this first of two narratives to feature the creature to which Carroll gives no name but which can accurately be called the “red-thread creature” contains numerous layers of domestic, feminized, bodily, and ghostly horror. Each of these elements operates with a strength of its own in “All Along the Wall,” but they are all contained within, and therefore tie in with and play into, the horror of the domestic sphere. The narrative and illustrations do not demarcate a specific time setting for this story, but, judging from the domestic trappings and the characters’ dress, it is within a decade or two of the turn of the twentieth century that Lottie has this near-fateful visit during a Christmas celebration. Writing on the use of the emblematic haunted house in media, Elizabeth Wilson finds that “fear has a location and, in a newly urban society, fear migrated to the built environment” (113). Though this story exists far from a city environment, the active horror that takes place within it is contained neatly within the bedroom walls of a state-ly country manor—a place of safety for the preyed-upon human inhabitants and domestic guests, as well as the creature trying to establish its existence in its own carved-out space.

In line with the expectations and potential subversions of her genre, Carroll chooses well

in selecting a young adolescent girl as the avatar that the red-thread creature uses to create its own domicile within its prey's domicile. In Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's extensive analysis of how and why women tell and continue telling ghost stories, he notes that 19th-century Gothic women's ghost stories attribute a transgressive function to "what gets 'ghosted'—what tries to present itself but can only achieve a half-life existence" (138). In constructing the human-housed monster that drives the plot of "All Along the Wall," Carroll doubly ghosts Rebecca and the red-thread creature that made a home of her body. It is pertinent to note, though, that this ghosting does not denote loss of material power, at least for the red-thread creature. Weinstock extends his notion of "ghosting" with Terry Castle's queered analysis of the storytelling strategy, which, when lesbian and queer writers use it, becomes "the very trope that evaporates [... that] can also solidify" (Castle qtd. in Weinstock 139). Though Carroll has not publicly disclosed her exact sexuality¹, her marriage with a woman proves that she is certainly queer.

Carroll's perspective as a queer woman is accordingly present throughout her work, particularly here, wherein she employs the twin ghosting of Rebecca and the red-thread creature as a force that simultaneously manifests ephemerality and materiality. While Rebecca's body is intact, able to be rapidly de- and reconstructed at the red-thread creature's whim, Rebecca's spirit is no longer intact, if it remains at all. Her positioning as a teenage girl is also pertinent here: particularly in her early-twentieth-century hetero-patriarchal family home, Rebecca's body and existence are caught between girlhood and womanhood, rendering her a uniquely existentially uncertain status as a household member, and as a horror character archetype. The vitality and shifting existence of young women have long been vilified and feared, and Carroll is drawing that out in Rebecca as a perversion of in-between states in young women. As for the red-thread creature, its existence falls right on the mark of Weinstock's notion of "half-life existence": for whatever bodily vitality it may possess, the creature cannot fully exist socially or, arguably, even domestically. Revealing itself would mean loss of its domesticated human flesh and human house, not to mention that these constructed domiciles have necessitated its move away from its original home in the cave where Rebecca's body was lost for three days and where her spirit was likely lost for good. Carroll even textually constructs a half-life for the creature's origins: the panel in which the creature enters and teems within Rebecca's limp body, her face hollowed, eyeless and blue, from a pool of underground standing water is only visible when the reader mouses over the panel in which Lottie asks if Rebecca was mute for a week after returning home from the woods "because you saw something very frightening?" (3). These varied and interconnected layers of half-alive ephemerality ultimately function as a critique of how hetero-patriarchal domestic spheres twist

1 At least, not in any sources that can be readily found on the Internet in a diligent search.

and use female bodies.

Carroll extends and multiplies the horrors of the red-thread creature and its carving out of feminine domiciles in her longer-form short comic story, “The Nesting Place.” In “The Nesting Place,” Carroll reopens the door to the country house that the red-thread creature occupies the human inhabitant of—but now, Rebecca’s rehomed body is the head of the household, with a fiancé who brings his sullen teenage sister home to the rural estate on her summer holiday from boarding school. The story is the longest one in *Through the Woods*, and Carroll’s narrative once again follows a young, dark-haired girl who contemptuously wanders off from most social conventions. This time, the new player in the domicile is an adolescent, Bell, whose storyline is not marked by curiosity and ignorance but by grief, resentment, and the ultimate horrifying discovery of what she actually shares domestic space with. As she is leaving her boarding school to meet her brother, Clarence, Bell recalls the stories of monsters that her recently deceased mother always asserted the existence of, particularly “the BURROWING KIND. The sort that crawled into you and made a home there. [...] The monster that ate you alive from the inside out” (Loc. 70, Panel 2). Not long into her stay at Rebecca’s house, Bell has her disbelief in these stories turned on its head. About a week of increasingly strange and unsettling occurrences around the house passes—Rebecca’s teeth clicking and wiggling in her mouth while she eats dinner; the housekeeper, Madame Beauchamp, ominously warning Bell against venturing into the woods as Rebecca did several years before; Mme. Beauchamp disappearing after behaving strangely that evening and late that night; and all the while, Clarence acting cheerful and flippant as ever, with Rebecca mirroring his attitude and trying to engage Bell in gender normative activities that she is patently uninterested in, such as makeup and shopping. The day after Mme. Beauchamp supposedly voluntarily leaves the house, Bell spends an idyllic day in the woods before falling into the cave just as Rebecca had, and discovering that it was not Rebecca that had come out of the cave, but the red-thread creature wearing her skin. Bell wakes up in the house, having been rescued from the cave, and the red-thread creature reveals its methods and intentions to her: it has babies in the pool in the cave, and Bell’s skin will be perfect for them. Bell manages to convince the creature that its plan of taking her skin and going to London with its babies and Clarence will ultimately thwart the creature’s reproductive aims because of London’s hostile, polluted environment, after which Clarence arrives to take Bell to the doctor, which makes “Rebecca” happy. As the siblings drive into the open countryside, Bell hands Clarence an apple—and his teeth click and wiggle against it. Bell’s eyes open wide in horror as she realizes she is in a car, alone, with more of the red threads wearing her brother’s skin. Carroll closes the story there.

This longer-form narrative of the domestic horrors of girlhood and ghosts housed in corrupted flesh and convention extends many of the themes of “All Along the Wall,” while also drawing upon new ones borne from the connections and growth of those themes. Carroll’s work with the conventions of her genre once again comes out here in modes that critique gender, social, and familial norms as they manifest in the domicile. Queer literature scholar Ardel Haefele-Thomas comments on the phenomenon of the Gothic genre as “a proverbial safe space” for women writers, and especially queer women writers, who find that “writing within a liminal genre like Gothic has enabled them to more honestly and thoroughly critique restrictive social and cultural conventions such as,” in the case of Carroll’s writing of Bell, how young women ought to handle themselves and their emotions socially, as well as how non-normative female bodies signify socially (169). Bell’s health status as a depressed, stocky teenage girl who wears a leg brace and often uses a cane sets her apart from her peers and family at best; at worst, the red-thread creature pathologizes her body’s build and capability. The creature rebuts Bell’s protests that someone at school or in her family would notice if the creature expelled her spirit from her body by pointing out that Clarence would “be so *thrilled* you’re no longer sullen and depressed he’ll never question the change!” and also targets Bell’s body with an assertion that her peers “will much prefer you once my babies stretch you into something tall, slim, and pretty” as the red threads have with Rebecca’s figure, which is unnaturally lithe and rosy throughout the story (Loc. 94, Panels 1, 2). While horrifying in a uniquely gendered way, Carroll plays this dynamic as a subversion of the usual handling of disability in not only horror but also in comics.

Aidan Diamond and Lauren Poharec write on how comics present and perpetuate othered bodies and othering of various kinds, specifically exploring stereotypes of characters and bodies with disabilities and/or medicalized conditions. Carroll’s characterization of Bell and of her enemy as explicitly trying to form her into a normalized social body directly subverts the trope in the comic genre of making “stereotypical representations [of disabled people that] respond to and reinforce an ideology of ability: the essentialist assumption that able-bodiedness must be preferred in all circumstances,” even the circumstance of a predatory parasitic creature supplanting a spirit from a body, which Bell’s peers and social circles would gladly, if unknowingly, accept (406). Setting this interaction between Bell and the red-thread creature, and their conversation’s underlying implications, in a simultaneously domestic and alienating physical space—a guest bedroom of an estate house whose mistress has been made herself a home for a predatory, ghostly and ghosting being—keeps this horror of hetero-patriarchal standards firmly housed within the horror of the domestic.

Adding to the horror and corrupting, haunting force of the red-thread creature is its status as mother. Female characters and figures drive the plots of both “The Nesting Place” and “All Along the Wall,” whose protagonists have relationships with their respective mothers that, while complex, are not particularly unexpected for children of their ages carrying out a relationship with a mother who shares and perpetuates hetero-patriarchal domestic space and norms with her daughter. Mothers and motherhood make for arguably Freudian horror material, as Gina Wisker discusses in her analytical review of horror stories and tropes with a focus on domestic horror. “Mothers in horror are often engulfing and entrapping” to their children, especially their female ones, and “monstrous and surrogate mothers [who] desire to kill off children to preserve themselves and their own offspring” are a particular kind of threat that Carroll, with her penchant for folklore and fairytale, creates in her red-thread Rebecca (5). Carroll tropes domestic horror to have the red threads puppet Rebecca’s skin to be kind and nurturing to the red-thread babies, and extend her maternal engulfing entrapment to Bell, whose personage and personhood it hopes to supplant for its babies’ sake. The ghostly creature’s folkloric attributes extend further in that the red-thread creature’s motherhood comes to narratively function as both its seeming downfall and its greatest strength: Bell seems to wrest power for herself in pointing out red-thread Rebecca’s vulnerability as a mother. “You claim to be such a GOOD MOTHER,” Bell accuses the creature with regard to her babies’ probable fate in London, “but what kind of heartless BEAST would chance their lives like this?” (Loc. 97, Panel 3). Whatever red-thread Rebecca’s true feelings are, Bell’s argument seems to have cowed her into submission, and Bell is free and safe—until the reveal that red-thread Rebecca’s maternal workings have long since hollowed her brother’s skin to make room for a paternal, monstrous counterpart. Red-thread Rebecca’s motherhood has proven to be truly horrifying, operating in these manners and corrupting living beings into half-existent ghosts within its appropriated domiciles.

Carroll continues to trope folklore archetypes with similar effectiveness and to the ends of critiquing hetero-patriarchal norms in a domestic horror setting in her fairytale-style narrative, “A Lady’s Hands are Cold.” “A Lady’s Hands are Cold” is not connected to “All Along the Wall” and “The Nesting Place” by recurring characters or settings, but it undoubtedly exists on the same thematic axis as these two stories: namely, if there is an archetypal “haunted house” story in *Through the Woods*, it is this one. Folklore scholar Christina Dokou describes *Through the Woods* as a collection that epitomizes the “fruitful threesome” of the Gothic, the fairy tale, and comic books. Dokou further characterizes “Carroll’s gothic play with tradition [... as] a palimpsestic reading that shows traces of the text that her own piece of literature has devoured to sustain itself,” an analysis

that serves as both an apt description of this story and an uncanny precursor to how ghosts and haunting function within it (572, 576).

The horror of “A Lady’s Hands are Cold” is put front and center from the outset, with the first page featuring the eerily short and apt lyrical description of the heteronormative patriarchal workings that shape the frame of this story and its characters. “There was a girl,” Carroll begins this lurid tale, “& there was a man/and there was the girl’s father/who said, ‘you will marry this man,’” utilizing the narration to frame illustrations of said girl and man in profile, casting their relationship, individual selves, and wedding with airs of half-alive material ephemerality, as well as menace and suffering (Loc. 21, Panels 1-3). The narration follows the newly wed girl as she travels through the woods from her father’s house to her new husband’s manor. In this new domicile, she leads an existence evidently so bereft of her husband’s presence that he becomes something of a menacing ghostly presence himself, particularly during the lavish dinners they are seated at together each night, where his predatory air intensifies. Rather than her husband having her share a marriage bed with him, the girl sleeps alone in her own bedroom, where each night she begins to hear a song seeping mournfully out from the very walls of the house, sung as follows:

I married my love in the springtime,
but by summer he’d locked me away.

He’d murdered me dead by the autumn, & by winter I was naught but decay.

It’s cold where I am and so lonely, but in loneliness will I remain,

unloved, unavenged, & forgotten, until I am whole once again. (Loc. 25, Panels 1-5).

After many nights of this, the girl’s husband leaves for a hunting trip. Now the sole living being in the manor who holds domestic power, the girl dismisses the maids and uses a hatchet to cut open the wall, where she finds a shriveled pair of hands. The girl moves throughout the house, chopping and digging until she finds the entirety of her husband’s murdered first wife, dismembered and scattered throughout, her ghostly white head singing its song once more to the girl when she discovers it. The girl gathers up the desiccated corpse pieces, brings them to her murderous husband’s bedroom, and reassembles her predecessor’s body on the floor, tying the enflashed wraith together with bits of red ribbon. The corpse reanimates—and vows to rip the girl to pieces for having usurped her role as lady of the manor. The girl flees the bedroom, then the manor altogether as her husband returns from his hunt, and continues running until she finds herself deep into the woods.

Of the three stories discussed in this essay, “A Lady’s Hands are Cold” is the one whose function and actors of the domestic horror are the most emblematic of the notion of the ghost-

liness of these stories as predatory corruption of the body-spirit connection. In examining queer Gothicism, Haefele-Thomas observes, “as a genre, Gothic thrives on complications and constantly throws what we think we know and believe into confusion, often with subversive and disturbing results,” and Carroll creates some truly viscerally disturbing results in her formulation of the being that haunts this story’s protagonist and massive manor home (170). With regards to the husband’s first wife, the original mistress of the manor, the narrative sets up key expectations for the reader and for the protagonist within the framing of the story and the house it takes place in, only to devastatingly complicate and subvert them. The dead wife’s song emanates from varying places throughout the manor as “a low keening that SEEPED [...] FROM the HOUSE’S VERY BONES,” very much in the manner of a ghost of the type that is simply spirit bereft of body (Loc. 25, Panels 5, 13). This typical ghostliness extends into the song’s almost possessive influence on the living wife, even as her maids, more fixtures of the house than people, tell her not to worry about the ballad that has “settled into HER bones [...] until the girl’s insides [became] clotted with HEARTACHE” as, night after night, she is forced to lay and listen to a song that seems almost to exist only to her (Loc. 28, Panel 1). With this seemingly traditional haunting as disturbing as it already is, Carroll then hacks into and takes apart the protagonist’s and the reader’s presumptions of what haunting being occupies this house with the reveal of the desiccated body parts spread throughout the house. The girl finds her predecessor’s hands, arms, legs, feet, torso, and head in all of the places from which she heard the song originate, thus attributing the dead wife’s body, not her spirit, with the ethereal power to have sung this song (Loc. 30-32). This wrathful, decaying wraith is all but impossible to definitively classify as a being who haunts within the bounds of horror tradition: she could possibly be called a ghoul, but to do so would deny her the totality of her spiritual power. This elision of classification is clearly in line with what queer women do with horror, per the writings of the scholars discussed throughout this essay, as well as exemplifying the true nature and horror of this story as one of a house haunted by the subduing and murder of women in domestic space and convention.

The themes present in “A Lady’s Hands” continue to spin off of and multiply upon themselves as discourse goes on, but the most pertinent aspect of this story’s domestic, ghostly horror is its sharp critique of how women’s bodies and agency function within the domiciles that house the hetero-patriarchal system of marriage. This manor house is not haunted only by the wraith wife’s song of her demise; her husband’s ruthlessly hungry predation upon each wife, as well as the selves, lives and bodies each wife has lost, also haunt the enormous white manor and its surrounding lurid red gardens. The forces that operate within and through the physicality of the

manor work well in the terms of Wilson's citation of Vidler's notion of seeing Romantically sublime buildings "as objectifying the various states of the body, physical and mental," which Wilson ties to her observation that "it is invariably women who activate the fear and the malice of the dwelling or who project it onto the house" (118). Both the wraith wife and the girl wife are activators and objects of this house and its malice, which is really the husband's hungering malice that has destroyed both his wives. Herein also lies Carroll's final subversion: in her fairy tale, a genre wherein the woods are where women are eaten, the girl wife must flee to the woods to escape being rent and consumed by either one of the manor's occupants: a lavish mansion has become and has always been more terrifying and threatening than any wild place.

Carroll makes all sorts of disturbing twists in these three stories to draw out the horror of being female in domestic spaces; her complex formulations of hauntings and troping of ghost and haunted house folklore serve only to produce more ghosts. The corrupted, ghostly predators of each story ultimately narratively consume the objects of their respective hauntings. Each one ends up transformed and ephemeral on the same level as that which plagues her, confined in domesticity: Lottie is left alone and confused in a dark bedroom that is not hers; Bell is trapped in a small space with something hungry that wears her brother's skin; and the girl is utterly wrecked, her eyes nothing but hollow blackness, looking as dead as the wraith wife that chased her from the house. The comic homes of Carroll's richly woven stories are replete with the terror of occupying a domestic space, especially as a non-normative girl or woman. Naturally, they all must occupy such a space, because per the title of *Through the Woods*, it is unwise to linger in a space outside of a domicile—not that residing within one bodes well either.

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Haunting the Body: An Exploration of Scars as Ghosts

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Trigger Warning: This essay contains discussions of self-harm.

This essay examines how Gillian Flynn's novel *Sharp Objects* and the HBO miniseries adaptation raise questions about representations of female self-harm in entertainment. I argue that the protagonist's scars act as ghosts since both scars and hauntings are messengers and manifestations of trauma. This paper examines the distinction between read and watched trauma, and the psychological validity of these interpretations. I assert that Flynn and director Jean-Marc Vallée present self-harm as a haunting to exploit the uncanny and attract readers and viewers with dramatic content. Ultimately, I ask that readers practice empathy when consuming entertainment featuring trauma and self-harm.

Released in 2006, Gillian Flynn's debut novel *Sharp Objects* draws attention to the severely damaging effects of trauma and the physical manifestations of such emotional pain for the protagonist Camille Preaker. The mystery-thriller not only explores how murders haunt a small Midwestern town, but also raises essential questions about the connections between psychological trauma and the supernatural. Expanding upon and drawing from the novel, the *Sharp Objects* HBO television miniseries directed by Jean-Marc Vallée portrays Flynn's story on screen, complicating the dynamic between read and watched interpretations of trauma. The differences between textual and visual portrayals of trauma create an important distinction: written trauma, much like horror narratives, leaves the visualization of traumatic events up to the readers' imagination, effectively creating personalized

fear, whereas on-screen depictions of trauma present a set image, which takes away the work of the imagination for viewers. Despite their differences in the presentation of the story, both the

novel and the miniseries portray the horrors of suffering as supernatural and portray self-harm scars as ghosts of the protagonist's tragic past.

Camille Preaker, a journalist and native of mysterious Wind Gap, Missouri, endured the death of her younger sister, Marian, and an emotionally abusive relationship with her mother, Adora, which resulted in Camille's reliance on self-harm as a coping mechanism for her childhood trauma. Though she also grapples with sexual harassment and alcoholism, Camille's self-harm practices and how the resulting scarification haunts her body are most closely connected to the supernatural. Scars, particularly those of self-harm, evoke uncanny feelings in people examining the scarred individual's body. This discomfort arises from the jarring and confusing realization that no one truly knows and understands each other, despite the perceived closeness of a relationship, as well as the viewer's unfamiliarity with the trauma that led to the scarification. In her 2018 article "HBO's 'Sharp Objects' Is A Messy Depiction Of Self-Harm, But That's OK," freelance writer and recovered self-harmer Samantha Puc reviews the miniseries through the position of both an intrigued fan and an individual who is hyper-sensitive to the triggering subject matter:

Because I'm familiar with the steps that cutters take to hide their scars, I immediately recognized that Camille wears only jeans, boots, and long-sleeved shirts and sweaters in neutral, dark colors, even in the height of summer. But those less familiar with this tactic who haven't read the novel may not initially notice.

The "uncanny is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar" (Freud 2), so the shock factor accompanying visualizations or descriptions of scars generates a response akin to encountering the supernatural. For the scarred individual, self-harm makes the body itself uncanny. Self-harmers display their own version of a doppelgänger, a more socially acceptable, less damaged persona of themselves, which stirs uncanniness within and leads individuals to question the authenticity of each identity. Furthermore, the body is an integral component of the self, and marking the body disrupts the sense of familiarity between the self and the physical being. Thus, repeatedly viewing markings of pain and suffering on a familiar body awakens the uncanny, even if only the self-harmer sees their own scars.

In Camille's case, being truly seen and understood, horrific scars and all, is deeply powerful. Social stigmatization and the demonization of self-harm in the media strip the humanity from struggling individuals, leaving them to feel any combination of loneliness, shame, and fear, and causing self-harmers to hide their expressions of pain. Camille falls victim to this cultural haunting, and as a result of never feeling truly seen for her authentic self, uncanny feelings dominate her mind. The contrast between Camille's intimate sexual experiences demonstrates the differ-

ence between the social discomfort leading to secrecy in self-harm and actual empathy with the complicated emotions behind it: with Richard, Camille likes “it with [her] clothes on” (Flynn 172), whereas John “held up [her] arms, [her] legs, turned [her] on [her] back” and “read [her],” allowing Camille to feel truly accepted in her haunted body (Flynn 209). Publicizing a novel and TV show largely revolving around self-harm stirs uncanny feelings in readers and viewers alike, exemplifying the importance of a more empathetic societal understanding of self-harm.

Outside of mediatized representations, self-harm is generally hidden from public view. As such, these representations not only offer rare glimpses into a rather private suffering, they operate pedagogically; that is, they operate to inform the spectator’s understanding of self-harm in the absence of other kinds of encounters. Importantly, however, cultivating empathic understandings of self-harm from such occasions depends upon moving past dominant readings of self-harm that view it as a destructive behaviour with solely negative consequences to recognize instead that, for those who practise it, self-harm serves as a means of survival in the wake of trauma. (Fallier 12)

It is important to note that the psychoanalysis and application of critical psychological theories to a fictional character coping with imagined trauma does not amount to the same significance as diagnosis for individuals suffering from real trauma. Furthermore, media implements representations of mental health struggles and self-harm as devices to create drama and add tension to a story. Sensationalization of self-harm in the media is a cultural haunting, hooking readers and viewers by exploiting the uncanniness of scars, the human craving for violence, and “flawed” characters as a means of catharsis. This dramatization of mental pain feeds an inaccurate and harmful perception of self-harm to the public, much like the negative perceptions surrounding ghosts and the supernatural. For struggling individuals and recovered self-harmers, visual depictions of self-harm are dangerous and can trigger more than a minor haunting, but rather cause relapses and throw people back into the horrors of previously lived trauma:

Given the inherent voyeurism in depicting trauma on screen, I worried that Camille’s struggles would be sensationalized once they got the HBO treatment. Far too often, the way television depicts trauma, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and mental health struggles is extremely insensitive, especially when the characters are women (Puc).

Taking inspiration from the famed spectacle of ghost stories and horror movies, modern content

creators use trauma and self-harm as shocking character flaws, often without considering the detrimental and delegitimizing effects that poor portrayals of suffering have on those struggling with mental health. Uncanniness and the horrific representations of self-harm in the media haunt scarred individuals, further connecting self-harm to the supernatural.

While not directly associated with the horror genre, the negative social messaging surrounding self-harm haunts entertainment culture—for example, many supernatural beings exhibit some form of mental illness. Scars, like ghosts, act as physical manifestations of emotional and psychological trauma. Camille’s scars externalize the buried fear, sorrow, anger, and confusion plaguing her mind, and scarification gives her an outlet to express tumultuous emotions, even though it physically and emotionally damages her. Permanence is a key factor in positioning scars as ghosts, since the scar itself lingers on skin, preserving the traumatic events or emotions that drove individuals to brutalize themselves. Despite being a practice to achieve catharsis, self-harm scars serve as constant reminders and messengers from the past, haunting the body as long as they remain visible. Similar to how locations experience repeated hauntings, “the body collects” scars and becomes its own haunted home for the suffering individual (“Falling,” episode seven, 5:25-5:29). *Sharp Objects* depicts the social stigmas and fears surrounding scars, which reminisce taboos associated with ghosts, thus demonstrating how society and the media demonize mental health struggles and self-harm to exploit the uncanny discomfort of scars as hauntings.

Apparitions of Anguish: Scars and Ghosts

Scars, like ghosts, have various positive and negative connotations, and can both haunt the body in comforting and vengeful ways. An understanding of the many functions and classifications of ghosts is necessary to pursue the scars as ghosts metaphor as it applies to the *Sharp Objects* novel and miniseries. Essentially, ghosts fall into three moral categories: good, neutral, and evil. While neutral ghosts are often thought of as docile spirits aimlessly wandering the mortal plane, good and evil ghosts have specific functions, namely to comfort or harm, respectively. Self-harm acts both as a coping mechanism and a destructive tendency, thus, the resulting scars could fall into either category. In her article “Twenty-First-Century American Ghosts: The After-Death Communication—Therapy and Revelation from beyond the Grave,” Susan Kwilecki defines After-Death Communications (ADCs) as “direct and spontaneous” forms of spiritual interaction (101). Self-harm scars act as communicators of emotion, similarly to Kwilecki’s definition of ADCs, and as she later asserts, ADCs appear as signs of “healing and revelation” for loved ones, connecting the healing nature of such ghosts with therapeutic coping and overcoming

trauma (Kwilecki 102). Many of Camille's own scars stem from the death of her younger sister, who appears frequently in brief flashbacks and hallucinations, and functions as an after-death communicator.

Alternatively, vengeful spirits are aggressive ghosts that seek retribution through haunting, and unlike ADCs, are a paranormal punishment for the living. In their research examining auditory hallucinations in patients diagnosed with schizophrenia, Paul Chadwick and Max Birchwood categorize vengeful spirits as powerful, authoritative voices. "Cognitive Therapy for Voices" posits that patients "may be terrified of the voice and comply with its command to harm" if it belongs to a vengeful spirit, however, patients may not experience these thoughts if the voice is "believed to be self-generated" (73). Birchwood and Chadwick's research implies that the desire to harm stems from a perceived spirit, countering the therapeutic construction of ghosts and scars and positioning self-harm as malicious. In *Sharp Objects*, Camille Preaker self-harms to cope with intense childhood trauma, but the cutting also aligns with her other self-destructive actions—binge drinking and forced isolation, for example. Adora Crellin, Camille's harsh, gas-lighting mother, believes that Camille self-harms "out of spite," further affirming the connection between self-punishment and the angry, hurtful actions of vengeful spirits ("Closer," episode five, 15:25).

In addition to benevolent and malevolent spirits, ghosts function as supernatural messengers. These apparitions haunt people to convey information and meaning, be it an important memory or an expression of strong emotions. Like after-death communications, messenger ghosts return from death to commune with the living, however, their messages are more associated with an expression of pain than comfort. These ghosts with unfinished business seek recognition of suffering and remain in the mortal world as a form of punishment, both of which factor into motivations for self-harm. Marilee Strong studies the impactful messages of self-harm in *A Bright Red Scream: Self-Mutilation and the Language of Pain*. One of Strong's interviewees not only wrote "reams of morbid poetry" and a "first and final suicide letter" to share her message of internal suffering, but she also externalized that message by "carv[ing] words and pictures into her arms and legs" (Strong 5). The linguistic component of the interviewee's pain is parallel to Camille's own self-harm, which appears as words and phrases scarred across the majority of her body:

I am a cutter, you see. Also a snipper, a slicer, a carver, a jabber. I am a very special case. I have a purpose. My skin, you see, screams. It's covered with words—cook, cupcake, kitty, curls— as if a knife-wielding first-grader learned to write on my flesh. I sometimes, but only sometimes, laugh. Getting out of the bath and seeing, out

of the corner of my eye, down the side of a leg: babydoll. Pull on a sweater and, in a flash of my wrist: harmful. (Flynn 60)

Self-harm is a language of pain—quite literally for Camille and Strong’s interviewee—and the resulting scars lingering on the individual’s skin serve as ghostly reminders of the past. Scars, like ghosts, act as messengers of residual trauma, haunting the body by preserving elements of suffering, and in the case of these two women, depicting causes or direct connections to trauma. Flynn’s novel presents literal words and first-person narration to brutally describe Camille’s scars, and “instead of voiceover, [the show] uses its own visual language involving flashbacks and hallucinations to clue the viewer into what’s really going on inside Camille’s head” (Puc). This television adaptation focuses on the visual language of scars to convey Camille’s emotions, which helps readers understand her dark personality and haunted past. Viewers may not initially realize that Camille self-harms, making the ultimate reveal at the end of “Vanish,” episode one, more shocking and uncanny.

Ultimately, recognizing humanity in self-harm and the supernatural is the most important consideration when positioning scars as ghosts. Both scars and ghosts are rooted in uncanny emotions and can both repulse and intrigue people, but the humanity of individuals struggling with self-harm is often stripped away, like the past lives of ghosts, and forgotten in the shocking fascination with self-harm. Though visualizing scars may cause discomfort, the person bearing such scars deserves empathy for surviving the hauntings of their past. *Sharp Objects* captures this understanding, endearing the audience with Camille’s strength and passion to remind viewers that she is more than just her ghosts. Vallée preserves and emphasizes Camille’s inherent value so that viewers “still care for her because there’s something about her that is so human; her humanity is deeply moving” (Vallée 3:57-4:02).

Femme Fairytale vs Trauma Trope: Women, Self-Harm, and the Supernatural

Patriarchal society marginalizes women as a form of oppression, stripping away female agency and value, and perpetuating the cultural haunting of sexism. Through *Sharp Objects*, Flynn draws attention to the jarring psychological and sociocultural connections linking women to self-violence and the supernatural, which appear not only in the dramatization of mental health struggles, but as modern adaptations to centuries-old tropes. The scarred words across Camille’s body are “often feminine in a Dick and Jane, pink vs. puppy dog tails sort of way,” which immediately associates femininity with self-violence, a connection present in centuries of literature (Flynn

60). In his essay, “The Uncanny,” Freud elaborates on the concept of doubling and doppelgängers, drawing from Otto Rank’s research on doubling as exemplified by “reflections in mirrors, with shadows, [and] guardian spirits” (Freud 9). Freud fails to address the biologically female practice of doubling through pregnancy and birth, and his conception of the double’s function establishes women as uncanny by association, since reproduction is essentially “preservation against extinction” (Freud 9). To further darken the psychological perception of women, Freud theorized that people with the ability to double are omens of death, further solidifying the links between women and self-harm, as well as self-harm and ghosts. In *Sharp Objects*, trauma is rooted in the familial connections of women, meaning that Adora’s own doubling in giving birth to Camille, Marianne, and Amma connects the women to uncanniness, which explains how each of them embodies elements of the supernatural through mental illness or death.

Society, as well as *Sharp Objects*, associates teenage girls with self-harm, which is attributed to the uncanny perception of women and of scars. Not only do girls and young women grow up amidst the haunting effects of gendered oppression, but they also endure marginalization and othering if their mental and emotional states are deemed too weak, or stereotypically feminine. In her article, “Resistant Rituals: Self-Mutilation and the Female Adolescent Body in Fairy Tales and Young Adult Fiction,” Cheryl Cowdy associates femininity and youth with violence toward the self.

‘Cutting’ in particular is an activity that is generally associated with troubled female adolescents. In psychiatric discourse, it has conventionally been treated as pathologically destructive behaviour. (Cowdy 42)

In the *Sharp Objects* miniseries, Camille befriends a fellow self-harmer at a rehab center, and the younger girl describes cutting as “something you grow out of” (“Fix,” episode three, 14:53). Camille’s scars and self-destruction, however, continue to haunt her body, reappearing in triggering times of trauma and depression. In the novel, Flynn connects horror and physical suffering with teenage girls, particularly through the continued fixation on the pornographic hunting shed, a shack where “pink flesh dangled from strings,” “the first floor was rusted with blood,” and “the walls were covered with photographs of naked women” (Flynn 14-5). Teenage Camille, along with Amma, Anne, and Natalie, visited the grotesque cabin, connecting young women with horrific depictions of trauma, a significant theme for both the novel and the miniseries.

Literature and film frequently subject women to violence to give male characters a reason to fight or to drive the plot of the story forward, as seen in *Sharp Objects*. This trope especially appears in the horror genre, where women either die to catalyze the male protagonist’s character arc or appear as ghosts themselves. *Sharp Objects* focuses on female stories—the inciting

incident involves the death of a little girl, and dead little girls continue to push the plot forward thereafter, frequently reappearing in flashbacks reminiscent of ghosts. Gillian Flynn and Marti Noxon's involvement in writing for the show gives the story more female agency, which subverts this patriarchal storytelling trope.

Centering a story on women's trauma without exploiting it for the betterment of men is desperately needed in media, and for the most part, *Sharp Objects* is careful not to exploit trauma for the sake of sensationalizing character development. (Puc)

In a male-dominated society, the "dying women" trope is so ubiquitous that it has become ingrained in our storytelling culture and remained so for centuries. In her 2018 article "*Sharp Objects* and Damaged Women," *New York Review of Books* editor Liza Batkin argues that "Gillian Flynn's mission to create disturbed or disturbing female characters is certainly less innovative than it felt to the author twelve years ago"—the span of years between publication of the novel and the miniseries release. Nonetheless, Flynn's own interpretation of the story is rooted in horror and femininity:

In an interview for *Entertainment Weekly*, she explained that, to her, "*Sharp Objects* was a character study hidden inside of a mystery"; but for *Rolling Stone*, she described the show as "largely a feminist fairy tale"—a genre not particularly well-known for its searing psychological portraits. (Batkin)

In terms of female-centric storytelling, fairytales provide the most widespread representation of women as otherworldly, and according to Batkin's analysis, vapid. Though culturally significant, these fairytales have haunted women both with attachments to physical suffering and societal notions of expected femininity. Socioculturally, women are rooted in self violence and the paranormal through fairy tales. Society conditions girls with stories of magic and mystery, both of which revolve around unfamiliarity and only differ from the uncanny by a positive connotation. Cowdy analyzes Grimm fairy tales, narratives of magical horror, as well as the values they teach to young women, exposing the dark, uncanny undertones of stories believed to be frivolous and feminine.

Taking "Cinderella" and "The Little Mermaid" as representative texts in children's culture, I argue that self-mutilation functions as an act of self-sacrifice to romantic hetero-normative narratives, expressing the violent demands patriarchal culture can require of the young woman as she takes her place in the competitive market of marriage... [Modern depictions of self-harm push for the understanding of] violence

and for agency in self-mutilative acts, graphically communicating young women's resistance to the symbolic demands revealed in the fairy tales. These contemporary representations of self-mutilation continue the critical work of the fairy tales, transferring the locus of pathology from the expressive female adolescent body to the diseased communal social body. (44–45)

As presented in fairy tales, the dichotomy of supernatural womanhood and perfect femininity is a clear theme throughout *Sharp Objects*. Flynn's use of fairy tale tropes further establishes women as otherworldly and horrific, a connection that haunts her characters as well as the women consuming her story. The miniseries visually juxtaposes Camille, the embodiment of ghostly trauma, and her half-sister Amma, exemplifying picturesque innocence by day, and teenage rebellion by night. Camille covers her scars to hide her personal haunting, and her wardrobe of long sleeves and dark colors establishes her as an edgy, un-feminine woman, whereas Amma, either clad in childish dresses and bows, or crop tops and short-shorts, represents both ends on the spectrum of feminine presentation. Contrasting these characters establishes women as either supernatural and unwomanly, or hyper-feminine, which furthers the cultural haunting of negative stereotypes surrounding women. *Sharp Objects* blurs this dichotomy with its revelation that Amma murdered the two girls in Wind Gap, subverting the preconceived notion of stereotypical femininity's docile and innocent nature and implying that women are supernaturally much more powerful and rooted in the horrors of original fairy tales than expected. The miniseries asserts that violent female narratives do not need to be solved or caused by men, challenging the societal belief that paranormal women are weaker than their male counterparts and that "women don't kill like that, that violent. Until they do" ("Cherry," episode six, 20:11-20:14).

Horrific Harm: Read vs. Watched Suffering

Written and televised media provide unique opportunities to portray emotion in different ways, but the distinction becomes serious when handling triggering subject matter. Though this distinction is not directly attached to ghosts or scars, the presentation of horror and self-harm drastically alters how an audience consumes trauma, and further examination of read vs. watched trauma and its effects on readers and viewers is essential for understanding hauntings of the body. Hidden self-harm translates to the screen uniquely because of its visceral, yet secretive, nature. The limited visibility of Camille's scars plays on the horror factor of ghosts, providing a jump scare for the audience upon the first appearance. Maggie Turp's classifications for more dramatic versus less visible self-harm put Camille's case in an interesting middle ground; her self-harm,

while drastic and jarring in its nature, remains completely hidden to almost everyone she encounters, as well as the readers and viewers. According to her research in *Hidden Self-Harm: Narratives from Psychotherapy*, Turp theorizes that “high visibility manifestations of self-harm are those most often highlighted in literature, both popular and professional” (9). Though Camille herself is “a text to decipher” and “her body is covered with words that she has cut into herself,” the palimpsest translates differently on screen than on the page. The miniseries layers shots like the scars collected on her body, filling each frame with visual metaphors of literal *sharp objects*—knives and mirror glass—and “each episode in the series is named after a scar on her body” (Batkin). These tactics set apart the TV show and the novel, creating a new assemblage of discomfort, fear, and uncanny emotions brought upon by Camille’s scars.

Throughout the miniseries, Camille experiences constant flashbacks of her deceased sister, visually displayed through fast, jarring cuts and dramatic depictions of Camille’s own fearful thoughts. The jump “cuts” reflect the theme of cutting and self-harm in *Sharp Objects*, and the use of flashbacks is reminiscent of a ghost continually haunting Camille with the horrors of her past. Additionally, visualizing self-harm scars impacts people in a significantly different way than when reading descriptions of scars. The triggering images of Camille’s body covered in scars unsettles viewers and enhances the uncanny, haunted aspects of self-inflicted scars. The visual depiction allows viewers to see the blood and gore described on the novel’s pages, which amplifies uncanny feelings. From the parallelisms of Adora cutting her hand on a rosebush thorn and Camille carving lines into her skin in episode three, “Fix,” to the symbolism of Camille’s childhood room being painted red, the visuals intensify this already tense story.

The *Sharp Objects* miniseries also has the advantage of casting powerful actresses in the lead roles, allowing viewers to give well-known faces to self-harm. Amy Adams’ portrayal of Camille breathes life into the written character and her intimate flaws and struggles. The beloved actress personalizes self-harm and scars for audiences, evoking the complicated emotions people experience when a loved one, or even an acquaintance, is visibly in pain. Flynn herself believes Amy Adams perfectly balances Camille’s air of mysterious beauty and her dark strength.

She has this angelic outer-coating in a way. She has this angelic voice, and she’s, um, you know, so lovely to look at. But she has what I call grit. She does what she says she’s going to do, she has this inner-strength and toughness. She has this spine of steel, and that’s who Camille is. (Flynn, “Gillian” 0:50-1:16)

The culmination of each of these filmic features points to the more serious consideration that visually graphic content is often more triggering than written depictions of horror and self-harm. A clear indicator of this difference is apparent in that the *Sharp Objects* series includes a public-service announcement reading: “If you or someone you know struggles with self-harm of substance abuse, please seek help by contacting the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration,” with provided phone numbers at the end of each episode, whereas the novel features no such acknowledgement of the real hauntings people face. Similarly, the HBO *Sharp Objects* page uses a resources tab listing organizations and services that help individuals cope with self-harm, substance abuse, and sexual violence, proving the real-world severity of themes throughout the story. For many people, reading the novel and watching the series evoke drastically different reactions.

Watching this series, especially as a recovered cutter, is hard. Initially, I was revolted by [the end of “Vanish,” episode one]. However, after some reflection, I conceded that this moment is as close to the matter-of-fact declaration Camille makes about being a cutter in the novel... I can’t say that *Sharp Objects* portrays these issues responsibly, because there are some jarring directorial decisions that left me having to pause and catch my breath, even having read the novel just months ago. But I can say that the series is very focused on portraying the complexities of recovery, not just for Camille but for everyone in Wind Gap. (Puc)

Seance of Significance: The Cultural Impact of Haunted Bodies

In addition to providing a gripping tale of murder, familial drama, and feminism, the *Sharp Objects* novel and television miniseries bring a widely ignored, yet vitally relevant, issue to the forefront of entertainment. Through connecting scars to the supernatural, Flynn made the complex and taboo topic of self-harm more digestible for readers by presenting the subject as a mystery-horror, a genre in great demand for modern readers and TV watchers. Mediatized hauntings not only provide adrenaline-pumping entertainment, but also an escape from reality and a cultural catharsis—both of which are motivations for self-harm. A more empathetic analysis of trauma and self-harm in the media helps readers and viewers understand the importance of respect and care for haunted individuals, using Camille as an example of how humanity is masked by pain, but can emerge with proper love and compassion, much like how ghosts are released into the beyond after communicating their messages of unfinished business.

It is often easier to designate scars as frightening manifestations of trauma and avoid interacting with, or even looking at, scarred individuals out of discomfort, but much like ghosts, scars tell stories that must be heard and understood before they fade. Though the depiction of scars as ghosts creates an intriguing extended metaphor and draws in readers and viewers with the uncanny promise of horror and human suffering, the positioning of self-harm as a haunting is both poetically accurate and socially destructive. If society and the media continue to dramatize self-harm and paint mental health struggles in a grim, supernatural light, then we can never fully accept those who have suffered and embrace them with compassion. As is the trope in many ghost stories, acceptance and empathy help spirits pass on to achieve peace, which requires a change in depictions of scars in the media. Flynn's *Sharp Objects* portrayal of self-harm and scars as ghosts is not perfect, but the representation and social discussion it prompted are steps on the right path. Though we feel haunted by our scars, the understanding and acceptance of those around us lightens the load, so that one day, we might be able to free our spirits.

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Peace at Last: Grappling with Ghosts and the Family Structure in *The Sixth Sense* and *The Haunting of Hill House*

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Sigmund Freud describes the uncanny as an unwilling revelation of what is private and hidden. *The Haunting of Hill House* novel and *The Sixth Sense* film both exhibit many aspects of the uncanny, but their main characters end up embracing this uncanniness to defy haunting narrative norms by accepting, in different ways, the ghosts that plague them. To this end, the characters either adhere to (in the case of *The Sixth Sense*) or diverge from (in the case of *The Haunting of Hill House*) the nuclear family structure.

When reading, listening to, or watching ghost stories, an unexplainable feeling overcomes us. It is not fear or disgust outright, but instead has some unique, innate quality. Sigmund Freud describes this feeling as “the uncanny.” The uncanny exists as a crossroads of familiar and unfamiliar, or, in German, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. *Heimlich* means homey or familiar, but it also means private and hidden. In Freud’s interpretation, if something is *heimlich*, it can also be hidden from the self. *Unheimlich* means strange or unfamiliar but can also be defined as “the name for everything that ought to have remained... hidden and secret but has become visible” (Freud 4). The

uncanny combines these interpretations as an unwilling revelation of what is private and hidden, despite our desire to keep that revelation hidden. *The Haunting of Hill House* novel and *The Sixth Sense* movie both exhibit many aspects of the uncanny, but their main characters end up embracing this uncanniness, defying haunting narrative norms by accepting the ghosts that plague them, and do so by adhering to (in the case of *The Sixth Sense*) or diverging from (in the case of *The Haunting of Hill House*) the nuclear family structure.

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor Vance, the main character, embraces ambiguity by becoming the haunting, blurring the line between living and dead, just as she occupies an ambiguous space in society, not having a solid home, family, or role in the world. *The Sixth Sense*, however, rejects this ambiguity as Cole helps ghosts come to terms with their death and resolves their trauma so they can move out of the transitional space. This mirrors the story's adherence to structure ideas of gender roles and family structures, shying away from ambiguity. To prove these points, a deeper analysis of family dynamics and its connection to ghosts and the uncanny in both narratives proves necessary.

The Uncanny and Ghosts

A variety of images evoke a feeling of the uncanny, including gouged-out eyes, disembodied limbs, doubling, and repetition. An aspect of the uncanny that is particularly relevant to ghost stories, however, is uncertainty. Freud posits that uncertainty drives uncanniness, especially in literature. Since fairy tales exist in a clearly fictional world removed from reality, the idea of uncanny does not apply to them. A sense of the uncanny, however, creeps in when the fictional world begins to mimic our own without showing signs of "normalcy." When a story does this, it settles in that uncertain space of familiar but also unfamiliar, which seems similar to the world we live in but also strangely foreign. *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Sixth Sense* exist in worlds that seem quite similar to our own until we begin to notice aspects of these worlds that diverge from what we expect. This deviation is made apparent when automatons conjure a sense of the uncanny and uncertainty about the animation of objects. They appear "normal," giving us a sense of familiarity, but that familiar feeling is undermined by a sense of strangeness or wrongness—this is the uncanny.

Ghost stories evoke a sense of the uncanny because spirits reside in a liminal space, a space of uncertainty. Ghosts are neither fully dead or alive. They manifest themselves in the physical forms of their once-living selves, such as in *The Sixth Sense*, or they imitate human voices and mannerisms (like knocking or writing) as seen in *The Haunting of Hill House*. In this way, they remind us of humans—of ourselves, even—and so they bring us a sense of familiarity and perhaps even comfort. Because ghosts are not fully living humans, however, they reside in a space of uncertainty where they mimic humanity, but cannot fully be human, and are therefore uncanny. As Julia Kristeva establishes, abjection comes into play when we want to protect ourselves from the uncanny and things that make us uncomfortable. She further specifies that abjection can be prompted by "[w]hat does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous,

the composite" (4).

Abjection is important in the case of ghosts because it allows us to solidify boundaries between what we are and what we are not. If ghosts are dead, unreal, and separate from us, then we can be sure that we ourselves are real, alive, and separate from them. As previously mentioned, ghosts disrespect borders—they shift between life and death while occupying an ambiguous space that scares us. Because this ability is unsettling, characters want to abject ghosts and distance themselves from both the uncertainty of ghostly existence and the cold reality of mortality. In fact, Noël Carroll writes in "The Nature of Horror" that "[i]n works of horror, the humans regard the monsters that they encounter as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order," and even react with "revulsion, nausea, and disgust" (52-53). This reaction is consistent with many examples of ghost stories in popular media, where main characters often feel the need to run from a haunted house or exorcise the ghost that plagues them.

In some unique stories, however, characters learn to accept and even embrace ghosts rather than run from them. In these cases, we must ask what compels these characters to overcome their natural urge to abject. The two main examples discussed here are Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* and M. Night Shyamalan's 1999 film *The Sixth Sense*. While these stories appear to have little in common on the surface, as they are more closely examined, it becomes apparent that the characters in both stories embrace hauntings and ghosts in unique ways in order to grapple with gender roles and the structure of the nuclear family. *The Haunting of Hill House* features Eleanor Vance, who eventually descends into madness and becomes part of the haunting in Hill House after the house goads her to insanity by referencing her unstable place in the family structure and society as a whole. In *The Sixth Sense*, Cole is a young boy haunted by violent visions of dead people and an unstable family unit in the wake of his father's leaving. Cole becomes a shepherd for ghosts, guiding them into the afterlife and out of the uncanny liminal space of ghostliness. Eleanor, alternatively, embraces the haunting by becoming it, occupying the uncertain space between human and inhuman herself.

Elements of the uncanny exist in both *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Sixth Sense*, but rather than abject the hauntings to distance themselves from the uncanny, Eleanor and Cole embrace them. From the beginning of the novel, *The Haunting of Hill House* evokes the uncanny by describing the house in a lifelike manner. The uncanny can be evoked by blurring the line between animate and inanimate, creating a sense of uncertain reality, and Jackson's description of the house certainly does this. The first page of the novel describes the house as "not sane," and later Eleanor describes it as "vile" and "diseased," words befitting a person rather than a house

(Jackson 1, 23). When she enters the house, she notes that it feels as though the house was “waiting” for her, “evil, but patient” (25). Making the house’s animacy uncertain puts the reader in an uncomfortable position as the house—typically an inanimate entity—comes alive to torment Eleanor and the other house guests. The book later describes the house as maternal or motherly, further giving it human characteristics. This observation becomes particularly chilling when we consider Eleanor’s fraught past with her own mother. This evil, almost human house should drive Eleanor out, but we ultimately see her fighting to stay there despite the house’s horrifying and uncanny elements. Moreover, these examples show us the essential role that uncertainty and its connection with the uncanny play in Eleanor’s experience at Hill House.

The Sixth Sense also features uncanny elements throughout. Although set in a world that seems similar to our own, in the story strange events keep occurring around the main character, Cole Sear, causing our sense of reality to become more and more precarious. Toward the beginning of the film, Cole eats breakfast with his mother in the kitchen. His mother leaves briefly and returns only a few moments later to opened cabinets and pulled-out drawers, even though it appears Cole never moved. This odd occurrence plants the idea in the audience’s minds that something uncanny exists in this universe. As the line between reality and fantasy blurs, we are launched into a realm of uncertainty. Once Cole reveals to Malcolm that he “see[s] dead people,” the sense of the uncanny grows even stronger (*The Sixth Sense* [1999], 0:20-0:21). The ghosts fail to understand that they are dead despite the graphic and horrifying wounds that many of them sustained. This puts the ghosts in a liminal space, making them neither dead or alive, human or inhuman. Based on this evidence, we cannot argue that a lack of the uncanny is the reason that the characters in both stories eventually accept the ghosts. In fact, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Sixth Sense* link uncertainty and the uncanny, and Eleanor and Cole’s negotiations with these elements reflects a larger struggle with their own uncertain places in society.

Based on this assertion, Eleanor and Cole see that ghosts are strongly linked to familial structure, family bonds, and familial trauma. The main characters in both narratives defy their urge to abject instead accept their respective ghosts, choices that are inextricably tied to their own roles in the family structure and society at large. *The Sixth Sense* conservatively advocates for adherence to the traditional family structure, whereas *The Haunting of Hill House* radically asserts that those who refuse to adhere to gender roles and the “correct” familial structure, like Eleanor, possess no defined place in the family or in society. Jackson is not placing blame on Eleanor for not conforming to these standards, but rather criticizing society for not creating spaces for those who dislike conforming to social norms. To further support these claims, these next sections will

analyze each narrative for themes about the family and its structure, gender roles, and uncertainty.

Ghosts in *The Sixth Sense*

In *The Sixth Sense*, ghosts haunt Cole and drive him away from his mother, peers, and child psychologist Malcolm Crowe, but the absence of his biological father haunts Cole the most. He clings to memories of his father (and perhaps the hope of his father's return) by wearing his father's overly-large glasses and watch. We see the connection between ghosts and the family structure in Coral Houtman's article "Questions of Unreliable Narration in *The Sixth Sense*," in which she views the film through a Lacanian framework, reinterpreting the Oedipus complex through a slightly more modern lens. Houtman argues Cole misses the "structural intervention" of the father figure because of his father's absence, which prevents Cole from accepting the loss of his absolute relationship with his mother and keeps him from moving successfully into society (5). Houtman describes Cole as suffering from "telepathic conversion hysteria," which essentially means that "his symptoms of distress and anxiety" caused by the Oedipus complex "are expressed through him seeing real ghosts" (6). The ghosts, according to Houtman, embody the "unconscious hostile wishes of the adult world," which Cole cannot interpret because of his improper development (6). Here, then, we see how "improper" development and a "broken" family structure directly connect to ghosts and hauntings.

Ironically, Cole is stuck in a transitional stage just like the ghosts he fears. He oscillates between acting as an adult, as when he visits his mother "during her nightmare," and acting as a child, as when he "sleep[s] in her bed" (Houtman 6). In this narrative, Cole occupies an uncertain, transitional space stuck between child and adult, unknowingly mimicking the ghosts that terrify him. This struggle sends a message to the viewer that they, too, should be scared of occupying this uncertain space where difficult definitions of gender roles and family exist. After all, Cole is so affected by his family trauma that child psychologist Malcolm Crowe makes it his personal mission to help Cole. Everything begins to change, however, when Cole meets Malcolm, who "provides the surrogate father figure that Cole has been lacking" in order to interpret those enigmatic messages (Houtman 6). Houtman argues that when they play a game where Malcolm must guess things about Cole, Cole sees how Malcolm accepts his own fallibility or "symbolic castration," which makes Cole less terrified of Malcolm (6). Though Cole hesitates to trust Malcolm at first, he eventually divulges his secret that he sees dead people. Because Malcolm himself is dead, it is even more telling that Cole shares this information, as it shows how Cole overcame his revulsion

to ghosts enough to trust a ghost with this secret, something he never shared with his mother. Cole even goes so far as to take Malcolm's advice about listening to the ghosts and trying to help them.

Once he receives the advice from Malcolm and confides in him like a father figure, Cole assumes his "place" in the family and acts as a shepherd for ghosts to help them cross the line into the afterlife. He completes his own transition and now helps ghosts complete their own, including Malcolm. *The Sixth Sense* conservatively adheres to ideas about what constitutes a "proper" family. The story promotes the idea that if you develop "properly" and have the "proper" family structure—in this case, one with a strong father figure—you can pull yourself out of the transitional space and help others as well, just like Cole. This is especially striking considering Cole, a child, helps adults through their transitions to the afterlife. Cole even helps Malcolm, a child psychologist and someone who helped him through his own development, to transition out of the uncertain realm of ghostliness. The moral of the story, then, is that we can only make peace with our ghosts—literal or metaphorical—if we adhere to the process of proper development. Further, the story argues that we can only fully integrate into society if we follow these same guidelines; essentially that normalcy becomes achievable and people become happy, integrated citizens of society only when they adhere to these specific guidelines. It is important to note that both main characters—Cole and Malcolm—are white, presumably straight men. Perhaps this formula only works so effectively for these characters because of positions of privilege. It begs the question: would this method work as well for someone not occupying that status? Ultimately, however, Cole only accepts ghosts in order to push them out of their uncanny transitional space and into one of certainty in the afterlife, effectively abjecting them in that way.

The article "The Mourning of Loss in *The Sixth Sense*" by Marguerite La Caze takes a slightly different stance on the situation, proposing that Cole cannot make peace with the ghosts until he resolves his personal grief. Being suspended in grief resembles being stuck in a transitional space; Cole is again trapped in limbo, unable to transition properly. La Caze writes, "On Freud's account, the work of mourning cannot be finished until reality is accepted," so if "[t]here has been no proper grief or recognition of the wrong that was done," then the reality of the death is not accepted. Here, the "death" that La Caze speaks of represents a few possibilities: Cole's father's absence in his life and/or the deaths of the ghosts that haunt him, and the trauma surrounding these hauntings. Essentially, peace cannot come about until the pain and grief are acknowledged, but as we see from earlier in the movie, Cole chooses to ignore pain and suffering (both his own and that of the ghosts), instead running into churches for protection because the ghosts are

unable to torment him there. Cole, however, eventually reveals his secret to Malcolm and acknowledges the trauma his “sixth sense” caused him.

Opening up to Malcolm allows Cole to finally begin the healing process and help the ghosts and his mother heal as well. Just as Malcolm helps Cole transition into adulthood in the Lacanian reading, in La Caze’s reading Malcolm helps Cole transition out of grief and into a space of healing. In that way, this reading still ends up reinforcing the idea that Cole needs a fatherly figure to confide in. Cole relies on Malcolm to act as a guide so that he can then replicate that role and act as a guide for ghosts. This reading still adheres to Lacanian ideas about Cole attempting to be like the father (or in this case, his surrogate father Malcolm), by trying to replicate his actions. Ultimately, *The Sixth Sense* confirms gender roles and a heteronormative, patriarchal family structure; by adhering to these norms, the story insists, one can transition out of an uncanny, uncertain space and assume a traditional, stable role in society.

Ghosts in *The Haunting of Hill House*

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, ghosts and familial trauma also haunt Eleanor Vance, but her uncertainty is not so easily resolved. Eleanor comes to Hill House as part of a study conducted by Doctor Montague, who specially chose Eleanor because of her past experiences with the paranormal, though she seems to repress these memories. When she arrives at Hill House, she flees the overbearing grasp of her older sister as well as her deceased mother who, though dead, “continues to haunt Eleanor” (Evans 5). Eleanor seeks her unexperienced freedom, romance, and an agency over her own life. As Lynne Evans notes in “‘Help Eleanor Come Home’: Monstrous Maternity in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*,” “Eleanor’s entrance into the realm of sexual maturity has been delayed by the eleven years she spent tending to her invalid mother” (2). Similarly to Cole, Eleanor suffered delayed development due to an unbalanced family structure and therefore never properly developed, leaving her unwilling to fulfill the role of a heterosexual adult woman. Like Cole, Eleanor suffers from a variation of the Oedipal complex, due to her relationship with her overbearing mother.

Evans points out that when Eleanor fantasizes a scenario of grandeur as she drives to Hill House, she imagines herself as a princess “who discovers a magic garden in which a ‘queen waits, weeping, for the princess to return’” (4). Here, Eleanor desires a loving mother heartbroken over her missing daughter, rather than a prince coming to sweep her off of her feet. Eleanor’s longing for a healthy, stable, loving family becomes apparent through this daydream. We can see how Eleanor’s traumatic family situation has stunted her development—she cannot yet move into the

realm of romance (heterosexual or not) because she is missing essential support and love from her own family. Just like Cole, Eleanor is trapped between child and adult because of this “improper” development, not fully one or the other.

Eleanor has been unable to establish appropriate boundaries within her own family, especially with her mother, meaning that she feels uncertain of her family role as well as her role in larger society. We see how Hill House manipulates those issues as we move further into the story. As Tricia Lootens notes in “‘Whose Hand Was I Holding?’ Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*,” the house is a “vicious travesty of a family home,” and a “nightmare embodiment of the nuclear family” (175). By mimicking the nuclear family structure, Hill House cruelly and crudely preys on Eleanor’s own familial trauma, making her more susceptible to the haunting and later drives her to madness at the end of the novel. Because Eleanor wants desperately to attain the family she never had, she is more susceptible to the House’s predations, and ultimately more willing to accept the haunting. It is important to note that Lootens classifies Hill House as a “brutal parody of a family home,” so none of the other houseguests actually constitute a healthy family dynamic for Eleanor (175). We can contrast this to Cole’s situation in *The Sixth Sense* where Malcolm Crowe genuinely wants to help Cole and act as a guide and father figure for him. Eleanor has no such support system in the house.

Richard Pascal echoes this sentiment in his reading of the story in the article, “Walking Alone Together: Family Monsters in *The Haunting of Hill House*,” noting that “the allure of the house, and also its horror, is bound up with the sense that it wishes to envelop [Eleanor] in a maternal embrace so comprehensive that her newly won independence and all vestiges of her individuality will be subsumed utterly” (469). Eleanor, like Cole, is trapped in a sort of pre-pubescent state due to her lack of “proper” development and perhaps also her struggle with her own sexuality. It is important to note, however, that Eleanor is actually older than Cole. Cole is still a child when he is led through his transition into adulthood, whereas Eleanor, despite her sometimes child-like behavior, is an adult. She struggles to transition into her place in adulthood because she has somehow missed an essential threshold and is now too far out of the window of development to make this essential transition. We see this struggle in the scene where Theodora paints Eleanor’s nails red. Eleanor at first seems to enjoy the interaction, almost falling asleep, but when Theodora points out her feet are “dirty,” Eleanor flies into a panic, exclaiming, “It’s horrible,” and “it’s wicked” (Jackson 85). Painted nails point to a mature woman, and the red color specifically calls to mind passion and sensuality. Eleanor’s horror is brought on by seeing herself as a mature, sexual woman when she feels so underdeveloped in this area. She cannot fully occupy this role, as

she has not moved through the essential earlier stages of development, leaving her trapped in an uncertain, uncanny space, just like Cole.

As a physically mature woman, Eleanor feels as though she should fit a certain role, perhaps being more like Theo, the single, beautiful houseguest who wears trousers that scandalize Eleanor. As an adult woman, Eleanor feels as though she has no place in a family, in a home, or in society as she struggles to fit any of the roles deemed appropriate by society. When she tries to convince Theo to live with her after they leave the house, Theo brushes her off. Eleanor is trapped in an uncertain space between childhood and adulthood, unsure of her place in the world—a space occupied by the uncanny. It thus makes sense that the house's "maternal embrace," which she sees as a promise of certainty and family, draws Eleanor to it.

It also makes sense for Eleanor to embrace the haunting to the point of becoming part of it. Lootens writes, "...Ultimately, in a sort of reverse birthing, Eleanor is absorbed into Hill House" (158). When Eleanor chooses to become a part of the haunting at the end of the book, she begins to occupy the same uncertain, transitional space that the ghosts in *The Sixth Sense* occupy. When she enters the library, she experiences it as being "deliciously warm," like the womb, despite it often smelling like decay and rotting to her before (Jackson 171). The center of the house has both qualities of life and death, and Eleanor occupies this uncertain, uncanny space as she enacts the haunting in the library, climbing the rickety staircase. Eleanor feels as though her place in the family structure and society is uncertain, and she physically enacts this by becoming a part of the house's haunting—becoming a part of the thing that terrified her. She is no longer scared, repeating over and over "I am home," even as she endangers her life climbing the staircase (171). This is the only place Eleanor feels at home because it is such an uncertain contradictory space—it embodies the uncertainty that she feels in her own life. At the same time, the library's maternal environment assuages her fears of never having a family or the trauma of never having a "proper" mother. This is why she chose to climb the rickety stairs in the library—to return to the womb by ending her own life. Though the library represents both life and death, Eleanor finds this uncertain space comforting; she feels like it is the only place she can properly exist. The library also provides the essential maternal "love" that she never received from her own family. She does not actually go through with this self-destructive impulse, of course, as she is interrupted by Luke and the other house guests and coaxed down from her own peril.

After this near disaster, Dr. Montague reveals to Eleanor that they are planning on sending her away from the house to live with her sister. Whereas in *The Sixth Sense*, Malcolm's character only leaves the narrative when Cole successfully transitions into the world and develops properly,

Eleanor is being sent away still damaged, back out into a world where she feels she does not fit. Dr. Montague is not a loving father looking out for a child. Rather, he tries forcing Eleanor back into society, into a role she is unwilling or unable to occupy. She is being sent away from the only place she ever felt home in, causing her to feel devastated, despite the fact that living in the house often makes her miserable and terrified. The house plays to Eleanor's weaknesses and trauma so well that she therefore feels she only exists in this space of transition and uncertainty because she is metaphorically stuck in that same space herself in society. This drives Eleanor to crash her car into the tree rather than leave Hill House, pointing to the fact that she believes she cannot exist anywhere else besides Hill House. She makes the final statement she tried to make in the library—a return to the womb, a sign that she cannot exist in society as an adult or at all.

We can contrast this tragic ending to that of Cole's, where he makes peace with his gift, Malcolm, and mother. With Eleanor's tragic demise, Jackson insinuates that Eleanor is unable to reenter society because she does not adhere to the ideas of the heterosexual, nuclear family prescribed by society. She did not have the advantage of having a loving mother as Cole did, nor did she have a father figure, like Cole eventually has with Malcolm. By giving Eleanor this ending, Jackson comments on the fact that society rejects people who do not follow the "proper form" of development, a criticism of societal expectations rather than Eleanor's inability to fill certain roles and experience "proper" development. Jackson shows how these societal pressures eat away at Eleanor because she knows that she either cannot fulfill them or does not want to fulfill them, ultimately forcing her to remain in the uncertain, transitional space of Hill House because she feels society has no concrete space for her. Eleanor regresses back into the womb where she does not have to play a role which she feels doesn't fit, embracing ambiguity by becoming the haunting, blurring the line between living and dead, just as she occupies an ambiguous space in society. It's equally important to note that this ambiguity is rejected in *The Sixth Sense*—Cole helps ghosts come to terms with their death and resolves their trauma that forces them to remain in this transitional space. I argue that Cole objects the ghosts as he ushers them into the afterlife by bringing them close only to then send them back to where they "belong." This mirrors the story's adherence to structure ideas of gender roles and the family structure, as it shies away from spaces of ambiguity and uncertainty. It seems that the narrative of *The Sixth Sense* demands a certain answer: that ghosts are dead and should stay that way, that families are nuclear and need to remain that way, and that only traditional gender roles and a traditional family structure can bring us peace.

Conclusion

The protagonists of both *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Sixth Sense* grapple with family trauma, which leaves them developmentally stunted and feeling lost, unsure, and unable to occupy a defined place in society. Both characters are unable to let go of the past, with Cole keeping his father's watch and glasses and Eleanor feeling as though the house brings up memories of her mother to haunt her. Additionally, both protagonists defy genre norms to accept the ghosts that plague them. With the help of Malcolm and "proper" development, Cole becomes a shepherd/guide to listen to the ghosts and bring them out of a transitional state. Alternatively, Eleanor embraces the ambiguity of the haunting by becoming a part of it, effectively blurring the line between living and dead.

These outcomes speak to larger societal issues that structured gender norms and the effects of those norms are a haunting that plagues our culture. Cole occupies a defined space in society because he adheres to traditional gender norms and ideas about family. Eleanor, however, occupies a liminal space of uncertainty when she becomes the haunting because she does not adhere to these same norms and therefore feels as though she does not have a place in society—she must retreat into the house because she feels she has nowhere else to go. She ultimately commits suicide because she feels as though she cannot return to society since she is either unwilling or unable to fill the role it has created for her. Jackson's story, therefore, is a more radical critique of how limiting ideas about "proper" gender roles, development, and family can be. *The Sixth Sense* is much more conservative in the fact that it shows the protagonist prospering because those rules were adhered to and led to "proper" development.

What do these stories tell us, then, about gender roles, the development process, and the restrictions of society? *The Sixth Sense* prescribes certain roles to its viewers, encouraging them to constrain themselves to traditional ideas of gender, family, and development in order to be successful in society. While the movie does eventually humanize its ghosts, it still portrays Cole doing the "good work" of sending ghosts into the afterlife to find peace, reinforcing the idea that uncertainty, ambiguity, and the uncanny are ultimately things to abject (and reject). This message may drive people who do not fit these roles to make choices that ultimately do not make them happy, simply because they feel they must fit a certain mold.

The Haunting of Hill House, on the other hand, does much more complex and interesting work, as it portrays the challenges (and, perhaps, consequences) of not occupying a defined, traditional space in society. Eleanor's descent into madness and eventual suicide is a warning for us not to conform, but rather to challenge the ideas about gender and family that, especially in 1959,

seem so set in stone. Jackson is calling us to think critically about what the family, gender roles, and relationships “should” be; why conform to roles and ideas that are not authentic to our lives? The lesson here is not that there is a right way and a wrong way to exist—dead or alive, single or married, mother or barren—but rather that we should explore those spaces of uncertainty further, and dive into what makes us uncomfortable. Perhaps embracing our ghosts means embracing the uncertain, no longer limiting ourselves to what we have been told is right. Maybe then, we can find peace.

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“Outside the Gate”: Family, Selfhood, and Post-Traumatic Growth in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* Dillon O’Neil, *Ball State University*

Shirley Jackson’s novel *The Haunting of Hill House* emerged during a period of familial reimagination. Indeed, the predominantly white, nuclear, and patriarchal family structure demanded by society now faced new scrutiny as people began considering the destruction these dynamics imposed on the individual. Jackson’s novel particularly attends to this debilitating relationship between controlling parental figures and daughters. By reading through the lens of trauma theory more broadly, this essay argues that Jackson’s text illuminates the complexities of familial trauma as well as the nuances of post-traumatic growth (PTG).

As Eleanor Vance, the timid protagonist of Shirley Jackson’s 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, approaches the titular building, an unyielding gate and cantankerous caretaker named Dudley prevent her from reaching her destination. Eleanor, after an unsuccessful attempt to convince Dudley to open the gate, remarks that “she knew, of course, that he was delighting in exceeding his authority, as though once he moved to unlock the gate he would lose the little temporary superiority he thought he had—and what superiority have I? she wondered; I am *outside* the gate, after all” (20). Jackson’s novel continuously returns to these themes of isolation and exclusion, of autonomy and power. As Eleanor attempts to escape the traumatic, debilitating family she left behind and forge a new sense of community

and selfhood, she consistently remains outside the gate, just within the reach of new friends and independent individualism yet barred from truly adopting either. The trauma she carries from her abusive mother and selfish sister functions as the metaphorical gate that prevents her from

attaining happiness. Indeed, Jackson's novel is concerned with the enduring ghost of trauma and how, if improperly handled, the damaged self becomes ensnared within a cycle of neglect, suffering, and stunted individualism. *The Haunting of Hill House* ultimately engages with the discussion surrounding the midcentury family structures of Jackson's times by scrutinizing the ways in which these structures both traumatize and entrap the self. By reading the novel through the lens of trauma theory more broadly, a better understanding emerges of how post-traumatic growth (PTG) can be achieved in the wake of the psychological damage caused by the aforementioned family structures.

At the time of *The Haunting of Hill House's* publication in 1959, cultural discourse surrounding the white, nuclear family had emerged in the wake of World War II. As the men embarked overseas, women filled the spaces they left behind, exiting the domestic sphere to work traditionally masculine jobs. The men, however, inevitably returned, fully expecting life to return precisely to the way it was before the war: women staying at home while men navigated professional careers. Susan J. Douglas explains in her book *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* how the nuclear family structure was irrevocably disturbed and that this return to "normalcy" would not be easy:

By the end of the war, most of these women had discovered that they liked working outside the home—they liked the money, the sense of purpose, the autonomy...Women also wanted to be reunited with their husbands or sweethearts, and they wanted to start families. This was a very real desire, but they didn't want to give up everything for it. Poor, deluded souls...the war was over, and they were supposed to sashay back to the kitchen and learn how to make green beans baked with Campbell's cream of mushroom soup. (46-47)

The war necessitated a change in traditional family structure, enabling millions to envision and briefly adopt alternative models outside of a strictly nuclear, patriarchal one. Women, despite desiring their families, had tasted autonomy; the submissive housewife could no longer peacefully exist. Even though the patriarchal society forced a return to the nuclear model, culture began thinking about families in new ways.

Family structures, especially white, patriarchal ones, faced scrutiny. If society began addressing the failures, misogyny, and limitations of the white, nuclear model that dominated culture, what would this mean for the future of family structures, parenting, and childhood development? Moreover, if the patriarchal structure failed, could a matriarchal structure function as a successful alternative? Richard Pascal, writing on a similar topic in his article "Walking Alone Together: Family Monsters in *The Haunting of Hill House*," observes that "as the century progressed,

the familial dominance of the patriarch was becoming a shared and even contested privilege, as the widely reported spectre of the obsessively manipulative mother became prominent" (466). This fledgling discussion challenged the nuclear status quo which, in turn, produced cultural anxieties. Pascal reveals that one such fear was that children harbored "the disruptive energies of individualism" (466). As Pascal notes, "Nothing less than the future of America as a society hung in the balance" (466). Jackson's novel, however, counters the presiding belief that children, not parents, were the harbingers of societal destruction, suggesting rather the inverse; the suppression of individualism rather than the promotion of it held these "disruptive energies." Eleanor, a product of the matriarchal family structure, endured years of abuse while caring for her sick, despicable mother, stunting her sense of autonomy and general selfhood. The Eleanor readers meet at the beginning of the novel is immediately presented as pitifully meek without a shred of confidence or sense of self-worth. Eleanor's traumatized, damaged self demonstrably resulted not from a nurtured and encouraged selfhood but rather from her inability to reconcile her mother's selfish needs and her own desire for autonomy. The constricting demands family structures had for women failed Eleanor, not vice versa.

Throughout the novel, Jackson dissects and criticizes the aforementioned familial structures. The novel scathingly attacks the ghostly presence of Hugh Crain, Hill House's deranged creator. While Crain's morality appears dubious from the outset, the true depth of his depravity is revealed later in the novel. The group, clustered within the library, all analyze a book Crain created for his two daughters that Luke Anderson, the heir to the home and a member of the group occupying the house with Eleanor, had discovered. Amongst a myriad of disturbing imagery, Crain orders his children to "'honor thy father and thy mother, Daughter, authors of thy being, upon whom a heavy charge has been laid, that they lead their child in innocence and righteousness along the fearful narrow path to everlasting bliss, and render her up at last to her God a pious and virtuous soul'" (124). Crain's book echoes the requested obedience demanded of nuclear family structures, particularly patriarchal: men, whether in the religious or family sphere, act as gatekeepers that determine women's ability to enter the gate of familial acceptance or religious salvation. The group, finding Crain's archaic diction and syntax, religious fervor, and imagery disconcerting, ultimately functions as a critique of those commanding masculine figures as vile, oppressive, and destructive to their children. Despite fatherhood now being a "contested privilege," however, the haunting presence of the patriarch nevertheless lingers within our culture; the controlling, domineering father may be dead but not yet moved on. As Eleanor attempts to leave at the end of the novel, the narrator reveals that "light glittered on the marble eyes of Hugh Crain,"

suggesting the marble statue commemorates a time past that nevertheless clings to a degree of life (179).

Despite criticizing the father figure, *The Haunting of Hill House* remains focused on the destructive, detrimental nature of the matriarchal family structure on children. The house, a product of a father, is now described by Luke as “a mother house,” effectively shifting the focus from fatherhood to motherhood by suggesting the force of the house now originates from the matriarch rather than patriarch (156). The correlation between the house itself and Eleanor’s own abusive mother bolsters the criticism of the matriarchal, nuclear model. Early on, Jackson describes the house as “disturbed, perhaps. Leprous. Sick,” all traits that similarly apply to Eleanor’s sickly mother (51). Upon first meeting Eleanor, the readers learn that she “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 held fast that someday something would happen” (4). The similar diction used in describing both Eleanor’s mother and the house unites the two, transforming the house into a symbol of deranged motherhood and trauma. While depraved matriarchy was originally intertwined with depraved patriarchy, both beasts that consume their children, Jackson’s novel suggests motherhood has now become a different disease altogether that deserves as much scrutiny as fatherhood.

If both of these unhealthy nuclear models inflicted trauma on the children they were meant to protect, the novel presents a pessimistic view towards a creation of new structures that could substitute or replace the current ones. Dr. Montague, Theo, Luke, and Eleanor—the group studying the paranormal activity of Hill House—speedily form an intimate, albeit superficial, bond that functions as a new, makeshift family structure. After just one night in the house, the guests “had met morning in Hill House, and they were a family, greeting one another with easy informality and going to the chairs they had used last night at dinner, their own places at the table” (71). This blissful family dynamic quickly erodes, however, and the guests start lashing out at one another—particularly Eleanor and Theodora. All of the guests escape momentarily from toxic family structures with their trip to Hill House—Dr. Montague from his arrogant wife, Luke from a distrusting family, Theo from an argument with her partner, and Eleanor from her mother and sister—yet find no solace in new community. The group eventually disbands at the end of the novel, with Eleanor dying and the others individually spanning the globe, suggesting an enduring, effective, and healthy family structure or sense of community are not yet available.

Considering these destructive, traumatic family dynamics, the inability to forge necessary new ones ultimately stunts selfhood. In her article “House Mothers and Haunted Daughters:

Shirley Jackson and the Female Gothic,” Roberta Rubenstein explores this complex relationship between mother and child. Rubenstein acknowledges the dependency on parental figures for healthy childhood development, despite the child yearning for autonomy, contending that “the tensions between ‘mother/self’ and between ‘home/lost’ connote a young child’s ambivalent desires and fears: both to remain merged with the mother...and to separate from her” (309). Without a motherly presence, “the mother’s absence becomes a haunting presence that bears directly on the daughter’s difficult struggle to achieve selfhood as well as to express her unacknowledged rage or her sense of precariousness in the world” (311). Rubenstein’s article demonstrates the danger of lacking an efficient family structure: without a mother, and by extension any parent in general, an independent self cannot develop. The child remains “lost” without a “home,” an individual without an identity. Eleanor, trapped between wanting complete severance from her mother but unable to evade her haunting presence, finds herself stuck just outside the gate, frustratingly close to independence but without an accompanying strong selfhood, free from abuse yet plagued by trauma, and finally owning her own agency yet gripped by a dependency on community.

Eleanor’s mother remains hauntingly active in her daughter’s life long after dying, and long after Eleanor says good riddance. The novel makes apparent Eleanor’s trauma early on, evidenced by her inability to “remember ever being happy in her adult life; her years with her mother had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair” (3). Late in the story, right before her untimely demise, Eleanor confesses “‘it was my fault my mother died,’ [she] said. ‘She knocked on the wall and called me and called me and I never woke up. I ought to have brought her the medicine; I always did before. But this time she called me and I never woke up’” (156). Curiously, Eleanor’s word choice of “woke” rather than “got” suggests she merely was unconscious during the knocking, but her guilty, confessional awareness indicates otherwise: she simply did not get up to go save her mother. Eleanor evokes Rubenstein’s “home/lost” confliction in that this act functions as Eleanor’s first true act of autonomy. No longer an obedient servant to her mother, Eleanor defies the woman who abused her for years and finally “leaves the home.” Her resultant guilt, as well as the relationship she leaves behind, ultimately traumatizes Eleanor. Awakened by a mysterious knocking, Eleanor reminds herself that “it is only a noise...it is a noise down the hall, far down at the end, near the nursery door, and terribly cold, not my mother knocking on the wall” (94). Knocking occurs in other moments of the novel, and while the other house guests notice the noise, Eleanor’s history suggests her trauma and guilt have followed her, forcing her to reenact the traumatic event interminably. Eleanor remains stuck

outside the gate, unable to pass through and escape her trauma or prevent it from following her.

The dependency on kinship, despite stunted, weak independency, remains and is seemingly unavoidable. Tricia Lootens, in her article “‘Whose Hand Was I Holding?’ Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*,” explores the various drafts of the novel and how each speak to the fantasy of harmonious domesticity. Lootens contends that by the final draft, Jackson had created “a house that entraps its inhabitants with fantasies of domestic bliss even as it forces them to recognize such fantasies as delusions” (172). This quote perhaps highlights the tragedy of family and selfhood best: humanity inextricably depends on kinship, regardless of the dangers it poses on the individual. Eleanor’s self-growth continues being stunted by both the lingering presence of her mother and the absence thereof. Without efficacious alternatives, her selfhood remains lost without a home, present but unformed—perhaps even deformed.

The novel offers no solutions, suggesting that a future cannot be forged without a reconciliation to the past; a gate to escape familial trauma exists somewhere, but the past must be bridged with the present to reach it. Eleanor faces the most harm from this lack of reconciliation, barring her from any chance of post-traumatic growth. Lootens continues analyzing the character in her article by exploring Eleanor’s sexuality and trauma. She suggests that Eleanor’s strained relationship with Theodora, and her reactions in response, suggest a longing both for a loving sister and romantic partner, both of which she has been denied. Lootens contends that Eleanor’s reactions “crystallize...her hopeless attempt to assert a new sexuality and sense of self without questioning the family structure and morality that have governed her life before Hill House” (182). Eleanor’s mistake lies not in striving for reconstructed selfhood but in ignoring the trauma she attempted to leave behind. Her character thus functions as a warning, embodying the concept of haunting best: abandoning trauma will not, cannot, eliminate it. Rather, the specters of our pasts float ever present around us until we properly give them burials and the open gates of trauma can finally be closed. Hill House, analogous to trauma, is no exception. Just as Ruth Franklin writes in her biography of Jackson entitled *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, “Like an abusive relationship—or an ineluctably entangled marriage of nearly twenty years— [Hill House] is both impossible to remain in and impossible to escape” (416). Toxic family structures are inextricably connected to trauma, as this paper and *The Haunting of Hill House* have demonstrated. Exploring the ways in which the novel addresses both themes thus illuminates the complexity of the novel in ways previous scholarship has neglected.

The above discussion regarding family structures has a direct connection to the field of trauma study, given the negative impact they have on children—particularly young women. *The*

Haunting of Hill House fails to provide any explicit explanation for Eleanor's trauma, but the answer lies within the novel's exploration and criticism of family structures. As mentioned earlier, women were torn between a desire for family and a need for autonomy following the disruption World War II had on the nuclear family model. As Wyatt Bonikowski argues in his essay "'Only one antagonist': the demon lover and the feminine experience in the work of Shirley Jackson," women were forced "either to conform to a passive position within rigidly defined gender roles or be abjected into a permanent state of anxiety, insecurity, and even madness" after the war. In other words, women were traumatized by the tension between society's expectations and personal fulfillment. Moreover, women often remained silent about this tension lest they risk social ostracization, a struggle Betty Friedan addresses in her famous book *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan asserts, "[I]f a woman had a problem in the 1950's and 1960's, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought.... She was so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it." Silence, therefore, was intertwined with trauma, much like the "silence [that] lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House" (Jackson 1). Eleanor's, and by extension the novel's, silence on this matter indicates her trauma originates from this tension caused by traditional family structures. The Netflix show of the same name (a reimagination of Jackson's novel rather than a faithful adaptation) literalizes the ways in which this tension inflicted trauma in the episode "Steven Sees a Ghost" when Steven Crain, a character who borrows his name from the aforementioned Hugh Crain, argues that "a ghost can be a lot of things. A memory, a daydream, a secret. Grief, anger, guilt. But, in my experience, most times they're just what we want to see. Most times, a ghost is a wish" (00:41:53). The term "ghost" may function as a substitute for "trauma," or the way certain events, emotions, and desires linger with us long after they are gone. Eleanor indeed has a wish that has traumatized her and continues haunting her: a wish for individualism that is prevented by a wish for family and community. If Eleanor finds herself inside the gate, inside the home and family, she finds herself outside of individualism. If she embraces autonomy, she finds herself outside of the home, of family. No matter where this tension pulls her, Eleanor remains tragically outside the gate. How, then, can children, especially young women, survive the suffocation of family models? As Jackson's novel demonstrates, middle-class, white women in the late 1950s were contemplating individualism in ways previously not done.

If the family unit cannot be abolished, and if alternative structures had yet to be imagined, reading *The Haunting of Hill House* through the lens of trauma theory more broadly illuminates how the self can be salvaged. In her article "Healing and Post Traumatic Growth," Suzanne

LaLonde leads “an exploration of the possibilities and limitations of the literary arts and imagination to promote healthy post-traumatic growth” (197). Synthesizing decades of research from dozens of healthcare professionals, LaLonde refers to the psychiatrist Judith Herman’s three-step process for PTG and then explores the ways in which they connect to literature. Herman’s process first involves establishing a sense of safety for trauma survivors, which “entails attention to and control of the body” (197). The second step of PTG involves the survivor using their “own intellect and emotional resources to comprehend the events of the traumatic event. During this stage of remembrance and mourning, the survivor tells her story” (198). The reconstructed story, however abstract, must be created “in a factual way” (199). As this paper will later discuss, Eleanor indeed engages in reconstruction but with a largely dishonest approach. PTG culminates with the third step, “which is that of restoring connection” (201). This essay, and by extension *The Haunting of Hill House*, is concerned primarily with this idea of connection and the lack thereof. LaLonde’s article serves as a particularly useful framework in which to analyze Eleanor by revealing her failures within this process and demonstrating how her death could have been prevented.

Superficially, Eleanor appears to engage with each of these three steps. Why, then, does she seem to only spiral further into dissociation? Throughout the novel, Eleanor remains attentive and in tune with her body and others, often focusing on dirtiness—a Freudian desire to distance herself as far as possible from her sickly, “dirty” mother. In one of her many scenes with Theodora, Eleanor subjects herself to the blazon trope:

Eleanor found herself unexpectedly admiring her own feet. Theodora dreamed over the fire just beyond the tips of her toes, and Eleanor thought with deep satisfaction that her feet were handsome in their red shoes; what a complete and separate thing I am, she thought, going from my red shoes to the top of my head, individually an I, possessed of attributes belonging only to me. I have red shoes, she thought—that goes with being Eleanor; I dislike lobster and sleep on my left side and crack my knuckles when I am nervous and save buttons. I am holding a brandy glass which is mine because I am here and I am using it and I have a place in this room. I have red shoes and tomorrow I will wake up and I will still be here. (60)

While this scene suggests an assertion of self, an attention to the body, it rather reveals a profound doubt in Eleanor’s selfhood. Her attention to her body strives not towards security but to reassure Eleanor that there is indeed a self that can be made safe. Eleanor, in an attempt to construct a healthy image of herself, deconstructs her various elements, ultimately cementing a self that is fragmented, disjointed, and broken.

Despite unsuccessfully engaging with the first step of PTG, Eleanor proceeds to the second to reconstruct her past. She professes some honesty, including her mother's death and overall dissatisfaction, but ultimately avoids true confrontation with her past. Eleanor tells Theo, "I have a little place of my own.... An apartment, like yours, only I live alone. Smaller than yours, I'm sure.... I had to look for weeks before I found my little stone lions on each corner of the mantel'" (64). Eleanor, obviously evoking the alluring home she found during her commute to Hill House, completely lies about her life she left behind, defying LaLonde's emphasis on reconstructing the story "in a factual way." Her reconstruction demonstrates avoidance, rather than ownership, of her traumatic past. Moreover, Eleanor derives the description of her imagined apartment from homes she had seen beforehand and from Theo's description of her apartment, revealing her lack of creativity. While one may conclude Eleanor simply lacks vision, her unoriginality rather suggests an inability to think independently, ultimately emphasizing her total lack of individualism.

The inability to productively approach the first two steps of PTG ultimately bars Eleanor from reaching the point survivors depend upon the most: reconnection. Lootens, in analyzing a scene in which Eleanor, thinking she was holding Theo's hand, awakens to realize she never was, argues that "the horror behind Eleanor's scream is not that she was alone in the dark, but that she believed herself to have someone there" (179). Eleanor's inability to find connection demonstrates the linear nature of the PTG process. For reconnection, one must reconstruct one's trauma, and to achieve that, one must have the security necessary to return to the traumatic event in the first place. As Lootens suggests, perhaps the true horror of *The Haunting of Hill House* lies not with ghostly apparitions or even traumatizing events themselves, but with finding oneself truly alone amongst family, friends, and colleagues—communities a gate of trauma prevents one from truly entering. Thus, without successful PTG and reintegration into a healthy family unit or alternative community, the novel warns of the destruction that will result. As Eleanor attempts to escape the house, her trauma lingers, leading to her ambivalent suicide: "I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really really really doing it by myself. In the unending, crashing second before the car hurled into the trees, she thought clearly, Why am I doing this?" (182). Eleanor's ambiguity about what precisely "it" is suggests she herself does not know and is simply carrying out the demands of external agents: Dr. Montague forcing her to leave and Hill House (or her trauma) refusing to allow that. Quite simply, Eleanor is doing what she is told, torn between wanting to escape the trauma that governs her life and being wholly incapable of doing so. Thus, Eleanor cannot escape Hill House but also cannot remain alive within it; her suicide was ultimately not of her own choosing. Moreover, the shift from a first person perspective to

an omniscient third person one removes any agency Eleanor may have had, emphasizing her lack of individualism and autonomy. Her final moments evoke a story from her childhood where mysterious falling rocks crashed into her home, suggesting the trauma endured during childhood will invade selfhood, or homes, and carry affected individuals to death unless properly put to rest. Until then, the specter stays.

Shirley Jackson's novel leaves the reader with a sense of unease and a lack of closure. The novel ends abruptly after Eleanor's death, suggesting the story was not, in fact, ever about the haunting of Hill House but rather of Eleanor Vance. *The Haunting of Hill House* relentlessly critiques the existing and fluctuating familial structures of Jackson's times, highlighting the damage dominating cultural attitudes towards parenting inflicted on children. While the novel acknowledges the need for community, it does not shy away from lambasting the rejection of selfhood by the collective group. Reading the novel through the lens of trauma theory thus illuminates the subtle nuances of PTG and forewarns the damage neglected familial trauma creates.

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Political Polarization and Demonic Possession: How American Culture is Haunted by its Own Fascination with Good and Evil

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American culture, framed in its most widely understood definition, is a culmination of the traditions, ideals, and behaviors of the people who live there. Naturally, the movies which are produced there are direct representations of the current social and political environments. This paper analyzes how political polarization presents itself within film representations of demonic possession through natural opposites such as good and evil, traditionalism and modernism, and conventional and unconventional definitions of femininity. Works analyzed within include *Annabelle: Creation*, *The Conjuring*, *The Evil Dead*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, and *The Exorcist*. The infiltration of political polarization into a typically unpolitical genre such as horror suggests that it not only culturally haunts the politics of America, but every other facet of American life.

American culture, framed in its most widely understood definition, is a culmination of the traditions, ideals, and behaviors of the people who live here. Those who consume pop culture with an intuitive eye understand that media directly reflects the political climate in America, including even those which claim no intended bias. One specific aspect of American politics that significantly impacts American culture and the media it produces is the concept of political polarization, or the divergence of political attitudes to ideological extremes. In fact, political polarization haunts pop culture, as its consequential ideas and concepts infest and control the framework of what becomes popular, going beyond being simply influential in it. For example, as a result of political polarization, countless decisions about what and how concepts are presented in pop culture must be immensely considerate of how audiences

will perceive them as a result of their conservative or liberal alignment, especially when it comes to what will be promoted and displayed in movie theatres across the country. Interestingly, the impact these ideological extremes hold on American culture resulting from political polarization extends its haunting influence into the horror genre, specifically in the form of depictions of demonic possession.

Historically, the polarization of politics means that the separation of two main parties becomes more concrete over time as the ideals held by both cement within the two sides, creating two naturally opposing teams. Research collected about the polarization of politics, as well as the ways in which pop culture reflects this polarization within the horror genre, suggest that the fascination with demonic possession held by Americans stems from the growing separation of core ideologies. The resulting reflection of political polarization in media depicting demonic possession functions as a cultural haunting. The ways in which the film industry depicts certain situations in the horror genre during specific periods of American political history, however, in fact highlights how America culture perceives its own political atmosphere.

The concept of a cultural haunting in America as a result of this phenomenon is especially evident due to the fact that everyday interactions between American citizens are steadily more affected as polarization increases, and more movies depicting demonic possession and introducing politically polarized metaphors are created and consumed. Many studies on political polarization have proven that Americans no longer view politics as a large intermixing ideas and beliefs, a shift which has become steadily more concrete since the 1970's (Abramowitz and Saunders 542). There have always been separated parties with contradictory plans for the betterment of America, but never before has the way that Americans think about their opposing parties been so directly oppositional. This ideological shift alters the way Americans create, share, and consume pop culture. As previously mentioned, however, political polarization does not appear exclusively in political themed dramas and contemporary storylines. As far as horror on the big screen, directly opposing groups find their representation in the everlasting oppositional archetype depicting the fight between good and evil through demonic possession.

The 1973 film *The Exorcist* was arguably one of the first widely viewed American-produced movies depicting the grotesque and terrifying battle between supernatural good and evil, and the reaction from the public showed their shock and awe. According to a *New York Times* article by Roy Meacham, reports of younger audience members being removed from theaters and taken to hospitals were made within hours of its release, and many people left early with assertions that the film caused them to gag and vomit. In fact, critiques of the film described it as "obscene" due

to its language, violence, and satanic content; a term which used specifically in the time frame of its release further explains the backlash it received (Meacham). The movie's catastrophic release and eventual switch from an R to an X rating, however, clearly did not curb the American fascination with demonic possession. As the political climate continued to separate and ideological beliefs became more decentralized, more movies depicting their own interpretations of demonic possession hit the box office. Films such as *The Evil Dead* (1983), *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *The Conjuring* (2013), and *Annabelle: Creation* (2017) would arguably still fall under the category of "obscene" in the 70's, and yet such films are watched by millions of Americans over time. As a result of this increased depiction of demonic possessions, the themes which are presented in these movies—including the unyielding fight against a perceived evil, the contradicting motives of traditionalism and modernism within society, and the inversion of the traditional definition of femininity—create the metaphor of a possessed society. Political polarization haunts pop culture, even within genres that are not expected to be political. Consequently, repeated depictions of demonic possessions mimicking political themes further cement the American fascination with polarized ideologies.

The Good and The Evil in America

In order to consider the ways in which polarization is demonstrated through pop culture representations of demonic possession, we must define what is considered "good" and "evil" in each pop culture representation. Good, in the context of the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church on demonic possession, is the fight for freedom from Evil. Freedom in this context means possessing the ability to choose good or evil. Evil, conversely, is having the ability to choose—and using that ability to choose—to be controlled by a force which exists only to negate and degrade God, or from a more general understanding, whatever is a constant "good" in a given situation.

Good and evil, however, do not have to be considered through the lens of the church, though the inclusion of Catholic priests as main characters in movies such as *The Exorcist* and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* leads to this assumption. For the sake of considering depictions of possessions as metaphors for political polarization, however, it is more apt to consider good and evil from their philosophical definitions, which present them simply as natural opposites. Even in a movie like *The Exorcist*, "good" and "evil" are more accurately defined as two independent forces fighting for their own intentions. Both still directly oppose each other while remaining fully independent of the other force because neither one depends on the other's existence. In fact, philosopher Friedrich Schelling, who considered the definitions of good and evil as being completely independent

of religion and rather something more accurately aligned with the concepts of ethics and morality, argued that “evil is not simply a *privation boni* (omission or negation of the Good), but an independent power,” and furthermore asserted that evil “exists as a *conditio sine qua non* (unalterable presupposition) of human freedom” (Naegeli-Osjord 21).

Of course, this is not to say that those who visit the movie theatre to enjoy a scary movie about demonic possession consciously decide that their political party aligns with the all-knowing good and that those who disagree might as well be from Hell. “Good” and “evil” in a horror movie, however, can mimic the experience of a viewer living in a polarized culture since polarization creates a culture where ideologies present as opposites. Furthermore, “evil,” in this case those who align with ideologies opposite of the viewer’s, has its own independent reasons for its choices, hence the continuously ongoing battle that symbolizes the political opposition in a polarized society. What is enticing about the fight between good and evil in movies like *The Exorcist*, *The Evil Dead*, *The Conjuring*, etc., is that what an audience deems as “the good” always conquers what they decide is “evil.” In other words, metaphors for whatever represents the opposite view from their own in the films is always defeated by the time the credits roll.

The Turning Tide of Tradition

To accurately represent both sides simultaneously, these films need to contain certain aspects that align with both sides of the political sphere. Traditionalism and modernism as they are represented in movies such as *The Exorcist*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, and *The Conjuring* are examples of the powers of metaphor in pop culture, as they stand in for the polarizing groups of conservative and liberal-aligned citizens. As Bodo Winter explains, “cultural representations may strengthen metaphors in the minds of the people who witness these representations, which helps to keep metaphors alive” and furthermore, “cultural representations may elaborate on existing metaphors, enriching them with specific examples” (164). The “hero priests” and performing exorcists in these movies, whether they align with liberalism or conservatism, or modernists or traditionalists, in the minds of viewers, serve as metaphors for the continually polarized opinions on these concepts, and viewing these pop culture representations further cements the sense of polarization in those who consume them.

In the case of *The Exorcist*, the conflict between traditionalist and modernistic ideals contradict each other throughout the movie, mimicking polarized American ideologies. In the film, two priests are enlisted to cure the possessed young Regan, who exhibits behaviors that are complete departures from her norm. Regan, formally a sweet and well-behaved daughter living

a well-provided life, now curses, threatens, fights, and even urinates on herself due to a self-proclaimed infestation of demons. Despite the title of the movie, her mother and other close family friends consult psychiatrists first, including Father Damien Karras, who, contrary to his own title, not only separated from his former training and Catholic beliefs, but approaches Regan's actions with the idea that they should hold an exorcism not to actually expel the demons, but in the hopes that playing along with her delusions will lead her to accept that she has been cured by the end of it. This ritual is handled with the utmost caution by bringing in the traditional priest Father Lankester Merrin, an experienced exorcist, who actually believes that Regan is possessed by the demons she claims inhabit her body. The film itself makes this possession hard to deny, especially when the words "help me" rise from within the girl and become etched on her stomach (1:31:40). Both priests, however—psychiatrist and exorcist—hold firm to their individual trainings in order to save the girl; traditionalist Father Merrin eventually dies from a stress-induced heart-attack before completing the exorcism, and modernist Father Karras dies in an act of self-sacrifice in which he demands the demon leave Regan and enter his own soul before jumping out the two-story window.

These representations are confusing yet apt, as it is natural for the audience to be unsure of who to "root for." Regan's actions, such as floating above her bed as if being carried by an invisible force (1:50:23), the words which appear on her abdomen (1:31:40), and the unbelievable transformation of her face from innocent child to milky-eyed mutation, lead the audience to understand that the traditionalist is correct in his understanding of Regan's possession. Yet, it is only through a suspension of disbelief that the viewers forget that, in any other situation, Regan's actions are more than likely a result of a psychological imbalance. Both priests are "heroes" in this movie, called in to fight the true evil, yet both cannot be simultaneously correct in their approach at conquering said evil. Ultimately, Father Merrin is revealed to be the "correct" hero, approaching the situation with seasoned understanding and little time to explain to the lesser informed Father Karras. It is Karras, however, who eventually prevails in saving Regan, and through the most untraditional and sacrilegious, methods of accepting evil into his soul and then choosing to commit suicide.

These contradictory characteristics represent the political climate at the time. In the years surrounding 1973, leadership and foreign policy become controversial topics between liberal and conservative-aligned citizens. Specifically, longstanding core values concerning nationalism and what it means to be a "good American" start to clash with modern political issues. Those who watched *The Exorcist* the year it was released would not have been surprised by the early scene which showed that the movie Regan's mother starred in depicted scenes of student protests

(14:02), reflecting similar, real-life early 1970s student protests—this time against war. At this time, public opinion turned resolutely against American participation in the Vietnam War, but those with friends and family still fighting overseas faced the burden of remaining proud of their sacrifice and harboring hate for both the war they fought in and those who stand in protest of said sacrifice. Father Merrin thus serves as a metaphor for these individuals clinging to the traditional idea of nationalism in America, while simultaneously being challenged by the character of Father Karras, whose unconventional methods and eventual victory in the war against evil in the end of *The Exorcist* seems to foreshadow the political directions of the country.

President Nixon haunted the minds of Americans at this time, causing an influx of distrust and paranoia among citizens concerning power positions in the presidential office. Nixon still remained in the office despite the Watergate Scandal, and mixed views as to whether he eventually should leave resulted in a ripple effect of the same distrust and paranoia in everyday interactions between American citizens. Both priests in *The Exorcist*, backed by the power of the Catholic Church, act as metaphors for the confusing reliability of leadership during the years of its release. The Catholic Church relies heavily on tradition, and the eventual failure of Father Merrin calls to mind the question prevalent in the minds of many Americans at the time of Nixon's presidency as to actual reliability of leadership, especially in the traditional definition of it, in the changing country.

As American politics continues to become more contradictory, the production and distribution of movies involves current representation of the country's polarization through depictions of traditionalist and modernist ideas. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, produced in 2005, brings the American court system into play as the same government declares a War on Terror, highlighting specific areas considered an "axis of evil." In the movie, young Emily Rose, previously heavily guarded by a faith-based upbringing and traditionalist family, enters college as a freshman and faces life away from her family's secluded farm for the first time. This exposure eventually leads to her possession by demons, and, as a result of an exorcism enacted by the family and performed by Father Richard Moore, she dies of exposure and malnutrition. Father Moore gets arrested and sent to court. He pleads not guilty and accepts the help of ambitious lawyer Erin Bruner under the assumption that his explanation of what happened during the exorcism proves he was in fact not the evil entity which caused her death but rather the person trying to prevent it.

What are deemed threats to American citizens during the making of *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* become more concrete as the War on Terror creates a monolithic enemy. Typical in a polarized society, however, not all of its citizens support this approach. Critics of the War on Terror

at this time claim that it foments an ideology of fear and repression that creates more enemies than what already existed for the country previously and promotes more violence than morally supportable by the country. This critique goes against the government's position that their plan mitigates the acts of terror and strengthens security. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* mimics the disputation that the "axis of evil" poses a concrete threat to the country. By the end of the film, the perception that a demonic presence indeed controlled Emily Rose and that Father Moore simply could not both expel the evil from the family and save the life of the girl is as equally disputed as the War on Terror. Father Moore stays true to the claim that demons possessed Emily Rose, but he is left with a guilt-ridden conscience and the question of whether he needed assistance from a medical professional during the exorcism, rather than staying true to the traditional faith-only ritualistic practice. The disparity lies in whether the "evil" was a real as Father Moore deemed it to be, shadowing the doubts of American perception of what threatened them at the time.

A few years later, 2011 brought about the movie *The Conjuring*, as well as a new wave of distrust in politicians, the immoral use of money in politics, and the blatant income inequality with the protest to Occupy Wall Street. The movie's plot mimics the simmering anger in Americans at rampant economic inequality, and its release during the same year as the Occupation led it to become one of the most popular horror movies of the year due to its representation of the economic status of the average American family. The middle-class family in *The Conjuring* gets monetarily trapped in a house haunted by the demonic presence of a devil-worshipping witch who once lived on the property. Traditional systems of power fail both American viewers (resulting in the March on Wall Street) and the family in the film as the Catholic Church responds to the possession of the mother, Carolyn Perrin, too late, and an un-ordained paranormal investigator must perform the exorcism in order to save her from murdering her own children.

In *The Conjuring*, the traditional teaching that only an ordained minister of God can perform an exorcism is challenged when the lagging response from the Vatican, or the seat of power in the Catholic Church, forces Ed Warren to perform an exorcism himself for the first time. The Warrens eventually save Carolyn Perrin through this exorcism without the help from an ordained priest, suggesting that modern thinking and action outside the traditionalist Catholic Church, which firmly discourages un-ordained individuals from performing an exorcism, not only saved her from the demon, but also that the traditionalist approach would have been too slow to save her. Yet despite the fact that an unconventional decision saved Carolyn Perrin, Ed and Lorraine Warren remain steady in their beliefs and continual practices of the more traditional views of the Catholic Church throughout the length of the movie, and ultimately claim that an act of God

saved them all. Hence *The Conjuring* seems to please both sides of the political spectrum, modernists and traditionalists alike.

Waves of Feminism and Possession

The years between 1973 and the late 2010's continued to reflect the polarization brought by the second and third waves of feminism. Despite the fact that what people usually highlight about these waves is the success that feminism provides women with over time, it would not have been a fight if there were not polarized ideas concerning whether or not feminism improved society. During these waves, movies depicting demonic possession mirror what feminism fought to change about society, as well as those who considered said fight to actually degrade what it means to be a woman. Movies such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Evil Dead* (1983), and *Annabelle: Creation* (2017) highlight that what others consider "evil" inverts what is traditionally "feminine" as well as anything which tries to take the control a woman has over her own body away.

In the case of *The Exorcist*, the specific attentions put on Regan's bodily functions and movements, as well as the fact that Regan is a young innocent girl, portray second-wave feminism in specifically obscene and polarizing ways. Arguably the most memorable scene from the movie is when the demon possessing Regan forces her to masturbate with a crucifix as a way of taunting her mother (1:18:34-1:19:34). The bloody, violent, and shocking scene shocked theater audiences. What made viewers so deterred, however, can be hard to pinpoint as the emphasis on polarization lies more in why the audience reacts so adversely to the scene rather than what the scene tries to convey.

The polarization shown through the famous crucifix scene depends on where "evil" lies within the scene for the viewer beyond the obvious demonic presence. Does "evil" reside in the notion that Regan's masturbation and foul language directly opposed the designated proper topics concerning the female body, or in the fact that a natural part of the female body is being used against the young girl's will? Feminism at the time of *The Exorcist's* theatrical release was focused on what it meant for a woman to have control over her own body. During the "second wave," feminist supporters worked to outlaw marital rape, built shelters for survivors of domestic violence and rape, and worked to raise awareness of—and put policies into place to stop—sexual harassment in the workplace. This wave also fought to eradicate widespread use of the term "girl" and replaced it with "woman," emphasizing the power of terminology and labeling in situations concerning unequal treatment of the sexes. Feminism between the 1960s and the 1980s focused on these issues because the main concern for eradicating inequality between the sexes lay within

the ways in which femininity, including but not limited to the physicality of the female body, can be taken away, withheld, and controlled. The attention focused on Regan's body, as in the crucifix scene, the writhing motions during the possession, and the words rising from within her gut, mimics American culture's own fixation on the female body because it portrays the lack of control many women feel they maintain over their own rights to their bodies, as well as the lack of control traditionalists feel they possess over the changing ideas of what "feminine" means.

Special attention to the female body continues within movies containing demonic possession, continuing to represent the second and third waves of feminism present in American politics between the years of 1983 with the making of *The Evil Dead* and 2017 with *Annabelle: Creation*. During these years, the transition between the second and third waves of feminism meant that the same core issues addressed are readdressed with more tactical moves. In other words, "third-wavers," as described by writer R. Claire Snyder, "embrace multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification" (1). Progressively more evident in the years 1973, 1981, and 2017, feminists develop more tactical measures rather than theoretical arguments to approach the same problems. Through this, the act of being a feminist becomes an even more polarizing label, as the subject of feminism becomes both more mundane and more confrontational.

The Evil Dead, for example, is far less subtle in its symbolism over loss of control. As objections to rape and sexual harassment become more outspoken and frequent, *The Evil Dead* reflects the second-wave drive to recognize the brutality of rape, but also insists on displaying that brutality on the big screen. In the movie, a group of college kids are trapped in the middle of the woods. Possessed trees violently rape Cheryl, one of these college kids, in a horrific scene (24:41-29:33). The film does little to hide the terribly horrific experience of rape, the action taken by trees rather than another human adding a terrifying and animalistic element to the act that caused many audiences to become sick in much the same way as *The Exorcist*. Upon its release, the film was given an X rating and deemed a "video nasty" for its violent depictions and pornographic elements (Kermode 65-67). Despite predictions of a horrified first reaction, director Sam Raimi stated that he wanted both the scene and the movie as gruesome as possible with little interest in fear or censorship. This approach, in turn, caused the film to be even more polarizing. Although the director made the scene as horrifying as possible in order to mimic the fear of women at the time and cause outrage by the thought that terrible people carry out such actions, many reactions to the movie deemed the scene more outrageous for its nonsensical nature and subsequently deemed offensive. The call for censorship, driven by both feminists and traditionalists alike, of the rape scene, as well as of many other scenes in the movie, reinforced the idea that society needed

to avoid discussing, displaying, or worst of all, reimagining such topics in a public setting (Kermode 66). Despite this attitude, viewers continued to flock to the movie once word of its infamy spread, regardless of its lack of sensitivity to traditionally unspoken rules about appropriate topics to discuss concerning treatment of the female body, and film industries continued to create more movies that disregarded these rules.

Like in *The Evil Dead* and *The Exorcist*, *Annabelle: Creation* portrays unyielding examples of issues presented by feminism at the time of its release, this time with more focus on the inversion of innocence and traditional femininity. Made over three decades later in 2017, *Annabelle: Creation* portrays another young girl of whom evil takes advantage. Evil, however, no longer masquerades as the traditional demon nor as a group of possessed tree limbs. In this film, the demon pretends to be the ghost of the lost daughter of a couple, Samuel and Esther Mullins, who recently opened their home to six orphans and their guardian Sister Charlotte. In this movie, evil hides behind the face of innocence and works to possess only young girls. The inversion of femininity is depicted through the way in which the demon pretends to be a young innocent girl and later a porcelain doll, as well as in the way that it focuses on tormenting and controlling other young girls.

By taking classic symbols of innocence and young femininity, like the doll and the little girl, and turning them ugly and evil, the movie comments on the fear that feminism eradicates what femininity truly means. Just like in 1981, polarizing ideas on what feminism really means were alive in 2017. The third wave of feminism continued to find more ways to boldly present the motives of second wave feminists, and the objections stayed the same despite vastly changing tactics. In *Annabelle: Creation*, the young females fall prey to evil, and what makes them innocent and “feminine” is destroyed and replaced by a mirror opposite creature of evil and ill-intent. The girls, however, eventually save themselves from the possessed doll, but not by behaving helplessly or innocently. When Janice, one of the orphans, becomes possessed, the girls react violently in order to save themselves. For example, another orphan, Linda, whom the demon also torments, throws the porcelain doll down the well (1:12:25-1:12:37), and Sister Janet saves the girls by locking young Janice, the doll, and the demon in a closet until the police arrive (1:31:17). Meanwhile, Samuel Mullins, previously expected to pull his weight in saving the girls, ends up defeated by the demons. The added fact that the girls must go against the traditional idea of innocence and femininity to survive contrasts the idea that feminism is attempting to destroy what it means to have femininity.

Infestation, Oppression, and Possession of the American Culture

Ed Warren, the un-ordained exorcist in the movie *The Conjuring*, describes the process of possession as occurring in three stages: infestation, oppression, and possession (44:37-45:07). The first stage, he explains, consists of subtle evidences of the coming evil. “That’s the whispering,” he states. “The footsteps, the feeling of another presence which ultimately grows into oppression” (44:41). Oppression continues the process as the stage in which the external force begins to target and affect certain members of the household more strongly, while others continue to notice its impending presence. Finally, possession occurs, the stage where the force ingrains itself not only in those it previously oppressed, but also in the household itself.

Through these stages, the metaphor of a possessed society becomes fully illuminated. Political polarization did not happen overnight, and it changed forms, tactics, and motives throughout the years between the making of *The Exorcist* to the release of *The Conjuring*. Polarization became stronger and ingrained itself further in society, resulting in more outward representations of its effect within “the household”—in this case, the United States. These outward representations, as is the natural process within a society, became the pop culture we consume, the continuing circulation of politically themed metaphors further cementing American fascination with polarized ideologies. Indeed, the political climate has always haunted pop culture, resulting in a society where we feel its presence in every aspect of our lives. American society is possessed by the concept of political polarization. The possession continues to seep more deeply into the foundation of American society: gradually with continual reinterpretations of the same ideas and the same citizens which flock to consume them.

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The Haunt of Injustice: Exploring Homophobia in Vampire Literature

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The vampire figure is used within gothic literature tradition as a metaphorical representation of the unknown, encapsulating the fears of the given society from which the piece of literature derives. This essay investigates the connections between the evolution of the vampire, more specifically in Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, both of which depict the violent hunt of the homosexual, vampiric figure within society. This piece exposes the gothic depictions of homophobic societies and reveals the ways in which homophobic violence still remains a prevalent issue within the contemporary world.

Vampire literature uses the terrifying, super-human creature as a fictional means to build upon the very human quality of anxiety. The vampire is a literary metaphor of the unknown, a force that has the ability to consume mortal lives and create immortal beings. Since the beginning of time, humans have thought themselves to be superior to their surroundings: to animals, the environment, etc. In a fictional world in which vampires exist, however, the human is no longer the dominant, most powerful being. Thus, the concept inflicts fear which permits the construction of the hunt in vampire literature. The classic texts of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* reinforce the notion that the vampire encapsulates societal anxieties about

the “uncontrollable,” one that pertains to sexuality and transforms these narratives into cultural hauntings. While some people may believe that vampire literature are composed of merely silly, “make believe” stories, the truth is that they act as platforms to address serious social issues—such as homophobia—that still haunt our society. *Carmilla* and *Dracula* portray the hunts for and violent deaths of homosexual vampires to underscore the normalized marginalization of homosexuals, a cultural haunting that extends into modern society. This essay seeks to expose the gothic depictions of homophobic societies to reflect the ways in which people have viewed

homosexuality as something dangerous which threatens the power of the heteronormative hierarchy. The textual analysis of the history of this narrative begins with the examination of Le Fanu's *Carmilla* then transitions into Stoker's *Dracula* to unveil the disturbing cultural haunt of the homophobic brutality inflicted upon the LGBTQ community within society even still today.

Carmilla presents the taboo topic of female desire through the fluidity of the homosocial and homosexual nature of the relationship between Carmilla and Laura that deviates from the heteronormative society. These desires seamlessly unravel throughout the story without much verbal discussion since they were not socially permissible during this time period. Adrienne Antirim Major supports this sentiment in her article "Other Love: Le Fanu's *Carmilla* as Lesbian Gothic." She unpacks the depiction of love within this novella and the anticipated social response to the women's relationship. Major writes, "... it poses a paradigm of feminine power and lesbian love that might well create terror in the hearts of his contemporaries..." (151). Major emphasizes the problematic response of society to homosexuality and later describes the public's perception of queer desire as perversion, which encapsulates the demonization of homosexual individuals and sets the stage for the homophobic cultural hauntings.

Major also addresses the portrayal of love within *Carmilla* as malevolent, yet argues that Carmilla and Laura's relationship offers Laura a position of power because it deviates from the traditional structure of relationships in which women were inferior. One particular scene that shows this within the novella is when Laura and Carmilla discuss the human fear of death, which Laura recognizes as universal to all humans. Carmilla responds, "But to die as lovers may—to die together so that they may live together. Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larvae..." (27). This quote exemplifies the sinister tone that the character of Carmilla adopts because it shows death in the context of lovers as a state that is embraced, or rather idolized. It is important to note that death as lovers is the only true way that this lesbian couple would be able to be together during the 19th century since openly homosexual relationships were not permitted. The comparison of women to insects metaphorically represents the lack of power that women have within society. Carmilla advocates, in a rather dark way, for Laura to die with her because the choice of death would be a final assertion of agency and power through their refusal to conform to the heteronormative society around them. Thus, the notion of sexuality transforms into a supernatural context as the heteronormative society haunts these individuals with torment and suppression to conceal this part of their identity.

Further addressing gender and sexual agency, vampire literature works with familial structures to reflect cultural hauntings. The incorporation of the familial structure enforces the cruciality of power dynamics within the microcosm of the private sphere to reflect the larger macrocosm of disparity between male and female power. In the article “Repossessing the Body: Transgressive desire in ‘Carmilla’ and *Dracula*,” Elizabeth Signorotti compiles the variation of interpretations that scholars have formed regarding sexuality within *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. Signorotti further describes the implications of homosexual relationships within a heterosexually dominated society. She explores the notion of power dynamics within the family, particularly between Laura and her father. Signorotti states that the “... lesbian relationship defies the traditional structures of kinship by which men regulate the exchange of women to promote male bonding” (607). This quote reinforces the objectification of the female within the heteronormative society, which gave males the familial power to control women through marriage. As with sexual dynamics, gender dynamics further exemplify the social haunting of marginalized people.

The relationship that is created between these two women threatens the very reassurance of male power within this traditional scope. This is particularly evident within the novella when Laura’s father and the General reflect upon the death of his daughter. The General proclaims, “... inveighing against the ‘hellish arts’ to which she had fallen victim... and his wonder that Heaven should tolerate so monstrous an indulgence of the lusts and malignity of hell” (49). The use of religion permits the General to invalidate the relationship of Laura and Carmilla by denoting it to an “indulgence of the lusts.” He regards female desire as something that detracts from the normality of human beings. Moreover, he portrays the homosexual vampire, Carmilla, as an evil “other” that corrupts the conditions of society and robs him of his own power. This displays another instance in which homophobic beliefs haunt the society in which these relationships exist and, furthermore, causes these individuals to suffer in turn.

After Carmilla is demonized for her sexuality and involvement with the daughters of these men, she is hunted by the male alliance who seek vengeance and the restoration of their own power and control within the world. They claim that an eye for an eye is the only true way to restore justice, or at least what they believe is a just society. The notion of justice, however, is skewed by the homophobic undertones that haunt these individuals. Some critics argue whether the General’s daughter even died, or if this is merely symbolic of the death of her purity. Signorotti quotes Sian Macfie’s perspective regarding lesbian relationships and blood in her article, arguing that it is not death that takes the General’s daughter away from him but rather the notion of the “psychic sponge” and lesbianism as a consumption of her youth and purity (610). Moreover, she

loses all value within society, ultimately leaving her undesirable by men. Macfie states that "... close female bonding and lesbianism are conflated with notions of the unhealthy draining of female vitality" (qtd. in Signorotti 610). Critics argue that lesbianism threatens the very nature of the social exchange of women, which gave men power over their daughters. The metaphor of vampirism in relation to lesbianism unveils the homophobic perspective of same-sex relationships producing an impurity of blood. This belief echoes the homophobic presumptions and beliefs that have haunted our society, which was particularly evident during the AIDS crisis within America during the 1980s. Furthermore, the relationship between the society in which this text was written and our modern world reflects the homophobic trepidations regarding same-sex relationships and the purification of the body, as well as the cultural haunting that these beliefs constructed.

Despite how much power has been attributed to Carmilla and her ability to steal all of Laura's vitality, the hunt ends with the sacrificial persecution of this homosexual vampire. It becomes abundantly clear, however, through Le Fanu's description of Carmilla's death that there are some overlaps between Carmilla as a vampire and as a human being. In the final scene of her life, Le Fanu writes, "... a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony" (70). In this final scene, the end of Carmilla's life emphasizes her human-like qualities, such as the ability to feel pain. Le Fanu contrasts the characters of Laura and Carmilla to depict the two binary identities that women could obtain within this society: the victim or the monster. In Julie Miess' article entitled "Celebrating the Female Monster: Undead Housewife and Likeable Lamia," she expresses that women had the scarce options of either being "... the passive victim or, if she chooses not to inhabit that role, she is figured as the inhuman mythological female monster" (236). Moreover, Le Fanu intentionally creates the dichotomy between Laura and Carmilla to construct a cautionary tale. In this sense, if one chooses to be a "monster" through the embracement of one's own lesbian sexuality, that person will face marginalization and social death. Whether the woman's death comes figuratively or literally, men remain in power within the heteronormative patriarchy, a haunting reality that still exists in today's world.

Twenty-six years after *Carmilla* was published, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* evolved and added to the genre of vampire literature. Stoker continues with the concept of "otherness" in society within vampire literature by approaching the topic of homosexuality in a drastically different way than Le Fanu. Many scholars critique this novel for being Stoker's way of reinstating the heteronormative beliefs of Europe during this time period, especially since it was published merely two years after Stoker's close friend, Oscar Wilde, was persecuted for being a homosexual (Clark 167-68). This is

particularly evident throughout the novel with Stoker's incorporation of female dialogue in the form of letters. Mina and Lucy share a homosocial bond, emphasizing their intimate connection, in which they often forcefully convey that their only purpose as women is to serve the men within a marriage. In a letter to Mina, Lucy writes, "My dear Mina, why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them?" (Stoker 73). This quote speaks volumes to the societal perception of women as inferior to men within the public and domestic spheres, and it also illumines the enforced heterosexual nature of relationships, which persists as a cultural haunting.

The examination of this text raises questions about Bram Stoker's own sexuality, suggesting that he hid behind these traditional structures in order to hide his homosexual relationship with Henry Irving (Primuth 17). In the article "Vampires Are Us," Richard S. Primuth explores not only the sexuality of the character Dracula, but also of Stoker. The author argues that Stoker used Oscar Wilde's letters to Lord Alfred Douglas as a means of inspiration for his unconventional style of text. Primuth explains that, "at a time of extreme repression and fear for gay people, using their characters as a metaphor for their own hidden sexuality was an outlet for self-expression" (17). With that being said, whether or not Stoker himself was gay is left unknown. It is apparent, however, that he used his knowledge of heteronormative structures to create a homosexual vampire as the demonized "other" within the novel.

Stoker writes Dracula as an exotic being who lives in complete and utter isolation to reflect the haunting marginalization of the LGBTQ community within society. Dracula traps Jonathan Harker merely to have connection with other human beings; however, Stoker's tainted description of Dracula portrays him as predatory rather than lonely. Stoker describes Dracula's hands as "... rather coarse—broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were thin hairs in the center of his palm... nails were long and fine and cut to a sharp point" (25). This quote highlights the dramatic dehumanization of Dracula as the "other," attributing animalesque qualities to him to emphasize his predatory nature. This description creates a notion of disgust and repulsion within the readers at the sight of Dracula, exploiting the uncanny resonance connects the human world to the supernatural.

As the text continues, Harker discovers that there are sexy female vampires who live within the shadows of Dracula's castle, and they try to seduce him. Dracula bursts into the room and exclaims, "How dare you touch him, any of you... This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me" (Stoker 50). This shows his intense level of infatuation with Harker and is the first example in which he establishes sexual ownership over him. Dracula also claims that he has the ability to love, which directly implies his homosexual intentions with-

in his relationship with Harker. The article “Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door,” written by Jules Zanger, explores the function of the female vampires within Dracula’s castle as a haunting of the European past traditions. Zanger asserts that they serve no purpose except to exist as symbols of “... proper Victorian ladies, remaining properly at home while the master of the house goes forth to do solitary battle against the forces of virtue” (18). He argues that the women are merely objects of past traditional images of the heteronormative household. Thus, there emerges a familial dynamic of power within the household similar to the one that is established within *Carmilla*. It differs, however, in the sense that this structure actually favors the homosexual vampire. The women are necessary to the plotline of the story and act as “mediators” to the homosexual undertones that Stoker intends to convey (Craft qtd. in Schopp 235). With that being said, the women exist simply to make the homoerotic undertones less abrasive within the text, since that would have been socially unacceptable during the turn of the 19th century.

The heteronormative frame within this story uses the binary contrast of gender to make the homosexuality less explicit between the men. Andrew Schopp’s article “Cruising the Alternatives: Homoeroticism and the Contemporary Vampire” explores the transformative evolution of the vampire and the ways in which its purpose changes to reflect the cultural anxieties and hauntings (231). Many scholars, like Schopp, believe that “the vampire product creates a space for performing alternatives to social/cultural mandates, and the act of reading allows the reader to participate in, and contribute to, the use of the space” (235). In the case of *Dracula*, however, this belief does not apply. While some critics argue that the importance of vampire literature is the product of fictional space created to address social injustices, the space created within *Dracula* reveals the reinforcement of homophobic perceptions. Thus, while more modern-day literature reflects progression towards the use of fiction as a means to right the wrongs within society, it is evident through the animalistic depiction of the “other” within European society that homosexuality will result in the marginalization and cultural haunting to which Dracula is subjected.

After Jonathan escapes from Dracula’s castle and returns home, the homosocial group of men—Van Helsing, Seward, Morris, and Arthur—make it their conquest to track Dracula down and slay him. With the assistance of Mina, they are successful in this endeavor. They have condemned Dracula as an evil monster and refuse to allow him to assimilate into their traditional English culture due to his foreign origins and sexuality. This condemnation leaves him susceptible to being pushed out on the margins of society. The group, however, does not even allow him to exist on the margins of society, because they will not stop until the hunt is completed and Dracula is dead. Nina Auerbach’s *Our Vampires, Ourselves* describes the complex relationship between this

overarching group of men. She argues that Dracula solely preys on the important women within Jonathan's social group because "... Mina is only a pawn in his battle against the men. Stripped of his power of combination, catalyzing homoerotic relationships in which he cannot participate, this vampire loses his story, for he has no confidante willing to hear it" (82). This shows the deep level of isolation inflicted upon Dracula, which subsequently results in the unfortunate deaths of many individuals within this social group. Dracula goes against the traditional nature of homosocial relationships because he seeks to pursue a homosexual relationship with Jonathan Harker. What is also important to draw from this quote is Auerbach's acknowledgement of the lack of a narrative that we, as readers, receive from Dracula. Thus, the reader is simply left with the tale that is told through the homophobic perspectives of the men, who are too afraid to go against the societal norms to allow themselves to view Dracula not as an "other" haunted by societal anxieties, but as a man.

In the context of society, vampire literature reflects the current conditions and injustices that haunt our society. Through the literary examples of Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the social injustices regarding homosexuality and homophobia within society prevail. What is particularly interesting about both works is the lack of narrative of the homosexual vampires. *Carmilla* never has the opportunity to tell her story, and neither does *Dracula*. One can infer that these narratives would have constructed a more empathetic and sympathetic view of these characters as a way to re-humanize them. But alas, the world may never know. One critique claims that internal vampiric dialogue "... described from within is transformed from a code of hegemonic anxiety to a signifier of cultural change" (Miess 235). These narratives, however, are intentionally left out to reflect the cultural hauntings and oppression via silence of the marginalized "other" within society: those belonging to the LGBTQ community.

While it is true that Western society has moved in a more progressive direction towards equality of LGBTQ rights, the unfortunate reality for many of these individuals is that they are still greatly oppressed. The homophobic hunt that continues today and haunts our world exemplifies this oppression and can be seen in incidents like the Pulse Nightclub massacre where 49 individuals lost their lives. Unfortunately, this is merely one example within the American society of mass murder that was targeted at the LGBTQ community. The FBI revealed that there has been a steady incline of hate crimes against this community over the past fifty years, with a specific emphasis on the years of 2014-2017 in which the hate crimes against this community of individuals rose approximately 3% (Hauck 1). In 2017, the FBI reports that there were 1,130 incidents of hate crimes reported against the LGBTQ community, a majority of which were targeted at gay men

(Hauck 1). These are solely the incidents that are reported and documented, which is indicative that there are likely to be even more incidents of violence that go unreported. Fear, violence, and hatred are perpetuated within these tragic events of the modern world and accentuate the cultural haunting of homophobia. The increase in violence and marginalization against the LGBTQ community urgently calls for societal action and expulsion of these homophobic mindsets that infect our society and culture. Both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* remind readers of the homophobic mindset that haunts our society and create a linear history of the transgressive marginalization against homosexuals within society. The power of these works derives not from what they lack, but rather what they stand for: an acknowledgement of the history of violence and hatred towards these individuals. They manifest these notions in terms of vampire literature to create a response of resistance towards these mentalities and a deconstruction of the injustice that continues to haunt our world.

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Taking a Look in the Mirror: The Inversion of Middle-Class Fears of Urban Decay and the Representation of Racial Violence in Bernard Rose's *Candyman*

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Horror fiction has often utilized urban settings, specifically spaces plagued by urban decay, as tools to inspire fear in the middle- and upper-class readers who devour these stories. Authors and directors exploit these people's anxieties about falling into a lower economic class and their determination to ignore the twisted, horrible history of racial violence and discrimination that contribute to the conditions that people in such neighborhoods would live in. This paper seeks to illustrate how, in the 1992 film *Candyman*, director Bernard Rose turns these tropes on their heads to terrify his audiences in an entirely different way.

In the American cultural consciousness, the city has always carried with it an element of sinister foreboding. Major metropolises like New York City and Los Angeles have, in recent decades, taken on an aura of fantastical fascination, viewed as places where people from all walks of life can make something of themselves and become the person that they are meant to be. This perception, however, is fairly new compared to the association of both physical and moral decay with the nation's cities, which goes back to the foundation of the United States itself: "Thomas Jefferson, for instance, viewed giant urban centers such as New York as 'cancers' on the body politic and as potential dangers to democracy" (Macek 82). This view has made its way into every

facet of American culture through the centuries, and literature is no exception to this rule. Horror literature dating all the way back to H. P. Lovecraft presents a link "between urban decay and

immigration, and by implication historic preservation and anti-immigrant sentiment” (Evans 109). In thrillers, film noir, and modern horror movies in particular, this association is made even more prominent by the union of these films’ prime villains or antagonists with the cities in which these movies take place. In David Fincher’s *Seven*, for example, the unnamed city in which the murders take place is “a thoroughly noxious, menacing place, an allegorical Hell as full of suffering and anguish as the Inferno of Dante on which it appears to have been modeled” (Macek 83). Writer-directors such as Bernard Rose, however, while tapping into this collective societal fear of the inner city, go beyond simply playing off of instinctual white, middle-class anxiety and revulsion. In the 1992 film *Candyman*, Rose exploits both the white middle-class fear of urban decay and ignorance about the pervasiveness of racial violence in the United States, turning these ideas on their heads and forcing the viewer to reckon with the unacknowledged history that haunts the back of their minds.

In the 1990s, there was no more potent invocation of urban decay, inner-city violence, and the general fear of housing projects in the eyes of the public than the Cabrini-Green Homes development in Chicago. Situated near the Gold Coast neighborhood—which was and still is one of the richest in the United States—Cabrini-Green “stood as the symbol of every troubled housing project—a bogeyman that conjured fears of violence, poverty, and racial antagonism” (Austen). It became especially notorious during the decade leading up to *Candyman*, during which there were “eleven murders and thirty-seven gun injuries reported in the first two months of 1981,” as well as an incident just before the film came out where a young boy was killed by a sniper (Briefel and Ngai 76). High rates of crime, however, were not all of what put this area in the center of the media’s focus during this period: “Other public housing developments in the city were larger, poorer and had higher rates of crime. But in the extreme segregation of Chicago, Cabrini-Green... remained that uncommon frontier where whites still crossed paths with poor blacks” (Austen). Since Cabrini-Green stared the Gold Coast in the face, it was impossible for the almost completely white and upper-class population of the Gold Coast to ignore it, as they did with other housing projects in and around Chicago. The entire development was eventually destroyed, with demolition commencing three years after *Candyman* was released and the last high-rise being torn down in 2011, but that did not stop the endemic poverty that plagued the residents of the development. Even though all the people living in Cabrini-Green were relocated, “the demolitions didn’t do away with the poverty and isolation of public housing; these problems were moved elsewhere, becoming less visible and no longer literally owned by the state” (Austen). They were simply put out of sight, which was enough for the people of Chicago and the Gold Coast to

consider the issue “solved.”

The Cabrini-Green that viewers are shown in *Candyman* seems to be exactly like this stereotype on the outside: all the plant life around the complex is dead; the walls are covered in graffiti ranging from complex murals to unintelligible scribbles, and they are often shown to be crumbling; trash and discarded furniture is scattered everywhere; and any bit of exposed metal exhibits flecks of rust. Many shots of the complex also show the high-rises of downtown Chicago, particularly the former Sears Tower, looming over the neighborhood in the distance; the viewer knows that they are relatively close, but every shot that includes these buildings makes them seem impossibly far away. The housing project is visually separated from the famous skyline that so many Americans associate with Chicago, and the sheer height of these buildings compared to the apartment complexes of Cabrini-Green make it seem as though the rest of the city is looking down upon the people that live there.

It is this pervasive disdain for Cabrini-Green and its residents among the people of Chicago and the United States at large that sets the stage for *Candyman*. While conducting a graduate thesis on urban legends, Helen Lyle, a well-to-do white woman and the wife of a professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago, and her best friend Bernadette Walsh, a black woman of similar economic status, decide to pursue the story of Candyman, a ghostly figure who appears and murders you with a hook if you say his name five times in a mirror. When a janitor at the university tells Helen that her cousin’s friend was murdered by Candyman at the Cabrini-Green development, Helen decides to investigate further, taking Bernadette with her. While Helen’s determination to get to the bottom of the story outweighs any fear she might have about visiting this part of town, Bernadette is not so unwary: she packs mace and a taser in her purse, warns Helen that their conservative dress will make them look like cops to the residents, and briefly implores her friend to abandon the trip altogether. The visuals during this part of the movie seem to confirm her worries: the camera follows their car on the way to Cabrini-Green from a birds-eye view, making them look tiny and fragile on the very highway that keeps Cabrini-Green cordoned off from the rest of Chicago. Even though Bernadette finally agrees to come in when they arrive, she is constantly on edge.

She appears to be more at ease when invited into the apartment of a single mother named Anne-Marie, who assures the two women that “we ain’t all like them assholes downstairs” (*Candyman* 26:27–26:30), referring to a group of young men that harassed Bernadette and Helen, but this rapprochement comes only after Anne-Marie provides a jump scare by showing up with her chained rottweiler and interrogating them. Bernadette sees Anne-Marie as a threat until she

invites them into her apartment, where her child is also present, and tells them all the ways in which the people that tend to visit Cabrini-Green only do so to disparage the neighborhood and its residents. Even though she is willing to recognize that she was wrong about this person in particular, Bernadette cannot shake off her ingrained class prejudices. Bernadette is self-aware enough to point out the important fact that they will not be seen as benevolent intellectuals while they are in the projects, since their “vestmental code could be received suspiciously by a different community of readers, as a marker of intrusive authority rather than anonymity,” but this first visit to Cabrini-Green also puts her own biases on full display (Briefel and Ngai 78).

Helen’s character, however, acts against Bernadette’s class prejudice, downplaying her friend’s fears about the people living there and saying, when she sees her friend’s mace and taser, “What’s with the arsenal, Bernadette? We’re only going eight blocks” (*Candyman* 16:59–17:01). Helen doesn’t buy the idea that there is a significant difference between her circle of friends and the people at Cabrini-Green, telling Bernadette that her upscale condo used to be part of a housing project: “Once it was finished, the city soon realized that there was no barrier between here and the Gold Coast....So they made some minor alterations. They covered the cinder block in plaster, and they sold the lot off as condos” (13:41–13:58). She hammers home the truth of this fact by going to her bathroom mirror, pulling it out, and pushing the slab of plastic behind it out of the wall, revealing that the only thing separating her apartment from the one next door is the thin protection of two mirrors that come right out if any force is applied to them. This detail is revisited when Helen and Bernadette are exploring Cabrini-Green, where Helen crawls through a hole where a mirror used to be to find a shrine to Candyman hidden in a rotting apartment. Helen is willing to admit that she is not so far from the people of Cabrini-Green as some might like to think; without fear, she acknowledges the permeability of class distinctions, which many middle- and upper-class Americans might like to consider as more rigid. Unlike Bernadette, she is perfectly at ease walking through the projects and crawling through walls to enter vacant apartments that Bernadette warns her might be occupied by drug dealers. In a way, she is at home there.

The fact that Helen accepts Cabrini-Green, lives in an extremely well-furnished apartment that was once just like it, and willingly crosses between the two with seemingly no concern for her own safety deliberately plays on traditional middle- and upper-middle-class fears about economic divisions and the “dangers” of urban squalor to those who have a higher socioeconomic status. In his discussion of so-called “yuppie horror,” film critic Barry Keith Grant says, “In an economy characterized by economic polarization and spreading poverty, these scenes of crossing into the nether world of urban decay exude the Manichaeian, middle-class paranoia...that once

you leave a bourgeois life, you're immediately prey to crime, madness, squalor, and poverty" (5). These are exactly the fears that Rose interacts with in the film, deliberately making the viewer confront these worries within themselves. He forces them to realize that the projects aren't one dark, terrifying, unified organism of terror, but are filled with diverse groups of people who have fallen on hard times, shoved to the side by the American public as murderers, drug dealers, and rapists without grounds. Such criminals were of course present in the projects, but they were a minority who were looked down upon by their neighbors rather than accepted as the norm, just like everywhere else. The terror of the middle-class general public of possibly falling victim to the same processes that doomed the projects haunts them and makes them unable to see the truth. Furthermore, as funds for housing projects across the country were slashed during the tenures of the Reagan and Bush administrations and more and more people were forced to relocate, horror films in the years leading up to the release of *Candyman* embodied yet another terror affecting the white middle class: "an irrational fear of infiltration from those evicted from subsidized housing," exemplified by the "insistence [of pre-*Candyman* slasher films] on preserving the intactness of [their] middle-class control group[s] of victims" (Briefel and Ngai 74).

The fact that Helen is white also forces both the characters and the viewer to reckon with the history of racial oppression and violence that is attached to the legend of *Candyman* and the projects themselves. *Candyman*, according to legend, was originally Daniel Robitaille, the son of a former slave. His father became rich, and Robitaille himself became a skilled and highly respected portrait painter. When he fell in love with and impregnated the daughter of a wealthy white landowner, however, he was lynched in gruesome fashion. The hand he painted with was cut off with a rusty saw, his naked body was smeared with honey, and an angry swarm of bees was released upon him, leading to his death from blood loss and bee stings. Lynching was one of the most brutal, hate-filled, and pervasive types of racial violence after the Civil War, and this instance in particular is extremely horrifying and spiteful. Rather than hanging and burning him, as was typical of a lynching, they took the time to eliminate his connection to white society (his painting hand) and to kill him with a symbol of the very sweetness that appealed to his lover in the first place (the honey).

The extreme malice that the people of Reconstruction-era Chicago showed toward Robitaille likely stemmed from the contemporary fear among middle- and upper-class white Americans of interracial couples and biracial children, whom they saw as "impure" and as a "corruption" of whiteness. It was not primarily the fact that Robitaille was well-to-do that sent these people after him (although his wealth was likely a factor), but that he and his lover would have created a

biracial child who, to their even greater fear, may have passed for white, that caused them to react in so visceral and sadistic a fashion. This is what sets this lynching apart from many others, aside from the physical details of the incident; it was not just the punishment of a black man for having sex with a white woman, but for conceiving a child with said white woman who could completely defy and eliminate the traditional idea that the white middle and upper classes were “pure.”

It is in Cabrini-Green that this legacy of horrific violence, prejudice, and American anxieties about racial divides are on full display. In her essay about the role of the urban gothic in slasher films, author Stacey Abbot links Cabrini-Green to traditional conceptions of the “Terrible Place” in urban gothic, which can be described as needing “a concentration of memories and historical associations” which “would [ideally] be expressed in an extant architectural or topographical heritage, as these areas provide for ghostly presences of imagined/projected meanings” (70). The fact that Cabrini-Green was built upon the same site as that of Robitaille’s lynching and exhibits the systematic economic oppression and unofficial segregation of African Americans in the United States—Bernadette explicitly describes it as a ghetto at one point—means that the housing project fits into this description perfectly. We are given inklings of the complex racial dynamics at play there during the first half of the movie, such as when Anne-Marie says, “You know, whites don’t ever come here, except to cause us a problem” (*Candyman* 25:48–25:50). Helen, unbeknownst to herself, has become “a perpetrator of White colonial aggression. Although several Black women characters advise her against intruding on community spaces and disrespecting sites of death, she pushes forward with her research agenda in hopes of publication” (Kee 52). She is well-intentioned in her investigation and does not mean to cause any trouble or harm, but she is still participating in the cultural norms that have oppressed Cabrini-Green by treating it merely as a space in which to freely conduct her research, rather than as a place filled with real people who are living in very real homes (52). The racial dynamics in the film come to a head with the appearance of Candyman, who in fact takes two forms.

The first form that we see is the leader of a gang, the Overlords, who calls himself Candyman and carries a hook around with him. This first version of Candyman has taken on the persona of the legendary ghost to inspire fear in the residents of Cabrini-Green and to create a near-mythical status for himself within the neighborhood. This Candyman is almost a specter unto himself, invisible until Helen visits the project alone to interview Anne-Marie a second time. When she arrives, she meets a young boy called Jake who tells her that he can lead her to Candyman. He takes her to a public restroom outside the building where he says Candyman can be found before telling her a story about a child being horribly mutilated by Candyman in that very bathroom.

When Helen enters, she checks all of the stalls and, in the last one, finds a colony of bees nesting inside the toilet bowl. She slams it shut and turns to leave when a young man walks in, who, as four other men follow him, pulls a hook from behind his back. When she tries to leave, they restrain her and he says, “I hear you’re looking for Candyman, bitch. Well, you found him” (*Candyman* 38:57–39:01), before hitting her over the head with the hook.

Helen is in genuine danger during this scene, and everything about the environment in which it takes place heightens this feeling. There is graffiti and grime all over the walls, and all the toilets, excepting the one filled with bees, are smashed to pieces. Spread over the wall and door of the stall with the bee toilet, in what appears to be human feces, is the phrase “sweets to the sweet,” which appeared near the aforementioned shrine to Candyman and marked the locations where Candyman murdered people. The scene also seems to suggest the potential for sexual assault; the bathroom is a space of extreme vulnerability, and the disgusting nature of this one has already set the viewer on edge. This sense of unease heightens when one of the Overlords restrains her and their leader gets very close to her, grabbing her neck before hitting her with the hook. It is a nightmare scenario for a white middle-class intellectual woman in this situation, and, while they leave her in the bathroom after hitting her in the head a few more times (enough to leave a pool of blood beneath her), Rose deliberately constructed this scene to play off of every stereotype that people had of Cabrini-Green in this time period and that the white middle and upper classes would have had of areas suffering from urban decay in general. This fact is only compounded by multiple characters expressing their fear for Helen’s safety and her good fortune at being alive after this incident.

To Helen, the mystique and legend surrounding the gang leader iteration of Candyman falls apart after this incident. He is quickly arrested, and when Helen sees Jake at the police station, she assures him, against his protestations that Candyman will come for him, that “Candyman” was never real: it was only a bad man wearing the name like a cloak. At this point in the film, the gang leader can be seen as emblematic of the perception that most Americans had of Cabrini-Green: violent, coarse, and mired in crime, inspiring fear and whispers. He doesn’t even have a name; his persona begins and ends with his role as the head of the Overlords and someone who adopts the persona of Candyman. Helen and the police think that, by rooting him out and bringing him into custody, they have solved the mystery of Candyman and put a stop to a major blight on the area; however, it is soon after this incident that the actual ghost of Candyman appears to Helen in a parking garage, proving them dead wrong.

When Helen enters the garage, she sees a dark figure standing at the other end of the

building; he is covered by a long, flowing black coat, and his right hand is replaced by an enormous, bloody hook. Helen tries to leave, but she is hypnotized, unable to break free from the spell of the true and undeniable Candyman, who proclaims to her, "I am the writing on the wall, the whisper in the classroom. Without these things, I am nothing. So now, I must shed innocent blood. Come with me" (53:29-53:12). This language is different from the more direct language of the gang leader and the tag associated with him, "sweets to the sweet," immediately signifying the divide between himself and who Helen thought to be Candyman in the first place.

Helen faints, only to wake up on the floor of a bathroom as someone wails nearby. She is covered by a long black coat and pulls it back to reveal a huge pool of blood on her stomach and the floor around her. When she opens the door, she discovers the severed head of a rottweiler lying on the floor of a hallway, a meat cleaver lying beside it. She takes the knife and emerges to find Anne-Marie, standing over her son's empty, gore-soaked crib, screams of grief and sorrow tearing from her lungs. When Anne-Marie sees Helen standing there holding the still-bloody knife, she lunges, demanding that Helen tell her where her baby is as she tackles her and slams her head into the floor. Helen manages to get the upper hand, but that's when the police burst in, finding a white woman kneeling over a black woman holding a meat cleaver, the white woman's shirt and the apartment around them already covered in blood, and an empty crib so saturated with crimson that it seems no child that lay within could still be alive.

This is the moment that the racial dynamics that Rose has been hinting at finally burst onto the screen. While we assume that Helen had nothing but the best of intentions when talking to Anne-Marie earlier in the film, the fact that she has been caught in this situation seems to confirm Anne-Marie's prior statement that white people only come to Cabrini-Green to cause trouble. We would like to think that Helen is innocent in all this, framed for the murder by a vengeful ghost, but it is impossible for the viewer to be sure at this point that Helen did not kill the dog and commit infanticide. Furthermore, when Helen is brought to the police station where she originally reported the gang leader and is asked to take off her clothes, this act covers the entirety of her upper body is covered in blood, a visual which tacitly compounds the fact that she might be guilty. The veracity of her own account is also thrown into question by the fact that she so recently sustained a head trauma severe enough to leave a sizable pool of blood on the ground, meaning that her vision in the garage could have been a hallucination (Kee 53).

The ghostly Candyman, as opposed to the gang leader, embodies not society's perceptions of the housing projects, but the horrible history of racial violence that has soaked the pages of the history in the United States. Helen and the police were perfectly willing to accept the reality of the

fake Candyman, but it isn't until the real Candyman stares her in the face that Helen admits that he exists and still has the power to hurt people in the modern world. His appearance also puts the death of a child on the hands of a white woman in both a mirror image of his own gruesome end (since the blood that has soaked Helen's sweater when she wakes up only covers her stomach, an apparent callback to the fact that Candyman was murdered for impregnating a white woman) and in a resurrection of that very event at the site upon which his death occurred. In fact, "Helen's subjection by the history she seeks is signaled throughout *Candyman* by the repetition of mirror images. On a basic psychoanalytic level, staring into a mirror to summon Candyman (who then will burst through the mirror and wreak havoc) indicates that Candyman dwells in the desiring subject's unconscious," and this moment is where Rose masterfully uses Helen's being framed to scare the white middle class (Wyrick 95).

Anyone who grows up in the United States is aware of the brutal oppression and pain that people of color faced throughout the nation's history; however, there are those who would like to believe that this inequality is all in the past, part of a bygone era that has no bearing on today's reality, relegating it to what Candyman calls himself: a whisper in the classroom. The ghost of Daniel Robitaille, functioning as a stand-in for that very history that haunts the American consciousness, forces the viewer to reckon with the fact that it is not so far behind them as they might like to think and that it still has the power to hurt people in the modern day. For all her education and good will, Helen (and, by extension, the white middle-class viewer prior to this point) has been unable to see the power that racism and racial violence hold over the American consciousness because of her white privilege until she is literally paralyzed from fear of this power. Then, just after recognizing it as real and tangible, she opens her eyes again on a world turned on its head and drenched in blood and despair. When Candyman was just an idea to her, Anne-Marie's apartment seemed almost untouched by the violence that permeated that spot a century before; after he became real to her, Helen herself became mired in the very history of death and gore to which she had, until now, been blissfully blind. This idea is compounded by the fact that the characters treat Candyman as just another horror-themed urban legend during the first half of the movie, thinking him similar to Bloody Mary. The Bloody Mary legend has been normalized in Western culture, and even though it is a terrifying concept, nobody actually thinks of it as real or dangerous because, as children, everybody is told that it is just a story. Similarly, while the history of racial injustice in the United States is extremely horrific and deplorable, white people frequently talk of it in the modern age as though it is just a story, rather than as a force that can genuinely harm people.

The importance of bathrooms in the film is further evidence of this interpretation of Candyman. Bathrooms tend to have two different associations: that of filth and unpleasant bodily functions and that of relaxation, peace, and cleanliness. The fact that Candyman appears to someone when they look in a mirror tacitly associates him with the act that would take place most often when someone is looking in a mirror: washing hands. The washing of hands symbolically means the elimination of one's guilt about something they witnessed or took part in, and Candyman's modus operandi means that this act is no longer enough. The people summoning him as a game in their bathrooms can no longer just wash their hands of the history that he represents and leave it behind when they lose interest; they have to deal with the consequences. The two bathrooms at Cabrini-Green, in turn, show how this violence and dirty national history cannot be avoided there. The bathroom that Helen awakens in is splattered with blood and is never shown to be cleaned up, and the bathroom in which she is assaulted is covered with grime and literal feces, and its sinks and toilets are all smashed to pieces. No relief or cleanliness can be found in these bathrooms; the horrid, reeking, poisonous filth that covers those bathrooms, just like the horrid, reeking, poisonous murder that infected that property, can never be washed away.

The murder of Candyman's second victim, Bernadette, cements this line of thinking. When Candyman appears to Helen this time, it is first by shoving his bloody hook through the mirror at her, both compounding the emphasis on mirror images and reminding the viewer of Helen's earlier story about the apartment being a former housing project. He then traps her in her kitchen, where she grabs a knife, and paralyzes her once again. This time, however, he is interrupted by Bernadette, who came to check up on Helen. Bernadette enters only to have the door swing shut behind her. When she turns around, she sees Candyman standing there, slowly raising his hook.

This moment is significant because Bernadette is the only character aside from Helen herself who sees Candyman at any point during the movie. While Candyman claims another victim later in the film, this third victim doesn't see him coming at all, as Candyman kills him from behind. Everyone else is unable to see him, even if Helen claims he is right in the room with them, leading them to believe her insane. Bernadette, however, sees him immediately. As a black woman, Bernadette would have been far more aware of the ways that the racial violence and hatred that has saturated American history still affects the modern world than her white associates and friends. She is therefore able to see Candyman the second that she encounters him, almost seeming to recognize him for who he is in the few seconds before he kills her. After she has been murdered, Helen's husband Trevor returns to find Helen unconscious in the kitchen, holding a knife and covered in blood, with Bernadette's eviscerated body lying a few feet away.

This intersection between the past and present in *Candyman* culminates at the climax of the film, in which Helen, who has escaped from a psychiatric ward and returned to Cabrini-Green, discovers a hook dangling from the ceiling and Candyman asleep on a slab of rock. She plunges the hook deep into his neck in an attempt to kill him, embracing Candyman's modus operandi. It doesn't work, however, and she surrenders herself to him in exchange for Anne-Marie's child, whom he kept alive. As she does this, Candyman says, "Our names will be written on a thousand walls, our crimes told and retold by our faithful believers. We shall die together in front of their very eyes and give them something to be haunted by" (1:22:20–1:22:37). Candyman then embraces Helen and kisses her with a mouth filled with bees, causing her to faint once again.

This scene, in which she is laid out on the slab of stone upon which Candyman had been lying and takes on the visual role of the sacrifice she has made of herself, also fits into Rose's technique of inverting traditional racial stereotypes to elicit fear from the audience and make them confront this within themselves. Here, Rose uses "[a trope] used much earlier in *Birth of a Nation* or *King Kong*: the ritual sacrifice of a virgin to a black potent male" (Hoeveler 99). While some, such as Diane Hoeveler, a professor at Marquette University, argue that *Candyman* simply replicates the stereotypes that they are supposedly speaking against, this scene in fact does the opposite. Helen's surrender to Candyman, rather than just playing into traditional tableaux of white fear about the corruption of white women by black men, represents Helen's acceptance of the raw power of the brutal history of repression that Candyman symbolizes and shows that she is willing to allow herself to be crushed by it if it means saving an innocent member of the next generation raised on the site of such atrocities.

When Helen awakes, she sees a mural depicting Candyman's former lover, who is an exact mirror image of her, and then hears the cries of a child, which draw her out of the building to a large pile of broken furniture that the residents of the building were planning to use for a bonfire that night. As she slips into the pile to find the source of the cries, the young boy that she had so recently consoled in the police station, Jake, sees her and whispers, "He's here" (1:26:23–1:26:24), before gathering the residents of Cabrini-Green and telling them to set fire to the pile of furniture because he saw Candyman go in there, which they do almost immediately.

In this scene, the fact that these people are so quick to light the fire exhibits their intense hatred of the figure they know as Candyman: the gang leader. It is people like him that have given Cabrini-Green such a deplorable and negative reputation, and, given the chance, they do not hesitate to set that image ablaze. The fierceness and ferocity with which they set fire to the furniture also echoes the lynching that happened there centuries ago, only this time it is the black

residents of Cabrini-Green taking revenge against injustice rather than an injustice being intentionally committed.

Helen is able to save the baby, but she, along with the ghostly Candyman, perish in the flames. At Helen's funeral, a procession of the residents of Cabrini-Green walks through the graveyard in silence, and Jake, wearing a coat that looks like a much brighter and bloodless version of Candyman's, casts the very hook that Helen used to try to kill Candyman into her open grave. In this moment, Helen takes on the haunting mantle of Candyman for these people. The gang leader has been removed from the area, and the ghost of Daniel Robitaille was shown to be truly gone when the camera zoomed in on what looked like a charred corpse in the bonfire, so there is no one left that this role could be placed upon but her. The fact that this tableau cuts away immediately to Helen's funeral only compounds this transition, and her new identity is confirmed at the end of the movie. When Trevor says "Helen" five times in the bathroom mirror while grieving, she appears to him as she looked in death, the skin on her head burned and scarred, holding the hook that was cast into her grave. When Trevor's girlfriend, who he had been seeing secretly while married to Helen, opens the bathroom door, she finds him split open from his waist to his ribs and screams, standing over him holding a kitchen knife that she had been using to make dinner. The final shots of the movie then cut to and zoom in on a new mural in Cabrini-Green: Helen rising from the bonfire in a swirl of flame, her head surrounded in a fiery corona, looming above the terrified people below like a vengeful spirit or god.

By taking on the mantle of Candyman, Helen reversed the traditional perceptions of the history of racial violence in the United States. Instead of the original Candyman, who represented the idea of this racial violence being ignored as a serious presence by the white middle- and upper-class intellectuals of the university and yet instilling great fear in the hearts of the mainly African American residents of Cabrini-Green, the movie now has Helen, who, as a well-to-do white intellectual, is emblematic of the very people who have incited or tacitly perpetuated the racial violence that has plagued American history. Now, instead of hurting the people who have suffered from this abuse for so long, Helen is killing people like Trevor, the very individuals who denied the power of racial violence to haunt and inflict pain upon modern America and who, just one hundred years ago, may have personally murdered Daniel Robitaille.

There are some, however, who do not take the story beats of Candyman to be so self-aware and critical of traditional American attitudes toward history. Author Michael Blouin, for example, sees Candyman's interpretation of and attention to race as too generalizing and bland, saying, "When *Candyman* moves to diminish divisions between a black man and a white woman, casting

these differences as 'merely superficial,' it willfully overlooks crucial distinctions between the material circumstances of these groups" (87). This is an understandable interpretation; however, the film not only acknowledges the difference in circumstances between Candyman and Helen but uses this gap deliberately to enhance the meaning of Helen's replacement of him. As an emblem of death and reversal of fortune to white intellectuals in the modern age, she will become a fearful tale to haunt the consciousnesses of people like Trevor, just as Candyman haunted the minds of the black residents of Cabrini-Green.

This haunting also forces the white intellectuals who will whisper Helen's name and spread her story to reckon with the fact that the homes they thought were so secure and separate from places like Cabrini-Green may no longer be so safe. Perhaps they never were. The mirror images and doubling that have been on display so explicitly throughout the film are exactly what allows this fear to manifest: they blur the lines between Helen and Candyman's roles as victim and monster and similarly blur the lines between the safety of white privilege and ignorance and the dirty realities of places like Cabrini-Green (Kee 52-53). Just like in Helen's apartment, which was only one shiny veneer away from being a housing project, the pervasive fear that the white middle and upper classes have of places suffering from urban decay has been turned on its head: it's not the projects where they can't feel safe anymore, but their own homes. The very people who would be so quick to deny that Candyman even existed will now be forced to reckon with the prejudices and histories that they have for so long ignored or risk ending up like Helen and becoming a whisper in the classroom, the writing on the wall.

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Stolen Spirits: The Appropriation of the Windigo Spirit in Horror Literature

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Although well-documented in Western literature, the windigo spirits present in stories like Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* and Algernon Blackwood's "The Wendigo" are stripped of their original context and reduced to mere stereotypes of the cultures from which they originate. By looking at the depictions of windigo in specific Western stories and Native beliefs, the ways in which appropriation has long-lasting effects on the perceptions of Native American cultures by the average consumer and even scientific communities becomes apparent. Ultimately, this paper argues that Native American spirits should belong to the cultures from which they originate.

Louis were the ears, which were not ears at all but curving horns... they were not like devil's horns; they were ram's horns.

His most vulnerable points, moreover, are said to be the feet and the eyes; the feet, you see, for the lust of wandering, and the eyes for the lust of beauty. The poor beggar goes at such a dreadful speed that he bleeds beneath the eyes, and his feet burn.

- Algernon Blackwood,
"The Wendigo" (1910)

Its eyes, tilted up like the eyes in a classical Chinese painting, were a rich yellowish-gray, sunken, gleaming. The mouth was drawn down in a rictus; the lower lip was turned out, revealing teeth stained black-ish brown and worn down almost to nubs. But what struck

- Stephen King, *Pet Sematary* (1983)

Introduction

The idea of the windigo is not entirely unfamiliar to Western readers, even if the windigo itself is not always referred to by name. A woods-dwelling, human-like, cannibalistic, horned figure—the common depiction of the windigo in television, books, and film—is visible in books by Margaret Atwood and Stephen King and shows like *Supernatural*¹ and even *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*.² While the spirit itself comes from Native American beliefs, the common visual depiction of the windigo does not. In most Native American beliefs, the windigo greatly resembles the human being it used to be except for tiny features that give it away as a shell of what it once was.

The image of the windigo as seen in non-Native literature is recognizable as a Native American spirit in its use of exaggerated and stereotypical Native American characteristics created by capitalism. The windigo of pop culture is wild. It often has antlers and haunts forests and cemeteries, cursing the people who enter and eating the ones who do not leave. This horned depiction of the windigo appears in movies like *Wendigo* (2001), *The Last Winter* (2006), and *Devil in the Dark* (2017) and shows like *Hannibal* (2013-2015)³ and *Over the Garden Wall* (2014). In other Western depictions, the windigo takes on some remarkably werewolf-esque traits: pointy ears, sharp claws and teeth, howling, and frantic wandering through the woods (DeSanti 192), traits that can be seen in episodes of *Supernatural* (2005-2020) and *Charmed* (1998-2006).⁴ It exists in the realm of horror tropes of curses and “Indian burial grounds.” None of these representations, however, reflect the true nature of windigo myths. In the recreating of spirits that do not belong to them, Euro-American writers warp and decontextualize the windigo from its original contexts. The windigo is an important symbol in the many Native beliefs it inhabits, but the decontextualized Western windigo does not tell you what it symbolizes. Severing the windigo from its context allows Western authors to create a literary way of invoking spirituality and magic by drawing on their created stereotypical Native American themes: antlers, wilderness, spirits, and other aspects created to “other” Native American communities and create a marketable genre of Native American spirituality.

Native American spirituality, in its romanticization as the purest, most natural way of being American, is extremely marketable. Native American cultures are often commodified in Western culture—sold through dreamcatchers, feathers, masks, designs, tattoos, and Halloween cos-

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- 1 Season 1, episode 2
 - 2 Season 2, episodes 1 & 2
 - 3 Various appearances throughout seasons 1, 2, 3.
 - 4 Season 1, episode 12

tumes—and this commodification does not end with material culture. Spirits, stories, music, and general cultural characteristics are prime targets for Western creators. Native cultures have already proved to be marketable, and using stereotypes in horror literature quickly and easily lends an air of spiritualism and natural wildness to stories in ways appealing to American consumers.

Windigo spirits have existed in the oral traditions of many Algonquian Native American cultures long before they ever appeared in stories by horror authors like Stephen King and Algernon Blackwood. In the oral traditions of the Cree and Ojibwe, the windigo are important cultural spirits, each with individual histories, personal attachments, and reasons for being. Windigo stories serve as moral foundations, warnings, and histories of the communities in which they are told. Without the context of Native stories, the windigo is simply a cannibalistic monster. In Euro-American literature, they haunt white people and are separated—both physically and metaphorically—from the communities in which they are born. Western stories have appropriated the concept of the windigo, but they have changed it into a more marketable monster. The windigo is a personal spirit that still belongs to the Native American cultures from which it has been taken, and the appropriation of this spirit harms Native American communities by poorly representing their beliefs for a marketable gain. By looking at two stories, the 1983 novel *Pet Sematary* by American author Stephen King and the 1910 work “The Wendigo” by English author Algernon Blackwood, we see similar misrepresentations of the windigo by Western authors and how, despite the seventy-year gap between the publication of the two stories, the windigo is still prominent in Western literature as a symbol of horror and fear of the wilderness. *Pet Sematary* is an important cultural artifact thanks to King’s widespread popularity and recognition as a horror writer. The book’s cultural importance granted it not one, but two movie adaptations, the first in 1989 and the second in 2019. On the other hand, “The Wendigo” is one of the first representations of the windigo by a Western writer and served as a foundation for the image many people attribute to windigos as horrific creatures. By analyzing the representations of the original Western-shaped windigo created by Blackwood and the contemporary version that lives on in one of King’s most recognizable stories, it is possible to distinguish the Native windigo from the Western imitation and recognize the harm the latter puts on Algonquian communities.

Windigos in Native American Belief Systems

Before analyzing the Western literature in which windigos often reside, it is important to understand the cultural origins and context of these spirits. Beliefs about the actions and appearances of windigos vary from culture to culture, but the basic principles remain consistent. The

windigo is a Native American spirit who was once human but has since been transformed into a cannibalistic spirit. It belongs to the Algonquian tribes that spread across the northeastern United States and Canada, including the Cree, Ojibwe (Chippewa), Delaware, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Illinois, Fow, Kickapoo and many more. Among these tribes, the windigo goes by many names depending on the linguistic differences among the tribes. For example, the Cree refer to them as witiko or wihtikow and the Ojibwe refer to them as wintiko or wiindiigo. In light of the many spellings among the many tribes of the Algonquian peoples, I have chosen to use the spelling “windigo,” one of the standard English spellings of the word for clarity and uniformity throughout.

Among the Cree, there are two distinctive types of windigo: one type is a supernatural cannibal being with anthropomorphic characteristics that demonstrates quite a bit of power, and the other type refers to humans who develop cannibalistic cravings and slowly transform into windigos. The supernatural windigo has terrifying characteristics, enormous strength, and powers that allow it to paralyze and transform mortals into cannibals, while the previously human windigos appear dirty and unkempt, but are otherwise nearly indistinguishable from their mortal counterparts (Flannery, Chambers, and Jehle 57-58).

For the Cree, the windigo is a symbol of failing social relations, when the relationship between individuality and cooperation with the larger group becomes unbalanced. The transformation into a windigo is representative of the final shift from human to greedy cannibalistic creature (Turner 64). Typically, a windigo goes after the people closest to it: children, spouses, and close friends (68). Many accounts of windigo from other Algonquian groups, such as those presented in Ojibwa Texts collected by William Jones, show the windigo going after their families or fixating on children (Brightman 347-48).

As with most depictions of the windigo in Native stories, the windigo of the Ojibwe has a heart of ice and cannibalistic tendencies. It is voracious, and its hunger is physically present, as the windigo is consistently emaciated (DeSanti 188). Presenting itself as a kind of psychological impairment, with the inability to control selfish desires and impulses, the windigo appears as a result of resource scarcity (Paredes 339-40) and an imbalance in the two souls that inhabit the body (DeSanti 196).

While the accounts of windigos vary slightly across Algonquian cultures, they all have essentially the same characteristics. They are mostly the spirits of people who were once human, but no longer are, transformed into windigos as a result of either famine-induced cannibalism or possession by larger, supernatural windigo spirits (Ferrara and Lanoue 78). The transformation from human into windigo is typically a gradual one, characterized by violence and selfishness (79).

Windigos have hearts encased in ice that must be melted to either cure or kill the windigo. They mostly appear in the winter, and they always appear alone (78).

Manifestations of the windigo are responses to environmental and cultural stresses—like isolation and starvation in harsh winter environments and outside colonial factors—as a way of explaining and taking control of stresses (Ferrara and Lanoue 76). Windigos haunt their local communities by facing them with prevalent issues of isolation, starvation, and selfishness. Separation from the community, either physically or emotionally, is detrimental to both the individual and the community, and windigo spirits serve as guardians of the community by protecting and enforcing the cooperative values of the community.

Windigos in Western Literature

While traditional stories of windigos have a long history within Algonquian tribal history, non-Native representations of the windigo date back to the 18th century, though the better known versions are more recent. One of the most popular and well-known of these was published in 1910. Algernon Blackwood's "The Wendigo" is one of the most prominent short stories about windigos in Western Literature, as it is the inspiration for Larry Fessenden's *Wendigo* (2001) and *The Last Winter* (2006) and has been recreated in an abbreviated form in *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* (1981). Blackwood's windigo has little physical presence; it is instead characterized through storytelling around a campfire and the way it affects the people and environment around it. The footsteps it leaves behind reveal a long stride and huge physicality, and it is consistently described as having a hideous odor. The speed at which it runs after its victims causes its feet to catch fire and burn. In comparison to Native American representations, this windigo has many similar characteristics, but the way in which it is discussed and stripped of meaning and context is very different.

In Blackwood's short story, the windigo appears as a way to contribute to the Western dehumanization of Native Americans. The windigo in Blackwood's story shows the racist attitudes that underpin Blackwood's perspective of Native cultures and, ultimately, his writing itself. In writing about a spirit that does not belong to him, Blackwood has created a different kind of windigo, one that is but a racist depiction of the culture from which it stems. The ways in which Blackwood discusses the windigo—and aboriginal peoples themselves—contribute to racist stereotypes and creates a biased and ethnocentric perspective of Native spirits.

In the story, two Scottish travelers are led through the Canadian wilderness by indigenous Canadian guides who warn them of the windigo, a "sort of great animal that lives up yon-

der" (504). Throughout the story, Native Americans as a people are also depicted as animal-like and wild with greater senses. In the darkness, they can see and hear like animals, and they move quietly "as only Indian blood can move" (495). Blackwood specifically describes the actions of one of the Native American characters in the story, Défago, as "like a dog sniffing game" (501). Défago later walks slowly into the woods and is described as being absorbed into the forest.

The windigo of *Pet Sematary* also makes few physical appearances, but its presence is blamed for many of the events in the book; it exerts its power over the people of Ludlow, inciting them to awful, macabre actions. It wants people to come to the local Native American burial grounds to resurrect their pets and loved ones and ultimately bring more people to their untimely and gruesome deaths. King depicts the windigo in *Pet Sematary* as an absolutely huge creature with ram's horns that can turn people into windigos by merely touching them. Any animal or person buried in the pet cemetery loses the essence that makes them unique and lively, and while this change does not seem to concern the characters when they consider resurrecting animals, it is a huge concern when thinking about their loved ones. Resurrecting a human is highly discouraged, as they will lose their humanity in the process, becoming what is essentially a wild animal seeking to destroy and cause harm.

Throughout the story, Judson Crandall refers to the Micmac tribe—properly spelled Mi'kmaq—in ways that associate them with wildness and the Western fear of the unknown that masquerades itself as a fear of the wilderness. The wilderness is a constant threat to survival in comparison to the paradise of civilization romanticized by Western societies (Nash 8-9). Especially in Christocentric societies, the wilderness stands in stark contrast to the Garden of Eden man was cast out of (15). Stephen King uses this fear of the wilderness to his advantage, making it the center of mystery and terror in *Pet Sematary*. The forest behind the Creeds' house has "a charm that was not Christian, but pagan" (42), and can be related to an "almost instinctive fear of woods" (37) that manifests itself in human beings, especially in Euro-American cultures that are more disconnected from the natural world. Louis is warned against entering "the Indian woods" just beyond the pet cemetery in another association between Native Americans and the wilderness that is so familiar to Western societies (104). Through its association with the pet cemetery and the resurrection of children's beloved pets, the windigo is dehumanized by being associated with a place where animals are buried and anything that is reincarnated is no longer human—and in most cases, never was. This suggests that the windigo itself is animalistic in its association with the pet cemetery.

The connection between windigos, Native Americans, and animals appears in King's book in much the same way as in Blackwood's story. While Blackwood connects Native peoples and animals through metaphors and animalistic actions and characteristics, King connects them through the tangible metaphor of the pet cemetery. Anything that is buried there, be it human or pet, is not human. The people who are buried there and brought back to life only resemble human beings. Their actions are murderous, dangerous, and animalistic, insinuating that the Native people who originally occupied the land and buried their dead in the cemetery are also murderous, dangerous, and animalistic.

King's version of the windigo, while physically and partially behaviorally similar to traditional Cree depictions of the supernatural windigo, does not fully represent the holistic idea of the windigo. King's version is tailored to dehumanize the windigo, making it an inhuman monster in a novel about the loss of humanity after death. Depicting the windigo as a supernatural monster targeting white people in Maine misrepresents the purpose and existence of the windigo, as it is no longer representative of the Native environmental and cultural struggles it stems from. Instead, it is a depiction of the wild, animalistic stereotype of Native Americans often used by Western writers to instill fear and distrust in their readers. In the same vein, Blackwood's version is harmful to Native American communities in its stereotyping and romanticizing of Native peoples' association with nature and the wilderness. It also draws on the idea that a cultural spirit is little more than a manifestation of "when an Indian goes crazy" (Blackwood 519), contributing to academic misunderstandings of cultural beliefs as psychological issues.

The Effects of Appropriation

Appropriation appears in many forms. The common idea of appropriation is the use of a specific group's cultural expressions by people from another culture without explicit permission, but many other things—unethical research, unauthorized collection and sale of cultural art and depictions, and the use of cultural aspects to appear "exotic," "spiritual," or "authentic"—fall under the umbrella of appropriation (Mathiesen 462). Unethical research and the collection and sale of stories, art, and music are two major issues that crop up when discussing the idea of the windigo. Appropriation creates a disconnection between Western depictions and Native realities that ultimately harms Native peoples.

Western depictions of Native spirits serve to disconnect the spirits from their culture. Both "The Wendigo" and *Pet Sematary* show this, as their authors weave in stories about the windigo while barely including the Native Americans to whom the windigos belong. The Mi'kmaq, al-

though mentioned quite a few times by Jud in *Pet Semetary*, are not physically included in the story. Their stories are told by a white man, who learned about them from another white man, who in turn learned it from a long line of white men with little to no connection to the tribe. In “The Wendigo,” the stories of the windigo are told by a Native American character, but the depiction of this man is problematic as it contributes to harmful stereotypes.

This disconnection between spirit and culture is partially ignorance on the part of the writers, but it is also part of a long history of disconnection that rends culture from people, an unwillingness to include Native American cultures in stories that center on their beliefs as an important plotline of stories. The long history of colonial deculturalization of Native communities has been spurred on by commodification, romanticizing, and the splitting of ideas from their original cultures. Taking something like the windigo from its Native contexts renders it less real, and the culture it comes from becomes less real for the consumer, making Native peoples and beliefs into something they can read and be scared of, but then something they can safely close and put on their bookshelf, never to be thought of again.

By appropriating Native themes without including accurate depictions of Native Americans, Western authors play an important role in a capitalist and colonialist economy. Cultural artifacts and stories are distorted to fit into a capitalistic mold, becoming commodities that can be easily sold to non-Native consumers (Kulchyski 605). Through the exaggeration of traits Western audiences deem more “Native,” authors are able to sell and play to their public’s wants and fears. The idea of Native American culture in media is largely based on the idea of “savage” vs. “civilized” and the romanticizing of the proximity to nature. By creating a romanticized and exaggerated idea of Native Americans, “non-Indian people ‘feel more American’” by identifying with Native ideas, but without acknowledging the results of this appropriation (Shanley 678). Equating Native Americans with wild, cold-hearted, greedy monsters makes them scarier, and authors can use that fear of the “uncivilized” peoples to create more frightening horror. The capitalistic molding of cultural commodities fundamentally changes those cultural artifacts in harmful ways. It skews understanding and perceptions of cultures, creating negative biases toward communities and their beliefs (Kulchyski 612). The appropriation of the windigo, like the appropriation of many Native American cultural ideas, is driven by a capitalistic appetite for money and fame. The irony of the appropriation of the windigo lies in the deep significance it holds in its Native communities as a warning against harmful and selfish appetites.

While Western horror authors have appropriated the windigo as a scary, animalistic, wild monster seeking to kill white men and reacting in a rage to colonialism, windigo stories have

important moral meanings and implications. They teach cultural values and morals to young members of the community through the important themes of the stories (Ferrara and Lanoue 77). Stories like these influence the development of morals important to the functioning and continued success of the community: the importance of self-balance, cooperation, collaboration, and family (79). Windigos function as a guide to psychological repair, reinforcing stories and beliefs in response to European colonialism and intrusion. Continued appropriation of these stories and myths further detracts this process of cultural reestablishment (Ferrara and Lanoue 70).

In museums, libraries, and archives, there are protocols in place for dealing with wrongfully gained Native American artifacts, like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). In many cases, the artifacts they have in their possession have been taken without permission and, although rights to these cultural artifacts are often not encoded in law or are vague and easily misused declarations of right, archivists must acknowledge their moral and historical rights of cultures to their own artifacts (Mathiesen 457). The people working in these professions are recommended to recognize that Native American communities have the right to limit or deny access to certain stories, ideas, information, etc. (458). Basically, the groups in question determine what archivists can have, know, and share about their culture. If Native Americans demonstrate the right to own their culture and refuse access to researchers, they reserve the right to limit the general public's access and use of their cultural ideas. By this reasoning, Western authors have no moral right to claim or disseminate ideas about Algonquian spirits. In writing stories about windigo, especially those which are stripped of context and without proper understanding and credit, Western authors are committing an act of cultural theft. Theft, however, is not the only issue with appropriation. Appropriation can lead to misinformation that can influence the thoughts of not only the general public, but researchers and scientific communities as well.

Many anthropological and medical texts refer to a psychiatric phenomenon known as the "Windigo Psychosis," an "environmentally induced cannibalism" (Ferrara and Lanoue 77). In the creation of this phenomenon, researchers drew on Native ideas of windigos, citing cultural stories and myths that do not match up with historic, literal cases of cannibalism. By creating this cannibalistic persona of Algonquian peoples, they misrepresent these tribes, making them seem cannibalistic and harsh and, ultimately, dehumanize the tribe by creating an animalistic view of them (Ferrara and Lanoue 77). Media unwittingly creates biases that influence research and study, and misrepresentations in media create a cycle of misunderstandings that perpetuate racial stereotypes of Native American peoples.

Conclusion

In both Western and Native depictions, the windigo is haunting someone or something, but the reasons for haunting differ. For Native Americans, the hauntings are personal, familial, communal. Westerners tend to conceive a windigo haunting as something directed at white people in general, in a fit of anger against colonial forces, connected to a specific place. This distinction between the focus of hauntings shows differences in community values that are lost in the appropriation of Native stories. Losing vital cultural context creates a misrepresentation of Native communities that has had immensely harmful effects on the people within those tribes, creating negative ideas about populations that create and perpetuate negative stigmas and racist ideologies.

In both Western and Native depictions of the windigo as a haunting, the windigo is a spirit representing the pains and sufferings of the past, a tangible, malevolent spirit coming back to bring light on the issues of inappropriate appetites and selfishness. What is distinctly different about these windigos is how they represent the issue. The Native American windigo depicts the selfish person as the one becoming the ice-hearted monster, while the Western windigo depicts the selfish monster as being attacked by the monster, creating a very clear idea of the cultural values involved. Western depictions misinterpret the purpose of the windigo as a vengeful spirit, while Native depictions use it more to show how individual selfishness impacts and harms others. This Western depiction shows how cultural hauntings are perceived differently in cross-cultural situations. Even though it is completely natural to use one's own cultural understanding of the world to interpret unfamiliar ideas and beliefs, the issues lie in the reproduction of those beliefs by people with no emic perspective.

In the reproduction of beliefs, culture is lost or, at the very least, disfigured for the personal gain of the reproducer. This appetite for money and fame on the part of Western writers is ironic in its use of the windigo as a featured monster in horror, as it depicts a similar selfishness as that in Native American stories of the windigo. The popularization of windigo in horror genres involves capitalistic gain on the part of Western writers, and the cultural owners of windigo spirits are left with nothing but stigmatization, misunderstanding, and stereotypes. Even the romanticized notions of Native cultures as being spiritual and close to nature that seem beneficial or kind have negative impacts on communities by masking real issues and distorting the perceptions of Native cultures. These romanticizations also function as part of a long history of cultures being stripped from their communities to lessen the connection between real, living Native American cultures and communities and the spiritual and natural Native American that can be put back on a shelf

when the book is done. Writing about the windigo in non-Native contexts is a type of cultural theft that presents itself not as a legal issue, but as a moral one, perpetuating the cannibalization of Native American belief systems.

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The American Midwest Haunting: The Asylum Lives On

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This paper explores the similarities and differences of Midwestern American small town ghost stories, as well as the haunted asylums of the Midwest and their own ghost stories. The essay explores asylum histories and shows what makes up the American Midwest cultural haunting and why those fears are pushed onto asylums and their ghosts.

Ghost stories, while seeming unique and individual to many cities, towns, and states, often fit into a practiced formula and outline that isn't always apparent. In the Midwestern region of the United States, there are countless stories of women in white, hitchhikers who disappear halfway through the car ride, wailing and screaming coming from woods and abandoned sites, figures wandering lighthouses

and the lakeshores, and haunted houses at the ends of streets—just to name a few. Stories like these all have common themes and structures, the most prominent being the idea and painful realization of a permanent and unbreakable isolation. Upon closer examination, these stories show that women in white are always left to wander the area where they died alone, hitchhikers never reach their destination and often vanish halfway through the car ride, and ghostly lighthouse keepers stay locked in their lighthouses. Unbreakable isolation is common theme scattered in many American Midwestern ghost stories, but its origin lies in the residual hauntings of the reformatories and asylums scattered throughout the solitary and empty midlands of America.

The haunted insane asylum is a prevalent story in the American Midwest. *Only In Your State*, a website dedicated to investigating every state in America in search for local attractions and the best tourist stops, has a section detailing each state's haunted loca-

tions and ghost stories. At least one asylum pops up in their lists for all but one of the twelve of the states that make up the American Midwest—the Dakotas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio—with South Dakota as the only exception. Towns adjacent to these abandoned asylums overflow with stories of ghosts haunting the buildings and property grounds (*Only In Your State*). Many residents of these neighboring towns express fear of these stories and ghosts, despite the fact that the alleged ghosts never seem to leave their haunting grounds. Asylums were scattered throughout the midwestern region because of the large open plots of land, the ability to keep and maintain a functioning farm near the asylum, and the condensed sites of the region's population. These asylums were typically located far enough away from cities to avoid causing disturbances, and some asylums even provided neighboring towns with food and other farm-fresh products as well as working opportunities for asylum patients. Yet haunted asylums are still among the first ghost stories haunting the American Midwest. Asylums housed patients grappling with both psychological and mental illnesses, and patients were the marginalized, unwanted members of society. Illness, in any capacity, awakens feelings of uncanniness and frightens many, and so the fear of asylums was already deeply rooted in American culture before people began filling the halls of these buildings. It was the aftermath of these institutions and society's own fears of what they meant for the people within that truly brought about the ghosts and hauntings of the American midwestern asylum.

Across the country, asylums were constructed using different architectural systems, the most common of which was the Kirkbride system, which was popular in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Devised by psychiatrist Thomas Kirkbride, this design featured a “bat wing” shaped floor plan and an emphasis on air circulation and natural light. According to the *Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum's* history website, which weaves the history of the Kirkbride system with their own, about 300 of these Kirkbride asylums were built. The asylums were only made to house only 250 people and focused on the idea of “building as cure,” which placed the brunt of patient treatments on the environment they were in. These asylums, however, very quickly became overcrowded and, in a combined total of asylum patients nationwide, housed nearly half a million patients

during the late 1950s and mid 1960s, right before the mass shutdown of many of these asylums. Tuberculosis hospitals started cropping up at the same time as many of these Kirkbride asylums, and the tuberculosis hospitals drew their own building plans and treatment tactics from the Kirkbride system. As tuberculosis came and went, these hospitals changed from sheltering tuberculosis patients to mental patients and some, like Waverly Hills Sanatorium, even housed elderly patients with mental illnesses along with their tuberculosis patients.

These buildings were isolated, and with that isolation came a growing fear of uncanny loneliness and the othering of asylum inhabitants. Often, when someone went to one of these hospitals, they rarely came back. In a research article on early tuberculous treatment, Jean-Antonie Villemin and Robert Koch found that nearly 450 Americans were dying per day because of tuberculous, with the largest death tolls in patients ranging from the ages of 15 to 44. At this same time period in mental asylums, however, Dr. Herman Josephy found that most patients who were dying were between 40 and 60 years of age, and the leading cause of their death was simply exhaustion from their own mental illness. In Chicago's State Hospital, out of the 2,477 patient deaths between 1935 and 1937, 1,297 patients were between the ages of 40 and 69, and most had died from either exhaustion or age. Violent and unexpected deaths, however, weren't all that common in asylums, despite what popularized ghost stories indicate.

The idea of mentally ill patients practicing unrestricted violence against doctors and patients alike is another popular fear spread throughout the American Midwest, even though that level of violence is almost unheard of in asylum histories. A 2014 study conducted by four members of the mental health field found that societal fears and stigmas about asylums persist in the general public, and even the mental health community, today (Stuber et al.). The researchers asked members of the general public and members of their own field various questions ranging from their belief in the violence level of those with a mental illness to how close of a proximity they were willing to be near them. They described their results as revealing "negative" attitudes towards those with mental illness, and that many participants wanted a "social distance" between themselves and those struggling with mental illness, written on the first page of the study (Stuber et al.). This

study was done almost 50 years after the height of asylums in the 1960s, and yet the same attitudes of isolation and othering towards the mentally ill continues haunting our society.

There is no denying the widespread neglect in these asylums, as many were overcrowded and did not have adequate staffing to properly care for their patients, but purposeful violence toward patients or staff was practically nonexistent. Most of the more severe treatments that had been used in previous centuries, like water dunking, beatings, and restraints, had been abolished with the implementation and widespread use of the Kirkbride system in the 1900s, as the system itself didn't use them. Outside of the acts of few violent patients, who were typically isolated from other asylum residents to avoid injury and assault, the only real example of horrendous and planned violence comes from Pennhurst Asylum, in Pennsylvania, and even then, it wasn't the patients who were violent.

Pennhurst was one of the first asylums to house patients on a massive scale. In her article detailing Pennhurst's history of patient neglect and abuse, Elisabeth Tilstra notes that almost 3,000 people filled its halls—a building that could only accommodate a little less than half of that number. Patient neglect occurred because of how understaffed and overcrowded Pennhurst was, and that neglect swiftly and violently morphed into a purposeful mistreatment of these patients. Patients were beaten and punished for “incorrect” behavior, forced into ice-water baths and injected with chemicals. Pennhurst staff also resorted to previously eradicated methods, such as tying patients to their beds. Doctors even encouraged violence among the residents, and readily admitted to doing so when the public finally demanded answers. Pennhurst opened in 1903, and it took nearly 60 years for all of this to be exposed. A documentary called *Suffer the Little Children* aired in 1968 on the NBC network, exposing all of Pennhurst's misconduct in the most public way possible. During interviews conducted for *Suffer the Little Children*, many of these doctors and nurses weren't apologetic for their actions; this lack of remorse sent the public into a horrified outcry about the treatment of the people at Pennhurst—many of whom weren't even mentally ill, as was discussed in the documentary (*Suffer the Little Children*). Pennhurst left a lasting impression of rampant violence in asylums, trickling

down to midwestern America, which—like most of America in the 1960s—was full of its own quickly deteriorating asylums. According to a timeline put together by a capstone class at the University of Maryland's College of Journalism, asylums were swiftly closing around the time of the documentary's release.

Violence like what occurred at Pennhurst, however, is common in deteriorating urban areas and crowded rural spaces, which present a similar social and geographical set up to the asylum. According to a study published in 2003 by sociologist Matthew Lee, who has studied violence and criminal acts, the upped violence in areas like this comes from the social isolation that these places suffer. This social isolation often occurs in minority groups, like disabled people, people of color, and people living below the poverty line—the people who most often ended up in these asylums. The perception that violence is more common among these gives communities an excuse to justify the fear of this violence being acted upon the middle and upper classes. Similar to the violence of Pennhurst, the Stanford Prison Experiment of 1971 demonstrated how abuse of power leads to the mistreatment of those without power. The exposé of Pennhurst's abuses was only four years earlier, and still fresh in everyone's mind. Perhaps the idea of the association fallacy was at play as well. Both Pennhurst and the Stanford Prison Experiment suggest that violence and abuse have a higher chance of occurring in small, confined spaces. Because of this correlation, people assume that the mentally ill had to be violent as well because of the association fallacy.

The American Midwest is a geographical oddity. According to the *American Census Reporter*, the population per square mileage is only 91 people. The next closest is the American Southern region, ringing in at 143.6 people per square mile. The Midwest has an overall population of 68,308,749 people, the second lowest population by region in the United States. Most of America's farmland is located in the Midwestern region, and the largest city by population is Chicago, coming in at 2,714,017 people. The next closest city in terms of population is Indianapolis at 846,674 people. A stark difference, to say the least. Most Midwestern counties have fewer than a million people living in them—in fact, only seven counties have a population of a million or more. The American Midwest only holds roughly 20% of the total American population, even though it makes up about a

third of the country's land. The set up of the American Midwest mirrors the set-up of the asylum—a large plot of surrounding farmland and small and dense rural centers of population. Urban areas often experience higher rates of violence, and most of the Midwest is comprised of rural and small urban areas. That fear of violence that we face is pushed onto the asylum, an outlet that already has a violent stigma attached to it, that still mirrors the setup of the American Midwest, because that violence was seen in an asylum already. Take Michigan's Traverse City State Hospital as an example. According to an article published by L.S. Stuhler, most Kirkbride hospitals strayed from the intended "building as cure" treatment and became far too overcrowded to properly treat patients, but Traverse City State Hospital was one of the few hospitals that took care to follow the Kirkbride plan as well as they could. The Traverse City State Hospital had its own self-sustaining farm that sent a lot of its produce and harvest to the Traverse City area. It had multiple buildings and functioned as its own little town, with patients performing jobs and tasks on the farm as well as helping run the asylum itself (not unlike the setup of a small rural town). The hospital was the furthest thing away from the violence of Pennhurst, yet the ghost stories and haunting tales came nonetheless. Stories of murder, of violent deaths and suicides, as well as a portal to Hell residing on the grounds of this peaceful hospital filled the ghost stories that eventually overshadowed the actual history of asylums.

This fear of violence that has been pushed onto these asylums trickles down to their ghosts, which is why hauntings such as those associated with Indiana's Central State Hospital and the Ohio State Reformatory emerge. Joy Neighbors has collected reports and stories of the Central State Hospital ghosts and spirits being hostile towards visitors and workers. These hauntings manifest through feelings of being watched, breezes going past, and harsh screaming and yelling. Bair, an author for *Mysterious Heartland*, a site dedicated to reporting ghost stories around the United States, has written one report from the Central State Hospital of a maintenance worker being choked by these ghosts. The Ohio State Reformatory, while finishing its last days as a high security prison, began as a hospital for mentally ill criminals, and has its own fair share of stories of violent ghosts. *Mysterious Heartland* has reports of people being pushed down the stairs of the guard towers, violent breezes, and angry screams that match the stories of Central State

Hospital's ghosts almost perfectly. Stories like this are scattered throughout many American Midwestern asylums, but it's not just in these asylums where violent ghosts linger. A small town in Michigan tells the story of the Ada Witch, named so because of the town she resides in. The story is a fairly common one and keeps rather close to the classic woman in white formula. A husband caught his wife and her lover one night and killed them both in a jealous rage. The husband also died in the struggle, and couples and hunters who have been to the area report seeing the crime continue to play out, and some have even reported almost being dragged into the ghostly reenactment themselves. Mike Kroll, who told the story of his own encounter with the Ada Witch to Gary Eberle in his book *Haunted Houses of Grand Rapids*, said that he didn't truly feel afraid of the ghost that he saw until he saw what he believed to be a knife in her hand. It was not the ghost that truly frightened him, but rather the fear of his own injury or death that prompted him to return to his car and leave. The fear of violence, despite its best efforts, has left the asylum and integrated itself in the small-town rural ghost stories.

But it is not just the fear of violence that the asylum has left behind. The fear of isolation frightens us just as much as violence. In his book *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger speaks to this idea of a "nomos" and "atomy." He uses these terms in regard to religion, but the concept remains the same. The nomos is the idea of a structured and meaningfully ordered society. Atomy is the idea of a complete and radical separation from society, and Berger even calls it a "powerful threat to the individual" (21). It's the idea of a disruption of everyday life, of a "loss of status of the entire social group to which the individual belongs" (21). Berger lists one of the reasons of this loss as a physical separation from society. According to Berger, to be placed in the "ultimate 'insanity' of such anomic horror" was the most feared thing to an individual, that to be placed in that isolation would ultimately destroy someone, which was what the asylum was (22). People were removed from the society they knew and placed in chaotic isolation, which they very rarely came back from. The asylum is a picture-perfect place of what that isolation would look like in regard to the already integrated fear of the stereotyped sickness and violence in asylums. Residents' families and loved ones didn't want them to leave the isolation, because it was easier to just leave them there. These patients were being taken care of, after all, both

in life and death. Family rarely came to claim the bodies and take their loved ones back home once they passed, either too ashamed of the mentally-ill family member, or unwilling to make the effort for a dead person. It was because of these attitudes that many of these asylums had graveyards to bury the dead, chock full of unmarked and numbered graves. According to an article by Peter Dockrill, the Mississippi State Hospital has 7,000 unmarked and newly discovered graves, and these numbers are not unique to Mississippi.

Ohio's Athens Asylum had three graveyards on its grounds, and up until 1943, not a single one of the headstones bore a name. They only contained numbers, with the patients' names recorded in ledgers that have since been long forgotten. One of these ledgers was found in the Ohio University archives, after the school took over several of the buildings; this discovery revealed the names of about 1,700 of the over 2,000 souls that had been buried on these grounds. Asylum patients, however, are not the only residents of these graveyards. According to *Haunted Athens Ohio*, the official site to set up tours through the buildings and graveyards, the Athens Asylum was open and running during the American Civil War, and it functioned as a military hospital at the time as well as carrying out its usual duties of caring for the mentally ill. The hospital staff buried the dead soldiers that came to them and the ones that died in their care just like they buried their own patients, in graves marked only by numbers. These graveyards are full of ghostly sightings and visible hauntings from both the students attending the campus and the surrounding town, but there is no one specific story or ghost to point to. There can't be, because no one even knows who was buried here, so how can anyone know who haunts them? Graveyard stories like this are not specific to asylums, but the fear of being forgotten lies most prominently with them, and the Athens asylum cemeteries show this cultural fear with a shocking clarity. Not only was a body left behind, but so was the name. It was the ultimate separation from society—the ultimate atomy.

The Peoria State Hospital in Illinois has the story of Mr. Bookbinder. According to Mysterious Heartland, who has the story in its archives, he was a patient at the asylum, and he was given the job of helping to bury other patients in the hospital graveyard. He's known for mourning every patient that passed, and when he too passed, the story goes that at his own funeral, his ghost came back to mourn his own passing. Dr. Zeller, who

was assigned to Mr. Bookbinder as his main doctor, writes in his personal journal that over 400 people saw this phenomenon and that they opened his coffin to confirm his death. It's an eerie story, not just because of Mr. Bookbinder's appearance at his own funeral, but because, having no loved one to mourn him, he did it himself. The story of the ghostly appearance echoes the sentiment of Mr. Bookbinder's ghost, in both his own mourning and his ability to not leave the graveyard that he worked at in life. Illinois also tells the story of Resurrection Mary, a young woman who died in a car crash along Archer Avenue near Chicago in the early 1930s. As Michael Keen tells it, she does not have one specific physical appearance outside of a white dress, but she always asks for a ride back to Resurrection Cemetery. One account of her story even has her telling the man who drove her back to the cemetery, "where I'm going you cannot follow." Mary, unlike Mr. Bookbinder, is able to leave the graveyard for a time, but she always has to return. It's isolation at the most painful—able to leave for a time, but always returning. The fear of death already frightens the Midwest, but the thought of having to return, as shown with both Mary and Mr. Bookbinder, is a self-imposed "atomy," the feeling that, according to Berger, is feared the most.

Patients are not the only ones still tied to the asylum walls. Countless stories of doctors and nurses haunting these buildings are just as common as the stories of patients. Manteno State hospital in Illinois reports stories of its former doctors and nurses roaming the long since abandoned halls, and some have even heard voices over the broken intercom going through what would have been the daily routine. Independent State hospital in Iowa is full of accounts of sightings of doctors and nurses, and every other aforementioned asylum has at least one account of an apparition of a doctor or nurse—both Mysterious Heartland and Only In Your State, websites featuring firsthand accounts of ghost stories, present ghostly sightings of doctors and nurses at the mental asylums they list. These people may not have all died within asylum walls, but it's not strange to think of them coming back. Like Resurrection Mary, they may feel a sense of obligation to return, to see out the care of the ghostly patients that still remain. It may go back to the idea of atomy—they have already been secluded from society, and are not welcomed back, or cannot merge back into the normalcy of everyday life. Society, due to the association fallacy, would have rejected them. These doctors have spent time among the so-called

“insane,” and so they must be too.

Asylums carry with them a stain on the history of mental treatment and the burden of the midwestern haunting and fears of unspeakable violence and being isolated and forgotten. Asylums were places where people were sent to die. Even in death the patients couldn't escape, buried in unmarked and numbered graves. Even doctors and nurses rarely left, rejected from a society who othered them along with the patients, staying behind to care for patients no longer there. Asylums are beacons of the Midwestern haunting—a safe place to project these fears on an environment similar to the region of the American Midwest without a seemingly direct correlation. Yet these fears still trickle down, tainting the ghost stories we tell and projecting the fear of the Midwestern cultural haunting back onto the culture itself.

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Horrors of Society: The Reflection of Societal Fears in American Horror Films

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The foundation of the Hollywood horror film industry has always included metaphors of what haunts American society. This industry capitalized on these fears in movies such as *Poltergeist* (1982) and the 2015 remake of the same film. These two films worked to represent current issues regarding technology in society while also predicting what America would become if these issues were not properly resolved. Analyzing the two films reveals the fears of past decades, how those fears have evolved in contemporary American culture, and where these representations of cultural fears will lead us next.

American ghost stories, although often not considered to be seeded in legitimate historical evidence, are paramount in representing, expanding, and building upon the framework of American culture. In recent decades, Hollywood manifested the concept of hauntings and various supernatural phenomena to elaborately explain and dissect cultural anxieties which, despite many Americans turning a blind eye, still haunt a majority of the American population. Hollywood largely relies on the increasing complexity of these anxieties, which scare people with haunted ideas, such as a demon possessing a loved one or *something* taking up residency in a home without the owner's consent. In the past, the fears that

circulated through American culture were concrete and visible, thus prompting horror films starring monsters such as vampires, werewolves, and zombies. American horror films, however, took a sharp turn into the realm of ghosts and demons as society's fears of enemies and threats we could tangibly identify and see warped into fears of terrorism, mental illness, and technology. One of the subcategories of ghosts is the poltergeist, which is a spirit that typically attaches to a person, not just a place. *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Poltergeist* (2015) offer deep insights into the representation of societal fears—more specifically, into America's fear of lack of privacy and control as a result of technological advancements.

Both *Poltergeist* films represent one of the widest spread fears of the American culture: the fear of technology. The newer *Poltergeist* (2015) serves as a reminder of the original film's warning: if we bring more technology into our homes it will consume our lives. In the first *Poltergeist* (1982), the fear of a technological invasion in the late 1970s and early 1980s provides Americans with the nuances of modern horror through the depiction of a young girl trapped in a TV void. This depiction perpetuated the growing fear that children would be "lost" in television programming and created a long-lasting fear of someone or something watching from the other side of a screen. This fear only intensified as cameras became commonplace on phones and computers, leaving the fear of having nowhere to hide. Looking through the lens of *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Poltergeist* (2015) reveals the fears of past decades, how those fears have developed in 2010s American culture, and where these representations of cultural fears may lead society next. Depictions of cultural hauntings demonstrate how it is not the ghosts or hauntings that conjure societal fears, but rather what manifested those ghosts and hauntings that conjure true fright.

Bodo Winter, author of "Horror Movies and the Cognitive Ecology of Primary Metaphors," argues that all horror movies are largely, if not entirely, composed of longstanding metaphors for fear that may stretch as far back as humans' primitive states of hunters and gatherers living in the wild. Winter states that metaphors for fear are strengthened "in the minds of the people who witness these representations, which helps to keep the metaphors alive" (164). More specifically, Winter asserts, horror films have three main effects of metaphors on culture: elaborating, reinforcing/maintaining, and creating/re-creating metaphors (164). These effects have infiltrated almost every horror movie the film industry has produced in the last five to six decades. In both versions of *Poltergeist*, the plots are anchored in the metaphor that the poltergeist itself is a manifestation of a repressed fear of technology, the unknown, or financial instability brought into the home. Many of the scariest aspects of movies may not have originated in the human mind as "scary." When moving away from monsters towards ghosts and hauntings, the American film industry had to create these new metaphors for fear to pass down through the generations. In fact, Winter also states that "cultural representations may create new metaphors...in the minds of new generations" (164). The instinct to fear werewolves and vampires stems from early humans' fear of predators, since people did not always live indoors with large semi-automatic weapons to protect them from the beasts of the wild. Older "monster movies" more directly played on the instinct to avoid animalistic predators; newer horror films still play this "monster" angle to some degree. Jonathon Norman, author of "Personality Types and the Enjoyment of Horror Movies," states that "Horror movies portray [ghosts and monsters] as very strong, incessantly hungry, and unstoppable..."

and he suggests that these traits “...would somehow trigger in humans their very basic survival instincts” (60). Of course, these survival instincts are still imbedded in humans’ biological make-up, but the reality of an animal attacking people in the wilderness is no longer a common fear in society. As a result, horror movies needed some new tactics to represent this fear and keep it alive in American culture. The most prominent expression of this fear in the *Poltergeist* movies is when Carol Ann and Maddy, the two poltergeist victims, are speaking to TVs. From the static, viewers can hear growling noises masked by the static buzzing of the televisions; where Carol Ann and Maddy seem to hear a voice speaking to them, viewers hear malicious animalistic intent.

Poltergeists are not simply spirits that have been introduced into the realm of horror in the last few decades, but rather phenomena occurring for centuries. Poltergeists are most literally classified as “noisy spirits,” which captures exactly how they operate (Bynum 222). These spirits typically attach to young children, most often girls, and cause mayhem for several days or weeks. Most people will never experience poltergeist activity as these spirits rarely manifest. As knowledge of this phenomenon has grown, however, it opened the door for Hollywood to utilize its unique markers of a haunting, including objects or people being moved, loud noises, shaking furniture, or even sounds that mimic human voices (Bynum 222). According to Joyce Bynum, author of “Poltergeists—A Phenomenon Worthy of Serious Study,” “poltergeist activity may represent the repressed feelings and fears that find expression in interaction with the outside world” (225). *Poltergeist* (1982) invokes American parents’ brewing repression of technological fears and the impact these fears have on children who watch too much TV, whereas *Poltergeist* (2015) uses repressed fears of financial instability in an economy recovering from a recession to conjure the poltergeist figure.

The original 1982 release of the film centered around the Freeling family which includes three children (Dana, Robbie, and Carol Ann) and their parents (Diane and Steve) who “are in their 30’s, happily married, doing all right financially” (Canby 6). The family’s financial situation allows for Steve to be the sole bread winner and for the family to live in a newly developed neighborhood in California. The opening scene in the film depicts Carol Ann, the youngest daughter, speaking to the living room TV just after midnight programming has ended. She asks questions such as “What do you look like?” (0:03:46) to the static, but she also seems to answer questions we cannot hear with a simple “yes” (0:04:21-0:04:25). This occurrence happens a second time, but with the TV in her parents’ bedroom, which happens to be when the spirits emerge from the TV. The following morning, the spirits begin interacting with the whole house (i.e., moving chairs, bending silverware, and playfully sliding Diane and Carol Ann across the kitchen floor). The family does not know

their neighborhood has been built on the grounds of a cemetery from which the bodies were never moved. The decision to build on top of the graves prompted spirits to communicate with Carol Ann and even to open a portal to the “other side” through her bedroom closet. As the movie progresses, Carol Ann is pulled through her closet to the “other side,” leaving her family with no way to communicate with her other than through open channels on their television set.

It is not difficult to see the significance of the family's predicament in the 1980s. Not only was it more common for families to own one or more television sets in their homes than ever before (the Freelings have multiple sets), but stations knew exactly what times of the day to draw in different audiences. According to a television schedule published in the *New York Times* in the mid-1970s, the bulk of children's television shows were broadcast between 7am-8am and 3:30pm-8pm (“Television”). These would be the most common times for school-attending children to be home. These would also be the common times that parents would have to spend with their children. With TV to occupy children, however, they spent less time with their parents, reading, or activities and more time devoted to television programming.

Around the time the movie was released, worldly news started becoming more widely available as cable TV became commonplace. According to Martin Bass's article “Television's Day in Court” published in the *New York Times* (1981), the concept of putting cameras in courtrooms was beginning to be seen as “a rational adaptation to an era in which most Americans get much of their news from television” (Bass). The newspapers were no longer a fast enough or convenient enough means to receive news. Although many parents purchased TVs because news and information grew more accessible via TV, it was not the only purpose they ultimately served in the household (McCoy). An increasing number of the population craved easy access to entertainment and news. It appears that adults never assumed children might choose a broadcast of *The Brady Bunch* over interacting with their parents or friends. Elin McCoy published the article “Limiting Children's TV Habits” just a year before *Poltergeist* (1982) was released. This article states that, in 1981, “the average child between the ages 2 and 11 watches [television] for about three and a half to four hours a day.” McCoy goes on to discuss the lack of interest children had for other activities such as reading and playing outside when television programming became an option. With TVs in the living room, kitchen, and master bedroom, watching was always an option for the Freeling children. Even after the spirits exit the TV in the master bedroom, Carol Ann turns the TV in the kitchen on to an “empty” channel hoping to find her friends in the static instead of playing or helping her mother clean up breakfast. Diane doesn't suggest Carol Ann go and play either; she simply makes a comment on how the static will hurt her eyes and changes the channel to a war

show/movie. Even the parents only interact with their neighbor when it's a matter of their TV remotes being on the same frequency and accidentally changing each other's channels.

Between the 1980s and mid 2000s, there was an economic boom in which inflation rates were incredibly low, thus giving money more purchasing power (Samuelson 21). As Americans began spending more money purchasing homes and acquiring mortgages, overspending became more widespread. This mode of thinking resulted in the Great Recession, from which the American economy took almost 10 years to recover. During this recovery, the Bowen family finds themselves down on their financial luck. In the 2015 remake of *Poltergeist*, the family is not as financially stable as they were in 1982. The father, Eric Bowen, has lost his job and their mother, Amy, does not work. The family loses their home because of their employment statuses and must look at a new house in a neighborhood built on a former cemetery from which, unbeknownst to them, the bodies were never moved. Since money is so tight, the deciding factor in purchasing their house in this neighborhood is the realtor who informs them, "Foreclosures have hit this neighborhood really hard. There's some wiggle room on the price" (0:06:46-0:06:50). Thus, from the first 10 minutes of the film, Gil Kenan, director of *Poltergeist* (2015), reflects America's established overwhelming fear of financial instability in the plot's framework.

In the five years leading up to the release of *Poltergeist* (2015), the iPad was released, artificial intelligence was being developed (i.e., Siri, Alexa, Google Home), and larger portions of Americans owned iPhones or Androids, etc. If "Alexa" is always listening and cameras on our phones and laptops are always watching, people may as well pull out a Ouiji board and invite ghosts into their home—exemplifying the modern collective lack of privacy. Kenan gives us this reality in his film on several counts. One of the first "selling points" the realtor mentions about the house is, pointing to a security system panel, "That security system works. The owner was a bit of a technophile, so this house is wired for whatever you might need" (0:03:25-0:03:28). Essentially, the entire house is one big gadget. While programming the security system, the Bowens' son, Griffin, asks Eric countless questions about how "bad guys" could cut the security system wires and break in. Eric responds to these questions by saying they would die of electrocution and "if they're dead then they can't get in the house" (0:10:12-0:10:13). Through this dialogue, Kenan establishes a false sense of security for the family; they believe their home is protected from any intruders by the technology. Later that same night the house experiences what Kenan refers to as an "electrical awakening" in an interview with Brendon Connelly. As Maddy begins speaking to the spirits through the TV in the living room, lamps, phones, iPads, and toys begin turning on and off on their own. Just as Carol Ann does in the 1982 film, Maddy begins speaking to a static TV channel. When Griffin finds

her speaking to the TV and asks what is happening, Maddy replies, “They’re coming” (0:25:45). The house is thrown into an electrical fit immediately after; all devices and electronics are sent into a frenzy, including the security system. When the parents rush downstairs as the alarm goes off in the house, Maddy informs everyone, “They’re here” (0:26:25). Thus, Eric’s earlier statement that a dead person cannot get past the security system is quite literally disproven.

No matter how many new devices humans surround themselves with, people have a natural instinct to survive by either fleeing or fighting. Horror movies provide a buffer for looking at what truly haunts our thoughts and culture. Jonathon Norman suggests that “...the cross-cultural appeal for horror movies provides useful insights into understanding human evolutionary psychology processes” (59). Essentially, what scares people on the screen may also comfort them because the conflicts are almost always resolved in the end; the “good guys” win, the evil is sent away, or a majority of people escape to safety. *Poltergeist* (1982 and 2015) both provide that cushion when forcing viewers to face the horrors of their technological surroundings which are primarily represented through the abduction of Carol Ann (1982) and Maddy (2015) through their closets and into the “other side.” By the end, the Freelings’ and Bowens’ houses may have been destroyed, but the families escape the horrors within. The depiction of a relatively happy ending for main characters gives Americans a false sense of security that the fears of what society is becoming and the technological advancements that have haunted American culture since before the release of *Poltergeist* (1982) can simply be walked away from or, in the case of the films, driven away from.

The infestation of technology in homes and relationships, however, did not end in the 1980s; instead, it grew into something unrulier than Spielberg’s spirits could have mustered in the original film. The 2015 remake of *Poltergeist* takes America’s original fears of the invasion of technology into their families and homes to a new level. Spielberg may have created and established the metaphor of poltergeists or hauntings in relation to the invasion of technology, but Gil Kenan’s remake reinforces this fear in American society. Though both the Freelings and the Bowens escape from their haunted homes in the end, the Bowens are not given the satisfactory ending of rolling a television set out of a hotel room symbolizing an escape from the sole cause of their torment like the Freelings. In the final scene of the 2015 movie, Eric Bowen is depicted as being employed as a high school baseball coach, and the family is going to look at a new house. Instead of boasting about technological capabilities of the house, the realtor mentions that “...the place is just swimming in closet space” (1:34:08), which prompts young Maddy to say, “Our last closet ate me” (1:34:13). When the realtor moves into the house to show them around, the camera pans back

outside to show the Bowens driving away, presumably because of the abundance of closet space in that prospective home. They clearly still value technology and see a closet as the cause of their previous problems, not technology. The Freelings could recognize the TVs as their main problem, which is why removing the TV was their first thought when arriving at the motel, not worrying how much closet space the room had. Despite escaping their home, however, the Bowens do not escape the horrors of technology and, thus, neither has the rest of America.

A constant example of Winter's created and reinforced metaphor is the appearance of Gothic architecture in many representations of the horror genre. In fact, these ever-present structures "entertain [people's] imagination[s] given that the thought of an old and dark castle would bring to people's mind the idea of secret passages, dungeons, and gloomy forests" (Norman 58). The Bowens' house is a modern interpretation of this architecture in the sense that the home's exterior consists of grey siding surrounded by dying trees and a flower garden that won't stay alive. Even the attic houses a secret compartment of creepy clown toys left by a previous owner. This automatically invokes more fear in viewers than the original film because people innately recognize similar structures with scary stories. Kenan's remake exemplifies Winter's main effects of metaphors on culture. While the film was not considered as nightmarish as the original, it still holds the originality of the metaphor while adding a few new twists.

Aside from the obvious updates to the plot, such as the family names and the lack of land-line phones in the house, Kenan elaborates on Spielberg's metaphors by adding nuanced details. The most notable of these details is how the characters describe what is after Carol Ann and Maddy once they are pulled to the "other side." In 1982, the clairvoyant the Freelings use to rescue Carol Ann, Tangina, claims there is a "terrible presence" with Carol Ann and refers to it as "the beast." This beast is a singular entity that represents television and its ability to pull children away from their families. In 2015, Kenan alters this detail when Carrigan Burke, the Bowens' clairvoyant, claims they're all around her (1:11:22-1:11:31). Even though there were multiple spirits on the "other side" with Carol Ann in the original film, the significance of this detail lies in the fact that the singular "beast" was the one who wouldn't let Carol Ann go, but none of the spirits in 2015 would let Maddy go. These malicious spirits represent all the forms of technology that withdraw people from society in the 2015 film: phones, tablets, laptops, TVs, and even the speakers and wired walls throughout the Bowens' house. Another detail Kenan alters in the 2015 film lies within the fear of clowns. In the original film, Carol Ann and her brother Robbie have a clown doll that attacks Robbie in the end of the movie. In 2015, Griffin finds multiple old clown toys in a hidden compartment of his attic bedroom. Clowns "have the capacity to provoke fear and horror given that their make-

up can conceal their true facial expressions, thus triggering people's instinctual need and desire to understand others through their facial expressions" (Schmidt and Cohn, qtd. in Norman 60). As the aforementioned "beast" represents the fear of television and the spirits represent the fear of all forms of technology, the clown dolls represent not just technology but what consumers cannot see behind it. In both films, neither the families nor the audience get to see the faces behind the screens until the end of the films, and American citizens never see what's behind the screens in their living rooms or the phones in their pockets. Having only one clown doll in the original film represented the singular fear of what hid behind the screen. Kenan, however, utilizes multiple clown dolls to symbolize all the forms of technology that people feared in the 2010s because they could not understand them. As we fear what we cannot see behind a clown's makeup, we fear what we cannot see behind the screen.

Unfortunately for American culture, Kenan points out in *Poltergeist* (2015) that technology is not the only issue facing the Bowen family. The entire premise of the movie is based on the fact that their father, Eric, has lost his job due to the de-unionization of skilled workers. This perspective seems to contribute to the lukewarm responses to the remake of the film. Since the reviewers failed to detect this financial struggle as a form of haunting upon the family, their reviews reflected an inaccurate representation of the film's nuances. Neil Genzlinger, in his *New York Times* review "They're Baaack, With Tech Upgrades," writes, "... parents might find it an enjoyable trip down memory lane, even if they do now recognize it as largely a well-served collection of horror-movie tropes." Seeing the films as a collection of horror tropes is valid in its own right, but closer analysis reveals that the tropes morph into metaphors that will force viewers and the next generations to wonder if the phones they keep in their pockets or the TVs in their rooms are something to fear rather than lull people to sleep. Critic David Blaustein states on ABC News Radio that he viewed the film as "a remake that lacks creativity, hoping to trade on an established brand," but he is wrong on each account. Kenan connects the hardships of unemployment and exacerbated debt due to a need for constant technological advancements in their lives directly to poltergeist encounters. After the electrical awakening of the house, Kendra claims that her phone is "fried." In response to being told they can't afford a new phone, Kendra says, "This isn't a luxury item, Dad. It's a necessity. What if you need to reach me in an emergency?" (0:27:20-0:27:24). Kenan is making a statement that Americans view the ability to be constantly connected to everyone and everything as a necessity; calling friends or checking the news channel at the end of the day simply isn't enough. Even though Eric can barely afford to buy squirrel traps for the squirrel living in his son's room, he still buys his daughter a new iPhone and his son a drone. He buys into the idea

that in order to be happy and fit in, they need to have new technology because the fear of living without it was greater than the fear of what bringing it into the house could invoke. Naturally, as the collection of technology within the household grows, so does the poltergeist activity. Working from Bynum's earlier mentioned theory that "poltergeist activity may represent the repressed feelings and fears that find expression in interaction with the outside world" (225), the connection of unemployment and debt-induced stress to the Bowens' poltergeist problem is clear. The Bowen family not only suffered the financial consequences of having no working parents, but they also suffered supernatural consequences that they could not escape because of the weight of their debt.

Culturally informed viewers of *Poltergeist* (1982 and 2015) are left wondering; what's next? The original film predicted the chaos of technology would continue to ensue over generations if people did not restrict their technological access, and the remake demonstrates the horrors of ignoring that warning along with how the need for technological updates inflames financial struggles affecting many lower to middle class American families today. Americans are always seeking the "next best thing," but at a quite literal cost. Elin McCoy discusses the effects of peer pressure on the youth of the country to be "up to date" on the latest tech. In her 1981 article McCoy states, "Many parents cite peer pressure, when many other children are watching particular programs and their child would feel left out if he or she could not watch too, as one reason they do not throw out the [television] set altogether." The fear of being less connected to the world than everyone else has survived from the original release of *Poltergeist* to the present day. Even if someone cannot afford the newest iPhone or Google Home mini for each room in their house, they want them so that at least their children can "fit in" with the rest of society. The Bowens suffered this dilemma and ultimately caved into reaching for a "higher standard" of living even if they could not afford the standard of living in which they already lived. Looking back at Bodo Winter's concept of how "horror movies play a role in maintaining and potentiating metaphor within the larger cultural system," American horror movies clearly serve as warnings to human error and guides to what we fear most in America. From *Poltergeist* (2015), we can see how cultural fears developed from a fear of television taking over children to a fear of technological advancements taking over everyone's lives. Following this pattern, America is headed down a path that will end in fears of spending money on any luxury, especially technological luxuries. Both *Poltergeist* films are comprised of more than horror tropes; they are built by America's cultural fears which make them scarier than the harmless nightmares they seem to be. If we are not careful, the long-perpetuated fear of technology truly ruling us will one day come to fruition.

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Death in the Digital World

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The ghosts of lost loved ones have always haunted us, but the undefined role of the dead, the dying, and the grieving in the digital world is an ever-growing cultural haunting. This paper explores how memories of the dead are shifted and changed in the deceased's lingering digital presence, how grief is altered by the digital world, and the uncertainties that arise with no etiquette book to guide us through death in the digital world. As this new phenomenon encroaches on our lives, where does technological innovation used to remember the dead meet an attempt to resurrect them?

Death and grief are everlasting parts of life, bringing their own types of haunting within different cultures and experiences. As they naturally invade our ever-growing digital lives, however, these processes morph and change. "Anthropological research has long established that the dead in many cultural contexts have social lives," which has now emerged into a perhaps more puzzling idea that the dead have social media accounts (Mitchell et al. 413). Considering the social media accounts of the deceased, virtual memorials, and the expanding real and imagined technologies to continue life after death can enhance our interaction with these ghosts of death and grief in our increasingly digital society. This phenomenon

that occurs at the intersection between death and the digital world has created a cultural haunting due to our lack of norms regarding it and the undefined lines in what is considered acceptable within the dead, the grieving, and the digital.

The Dead Have Social Media Accounts

The deceased of today's world leave ghostly traces of themselves in our minds, in photo albums, and in personal belongings, as they always have. As those who die leave behind their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts, however, they are ever-present in the pulse of the Internet. Consider Facebook with "over one billion users, and yet, more than 10,000 of them die every day" and they do not just delete themselves (Hiscock). These accounts linger on Facebook and the Internet because these technologies do not have the ability to understand the difference between when a user has simply not logged in and when they have died. The magnitude of

deceased people with Facebook accounts continues to expand by the second: “In fact, 428 [users] die every hour, so they’re practically dropping like flies. And every day, these dormant accounts receive friend requests, get tagged in photos, and sometimes, they’re even wished a happy birthday” (Hiscock).

Recognition that these accounts do not simply remain, but are interacted with, reveal their deeper reach into our culture from beyond the grave. The remaining posts and automated messages connected to a dormant account act as interaction on the part of the dead—a haunting from the ghost trapped in cyberspace. Naturally, it cannot be expected that new posts will magically be made from the beyond, but the previous comments, likes, and pictures will eerily remain. The old friend from high school that passed away will pop up on your feed as someone who still follows a suggested page. The retired teacher who has been dead for months will still appear in comments and suggested friends. These traces seem as though they will always remain as this relatively new cultural haunting has yet to identify itself as either a friendly or malignant spirit.

Cyberanthropology expert Michaelanne Dye goes as far as to theorize a possible change in identities of the dead: “Today, identities are co-constructed through social media interactions. Therefore, the deceased’s online identity not only continues in the virtual space; it can also evolve and adapt as others continue to interact with the dead person’s profile” (qtd. in Buck). The idea that a person’s online identity continues beyond death suggests that these ghosts are not limited to a person’s authentic character. When posts to these accounts become an inaccurate representation of the dead, it changes their online identity. Morphing an openly sarcastic and honest individual into a saint of compassion after death is more than an interaction with an account—it is a rewriting of their digital mark. If these accounts remain, they are forever present and if they become untrue to the person that once owned them, their loved ones can be haunted by the ghost of what once was an active online connection. These remnants of a person’s digital presence, however, were once created by the living body, whether that is an accurate representation of our memory of them or not. We must consider the opposing remaining images of a loved one as their online presence, the entity created by digital memory, and the ever-present memory we create through our grief.

In Lieu of Flowers: Virtual Memorials

The dead are not only present online through traditional user accounts. Virtual memorials transform the quiet and private gravestone visit to a public and endless forum for remembrance where the living feed into a digital haunted house. It is important to consider the scope of these

online apparatuses:

What is a virtual or on-line memorial? They are found on the Internet in a number of forms: On social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, in slideshows of the deceased set to music and uploaded onto YouTube, and on specialized memorial hosting websites created by charities, funeral homes, bereaved individuals, associations connected with specific illnesses, and notably in profit-based Internet sites which provide web-space at a cost to the bereaved individual (Mitchell et al. 415).

The variety in virtual memorial options are differing in scope and intimacy. While some act as simply a method of remembering through images, others are designed for interaction between grievers. Creating these digital spaces shifts traditional grieving to be considerably more public and practically boundless.

Posts to memorial websites have the potential to reach other people who are hurt by a death. This public aspect allows for connection and joint healing. This approach also allows for personal trauma to be shared with strangers and future generations. The virtual memorials are not limited to a period of time; the painful lamenting of someone in grief enters cyberspace forever, and those in grief are able to dwell in these spaces indefinitely. Just as the dormant account, these resources push the dead into a never-ending preoccupation and changing online identity. Virtual memorials often contain information both basic and intimate: obituaries, funeral information, pictures of the deceased, remaining pieces of their online presence, shared stories by Internet users, and posts of expressed grief. The appropriateness of varying posts in these spaces have no societal norms and thus fall on each individual's judgement.

Every citizen in our growing digital world should understand and consider the use of virtual memorials. Are they a source of comfort or a new way for our grief to linger and the pain of memory to haunt us? Not only are we trapped within our own pain but the moaning ghost of widespread grief and the phantom of cheerful memories slip into Facebook feeds and linger in Twitter timelines. Our choice in how to grieve may be limited or even removed by the virtual hauntings inflicted through new phenomena such as these virtual memorials. Pages that display both the pain and positive memory of the dead expand the impact of both their living presences and their absences. It can make the single pain of one person—whether they themselves decide to post their grief—feel as public and endless as the page for virtual memorial itself.

Virtual memorials, however, do provide options for handling memories of the dead online that better control the haunting of online grieving. Facebook allows accounts of the dead to be turned into virtual memorials. These “Memorialized profiles don’t appear in public spaces such

as in suggestions for People You May Know, ads or birthday reminders” (Facebook). This removes some of the pain of active accounts such as receiving a birthday reminder for someone who no longer ages. The intent, and in some cases, the reality, is that memorialized profiles and virtual memorials confine the online presence of the dead and grieving to one location like a gravestone. People can join and post in these online places as they choose. They also provide the possibility of finding comfort in the posts of family and friends that knew the deceased. Virtual memorials magnify the visitation of a gravesite. The abilities of these online tools can be used to amplify the positives or escalate the difficulties of online grieving, which leaves us to navigate them thoughtfully. One of the gravest dangers of this new digital element of death is that there is no etiquette book to guide us as we decipher for ourselves if the lingering online ghosts of our loved ones and public forums for grieverers are a blessing or a curse. Where is the line between using technology to better remember the dead and trying to resurrect them?

Moonwalking from the Beyond: Recreation of the Famous Dead

The exceptionally talented and now well-known Vincent van Gogh, Franz Kafka, and Emily Dickinson only gained their fame after death. The way we remember famous individuals has always been focused on their talent and keeping that talent alive. Technology allows us to recreate the art of deceased famous people, which has gone to an extent worthy of ethical reflection. We have kept celebrities alive through social media hashtags and online song purchasing, but a line was perhaps crossed when remembering Michael Jackson and Tupac Shakur. Digital creations of these artists (often simply referred to as holograms) were designed to perform at the Billboard Music Awards and Coachella, respectively. Technology allows us to see these artists perform from beyond the grave as phantoms of their past performances. We have engineered pixelated ghosts to continue a legacy or perhaps to further economic gain. The question we must ask is where we should draw the line. We have gone from expecting a right to continue the release of music, with or without the consent of the dead, to a digital violation of their very bodies. One instance has gone as far as Hologram USA suing the late Whitney Houston’s estate after the estate backed out of a hologram performance agreement (Toto). This lawsuit implies a sense of entitlement to the voice, music, and image of the dead. Digital advances reduce the memory of famous people to a shallow copy of the person that disrespects the dead and disarms the living in the pursuit of turning out money-making holographic ghosts for public viewing.

We must be aware of the liberties being taken with deceased celebrities through these cultural hauntings. We should question if technology is being used to abuse the dead as a contin-

ued source of money or respect the dead in an effort to enhance their memory. These technological advances will continue and could easily become a normal occurrence. Digitally created stars such as Peter Cushing's digitally resurrected appearances in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* may have us questioning if we could know the difference between a digital recreation and a real human being (Toto). As these occurrences become more common and more vivid, we may begin to question the value of talent and life when it can merely be recreated. Could celebrities never die in the eyes of users of film, television, and music? This possibility would leave the family members with only superficial digital remains of their loved ones. Could we one day never need living actors when we could create actions and images with technology? We need to consider what it means to recreate the famous dead and how far we should be willing to go.

The Tech of Frankenstein's Monster

As our world is constantly technologically advancing, the shift in how we handle death may be too much to bear. The Netflix series *Black Mirror* explores society and technology in alternative and future worlds. The episode titled "Be Right Back" follows the life of a woman, Martha, when she turns to a new software to cope with the death of her significant other, Ash. The pain of learning she is pregnant combined with simple curiosity quickly causes Martha to use software that analyzes Ash's online presence. This software replicates a dead person's personality in text message conversations. A strong essence of who we are is left in our digital mark and this technology capitalizes on the lingering traces. Today, or in the near future, computer programmers may very well be able to create text responses that sound like the language used in online profiles.

With these types of technologies, there is a risk of companies abusing grief for profit. In the *Black Mirror* episode, Martha is tempted by the "new Ash" to provide video and audio footage of Ash so that the software would have the ability to talk on the phone. Her doing so could result in added charges or even a security risk. In her fragile state, Martha, as many of us might, took this opportunity instantly, without consideration for cost or risk. Though her spirits begin to rise, we are encouraged to ask if her fixation on recreating Ash digitally is psychologically healthy. Martha soon spends the vast majority of her time talking to the replication of a dead person—a ghost. She begins to ignore her living loved ones, even ignoring a phone call from her sister to speak to the digital doppelganger of her boyfriend. This type of technology could very well only delay the grieving process and create further controversy where remembering the dead meets disrespecting them.

The aspect of this episode that truly tests the ethics of technology and the dead is when this “new Ash” suggests the third level of this software. “Ash” tells Martha that there is a service that is still in the testing phases that she could try, but at a high cost. Martha agrees to the incredibly expensive service to give her new computer-based Ash a body. After a blank body is mailed to her home, Martha follows the steps to sync the digitally created consciousness of Ash to this new body that is also meant to look and sound like her lost love. It can seem easy to judge this character’s choices, to dismiss this action as simply too creepy, and to claim that “I could never do this.” The problem is that we all have known, or will someday know, the loneliness and pain from losing a loved one. It is important to protect people from technologies and companies that might take advantage of grieving people. Companies have already set up paid websites to house virtual memories and sued estates of the famous to make money off of holograms. We must be aware of evolving innovations as they are more haunting than helpful, and judge if software like the creators of *Black Mirror* have imagined have a place in our world.

For Martha, this defiance of death was not the “re-do button” she had hoped it to be. Slowly, but surely, her interactions with the reincarnate Ash are inconsistent with the man himself. She notes that the body looks like Ash “on a good day” due to our tendency to post mainly flattering pictures online. He is a man-made ghost of his digital remains. Our digital identities are a part of who we are, but they are only a *part*. Martha’s experience displays how our online selves do not know the moles beneath our shirts, the way we make love to our significant others, or the tone in which we have our lovers’ quarrels. Simply, our online selves are not enough. When the character of Martha finally has a breakdown, she says to this digital imposter of her lover, “You’re just a few ripples of you. There’s no history to you. You’re just a performance of stuff that he performed, without thinking, and it’s not enough” (“Be Right Back”). Since human beings feel, love, and hurt in human ways, it is natural to wish for our deceased loved ones back often at any cost. Through this fictional story, however, we are warned of the repercussions of crossing the unclear lines within the overlapping of technology and grief.

Social media and the like are shifting the memory of the death and crafting dangerous patterns in grieving that have facilitated an uncertainty and lack of societal norms that feed into this new cultural haunting. We have no guidelines to navigate the ghosts on our social media feeds, let alone the possibilities of resurrecting the dead as technological advancement continues pushing towards boundaries that we have not yet made. It is both the uncertainty and the possibility that haunt us. Finally, technologies and online interactions can make grieving easier, but to properly use these and future technologies we must remember that death is a universal inevitability

we all share and those who are lost cannot be recreated in the digital mark they leave behind. Otherwise, we risk being haunted by the ghosts we helped create.

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Contributors

Born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, **ASHLEY BURNS** is now a junior at Ball State University studying English Literature and minoring in Marketing and Professional Writing and Emerging Media. Ashley hopes to use the tools she acquires from her major and from the *Digital Literature Review* to pursue a career in the publishing industry. Ashley has gained experience working in acquisitions at Tanglewood Publishing Industry to help collect and edit the best submissions for the current year. She has published “My Interview in a Secretly Haunted House” and “Validating Visitations” on the *Digital Literature Review* Blog. Throughout her experience in the *DLR*, she has paid special attention to how the horror genre represents societal issues in American culture, how Americans’ perceptions of the deceased change over time, and the purposes of haunted locations.

JACOB GARRETT is a senior at Ball State University, majoring in History and English Literature while minoring in Creative Writing and Political Science. The horror genre is one of his strongest passions, and he has devoured stories of ghosts, demons, hauntings, and other tales of terror for as long as he can remember. He has long been interested in scholarly analysis of stories dealing with hauntings, ghosts, monsters, and other dark stories, as they have a great deal of academic merit that has largely gone unnoticed by the academic community. He has been previously published in the 2019 edition of the *Digital Literature Review*, as well as the *Odyssey* at Ball State University, and he thoroughly enjoyed serving as the teaching assistant for this year’s edition of the *DLR*. He plans to attend graduate school for literature after graduating in May 2020 and, after that, wishes to become a professor.

ERIN GOFF is a graduating senior from Liberty Township, Ohio. In May, she will receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary English/Language Arts Education. She is also a student of the Ball State Honors College. Her paper, “Death in the Digital World,” is her first critical work to be published. She has, however, had poems published in the Ball State Honors College’s *Odyssey* and has presented two poetry collections titled “The Sin-

ister Sequence” and “Mother Knows Best” at the 2018 and 2019 Sigma Tau Delta International Conventions, respectively. After graduation, Erin Goff will be pursuing a Master’s degree in Rhetoric and Composition before beginning her career as an English language arts educator.

KALLIE HUNCHMAN is a junior at Ball State University majoring in Cultural Anthropology with minors in Spanish and Studio Art. As an anthropology major, she has studied the things that scare people the most—from myth to legend to ghost story—and she is proud to bring that understanding of cultural fears to this year’s *Digital Literature Review*. Her visual art has been published in Ball State Honors College’s *Odyssey*. Kallie spends much of her time painting, drawing, designing, and creating. This year, she reviewed visual art submissions for *Odyssey* and worked as part of the design team for the *Digital Literature Review* bringing the journal to life. She will be graduating in May 2021, and, after that, she plans to pursue a career in design and illustration.

ADAM LADNER is a third-year student at Ball State University with a major in Creative Writing. This is his first year working for the *Digital Literature Review*, where he’s taken part in creating and putting together the design of both the *Digital Literature Review*’s website and journal, as well as creating marketable items for the journal. He would love to continue the research that has been presented in this year’s issue of the *Digital Literature Review*, as well as look into other parts of the country and their ghost stories. He has plans to continue this research already in motion and intends to present his findings in the form of recordings and podcasts. He currently lives by himself, although he does own a cat named Banjo, whom he considers to be his son.

BROOKE LILEK is originally from the south suburbs of Chicago and moved to Muncie, Indiana, to pursue higher education in the sciences at Ball State University. She switched to an English major her sophomore year, however, and is now a senior majoring in Creative Writing. She worked on the Editorial team for the seventh volume of the *Digital Literature Review (DLR)*. Brooke has published “Chestnuts Roasting Over an Open Fire”

and “The Irony of Transparency” on the *Digital Literature Review* Blog as well. In addition to her work with the *DLR*, she also worked with students at Muncie’s Southside Middle School to create and collect work for the 2020 edition of *Creative Writing in the Community*. She will have three poems (“May 2, 2020,” “The stars tell Hubble about real-estate in space,” and “West Weber Road”) published within this collection in addition to her collaborative poems with Southside and Ball State students. Along with her work writing literature, Brooke also interns at the Ball State University Writing Center helping students to construct and revise their own work, whether they are academic papers, creative works, resumes, or anything in between.

CLARE NEE is a senior English major and Psychology minor at Siena College in Loudonville, New York. As an undergraduate student, Clare has found a critical interest in themes pertaining to trauma in film and literature. During her freshman year, her essay “The Calamity of Social Ignorance” was published in the 2016-2017 edition of Siena College’s First Year Seminar Journal, *Gleanings*. This piece investigates the crucial role of society’s inherently taught responses to trauma victims with a specific focus on veterans in literature who return home from war with PTSD. This past fall, Clare presented her capstone piece “Suicide Sells: The Sensationalism of Trauma in Film and Literature” at Siena College, and was invited to attend and present her research at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference in Ogden, Utah. Literature and writing are two of her greatest passions in life, aside from baking, crocheting, and spending time with her family and friends. She is inspired by authors such as James Baldwin, Richard Yates, Willa Cather, and Ernest Hemingway. She seeks to explore new avenues of thought and to boldly question socially constructed norms and beliefs, and hopes to pursue her master’s degree in English, and, potentially, her PhD.

DILLON O’NAIL is a junior at Ball State University and a member of the Honors College there. He double majors in English Literature and Psychology and minors in African-American Studies. Dillon’s article “Mind Under Matter: Death and Margaret Cavendish’s Poetic Natural Philosophy” appears in the 2020 spring edition of the *Sigma*

Tau Delta Review, a journal produced by an English Honors Society of which Dillon is a member. Moreover, Dillon's piece "Spot the Difference," a short essay examining the misogynistic, racist implications of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, is published in the *Digital Literature Review Blog*. He has helped produce *Poverty and Uplift: Stories from Muncie, Indiana*, a collection of stories that works to shatter stereotypes of poverty. Dillon has also interned at the Indiana Writers Center, helping at-risk youth in downtown Indianapolis write and share their experiences in the 2019 edition of the anthology *I Remember: Indianapolis Youth Write About Their Lives*. He has also previously worked as a Peer Advocate Leader at Ball State's Multicultural Center, leading educational workshops that foster inclusivity, awareness, change, and inter-group understanding. Currently, Dillon serves as the editor in chief for the *Digital Literature Review* and will return as the teaching assistant for the next volume of the *DLR*. Dillon also serves as lead editor for an upcoming collection of senior citizens' stories of grit, grace, and gratitude. After graduation, Dillon plans to enter graduate school to become a cognitive behavioral therapist.

ISABEL PARHAM is a junior at Ball State University, where she majors in English Studies and minors in Sociology. While at Ball State, Isabel has been involved in a variety of immersive learning opportunities. She has been a copyeditor for *Stance: An International Undergraduate Philosophy Journal* for two years, and this year served as co-lead copyeditor. Isabel is a Ball State Honors College undergraduate fellow and also a member of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society at Ball State. After graduation, Isabel hopes to put her editorial experience to work in the publishing industry.

Originally from Evansville, Indiana, **ADDISON PAUL** is a junior Creative Writing major at Ball State University. As an imaginative writer—be that of fictional stories, blog entries, poetry, magazine articles, or screenplays—Addison strives to improve her communication skills across all styles of writing. She is currently working on a novel inspired by her love of fantasy, and she hopes to bring her own unique magic to life through her writing. Addison works as a Communication Specialist for the Ball State Digital Corps, where she conducts interviews, oversees blog posts, writes scripts, and manages the Instagram account.

She received Ball State's 2018 Excellence in Creative Writing Award for poetry, and she has poetry published in the 2019 and 2020 issues of *Odyssey*. Addison also volunteers as an Honors College Peer Mentor. When she's not writing, Addison spends time baking pies, crocheting, and looking at pictures of her dogs.