

Kjetil Karsrud

# The Gothic Spirit of Place

A Study of the House in American Gothic Fiction

Master's thesis in English Literature

Supervisor: Eli Løfaldli

December 2020



Kjetil Karsrud

# **The Gothic Spirit of Place**

A Study of the House in American Gothic Fiction

Master's thesis in English Literature  
Supervisor: Eli Løfaldli  
December 2020

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Language and Literature





## Abstract:

This thesis is a study of the properties of place in American Gothic fiction. It assumes that the Gothic genre consists of literature that, far from merely seeking to frighten, seeks to reveal hidden and repressed fears of the societies in which it is written. With an emphasis on the American Gothic house — not as any specific architecture, but quite simply as houses represented in Gothic fiction — this study explores how the settings and locations of such fiction can aid in the expression of societal fears such as oppression, injustice, and a general sense of unease lurking beneath the surface of American communities. This is explored through the lens of three works of American Gothic fiction in which houses feature prominently: Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* (1975). In three separate chapters, the fictional locations of these texts are discussed, and the close ties these locations have with their stories' underlying societal fears are examined in detail. The study finds that, although the three works diverge in the usage and features of their locations, place is of great importance to all these stories, and that their houses are far more than mere settings for their events. The Gothic houses embody the same fears that the literary texts otherwise express, and they serve as constant, monumental reminders of these fears. In the Gothic genre, place can be employed to elevate the expressions of such fears, contributing greatly to the American Gothic's function of highlighting shortcomings of the society to which it belongs.

## Acknowledgements:

This thesis is dedicated to my family, and to all others who have shown me kindness and patience. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Eli Løfaldli, for her unending feedback and encouragement. It simply would not have been possible to finish this thesis without her help.



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: <i>The Fall of the House of Usher</i> .....	10
Introduction: Into the House of Usher .....	10
Gothic Minimalism .....	14
Existing in a Nameless Time and Place? .....	17
The Mirror in the Tarn .....	20
Conclusion .....	24
Chapter Two: <i>The Haunting of Hill House</i> .....	25
Introduction.....	25
Entrapment and the Female Gothic.....	28
Hill House .....	34
Placelessness and a taste of freedom .....	40
Conclusion .....	42
Chapter Three: <i>'Salem's Lot</i> .....	44
Introduction.....	44
The Marsten House .....	47
Small-town Gothic .....	53
A Map of Jerusalem's Lot.....	57
Conclusion .....	62
Conclusion: A Spirit of Place?.....	64
Works cited .....	66



# Introduction

Throughout the history of Gothic literature, its works have presented readers with countless memorable, frightening locations. Of these, the setting of Edgar Allan Poe's classic tale, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, stands as one of the most mysterious, enigmatic places found in this vast literary tradition. In this short story, Poe takes his readers on a journey to a truly striking Gothic location. At an unknown time, in an unknown place, Poe's unnamed narrator finds himself in a particularly gloomy part of the world, where the decaying House of Usher rests. Within this "singularly dreary tract of country" (90), the narrator finally reaches the House of Usher, the sight of which fills him "with an utter depression of soul" (90). He cannot quite understand why this location evokes such feelings, and wonders what it is about this place that makes him feel this way: "What was it — I paused to think — what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?" (90). As with many of Poe's works, the truth of the House of Usher is never quite explained. And as with much other Gothic fiction, the location of this work is unnerving and memorable. This study aims to delve deeper into the workings of the locations found in Gothic literature, in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between Gothic fiction and place.

Often, places can be quite difficult to define. Sometimes, a certain smell, a particular sound, or an unusual layout is enough to give a place its own unique atmosphere. In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, D. H. Lawrence provides an intriguing point of departure for understanding literary places:

Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. (Lawrence, Project Gutenberg)

Here, Lawrence defines the almost indescribable nature of place as a particular spirit of place, something utterly unique to all nations, homes, and places of our world. It is likely, then, that such a spirit of place should also be found in the places of literature. After all, spending time in fictional worlds can often feel just as vivid as being in the real one, and experiences of these places may leave fond, lifelong memories. It is this feeling that Edgar Allan Poe's

narrator attempts to articulate in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and although he does not quite reach a final thought as explicit as Lawrence's, he expresses a similar sensation: an experience of a Gothic spirit of place.

From its early days, the Gothic has shared a close bond with place. Already, for instance, in Horace Walpole's 1764 novel, *The Castle of Otranto*. According to Vijay Mishra, Walpole is the "founder of the Gothic novel" (293), and Neil Cornwell concurs by stating that "the craze for Gothic dates from Horace Walpole's formulation of the genre," thanks in part to the book's "combination of economic and sexual intrigue, based on an accursed dynastic succession, to the accompaniment of supernatural manifestations in a southern European medieval Gothic-castle setting" (Cornwell 64-65). The novel tells of a castle in the possession of a dishonest ruler who inherited it through a "fictitious will" (Walpole 104). This wicked ruler, Manfred, is haunted by the misdeeds of the past, and eventually, the ghost of the castle's legitimate lord brings both Manfred's family and his castle crashing down. As Walpole writes, "the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso [the legitimate ruler], dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins" (103). In this early Gothic work, the castle is both a setting and the home to a dark secret that is eventually brought to ruinous light, which remains a familiar Gothic idea to this day.

In the first edition of his novel, Walpole presented *Otranto* not as his own work, but as a text "found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England" (Walpole 5) and translated by one "William Marshal ... from the original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto" (1). By doing this, the novel is given a murky backdrop and a sense of authenticity, and Walpole — or Marshal — "cannot but believe that the ground-work of the story is founded on truth," and that its action "is undoubtedly laid in some real castle" (7). For a genre that would come to develop a strong relationship with history and genuine social issues, it is strange to think that one of its founding texts is, as Jerrold E. Hogle writes, "constituted by layer upon layer of falsity" (496), and yet, this falsity gave rise to the Gothic genre. After *Otranto*'s "first edition of 500 copies sold out in four months" (Groom "Explanatory Notes" 116), a second edition was printed, with an added subtitle: "A Gothic Story" (Walpole 3). In this second edition, Walpole reveals that he is the novel's true author, and asks "pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator. At the time, the term Gothic was best known as "a synonym for barbarism," referring to "the Goths of the medieval period ... epitomized by their churches — pointy, busy and strewn with gargoyles" (Miles 12), and the term was often employed "derogatively about art,

architecture, and writing that failed to conform to the standards of neoclassical taste” (Botting 13). By adding “A Gothic Story” as *The Castle of Otranto*’s subtitle, Walpole connected his novel to an idea of a distant, frightening past, and the book’s popularity in turn helped to associate the term Gothic with “literature that was often set in the ruins of medieval castles and churches (Crow *American Gothic* 3-4).

According to Nick Groom, Walpole’s novel “is a striking example of a book that by inaugurating a new style within a few years made itself obsolete” (“Introduction” ix). Although Groom is also quick to defend the novel as “a game-changer” that “eighteenth-century readers read ... in astonished awe” (x), Walpole’s castle setting and supernatural occurrences soon saw better — or at the very least more popular — use by other authors. Ann Radcliffe is one such author. Allison Milbank outlines several castles featured in Radcliffe’s works. While discussing Radcliffe’s 1789 debut, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, in which two separate castles are featured, Milbank observes a use of “labyrinthine castle vaults” (88), where characters are “trapped in a spatiality that admits no history” (87), though she argues that “Radcliffe’s first novel only begins to exploit the epistemological possibilities of the Gothic ruin” (94). Continuing, Milbank finds that “Radcliffe’s plots take the form of unveilings and revelations of secret truths” (94), and that her 1790 novel, *A Sicilian Romance*, achieves this by following “the labyrinthine underground paths of the natural landscape or cavernous underworld of the ruined castle and so unravels historical chains of occlusion” (94). Just as in *The Castle of Otranto*, it is evident that Radcliffe’s castle settings are vital to her storytelling, and that these are important to her revelations.

Radcliffe’s works quickly became immensely popular. According to Edward Jacobs, they were not only “increasingly popular Gothic novels that earned some of the highest copyright prices of the Romantic era,” they were also “widely imitated by other authors” (Jacobs 49). Furthermore, Jacobs writes, Radcliffe’s “imitators had to adhere to such precise correlations between topic, style, and textual region in order to exploit Radcliffe’s popularity,” to such an extent that Gothic works would typically be branded “by titular keywords such as ‘Castle of’ or ‘Mysteries of’” (54). Radcliffe was not just the gold standard for her imitators, either, as Townshend and Wright state that the works “other Gothic novelists and writers in the 1790s ... were invariably unfavourably compared with those of Radcliffe” (15). Thus, the sheer popularity of Radcliffe’s novels, combined with the number of imitators of her style, led to the cementing of a set of Gothic tropes, by the late 1700s, Gothic had “already become a synonym for both a national, non-classical English taste and

... a particular brand of fiction, one characterized ... by ghosts, witchcraft and other such superstitious imaginings” (Townshend and Wright 17).

From early works like those of Walpole, Radcliffe, and many others, the Gothic has undergone countless changes and evolutions. Andrew Smith describes how the “Gothic ... mutates across historical, national, and generic boundaries as it reworks images drawn from different ages and places” (4). Despite these mutations, however, Smith believes that “it is possible to identify certain persistent features which constitute a distinctive aesthetic,” and suggests “[r]epresentations of ruins, castles, monasteries, and forms of monstrosity, and images of insanity, transgression, the supernatural, and excess” as some of the core characteristics of Gothic literature (4), showing how the eighteenth-century definition is still relevant to this day. In addition to these, there are certain other characteristics that ought to be explained before this study commences in full. William Patrick Day writes that the “world of Gothic fantasy is an imitation of the world of the dream, the hallucination, in which that which is real and which is imaginary fade into one” (30). This dreamlike nature can take many forms, and perhaps most powerful of these is the idea of the uncanny.

According to Sigmund Freud, the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, “is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light” (qtd. in Punter 130), and David Punter further narrows Freud’s idea down to the following definition of the uncanny:

a feeling which relates to a dialectic between that which is *known* and that which is *unknown*. If we are afraid, then more often than not it is because we are experiencing fear of the unknown: but if we have a sense of the uncanny, it is because the barriers between the known and the unknown are teetering on the brink of collapse. (130)

In the Gothic, then, the fears that are explored are not merely those that are unfamiliar to us. Rather, the Gothic seeks to explore ideas that lurk just beneath the surface, that its readers may be aware of but choose to ignore. Punter summarizes his thoughts by suggesting that “the uncanny, at root, suggests the uncontrollable nature of memory, of trauma, of haunting; it serves to remind us that we cannot, at the end of the day — or during the watches of the night — exorcise the ghost” (136).

The Gothic’s relationship with place is closely related to these uncanny ghosts. As this study begins to turn its attention to the American Gothic and the Gothic house, Leonard Cassuto’s definition of Gothic places is a helpful transition. According to Cassuto, Gothic

literature and Gothic architecture — in the form of cathedrals — are closely linked. He writes that “Gothic architects aimed at evoking a specific emotional response ... that response was a combination of fear and awe that was considered appropriate to one standing in the presence of God” (156). This architecture, he continues, “spread to other structures, such as castles and palaces, which borrowed exemplary visual elements,” and thus, an originally religious intent “was shifted and distilled to a sense of pure intimidating effect” (156). Cassuto’s argument is that a similar process also applies to Gothic literature, as “it secularizes and transports the visuals to another medium” (156). He elaborates on some of the traits of Gothic locations thus:

Gothic literature is marked by an elaborate, darkly lighted architectural setting that creates fears and apprehension in the characters who inhabit it ... The crossing of the Gothic from architecture to literature gave flexibility to its practitioners, particularly as to location. Removed from houses of worship, the fear inspired by the Gothic no longer had to be a fear of God; it could now be brought on by ghosts, vampires, or flesh-and-blood murderers. Gothic literature began as a verbal expression that *felt* something like Gothic architecture — and fundamentally, that’s what it still is. (156-157)

This feeling of Gothic architecture, then, does not have to be limited to actual castles or cathedrals. Instead, what matters is the uncanny sensations of fears that are found in literary places that are reminiscent of this Gothic sensation. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, it should be noted that Gothic houses do not necessarily have to be defined as any particular architecture, but rather as places that embody the qualities of the Gothic, such as the supernatural, a dark past, and a sense of the uncanny.

As American writers attempted to bring Gothic literature to the New World, they initially struggled to understand how to evoke the feeling of Gothic literature in their young nation, as there, apparently, was no frightening past or any towering castles to draw from. In the preface to his 1860 novel *The Marble Faun*, Nathaniel Hawthorne bemoans what he perceives as a lack of history:

No author, without trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, as is happily the case

with my dear native land ... Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers need ruin to make them grow. (qtd. in Crow *American Gothic* 10)

While Robert Mighall points out that Hawthorne's own works contradict this statement, as Hawthorne's "Seven Gabled House is as steeped in bad memories and buried crimes as any Italian castle or former urban sanctuary" (58), this still illuminates a prevalent view of there simply not being enough history in the so-called New World.

According to Faye Ringel, "one startling approach to creating Gothic terror in the New World was to import the Old World's castle along with dungeons, cruel aristocratic fathers, loyal *famuli* [servants], simple peasants, conspiracies, and the dead hand of the past" (23). Thus, the Gothic was originally an imported genre, with imported, even imagined fears. However, these imagined fears were soon replaced by actual ones, as the young nation began to grapple with the fact that it was not free from fears, atrocities, and history. As Charles Crow writes, American literature can be viewed "as a process of learning to see American history, and the Gothic would play its part in making the invisible visible" (*American Gothic* 10), and American writers soon discovered ruins of their own.

In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler outlines how the Gothic is a constant presence in American fiction, as "the images of alienation, flight, and abysmal fear possess our fiction," and therefore, "Until the gothic had been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin" (143). The process of looking behind the façade of its own myth is essential to American Gothic, and, in the New World, supposedly free of anything for the Gothic to express, it found, as Allan Lloyd Smith writes, the "shadow of patriarchy, slavery, and racism, as of Puritan extremes of the imagination and the political horror of a failed utopianism" (174). These shadows, Lloyd Smith concludes, "direct [the American Gothic's] shape toward a concern with social and political issues as well as toward an agonized introspection concerning the evil that lies within the self" (174).

Soon, the Gothic quickly saw rapid growth in America, with writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Brockden Brown, and the aforementioned Nathaniel Hawthorne among the early writers of American Gothic (Lloyd Smith 163). In place of the Gothic castles, these writers instead Gothicized the landscape and cities of America, as seen in Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, a 1799 novel that "derives its horrors from Indian attacks and the caves and cataracts of Western Pennsylvania" (Ringel 24). Meanwhile, Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* refutes his own previous concerns by featuring "Gothic elements of haunted house, sinister villain, concealed crimes and hidden manuscript" (Crow *American Gothic* 49)

in a New England setting. With these works, and their locations, the Gothic found a home in the everyday, seemingly innocuous homes of the colonies, and since then, the American Gothic has, according to Crow, continued to challenge the American narrative of progress through “a counter-narrative in which skepticism, bitterness and nightmare are acknowledged” (*American Gothic* 187).

With this in mind, it is time to reach a final definition for the American Gothic. According to Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Gothic narratives give shape to culturally specific anxieties and tabooed desires ... those anxieties and desires will always have to do with power and prohibition” (“Introduction: The American Gothic” 6). This means that American Gothic works often reflect larger underlying societal issues and struggles, and can expose these to the reading public. They are horror stories and are often seen as light entertainment, but they also speak to something deeper, and something repressed, in American society. Similarly, Charles Crow describes the American Gothic as “the imaginative expression of the fears and forbidden desires of Americans” (*American Gothic* 1), and, most importantly, provides an important, concise definition of just what the Gothic is:

a tradition of oppositional literature, presenting in disturbing, usually frightening ways, a sceptical, ambiguous view of human nature and of history. The Gothic exposes the repressed, what is hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten, in the lives of individuals and of cultures. (*American Gothic* 2)

In addition to this, it is my belief that the Gothic house plays a significant part in such expressions, and that its role in the American Gothic is worth discussing in greater detail.

The focus of this thesis is on the function of the house in American Gothic fiction, and on the use of the house as a locus for the genre’s expressions of hidden and unspoken fears. It will discuss the properties of houses in the American Gothic in order to ascertain how these everyday locations serve as expressions of societal fears, as specific issues and as a general sense of unease.

This will be achieved by examining three works of American Gothic fiction in which houses feature prominently. The intent is not to chart any kind of progression or general trend in the usage of Gothic houses, but rather to examine a selection of expressions of fear through place, at different points in time. Although the three selected texts all make use of Gothic houses, the properties and uses of these locations differ greatly. The diverse uses of these Gothic houses will show just how versatile they are as Gothic locations, and how they can be

used to express the fears of the Gothic in a range of different ways. These works will be discussed in chronological order, and although three texts will not be enough to say anything definitive about the Gothic as a whole, discussing them will offer valuable insight into the properties of the American Gothic house.

In Chapter One, Edgar Allan Poe's 1839 short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* — also featured in the opening paragraph of this introduction — will be discussed. *Usher* is a twisting, nightmarish work in which it is quite difficult to find any one meaning. Rather than attempting to find one such meaning, or particular fear, that Poe's Gothic house expresses, this chapter treats the House of Usher — with the aid of Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm's *Poe, "The House of Usher," and the American Gothic* — as an expression of the Gothic itself. The tale is something of a blueprint, or formula, for the Gothic itself, and this chapter will show just how important place, and the Gothic house, is to the American Gothic's expression of its fears.

Chapter Two takes a closer look at *The Haunting of Hill House*, written by Shirley Jackson and published in 1959. Unlike the vague, uncertain fears of Poe's *Usher*, *Hill House* is fully focused on expressing one very particular type of fear: a lack of autonomy and freedom for women. The chapter discusses how this fear is expressed through the imposing Hill House — an old mansion hidden away among a cluster of hills — in which the protagonist Eleanor Vance is trapped. Through Hill House, the American Gothic house's ability to heighten the fears of its stories will become clear, as Shirley Jackson's house shows how limited the protagonist's personal freedom really is, and expresses a sense of imprisonment for a single person in an oppressive society.

Chapter Three discusses Stephen King's second novel, *Salem's Lot* (1975). In this vampire novel, the Gothic house is not the primary setting for the action. Instead, King's house — the Marsten House — stands on a hill overlooking the town known as 'Salem's Lot, and around it, King's novel builds a vivid version of a small American town, one that is deeply affected by past, collective trauma. This final chapter discusses how the Marsten House acts as the center of this town, as it investigates how the rest of the town is mapped out, with this one house as its dominant feature.

Each chapter will make use of secondary literature that is relevant to the individual work. In addition, Leonard Lutwack's *The Role of Place in Literature* will supplement each chapter, as this book contains helpful terms and distinctions that will aid the discussion of places and houses. In his study, Lutwack outlines a distinction between central and a-central places, as well as a range of other factors. According to Lutwack, the "centrality of a place in



a literary work is established by the frequency and importance of the transactions that occur in it, by its weight in the behavior of characters, and by the force of the imagery and style describing it” (42-43). Such a central place can serve as a “framing effect” for events in peripheral places, when a literary hero journeys “from a central place to a number of outlying places and from them back to the starting place” (43). Thus, a central place does not need to be the main setting for a text’s action, but it rather serves as a starting point from which to understand other places and events in a narrative. In contrast to this, Lutwack also describes a-central place, which are the direct “opposite of the central place” (44). A-central places can be “removed from the center by distance or difficulty of access,” or they may be “a strange place [that] may not be easily comprehended as part of the greater world” (44). These are important terms when discussing American Gothic houses, as these places are often grounded in real-life central places like homes, while also being strange, otherworldly, and uncanny places.

# Chapter One: *The Fall of the House of Usher*

## Introduction: Into the House of Usher

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the great, towering figures of American literature. “No other American writer has had such a profound impact on the arts as well as on the popular imagination in the United States and abroad,” writes Barbara Cantalupo (1), while Allan Lloyd Smith names him as one of the “great originators of American fiction,” along with Charles Brockden Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne (163). In addition to this, Poe also contributed greatly to the Gothic, as he helped to turn the Gothic genre more toward horror fiction. As David Galloway writes, in “the work of Poe most frequently printed and translated, terror is the most distinctive quality” (xxxix), and, according to Frederick S. Frank, Poe achieved this terror while still “[r]etaining literally all of the secondhand mechanisms of Gothic fiction” and thus “forged a higher Gothic by internalizing horror and terror to a point of no return” (340). Horror and terror are evident in many of his works, such as *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and *The Cask of Amontillado*, but his most frightening, disorienting, and utterly Gothic writing is arguably found in 1839’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

This short story is a strange, unsettling work that allows for a multitude of interpretations. According to Perry and Sederholm, “[f]inding a stable meaning within ‘Usher’ will always be futile” (3), while Alfred Bendixen is somewhat more cautious in his assessment: he emphasizes the short story’s ability to “[illustrate] the capacity of the Gothic to move in multiple directions, suggesting a wide number of interpretations that can exist in surprising harmony with each other” (35), and mentions how scholars have interpreted it as “an incest story, or a vampire tale, or a fable of the Fall of the South” (37). Despite its brevity, it is evident that it is a multifaceted narrative that is extraordinarily open to interpretation.

Much of its ambiguity arises from the narrator’s potential unreliability. While discussing the final section of the short story, Scott Brewster states that the “narrator’s brain reels as he flees the collapsing house, tottering on the threshold between objective knowledge and delirium” (488). Because of this, it is clear that the narrator himself is not to be trusted, and it is impossible to say if the events he recalls are true, or if he ever visited the House of Usher at all. Frederick S. Frank supports this view in his reading, writing that “[b]ecause the

entire tale is the recollection of the escaped narrator, it is fair to say that the story is ‘about’ the narrator and his understanding or misunderstanding of his adventure” (338). This may be what creates the seemingly infinite readings of the short story, with critics and readers finding very different meanings in the text depending on their own goals and expectations. The true events are left largely up to interpretation, as the narrator’s recollection may be twisted, made up, or just a fragment of the events that he claims to have witnessed inside the House of Usher.

This aim of this chapter is not to arrive at any definitive reading or interpretation of Poe’s short story, as such a thing may be unattainable. Instead, this chapter will investigate the use of the house in this Gothic text in order to see how place can be used to express such a twisted and vague version of the American Gothic. In order to do so, the short story’s standing as a Gothic work must first be affirmed. After all, this study is written with a particular definition of the Gothic in mind: that, as Charles Crow writes, the Gothic is “a tradition of oppositional literature,” and that it “exposes the repressed, what is hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten, in the lives of individuals and of cultures” (*American Gothic* 2). If, due to its vague, open nature, *The Fall of the House of Usher* does not seem to expose any such hidden fears, can it truly be Gothic?

This chapter aims to reconcile Poe’s short story with Crow’s idea of the Gothic in three parts. First, Perry and Sederholm’s analysis of *The Fall of the House of Usher* as a kind of blueprint for Gothic storytelling will be discussed. Their analysis treats Poe’s short story not as an expression of any specific types of fear on Poe’s part, but as the idea of the Gothic itself condensed to a single story. Rather than expressing particular fears of its own, they argue that this text shows how fears can be expressed through the Gothic. In the next section, the discussion is focused on place, as the hazy, vague setting of *The Fall of the House of Usher* is discussed, in an attempt to see how the setting, which seems to exist somewhere out of time and space, is perhaps not completely removed from reality. Here, a selection of essays on the topography of Poe’s works will support the discussion. Finally, this chapter turns to the House of Usher, and to the strange, warping mirror by which it rests, the tarn. In the tarn, or pool, a mirror image of the house is revealed, and this section discusses the many elements of the Gothic that are found in this mirror, and in the miasma that seems to rise from the tarn and seep into the House of Usher. Together, these sections will discuss issues of relevance to the short story itself, but also to the Gothic’s intriguing relationship with place. However, before these discussions can begin, it is necessary to summarize the short story itself, and to present its frightening and confusing location: the House of Usher.

The short story opens on “a dull, dark, and soundless day,” as the unnamed first-person narrator is traveling “through a singularly dreary tract of country” (90) in order to reach the home of his childhood friend, Roderick Usher, who is suffering from an “acute bodily illness” (91). Soon, the narrator reaches “the melancholy House of Usher,” the sight of which fills him with “a sense of insufferable gloom” (90). This house serves as the centerpiece of the story, with most of the narrative taking place within its dilapidated walls. Detailed descriptions of the house’s layout are rarely provided. Instead, a vague idea of the House of Usher is presented through the narrator and his emotional responses to the house’s features. Every aspect of the house — be that its location, its windows, walls, or stairwells — is unclear, nightmarish, and seems to exist somewhere just beyond the grasp of the narrator’s understanding. He attempts to make sense of these feelings, but he cannot fully explain the nature of the house: “No portion of the masonry had fallen, and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones” (93). His emotional, uncanny response to these features is what tells him that there is something deeply wrong with the House of Usher.

With a few brief lines, Poe creates an image of a house that is simply dripping with fear itself, as looking “upon the bleak walls — upon the vacant eye-like windows — upon a few rank sedges — and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees” evokes “an utter depression of soul” (90) in the narrator’s heart. Immediately, this house is, in every way, the very image of a Gothic mansion, filled to the brim with frightening imagery and a sense of doom. Much of this imagery is vague and ambiguous, but Alfred Bendixen still argues that “some of Poe’s symbols ... seem quite clear,” as the House of Usher, “with its eye-like windows is clearly an image of the human mind” (37). However, it should be noted that “the vacant and eye-like windows” (Poe 91) are a description provided by the notoriously unreliable narrator, and that, again, this is more of an emotional response than an actual description of the windows. The narrator ponders just what it is that evokes these emotional responses: “It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression” (91). As a result, he attempts to rearrange the view by gazing into the house’s reflection in a nearby tarn, or pool, but this only evokes “a shudder even more thrilling than before” (91). Just as the narrator’s words are vague and ambiguous, he cannot seem to make sense of his own memories.

Continuing into the “‘House of Usher’ – an appellation which seemed to include ... both the family and the family mansion” (92), the narrator finally meets his friend Roderick.

Just as the house is so unsettling to behold, so too is Roderick's appearance: "Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher!" (94), the narrator recalls. This man is close enough in appearance to the memory he has of his childhood friend, but now resembles a ghost more than a man: "The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me" (94). Usher looks to be a man on the brink of collapse. According to Marilyn Chandler, Usher and his family house are mirror images of each other, as the house's fragile, frightening condition "reflects Roderick's physical state to such a degree that the building and the man seem united in a general excess of contagion and disease that has spread beyond Usher's wracked body to walls and windows" (Chandler 54). Evidently, both house and man are sick beyond help. Usher is described as suffering from "a constitutional and a family evil" (Poe 95) that affects not just himself, but has run through his familial line and is found within the walls of his ancestral home.

Inside the house, the evidence of the madness of Roderick Usher grows clearer still, but his madness also provides some insight into what the House of Usher may actually be. While readers and critics may struggle to find any firm meaning within the house, its owner, Roderick Usher, rages against this supposed futility. During the long years he has spent inside its walls, Usher has attempted to diagnose the true condition of his home and its effect on him and his family. Usher believes in "the sentience of all vegetable things" (100), and that his own home is, in some unspecified way, sentient. The narrator, clearly shocked by his friend's belief, recalls Usher's conviction:

Its evidence – the evidence of the sentience – was to be seen, he said, (and I here started as he spoke,) in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent, yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him – what he was. Such opinions need no comment, and I will make none. (101)

While, just like the narrator, Usher cannot be considered to be a reliable source, his conviction is striking, and the narrator himself soon begins to believe there may be something to the house. Scott Brewster argues that the narrator is "[s]usceptible to the delirium wrought by the Usher estate," and begins to believe in Usher's words, as the "seductive logic of Roderick's obsessions grows on the narrator" (487). Brewster also notes that there are doubts

concerning the narrator's sanity, because he is "prey to Roderick's wild influences," and "his narrative authority spins out of control" (488). Thus, the narrator becomes as unreliable as Usher himself, and every detail of the House of Usher falls into doubt.

Towards the end of the story, Usher's sister Madeline — who previously only haunts the background of the text as a frail figure — passes away, and the narrator recalls how he "personally aided [Roderick] in the arrangements for the temporary entombment" (102) of Madeline. She is placed in a vault that is "small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light" (Poe 102), as Roderick and the narrator attempt to ease their grief. However, it is not only grief that they feel. The narrator cannot "reason off the nervousness" (103) that overcomes him, and Roderick has "an evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole demeanor" (104). As their nervousness and hysteria grow into "a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant" (107), the two men come to realize that Madeline is in fact not dead, and that they "*have put her living in the tomb!*" (108); Madeline suddenly appears before them, alive, but with "blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame" (108). Finally, Madeline dies for good, and her brother dies with her, "a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (108). The familial line of Usher ends, and as the narrator escapes their home, their house comes crashing down as well: "my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder — there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters — and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'HOUSE OF USHER'" (109).

## Gothic Minimalism

The purpose of this section is to reconcile *The Fall of the House of Usher* with Charles Crow's definition of the Gothic as "a tradition of oppositional literature" that also "exposes the repressed, what is hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten, in the lives of individuals and of cultures" (*American Gothic* 2). Few would dare to deny that *Usher* is a Gothic story, nor will this study attempt to do so, but it is intriguing to see how it clashes with Crow's definition, as the vague narrative makes it difficult to see what, if anything, is revealed by Poe's short story. It is an effective horror story, and it does feature classic elements of Gothic fiction — such as the supernatural, an imprisoned woman in the form of Madeline Usher, and a frightening, crumbling building — but it still seems slightly at odds with Crow's more

modern definition. However, there is a key to reconciling it with this definition, and it is found in the very structure of Poe's short story.

In their 2009 book titled *Poe, "The House of Usher," and the American Gothic*, Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm dive straight into the story's structure and make convincing arguments in favor of seeing Poe's text as a unique expression of the Gothic — one that happens to be more in line with Crow's definition. Their argument is that *Usher* is not merely a nineteenth-century example of Gothic fiction, but rather a fundamental formula for Gothic storytelling, which boils the Gothic tradition down to its essential, most vital elements. They believe that, in making this formula, Poe "removes the usual plentitude of characters, simplifies the plot to build toward one climactic event, eliminates cultural, national, moral, or political contexts, and virtually invents Gothic minimalism" (12). Furthermore, they add that this "formula he establishes is so simple, yet powerful, that, like a new form of the Gothic itself, it lends itself easily to endless variations and elaborations" (13). With this formula in mind, *Usher's* standing as a Gothic text becomes far more secure, as, although it is still difficult to find any one meaning in the text itself, its structure, or formula, can be seen as an important one to subsequent Gothic works.

Perry and Sederholm elaborate on this further, stating that the story's formula, while "not reducible to a simple definition," offers "a fluid set of variables that includes plot elements, characters, imagery, atmosphere, and psychological overtones" (13). These variables, they claim, spring out of what they think of as the tale's core constituent parts:

an outsider, with psychological problems, comes into a house on the brink of collapse that is full of secrets and traumas from the past and begins to merge with the house, the house becoming a reflection of the outsider's unconscious mind with its secrets, fears and traumas. Thus begins a process of deterioration and collapse that leads to an apocalyptic ending. Adjunct to this structure is an immured or otherwise repressed female. In addition, "Usher" is set in an uncanny dreamland, a place where reality and unreality become blurred. (13)

By doing this, they think of Poe's text as a way to understand other Gothic works, both past and present, and as a way to better understand the Gothic itself, as this narrative, "with its infinite flexibility, has become the model for and basis of endless variations to the present day" (13). Originally, this chapter of my study was originally designed to uncover underlying societal fears in Poe's short story. However, as Perry and Sederholm's work shows, this is

not the true Gothic value of the text. Instead, it is vital to understanding the Gothic itself, as well as the genre's depictions of place. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will turn its attention to *The Fall of the House of Usher* as an essential expression of Gothic place, with Perry and Sederholm's study serving as a springboard for further discussion.

In this light, the House of Usher can be seen as a monument to fear itself, and it provides an understanding of how other stories express their fears through place. Thus, while the story may not be directly oppositional in its content, due to the removal of anything in the way of context, it is essential to understanding how place is a tool for the expression of other Gothic texts' oppositional nature. In Perry and Sederholm's reading, Poe, through his tale, "creates an infinitely complex matrix of horror best read through the spectral, fantastic, and uncanny, the harbingers of troubling uncertainties between life and death, real and unreal, self and other" (17); their reading then uses this matrix to analyze other Gothic texts, which they view as "particularly beholden to" (17) Poe, through the prism of *Usher*.

Here, it is important to distinguish between their reading and the one presented here in this study. Perry and Sederholm treat *Usher* as a kind of Gothic blueprint that is followed by many subsequent texts, as they "examine how Poe continues to point the way for future writers to explore the deepest and most primitive corners of the human mind and heart" (18). In the case of this study, however, there will not be an attempt to chart a direct progression from *Usher* to *The Haunting of Hill House* and *'Salem's Lot*, as these works will instead be treated as their own, separate expressions of Gothic place. Still, *The Fall of the House of Usher* will remain important to bear in mind throughout the rest of the study, even though its formula will not be directly applied to the subsequent chapters.

Where Perry and Sederholm initially focus on the structure of the narrative itself, the remainder of this chapter will revolve around the use of place in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Not just in terms of the House of Usher itself, but also in terms of how the entire short story wraps itself around its location and uses other elements of place, such as weather and nature, to craft a sense of Gothic place. In addition to the decaying house — with its twisting hallways, cold, pressing chambers, and close link to the Usher family's demise — which has already featured prominently in this chapter and will continue to lurk in the background of the other sections, two important aspects of the use of place in the text will be discussed: there is the strange, seemingly unfathomable land in which the house is located, with all the uncertainty of its vague, placeless topography; and there is the alluring, terrifying tarn — a vast, reflective pool — by which the House of Usher so uneasily rests, and whose vast depths eventually consume the entire house. These parts, when viewed in conjunction with Perry and



Sederholm's reading of *Usher* as a Gothic formula, combine to create a truly memorable, confounding, and timeless Gothic place; a place that vividly shows the relationship between the Gothic, as both horror fiction and as oppositional literature, and its fictional places.

### Existing in a Nameless Time and Place?

I have reached these lands but newly  
From an ultimate dim Thule—  
From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,  
Out of SPACE—Out of TIME. (Poe "Dream-Land" lines 5-8)

In this poem, Poe's words echo a sensation that is found in so much of his writing; a sense of placelessness, that his words exist somewhere "Out of SPACE—Out of TIME," separate from reality. As noted by Jeffrey A. Savoye, this is considered something of a trope of Poe's fiction: "While many readers may want to assign tangible roots to Poe's works, Poe himself ardently resists such efforts in works like 'The Fall of the House of Usher' that are set in no particular geographical location and take place in an indistinct time" (98). Allan Lloyd Smith agrees with Savoye, and writes that Poe's "stories of morbid introversion employed stylized Gothic items, such as the ancient house of Usher ... but divorced them from social or historical resonance so that they became symbolist motifs" (168), while Crow describes *Usher's* setting as "the familiar geographically ambiguous Poescape" ("Southern American Gothic" 145). Evidently, Poe's writings can be said to take place a world of their own, in indistinct, vague, and nightmarish places seemingly entirely separate from our reality. This, however, is not the whole story of the location of *The Fall of the House of Usher*; the descriptions of Savoye, Lloyd Smith, and Crow are fitting in terms of discussing the immediate sense of Poe's place, but when seeing it as a Gothic place, these descriptions are somewhat lacking, as they do not truly see what makes the House of Usher, and what Poe's narrator calls "a singularly dreary tract of country" (90) truly Gothic.

For instance, Crow, in the two works of his that have previously been quoted here, contradicts himself somewhat when he discusses *Usher* as a Gothic text. He defines the Gothic "a traditional of oppositional literature" that "exposes the repressed, what is hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten, in the lives of individuals and of cultures" (*American*

*Gothic 2*); meanwhile, he also writes that “the work by Poe that has the greatest resonance for Southern [American] Gothic may be one that has no apparent connection with the South,” and that *The Fall of the House of Usher*, as “an account of the collapse of a house, in both senses, as a dynasty and a structure, would echo through the literature of the postwar South as one of its most powerful images” (“Southern American Gothic” 145). Crow’s reading is a valid one, but it also highlights how this resonance seems to come after the fact, as, arguably, there is little in Poe’s text that points directly to the American South. Therefore, it is not the expression of any one fear that allows for this resonance, but rather the vague nature of Poe’s writing. Again, it is Perry and Sederholm’s reading of the text as a form of Gothic minimalism that really solidifies Poe’s text as Gothic. Without this reading, Poe’s work might be a little too vague to truly be Gothic, at least according to Crow’s definition. When seen as a minimalistic form of the Gothic however, this vague nature allows for a multitude of readings, such as those Crow ascribes to the American South, to resonate. This resonance does not occur due to the presence of precise commentary on the South within the text, but precisely due to the lack thereof; Poe’s Gothic minimalism has room for such readings to resonate, and it the vague story and setting allow both readers and subsequent writers to shape Poe’s text to their own fears.

As a setting, the world presented in *The Fall of the House of Usher* matches Leonard Lutwack’s idea of an a-central place. While it is true that most of the story takes place within the house, the House of Usher and the area that surrounds it remain utterly alien throughout the story. According to Lutwack, a place is a-central when it is “removed from the center by distance or difficulty of access,” and he also adds that “When a strange place may not be easily comprehended as part of the greater world, it is truly a place apart” (44). Poe’s text offers little in the way of contextualizing his location. Instead of first providing a central place and a sense of normalcy, the story begins with the narrator already inside this strange place. It is a heightened version of the a-central place, that seems to exist without any connection to the greater world at all, and the narrator is not interested in relating his journey to any real-world place. Instead, he begins his tale in the following way:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.

(90)

Here, there is no indication of where the house is located, or where the narrator has journeyed from. It is as if entire paragraphs have been clipped from the story's opening, removing any semblance of familiarity, and leaving only this "dreary tract of country" remaining. Returning to Lutwack's words, the effect of this lack of context becomes clear:

Complete separation from the familiar world allows the suspension of the usual environmental conditions in these places and makes possible the purity of their essential nature: absolute good in paradise without even a variation of time or season, absolute evil in inferno, absolute perfection in utopia. (44-45)

Just as the story becomes, as Perry and Sederholm claim, a kind of Gothic minimalism that is free of all extraneous detail and context, the world of Poe's text is allowed to fully express its nature, becoming, to match Lutwack's examples, absolute Gothic.

As strange as this world is, however, some critics also believe that there are, in fact, certain elements in it that indicate that this world is not as separate from our own as it may at first appear. Neil Cornwell believes that "an Anglo-European element remained vital to this style of American [Gothic] fiction through works by Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville" (67), while other critics, like J. Gerald Kennedy, emphasize the importance of Poe's childhood experiences in Britain to his writing. Kennedy suggests that while "[m]any of Poe's most compelling stories conjure an invented, continental Europe, which he had never seen" (71), there are also "a few intriguing exceptions to Poe's usual practices" that indicate that "his childhood years spent abroad left enduring images of England and Scotland" (72). According to Kennedy, several of Poe's stories, including *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Ligeia*, and *The Man of the Crowd*, "represent complicated explorations of the England Poe remembered" (72). This is an intriguing observation, possibly indicating that Poe's literary location is not as removed from the world as it may appear. Certainly, Kennedy provides several pieces of evidence that point to this being the case.

Kennedy's thinking is that, as "young Edgar accompanied his foster parents, John and Frances Allan ... on a voyage to England" in 1815 and stayed there "until the summer of 1820" (72), the effects of this time abroad can be found in the adult Poe's life. Kennedy points to the adolescent Poe's tendency to "read British poetry and fiction to keep alive thoughts of England" (80), and believes that manifestations of these thoughts are present in Poe's later writings, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher*. It is Kennedy's belief that Poe

“probably recalled the [Usher] name from childhood memory,” as a distillery bearing that name “was prominent in Edinburgh in 1815”, and the name “was also common in the Scots Lowlands and had been established in Britain since the eleventh century” (85). As Poe spent time in “John Allan’s home county, Ayrshire, Scotland” (72), Kennedy believes that he encountered the name during his time there. His final piece of evidence is found in the form of a story Poe’s narrator reads to Roderick Usher just before Madeline comes back to life and the house is brought crashing down. “Here is one of your favourite romances,” the narrator tells a distraught Usher, “I will read, and you shall listen; — and so we will pass away this terrible night together” (Poe 105); in an unsuccessful attempt to calm Usher, the narrator reads from an “antique volume” called “the ‘Mad Trist’ of Sir Launcelot Canning” (105). Kennedy sees this volume as a clear reference to English culture, with the name Launcelot Canning referring both to the legendary Arthurian knight and to George Canning, a politician who was “[o]n the rise politically during Poe’s years in England” (86), while the volume’s hero is Ethelred, whose name “recalls the Anglo-Saxon King Ethelred the Unready, who ruled England for four decades” (85).

Kennedy’s evidence is sound, but it is not sufficient to truly alter the character of Poe’s location, which remains a strange, almost placeless land. However, his evidence does tie the place somewhat to real-life locations, and it is perhaps through these little clues that the location of *The Fall of the House of Usher* becomes uncanny rather than utterly alien. It is just familiar enough that it can be related to the real world, and it establishes an eerie sense of place which can then be expanded upon and contextualized by other Gothic works that express more specific fears.

## The Mirror in the Tarn

As he is gazing at the House of Usher, Poe’s narrator wonders just what it is that makes the place so deeply unsettling. He begins to think that “a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression” (91). Aiming to see the house in a different light, he turns his eye to the water by which the house is situated:

I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down – but with a shudder even more thrilling than before – upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows. (91)

Gazing into the mirror in the tarn does not calm the narrator's fears; instead, it intensifies them by showing him an even more terrifying picture of the house. In this mirror, the true decay of the House of Usher briefly reveals itself to the narrator. The sensation shocks him. Although he does not yet understand this, the still, black waters have given him a glimpse of the true nature of the house, and the feelings he previously struggled to explain are given form in this mirror image. With the shocking glimpse of the mirrored house still floating in his mind, the narrator proceeds, finally entering the gloom, fear, and sadness of the House of Usher.

This mirror in the tarn holds the secret to understanding the Gothic place of Poe's tale. It is held up to the Gothic house, and is capable of revealing its true nature. Around this mirror, the location of the text is built, as several of the house's aspects, including its frightening nature, and a peculiar, gloomy atmosphere, are connected to the mirror image presented by the water's reflective properties. In this final section, the mirror in the tarn will be discussed in full, and it will soon become clear that this mirror is the connecting tissue of Poe's use of place, and shows how the tale's Gothic structure is essential to its depiction of place.

The tarn does not simply provide a mirror image of the house. It is also the source of a strange, unsettling atmosphere that pervades the interior of the house as well as its surroundings. Prior to his reunion with his childhood friend, Roderick Usher, the narrator remarks upon an atmosphere that seems to enshroud the house:

I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity — an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn – a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued. (92)

While the narrator does attempt to downplay this as something arising from the workings of his own imagination, his description makes it difficult to envision the House of Usher as

anything other than a decaying, rotting place surrounded by a thick, sickly-colored fog. It is as if the fog covers the pages, wrapping the text and its setting in its noxious fumes, and creating a nightmarish location like no other. Again, this is evident later in the short story, when the narrator remarks upon the peculiar air, describing it as “the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion” (105).

This air does not just affect the view of the house, either. Without exception, the air is felt in the interior of the house as well, shrouding “this mansion of gloom” (91) and its rooms in an inescapable air that seems to consist of sorrow, decay, and fear itself. When the narrator first enters Usher’s chamber, he immediately senses a change in the air of the place: “I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow,” he recalls, noting that “[a]n air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all” (94). By entering this place, the narrator also enters this atmosphere, and with every breath he draws, he allows the atmosphere to fill his lungs and immerse him in the madness of the House of Usher. Marilyn Chandler refers to this air as a “contagion” that “seems to have spread beyond the house to the surrounding countryside”, and notes that its qualities “precisely describe both house and inhabitant” (55). However, Chandler fails to note that the air does not originate from the house. Its point of origin seems to be the tarn itself, as Poe writes that the “atmosphere” about the mansion “had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn” (92). Just as the narrator pulls the air into his lungs when he enters Roderick’s chamber, the house itself inhales this air, and allows it to alter its condition. This breathing, an indication of lifelike qualities, is hinted at towards the end of the story, as “the dark and tattered draperies, which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls” (103). The breath, whether belonging to the tempest or the house itself, acts as a weak set of lungs that draws ragged breaths and pulls the atmosphere of sorrow into the house, letting it enter every fiber of its being. Here, the Gothic seems to be in the form of the very air, and this air rises from the mysterious tarn that surrounds the house.

Throughout the narrative, the strange powers found in the atmosphere of the place is hinted at. Roderick Usher himself believes that his house is sentient, and that evidence of this is seen “in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls” (101). Likewise, the narrator, who observes such an atmosphere early on in the story, but dismisses it as a product of his imagination, also begins to believe that there may be something in the tarn’s waters. While he first reacts with horror to Usher’s claims, his belief in the tarn also grows. This development is best portrayed toward the very

end of the tale, when the narrator attempts to snap Usher out of his delirium: “These appearances, which bewilder you are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon — or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn” (105), he tells Usher. Here, even his attempts at rational explanation give a kind of life to the tarn’s waters.

If we, once again, turn to Charles Crow’s definition of the Gothic as literature that “exposes the repressed ... hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten in the lives of individuals and of cultures” (*American Gothic 2*), it is possible to see the mirror in the tarn as a form of this. When Poe’s narrator gazes into the tarn and sees a twisted mirror image of the house, he sees the true nature of the house. In the mirror, the hidden, unspoken decay of the House of Usher is exposed, and the air that rises from the tarn also changes the house, bringing it ever closer to its doom. Still, as Perry and Sederholm have revealed, Poe’s story does not reveal the truth of any-real world fears. Instead, *The Fall of the House of Usher* is the purest expression of the purpose of the Gothic story. It is the very definition of the Gothic in fictional form, and through the tarn’s mirror, it shows how the Gothic can reveal the true mirror images of societies and cultures, and reveal the truth that lurks behind their façades. Through the Gothic, such mirrors can take many forms, and so can the structures they bring crashing down.

The final part of the mirror’s role is precisely this: to bring the House of Usher crashing down. Foreshadowing what is to come, the narrator mentions a strange, unseen detail in his description of the house. Indicating that he did not notice this while he was there, only adding the detail to his account later, he makes the following observation early on in the text: “Perhaps the eye of a scrutinising observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn” (Poe 93). Although he traces this crack down from the top of the house and into the tarn, it is possible that, just as with the atmosphere of the place, the tarn itself is the source of this crack. Like a crack in a mirror’s glass, it runs through the mirror image of the water and into the actual House of Usher. By revealing the truth behind the house, Poe’s Gothic mirror weakens the house itself, inch by inch until it is no longer capable of supporting its own weight. The truth in the mirror, the decay it shows, becomes one with the actual house. In the end, as the atmosphere around the house — also rising from the water — is whipped into a storm, it works together with the crack to fully destroy the house. The narrator, still in shock from the deaths of Madeline and Roderick Usher, sees a bright light behind him as he is leaving their house, and recalls that “The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon which now shone

vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base” (109). His gaze becomes fixed on the crack the mirror has created, and “While I hazed, this fissure rapidly widened — there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind — the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight — my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder” (109). Finally, then, that once tiny crack manages to tear the entire House of Usher apart, and the story ends as the tarn not only reveals the truth behind Usher, but swallows it whole, as “the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘HOUSE OF USHER’” (109).

## Conclusion

There is much to be learned from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and the sheer breadth of readings it allows for means that it is impossible for this chapter to fully cover the wealth of information hidden within Poe’s story. However, this chapter has shown just how important place is to this Gothic short story, and how Gothic settings can be far more than a mere mansion, house, or castle in which the action takes place.

Although *Usher* does not immediately meet the criteria Crow lays out for Gothic stories, as it does not express any one fear, it is still an intensely Gothic story, as shown by the general uncontested attribution of the term, and by Perry and Sederholm’s work. With their help, this chapter has shown how *Usher* is a microcosm of the Gothic genre, as rather than exposing a particular societal fear, it instead paves the way for the expression of these fears through the Gothic. This reading of the short story shows that place is of vital importance to the Gothic, as it is place that makes the entire story function. This happens not just through the House of Usher, but also through the vague country in which the story is set, and most importantly, through the mirror in the tarn that reveals the truth behind the house and brings it crashing down. In fact, the entire location is built around this tarn, as several essential elements of the story are linked to its waters, such as the mirror image that shows the truth of the house, and the strange atmosphere that seeps into the house, and transforms both building and resident. *The Fall of the House of Usher* shows how place is not just an interesting accessory to the Gothic. Rather, place is an essential part of Gothic fiction’s expression of underlying social fears, as it is a tool that helps reveal the inherent darkness of communities, nations, and people.



## Chapter Two: *The Haunting of Hill House*

### Introduction

After being “adapted very loosely” (Fienberg) into a Netflix miniseries in 2018, Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, originally published in 1959, has seen something of a resurgence in the popular consciousness, thanks in part to the series receiving overwhelmingly positive reviews by both critics and audiences (Rotten Tomatoes). This is a popular consciousness that finds itself in a very different society to that of Jackson’s time, but where her themes still appear to resonate strongly. Although the struggles of feminism and the fight for equality remain ongoing and hugely relevant, there can be little doubt that things have changed massively in the years following the writing of *Hill House*. Because of its publication in the late fifties, it reflects an era of far fewer opportunities for women, and shows how the perceived freedoms of American society are not to be enjoyed by all of its citizens. Through her truly terrifying novel, Jackson expresses a pressing sense of imprisonment and a lack of personal freedom. Much of the narrative takes place inside an old, abandoned mansion known as Hill House. This Gothic house becomes a prison for the protagonist, Eleanor Vance, who travels there in search of opportunity and belonging, but in the end only finds loneliness and death. Depictions of loneliness and entrapment are prevalent throughout the novel, and this chapter seeks to discuss how such fears are expressed through Hill House itself.

While far from obscure, Jackson’s writing is said to have been “underrated and excluded from the literary canon” (Showalter). Darryl Hattenhauer offers “the problem of classification” (7) as a potential reason for this exclusion, as, owing to the narrower definition of the Gothic in the fifties, her work did not fit “into the myth of Southern Gothic” (7), nor was it applauded by feminists, who at the time “asserted self-fashioning over historicism, and looked for role models rather than victims” (8). However, Hattenhauer, writing in 2003, asserts that “Jackson criticism has flourished” (11), and her work has come to be more widely recognized, even if it is not quite part of the literary canon yet. Despite the lack of recognition from some feminists of her time, many now view Jackson as an important, groundbreaking writer. For instance, Lynette Carpenter lists the “causes and consequences of female victimization” as just some of the themes that can be found “throughout her work” (Carpenter 32). In *The Haunting of Hill House*, these themes are prevalent and clearly expressed.

*Hill House* is quite open-ended in terms of the variety of readings it accommodates. For Tricia Lootens, it is a novel that “touches on the terror of [Jackson’s] entire culture” by portraying the nuclear family as destructive rather than a supportive, loving ideal (151), and while elements of the supernatural make appearances, Lootens sees the true horror of Hill House not as “a losing struggle with the forces of the next world, but a brutal, intimate exposure of the ineffectuality of their own dreams” (150). Others, like Graley Herren, emphasize the “erotic undercurrent ... flowing beneath the surface” (6) of the novel, emphasizing that Hill House is both “a queer playground for subversive sexual desires” and “a danger zone where women are haunted, hunted, and consumed” (6). Here, Herren points to one of the great dichotomies in the narrative: the push and pull that the novel presents between hope, desire, and intense yearning on one the hand, and on the other, hopelessness, oppression, and loneliness in a patriarchal and intensely heteronormative world. The novel also allows for psychological readings that explore its blurring of “the line between sanity and madness” (Wilson 114), as a result of the sheer uncertainty of the narrative as presented to the reader.

In all of these readings, the structure of Hill House itself, whether real or imagined, is an inescapable presence in the text. As an instance of the Gothic house, however, Hill House deserves more attention. This chapter will examine how the location of Hill House expresses and amplifies the fears of Jackson’s novel. This Gothic house is a truly frightening place, one that is crafted to create a pressing sense of imprisonment that grows stronger with every page, and in order to fully understand it, there are several factors that must be examined. Following a brief summary of the novel, the next section of this chapter discusses *The Haunting of Hill House* as an expression of the Female Gothic, a form of the Gothic used by women writers to express fears more specific to women. Subsequently, Hill House itself will be discussed, with a particular focus on its sense of imprisonment and enclosed space. Finally, a small section of the novel, where Eleanor Vance drives to Hill House and briefly experiences personal freedom, will be examined. During this drive, Eleanor spends time on America’s highways, which seem to exist somewhere out of place, and for a brief moment, the novel’s pressing sense of fear and imprisonment seems to disappear. However, this section only heightens Eleanor’s shock when she finally reaches Hill House, making its expression of the Gothic fears even more apparent. The aim of this chapter is to show just how essential the Gothic house is to *The Haunting of Hill House*, and how this Gothic text has its own striking spirit of place.

Before this is achieved, Jackson's novel will be summarized briefly. *The Haunting of Hill House* opens with the following passage:

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (Jackson 3)

This chilling passage introduces the place known as Hill House. With these brief lines, a simple house becomes more than the sum of its walls, doors, and materials; it becomes an organism existing somewhere beyond our understanding of reality — a frightening, twisted version of what a house should be. Few, if any, things are explained, but the passage breathes a kind of life into the place, forming an idea that the titular house is something more than it appears. There is a darkness within its walls, and the introductory passage introduces a darkness that goes on to loom over the entire story.

The novel's protagonist is Eleanor Vance, who, in her early thirties, finds herself stuck in a bleak, hopeless situation. A trait of Jackson's fiction is that she uses the Gothic to explore "the violations of the human self – the aching loneliness, the unendurable guilt, the dissolution and disintegrations, the sinking into madness, the violence and lovelessness" (Parks 28), and if there is any one character that embodies these violations, it is poor Eleanor Vance, who thinks of herself as a failure. After spending most of her youth caring for an ungrateful mother, she is at a crossroads as the novel opens. Following the death of her mother, her life now lacks direction. With no friends, no work, and no real future in sight, her life seems destined to fade into long, lonely years. Eleanor's loneliness is conveyed through a single sentence: "Without ever wanting to become reserved and shy, she had spent so long alone, with no one to love, that it was difficult for her to talk, even casually, to another person without self-consciousness and an awkward inability to find words" (Jackson 6).

Eleanor has fallen by the wayside of society, and there seems to be no escape from the lonely, mundane days she spends living in the home of her sister and brother-in-law. Every opportunity for love, friendship, or any kind of happiness has passed her by. That is, until the mysterious Doctor Montague — an eccentric researcher of the supernatural — invites her to stay at an old mansion known as Hill House. To her, this seems to be an opportunity to

finally get away, and, finally sensing a glimmer of hope, she gladly seizes it. “Journeys end in lovers meeting” (37) is a phrase she often repeats to herself, expressing a hope to find some sort of love, friendship, or belonging at her journey’s end. As Jackson writes, “Eleanor, in short, would have gone anywhere” (7), indicating that Eleanor has been waiting for a chance like this for a long, long time.

However, there is no happiness to be found in Hill House. When she first arrives there, she meets Doctor Montague, as well as Luke, whose aunt is the owner of Hill House (9), and Theodora, a charming woman who seems to have everything Eleanor wants in life. The four of them form a strange sort of family at first, but their relationships quickly turn sour. Eleanor soon becomes distanced from the group, as the others grow suspicious of her. Eleanor, meanwhile, growing more and more delirious in the presence of Hill House, begins to identify with the house itself. Near the end of the story, Eleanor is unrecognizable, changed by Hill House: “‘Walled up alive,’ Eleanor began to laugh at their stone faces. ‘Walled up alive,’ she said. ‘I want to stay here’” (229). Hill House, a truly terrifying place, imprisons Eleanor and even makes her want to stay there. What Eleanor hoped would be her ticket to a better life becomes a prison for her, and the story ends with her crashing her car into a tree, ensuring she stays in Hill House forever. The book’s final passage echoes its introductory one: “Within, its walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone” (235); Eleanor Vance has become a part of whatever walks inside Hill House, forgotten and absorbed into its darkness.

## Entrapment and the Female Gothic

From the very beginning, *The Haunting of Hill House* tackles uncomfortable themes. Eleanor’s solitary, confined life and her yearning for more point to difficult, secret aspects of everyday life that rarely see the light of day. As the novel progresses, these familiar yet uncomfortable emotions are then used to craft a haunting, nightmarish place where loneliness and solitude are elevated to feelings of imprisonment, terror, and death. Familiar truths about our societies, in which countless individuals like Eleanor fall by the wayside, are used to craft an intense Gothic world, where the terrifying Hill House serves as an embodiment of this fear.

According to Darryl Hattenhauer, “Jackson often begins with what seems to be mundane and unravels it — shows the character and sometimes the setting as they disintegrate along fault lines of internal contradictions” (3). This is clearly evident in both *Eleanor Vance* and *Hill House*, as they, unrelated though they may seem at first, become drawn to each other, turning Eleanor’s mundane life into a frightening experience, eventually leading to her death in *Hill House*. Furthermore, Hattenhauer writes that “the hallmark of Gothic that Jackson reinscribes most is the motif of entrapment as a figure of power and powerlessness” (5). This motif serves as the backbone of *The Haunting of Hill House*, influencing every interaction Eleanor has with others, and every aspect of the novel’s depictions of place.

If Eleanor is the powerless figure, then *Hill House* is the figure of power. From the moment Eleanor receives Montague’s invitation, *Hill House* is presented as an opportunity for her: “I am going, I have finally taken a step” (Jackson 14), Eleanor thinks to herself as she drives away from her old home. Where there was hopelessness, she sees hope for a new, exciting life; where there was loneliness, she sees potential friendships, and even love. Her hopeful nature sees all of this — hope, love, friendship — in her idea of *Hill House*, the place she envisions in her mind’s eye. To Eleanor, it is a beacon of hope, telling her that there is a way out of a lonely life, even for her. In the end, however, *Hill House*, for all the hope it suggests, only offers Eleanor more sadness, loneliness, and oppression.

*The Haunting of Hill House* can be read as part of a rich tradition of Gothic fiction written by women writers. This is a tradition where a different set of fears, often relating to personal autonomy in oppressive systems, is expressed. For many women writers, the Gothic has been used to express and expose the constricting nature of their patriarchal societies, and this also rings true for Shirley Jackson’s novel. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock describes this tradition as “Female Gothic — that category of literature in which female authors utilize Gothic themes in order to address specifically female concerns” (Weinstock *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women* I). The Gothic is an inherently female genre, as much of its early rise is attributed to Ann Radcliffe and many others writing in her wake, and, as Edward Jacobs observes, “various samples of Romantic Gothic novels suggest that female authors published by circulating libraries dominated the Gothic genre” (54). However, due to the sheer vastness of the Gothic as it is known today, “female Gothic” is an important distinction, as it allows for the discussion of social issues that are particularly felt by women.

Diane Long Hoeveler, for instance, argues that the Gothic is “particularly effective as a means by which female writers can express a variety of political, social, religious, and

sexual critiques” (99). Similarly, Michelle Massé describes Gothic, as written by male writers, as using “woman’s whole body as a pawn: she is moved, threatened, discarded, and lost” (Massé 108), while women writers can turn this tradition around to fully express their own fears. This paints a picture of a genre through which women can convey personal and larger, social feelings of oppression and entrapment, along with the experience of living in societies that try to force them into constricting gender roles.

Shirley Jackson’s fiction fits into this tradition, and *The Haunting of Hill House* clearly expresses, through Eleanor and Hill House, a lack of personal freedom. According to Hoeveler, “Jackson writes out of concern for more than the personal. She is deeply invested in exploring the persistence of evil in communities and institutions” (Hoeveler 109). *Hill House*, therefore, is arguably about more than a character falling victim to a haunted house. That house is itself a monument to fears that are particularly felt by women. It embodies the fear of entrapment, of oppression, and of unfulfilled dreams. These fears are felt throughout Jackson’s novel, but most strongly within the walls of Hill House. Thus, *The Haunting of Hill House* is an example of the female Gothic, and it makes prominent use of place and the Gothic house to achieve this.

A sense of oppression is present from the opening pages of the novel, when Eleanor is first introduced: “She could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life; her years with her mother had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair” (Jackson 6). She has felt trapped all her life, caring for a mother who, seemingly, gives nothing back. She has been forced into this role of carer, and she finds it impossible to break out of this role. What could have been a loving family, even though it was affected by a mother’s illness, has become a prison for Eleanor. Even after her mother dies, Eleanor finds it impossible to break out and start a life for herself, as her sister and brother-in-law continue to infantilize and control her. While they do not mean to be cruel, Eleanor perceives them as being so, and feels as if she cannot do anything for herself. In fact, they seem to act in a manner that continues the mother’s entrapment of Eleanor: when they try to keep her from leaving, the sister says that she is “doing what Mother would have thought best. Mother had confidence in me and would certainly never have approved my letting you run wild, going off heaven knows where, in my car” (11). Leaving for Hill House turns out to be a terrible idea in the end, but from Eleanor’s point of view, this is just another way for the sister — almost acting like the mother’s ghost — to rob Eleanor of her autonomy. She is locked in a situation where there does not seem to be any way for her to achieve a happy life; there are no opportunities for her — no way to make her

own decisions and be anything other than a pawn for others to move. “I am sure Mother would have agreed with me, Eleanor” (11), the sister remarks, ending their conversation.

However, for once, Eleanor refuses to listen. In a desperate act of defiance, she attempts to break free from her entrapment and makes her way to Hill House. However, in this Gothic world, there is no real way out for Eleanor. Hill House does not constitute the escape she yearns for, but turns out to be yet another place where Eleanor is hopelessly lonely and trapped. By leaving for Hill House, Eleanor finally seems to make a decision for herself, but in truth she is still an almost stereotypically Gothic woman, controlled by a series of oppressors: her mother and sister, who despite being women themselves, act as oppressors on behalf of a larger society; Doctor Montague, who invites Eleanor to take part in his experiments; and Hill House itself, which through its dark history and influence lures Eleanor to a horrible fate.

Alongside the sad and lonely Eleanor, however, another female character is presented: the charming, intriguing Theodora. She is introduced as Eleanor’s complete opposite: “Theodora was not at all like Eleanor. Duty and conscience were, for Theodora, attributes which belonged properly to Girl Scouts. Theodora’s world was one of delights and soft colors” (8). In total contrast to Eleanor Vance and her dreary life, Theodora is exciting, spirited, and prone to go on all kinds of adventures, which leads her to Hill House. According to Darryl Hattenhauer, Theodora acts as a double for Eleanor, or mirror version of her: “As Eleanor’s double, Theodora is also Eleanor’s mirror opposite. Theodora expresses Eleanor’s repressed feelings” (163). He goes on to argue convincingly that “Theodora is the projection of Eleanor’s denied self. As Eleanor’s alter ego, she embodies Eleanor’s repressed eroticism and assertiveness” (163). While there is much merit in this interpretation of the doubling, it can also be approached slightly differently. By introducing Eleanor and Theodora’s characters almost simultaneously, Jackson shows us two young women whose lives have taken completely different turns. As doubles, they are two different versions of the same person; Theodora has had opportunities in life and has made the most of them, while Eleanor has had her freedom restricted at every turn. Theodora represents everything Eleanor lacks, and when they meet, it seems as if Eleanor might finally attain such a life for herself. Just as Hill House at first sounds like an opportunity for her, a friendship with Theodora promises to turn her life around.

If these two doubles were to merge into one, Eleanor might finally become a happy person with an exciting, eventful life. At first, this seems like a genuine possibility. The two meet inside Hill House for the first time, and quickly strike a friendly, playful tone:

“Theodora turned with a quick smile and touched her shoulder gently, reassuringly; she is charming, Eleanor thought, not at all the sort of person who belongs here in this dreary, dark place” (Jackson 41). Theodora is a charming, confident person, and when she is with her, Eleanor forgets her shyness and sees some of Theodora’s qualities in herself: “she looked oddly well, it seemed to her as she stood by the long mirror on the wardrobe door, almost comfortable” (44). They both gaze into this mirror, and for a brief moment, it seems as if they are quite similar: “Theodora came over and regarded herself approvingly in Eleanor’s mirror. ‘I feel,’ she said, ‘that in this dreary place it is our duty to look as bright as possible. I approve of your red sweater; the two of us will be visible from one end of Hill House to the other’” (44). Here, Theodora and Eleanor seem deeply connected, as they do not refer to themselves as separate people, but rather speak of “our duty” and “the two of us,” indicating a close relationship, or even a melding of the two mirror images. However, their budding friendship quickly cools, and the confident version of herself that Eleanor sees in the mirror soon fades from the realm of possibility. While the image of the mirror hints at the possibility of merging the lost, lonely Eleanor with the confidence and charm of Theodora, Hill House soon rips them apart from each other, as they grow more distant, even hostile, towards each other.

Sometimes, the cooling of their friendship can be easily explained, such as when Theodora suspects Eleanor of doing some things for attention, while on other occasions the hostility comes suddenly and unexpectedly. At one point, Eleanor realizes “that she had never felt such uncontrollable loathing for any person before” (148) without ever explaining why she feels this way. From wanting to be her friend, or even wanting to be like her, Eleanor begins to feel revulsion at the thought of Theodora; when Theo attempts to gently touch Eleanor again, she recoils, “hating the touch of her” (151). Their relationship soon becomes irreconcilable, and from a perspective of seeing them as doubles of each other, the two of them grow further apart. The qualities of Theodora — such as her charm, happiness, and bright future — become impossible for Eleanor to attain, and she becomes disgusted by Theodora. Instead, she begins to identify more closely with Hill House itself, as she seems to realize that her fate is inevitable. While Theodora is “not at all the sort of person who belongs here” (41), Eleanor begins to think that she does, and at the novel’s end, Eleanor stays in Hill House forever. Therefore, the relationship between these two women is important for the understanding of the themes of the text, as it shows that the house is not a prison for everyone. Instead, it is a prison for the truly vulnerable women like Eleanor, those who have fallen by the wayside of society, and simply do not have the means to break free. With this,



*The Haunting of Hill House* seems to say that, while there are some women in 1950s America who are happy like Theodora, there are many more souls like Eleanor who are trapped in an oppressive, constricting society.

The history of Hill House also helps to confirm the book's standing as a female Gothic novel. As Eleanor and the other characters spend more time in the house, they begin to learn what has transpired there in the past, and once the history of the house is revealed by Doctor Montague, it becomes clear that Hill House is an unsafe place for women. Montague tells Eleanor and the other residents of Hill House that it was built around eighty years prior to their arrival by a man called Hugh Crain (70). Crain built the house for his wife and his family, "where he hoped to see his children and grandchildren live in comfortable luxury, and where he fully expected to end his days in quiet" (70). This, sadly, does not come to pass. Montague continues his story, and offers a clue to the inherent darkness of Hill House:

Unfortunately Hill House was a sad house almost from the beginning; Hugh Crain's young wife died minutes before she first was to set eyes upon the house, when the carriage bringing her here overturned in the driveway and the lady was brought here — ah, *lifeless*, I believe is the phrase they use — into the home her husband had built for her. He was a sad and bitter man, Hugh Crain, left with two small daughters to bring up, but he did not leave Hill House. (70)

From the start, the expected domestic joy of this place has been poisoned by trauma; the death of Crain's wife immediately transforms it into an unhappy place, and it becomes the complete opposite of a happy family home. Subsequent events make the place deteriorate further, and it becomes clear that this is not just an unhappy place, it is also unsafe, especially for women. According to Montague's story, Crain soon marries again, but he "seems to have been — unlucky in his wives. The second Mrs. Crain died of a fall [...]. The third Mrs. Crain died of what they used to call consumption" (71). Little is said about these events, or whether Mr. Crain had anything to do with them; what is evident, however, is that Hill House seems to lead women to unhappy, domestic ends. If the wives of Crain are an indication of this, then his daughters are concrete proof. The Crain daughters outlive their father, but they have to endure an unhappy, controlled upbringing within the walls of Hill House.

Although this is not fully revealed at first, the house's library contains its deepest, darkest secret. In one of the old bookshelves, Eleanor, Theodora, and the others discover a book that contains the truth about Hugh Crain's controlling, abusive nature: "MEMORIES,

*for SOPHIA ANNE LESTER CRAIN; A Legacy for her Education and Enlightenment During Her Lifetime From Her Affectionate and Devoted Father, HUGH DESMOND LESTER CRAIN; Twenty-first June, 1881*” (159). This book, stitched together using a variety of pictures pillaged from various other books, contains a series of moral lessons, or ominous warnings, to one of Crain’s daughters. Alongside an illustration of angels that are “released before they have learned aught of sin or faithlessness”, he asks his daughter to “make it thine unceasing duty to remain as pure as these” (160). Here, he infantilizes her, and wants her to stay as innocent as a child forever. The daughter is his property, and Crain denies her any kind of autonomy. As more of the book is revealed, its images and messages grow more sinister: “Daughter, hold apart from this world, that its lusts and ingritudes corrupt thee not; Daughter, preserve thyself” (160), Crain writes, expressing a wish to keep his daughter apart from all the perceived evils of the world. To Crain, Hill House is the only safe place for his daughters, and his will is the only one that should be obeyed. Illustrating how his will must be followed, a part of Crain’s message has been burned, leaving a cruel warning: “your father has this minute touched the corner of his page to his candle, and seen the frail paper shrivel and curl in the flame” (160). The burnt corner represents what will happen if his will is not obeyed, and Crain adds another visual example to his warning, saying that “as this paper burns in its slight flame so shall your soul burn forever, in a fire a thousandfold more keen” (161) Finally, Crain signs the book with his own blood: “Daughter: sacred pacts are signed in blood, and I have here taken from my own wrist the vital fluid with which I bind you” (162). He turns his controlling wishes into a demand, a ritualistic act that shows just how possessive Crain is.

This desire to trap and control the female body is an essential part of the house’s history, and for women like Eleanor and the Crain daughters, Hill House is like a prison. This Gothic house is far more than a setting; it is a place that is at one with the novel’s Gothic fears, and it helps express the untold evils of domestic American life. The following sections of this chapter will explore how these fears are expressed through Hill House itself.

## Hill House

When Hill House is first seen through Eleanor’s eyes, it is in every way an uncomfortable place: “The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once” (Jackson 31). It evokes the

classic Gothic sense of the uncanny, where “the barriers between the known and the unknown are teetering on the brink of collapse” (Punter 130) and “forms of knowledge which run counter to everyday expectations” (131-132) are encountered. Immediately, Hill House is repulsive, off-putting, and spectacularly unfamiliar, despite taking the well-known shape of a house. In most ways, Hill House resembles a home, with all the required constituent parts in place, but the whole of these parts combine into an uncanny version of a house, as it appears “somehow to have formed itself, flying together into its own powerful pattern under the hands of its builders, fitting itself into its own construction of lines and angles” (Jackson 32). Eleanor also notes that it seems as if “the builders of the house had given up any attempt at style — probably after realizing what the house was going to be, whether they chose it or not” (35). From the ground up, Hill House is portrayed as an evil place, built by human hands, but transformed into something more than what it should be. It is intact enough to resemble the familiar idea of a home, yet strangely slanted and unpleasant in ways that make it a frightening imitation of a home. Hill House has all the makings of a traditional, comfortable home, but its parts are arranged in such a manner that nothing appears natural or safe.

The architecture of Hill House is uncanny, and its location is equally strange, as if it exists somewhere entirely separate from the world Eleanor knows. Returning to Leonard Lutwack’s *The Role of Place in Literature*, this location is an a-central place that is removed from the known world. According to Lutwack, a location is a-central “[w]hen a strange place may not be easily comprehended has part of the greater world,” and when “it is truly a place apart, such as uncharted islands, underground areas reached by hidden entrances, sequestered houses, secret rooms” (44). While there is no magical portal to this place, it is still as if Eleanor has entered a fairy-tale world, albeit one that fills her with revulsion rather than wonder. Hill House is cut off from the rest of reality by the hills that are “piled in great pressing masses” behind it (Jackson 47). Theodora also notices this, as she “can feel those hills pushing in” (114). Clearly, Hill House is well hidden away, like an unwanted secret.

The true nature of Hill House is never fully explained, but as with the history behind it, Doctor Montague — attempting to provide a factual voice in an otherwise vague narrative — offers some possible reasons. He tells Eleanor and the others that “the concept of certain houses as unclean or forbidden ... is as old as the mind of man,” and that “there are spots which inevitably attach to themselves an atmosphere of holiness and goodness; it might not be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad” (65). Montague attempts to give scientific explanations for the emotions caused by the place, and why it makes anyone who

stays there feel so uneasy, but he cannot give any definitive answers, and the novel does not seem willing to fully reveal the secrets of its location. However, Montague comes close to an answer on a few occasions, such as when he voices his belief that “the evil is the house itself,” and that the house is “place of contained ill will” that “has enchained and destroyed its people and their lives” (77). Furthermore, Montague cannot say “whether its personality was molded by the people who lived here, or the things they did, or whether it was evil from its start” (66). What is clear is that the entire place just appears off, in a multitude of ways; even the most insignificant rooms are unwelcoming, including one that “had an unpleasantly high ceiling, and a narrow tiled fireplace which looked chill in spite of the fire” (55).

These unpleasant sensations run through the entire house, but these are merely symptoms of the larger sense of entrapment that is weaved into the place. The fears of the Female Gothic are ever present in Hill House, and it soon becomes apparent that this is a prison for Eleanor and women like her. In fact, the very moment Eleanor sets foot inside it the walls of the place seem to close in around her: “Hill House came around her in a rush; she was enshadowed” (34). Although she does not know it at this point, Eleanor is trapped, and doomed to stay in Hill House forever, as soon as she enters it. Doctor Montague strengthens this sense of imprisonment, as he says that “Hill House has a reputation for insistent hospitality; it seemingly dislikes letting its guests get away” (63). Thus, stepping inside this place results in a form of life imprisonment and a complete loss of agency for its residents. Eleanor, having entered its halls, is now in the care of Hill House, and she soon comes to accept this with quiet resignation:

Eleanor thought wearily that it might be the darkness and oppression of Hill House that tired her so, and then it no longer mattered. The blue bed was unbelievably soft. Odd, she thought sleepily, that the house should be so dreadful and yet in many respects so physically comfortable. (85)

The revulsion and fear Eleanor felt when she first entered Hill House has vanished, replaced by this numb acceptance. This passage shows how Eleanor succumbs to the oppression of Hill House and almost grows to accept it, due to how overwhelmingly constant it is. In the novel, there are several moments where Eleanor and the other characters feel trapped and constricted, as if the walls are closing in around them. An early example of this is seen in chapter II, as Eleanor is unpacking her bags: “When she stood in the middle of the room the pressing silence of Hill House came back all around her” (Jackson 39). Another instance

occurs in chapter III: “When they were silent for a moment the quiet weight of the house pressed down from all around them” (55). These brief moments show how simply being inside Hill House causes a pressing, suffocating sensation, and as Eleanor spends more and more time there, she comes to accept this sensation as inevitable.

A similar sense of enclosed space pervades many of the house’s rooms. Yet again, Doctor Montague explains the house’s features, and how “[s]ome of these rooms are entirely inside rooms,” in which there is no sunlight, “[n]o windows, no access to the outdoors at all” (59). In these rooms, the enclosed space of Hill House becomes even smaller and more constrictive, entirely cut off from the rest of the world. In addition to this, these small, sunless spaces are usually kept separate by the use of doors, which immediately slam shut on their own. These doors create an effect of even smaller, more suffocating spaces that trap the residents of Hill House wherever they go. At first, Theodora suggests that they “ought to make a practice of leaving every door wide open”, but Eleanor reminds her that “[e]very door in this house swings shut when you let go of it” (60). Later, despite making a great effort to keep several doors open, all the doors shut by themselves, as “the hall had returned to itself; all the doors they had left open were neatly closed” (108), showing how shut, enclosed spaces are an essential part of the nature of Hill House. When they discuss these doors, Eleanor appears to accept the nature of Hill House, and almost feels as if she belongs there. Theodora, on the other hand, does not belong, and does everything to keep the doors open and maintain her sense of freedom. By constantly trapping its residents and pressing in around them, Hill House evokes fears found in the female Gothic tradition, like entrapment and a loss of personal autonomy.

This sense of confinement is not the only thing that is wrong in Hill House. Eventually, supernatural, horrifying events soon begin to occur within its walls, and the most notable of these events is also closely linked to Eleanor’s fears and feelings of entrapment. There are several unexplained phenomena inside Hill House, such as a peculiar cold spot that feels like “the doorway of a tomb” (112) and which Montague describes as the “heart of the house” (113). The other characters also hypothesize that there may be simple explanations for such phenomena, by wondering if “what people have been assuming were supernatural manifestations were really only the result of a slight loss of balance in the people who live here” (101), caused by the construction of the house being at strange angles. “Angles which you assume are the right angles you are accustomed to ... are actually a fraction of a degree off in one direction or another” (100).

These strange, but relatively harmless phenomena quickly pale in comparison to later events, especially to one that occurs in chapter IV, that is particularly relevant for the topic here. There, Eleanor is woken by Theodora, who, in her sleepy haze, she first assumes to be her mother: “‘Coming, Mother, coming,’ Eleanor said, fumbling for the light. ‘It’s all right, I’m coming.’ *Eleanor*, she heard, *Eleanor*. ‘Coming, coming’, she shouted irritably, ‘just a *minute*, I’m *coming*’” (120). When she kicks a table as she is trying to get to the door, her thoughts still dwell on her mother: “That is not the table falling, she thought; my mother is knocking on the wall” (120-121). Eleanor attempts to calm herself by detaching this knock from the one that has haunted her so in her previous life: “Not at all like my mother knocking on the wall; I was dreaming again” (121). Together, Eleanor and Theodora endure a horrifying night, as the knocking grows more intense; “[i]t was louder, it was deafening, it struck against the door next to them” (122). Whatever is knocking never enters the room, except in the form of a “sickening, degrading cold” (123) which seeps in through the tiny openings around the door. This cold is reminiscent of the cold spot they encountered in the house previously, the one that Montague referred to as the house’s heart. This cold, beating heart of the house is linked to whatever entity is knocking on the door, and this, in turn, vividly reminds Eleanor of the way her mother would knock on the walls when she needed her.

The knock is a reminder of one of Eleanor’s worst memories, as, although she does not miss her mother, she blames herself for her death: “It was my fault my mother died,” Eleanor reveals to Theodora, “[s]he 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” (201-202). Although Eleanor wants Theodora to think that her mother’s death does not affect her, as her mother “wasn’t very happy” (81), it is made clear that she is haunted by it. After suffering for so long while caring for her, Eleanor is ridden with guilt, as she feels she did not do enough to help: “I’ve wondered ever since if I did wake up. If I did wake up and hear her, and if I just went back to sleep” (202). Eleanor simply cannot escape her past, and it influences every place she goes to. Her feelings of being trapped by her mother turn into guilt, and no matter where she turns, she finds it impossible to break free. The hauntings inside Hill House, these chilling events that should feel so alien to Eleanor, still conjure up unhappy memories of the time she spent caring for her mother. Even when she is asleep dreaming, her mind keeps returning to the feeling of being trapped in her mother’s house. Even inside this terrible, alien place, Eleanor’s mother is a constant presence.

Judie Newman summarizes Eleanor's relationship with her mother thus:

On the one hand she detests the mother's dominance, resenting the loss of her own youth in the forced assumption of the 'mothering' role. On the other, she feels guilt at not having mothered adequately. Both images are internalized so that Eleanor is haunted by guilt as a mother over the neglected child within herself. (126)

Here, Eleanor sees herself as a failure in either capacity, due to her mother's actions as well as her own. In the traditional gender roles envisioned for her, as both daughter and mother, Eleanor has failed to fit in, and by being forced into these roles, she is trapped. Eleanor's relationship with her mother is always present in Hill House. In the novel, the house is referred to as "motherly," in the shape of "embracing chairs and sofas which turn out to be hard and unwelcome when you sit down, and reject you at once" (Jackson 199). Through these motherly qualities, Tricia Lootens reads Hill House as being "furnished with symbols of the destructive power of motherhood" (157), and states that it is "the original womb/tomb" (158) for Eleanor. Despite the mother's death, Lootens extends the qualities of the mother — the entrapment of Eleanor, and their hateful relationship — to the house, and, just as Eleanor's sister continued the mother's entrapment, Hill House does so in an even more intense and destructive manner.

Earlier in this study, Hill House was described as an a-central location, removed from the rest of the world and operating under its own rules. While this may still be the case, the fears Eleanor faces inside its walls are, in effect, the very same ones she already experienced while caring for her mother. While they may be different physical places, both Hill House and her mother's house represent the same entrapment and lack of freedom for Eleanor. In one of her bleak utterances, Eleanor hints that this is a continuous state for her: "I've never been away from anywhere, ... so I suppose I've never been homesick" (Jackson 119). Here, homesickness is an alien concept to her, as she has never really escaped her home, not even after the death of her mother. It is as if she does not register Hill House as an alien place, which may be why she is so quick to accept its rules — such as the closing doors — and let the house enshroud her. This is supported by another passage, where Eleanor seems to dissociate completely and wonder "if she were really here at all, and not dreaming of Hill House from some safe spot impossibly remote" (55). While this does not have to mean that Hill House is a dream, it indicates that the place feels familiar enough to Eleanor for her to still imagine herself at home.

In his study, Darryl Hattenhauer goes one step further by suggesting that the house “gives Eleanor a shock of recognition because it is a figuration of her” (159), and adds that “the house’s foundation and construction allegorize Eleanor’s psychological foundation” (159). There is merit to this reading, and while this study does not seek to answer just what Hill House is, Hattenhauer’s thoughts do at least suggest that Eleanor’s previous experiences are closely linked to what she experiences inside Hill House, whether real or imagined.

However, such readings must take care to avoid suggesting that Hill House is unimportant to the narrative. While it is true that Eleanor already knows some of the typical fears of the female Gothic genre, such as entrapment, controlling figures, a lack of autonomy, and repressed sexuality, these fears are given an intense, nightmarish form in Hill House, which in the end, consumes and traps Eleanor Vance forever. “I want to stay here” (Jackson 229), she says near the end of the novel. Having felt trapped her entire life, she finally sees no other option than to stay in Hill House forever.

### Placelessness and a taste of freedom

Within the bleak pages of Jackson’s novel, there is one brief section that offers Eleanor a moment of respite from the sense of imprisonment that pervades her life, and also contains an important aspect of *The Haunting of Hill House*’s use of place. It occurs just after Eleanor has finally decided to leave for Hill House. In a rare act of defiance, she goes against her sister’s will — and, by extension, her mother’s — and takes their shared car, setting out for Hill House. “I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step” (14), she thinks to herself, elated by her action. Finally, she does something for herself, of her own will, and she finally enjoys a taste of the freedom that she has been denied her entire life. In this one, brief section of the book, Eleanor Vance is free. Free of all sense of imprisonment, free of her past, free of all the places that can hurt her. She finally has a place where she can exist on her own terms, and where she is in control: “the car belonged entirely to her, a little contained world all her own” (15); a world that is free of everything Gothic, where the fears expressed in the rest of the text cannot enter. The few hours she spends on the road give Eleanor the freedom she has yearned for her whole life, and during this drive, she finally allows herself to dream.

On the road, all fears seem to vanish. Eleanor is “free of the city,” and with “her destination vague,” her journey blurs into a “passage of moments” (15). With this freedom from the city, and from her sister’s home, any notion of place is also blurred, replaced by a



calm, open sense of placelessness. While Eleanor is, of course, on her way to her doom, Hill House itself, and all the fears it embodies, fades from existence during this drive: “[t]he journey itself was her positive action, her destination vague, unimagined, perhaps nonexistent” (15-16); in the little world of possibilities created by her car, Eleanor’s mind is completely free from Hill House and everything it represents. Hattenhauer, meanwhile, presents a different view of the way Eleanor’s mind wanders during this journey, and he states that “Eleanor lives in her childhood world of fairy tales, imagining enchanted gardens as she drives through the country” (Hattenhauer 157), while he otherwise pays relatively little attention to this section. It is true that Eleanor dreams herself away on this journey, as her imagination lets her experience things that are otherwise out of reach to her. For example, she imagines another life for herself, in a pleasant, almost magical house: “in these few seconds I have lived a lifetime in a house with two lions in front” (Jackson 17). By imagining this life, even houses, which are so terrifying in the rest of the story, become peaceful and free of all Gothic qualities. Having an imagination such as this may be somewhat childish, but it also shows just how free her mind is in this one part of the novel. For once, her thoughts and dreams are truly good, and Eleanor is finally allowed a taste of a life she cannot possibly reach in the real world.

During her journey, Eleanor sees another glimpse of what she has lost. She stops at a restaurant, where she sees a little girl who is refusing to drink her milk unless she gets her special cup with stars on it. The girl’s mother explains that the cup “has stars in the bottom, and she ... calls it her cup of stars because she can see the stars while she drinks her milk” (20). Watching from a distance, Eleanor silently urges the girl to refuse to drink from another cup: “insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again; don’t do it” (20). As with most aspects of the novel, the encounter with the girl could just be a product of Eleanor’s imagination, but is still an important one. It shows how Eleanor is desperate for any kind of freedom or small joy, and how she does not wish for anyone to have their autonomy taken away. Eleanor, with everything she has lost, still yearns for her own cup of stars. The stop at the restaurant also shows how Eleanor’s unpleasant thoughts return as soon as she gets out of her car, as the fears of being trapped or controlled are constantly present in her head when she is in the real world. Only in the placeless fairy-tale world of her car is Eleanor truly free.

Eleanor’s little journey is a welcome moment of rare beauty in the bleak world of Jackson’s story. It is also a heartbreaking look at everything that has been taken away from Eleanor, and countless women like her, by an oppressive society. In her car, Eleanor is free

from this society, and from everything represented by Hill House. As the evil place fades away, so too does the evil it represents. At one point, she notices that she is going “too fast and might reach Hill House too soon” (18), so she reduces her speed in order to stay in the peaceful realm of her car a little longer. When Eleanor finally does reach her destination and returns to the real world, the crushing sense of place hits her like a truck: Hillsdale, the little town that hides Hill House, “was upon her before she knew it, a tangled, disorderly mess of dirty houses and crooked streets” (22). She snaps out of her reverie, and the presence of Hill House grows more intense from this point on. In the end, the break from place offered by the road only serves to intensify the Gothic spirit of place, as Eleanor’s sudden return to reality shows just how strongly the uneasy Gothic fears of the novel are expressed through Hill House.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown how *The Haunting of Hill House* uses place to express societal fears. Hill House is a spectacular location, and Jackson uses it not just to frighten her readers, but also to accentuate the feeling of hopelessness and entrapment experienced by her main character, Eleanor Vance. As an example of Female Gothic fiction, it turns the fears and uncertainties of American women, especially those of Jackson’s time, into a tale of horror, imprisonment, and a lack of autonomy. These fears find striking expression through the places of the novel, through Hill House itself, but also through the home of Eleanor’s mother. Still, the titular house is the primary expression of the Gothic, and the fears grow intense in and around Hill House. It has a dark history, in which Hugh Crain, who had the house built, lost several wives and slowly turned insane, controlling and confining his daughters to solitary lives within the house. Jackson’s descriptions of it reflect this sense of it being a prison, as its rooms are often without sunlight, and its doors continually slam shut on their own, constantly keeping its residents locked inside enclosed, choking spaces. The sense of imprisonment is not limited to Hill House, either, as it is also found in the other places of Eleanor’s life, such as her mother’s house and her sister’s home. It is when Eleanor reaches Hill House, however, that this feeling is intensified. All the hopelessness she has already felt becomes even stronger within the haunted house, and Shirley Jackson shows just how intense the fear of being locked away and robbed of one’s rights can be. *The Haunting of Hill House* is a truly Gothic story, one that would not be as frightening or effective if its themes were not

so closely linked to its locations. This is an example of what the Gothic spirit of place is: a close link between place and the Gothic, and a sense that societal fears permeate every aspect of a place.

## Chapter Three: *'Salem's Lot*

### Introduction

Originally published in 1975, *'Salem's Lot* is one of horror icon Stephen King's earliest novels. Featuring certain now-familiar King tropes — like the small-town Maine setting that has “so strongly shaped” King's work (Magistrale "Stephen King" 213) and a writer-protagonist, like *The Shining*'s Jack Torrance (Sears 211) — it may at first appear to be a relatively straightforward vampire novel, where a town is overrun by fanged monsters with a thirst for blood and a fear of crucifixes and sunlight. According to Tony Magistrale, King's novels feature “traditional Gothic tropes, such as the haunted house, revenants, monsters, and other supernatural phenomena [that are] juxtaposed with contemporary social issues” (“Stephen King" 213), while Charles Crow describes him as a “vastly popular Gothic writer” (*American Gothic* 179). However, perhaps due to the sheer amount of novels King has written, *'Salem's Lot* sometimes seems to be relegated to a footnote in discussions of its main source of inspiration, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. For instance, Charles Crow refers to it as “a homage to *Dracula*” (*American Gothic* 179), while Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock thinks of it as an “updating” of Stoker's 1897 novel (“Introduction: The American Gothic" 5). It is by no means ignored, but it has perhaps not been as thoroughly discussed by Gothic critics as some of King's other works, such as *The Stand* or *The Shining*.

However, there are some critics who have investigated *'Salem's Lot* in detail. One of these is John Sears, who in *Stephen King's Gothic* describes the novel's plot as “the triumph of Gothic horror's other over the domestic banality of King's small-town world and the fulfilling of Gothic's promise of destruction” (196). Furthermore, Sears writes that the novel concerns “the failure of social fabrics and of neighbourliness” (156), and that it uncovers this through an exploration of secrecy and “closed, concealed spaces within the novel's complex social world” (70). Sears' study is thorough, but the social world of *'Salem's Lot* is worth investigating further, as, beneath the novel's surface, there is a complex Gothic narrative that both plays with genre conventions and makes extensive use of them — especially the Gothic house known as the Marsten House — to create a vivid sense of place in the town called 'salem's Lot.

The novel centers around Ben Mears, a writer who, after a long absence, returns to ‘salem’s Lot — short for Jerusalem’s Lot — in search of inspiration. As he only spent a short time there as a child, Ben’s memories of the place mostly consist of vague, hazy recollections that are more nostalgic emotions than specific memories. His quest for inspiration leads him back home, even though he questions what he has to gain from returning there: “What was he doing, coming back to a town where he had lived for four years as a boy, trying to recapture something that was irrevocably lost?” (King 16). This suggests that his entire plan is as hazy as his memories of the town. The haze suddenly lifts from his mind when Ben approaches the outskirts of the town and sees something that snaps everything back into place for him: the Marsten House:

From here the town was not visible. Only the trees, and in the distance, where those trees rose against the sky, the peaked, gabled roof of the Marsten House. He gazed at it, fascinated. Warring emotions crossed his face with kaleidoscopic swiftness. ‘Still here,’ he murmured aloud. ‘By God’. He looked down at his arms. They had broken out in goose flesh. (King 17)

This chilling sensation caused by the Marsten House introduces the town, and it also serves as the framework for understanding the darkness that turns out to exist in the town. Unlike some Gothic houses, Shirley Jackson’s Hill House, the Marsten House is not the primary setting for this novel. Instead, it is an inescapable presence that looms over the town, scarring the otherwise sleepy idyll of ‘salem’s Lot.

In the town, Ben comes to meet a range of characters, some quirky and only mentioned briefly, while others become essential to his time in ‘salem’s Lot. One of the first people he meets is Susan, who quickly falls in love with Ben but is later tragically transformed into one of the town’s vampires. Other important characters include Matt, a high school English teacher with an interest in vampires and folklore, and Mark, a young boy who is obsessed with all kinds of monsters and vampires. Together, they face the nightmare that arrives in the form of Mr. Straker and Mr. Barlow, who move into the Marsten House under the guise of running a “perfectly ordinary furniture business ... [w]ith a line of rather special antiques for collectors” (King 68). Following their arrival, mysterious disappearances start to occur as the people of the town are turned, one by one, into vampires. The entire fabric of Jerusalem’s Lot is unraveled by the vampires, and the novel ends as Ben and young Mark, the only survivors, set fire to the town: “In the small clearing overlooking the power lines, the

fire in the brush began to burn more strongly, urged by the autumn wind that blew from the west” (451). Though the ending is quite open, it is clear that ‘salem’s Lot cannot be saved. The little town has been overrun by darkness, and there is no longer any peace to be found there.

Despite all the obvious horror caused by the vampires, however, the true fear of the book is found in the town itself. It is not in the vampires that arrive, but in the evil already present there. As noted by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, the vampire “Barlow is in effect the materialization of the peevish and petty immorality already present in the town” (“Introduction: The American Gothic” 5). Rather than being a story about a pure society corrupted by a foreign evil, ‘*Salem’s Lot* exposes the evil present even in the smallest, sleepest towns of America. This chapter will explore how the novel uses place — both the Marsten House and the town itself — to express fears about small-town America. In the chapter’s first section, the Marsten House is the center of attention. This house, and the fear Ben Mears associates with it, introduces the town, and while little of the novel takes place inside it, the house is essential to discussing the book as Gothic fiction. Evil rests inside the Marsten House, and it also acts as a monument to the inherent evil of the rest of the town, and as a constant reminder of what kind of place Jerusalem’s Lot actually is.

Following this, the chapter will discuss ‘*Salem’s Lot* in the context of the Gothic tradition, and how it can be seen as a form of social commentary that exposes hidden and repressed fears about small-town America. Here, the novel’s connection to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is also discussed, as King uses one of the most iconic figures of the European Gothic to tell his own American Gothic story.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the findings regarding the Marsten House and the novel’s Gothic traits will be used to discuss the way the town of ‘salem’s Lot is mapped out. Through constantly shifting perspectives that tell the stories of many denizens of the town, the novel reveals a darkness that is present in the place and its people. This results in a unique expression of Gothic fears, as the Marsten House is the Gothic house of this narrative, and around it, a sprawling Gothic town is created. Together, these sections aim to paint a picture of just how ‘*Salem’s Lot* uses place to express its Gothic fears, in order to show just how versatile the American Gothic can be regarding its various representations and uses of the Gothic house.

## The Marsten House

Even before the town becomes visible, the Marsten House, towering over Jerusalem's Lot, reveals itself to Ben Mears. It is through the lens of this house, as well as Ben's history with it, that the town begins to present itself. By returning to the town, Ben is forced to confront his own personal trauma, a painful memory of the Marsten House, in addition to the emerging threat of the vampires Barlow and Straker, who have taken up residence in the house. Layer by layer, the history of the house is uncovered, as Ben begins to realize just what he saw inside the house during one fateful childhood day.

However, before discussing Ben's childhood memory, it is necessary to briefly explore the history of the Marsten House, as understanding its place in the consciousness of 'salem's Lot is necessary for understanding how the house is used to convey the hidden truths of the town. For the people of 'salem's Lot, the Marsten House is a shameful but intriguing secret, and its history is something of a whispered legend. The house is named after its owner, Hubert Marsten, who, according to town legend, began to lose his mind and retreat more and more into his house. According to Ben, during "the ten years between the fall of the market and the rise of Hitler, Marsten and his wife lived in their house like hermits" (King 37). Their house, high up on a hill simply known as Marsten's Hill, from which it looks out toward the town (18), is in full view from many different parts of the town, making it a constant presence in the minds of the townsfolk, no matter how much they try to ignore it. Unlike Hill House, this place is not hidden away. Instead, the haunted house is imposingly visible, placing the darkness and fear of 'salem's Lot in open view of the entire town.

In certain ways, Hubert Marsten himself is not a prominent character in the story. Having been long dead when Ben Mears was a boy, he remains dead throughout the story. However, just as his house stares at the town from the top of its hill, Marsten's past casts a long shadow over Jerusalem's Lot. Although the horrific events that occurred in hours are many years in the past, "small towns have long memories and pass their horrors down from generation to generation," which has made "the story of Hubert Marsten and his wife, Birdie, ... the closest thing the town had to a skeleton in the closet" (37). The townsfolk tell themselves that both Marstens were found dead inside the house, both victims of Hubert, who "had been a full-fledged Loony" (King 39). This story, horrific as it may be, is only the version of the tale that 'salem's Lot's inhabitants collectively tell themselves. Hubert Marsten is written off as a "Loony", and even the legend itself is, in a way, used to paint the town in a positive light: by treating the Marsten House and its history as one of the only bad things

about the town, they write it off as nothing more than aberration and a freak occurrence in an otherwise peaceful town. Thus, the true ugliness of both Marsten and the town itself are allowed to go unnoticed, which eventually leads to the destruction of 'saalem's Lot.

The town's destruction arrives in the form of the vampire Barlow, who quickly turns the people of the town into vampires. However, Barlow does not simply arrive out of nowhere. It is revealed that Hubert Marsten enjoyed a "twelve years' correspondence" (227) with Barlow — going by another name — before his death. Marsten "burned each and every letter ... feeding them to the fire one at a time, watching the flames blacken and char the thick, cream-colored paper and obliterate the elegant, spider-thin calligraphy," and this was no mere hiding of evidence, as "he was smiling as he did it" (227). The act is a ritualistic one, and together with the deaths of Marsten and his wife, the burning of the letters transforms the Marsten House into something more than a simple home. It becomes a place of evil, and it summons Barlow, who, when he first reveals himself to one of the townspeople, claims to "have come here, to a town which was first told of to me by a most brilliant man, a former townsman himself, now lamentably deceased" (King 252-253). Barlow then makes the Marsten House his lair, completing Marsten's ritual. Still, although the evil of Marsten and Barlow would be enough to ruin any place, the end of 'saalem's Lot is not merely the result of their presence. The town itself helps create the true evil of the house, and with his arrival, Barlow only helps reveal what is already present in Jerusalem's Lot.

The idea of the Marsten House being something more than an evil place is slowly expanded upon as the novel progresses. A central element is Ben Mears' childhood trauma inside the house, as he is the one who first hypothesizes that there must be something more to the house. Arising from the local children's use of the Marsten House as a fun horror story, Ben's memory of the Marsten House is an immensely traumatic one. Recalling his youth, Ben remembers that the house was something of a legend for the local boys, a place to tell scary stories about, or to enter on a dare. For Ben, however, such a schoolboy dare turned into trauma and a glimpse of the evil lurking behind the façade of 'saalem's Lot. "We were all going up to the Marsten House," he tells a frightened Susan, "and I was supposed to bring something out" (King 40). Ben then recalls how he entered the house, and how, wanting to prove his bravery to the other boys, kept going further and further into the Marsten House:

I crept up the stairs, a little kid nine years old, scared shitless. The house was creaking and settling around me, and I could hear things scuttling away from me on the other side of the plaster. I kept thinking I heard footsteps behind me. I was afraid to turn



around because I might see Hubie Marsten shambling after me with a hangman's noose in one hand and his face all black. (41)

Clearly, the memory haunts Ben, with even the sounds of the house making lasting marks on his mind, as his vivid descriptions indicate that he has retraced his journey up the Marsten House's steps again and again. As she listens to Ben telling his story, Susan notices a change in his face, which becomes "set in the long lines of a man who was traveling a hated country he could not completely leave" (41). Finally, Ben comes to the end of his story, as he reveals "[t]he truth of what a nine-year-old boy saw and what the man remembers twenty-four years later," acknowledging that he cannot quite say whether this is a real memory, even though the sight of Hubert Marsten is burned into his mind: "Hubie was hanging there, and his face wasn't black at all. It was green. The eyes were puffed shut. His hands were livid . . . ghastly. And then he opened his eyes" (42). He cannot be sure if this really happened, but the memory itself is real to Ben, and it is obvious that it still affects him.

Because it is such a vivid memory, Ben attempts to understand just what the memory is, and he has a striking hypothesis, thinking that "there may be some truth in that idea that houses absorb the emotions that are spent in them, that they hold a kind of . . . dry charge" (42). If this is the case, the house may have absorbed the ritualistic evil of Hubert Marsten, and Ben may have caught a small glimpse of this evil being discharged when he was a small boy. Here, a clear connection between history and place is established, as is the idea that there is a certain power in houses that gives them the ability to absorb the emotions around them. Later on in the book, the hypothesis is affirmed by Matt Burke, the English teacher, who has arrived at a similar idea as Ben, since they have "read the same books" (217). Matt's hypothesis is almost identical, as he speculates that "the Marsten House may have become a kind of evil dry-cell; a malign storage battery" (217). Susan, on the other hand, is of the belief that "[h]ouses are only houses," just static things unaffected by any act or emotion, as "[e]vil dies with the perpetration of evil acts" (217). Here, Ben and Matt touch upon the very idea of what the Gothic house is. After all, such houses are not frightening due to any kind of specific architecture; instead, they are made frightening by ghosts, hauntings, and a sense of history. In this manner, all haunted spaces are like batteries that absorb and store the evil of the past.

This notion is fundamental to the Marsten House's relationship with the rest of 'salem's Lot as well. If it does indeed act like a battery, as Ben and Matt claim, then it does not only store the emotion of Marsten's act. Throughout the novel, the house is portrayed as a

kind of watcher of the town, and while it does not have a full conscience or a voice, it seems to constantly watch the goings on of the town. As a battery, then, it should also be able to absorb the evil and emotion present in the entire town. Perhaps the most provocative indication of this is found in chapter five, when Ben and Matt are discussing the house's place in the town. Ben, finally finding the words to express "an idea that had been lurking below the level of his consciousness from the day he had arrived back in town" (King 134), seems to finally have figured out what the Marsten House is. "It stands on that hill overlooking the village like — oh, like some kind of dark idol," Ben says, and Matt agree with this claim, replying that "The Marsten House has looked down on us all for almost fifty years, at all our little peccadilloes and sins and lies. Like an idol" (King 134). If the house is up there watching, it must also be able to act like a battery from this place. Possibly brought to a kind of life, or un-life, by the evil acts of Hubert Marsten, his house keeps watching the village long after his death. From its hill, it is able to keep absorbing every little evil act in 'salem's Lot, accumulating the town's history within its walls.

Later, in a chapter from one of the townspeople's point of view, the feeling of the house keeping watch over the town is reinforced:

Perfect elevation and a very nearly 360° view of the township itself. It was a huge and rambling place, and with the shutters closed it took on an uncomfortable, overlarge configuration in the mind; it became a sarchophaguslike monolith, an evocation of doom. And it was the site of both suicide and murder, which meant it stood on unhallowed ground. (King 350-351)

As well as noting the "unhallowed ground" of the house, and the "360° view" this ground offers the house, this section highlights another vital part of the house's design: its shutters. In this instance, the shutters are closed, shielding the windows from the rest of the town. There are several mentions of windows and shutters found in King's novel. Early on, just after Ben has finished telling Susan about his traumatic memory of the house, it is as if the house comes back to life. "Look at the Marsten House," she said. He did. There was a light on up there" (44). The light indicates that there is something going on in the house, and the lights are mentioned again just a few pages later, as Ben looks up and notes that the same "lights up there were still on" (46).

Were it not for thinking that the house is a kind of watcher or observer, these lights would perhaps not be so significant. However, this is changed by how the windows are often

likened eyes, and the shutters as eyelids. For example, Ben looks at the house and notices that “[t]wo of the fallen shutters had been replaced, too, giving the house a secretive, blind look that it had not possessed before” (75), making the windows act like eyes, and when the shutters are closed, these eyes are closed off from ‘salem’s Lot. Several subsequent mentions of eyes, blindness, as well as previous mentions of the house having a good view of the town, make it clear that the house relies on sight to observe everything going on in the town. It is not as mechanical as Ben and Matt make it sound when they refer to it as a battery. Instead, it is a presence, something near-sentient that is always watching. Another example of this presence is seen as Ben once again looks up at the house and, almost delirious, tells himself that though the shutters are closed, “they would open up later on”, and, certain of the truth behind his thoughts, he repeats himself: “[t]he shutters would open after dark” (92). Ben seems sure that the house comes to life at night, when the people of the town think they are hidden away from its gaze. At night, the house can keep acting like a battery, absorbing every little secret of the town. Finally, and perhaps most frighteningly, Ben reveals that he occasionally sees something, more than glowing windows: he calls it “the face of evil — the really monstrous face — that I sometimes think I can see buried in the outlines of that house” (128). With this, there can be no doubt that there is something more to the Marsten House. If Ben’s word can be trusted, then this house is given certain life-like qualities and looming, watchful eyes that can see and absorb the emotions of the town. There is no hiding from the Marsten House.

Its watchful nature becomes even more clear when, as she is approaching the house, Susan is frightened by “the sight of an ordinary house with its shutters closed” (278). However, walking up to the windows, she notices that “most of the shutters had broken slats” (279). Thus, it becomes clear that these shutters never actually hide the windows, and the house is, at all times, able to peek out through its shutters, even when they are closed. From a distance, the shutters give a false sense of comfort. It allows the townsfolk to think that the house is dormant, while in reality, it is always peering out from behind its shutters, watching and absorbing every action and secret of ‘salem’s Lot.

The interior of the Marsten House also has thematic significance and often serves to show how an American house can carry on the legacy of the classic Gothic castles originally found in the works of writers like Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, featuring twisting corridors, dark passages, and countless secrets. With Ben and Matt’s hypotheses about the house being a battery in mind, it is clear that the Marsten House has been changed by what has transpired in and around it. Town legend states that “Marsten got four daily papers”

delivered to his house: “*The Saturday Evening Post*, *The New Yorker*, and a pulp magazine called *Amazing Stories*” (38). These papers, full of all kinds of stories, were allowed to accumulate inside the house. A description of the house’s interior shows how these stories were absorbed into the very structure of the house, dramatically changing it: “Hubert Marsten’s house was a piled, jumbled, bewildering rat’s nest of junk, scavenged items, and narrow, winding passageways which led through yellowing stacks of newspapers and magazines and piles of moldering white-elephant books” (39). With this fascinating act of renovation, the interior of the Marsten House resembles a cavernous Gothic castle more than a house. Time, history, and all kinds of stories discussed by these papers have altered the house. Here, the Gothic house is a living, changing thing that is deeply affected by what transpires in and around itself. If the Marsten House is like a battery, its wicked energy must come from somewhere, and as this example illustrates, it is evident that it was changed by more than just the evil of Hubert Marsten. It is through the town’s actions, and those of all of America, that the house becomes truly Gothic. In the Marsten House, history, secrets, and fear have been allowed to accumulate, leaving the house utterly changed and unrecognizable.

During the brief moments the book actually spends inside the Marsten House, the evil of the house becomes intense, almost suffocating for the novel’s characters. In one scene, two men are making a delivery to the house. As they approach it, the house seems “to lean toward them, as if awaiting their arrival” (101). What follows is a brief, intense journey into the frightening, dark, and cold cellar of the house. As the rational, adult mind attempts to calm itself by reiterating that a house is nothing more than its constituent parts and materials, and that to “feel that each splintered crack was exhaling its own aroma of evil” (101) belongs only in a “childlike, dreamy” (101) mind, it is made clear that the Marsten House is a truly evil place. The house is also given hellish qualities, as, bathed “in the red glow of the truck’s taillights, the shallow stone steps seemed to lead into hell” (101). When, much later in the narrative, Mark and Susan enter the house, this cellar once again emanates true evil:

The [cellar] door was open just a crack, and the light did not penetrate at all. The tongue of darkness seemed to lick hungrily at the kitchen, waiting for night to come so it could swallow it whole. That quarter inch of darkness was hideous, unspeakable in its possibilities. (302)

This passage hints at the concentration of evil present in the Marsten House, that is just waiting to be unleashed. The combination of the terrible acts committed inside the house and

what it has observed in 'salem's Lot has turned the house into a place completely saturated with evil. King's dry-cell battery is a potent place of power, and with all the evil this battery has absorbed, it seems "to almost ooze evil from the cracked pores of its paint" (351).

Although very little of the novel actually takes place inside this house, the Marsten House is a presence throughout the text. This presence is constantly peering over King's pages, making itself known in every thought, and every conversation in Jerusalem's Lot. It is a variant of the Gothic house, and around it, Stephen King builds a truly Gothic location. In '*Salem's Lot*, the Gothic spirit of place emanates from this one house, and the sleepy little town in its vicinity cannot escape its presence.

### Small-town Gothic

One night over supper I wondered aloud what would happen if Dracula came back in the twentieth century, to America. "He'd probably be run over by a Yellow Cab on Park Avenue and killed," my wife said. That closed the discussion, but in the following days, my mind kept returning to the idea. It occurred to me that my wife was probably right – if the legendary Count came to New York, that was. But if he were to show up in a sleepy little country town, what then? (King "Inspiration")

On Stephen King's official website, this little anecdote is listed as his inspiration for writing '*Salem's Lot*. Replacing Stoker's Dracula, King's twist on this "legendary Count" is Barlow, an ancient vampire who claims to have been old "when [the Catholic Church's] members hid in the catacombs of Rome" (King 355). While Weinstock refers to the story as "Stephen King's updating of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" ("Introduction: The American Gothic" 5), and King himself playfully says that he is simply moving the Count to small-town America, they are both underestimating the complexity of the transposition of Dracula in the novel. King has not simply exchanged the Carpathian mountains and Victorian London of Stoker's novel with a New England setting. Instead, he has moved Count Dracula to a world that is saturated with stories about, well, Dracula. According to William Hughes, "The eponymous anti-hero of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel has become *the* reference point to which the characteristics of other vampires are judged to have adhered, or to have departing from," before adding that the Count "has thus ceased to be merely a fictional character" (197). Similarly, Baldick and

Mighall believe Dracula to be a hugely versatile character, as “His protean nature and almost complete silence mean that he can be fashioned into a variety of forms” (280).

In King’s fictional world, it is not Stoker’s exact version that arrives, but rather a version of the legendary Count. His vampire is the icon itself — the idea of vampire that Dracula has become synonymous with — found in countless pop-cultural forms, and some of these expressions are referenced throughout the novel. For example, Susan “has seen enough Hammer films at the drive-in on double dates to know that you had to pound a stake into a vampire’s heart” (276), while young Mark’s obsession with vampires actually saves the day on multiple occasions. When one of the vampires Barlow has created asks to be invited into Mark’s room, he turns to his favorite stories for help: “*Of course. You have to invite them inside.* He knew that from his monster magazines, the ones his mother was afraid might damage or warp him in some way” (257). This knowledge saves his life, as the magazines teach him not to invite vampires inside. Later, Susan asks Mark, “[h]ow do you know so much?” to which the young boy simply replies, “I read the monster magazines ... and go to see the movies when I can” (299). Stephen King’s version of Dracula, then, is far more complex than it would appear at first; it is hugely intertextual, mixing Stoker’s Count with the iconic vampire that is found in countless forms of film and writing, in pulpy magazines, and in all forms of culture.

Although King celebrates the icon of Gothic horror that is Dracula, his own novel is also a deeply Gothic one, one that explores the relationship between history and the stories that communities tell themselves. Just as the vampires from Hammer Horror movies and monster magazines come to life, the history of ‘saalem’s Lot and the traumas of the past that have been turned into simple stories for the townsfolk return to terrorize and reveal the true darkness of the town. “The Gothic insists that humans are flawed and capable of evil, and that the stories we tell ourselves in our history books may leave out what is most important for us to understand,” Charles Crow argues (*American Gothic 2*), and the people of Jerusalem’s Lot embody this aspect of the Gothic.

In Jerusalem’s Lot, people are obsessed with stories, especially gossip. As it is a novel from the 1970s, this gossip is shared by way of telephone conversations. These conversations are constantly taking place, and they are very important to the town: “The telephone wires make an odd humming on clear, cool days, almost as if vibrating with the gossip that is transmitted through them, and it is a sound like no other — the lonely sound of voices flying over space” (116). These stories surround the town, and the unfortunate events of the town are quickly turned into gossip. However, just as the story of Marsten and his wife turned into

a story simply used to scare children, the stories that flow through the wires of Jerusalem's Lot are sanitized, scrubbed clean of anything truly uncomfortable. "The town has its secrets, and keeps them well. The people do not know them all" (226), King writes in chapter ten. By listing some of the town's most notorious stories, it is revealed just how little about the truth of 'salem's Lot is known by the town gossipers: first, in the simpler, more comfortable versions that the townsfolk share with each other, followed by the true more sinister versions only the town itself seems to know. There is, of course, the story of the Marsten House, where all characters are unaware of the correspondence between Marsten and the vampire Barlow. Similarly, they "know that a fire burned up half of the town in that smoke-hazed September of 1951, but they don't know that it was set" (227). They love telling stories, but by doing so, they leave out the truly uncomfortable truths about the town. Instead, the people of 'salem's Lot create their own version of the town's history, failing to understand what is actually going on.

According to Tony Magistrale, Stephen King is "interested in probing some of our darkest and primal collective cultural fears" (*Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic* 25-26). "The particular horrors of King's novels are aligned with, and often emerge from, culturally specific disturbances; throughout his fiction there are signs that traditional concepts of social solidarity are fraying or have dissolved," he argues further (*Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic* 26). In the town of Jerusalem's Lot, the fraying of these social bonds happens, ironically, through the town's preferred way of communication. Characters may think they are bonding through this gossip, but by ignoring their history and the uncomfortable truths of the town, they are allowing the Marsten House to keep watch over them, constantly absorbing the evil emotions of what actually takes place in the town. These lines from chapter ten are worth repeating again: "The town has its secrets, and keeps them well. The people don't know them all" (King 226). The people may not know them, but from its vantage point up on its hill, the Marsten House sees everything, including the town's darkest secrets. This is the Gothic fear that is expressed in the novel: that there is something hidden and repressed beneath the surface of all communities in America, even in the sleepest little towns. The façades of these communities are also attacked, along with ways in which the darkness of the past, of history, is hidden away. In the end, King uses the vampire Barlow to show that this past cannot simply be hidden away. Through Barlow, and the Marsten House, the past of Jerusalem's Lot comes back to bite it.

A final point regarding the town's relationship with its history is found in its name. Immediately, the title of the book, and the name of the town, draws the mind to the Salem

witch trials, connecting both book and town to a fear of the occult. As one of the many blemishes on the myth of colonial American, the name has powerful connotations of injustice, evil, and a touch of the supernatural. To the people who live in 'salem's Lot, however, there seem to exist no such connotations. The town is, quite simply, named after a troublesome pig, Jerusalem. According to town legend, Jerusalem's owner used to tell people to stay away by yelling, "Keep 'ee out o' Jerusalem's wood lot, if 'ee want to keep 'ee guts in 'ee belly!" This apparently became something of a mantra: "The warning took hold, and so did the name. It proves little, except that perhaps in America even a pig can aspire to immortality" (29). Sooner or later, the name found its shortened form, seemingly without any concern for the connotations. This name indicates just how ahistorical the town is, and it shows the town's willingness to exist in blissful ignorance of any kind of problematic history. Naturally, the name is also an allusion to the true horror of the witch trials, which was not found in any witchcraft or supernatural beings, but in the fearful community that allowed for such persecution.

In the end, all this evil and failure to reckon with history manifests itself in the shape of Barlow, and all the others he turns into vampires. When he finally reveals himself in full, Barlow mocks the town's relationship with the past:

They have never known hunger or want, the people of this country. It has been two generations since they knew anything close to it, and even then it was like a voice in a distant room. They think they have known sadness, but their sadness is that of a child who has spilled his ice cream on the grass at a birthday party. (252)

In some ways, this section could be seen as contradicting the idea of there being something deeply wrong with the town, as Barlow's statement can be understood as saying there has never been any sadness present in Jerusalem's Lot. However, it can also be read in another light: just as the people of the town do not know the truth behind the stories they tell themselves, they also do not know of this sadness. The people of 'salem's Lot are, in many ways, privileged individuals, as they have never had to reckon with any true atrocities of the past. When they "think they have known sadness," this is just the sanitized stories they share. The people, the larger, collective community, have ignored their history for so long that, to them, there may as well be nothing wrong in their little town. The true sadness, the one they have never known, is only known by the town itself, by Barlow, and by the Marsten House. With his arrival, Barlow finally reveals the true nature of 'salem's Lot to all.



## A Map of Jerusalem's Lot

In the essay *Maps of Fictional Space*, Michael Irwin discusses the use of “cartographic representations of usually non-existent areas” (25) in literature. He states that such maps may serve as “imaginative stimulation” (48), where a map can be helpful when trying to visualize a literary place, helping readers understand the scale of place, or to see where in this fictional world a certain character lives, or where they are going. Fictional maps are perhaps most familiar to readers of fantasy fiction set in worlds very different from our own; these maps can show how tightly clustered the isles of *A Wizard of Earthsea*'s archipelago are (Le Guin xvi-xvii), or tell readers of Tolkien that in the map found in *The Hobbit*, “the compass points are marked in runes, with East at the top, as usual in dwarf-maps” (2). Irwin also states that maps can represent “an author's conscious endeavor to situate the action of a given narrative in an imaginable topographical area” (26), while also serving as “a statement of intent, proclaiming that in some sense ‘place’ will be of importance in the narrative concerned” (25). In *Salem's Lot*, there is no such statement to be found in the book. King does not use a map to introduce the town, nor does he include one later. There is no overview of place names, scale, or street networks turned into any one cohesive map of the place. How then, can the writing in *Salem's Lot* be described as an act of cartography?

To include one final quote from Irwin, “[a]ny map, whether literal or merely implied in an author's habit of description, simplifies” (45); here, Irwin notes how literary maps are, by necessity, simplifications of literary spaces, and their depiction of a place can never be fully accurate. Additionally, these simplified maps do not have to be actual maps: they can also simply be implied through the author's writing. In the case of *Salem's Lot*, a map of Jerusalem's Lot is absolutely implied through the novel, and it is this map that takes the sense of Gothic place to the forefront.

As already established, the Marsten House is featured prominently in *Salem's Lot*. It is not its primary setting, but it is a constant presence that is always watching and absorbing the goings on of the town. According to John Sears, “The action of *Salem's Lot* depends upon the house, but the house is peripheral to its action, a mere adjunct” (Sears 163). The Marsten House is a largely passive creature, watching the town rather than specifically acting. However, its importance to the text must not be understated, and the same goes for its role in depicting Jerusalem's Lot as a Gothic literary place. Sears also states that King “disavows the centrality of the ‘Marsten House’ to *Salem's Lot*” (162), which, while true in

the sense that it is not the setting for most of the action, may be disputed when it comes to King's depiction of place.

As a literary creation, *Jerusalem's Lot* is built up around the Marsten House, and this can in part be understood by Leonard Lutwack's notion of centrality. While Lutwack does define the centrality of a place as being "established by the frequency and importance of the transactions that occur in it" (42), meaning the Marsten House falls outside this definition, he also adds another important distinction:

One of the most satisfying narrative motifs is the journey of the hero from a central place to a number of outlying places and from them back to the starting place. The peripheral places offer variety of action and scene but are kept within a unified field by the framing effect of the dominant central place. The hero's return to the center creates a feeling of stability and completion. (43)

While the Marsten House's evil nature may not lend itself too well to feelings of "stability and completion," the house absolutely functions as one of Lutwack's unifying fields. The returns to the house are not that frequent in terms of actual, physical journeys to the house, but as *Salem's Lot* uses constantly shifting perspectives to tell its story, these returns take the form of looks and glances up at the house. Even if their bodies do not, the minds of the characters make frequent returns to the Marsten House.

Of all the characters that are drawn to the Marsten House, Ben Mears is the most prominent, as it is his experience of returning to the town of his childhood that serves as the introduction to *Salem's Lot*, and it is he who serves as the novel's protagonist. When Ben arrives, "the peaked, gabled roof of the Marsten House" (King 17) is the landmark that introduces the town. Before Ben drives on into *Salem's Lot*, he makes a quick stop by the house. He pauses, briefly considering its features: the overgrown front yard, full of "witch grass ... wild and tall" (18); the collapsed roof which gives the house "a slumped, hunched look" (18); the "windows haphazardly boarded shut". All its weathered, worn features affect Ben, as the house seems to stare "back at him with idiot significance" (18). This interaction is the first of many returns to the Marsten House in the novel, and through them, the town itself is created and mapped out.

Acting as cartographer, King presents his vision of the town. In chapter two, he provides a brief depiction — the closest he comes to fully outlining the place — of the town's topography:

Brock Street [the main street] crossed Jointner Avenue dead center and at right angles, and the township itself was nearly circular (although a little flat on the east, where the boundary was the meandering Royal River). On a map, the two main roads gave the town an appearance very much like a telescopic sight. (30)

With the final line of this passage, King indicates that, somewhere, there exists a map of the town, though he never quite reveals this in full. Instead, he has chosen to depict the town through a series of stories and anecdotes, as seen in the passage immediately following the mention of the map:

The northwest quadrant of the sight was north Jerusalem, the most heavily wooded section of town. It was the high ground, although it would not have appeared very high to anyone except maybe a Midwesterner. The tired old hills, which were honeycombed with old logging roads, sloped down gently toward the town itself, and the Marsten House stood on the last of these. (30)

Here, even the outlining of the town's topography cannot seem to escape the presence of the Marsten House. As with everything in 'saalem's Lot, it all comes back to that one house.

The structure of the novel's narration is essential to the realization of the written map. Instead of following just one character's perspective, the story is told from the shifting perspectives of a wide range of characters. All of these perspectives provide a slice of insight into life in the fictional town, and, as the different characters are found in many different parts of the town, these anecdotes slowly begin to map out a vague image of 'saalem's Lot. This is also the key to the novel's sense of Gothic place, as many of these stories are closely linked to the presence of the Marsten House. Just as that horrible house can see what goes on in the town from its hill, the house is nearly always in full view of the people down below. Because of this, the house is often present in the various anecdotes that map out the town, which means that many of the descriptions are affected by the presence of the Marsten House.

Changing perspective is used extensively in chapter three, which takes place during a single day in 'saalem's Lot. The chapter is split into twenty sections taking place in chronological order. In an interview with King, writer Neil Gaiman refers to '*Salem's Lot* as a "Dickensian portrait of a small American town destroyed by the arrival of a vampire"

(Gaiman), and this third chapter is certainly reminiscent of Dickens' writing. Evoking the descriptions of London found in *Sketches by Boz* — especially “The Streets – Morning,” where Dickens observes the passing of the hours in London's streets (69) — King's chapter, spanning some forty pages, starts in the early hours of the day and finishes at exactly 11:59 P.M. While a more sinister affair than Dickens' *Sketches*, the chapter provides a series of brief, insightful glances into daily life in Jerusalem's Lot. The first stories of the chapter are relatively quiet, featuring looks at the frustrations of farm life, and a brief story from the town milkman's point of view, which provides another description of town topography, as it mentions how his route covers the “center of town” and then works “back out of town along the Brooks Road” (King 49). The first stories are quiet, and the town seems peaceful. However, the chapter rapidly moves between characters, and the stories quickly become more sinister. At 6:05 A.M., there is a representation of a young, helpless mother who hurts her child (52), before another story is told from the perspective of Mike Ryerson, who is followed along on a drive. On this drive, a series of place names is provided, like “Harmony Hill,” one of the town's three cemeteries, and the Burns Road, running along “the skeletal, leafless trunks of the trees that had burned in the big fire of ‘51” (53). A grotesque sight at the town cemetery makes the chapter's tone more sinister, and as more and more people and places are introduced, it is revealed just how much violence and unhappiness exists in the town. At 10:00 A.M., a schoolyard fight is observed (59); at 11:15 A.M., a man living at the town dump reveals his violent thoughts (65).

As the chapter progresses, the references to the Marsten House grow more frequent, as one character glances “up at the Marsten House” (66) at noon, while Ben Mears does the same at 4:00 P.M., “feeling a crawl of terror in his belly” (74). As night approaches, the chapter becomes increasingly sinister. The final story happens at 11:59 P.M., again at the cemetery, where “a dark figure stood meditatively inside the gate, waiting for the turn of the time” (87). This figure, speaking to Barlow, says that it waits “for a sign to begin your work” (87). As this day in 'salem's Lot ends, the threat of the vampires is about to begin. Over the course of this chapter, the darkness of everyday acts within the town is portrayed, showing how Barlow and his vampires are not merely outsiders who prey on a pure, innocent town. They are instead the manifestation of the evil and fear present in this community. By jumping between these different perspectives, this evil is shown to be present throughout 'salem's Lot, revealing a Gothic fear of what is hiding beneath the surface of small-town America.

While the Marsten House is mentioned far too many times to include every occurrence, examining a selection of these mentions will show how King uses his anecdotes

and stories to sketch out a map of his town. In chapter four, one of these scenes takes place in one of the town's stores, which is "located in the angle formed by the intersection of Jointner Avenue and Railroad Street" (107). Some of the customers, mostly older men, are surprised when Straker — who is in league with the vampire Barlow — walks through the door. Straker quickly finishes his shopping, and as he leaves and drives away, the other customers eye him suspiciously, and a detailed sense of place and scale is in focus:

[Straker] went around to the driver's side, got in, and drove off up Jointner Avenue. The car went up the hill, turned left onto the Brooks Road, disappeared, and reappeared from behind the screen of trees a few moments later, now toy-sized with distance. It turned into the Marsten driveway and was lost from sight. (108)

By placing the perspective in the eyes of the townsfolk rather than Straker himself, the drive up to the Marsten House becomes an almost visual journey, as if King himself is sketching out a drawing that shows how the distance between the house and the rest of the town. Due to the "toy-sized" car, this distance is likely considerable, but still short enough to ensure that the presence of the Marsten House is always known in the town.

In chapter two, there is a similar example, wherein "Lawrence Crockett, the Lot's second selectman and proprietor of Crockett's Southern Maine Insurance and Realty" (65), takes a stroll outside. Just as Crockett is about to start his lunch routine, which includes a "walk up to the Excellent Café" (66), something catches his eye: "He ... moved off down Jointner Avenue. He paused on the corner and glanced up at the Marsten House. There was a car in the driveway. He could just make it out, twinkling and shining" (66). Again, the description of the town, with the walk down its main street, is affected by the Marsten House, as the people of the town just cannot keep their eyes away from it. In Ben's case, his eyes are "drawn toward the Marsten House as if by magnet" (92), and this true for everyone in the town, whether they are conscious of this magnetism or not.

A striking example of the magnetism of the house occurs in chapter six, where, following a funeral, a man named Mike Ryerson is tasked with covering a coffin with dirt. At five o'clock, Ryerson cannot shake the feeling that someone is watching him (146). As day passes into evening, the light fades, with the Marsten House functioning as a form of sundial, indicating the coming of night: "The shadows were getting very long now. He paused, looked up, and there was the Marsten House, its shutters closed blankly. The east side, the one that bid good day to the light first, looked directly down on the iron gate of the cemetery" (148).

Ryerson feels watched by the Marsten House, but he also cannot keep himself from glancing up at it. Another glance, this time causing Ryerson to feel “alarmed to see how much light had gone out” of the sky, with nothing but “the top story of the Marsten House” covered by sunlight (149). The light keeps fading, and Ryerson keeps looking up at the house, which has passed beyond the sun’s grasp, “[e]ven with the shutters closed the house seemed to stare at him,” he notes (150). As Ryerson grows increasingly fearful, the light passes “below the horizon,” and the body he is supposed to bury wakes up in the form of a vampire (151).

Within these few pages, the cemetery’s vampire is linked with the Marsten House, as Ryerson is watched by both the house and the vampire in the coffin, with its “glittering, frozen stare” (151). The cemetery scene is an excellent example of how the many locations of this little town are tied to the Marsten House. The house is undoubtedly the central location of the town, and around it, King sketches out little places and stories that create a mental map of ‘salem’s Lot. These sketches, with all their glances up at the Marsten House, show how the people of the town keep returning to the house, again and again, making the Gothic house the foundation around which this Gothic town is built. This should not be seen as a one-to-one drawing or diagram of the place. It is not important to know exactly where a store or street is; what is important is the relation of that store or street to the Marsten House and its evil presence. By making every part of the town appear so connected to the house, King shows how the fear represented by the house, the darkness inherent in the town, is felt in every street, house, and corner of Jerusalem’s Lot.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, the thoroughgoing use of place found in *‘Salem’s Lot* has been examined. In this Gothic horror story, a collective sense of fear is expressed. It is not a single, specific fear, but rather a shared, accumulated sense of history being brushed aside and repressed in the communities of small-town America. Whereas *The Haunting of Hill House* uses the house to express the helplessness of a single, powerless person trapped in an oppressive society, the spirit of place found in *‘Salem’s Lot* is a more collective one, where each and every person is just a small part of the inherent darkness of their community.

The Marsten House is an ambitious variation of the Gothic house, where the house represents both a single traumatic event in the town’s history, but also the everyday violence found throughout the town. Acting as a “dry-cell battery”, the Marsten House exists in a near-

sentient state, observing and absorbing the emotions of Jerusalem's Lot's secrets. In this one house, King places all the history that communities choose to ignore; it represents the lies such places tell themselves about their history, and like the many atrocities of American history, it is always present in the minds of its people, no matter how much they try to ignore it.

Around the fear of the Marsten House, King has created a vivid literary location, with every aspect of his town affected by the evil this house represents. Although little of the action takes place inside the Marsten House, it still serves as the story's central location, as the topography of the town, detailed as it is, is not mapped out as a cohesive place, but as different expressions of the evil in the Marsten House. Between the lines of every little story, and every location King places inside Jerusalem's Lot, the darkness of the Marsten House is always present.

## Conclusion: A Spirit of Place?

This thesis set out to explore the relationship between place, the American Gothic house, and the expression of societal fears that characterizes the literature of the American Gothic. This relationship has been investigated by discussing three works of fiction within this genre, and the study has found that, in the case of these works, the Gothic house is a vital part of the genre's socially conscious writings. Far more than an arena for Gothic stories to take place in, the Gothic house is, in itself, an expression of the Gothic, with writers able to imbue their houses with many of the same fears that they explore in their stories.

Building on the spirit of place found in the castles and cathedrals of medieval Europe — or at least in a British idea of them — the American Gothic house is a reminder that secrets, injustice, and the darkness of the past may be found not just in the most obvious, frightening places, but also in the seemingly innocuous realm of the domestic. In novels like those by Shirley Jackson and Stephen King, the Gothic house is an object, a character, that can be used to amplify fears by focusing them around a locus. In the chapter concerning Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, the study finds that the novel's primary location, Hill House, is the very embodiment of the underlying female Gothic fear of her story. It is shown that Hill House is in itself a prison — into which Jackson places a series of closed spaces and doors that slam shut on their own — and a house that has a history of imprisoning women. Jackson's Gothic house is not just a place where her protagonist, Eleanor, happens to experience a feeling of being trapped; instead, the place itself contributes to the entrapment of Eleanor, and every aspect of Hill House contributes to robbing Eleanor of her autonomy. Hill House continues the long tradition of dark castles, mansions, and cathedrals from which it has originated, and uses these elements of the Gothic to heighten Jackson's expression of the particular female Gothic fears of her time.

Through the chapters discussing *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *'Salem's Lot*, this study has also shown how the Gothic house can also be a vital part of the very structure of American Gothic storytelling. Although Edgar Allan Poe's *Usher* does not reveal a direct societal fear, it instead provides valuable insight into the ways in which the Gothic house, as a locus for a general fear, is essential to Gothic storytelling. In Poe's short story, the house is both the setting and an integral structural element of his storytelling. Through the confusing and nightmarish house, it becomes clear that one of the main roles of the Gothic is to expose and bring down the inherent darkness of places and structures like the House of Usher. Thus,



*The Fall of the House of Usher* is vital to understanding the basic constituents of the Gothic itself, as well as the significance of the Gothic house.

In *'Salem's Lot*, a Gothic house once again serves as an important part of the novel's location, but this text also shows how the house does not need to be a narrative's primary setting. Instead of placing all the action inside the walls of the house, King's novel builds an entire town around a single Gothic house, a house that embodies the fears and secrets of every one of the town's inhabitants. With this, it is evident that the American Gothic house is not only a frightening setting: rather, it represents the inherent societal fear which Gothic stories attempt to express, and it is an immensely important tool for the expression of these fears, both as symbol, and as a storytelling device.

The small sample size of this study, limited to three main works, means that its discussion of the Gothic house cannot provide any universal wisdom about Gothic houses and places. However, it has still provided an indication of the qualities that are found within these locations, making a definitive statement on the Gothic house's importance to the American Gothic. Another drawback of the small sample size is in the relatively homogenous fears that have been expressed so far. The three selected works showcase vastly different uses of place to express fears, and offer a good overview of the uses and properties of Gothic place. However, they do not sufficiently cover the vast range of social issues that the American Gothic is able to shed light on, especially when it comes to the largest, most uncomfortable aspects of American society, including race, slavery, and its treatment of indigenous peoples.

The work of the Gothic and its criticism, therefore, is unending. As the Gothic increasingly allows more voices — Black writers, indigenous writers, writers of color and other marginalized groups — to express their American fears and concerns, so too must Gothic criticism follow. Thus, the only logical way forward for discussions of American Gothic houses and places is to follow these voices. This study may have shown that there is such a thing as a particular Gothic spirit of place — one that arises from these places' close ties to the fears of Gothic stories, and their role in the structures of these stories — and as the Gothic expressions of these more diverse voices become ever more prominent, the American Gothic house will be important to bear in mind. Through it, the Gothic spirit of place will continue to be developed, and to express old and new fears of American society.

## Works cited

- Baldick, Chris and Robert Mighall. "Gothic Criticism." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 267-287.
- Bendixen, Alfred. "Romanticism and the American Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to the American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 31-43.
- Botting, Fred. "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 13-24.
- Brewster, Scott. "Seeing Things: Gothic and the Madness of Interpretation." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 481-495.
- Cantalupo, Barbara. "Introduction." *Poe's Pervasive Influence*, edited by Barbara Calupo, Lehigh University Press, 2012, pp. 1-7.  
search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=513208&site=ehost-live. Accessed 3 Nov. 2020.
- Carpenter, Lynette. "The Establishment and Preservation of Female Power in Shirley Jackson's 'We Have Always Lived in the Castle'." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 8, no. no, 1984, pp. 32-28, JSTOR, doi:10.2307/3346088.
- Cassuto, Leonard. "Urban American Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 156-168.
- Chandler, Marilyn R. *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*. University of California Press, 1991. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft167nb0r5/>, Accessed 7 Nov. 2020.
- Cornwell, Neil. "European Gothic." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 64-76.
- Crow, Charles L. *American Gothic*. University of Wales Press, 2009. *History of the Gothic*. ---. "Southern American Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 141-155.
- Day, William Patrick. *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy*. Chicago University Press, 1985.

- Dickens, Charles. "The Streets – Morning." *Sketches by Boz*, edited by Dennis Walder, Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 69-74.
- Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Dalkey Archive Press, 1997.
- Fienberg, Daniel. "'The Haunting of Hill House': Tv Review." *Hollywood Reporter*, 9 Oct. 2018 [www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/haunting-hill-house-review-1149714](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/haunting-hill-house-review-1149714). Accessed 1 Nov. 2020.
- Frank, Frederick S. "Edgar Allan Poe." *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Bibliographical Guide*, edited by Douglas H. Thomson Jack G. Voller, and Frederick S. Frank, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002, pp. 330-343. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=77777&site=ehost-live. Accessed 1 Nov. 2020.
- Gaiman, Neil. "Popular Writers: A Stephen King Interview." Neil Gaiman 28 April 2012 [journal.neilgaiman.com/2012/04/popular-writers-stephen-king-interview.html](http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2012/04/popular-writers-stephen-king-interview.html). Accessed 11 Nov. 2020.
- Galloway, David. "Introduction." *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, edited by David Galloway, Penguin Group, 2003, pp. xvii-lv.
- Groom, Nick. "Explanatory Notes." *The Castle of Otranto*, edited by Nick Groom, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 113-132.
- . "Introduction." *The Castle of Otranto*, edited by Nick Groom, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. ix-xxxviii.
- Hattenhauer, Darryl. *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*. State University of New York, 2003.
- Herren, Graley. "Shades of Shakespeare in the Queering of Hill House." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 2020, doi:10.1080/00111619.2020.1789542.
- Hoeveler, Diane Long. "American Female Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 99-114.
- Hogle, Jerrold E. "The Gothic Ghost of the Counterfeit and the Progress of Abjection." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 496-509.
- Hughes, William. "Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 197-210.

- Irwin, Michael. "Maps of Fictional Space." *Literature & Place: 1800-2000*, edited by Peter Brown and Michael Irwin, second unrevised edition, Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 25-48.
- Jackson, Shirley. *The Haunting of Hill House*. edited by Laura Miller, Penguin Books, 2013. *Penguin Horror*, Guillermo del Toro.
- Jacobs, Edward. "Ann Radcliffe and Romantic Print Culture." *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, edited by Dale Townsend and Angela Wright, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 49-66.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. "The Realm of Dream and Memory in Poe's England." *Poe and Place*, edited by Philip Edward Phillips, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 71-96.
- King, Stephen. "Inspiration." Stephen King | The Official Website [stephenking.com/works/novel/salems-lot.html](http://stephenking.com/works/novel/salems-lot.html). Accessed 11 Nov. 2020.
- . *'Salem's Lot*. Doubleday, 1975.
- Lawrence, D. H. "The Spirit of Place." *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Project Gutenberg [www.gutenberg.org/files/60547/60547-h/60547-h.htm#I THE SPIRIT OF PLACE](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/60547/60547-h/60547-h.htm#I_THE_SPIRIT_OF_PLACE). Accessed 31 Oct. 2020.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Gollancz, 2019.
- Lootens, Tricia. "'Whose Hand Was I Holding?': Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson's *the Haunting of Hill House*." *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*, edited by Bernice M. Murphy, McFarland & Company, 2005, pp. 150-168.
- Lutwack, Leonard. *The Role of Place in Literature*. Syracuse University Press, 1984.
- Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*. Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988.
- . "Stephen King." *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Bibliographical Guide*, edited by Jack G. Voller Douglas H. Thomson, and Frederick S. Frank, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002, pp. 212-224. EBSCOhost, [search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=77777&site=ehost-live](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=77777&site=ehost-live). Accessed 1 Nov. 2020.
- Massé, Michelle A. *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic*. Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Mighall, Robert. "Gothic Cities." *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, edited by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, Routledge, 2007, pp. 54-62.
- Milbank, Alison. "Ways of Seeing in Ann Radcliffe's Early Fiction: The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789) and a Sicilian Romance (1790)." *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism*

- and the Gothic*, edited by Dale Townshend and Angela Wright, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 85-99.
- Miles, Robert. "Eighteenth-Century Gothic." *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, edited by Catherine Spooner and McEvoy, Routledge, 2007, pp. 10-18.
- Mishra, Vijay. "The Gothic Sublime." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 288-306.
- Newman, Judie. "Shirley Jackson and the Reproduction of Mothering: The Haunting of Hill House." *American Horror Fiction*, edited by Brian Docherty, Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, pp. 120-134.
- Parks, John G. "Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson's Use of the Gothic." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 30, 1984, pp. 15-29, JSTOR, doi:10.2307/441187.
- Perry, Dennis R. and Carl H. Sederholm. *Poe, "the House of Usher," and the American Gothic*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "Dream-Land." Poetry Foundation  
[www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48631/dream-land-56d22a06bce76](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48631/dream-land-56d22a06bce76). Accessed 21 Oct. 2020.
- . "The Fall of the House of Usher." *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, edited by David Galloway, Penguin Group, 2003, pp. 90-109.
- Punter, David. "The Uncanny." *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, edited by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, Routledge, 2007, pp. 129-136.
- Ringel, Faye. "Early American Gothic (Puritan and New Republic)." *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 15-30.
- "The Haunting of Hill House: Miniseries (2018)." Rotten Tomatoes  
[www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/the\\_haunting\\_of\\_hill\\_house/s01](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/the_haunting_of_hill_house/s01). Accessed 1 Nov. 2020.
- Savoye, Jeffrey A. "Poe and Baltimore: Crossroads and Redemption." *Poe and Place*, edited by Philip Edward Philips, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 97-122.
- Sears, John. *Stephen King's Gothic*. University of Wales Press, 2011. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=409319&site=ehost-live, Accessed 7 Nov. 2020.
- Showalter, Elaine. "'Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life' (Book Review)." *The Washington Post*, 22 Sept. 2016  
[www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/shirley-jackson-a-rather-haunted-](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/shirley-jackson-a-rather-haunted-)

- [life/2016/09/15/4293b85e-5f2b-11e6-af8e-54aa2e849447\\_story.html](https://www.life/2016/09/15/4293b85e-5f2b-11e6-af8e-54aa2e849447_story.html). Accessed 25 Nov. 2020.
- Smith, Allan Lloyd. "Nineteenth-Century American Gothic." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp. 163-175.
- Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*. Second edition, Edinburgh University Press, 2013. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=575548&site=ehost-live., Accessed 7 Nov. 2020.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*. Film tie-in edition, HarperCollins, 2014.
- Townshend, Dale and Angela Wright. "Gothic and Romantic Engagements: The Critical Reception of Ann Radcliffe, 1789-1850." *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, edited by Dale Townshend and Angela Wright, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 3-32.
- Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. edited by Nick Groom, Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. "Introduction: The American Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 1-12.
- . *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women*. Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Wilson, Michael T. "Absolute Reality and the Role of the Ineffable in Shirley Jackson's the Haunting of Hill House." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 48, no. 1, Feb. 2015, pp. 114-123, doi:10.1111/jpcu.12237.

