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The Development of The Trope of Hauntings in Gothic Fiction:
A Comparative Analysis of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Haunting of*
Hill House

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Abstract

The research conducted in this paper will concern the development of the Gothic trope of hauntings in a comparative analysis of two gothic novels, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë and *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) by Shirley Jackson. The analysis will focus on how hauntings of various forms are presented and what they represent in the two texts before and after the development of psychoanalytical studies, particularly Sigmund Freud's conceptualization of "Das Unheimliche". The analysis will be supported by cultural and historical notions and background scholarship.

1. Introduction

Among literary genres, there is one which seems to still raise interest and still develop in our contemporary fiction: Gothic. As an enthusiast of the genre myself, I contemplated the reason behind the ongoing development of this genre, which originated over two centuries ago, and is continually evolving and more and more present in our contemporary narratives. More specifically, I decided to focus this paper predominantly on the development of one of the Gothic tropes, that of hauntings.

This paper aims to establish the role of psychoanalysis theories in the development of the trope of haunting in Gothic fiction through a comparative analysis of two novels that belong both to the genre, but that have been written over a century apart: *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë published in 1847, and *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson, published in 1959. The choice of two novels that are written so far from each other, will help analyze how the trope of haunting has developed from Victorian British Gothic to American Post-Modern Gothic. More specifically, the analysis will be focused on the portrayal of hauntings in fiction before and after the advent of psychoanalytical theories, particularly Sigmund Freud's conceptualization of "the Uncanny" in 1919, and other general psychoanalytical notions about the human psyche. The analysis will furthermore be reinforced through cultural and historical notions, supported by theories and articles of different scholars, and through close readings of relevant textual extracts from the two novels.

A short summary of the two novels helps start the research. *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë narrates the passionate but tormented relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. Set against the desolate Yorkshire moors, this Victorian Gothic masterpiece unravels a tale of troubled love, vengeful passions, and societal barriers. Brontë's narrative, populated by supernatural elements, explores the haunting repercussions of

unresolved emotions and trauma. *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson centers on a group's investigation into the mysteries of Hill House, rumored to be haunted. Jackson masterfully crafts a mid-20th-century Gothic tale intertwining psychological terror with the haunting event within the mansion's walls. The novel intricately blurs the lines between the characters' realities and the spectral influences of the house, probing the depths of fear, mental instability, and the connection between hauntings and the human psychic. As will be demonstrated, the novels deal with the theme of hauntings in different ways, and the emergence of psychoanalysis is evident considering how the trope develops between the two texts.

This thesis is structured in four main chapters. Beginning with this introduction, it proceeds with the “Background and Theoretical Framework” section in chapter 2, where it delves into the origin and development of the Gothic hauntings mainly from early to Victorian Gothic, followed by an exploration of Sigmund Freud's conceptualization of "Das Unheimliche," and a discussion on the development of hauntings in American Post-Gothic Fiction. Subsequently, chapter 3 “Comparative Analysis” is divided into two sub-chapters: “Haunting as Longing: *Wuthering Heights*”, where it scrutinizes the portrayal of hauntings in Emily Brontë's novel, and “The House Lives: *The Haunting of Hill House*” where Victorian anthropomorphic haunted houses and Jackson's text are analyzed. Within this section, detailed subcategories in both novels are explored, dissecting nuanced aspects such as cyclic abuse, the persistence of the deceased, the psychological turmoil associated with haunting, and the manifestation of haunted spaces. In Chapter 4, the thesis is concluded with a summary of the findings and consideration of the research that has been carried out, and with a few ideas about the future development of research in this field.

2. Theory and Background Research

2.1 Origin and Development of The Trope of Hauntings

To proceed with the analysis, it is important to provide a background to the development of the Gothic novel and therefore of the theme of hauntings. The text that is believed to have originated this genre is Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* published in 1764. Set in a Medieval castle, it recounts the story of Lord Manfred's quest for power and the haunting events following the sudden death of his son, Conrad, on his wedding day. The novel is a precursor to the Gothic genre, setting the stage for new literature inhabited by haunted castles, stormy skies, ghostly apparitions, and mysteries. While today Gothic and horror fiction has grown to be one of the most loved and successful genres, with dozens of Gothic novels being adapted to all kinds of media, this was not always the case: the raising of Gothic literature was indeed initially followed by some harsh criticism. In fact, critics from more conservative or highbrow literary circles dismissed the genre as catering to popular tastes rather than contributing to intellectual discourse, appealing to reasons such as religious and moral concerns. Moreover, Gothic literature was accused of lacking realism in favour of melodrama and sectionalism and of reviving dark medieval memories. Both the advent of the genre and its criticism have roots in the social and historical context of the time, which holds a fundamental role in analyzing the Gothic before the advent of psychoanalysis in this research.

The genre appears to emerge as a cloud over the sublimed reality of neo-classicism and Enlightenment, determined to rebel against ideals of high arts by bringing back to life more primitive impulses, such as imagination, stupor and fear. Maggie Kilgour in her book *The Rise of The Gothic Novel* (1995) affirms that "The emergence of the gothic in the eighteenth century has also been read as a sign of the resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent in a modern enlightenment secular world which denies the existence of

supernatural forces, or as the rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason.”

(Kilgour 3) The detachment of modern society from its more primitive past and values fuels therefore this new genre which, just like many of its characters, returns from the dead ready to reassemble its fragmented self and past. The reader plays a crucial role in interpreting this genre, as their emotions triggered by the text are processed through their internal cognitive mechanisms: this will be later understood through the development of psychoanalytic research. Additionally, akin to Romantic artists, Gothic authors like Mary Shelley and Walpole function as a vessel of their own imaginative expression, often drawing inspiration from vivid dreams or haunting nightmares.

It is of great relevance to underline the early gothic's connection with the revival of the past, and it is important to delve into how this unfolds in the novels of the genre. In chapter 3 of her book “The Sublime and The Odd”, Kilgour takes into analysis Walpole’s pivotal text to underline how the author, who had, in reality, built himself a fake Medieval castle called Strawberry Hill, creates in his text a world inspired to the idealized past which is “more secure than the changing present” (17), where one can hide from the immoralities and rationality of modernity. While emerging from the past, the gothic novel also aims at creating something original, creating this way a hybrid, Frankensteinian text made of pieces of old and new: “The very name ‘gothic novel’ which was ultimately given to the form he [Walpole] created is an oxymoron that reflects its desire to identify conflicting impulses: both towards newness, novelty, originality, and towards a return to nature and revival of the past” (Kilgour 18). This attempt to revive the past is to be seen as a rebellion against the impoverishment of human creativity in a world “tyrannically ruled by dry realism, which banishes the fertility of imagination.” (20)

The title of Kilgour’s paragraph, “The Sublime”, brings into the discussion a very important theorist and philosopher, Edmund Burke, who in 1757 published his treatise A

Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime. In his work, Burke makes a clear distinction between two different categories of pleasing sensations: the beautiful and the sublime. Within his philosophy, the sublime is delineated as eliciting the most intense emotions the mind can experience: “Whatever therefore is terrible, (...) is sublime too.” (Burke 1757) Burke’s definition emphasizes that the sublime is associated with anything capable of evoking feelings of pain, danger, or terror. He affirms that elements provoking fear significantly contribute to the sublime, suggesting that fear itself is a force that incapacitates the mind's ability to reason and act effectively. The concept of the sublime can be considered a precursor to the later concept of the uncanny, even though the two concepts are distinct. Indeed, in his article *The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime* published in 1987, Anthony Vidler underlines that the uncanny has connections with the sublime, with some differences. The author suggests in fact that the genres associated with the sublime, including the uncanny, the grotesque, the caricature, the fairy story, and the melodrama, are essentially subversive. The type of sublimeness in gothic fiction is not therefore to be thought of in Romantic terms, but as a longed ideality that is disrupted in its translation into modernity. British society's rejection of the past is also analyzed by Paula Krebs who analyzes this in the novel *Wuthering Heights* linking this sentiment to the rejection of the evolving middle class towards old folklore and what it represented. In her article *Folklore, Fear, and the Feminine: Ghosts and Old Wives’ Tales in ‘Wuthering Heights’* she states:

Victorian folklorists saw folk custom and lore as survivals of earlier cultures, but folk elements in *Wuthering Heights* carry no such connotations. They do not indicate the primitive or the rustic. Instead, in *Wuthering Heights*, folklore functions like Freud's uncanny; in the novel's folkloric references, as in the uncanny, a cultural past resurfaces in psyches in which the primitive had been deeply buried. Folklore in

Bronte's novel reveals middle-class English culture's repressed, unwanted links with the cultures of those who were living artefacts of a British cultural past. (Krebs 42)

This rejection of the past is discussed by Burke too. He is brought into Kilgour's discussion affirming that Burke places the blame on the French Revolution for the disruption of the natural ways of social construction in favour of the Enlightened abstract philosophies. These philosophies, according to him, were unnatural and far from his idea of human connection through tradition and culture (Kilgour 26). She further adds that Burke himself in his *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) uses gothic as an element of comparison: "Burke represents the Revolution in terms of the gothic imagery of grave robbing, parents dismembering their children and children dismembering their parents." (Kilgour 29), establishing the relevance of the genre in the discussion of the relation between past and present. As this process of modernization progresses and more individual values are assessed, the result is an inverted natural world, in which family relations are disordered. The safe sphere of the home becomes an uncanny place of alienation." (Kilgour 29).

2.2 Sigmund Freud's Conceptualization of "Das Unheimlich"

The last citation in the latter paragraph anticipates a theory that has been fundamental in more recent reviews and the reinterpretation of Gothic fiction: the uncanny. As the gothic genre brings the past to life, it often creates a haunted present. While early Gothic literature relied on spooky settings for its eeriness, later developments, especially during Victorian Gothic, saw a shift. Feelings of discomfort and haunted sensations became integral to characters and plots, pervading their thoughts and homes. Although hauntings existed in earlier literary works, Gothic fiction prominently emphasizes them, attributing potent symbolism. Unlike the common perception that horror fiction aims to instill fear, the presence of hauntings in Gothic narratives symbolizes a connection between past and present,

and the cyclical nature of time and memory. The emergence of psychoanalysis significantly aids in comprehending the emotional resonance evoked by these elements. Of particular interest in this study is the concept of the uncanny which gives deeper insights into these haunting phenomena.

The “uncanny” is not a theory, but a feeling and a sentiment evoked in humans, and therefore not easy to explain or theorize. Nevertheless, with very few preceding attempts, Sigmund Freud had a pivotal role in the conceptualization of this sentiment in his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche*, which translates to English as “unhomely”. In the Cambridge Dictionary under “uncanny” the first definition is: “strange or mysterious, often in a way that is slightly frightening” (*Uncanny*); this definition I believe to be overly simplifying and not accurate, as this sentiment is deeper and more specific than that. Uncanniness is, simply put, associated with a feeling of alienation in a once-known and familiar space now become unfamiliar. An attempt at a more specific definition of the sentiment is made by Ian Buchanan in his work *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2010):

That which is unfamiliar—or more literally, un-homely—in the familiar or homely. In a famous essay, *Das Unheimliche* (1919), Freud argued that the uncanny is the feeling we get when an experience that occurred by chance suddenly feels fateful and inescapable. His own quite humorous example of this is an anecdote about an afternoon walk he took in a small provincial Italian town in which he happened upon the brothel district and though he hurriedly exited the area the continuation of his walk somehow brought him back there, twice, a discomforting fact that he felt was noticed by the locals. He traces the uncanny feeling this provokes in him back to infantile psychology because it clearly evidences a compulsion to repeat and argues that anything that reminds us of this aspect of our childhood will be perceived as uncanny. Literature then can create the same feeling by evoking situations in which a

character acts without reason, or, more particularly, returns when they are thought to be gone—the archetype of this is the ghost or the zombie. The uncanny is not a new thing; it is always an old, and usually repressed, thing that recurs in the place where it is not expected.

While Buchanan gives a more detailed explanation, I believe is not exactly faithful to Freud's original thought. In *Das Unheimlich*, Freud introduces his work stating that while previous research and treatises on aesthetics focused on the beautiful and the sublime, therefore on a positive view of nature, his research based on psychoanalysis focused on ugly feelings of unpleasantness and fear evoked by a once known place which because unwelcoming and unfamiliar: “The subject of the “uncanny” (...) undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread.” (Freud 1). Freud sustains that the feeling of uncanniness possibly derives mainly from two categories: a system of forms of thoughts that have been suppressed, such as primitive superstitious beliefs of different types, and a series of repressed complexes, especially from childhood. The feeling of uncanniness arises therefore when there is a conflict of judgment between reality and the things considered surmounted: “An uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed.” (Freud 17). Anneleen Masschelein elaborates on the uncanny suggesting that “Freud introduces the uncanny as a special shade of anxiety, which can be experienced in real life or in literature, caused by the return of the repressed or by the apparent confirmation of surmounted, primitive beliefs.” (Masschelein 54)

What Buchanan early additionally fails to mention in his definition of “uncanny” is that in his essay Freud specifically separates the issue of the uncanny in literature from his

main argument. In fact, Freud states that in the case of literature and fiction, the sentiment of uncanniness is heavily influenced by the author's artistic freedom. We can summarize and say that he mainly divides three categories: fairy tales, fiction where the setting is somehow supernatural (for example Dante's *Divine Comedy*), and ultimately fiction set in common reality: while in the first two, the sensation of uncanniness is not produced despite supernatural elements, in the third case the sentiment of uncanny is inevitably produced. This last reflection is central to this paper, as both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Haunting of Hill House* fall into this category, being them set in common reality and not in any supernatural storyworld.

2.3 Hauntings in American Post-Gothic Fiction

The influence of the advent of psychoanalysis in literature and fiction, specifically Gothic fiction, is remarkable. In the analysis of two novels that belong to the same genre but are written over a hundred years apart, we can set the advent of psychoanalysis as a watershed moment: while in Victorian gothic such as *Wuthering Heights* we can conduct psychoanalysis reviews retroactively, in modern and postmodern gothic, psychological elements are clearly present and very often used by authors themselves to create fear and distress. Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* falls well in its genre; while Brontë's hauntings are a symbol of longing and revival of the past, Jackson's hauntings have deeper psychological meaning, as the characters do not see ghosts, but their minds and houses are themselves haunted.

While in Victorian gothic the past is revived and longed for, in American postmodern gothic it is the past itself that creates the uncanny. Indeed, Victorian houses that were just houses in early fiction, are personified, and transformed in American gothic into the symbol of gothic itself: still in contemporary fiction and common belief, gothic is associated with a Victorian decaying creepy haunted house. In her article '*Better for Haunts*': *Victorian*

Houses and the Modern Imagination, historian Sarah Burns analyzes the reasons behind this shift. She establishes cultural and historical reasons for this revision of Victorian houses, such as a post-war association of Victorian houses to the war and also with a modern American refusal of the colonial style: “The Victorian house became the prime sinister locus of the modern American imagination.” (3) What happened is that while Americans were trying to build new cities, these old colonial mansions were seen as an element of a past to be forgotten. While new buildings meant new beginnings, Victorian houses which had been inhabited for many decades, and where many had lived and passed, became infused with the shadows of their dead former inhabitants and heavy with their own past: “Like a body, the Victorian house enclosed a spirit within its shell. (...) Victorian houses were made to be haunted (...) because—with its dark crannies and cobwebbed attic—it harbored the shadows of past lives, memories that refused to die”. (10)

What we can furthermore notice with American Gothic is the strong link with psychoanalytical elements. As we will also see in Shirley Jackson's novel, the sense of the uncanny emerges from subconscious elements of repulsion, morbidity, and trauma. More and more often in recent gothic and horror fiction, hauntings and haunted spaces are associated not only with feelings of fear and uneasiness but also with trauma, childhood trauma, and cycles of abuse. As Burns also states, the sentiment of unfamiliarity that was already present in early and Victorian Gothic is brought even closer to the self in postmodern Gothic, often precisely in the home and family itself, where the character, and often the child, does not feel safe. Monica Michlin conducts a postmodern interpretation of haunted houses concerning the portrayal of trauma in her article *The Haunted House in Contemporary Filmic and Literary Gothic Narratives of Trauma*. She discusses gothic use of repetition, circularity, and mazes to portray abuse and trauma; we already have a premature example of this in *Wuthering Heights*, but in post-modern and contemporary gothic these become recurrent themes.

Michlin states that “contemporary gothic narratives display post-Freudian awareness that the haunted house is the place where trauma occurred, but also, and subsequently, the projection of the traumatized and haunted psyche itself.” (6) The author concludes by affirming that:

If haunted houses have endured in recent American literature, authors, and directors have had to find new variations on a now classic gothic motif. From tales of haunting that deliberately shun the house for larger settings, to attempts to renew the topos from a psychoanalytical perspective, presenting it as a projection, double, or embodiment of the haunted psyche itself, the haunted house narrative haunts on. (Michlin 18)

From all these backgrounds and theoretical research, I aim to draw two main reflections regarding the comparative analysis of the two novels investigated in this paper: firstly, *Wuthering Heights* can be considered to all effects a gothic novel of abuse that disrupts the sublime in favour of the sentiment of uncanny; and secondly, that the heavy presence of psychoanalytical elements in post gothic novels such as *The Haunting of Hill House* establish the genre as one of the closest and more faithful expression of the human nature. The following chapters will delve more into the analysis of how the theme of hauntings is dealt with in the two novels and how this theme has developed within the genre.

3. Comparative Analysis

3.1. Hauntings as Longing: *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë

While conducting the research for this paper I navigated multiple libraries looking for theoretical books on Gothic fiction, and I realized that none of them listed *Wuthering Heights* among the texts brought as an example for this genre, and it was not surprising. Not even the books about female Gothic authorship I consulted mentioned Emily Brontë’s work. It is accurate to say that Brontë’s masterpiece is often not viewed as a Gothic morose novel not

only by the general public but also by literary critics; on the contrary, it is often considered as a romantic novel, if not “the” romantic novel for excellence. Indeed, Catherine and Heathcliff’s tormented and doomed love story is celebrated as an example of love that defies conventions, and ultimately death itself. Even in the series of advanced literature guide notes *York Notes Advanced: Wuthering Height*, the author Claire Jones, lecturer of English literary studies at the University of Luton, rarely refers to the novel as a gothic piece and does not analyze it in any gothic terms, putting the romance in the centre of the novel: “The deferred passionate relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff is the single dominating feature of *Wuthering Heights*, driving the action of the novel (...)” (10) The truth that this paper wants to sustain is far from this affirmations: in fact, *Wuthering Heights* is a horrible novel, not horrible in the sense of literary quality of course, as it is one of the most important texts of English literature, but in the sense of what it portrays. What Jones describes as a “dynastic novel, which plots the intertwined fortunes of three generations (...) fortunes which seem to repeat and revise the prime relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff”, I would debate being instead a novel about cyclic abuse, hate, and the haunting past.

3.1.1 A Novel of Cyclic Abuse

The novel's departure from the sublimed feelings of Romanticism becomes evident in its initial chapters, setting the tone for the narrative ahead and establishing the Gothic atmosphere that defines it. Lockwood's introduction to *Wuthering Heights* vividly depicts an unsettling and eerie ambience surrounding the setting. Brontë utilizes atmospheric elements to create an evocative sense of uncanniness as Lockwood arrives at the remote and desolate estate. The harsh and desolate Yorkshire moors, coupled with windy weather, surround the ancient manor in an aura of uneasiness and isolation. The deteriorated dark facade, made of weather-worn stone walls and deeply embedded windows, and Lockwood's hostile reception by the residents, especially the surly and enigmatic Heathcliff, intensifies the unwelcoming

atmosphere. Lockwood introduces the setting as “a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropist’s heaven” and his attempts to converse with his tenant, Heathcliff, are cut short by the latest whose reply “was uttered with closed teeth, and expressed the sentiment.” (Brontë 3)

The sense of uncanniness persists throughout the narrative, aligning with Freud's theory, as the novel is set in a familiar, common reality but contains unsettling elements, evoking a sentiment of uneasiness in the reader. From this point on, more and more elements add to the feeling of unhomeliness. The estate itself, rather than invoking a comforting sense of home, resonates with an unsettling emptiness. Lockwood's observations within the barren kitchen, where he sees “no signs of roasting, boiling, or baking, about the huge fireplace; nor any glitter of copper saucepans and tin cullenders on the walls” (Brontë 5) deny therefore signs of domesticity or warmth, reflecting the inhospitable nature of the dwelling he observes. The home where the narrator seeks refuge is *Unheimlich*.

It can be further discussed that the uncanniness of this novel also derives from the structure itself. Brontë's deliberate use of an intricate narrative structure, characterized by unreliable narrators, shifting timelines, and complex character connections, amplifies the reader's disorientation and discomfort. The unconventional storytelling intentionally confounds the reader's attempts to establish a clear starting point for the story, contributing significantly to an unsettling sense of uncertainty. Moreover, as the story unfolds backwards, Heathcliff’s grumpy nature which makes him dislikable immediately, is further comprehended as being the result of a story of abuse and resentment unfolding of events that explain that he is a product of abuse and trauma. Emily Brontë proceeds to encapsulate a narrative of cyclical abuse intertwined intricately throughout the generations of characters. Heathcliff enters Wuthering Heights as an orphan foundling and is discriminated against and bullied from the beginning. The cycle of abuse is prominently illustrated through various

relationships, particularly Heathcliff's treatment at the hands of Hindley Earnshaw, his violent and alcoholic "brother", and later Heathcliff's own abusive behaviour towards Hindley's son Hareton Earnshaw. Hindley's mistreatment of Heathcliff, stemming from jealousy and animosity, exemplifies an initial instance of abuse. Heathcliff, in turn, perpetuates this cycle by subjecting Hareton to neglect, degradation, and emotional abuse as a means of revenge against the Earnshaw family. Additionally, Heathcliff's treatment of Isabella Linton, whom he marries intending to inflict suffering upon her and use her as a means to exact vengeance, further perpetuates the pattern of abuse within the narrative. This intergenerational repetition underscores a deeply ingrained pattern of pain and cruelty passed down through the characters, also symbolized by the continuous recurrence of names, births, and deaths.

Far from the frivolity of former romantic texts to which this novel is wrongly associated, such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, it becomes clear that Brontë did not intend to write a piece of romance. In her online article *Wuthering Heights: Cycles of Abuse*, Sophie Daubigny writes that while the love story between Catherine and Heathcliff is a central theme of the novel, it just constitutes a portion of it, stating that:

The story is peppered with violence; men, women, children, and even dogs alike suffer abuse. As a boy, Heathcliff is bullied because of his class and race, which only harden him so that by adulthood, Heathcliff's character is stripped of all feeling to the extent where he doesn't even resemble 'a human being'. Heathcliff recycles these feelings of bitterness by abusing those around him, such as his wife and son. The stormy, deadly moors outside merely reflect the anguish each character is caused to feel because of this endless abuse.

The centrality of the theme of abuse changes the way this novel is considered and its encapsulation of themes of horror, evil, and sin should make Emily Brontë a rightful

predecessor of psychological Gothic fiction. Famous French essayist and philosophical theorist Georges Bataille is one of the few who points to Emily Brontë as a writer of evil. In his book *Literature and Evil* originally published in 1957, Bataille underlines that Brontë characterizes Heathcliff as a sadist who is thirsty for revenge. He states that:

The mere invention of a character so totally devoted to Evil by a moral and inexperienced girl would be a paradox. But the invention of Heathcliff is particularly worrying for the following reason: Catherine Earnshaw herself is absolutely moral. She is so moral that she dies of not being able to detach herself from the man she loved when she was a child. But although she knows that Evil is deep within him, she loves him to the point of saying “I am Heathcliff! (...) Death is the punishment, sought and accepted for this mad dream. (21)

However, within this context, morality is asserted through the notion of accepting death as a form of punishment. This prompts a question: if death is perceived as the ultimate punishment, why do the protagonists return from it to haunt the narrative?

3.1.2 *The Dead Shall Not Rest*

The answer that I provide for the latter question is that her romance is haunted because Brontë's ghosts are not meant to die or rest. The novel's haunting atmosphere is rooted in Brontë's portrayal of ghosts that defy the usual conventions of death or finding rest. Despite her Anglican background as the daughter of a minister, the author does not seem driven to convey a specific moral lesson, suggesting a departure from deliberate Christian beliefs regarding death as a form of punishment. Brontë introduces an unconventional element early in the story: Catherine Earnshaw's ghostly apparition to Lockwood. It is not wrong to sustain here that *Wuthering Heights* primarily revolves around themes of haunting and the supernatural rather than other narrative aspects, as we see early in the text. In chapter 3, Lockwood is reluctantly accommodated in a hidden and secretive room, “While leading

the way upstairs, she [Zillah, the servant] recommended that I should hide the candle, and not make a noise; for her master had an odd notion about the chamber she would put me in, and never let anybody lodge there willingly” (Brontë 24). Once in the room, Lockwood finds engraved in the library the name of Catherine in different forms:

The ledge, where I placed my candle, had a few mildewed books piled up in one corner; and it was covered with writing scratched on the paint. This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small
 CATHERINE EARNSHAW, here and there varied to CATHERINE HEATHCLIFF,
 and then again to CATHERINE LINTON.

He proceeds to fall asleep, and in a dream-like state he the childish ghost of Catherine outside the window. This passage is one of the most famous of the novel, and it is soaked with feelings of both terror and sadness:

(...) my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, ‘Let me in, let me in!’ ‘Who are you?’ I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. ‘Catherine Linton,’ it replied, shiveringly
 (...) ‘I’m come home: I’d lost my way on the moor!’ As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child’s face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, ‘Let me in!’ (...) ‘It is twenty years,’ mourned the voice: ‘twenty years. I’ve been a waif for twenty years!’ (Brontë 32)

This scene, introduced at the outset of the novel, sets the haunting atmosphere of the narrative. During his lecture at Durham University about the interplay of ghosts and settings in *Wuthering Heights*, Professor James Quinnell reinforces the discussion that this novel

primarily embodies themes of haunting. He describes his personal encounter with it as an unforeseen revelation, likening it to an "ambush," given his prior assumption that it solely revolved around a love story. He further argues that Brontë's ghosts, as evident in her poetry as well, do not aim for heavenly peace but linger due to a sense of homesickness. Quinnell asserts that "the quality of the haunting in *Wuthering Heights* is more powerful than the quality of its romance." (Quinnell)

Another interesting element that arises from Lockwood's ghostly encounter is the use of dreams as a veil: the author aims to blur the boundaries between life and death, reality and the supernatural, secular and folkloric through the use of dreams and leaves them ambiguously open-ended. This is not the only time this occurs; also in chapter 15, when Catherine is sick and bedridden, in a dream-like state or hallucination she sees an anthropomorphic face in the fire. Both dreams and hallucinations are effective Gothic tools for the author to leave the reader questioning whether the events happen or not. In later Gothic horror fiction, this and other tropes will be useful to create doubt about a character's sanity. Freud too refers to this in *The Uncanny* sustaining that "An uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality." (Freud 15) It is therefore accurate to say that, faithfully to Gothic standards, the past in *Wuthering Heights* is not put to rest.

3.1.3 Haunting as Longing

Remaining true to early Gothic traditions, *Wuthering Heights* perpetuates an unsettled past that refuses to be laid to rest. In this context, death does not signify finality; instead, departed individuals return to haunt the present, as Kilgour notes: "the revived past cannot be an alternative to the present for it is a nightmare version of it" (Kilgour 30). This notion finds manifestation in Catherine's ghostly apparition, presenting a nightmarish reality for both

Lockwood, who witnesses her ghost, and Catherine, who yearns to return to her home after a twenty-year wait. Catherine's spectral appearance, depicted in a childlike form, holds profound symbolism, signifying her longing for the carefree years of childhood spent with Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights, where innocence was preserved. It is also significant to note that she haunts the house of her birth rather than Thrushcross Grange, where she lived as married, and the moors where she shared moments with Heathcliff.

Catherine does not only haunt the narration and the place, but she mainly haunts Heathcliff. When Lockwood cries for help and tells Heathcliff about his view of Catherine Linton, the host has an opposite reaction: he longs to be haunted by Catherine: "He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. 'Come in! come in!' he sobbed. 'Cathy, do come. Oh, do once more! Oh! my heart's darling! hear me this time, Catherine, at last!'" (Brontë 36) In this poignant scene, we see both lover's longing, and as the past cannot be brought back, haunting is what is left. Heathcliff's plea to be haunted by Catherine is seen also after her death, with the famous utterance:

Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living. You said I killed you – haunt me then. The murdered do haunt their murderers. I believe – I know that ghosts have wandered the earth. Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad. Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul! (Brontë 213)

This scene, almost resembling a theatrical tragedy, is heavily emotionally charged. While uttered in romantic tones and expressions, it is rich with elements that display the terrifying reality of a gothic, ghost story. A close analysis of this passage is fundamental. Many elements here reference hauntings as, as Heathcliff affirms, he not only believes, but "knows"

that ghosts wander the earth, and that they can “take any form”. The scene is again poignant, and Heathcliff’s curse to Catherine represents important elements: firstly, his desire for her not to find peace after death does not come from condemnation but from his inability to let her go; secondly, it underscores the intricate connection between past actions and their consequences in the present (“I killed you – haunt me!”); lastly, his longing for this haunting signifies an intense desire to be reunited with Catherine, which will be ultimately possible only in death, but that as long as he lives can take the form of haunting.

Some points of the narration imply that Heathcliff does indeed perceive Catherine’s ghostly presence, as it is alluded by Heathcliff himself in the scene previously discussed where Lockwood is terrified of the ghost he saw: “‘Always at nine in winter, and rise at four,’ said my host, suppressing a groan: and, as I fancied, by the motion of his arm’s shadow, dashing a tear from his eyes. ‘Mr. Lockwood,’ he added, ‘you may go into my room (...)’” (Brontë 35).

Furthermore, as the novel comes to an end, just before his demise, Heathcliff increasingly frequents the moors, where Catherine's spirit is said to have wandered. Each time he returns from these excursions, he appears more content and yearns for his own death, which is a veiled implication that he goes to meet her ghost. The story concludes with the fulfilment of Heathcliff's wishes: he is buried beside Catherine, and their apparitions are believed to haunt the moors, as vividly depicted in the novel's closing pages:

(...) the country folks, if you ask them, would swear on the Bible that he WALKS: there are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house. Idle tales, you’ll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on ‘em looking out of his chamber window on every rainy night since his death: and an odd thing happened to me about a month ago. I was going to the Grange one evening, a dark evening, threatening thunder and,

just at the turn of the Heights, I encountered a little boy with a sheep and two lambs before him; he was crying terribly; and I supposed the lambs were skittish, and would not be guided.

‘What is the matter, my little man?’ I asked.

‘There’s Heathcliff and a woman yonder, under t’ nab,’ he blubbered, ‘un’ I darnut pass ‘em.’

I saw nothing; but neither the sheep nor he would go on so I bid him take the road lower down. He probably raised the phantoms from thinking, as he traversed the moors alone, on the nonsense he had heard his parents and companions repeat. Yet, still, I don’t like being out in the dark now; and I don’t like being left by myself in this grim house: I cannot help it; I shall be glad when they leave it and shift to the Grange. (Brontë 427)

It can be concluded that his analysis of Brontë’s novel underscores the overlooked significance of the haunting theme in *Wuthering Heights* asserting its pivotal role in shaping subsequent psychological terror fiction. This recognition should rightfully enhance Emily Brontë’s stature as a gothic writer. An evaluation of the novel from this perspective also prompts a reconsideration of Victorian gothic literature, elevating its literary importance. As posited by James Quinnell, Brontë’s spectral entities are not meant for fright but rather evoke feelings of yearning and nostalgia that resonate universally among humans. I advocate for the belief that, among other literary genres, gothic and horror fiction hold an intimate connection to human nature, delving into the depths of our minds and subconscious. Therefore, Emily Brontë’s early endeavours in this realm can be considered early attempts to create what later Gothic fiction does: the intertwining of fiction with the complexities of the human psyche

through psychoanalytical developments. This will be better observed in the second novel under analysis.

3.2. The House Lives: *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson

A lot has changed in the one hundred and twelve years that separate Shirley Jackson's novel from Brontë's, both culturally and historically of course, but also regarding the development of the Gothic fiction genre. More specifically for this analysis, it is interesting to see how the trope of haunting has shifted after the advent of psychoanalytic studies. *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), a post-modern piece of Gothic, is the perfect example of the integration of psychological torment and uncanniness in fiction. While *Wuthering Heights*, as shown, undergoes critical debate about which theme is central to the novel, whether romance or hauntings, in Jackson's novel there is no such doubt: the theme of haunting is already explicit in the title, and this novel is firmly set as a classic Gothic piece.

The relevance of this novel has moreover trespassed literary borders and in 2018 it has been adapted into a TV series for Netflix with the homonymous title directed by Mike Flanagan, which has been a great success and paved the way for other Gothic pieces to be adapted, such for example *The Turn of The Screw* by Henry James (on Netflix with the title *The Haunting of Bly Manor*) and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of The House of Usher* (on Netflix with the homonymous title). Notably, all these adaptations revolve around a common theme: a haunted house. Hence, the title *The Haunting of Hill House* becomes a focal point for discussing the essence of haunting tropes depicted and their significance. Upon closer examination, it presents in fact conflicting notions: while it clarifies that haunting occurs within a house, the use of the preposition "of" makes us wonder: does the house itself haunt, or is it haunted?

3.2.1 *Living Victorian Houses*

In Shirley Jackson's novel, the motif of haunting takes a different shape and scope compared to Brontë's work by intertwining with another literary trope that emerged precisely in the century between the two books: the haunted house. This motif was not present in early or Victorian Gothic literature but arose later as American Gothic writers reimagined Victorian houses in a sinister light, as haunted places. *Wuthering Heights*, as an estate, was not haunted, whereas *Hill House*, with its Victorian architecture, stands as a haunted structure. As previously explained, some critics establish that this trope emerged in the post-war United States as a break from its colonial past: while Americans were building new cities and neighborhoods, Victorian manors represented old structures where people had lived and died, and therefore a past to bury. As we see, while Victorian gothic celebrated a return of the past somehow, in modern gothic the past that does not die haunts. Monica Michlin, examining haunted houses in postmodern fiction, suggests that this transformation is linked to the rise of psychoanalysis. She indeed contends that “gothic narratives display post-Freudian awareness that the haunted house is the place where the trauma occurred, but also, and subsequently, the projection of the traumatized and haunted psyche itself” (Michlin 6)

The Haunting of Hill House opens with the introduction of Dr. Montague, a scientist aiming to validate the existence of paranormal phenomena. He selects *Hill House*, rumored to be haunted, as his research site, anticipating recognition for his work: “he expected to be absolutely compensated for his pain by the sensation following upon the publication of his definitive work on the causes and effects of psychic disturbances in a house commonly known as ‘haunted’” (Jackson 4) Here “psychic disturbances” are mentioned as in the understanding of hauntings, and this stands as an implication of psychoanalytic awareness in the text. A few lines later, explicit references to the Victorian age are provided:

Dr. Montague's intentions with regard to Hill House derived from the methods of the intrepid nineteenth-century ghost hunters; he was going to live in Hill House and see what happened there. (...) Perhaps the leisurely ways of Victorian life lent themselves more agreeably to the devices of psychic investigation" (Jackson 4)

It can be noticed that this passage hints at the irony employed by the external narrator, alluding to the naivety of the Victorian belief that hauntings were physical apparitions, and not manifestations of psychological depth, as psychoanalysis later sustained. The house itself is described as a Victorian uncanny mansion also in its architecture:

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting a roof of sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank window and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice. (...) a house arrogant and hating, never off guard, can only be evil. (Jackson 35)

In this passage, the house is a being. Historian Sarah Burns analyzes this revisitation of the Victorian affirming that:

In the modern age the Victorian house became home to psychological demons. Each house was a vessel, a lid clamped down on a stew of powerful emotions, both personal and cultural—fear, dread, trauma, anxiety (...) What the house contained, though, always threatened to seep out, no matter how strong the desire to subdue and repress it. (Burns 16)

Just as in the text, Burns also speaks of the haunted house as an uncontrollable monstrous being who traps, just as our mind can be sometimes; in contemporary fiction, this trope has developed to even portray repressed childhood abuse.

3.2.2 *Hill House: Subject or Object of Hauntings?*

While the reference to Victorian architecture and era is noticeable and relevant, another element here gets the attention: the house is alive, with human features and personality. The primary emphasis of this analysis must therefore center on this crucial aspect: the personification of the house.

From the very first page, Hill House is introduced as if it were a character of its own, captivating readers with its famous, impressive lines: “No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality (...) 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 (...) and whatever walked there, walked alone.” (Jackson 3) Already from these first few lines, we note that the use of the language would be appropriate for a living being: in fact, Hill House is paralleled to a “live organism” who is “not sane”, it “stands” and “holds” within darkness and insanity, just as if it was alive. In the introduction to his book *Women and Domestic Space in Contemporary Gothic Narratives: The House as Subject*, titled *The Subject of The House in Gothic Narratives*, Andrew Hock Soon Ng argues how often “the subject of many Gothic works is not just their principal character, but is also frequently the house itself” (5) Therefore, what happens to Dr. Montague and the other characters inside Hill House: is the house haunted or does the house itself haunt them?

I would argue that the answer to this question is intentionally open to debate, and both options could be possible, as well as none of them: all the haunting events could also be hallucinations of a disturbed mind. What is more agreeable is that in the narration the personification of the house plays an important role in the character’s relation to hauntings and paranormal events. The text is crowded with references to the house as a living being. Dr Montague himself discusses haunted houses as living entities affirming that “some houses are

born bad” and stating about Hill House that he cannot answer whether “its personality was molded by the people who lived here (...) or whether it was evil from its start” (Jackson 70) The house holds stillness and evil within itself, just “sitting here thinking (...) and waiting” (82) It can be affirmed that, As Andrew Hock Soon Ng states, “many of its [the Gothic’s] narratives that identify the house in the title seems to suggest that the architecture’s prominence exceeds its function as a backdrop but is in fact the very thing that engenders terror.” (1)

The close reading of textual extracts is essential because the text is self-explanatory, and it helps to narrow down the discussion about the form of haunting in this novel. Indeed, it is made clear that the house has a form of its own life; while this has no foundation in logic, it makes sense in the context of narrative fiction, because the author has freedom and control over its creation. This observation fits with Freud’s thoughts about the uncanny in literature:

The story-teller has this license among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. (...) The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move into the world of common reality. (...) He takes advantage, as it were, of our supposedly surmounted superstitiousness; he deceives us into thinking that he is giving us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility. We react to his inventions as we should have reacted to real experiences. (Freud 18)

The author therefore skillfully plays with the borders of reality and supernaturality, making the haunting a psychological experience. It can be derived therefore that the idea of a house that is alive not only reinforces the feeling of the *unheimlich*, but also makes the reader wonder what is real and what is not, and therefore unable to fully reply to whether the house is the object or the subject of the hunting, and if the hauntings are happening at all.

3.2.3 *Haunted Minds*

In this novel, there are no visions of ghosts, and no paranormal entities appear to the characters. Nevertheless, inexplicable events occur, such as doors that shut by themselves, loud bangs in the walls, sinister murmurs, blood on walls and spots in the house where the temperature suddenly drops. Therefore, how the haunting manifests is not made explicit: the border between real and surreal mingles with that sanity between insanity.

While all characters are involved in strange occurrences, the narration is more closely centered around one of the character's perceptions, Eleanor Vance. Jackson crafts Eleanor's character by emphasizing her emotional vulnerability and the impact of her troubled past, particularly her dysfunctional relationship with her mother and sister, "The only person in the world that she generously hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister." (Jackson 6); Eleanor is in Hill House to prove herself that she can do something special "I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step." (Jackson 15) The novel employs psychological realism to blur the lines between Eleanor's reality and her internal struggles, delving into her inner thoughts to represent her fragile mental state, especially through her inner dialogues. From the beginning, her thoughts appear bizarre, just like her imagination, and during the narration she shows signs of instability. For example, while driving to Hill House she imagines herself living in a house with two lions, and at many points of the story in her inner dialogue, she belittles and doubts herself. As events progress, Eleanor begins to experience hallucinations and develops a sense of paranoia, viewing the other residents of Hill House as potential dangers. Her intensifying suspicion regarding their motives clearly illustrates her declining mental state, underscoring the deepening fragility of her psyche throughout the story.

The final chapter of the novel culminates with an episode of madness from Eleanor, where she undergoes intense thoughts while racing through the house, pounding on doors, and finally reaching the library. At this crucial moment, Eleanor experiences a profound

connection with Hill House, reinforcing her past aspirations to remain within its confines forever. The library, previously repulsive with an exclusive foul odour that only she detects, holds the history of a previous owner's suicide. Eleanor's compulsive urge to ascend the metal stairway leading to the turret, the location of the previous owner's hanging, serves as a warning sign of her deteriorating mental state: "No stone lions for me, she thought, no oleanders; I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come inside. I am home, she thought, and stopped in wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought; now to climb." As she climbs the stairs, the others try to stop her, but she is in delirium, "For a minute she could not remember who they were (had they been guests of hers in the house of the stone lions? Dining at her long table at the candlelight? Had she met them at the inn, over the tumbling stream?)" (Jackson 232) Her persistent mantra of "I am home" signifies her determination to spend the rest of her life within Hill House, and it appears that she is contemplating taking her own life. Eleanor's actions are blocked by the other characters, and she is ultimately sent away from Hill House, leaving an open ending to how her fate goes.

At the end of this novel, we do not have a clear answer to any of the questions previously raised. It is almost impossible to define whether Eleanor, who is the character who mostly deals with paranormal activities, is actually witnessing the events, or if, as some argue, she suffers from schizophrenia or some other type of mental illness. What we can draw from this analysis though, is that Shirley Jackson has created a perfect haunted house story of psychological terror, which clearly arises from the implications of psychoanalytical notions and development of the time. The implementation of a character like Eleanor, whose mental condition is questionable, also centers the attention around the notion that hauntings in modern and contemporary fiction are metaphors of a repressed conflict or trauma. Ng sustains regarding this that the familiarity of the house makes it hard to understand these elements at first, and that therefore it is:

(...) unsurprising that many Gothic works linking the supernatural to the house are susceptible to a psychoanalytical reading: the protagonist wavering between belief and disbelief as the haunting intensifies is certainly an effective metaphor for a patient struggling with irrationality as he becomes increasingly unable to differentiate between what is real and otherwise. (2)

In essence, Shirley Jackson deliberately leaves ambiguity regarding whether the supernatural events experienced by Eleanor are real or manifestations of her mental state, opening the road to the reader's interpretation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, during the analysis carried out in this paper to answer the research statement, different points emerge. Most notably, it is safe to state that the development of studies on the human psyche and subconscious carried out at the beginning of the 20th century, specifically by Sigmund Freud, has helped not only understand the reason behind the effectiveness of the trope of haunting in literature, but they have also provided modern and subsequent writers with a tool to incorporate and navigate the mind's darkest expressions in fiction. The comparative analysis of the novel, both through theoretical notions and textual reading, highlights that the two texts serve a similar and complementing purpose through their similarities and differences: While Emily Brontë makes an early attempt at portraying the trope of hauntings as an expression of both longing for the past and as a metaphor of abuse, Shirley Jackson's skillfully perfects this by opening the discussion on hauntings as a metaphor for disturbed mental health.

As the analysis provides, an important aspect that both novels have in common is therefore the blurring of the boundaries between reality and irrationality, life and death, rationality, and folklore, and natural and supernatural. We can deduce these features of the Gothic, possess qualities intimately close to human beings, making this kind of fiction reliable; scary too, but irresistible, delightfully uncanny.

For future research, a more careful eye on how the theme of hauntings will develop in fiction can be useful in analyzing social and cultural shifts in reality. Moreover, examining reader responses to haunting depictions and their psychological impact opens the road to understanding the interplay between literature, emotions, and the human psyche. Lastly, on a more personal reflection, I would suggest that the revision of the novel *Wuthering Heights* can be useful in establishing not only the role of this novel in the field of Gothic literature of

trauma and abuse but also in being more careful in celebration a story of toxic love and abuse as an example of undefinable love.

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