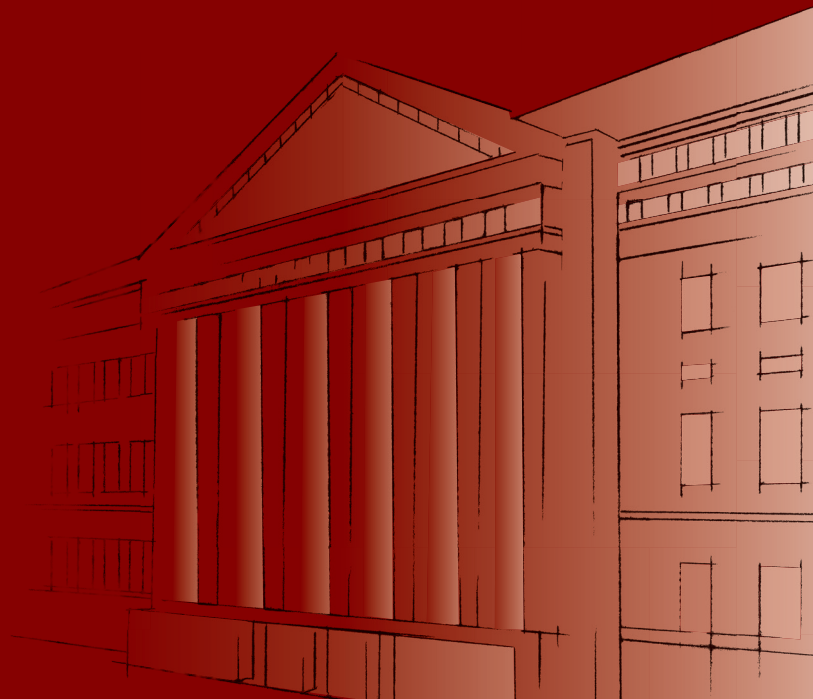


HELEN ROOSTMA

Affective Hauntings, Absolute Reality:  
Space, Time, Experience and  
the Haunted House Narrative





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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality.”

Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

In August 2024, I finally moved out of the tiny apartment I grew up in. Even when I was a child, the place was known as ‘the old house’. A Bonafide haunted house, that place. A two-story *khrushchevka* from the 1970s entirely unsuited to its environment, it squats in an unremarkable patch of marshy land just off National Road 6. Not particularly scenic, not at all spacious, and never really comfortable, its perpetually damp walls foster molds horror authors can only dream of. It was, after all, not built to last.

But the old house was always beautiful to me because it was **home**. Filled with memories, some kinder than others. There: My paternal grandparents, living in the apartment next to ours. My aunt, coming up the driveway to ask for my help with “computer stuff,” usually requiring nothing more than a couple clicks on a website. My cousin, teaching me to play Solitaire on my first computer. My childhood cat at the kitchen window waiting for me to lumber up the stairs already, her green eyes glinting. My mother, reading bedtime stories to a little girl who was terrified of the shadows but wanted to hear about them anyway. That little girl now grown up, reading early drafts of this very dissertation to her mother in the middle of the night while our new kitten slept in her lap, completely unbothered. That is warmth. Life. Home. It will never happen again the way it did.

Today, that old house stands empty. Uninhabited, its windows are dark, its rooms home to no one. But everyone that used to be there still is. As memories, they will always be there. Just like I will be for someone else, someday. But right now, as I am writing this, I am twenty-nine years old and I am somewhere else and I am home. A moment that stretches out and will continue to stretch out, suspended in words put to paper. All things end, save for time. That specter keeps marching on, uncaring, until it devours all. In my heart, there has always been an urge to resist it. I do not *want* time to pass. I do not *want* things to end. I fear what comes after. I dread that nothing does.

I have now dedicated over five years of my life to studying haunted houses because I instinctively understood mine always was. I did not move far: I am still in the same parish my family has lived in for centuries. This new old house, sharing the birth decade of the old, has become home. A home that does not harm my body simply for daring to live in it. A home that is warm, and comfortable, and safe. Here, I assembled the kitchen cabinets. My mother and I put up wall-paper together. The kitten, now grown, sleeps on a chair next to the kitchen stove. It is not perfect, but it is ours – as much a part of me as I am of it. This new place,

too, is haunted in its own way. Everything is. That thought, born long before I ever heard the word hauntology, was the impulse behind this dissertation. All the rest came after, along the way.

But I have thanks to give. I did not, after all, do it alone. No one does. For their support and genuine interest in this topic, I would like to thank the review committee I had the pleasure of working with through this process for their valuable feedback year after year. Numerous thanks must undoubtedly go to my wonderful reviewers, Drs Xavier Aldana Reyes and Rebecca Janicker, whose constructive and exceedingly kind comments doubtlessly improved the work before you now. Thank you both for your time and attention. To the academic community around speculative fiction at large: thank you for making me feel like I was not alone – in a good way, for once. The greatest of thanks, of course, go to my supervisor Prof. Raili Marling. “So what?” is an incredibly frustrating question, but it is also a question that deserves an answer. Thank you for asking it, again and again.

My thanks as well to my friends, colleagues, and family, most of whom live and work far away from academia. This is, apparently, how long I was going to be doing this for. And now it is done, as hard as that is to believe. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my mother: thank you for your endless support, your endless patience, and your endless love. Thank you for putting up with the ceramic skull collection and the pumpkins. And the rest of it, too. Whatever houses I find myself in, I know what home means to me.

Love you, Ma. Here’s to us.

## INTRODUCTION

*“Last night I saw upon the stair,  
A little man who wasn’t there,  
He wasn’t there again today  
Oh, how I wish he’d go away...”*

William Hughes Mearns, *Antigonish*

Tales of ghosts are by no means a modern phenomenon. There is enough extant archaeological data to suggest that the ancient Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans all believed in life after death and the specters that shadowed this belief. For example, a hauntingly familiar narrative can be found in a letter from Pliny the Younger (Plin. *Ep.* 7. 27), which, among other things, outlines a story about a haunted house in Athens, occupied by one of what the Romans would have called *lemures* or *larvae*, the spirits of the dead. The spirit in the story was placated once his earthly remains were found and properly interred, repeating a common pattern in haunting folklore,<sup>1</sup> where a spirit haunts the vicinity of its earthly remains and desires closure to move on to the afterlife.

Indeed, tales of malicious spirits, specters, and the restless dead can be found in cultures all over the world and through time, from the *onryō*<sup>2</sup> of Japan to *La Llorona*<sup>3</sup> of Latin America to the various spirits of Eastern Europe,<sup>4</sup> and many stories follow a similar pattern to the one outlined above. However, there is a marked difference between the specters found in ghostlore and in modern horror fiction: one such difference might be that, today, restless spirits have become a problem that cannot be solved through ritualistic actions. If the hauntings found in traditional folklore and classical as well as medieval literature can serve a didactic function, depicting revenants with agendas that can be placated and telling stories which can teach their audience (cf Grider et al. 2007), the spectral forces found haunting contemporary fiction often lack such a clear explanation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes termed “ghostlore” (see Jones 1944).

<sup>2</sup> In Japanese, 怨霊 (*onryō*), a type of vengeful spirit. According to Lovelace (2008: 30), the *onryō* is often depicted as a “wronged woman who has been murdered, or subjected to a traumatising event during life that has instigated her demise,” which leads the restless spirit to seek revenge.

<sup>3</sup> Otherwise known as “the weeping woman,” *La Llorona* is traditionally the spirit of a woman who drowned her children as an act of revenge against her unfaithful husband. Another spirit connected to adulterous men is *La Sayona*; similar wailing spirit is the *bean sí* or banshee; other spirits associated with water include the female *rusalka* and the male *водяной* (*vodjanoi*).

<sup>4</sup> Such as the Slavic *домовой* (“household spirit”), the Estonian *kodukäija* (“restless spirit”), and the Romanian vampire-like *strigoi* and *moroi*.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Max Weber posited that the replacement of magical thinking in culture<sup>5</sup> by reasoning led to a devaluation of ultimate beliefs and religious ethics (cf Gane 2002), in a process Weber called “disenchantment”. Weber believed that something irreplaceable is lost when the role of religion declines in a culture and strict rationality governs prevalent thought, leaving no room for the magical. However, others have suggested that we might instead be now experiencing a “re-enchantment,” where rational reasoning might not be as prevalent and triumphant as it once seemed to be and interest in the supernatural and magical is reignited. Indeed, Landy and Saler (2009: 1) suggest that secular mysticism fills the gaps in cultural spaces that were left from the loss of religion.

As might be expected, one place where re-enchantment can be observed is in the arts (cf Graham 2007) and in entertainment. One of the foremost genres in which this re-enchantment can be seen is horror – the enduring critical, commercial, and cultural success of films such as *The Amityville Horror* (1979) and *Poltergeist* (1982), novels like *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and *The Shining* (1977) as well as the multi-million-dollar industry of paranormal tourism, commercial haunted houses, and ghost hunting would suggest that there is something about the spectral that has remained enticing even in the supposedly secular and rational 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

One explanation for the enduring popularity of horror fiction and, by extension, of haunted houses, might well lie in what Carroll (1990: 160) refers to as the “paradox of horror”: the tension between attraction and repulsion that is inherent in the horror genre. While horror is, as the name might imply, primarily concerned with evoking negative affect, we still seek it out because it offers something besides fear. Speaking from a biocultural point of view, Clasen (2017: 5–6) suggests that the popularity of horror fiction is tied to how it triggers certain neurochemical processes which are linked primarily to the survival instinct – as much as horror fiction might upset or distress its audience, it is also consumed in a controlled environment and can provide a sense of catharsis that is otherwise unattainable without genuine physical risk.

This effect produced by horror has been described by Andersen et al. (2020: 1507) as ‘recreational fear’: participants in the study who visited a commercial haunted house experienced a combination of fear and enjoyment that both they and the researchers characterized as a form of play. However, recreational fear was only present if the two reactions were balanced correctly: an excess of either would not produce the effect, leaving either fear or enjoyment as the dominating experience. Consequently, we might infer that consuming horror fiction, much like visiting a haunted house, provides the experience of a heightened psychological state without intense physical effort or unintended consequences, differing from activities such as extreme sports which have the same effect but involve genuine danger.

Perhaps it is precisely this element of thrill-seeking that makes horror fiction particularly appealing and relevant in the neoliberal cultural spaces we inhabit.

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<sup>5</sup> A shift evidenced in the decreasing role of organized religion in people’s lives.

We think we are safe since the problems that plagued our ancestors appear to be mostly solved through perseverance and by scientific progress – the god of the gaps is dead at last. In such a context, horror fiction can supply an environment to explore an inherently terrifying question: might we be wrong? As we have come to suspect over the past decades and have seen by the events of the 2020s, this question has become increasingly troubling. Horror fiction can offer an escape to explore these thoughts seemingly without implications for reality because, especially in the case of haunting fiction, it concerns impossible entities and situations.

While the term ‘neoliberalism’ has had conflicting definitions and debates over its meaning are still ongoing (cf Boas & Gans-Morse 2009), this dissertation will approach it on the basis of the definition given by Springer et al. (2016: 2), who state that neoliberalism entails “political, economic and social arrangements within society that emphasize market relations, re-tasking the role of the state, and individual responsibility” to increase personal freedoms and economic capabilities while limiting state interference in the economy. However, within the last fifty years, it has also expanded beyond economic philosophy, being constantly reinvented and reimplemented (cf Peck 2010). Indeed, Harvey (2005: 3) states outright that neoliberal discourse “has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world”. As Brown (2015: 9) puts it, in the neoliberal mode of reasoning, “[a]ll conduct is economic conduct”. Today, neoliberalism is no longer simply an economic or political phenomenon – instead, it is a spectral ideology which permeates both the public as well as the domestic sphere, making life itself transactional.

Speaking of the impact of neoliberal thinking on the individual, it is worth noting that there is a marked difference between the idea of neoliberalism as an economic concept and its practice as a cultural mode of being. On the example of the U.S., Navarro (2007: 49–50) states that while the Carter and Reagan administrations promised less state intervention, they simply “changed the nature” of it: in particular, the policies enacted during the Reagan administration were beneficial for the upper classes as well as corporations but detrimental to the middle and working classes. As Morgen and Gonzales (2008: 233–234) put it, the hegemony of neoliberal discourse is by no means seamless or complete and the experiences of low-income Americans “often speak volumes about the hollowness of promised market solutions to poverty” precisely because the promise found in the theory of neoliberalism has not been realized. Simultaneously, while faith in the attainability of the American Dream appears to be in decline among Americans due to increasing social and economic inequality (cf Wolak & Peterson 2020), the neoliberal ideal of individual responsibility paradoxically endures in public discourse despite ample evidence against the omnipotence of the individual as a participant in the free market. This, in turn, both amplifies and reinforces the ubiquity of neoliberal rationality in the cultural spaces we inhabit while leaving little room to explore alternatives, whatever form they may take (cf Fisher 2009).

If the neoliberal mindset would argue that all problems can be solved if one tries hard enough, endorsing a tirelessly optimistic outlook and stressing the infinite power of the abstract individual, horror fiction can refract this by instead ruminating on the specific individual's helplessness and inability to act. This becomes readily apparent in haunting fiction and, as this dissertation would contend, specifically in connection to what Janicker (2015) refers to as the 'haunted house motif'. From this derives an important argument of this dissertation, namely that the haunted house motif allows us to see fissures in neoliberal ideology. To do this, however, what kind of haunted houses are being addressed here needs to be examined.

The haunted house motif seems inherently tied to all things Gothic: when thinking of a 'haunted house,' the image of a dilapidated Victorian mansion filled with the restless spirits of the dead, seemingly plucked whole from the pages of a Gothic novel, is remarkably easy to conjure up. However, Gothic as a term has become increasingly vague. For example, for Punter (1980) the term covers most supernatural and horror fiction: directly because of this, Joshi (1990: 3) points out that the term has been and continues to be used in such a broad way as to be almost meaningless. Nevertheless, I disagree with Joshi's argument that 'Gothic' is useless for works published later than the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, after Edgar Allan Poe: to me, there are contexts where the term can be useful if narrowed down. As can be seen from its diverse and numerous iterations, however, the haunted house narrative cannot be limited solely to the Gothic.

The contemporary prevalence of genre hybrids,<sup>6</sup> i.e., works which do not belong to only one genre but, rather, combine elements of two or more genres, makes an already troubled categorization ever more complicated. The other problem is not with terminology but with the genre system as a given when it comes to haunted house fiction. Indeed, although 'horror' as a label appears to be fairly recent and has been used as an umbrella term for almost every novel which has some element of fear attached to it, from the Gothic to the mystery to the weird and beyond, it is also much too broad to help create a functional typology.

To put it bluntly, as Morgan (2002: 37) did: "Criticism addressing the literature of horror is notoriously lacking in an established terminology". Twenty-odd years later, this unfortunately remains the case. One example of the problem with terminology is 'ghost story,' which in the context of this dissertation will refer to texts that incorporate spectrality, including both human ghosts and nonhuman spectral entities. This is, paradoxically, a narrow definition of the term. Briggs (1977: 12), for example, states that the term 'ghost story' applies to "not only stories about ghosts, but about possession and demonic bargains, spirits other than those of the dead, including ghouls, vampires, werewolves, the 'swarths' of living men and the 'ghost-soul' or *Doppelgänger*" while conceding later that the term

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<sup>6</sup> One such hybrid is the horror comedy, examples of which include films such as *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), the five-film *Scary Movie* franchise (2000–2013), and *Jennifer's Body* (2009). Another hybrid is science fiction or sci-fi horror, film examples of which include works such as *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), *Alien* (1979), *Cube* (1997), and *Event Horizon* (1997).

'supernatural stories' might be more precise. Sullivan (1979: 9) likewise uses 'ghost story' as an umbrella term while admitting its shortfalls in that function: his justification is a sense of the "apparitional" in the corpus of texts he studies.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, as the terms 'horror' and 'Gothic' have sometimes been used almost interchangeably (see Punter 1980), the former is used in the context of this dissertation as the broad term for narratives which evoke the affect of fear and make use of recreational fear, whereas 'the Gothic' designates a specific type of fiction including but not limited to horror.<sup>8</sup>

Other scholars have built taxonomies based on the presence of the effects created. For example, Carroll (1990: 42) makes a formal distinction between 'art-horror', requiring the presence of entities and 'art-dread', requiring the presence of events. Freeland (2004), in contrast, distinguishes the two based on emotions invoked: horror for the former, dread for the latter. Dread, by omitting the viscera of the monstrous body and gore, can hold that which is dreadful at a distance but keep it always looming, and is thus of more interest for this dissertation. This distance and disembodiment, in turn, can produce the affect of dread both within the narrative in connection to the characters and, by extension, for the audience as well because it suggests the fragility of agency. After all, even a profoundly empowered individual cannot fight something that is intangible, such as a deadly virus or, in the case of this dissertation, a phantom. Perhaps it is an inherent pessimism in supernatural horror fiction, as suggested by Stoneman and Packer (2017), which makes this type of fiction particularly antithetical to neoliberalism. By creating such narratives, we can attempt to dissect our powerlessness against specters, be they literal or metaphorical – haunted spaces might be the place where the god of the gaps could yet endure, at least in spirit.

When speaking of spirits in the cultural context of the U.S. in particular, the enduring popularity of the ghost story has traditionally been interpreted as symptomatic of the disquiets in the American culture. Bailey (1999: 114) goes as far as to state that the American haunted house is "a symbol of America and the American mind" where past traumas, both cultural as well as individual, can reverberate through the narrative in the depiction of ghosts as their inevitable results. Janicker (2015: 1) takes a similar position, arguing that haunted house narratives "provide imaginative opportunities to keep the past alive while highlighting the complexities of the culture from which they emerged", conceptualizing the haunted location as a liminal space where the past and present can collide.

More broadly, Magistrale (2005: 90) argues that the haunted building "serves as a vehicle for the inner psychology of its inhabitants", making manifest the troubles that haunt them. Spooner (2006: 17) adds that ghosts caused by past

---

<sup>7</sup> Conversely, Sullivan also points out that "[f]inding the appropriate language and tone for discussing this fiction is tricky business. . . . [I]t lies in a strange intermediary class between 'popular' and 'serious' art": this, in part, might be the reason for why consistent terminology has been and continues to be severely lacking in this field.

<sup>8</sup> A more detailed discussion is provided in Chapter One.

traumas are “not restricted to architectural locales” but, rather, make “the mind itself a kind of prison”. We can infer, then, that in genre scholarship the primary function of ghosts and the spectral is believed to be psychological, made manifest with the haunted house as metonymy for cultural anxieties, and it is in this way that haunting narratives have primarily been interpreted. In the wake of Derrida, Davis (2005: 373) states that ghosts are simply “neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive”: literary specters have thus become nonbeings, existing on the fringes without coming into focus, converting cultural anxieties into individual dread for those being haunted.

It is this individual dread that can be explained with the help of affect theory, creating a more rounded approach to spectrality that considers both meaning and experience. Certainly, while places can be construed as embodied in terms of affect (cf Anderson 2014), the spectral body is disembodied, an affective nonbeing. The prevalent approach to haunting narratives thus far has focused on the response to hauntings, which is then interpreted by explaining the haunting, treating spectrality as an act of representation of a hidden, deeper meaning. The tools and concepts for such analysis tend to be derived principally from psychoanalytical thought through concepts such as the uncanny and the abject (see Wolfreys 2002 and Ransom 2015 for examples). This existing body of work can be enriched by an approach that combines attention to interpretation and experience. As affect, in the sense that the term is employed in this dissertation, is the capacity both to affect and to be affected (see Deleuze & Guattari 1987), it can help examine spectrality not only in how it affects but also in how it is affected itself. This approach makes it possible to study the transmission of affect within narratives through examining the way it transpires between the embodied characters and the disembodied specters. This can serve two purposes: firstly, to make visible sticky affects, such as anxiety, which accumulate objects real and unreal, always in the process of “passing by” (Ahmed 2004: 125) and never crystallized but, simultaneously, retaining connections between “ideas, values, and objects” (Ahmed 2010: 29). Secondly, it touches on troubled or problematic embodiment, where the process of (re)constructing the material body, as theorized by Butler (2011), is interrupted or distorted: I would suggest that one way this process has been made visible in fiction is through the way it is recreated as the process of haunting.

This process has, as far as could be determined at the time of writing, not yet been studied in connection with haunting fiction. Gender studies scholars have produced significant amounts of work on embodiment and body horror in slasher films by examining the depiction of women in horror cinema and showing how horror fiction can reaffirm or subvert the objectification of women in a visual medium by incorporating or abandoning certain clichés and tropes (see Modleski 1988; Clover 1992; Creed 1993; Grant 2015). The notion of the objectified body, monstrosity, and the monstrous body in film have been examined extensively in cultural studies, particularly in connection to race and postcolonial theory, to trouble the function of monstrosity as a constructed notion which inevitably relies on the alienation, vilification, and eventual rejection of the Other (see Halberstam

1995; Cohen 1996; Gordon 1997; Brogan 1998; Skal 2000; Yaeger 2005; Cheyne 2019; Weinstock 2020). Additionally, while Aldana Reyes (2012; 2016) and Cheyne (2019) have used affect theory to study horror cinema, and Brinkema (2022) has redeveloped the affect of horror in *Life-Destroying Diagrams*, the primary focus of affect theory as applied to horror fiction has been on slasher films and the monstrous body – in other words, on reader reception of the visceral and of art-horror. Thus, there remains a research gap in examining spectrality in horror fiction outside of the film medium with affect theory.

Current scholarship on horror fiction and spectrality, then, tends to assume that hauntings are caused by unresolved past trauma and/or teach us something about the culture we live in (see Bailey 1999; Spooner 2006; Grider et al. 2007; Janicker 2015). Thus, existing scholarship of haunting narratives has approached its subject matter from a perspective that is thoroughly saturated by psycho-analytical thought and treats hauntings as symptoms of deeper troubles, be they cultural or psychological. This dissertation focuses on alternative ways of reading such narratives, combining affect theory, narratology, and cultural theory.

The majority of prior research on haunted house narratives appears to be case studies of individual texts, of which the most popular appear to be *The Shining* (e.g., Caldwell & Umland 1986, Metz 1997, Nolan 2011, Donnelly 2018), *The Haunting of Hill House* (e.g., Castricano 2005, Pascal 2014, Ashton 2018, Vinci 2019), and *House of Leaves* (e.g., Cox 2006, Askin 2016, Kilpiö 2018, Bekavac 2020). Beyond *House of Leaves*, little attention this far has been paid to haunted house narratives of the 21st century. This dissertation attempts to fill this gap by developing a typology that allows me to map the textual corpus and systematize it.

Indeed, systematized overviews of the haunted house phenomenon in literature are rare, most likely because of the vast number of texts published every year. Two previous examples are Dale Bailey's 1999 study *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* and Rebecca Janicker's 2015 study *The Literary Haunted House: Lovecraft, Matheson, King and the Horror in Between*, both of which focus exclusively on American haunted house narratives and primarily on the works of a selection of classical authors. In the case of the former, the texts examined are from the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Shirley Jackson, Robert Marasco, Stephen King, Jay Anson, and Anne Rivers Siddons;<sup>9</sup> for the latter, the corpus is even narrower, encompassing H. P. Lovecraft, Richard Matheson, and Stephen King.<sup>10</sup> Notably, neither discuss recent (to their time) fiction in depth.

Both Bailey and Janicker systematize their corpora of haunted house fiction based on subject matter rather than any generic alignment: both authors appear to

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<sup>9</sup> Respectively, the texts examined are “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), *Burnt Offerings* (1973), *The Shining*, *The Amityville Horror* (1977), and *The House Next Door* (1976).

<sup>10</sup> “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1933) for Lovecraft, *A Stir of Echoes* (1958) and *Earthbound* (1982) for Matheson, and *The Shining*, *Christine* (1983), and *Bag of Bones* (1998) for King.

consider the haunted house innately Gothic and leave it at that. Bailey's primary focus is on haunted house novels from the 1970s<sup>11</sup> and on showing that these texts contain a haunted house formula, i.e., elements through which a typical haunted house narrative is constructed such as archetypal characters, settings, plot structures, and themes. Janicker, on the other hand, argues that the haunted house motif can be interpreted as a liminal space, which for her designates a transitional space, a sort of threshold between defined states where knowledge unavailable in the regular world becomes attainable. This makes Janicker's "haunted house" broader than architecture: a more accurate term might be "haunted space" since Janicker's corpus includes *Christine*, a novel about a haunted car. Although I largely agree with her approach in that I believe the haunted house motif transcends buildings and can be viewed more broadly, my focus here is on haunted architecture.

This dissertation examines the haunted house motif as used in speculative fiction – used here as a blanket term for horror, fantasy, and science fiction, and all their hybrids and/or derivatives – in general and in supernatural fiction more specifically. My aim is to examine how the articulation of the haunted house motif and the haunting narrative have developed in 21<sup>st</sup>-century American fiction and to systematize these changes with the help of a new typology for the haunted house motif.

Said typology will be created by using the concept of storytelling mode, which will allow narratives to be categorized not solely based on the presence of the haunted house motif but also on their narratological properties. Firstly, the concept of the storytelling mode is derived from the narratological concept of mood, a term used to indicate the ways the discourse plane, i.e., the expression<sup>12</sup> (Prince 2003: 21), of the narrative relays its content plane, i.e., the story<sup>13</sup> (*ibid*). In essence, mood is the atmosphere of the narrative within the story(world) as created through conventions. The second inspiration is the approach to both Gothic and weird fiction as modes of fiction rather than genres in Punter (1980) and Botting (1996), and Joshi (1990), respectively. As modes, the two are viewed as loose collections of conventions in service of a distinct atmosphere rather than consistent sets of conventions in service of specific subject matter, which they would be as genres. Thus, a mode can overlap with different genres: for example, distinctions can be made between Gothic romances<sup>14</sup> and Gothic horror, because while both are Gothic in mode, the conventions used in the romance and horror genres inevitably differ.

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<sup>11</sup> Of the seven main chapters in the book, the first serving as an introduction and the last as a conclusion, three out of five content chapters are dedicated to these novels.

<sup>12</sup> How something is told.

<sup>13</sup> What is being told.

<sup>14</sup> Used here in the sense of the genre developed during the medieval period rather than the modern meaning of a genre focused on depicting romantic love, although gothic romance in the modern meaning of the term also exists.

Finally, my approach to what I term storytelling modes is drawn from the idea of the architext as proposed by Gérard Genette (1992; 1997). In Genette's (1992: 82–85) theory, architextuality contains the “theory of genres, /.../ theory of modes, /.../ theory of figures, /.../ theory of styles, /.../ theory of forms, /.../ theory of themes” – in short, literary theory and linguistics. The architext, in his view, is the interconnection between a text and “the various types of discourses it belongs to” – “constituted by way of imitation,” yet often open to interpretation rather than concrete (*ibid*). What I have aimed to achieve by the creation of the proposed typology is to make legible the relationships between the haunted house narrative as an architext and the individual texts derived from it as I see them. I suggest that in doing this, analysis can be undertaken more broadly than through case studies of individual texts, and can offer a more comprehensive perspective. I cannot, of course, claim that mine is the ‘correct’ way of looking at the history – as well as the present state – of the haunted house narrative: admittedly, I suggest an approach which has not, to my knowledge, been attempted before but which I believe has merit precisely because of its ambition.

The first chapter of this dissertation examines the history of the ghost story in English-language fiction, tracing its development from the Gothic fiction of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to the weird fiction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the dispersion of horror fiction through various media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the genesis of the haunted house narrative formula in the 1970s. Because of its long history, there is a significant degree of intertextuality and revivalism in individual articulations of the haunted house motif, as the motif has not been limited to a single genre, mode, or medium, and can, for example, be as easily used in a metaphoric<sup>15</sup> or a comedic/ironic manner,<sup>16</sup> as well as seriously. As it is, the haunted house motif is much broader than the scope examined in this dissertation: by necessity, I can focus only on a highly curated – but calculatedly diverse – selection of haunted house fiction.

Throughout the first chapter, I argue that the Gothic and the weird can easily be viewed as both genres and modes within the broader category of supernatural fiction. For instance, all weird fiction does not overlap with supernatural fiction because the former does not always deal with the supernatural. This can be seen, for example, in the occult detective story, which emerged from weird fiction, where the supernatural is something natural but difficult or impossible to

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<sup>15</sup> In Michlin (2012), for example, ‘haunted house fiction’ covers texts as diverse as Jim Grimsley’s *Dream Boy* (1995), Stanley Kubrick’s 1980 film adaptation of Stephen King’s *The Shining*, Matt Ruff’s *Set This House in Order* (2003), and Jonathan Demme’s 2004 remake of *The Manchurian Candidate*. With perhaps the exception of *The Shining*, the haunted house motif is used metaphorically rather than literally in most of these works.

<sup>16</sup> One of the earliest examples of the comedic haunted house can be found in *Mostellaria*, written by the Roman playwright Plautus, where a house is alleged to be haunted to stop a character from entering it. In contemporary fiction, one example might be the British television series *Ghosts* (2019–), a situational comedy about a haunted house and its occupants; another example is *The Selling* (2011), a comedy film about a real estate agent trying to sell a haunted house.

comprehend, not something beyond the natural (see Alder 2020: 121). Because of this, the present dissertation argues that the Gothic and the weird as modes emerge from the Gothic novel and weird fiction as genres. I argue that a process occurs over time where the consistent sets of conventions which characterize the two as genres break down and loosen to the point where the Gothic and the weird become storytelling modes. When applied in this sense, the mode of a given narrative can be used to suggest which kinds of moods are common in similar narratives in similar genres, but little else. Based on the above, I argue that the Gothic and the weird as modes can act as broad outlines for the moods of the narratives where they appear, whereas as genres, Gothic fiction and weird fiction respectively have more cohesive sets of conventions.

This, in turn, leads to the question of whether horror is a mode or a genre. Like the prior two, horror can be used either way depending on the focus: the subject matter (things that are frightening), the intent (to frighten), or the effect (being frightened) of horror. In the context of this dissertation, then, horror as a broad term is based on the intent/effect/subject-matter of the texts in the sense of a genre and horror as a mode is based on, like the Gothic and the weird modes, ways of conveying and interpreting the text.

I argue that the Gothic, the weird, and the horror mode all contain the building blocks through which the characteristic mood of the narrative is created. I propose that the storytelling mode of a narrative consists of a specific mood combined with a specific motif, in this case the haunted house, which creates distinguishable narrative atmospheres. This, in turn, is connected to the *architext*<sup>17</sup> of the narrative and consists of conventions such as typical characters, plots, themes, and settings as well as how these conventions are expressed: in the gothic mode, the haunted house depicted is distinguishable from that in the weird mode or in the horror mode. This dissertation argues that each mode where the haunted house motif appears uses different techniques to articulate the motif which can be charted through analysis. I propose that this can be useful in creating a typology of the haunted house motif by examining both the discursive and the content plane of narratives which use the motif and thereby circumventing the inherent subjectivity of creating genre canons.<sup>18</sup> The aim of the first chapter of the dissertation is thus to look beyond genre and, instead, to synthesize a new, more detailed approach to works which share similar characteristics but not necessarily a genre

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<sup>17</sup> As discussed briefly above, *architext* is one of the five categories of transtextuality as proposed by Genette (1980; 1997), forming the implicit broad framework of the text. This primarily affects the reception of the text but can also extend to influence the text itself wherein the established conventions in the *architext* are either subverted or confirmed.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, canonicity is a salient concern when it comes to the modes and works which are to be the focus of this dissertation: for example, a canon of weird fiction does not and perhaps cannot exist because weird fiction is defined by its existence on the margins, often combining features of science fiction, horror, and fantasy, making even the classification of a text as weird fiction inevitably subjective (see Luckhurst 2017).

or publication period and to show the interconnectivity and self-reflexivity of the haunted house narrative.

The second chapter of the dissertation contains the theoretical apparatus for conducting the empirical analysis in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Chapter Two builds a theoretical framework to approach the haunted house in three distinct perspectives: space, time, and experience. These perspectives, in turn, provide the structure of the chapter, which is divided into three subchapters.

In the first subsection, the broader notion of space is discussed, focusing first on Gaston Bachelard's (1994 [1958]) conception of the poetics of space with particular attention to the notions of the poetic image, the oneiric house, and the notion of verticality within the house. Secondly, the notion of heterotopia as coined by Michel Foucault (2008 [1984]) is discussed, arguing that the principles which Foucault uses to describe the function of the heterotopia can serve as an organizing mechanism for the haunted house narrative typology proposed in Chapter One of the present dissertation. Finally, the section discusses the concepts of space and place, relying primarily on the work of Doreen Massey (1994), and discusses different approaches to the concept of home.

In the second section of the chapter, the concept of time as pertaining to hauntings is discussed. The first subsection discusses the notion of hauntology as developed by Jacques Derrida (1994) and expanded by Hägglund (2008), Fisher (2014), and Shaw (2018), focusing primarily on how it may be adapted to the analysis of haunted house fiction. The second subsection discusses the concept of the specter and the spectral, arguing that the specter and the ghost are distinct entities in the context of haunted house narratives. In the third section, the notion of anachrony is discussed, drawing primarily on narratological research of Gerard Genette (1980), to introduce a functional vocabulary for the way time functions in literary texts.

In the third subchapter, the notion of experience is approached primarily through affect theory. The first subsection discusses the concept of the affective atmosphere as developed by Brennan (2004), Anderson (2009; 2014), and others, adapting affect theory for the purpose of literary analysis. I argue that the terminology introduced by Brown et al. (2019) is particularly useful for conducting an empirical analysis of affective atmospheres in texts. In the second subsection, the transmissibility of affect is discussed, focusing on the affects of fear and anxiety in particular and drawing from the work of Ahmed (2004; 2014) to determine how these affects may be transmitted not only between people but also within the environment and from objects to people and vice versa.

The third chapter of the dissertation contextualizes the novels discussed in the empirical analysis within the broader trends of 21<sup>st</sup> century horror genre. The second section of the chapter briefly discusses the methodology used to undertake the empirical analysis in the following chapters. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters cover the empirical analysis. The novels discussed are divided by what I consider to be their primary storytelling modes into three categories: gothic, weird, and horror. These categories, in turn, form the structure of the chapters with the

theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two providing the focal points in the analysis.

In Chapter Four, the novels *Mexican Gothic* (2020) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia and *The Hacienda* (2022) by Isabel Cañas are discussed as part of the gothic mode. As examples of the postcolonial gothic, I argue that the novels articulate their haunted houses in a manner closely aligned to the temporal axis of the heterotopia but do so in distinct ways through prioritizing different specters. In Chapter Five, the novels *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski and *Episode Thirteen* (2023) by Craig DiLouie are discussed. In these novels, the spaces which correspond to the haunted house motif articulate markedly diverse kinds of heterotopia: however, both novels depict a heterotopia that is at once intrusive as well as extrusive, paradoxically both constraining and uncontainable. In Chapter Six, the novels *The September House* (2023) by Carissa Orlando and *Diavola* (2024) by Jennifer Thorne are examined. The haunted houses in these novels both constitute crisis heterotopias but differ significantly from one another in terms of their approach to who, why, and how is in crisis. I suggest that both novels depict extrusive heterotopias: the events in the characters' pasts which caused the haunting have irreversibly affected their lives afterward.

Throughout the empirical chapters of the dissertation, I develop the argument that the motif of the haunted house, being decidedly outside the norm, can be instrumental in understanding what constitutes the normative 'home' and 'family.' As Butler (2004: 42) states: "The question of what it is to be outside the norm poses a paradox for thinking, for if the norm renders the social field intelligible and normalizes that field for us, then being outside the norm is in some sense being defined still in relation to it." While the dominant order is haunted by its alternative, that alternative is only made possible through the dominant order. In examining the contemporary haunted house narrative, my aim is thus two-fold: firstly, I intend to examine a literary phenomenon that is inextricable from the horror genre at large and which has thus far received little scholarly attention beyond individual texts. Secondly, I intend to illustrate the interconnectivity of the haunted house narrative as a type of text, showing its rich tradition and the transmutations therein that have led to its current state.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Mind, Body, Spirit: haunted house fiction from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the development of the haunted house motif through three distinct modes of fiction: the Gothic, the weird, and 20<sup>th</sup> century horror. Of each, a selection of texts which have had an impact on the development of the haunted house motif has been made. The chapter is organized chronologically into three subchapters, beginning with the emergence of the Gothic in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, moving on to weird fiction's nascence in the *fin de siècle* between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and in the 1920s and 1930s, to the dissemination of horror into various media over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the 1930s onwards, ending with the 1990s.

In each section, I identify the salient features of the ghost story and the haunted house motif prevalent during certain periods: the haunted house motif is common in the ghost story, and, as I will argue, the depiction of ghosts and spectrality in fiction influences the ways in which the haunted house motif can be articulated. As these depictions have changed over time, so have the ways that the haunted house motif can be articulated. These articulations, in turn, can be grouped together broadly by genre and mode. It should be noted here that the haunted house motif is not limited to supernatural fiction nor to horror: for example, the 1987 novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison uses the haunted house motif to examine the impact of slavery.

Since I contend that the developments which have occurred in the three periods reverberate through the articulation of the haunted house motif in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the typology created in this chapter will be used in the third chapter to create a system through which individual haunted house narratives can be grouped into distinct categories. The occurrence of these modes is cumulative and all three are present in contemporary haunted house fiction: an argument which I will return to in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of the present dissertation.

### **1.1. Gothic fiction and the developments of horror from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The Gothic literary tradition traces back to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, explicitly subtitled "a Gothic story" in its second edition, was published in 1764. It was not until the late 1780s, however, that the Gothic achieved its peak:

The decade of the French Revolution was also the period when the Gothic novel was at its most popular. Gothic, too, was a term invoked in many political debates, signifying, for a range of political positions, revolutionary mobs, enlightened radicals and irrational adherence to tyrannical and superstitious feudal values. In a more specific historical sense, Gothic was associated with the history of the northern, Germanic nations whose fierce avowal of the values of freedom and democracy was claimed as an ancient heritage. (Botting 1996: 3)

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, then, the Gothic as a term had many functions: not only did it invoke the medieval past and the literature of that period such as the romance, but it also carried political implications. These implications, in turn, could be used by different groups for different purposes (*ibid*: 28): for example, the term was used to invoke pre-Roman governance systems as proof of historical independence, thus creating an artificial binary opposition between Gothic and Roman. However, as Botting (*ibid*) points out, “privileged meanings of ‘Gothic’ or ‘classical’ alternated”: thus, the Gothic could suggest a variety of often incompatible ideologies but, at the same time, was always characterized as being in opposition to something else.

As Punter (2013: 5) notes, the Gothic began as “the archaic, the pagan, that which was prior to, or was opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilized values and a well-regulated society.” After all, the Gothic in its literary form began by opposing the orderly ascetism of neoclassicism:

Associated with wildness, Gothic signified an over-abundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason and unrestrained by conventional eighteenth-century demands for simplicity, realism or probability. The boundlessness as well as the over-ornamentation of Gothic styles were part of a move away from strictly neoclassical aesthetic rules which insisted on clarity and symmetry, on variety encompassed by unity of purpose and design. (Botting 1996: 2)

This was, at first, achieved by invoking associations with the medieval period, such as archaic and historical settings, but also by a refusal to abide by the rational norms of neoclassicism. Instead, the Gothic focuses on passion and emotion over rationality and reason. Collectively, this period of Gothic writing is known as high Gothic, or the 18<sup>th</sup> century Gothic revival.

Because of the malleability and wide range of the Gothic, the word “revival” might help to characterize Gothic fiction in general: while the core aspects of the Gothic remain consistent, its cultural dimension and concerns change. As Spooner (2006: 11) puts it, “revival can be seen to imply a reappropriation and reinvention of previous forms rather than a straightforward repetition”, where the function and purpose of Gothic fiction is flexible, but the motifs and techniques used remain consistent. Thus, distinctions are made between distinct kinds of

Gothic: There is an American Gothic,<sup>19</sup> a contemporary Gothic,<sup>20</sup> a high Gothic,<sup>21</sup> a Southern Gothic,<sup>22</sup> etc., all of which belong to a Gothic tradition of fiction while being distinct.

The following two sections, 1.1.1. and 1.1.2., discuss the high Gothic at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Gothic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting the theoretical concepts which are most often associated with the Gothic in these periods. This is done firstly to determine when and how the Gothic might have developed into a mode and secondly to examine how the Gothic as a genre connects to the psychological ghost story. To achieve this, the third section, 1.1.3. discusses the characteristics of the Gothic mode and its interpretations.

### 1.1.1. The Gothic at the *fin de siècle* between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century

The late 1780s and the 1790s saw the emergence of two classics of the Gothic, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, each of whom brought something new to the genre. In Radcliffe's works, the medievalism and use of romance elements that characterized Walpole's Gothic were combined with the conventions of the sentimental novel such as the figure of the sentimental hero or heroine. Radcliffe thus introduced terror as a crucial factor of the Gothic novel when the sensibilities of the refined, sensitive protagonist and those of the wild, archaic setting they inhabited inevitably clashed (Crawford 2013: 70–71). In Lewis, the conventions of the German Gothic novel (*Schauerroman*<sup>23</sup>) and the German Romantic *Sturm und Drang* movement were used in an analogous manner to augment the earlier Gothic. As can be seen in *The Monk*, Lewis “describes in lurid detail the spectres that Gothic fiction had previously left to the superstitious imagination or explained away” and could thus be seen “turning terror into horror” (Botting 1996: 49). Indeed, it is in the 1790s that a distinction between “horror” and “terror” is made: where horror relies on viscera and gore to produce shock, terror is concerned with anticipation and limits explicit violence to produce dread.

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<sup>19</sup> Examples include works such as *Edgar Huntly* (1799) by Charles Brockden Brown, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe, and “The Lottery” (1948) by Shirley Jackson.

<sup>20</sup> Such as *The Vampire Chronicles* series (1976–2018) by Anne Rice, Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), loosely based on “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820) by Washington Irving, and *Mexican Gothic* (2020) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia.

<sup>21</sup> Next to *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, works such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe and *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis.

<sup>22</sup> In the sense of a Gothic connected to the southern states of the United States. Examples are *As I Lay Dying* (1930) by William Faulkner, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960) by Flannery O'Connor, and *Child of God* (1973) by Cormac McCarthy.

<sup>23</sup> German for “shudder novel;” the term is not exclusive to the Gothic but can be applied to horror fiction more broadly.

During this period, Radcliffe and Lewis were far from the only authors working with the Gothic. Because it was the bestselling genre during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Crawford 2013: 132–133), examples of Gothic works abound: for example, *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) and *The Mysterious Warning, a German Tale* (1796) by Eliza Parsons, *Clermont* (1798) by Regina Maria Roche, *The Midnight Bell* (1798) by Francis Lathom, and *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798) by Eleanor Sleath.<sup>24</sup> American examples from the same period include *Wieland: or, The Transformation: An American Tale* (1798) and *Edgar Huntly, Or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799) by Charles Brockden Brown, but the American Gothic as it is approached today would crystallize in the works of authors such as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe.

There appear to be two distinct approaches to the depiction of the supernatural during this period in Gothic fiction: the first entails the supposedly supernatural events being interpreted as genuine at first by the characters but being later revealed to have a rational explanation. This is common in Radcliffe's texts (see Smith 2007: 147), but it can be seen, for example, in Parsons as well: the titular castle in *The Castle of Wolfenbach* is alleged to be haunted, but as the narrative progresses, it is revealed that the caretaker Joseph is forging the haunting at the order of Count Wolfenbach. The second approach to the supernatural appears to be carried over from Walpole. While the ghosts of Alfonso and Ricardo in *The Castle of Otranto* are depicted as genuine ghosts, Lewis' Matilda and the Wandering Jew in *The Monk* are people able to use magic,<sup>25</sup> coexisting with the Bleeding Nun ghost and consequently suggesting a supernatural-imbued storyworld. Thus, there are two distinct approaches to the supernatural in Gothic fiction at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the first, supposedly supernatural events occur in the narrative but are solved via rational explanation within the diegesis.<sup>26</sup> This is what Spooner and McEvoy (2007: 128) refer to as the "Radcliffean 'explained supernatural'." In the second, as is the case with *The Monk*, supernatural events are diegetically genuine<sup>27</sup> and are not rationally explained within the diegesis. I would argue that these two approaches persist to this day in the haunted house narrative.

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<sup>24</sup> With the German novels *Der Geisterbanner: Eine Wundergeschichte aus mündlichen und schriftlichen Traditionen* (1794) by Karl Friedrich Kahlert under the pen name Lorenz Flammenberg, and translated by Peter Teuthold as *The Necromancer; or, The Tale of the Black Forest*, as well as *Der Genius. Aus den Papieren des Marquis C. von G.* (1796) by Carl Grosse and translated by Peter Will as *The Horrid Mysteries; A Story from the German of the Marquis of Grosse*. This list of novels is explicitly invoked by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1817).

<sup>25</sup> Such as the graveyard ritual that Matilda uses to purge herself of poison as well as the dark ritual she uses to commune with the devil later in the novel. The Wandering Jew is instrumental in performing an exorcism on the ghost of the Bleeding Nun.

<sup>26</sup> I.e., the storyworld. I am using the term here in the sense that Genette (1997: 265) uses it, its French equivalent being *diégèse*. "Diegetic" in this context signifies something that applies to or forms a part of the storyworld (see Prince 2003: 20).

<sup>27</sup> i.e., real within the storyworld.

If the former way of depicting the supernatural is more intricately connected to terror, which can be transformed into relief as the haunting is revealed to be fake, the latter is attached to horror since no relief is available. Botting (1996: 6) summarizes the difference between the two reactions as follows: “If terror leads to an imaginative expansion of one’s sense of self, horror describes the movement of contraction and recoil. /.../ Terror expels after horror glimpses invasion, reconstituting the boundaries that horror has seen dissolve.” Where terror allows for expansion, horror confines, showing its object to be internal rather than external. Over time, this signals a shift in the Gothic towards symbolism and psychologically motivated narratives, where conventions originally conceived as literal would become figurative after the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Gothic castles, villains and ghosts, already made clichéd and formulaic by popular imitation, ceased to evoke terror or horror. Their capacity to embody and externalise fears and anxieties was in decline. If they remained, they continued more as signs of internal states and conflicts than of external threats. (Botting 1996: 7)

This interplay between horror and terror, Botting argues, characterizes the early Gothic because it is above all concerned with “the externalisation or internalisation of objects of fear and anxiety” (*ibid*), which in turn produce affectively loaded and complex storyworlds where the supernatural can be both a genuine threat and a symbolic representation.

Because of its potential to engage the imagination, terror can be connected to the sublime. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of the sublime in its aesthetic form refers to a sense of vastness beyond ordinary experience (Costelloe 2012: 4). In the works of Burke, particularly in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* from 1756, a connection is drawn between terror and the sublime:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. [emphasis mine] (Burke 2005: para. 111)

In Burke’s approach to the sublime, the concept is described in terms of heightened emotion: in particular, the sublime is brought into existence through fear. As Punter (2013: 39) points out, Burke’s treatise marks the first time a systematized connection between terror as a form of fear and the sublime was proposed.

It is important to note that in this approach, a clear distinction is to be drawn between the sublime and the beautiful. As Botting puts it:

While beauty could be contained within the individual’s gaze or comprehension, sublimity presented an excess that could not be processed by a rational mind. This excess, which confronted the individual subject with the thought of its own

extinction, derived from emotions which, Burke argued, pertained to self-preservation and produced a frisson of delight and horror, tranquility and terror. (Botting 1996: 26)

The beautiful and the sublime rarely overlap because sublimity requires a sense of distance and vastness but, above all, an intimation of immense power beyond human comprehension. For instance, the sublime can often be seen in Romantic poetry: as an example, William Wordsworth connected it primarily to nature and landscapes, which can simultaneously evoke awe and terror. There, the sense of sublime derives directly from both admiration and anxiety, each heightening the other to result in a synthesis of something new.

Similarly, the connection between the sublime and the Gothic can be seen in the use of wild, natural landscapes in the Gothic novel, with nature being the initial place for the manifestation of the sublime. In Radcliffe's novel *The Italian* (1796), for example, the picturesque landscape becomes a source of comfort for the heroine and an escape from the turmoil she is experiencing (see Punter 2013: 68–69). There, the landscape serves as a *memento mori* of sorts, a reminder that there are forces greater than oneself which will endure long after a single human lifespan. Indeed, Clery (1995: 36) states that the sublime “seems to entail a turning of cultural and aesthetic theory away from problems of public, dramatic representation and the collective response of the audience towards the sphere of private aesthetic consumption and the psychosomatic economy of a single representative individual.” Individual experience is prioritized over the collective. This, in turn, means that a confrontation with the sublime allows the narrative to turn inward, to examine the psychology of the focal character. An experience of the sublime and the terror that comes with it is inherently transformative on the individual level.

### 1.1.2. The Gothic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

As McEvoy (2007: 20) argues, since the Gothic and Romanticism dominated around the same time, “[t]he course of Gothic is bound up with the myth of Romanticism; Romantic texts indulge in dialogic interplay with the Gothic, and Gothic texts themselves comment on the phenomenon of Romanticism”. For example, Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) can be considered both Romantic as well as Gothic texts.

After the 1820s, the Gothic seems to have lost some of its popularity as a fiction genre, but Gothic conventions retained their currency. As Botting (1996) suggests, they would be reinvented in the Victorian ghost stories, taking on new forms through the progression of the century. Certainly, it is the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where the ghost story becomes popular once more and, crucially, not always as part of the Gothic: works such as *A Christmas Carol* (1843) by Charles

Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1846),<sup>28</sup> Sheridan Le Fanu's mid-19<sup>th</sup> century ghost stories like "An Authentic Narrative of a Haunted House" (1862), "Madam Crowl's Ghost" (1870) and "The Familiar" (1872), as well as Charlotte Riddell's<sup>29</sup> *The Uninhabited House* (1875) all incorporate some form of ghost or spectral being. From the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there are also more humorous examples of ghost stories, such as Oscar Wilde's "The Canterville Ghost" (1887), which take a more satirical stance on Gothic conventions.

Indeed, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the undead and the monstrous crystallized as a topic of interest in both popular and literary fiction. Next to the spectral and the sublime, the figure of the vampire appeared often in Romantic fiction (see Punter 2013: 103–105) and continued to be popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century in stories such as the sprawling penny dreadful<sup>30</sup> *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood*<sup>31</sup> (1847), Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla* (1874) and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). As the century progressed, texts engaged with one another and drew inspiration from earlier works: for example, the depiction of the vampire in *Dracula* shares commonalities with *The Vampyre*, *Varney the Vampire*, and *Carmilla*, such as pointed fangs, an aristocratic background, a penchant for seducing young women, and the ability to shapeshift. This, in turn, indicates that distinct subgenres began developing around types of supernatural beings, with vampire fiction being just one example.<sup>32</sup>

An example of a similar kind of productive intertextuality between Victorian ghost stories and older texts which illustrates the formulation of a subgenre can be seen in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Haunted and the Haunters; or the House and the Brain* (1859), modelled after Pliny the Younger's tale of a haunted house (Plin. *Ep.* 7. 27). González-Rivas Fernández (2016) finds that the former can be seen updating the hypotext<sup>33</sup> to suit the context of the hypertext<sup>34</sup> being created. While Bulwer-Lytton's hypertext retains many similarities to Pliny the Younger's hypotext by keeping certain themes and narrative aspects close to the original, there is a significant degree of reinterpretation, such as changing the story's

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<sup>28</sup> I am including this story here not because it is a ghost story in the narrow sense, i.e., that there is a ghost, but in the sense outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, in that it contains a spectral presence.

<sup>29</sup> Published under her pen name 'Mrs. J. H. Riddell,' derived from the name of her husband, Joseph Hadley Riddell. Prior to 1864, she also published under the pseudonym F. G. Trafford.

<sup>30</sup> A penny dreadful was a cheap pulp pamphlet, primarily used to publish crime/mystery fiction and speculative fiction.

<sup>31</sup> *Varney the Vampire* is over 600 000 words long: for comparison, *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy is a little over 561 000 words long.

<sup>32</sup> There were also tales of werewolves such as Leitch Ritchie's "The Man-Wolf" (1831), Catherine Crowe's "A Story of a Weir-Wolf" (1846), and G. W. M. Reynolds' *Wagner the Wehr-wolf* (1847).

<sup>33</sup> I.e., source / original text.

<sup>34</sup> I.e., a new text modelled on the hypotext.

setting and location from ancient Athens to Victorian London (González-Rivas Fernández 2016: 855–856). Additionally, where the hypotext allows the supernatural to exist at face value, the hypertext attempts to give a “scientific explanation” to the events of the narrative (*ibid*: 854). This can be connected to the popularity of the Spiritualist movement in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to explain the existence of the paranormal, particularly that of ghosts and apparitions, in scientific terms and through scientific means (see McGarry 2012). Indeed, González-Rivas Fernández (2016: 837–838) connects the popularity of the ghost story in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the rising influence of spiritualism, citing “a specific historical and social *fin-de-siècle* context, in which science and technology evolve in parallel with curiosity about the occult and the irrational.”

The subject matter of ghost stories in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century was informed not just by the advent of scientific approaches to the supernatural but also the economy. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the solidification of capitalism, the problem of money and greed also seeped into the fiction in the period. Smith (2007), for example, shows how in *A Christmas Carol* (1842) the question of money informs much of the tale’s narrative and events. The same can be said about the ghost by Dickens’ contemporary Charlotte Riddell. This leads Smith (*ibid*: 151) to state that “[m]oney is thus dangerous in these tales; its improper use conjures up a ghostliness which is inherent to money,” alluding to the emergence of capitalism and the prevalence of intangible commodities such as labor. Anxieties about personal finances thus became cemented as an important nuance of the ghost story already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As the century progresses, the ghost story moves steadily away from Gothic settings. Instead, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic revival, the setting of the ghost story had become the average family home. As Fielding (2000) puts it:

Throughout the century, Gothic terrors move from the crypts of castles and abbeys to alarm urban bourgeois professionals in their own homes, hiding out in attics, appearing in bedrooms and drawing rooms, and leading up to the terrifying domesticity of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). (Fielding 2000: 764)

The spectral had thus become a part of everyday life.

In addition to the shifting locus of the ghost story, by the *fin de siècle* period between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the cultural conception of ghosts and spirits had become far more complicated than simply involving the restless dead or demonic spirits. This increase in complexity changed the way ghost stories approached their subject matter. As Bissell (2019: 45) puts it, in the *fin de siècle*, “[t]he traditional ghost emerging to correct a past wrong is /.../ supplemented and, in a sense, displaced by the idea of spectrality as a metaphor,” where the ghost functions as a symbolic representation of something else. This would, understandably, influence the form of the ghost story as well. As Hay (2011) argues, instead of using realism as their counterpoint, ghost stories began to engage with naturalist fiction since they would come to focus on depicting the psychology of the individual and perfecting the technical and stylistic aspects of the form. “Ghost

stories become not an engagement with reality but a distraction from it,” (Hay 2011: 123) constituting a strange naturalism as far as they depict decidedly unnatural storyworlds through naturalistic techniques.

While ghosts could also function as metaphors, they could also, as Freeman (2018: 334) points out, vanish from haunting narratives altogether. These changes together appear to have facilitated the diversification of the ghost story form and, through that, the emergence of the psychological ghost story at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century alongside the 1890s Gothic revival. In the psychological ghost story, the onus is not the solving of a haunting by appeasing a revenant or figuring out a rational explanation as it may have been in the 1790s Gothic novel but, rather, the rupture of the past into the present and the consequences of the spectral inside rather, not outside, of the mind. The spectral becomes both external and internal, particularly in the case of the haunted house motif, an aspect of the mind made manifest.

### 1.1.3. The Gothic mode

Fear is an element paramount in Gothic fiction regardless of time and space. Punter (2013: 18), for example, states that, throughout the various forms of the Gothic, fear is “not merely a theme or an attitude”, but, rather, its presence has “consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of the texts”. From this, we can infer that the way the Gothic is expressed depends heavily on its context in time and space. Similarly, to Botting (1996), the Gothic narrative is characterized by excess and transgression both on the level of content and expression. Cooper (2010: 6) explicitly draws from this approach, positing that “a Gothic fiction is a fiction that primarily represents fear, the fearful, and the abject, even if the representation is comic.” Cooper makes a further distinction between the ‘Gothic’ and the ‘gothic,’ with the latter referring to works that use Gothic conventions but do not take fear as their primary focus.

In this dissertation the Gothic will thus be reserved for works which 1) make fear their central focus, 2) contain conflicting discourses and ambiguities, particularly in terms of their political or social interests, and 3) use Gothic conventions such as an archaic or historical setting, archetypal characters like the damsel and the villain, and wild, picturesque landscapes. Works which exhibit only Gothic conventions will be referred to as gothic.

There is an inherent degree of subjective interpretation involved in deciding which works use the gothic mode. Baldick (1992: xiii), for example, requires a narrative to present “a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space” with “these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration,” highlighting the significance of specific spatiotemporal elements that create the psychological effects in the narrative. On the other hand, in David Punter’s 1980 seminal work on the Gothic, *The Literature of Terror*, for a narrative to be ‘Gothic’, merely the prominence and influence of fear as well as the presence of conflicting discourses are required. This allows for the Gothic to encompass a diverse selection of works

from the 18th to the 20th century, explaining why it is more productive to speak of the Gothic as a mode of literature.

*The Routledge Companion to the Gothic* (2007) lists the terms that have historically been used in analyzing the Gothic in academic contexts: the uncanny, the abject and the grotesque. The uncanny derives from Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay of the same name and refers to something familiar that has become strange somehow (Freud 1956: 224). As Punter (2007: 130) puts it, "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." Thus, the uncanny is an effect of the fear of the unfamiliar within the familiar. For example, the ghost of a loved one is an uncanny thing: the familiarity of the loved one as a concept combined with the unfamiliarity of the spectral embodiment.

The abject and the grotesque are closely tied to materiality. As Harpham (1976: 462) argues, the grotesque "must begin with, or contain within it, certain aesthetic conventions which the reader feels are representative of reality as he knows it." The grotesque inhabits the same liminal edge as the uncanny, balancing between the familiar and unfamiliar, infusing the former with a sense of wrongness by adding the latter. Unlike the uncanny, which can apply to a variety of phenomena, the grotesque is most often associated with the body. In Bakhtin (1984: 26), the body is connected to the world around it in acts of both reception and penetration through its protrusions and orifices, "not separated from the rest of the world" and in a constant act of metamorphosis, always in the process of and on the cusp of becoming. Where the uncanny can be quite subtle – for example, in the charming yet undeniably inhuman vampire Lord Ruthven in John Polidori's 1819 short story "The Vampyre" – the grotesque is much more prone to extremity. As Harpham (1976: 467) puts it, "the grotesque is most congenial to irony, which, rippling up beneath the surface, undercuts and subverts language itself."

The grotesque is, for example, a crucial part of celebrating the physical aspects of embodied humanity in the carnival. Its iteration in Gothic fiction is different, however. As Hurley (2007: 142), leaning on the work of Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser, puts it, "Gothic horror unfolds its uncontrollable and prolonged metamorphoses without apology or restraint, and unconcernedly piles its bloody, eviscerated, suppurating bodies one atop another." Thus, the grotesque in Gothic fiction, and particularly in Gothic horror, is less concerned with positive transformative power and more interested in the negative affects the grotesque can invoke: less the jubilant debauchery of the carnival and more the deformed living-dead body of Frankenstein's creation. In this sense, the Gothic grotesque is closer to the union of the "grotesque concept and grotesque subject" suggested by Fin- gesten (1984: 425) in reference to figurative art, far more similar to "Saturn Devouring His Son" by Francisco Goya than to Venetian carnival masks.

The most prevalent understanding of the concept of the abject derives from the works of Julia Kristeva, particularly from *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980, in English 1982). Much like the grotesque, the abject is directly connected to embodiment, like bodily fluids and excrement. That which is abject

exists on the borders between the self and the outside – much like the grotesque, and, to some extent, the uncanny. According to Kristeva (1982: 5), however, unlike the uncanny where the unfamiliar lies within the familiar, the abject eludes understanding: “abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory.” Partially, it is precisely this unfamiliarity that creates the fear-fascination reaction associated with the abject: that which is abject lies within the liminal space between the Subject and the Other, between the self and radical alterity, at once something to be rejected and still something necessary to constitute the self in the first place.

According to Hogle (2019: 109), the effects produced by abjection are connected to “a chaos of un-differentiation (where death is inseparable from birth),” functioning as a reminder of a time before the construction of the self, the source of the frightening aspects of the abject. Indeed, much as the creation of the self as a subject is an ongoing process, so too is the process of abjection: “[t]he anomalous or interstitial phenomenon – the wild man, the dog-faced boy, the hermaphrodite – is troubling because it undermines such crucial binarisms as nature and culture, human and animal, male and female” (Hurley 2007: 139). In this sense, the abject resembles the grotesque because it, too, thrives in the liminal spaces between binary oppositions, making visible the sites where these binaries break down.

The grotesque of Bakhtin and the abject of Kristeva produce different affects. As Hurley (2007: 138) phrases it, “[f]or Bakhtin this grotesque body is a richly comic body. /.../ For Kristeva, the grotesque–abject body is a body of fear, but fear tempered with fascination.” At once repulsive but still enticing in its own way, that which is abject is to be rejected but can never be rejected completely. It induces disgust, but, most crucially, it is also an inevitable part of material reality as the corruption of the body racked by illness or parasites, as the expulsion of urine, blood, and excrement, and as the ultimate, rotten putrefaction of the corpse. Abjection strips the comedic element from the grotesque, rendering it bare and unbearable.

#### 1.1.4. The psychological ghost story in the gothic mode

As Briggs (1977: 143–144) points out, the psychological ghost story relies on a “clash between a mysterious, irrational or supernatural universe, and prosaic everyday life,” continuing that “[w]hatever conditions may seem to operate on the supernatural level, that level is itself always thrown into doubt by medical evidence, so that it appears merely subjective, the morbid creation of a sick mind.” Two crucial examples of the psychological ghost story outside the anglophone tradition which must be mentioned here, if only in passing, are E.T.A. Hoffmann’s 1812 short story „*Der Sandmann*” (“The Sandman”), the focus of Freud’s seminal 1919 essay on the uncanny, and Guy de Maupassant’s 1887 short story “*Le Horla*” (“The Horla”). Briggs (1977: 146) contrasts the approaches taken in the two, where the first appears to be outright supernatural, introducing its ambiguously interpretable elements only as the tale progresses, and the second

does the reverse. In broad terms, these are the two primary ways in which psychological ghost stories operate, as will be shown later. Both, however, are characterized by a tension between the rational and the supernatural.

This tension, gestured towards already in the Gothic fiction of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the form of the Radcliffean explained supernatural, remained of interest in the mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century alongside discoveries in science and medicine, particularly – and predictably – with the field of psychology. Crucially, however, it should be noted here that not all psychological ghost stories are gothic in nature: as with all ghost stories, they can be categorized in a variety of ways and fall under multiple genres. In the context of this dissertation, examples of the gothic psychological ghost story are Charlotte Perkins Gillman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and Oliver Onions’ “The Beckoning Fair One” (1911), all of which combine Gothic conventions with the psychological ghost story. A key characteristic of the form is that the haunting depicted tends to lack a visceral aspect: the specters are emphatically ethereal, so that whenever any physicality of the specter(s) is broached, it is a cause of horror both within the narrative and without. This sense of precarity tends to also apply to the psychological state of the focal character, especially as the narrative develops and the focal character begins to question their sanity (“The Yellow Wallpaper”). The supporting characters are either the family or a family surrogate of the focal character who, while not antagonistic, are either hesitant or unable to believe or help the focal character. Thus, the narration in such narratives tends to be unreliable: as the focal character is unsure whether the paranormal events depicted are diegetically genuine or not, so is the audience.

Thus, a key feature here is the interpretational ‘loophole’ in the sense used by Carroll (1990: 148), derived from the writings of M. R. James,<sup>35</sup> which allows for both a supernatural and natural interpretation of the text. This means that a diegetically genuine haunting could be depicted in the narrative, but simultaneously the haunting could also be occurring only in a character’s unwell mind and is thus not genuine within the diegesis. As a result, the salient themes connected to the gothic mode are primarily the effect of the past on the present, both on a socio-cultural as well as the personal scale. This, in turn, has significant bearing on the psychological aspect of the mode. Another significant theme is gender and women’s position culturally as well as socially, although this is not always the case with every narrative.

The setting of such narratives is often, as is typical of the haunted house narrative in general, an old, large house. This house holds uncomfortable secrets and

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<sup>35</sup> More specifically, from what James wrote in the introduction of the anthology collection *Ghosts and Marvels: A Selection of Uncanny Tales from Daniel Defoe to Algernon Blackwood* (1924): “It is not amiss sometimes to leave a loophole for a natural explanation, but I would say, let the loophole be so narrow as not to be quite practicable” (James 1924: v). While James suggests that the supernatural can be rationally explained in a text sometimes, this should not be the primary course for interpretation of the events in the text. I will return to James in the next subchapter.

exacerbates or brings to surface (past) psychological troubles and/or trauma which the focal characters have repressed thus far. A somewhat exaggerated example of this could be 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (2011 [1839]) by Edgar Allan Poe, where the family estate is metaphysically connected to the titular family and its decline – as the family falls apart, so does the house. As the past erupts into the present in the form of the haunting and time becomes increasingly blurry, the distinct atmosphere of the gothic mode is generated. The haunting connected to the house, moreover, is often ethereal rather than visceral. Whenever any fleshliness for the specter(s) is suggested, it is disturbing. For example, in *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) by Shirley Jackson, a pivotal moment in the haunting is a brief physical contact between Eleanor and what she assumes, at first, to be her housemate Theo. Uncertainty thus becomes an integral part of the narrative, affecting how Eleanor interacts with the house both conceptually and physically.

Often, the focal character of these narratives is a person, usually a woman, whose position is somehow precarious and dependent on someone else, particularly in terms of finances and living space. For example, in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henry James, the primary focal character is an unnamed governess. This sense of precarity tends to also apply to the psychological state of the focal character, especially as the (seemingly) supernatural events escalate and the focal character begins to question their sanity, a sequence which characterizes the psychological subtype of the haunted house narrative. As the supporting characters are either the family or a family surrogate of the focal character who, unable to believe or help the focal character, only add to the stress: next to the haunting, then, interpersonal relationships become a source of anxiety as well. Consequently, the ambiguity which characterizes this type of narrative is brought to the forefront. Whether the events depicted are genuine or not remains, ideally, ambiguous to both the characters in the narrative and to the audience: this is the case in *The Haunting of Hill House* as well as in *The Turn of the Screw* and 'The Fall of the House of Usher'.

Thus, the key feature of the psychological ghost story in the gothic mode is the interpretational 'loophole' as pointed out by Carroll (1990: 148) which allows for both a supernatural and natural interpretation of the text. In these narratives, this usually means that a diegetically genuine haunting could be depicted in the narrative, but, simultaneously, the haunting could also occur only in a character's unwell mind and cannot thus be genuine within the diegesis. The focus of such narratives tends to be on the individual since the core of the narrative is by necessity introspective and focused on individual psychology.

## 1.2. Weird fiction and the developments of horror in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

The emergence of weird fiction was concurrent with the development of the psychological ghost story as well as a Gothic revival at the *fin de siècle* between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Britain. In the USA, however, the genre appeared far later. The topics of weird fiction from the 1890s to 1940s ranged from ghosts to aliens, from zombies and vampires to metaphysics, leading to a sprawling corpus of material that is connected by little else but a certain quality of weirdness. Indeed, weird fiction is difficult to define based on anything other than intuition: any application of the label seems to depend on the atmosphere of the individual narrative rather than a coherent set of fixed conventions. Weird fiction inhabits the borderlands between other genres, as speculative fiction and yet not as an aspect of horror, science fiction, or fantasy (see Luckhurst 2017; Alder 2020).

However, there are some ways in which weird fiction can be delineated, even if it is through a process of elimination. Certainly, the oft-quoted passage from H. P. Lovecraft's *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927), one of the first attempts to chart the historical development of horror fiction, suggests a clear distinction between the Gothic and the weird:

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft 2011: 523–524)

From this, we can infer a connection between weird fiction and the spectral, but a spectral which is different from that of the Gothic and Victorian ghosts as it is neither the ghost of the deceased loved one nor a vengeful or wronged specter. The familiarity of the uncanny ghost in its Gothic and Victorian forms, still recognizable as something that was once human, begins to disappear in weird fiction. Similarly, for example, the classic vampire rarely<sup>36</sup> appears in weird fiction for the same reason: because the vampire is usually positioned to be an uncanny distortion of a human, it is of little interest for weird fiction.

Indeed, Luckhurst (2017) argues that, instead of depicting traditional monsters familiar from the Gothic, the weird focuses on radical alterity which manifests in particularly material ways. One of these manifestations is the tentacle (Thacker 2015: 150), but others are possible.

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<sup>36</sup> There are occasional creatures resembling vampires in weird fiction: one example can be found in “Count Magnus” by M. R. James, although it is debatable what, if any, creature is really depicted in the story.

As Alder (2020: 27) puts it, “in its *fin-de-siècle* forms, the weird tale arises because scientific discourses had murky edges, because the limits of knowledge and the extent of what was or wasn’t possible in the world were unclear, because the boundaries of valid scientific enquiry itself were not stable.” For example, during the period, parapsychology and the study of the paranormal was alternately considered and not considered to be scientific. This suggests that the weird fiction of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was primarily experimental both in content and form. Many of the works of M. R. James experiment with a particular narrative form such as the ghost story. The works of H. P. Lovecraft broaden the scope of supernatural fiction from the tried-and-true uncanny monsters and ghosts of the Gothic to new and unknowable cosmic horrors.

Much like the Gothic, the weird has endured into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although it appeared to be mostly forgotten during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1990s the genre began its resurgence in what has been called the New Weird (VanderMeer 2008: x). This revival has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with authors such as M. John Harrison<sup>37</sup>, China Miéville, and Jeff VanderMeer most often cited among people who have engaged with the genre. Characterized as “a type of urban, secondary-world fiction that subverts the romanticized ideas about place found in traditional fantasy” by depicting “settings that may combine elements of both science fiction and fantasy” via emulating “complex real-world models” (VanderMeer 2008: xvi), the nebulous New Weird produced in the 1990s and early 2000s is perhaps better understood as a descriptor of extant texts rather than necessarily a prescriptive genre. As is typical of weird fiction in general, its contemporary form resists canonization and strict categories as much as Old Weird did in its time, often existing simultaneously in, on, and across the borders of other (sub)genres.

The following subchapter is divided into four sections. Firstly, British weird fiction and its connection to the developments of the haunted house motif are examined., followed by a discussion of American weird fiction. Both subsections include theoretical concepts that have been used to analyze the weird. The third subsection discusses the concept of the mode as connected to weird fiction.

### 1.2.1. British weird fiction from the *fin de siècle* to the 1920s

British weird fiction started to be published in literary magazines in the 1890s by authors such as Arthur Machen,<sup>38</sup> and appeared well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Individual short story anthologies from M. R. James and Algernon Blackwood, significant contributors to the development of horror fiction in general, first appeared in 1904 with *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* and in 1906 with *The Empty House*

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<sup>37</sup> Who coined the term ‘New Weird’ in the early 2000s.

<sup>38</sup> Specifically, the first chapter of what would later become the novella *The Great God Pan* was published in *The Whirlwind* in 1890 as a short story. *The Great God Pan* in its complete form and the short story *The Inmost Light* were published together as a book titled *The Great God Pan and The Inmost Light* in 1894.

*and Other Ghost Stories*. Lord Dunsany's short story collections on the fictional realm of Pegāna and the gods who inhabit it, *The Gods of Pegāna* and *Time and the Gods*, published in 1905 and 1906, respectively, had considerable influence on not only the development of weird fiction but also on speculative fiction as a whole. Some British weird fiction novels were also published in the 1900s and 1910s. For example, William Hope Hodgson's *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig"* in 1907 was his first to be published and *The Night Land* in 1912 the last.<sup>39</sup> As can be surmised from the above, early British weird fiction was not limited to one form or subject matter, ranging from short stories to full-length novels, from fantastical worlds to ghost stories.

With a few exceptions,<sup>40</sup> British weird fiction can primarily be seen grouped together with works produced during the Gothic revival of the 1890s and in the Gothic tradition in general. For example, Punter (2013) incorporates both Blackwood and James into his corpus of Gothic texts in *The Literature of Terror*.<sup>41</sup> I would argue, however, that British weird fiction is distinct from Gothic fiction because of the divergent ways that the supernatural is approached in the two. This difference is particularly clear in the occult detective story, a hybrid of supernatural fiction and the detective story, which initially developed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but reached its prime in the *fin de siècle*.<sup>42</sup>

During this period, different organizations interested in the paranormal attempted to establish the study of the paranormal as a legitimate, scientific discipline. For example, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was established in 1882, with an American branch (ASPR) to follow three years later in 1885 (SPR 2025: para 2). The SPR was far from the only such organization and was not even the first, but its formation illustrates an increased interest in the paranormal. This, in turn, might explain the emergence of the figure of the occult detective, who investigates paranormal occurrences and events, in supernatural fiction. As Cook (2014: 18) summarizes it, "[t]he form of the detective story narrative with its formulaic structure of crime – investigation – solution seemed the ideal place in which to submit the irrational to the rational rigours of a genre where explanation was the very key." The occult detective story filled a niche in supernatural fiction and offered a place to theorize on the paranormal and to do so in a notably rational, logic-based framework.

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<sup>39</sup> Hodgson published four novels in total during the period: *The Boats* in 1907, *The House on the Borderland* in 1908, *The Ghost Pirates* in 1909, and *The Night Land* in 1912. The rest of his oeuvre is primarily short stories along with some poetry, published in both British and American magazines from 1904 until his death in 1918. Many of his stories have also been published posthumously.

<sup>40</sup> Such as William Hope Hodgson.

<sup>41</sup> Punter also includes Lovecraft in this corpus.

<sup>42</sup> An early prototype of the occult detective could be Sheridan Le Fanu's Dr. Martin Hesselius, who appears in five stories in the collection *In a Glass Darkly* from 1872. As Cook (2014: 15) states, while it "does not contain that element of detection which marks out later texts, it does introduce into the prologue of the supernatural tale an objective element of scientific inquiry".

If during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the person most often associated with the paranormal was the female spiritualist medium, during the *fin de siècle*, the male expert appears and, eventually, overtakes this position of authority entirely. In supernatural fiction, this expert takes the form of the occult detective. As Alder (2020: 116) puts it, the occult detective “elevates occult practices to a place in mainstream society and asserts authority over the weird encounter, while at the same time making weird realities more “real” than ever.” In occult detective fiction, then, the supernatural or paranormal event is explicable, solvable, and containable by the professional investigator.

The first example of the *fin de siècle* occult detective can be found in E. and H. Heron’s stories of Flaxman Low,<sup>43</sup> tales of whom are collected in *Ghosts: Being the Experiences of Flaxman Low* (1899).<sup>44</sup> A scientist with connections to the SPR (see Alder 2020: 125–126), Low is a scholar and athlete with a particular interest in the budding field of psychology who is willing to investigate and explain supernatural events. Algernon Blackwood’s occult detective Dr. John Silence, appearing in *John Silence, Physician Extraordinary* (1908;<sup>45</sup> 1942), is another similar figure. Silence is a doctor by trade and an expert on the arcane and the occult. The cases he investigates range from haunted houses (“A Psychological Invasion”) to lycanthropy (“The Camp of the Dog”) to unwilling interdimensional travel (“A Victim of Higher Space”). In these short stories, the subject of the paranormal is approached in a rational, almost clinical way: the case is brought to the occult detective, empirical evidence is gathered, investigated, and interpreted through the occult detective’s knowledge and skills, the case is solved.

Another significant occult detective in British weird fiction is William Hope Hodgson’s Thomas Carnacki, stories of whom are collected in *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* (1913; 1947).<sup>46</sup> Unlike Low and Silence, who primarily rely on their knowledge, Carnacki makes ample use of specialized equipment and technology

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<sup>43</sup> The name is allegedly a pseudonym for an undisclosed person; E. and H. Heron, the names of the authors, are pseudonyms of Hesketh Hesketh-Pritchard and his mother Kate O’Brien Ryall Pritchard.

<sup>44</sup> The short stories were originally published in the monthly *Pearson’s Magazine* from 1898 to 1898. In the Internet Speculative Fiction Database (=ISFDB) of von Ruff et al. (2022a: para 2), the collection has twelve short stories: “The Story of the Spaniards, Hammersmith”, “The Story of Medhans Lea”, “The Story of the Moor Road”, “The Story of Baelbrow”, “The Story of Yand Manor House”, “The Story of the Grey House”, “The Story of Saddler’s Croft”, “The Story of Sevens Hall”, “The Story of No. 1 Karma Crescent”, “The Story of Konnor Old House”, “The Story of Crowsedge”, and “The Story of Mr. Flaxman Low”.

<sup>45</sup> The collection holds five short stories: “A Psychological Invasion,” “Ancient Sorceries,” “The Nemesis of Fire,” “Secret Worship” and “The Camp of the Dog” (von Ruff et al. 2022b: para 2). An added Silence story was published in the 1917 collection *Day and Night Stories*, titled “A Victim of Higher Space” (von Ruff et al. 2022c: para 2).

<sup>46</sup> The first edition contains six stories: “The Thing Invisible”, “The Gateway of the Monster”, “The House Among the Laurels”, “The Whistling Room”, “The Searcher of the End House”, and “The Horse of the Invisible” (von Ruff et al. 2022d: para 2). The 1947 reprint includes three further stories: “The Hog”, “The Haunted *Jarvee*”, and “The Find” (von Ruff et al. 2022e: para 2).

in his investigations. One example can be seen in the short story “The Thing Invisible”, where he uses a photographic camera to gather evidence about an allegedly haunted dagger; the photographs are instrumental in solving the case, proving that the dagger is not haunted at all but, rather, is made to move by a complex mechanism. Another example is the use of an electric pentacle<sup>47</sup> in “The Gateway of the Monster” to protect Carnacki from the entity causing the haunting, which can become material or immaterial at will.

It is the latter example that is of particular interest for this dissertation: although it is far from being the only Carnacki story where the entity haunting a place can become material, it creates a contrast between the spirits appearing in fiction of the *fin de siècle* and in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Where the Victorian ghost is intangible and immaterial, the weird ghost is alarmingly tactile: as Alder (2020: 143) puts it, in the Carnacki stories, “material and immaterial forces combine to make and embody the weird monster.” Indeed, in weird fiction, the line between “monster” and “ghost” becomes blurred. As Bann (2009) argues, while early 19<sup>th</sup> century ghosts were primarily ethereal and intangible, over the course of the century, the fictional ghost developed increased agency and, by extension, became more material. According to her, this could be connected to the increased presence of spiritualist thought in fiction. This, she argues, is salient in the image of the ghostly hand, the inspiration of which is the spiritualist séance room (Bann 2009: 664). Spiritualism made ghosts tangible; this influenced the way ghosts were depicted in fiction as well, although only gradually.

The materiality of the spectral can be seen in the works of Montague Rhodes James. Their protagonist is often an antiquarian, an academic or otherwise a scholarly person who becomes entangled in supernatural events, sometimes because of a haunted object. One such example can be seen in “Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” (1904), where the blowing of a whistle found in an archeological dig site unleashes an entity that can make itself visible by lifting a bedsheet over its form. Another example of a haunted object is in “Casting the Runes” (1911), where slips of rune-covered paper are used to curse two men to die within three months: the curse is reversed when the papers are returned to the man who cast the runes, and the perpetrator falls victim to the curse instead.

In addition to a degree of materiality being connected to the spectral, tradition plays a significant role in these narratives. Simpson (1997) proposes that James primarily uses folklore and folk traditions to augment, rather than define, his works, perhaps most notably as framing devices.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps, then, it is not neces-

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<sup>47</sup> In this context, a pentacle is a magical protective sigil composed of a pentagram and a circle. This device is also used in “The Hog,” but instead of protecting Carnacki, it only puts him in greater danger.

<sup>48</sup> It should be noted here that James is widely credited with revitalizing the ghost story as a literary form and creating a particular style of ghost story. In the Jamesian ghost story, the setting is often the modern day, the location a quaint rural town or estate, a library or a university, the protagonist an unfortunate academic and/or antiquarian who happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. James’ ghosts tend to be nonhuman spectral entities rather than the vengeful ghosts usually found in folklore and Gothic fiction.

sarily traditions that James takes issue with, but rather the mishandling of tradition by people who unwittingly engage with forces beyond their understanding. An example of this could be “Lost Hearts” (1904), where a man trying to obtain immortality through a sacrificial ritual involving children is instead killed by the spirits of the children he sacrificed.

While the legacy of the past can be a theme in weird fiction, particularly in narratives exploring spectral entities, this is not always the case. Indeed, some narratives which draw on the haunted house motif contain no ghosts at all. This can be linked to the changes in the *fin de siècle* ghost story, particularly to Freeman’s (2018: 334) account of ghosts being able to vanish from haunting narratives altogether. This, in turn, means that the implicit requirement of the haunted house motif, i.e., the presence of a ghost within the house to make it haunted, is not as firm as it might seem.

One example of the haunted house motif without ghosts is William Hope Hodgson’s novel *The House on the Borderland* (1908). The framing narrative follows two hikers who come upon a journal near the ruins of a sprawling house in rural Ireland. In the journal, a strange metadiegetic narrative unfolds, centered around a man known only as the Recluse and his experiences in the titular house. The title of the novel, as Jones (2009: 40) points out, refers to a prominent Spiritualist journal, *Borderland*, established in the 1890s and, fittingly, the novel delves into ideas important to Spiritualism and other occultist movements:<sup>49</sup> potential alternate dimensions, knowledge only obtainable in the spirit world, and the possibility of human existence beyond the death of the body. This points to a deeply existential slant in conjunction with the haunted house motif: the narrative poses questions about the very nature of being human, such as whether human life is tied to material existence or is independent of embodiment. The key to these questions, at least in the context of this novel, is the haunted house.

However, the knowledge that the Recluse obtains over the course of the narrative is inoperative: to quote Alder (2020: 208), “[t]he secrets of time and the universe are partially unlocked /.../, but at crucial moments he cannot make sense of or process what he is experiencing, nor even describe it.” Similarly, the two hikers in the framing narrative gain potential knowledge and nothing else: the journal ends mid-sentence, and questions about the verity of the Recluse’s story remain unanswered within the storyworld. This uncertainty is not limited to the storyworld. For example, in Jones’s (2009: 40) reading of the novel, the “swine-creatures” in the journal of the Recluse and the rural, insular community of Irish peasants in the hikers’ story are approached as the same. Perhaps it is simply the Recluse’s imagination which molds and transforms the ordinary peasants into otherworldly monsters. Thus, we can see that the multiple readings of the metadiegetic narrative in the journal are possible because there is always a certain degree of ambiguity involved. Certainly, while ambiguity is mostly found in the psychological ghost story, *The House on the Borderland* shows that it can be used to explore ontological questions. The question is no longer whether the events are

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<sup>49</sup> Such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the theosophist movement.

true or not, but, rather, what the possibility of their incidence might imply about the world around us.

The novel can be connected to the concept of the *omphalos*,<sup>50</sup> which Jones (2009: 32) describes as “a geomantic<sup>51</sup> centre point, locus of the convergence of occult forces, a singularity of spiritual creation or force”, a sort of interdimensional *axis mundi*. The *omphalos* in the novel is the titular house which, in addition to functioning as a threshold or gateway to new states of knowledge, also functions as a diegetically genuine gateway between states of being. This transformative quality of the house, however, is not without its dangers: in addition to the Recluse himself, the house has also come to the attention of the monstrous swine-creatures who, over the course of the novel, make several attempts to break in. The Recluse fears this incursion and begins to disconnect from the material reality of his home and his embodied existence, culminating in an astral projection journey through time to the heat death of the Sun in chapters XV to XXIII.<sup>52</sup>

An analogous interplay of the material and the spectral, of ontological considerations emerging into weird fiction, can be seen in the works of Algernon Blackwood, particularly in “The Willows” (1907) and “The Wendigo” (1910). The former tells the story of two men on a canoeing trip on the Danube who encounter something ancient and otherworldly that masks itself as willow trees. Indeed, the willows as well as the small islet they inhabit appear to be a nexus between this world and another dimension, much in the fashion of an *omphalos*. The question of whether there is something malevolent or simply something that exists beyond human understanding in the willows forms the crux of the tale. This, in turn, suggests an increased scale in terms of the scope of the haunting narrative: spectral beings are no longer simply human ghosts, but can, instead, be unknowable, nonhuman spectral entities that force the characters who encounter them to reevaluate their beliefs and worldviews.

Similar ontological questions are a focal point in “The Wendigo,” where a group of men on a hunting trip in the Canadian wilderness encounter a supernatural presence that kidnaps one of them, Joseph Défago, who returns once only to disappear again. His second return, with frostbite and in delirium, is not quite right, because during his absence, he has been irrevocably marked by the spectral being that lured him away. Because of this interconnectedness of personhood and embodiment suggested in the narrative, Thompson (2015: 284) argues that

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<sup>50</sup> Derived from the Ancient Greek ὀμφᾶλος, meaning navel.

<sup>51</sup> From the Greek γεωμαντεία, i.e., earth divination.

<sup>52</sup> Although it appears as early as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the motif of planetary entropic apocalypse was popularized in H. G. Wells’ science fiction novella *The Time Machine* (1895), where the last location the time traveler goes to is the distant future, nearly devoid of life. Hodgson uses the motif again in *The Night Land*, which is set in the distant future after the Sun has burned out, and the last remnants of humanity inhabit a giant pyramid known as the Last Redoubt. These two works can be viewed as important texts in speculative fiction for the development of the Dying Earth subgenre, named after the 1950 short story collection by Jack Vance.

“Défago’s transformation raises ontological questions regarding his identity and even his continued existence,” specifically in terms of what, exactly, constitutes Défago as a person: his body, which has been transformed beyond recognition, or a conjunction of mind, body, and soul? In essence, the question posed by the narrative is this: is a person still the same person after a transformative experience? Inevitably, the answer to this is left open-ended.

### 1.2.2. American weird fiction from the 1920s to the 1940s

Most of the major authors of American weird fiction were actively writing and publishing between the 1920s and the 1940s, primarily in pulp magazines. The most significant of these magazines was *Weird Tales* (1922–1954): for example, H. P. Lovecraft, Henry S. Whitehead, Seabury Quinn, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard<sup>53</sup> all sold some of their work to *Weird Tales*. Indeed, while authors also published in its short-lived rival publication *Strange Tales* (1931–1933) and elsewhere as well, it is *Weird Tales* which forms the general basis of the genre now considered weird fiction (see Weinstock 2016).

However, it was not until 1939 and the creation of Arkham House, a publishing house created specifically for collecting, publishing, and popularizing weird fiction,<sup>54</sup> that the genre began attracting broader attention under the name “weird fiction”. Although Lovecraft had referred to the genre as ‘the weird tale’ already in 1928 (see Lovecraft 2011), few other writers used the label that has mostly been applied retroactively (see Joshi 1990). Arkham House had also begun publishing the work of non-American authors in the mid-1940s, for example collected works of Sheridan Le Fanu in 1945 under the title *Green Tea and Other Ghost Stories* and works from William Hope Hodgson,<sup>55</sup> H. Russell Wakefield,<sup>56</sup> and Algernon Blackwood<sup>57</sup> in 1946. The publishing house is still in operation today.

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<sup>53</sup> Both Smith and Howard are better known today for their contributions to other genres: Smith for his poetry and visual art; Howard for the creation of the character of Conan the Barbarian and the sword and sorcery subgenre of fantasy fiction.

<sup>54</sup> Although it began in late 1937 as a project to collect, publish, and popularize the works of H. P. Lovecraft, who had died earlier that year, Arkham House almost immediately began to publish other weird fiction authors as well. The second publication of Arkham House was *Someone in the Dark*, a collection of short stories by August Derleth, one of the publishing house’s founders, and the third a collection of Clark Ashton Smith’s short stories titled *Out of Space and Time* (see Joshi 1999).

<sup>55</sup> *The House on the Borderland and Other Novels*, a collected edition of his four novels with an introduction by H.C. Koenig, was published by Arkham House in 1946.

<sup>56</sup> *The Clock Strikes Twelve*, a collected edition of eighteen short stories and one essay, was published by Arkham House in 1946. It is not to be confused with *The Clock Strikes Twelve: Tales of the Supernatural*, an earlier version of the collection containing fourteen stories, which was published by Herbert Jenkins in 1940.

<sup>57</sup> *The Doll and One Other*, a collection of two novelettes (“The Doll” and “The Trod”) was published in 1946 by Arkham House. Neither had been published before this.

In its format and subject matter, American weird fiction differed from its British counterpart in several respects. Firstly, although the novella format was sometimes used, American weird fiction often takes the form of short stories published individually at first and later collected into anthologies, sometimes posthumously, by Arkham House. Secondly, in American weird fiction a conception of what constitutes weird fiction is created and distinguished from the Gothic tradition (see Lovecraft 2011), and shared ideas and worlds begin to appear. For example, while fictional texts were incorporated into some British weird fiction, particularly in Machen and James (Luckhurst 2017: 1047), it is only in American weird fiction that same fictional texts begin appearing in the works of different authors. On this in the works of Lovecraft and his associates,<sup>58</sup> Luckhurst (2017: 1048) states that “[a]s a series of in-jokes,” they “began to refer to each other’s fake texts in their fiction, giving them a weird sort of extra-textual glamour that was not always entirely in their control.”<sup>59</sup> Some fictional books, such as the *Necronomicon*, became so ubiquitous that it could be difficult to distinguish them from real books.

Many of these fictional texts, in turn, were later incorporated into the Cthulhu mythos.<sup>60</sup> Although Lovecraft initially produced the broad concept of the mythos (see Price 1990), other writers began incorporating its aspects into their works soon after (e.g. “The Curse of Yig” (1929) by Lovecraft and Zealia Bishop, “The Tale of Satamptra Zeiros” (1931) by Clark Ashton Smith, and “The Shambler from the Stars” (1935) by Robert Bloch). Thus, collaboration, the creation of shared fictional texts and universes and the use of the short story and novella formats distinguish American weird fiction from the British one.

While, with some exceptions, British weird fiction mostly engaged with the spectral and its convergence with the material, American weird fiction appears far more interested in the material, even in its use of the haunted house motif. Specifically, this can be seen in Lovecraft’s short stories which incorporate the

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<sup>58</sup> Mostly his friends and correspondents like Smith, Howard, Henry S. Whitehead, Fritz Leiber, and Robert Bloch.

<sup>59</sup> One such book is Robert Bloch’s fictional grimoire *De Vermis Mysteriis*, also known as *Mysteries of the Worm*. As well as appearing in Bloch’s own writing, it is referenced in Lovecraft’s short stories “The Haunter of the Dark” (1936) and “The Shadow Out of Time” (1936). Later, it would also appear in Stephen King’s 1978 short story “Jerusalem’s Lot”.

<sup>60</sup> The Cthulhu mythos began as a loosely connected shared fictional universe that revolved around the “Great Old Ones”, a loose fictional pantheon of gods and godlike beings such as Cthulhu, Dagon, and Azathoth, as well as lower creatures such as the Deep Ones and the Mi-Go, that Lovecraft used in his stories. After Lovecraft’s death, August Derleth and others have reworked, broadened, and systematized many aspects of the mythos. This has created some controversy, as some changes appear to conflict with the original purpose of the mythos as loose aesthetic guidelines rather than a rigid system (see Price 1990; Joshi 1995). Over time, the Cthulhu mythos has developed into a distinct subgenre of speculative fiction and authors such as Stephen King, T. E. D. Klein, and Neil Gaiman all have contributed short stories to Cthulhu mythos anthologies. These have been published with some regularity since the late 1960s, with over half of them published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

haunted house motif, like “The Rats in the Walls” (1924), “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1933), and “The Haunter of the Dark” (1935). In the “The Rats in the Walls,” the gothic convention of the ancestral estate that contains unpleasant family secrets is the focal point of the narrative. The nature of these secrets is only revealed after a descent into the underground city hidden below the house, followed by the disintegration of the focal character into a cannibalistic rage as he uncovers evidence of his family’s shocking history.<sup>61</sup> The spectral, recurring pattern in the story is the scuttling of rats in the walls, perhaps as a symbol of ancestral guilt and the consequences of the ancestors’ actions on the descendants. In “The Haunter of the Dark”, the motif is used not in the form of a residence but, rather, through a church: it is said that a primordial evil presence haunts it, but over the course of the narrative it becomes apparent that this presence is not connected to the building but, rather, to an artifact called the Shining Trapezohedron.

In “The Dreams in the Witch House,” however, the salient features of the haunted house motif in weird fiction can be seen together. The focal character, Walter Gilman, is renting a room in a house rumored to be haunted by the spirit of a witch. As the narrative progresses, it becomes apparent that the witch haunting the house is not haunting it but has instead attained a sort of eternal life through a contract with one of the Great Old Ones.<sup>62</sup> The secret lies in the strange geometry of the rented attic room – within this storyworld, the secret to inter-dimensional travel and, by extension, to immortality, can be found in mathematical formulae and non-Euclidean geometry.

Much like the house in *The House on the Borderland*, the attic room functions as an *omphalos*, a threshold between the ordinary realm and another place both in terms of states of knowledge as well as states of being. Unlike Hodgson’s novel, however, Lovecraft’s short story has an unambiguous ending: even though Gilman manages to defeat the witch in the other realm and to avoid losing his soul, he is killed a few days later in the ordinary world by the witch’s familiar. This, in turn, shows another instance of spectral materiality: even though to most characters in the narrative, the witch and the familiar appear as vague apparitions, they are solid for Gilman. While in the novel, the ending of the narrative is ambiguous, in the short story, it is anything but: after Gilman’s death, the house is demolished, and horrifying evidence of the witch’s activities over the centuries is found behind the bizarre walls and ceiling of the attic room along with the remains of the witch herself and her familiar.

Lovecraft’s use of a wider fictional world in this story and others gives the haunted house motif in “Witch House” a distinct atmosphere of cosmic horror: in essence, an implication that the world is not governed by natural laws that are comprehensible to humanity but, rather, that it is ruled by something impossible to understand. If the Gothic makes ample use of the sublime, then Ralickas (2007: 365–366) suggests that cosmic horror, particularly in Lovecraft-style weird fiction, is not an encounter with and an affirmation of the sublime but its “implicit

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<sup>61</sup> His ancestors had farmed human beings as livestock for eating in the underground city.

<sup>62</sup> Azathoth, the Cthulhu mythos version of primordial chaos personified.

rejection”. Instead, it problematizes subjectivity, the idea that the human being is inherently the apex. While the Gothic sense of terror can enable its subject to transcend the borders of the body to gain access to the sublime, cosmic horror works in the opposite way, chaining its subject into the body. Miller (2011) suggests that it is not necessarily the embodiment of the monstrous but the promise of it, along with the helplessness of the individual to stop it, that drives the mechanisms of cosmic horror. The primary concern of cosmic horror is then not simply a fear of one’s own death or the desolation of an apocalypse but an often-traumatic confrontation with the inevitability of these things, made manifest through monsters and horrors.

While Sperling (2016: 98) suggests that “[t]he horror of Lovecraft’s corpus is /.../ the unfamiliarity with and estrangement from the human body”, Miller (2011: 124) finds that “[i]t is no accident that the phrase “cosmic horror” does double duty in referring to both the feeling of terror located in a human body and the physical manifestation of that horror as an immense entity, a tremendous sign.” Indeed, Miller argues that there is a decidedly unstable link between the source (an enormous, monstrous, (semi)<sup>63</sup>embodied entity) and the result of fear an increased awareness of the self as an embodied being, small and insignificant in the face of the uncaring universe. I would argue that in narratives where this logic of cosmic horror informs the articulation of the haunted house motif the uncanny ghost of the Gothic, still recognizable as something that was once human, is replaced with either something nonhuman, like in *The House on the Borderland* and “The Dreams in the Witch House” – or, perhaps, with nothing at all. This replacement makes the weird a plausible mode for the articulation of the haunted house motif.

### 1.2.3. The weird mode

Although the Freudian uncanny, a sense of wrongness in the familiar, could be considered as something that characterizes a significant part of the ambiguous weirdness of weird fiction, in its most celebrated forms, the weird works through other mechanisms. For example, many of Lovecraft’s short stories begin in a world not unlike our own. As the narrative progresses, however, it becomes clear that the world the narrator thought he knew is stranger and more complex than he can understand, and the rules about the supernatural do not apply because the monsters are no longer the vampires, witches, and werewolves of the Gothic. It is this shift in comprehensibility that interests me here.

Luckhurst (2017: 1053) states that “[t]o begin to grasp weird fiction is to orient away from the uncanny, /.../ to disorient it in the twist of the uncanny and the other distorted affects that lie beyond.” This uncanny, in Miéville’s (2012: 381) definition, signals that which eludes meaning, which is not what it seems and cannot be understood or interpreted through the lines of reasoning available to us.

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<sup>63</sup> In the sense, of course, that this is not a physical, real-world monster.

While the uncanny pertains to the strange within the familiar, the abcanny instead signifies that which has never been familiar. For Fisher (2016), however, the concepts of the weird and the eerie refer to that which is beyond the uncanny.<sup>64</sup> The former, according to Fisher, is “that which does not belong” (*ibid*: 10), while the latter is characterized as a presence when there should be absence and vice versa (*ibid*: 11). Fisher also makes a clear distinction between the uncanny and the weird and eerie: if the former is inevitably internal, a disruption of something that is familiar, then the latter are external, the mere presence of something that should not be present at all (*ibid*: 10). In this sense, then, Fisher has divided what Miéville has defined as the abcanny into two distinct concepts.

While the weird and the eerie in Fisher’s definition are not necessarily restricted to a single genre,<sup>65</sup> I would argue that the tie between the weird mode and what is represented by the two, i.e., the unknown and the unknowable, is particularly relevant. If the 19<sup>th</sup> century was preoccupied with domesticating the other-world and striving for knowledge, the 21<sup>st</sup> century appears to fear the unknown. The world is a known place, a calculable quantity, until it is not. Weird fiction in particular – arguably more so than Gothic and Victorian fiction, which were primarily working with well-established monsters – can be viewed as the foundation for many of the metaphysical elements in contemporary horror fiction. Indeed, as Joshi (1990: 11) suggests, the weird should be conceived of as “an inherently philosophical mode” because of the way it contemplates fundamentally ontological questions. These questions are about the very nature of humanity: who we are, where we have come from, where we are going, and what our purpose and place in the universe is.

Miéville (2009: 511) refers to the weird as a “radicalized sublime backwash,” contending that, as the weird “punctures the supposed membrane” around the sublime, it “allows swillage” of it “back into the everyday.” Where the Gothic may grant access to the sublime, the weird actively denies it, twists it, and presents the abcanny through this process. This twisting of the sublime could be achieved through invoking the “numinous”, borrowed from Rudolph Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy* (1917; in English in 1923).<sup>66</sup> Otto uses the term to refer to an irrational, non-sensory experience originating from an object outside of the self, citing the divine as its primary inspiration. The numinous is thus connected primarily to religious experience and is composed of the *mysterium* (the mystery as the object), the *tremendum* (the awe-inspiring as the reaction), and the *fascinations* (fascination as the result) (Varnado 2015: 11–13). As Varnado (*ibid*: 15)

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<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that Fisher refers to this concept as the *unheimlich* throughout *The Weird and the Eerie*, stating that “[a]s is well known, the *unheimlich* has been inadequately translated into English as the uncanny; the word which better captures Freud’s sense of the term is the “unhomely”” (Fisher 2016: 9).

<sup>65</sup> Alongside Lovecraft and M. R. James, Fisher finds his examples of the weird and the eerie in the works of Margaret Atwood, Nigel Kneale, and Christopher Nolan, among others.

<sup>66</sup> Derived from the Latin *numen* or divinity. The German title is *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*.

puts it, “[t]he numinous /.../ can be summed up as an affective state in which the percipient – through feelings of awe, mystery, and fascination – becomes aware of an objective spiritual presence.” This contrasts with the sense of the sublime, which can also be derived from natural things such as mountain ranges or the night sky.

Varnado (2015: 11) stresses that numinous emotion is markedly different from natural emotion, illustrating this with the following passage from C. S. Lewis’ 1940 nonfiction book *The Problem of Evil*:

Suppose you were told that there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told “There is a ghost in the next room,” and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for no one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fact that it is a ghost. It is “uncanny” rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous. Now suppose that you were told simply “There is a mighty spirit in the room” and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking – a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it... This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it is the Numinous. [emphasis mine] (Lewis 1940: 5–6)

This quote suggests that the numinous occurs only in conjunction with the supernatural. In weird fiction and in cosmic horror in particular, it is not God which evokes the numinous but, rather, something more sinister. Wilson (2020: 439), for example, contends that Otto’s discussion of the numinous was a direct inspiration for Lovecraft’s critical approach to weird fiction in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* and in his fiction writing in general. Paralleling and subverting the religious ecstasy of Otto’s genuine numinous, Lovecraft’s “‘bad numinous’ is *tremendum* with the *mysterium* subtracted out” (Wilson 2020: 453), where cosmic horror thus “depends upon the successful narrative deployment of the cultural residue of the theological imaginary” (*ibid*: 455). Certainly, one characteristic of the numinous is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to convey in words. As Alder (2020: 62) says on the numinous in *The Great God Pan*, “language can’t bring these mysteries into existence, which is just as well because their failure of absence would be overwhelmingly terrifying.” In this context, then, the numinous could be one way to describe the origin of the uncanny: in the absence of the quantifiable, old terrors of the Gothic, the weird instinctively reaches out towards something greater and more awe-inspiring.

Joshi (2012: VII para. 1) suggests that the move from uncanny Gothic monsters to uncanny eldritch<sup>67</sup> horrors occurred, at least in the case of some writers, because of the scientific advances at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century since “science

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<sup>67</sup> I.e., strange and unnatural in an unsettling way; the word is often used to refer to the creatures depicted in weird fiction.

increasingly probed not merely the physical universe but the human psychology” that believed in vampires, werewolves, ghosts, and the like. The old Gothic version of the uncanny had become familiar, which at least partially inspired a turn towards more complex monstrosities already at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly, while the Gothic treats the supernatural as precisely that, in weird fiction, the supernatural is something natural which is not yet – and perhaps can never be – understood (Alder 2020: 10). Perhaps because of this interest, the weird persistently resists demarcation, thriving in the in-betweens of science fiction and horror.

One of the key features of the weird is precisely its engagement with science and scientific development in psychology, biology, and physics (Alder 2020: 27). In contrast to science fiction, though, the focus of weird fiction is not necessarily on science but its effects. For example, in *The Great God Pan*, most of the narrative focuses on the aftermath of an experiment gone wrong. For Joshi (1990: 8), science fiction is far more concerned with the future; in weird fiction, however, the focus is more likely on either the past or on the present. He argues that weird fiction focuses on what could be done here and now with the knowledge that already exists rather than what might be done elsewhere and later with future knowledge, as science fiction does.

#### 1.2.4. The weird haunted house

The foremost examples of the haunted house motif in the weird mode are William Hope Hodgson’s *The House on the Borderland* (1907) and H. P. Lovecraft’s “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1933). Like in the gothic mode, the setting of these narratives is an unusual old house. In the case of “The Dreams in the Witch House,” the house also has a sordid past, but this need not be so. The function of these houses as *omphaloi*, as a threshold or gateway, gives the setting a particularly uncanny effect: if the gothic mode evokes the presence of ghosts, diegetically real or not, the weird does not require ghosts at all. Indeed, while “The Dreams in the Witch House” hints at a ghostly presence within the house, it can be interpreted not necessarily as a deceased human spirit but, rather, as a still-living person capable of stepping outside linear time. In this sense, the house in the weird mode is “haunted” in a broad sense, and not always by actual ghosts. The weird mode haunted house is also, far more so than the gothic, concerned with materiality – the haunting often manifests in visceral ways and has a direct impact on the embodiment of the characters. This is the case with *The House on the Borderland* and the Recluse’s astral journey as well as Gilman’s exploration of dream realms in “The Dreams in the Witch House.”

In the weird mode, the focal character of the narrative tends to be a person alone who, over the course of the narrative, becomes increasingly obsessed with attempting to solve the mystery of the house. Additional characters can be present, but their significance in the primary plot can be negligible. In *The House on the Borderland*, for example, the protagonist cohabits the house with his sister

while in “The Dreams in the Witch House” the protagonist is renting only a single room in a large and crowded house.

As can be inferred from above, the plot here concerns an unravelling of the focal character as they attempt to uncover the mystery of the haunted house. Unlike the protagonist of the gothic haunted house narrative, however, the focal character here does not seek out the history of the house but confronts its mysteries empirically. This search for knowledge involves philosophical as well as (pseudo)scientific methods and theories such as metaphysics, eschatology, and cosmology (*The House on the Borderland*) and/or mathematics, biology, and (quantum) physics (“The Dreams in the Witch House”). Additionally, the weird mode focuses on the notion of texts and textuality within the narrative: significant use is made of texts which do not exist outside its diegesis. This is, for example, invoked in “The Dreams in the Witch House” where Gilman’s original motivation for attending Miskatonic University<sup>68</sup> and living at the house is to get access to the *Necronomicon*, a copy of which is rumored to be at the university’s library. Indeed, the narrative itself can be built around such a text (*The House on the Borderland*).

Thematically, the weird mode haunted house is, as can be expected, primarily concerned with questions that are profoundly ontological; of these, the focus tends to be on the place of and/or insignificance of humanity on the grand cosmic scale. Another salient theme is epistemology and the questions it poses on and around the concept of knowledge, the most significant of these being its price. Secondary themes may differ between individual narratives, and can involve family dynamics, inherited trauma, etc. as is common across haunted house narratives in general.

### 1.3. Horror in various media throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century

20<sup>th</sup> century horror from the 1930s onwards is characterized by its dispersion into new media beyond fiction. As the genre is characterized by a significant degree of intertextuality and self-referentiality, this inevitably means that the textual base which new narratives draw from is not limited to a single medium. This is the case for the haunted house motif as well.

By the 1990s, the horror genre had become a staple of most if not all narrative media available. This, in turn, has created a complex, sprawling body of texts. Here more than elsewhere, I stress that this overview is highly selective and can only represent a minuscule amount of English-language horror connected to the haunted house motif and the haunting narrative, focusing primarily on literature and film. Throughout this subchapter, I argue that the developments occurring in

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<sup>68</sup> Miskatonic University, as might be expected from its location in the fictional town of Arkham, Massachusetts, is a fictional university that is mentioned and/or depicted in several of Lovecraft’s works, including but not limited to the short stories “Herbert West – Re-Animator” (1922) and “The Dunwich Horror” (1929), as well as in the novella *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936).

one medium can affect other media and that different media have symbiotic relationships in horror.

This subchapter is divided into three sections, the first of which surveys the developments in the horror genre through the 1930s to the 1990s in film, literature, television, radio, video games, and comic books. The second section examines approaches to horror as a mode, particularly in connection with the haunted house motif. The third section of the subchapter outlines the haunted house formula of the 1970s and its socioeconomic dimensions.

### 1.3.1. Horror from the 1930s to the 1990s in various media

Although the first horror films premiered in the 1890s, it was not until the 1930s that the classic monster horror film as we know it today began gaining traction. Many of these films adapted narratives published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a Gothic revival. For example, in 1931 the Universal Pictures releases of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, starring Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff, respectively, and the Paramount Pictures *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, starring Fredric March. Often referred to as the Gothic triptych (Elliott 2007: 223), the films were popular and critical successes, influencing the direction of the horror film, and the horror genre in general, for the rest of the decade.

However, the late 1930s saw the implementation of the Hays Code,<sup>69</sup> which required all films to be reviewed and approved by the PCA<sup>70</sup> before release, resulting in the sanitization of the horror movie (Petley 2014: 135). As a result, the number of works of supernatural fiction viable for film adaptation shrunk significantly. *The Uninvited* (1944), directed by Lewis Allen from a screenplay by Dodie Smith and Frank Partos, adapted from Dorothy Macardle's 1941 novel *Uneasy Freehold*,<sup>71</sup> tells the story of siblings Rick and Pam Fitzgerald who purchase an old, abandoned house for a cheap price only to discover it to be haunted. A critical and commercial success, the film primarily used gothic conventions to create its horror and appeared to establish the haunting horror film as a potentially profitable and successful subgenre, particularly because it could avoid the content deemed problematic by the Code: there is very little violence, and it seems more of a gothic romance than a horror film to the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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<sup>69</sup> Also known as the Motion Picture Production Code, the Hays Code was a set of self-regulatory guidelines in the film industry which governed what could and could not be depicted in films. Prohibited topics included crime without appropriate punishment, gratuitous violence, profanity, nudity and sexual content, as well as homosexuality and interracial relationships (Leff & Jerold 2001).

<sup>70</sup> Production Code Administration. The PCA was formed by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA; today known as the Motion Picture Association of America or MPAA) and oversaw the enforcement of the Hays Code. The Code was largely abandoned by the mid-1960s and was subsequently replaced by the MPAA rating system that is still in place today.

<sup>71</sup> Published in the U.S. in 1942 as *The Uninvited*.

audience. Although some ghost stories appeared in films during the 1940s, such as *A Place of One's Own* (1945),<sup>72</sup> the 1940s had few supernatural horror films.

It is not surprising, thus, that innovation in horror moved to other media like radio broadcasting. The earliest example of horror in radio, according to Hand (2012: 66), is *The Witch's Tale* (1931–1938), an anthology series of original horror stories with some literary adaptations, but also retellings of urban legends and folk stories. Another example of early radio horror is *Lights Out* (1934–1947),<sup>73</sup> an anthology series of genre-hybrid original stories. Later notable examples of horror in radio include *Suspense* (1940–1962) and *Escape* (1947–1954), which focused primarily on mysteries, thrillers, and high-adventure stories but also adapted classic horror such as Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (aired October 22, 1947 on *Escape*) as well as M. R. James's "Casting the Runes" (aired November 19, 1947 on *Escape*) and Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror" (aired November 1, 1947 on *Suspense*). A British example of radio horror is *Appointment with Fear* (1943–1955), another anthology series which featured both original stories, penned mostly by John Dickson Carr, as well as adaptations of horror classics such as Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" (aired September 18, 1943) and Ambrose Bierce's "A Watcher by the Dead" (aired April 27, 1944). This suggests that, if horror cinema in the 1930s and 1940s focused mostly on Gothic monsters and literary adaptation, horror radio in the same decades was already producing genre hybrids and combining adaptation with original storytelling. This trend, I argue, continues to be an integral part of horror fiction to this day.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, as the century progressed, it comes increasingly difficult to draw firm distinctions between genres: if in the first half of the century, weird fiction was probing the borders of speculative fiction genres, then horror fiction in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century appeared to often ignore any borders altogether.

The 1940s also saw the beginning of the short-lived horror comic book format, with the first single-issue adaptations emerging early in the decade, soon after the birth of the comic book medium. Still, it was not until 1948 that ACG<sup>75</sup> published *Adventures into the Unknown* (fall 1948 – August 1967), the first ongoing horror comic title (Goulart 1986: 256). Much like horror radio of the time, *Adventures into the Unknown* was an anthology series: its first issue, for example, alongside original stories of zombies, a haunted house, and werewolves, also includes a very abbreviated adaptation of *The Castle of Otranto*. Soon after, in 1950, EC Comics launched three bi-monthly horror anthology titles: *The Vault of Horror* (April / May 1950 – December / January 1955), *The Haunt of Fear* (May / June 1950 – November / December 1954), and *Tales from the Crypt* (October /

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<sup>72</sup> Based on the 1942 novel of the same name by Osbert Sitwell, the film was written by Brock Williams and directed by Bernard Knowles.

<sup>73</sup> Note here that this is an oversimplification: *Lights Out* was cancelled and revived several times during this period, switching networks (and writers) multiple times. A more accurate timeline of its airing would be 1934–1939; 1942–1943; 1946–1947.

<sup>74</sup> More on this in Chapter 3.1.

<sup>75</sup> American Comics Group.

November 1950 – February / March 1955). All three were hugely popular (Costello 2009: 7) but were discontinued by the publisher despite their commercial success. This appears to be partially in protest of the formation of different trade associations after widespread public outcry on the dangers of fictional violence on the minds of children<sup>76</sup> and a congressional inquiry into the content of comic books and their connection to juvenile delinquency. In 1956, EC stopped publishing comics altogether (cf Costello 2009: 8). Much like the Hays Code, this self-censorship severely limited the topics and genres comics could depict. However, while in the late 1950s film directors were sidestepping or even openly defying the Hays Code, the code effectively ended the publication of full-color American horror comics, and the format did not fully recover until the 1970s when titles such as *The Tomb of Dracula* (April 1972 – August 1979) and *Ghosts* (September-October 1971 – May 1982) were published by comics industry leaders Marvel and DC Comics, respectively.

In literature, several significant subgenres of horror fiction were developing by the 1950s. For example, apocalyptic horror rose to popularity with the publication of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, a science fiction / vampire horror hybrid, in 1954. Apocalyptic horror would eventually lead to the development of the zombie film as a distinct subgenre in the late 1960s, with *The Plague of the Zombies* (1966)<sup>77</sup> and *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968)<sup>78</sup> as prominent examples. Alongside a minor resurgence in monster fiction, the 1950s also saw the rise to popularity of the horror/thriller hybrid and the human murderer antagonist, exemplified by the 1959 novel *Psycho* by Robert Bloch, the source text for Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film of the same name which, in turn, influenced the genesis of the splatter and slasher subgenres.<sup>79</sup> At the end of the century, these subgenres would prove to have an impact on the haunted house narrative as well.

The early 1950s also saw a minor resurgence of ghost stories, like Shirley Jackson's horror-infused short stories such as "Charles" (1948) and "The Lovely House" (1950), the latter of which is an outright haunted house narrative. It was not until the end of the decade, however, that the haunted house novel began to reappear. An example is Richard Matheson's *A Stir of Echoes* (1958), which centers on a man who, after obtaining psychic powers, becomes enmeshed in a

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<sup>76</sup> This was stoked by Frederic Wertham's controversial book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), where he alleged that juvenile delinquency was caused by the often lurid and violent content of horror comics.

<sup>77</sup> Directed by John Gilling and written by Peter Bryan.

<sup>78</sup> Directed by George A. Romero from a screenplay by John Russo and Romero, the film launched a successful franchise.

<sup>79</sup> A splatter film is a horror film involving gratuitous gore, blood, and violence (McCarty 1984). Examples of splatter films include *Blood Feast* (1963), *Bad Taste* (1987), and *Hostel* (2005). A slasher film is a horror film involving a killer using a melee weapon and a group of young people who are murdered one by one; usually, there is a single survivor – Clover (1992) refers to this character archetype as "the final girl". Examples of slasher films include *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), and *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980).

haunting involving the spirit of a young woman seeking revenge for her premature death.

The most significant example from the period, however, is Shirley Jackson's fifth novel, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), widely considered to be one of the best ghost stories of all time. As much a psychological ghost story as it is Gothic, the novel tells the story of a group of four who embark on an experiment to live in an allegedly haunted house for a summer. As time passes, the focal character, Eleanor Vance, begins to experience increasingly disturbing events and becomes paranoid and unstable. The novel has been discussed and studied extensively. Bailey (1999: 28), for example, reads the novel and its haunted house as an allegory of "oppressive patriarchal society"; Smith (2007: 152) sees the story as an allegory for a 1950s white, middle-class woman's attempt at self-identification "independent of family". These themes, in one form or another, continue to be attached to the haunted house story. Additionally, the importance of the novel lies in its minimalistic use of the paranormal and the conventions of the psychological ghost story: after all, whether Hill House is haunted at all is up to the reader's own interpretation. This, in turn, shows the ambiguity which allows one to read the story as that of a legitimately haunted house, or as that of a character's psychological breakdown.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that the haunted house narrative became commonplace in horror: examples of haunted house narratives from the decade include novels such as Richard Matheson's *Hell House* (1971), Robert Marasco's *Burnt Offerings* (1973), Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977), and Anne Rivers Siddons's *The House Next Door* (1978). *Hell House* shares a premise with *The Haunting of Hill House*: a group investigates a haunted house and experiences seemingly paranormal events. However, *Hell House* depicts the breakdowns of all four characters as the house turns their weaknesses against them. *Burnt Offerings* depicts a family who rents a house for the summer, unaware that its owners mean to use them as a sacrifice to restore the semi-sentient house to its former glory. *The Shining* depicts the horror which befalls a family at a haunted hotel: the mounting paranormal events at the Overlook and Jack Torrance's loss of sanity and control which culminates in him attempting to murder his wife and young son. *The House Next Door* tells the story of a couple who live next door to a brand-new, yet haunted, house. In the case of this novel, it is the architect rather than the house by itself that is haunted. Indeed, all four novels have certain features in common: the haunted house is an active participant in the narrative, it is not owned by the main characters of the story, and the actions of the characters have little to no bearing on the evil which resides in the house.

There is another significant haunted house narrative in late 1970s horror literature: Jay Anson's 1977 book *The Amityville Horror*. Allegedly based on a true haunting experienced in Amityville by the Lutz family in 1975, the text depicts the events that led up to the family's flight from the house after only 28 days of residence. While it is not particularly innovative from a formal perspective, it inspired several sequels by other authors, launched one of the largest

horror film franchises of the modern era,<sup>80</sup> helped to bring the haunted house motif to the forefront of the horror genre, and reignited interest in folk stories, alleged true paranormal experiences, and urban legends as source material for mainstream horror. Most significantly, however, it also exemplifies what Dale Bailey (1999) refers to as “the haunted house formula”, or a set of four primary conventions that, to various extents, the haunted house narratives of the 1970s mentioned above all follow. First, the setting is a large, historical, named<sup>81</sup> house that is home to supernatural forces beyond human ghosts that can be an active participant in horrors. Secondly, the main characters are, according to Bailey, usually a family or family surrogate, skeptical of the supernatural, who take advantage of the opportunity the house represents, accompanied by secondary characters who are skilled helpers, knowledgeable about science and/or the supernatural. Additionally, in a small but nevertheless highly impactful role, there is also the character of the “oracle” (Bailey 1999: 56–60), who provides cryptic warnings of danger and attempts to help the family escape before it is too late.

The plot is perhaps the most significant in charting the narratological characteristics of the haunted house story. In a dual plot structure, one half concerns the escalation of supernatural events experienced in the house by the family/family surrogate, who become increasingly isolated from the outside world because of this, while the other half concerns the origin of the events and the history of the house. The dual structure culminates in one of two common endings: either the family escapes and the house is destroyed, or the family escapes and the house remains, but both establish the cyclical nature of evil (Bailey 1999: 61–62). There is also the possibility that the family does not escape at all and is killed, but this appears less common: an example from the period is *Burnt Offerings*. This could indicate that, while the middle class could be punished in fiction for upward mobility, the characters involved are usually not killed for having ambition for a better life.

The formulaic haunted house story often involves and invokes anxieties about money. In the case of *The Amityville Horror*, for example, the family only buys the house because of its comically cheap price; the house is only cheap because of the six brutal murders committed there the previous year. Indeed, an economic angle is present in most of the narratives mentioned above: most of the focal characters depicted are lower-middle to middle-class, and although the family / family surrogate may inhabit the house, they have no ancestral ties to it, nor do they typically own it. According to Bailey (1999), what sets the formulaic haunted house narrative apart from other ghost stories in the American context is its connection to the American Dream and the economic anxieties of the middle class.

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<sup>80</sup> There are 30 films which either involve or directly reference either the people or the events associated with the alleged haunting in Amityville as well as a documentary film.

<sup>81</sup> Old family estates are named, although there is room for interpretation for what “naming” a house in such narratives could stand for.

In the 1980s, however, the haunted house motif was once more being used in a Gothic context, for example in *The Elementals* (1981) by Michael McDowell, and *The Woman in Black* (1983) by Susan Hill. This, in turn, indicates a connection between the articulation of the haunted house motif and the prevailing ideologies and problems in its contemporary culture. In times of hardship, horror fiction often turns to the past – as was seen in sections 1.1. and 1.2. in this dissertation – and the early 1980s, a period of a severe global recession, were no exception. The middle-class ambitions of the 1970s haunted house narrative were put aside for the moment and the motif returned instead to the Gothic. An example of this might be seen in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987),<sup>82</sup> which uses the haunted house motif to examine the repercussions of slavery in the United States. The postcolonial Gothic operates on a ‘logic of haunting’ (Punter 2003) and is definitionally concerned with an impending and inevitable repetition of the past. In *Beloved*, it is systemic as well as personal pasts which irrevocably disrupt the present time and again.

The period from the late 1970s to the early 1980s was a veritable golden age for horror film purely by numbers: according to Prince (2000: 298), the year 1981 alone saw the release of 93 horror films, the number which was surpassed six years later when 105 horror films were released. Many of these films, however, were primarily produced by smaller, independent studios and with low budgets (Kendrick 2014: 311). The horror film genre had the potential for high profit margins as the initial investment could be comparatively small and returns high: one example, as Cherry (2009: 8) points out, is *The Exorcist* (1973)<sup>83</sup> with domestic box office returns on initial release totaling \$193 million against a production budget of \$12 million. This, in turn, meant that an increasing number of horror films were being produced and released, and the increase of supernatural horror films in the 1970s and 1980s meant that the ghost story in film was undergoing several concurrent developments into different directions.

While many of these films were adapted from novels (such as *The Exorcist*, *Burnt Offerings* (1976),<sup>84</sup> *The Amityville Horror* (1979),<sup>85</sup> *The Shining* (1980)<sup>86</sup> and *Ghost Story* (1981)<sup>87</sup>), some introduced significant changes which could, in turn, create narratives that depart from the novels they were based on. For example, the film version of *The Shining*, particularly in its ending, is markedly different from the novel. If in the novel, it is unambiguous that diegetically genuine supernatural events are occurring at the hotel, in the film, it is made far

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<sup>82</sup> The novel is sometimes included in overviews of the American Gothic (see Goddu 2007) and can also be found included in horror scholarship compendiums such as *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature* (particularly in the articles of Höglund (2018), Hock Soon Ng (2018), and Dokou (2018)).

<sup>83</sup> Directed by William Friedkin and written by William Peter Blatty.

<sup>84</sup> Directed by Dan Curtis and written by Curtis and William F. Nolan.

<sup>85</sup> Directed by Stuart Rosenberg and written by Sandor Stern.

<sup>86</sup> Directed by Stanley Kubrick with the screenplay by Kubrick and Diane Johnson.

<sup>87</sup> Directed by John Irving and written by Lawrence D. Cohen.

more ambiguous.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, *Ghost Story* the novel depicts a spectral entity preying on a group of men who murdered a woman through taking the form of their victim while *Ghost Story* the film depicts the entity as being the ghost of the woman. Here, the haunting depicted in the film adaptation has a simpler background but, at the same time, is more complex in its implications for the psyches of the focal characters. The onus of the story is once again on the psychological impact of the haunting rather than the provenance of the haunting. This shifting paradigm in film hauntings would, in time, begin to affect literature as well.

The 1990s saw the release of horror video games such as *Alone in the Dark* (1992), *The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest* (1993), and *Phantasmagoria* (1995), all of which made use of the haunted house motif. While the haunted house motif began to appear in video games already in the 1980s in titles such as *Uninvited* (1986), *Alone in the Dark* is considered to be the first survival horror video game and combines the haunted house motif with what would eventually become conventions of the survival horror video game subgenre. In the case of *The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest*, while the game is a puzzle adventure game by function, its story is a horror narrative of a mansion haunted by the spirit of the titular seventh guest, who functions as the focal character. Similarly, *Phantasmagoria* centers on a woman and her husband moving into a secluded mansion only to be beset by demonic forces. The game combines the haunted house motif with splatter-film-like graphic violence and sexual abuse. The introduction of the haunted house motif into an interactive medium meant that interactive elements became valuable for the articulation of the haunted house motif in other media as well.

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is also marked by genre-internal hybrids, particularly in film. For example, films such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984),<sup>89</sup> which combined elements of supernatural horror with the slasher film structure (see Cherry 2009: 25), showed that such hybrids could launch successful franchises. Genre hybrids between horror and other genres also became increasingly prevalent, for example in comedy-horror hybrids like *An American Werewolf in London* (1982)<sup>90</sup> and *The Lost Boys* (1987).<sup>91</sup> Similarly, the *Evil Dead* franchise (1981–), in particular the first film in the franchise, *The Evil Dead* (1981),<sup>92</sup> could be considered the first haunted house / slasher horror hybrid: the film depicts a group of friends staying at a cabin, where they discover a cursed book in the basement and unleash malevolent spirits which begin to kill them and possess their corpses one by one. The franchise, however, combines zombie

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<sup>88</sup> It should be noted, however, that in King's sequel novel *Doctor Sleep* (2013) as well as in its 2019 film adaptation (dir. Mike Flanagan), the ambiguity around the events is removed entirely with additional supernatural elements introduced into the shared storyworld.

<sup>89</sup> Written and directed by Wes Craven.

<sup>90</sup> Written and directed by John Landis.

<sup>91</sup> Directed by Joel Schumacher, written by Jeffrey Boam, Janice Fischer and James Jeremias with the story by Fischer and Jeremias.

<sup>92</sup> Written and directed by Sam Raimi.

horror elements with slapstick comedy from the second film, *Evil Dead II*<sup>93</sup> (1987), onwards.

In conjunction with the popularity of the horror comedy, the emergence of meta-horror such as *Scream* (1996),<sup>94</sup> which satirized slasher film conventions through its characters' awareness of prior horror films, would lead to the horror parody of the 2000s, which made ample use of the haunted house motif (for example, *Scary Movie 2* (2001)<sup>95</sup> parodies supernatural horror and haunted house films). The 1990s also saw the science fiction / horror hybrid in *Event Horizon* (1997),<sup>96</sup> which superimposes the haunted house motif onto a spaceship. The ever-increasing hybridity of the horror genre had its effects on the development of the haunted house motif into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well.<sup>97</sup>

### 1.3.2. The horror mode

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the horror genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century appears to be primarily characterized by two features: first, that it is highly hybrid with other genres and, second, that it can create genre-internal hybrids due to the sheer number of subgenres that have developed. In connection with the haunted house motif, most hybridity occurs between horror and mystery/thriller, as is the case with *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne du Maurier, which also combines horror elements with gothic conventions. Significant subgenre examples include *Phantasmagoria*, which combines the haunted house motif with the graphic violence of the splatter film. To analyze such hybrids, however, it is necessary to delineate what, exactly, constitute the horror elements in horror hybrids. These elements are what I will refer to as the horror mode.

The theoretical apparatuses applied to the Gothic and the weird can also be easily applied to the horror mode: Carroll (1990) uses the concept of the uncanny to develop his concept of art-horror, Clover (1992) augments the concept of the final girl with the notion of the abject and abjection, and Balanzategui (2017) uses the concept of the uncanny to analyze the changes in the depiction of children in horror film. Indeed, the concepts examined alongside the Gothic and the weird in the present dissertation are present in horror as well. However, because of the sheer number of subgenres and media involved in the production of 20<sup>th</sup> century horror fiction, it becomes increasingly difficult to characterize horror and to draw firm genre boundaries in film (see Cherry 2009) and, I would argue, in all media.

Horror elements are primarily connected to the subject matter of the text and can be derived from gothic or weird conventions, although this is not compulsory.

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<sup>93</sup> Directed by Sam Raimi, written by Raimi and Scott Spiegel.

<sup>94</sup> Directed by Wes Craven and written by Kevin Williamson.

<sup>95</sup> Directed by Keenen Ivory Wayans and written by Shawn Wayans, Marlon Wayans, Alyson Fouse, Greg Grabienski, Dave Polsky, Michael Anthony Snowden, and Craig Wayans.

<sup>96</sup> Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson and written by Philip Eisner.

<sup>97</sup> I will return to this in section 3.1. of the present dissertation.

One example of this might be the haunted house motif, which originates in Gothic fiction in the form of a large historical house holding dreadful secrets. At the same time, the motif can be traced back beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has been appearing intermittently through various formats and not always as horror, as I have outlined in the introduction. Thus, horror elements can be made visible in subject matter (things which frighten), intent (to frighten), and effect (being frightened): as is the case with Gothic and weird fiction, however, these characteristics vary, as fear changes over time (see Smith 2007).

It seems prudent, then, to focus instead on the horror mode as a smaller unit, which charts the specific characteristics of a single motif in a single manner, in lieu of trying to theorize any, inevitably unreliable, universal characteristics. For example, slashers and supernatural fiction can, and do, sometimes overlap – however, each has specific conventions, and hybridity occurs in their combination, rather than cross-contamination of characteristics. In essence, the characteristics of a slasher remain the same whether applied to a narrative with a human killer or a supernatural one. I would thus argue that the horror mode strives for verisimilitude more than the Gothic and the weird do: in the horror mode, the stylistic flourishes of the Gothic and the slipperiness of the weird are muted, if not non-existent. In this sense, the horror mode resembles the weird more than it does the Gothic. However, while the weird generates its atmospheric effects through invention, the horror mode appears more inclined towards reinterpretation. In this sense, then, the horror mode is itself a hybrid of the Gothic and the weird, its monsters often invoking traditional forms with its settings often drawing from the mundane.

### 1.3.3. The haunted house formula of the 1970s

In the haunted house fiction of the 1970s, the horror mode could be illustrated by *Burnt Offerings* (1973) by Robert Marasco, *The Shining* (1977) by Stephen King, and *The Amityville Horror* (1977) by Jay Anson. The setting is customarily a large, old house with a (secretly) disreputable past, often a site of violence and crime, which turns out to be already inhabited by malevolent spectral forces by the time the main characters move in. These spectral forces can manifest in both intangible and visceral ways, such as the omnipresent, unnatural host of flies in *The Amityville Horror* and Jack Torrance's slow descent into madness induced by the spectral forces inhabiting the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*, culminating in his attempt to murder his wife and son.

In terms of the characters depicted, the focus is on a (lower-)middle class family or family surrogate (Bailey 1999: 56), such as the Lutz family in *Amityville* or the Torrance family in *The Shining*. The supporting characters may include amicable outsiders who are knowledgeable of the history of the house and/or the supernatural and who can, if sometimes cryptically, warn the family of the location's dangers and attempt to aid them, such as Dick Halloran in *The Shining* or Father Mancuso in *Amityville*. In addition, while a sense of isolation and insularity of the focal character is characteristic to the weird, it is also present in

here. However, this does not apply to a single character but the whole family and can manifest both metaphorically through psychological isolation and literally through physical isolation because of the remote location of the haunted house.

The plot resembles that of the other modes in that the narrative often includes a kind of unravelling. This, however, unlike the gothic, manifests primarily in the breaking apart of the family structure. As Bailey points out (1999: 61–62), in the haunted house formula, there is often an escalation of the supernatural events as the family uncovers the history of the house, which ends in a climactic confrontation with the spectral forces inhabiting the house, the escape of the family through some form of sacrifice, and either the destruction, or the continuing existence, of the house. However, the iteration of the haunted house motif in the horror mode does not necessarily always adhere to this formula: for example, the family in *Burnt Offerings* does not survive their time at the haunted house.

The salient themes in these narratives include economic concerns and the difficulties of upward mobility in the context of the class system – there is generally an economic imperative for why the family (surrogate) must inhabit the haunted house. Examples include the house being particularly cheap to purchase (*The Amityville Horror*) or to rent for a limited time (*Burnt Offerings*), as well as a profitable opportunity which requires living at the house (*The Shining*). What is significant here is ownership: although the family / family surrogate may inhabit the house, they have no ancestral ties to it, nor do they typically own it. This, in turn, as Bailey (1999) interprets it, connects these narratives to an increased anxiety about the attainability of the American Dream.

#### 1.4. Concluding remarks

The first chapter of this dissertation has explored the history of contemporary horror: beginning with high Gothic fiction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, following through the revivals of the Gothic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the weird fiction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the development of the horror genre as a multimedia phenomenon in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through these periods, certain aspects of the genre have remained the same: the nature of the high Gothic, for example, has endured as an aspect of contemporary horror as well, playing on the anxieties of the modern person as deftly as it did on those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reader. The uncanny, the abject, and the grotesque also remain integral parts of horror.

Over the course of the first chapter, I have attempted to characterize the Gothic, the weird, and horror first as genres, giving an overview of their development through time. Second, I have attempted to synthesize a typology from these developments by dividing the three into distinct modes, through which certain motifs can be conveyed: in this case, the haunted house motif. I have argued that distinct types of haunted house narratives have emerged in the three modes described in the chapter, and these types of narratives are not restricted to their originating mode or period.

The horror mode functions differently from the Gothic and the weird firstly because it integrates elements of the former two. Secondly, rather than being connected by period, location, and analytical apparatuses like the other two, the horror mode is broader and more nebulous, connected primarily through its intention and effect. The mode, such as it is, appears to acquire unique characteristics only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the horror boom of the 1970s, where distinct subgenres emerge and combine genre-internally.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Space, Time, Experience

The purpose of this chapter is, firstly, to construct the theoretical apparatus of this dissertation by adapting spatiality, hauntology and affect theory for studying horror fiction. Throughout the course of this chapter, my aim is to adjust these theories to the study of haunted house narratives through an admittedly structuralist perspective. Because of this, there are inevitably aspects of the theories I discuss here which have been modified more forcefully than others and which serve different purposes than their creators intended. Secondly, this chapter aims to bring together the context examined in the first chapter with ontological theories to construct a theoretical apparatus which can be used to address both meaning and experience as they pertain to the research questions of this dissertation.

### 2.1. Space

The aim of this section is to establish a theoretical framework for approaching space in the empirical section of this dissertation. The first subsection examines Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological approach to space in *The Poetics of Space*, arguing that through poetic images, in particular Bachelard's concept of the oneiric house and its verticality, the meanings which stick to certain areas of houses can be identified. In the second subsection, the concept of heterotopia as developed by Michel Foucault is discussed. The heterotopia, if approached through the six principles that Foucault outlines, can be used to examine the haunted house motif from a perspective which accounts for the variety of haunted houses in fiction. Finally, the conceptualization of space, place, and home is approached in the final subsection through Doreen Massey's work to discuss the ways in which the spatial is connected to the social and the temporal. Additionally, the concept of Thirdspace by Edward Soja is introduced, which helps to account for the relation between space and lived experience.

#### 2.1.1. The Poetics of Space

In *La Poétique de l'espace* (1958), published in English as *The Poetics of Space* in 1964, Gaston Bachelard examines the interaction between space and intimacy in phenomenological terms, primarily through the analysis of poetic images. Although the book touches on many kinds of space and different conceptions of space, he does not focus on geographical space. Rather, the space that interests him is that of the imagination. He terms his approach topoanalysis, defined as "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives." (Bachelard 1994: 8) His analysis concentrates on what he calls "felicitous space" (1994:

xxxv), images of spaces which are pleasant and attractive, omitting the negative. Bachelard's (1994: 12) reasoning for this omission is that "[t]here does not exist a real intimacy that is repellent. All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction. Their being is well-being. In these conditions, topoanalysis bears the stamp of a topophilia." Thus, we can differentiate between topoanalysis, which would incorporate both the negative and the positive images of sites of intimacy, and topophilia, which includes only the positive images.

Miles Kennedy (2011) engages with Bachelard's work by positioning it alongside the work of his contemporaries such as Heidegger and Sartre, connecting Bachelard's 'concrete metaphysics' to Heideggerian thought on dwelling places to examine the notion of home. He argues that the crucial underpinning of phenomenological and existentialist philosophy is that meaning does not exist independently and that meaning is always "meaning *to*" (Kennedy 2011: 53), an idea which he finds in Bachelard and Heidegger alike. The notion of home is an excellent example of this: the concept has no inherent meaning but, rather, is highly subjective, with each individual having their own reference points and interpretations. In Kennedy's interpretation, Bachelard contended that no image is representational in the sense of drawing a likeness to reality but that it exists in and for itself, offering only the 'as' or 'as if' rather than direct parallels. To describe such a reality, I will employ the narratological term 'storyworld', i.e., "a coherent, unified, ontologically full and materially existing geographical entity, even when it is a fictional world" (Ryan 2014: para 9), because the storyworld of a narrative is approached as a possible form of reality insofar as it models a reality of its own.

However, Bachelard's insistence that all spaces of intimacy are created through an attraction is problematized by the spaces that are the focus of this dissertation, namely haunted houses. The concept of recreational fear (Andersen et al. 2020) could be used to bridge the gap between the Bachelardian felicitous image and space of intimacy with the images found in horror fiction. The concept of recreational fear relies upon the interaction between attraction and repulsion, between fear and delight, suggesting that negative affect and emotion are not inherently divorced from the sites and spaces of intimacy. For example, in watching a horror film at home, one introduces fear and discomfort into the prime space of intimacy, and in the case of haunted houses, an ostensible space of intimacy can become its antithesis. It should be noted here that when Bachelard speaks of spaces of intimacy, he does not appear to be discussing physical intimacy – indeed, the relationships between people rarely figure in *The Poetics of Space*. However, I would argue that a differentiation should still be made between the images suitable for topoanalysis and those for topophilia. The most common type of space found in haunted house narratives is of the uncanny<sup>98</sup> variety – strange and familiar at the same time, and thus more suitable for topoanalysis rather than topophilia.

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<sup>98</sup> As discussed in Chapter One.

It is nonetheless clear that these sites of intimacy can take many forms: here, perhaps the most relevant is the concept of the oneiric house.<sup>99</sup> Bachelard describes the oneiric house as “a house of dream-memory, that is lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past” (Bachelard 1994: 15), which he connects to the first childhood home. However, the oneiric house is by no means simply a replica of the real childhood home. Rather, for Bachelard it is “the unity of image and memory, in the functional composite of imagination and memory” (1994: 16). In essence, it is a half-imagined, half-remembered but first and foremost unreal space that is nevertheless particularly suited to sheltering reverie.<sup>100</sup> This oneiric house contains in many different spaces: “Centers of boredom, centers of solitude, centers of [reverie] group together to constitute the oneiric house which is more lasting than the scattered memories of our birthplace” (Bachelard 1994: 17). The ephemeral quality of the oneiric house does not mean it does not, at least in Bachelard’s view, have certain compulsory components:

If I were the architect of an oneiric house, I should hesitate between a three-story house and one with four. A three-story house, which is the simplest as regards essential height, has a cellar, a ground floor and an attic; while a four-story house puts a floor between the ground floor and the attic. One floor more, and our dreams become blurred. In the oneiric house, topoanalysis only knows how to count to three or four. (Bachelard 1994: 25)

Perhaps more important than the specific layout of the oneiric house is its capacity to consist of many other spaces. In fact, the oneiric house could be interpreted as a type of heterotopia, a concept to which I will return below in section 2.1.2., primarily because of its capability to juxtapose different spaces within itself. After all, the attic and the cellar are described in Bachelard as fostering two vastly different kinds of reactions and therefore two distinct kinds of reverie. In essence, he argues that the cellar is more conducive to the primal and chthonic, whereas the attic fosters the rational and intellectual. If the cellar is connected to the earth, harkening back to the cave/cavity which Bachelard in *Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay on Images of Interiority* (2011 [1948])<sup>101</sup> considers to be the primal dwelling place and thus connected to the irrational, then the attic is its binary opposite.

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<sup>99</sup> ‘Oneiric’ from the Greek *ὄνειρος*, meaning ‘dream.’ It should be noted here that I am purposefully disregarding Bachelard’s general opinions of modern architecture in *The Poetics of Space*, as well as his general distaste for urban environments and apartment buildings.

<sup>100</sup> The term which Bachelard uses throughout the original text is ‘*rêverie*.’ I have elected to use the English ‘reverie’ instead of the translator’s ‘daydream’ because Bachelard does not consider daydreaming per se, but, rather, the poetic imagination alongside daydreaming and dreams in general.

<sup>101</sup> Originally published as *La terre et les rêveries du repos* in 1948.

Beyond the oneiric house, Bachelard describes the house in the following way:

A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing a veritable psychology of the house. [...] [W]e should consider two principal connecting themes: 1) A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward. It differentiates itself in terms of its verticality. It is one of the appeals of our consciousness of verticality. 2) A house is imagined as a concentrated being. It appeals to our consciousness of centrality. (Bachelard 1994: 17)

In this sense, all space becomes oneiric – objective reality, if such a thing exists at all, loses relevance next to the half-dreamed, half-remembered collection of images that create the composite image of the house. This, I would argue, is precisely how the house can be approached as a centralized, concentrated entity. To allow for incompatible images to co-exist in the same space, however, the dimension of verticality becomes necessary. In essence, the primary significance of verticality lies in the differentiation between three broad categories of space: the cellar, the attic, and the floor(s) which make up the inhabited spaces of the house. In this way, we can differentiate between the image and components of the cellar from those of the living room, the bedroom, and so on, while allowing them to remain connected through their positioning in relation to one another.

Indeed, Bachelard (1994: xxxvii, 18) connects the three levels of his oneiric house to psychoanalytic theory, drawing a link between the house and the concepts of the *id*, *ego*, and *super-ego*<sup>102</sup>. He argues that “when we dream of the heights we are in the rational zone of intellectualized projects. But for the cellar, the impassioned inhabitant digs and re-digs, making its very depth active” (Bachelard 1994: 18). This indicates that the attic broadly corresponds to the *super-ego*, as the space of intellectualism and rational thought, the living spaces to the *ego*, as the quotidian space of day-to-day life, and the cellar to the *id*, as the primordial, chthonic space of the house that is in a constant process of creation and recreation in the imagination. If in the ‘regular’ oneiric house, these levels are generally separated from one another metaphysically as well as physically, to an extent, then the haunted house forces the experiences associated with the cellar and thus the *id* to extrude so that the haunted house in its completeness becomes a chthonic, primal, and dangerous space with little room for the rationality and intellectual pursuits of the attic, nor the quotidian daily life of the living spaces. As Martin (2008: 52) puts it, “to achieve verticality, the home is defined [by Bachelard] in terms of the ‘polarity of cellar and attic’” where the former is connected to negativity and fear and the latter to positivity and transformation through the conquering of fear. In this sense, vertical positionality is a key factor in Bachelard’s conception of space: only through vertical movement can the true

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<sup>102</sup> Drawn from Freudian psychoanalysis, the *id*, *ego*, and *super-ego* form a model of consciousness where the super-ego is the highest and id the lowest form of consciousness. For further discussion, see Freud 1920; 1923.

potential of the oneiric house be unlocked. This, as Martin points out, however, becomes problematic when examining different types of dwellings and not the detached, multi-story single-family home. For example, vertical movement, as Bachelard describes it, is difficult if not impossible to achieve in a single-story house, much less in a small apartment where even metaphorical movement can be restricted.

Bachelard views the cellar as a space capable of provoking an incredibly profound reaction, one that is of particular interest here: fear. Discussing an image from Henri Bosco's 1954 novel *L'Antiquaire*,<sup>103</sup> where the protagonist encounters a vast body of water underground, Bachelard says that

[t]his shiver [which is the reaction of the narrator to the body of water], we sense, is no longer human fear; this is cosmic fear, an anthropo-cosmic fear that echoes the great legend of man cast back into primitive situations. From the cavern carved in the rock to the underground, from the underground to stagnant water, we have moved from a constructed to a dreamed world [...]. The house, the cellar, the deep earth, achieve totality through depth. **The house has become a natural being** whose fate is bound to that of mountains and of the waters that plough the land. (Bachelard 1994: 23–24) [emphasis mine]

Of particular interest here is the phrase 'the house has become a natural being' and its connection to the cosmic fear Bachelard finds in Bosco's writing. Through the introduction of a cosmic dimension, and, by extension, cosmic fear, into the house, the house then takes on a life of its own. In this sense, experience shapes the space it occurs in. In this case, it is fear which shapes the space of the cellar. I would argue, however, that anxiety is more important in shaping this space than fear.

Kennedy (2011: 145) stresses that Bachelard's "study of poetic images hinged on entering into a fundamental mood of reverie, a mood which, much as Heidegger's anxiety pointed forward toward death without being of or about death, gestured back toward pre-natality." Kennedy uses the term "fundamental mood" to discuss the way in which these texts engage their reader: in his view, Bachelardian reverie and Heideggerian anxiety serve the same function by invoking a certain emotion. Kennedy argues that, in Bachelard's work, the focus is on reverie as the filter through which being is experienced, in contrast to Heidegger's anxiety. Instead of drawing a binary opposition between Heidegger and Bachelard, who argue for opposite understandings of ontology (the former being interpreted as negative (being-toward-death) and the latter as positive

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<sup>103</sup> The novel concerns a geologist who is recruited by a group of antique dealers to carry out an unspecified mission, with the central focus of the novel being on an unusual house. The quoted passage is from the closing section of the book, where Baroudiel, the protagonist of the novel, ventures into the labyrinthine basement of the house and, eventually, disappears.

(being-toward-birth/life<sup>104</sup>), however, Kennedy believes that the implications of their respective approaches are remarkably similar. Both redraw the focus of phenomenological enquiry to, respectively, works and images, which allows for a closer connection to the ontological rather than simply the ontic. In other words, they focus not on the tangible properties of things but, rather, **how** they are what they are.

Bachelard's phenomenology as shown in *The Poetics of Space* focuses primarily on felicitous images, as the images as well as the experiences attached to them which he analyzes are primarily positive. A notable exception is a brief consideration of "The Fall of the House of Usher",<sup>105</sup> where Bachelard approaches the story as a miniaturization of reality insofar that it is a study of anticipation particularly in its images of sound (Bachelard 1994: 176–177); Bachelard does not, however, examine the tale any further.

Bachelard (1994: 26) completely excludes multi-family dwellings such as apartment complexes, as well as single-story dwellings, from his topoanalysis, stating that "[i]n Paris there are no houses, and the inhabitants of the big city live in superimposed boxes," and appears to be highly critical of urban architecture in general, arguing that, unlike the houses he focuses on, these kinds of spaces are not inherently poetic. Pint (2013) contends that, by doing this, Bachelard makes the focus of topoanalysis unnecessarily narrow through implying that not only are domestic spaces universally positive but that they must be structured in a specific way to even count as a 'house' in the Bachelardian sense. Pint also contends that the absence of human relationships in Bachelard's conception of dwelling is deeply problematic. Instead, Pint (2013: 120) proposes that Bachelardian topoanalysis could work well in combination with a strategy of "deformative criticism" through approaching text in unconventional ways such as piecing it apart and reassembling it<sup>106</sup> (cf Samuels and McGann 1999) and could help to "understand the interaction between the cultural imagination and actual demographic, economic, and social changes that occurred and influenced our view of interior spaces." Instead, Pint suggests using topoanalysis in conjunction with the deconstructive method to untangle the complex relations between domestic spaces as places and lived experiences, including relations between people, not just between people and the places they dwell.

As mentioned, viewing the childhood home as the positive, nourishing foundation for the oneiric house is a highly subjective premise since the single-family home is far from the most common type of dwelling and positive childhood

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<sup>104</sup> In the metaphorical sense, meaning that being is oriented not towards its own ending but, rather, to its continuation. For a political treatment of this, see Hannah Arendt's work on the concept of natality (1958; 1965).

<sup>105</sup> Previously discussed in Chapter One, "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe follows the downfall of the titular family and their ancestral house. The family's decline is reflected in the decay of the house.

<sup>106</sup> At least as far as deformative criticism seeks to deconstruct its object into constituent parts, sometimes even reassembling it, for a better understanding (Samuels and McGann 1999).

experiences in one's home are far from universal. Using *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros as a case study, Martin (2008) proposes an account of space which does not fit the idealized model of the oneiric house by examining the horizontal motion possible in urban dwellings. She contends that while the vertical oneiric house suggested by Bachelard serves its desired function in certain contexts, as it offers isolation to the wealthy and privileged, the alternative, horizontal dwelling can be a "transgressive space whose creative possibilities, peacefulness, and sense of security derive /.../ from the joy of collective existence and shared experiences" (Martin 2008: 66). Motion remains possible in non-traditional oneiric houses through reorientation and recontextualization. This, in turn, shows that the concept of the oneiric house can be reworked through an emphasis on movement in general rather than specifically vertical, or even horizontal, movement. Paradoxically, the oneiric house, once decontextualized, becomes something reminiscent of place as an idea rather than a specific, remembered space. This, in turn, allows it to be used in the study of horror fiction and particularly haunted house fiction, since the houses in question are far more often sites of danger, not safety.

### 2.1.2. Heterotopia in its various forms

The concept of 'heterotopia' first appears in Foucault's writings in the introductory section of *The Order of Things* (1966), where it is mentioned twice. In this version, as Johnson (2006) suggests, it seems divorced from its later meaning and appears to refer to a discursive, rather than physical, space. Similarly, while the concept of 'utopia' is touched upon in conjunction to heterotopia in *The Order of Things*, the distinction made later in *Des autres espaces* (1984)<sup>107</sup>, Foucault's key text on the concept, between the two types of spaces is not present. As *Des autres espaces* is based on notes from a lecture given by Foucault to the Cercle d'études architecturales<sup>108</sup> in 1967, which in turn was based on a radio broadcast that aired in 1966, interpretations of the text can vary significantly. In addition, since Foucault did not develop the concept of heterotopia any further, concrete definitions of what the heterotopia precisely is for him, as well as connections between it and his later work on spaces, are difficult to establish (see Topinka 2010).

However, despite this conceptual incoherence, the heterotopia has been used in diverse disciplines from architectural studies (e.g., Urbach 1998; Dehaene & De Cauter 2008) and various branches of geography (e.g., Soja 1996; Johnson 2013) to literary and film studies (e.g., Casarino 2002; Davies 2008) and theatre criticism (e.g., Tompkins 2014). As a result, the concept has multiple, often conflicting, interpretations, although the most common approach considers the

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<sup>107</sup> Which was published without any revisions or review from Foucault in *Architecture Mouvement Continuité*, a French architectural journal.

<sup>108</sup> 'The Circle of Architectural Studies,' a group established by prominent French architects in 1951, with Auguste Perret, Pierre Sonrel, Eugène Beaudouin and Bernard Zehrffuss as its founding members. Other prominent members of the group include Jean Prouvé and Le Corbusier.

heterotopia a transgressive space (cf Urbach 1998). Perhaps some of the most sustained engagements with the concept in English can be found in Hetherington's (1997) treatment of social spaces and modernity. The most relevant here is his argument, echoing Stallybrass and White's (1986) work on similar marginal sites, that the heterotopia should not necessarily be thought of as a site of resistance and transgression as it had been widely used in earlier architecture studies but, rather, as simply a way of ordering space.

In his book *Geography of Horror: Spaces, Hauntings and the American Imagination* (2022), Lukić uses the concept of heterotopia to examine horror fiction set in small towns. In particular, drawing on his earlier work (Lukić and Parezanović 2020), he comes back to the concept of the 'dark heterotopia', referring to "parallel spaces whose primary function surpasses the opposing and containing qualities as initially presented by Foucault that are now intent on subverting and possibly annihilating the dominant norm" (Lukić 2022: 15). This interpretation could be useful to examine the transgressive potential of space in horror as far as the dark heterotopia, in Lukić's conception, opposes ordinary space and can create new (spatial) paradigms. However, the heterotopia as such is not necessarily transgressive and neither is the dark heterotopia – an argument to which I will return later.

In the earlier uses of heterotopia in connection with the horror genre, Botting (2004) has suggested that it could be useful in examining the relationship between space and the Gothic. Drawing on Botting's work, Hock Soon Ng (2018: 444) has used the concept to argue that the haunted house "directly embodies the heterotopic quality of being here and elsewhere at the same time" by being "situated in the present while situating the past". In this sense, he considers the heterotopic quality of the haunted house to be primarily connected to its relation to time and to the space around it. I would argue, however, that what Hock Soon Ng offers is only one aspect of the several potential connections between the heterotopia and the haunted house. Because of this, I suggest a re-examination of the original text and concept as proposed by Foucault (2008).

Any in-depth discussion of heterotopias begins by necessity with utopias, which Foucault (2008: 17) describes as "fundamentally unreal" spaces, as "emplacements with no real space". Although he does not elaborate on the concept of emplacement further, the term primarily indicates the network of relations between sites – relations which make emplacements possible, allowing a site to be situated and meaningful. Drawing on this, the utopia is then to be understood in this context as something that is unmoored from that network even as it is situated. Foucault's utopia can act as "a perfectly ordered society or the opposite of society" (Johnson 2006: 82). In other words, this interpretation of utopia,<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> This appears to indicate that Foucault draws on the combination of *οὐ* + *τόπος* ('not' + 'place') rather than *εὖ* + *τόπος* ('good' + 'place') for this use of utopia. However, the latter combination is more commonly used elsewhere and contrasts with dystopia, which is derived from *δυσ* + *τόπος* ('bad' + 'place'). Thus, Foucault's definition can contain both the meaning of *εὖ* + *τόπος* as well as *δυσ* + *τόπος*.

even as it is always unreal, should not be read exclusively as a positively valued space but, rather, as something that can have a variety of connotations.

In contrast, heterotopias are “effectively real places” which act as “a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (Foucault 2008: 17). Or, as Johnson (2006: 78) puts it, “[l]ike utopias, [heterotopias] relate to other sites by both representing and at the same time inverting them; unlike utopias, however, they are localized and real.” In this sense, then, the heterotopia can function as the idea of a place realized while the utopia would, in this context, be the idea of a place. Foucault’s conception of the heterotopia can be described through six principles that can be thought to characterize the heterotopia in its various forms.<sup>110</sup> As Johnson (2013: 794) puts it, however, the concept of heterotopia “does not imply a closed or complete system or hidden structures that designate absolute difference”. Instead, the concept is as flexible as the contexts that create it. Thus, the principles proposed by Foucault (2008) function as starting points rather than as rigid rules for the concept.

The first principle states that heterotopias are universal and occur in most, if not all, cultures. Here appears what the translators of the 2008 edition of Foucault’s text describe as an “anthropological axis” (Foucault 2008: 27n30) of the concept, where a distinction is made between crisis heterotopias and deviation heterotopias. The primary difference between the two seems to be in who is placed into them: in the case of the former, it is people in a state of crisis,<sup>111</sup> whereas with the latter, it is people who deviate somehow from societal norms. Examples of the former are boarding schools and honeymoon hotels, while examples of the latter can be prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and the like. Foucault (2008: 18) suggests that some places can serve both as crisis and deviation heterotopias. One example of this might be the nursing home, where the elderly and sick are separated from the rest of society. In this sense, the heterotopia is a space imbued with a specific function.

The second principle is that heterotopias, to maintain their purpose as a break in the space that surrounds them, can change their function as their originating culture changes. Foucault’s example of this is the cemetery, which shifted both in physical location, i.e., away from the city center, and in cultural purpose during the transition from the medieval period to modernity. This implies a connection between heterotopias and time. That link is developed further in the fourth principle, which draws a connection between heterotopias and temporal displacement.

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<sup>110</sup> But not necessarily concurrently.

<sup>111</sup> With the caveat that this crisis need not necessarily be recognized as such. Foucault uses the same-sex boarding school as an example of this, pointing out that adolescence is often viewed as a state of crisis because it is a transitional period in a person’s life, situated at the end of childhood and on the cusp of adulthood.

Foucault (1998: 182) refers to this as heterochronia<sup>112</sup> which manifests primarily in two forms: accumulating time and festival time. The former is used for places such as museums and archives, where artifacts from different periods exist in the same space, and the latter for places such as touring carnivals, which are ephemeral and exist in a specific form and a specific location for only a brief time. This forms what the translators designate as a “temporal axis” (Foucault 2008: 27n30) of the heterotopia, its relation to indefinitely accumulating time and to fleeting time.

The third principle is that the heterotopia, if positioned as a real space, can juxtapose multiple places and emplacements within itself: Foucault’s (2008) examples of this are the cinema and the theatre, which can hold an infinite number of other spaces through the use of the screen and the stage, respectively. The fifth principle of the heterotopia is that it requires mechanisms for closing and opening: while entrance is usually not free, it is still possible through ritualistic actions which can take many different forms. For Foucault (*ibid*), examples of this include the vacation village and the sauna, but this pertains to cinemas and theatres as well.

The sixth and final principle of the heterotopia is its function, which relates to ‘the rest of space’ that lies outside it (Foucault 2008: 21): here, what the translators refer to as the “imaginary axis” (Foucault 2008: 27–28n30) of the heterotopia appears. A distinction is made between heterotopias of illusion and heterotopias of compensation. The former “exposes all real space, all the emplacements in the interior of which human life is enclosed and partitioned, as even more illusory” whereas the latter is “another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed and sketchy” (Foucault 2008: 21). The examples cited are brothels for the former and Puritan colonies for the latter; in the former, the outside world and its order are made irrelevant whereas in the latter, the space itself is rigorously ordered in stark contrast to the world around it. This principle is tied closely to the idea of heterotopias being realized utopias: unreal – even impossible – spaces somehow made real.

Haunted houses have several heterotopian qualities, not in the least in that they reflect and distort the idea of the house as a site. In horror narratives, this distortion tends to lie in the depiction of the house not as a place of safety but as a site of both physical, mental, and spiritual danger. However, since all fictional spaces are inherently utopian as they are fundamentally unreal, the application of the concept of heterotopia can become problematic because of its nature as a realized utopia. To sustain a dichotomy of utopian/heterotopian in the practical

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<sup>112</sup> Different translations of the original text use different terms to refer to this concept: the 1986 translation uses the term ‘heterochrony’, the 1998 translation ‘heterochronia’. The 2008 translation uses another alternative, ‘heterochronism’, but I have elected to use the term *heterochronia* because it is the closest to the French original, *l’hétérochronie*, and retains the cadence of *l’hétérotopie* / *l’hétérochronie* from the original text as *heterotopia* / *heterochronia*. Other texts on the subject appear to vary between using either heterochrony or heterochronia.

application in the empirical section, then, I use the narratological concept of storyworld to reposition these concepts into a text-centered framework and to use them as analytical tools. In this way, the storyworld supplies a context in which the ‘real’ emplacements of heterotopia exist and allows for the utopia to retain its function as an ‘unreal’ space in the context of fiction even as the storyworld itself is a constructed reality.

The six principles of heterotopia could be taken as a starting point. Heterotopias are not limited to the anthropological, temporal, and imaginary axes. Indeed, the concept of “dark heterotopia” proposed by Lukić and Parezanović (2020) could be taken as the basis for at least one additional axis, which I call the itinerant axis, to be primarily drawn from the fifth principle of Foucault’s heterotopia, that of opening and closing. The dark heterotopia shares most qualities of the heterotopia but it also has “the capacity to invade ordinary places” and to transform them (Lukić and Parezanović 2020: 1140). Perhaps paradoxically, I characterize the dark heterotopia not as a separate kind of space but as an extrusive form of heterotopia, a heterotopia which breaks out of its borders. I suggest that its dialectical opposite would be the intrusive heterotopia, a heterotopia that excludes everything else from itself. If the intrusive heterotopia could be conceptualized as a painting, its depicted space contained and separated from surrounding space, the extrusive heterotopia would resemble a perforated sculpture, blending itself with its surroundings even as it stands apart from them. In this sense, the pure intrusive heterotopia is an enclosed space with no entry while the pure extrusive heterotopia is open to the point of merging into the space around it.

Drawing from this, I argue that haunted houses are always positioned on the itinerant axis of the heterotopia, capable of both intruding and extruding. However, I suggest that different types of haunted house narratives are more prone to invoke different axes of heterotopia even as they all function, on some level, as itinerant heterotopias. More specifically, narratives which I have classified as belonging to the Gothic mode in the first chapter of the present dissertation generally invoke the temporal axis of the heterotopia: functioning as both a repository of time and a break from it, the Gothic haunted house is troubled first and foremost by an irruption of the past into the present. On the other hand, the weird haunted house narratives are more likely to draw upon the imaginary axis of the heterotopia, as heterotopias of illusion rendering everything that surrounds them in the storyworld more unreal than themselves. Finally, horror aligns closely with the anthropological axis of the heterotopia, particularly in how it invokes and examines socioeconomic concerns alongside deeply human issues such as (social) isolation.

### 2.1.3. Space and place

Doreen Massey’s (1994) approach to both space and place is contingent on the existence of social relations. In defining space, she argues that

[s]pace must be conceptualized integrally with time; indeed that the aim should be to think always in terms of space-time. That argument emerged out of an earlier insistence on thinking of space, not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of social relations: that what is at issue is not social phenomena in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations ‘stretched out’. The fact is, however, that social relations are never still; they are inherently dynamic. Thus even to understand space as a simultaneity is, in these terms, not to evacuate it of all inherent dynamism. (Massey 1994: 2)

In this sense, then, if space is created through social relations, it must necessarily have a temporal component as social relations are fundamentally unsettled. She continues by saying that “since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial is as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification” (Massey 1994: 3). This, in turn, indicates that structures of power have a significant role in determining the spatial: different scales of space, from the global to the local, all depend on complex networks of social relations which not only sustain the spatial but also inform the way the spatial is constructed. She argues that “an understanding of the spatial must entail an analysis of the economy and society more generally” (Massey 1994: 22), particularly when it comes to larger-scale space which entails a wide range of social relations.

Building on this, Massey argues that the concept of ‘place’ could then be approached

as particular moments in such intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one another, decayed and renewed. Thinking of places in this way implies that they are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations. It implies that their ‘identities’ are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by counterposition to them. It reinforces the idea, moreover, that those identities will be multiple (since the various social groups in a place will be differently located in relation to the overall complexity of social relations and since their reading of those relations and what they make of them will also be distinct). And this in turn implies that what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time. (Massey 1994: 120–121)

A place is thus a node in the complex webs of social relations which make up space. Crucially, this means that a place is, in Massey’s definition, always-already a heterotopia as it holds within itself multiple sites. A place viewed through this approach corresponds to Foucault’s (2008) third principle of the heterotopia, that of juxtaposing multiple emplacements within itself. The ‘identity’ of a place, such as it can be, is itself dependent on other places and changes over time. This, again, resembles the heterotopia as outlined in section 2.1.2. of the present dissertation.

However, the most significant argument Massey makes is that

the identity of place is in part constructed out of positive interrelations with elsewhere. This is in contrast to many readings of place as home, where there is imagined to be the security of a (false, as we have seen) stability and an apparently reassuring boundedness. Such understandings of the identity of places require them to be enclosures, to have boundaries and – therefore and most importantly – to establish their identity through negative counterposition with the Other beyond the boundaries. An understanding of the socio-economic geography of any place [...] reveals that such a view is untenable. The identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with ‘the outside.’ (Massey 1994: 169)

The idea of a place being constructed through its interrelations with the space around it is integral to this dissertation’s argument that the haunted house motif can be, perhaps paradoxically, viewed as a reassertion of a normative understanding of space. I argue that the haunted house as a literary device, being often actually a haunted **home**, depends on an understanding of what ‘home’ is and how it is constructed. Massey’s argument that places – home among them – are not rigidly bordered and definite but, rather, permeable and open, form an underlying logic in the construction of a haunted house narrative. While Massey is arguing that this openness is not inherently a negative thing, the haunted house narrative seems to contend the opposite: the haunted house invokes the itinerant axis of the heterotopia precisely because of its capability for expansion out of its own borders.

This also raises a point of friction between this understanding of place and, by extension, of the notion of home. There is tension between the understanding of one’s home as one’s castle, a bordered, definite, and secure space, with Massey’s view of places as inherently porous and dynamic. Said tension illustrates what the haunted house narrative does – it makes the openness of the house and the home apparent through hauntings. Further still, it stresses the idea that even without any haunting, a house and a home are never truly closed and secure.<sup>113</sup> However, neither every house nor every place is a home, and thus the question remains: why is the home considered a special place?

Mallett (2004) problematizes the conflation of ‘house’ and ‘home’. Instead, Mallett (2004: 84) argues that “how home is and has been defined at any given time depends upon ‘specification of locus and extent’ and the broader historical and social context.” Mallett (2004: 84) states that “the term home functions as a repository for complex, inter-related and at times contradictory socio-cultural ideas about people’s relationship with one another, especially family, and with places, spaces, and things.” Most importantly, however, how one approaches the concept depends on one’s own context as well as the context of the site in question. In the present dissertation, I will focus on the friction between the

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<sup>113</sup> As is evidenced by home invasion being a popular subgenre of horror, as well.

concept of home and the literary haunted houses I will study. Specifically, I will focus on the home created through social relations.

According to Easthope (2004: 136), 'home' is "a particularly significant kind of place with which and within which we experience strong social, psychological and emotive attachments, /.../ an open place, maintained and developed through the social relations that stretch beyond it." Easthope stresses that rigid, *a priori* conceptions of what 'home' is are reductive because of the inherent subjectivity of the concept. This parallels Massey's (1995) definition of place: that it is not only a social construct but a nodal point within a complex web of interacting (social) systems. In a similar vein, Saunders and Williams (1988: 83) have described the home as a socio-spatial system which requires a social component, the household, and a spatial component, a physical location. They distinguish between the house (the physical location), the household (the people), and the home (the socio-spatial system). Thus, the home need not be a special place per se, but in the home, complex social relations converge and overlap in a location to create a specific site, the individual home.

One of the most significant threads of social relations which influence the creation of the home as a site are those between its inhabitants. For example, Spain (1993) states that the home as a gendered space has historically enabled the stratification of gender in favor of men over women through the division of labor within the home-space. Because domestic labor has been considered the responsibility of women, it has limited women's capacity for action outside of the home. Spaces such as the home, the workplace, and the school all "have the ability to sustain the status quo without encountering resistance" (Spain 1993: 147) because these spatial arrangements are not routinely critically examined, allowing the social relations and stratifications within to remain unquestioned. However, Spain (1993: 144) also argues that because "relatively little socially valued knowledge is located in the home in an advanced industrial society," "gendered spaces in schools and workplaces are more consequential to women's access to resources than are those in the home." While the home retains its capacity to reinforce the stratification of genders, its significance in this function has been superseded over time. This also affects how the haunted house narrative approaches the relation between the home and its inhabitants as well as the relationships between the people inhabiting the place.

As Doan (2010) rightly points out, a rigid dichotomy of 'men vs women' in examining the intersection between space and gender excludes people of marginalized identities, particularly queer, transgender, and intersex individuals. Instead, Doan (2010: 647) argues through an autoethnographic approach<sup>114</sup> that while the home can be "a necessary place of refuge," it is not "uncontested" in this function in the age of remote communication and for people of marginalized identities. She claims that, because the home has become a porous place that touches upon and can be touched by other places, it is incapable of completely isolating its inhabitants from the outside world. This, in particular, is relevant for

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<sup>114</sup> Studying her own experiences of home as a trans woman.

the study of the haunted house narrative, where the haunted house / home functions as an isolating factor and the effect is only compounded by the porous nature of place.

As Morley (2001: 428) puts it, the home has become something of “a ‘phantasmagoric’ place, to the extent that electronic media of various kinds allow the intrusion of distant events into the space of domesticity.” This, in turn, means that the idea of one’s home as an impenetrable fortress and a place of security and privacy has become problematic in general. Certainly, the presence and prevalence of the Internet has drastically changed the ways in which our homes are open to the spaces around them. This can be seen both in how easily and quickly the home can extrude into the outside world as well as how the outside world can intrude within the home. As social relations are a part of what constitutes the home, as shown above, it follows that, because these social relations have become increasingly complex and stretched out, so too has the home become more difficult to pin down as a concretely situated, rigidly bordered site. In this context, home might be viewed, as Mallett (2004: 64) puts it, as “a virtual place, a repository for memories of the lived spaces. It locates lived time and space, particularly intimate familial time and space.” This, in turn, is reminiscent of Bachelard’s oneiric house, which is both real and imagined, both remembered and dreamed.

An interaction between space as physical and space as idea can be seen in Soja’s (1989; 1995; 1996) influential tripartite conception of space, drawn in part from Henri Lefebvre’s seminal work *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]). Soja (2009: 51) argues that “[w]hereas Firstspace epistemologies are used to describe spatial dimensions, which can be perceived, Secondspace epistemologies rather deal with symbolic worlds, which are conceived.” Firstspace, thus, refers primarily to physical space, Secondspace to imagined space. However, the core of Soja’s argument is that, in addition to perceptible, physical space (Firstspace) and thinkable, conceptual space (Secondspace), there is a third type of space, which emerges in the interaction between the two. He calls this interaction, characterized by the interplay between physical location and the idea of what that location should be “Thirdspace.” As Lukić (2022) points out, Thirdspace can be thought of as experienced or lived-in space. Soja (2009: 50) argues that Thirdspace as a tool allows one “to set aside the demands to make an either/or choice and contemplate instead the possibility of a both/and also logic, one that not only permits but encourages a creative combination of postmodernist and modernist perspectives, even when a specific form of postmodernism is being highlighted.” Thirdspace can, then, in taking a more holistic approach to space as both material and ideal at the same time without eliminating one or the other, focus on the interaction between the two. In this sense, Thirdspace is “both a space that is distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or first and second) and a transcending composite of all spaces” (Soja 2009: 52).

The presence of Thirdspace “produces what might best be called a cumulative ‘trialectics’ that is radically open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge” (Soja 2009: 55). Soja argues that spatiality can be viewed simultaneously as perceived, conceived, and lived, creating a holistic

understanding of space, viewing its constituent parts as integral to the existence of space.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha claims that to look beyond the Western hegemonic understanding of culture and diversity, culture should be thought of as hybrid. As Soja summarizes it (2009: 58), “the difference of cultures cannot be contained within the universalist frameworks of liberal democracy or Marxist-historicism, for these different cultures are often *incommensurable*, not neatly categorized.” This, Soja (*ibid*) argues, makes Bhabha identify a ‘third space’ of alternative enunciation” [original emphasis] that looks beyond existing frameworks. Bhabha calls for an understanding of human culture not in terms of universals or binary oppositions, but, rather, as a complex phenomenon which can take many different forms. In this way, for Bhabha (1994: 7) a third space can function as a political strategy to bring the marginalized beyond the margins without an emphasis on historicizing and generalization: “the intervening space ‘beyond’ becomes a space of intervention in the here and now.” This third space is not merely theoretical but can be a powerful tool for political engagement precisely because it allows to account for hybridity.

I would argue that in the haunted house narrative, possible hybridity is integral to understanding the shifts the space undergoes throughout the narrative and can help to account for the different functions the haunted house can have within the narrative in terms of its transgression against the normative understanding of house and home.

#### 2.1.4. Concluding remarks

Bachelard’s concept of the poetic image and its connection to storyworlds is essential for understanding the symbolic values that the haunted house motif can be charged with. Bachelard’s conception of the oneiric house in its verticality can help to explain some of the wrongness attached to the haunted house motif. The function of the cellar in the haunted house is directly tied to its function in the oneiric house as it a space of the primal. This offers two possible foci for the empirical analysis in the present dissertation: firstly, it demonstrates an approach to poetic images which accounts for both real and imagined space through the concept of the oneiric house, and, secondly, it provides a rough layout for the symbolic attachments to be found in the house.

Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia, if approached as a multiplicity, can manifest in multiple ways simultaneously through the temporal, imaginary, anthropological, and itinerant axes. This approach augments the typology for the haunted house narrative I have developed in Chapter One. I contend that the temporal axis of the heterotopia is prioritized most often in narratives in the gothic mode, the imaginary axis is intrinsic to narratives in the weird mode, and the anthropological axis is often centered in the horror mode. I suggest that the concept of heterotopia, as Foucault (2008) outlines it, can reveal certain norms by enforcing them without necessarily being transgressive by nature. For example, the haunted house, in its heterotopian quality, refracts the idea of home and house as

a place. It is a house, often a home, which is somehow wrong. This wrongness in the “reality” of the haunted house, in turn, enforces the normative idea of what the house/home **should** be, creating a dialectic between the reality of and the idea of the site.

The relationship between the concepts of space and place is in this dissertation approached, following Massey, as space-time. Morley and Mallett view the home as a virtual/phantasmagoric place that resembles the Bachelardian oneiric house. This understanding is crucial for the empirical analysis in the present dissertation. The concept of Soja’s Thirdspace as lived experience of space and place, as a site that is at once imagined, perceived, and experienced, is particularly useful for the study of the haunted house motif as it allows for a holistic approach to the haunted house as more than simply the setting of the narrative. Rather, the haunted house diegetically functions as a complex site which should be approached from multiple directions to understand its significance. This, in turn, informs the subsequent sections of the present chapter, which examine time and experience.

## 2.2. Time

The aim of this section is to examine the ways in which Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology is connected to time and hospitality, and the ways in which these notions intersect, to establish the theoretical approach to the notion of time in the haunted house narrative.

### 2.2.1. Hauntology and the specter

The concept of hauntology<sup>115</sup> originates in Jacques Derrida’s 1993 book *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*.<sup>116</sup> The book was based on a series of lectures Derrida gave at a conference on Marxism after the fall of the Soviet Union at the University of California, Riverside in 1993. Fittingly, the primary concern of the work are the titular specters of Marx, particularly the position of Marxism as an ideological haunting of capitalism. The concept of hauntology responds to the claim that the period was the ‘end of history,’ as Francis Fukuyama (1989) proposed. Derrida instead argues that Marxism, in one form or another, has and will always haunt capitalism (Shaw 2018: 5) as an alternative economic system, even if merely on the ideological level. In this way, Derrida (1994: 46) claims, hegemony “organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” and, for the hegemony of capitalism, Marxism is that haunting.

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<sup>115</sup> A wordplay on ‘haunting’ and ‘ontology’ – ‘hantologie’ in the French original.

<sup>116</sup> The full title of the work in English is *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New Internationale*; the book was translated into English in 1994. The book will be referred to as *Specters of Marx* from here onward.

For Derrida, there remains a haunting in any power structure as it is never the only option.

As Derrida (1994: 202) puts it, “[t]o haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology.” Hauntology functions as the twin of ontology as it concerns all that is but, in addition, asserts that there are also things which fail to be. As Shaw (2018: 19), following Fisher, suggests, hauntology is thus “motivated by an interest in illuminating a past we do not know, as well as preventing us from forgetting a history we would sometimes rather not know.” Shaw uses the concept to examine contemporary British fiction, problematizing the conception of the cultural past as something that is gone by showing that traces remain everywhere. In this way, a literary haunting can be viewed as a particularly literal way of approaching the concept of hauntology, as the traditional ghost functions as a personification of the past come to haunt the present, for example in the haunting narrative about improper burial, where the aim of the ghost is to right a past wrong and thus illuminate a secret. This illumination, in turn, requires a specter.

For Derrida, such a specter is a

paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. /.../ The spirit, the specter are not the same thing, /.../ but as for what they have in common, one does not know what it is, what it is presently. *It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. (Derrida 1994: 5) [original emphasis]

In this way, the specter problematizes epistemology, particularly as it is something which cannot be understood or, even, be understood to exist – and yet, it **does**, and it **is**. The specter is “three things of the thing” (Derrida 1994: 9): first, it is mourning, through identification and localization; second, it is marked in language; third, it “*works*, whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself” [original emphasis] (*ibid*). The primary characteristic of the specter is thus its capacity to instigate the action of mourning because the act of identification requires something to be identified and localized. Similarly to the traditional ghost, the specter becomes complicated when it cannot be identified or localized –when it is neither present nor absent, which, for the specter, seems to be the primary mode of being. Secondly, its demarcation in language indicates that the specter is recognizable because it can be spoken of – and, as Derrida (1994) asserts, spoken *with*. Finally, perhaps the most crucial characteristic of the specter is that it has a purpose – what Derrida calls work. There is a reason for the specter’s (non-)existence where- and whenever it appears: it either takes or inspires action.

Hägglund (2008: 82) contends that the crucial feature of the specter is that

it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*. And since time – the disjointure [sic] between past and future – is a condition even for the slightest moment, **spectrality is at work in everything that happens**. An identity or community can never escape the machinery of exclusion, can never fail to engender ghosts, since it must demarcate itself against a past that cannot be encompassed and a future that cannot be anticipated. Inversely, it will always be threatened by what it cannot integrate in itself – haunted by the negated, the neglected, and the unforeseeable. (Hägglund 2008: 82) [italics original emphasis, bold emphasis mine]

In this sense, spectrality troubles the argument that to Be, that which is must be self-identical, offering instead a position to account for that which cannot be accounted for in ontology – broadly speaking, spectral Otherness. For Hägglund (*ibid*), spectrality is directly connected to the notions of justice and violence because of hegemonic power: “we are always already inscribed in an ‘economy of violence,’ where we are both excluding and being excluded. No position can be autonomous or absolute; it is necessarily bound to other positions that it violates and by which it is violated.” This, Hägglund (2008: 83–84) argues, does not mean that absolute peace is desirable. On the contrary: “[t]he idea of absolute peace is the idea of eliminating the undecidable future that is the condition for anything to happen” (Hägglund 2008: 84). The specter, then, through its association with the future – it is tied to the *not yet* – is connected to violence and the violence of **change** in particular.

### 2.2.2. The specter and hospitality

Shaw (2018) uses the concept of the specter in conjunction with Derrida’s writings on hospitality (e.g., Derrida 2000) to examine the notions of spectral visitation in Zadie Smith’s novel *NW*. For Derrida, the concept of hospitality is predicated on the presence of the host who receives the visitation and the guest who performs the visitation, and in Shaw’s interpretation, hospitality thus refers to whether the host is receptive to the guest or not. Shaw (2018: 56), following Derrida, problematizes the notion of hospitality by pointing out that in a state of unconditional hospitality, “the act of surrendering all claims to ownership and power also renders it impossible for the individual to function as a host”. Drawing on Derrida, Shaw (2018: 63) claims that “the paradox of hospitality is that the condition of its possibility is also the condition of its impossibility.” Connecting this to the novel, Shaw claims that spectrally aligned<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Spectrality here is strictly metaphorical, primarily referring to the shared histories and experiences between characters in their connection to *NW*, the site. In this way, the past itself is the specter in Shaw’s argument.

visitations and encounters /.../ unsettle and create a new state of uncertainty regarding who is 'visitor', who is 'guest' and where 'home' actually is. In this model of relations, both host and guest share a loyalty to a specific locale that inspires a demonstration of solidarity through the act of unconditional hospitality to the Other, one that carries with it the potential to present a counter to the power and priority of the established host. (Shaw 2018: 64)

Such a haunting / visitation disturbs the hegemonic order of power within the home and the dynamics of guest/host. Referring back to Coughlan's (2016) notion of "ghostpality", which broadly refers to hospitality towards the spectral in the sense that the spectral should be welcomed, not shunned as it is always-already in the position of guest, Shaw's conclusion is that ghostpality can generate a positive encounter if, and only if, the person in the host position welcomes and engages with the (spectral) Other / guest.

This echoes Hägglund's (2008: 104) argument that "[t]he 'hospitality' to otherness is unconditional not because it is ideal or ethical as such, but because one is necessarily susceptible to violent visitations." Violent visitations, Hägglund argues, are precondition for change – if violent irruption does not happen, progress is stifled. Because of this,

unconditional hospitality is thus another name for the violent alteration of time, which opens me both to what I desire and what I fear. The exposure to visitation is intrinsic to the hospitality I desire, since no one can arrive and nothing can happen without the unpredictable coming of time. But by the same token, the hospitality I desire also opens the door to what I fear. Hospitality can never be reduced to the invitation of an other who is good; it must be open to the risk of an evil visitation. (Hägglund 2008: 104)

For hospitality to be possible, then, an opening must be present for a bad visitation as much as a good one. It is telling that the notion of hospitality is here connected to time: in the context of the present dissertation, the paradox of hospitality is essential for understanding the role that the spectral plays in haunted house narratives. Since time is a fundamental part of visitation and of haunting, compressed into the concept through what comes before, during, and after, the paradox of hospitality could help to explicate the roles that the haunted and the haunter enact and fulfill, and the temporal dimension of the spectral visitation.

However, this is complicated by the problem of the metaphorical nature of Derrida's specter and the diegetically genuine, or implied-to-be diegetically genuine, ghosts and spectral entities in horror fiction. Because of this, I suggest that it is productive to distinguish between the terms 'the specter' – which in this dissertation functions primarily as an always already emerging manifestation of temporal and social processes rather than a haunting in the traditional sense – from 'the ghost' or 'spectral entity'.

Indeed, Derrida (1994: 6) differentiates between the specter and other spectral forms by stating that "[t]his spectral *someone other looks at us*," indicating an interaction between the specter and ourselves. However, this interaction is not

symmetrical as the specter is not symmetrical to us, its interaction with us one-sided for it can perceive others but cannot be perceived in turn. “Since we do not see the one who sees us, /.../ we cannot identify it in all certainty, **we must fall back on its voice,**” as Derrida (1994: 7) [emphasis mine] proposes, suggesting that communication with the specter is not only possible but desirable. The specter demands to be heard purely because it cannot be seen. As the specter can speak and be **spoken with**, it can be drawn towards the notion of hospitality as discussed above. In this context, the specter is a guest who cannot be ignored or banished but must be acknowledged. Similarly, Colin Davis (2005; 2007) differentiates the concept of the specter in Derrida and that of the phantom in the work of Abraham and Torok (1976; 1978), arguing that in Abraham and Torok’s view,

the phantom and its secrets should be uncovered so that it can be dispelled. For Derrida /.../, the spectre’s ethical injunction consists on the contrary in not reducing it prematurely to an object of knowledge. /.../ Phantoms lie about the past whilst spectres [sic] gesture towards a still unformulated future. (Davis 2005: 379)

Davis claims that the difference between the two lies in the attitude towards secrets and secrecy and, by extension, knowledge: while the phantom’s function is to keep a secret – and, thus, knowledge – buried, the function of the specter is secrecy as the specter lies outside of knowledge.

Secondly, a difference can clearly be seen in the phantom and the specter’s relation to time when comparing Derrida’s approach to the specter to Abraham and Torok thoughts on the phantom. If the phantom is primarily tied to the past, being “the presence of a dead ancestor in the living Ego, still intent on preventing its traumatic and usually shameful secrets from coming to light,” the specter is “a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate” (Davis 2005: 374, 377) and is more connected to the uncertainties of the future. However, this does not mean that the specter has no connection to the past: on the contrary, in fact, as Derrida (1994: 11) states that “a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*” [original emphasis]. In Shaw’s (2018: 8) interpretation, such a specter will “challenge limits between states of living and death, past and present and, in doing so, question notions of historicism by disrupting the linear pathway of historical time.” This is particularly relevant for the study of haunted house narratives, where the linear flow of time is constantly interrupted.

Certainly, the crucial notion around which hauntology revolves is that of temporal disjunction. This can be seen from the opening quote of *Specters of Marx*, citing a passage in *Hamlet*.<sup>118</sup> As Shaw (2018: 7) puts it, the hauntological “[h]aunting looks back to the past and points forward to the future from the moment of the present. In doing so, it signals towards a legacy as well as to a

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<sup>118</sup> „The time is out of joint.”

promise of something to come, drawing attention to the structuring role of absence.” Through this, the past bleeds into the present and, at the same time, also into the future. In this way, the specter of Derrida distorts the perception of linear time, instead showing its simultaneity. Because of this, acknowledging the specter means acknowledging the idea that the past is never truly gone but, rather, reaches into the present moment and beyond, in perpetuity.

For Mark Fisher (2012, 2014), hauntology also revolves around time. Firstly, Fisher draws on Berardi’s (2011) argument of the “slow cancellation of the future” from the 1970s onwards. Berardi (2011: 18) argues that in the 1970s the psychological and cultural expectations of the future as an “ever progressing development” began to break down. Instead of looking to the future, artistic endeavors became increasingly retrospective and failed to produce the new. Secondly, Fisher draws from Fredric Jameson’s (1991) “nostalgia mode” or non-specific anachronism, a vague and unspecified past era, which evokes an undirected nostalgia without a clear object or referent. As Fisher (2014: 11) puts it, “the nostalgia mode as Jameson theorises it might be said to preclude psychological nostalgia, since it arises only when a coherent sense of historical time breaks down.” Thus, this form of nostalgia is based on a longing for nostalgic form rather than content: an aesthetic of the past without its historical trappings.

Through invoking the nostalgia mode, Fisher contends that the twenty-first century is, due to the hegemony of neoliberal late capitalism, obsessed with re-producing rather than innovating. This, he claims, can be seen from two primary perspectives. The first is consumption. Fisher (2014: 14) argues that since “retro offers the quick and easy promise of a minimal variation on an already familiar satisfaction,” we are primed to engage with works which resemble other works we have already engaged with because the ultra-fast pace of life in the twenty-first century is draining. The second aspect concerns production. Here, Fisher (2014: 14) claims that “neoliberal capitalism has gradually but systematically deprived artists of the resources necessary to produce the new,” linking this primarily to skyrocketing costs of living as well as general socioeconomic instability and a lack of state support for arts and culture.

Based on this, Fisher (2014: 18) approaches hauntology as “*the agency of the virtual*, with the specter understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing” [original emphasis]. Thus, he argues that the specter is simply the virtual, which he approaches as that which lacks physical form, made capable of action. Drawing on Hägglund’s (2008: 82) argument that the specter “has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer or not yet*” [original emphasis], Fisher (2014: 19) proposes that a distinction between two branches in hauntology is created:

The first refers to that which is (in actuality is) *no longer*, but which *remains* effective as a virtuality (the traumatic ‘compulsion to repeat,’ a fatal pattern). The second sense of hauntology refers to that which (in actuality) has *not yet* happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behaviour) [original emphasis].

Viewed this way, hauntology is both retrospective, looking back, and prospective, looking forward. Of the two, Fisher focuses on the prospective aspect of hauntology: the “lost futures” (Fisher 2014: 26) which were once seen as plausible, but which failed to come to pass. Fisher’s hauntology is thus concerned not necessarily with the past but the unrealized expectations for the future accessed through the past.

The relevance of the above discussion for the present dissertation is twofold: firstly, it provides a vital component for the typology for the haunted house narrative. As the 21st century so far has been characterized by a persistent but undirected nostalgia, this appears in the fiction of this time as well. This is why I argue that it is more productive to approach the haunted house narrative in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through co-existing storytelling modes, generated at various points in the past but coming together in the present, that draw inspiration from previous work in the broader horror genre. The typology I propose considers this blended temporality and offers a way to systematize and examine a vast body of material which would otherwise become either extremely compartmentalized or so diffuse as to be incomprehensible.

Secondly, the concept of hauntology is also significant because of the nature of time in the haunted house narrative. If, taking Fisher’s approach, we consider hauntology as an underlying logic which considers not only the *no longer* but also the *not yet*, certain patterns begin to emerge in the haunted house narrative. In this way, it is possible to account for the historicity that is built into the haunted house narrative, especially in both personal and locational histories within the storyworlds which affect the development of the narratives. Moreover, and perhaps more crucially, it becomes also possible to examine the innate *what ifs* and lost futures that these narratives present. Taking the 1970s socioeconomic haunted house formula as an example, using the concept of hauntology as an underlying logic for analysis allows me to consider the subversion of the suburban success story presented in these narratives from multiple perspectives. It opens the avenue for examining not only what happened in the narrative but also, and perhaps more importantly, what failed to happen. I propose that this potentiality is the key to understanding why the haunted house narrative retains considerable relevance and impact today.

The concept of hauntology along with its satellite terminology (e.g., specter, hospitality, lost futures) serves a two-fold function in the current dissertation. Firstly, hauntology is a framework for understanding the underlying logic of contemporary horror fiction production and the utility of the proposed typology for the haunted house narrative. Secondly, it identifies markers to look for in the empirical analysis. Alongside traditional ghosts and entities, there are specters within these narratives which can elude notice precisely because the diegetically genuine or implied-to-be genuine hauntings draw the attention away from the complex social relations and power structures which inform the narrative beyond the haunting. Therefore, I argue that the haunting in the haunted house narrative is multifaceted, with the ghost or spectral entity providing only a small fraction of the totality of the haunting.

### 2.2.3. The anachrony and the specter

To examine the haunting and its relation to time, I propose first examining the way in which time and temporality have been studied in narratology. The natural starting point for this would be Gerard Genette's (1980) tripartite structure of temporality in narratives through the concepts of order, frequency, and duration. Of these, the most relevant here is the notion of order: the relationship between the way events happen in the narrative, i.e., the narrated time, and the way said events are relayed, i.e., narrating time (Prince 2003: 69). The other two are more concerned with the narrative speed and frequency of events, that is, the interplay between the narrated time and the narrating time to relay the narration (Genette 1980). To put it simply, **order** shows the sequence of events in the narrative as compared to the narration, **frequency** the relationship between the events and how many times they are narrated, and **duration** the relationship between the events and the narration in terms of how quickly the events occur in the narrated time *versus* in the narration time (Chatman 1978).

The concept of anachrony helps to describe the recounting of events in the narrative in a different order from how they happen in the storyworld. The anachrony, or the temporal break, can indicate movement in one of two directions: analepsis (i.e., the 'flashback') is the narrative relaying events in the narrative past, prolepsis (i.e., the 'flashforward') is the same phenomenon but in the narrative future. In addition, there is lateral ellipsis – the *paralepsis* – where an event occurs in a temporal break but simultaneously with the primary narrative (Chatman 1978: 355): an event relayed as the 'meanwhile'. Finally, there is the *achrony*, an event devoid of any temporal relation to other events in the narrative (Prince 2003: 1), a moment undisclosed in time.

Anachronies can occur both within and outside of the primary narrative, or in a combination: the former are called internal, the latter external, and combinations mixed anachronies. Anachronies possess amplitude and distance, where amplitude indicates the length or duration of the anachrony and distance its reach from the primary narrative and the narrative present. Further, anachronies can be either heterodiegetic in the sense that they do not interact/interfere with the primary narrative or homodiegetic in that they affect the primary narrative (Chatman 1978: 355).

Horror often plays with temporality through anachronies, particularly in building tension and affect within the narrative. In the case of haunted house narratives, for example, particularly if they use embedded narrative structures, anachrony is central to the construction of the narrative not only because it is a prerequisite for the embedded narrative structure, but also because the haunted house motif depends on a haunting which is, regardless of its specifics, intrinsically tied to temporality. However, the level of temporal complexity in the narrative is connected to its storytelling mode. I hypothesize that, in particular, the gothic mode uses analepsis because of its propensity to depict the irruption of the past into the present, the weird mode uses anachrony in embedded narratives and

other complex narrative structures, and that the horror mode, compared to the others, makes limited use of anachrony.

#### 2.2.4. Concluding remarks

The concept of hauntology serves two functions in the present dissertation: firstly, it provides the theoretical background for the proposed typology as it has been used by Fisher (2012) to argue that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a timeless time, governed by nostalgia for that which never was. Hauntology, I claim, embodies this longing and helps to make it legible in fiction.

Secondly, the notions of the specter and hospitality or ghostpality help us understand the multiplicity of functions that haunting can have in the haunted house narrative. These houses are haunted not only by supernatural or paranormal forces but also by the world around them. As Lampropoulos puts it,

[b]y temporalizing the relationship between the host and the guest, ghostpality adds the dynamics between the past and the present to the tension between the interior and the exterior, spelling out the possibility of new intermediate zones and porosities, or even of an amalgamation between owners, householders, visitors, and intruders. (Lampropoulos 2022: 186)

In the haunted house narrative, the roles of the host and the guest are constantly problematized. For example, if a family moves into a house already inhabited by a ghost, is the family, i.e., those getting haunted, in the position of the host or guest? In a material sense, the family might own the house but, in the temporal sense, the ghost predates them as a resident and persistently remains. Because of this, I argue that the concept of spectral visitation helps to examine the haunted house narrative in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the concept of home ownership has become increasingly troubled under neoliberal capitalism.

To examine the ways in which troubled temporality manifests in the narrative, I have turned to narratologist Gerard Genette's concepts of order and anachrony. These will assist in the empirical analysis, providing terminology with which to analyze the problematization of time that the specter invokes with its absent presence.

### 2.3. Experience

This section aims to establish a theoretical basis for examining experience in the haunted house narrative. In the first subsection, the concept of the affective atmosphere and the transmission of affect are discussed, relying on the work of Ben Anderson, Sara Ahmed, and Teresa Brennan, to establish a basis for the empirical analysis of experience. Secondly, the concept of affect is examined, particularly the transmission of negative affects such as fear and anxiety in haunted house narratives.

### 2.3.1. Affective atmospheres

Ben Anderson (2009: 78) considers atmosphere “a class of experience that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions” [original emphasis]. For him, an atmosphere is always-already affective. At the same time, however, this does not mean that atmospheres are static. Rather, drawing from phenomenologist Mikel Dufrenne’s (1973) work on aesthetic experience, Anderson (*ibid*: 79) argues for “the unfinished quality of affective atmospheres. Atmospheres are perpetually forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter into relation with one another. They are never finished, static or at rest.” This is connected to the concept of the ‘expressed world’ developed by Dufrenne (1973), where “a perceived work of art expresses a certain bundle of spatial-temporal relations” and which possesses an affective capability where “atmospheres are unfinished because of their constitutive openness to being taken up in experience” (Anderson 2009: 79). In this dissertation, the affective atmosphere is crucial for articulating the differences between distinct types of haunted house narratives.

Brown et al. (2019: 10) use both a literary and a practical example<sup>119</sup> to suggest three key themes for the analysis of atmosphere with affect theory. Firstly, atmospheres “depend on both the features of the environment and that of the persons who engage with them, but cannot be reduced to either,” that is, they inhabit the borderland between subject(s) and object(s). Secondly, the production of atmosphere is a continuous process which can occur independently and without intervention. Finally, drawing on McCormack (2018), they claim that atmospheres are produced through “an ‘envelopment’ or ‘folding’ together of bodies and forces”, where “envelopment constitutes its own specific ‘space-time’.” This, in turn, means that to approach an atmosphere holistically, its spatial and temporal qualities matter as much as the experience of it does.

To analyze atmospheres, Brown et al. (2019) introduce additional terminology. The first of these is the concept of the perdurational, which means a quality of being “disclosed by its ongoing transformations or becomings rather than granted in its constitution” (Brown et al. 2019: 11). The second and third draw on Cache’s (1995) approach to the Deleuzian fold where “points of inflection” in the fold “gather competing forces in complex ways” (Brown et al. 2019: 11) to produce a “meshwork”<sup>120</sup> which acts as a loose, open assemblage. This, they argue, means that the atmosphere is generated in an interaction between its constituent parts, which are more mobile and more loosely connected than a network – hence, the proposed concept of meshwork. Brown et al. (2019: 12) suggest that “the overall atmosphere of a place could be approached through multiple modalities (e.g., sound, light, smell, warmth, etc.), exploring the interplay of specific forces and materials, and the ways in which they radiate affects.” In this sense, an atmo-

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<sup>119</sup> The first of these is the ghost story “Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” by M. R. James, the second field notes from a visit to a secure psychiatric ward.

<sup>120</sup> Brown et al. borrow this term from Ingold (2013).

sphere becomes a dynamic environment, the parts of which act as points of inflection in a meshwork where they are always perdurational and in motion.

However, most significantly for the present dissertation, Brown et al. (2019) use the terms “affordance” and “attunement” to map the elements which constitute a particular atmosphere. Drawing on Gibson (2014 [1979]) for the former and Stewart (2007; 2011) for the latter, Brown et al. (2019: 13) suggest that “[a]ttunement and affordance may be thought of as complementary terms”, where being attuned means being “able to ‘hear’ the summons of the invitation character contained within an atmosphere,” i.e., to experience an affordance or “a relational possibility between an organism and its environment.” Attunement, which Stewart (2011: 445) defines as “an intimate, compositional process of dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds,” becomes the key to noticing “the affordances that are arrayed within the elements through which it is constituted and to become part of the relational possibilities that it may express” (Brown et al. 2019: 14). These, in turn, allow the production of attachments, which Stewart (2007) considers essential to engaging with atmospheres. In Stewart’s approach, these attachments can be both metaphorical and literal. Brown et al. (2019: 16) conclude from the above that “[t]he practised sensibility of attunement and relational knotting of forces that is attachment are the principal modes through which we enact our situated engagement with the atmospheric affordances of settings.” Only by connecting to the atmosphere can engagement with it become possible.

Indeed, the transmissibility of affect has been a subject of interest for many scholars. Brennan (2004), for instance, argues that an atmosphere is a direct result of the transmission of affect, which in her view is both psychological and physiological. Crucially, she contends that this transmission occurs based on an outside-in model. Anderson (2014: 148), however, claims that “[a]n atmosphere’s openness to change as it is emanated, expressed and qualified makes it less a property, a finished thing in itself, and more a condition constantly being taken up in experience.” This suggests that for an understanding of the movement of affects in a given space and the production of an affective atmosphere, attention needs to be given to its experientiality. Brink (2016: 110) uses the example of the titular house of “The Fall of the House of Usher” to argue that neither direct objects nor signs are required for the transmission of affect, claiming that in “a coherent *affective ecosystem*” [original emphasis], “affects circulate as such.” The haunted house can thus be viewed as a site of high affective capacity where the movement of affects both outside in and inside out is particularly intense.

In this dissertation, the above terminology allows me to analyze holistic atmospheres. I propose that the concept of atmosphere in storyworlds characterizes the storytelling mode. A distinction can be made between the atmospheres presented in the gothic mode, the weird mode, and the horror mode, and that in haunted house narratives, an essential part of the atmosphere presented is the form of heterotopia that the articulated haunted house engages with. In this sense, the meshwork of atmosphere in each narrative is composed of different affordances even if the central features of the narratives and the settings, i.e., a house which

is haunted, are the same. For example, one of the differences I would suggest is that different haunted houses prioritize different affects: the gothic mode favors dread, the weird awe, and horror fear. Drawing on this, I hypothesize that across different narratives of the same type, clusters of inflection points or “knots” as Gibson (2015) terms them, create atmospheric meshworks which resemble one another sufficiently to group such narratives together. I argue that this becomes traceable through the characters in the narrative, who all encounter distinct affordances even in a shared atmosphere and practice attunement in diverse ways, and experience ostensibly shared affects in unique ways.

### 2.3.2. Fear and anxiety

Kennedy (2011: 81) argues that anxiety, rather than fear, is an affective focal point for examining space because, unlike fear, anxiety in the Heideggerian sense<sup>121</sup> lacks a concrete object. Through this absence, Kennedy proposes, anxiety “reveals its own ontological root” that is connected to being-towards-death. Kennedy (2011: 81) draws a direct connection between anxiety and time, arguing that since time is directed towards death, anxiety is directly connected to temporality in the sense that time eventuates. However, as anxiety has become naturalized to the point of not being connected to specifically being-toward-death but b/Being itself, existence in a state of crisis has become ordinary (Berlant 2011). Indeed, in *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant examines the way in which the “optimistic objects / scenarios” that have been held up as doorways to “the good-life fantasy” today create what she terms ‘cruel optimism’, as the good-life fantasy becomes more and more detached from what is possible for people to obtain. In essence, such optimism is cruel because its promises will always remain unfulfilled – and its surrounding context is governed by anxiety.

The location of this anxiety, however, is difficult to pinpoint. Ahmed (2004: 124) argues that “it is the failure of emotions to be located in a body, object, or figures that allows emotions to (re)produce or generate the effects that they do.” In this view, all emotions are dynamic and not localizable in a single subject or object. Like other similar affects, “anxiety tends to stick to objects” but, crucially, does this through becoming “an approach to objects” and is not produced through “an object’s approach” as fear is (Ahmed 2004: 125). In the process, the “sideways movement between objects, which works to stick objects together as signs of threat, is shaped by multiple histories. The movement between signs does not have its origin in the psyche, but is a trace of how histories remain alive in the present” (*ibid*: 126). In this way, Ahmed claims, it is not necessarily the individual experiencing anxiety autonomously but, rather, their context informing the

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<sup>121</sup> Heidegger’s (1927) anxiety or *Angst* draws from Kierkegaard’s *Angst*, which Kierkegaard (1944 [1844]) argued was fundamental to the human condition because human beings possess free will and do not operate solely on instinct as other animals. For Heidegger (1962), anxiety is rootless as it does not have a specific object as fear does but lacks an object entirely and is more general.

signs anxiety sticks to. Any affective attachment that may occur can be followed by detachment and the formation of new attachments. Thus, the stickiness of anxiety (and other similar affects) is dependent on a pre-existing, subconscious framework and occurs without conscious effort.

The capacity for circulation and movement of affects and emotions, Ahmed (2014: 10) claims, indicates that they “are crucial to the very constitution of the psychic and the social as objects, a process which suggests that the ‘objectivity’ of the psychic and social is an effect rather than a cause.” Emotions are instrumental in constructing the boundaries between the individual and their surroundings to separate them “as if they are objects” (*ibid*). In this sense, then, emotions are approached not as a psychological state of the individual but, rather, as social and cultural practices. This reinforces the idea that anxiety, through its stickiness or attachment to objects, creates something akin to a subconscious frame of reference where different objects become enmeshed. When this enmeshment is invoked, the resultant affects become dynamic and mobile, capable of moving between different people and different objects.

Ahmed’s approach to fear is significant for the present dissertation because she suggests that, more than being attached to an object per se, the object of fear generates its effect/affect in “passing by” (Ahmed 2004: 125): fear is not contained in an object but, rather, is tied to a failure of the object to be contained. The subject who experiences fear is not necessarily afraid of the object but of the possibility of its eventuation as something which stands opposite the subject. Ahmed (2004: 128) argues, “[f]ear does not involve the defense of borders that already exist; rather, fear makes those borders by establishing objects from which the subject, in fearing, can stand apart, objects that become ‘the not’ from which the subject appears to flee.” The object which invokes fear becomes crucial in the construction of the subject: that which is feared helps to construct the identity of the subject through being what the subject is not.

### 2.3.3. Concluding remarks

This section shows the necessity of the concept of affective atmosphere for the study of the haunted house motif in the empirical chapter. I have introduced crucial terminology for conducting the empirical analysis in the following chapter, and highlighted the ways in which different negative affects, particularly fear and anxiety, can be made mobile. This will be instrumental in conducting the empirical analysis, giving focal points and markers to look for in the novel I will be examining in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The haunted house motif in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The first section of this chapter addresses the major developments in horror over the 21<sup>st</sup> century so far, taking a close look at the trends connected to the haunted house motif: what kinds of haunted house narratives have been told thus far and how the texts examined in the analysis fit into the wider context of horror in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I propose that the storytelling modes addressed in Chapter One – being gothic, weird, and horror – occur concurrently in 21<sup>st</sup> century haunted house narratives. This idea is crucial for placing the texts analyzed in the next three chapters of this dissertation into their temporal context: rather than being individual, isolated examples of convergence, I argue that the novels examined in the empirical chapters of this dissertation exemplify wider trends in contemporary haunted house fiction. The second section of this chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the empirical analysis that follows in the three final chapters of the dissertation.

#### 3.1. The haunted house narrative in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

As the early 21<sup>st</sup> century popular culture has so far been characterized by an increased effort to revitalize existing franchises through reboots and remakes,<sup>122</sup> this tendency is present in horror as well. The 2000s saw a marked growth in reboots in existing horror franchises with films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003 [1974])<sup>123</sup> and *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006 [1977])<sup>124</sup> in the slasher subgenre, and into the haunted house subgenre specifically with *The Amityville Horror* franchise particularly heavily featured in remakes and prequels/sequels.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The superhero genre is perhaps the best example. In the case of the hero Spider-Man, for example, there have been three distinct iterations of the character in licensed live-action film in the past two decades alone: Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* trilogy (2002–2007) with Tobey Maguire, Marc Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man* films (2012–2014) with Andrew Garfield, and three Marvel Studios *Spider-Man* films (2017, 2019, 2021) with Tom Holland. The final film of the third iteration is particularly interesting because the previous two versions of the character are (re)introduced in the film as alternate-universe Spider-Men with the actors reprising their earlier performances.

<sup>123</sup> The 1974 original was directed by Tobe Hooper and written by Hooper and Kim Henkel; the 2003 remake was directed by Marcus Nispel with the screenplay by Scott Kosar.

<sup>124</sup> The 1977 original was written and directed by Wes Craven; the 2006 remake was directed by Alexandre Aja with the screenplay by Aja and Grégory Levasseur.

<sup>125</sup> By 2023, 32 films connected to the Amityville haunting have been released in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: *The Amityville Horror* (2005), a remake of the 1979 original; *The Amityville Haunting* (2011); *The Amityville Asylum* (2013), *Amityville Death House* (2015); *The*

Another trend clearly visible in the late 1990s and early 2000s were American remakes of Japanese horror films: haunting-based examples include *The Ring*<sup>126</sup> (2002), based on リング [*Ringu*] (1998)<sup>127</sup>, and *The Grudge* (2004)<sup>128</sup> based on じゅおん [*Ju-On: The Grudge*] (2002)<sup>129</sup>, with both expanded into franchises in both their American and Japanese incarnations.

This does not, however, mean that no original works appeared. During the late 2000s and early 2010s haunted house film boom, franchises such as *Paranormal Activity* (2007–),<sup>130</sup> *Insidious* (2010–),<sup>131</sup> and *The Conjuring* (2013–)<sup>132</sup> were first launched. The *Paranormal Activity* franchise is particularly relevant because of its popularity and profitability. *Paranormal Activity* brought the found footage film technique together with the haunted house narrative. Two other examples which followed soon after are *Lake Mungo* (2008),<sup>133</sup> which depicts a family's experiences of haunting after the death of their daughter, and *Grave Encounters* (2011),<sup>134</sup> a film about a crew of paranormal investigators filming an episode for their reality television ghost hunting show in a haunted psychiatric hospital.

The primary importance of the found footage haunted house film is in its ambiguous endings. In the original *Paranormal Activity* (2007) the ultimate resolution of the haunting and the finale of the story happen offscreen in the theatrical

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*Amityville Playhouse* (2015), *Amityville: No Escape* (2016); *The Amityville Legacy* (2016); *Amityville: Vanishing Point* (2016); *The Amityville Terror* (2016); *Against the Night* or *Amityville Prison* (2017); *Amityville: The Awakening* (2017); *Amityville: Evil Never Dies* (2017), re-released in 2020 under the title *Amityville Clownhouse*; *Amityville Exorcism* (2017); *Amityville: Mt. Misery Road* (2018); *The Amityville Murders* (2019); *The Amityville Harvest* (2020), *Amityville Island* (2020); *Amityville Vibrator* (2020); *An Amityville Poltergeist* (2021); *The Amityville Moon* (2021); *Amityville Cult* (2021); *Amityville Vampire* (2021); *Amityville Scarecrow* (2022); *Amityville Uprising* (2022); *Amityville Gas Chamber* (2022); *Amityville in Space* (2022); *Amityville Hex* (2022); *Amityville in the Hood* (2022); *Amityville Karen* (2022); *Amityville Christmas Vacation* (2022); *Amityville Thanksgiving* (2022), and *Ghosts of Amityville* (2022). It should be noted that most of these films are only tangentially related to the original story – if at all.

<sup>126</sup> Directed by Gore Verbinski with the screenplay by Ehren Kruger.

<sup>127</sup> Directed by Hideo Nakata with the screenplay by Hiroshi Takahashi, based on the novel series of the same name by Japanese writer Koji Suzuki.

<sup>128</sup> Directed by Takashi Shimizu with the screenplay by Stephen Susco.

<sup>129</sup> Written and directed by Takashi Shimizu.

<sup>130</sup> Created by Oren Peli, with the first film written and directed by Peli.

<sup>131</sup> Based on characters by Leigh Wannell, the first film being written by Wannell and directed by James Wan.

<sup>132</sup> Created by James Wan, with the first film directed by Wan and written by Chad Hayes and Carey W. Hayes.

<sup>133</sup> Written and directed by Joel Anderson.

<sup>134</sup> Written and directed by The Vicious Brothers *alias* Colin Minihan and Stuart Ortiz.

release.<sup>135</sup> A more recent example can be seen in *Deadstream* (2022),<sup>136</sup> a haunted house film formatted as a livestream, which combines elements of the slasher film with the haunted house motif in a similar fashion to the first installment of the *Evil Dead* franchise. The film ends with the protagonist's success in defeating the primary entity in the house without realizing that the other entities are still there and bound to him. Whether he survives or not is unclear as the livestream broadcast cuts out abruptly. *Lake Mungo* is similarly ambiguous about the veracity and the origin of the haunting. However, in *Grave Encounters* its ambiguity stretches only so far as to suggest that none of the crew were seen again. The viewer, however, has witnessed them being beset and eventually killed by the entities inhabiting the haunted location one by one. This, in turn, indicates that the motif of ambiguity, which so far has primarily characterized the gothic haunted house narrative, is being used in other types of haunted house narratives as well: of the films listed, only *Lake Mungo* might be characterized as a gothic mode narrative.

In television, the haunted house motif can be most often seen as an episodic feature of series with a broader focus: for example, in the dark fantasy series *Supernatural* (2005–2020),<sup>137</sup> the trope appears in several episodes. There is a similar trend in video games and podcasts, where narratives strictly centered around haunted locations are uncommon<sup>138</sup> but narratives where haunted locations appear episodically<sup>139</sup> are not limited to the horror genre. For example, haunted house stories have been included as side quests in (action) roleplaying games such as *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014),<sup>140</sup> *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015),<sup>141</sup> and *Disco Elysium* (2019).<sup>142</sup> There have also been television adaptations of haunted house fiction: for example, *The Haunting of Hill House* and

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<sup>135</sup> In the home video release, the sequence of events at the end of the film is slightly different: in the theatrical release, the female protagonist leaves the bedroom and thus is out of view of the static camera even as a scream is heard, which prompts the male protagonist to go search for her, the last few minutes of the film depicting simply an empty bedroom and the final seconds the bedroom door slamming shut of seemingly its own volition. In the home video release, however, the same sequence of events happens, but in the last moments, the female protagonist's face suddenly appears in front of the static camera, covered in blood and holding a knife.

<sup>136</sup> Written and directed by Vanessa Winter and Joseph Winter.

<sup>137</sup> Created by Eric Kripke.

<sup>138</sup> To name a few, examples include horror video games such as *Gone Home* (2011) and *Anatomy* (2016) as well as horror podcasts such as *I Am in Eskew* (2018–2019) and *The White Vault* (2017–2022). Both video game examples here concern a family home while the podcasts feature a town and a network of underground vaults, respectively.

<sup>139</sup> E.g., podcasts *Welcome to Night Vale* (2012–present) and *The Magnus Archives* (2016–2021) both feature episodes centered around haunted houses.

<sup>140</sup> The *Dragon Age* franchise is developed by BioWare and published by Electronic Arts.

<sup>141</sup> The *Witcher* video game franchise is developed and published by CD Projekt. The franchise is based on the fantasy series *Wiedźmin* [*Witcher*] by Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski.

<sup>142</sup> Developed and published by ZA/UM.

*The Haunting of Bly Manor*, two limited series created for Netflix by director-screenwriter Mike Flanagan and loosely based on *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson and *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, respectively. In both, however, the novels serve as a loose inspiration for the original narratives, and the two limited series are thus remakes or retellings rather than as adaptations. For example, Flanagan's version of *The Haunting of Hill House* is a family narrative about siblings whose lives were changed after a night at Hill House and the death of their mother. This is completely different from the novel's narrative of a group of paranormal researchers visiting the house. This example demonstrates that adaptation is being used in the horror genre not only from medium to medium but also from narrative to narrative.

In literature, genre-internal adaptation has been likewise popular. Among haunted house narratives, two examples are T. Kingfisher's<sup>143</sup> reworks of Algernon Blackwood's "The Willows" (1907)<sup>144</sup> in *The Hollow Places* (2020) and of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) as the novella *What Moves the Dead* (2022).<sup>145</sup> In the former, the narrative of the original short story is mostly discarded and it merely exists as an alluded-to backstory for the haunting experienced by the main character. The setting is transposed from Europe to the United States, and to today. In the latter, however, the overall original narrative is retained, but the protagonist is switched from an unnamed male narrator to a nonbinary ex-soldier. The most notable change, however, is that in both narratives, there is an explicit cause for the haunting which occurs. These examples point towards a broader trend in contemporary genre literature in general: the modernized retelling of an existing text has become an integral part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century publishing industry.

Reworks of the classic haunted house narrative that includes a family house which is haunted are similarly prevalent. Narratives where it is not necessarily the house itself that is haunted but the land beneath it include Tananarive Due's *The Good House* (2003) and Jennifer McMahon's *The Invited* (2019).<sup>146</sup> Another example of a twist on the classic narrative is Grady Hendrix's 2014 novel *Horrorstör*, which depicts a haunted IKEA superstore: fittingly for the theme, the novel is formatted as an IKEA catalogue. Additionally, novels featuring haunted architecture other than domestic houses are similarly prevalent. Two examples

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<sup>143</sup> Pen name of children's fiction author Ursula Vernon.

<sup>144</sup> This is not a haunted house story but, rather, depicts a haunted river island on the Danube.

<sup>145</sup> In addition to these, Kingfisher's first retelling of a classic horror story was published in 2019 and titled *The Twisted Ones*, based on Arthur Machen's short story "The White People" (1904). This, however, is not a haunted house story, but is closer to folk horror and fey narratives. *What Moves the Dead* is not the only Usher retelling; another one is *The Fall* by Bethany Griffin.

<sup>146</sup> This approach, it should be noted, does not originate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in and of itself – a particularly famous earlier example is the 1982 horror film *Poltergeist*. The novelty, I would argue, is in that these novels do not use the 'Native American burial ground' trope which gained prevalence in horror during the 1980s in the wake of the success of *The Amityville Horror*.

can be seen in Simone St. James' work, where in the case of *The Broken Girls* (2018), the plot of the novel revolves around a haunted boarding school and in *The Sundown Motel* (2020), the setting is, as might be expected, a haunted motel.

Indeed, the prevalence of genre hybrids is also reflected in the haunted house narrative. In addition to sci-fi/horror hybrids such as S. A. Barnes's *Dead Space* (2022), a particularly prolific variety is the historical fiction haunted house narrative, such as *Dark Matter: A Ghost Story* (2007) by Michelle Paver, as well as dual historical/modern timelines as in *Build Your House Around My Body* (2021) by Violet Kupersmith. Additionally, some haunted house narratives are combined with mystery/thriller components, e.g. *No One's Home* (2019) by D. M. Pulley as well as *Home Before Dark* (2020) by Riley Sager. In these novels, the haunting is eventually revealed to be the result of the actions of real people but an element of the supernatural is alluded to regardless of the diegetic status of the primary haunting. There are also genre-internal hybrids in haunted house fiction. The most notable is the haunted house / slasher hybrid.<sup>147</sup> One example is *Kill Creek* (2017) by Scott Thomas, which follows four horror writers invited to an overnight interview in a haunted house, with a plot structure that follows that of the classic slasher, as the group spends some time in relative peace until they start getting picked off one by one. Similarly, *Theme Music* (2019) by T. Marie Vandelly combines slasher elements with the haunted house narrative. Another hybrid worth mentioning is Caitlin Starling's *The Death of Jane Lawrence* (2021), which combines gothic haunted house elements with weird fiction and historical fantasy.

The haunted house motif has also been used in digital media. Kvistad (2020), for example, examines three such online horror stories: "Dear David", published by Adam Ellis on Twitter from 2017–2018, "My dead girlfriend keeps messaging me on Facebook," originally published on reddit.com/r/nosleep<sup>148</sup> by natesw in 2014, and "Dionaea House", written by Eric Heisserer and published across a series of blogs from 2004 to 2006. Each depicts a haunting, but Kvistad (2020: 958) shows that all three depend on a balanced "hoaxiness", an interplay between fakeness and authenticity. Kvistad contends that, in this format, "authenticity and fictionality do not operate as binary qualities, but as interacting elements." Kvistad (*ibid*: 969) argues that in digital media, such narratives are "able to create immersive and powerful gothic reading experiences by building a haunted space out of their own storytelling medium," because "[w]hile virtual reality has yet to create a simulation of a haunted house that is indistinguishable from reality, a fictional LiveJournal, like a fictional Reddit post or a fictional tweet, *looks* just like a real one." She claims, these narratives can blur the lines between fact and

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<sup>147</sup> This is more prevalent in horror film and can be quite literal, with examples set in haunted house attractions ranging from traditional slashers such as *The Funhouse Massacre* (2015) to found-footage films like *The Houses that October Built* (2014) and *Hell House LLC* (2015),

<sup>148</sup> r/nosleep is a subreddit dedicated to original scary stories or 'creepypastas' which in the environment of the subreddit are treated as genuine and real despite users being aware that the stories are fictional.

fiction for readers more easily than traditional media and thus produce a more intense experience.

Considering all the above, I would argue that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the distinct modes of articulation in the horror genre as discussed in Chapter One have converged and are being used at the same time with no mode being favored over the others. Moreover, self-referentiality has become particularly noticeable in the horror genre, where texts either refer back to earlier work – such as the retellings of prior narratives through reframing them in a contemporary context, or use of archetypal narratives – or interact with one another otherwise, as is the case with the genre-internal hybrids such as the haunted house / slasher narrative.

### **3.2. Methodology**

The empirical analysis conducted in the next chapters has three key foci, as established in the theoretical framework. Firstly, I will focus on the depiction of space in these texts – how narrative space is depicted, how its composite parts interact with each other, and how they affect the approach to space taken in the narrative. I will look at how the individual spaces depicted in the narrative form the broader storyworld through poetic images, how the heterotopian qualities of the haunted location inform the narratives presented, and how the concept of home as a place is approached in the narrative. Secondly, I will examine how time is represented in each text, with a particular focus on the interaction between space and time, what kinds of specters emerge from these interactions, and how the notions of hospitality and ghostpality are approached. Finally, I will examine how experience intersects and interacts with the space-time depicted, focusing primarily on the experience of being haunted as depicted in the text.

I will use both thematic and close reading approaches, considering the text as a complex interaction between the three focal points chosen in the theoretical framework – space, time, and experience – paying particular attention to the markers pointed out in the second chapter such as verticality, heterotopia, anachrony, and affective atmospheres. In the case of experience, I am focusing primarily on experience as it occurs in the storyworld, not reader response to the text. In describing the texts, I am using the term specter in accordance with Derrida's (1994) approach as discussed in section 2.2. to refer to ontological spectrality, and other terms such as ghost and apparition to refer to storyworld-literal hauntings. Longer text examples have been chosen to examine the texts through Bachelard's (1994 [1958]) concept of the poetic image, which I believe can illustrate both the formal and thematic qualities of the given text.

The selection of texts for the empirical analysis has been made according to a set of guiding principles. First, they include at least one form of haunting, preferably in the form of a haunted location. Second, the novels use at least one of the three storytelling modes outlined in the first chapter (gothic, weird or horror) and approach their subject matter in distinct ways, with similar novels analyzed comparatively. The analysis is divided into three chapters, with each chapter

examining articulations of the haunted house motif produced in each storytelling mode: Chapter Four studies the gothic mode through *Mexican Gothic* (2020) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia and *The Hacienda* (2022) by Isabel Cañas, Chapter Five the weird through *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski and *Episode Thirteen* (2023) by Craig DiLouie, and Chapter Six horror through *The September House* (2023) by Carissa Orlando and *Diavola* (2024) by Jennifer Thorne. In chapters, each novel will first be analyzed individually, followed by a short comparative discussion of the two novels where I highlight the commonalities between the texts both in their approach to their respective storytelling modes and to the concepts discussed in Chapter Two of the present dissertation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The gothic mode in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Mexican Gothic & The Hacienda

The chapter is divided into two sections, each examining a novel which I believe to be an example of the gothic mode in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Neither has so far received thorough scholarly attention from the perspective I offer here. These novels, while sharing similarities because of their storytelling mode, take, in my view, a markedly different approach to the haunted house motif and are examples of the gothic mode in distinct albeit connected ways.

#### **4.1. *Mexican Gothic* (2020) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia**

Published in 2020, *Mexican Gothic* is the sixth novel by Mexican-Canadian author Silvia Moreno-Garcia. The novel follows a 22-year-old woman named Noemí Taboada, a socialite and aspiring academic accustomed to an easy life filled with lavish parties in Mexico City, wondering which suitor to entertain and what gown to wear. In August 1950, however, Noemí is sent by her father to a remote town to check on her newlywed cousin Catalina, who has sent a bizarre letter, requesting Noemí to come to her. Once Noemí arrives at the Doyle family's estate, High Place, however, she begins to understand the true nature of the Doyles and the danger she and her cousin are in.

The novel is divided into 27 chapters, narrated from the third-person point of view, and focalized through Noemí's perspective. The flow of the narrative is linear, occasionally intercut with anachronies of short amplitude and brief duration, primarily in the form of analepses and used for exposition. The longest and most significant of these occurs in the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of the novel, where Noemí experiences a sequence of memories which explain the provenance of the fungus that plays a central role in the narrative and how Howard Doyle came to be in the area.

##### **4.1.1. Space in *Mexican Gothic***

There are three particularly important places in the novel: Noemí's home in Mexico City, the village of El Triunfo, and High Place, the Doyle family estate. Both her home and High Place are homes but differ significantly from one another, with El Triunfo functioning as a sort of bridge between the two.

In the first chapter, we are given this description of the office of Noemí's father, where she has been summoned via phone call:

Like the rest of the house, his office was decorated in a modern style, which seemed to echo the newness of the occupants' money. Noemí's father had never been poor, but he had turned a small chemical dye business into a fortune. He knew what he liked and he wasn't afraid to show it: bold colors and clean lines. His chairs were upholstered in a vibrant red, and luxuriant plants added splashes of green to every room.

The door to the office was open, and Noemí did not bother knocking, breezily walking in, her high heels clacking on the hardwood floor. She brushed one of the orchids in her hair with her fingertips and sat down in the chair in front of her father's desk with a loud sigh, tossing her little handbag on the floor. She also knew what she liked, and she did not like being summoned home early. (MG: 5)

Here, there are multiple points of interest. The characterization of Noemí establishes that she is similar to her father as they are both sure of themselves and their place in the world. Secondly, it establishes that the family is wealthy – not ancestrally wealthy, perhaps, but wealthy. This has implications for the later developments in the narrative. Most importantly, however, this description establishes that Noemí's home is “decorated in a modern style” much like her father's office – red upholstery, “splashes of green” from potted plants, “bold colors and clean lines.” Put together, this image relays that the Taboada residence is modern, fashionable, and rooted in the narrative present: over the course of the narrative, the other spaces that are seen provide a sharp contrast to this modernity. In her home and in Mexico City more broadly, Noemí is confident, comfortable, and at home – she walks in without having to ‘bother knocking,’ throws her handbag on the floor without a care. This sharply contrasts with the other spaces found in the novel, where she is ill at ease.

The transition from the comfort of her home to the danger of High Place is gradual, occurring in the second chapter of the novel which depicts her journey from Mexico City to High Place. Her sense of displacement is already apparent in the description of the landscape surrounding El Triunfo, the small town near High Place.

It took her a while /.../ to realize that she was headed into a forest, for El Triunfo was perched on the side of a steep mountain carpeted with colorful wildflowers and covered thickly with pines and oaks. Noemí sighted sheep milling around and goats braving sheer rock walls. Silver had given the region its riches, but tallow from these animals had helped illuminate the mines, and they were plentiful. It was all very pretty.

The higher the train moved and the closer it got to El Triunfo, though, the more the bucolic landscape changed and Noemí reassessed her idea of it. Deep ravines cut the land, and rugged ridges loomed outside the window. What had been charming rivulets turned into strong, gushing rivers, which spelled doom should anyone be dragged by their currents. At the bottom of the mountains farmers tended groves and fields of alfalfa, but there were no such crops here, just the goats climbing up and down rocks. The land kept its riches in the dark, sprouting no trees with fruit.

The air grew thin as the train struggled up the mountain /.../. (MG: 15–16)

The modern city conveniences of telephones and taxi cabs disappear, first giving way to ‘the bucolic landscape,’ which Noemí finds ‘very pretty’ – at least, from a distance. Then, the idyllic beauty is replaced by stark, harsh mountains, and the description begins to emphasize danger. El Triunfo, once a thriving, lively community, is in decline:

The town, as she saw it from her window, was peppered with winding streets, colorful houses with flower pots at their windows, sturdy wooden doors, long stairways, a church, and all the usual details that any guidebook would call “quaint.”

Despite this, it was clear El Triunfo was not in any guidebooks. It had the musty air of a place that had withered away. The houses were colorful, yes, but the color was peeling from most of the walls, some of the doors had been defaced, half of the flowers in the pots were wilting, and the town showed few signs of activity. (MG: 17)

Even though it is outwardly reminiscent of other small towns she has seen, it is unlike them, having the ‘musty air of a place that had withered away.’ This, in turn, sets the town up as a transitional zone between the modernity of Mexico City and the stagnant, temporally disjointed High Place, which sticks out like a sore thumb from the landscape around it. Even though El Triunfo is a place she has never been to before, she still has a frame of reference for other towns like it. With High Place, however, that frame disappears:

Then, all of a sudden, they were there, emerging into a clearing, and the house seemed to leap out of the mist to greet them with eager arms. /.../ It looked absolutely Victorian in construction, with its broken shingles, elaborate ornamentation, and dirty bay windows. She’d never seen anything like it in real life; it was terribly different from her family’s modern house, the apartments of her friends, or the colonial houses with façades of red tezontle.

The house loomed over them like a great, quiet gargoyle. It might have been foreboding, evoking images of ghosts and haunted places, if it had not seemed so tired, slats missing from a couple of shutters, the ebony porch groaning as they made their way up the steps to the door, which came complete with a silver knocker shaped like a fist dangling from a circle. (MG: 20–21)

Completely different from its surroundings in style and architecture, High Place ‘loomed over them like a great, quiet gargoyle’: this Gothic element, in particular, conveys the wrongness of the house in relation to its surroundings, creating a distinct affective atmosphere that contrasts sharply with the world Noemí knows and is comfortable in. The house appears an organic thing, the porch ‘groaning’ as Francis and Noemí approach the front door. The house seems ‘tired,’ which underplays its menacing qualities in Noemí’s eyes, and she compares it to “an abandoned shell of a snail” (MG: 21). This, in turn, will let her underestimate the dangers of the house – much like how she underestimates the Doyles, who appear similarly tired and harmless.

Inside, the house is clearly past its days of splendor: although the construction is of good quality, the furnishings and the details of the house are worn and old.

Francis took out a key and opened the heavy door. Noemi walked into the entrance hall, which gave them an immediate view of a grand staircase of mahogany and oak with a round, stained-glass window on the second landing. The window threw shades of reds and blues and yellows upon a faded green carpet, and two carvings of nymphs—one at the bottom of the stairs by the newel post, another by the window—stood as silent guardians of the house. By the entrance there had been a painting or a mirror on a wall, and its oval outline was visible against the wallpaper, like a lonesome fingerprint at the scene of a crime. Above their heads there hung a nine-arm chandelier, its crystal cloudy with age. (MG: 21)

The descriptions of the interior of the house which follow similarly set it up to be museum-like, a place untethered from the world around it, history accumulating between its walls. The room assigned to Noemí is similarly dated, sparsely furnished with a spot of mold growing in one the corners above the door. Even the spaces adjacent to but outside the house, such as the small English cemetery and the greenhouse, bear a similar quality of temporal displacement and decay.

This indicates that the space of High Place – its atmosphere as well as its constituent parts – is presented as a classically Gothic environment, merely displaced from the moors of England to the highlands of Mexico. Similarly to the space, the Doyles are unhappy transplants from England as well: the patriarch, Howard, has “brought European earth” (MG: 18) to set the house apart from its surroundings, has imported three servants from England, and the family refuse to speak Spanish at the house, conferring amongst themselves and with Catalina and Noemí in English. The space is depicted as particularly oppressive to the sociable Noemí because the Doyles abhor noise in the house, dislike her smoking on the property, and have little contact with the outside world and with El Triunfo, as even the family doctor is English. The house is filled with paintings depicting England, introducing a nostalgic element into the space, further distancing it from its actual context in Mexico.

In terms of its heterotopian qualities, High Place interacts with the itinerant axis of the heterotopia in its intrusive form: separated firmly from its surroundings, High Place is a Gothic English manor transplanted into the Mexican highlands with no efforts being made to integrate the home or the family to their surroundings. As it is revealed in the novel, the house and the family are infested with a semi-sentient fungus they call “the gloom” that has made the house and the family into a symbiotic organism. The Doyles cannot physically leave the house for too long. Simply by being in the house and inhaling the fungal spores, both Catalina and Noemí become intrinsically connected to it and the Doyle family, making an escape difficult if not impossible. In this way, the house acts as an intrusive heterotopia, separating its occupants from the world around them.

As for the verticality of the house, the source of the haunting is revealed to be below the house, in a hidden chamber below the family crypt. From the pantry, a hidden tunnel leads to the crypt, and is described thus:

The walls had been decorated with yellow tiles, and upon those tiles were painted flower patterns and green, curling vines. On the walls there were graceful silver sconces shaped like snakes. Their open jaws would have held wax candles if they had not been tarnished and covered with dust.

On the ground and on the walls she noticed a few tiny yellowish mushrooms popping up between stone cracks. It was cold and damp, and no doubt the mushrooms found the conditions underground deeply inviting, for as they advanced they seemed to multiply, clustering together in small clumps. (MG: 278)

Here, the ouroboros<sup>149</sup> motif present throughout the rest of the house continues, along with the organic qualities of the house: the walls are decorated with floral patterns, fungi grow from the floor, carved silver snakes serve as sconces. The tiles are yellow, as if in an imitation of the world above. This, however, does little to make the space feel grounded: if anything, the masking of the house in organic matter serves as a constant reminder that something is amiss.

In the crypt proper, the motifs continue:

The chamber was festooned with mushrooms of varying sizes, a living, organic tapestry gracing the walls. They ran up and down the high walls, like barnacles on the hull of an ancient ship run aground, and they glowed, furnishing the large room with an unwavering source of light, stronger than candles or torches. It was the light of a moribund sun.

A metal gate to the right of the chamber had been spared the mushroom growth, and the chandelier above their heads, with its coiling metal snakes and candles reduced to stubs, evidenced no mushrooms either. The stone floor was almost bare of the luxurious mushroom growth, a scant few popping up here and there among loose tiles, and it was easy to see the gigantic mosaic that served as a decoration. It was a black snake, viciously biting its tail, its eyes aglow, and around the reptile there was a curling pattern of vines and flowers. It resembled the ouroboros she'd seen in the greenhouse. This one was larger, more magnificent, and the glow of the mushrooms gave it an ominous appearance.

The chamber was bare, except for a table set upon a stone dais. The table was covered with a yellow cloth, and upon it there sat a silver cup and a silver box. Behind the table a long, flowing drape, also of yellow silk, served as a backdrop. It might be a portiere that would hide a doorway. (MG: 280)

Here, the truth of High Place and its occupants is revealed. The gloom tints everything in the building, but the crypt is its source: Howard Doyle's sister and wife, Agnes, and the mushroom sprouting from her body. The motifs present throughout the house continue – the ouroboros, the sickly yellow, the organic patterns – and act as a backdrop for a real, human horror. The gloom is not natural but was created by Howard Doyle. Hidden away in a secret room below the family crypt, the fusion of Agnes and the fungus spreads through the rest of the house, making it the organic thing that Noemí's first impression made it out to be. In this strained way, the house is revealed to be connected to the landscape

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<sup>149</sup> From the Greek οὐροβόρος, the symbol depicts a snake eating its own tail.

around it: the mushroom is native to the area and is the sole reason for the presence of the Doyles in the region.

In sharp contrast to the connection between High Place and the land around it, other locations in the novel are connected to the land around them in positive ways. The house of Marta Duval, the local healer and wisewoman, contrasts with not only Noemí's home and High Place, but also with the dilapidated houses around it on the outskirts of town:

The healer's house was very small and stood out because it was painted white and was better taken care of. /.../ Noemí followed [Marta] inside, into a small kitchen that also served as the dining room. On a wall there was a picture of the Sacred Heart and a bookshelf held plaster figurines of saints, candles, and bottles filled with herbs. From the ceiling there also hung herbs and dried flowers, lavender and epazote and branches of rue. (MG: 64–65)

This place, in sharp contrast to High Place, is intrinsically connected to the space around it: Catholic paraphernalia connect it to the official religion in the area whereas the harvested herbs and flowers create a connection between the house and the nature around it, simultaneously harkening to older beliefs and folk medicine. In comparison to the untethered quality of High Place, Marta's house is firmly grounded in its surroundings both physically and culturally even as it stands out from the houses around it. It is this connection that ends up facilitating the escape of Noemí, Catalina, and Francis from High Place: as a folk healer, Marta has the knowledge to create a draught which alleviates the effects of the fungal infection.

#### 4.1.2. Time in *Mexican Gothic*

The notion of time is significant in the novel in several ways. The first is the longevity of the Doyle family. It is revealed that the patriarch of the family, Howard, is effectively immortal because he keeps extending his life by possessing the bodies of his children. Indeed, the passage of time becomes increasingly important throughout the novel: the longer Catalina and Noemí remain at the house and inhale the fungal spores, the more difficult it will be for them to physically leave. Similarly, Howard's advanced age and failing physical body mean that his transition from his own body into that of a male relative must happen soon. This introduces a sense of urgency into the final act of the novel when it becomes clear to Noemí that Virgil was never supposed to be the new vessel for Howard's spirit but, rather, Francis. Her designated purpose is to marry Francis and carry on the bloodline. This cycle explains the motif of the ouroboros: for Howard to live forever, he must metaphysically consume his own bloodline even as he creates it.

The temporal setting of the novel is significant as the historical period and the physical isolation of the house dictate that it is remote both in terms of location and in its contacts with the outside world. This seems purposefully done by the

Doyles: although the house has electrical fixtures and a generator, electricity is used sparingly. This makes the house detached from the temporal setting of the narrative, invoking the 19<sup>th</sup> century rather than the 1950s. Thus, the house as an accumulation of Doyle family history also calls attention to the temporal axis of the heterotopia: built in the 1890s, the house is virtually unchanged from its original form, slowly decaying over time, reflecting the diminished wealth and status of the Doyle family, whose numbers were decimated by a murder-suicide by the oldest daughter of Howard Doyle. The atemporal effect is compounded by Noemí referencing the Gothic in relation to the house twice: “an old house atop a hill, with mist and moonlight, like an etching out of a Gothic novel” (MG: 35), describing the appeal of High Place for her cousin Catalina, and mentioning that the four-poster bed in her room looked like “something out of a Gothic tale” (MG: 23). This is purposeful: as Virgil explains it, “it is not as if my father would allow even a single curtain to be changed” (MG: 165). All this serves to further move the house from its temporal setting in the 1950s into the past.

The foremost specter present in the novel is the specter of colonialism. This is apparent both literally and figuratively, from Howard Doyle’s keen interest in eugenics and his arrogant view of himself and his bloodline as superior to all others down to the presence of the Doyle family in Mexico in the first place. It is similarly present in the interest of the Doyles in using Catalina and Noemí as breeding stock for the continuation of the family bloodline. Although they are both resistant to the fungus as exposure will not immediately kill them, Noemí copes better with the infection, which Howard explains with her genetics.<sup>150</sup> It is revealed in the novel that Virgil married Catalina for her money: the family intends to reopen their silver mine, which had closed due to flooding caused by the torrential rains that plague the area.

Similarly, the Doyles’ use of the fungus carries with it colonialist implications. As Keetley (2022: 194) deftly summarizes it, the novel “effectively employs the human-nonhuman symbiosis to dramatize the parasitic colonial relationship.” Indeed, Howard claims to have perfected the use of the mushroom, which the local natives had traditionally used for healing rather than unnatural longevity. Additionally, the Doyles’ did not consider the workers, both the imported English workers and the contracted locals in their silver mine, as human beings. However, while the English workers who perished in the mine were buried at the small cemetery behind High Place in individual graves, the graves of the local workers were unmarked (MG: 150–151).

Understandably, the notion of hospitality has relevance to the novel because Noemí is a guest of the Doyle family. The dynamic between the guest and the host is troubled when it becomes clear that the Doyles intend to trap her in the house and in the family. The experience of ghostpality is particularly significant in the novel. It is only through listening to the spectral presence of Ruth, Howard’s

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<sup>150</sup> It is noted that Catalina’s mother was French, and she has light skin, dark red hair, and green eyes, whereas Noemí’s parents are both mestizo, her mother’s family being Mazatec, and she is darker skinned than her cousin, with black hair and brown eyes.

eldest daughter and would-be killer, that Noemí finally understands how to fight the influence of the fungal infection and to resist Howard and Virgil's attempts to control her. A recurring motif throughout the haunting is a call for her to "open her eyes" – to the situation in the house, to the truth of what the Doyles want from her, to the danger she is in. In this way, by speaking to and with the ghost of Ruth, a path towards freedom from the house opens up not only to Catalina and Noemí but also for Francis, who abhors the parasitic nature of his family and desires to escape it. Thus, it is precisely through engaging in ghostpality that the narrative can have any resemblance of a happy ending, at least for Catalina, Noemí, and Francis.

### 4.1.3. Experience in *Mexican Gothic*

The haunting in *Mexican Gothic* is depicted primarily through a blending of dream and reality. Throughout the novel, Noemí has recurring nightmares about presences in the house. The first occurs on her first night at High Place, at the end of the fifth chapter, and is described as follows:

That night she dreamed that a golden flower sprouted from the walls in her room, only it wasn't...she didn't think it a flower. It had tendrils, yet it wasn't a vine, and next to the not-flower rose a hundred other tiny golden forms. /.../ Suddenly, Noemí was aware of a presence in the room. She raised her head, her hand pressed against her nightgown, and saw someone standing by the door. It was a woman in a dress of yellowed antique lace. Where her face ought to have been there was a glow, golden like that of the mushrooms on the wall. The woman's glow grew stronger, then dimmed. It was like watching a firefly in the summer night sky.

Next to Noemí the wall had started to quiver, beating to the same rhythm as the golden woman. Beneath her the floorboards pulsed too; a heart, alive and knowing. The golden filaments that had emerged together with the mushrooms covered the wall like a netting and continued to grow. She noticed, then, that the woman's dress was not made of lace, but was instead woven with the same filaments.

The woman raised a gloved hand and pointed at Noemí, and she opened her mouth, but having no mouth since her face was a golden blur, no words came out. (MG: 55–56)

As previously mentioned, the colors of gold and yellow are repeated throughout the novel, as are organic motifs of plant life and fungi. The presence in Noemí's room is not frightening to her immediately but only when it attempts to communicate with her. This indicates Noemí's reluctance to engage in ghostpality and welcome the visitor in. As the novel progresses, the visits become more frequent and less frightening as she begins to understand what the ghost is attempting to tell her. By that point, the horror Noemí feels is derived not from the experience of being haunted but, rather, from the behavior and intentions of Howard and Virgil. Ruth's ghost, essentially a memory recorded in the fabric of the fungal gloom, does not seem to intend to harm her. Halfway through the novel, it is

revealed that Ruth had attempted to break the family's cycle of violence by killing Howard but had failed.

The longer Noemí remains in the house, the sicker she begins to feel. Catalina's sickness, too, comes from the fungal infection: she claims, for instance, to be able to hear people speaking to her when no one is there, and struggles with distinguishing dreams from reality. The Doyles claim that she is merely suffering from tuberculosis, but Noemí is doubtful, because of Catalina's symptoms. As time goes on, however, Noemí begins to question her own perception and whether the events that she thought she merely dreamed were really happening. For instance, she dreams several times that Virgil invades her room and makes advances at her. In the dreams, she is receptive to these advances, but when she wakes up, she is unsettled and repulsed. Indeed, the second half of the novel, as the sordid family history of the Doyles begins to come to light, Noemí perceives the house primarily through disgust: she is horrified at the actions of the Doyles, at their callous disregard of anything other than themselves.

## 4.2. *The Hacienda* (2022) by Isabel Cañas

Published in 2022, *The Hacienda* is the debut novel of Mexican-American author Isabel Cañas. Set in the fall of 1823, some two years into the aftermath of the Mexican War of Independence (1810–1821), the novel follows twenty-year-old María Beatriz Hernández Valenzuela, the daughter of a disgraced general. With few prospects and little choice in the wake of her father's death during the overthrow of the imperial government, Beatriz accepts the marriage proposal of Don Rodolfo Solórzano, a recently widowed wealthy landowner, despite her mother's protests. After the wedding, she insists on moving from the city to his estate, Hacienda San Isidro,<sup>151</sup> in the Apan valley, hoping to make it into a home for herself and her mother. Quickly, however, Beatriz discovers that the *hacienda* is far from the sanctuary she had hoped for. To contend with the dark force infesting the estate, she enlists the help of a young priest, Padre Andrés, who might be the only person capable of ending the haunting at San Isidro.

The novel is divided into 35 chapters, narrated from the first-person point of view, and focalized through the perspectives of Beatriz (25 chapters) and Andrés (10 chapters), each telling a separate narrative. Beatriz's narration depicts the present day with occasional analepses to expand on her past and the circumstances which led her to marry Don Rodolfo Solórzano, while Andrés's perspective opens the novel in a prolepsis to the end of the novel but moves otherwise in a linear fashion as well, eventually arriving at the present day and complementing Beatriz's narration.

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<sup>151</sup> Most likely named for the Catholic Saint Isidore, the patron saint of farmers.

### 4.2.1. Space in *The Hacienda*

The primary setting of the narrative is Hacienda San Isidro. The estate is described at the outset of the novel in Andrés's point of view: "Behind me, high white stucco walls rose like the bones of a long-dead beast jutting from dark, cracked earth" (TH: 1). In the next chapter, Beatriz describes her first impression of the estate as follows: "I let my eyes drag over the heavy door, its wrought-iron accents, the high dark spikes on the front of the walls, the wilting bougainvillea that wound through them, blossoms and thorns alike drained of color and dying" (TH: 5–6). Both images illustrate two things: in the first passage, the walls surrounding the estate are described as bone-like and, in the second, the description of the spikes atop the walls calls to mind teeth. It is apparent that there is something wrong with the hacienda through the comparisons to dead and decaying organic matter. The comparison is sustained further when Beatriz describes the *hacienda's* buildings as

muscular and ungainly, the awkwardly splayed limbs of a beast frozen halfway into adolescence. The rainy season was ending: **the garden should have been shades of emerald at this point in September, but what scarce vegetation grew in the outer courtyard was as brown as the earth.** Wild magueys scattered weed-like and drooping on either side of a grayed capilla – it must have once been white – and dotted the lawn that led up to the house. Rotting birds of paradise crowded in scattered beds, their heads submissively bowed before us /.../. The air felt heavier inside San Isidro's walls, thicker, as if I had stepped into a strange, soundless dream where the stucco swallowed even the songs of the birds. (TH: 7) [emphasis mine]

This passage deftly compounds the effect of wrongness inherent in the haunted house. In addition to the plant life surrounding the buildings being unseasonably wilted, the site itself appears uncanny – a perception which is reiterated when Beatriz finally arrives at the main house. "As I at last faced the house, the slant of its gap-toothed roof, its dark windows and age-weathered white stucco walls, a feral feeling seized me. *Get back.* My spine stiffened. I wanted to fling myself back from the courtyard as if I had been burned" (TH: 10) [original emphasis]. Here, the house is imbued with an almost malicious character, with Beatriz perceiving it as actively hostile towards her presence.

The main house is described as a traditional example of Spanish colonial architecture:

The house's walls were thick, stucco and whitewashed; though the sun shone bright outside, cool shadows draped the halls. The building was arranged in a U shape around a central courtyard and was two-storied only over its central, largest section. The southern branch housed the kitchen and storerooms and was [the cook's] domain. At the north end of the central wing, a staircase led to an upper floor composed of bedrooms, the suite of the patron, and several empty drawing rooms. /.../ **I noticed a narrow passage to the right of the foot of the stairs. Its doorway was boarded up, a hasty job of mismatched wood and rusting nails.** (TH: 13) [emphasis mine]

The blocked doorway leads into the northern wing of the house and, as the narrative progresses, it is revealed to be the source of the haunting: it is where the body of the murdered first Doña Solórzano is hidden, and it is her restless spirit which haunts the halls of San Isidro. *The Hacienda* thus presents a markedly traditional haunting. If *Mexican Gothic* integrates its haunting with the tradition of the fungal weird which “depicts the post-death state, typically spectral and ethereal, as entirely tangible matter” (Keetley 2021: 45), with the ‘ghosts’ that Noemi sees being revealed to be memories retained in the fungus that permeates High Place, in *The Hacienda*, the haunting is traditionally spectral: a disembodied voice repeating a name (TH: 45; 116) later revealed to be that of the killer, “a cold draft” (TH: 61) and a “flash of red eyes in the dark” (TH: 63) with no substance behind it. This is in keeping with the gothic conventions discussed in the first chapter of the present dissertation and is an example of a classical haunting.

On the one hand, Hacienda San Isidro is not malevolent nor is it infested by something which can be twisted to fit malevolent purposes, as is the case with High Place. On the other hand, it is notable that the main house of the *hacienda* has always been haunted, at least to those capable of hearing it, but this is not depicted as strange: “Any building of that age has memories down to its bones. But its voices are different now. One dominates the rest,” as Andrés puts it (TH: 137). Up until the death of Doña María Catalina, the haunting of the house was not active enough for everyone to be aware of it. Because of his abilities, Andrés is uniquely positioned to be sensitive to it and can thus describe a marked shift in how the house feels.

#### 4.2.2. Time in *The Hacienda*

Hacienda San Isidro functions as a heterotopia of accumulating time, gesturing towards the first of the specters haunting the narrative of *The Hacienda*, the *casta* social system.<sup>152</sup> Elements of social stratification are present throughout the novel, which depict a newly impoverished young woman marrying a man in a higher social position. A salient example is found in how Andrés describes the late Doña María Catalina, as having eyes which “did not see faces that were not peninsular or criollo,” adding that “[t]here were many such pairs of eyes among the hacendados and their families” (TH: 40). Clearly, the social effects of the *casta* system are still very present. Later, Beatriz describes Rodolfo as “Janus-faced,” “a staunch defender of the Republic and *casta* abolitionist who raped women who worked on his property” (TH: 229). This highlights the contradiction between his – admittedly admirable – striving for freedom and equality and the reality of his actions.

Early in the novel, a fellow *hacendado*’s wife refers to the *mestiza* Beatriz as “nearly as lovely” as the *criolla* Doña María Catalina “though quite a bit darker” (TH: 27), a comment which Beatriz dwells on throughout the novel. As a

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<sup>152</sup> It was not purely based on race but considered religion and genealogy as well as social status (Martínez 2008).

*hacendado*'s wife, Beatriz has attempted to improve her standing: however, her position is precarious both because of her status as Rodolfo's second wife as well as her lineage. Her parents' marriage was the reason her mother was disowned: "Mamá's family cared about *limpieza de sangre*,"<sup>153</sup> a problem since her father was mestizo, and her mother's family "cherished that poisonous criollo obsession with *casta*, the belief that any non-peninsular heritage spoiled what was desirable and pure" (TH: 135), as Beatriz explains. Although Beatriz does not seem to support *limpieza de sangre* or the *casta* system, she is bound by them. Her family history is the reason she marries Rodolfo, a man she does not love, and contributes directly to the precarity she and her mother experience after her father's death as well as her retreat to Hacienda San Isidro as a newlywed, despite her husband's family owning an apartment in the city. Other characters in the narrative are affected by the *casta* system as well. Andrés's parents, for example, are from different *casta* with his mother being *mestiza* and his father *peninsular*, something which affects him considerably:

My surname smarted; it was what old Solórzano [i.e., Rodolfo's father] had called my father, when he was San Isidro's foreman. What old Solórzano called me or any of my brothers. *The Villalobos boy*. As if we had no other identity but the legacy of the Spanish foreman forcing himself on an hacienda maid and being ordered to marry her. That name was a living, breathing scar of the criollo stranglehold on this land. /.../ I wanted to strip it from my body like so much flesh and burn it" (TH: 267). [original emphasis]

Combined with the supernatural abilities passed on to Andrés through both bloodlines, his heritage puts him into a position perhaps even more precarious than that of Beatriz. It is this shared precarity that enables the two to become closer as the narrative progresses but, at the same time, it is also what separates them in the end.

The second significant aspect of the narrative and the second specter is family history, that of the Solórzanos in particular. At the climax of the novel, it is revealed that Doña María Catalina, Rodolfo's first wife, was not murdered by her husband as Beatriz has suspected but, rather, by his sister. The murder is the

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<sup>153</sup> Lit. 'cleanliness of blood.' Originally appearing in Spain during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of 'blood purity' was legitimized through a statute of *limpieza* in Toledo in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, targeting *conversos* (people who had converted to Christianity, particularly Jewish people) and descendants of *conversos*, barring them from certain positions and social mobility. During the Spanish Inquisition, it was also used to establish genealogies during tribunals so the Inquisition could better choose its targets.

In the context of New Spain and the later independent Mexico, the concept of *limpieza de sangre* persisted even as it began to decline in Europe, acquiring the meaning of an absence of Muslim, Jewish, and black ancestry in a given person (Martínez 2008: 283) and functioning as one of the bases for the *casta* system in the Spanish colonies. In the period the novel takes place, i.e. during and after the Mexican War of Independence (1810–1821), the *casta* system was questioned by prominent political figures such as José María Morelos (Krauze 1997: 112) already in the early years of the war and would be challenged in independent Mexico as well. However, particularly among the (criollo) upper classes, the *casta* concept endured.

reason the vengeful ghost of the first Doña Solórzano repeats Juana's name throughout the novel, an aspect of the haunting which unsettles Beatriz since no one else appears to hear it. Shortly before his own death, Rodolfo has an intense argument with Juana specifically over her provenance: "You and I both know he is no father of yours, and I will no longer tolerate your lying bastard tongue" (TH: 228), he tells her before threatening to banish her from the house if she does not conform to what is expected of her. This crystallizes both Juana's reasoning for killing Rodolfo (the precarity of her own position) and explains her murder of Doña María Catalina and the attempted murder of Beatriz at the culmination of the narrative. In this sense, Juana's possible illegitimacy is the impetus of the entire narrative depicted in *The Hacienda*.

The novel problematizes the victim/villain dichotomy through not only Juana's character but also through the characters of Doña María Catalina and Rodolfo. Indeed, Beatriz's initial theory about the mysterious death of Doña María Catalina is that she was murdered by her husband: "I heard his first wife was murdered by highwaymen on the Apan road. /.../ I heard she died of typhus. I heard she was kidnapped by insurgents. I heard she was poisoned by the cook" (TH: 21), as Beatriz recalls the gossip spread at her own wedding. It is later revealed that the grave behind the *capilla* bearing Doña María Catalina's name is empty and her body is interred inside the house, a fact which at least some of the servants are aware of and undisturbed by: "That bitch got what she deserved," as Paloma puts it (TH: 274). Doña María Catalina murdered a serving girl not long before her own death and treated the staff horribly, becoming furious with them rather than with her husband for assaulting them in the first place (TH: 264–266), and so the staff kept the secret of what actually happened to her in turn. It is precisely this knowledge which helps Beatriz to conclude that Rodolfo was not killed by the spirit of Doña María Catalina as she initially believed but, rather, by his sister: "It wasn't the house that killed Rodolfo. Not like Ana Luisa, no. He never felt the cold, he saw no apparitions nor heard dissonant laughter, because the house – María Catalina – *liked* Rodolfo" (TH: 275) [original emphasis]. In this sense, the novel establishes its violence as cyclical, particularly as it pertains to the Solórzanos and, more crucially for the purposes of this dissertation, clearly demarcates the haunting as being entirely dependent on the whims of the vengeful spirit haunting San Isidro. Doña María Catalina's character problematizes the villain/victim dichotomy because while she is murdered, she is not an innocent.

However, it is also important to note that Juana's decision to murder Doña María Catalina in turn most likely did not stem from loyalty towards the staff but, rather, fear for her own precarious position. Beatriz theorizes that both the murder of Doña María Catalina and Rodolfo stemmed from the same impulse:

Juana hated me because I threatened her authority. I was her brother's wife, a check on her power in the kingdom of San Isidro. She must have hated María Catalina because she, too, was a symbol of Rodolfo, how Juana's life of privilege and freedom was nothing but a lie. That it could all be taken away in a moment. (TH: 275)

This sets up the climax of the novel, where Juana frames Beatriz for Rodolfo's murder and, once she is locked up in the house, sets the building on fire – only to perish in it herself because Doña María Catalina's spirit attacks her, effectively ending the Solórzano bloodline.

#### 4.2.3. Experience in *The Hacienda*

The experience of the haunting at Hacienda San Isidro is depicted in the narrative as highly individual: Rodolfo experiences none of the characteristics of the haunting Beatriz does, instead claiming that “[i]f anything, it's too warm” (TH: 233). The implied explanation is that the *hacienda* is haunted by the spirit of his first wife who was genuinely fond of him. For others, however, the house is not as welcoming: from the outset of the novel, Beatriz feels uncomfortable at Hacienda San Isidro, and the atmosphere of the main house only worsens the longer she stays. In addition to the classical signs of a haunting discussed in the above sections, Beatriz also experiences vivid visions which are frightening enough to drive her from the house at night to seek shelter in the *capilla* multiple times (TH: 157; 239). Indeed, once Rodolfo has returned to the capital, the house seems more hostile to Beatriz, who experiences unsettling sights and sounds throughout the day. In Rodolfo's absence, Beatriz is the only person who remains in the main house at night: the servants sleep in their own homes and Juana refuses to spend even a minute in the main house after sundown. In this sense, while the affective atmosphere of the haunting is potent, it can be escaped.

After the failed exorcism conducted by Andrés and Beatriz in the middle of the novel, however, the haunting becomes stronger, as Doña María Catalina's can exit the house. This is discovered the morning after, when Andrés and Beatriz find out that, in the night, the cook Ana Luisa has passed away, seemingly from fright. Based on this, I would argue that on the itinerant axis of the heterotopia, Hacienda San Isidro should be characterized as an extrusive heterotopia. Unlike the other novels discussed in the present dissertation, however, it is notable that in *The Hacienda*, the haunting **becomes** mobile rather than inherently being so. While the spirit of Doña María Catalina has had free reign in the house, it is only after the protective circle is broken during the exorcism that she seems to be able to venture beyond its walls, and it takes significant effort on Andrés's part to banish the ghost for good.

In terms of the *hacienda*'s heterotopian qualities on the anthropological axis, its function as a heterotopia of deviation is immediately invoked in Beatriz's desire to make it into a refuge for herself and her mother. However, as the narrative progresses, it becomes apparent that the *hacienda* is also a heterotopia of crisis, especially for Beatriz. She has married Rodolfo for social standing, believing that marrying for love is childish, but ends up realizing through her experiences at the house and her growing closeness with Andrés that genuine love is far from impossible for her. Similarly, for Andrés, the *hacienda* eventually becomes a place of transformation, allowing him to accept the hereditary abilities passed on to him from both sides of his family and to use them to save the people

he loves. However, it is also notable that the novel ends with Beatriz leaving Hacienda San Isidro, presumably for good even after the haunting is resolved.

### 4.3. Comparison

Both novels feature Gothic conventions: a historical, haunted house (High Place; Hacienda San Isidro), a family with a dark and mysterious history (the Doyles; the Solórzanos), a gothic heroine (Noemí; Beatriz), a handsome, villainous man (Virgil; Rodolfo), a forbidden or ill-fated love story (Noemí and Francis; Beatriz and Andrés), tragically deceased wives who died under mysterious circumstances (Agnes; María Catalina). However, both novels also use these conventions in different ways, subverting some while retaining others. A particularly salient example in both is the tragically deceased wives. Another significant difference between the two novels is their approach to the hauntings depicted: where *The Hacienda* portrays a remarkably traditional haunting in Doña María Catalina's vengeful ghost, the phantoms seen in *Mexican Gothic* are revealed to be memories etched into the fungus infesting High Place. However, it is also notable that the presentation of the haunting in *Mexican Gothic*, particularly in the novel's first half, is closely aligned with that of traditional hauntings such as ethereal figures, unexplained noises and sensations, etc. Even as the narrative progresses and the true provenance of the haunting is revealed, the presentation of the 'ghosts' remains similar to the beginning.

In their relation to the itinerant axis of the heterotopia, both novels depict heterotopias which are at once intrusive and extrusive: both Noemí and Beatriz are, in their own ways, trapped in the haunted houses they find themselves in. However, both hauntings are also unlimited by the physical structures of the main houses and capable of movement. In *Mexican Gothic*, this becomes apparent as the fungal nature of the haunting is revealed, with Noemí being fearful at the end of the novel that it could be only a matter of time before the spores from the fungus infesting High Place overtake both her and Francis, rendering their destruction of High Place the physical building as an end to the haunting uncertain. Similarly, in *The Hacienda*, Beatriz's experience of the haunting at Hacienda San Isidro drives her from the estate at the end of the novel, leaving it (and Andrés) behind because she cannot yet live with the trauma in the place where it happened. However, as the owner of the estate, she corresponds with the people still there, and the final pages of the novel imply possible reconnection between her and Andrés. Crucially, the haunting appears to be the itinerant aspect of the heterotopias presented in both novels, High Place and Hacienda San Isidro.

The haunting depicted in *The Hacienda* interacts with religion in a way that the one in *Mexican Gothic* does not: as the haunting in the *hacienda* escalates, Beatriz repeatedly seeks solace in the *capilla*, the chapel on the property. This functions on two levels: firstly, it gestures towards the interrelation between folkloric monsters and hallowed ground as the monster is repelled by the holy. The novel never shows the ghost of Doña María Catalina attempting to approach

the *capilla*, sustaining Beatriz's trust in the holy as a refuge from spiritual as well as physical danger: after all, upon discovering Hacienda San Isidro is haunted, Beatriz's first instinct is to seek out a priest to bless the house. Secondly, as the narrative progresses, Beatriz and Andrés's growing intimacy is interrogated primarily on the grounds of the *capilla*, with the safety of the spiritual refuge being augmented by the safety Beatriz feels around Andrés. In this way the novel gestures towards the refuge found in the sublime as seen in early Gothic novels. In *Mexican Gothic*, however, there does not appear to be a religious dimension to Noemí's experience or response to the haunting, and the affective atmosphere is consistently menacing across the grounds of High Place.

Both novels interact with the postcolonial gothic tradition which, according to Punter, operates on 'a logic of haunting' and is concerned with an impending and inevitable repetition of the (colonial) past. The specters in both narratives are directly tied to the history of colonialism in North America and, in the case of *The Hacienda*, specifically the aftereffects of Spanish imperialism. In *Mexican Gothic*, the Doyles' worldview and behavior towards their new homeland are the primary vessels through which the return of the previous order is threatened. In essence, the Doyles are enforcing English imperialism, updated for the temporal setting of the 1950s with, among other things, Howard's keen interest in eugenics. In *The Hacienda*, the return is similarly threatened through the family central to the story, the Solórzanos, and while its social problematics are more directly tied to Spanish colonialism, a significant weight is placed in the narrative on the realities of the *casta* system and its violence. In a sense, it is history which haunts both High Place and Hacienda San Isidro: history on the personal level in the form of family history as well as history on a broader level through implicit power structures. Because of this, both novels primarily focus on presenting heterotopias of accumulating time.

Both novels engage with the Bluebeard story and are thus intertextual through genre-internal referentiality, but both do so in their own ways. In *Mexican Gothic*, the Bluebeard-figure is the patriarch Howard Doyle rather than the villainous and seductive Virgil Doyle, and the previous wives have not been murdered for seeking forbidden knowledge but have instead been used as compost to feed the fungus. In *The Hacienda*, the suggested presence of a Bluebeard-figure sets up the novel's twist: while Rodolfo is a confirmed rapist, he did not murder anybody, and it was his sister who killed his first wife. Through this, both novels also problematize traditional victim/villain dichotomy: *Mexican Gothic* positions its white characters not as the victims of the fungus in High Place but, rather, as its caretakers and propagators. The problematization appears in Ruth's character as well: while she did indeed attempt to kill the entire family, she saw no other way to escape. Similarly, in *The Hacienda*, while Juana is unquestionably the antagonist, her motivation for killing her brother's wife and her brother derives from a desire to retain her freedom and privilege. Doña María Catalina's character also subverts the victim/villain dichotomy: the novel's initial implication is that she is the innocent victim of a violent, abusive husband but it is eventually revealed that

not only was she herself a violent, abusive person but that she was not killed by her husband at all and apparently loved him.

Both novels place significant focus on their characters and, through doing this, are examples of heterotopias of deviation which, as the respective narratives progress, become heterotopias of crisis not only for the female protagonists but also the supporting characters and, in particular, their romantic interests. Because of the increased attention in the narrative on the psychological implications of the respective hauntings as well as the social contexts which have made them possible, both novels problematize the division between heterotopias of compensation and illusion specifically through the shift between the heterotopia of deviation and the heterotopia of crisis. This appears through the protagonist's character arcs: *Mexican Gothic* presents Noemí at the beginning of the novel as carefree and nonchalant, but she matures considerably by the end of the narrative, losing some of her vivacity in the process. While neither Noemí nor Beatriz are the same as they were at the start of their respective narratives, they are arguably far better equipped to face the more mundane problems of the worlds they return to at the close of the novels.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The weird mode in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: House of Leaves & Episode Thirteen

The chapter is divided into two sections, each examining a novel which I believe to be an example of the weird mode in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although lavish scholarly attention has been given to *House of Leaves* in the years since its publication, my aim here is to offer a different perspective on the novel and to treat it not as an independent, unique text but to demonstrate its connections – and, as seen in *Episode Thirteen*, its contributions – to the broader tradition of the haunted house narrative. I argue that the novels, while sharing similarities because of their storytelling mode, take a markedly different approach to the haunted house motif and interact with it through their engagement with the weird.

#### **5.1. *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski**

Published in 2000, *House of Leaves* is the debut novel of American author Mark Z. Danielewski. The novel is structured into several nested narratives, the first of which follows Johnny Truant, a young man who discovers a bizarre academic manuscript about a film that does not exist in the apartment of a deceased elderly neighbor. The manuscript, forming the second narrative in the novel, analyzes a film called *The Navidson Record*, which depicts a family of four and their experience in a strange, physics-defying house that is bigger on the inside. The novel is unique because of its use of typography to augment its narrative: different perspectives, for instance, are indicated through the use of different fonts, and certain sections of the novel feature text that is backwards, mirrored, upside down, or otherwise challenging to read. The novel has received considerable academic attention, ranging from interpreting the house at the center of the narrative as an example of the Deleuzian fold (Askin 2016; Hock Soon Ng 2018) to its relationship with the concept of mediality (Kilpiö 2018) to speculative philosophical approaches of its depiction of space (Bekavac 2020). Of note here, however, is the Bachelardian reading of the poetics of its space by Kennedy (2014). Relying on both Heidegger and Bachelard, Kennedy contends that the house in *House of Leaves* can be read as a metaphor for Being itself. Karen's character as a mother, he argues, represents the Bachelardian idea of the mother as "primary space, the original site of fixity," allowing her to function as a key and the one who enables an exit from the *unheimlich* Being of the house and towards "Being-well" (Kennedy 2014: 95–96).

The novel consists of several nested narratives, with the highest level being that of the Editors, indicated by the Bookman typeface. The discussion of *The Navidson Record*, in Times New Roman, forms the center of the novel and

consists of twenty-two chapters, forming the narrative levels of both Zampanò as well as *The Navidson Record*. Its footnotes and endnotes, whenever presented in the Courier typeface, present the second-highest narrative level, that of Johnny Truant. The novel includes three appendices which do not fit into the nested structure as complete narratives, consisting of a variety of fragments such as illustrations, poetry, quotes, and letters. An index consisting of random words and phrases is also included in the remastered full-color edition, the two-color edition as well as the black and white edition of the novel. Additionally, two words are rendered in different colors from the rest of the text in the full color and two-color editions of the novel: the word ‘house’ always appears in blue, the word ‘Mino-taur’ always in red and struck through.

This, in itself, already problematizes the concepts of time and space within the novel, as well as interpretive possibilities because through the framing of *The Navidson Record* that is only conveyed through Zampanò’s (pseudo-)academic analysis and Johnny Truant’s commentary on this analysis, the text interprets and reinterprets itself. Additionally, by using different colors and fonts as well as spatial positioning of the text on the page, the novel suggests that these features are significant and require careful attention. However, the analysis below will primarily focus on the thematic qualities of the novel to allow for more substantial comparisons to be drawn between it and the other novels discussed in this dissertation.

### 5.1.1. Space in *House of Leaves*

The central space in the novel is the setting of *The Navidson Record*, referred to as the House on Ash Tree Lane. The house is described as a “small, old-style heritage house” (HoL 9), nestled in a rural neighborhood with plenty of peace and quiet: “pristine glimpses of the Virginia countryside, the rural neighborhood, purple hills born on the fringe of night” (*ibid*). This is contrasted sharply even within the novel to the later developments of the narrative, with the text reading “[i]n many ways, the opening of *The Navidson Record* [...] remains one of the more disturbing sequences because it effectively denies itself even the slightest premonition about what will soon take place on Ash Tree Lane” (HoL 8). This, in turn, creates a sense of unease even as the narrative then goes on to detail the picturesque qualities of the house and its surroundings. Curiously, neither the precise layout of the house nor the position of the rooms in relation to one another are addressed during this section, lending the place an almost impressionistic quality.

However, it is notable that, to the reader of the novel, the irregularity of the house is telegraphed throughout the opening sections of the novel. In the first chapter, two distinct videos are discussed, both of which indicate that the house is something unusual: “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway” and “Exploration #4,” described in the novel as functionally a teaser trailer and a trailer for the fictional film, respectively, both demonstrate that the house is far stranger than it seems from the outside. The former, of particular interest here, depicts a ten-foot

hallway in the north wall of the living room that does not correspond to the appearance of the house's exterior:

In one continuous shot, Navidson, whom we never actually see, momentarily focuses on a doorway on the north wall of his living room before climbing outside of the house through a window to the east of that door, where he trips slightly in the flower bed, redirects the camera from the ground to the exterior white clapboard, then moves right, crawling back inside the house through a second window, this time to the west of that door, where we hear him grunt slightly as he knocks his head on the sill, eliciting light laughter from those in the room, presumably Karen, his brother Tom, and his friend Billy Reston – though like Navidson, they too never appear on camera – before finally returning us to the starting point, thus completely circling the doorway and so proving, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that insulation or siding is the only possible thing this doorway could lead to, which is when all laughter stops, as Navidson's hand appears in frame and pulls open the door, revealing a narrow black hallway at least ten feet long, prompting Navidson to re-investigate, once again leading us on another circumambulation of this strange passageway, climbing in and out of the windows, pointing the camera to where the hallway should extend but finding nothing more than his own backyard – no ten foot protuberance, just rose bushes, a muddy dart gun, and the translucent summer air – in essence an exercise in disbelief which despite his best intentions still takes Navidson back inside to that impossible hallway, until as the camera begins to move closer, threatening this time to actually enter it, Karen snaps, “Don't you dare go in there again, Navy,” to which Tom adds, “Yeah, not such a hot idea,” thus arresting Navidson at the threshold, though he still puts his hand inside, finally retracting it and inspecting it, as if by seeing alone there might be something more to feel, Reston wanting to know if in fact his friend does sense something different, and Navidson providing the matter-of-fact answer which also serves as the conclusion, however abrupt, to this bizarre short: “It's freezing in there.” (HoL 4-5)

In this way, the house acts from the beginning as an extrusive heterotopia, introduced before its occupants are and seeping beyond the confines of *The Navidson Record* because even describing the house involves its extrusion from the medium of film into the medium of written text, which emulates the effect of the continuous shot in the fictional video through the use of a single run-on sentence in the novel.

In the linear narrative of *The Navidson Record* film, the weird qualities of the house only begin to emerge when the family returns from a four-day trip to Seattle only to discover that something feels different: “[n]o one could deny there had been an intrusion, but it was so odd no one knew how to respond” (HoL 24). The horror is developed, moreover, with the discovery of a new closet in the master bedroom:

Upstairs, in the master bedroom, [viewers / readers] discover along with Will and Karen a plain, white door with a glass knob. It does not, however, open into the children's room but into a space resembling a walk-in closet. However unlike other closets in the house, this one lacks outlets, sockets, switches, shelves, a rod

on which to hang things, or even some decorative molding. Instead, **the walls are perfectly smooth and almost pure black** – ‘almost’ because there is a slightly grey quality to the surface. The space cannot be more than five feet wide and at most four feet long. On the opposite end, a second door, identical to the first one opens up into the children’s bedroom. (HoL 28) [emphasis mine].

The significance of this passage is in the contrast drawn between the space of the closet, in its strange texture and dark color, and the two doors leading into it, which seem to match the others in the house and are, save for their presence, otherwise unremarkable. We can see a marked difference between the descriptions of the parts of the house: the ‘original’ house is a domestic space like any other, but the expansions – the new closet upstairs, the new hallway which appears in the wall of the living room and the space beyond it – are described as almost alien.

The discomfort created by the addition of this space is only compounded when Navidson discovers that the house is, paradoxically, bigger on the inside. Initially, he discovers a difference of 1/4” between the interior and exterior, appearing out of nowhere. Soon after, once Navidson’s brother Tom arrives, they discover that the difference has increased to 5/16”, still with the interior exceeding the exterior.<sup>154</sup> This disparity is examined thoroughly by Navidson and Tom, interspersed with a scene of Karen building a bookshelf with her friend in the living room. After some time, they finally manage to get the measurements to match up, but this does not last:

Tom turns to Karen’s shelves and reaches for the largest volume he can find. A novel. Just as with Karen, its removal causes an immediate domino effect. Only this time, as the books topple into each other, the last few do not stop at the wall as they had previously done but fall instead to the floor, revealing at least **a foot between the end of the shelf and the plaster**. (HoL 40) [emphasis mine]

Here, the spatial anomaly becomes undeniable: where, before, it was a question of less than an inch, now it is a foot of space that should not be possible. Thus, the house simultaneously acts as an intrusive heterotopia as it can expand deeper within itself, since the added space within the house does not appear on the outside of it.

This intrusion only escalates as the novel progresses, first in the form of a new hallway, discovered by the children:

No room in the house exceeds a length of twenty-five feet, let alone fifty feet, let alone fifty-six and a half feet, and yet Chad and Daisy’s voices are echoing, each call responding with an entirely separate answer.

In the living room, Navidson discovers the echoes emanating from **a dark doorless hallway which has appeared out of nowhere in the west wall**. (HoL 57) [emphasis mine]

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<sup>154</sup> Paratextually, it is also notable that, at least with the remastered full-color edition, the interior of the novel itself exceeds its covers by some half an inch.

The effect of the appearance of the impossible hallway is compounded by footnote 68 (ibid), which contrasts the position of the hallway in the above passage to its position in “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway” – the hallway appears to be located on the north wall. This, in turn, increases the oneiric qualities of the house, where dream mixes with memory to produce uncertainty.

Additionally, by the time the section of the film corresponding to “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway” short begins, the “hallway which was well over sixty feet deep when the children entered it is now a little less than ten feet” (HoL 60). This reinforces the oneiric qualities of the house because upon its first appearance, the hallway is not only a spatial anomaly but a genuine source of terror, particularly for Karen who suffers from crippling claustrophobia and thus can only watch as Navidson retrieves the children from the impossible hallway. Once the children are retrieved, the hallway’s menacing qualities seem to diminish, allowing it to physically shrink as well. The text shows this through its seeming responsiveness to Karen’s behavior: when she perceives the children to be in danger, her panic is on full display, and the hallway is at its least. However, “by the following morning, Karen has already molded her desperation into a familiar pose of indifference” (HoL 59) and, as discussed above, the hallway has contracted in response. Thus, the house rewards performance: if the family pretends that everything is normal, the house seems to respond by becoming less bizarre.

Unlike the closet upstairs, the hallway does not have a door<sup>155</sup> and, once Tom installs one, he locks it only to discover that the hallway has expanded once more. The house asserts an unsettling sense of agency: it will not allow itself to be ignored. This produces a rift in Navidson and Karen’s relationship, pulling them in opposite directions: while Navidson treats the new hallway as an intellectual curiosity to be solved, Karen wants nothing to do with it. After an argument, Navidson finally decides to venture into the hallway, beginning the section of the novel dedicated to the explorations of the impossible space. The further he goes, the more complex it becomes:

no matter how far Navidson proceeds down this /.../ passageway, his light never comes close to touching the punctuation point promised by the converging perspective lines, sliding on and on and on, spawning one space after another, a constant stream of corners and walls, all of them unreadable and perfectly smooth.

Finally, Navidson stops in front of an entrance much larger than the rest. It arcs high above his head and yawns into an undisturbed blackness. His flashlight finds the floor but no walls and, for the first time, no ceiling. (HoL 64)

This image of the space the novel later refers to as the Great Hall reinforces the interpretation that the house responds to its occupants, changing to mirror their emotional and mental states. Because Navidson expects a mystery to solve, the house gives him an impossible one. The intrusive quality of the heterotopia in *House of Leaves* is twofold: in addition to the intrusion of the house on Ash Tree

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<sup>155</sup> This detail will be discussed in depth in section 5.1.3. of the present dissertation.

Lane throughout the novel, it entices the characters further into itself, only expanding inward as it does so.

Perhaps the most striking image in the novel that pertains to space is the Spiral Staircase, particularly because it infuses the house with verticality. Although the House on Ash Tree Lane is a multi-story building with a downstairs and an upstairs, an attic or a basement are not mentioned in the novel. With the discovery of the Spiral Staircase in the Grand Hall, however, the house acquires an almost chthonic dimension:

After Holloway's team returns, Jed tries to describe the staircase: "It was enormous. We dropped a few flares down it but never heard them hit bottom. I mean in that place, it being so empty and cold and still and all, you really can hear a pin drop, but the darkness just swallowed the flares right up." Wax nods, and then adds with a shake of his head: "It's so deep, man, it's like it's almost dream like." (HoL 85)

As Exploration #4 descends the Staircase, it becomes clear that it is as much a metaphorical descent as a physical one, acting as a symbol for a descent into Hell for Jed and Wax and into madness for Holloway. This, in turn, solidifies the interpretation of the 'new' section of the house as a chthonic, primal space: by venturing into it, the men are pushed to the limits of rationality and soon begin to fracture in the face of the impossible and irrational.<sup>156</sup>

### 5.1.2. Time in *House of Leaves*

Time in *House of Leaves* is less important than in the gothic examples of *The Hacienda* and *Mexican Gothic*. However, this does not mean that time is insignificant; rather, in *House of Leaves*, time is simply prioritized in a different manner than in the other two novels. Time becomes relevant during the expeditions into the depths of the house: as the temperature of the space is just above freezing, simply surviving an exploration requires close attention to how long the explorers can withstand the temperature, how long their supplies will last, and how long it takes to traverse the seemingly endless hallways. The focus is not on the time the explorations take but, rather, the spaces that are uncovered. Indeed, compared to the historied settings found in *Mexican Gothic* and *The Hacienda*, the House on Ash Tree Lane lacks a previous tragedy before Navidson and his family move in beyond a lengthy list of previous owners. As the real estate agent tells Karen, "the only thing distinguished about your home's past, but I guess it's part of everybody's past around here [in Virginia], and it's no mystery either, would be the colony, the Jamestown Colony" (HoL 409). In the context of *The Navidson Record*, this lead is not followed up on; Zampano's analysis, however, picks up the thread and reveals references to the site of the house already in a journal from the 1610s. Although the entries tend to be laconic, particularly the

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<sup>156</sup> Holloway's reaction will be discussed in depth later.

final entry, which simply states, “Ftairs! We haue found ftaires!” (HoL 414), they play a key role in positioning the temporal origin of the house as it appears that the inside predates the house proper. This information, however, is available only in hindsight and has little to do with the narrative presented in *The Navidson Record* beyond establishing that the ‘house’ predates the physical family home.

The foremost specter in the novel is thus that of unattainable knowledge. Throughout the text, different men throw themselves entirely into a futile mission to understand the House on Ash Tree Lane and suffer because of this: by the end of *The Navidson Record*, Tom, Holloway, and Jed have all died in the house, and while Navidson, Reston, and Wax survive, they are all marked by the experience. This resonates throughout the framing narrative of the novel as well, with Johnny’s life spiraling increasingly out of control the further he tries to dig into the mystery of Zampanò’s manuscript. Indeed, the specter of forbidden knowledge haunts the very form of the novel: in the remastered full-color edition of the novel, all passages which speak of the Minotaur and/or its labyrinth are struck through and rendered in red. Crucially, however, they are still legible. This is purposeful to contrast the always-blue ‘house’ with the always-red and struck through ‘Minotaur’: the house becomes legible only despite this forbidden knowledge. The text thus actively resists comparisons to Greek mythology in form even as it regularly invokes its elements in content.

In turn, this creates an ironic contrast between the house and the Minotaur as the presence of the Minotaur implies the existence of a labyrinth, which the house emulates to some degree. However, this is a deliberate invitation to misinterpret the narrative as knowledge of the Minotaur and the labyrinth does not help to understand the house, as is evidenced in Johnny’s narrative and his decline into madness as well as Holloway’s tape. I would argue that the house is a cave rather than a labyrinth, a space of an intelligent human design. Labyrinthine caves are not human creations – the sequence of journal entries dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on pages 410–414 states that the spiral staircase was present on the site long before the house was constructed. This, in turn, suggests that no guiding hand is involved in the creation of the house’s labyrinthine depths but, rather, that they are a naturally occurring phenomenon that is impossible to fully comprehend.

In addition to linking the novel to the tradition of the weird, discussed in Chapter 1.2., this also creates an ontological knot that is further reinforced by the following quote in a letter written by Navidson to Karen: “my God isn’t your Catholic varietal or your Judaic or Mormon or Baptist or Seventh Day Adventist or whatever / whoever. No burning bush, no angels, no cross. God’s a house. Which is not to say that our house is God’s house or even a house of God. What I mean to say is that our house is God. [original emphasis]” (HoL 390). The passage in Braille at the beginning of section XX, the translation of which into the Latin alphabet is signaled in a footnote with an arrow pointing to the right, reinforces the above:

The walls are endlessly bare. Nothing hangs on them, nothing defines them. They are without texture. Even to the keenest eye or most sentient fingertip, they remain unreadable. You will never find a mark there. No trace survives. The walls obliterate everything. They are permanently absolved of all record. Oblique, forever obscure and unwritten. **Behold the perfect pantheon of absence.** (HoL 423) [emphasis mine].

This description, echoing the description of the extra space within the house (the walls are black, smooth, and entirely bare) and referring to a pantheon of absence links the house to a search for or loss of divinity. This further reinforces the idea that the house, as far as it comes to its labyrinthine qualities, is something akin to a Great Old One<sup>157</sup> found in Lovecraftian cosmic horror. Its responsiveness discussed above suggests the space **itself** is intelligent and predates its context of American suburbia.

In this way, the specter of knowledge about the truth of the house becomes the secondary facet of Navidson's survival in the final exploration. Navidson engages with and banishes the specter of forbidden knowledge, seemingly understanding that understanding the house is worthless when compared to the "people he has known and loved" (HoL 474), from his twin brother to his children to, most importantly, his partner Karen. Indeed, of the occupants in the house, only Karen appears able to understand the presence of this specter and to be able to acknowledge it. At the climax of *The Navidson Record*, it is because of her that Navidson survives his final expedition into the depths of the house since she follows him inside and brings him out. In this way, Karen engages in ghostpality with the specter of unattainable knowledge, suggesting that genuine human connection is the only way to weather the brutal and ultimately uncaring world, symbolized in the novel through the House on Ash Tree Lane. The novel argues that home is not necessarily a physical space but, rather, family: the space itself does not care, but people do.

The second significant specter throughout the novel is that of guilt. In the case of Navidson, this manifests through his invocations of a person called Delial, later revealed to be one of his photography subjects. These, in turn, Karen finds frustrating:

"He mentioned Delial again," she says in an extremely clipped tone. "I've warned him if he's not going to tell me who she is he better damn not bring her up. Part of this move south was supposed to be about **putting the past and all that behind us**. He's been pretty good but I guess he can't control his dreams. Last night, I wasn't sleeping very well. I was cold. It's the middle of May but I felt like I was lying in a freezer. I got up to get a blanket and when I came back he was talking in his sleep: 'Delial.' Just like that. Out of the blue. And I'm certain because he said her name twice. Almost shouted it."

As it turns out, Karen was not the only one who was kept in the dark about Delial. Even friends and fellow photojournalists who had heard Navidson use the

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<sup>157</sup> See section 1.2.2. [footnote 60 specifically]

name before never received any sort of explanation. No one had any idea who she was or why it was **she haunted his thoughts and conversation like some albatross**. (HoL 17) [emphases mine].

The intertextual reference to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the last sentence of the passage,<sup>158</sup> in particular, reinforces the idea that Delial functions in the novel as much a symbol as a specter of guilt. The mystery of the name is developed gradually throughout the novel: preparing for the rescue of Exploration #4, Navidson's comment that he "waited too long with Delial" (HoL 102) mollifies Karen enough that she does not attempt to stop him from entering the depths of the house. It is only in Chapter XV that it is finally revealed what the name signifies:

In her filmic sonnet, Karen includes a shot of Navidson's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph. As she explains in a voice-over: "The print comes from Navy's personal collection." The same one hanging in their home and one of the first things Navidson placed in their car the night they fled.

As the world remembers, the renowned image shows a Sudanese child dying of starvation, too weak to move even though a vulture stalks her from behind. Not only does Karen spend twenty seconds on this picture, she then cuts to a ten second shot of the back of the print. Without saying a word, she zooms in tighter and tighter on the lower right hand corner, until her subject finally becomes clear: there, almost lost amidst so much white, lie six faintly penciled in block letters cradled in quotes—"Delial" (HoL 368).

This is significant in two ways: firstly, it is the moment when the specter is finally addressed. Secondly, it is important that Karen is the person who reveals the truth of the specter of Delial: "through the course of [*The Navidson Record*] Delial appears only once, in Karen's piece, bordered in black, frozen in place without music or commentary, just Delial: a memory, a photograph, an artifact" (HoL 395). As the novel discusses in length (HoL 394–396), Delial has little to do with the girl in the photograph but, rather, becomes a specter encompassing Navidson's guilt over his inaction and, crucially, one that only Karen can engage through ghostpality by acknowledging its presence and allowing it to speak.

In terms of heterochronia presented in the novel, *House of Leaves* primarily presents a repository of time, with the notion of historical record playing a significant part in the narratives within, as discussed above. However, a formal technique is employed which bears examining here: in particular, the sequence in chapter XX (HoL 423–490), chronicling the final expedition or Exploration #5. In addition to the beginning of Navidson's descent on pages 424–425 being signaled in the text by shifting from the justified mode to the centered mode and decreasing in size to the point that by the end, the text is an inch wide and ends

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<sup>158</sup> A fact pointed out by the novel itself: "Delial is to Navidson what the albatross is to Coleridge's mariner. In both cases, both men shot their mark only to be haunted by the accomplishment, even though Navidson did not actually kill Delial." (HoL 394)

halfway down the page. On the following pages, the text becomes physically ergodic as one must flip through pages quickly when there is little text on each page (e.g., HoL 442–464) or, conversely, must slow down entirely to change the position of the physical book to be able to read text printed sideways, diagonally, or upside down (e.g., HoL 464; 470–471). This, in turn, augments the narrative conveyed in this section, particularly the tactile experience of the house as Navidson descends further. Where the rest of the text is mentally taxing to read as it requires one’s attention to keep up with several sets of footnotes as well as bizarre formatting, section XX requires significant physical effort from the reader and has no footnotes, unlike the rest of the novel.

All this, however, contrasts sharply with the content of the narrative as the notion of time becomes ephemeral as Navidson’s time both extends infinitely and is constantly on the verge of running out. Section XXI consists only of a quote and of Johnny Truant’s entries dating from October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1998, the date of Lude’s death to October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1998, the signing date of the Introduction. This, in contrast to the previous section, provides a clear temporal positioning. Section XXI does not contain any further development of the narratives of *The Navidson Record* or *Zampanò*. Thus, the section is not only a break in the Navidson narrative but also in its interpretation, interrupting the finale of *The Navidson Record* by concluding Johnny Truant’s narrative instead. In doing this, the section highlights the two different outcomes of, at the core, remarkably similar stories of men pursuing unattainable knowledge.

The quote from Thomas F. Hornbein’s *Everest: The West Ridge*<sup>159</sup> at the beginning of section XXI aptly summarizes the arguments made in the sections above:

There was a hint of fear, not for our lives, but of **a vast unknown** which pressed in upon us. A fleeting feeling of disappointment – that after all those dreams and questions this was only a mountain top – gave way to the suspicion that maybe there was something more, something beyond the three-dimensional form of the moment. **If only it could be perceived.** (HoL 491) [emphases mine].

The emphasized phrases in particular link not only the themes of exploration but also the limits of human perception and understanding as interrogated throughout the novel. In the end, The House on Ash Tree Lane is just that – a house, like Mt. Everest is a mountain. It is the experience of these, however, from a uniquely human perspective that lends them their mystery and allure, the desire to understand and conquer them that leads people to their doom. It is not a coincidence that members of the team on Exploration #4 are mountaineers.

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<sup>159</sup> Styled in the novel as *Everest – The West Ridge*. The nonfiction book chronicles the first successful summit of Mt. Everest’s west ridge by Hornbein and his partner Willi Unsoeld in 1963, a climb thought to be impossible until then.

### 5.1.3. Experience in *House of Leaves*

A characteristic feature of the novel, like many other haunted house narratives, is that the experience of the House on Ash Tree Lane is highly individual: every character, within or outside *The Navidson Record*, has their own understanding, relationship to, and interpretation of the house.

In the case of Will Navidson, his interest is to, against all odds, understand the house. This attempt begins in earnest through Exploration A, where the sensory qualities of the space that is both part of the house and beyond it become significant. In particular, the sound the house makes is highlighted during this section of the novel. As Navidson ventures deeper into the atrium, something shifts, and the archway through which he entered vanishes: “immutable silence rushes in to replace what had momentarily shattered it. Navidson freezes, unsure whether or not he really just heard something growl. /.../ [H]e can no longer see the arch let alone the wall. /.../ [T]he only thing he can perceive is oily darkness” (HoL 67). This sensory disturbance twists the sense of exploration into one of fear as Navidson scrambles back to his living room: the inky blackness of the true house is no longer a scientific curiosity but something which actively poses a threat to Navidson’s life.

Navidson’s fear only makes the situation worse. The house now actively shifts and growls around him as he tries to find his way: “he discovers that the penny he left behind, which should have been at least a hundred feet further, lies directly before him. Even stranger, the doorway is no longer the doorway but the arch he had been looking for all along” (HoL 68). “When a third growl ripples through that place, /.../, Navidson panics and starts to run” (*ibid*) before he reconsiders, attempting to use the echo of his own voice to navigate the now maze-like hallways. This, however, does not prove enough and it is only the sound of his daughter’s voice calling for him that helps him navigate the new hallways and make his way back into the living room: “quite abruptly he steps to the right through a low passageway and discovers a corridor terminating in warm yellow light, lamp light, with a tiny silhouette standing in the doorway, tugging her daddy home with a cry” (*ibid*).

Similarly, Johnny Truant’s desire is to understand the house by working through the manuscript, attempting to make sense not only of what the house is but also of his own past. The aftereffects of engaging with *The Navidson Record*, however, can do as much harm as good. As the manuscript points out:

Perhaps strangest of all, the consequences of Navidson’s journey are still being felt today. In what remains the most controversial aspect of The Haven-Slocum Theory, the concluding paragraphs claim that people not even directly associated with the events on Ash Tree Lane have been affected. The Theory, however, **is careful to distinguish between those who have merely seen *The Navidson Record* and those who have read and written, in some cases extensively, about the film.**

/.../ [T]he latter group seems to have been more radically influenced: “As evidence continues to come in, it appears that a portion of those who have not only

meditated on the house's perfectly dark and empty corridors but articulated how its pathways have murmured within them have discovered a decrease in their own anxieties. People suffering anything from sleep disturbances to sexual dysfunction to poor rapport with others seem to have enjoyed some improvement."<sup>393</sup>

However, The Haven-Slocum Theory also points out that this course is not without risk. An even greater number of people dwelling on *The Navidson Record* have shown an increase in obsessiveness, insomnia, and incoherence: "Most of those who chose to abandon their interest soon recovered. A few, however, required counseling and in some instances medication and hospitalization. Three cases resulted in suicide." (HoL 407)

A notable technique employed in the passage above is the prioritization of, in the order in which the information is presented, the positive effects of the exposure to the house. This, in turn, amplifies the affective capacity of the negative effects listed later. For Johnny Truant the manuscript discussing the film becomes an obsession, its subject matter infecting his own life to the point that he struggles to distinguish the manuscript from reality, becoming convinced that a monstrous entity is after him. Unlike for Navidson, for Johnny there is no escape from the house since, after his friend Lude's death, no one loves him enough to pull him from its (metaphorical) depths. In this sense, the connections between people can function in relation to the house as a thread of sorts, further highlighting the labyrinthine qualities of the space as well as the text's self-contradiction since it both invokes the image of the labyrinth while actively attempting to eradicate it.

For Holloway Roberts, the experience of the house is markedly different from those of Johnny and Navidson. While the other two seek to understand it, he seeks to tame it, the elisions in the text symbolic of the missing knowledge:

And in Navidson's house that faceless black i[] many myths incarnate.

"*Ce ne peut être que la fin du monde, en avançant,*" Rimbaud dryly remarked. Suffice it to say, Holloway does not [ ] French for his end. Instead he props up his [i][eo camera, ignites a magnesium flare, and crosses the room to the far end, where he slumps in the corner to wait. Sometimes he mumbles [ ] hi[]self, sometimes he screams obscenities [ ] to the void: "Bullshit! Bullshit! Just try and get me you motherfucker!" And then as the minutes creak by, his energy dips. "[ ] I don't want to die, this [ ]" words coming out like a sigh—sad and lost. He lights another flare, tosses it toward the camera, then pushes the rifle against his chest and shoots himself. [ J Jill Ramsey Pelterlock wrote, "In that place, the absence of an end finally became his own end."<sup>300</sup> (HoL 337) [<sup>160</sup>]

Notably, the elisions do not make the text illegible because there is enough context to guess at least the shape if not the specifics of what is missing. However,

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<sup>160</sup> The French line from poet Arthur Rimbaud can be translated as something like "advancing cannot be anything but the end of the world." In his 2011 translation of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, John Ashbery translated the line as "[i]t can only be the end of the world, as you move forward".

the most interesting aspect of this image comes after Holloway finally dies a few minutes later:

Nearly a minute of silence. In fact, the length is so absurd it almost appears as if Navidson forgot to trim this section. After all there is nothing more to be gained from this scene. Holloway is dead. Which is what happens when it happens.

The whole thing clocks in under two seconds. **Fingers of blackness slash across the lighted wall and consume Holloway.** And even if

he loses sight of everything, the tape still records **that terrible growl**, this time without a doubt, inside the room. (HoL 338) [emphases mine]

This, in turn, problematizes the interpretation that the only monster in the novel was inside Holloway's head. However, this scene, too, functions in line with the capacity of the house to respond to its inhabitants discussed above. If anything, the vanishing of Holloway's body implies that the house has a predatory relationship with its inhabitants. The growl and the "fingers of blackness" only appear after Holloway's death, suggesting that the house has consumed him metaphorically before it does so literally. This indicates that the house / entity present there resembles an intelligent actor rather than a passive setting.

In the context of the narrative, the house functions firstly as a utopia. For Johnny, it is an unreal space simply because the film depicting it is not real. Through this, the novel directly engages with the questions of reality/unreality in fiction. In particular, the novel poses the question: what matters more, the experience or its diegetic reality? Thus, whether the house is diegetically real or not does not matter, because it still has an effect on the characters in the narrative: it acts as a tether between Johnny and his past, between him and Zampanò, connecting him with the world around him even as it consumes his thoughts, time, and attention. Where Holloway sought to dominate its monstrosity and ultimately became the murderous monster, Navidson was saved because of the bond he shared with his partner, Karen. Johnny, however, has no one to pull him from the ledge. Thereby, the narrative also engages with the heterotopia in its imaginary axis by making everything else around it seem unreal: even if *The Navidson Record* is not diegetically real, the effect of the house on the entire narrative around it is very much so. Thus, the house on Ash Tree Lane appears to be a heterotopia of illusion.

As strange as it is, however, the House on Ash Tree Lane is not depicted as particularly ominous or evil; it simply is. This allows a connection to be drawn between *House of Leaves* and weird fiction, particularly Lovecraftian cosmic horror. Rather than having ill intent like other haunted houses (e.g., *Burnt Offerings* or *The Shining*) the House on Ash Tree Lane simply exists the way that it is and acts without intent. The danger perceived within it by the characters in the narrative depends entirely on what they expect from it. Because Holloway approaches the labyrinthine hallways in the depths of the house expecting a monster, he eventually becomes one, resulting in the tragic ending of Expedition #4 where Holloway shoots and injures Wax, shoots and kills Jed, and eventually dies himself.

## 5.2. *Episode Thirteen* (2023) by Craig DiLouie

Published in 2023, *Episode Thirteen* is a novel by American author Craig DiLouie. Structured as an epistolary or ‘found footage’ novel with the narrative conveyed through a series of recovered video transcripts, journal and blog entries, emails, and text messages among other media, *Episode Thirteen* centers on the titular thirteenth – and final – episode of a fictional reality ghost-hunting television program titled *Fade to Black*. As is standard of the paranormal television genre, the focus of *Fade to Black* is on a team of paranormal investigators – co-lead investigators Matt and Claire Kirklin, investigator Jessica Valenza/Rashida Brewer,<sup>161</sup> technology manager Kevin Linscott, and cameraman Jake Wolfson – as they explore allegedly haunted locations. During their fall 2016 investigation of the highly unusual Foundation House, formerly occupied by a group of researchers who vanished in 1972, the *Fade to Black* team ends up finding far more proof of the supernatural than they ever imagined before they vanish, leaving behind the documents and recordings which the novel consists of. Unlike *House of Leaves*, *Episode Thirteen* has not yet been subjected to academic analysis, to my knowledge.

Prefaced by an intradiegetic editor’s note set long after the events depicted, the novel is divided into 11 sections and narrated in a broadly linear manner. Analepses occur sporadically in blog and/or journal entries by team members, primarily to give context to events in the central narrative, as well as in the section titled “Day Three” in the form of four separate research notes by the last occupants of the house. While the *Fade to Black* video transcripts broadly progress forward in time in a linear manner, the journal entries of the characters occasionally return to distant past events but only for brief periods. Similarly, journal entries occasionally recount and offer new perspectives on events already described through video transcripts, especially in the middle sections of the novel. However, the final three sections of the novel, titled “Three Years Later,” “Four Years Later,” and “Five Years Later,” each consist of a prolepsis past the timeline of the central narrative. The narrative is conveyed through multiple points of view which use first person as well as third person limited perspectives and is focalized through the research team with Claire and Matt Kirklin being the primary foci<sup>162</sup>.

### 5.2.1. Space in *Episode Thirteen*

The setting of the novel is a building referred to as Foundation House, located in Denton, Virginia (ET: Editor’s Note). Matt Kirklin, the lead investigator of the *Fade to Black* team, describes the house built in 1920 as “a throwback to antebellum architecture”, imploring the reader to imagine “large, wrap-around

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<sup>161</sup> The former is the character’s stage name and the latter her birth name.

<sup>162</sup> This is based on the number of individual journal entries given to each character in the novel: Jake Wolfson has five, Jessica Valenza / Rashida Brewer six, Kevin Linscott eight, Matt Kirklin nine, and Claire Kirklin fifteen.

porches where you sip mint juleps while you enjoy the sunset” (ET: 9). This creates an almost romantic image of the building which is soon challenged by the description of the haunting, with people having “reported seeing the ghostly apparition of an abnormally tall woman appearing in the upstairs window” as well as “invisible feet stomping on the grand staircase,” “cold spots”, and “strange flashing lights in the woods around” the house (ET: 10). This creates a tension between two poetic images, which is further sustained through the description of the interior of the house once the *FtB* team arrives on-site: “couches, throw rugs, and polypropylene chairs saturated in once-vibrant pea-green, yellow, pink and peach colors or flower patterns” set against “grand” architecture and original wood paneling and wallpaper, as Matt describes in a journal entry (ET: 49).

The house seems to adhere to the principles of verticality as on the higher floors, the house is in better condition both structurally and atmospherically, whereas the basement strikes the team as unsettling soon after their arrival. As the novel progresses, the well in the basement becomes the site of the second paranormal incident witnessed by the team, involving the music and flashing lights of the first but with the added element of a disembodied hand reaching out from the well, beckoning them forward as phantom music blares that there is “nothing to fear but fear” (ET: 146). This suggests that the mouth of the well in particular functions as an *omphalos*, a connective point between different dimensions as discussed in section 1.2.1. of the present dissertation.

Below, the tunnel, the spiral, the staircase down, and the final maze appear to be something resembling a pocket dimension, detached from the linear progression of time in the ‘real’ world and with their own rules towards spatiality as they, too, appear to expand, contract, and change seemingly of their own volition the further the team ventures. An indication of this distorted temporality is Kevin’s solo descent into the well in the early section of Day Four, where he returns seemingly moments later while having experienced at least thirty minutes in the labyrinth below, evidenced by his electronics being some half an hour ahead of the others’ (ET: 276). Combined, this creates a sense of dissonant time and spatiality which becomes gradually more harrowing as the novel progresses and the true strangeness of the space below is revealed. Thus, the notions of space and time are intricately linked in the novel, becoming increasingly more difficult to separate as the novel heads into the final two primary narrative sections, “Mandala” and “The Maze.”

### 5.2.2. Time in *Episode Thirteen*

As the house has been unoccupied since the disappearance of the Paranormal Research Foundation scientists who give the house its name, the house functions as a heterotopia of accumulating time as far as the physical space is concerned. The nature of the haunting and thus the nature of the place, however, induce a shift in not only the perception of the space but its physical qualities as well. On the second night of the *FtB* team’s stay, the scene referred to diegetically as the ‘Paranormal Event’ occurs. It is followed by another event the next night, and the

temporally scrambled sections “Mandala” and “The Maze,” where the sequence of events and the events themselves become increasingly more difficult to position into a concrete timeline. As the novel itself comments on Jessica/Rashida’s final journal entry in the latter section: “*Chronologically, her story continues here, as it is hinted it is occurring while the other investigators are down the stairwell, though it has already also clearly diverged, as if she experienced time differently from the others once they separated*” (ET: 382) [original formatting]. The maze below the house is transient. As Claire puts it, the “bubble” of the maze, once its purpose is served, “is already crumbling” (ET: 416) and did not exist before the team ventured into the building. Thus, both the heterotopia of accumulating time and the heterotopia of festival time are present in the novel, with the house acting as the former and the underground maze as the latter.

In terms of the specters in the novel, each character has their own to contend with. Specters are identified for each throughout the section titled “The Maze,” where Claire, Matt, Jake, and Kevin descend the staircase at the end of the spiral in the basement and enter the maze below. The first specter that merits in-depth discussion is Jake’s: his inability to connect to others and overcome the familial abuse he suffered in childhood, made manifest through a formless entity speaking with the voice of his father. Although Jake appears receptive to the specter and attempts to engage in ghostpality before the encounter in the maze, saying that, instead of passively observing from behind the camera, “[t]his time, I was a part of the story. /.../ I thought: This is my chance to step up” (ET: 359–360), his attempt is doomed to fail. Curiously, the failure does not appear to be his own – as he attempts to assist Kevin, who is being tormented by what he believes to be the demon he encountered in Philadelphia, the man ends up fatally shooting Jake. This, however, is directly referenced by the form Jake’s specter takes in the novel. It tells him regarding Kevin, “I wouldn’t go help him if I were you” (ET: 365) as Jake, unheeding, only begs to be left alone. It is Jake’s refusal to listen to the specter that brings about his death.

On the other hand, it is understandable **why** Jake fails to listen: he does not and cannot know the intent behind the words he hears, and based on previous experiences in the house, assumes it to be negative. As established during the final journal entries of Claire Kirklin, the entities in the maze below the Foundation House respond to and behave in accordance with the intention they perceive in people: “Good intention draws good. Bad draws bad. /.../ If the spirits have a moral law, it is this simple sense of karma, no matter how harsh their tests may seem. Intent – the core you, the real you, defined as your single driving desire – attracts result” (ET: 415). At first glance, this seems at odds with what happens to Jake. However, he states in the video transcribed on page 350 that “[i]t’s not fair. I came down here to help a friend. I was doing the right thing. /.../ I’m lost, and I broke my one rule, which is **survival first**” [emphasis mine]. Here, it becomes apparent that Jake’s attempt to engage with the specter has failed before it could begin precisely because he lacks the purity of intent the action appears to require in the storyworld, being worried about his own life before that of others. Viewed from this angle, his attempt to approach Kevin in the maze can

be read as a selfish act – an attempt, perhaps, to (re)gain safety in numbers rather than face the unknowable alone. It is a human impulse, but unfortunately one that is at odds with the purpose of the maze as a site of individual transformation, as will be demonstrated below.

It is noteworthy, however, that Jake’s statement about “stepping up” discussed above and his statement about “survival first” occur in two different media, the former in a written journal entry and the latter in a video recording. This, in turn, creates friction in the reliability of the narration, especially as the novel moves towards its climax: it becomes increasingly more difficult to find an objective ‘truth’ of what happened. This is echoed in Claire’s final journal entries as well. Even though she proclaims to know exactly what has happened and why after her own death and transformation, saying “We know everything, /.../ though we no longer consider it important to know” on page 410, before recounting her final moments in the next journal entry, she follows it with “I remember believing if I opened the spirit door, I’d be able to save [Matt]. I remember him yelling at me to keep going. I don’t know how much of this is real or how I **choose** to remember it” on page 412 [emphasis mine]. She also states that the “only way to learn about these spirits is to join them. I wanted to know them so badly that I became one of them” (ET: 410). Thus, it appears that her memory of her final moments as a human is how she later chooses to remember them rather than what actually happened.

Claire’s specter throughout the novel has been knowledge, in particular, unattainable knowledge. As she states in her first journal entry, “I dreamed of being the girl who produced a defensible Theory of Everything” (ET: 36). This idea governs her actions in the narrative as well as her capacity to engage in ghostpity. Of the team, she does seem to be the most successful, given that she undergoes the transformation the maze is supposed to facilitate, becoming a ghost herself while her companions either die (Jake, Kevin, and Matt) or survive, albeit damaged (Jessica/Rashida). However, Claire’s transformation negates the entire idea of ghostpity since Claire forfeits her own self: “It hurts to see my husband and friends suffer, but it won’t hurt for much longer. Already, my sense of self is starting to fade away. So much of what made me Claire was a projection of genetics, chemicals, and environment. Take them all away, and what are you?” (ET: 411), as she puts it. This, combined with the statement on knowing everything but no longer considering it important, means that Claire Kirklin has stopped existing in death, like the others who have perished in the house, despite the strength of her intent and desire to know. Unattainable knowledge remains unattainable precisely because, even when ostensibly achieved, it is made inert because the person who coveted it no longer exists and can no longer share it.

This outcome is foreshadowed early on in “The Maze” section, when Claire discovers a wall that she determines to be covered in solutions to famously unsolvable equations but which the camera only perceives as “blurry and shifting” symbols (ET: 346–347). Matt, later on, appears to share that perception: where Claire perceives what she calls the “encyclopedia” of the “language of the universe,” her husband says he sees nothing but “Nordic runes” (ET: 377). This

causes her to lose sight of the ‘truth’ she sees as well, prompting her to scream at Matt that he has “ruined it” and the entities “took it all away” because of his arrival (ET: 377–379). This outburst is at odds with Claire’s insistence that she wants knowledge to share it, showing a covetous – and very human – intent to possess. Compared to the others, however, this seems to have no ill impact on her journey: where Jake’s death comes about purely because he does not want to be alone and Matt’s because he does not want to abandon his wife, Claire achieves transformation regardless of her own faults.

In this sense, then, engaging in ghostpality in *Episode Thirteen* seems to involve both language and lost future: only through identifying, localizing, and engaging with the specter can transformation through de- and reconstruction be achieved. The only character who enters the maze and seems to succeed is Claire, but she does so at the cost of forfeiting what she wanted in the first place. Because of this, the only successful engagement in ghostpality is undertaken by Jessica/Rashida, who refuses to enter the maze and instead intends to make her way back to the well through the space the team refers to as the Spiral. Throughout the novel, her specter is a conflict between her simultaneous desires to be a good mother and make a career as an actress. As she attempts to make her way back to the well – a journey that should take a couple of hours at most – she ends up trapped in an infinite loop, circling the spiral with no way out. As she states in her final journal entry:

Even my memories, which I replay in my mind’s eye over and over like a private movie collection, have begun to lose their color. Only when I dream do I remember, and I worry the dark will one day take that from me as well. At that time, the dark will become a part of me, and I will disappear in it forever.

When I ran into Grady, I knew I’d finally lost my final grip on sanity. (ET: 383)

This passage forms an image which signals the deconstruction taking place. However, this is undercut by the exchange between Jessica/Rashida and the entity appearing as her son, who claims the spirits wanted him to let her know that “*the way is still open /.../ [t]o go down the stairs and finish what you started. You can join the others who have yet to complete their testing. All you have to do is want it*” (ET: 384) [original formatting]. This interaction with the specter made manifest also highlights a choice to be made – or, rather, the illusion of a choice. Jessica/Rashida seems to be the only one to understand this. “Another trick,” as she puts it, “I knew it would mean giving up on ever getting home” (*ibid.*). This, in turn, suggests that she is capable of not only hearing but also understanding the specter and all that it implies. Instead of descending the stairs, she keeps walking, asking only that the entity walk with her, treating it as a proxy for her son. “His hand is dry and smooth and cold. Wherever he goes, I will follow,” she writes in her final journal entry (ET: 385). It is notable that she is the only member of the *FtB* team to survive the experience of Foundation House, reappearing at the end of the novel in the section “Five Years Later” seemingly from thin air and howling in grief at her perceived loss of her son (ET: 432–433).

This signals a transformation as well, perhaps even more than what happens to Claire, since Jessica/Rashida seems to emerge from the house with at least some measure of selfhood still intact. The loss of the entity posing as her son signals another lost future: he appears to her as an adult, although her experience of the spiral seems to last some five years, the son she has returned to is not the same she left behind, nor is he the same as she met in the spiral. In this way, hers, too, is a Pyrrhic victory – although her intent is arguably the strongest, there is a marked temporal gap between herself and the home she is returning to, rendering the return hollow. It is notable, however, that it is precisely **through** engaging with the specter that she achieves this in the first place: she is the only character who takes the specter she is presented with at face value and asks it questions about the person it claims to be (ET: 384–385). Here, then, there is evidence of a de- and reconstruction, a successful engagement in ghostpality and a transformation that results from it, with Jessica/Rashida finally realizing that her priority is her son, which allows her to eventually escape the spiral.

The heterotopia presented in *Episode Thirteen* thus appears to belong to the crisis heterotopia variety on the anthropological axis, with the space below the house characterized by Claire’s final journal entries as a “bubbled construction the spirits built,” a proving ground of sorts: “In their mind, a simple test” to see who is capable of undergoing the transition from one dimension to another, with Claire being the only one to reach the “dark dimension”, governed by gravity rather than light and time (ET: 410), and Jessica/Rashida the only one to succeed in returning to the ‘real’ world. Both women, however, are irrevocably transformed by the ontological transition taking place in the house.

### 5.2.3. Experience in *Episode Thirteen*

The affective atmosphere of Foundation House is remarkably self-contained especially when compared to the other novels discussed in the present dissertation, offering an example of a purely intrusive heterotopia. As discussed in the above sections, the truly ‘haunted’ area of the house is the temporary pocket dimension below it. However, this does not mean that the rest of the house is unaffected: the first encounter with the entity occurs in what the team has termed the Apparition Room on the second floor as well as in the upstairs stairwell. The progression of the haunting, however, is downward: the second encounter happens in the basement, with the subsequent encounters occurring in the strange space below. In addition to invoking verticality (as discussed in section 5.2.1.), the mystery of the house lures the team further into its depths until escape appears impossible, thus articulating it as an example of an intrusive heterotopia. Even Jessica/Rashida, who temporarily quits the investigation in the aftermath of the first paranormal event the team experiences at the house, ends up returning to the house despite her sister’s concerns (ET: 211–216).

The heterotopia of Foundation House operates on the imaginary axis on the side of the heterotopia of illusion given its effects on the *FtB* team. For example, the day after the first encounter with the entity in the house at midnight in the

section Day Two, Claire and Matt both write in their journals that they “have never felt so alive” (ET: 183) and “never felt more alive than I do right now” (ET: 225), respectively. Similarly to *House of Leaves*, the haunting seems responsive to the emotional states of the characters: the first event cuts off a team-wide argument over Kevin having faked evidence of the paranormal. The second event occurs soon after Claire’s discovery of old files which seem to inexplicably pertain to each member of the present-day team in the Paranormal Research Foundation archives, prompting another argument with Claire accusing the others and/or the production company of foul play. Similarly to the first paranormal event, the second occurs during the fight, seemingly drawing from the intense emotions of the characters for its spectacular presentation. Both events are multi-sensory: the video transcripts for each describe in depth the effects of cold spots, the inexplicable sounds, and the fear and delight experienced by the members of the team.

The second event prompts strong physical reactions: Claire “howls with laughter,” a sobbing Jessica/Rashida wets herself, Kevin “slowly curls into a ball” on the floor, and Jake vomits (ET: 240–241). While they found the first event frightening but thrilling all the same, watching back the captured footage after escaping from the house, the second event prompts an almost resigned reaction. Matt, for example, writes that he “can’t just walk away from this. /.../ It’s way bigger than what we can handle, but it’s *ours*. Our discovery. We own it, which carries a certain responsibility” (ET: 249) [original emphasis] even though he is aware of the danger and the futility of attempting to continue the investigation at this point. This links back to the idea of the house being an intrusive heterotopia and, in turn, indicates that the affective atmosphere of the house – insofar as it pertains to the effect the haunting being active has on the physical building – becomes more pervasive as the novel progresses, no longer mere environmental discomfort but a persistent sense of dread within the characters.

Indeed, perhaps the most harrowing experience is had by Kevin since his specter seems to be intrinsically tied to the two prior experiences he speaks of in his introductory blog post: firstly, he was involved in a fatal shooting during his tenure as a police officer in Philadelphia, and he encountered what he believed to be a demon while responding to a domestic violence incident (ET: 24–28). In the maze, Kevin ends up in a hall of mirrors, tormented by, seemingly, that same demon. As the video transcript describes:

*Kevin stands at the end of a corridor surrounded by funhouse mirrors, two of which are shattered to expose plain stonework. His back to the camera, he shouts and waves his gun.*

*In the mirror he faces, an apparition swirls like intricate gusts of gray smoke against a window. /.../ A claw appears, reaching. Curved horns. Swishing tail. Hairy animal form. Long-toothed snarl. Clouds of gray smoke.*

*Rolling as continuous video, these images form a swirling, disjointed, nightmare vision broken only one to show, for a single frame only, a tall, skinny man wearing a hoodie that shrouds his face in shadow. The only element that remains consistent in every frame is a pair of eyes, glowing red like coals. Kevin is crying.*

*The apparition snarls, a deafening staccato that sounds like the coughing muffler of a souped-up sports car. The mirror explodes in a spray of glass as Kevin shoots it. (ET: 366–367) [original formatting]*

This image provides an excellent example of the responsiveness of the haunting: where *House of Leaves* features no entities other than the house itself yet is similarly responsive, *Episode Thirteen*'s haunting is responsive only as far as the spirits within Foundation House are responsive. The above sequence occurs directly before Jake's death at Kevin's hand – an accidental death, seemingly, considering the contrast between the almost clinical incident report that Kevin writes in his journal and his actual reaction in the moment, which is to weep and beg for forgiveness. This grief is quickly replaced by fury, with Kevin vowing that, should he find “a way to kill” the spirits, he is “going to do it” (ET: 373). On first glance, this seems to indicate that he is looking for justice. However, when he meets Matt and Claire in the maze, he attempts to obfuscate the precise details of Jake's death, claiming that the demon killed Jake: “He's dead. The demon **tore him apart**” (ET: 395) [emphasis mine], as he puts it, and Matt and Claire believe him. While the truth is revealed soon after, it changes little, however, since he appears too far gone to argue with and, unlike Matt and Claire, is armed.

In the end, Kevin's own death is violent and painful: “A bestial snarl fills the air. A horrible ripping sound. Kevin screams. /.../ The camera glimpses Kevin's floating, writhing form **being torn apart**. Kevin bellows a bloodcurdling howl /.../ [which] quickly fades as Kevin plummets into the chasm” (ET: 405–406). Kevin seems the most reluctant to engage with his specter – his unresolved trauma, guilt, and a loss of control – and instead gets angry, enacting violence to regain a sense of agency and power. This also highlights the responsiveness of the haunting once more: intentions have power at Foundation House. What Kevin claims happened to Jake ends up happening to him, instead, perhaps as some form of punishment for his pretense: Kevin has refused entirely to engage in ghostpality with the specter, choosing empty threats of violence and destruction instead.

Kevin seems the most inclined towards theatrics and performance, playing to an imaginary audience during his venture into the well where he discovers the tunnel leading into the spiral. His predisposition to posturing is apparent throughout his reunion with Matt and Claire as well, with him arguing that he is in control of the situation and knows exactly how to fix things once they reach what they term the ‘spirit door’: “I'm gonna dump salt on the threshold, for starters. Then I'll sprinkle it with holy water. And then I'll deliver the coup de grâce when I nail a cross to it. Like a stake through a vampire's heart” (ET: 400). This highlights the ill intent Kevin bears towards the space beneath Foundation House to which the haunting responds, and why his death is arguably the most violent of the four. In comparison, Matt's death is oddly peaceful, brought about as it is by a transformed Claire stopping his heart near the end of the novel (ET: 415).

In addition to displaying Kevin's arrogance, the quoted passage above also demonstrates his fundamental misunderstanding of the narrative he is in since he

expects the haunting to adhere to traditional rules when it is anything but traditional. After all, already in the aftermath of the first paranormal event, Matt writes in his journal: “It’s even possible that this isn’t a classic haunting but instead the product of the Foundation’s forays into weird physics. Some kind of **reality distortion**” (ET: 176) [emphasis mine]. While he is wrong about the former, he does appear to be correct about the latter. This, combined with the narrative’s initial focus on the mystery of the Paranormal Research Foundation and the occult science they conducted in the 1970s, indicates that *Episode Thirteen* is aligned closely with the weird fiction genre. The eventually revealed nature of the haunting cements this idea: “My new home is the dark dimension, which coats the dimensions of light like a thin layer of tendriled [sic], fuzzy black mold” and where “there is no light or time, only gravity and its primordial hum. The spirits ride these warm tidal currents as a multitude of pure frequencies” (ET: 410), as Claire writes. The argument here appears to be that the spirits encountered in the house and the paranormal – the **true** paranormal – is merely science that is not yet understood. This, as shown earlier in the present dissertation, is closely aligned with how weird fiction tends to view the events it depicts. In this, the novel evokes a sense of cosmic horror, which is a common characteristic of the weird-aligned haunted house novels discussed here.

### 5.3. Comparison

Both novels prioritize a search for knowledge, specifically unattainable knowledge, connected to the haunted house. However, where *House of Leaves* ends on the idea that this knowledge is indeed unattainable and not worth having because of its great cost, *Episode Thirteen* implies that, for some, no cost is too great. On the other hand, even once this knowledge is accrued, it is rendered functionally useless because Claire no longer cares about having or using it. This means that the primary specters relating to both novels are the same, taking the form of unattainable knowledge. At the core of these novels is a mystery to be solved. This links them to the illusion heterotopia characteristic of the imaginary axis of the heterotopia. Within these houses, both narratives appear to argue, reality as the characters have known it thus far is no longer tenable, and a new paradigm must be constructed. In this sense, both novels depict an engagement with their specters through ghostpality. However, most of the characters within fail to lay their own specters to rest.

Both houses function as examples of crisis heterotopias where the primary specter presented in the narrative is directly tied to the nature of the haunted house. In *House of Leaves*, the house on Ash Tree Lane is a conduit to change, with mere knowledge of its existence having profound effects. In *Episode Thirteen*, Foundation House functions in an analogous way, being the site where Claire undergoes a transition from the human state of being to an entirely alien one. This, in turn, signifies that on the itinerant axis of the heterotopia, the house on Ash Tree Lane is best characterized as an extrusive heterotopia since its

influence extends well beyond the borders of the physical location while the site itself exemplifies an intrusive heterotopia since it expands further inside itself. Foundation House, on the other hand, appears to be near exclusively an intrusive heterotopia as it draws the investigation team back into itself, similarly expanding inward, but lacks the extrusive aspect displayed by the house on Ash Tree Lane. Thus, the affective atmospheres of both houses appear at odds with one another: whereas the house on Ash Tree Lane extends its influence far beyond the confines of the physical site, pervading through the different narrative layers as well, Foundation House is far more self-contained.

Thus, *House of Leaves* and *Episode Thirteen* both focus on a haunting which is not necessarily depicted as paranormal in the traditional sense, connecting the novels to the weird tradition, which is characterized by the absence of supernatural monsters and prioritizing pseudoscientific approaches. In both novels, the haunting is a natural phenomenon which cannot be explained according to the existing ontological paradigm. Both novels gesture towards the cosmic horror tradition, which draws its horror from incomprehensible phenomena and entities. The house on Ash Tree Lane seems to be one such entity, whereas Foundation House is a conduit for these entities. Crucially, however, it is not the dead who haunt these halls: indeed, neither Foundation House nor the house on Ash Tree Lane present striking characteristics of the temporal axis of the heterotopia. Compared to the house on Ash Tree Lane, Foundation House might be characterized as a heterotopia of accumulating time but the labyrinth beneath is established in the narrative to be transitory, aligning it with the heterotopia of festival time.

Both novels focus heavily on the spatiotemporal qualities of the haunted houses, theorizing to varying degrees on the provenance and effects these have on the people who experience them. *House of Leaves* primarily focuses on the spatial, highlighting this with the ergodic nature of the physical text through font changes, textual placement, and formatting. *Episode Thirteen*, however, appears to prioritize the spatiotemporal qualities of Foundation House through the effects it has on the characters who experience it. Both novels feature teams of explorers. In *House of Leaves*, it is a group of mountaineers hired to venture into the depths of the house. In *Episode Thirteen*, it is a group of paranormal investigators. Both teams approach the houses with a pseudoscientific outlook but quickly realize that existing methods are insufficient for understanding the truth of the house.

Both novels are examples of epistolary literature as there are framing narratives and nestled narratives, and the events within are relayed to the audience through secondary texts rather than direct narration by the characters involved. In *House of Leaves* especially the distance between the characters in the central narrative and the audience is heightened through the framing narratives: *The Navidson Record* is accessible even in the storyworld as a retelling of a film behind two layers of editing. Similarly, *Episode Thirteen* conveys Episode 13 of *Fade to Black* through fragmented transcripts but is covered with only one layer of editing and gives access to the characters' thoughts in the form of journal entries. Here, too, a layer of editing is implied since the characters are aware these texts are meant to be published as supplementary material on the television

show's website. Notably, however, in both novels the poetic images prioritize the characters' experiences regardless of their ostensible focus on the spatiotemporal qualities of the haunted houses. This could be since Thirdspace,<sup>163</sup> which is being constructed throughout both novels, is a combination of imagined and experienced space. To problematize the spatiotemporal for the audience, then, a translation occurs within both novels where the impossible spaces are described.

Moreover, both novels engage with the idea of verticality and the oneiric house. In both a descent is made to access the chthonic, 'real' space of the house by way of a spiral staircase and a labyrinth. This descent is contrasted with the upper levels of the houses, which are in both depicted as safer. In particular, *House of Leaves* pays little attention to the second story of the house on Ash Tree Lane aside from the brief introduction of a new room in the first third of the novel before settling the spatiotemporal oddness on the ground floor. *Episode Thirteen* begins similarly as the first instance of the haunting occurs on the second floor of the building, but moves quickly into the basement and, after that, further below the structure of the house as the investigation team enters the Maze beneath through a descent into the well in the basement. Whereas the strange spaces in *House of Leaves* are depicted as an organic part of the house, in *Episode Thirteen* it is revealed that the Maze below is a pocket dimension, disconnected from the physical site.

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<sup>163</sup> Discussed in section 2.1.3. of the present dissertation.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The horror mode in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: The September House and Diavola

This chapter constitutes the third and final part of the empirical analysis in the present dissertation. It is divided into two sections, each examining a novel which I believe to be examples of the horror mode in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and which have not yet received thorough scholarly attention. The novels, while sharing similarities because of their storytelling mode, take a markedly different approach to the haunted house motif even as they share similar themes and storytelling techniques.

#### **6.1. *The September House* (2023) by Carissa Orlando**

Published in 2023, *The September House* is the debut novel of American author Carissa Orlando. Set in the modern day, the novel follows fifty-something Margaret Hartman, wife to Hal Hartman, and their adult daughter Katherine. The narrative centers on their attempts to find Hal, who has recently left the house the couple bought about four years ago and has not been heard from since. While Margaret is aware that her dream house on Hawthorn Street is very much haunted – and she does not mind – Katherine, unable to perceive the haunting, fears that her mother’s sanity is slipping. Every September, the haunting escalates, and this one might just prove to be the worst of them all. The novel consists of 26 chapters and is narrated in a linear fashion with occasional anachronies in the form of analepses recounting the history between Margaret, Hal, and Katherine. *The September House* is focalized through the perspective of Margaret Hartman and told from first person point of view.

##### **6.1.1. Space in *The September House***

The novel features a single principal setting: the house on Hawthorn Street, described by Margaret as “our dream house” and “truly something to see,” with Margaret saying she loved the house before she ever set foot on the property: “My feet had barely even touched a pebble in the driveway before I knew that this place was my – *our* – home” (TSH: 1) [original emphasis]. Immediately, then, the ideas of the Victorian on Hawthorn Street and of home are intertwined in the novel; for Margaret, this connection will persist throughout. Whenever she speaks of the house, she does so in glowing terms and through personification. “The house was nearly a hundred fifty years old but had aged gracefully, appearing composed and wise instead of decaying and haggard,” as Margaret puts it (TSH: 3). Even after Hal and Margaret have moved in and the haunting has made itself known, she remains undeterred: “The walls of the house were bleeding again.

This sort of thing could be expected; it was, after all, September” (TSH: 7), as she admits at the beginning of the novel. In addition to signaling Margaret’s general disposition towards her life in the haunted house, this passage already illustrates the nature of the haunting.

As the narrative shows, while the house is haunted year-round, things escalate significantly as September progresses, with increasingly unsettling events unfolding over the course of the month. The walls bleed, birds batter themselves to death against the outer walls of the house, there is nightly screaming, and even helpful ghosts such as Fredricka, a former housekeeper, become erratic and a hindrance rather than a help. Grievously wounded dead children, whom Margaret calls “Angelica and all her little friends” (TSH: 28), begin to appear in the house and point towards the boarded-up basement door without saying a word. In the face of all this, Margaret remains unflappable: “Eventually, one has to give up asking questions, just accept that things are the way they are, and act accordingly. So when I woke up to a wall dripping with blood and to a foggy head from not-quite sleeping through hours of moaning, I simply nodded and got on with my morning” (TSH: 9). This early passage illustrates two trends that continue throughout the rest of the novel: firstly, that the novel takes a darkly comedic approach to its depiction of the haunted house, with Margaret’s reactions to the horrifying visuals and events being strangely nonchalant.

The only room in the house that is described in negative terms is the basement, which is described as “unfinished and windowless, with dirt floors and a dank smell,” having “a bit of a wrong sense to it” and raising goosebumps on Margaret’s arms which she disregards as the effects of “the cold air and dim lighting” (TSH: 5). Even the three upstairs bedrooms are described in comparatively positive terms against the basement, despite being haunted: the first houses the ghost of Blythe, a woman burned alive by her husband, the second Jasper, the husband, and the third being “generally fine, although from time to time a large gash would appear on the wall, giving way to some sort of black void oozing something that looked an awful lot like blood but was definitely not blood” (TSH: 75).

In terms of the imaginary axis of the heterotopia, then, the basement serves as a heterotopia of illusion since it is decidedly a negative space, with the rest of the house and the kitchen juxtaposed as a heterotopia of compensation. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that the only entity in the entire building that Margaret considers to be genuinely evil, referred to in the text as Master Vale, resides in the basement where he murdered the children who appear each September and where he died himself. In sharp contrast to this is the kitchen, described as “the brightest room in the house, surrounded with windows displaying the greenery outside” and “a particular haven as September raged on” given that it remained untouched by the blood seeping through the rest of the house (TSH: 12). As expected, the kitchen becomes the room which Margaret increasingly gravitates towards as the month progresses and the haunting worsens. Since the entrance to the basement is located in the kitchen, however, this spot of safety is constantly at risk: the evil of the basement appears to only be held at bay by Bible pages glued to the back of the door and nailed-on boards already coming loose

(TSH: 12–13). Thus, the basement acts as the extrusive aspect of the heterotopia as it is later revealed to be the spot where the sole entity in the house that Margaret considers to be genuinely evil resides (TSH: 274). Indeed, the expansion of the unsettling affective atmosphere of the basement seems to be the reason the house becomes as chaotic in September, the anniversary month of Master Vale’s child murders, with Master Vale also venturing out of the basement more often as the month progresses.

Because of the intrinsic tie between the basement and Master Vale, the latter also acts as the itinerant axis of the heterotopia: he is its intrusive aspect, drawing the other ghosts into his orbit and keeping them tied to the house. This influence is not limited to the dead: Margaret feels discomfort at being away from the house for too long, comparing it to her husband in saying that “the house and Hal had the same sorts of feelings about my leaving” (TSH: 199), as neither wanted Margaret to go and would ensure that she did not with violence. This seems to be an unnecessary rule, however, given that Margaret states that “I’d had no intentions of leaving Hal back then and I certainly had no intentions of leaving the house now” and makes the argument that she loves the house despite its “little idiosyncrasies and headaches” (TSH: 200). This intrusive effect, to the extent that the house locks things within itself, is compounded by the fact that the two men who have attempted to burn the house down and put an end to the haunting both ended up dead within it, as do the police officers who attempt to arrest Margaret and take her away during the climax of the novel: “This house – Master Vale – had very particular opinions about the sorts of things that went on here, about people – me, specifically – leaving,” as Margaret muses (TSH: 313). Thus, the intrusive effect of the heterotopia is also closely tied to adherence to the status quo, and those who attempt to resist or disrupt it end up suffering.

At the climax of the novel, when Master Vale is defeated and gone, however, all who desire can leave, even the ghosts: “Behind me, the pranksters drifted out of the house and down the steps of the front porch, out into the yard. /.../ They were still a rough sight to look upon – pale and wrong in the Technicolor world – but they seemed to be on the mend” (TSH: 337). This, in turn, indicates that the heterotopian capacities of the house as far as they pertain to its itinerant axis as well as to its imaginary axis have been neutralized and the problematic aspect of the haunting solved.

### 6.1.2. Time in *The September House*

In terms of the temporal axis of the heterotopia in *The September House*, the house on Hawthorn Street functions both as a heterotopia of accumulating time as well as a heterotopia of festival time.

In the case of the former, this characteristic of the heterotopia is presented primarily through the spectral residents of the house, originating from the time of the house’s original owners, the Vale family, all the way to the 1990s in Edie, only revealed to be a ghost during the climax of the novel. This connection is multi-faceted: upon touching a ghost, Margaret experiences their last moments alive to

the point of becoming disconnected from the present. A salient example can be found in Chapter Six, where Margaret is asking Fredricka to keep herself hidden from Katherine while the young woman is at the house:

As a final plea to drive my point home, I placed my hand on Fredricka's. /.../

**I saw the world through her eyes and** I was in the dining room, the walls dark and unrecognizable, the thick smell of dinner – a roast – hanging in the air. **I saw the world through her eyes, and** although there were no windows, I knew it was nighttime and the flickering candles on the table cast jagged shadows that twitched and jumped on the wall. **I saw the world through her eyes and** there was a noise as someone shoved their way into the room, the swinging door slamming into the wall and shadows tilting to the side as the flames cowered in the wind. **I saw the world through her eyes and** a man with a wide, gleaming grin lifted his arms and, laughing, swung an axe into her head with furious strength. **I saw the world through her eyes and** I felt her skull collapse and heard a thick noise like a watermelon splitting in two. **I saw the world through her eyes but** one eye went dead, the other remaining trained on that man and his grin, laughter pouring from his mouth.

So, obviously, I tried to refrain from touching Fredricka whenever possible. (TSH: 47) [emphasis mine]

Here, the encounter is described in almost trance-like terms through the phrase “I saw the world through her eyes,” using repetition to reinforce that the existence of a ghost is one unstuck in time, static and unchanging. Because of this, the image of Fredricka’s final night alive is disjointed, more dreamlike and fluid than an objective, itemized retelling. In turn, this creates a strong poetic image, binding together experience and imagination.

The above passage also gestures towards the most prominent specter in the narrative, that of violent history. As the novel progresses, it is gradually revealed that Margaret and Hal’s relationship had not been healthy during Katherine’s childhood, having improved only after Hal had been to prison for his third DUI conviction (TSH: 117). The true extent of what Margaret refers to as their “rough patches” in her statement to the police after Katherine has filed Hal as a missing person, however, is only hinted at. The short Chapter Eleven establishes that the abuse had progressed gradually: from “[t]he first time Hal put his hands on me when he was angry, it wasn’t even that bad” to “[e]ventually, Hal putting his hands on me became commonplace” (TSH: 143). This is developed further in Chapter Seventeen, where Margaret describes how she endured being married to a violent, controlling alcoholic:

Nobody can create rules for [random] situations – they’re too specific. So the rule was to do nothing. **Brace for impact.** For an evening, the house would become a conductor for chaos. I charted the progression of the storm, from slurring to yelling to stumbling to fists to unconsciousness to teary, heartfelt apologies that came either much later that night or the following morning. Clockwork.

/.../ There were good times, times when things were peaceful and everyone got along.

/.../ I never really knew how long the good times would last – sometimes a few days, sometimes a few months – so it was best to enjoy the moments when they were around and not to worry about the future.

/.../ Of course, nothing lasts forever – that’s just the cyclical nature of it all. However, if the rules were followed, the good times could last longer. (TSH: 198) [emphasis mine]

This, in turn, mirrors closely the progression of the haunting occurring at the house on Hawthorn Street: periods of calm interrupted by periods of traumatic activity followed by calm once more. Margaret confirms the parallel in saying that “I can’t tell you how I knew it, but I had a feeling that the house and Hal had the same sorts of feelings about my leaving” (TSH: 199), and it is evident that, to her, the majority of her marriage and the experience of life at Hawthorn Street are very similar and to be approached in the same way: through following mostly unspoken, self-imposed rules, she convinces herself that the horrifying conditions she lives in are fine as long as she survives.

The above passage also signals the way in which the novel engages with the heterotopia of festival time, showing it in two varieties, with the first being Hal’s acts of violence in their previous homes, the most severe of which Margaret glosses over quickly in saying that

[Hal’s] hand met my face with a thundering crack – open palm but hard, hard enough to knock me to the ground. There was a ringing in my ears and my head felt shaken loose. My hand rose to my face, which was hot and stinging. I blinked through the disorientation and saw his feet in front of me.

Things got much, *much* worse from there.

But everything is survivable. And I did survive, of course. So far, my survival rate has been excellent. (TSH: 242).

In this sense, the abusive relationship itself becomes a transient thing, a brief period of hurt and pain to bear in exchange for better times. Margaret genuinely seems to harbor no resentment towards Hal, insisting that they “had six years of bliss after Hal got sober” (TSH: 117), that the relationship improved significantly and that “[e]verything was as it should have been from the beginning” (TSH: 118) before they bought the house and things became strained once more, albeit for entirely different reasons with different outcomes. Thus, Margaret’s entire home life is characterized by heterotopias of festival time since she is always aware that neither peace nor chaos last forever. Because of this, she seems to exist in a transient, precarious space that she considers normal, but which strikes readers as horrifying precisely because this instability defies the norm of a happy home life.

The scene in the above passage is presented in the leadup to the climax of the novel, solidifying the idea that a violent history functions as the novel’s primary specter. But, crucially, it also gestures towards its second, that of safety, specifically, Katherine’s safety. The attack elided in the above passage occurs directly after Margaret steps in to defend Katherine from Hal’s wrath, furious that he had broken what she considered to be the most important rule of all: “the situation

with Hal and me – our disagreements and our oh-so-slow changes and the ever-developing rules and Hal’s unpredictable anger – Katherine was to be spared all of it” (TSH: 237). This sentiment is reiterated later in the scene with “I was perfectly willing to make a heaven of any hell in which I happened to find myself. But I would be goddamned if I made my daughter endure it” (TSH: 241). After Hal finally leaves the house, Margaret expends considerable effort in her injured state to find her phone and contacts her estranged sister to send Katherine to live with her. It is crucial that what spurs Margaret into acting is Katherine being in danger, be it currently or potentially.

Similarly, during the climax of the novel, it is Katherine being dragged into the basement by Master Vale that spurs Margaret into action and, eventually, to triumph over the malicious entity by quite literally speaking with the ghost, telling it to leave the house, echoed by the house’s all other residents. In this sense, then, Margaret engages with the specter of safety through taking a more active role in eliminating the source of danger rather than making herself the target. The tertiary specter in the novel – Katherine’s guilt over being unable to stop the abuse happening to her mother when she was a child – is similarly engaged with when Katherine steps in to attack Master Vale and to allow her mother to escape, enabling them to exorcise the metaphysical and metaphorical specters.

As signaled above, Margaret prefers to avoid thinking about the specifics of the abuse she has endured, and the specifics of violence in general if she can at all help it. During her and Hal’s confrontation with Master Vale in the basement during the previous September, there is a temporal glitch as the notions of the past and the present are described as being hazy: “there [Master Vale] was, blinking into existence as the lights worked into a frenzy, the time frame of the world around us shifting from now to then” (TSH: 220–221). They are seemingly transported to the time when Master Vale killed his first victim, a young girl named Angelica. The murder is described sparingly, however: “What had happened to Angelica had happened a very, very long time ago. I knew how this story ended. I had read the newspaper clippings, I knew about her disappearance. But most of all, I had seen her. I knew what had happened to her head” (TSH: 222). The act itself, i.e., that Vale used a hammer on the girl’s head, is described simply with “[t]hen, the thing that had happened to Angelica’s head happened” (*ibid.*). This, in turn, connects the notion of time in the context of the novel to the notion of experience: the novel is more inclined to engage with how time is perceived and experienced rather than with the specifics of how time functions in the house. Even the month of September, albeit dreaded, seems to pass faster than Margaret realizes.

### 6.1.3. Experience in *The September House*

On the anthropological axis of the heterotopia, the house functions as a heterotopia of crisis. It is at the house where Margaret stays firm to herself for the first time in her relationship with Hal as she refuses to leave it despite his arguments,

and it is where Margaret takes action for the second time in her life to protect her daughter from a cruel man. This time, however, instead of sending Katherine away and staying behind, she takes the initiative in banishing the offending presence from her home. The breaking point comes when Margaret is being attacked by Master Vale, forcing her to reassess not only her prior understanding of herself and her place in the world, but also what she wants from the future:

I'd been moving in wretched little circles for as long as I could remember – longer – and I was not about to have it all end like this, snuffed out in the basement only to flicker back, likely in September. I would twist my life into a line that pointed towards something worthwhile for myself, for Katherine, even if it killed me. Which, at the moment, it seemed intent on doing. (TSH: 326)

This passage presents the culmination of Margaret's character arc which began with the purchase of the house. Her refusal to leave it once the extent of the haunting became clear signaled the second time she had stood her ground. Here, she is defending both the house and Katherine. Indeed, there appears to be a parallel between the house and Katherine in the novel, tied together because Margaret loved both sight unseen. As she says about the house, "I knew it [was our dream house] from the moment I saw the listing in the newspaper" (TSH: 1), and about her daughter, "I knew even before the sonogram told me that my baby would be a girl, and her name would be Katherine" (TSH: 280).

Margaret's life both before and after purchasing the house is characterized by rules and rituals. In Chapter Seven, for example, she states that "every situation, no matter how unusual, has rules. They might be strange rules, and they might be difficult to figure out, but once they are learned, they can be followed. And everything works out" (TSH: 91). This stance is later revealed to have developed in Margaret because of her life experience in general, but it is notable that she brings the attitude to the haunting at the house on Hawthorn Street as well. While certain rules might be inconvenient (e.g., no fires in the house at any time because Blythe, having died by fire, objects to them (*ibid.*)) or downright unpleasant (e.g., Margaret having to dig up Elias's mother's bones if she wants Elias to be calm for about a week) – some things in the house remain beyond Margaret's control. Her attitude towards this, too, seems blasé:

Take, for instance, the blood dripping down the walls every September. Logic would dictate that the rule should be to clean it up, but that course of action is never particularly effective. So it seems that the rule is simply to do nothing. /.../  
**Knowing how much blood is on the stairs doesn't change how much blood is on the stairs.** (TSH: 93). [emphasis mine]

This sentiment – that one must accept there are problems one cannot solve and must simply endure – is referred to later in the novel multiple times. The phrase "brace for impact," in particular, is used both on page 93 to refer to the escalation of the haunting during September and to how Margaret tolerated being married to Hal during the height of his abuse and alcoholism on page 198. This, in turn,

further cements the parallels between Margaret's experience of life at a haunted house and life in an abusive marriage.

When Katherine pushes back against her mother on her statement that she would take Hal back, were he to return, echoes another refrain phrase, repeated throughout the novel: “[Katherine] shook her head. ‘No one deserves to live like this,’ she said. *No one deserves to live like this*, Hal had said to me that night as he was begging me to get into the cab with him. *No one deserves to live like this*, Edie had said to me that morning on the porch, watching me sob over Master Vale” (TSH: 193–194) [original emphasis]. Here, the parallel between the marriage and the house is amplified by Margaret's indignant response that

[o]f *course* no one deserves to live like this. Of *course* this isn't a hell anybody wants to walk through, least of all alone. But none of that exactly matters, now does it? It doesn't change reality. /.../ There's no sense in bellyaching over it if it can't be changed. One does what one must. *There are rules* (TSH: 194) [original emphasis].

At this point, Margaret's nonchalant attitude towards the house which works during the first half of the novel as black comedy and optimistic resistance, offering a relief to the tension of the haunting, appears as defeatism and denial. Since Margaret does not consider herself capable of making changes, she spends no effort on trying.

Before the above, Margaret muses on how Katherine had asked Margaret to leave Hal, who in turn had asked Margaret to leave the house on Hawthorn Street. In both instances, Margaret had been asked the same question: why would she stay? Margaret's response, in both cases, was to wonder why that mattered. Thus, Margaret shields herself from the horrors she faces and has faced by denying her own agency and, to an extent, complicity. “It wasn't horrible every single day – so few things ever are – and when it wasn't horrible, it was almost lovely,” she says, following the statement with what is perhaps the most significant passage in the entire novel:

I knew how to survive here, and I always had the sense that if I just survived long enough, if I just played by the rules well enough, I could make it into a perfect home once and for all. I just needed to work a little harder. I loved this house. And **you didn't give up on the things you loved** (TSH: 191–192).

Given that this attitude has worked for her before as her marriage significantly improved once Hal went to counseling and got sober, she insists it might work with the haunting as well.

As already hinted above, another significant aspect of the novel is the contrasting of perspectives when it comes to the house, especially those of Margaret and Katherine – but, to a lesser extent, Hal's as well. For Margaret, as discussed, the house is an object of affection, its flaws and shortcomings irrelevant if there are positives as well. The experience of the haunting within is of no particular concern to Margaret for most of the year: as mentioned above, she has rules and

rituals tailored to co-existing with the entities living in the house. Examples of these abound in Chapter Seven in particular, the most significant of which is what Margaret says about Jasper, the “crumpled man in the upstairs closet” and the murderer of Blythe and Fredricka: “you can live with something without approving of it – those are two different things. You can live with many, many things you find deplorable. Especially when there are rules” (TSH: 92–93). Again, Margaret is taking things in stride, evidenced also in the fact that she affectionately refers to the ghosts of the dead children who appear in September as “pranksters” throughout the novel.

This contrasts sharply with Hal’s experience of the haunting in the house, firstly because he does not see all the ghosts all the time, like Margaret, and secondly because Master Vale is personally targeting him. It is Hal that Master Vale speaks to – a fact which Margaret is surprised by as the entity has never spoken to her, merely “gave chase” whenever he saw Margaret around the house (TSH: 214) – and physically injures during Hal and Margaret’s venture into the basement in the previous September. This experience that results in a sense of complete loss of control in Hal is implied to be what makes him drink again. It is significant that Hal is not the first man accosted by Master Vale in such a way. Indeed, Margaret witnesses the cyclical violence enacted by Master Vale even after his death during the climax of the novel:

I saw how he did something to Elias’ mother (Hattie – her name was Hattie) that made Elias the way he was and later made Hattie die and slowly, slowly made Elias die too, full of hate, alone in the room that would later be Hal’s office.

**I saw Master Vale whisper to Jasper night after night** until Jasper did what he did to Fredricka and Blythe and, when he finally came to his senses, tried to light the whole house on fire but failed, failed.

I saw Master Vale suck the joy out of Edie’s soul and smile down at her as she slipped into breathless sleep.

**I saw him hovering over Hal in his office, whispering, whispering, whispering,** until Hal bought the cans of gasoline and Master Vale crushed him like a spider in the basement. (TSH: 325–326) [emphasis mine]

In addition to Master Vale’s own killings, described at the beginning of the passage, it is made clear here that men and women in the house have different experiences of the haunting. The men experience something like possession and are incited towards violence only to be punished when they attempt to destroy the house whereas the women have violence enacted upon them, but Master Vale does not kill them unlike the men. Father Cyrus, an elderly priest Margaret and Hal have requested to bless the house, becomes a victim of Master Vale, too and is pinned in place and forced to vomit flies; later on, it is revealed that he died about a week later (TSH: 61–62; 264). Master Vale only becomes a genuine threat to Margaret’s life when she attempts to fight back during the climax of the novel, and it is Katherine’s interference that allows Margaret to escape, if but for a moment.

On the other hand, however, it is important to note that, for most of the novel, Katherine does not experience the haunting at all. Instead, because of her mother's erratic behavior and seeming lack of care for her father's disappearance, the passage of time, and the world around her, she comes to suspect that her mother is losing her mind. Even in her sleep deprived state in the middle of September, Margaret finds Katherine's inability to see the ghosts puzzling:

Elias was right there, plain as day, very real and very toothy. He growled at me, his lips curling, revealing more of my blood caught in his gums. Yep, he was there all right. /.../

'Who are you talking about, Mom?' Katherine moved closer.

/.../ She strode past me to peer into the living room, walking right through the line of pranksters. They parted like the seas for her but kept their eyes on me.

She couldn't see them. (TSH: 208)

Before the events of the novel, Katherine had never been to her parents' house – they purchased it after she had already left for college – and the severity of the haunting seems to lessen when she is around. As Margaret notes: "Like feral cats, [the pranksters] kept their distance around strangers, saving the yowling and scratching for people with whom they were familiar" (TSH: 183). Because Katherine cannot see the ghosts, she believes that her mother is behind the strange occurrences at the house, such as kitchen knives ending up in the upstairs bathroom, furniture being moved around downstairs, and even the injuries Margaret sustains during the incident with Elias cited above.

Katherine's lack of perception and experience with the haunting compounds the effect of Chapter Twenty-Five and what is perhaps the most harrowing sequence in the novel, the prelude to the climax where police officers arrive at the house for their second visit, having finally figured out that Hal returned to the house a day after he left. As the sequence progresses, Margaret is questioned once again, answering the questions the same way she had during the first conversation but with the crucial difference that she is finally acknowledging her memory of Hal's return to the house. During the conversation, however, one of the officers approaches the basement door and ventures downstairs despite Margaret's protests – and discovers Hal's body, crumpled up in a corner of the basement. The questioning changes with that, and despite Margaret's insistence that the house is haunted and that Hal was killed by Master Vale for trying to burn the house down, the police become convinced that she murdered her husband. Since no one can confirm the reality of the haunting, in her exhausted and mentally drained state, Margaret begins to question her own perception of events and the truth of the haunting:

In my mind's eye, I could see the pranksters fading, drifting from transparent to nearly invisible. With no trace left behind, it was hard to say if they had even been there in the first place. I looked at the scars on my arms. They did closely resemble the scratches Hal used to leave on me in those early days. Now that I examined them closely, I couldn't see how they came from teeth at all. /.../

I looked around the room, saw what utter disarray the house was in. The cabinets were still thrown open from my search for the bones, revealing the smattering of random objects that lay inside. The sink was a grimy mess, covered in mud and debris. There was dirt everywhere, dark footprints and handprints covering most surfaces. And the *flies*. God, how had I gotten so used to the flies? (TSH: 299) [original emphasis]

This is perhaps one of the most poignant passages in the novel precisely because it puts under question the verity of the entire text that precedes it, especially as Margaret begins to suspect that the police may be right and she may have indeed murdered her husband. Even though the police officers seem to act in Margaret's best interests, it is telling that the scene brings to mind how in actual police interrogations people can be coerced into accepting responsibility for and confessing to crimes they never committed. This circles back to the central characteristic of Margaret in the novel, her willingness to accept the unacceptable.

When Margaret accepts that the police will take her away from the house, however, the haunting ramps up to an unprecedented level, with the events which usually occur gradually over the course of September happening seemingly all at once: moaning that escalates to screams, birds battering themselves against the outer walls of the house, the walls bleeding to the point that blood gushes down the staircase and pools on the floor. Ghosts appear, finally seen by all.

From out of the kitchen, behind everybody, darted Angelica. She ran full tilt, her mouth open but soundless, her stringy hair whipping about and her dirty dress fluttering behind her, her skinny little arm gesturing back towards the basement. Her head was cracked open and her eye wasn't right and she ran like something awful was chasing her.

Everyone screamed. (TSH: 307)

One by one, the resident ghosts of the house appear, trying to escape the house but failing. Just as quickly as it began, however, it ends – only to ramp up again with the male police officers in the house being killed by Master Vale one by one in the same way he killed Jasper and Hal. The only police officer who survives this sequence is the female Officer Jones, who spends the confrontation in the basement pinned to the ceiling of the living room, vomiting flies. The final confrontation between Master Vale and Margaret occurs in the basement, ending outside of the house when, with the help of the other ghosts, she finally banishes the entity from the house.

## **6.2. *Diavola* (2024) by Jennifer Thorne**

Published in 2024, *Diavola* is the second horror novel of American author Jennifer Thorne. Set in the present day, the novel follows the three generations of the Pace family, American tourists who have rented a renovated historical villa outside of a remote Tuscan town for the yearly family trip abroad. The narrative

is centered on Anna, a visual artist, whose relationship with her siblings and parents is best described as strained. Soon after arriving at Villa Taccola,<sup>164</sup> Anna begins to understand that all is not as it seems at the beautiful house, and that great danger lurks in the picturesque Italian countryside.

The novel consists of 44 sections, narrated in a linear fashion with occasional anachronies in the form of analepses as well as an epilogue set around ten years later. *Diavola* is focalized through the perspective of Anna Pace and narrated in third person limited point of view.

### 6.2.1. Space in *Diavola*

The novel features two principal settings: Villa Taccola and Anna's apartment in New York City, with the bulk of the narrative taking place in the former. The countryside around the Villa is described as picturesque – “[s]kinny cypress and squat olive trees, tidy lines of vineyard hills, beautifully crumbling walls, villages that had been clinging to their rocky brown hillsides for a thousand years or more” (D: 9) – and on first glance the house fits in perfectly with its surroundings. However, there is something unnerving about it. As Anna thinks while making her approach after being dropped off at the gate by a taxi driver:

There was something careful about the energy here. Not calm, exactly. More... preserved in amber. /.../ **There was a perfect circle of dirt surrounding the house and drive, inside of which even weeds didn't grow.** Not well-tended gravel. Dirt. Remnants of dead plants poking up in places. /.../ Anna slowed her step, allowing the sense of this place to wind tight around her. The sunlight and shadow, the isolation. Something else she couldn't yet name. (D: 10) [emphasis mine]

Early in the novel, then, the dead circle around the house is described. This already indicates the presence of an itinerant heterotopia: as Anna puts it, the dead circle “surrounded the house in all directions, as if there were some pollution oozing from the foundation of the villa into the soil” (D: 20). Later, in the middle of night, Anna almost catches some people pouring salt<sup>165</sup> on the line of rot pulsing forward from the house: “They'd been standing right here, at the dead line, the edge of the expanding wasteland. And it was expanding, there was no doubt – the nonarable circle reached much farther than it had when Anna arrived here” (D: 102). The heterotopia of Villa Taccola is thus extrusive, extending beyond the borders of the house and, eventually, the estate.

The actual Villa Taccola, however, is described through details rather than holistically:

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<sup>164</sup> ‘Taccola’ is Italian for ‘jackdaw,’ the motif which recurs throughout the novel.

<sup>165</sup> Salt has been used across the globe for millennia for protection and to ward off evil.

[Anna] set down her shoulder bag and looked around, making a mental sketch instead, marking the gently worn tile roofline, **the square tower that rose elegantly from the western wall**. There was a single tall window set high in the tower, thick curtains drawn, obscuring the view inside, but as Anna peered up, hand shading her eyes, she saw the fabric move like someone had been spying but had darted away to hide. (D: 11) [emphasis mine]

Immediately, attention is drawn to the tower, which might be called the center of the house that is later revealed to be the epicenter of the haunting. Looking at the house from the back yard, however, the building is described through pointedly visceral terms:

[Villa Taccola] looked much less elegant from this angle. The great glass extension blocked the original architecture, creating the effect of **something amputated and replaced with the wrong prosthesis**. /.../ In contrast to the blinding new-build, the stone tower loomed unnervingly dark, like a great shadow cast by nothing. (D: 17) [emphasis mine]

This foreshadows the later developments of the novel pertaining to the haunting, which will be discussed in depth in section 6.3.3. In terms of space, however, it is significant that the house consists of the original, historical building, and a modern addition. This gives the house a disjointed character, troubling its internal cohesion as a place and segmenting it into the old and the new. In turn, the lack of cohesion affirms the affective atmosphere of the house expanding beyond its original borders.

Eventually Anna discovers the truth about the house and its strangeness from the Italian caretaker:

[The house] had to be fed. **If it wasn't fed, her rot would spread**. It had happened before. The villa had lain empty and the dead circle around the house had spread down the hill. Crops had failed. Villagers had grown ill, died. Some had simply vanished. They checked now. They turned up at night, spread salt or whatever, made sure the decay didn't go past *la capra*<sup>166</sup>. (D: 199) [bolded emphasis mine]

This implies significant agency for the house. When taken together with the paragraph which precedes it, discussing the most prominent ghost infesting the place, a spirit called La Dama Bianca,<sup>167</sup> however, it is evident that the hunger does not concern the house but the spirit within, indicated perhaps also through the use of the feminine possessive pronoun. In this way, the novel takes a classical approach towards the extrusive heterotopia as its mobile aspect is metaphysical

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<sup>166</sup> Italian for “the goat”: this refers to the “gangly goat” near the edge of the property, “tied to a post” mentioned for the first time on page 9, the animal apparently being used as an early detection system of sorts.

<sup>167</sup> Italian for “The White Lady.” Sometimes referred to as woman in white, a White Lady is an archetypal ghost in folklore and urban legend, often the spirit of a young woman who has been either murdered or otherwise betrayed by a lover.

rather than something physical, as was the case with *Mexican Gothic*. Anna uncovers the information, however, only the very last hours of the family at the house before they flee the property.<sup>168</sup>

Anna's apartment in New York, in contrast, seems fine when she returns to it: "Her apartment opened with a faint puff. It smelled stale in here, but her own brand of stale. Her own stagnant, decomposing skin cells welcoming her back" (D: 221). It does not take long, however, for her to realize that La Dama, attached to the key to the tower back in Villa Taccola, has followed her home:

Anna walked past framed art, shining door handles, open laptop screen, and sour spit bubbled in her throat. The bathroom mirror had begun to fog up, but not so much that she couldn't see it standing behind her. Piss-yellow hair, coiled and stringy, sweat-sodden sleeves, face obscured. (D: 223)

This, in turn, marks the beginning of the haunting in the final third of the novel, with La Dama following Anna around to the point where Anna stops showering entirely to avoid being nude around the entity. Plagued by bizarre dreams and the ever-present entity, Anna's perception of the passage of time and reality become unreliable, culminating in her quitting her job at the advertising agency and being evicted from her apartment due to noise complaints from the neighbors. Her relationship with the entity, however, transforms during this time from simple fear to a grudging acceptance tinted with resentment, illustrated by an exchange that occurs early on:

Back home, Anna picked at a microwave meal on her sofa, but gave up when she heard something slowly scratching the inside of the front door. Could have been a bug, but this was steady. And big. Fingernails.

"Wanna go out?" Anna called through a full mouth. "I'll let you out."

It kept going. *Scratch*.

"You need a nail file?" Anna rubbed her temple. "They're in the bathroom."

The sound stopped, and she felt a full second of satisfaction before the bathroom door slammed shut, and she flinched so hard her dinner spilled out of its tray.

*This is not sustainable*, Anna thought, downing her sleeping pill with a glass of water instead of wine. (D: 236)

Here, the interplay between the compensation and the illusion heterotopia becomes visible through character interaction. Firstly, the presence of La Dama in Anna's home forces the latter to re-examine her relationship to and perception of a site that, ostensibly, belongs to her. Secondly, the signs of haunting which occurred in the Villa Taccola sections of the novel – e.g., food going rancid more rapidly than normal, strange noises and furniture being moved around, lost time – persist in New York, arguably becoming more intense since La Dama's attention is no longer divided between all the Paces and is instead focused solely on Anna. This, taken together, indicates that the imaginary axis of the heterotopia is

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<sup>168</sup> I will return to this in section 6.2.3..

engaged throughout the novel, forcing constant re-evaluations with the two primary settings never quite settling permanently at either end of the axis: both sites, I would argue, are equally real and unreal because of the heterotopia's intrinsic connection to La Dama Bianca.

### 6.2.2. Time in *Diavola*

The notion of time in *Diavola* is decidedly troubled. On several occasions, the haunting includes lost time. The first of these incidents occurs about halfway through the novel during the Paces' stay at Villa Taccola. Having returned from an excursion on Wednesday, the group discovers two facts at breakfast the next morning. Firstly, Benny's boyfriend Christopher has seemingly left both the villa and Benny. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, they discover that an entire day has gone by unremembered: "Nicole had already turned away, but Anna caught a glimpse of the date before the screen blinked out again. Friday, August 9. She could swear today was Thursday. Because yesterday was very obviously Wednesday" (D: 167). The argument continues in a circular fashion, with Anna and Nicole being insistent that it should be August 8<sup>th</sup>: "She wanted to press her sister about yesterday – she felt like all rationality was slipping loose around her, and Nicole, of all people, was the last bastion – but tears had started to form in Nicole's eyes" (D: 169). Anna's nieces say their heads hurt, but the confusion clears quickly. Anna is alone in her distress about the missing day.

While the strained relationships between Anna and the rest of the family have been suggested in the prior sections of the novel, it is during lunch that Anna is shown to stand alone, as always: "Anna gripped the stem of her wineglass. 'Nobody should be going back to that house.' Everyone stared at Anna. As if this was a strange thing to say, as if it wasn't the most rational response right now" [original emphasis] (D: 181). The more she insists there is something wrong with the house, the more adamant the others become that everything is fine. Anna's parents become agitated, her usually stoic father accusing her of trying to derail their expensive vacation (D: 185). This, in turn, hints at what I would argue to be the primary specter in the novel: resentment.

As the narrative progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that Anna is the scapegoat of the family, blamed for everything from Nicole's disrespectful high school boyfriend to Benny's unlucky love life. Yet, Anna cannot help feeling responsible for their well-being:

She owed it to the rest of them to drag them out of danger. They were her family. Everybody kept telling her how important that was. And while the collective concept of the Paces as a family made Anna grind her teeth, when she pictured them individually /.../ her heart beat faster with resolve. At the very least, she had to find out what was happening. (D: 188)

Fittingly, after the family escapes from the house soon after, Anna's duty appears to be finished. Since they have not included her in the new accommodations, she leaves for the train station:

She pictured the Paces in their new Airbnb in Florence, opening a bottle of Chianti. Maybe they'd talk about her, how she'd taken off. Not about Christopher, no, they wouldn't want to upset Benny. No rehashing of the horrors of last night either, or every wrong moment that led to it, just the worn grooves of that old album, "Ugh, *Anna*."

**She didn't even begrudge them it.** They needed to do what Dad was doing, repacking those bags, smudging the edges of everything that had just happened, blurring back into the sensation of normal life. (D: 219) [bolded emphasis mine]

Here, it is apparent that Anna is aware of her position in the family hierarchy but, crucially, it marks the beginning of Anna's independence by opening to ghostpiality towards the specter of resentment. By accepting that, no matter what she does, she will always be the scapegoat, Anna begins the process of disentangling herself from her family. While she reaches out to her twin brother and her mother a few times in the following sections of the novel, whatever bonds were there before the Villa have been irreparably damaged.

This, in turn, culminates in the final phone call between Anna and Benny, where the old accusations and resentments resurface:

"When chaos creeps back into your life without me there to blame for it – and it will, Benny, that's just life – /.../ pretend I'm dead. *Assume* it. Deal?"

/.../ "Yeah," he said. "Deal."

And Anna hung up.

**The room spun with glee,** and Anna held on. [...] She thought of how he used to grab her face, giggling, and kiss it, and she wept, right there on the kitchen floor. She shook with it, moaned like she was poisoned, and **she felt the air laughing around her, dancing merrily.** (D: 298–299) [bolded emphasis mine]

At first glance, it is merely La Dama's glee that is being depicted here as her efforts of isolating Anna and driving her to despair seem to have worked. However, when contrasted with the later revelations – that Anna spent most of her time in New York trying to figure out how to exorcise the ghost tormenting her – this moment also functions as the culmination of Anna's character arc. Here, she finally lays the specter of resentment to rest by cutting the last ties between herself and her blood relatives. The next day, she buys plane tickets to return to Italy and to finish things with Villa Taccola once and for all.

The second instance of lost and expanded time occurs back in New York. Having returned home, Anna finds that the intricate iron key she had thrown as far as she could while escaping from the house has somehow appeared in her pocket, the villa's most powerful ghost in tow (D: 222–223). However, the lost time or the persistent haunting does not seem to bother Anna in New York: "All she could do was carry on, breathe through the frustration, and continue. To what? To live, she guessed. Keep cursed and carry on." (D: 272). Here, the second

specter of the novel becomes apparent, that of Anna's self-loathing. As she tells La Dama during the climax of the novel:

"I thought I was terrified of you all this time – I mean, I was. At first, I was! You're disgusting, and you pop up at the most awkward moments. But /.../ [i]t wasn't you that really scared me. /.../ It was *me*. How fucking done I was. The consequences of that feeling." (D: 310)

In this sense, then, the time lost and the haunting in New York has not necessarily been a negative experience for Anna as it has helped her pinpoint the problems in her life and to engage with the specters that she has refused to deal with until then. By taking control and fighting La Dama, Anna engages in ghostpality with the specter of her self-loathing and ends up having a transformative experience as the haunting forces her to reassess the direction of her life and to make changes, to put her own happiness above that of others.

Because of this, on the temporal axis of the heterotopia, Villa Taccola functions as a heterotopia of accumulating time on two levels. The first is the metaphysical one, as a nexus for what remains of the spirits of La Dama's victims across the centuries. The second is the metaphorical one as dealing with the literal haunting allows Anna to also address the lifelong spectral influences of resentment and self-loathing that have haunted her.

### 6.2.3. Experience in *Diavola*

As discussed earlier, the haunting at Villa Taccola in the earlier sections of the novel culminates in the section titled 'Finale,' where the family is physically assaulted by the spectral. Anna's young nieces vomit wine, her parents get trapped in their bedroom, Benny's hand is pierced by a door hinge, and Anna gets accosted by La Dama to an unprecedented extent:

The instant her fingers closed around the [stuffed toy], she felt something grab at her in exactly the same way – cold, damp fingers twisting around her ankle.

She kicked, but it only made the fingers slide higher, up into the leg of her jeans, all the way to the inside of her thigh. The fingers curled. She felt its nails start to scratch.

And then the tongue. Running along the arch of her foot. (D: 212)

Here, the tactile component of the haunting is highlighted: in addition to being a mental and spiritual violation, it is also a physical one. Throughout the following sections of the novel this physicality continues, indicating that the affective atmosphere of Villa Taccola and particularly its tower is pervasive. It expands through not only the building but also to the estate around it as the novel progresses, even following Anna all the way to New York because of its connection with La Dama Bianca.

In the section titled *Everything Becomes Mine*, the provenance of the haunting is explained through a series of images in Anna's dreams where Anna witnesses

the transformation of a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Florentine woman, Caterina Colonna, into the entity now haunting Villa Taccola, from her relationship with an unnamed man to being abandoned by him. This is followed by La Dama's arrival at Villa Taccola, her seduction of the man's eldest son, and her poisoning the entire family before killing herself and binding them all to the house forever. At the end, Anna wakes to find La Dama watching over her:

A shadow of a woman loomed at the foot of her bed. It had been watching her dream.

Anna could see only its outline, but she knew it was smirking. She felt it, the negative image of it, imprinted in her mind.

*You're mine*, it seemed to say. *Your dreams are my dreams now, your brain my brain.*

*Everything becomes mine.*

Anna waited for it to go, to blink away, but it never did, only got blurred by daylight, so she couldn't tell if it was still at the foot of the bed or right beside her, above her.

**Inside her this whole time.** (D: 231) [bolded emphasis mine]

Crucially, this indicates a blending of Anna and La Dama. Indeed, the two characters share an intrinsic quality: they are both, at their core, angry. While Anna has spent her life thus far suppressing her emotions, La Dama is emotion made manifest. In a metaphorical sense, the destructive power of the entity has been within her the entire time.

While the most egregious aspects of the haunting stop once the spirit is trapped into the tower at the climax of the novel, the suggestion of a possible return remains in the epilogue:

[Anna] feels no gripping hands, no weight like a hood behind her. Only the lump in her pocket, as ever. Sometimes the key gets hot. Sometimes it rattles. Sometimes she has the oddest urge to swallow it in one gulp or chew it or ram it into her eye. **Mostly she wants to drive it deep into that lock back at Villa Taccola and turn it hard and swing that door open and feel release in every cell of her body.**

Every day, she feels that urge. Every day, she says no. (D: 321)

Here, Anna is positioned almost as a recovering addict, constantly fighting the urge to indulge again. The act of opening the tower door and unleashing La Dama is described in pointedly erotic terms, echoing the intimate elements of the haunting in the New York sequence, where Anna dreamed of having sex with the entity multiple times despite finding it disgusting. Despite her hatred, on some level Anna still craves intimacy with the entity even though she prefers solitude. The haunting depicted in *Diavola* thus has a seductive element which sustains a tension between Anna's disgust towards the entity and its persisting influence in her life and mind. In this sense, the haunting is classical as its pull continues even after its ostensible end, a characteristic present in other novels discussed in the

empirical section of this dissertation such as *Mexican Gothic*, albeit with a different set of connotations.

As the novel progresses and particularly in the final third, the narrative makes a sharp turn towards a more humorous tone, with Anna reacting to La Dama increasingly dismissively even as the haunting escalates. This indicates firstly that Anna has arrived at and passed her breaking point in her perception and understanding of reality. Even the death of her ex-boyfriend, to whom she had attempted to pass on the iron key, is depicted jarringly off-handedly. After a glimpse of Josh's body being removed by paramedics, "Anna picked up the key with the tips of her fingernails and dumped it back into her bedside drawer. 'Worth a try,' she said. She could have sworn the drawer laughed" (D: 290). Secondly, this seems to gesture towards a trend in contemporary horror where elements of humor are used to break the constant tension.<sup>169</sup> When Anna has returned to Villa Taccola alone and is trying to imprison La Dama during the climax of the novel, she chastises the entity with "'Could you back the fuck off for two seconds? I am *monologuing!*'" (D: 308) [original emphasis], her fury potent enough to send "La Dama flying across the kitchen and onto the tile wall with a thud that rattled the villa's foundations" (*ibid.*). Anna continues to taunt the spirit even as she works on the binding ritual, finding a sense of satisfaction in finally taking an active role in her life. She attains freedom by experiencing a visceral haunting, performing the ritual partly to free herself from La Dama and partly to set free the other spirits imprisoned in the vortex of La Dama's presence at Villa Taccola.

Certainly, although the experience has changed Anna's life irrevocably – in the epilogue, we see that she no longer lives in the United States, no longer works at an advertising agency, and no longer speaks to her family – it is apparent that it was not entirely negative. Anna appears far happier at the end of the novel than at the beginning, the self-imposed limitations now removed. Anna's stay at Villa Taccola was, unequivocally, a metamorphic experience and, for her, the heterotopia has no confining qualities. This is similar to the other novels discussed in the present dissertation where the haunting experience has been of the crisis variety: they have all involved a price of some sort, physical or metaphysical. In Anna's case, while she loses her old life, she gains a better life at the cost of being disowned by her family and constantly reminded of Villa Taccola because of the tower key she carries.

The heterotopia depicted here seems to be of the crisis rather than deviation variety on the anthropological axis. For all its horrors, in the end Villa Taccola ends up being a transformative space for Anna, helping her to cut her family from her life as well as to move to Europe and pursue a career as an artist rather than working a dead-end job at an advertising agency. *Diavola* thus offers an interesting

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<sup>169</sup> A recent example of this in haunted house fiction can be found in Grady Hendrix's 2023 novel *How to Sell a Haunted House*, which interlaces humor and horror not only in its style but also its content. The final confrontation in the novel, for example, is between the main characters and a giant ghost-animated pile of puppets.

inversion of the traditional family haunting narrative where the family is brought closer together after the experience. Here, it is revealed in the epilogue that the family has fallen apart entirely in the ten years between the main body of the narrative and the epilogue, with Nicole's eldest daughter Waverly no longer speaking with her now-divorced parents, her uncle, and her grandparents, trying to reconnect with her aunt Anna, instead.

### 6.3. Comparison

As I have demonstrated, both novels belong to the horror mode of the contemporary haunted house narrative. This is illustrated by the fact that both novels contain comedic elements, thus displaying a hybridity which I have argued is characteristic of the horror mode in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In *The September House*, Margaret's nonchalance towards the haunting is depicted as comedic during the first half of the novel only to be later turned around and revealed to be a coping mechanism she has developed over the course of her residence at the house and, to a lesser extent, throughout her relationship with her abusive husband. In *Diavola*, the comedic elements are particularly pronounced in the latter third of the novel once Anna has reached her breaking point and no longer cares whether she survives the experience. Her nonchalant dismissal of La Dama Bianca, moreover, is precisely what allows her to succeed in locking the entity away.

Both novels depict their respective haunted locations as heterotopias of crisis, where the focal female character undergoes a transformation which enables her to stand up for herself. In *The September House*, this moment is seen in the climax of the novel where Margaret, with the other ghosts in the house, evicts Master Vale whereas in *Diavola* this moment occurs earlier, with Anna finally cutting off her family. The novels are also similar in that both problematize the notion of the happy nuclear family. *The September House* sees Margaret entirely unconcerned by Hal's disappearance and when it is revealed that he has been dead in the basement the entire time the novel depicts, neither she nor Katherine seem particularly affected by this. In *Diavola*, Anna detaches herself from her family entirely by the end of the novel, finally recognizing that their presence in her life does not have a positive effect.

Both novels also feature specters which have, in one way or another, to do with guilt and a lack of agency. In *The September House*, the primary specter is violent (family) history both for the house and the Hartman family, to which the secondary specters of precarious safety and a child's guilt are directly connected. These specters are addressed and excised in the climax of the novel, with Master Vale as the symbolic embodiment of the violent history and Margaret and Katherine's direct actions in evicting him their engagement in ghostpality. Ghostpality is thus not always **acceptance** of the specter but rather the acknowledgment of it. In *Diavola*, the primary specter seems to be (familial) resentment, which is directly connected to the second, Anna's self-hatred. Compared to the tentative optimism in *The September House* which allows for the specters to be excised,

however, in *Diavola* the narrative seems to affirm that Anna's nihilism is, at least in engaging with ghostpality, liberating. In detaching from her family and confronting La Dama, Anna attains a sense of agency which is hard-won since it has cost her everything she believed she needed. However, this is a positive development, because the epilogue sees her happier than before, making a fresh start in her life. In this way, the specters in both novels also directly correspond to the crisis nature of the heterotopias depicted within.

The heterotopias are similar in temporality as well, with both functioning as heterotopias of festival time primarily since the hauntings are cyclical and occur sporadically. Because of this, both novels trouble temporality as the perception of time is put under question rather than time itself. Septembers in the house on Hawthorn Street blend together for Margaret, with clear delineation between days becoming blurrier as the month progresses, and in Villa Taccola, the Paces lose an entire day without perceiving it to have passed. Crucially, the provenance of these houses and the hauntings within is uncovered over the course of the novels, linking the two to the haunted house formula. Similarly to the weird mode, however, both novels prioritize the experience of being haunted over the spatial and/or temporal qualities of the haunted houses. In particular, the affective atmospheres of both houses are given significant weight in the narrative, with many poetic images depicted within relying heavily on sensations and perception.

However, both novels also feature historical houses with unsavory histories, a classic approach in the haunted house novel. The house on Hawthorn Street has been the site of multiple murders and suicides while Villa Taccola became haunted after a murder-suicide. Thus, both contain elements of accumulating time as well: the central entities in both houses function as vortexes, drawing in other spirits and keeping them there in suspended time across decades, if not centuries. Notably, both novels depict these vortex entities as extensions of the heterotopia but approach the itinerant aspects of the heterotopia in opposite ways: in *The September House*, the heterotopia is decidedly intrusive, attempting to lock Margaret in, whereas in *Diavola*, the heterotopia is extrusive, extending far beyond the confines of the tower in Villa Taccola and following Anna home to New York.

Finally, both novels problematize the imaginary axis of the heterotopia. In *The September House*, the basement functions as a heterotopia of illusion against the rest of the house, a heterotopia of compensation, with the basement juxtaposed as an entirely negative space, especially when compared to the kitchen, which Margaret perceives as "a particular haven" (TSH: 12) in the month of September when the haunting cyclically escalates. In *Diavola*, the same juxtaposition happens between the tower at Villa Taccola as the heterotopia of illusion and Anna's apartment in New York serving as the heterotopia of compensation. In both novels, the heterotopias of compensation are troubled as the respective hauntings escalate, which illustrates a connection between the itinerant capacities of the heterotopia and its positioning on the imaginary axis: the more mobile the negative aspects of the heterotopia are, the more difficult it becomes to sustain a heterotopia of compensation.

## CONCLUSION

*“Strange house we must keep and fill.  
House that eats and pleads and kills.  
House on legs. House on fire. House infested  
With desire. Haunted house. Lonely house.  
/.../  
House whose rooms are pooled with blood.  
House with hands. House of guilt. House  
That other houses built. House of lies  
And pride and bone. House afraid to be alone.”*

Tracy K. Smith, *Ash*

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler (2004: 41) argues that while one might approach a norm as “analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded,” norms “usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce.” Although Butler’s discussion centers on how normativity governs our understanding of gender, the idea that norms are anchored to their setting appears particularly relevant when discussing haunted house fiction. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the context for this discussion is, unavoidably, neoliberal ideology.

Throughout this dissertation, I have been building towards the argument that the haunted house motif allows us a glimpse into what the normative ‘home’ and ‘family’ are by showing us what they are **not**. This interconnectivity between the norm and the abnormal forms the crux of the dissertation as I have demonstrated that the haunted house permeates the texts it appears in and should not be simply viewed as yet another type of setting. Rather, as Massey (1994: 169) put it, “The identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with ‘the outside’.” Thus, the horror of the haunted house, of the haunted home, is only made possible through *a priori* assumptions about houses that are not haunted. The novelty of the approach I have taken to this subject matter is threefold: firstly, I have shown that the haunted house motif is most productively approached not based on its genre but, rather, on its storytelling mode. Secondly, I have brought together theories on space, time, and experience which have thus far been used to examine haunted house fiction separately. Thirdly, except for *House of Leaves*, the corpus of texts that forms the core of the empirical analysis I have conducted consists of novels which have yet to be examined in depth in an academic context. In engaging with newer texts, I have aimed to produce an overview of the rich variety of approaches to the haunted house motif at this moment in time.

In the first chapter of this dissertation – *Mind, Body, Spirit* – I discussed the development of the haunted house motif, beginning roughly from the nascence of Gothic literature in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to horror fiction in the 1990s. In the

three subsections of the chapter, I described what I argue are the three primary modes of fiction through which the haunted house motif is articulated: Gothic, weird, and horror. It is important to note once again here that these three modes are not mutually exclusive. Rather, each mode contains certain narrative characteristics which will, to an extent, be present in most, if not all, contemporary haunted house fiction. The degree to which a given text exemplifies the characteristics of a given mode is the basis on which the system of classification works. This does not, however, mean that I prescribe a meaning or interpretation to a text simply by identifying its mode. Rather, this system helps to explain the different and quite often contradictory approaches taken to haunted houses in contemporary fiction and to demonstrate the intertextuality that has characterized ghost stories and haunted house fiction from its earliest days.

In speaking of the gothic mode, I have suggested that it can be primarily characterized through its similarity to the Gothic genre although the two are not identical. Where the Gothic – as Punter (1980) and Baldick (1992), among others, have argued – primarily focuses on interrogating and representing “fear, the fearful, and the abject, even if the representation is comic” (Cooper 2010: 6), the gothic merely requires the presence of Gothic conventions. Without a thematic limitation, the gothic mode thus allows for a wider variety of articulations. However, both also feature ample material to be analyzed through the lenses of the uncanny (Freud 1956 [1919]), the abject (Kristeva 1982 [1980]), and the grotesque (Bakhtin 1941), all of which deal with transgression in one form or another. Much as the Gothic itself, the gothic mode is best described as resistant to stagnation. For example, the lofty, upper-class settings seen in the high Gothic of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century slowly shifted towards the more common middle-class family homes as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed (Fielding 2000). The depiction of the spectral in such fiction is also subject to change. As dominant cultural attitudes towards ghosts and spirits shifted, so did their articulation in gothic fiction (Hay 2011; Bissell 2019). Over its long existence, the gothic has been characterized by what Spooner (2006: 11) describes as “a reappropriation and reinvention of previous forms rather than a straightforward repetition.” This activity seems to be connected to the specific subcategory of the gothic one is encountering in a given text: in the case of the present dissertation, for example, I have examined two texts of postcolonial gothic fiction, where the classic Gothic dichotomy of villain and victim is highly problematized.

In contrast to the gothic mode, the weird is difficult to describe. Where the gothic reinvents and reinterprets traditional (folkloric) supernatural monsters – in the case of this dissertation, ghosts and their like – the weird tends towards uncharted territories. As Luckhurst (2017: 1053) put it, “[t]o begin to grasp weird fiction is to orient away from the uncanny, /.../ to disorient it in the twist of the abcanny and the other distorted affects that lie beyond.” As Alder (2020) argues, in the weird nothing is depicted as supernatural but as an unknowable natural. Rather than examining vengeful spirits of the murdered who can be banished through some kind of ritualistic appeasement, the weird mode centers on the idea that ontology itself is broken, rendering epistemological inquiries useless at best

and downright deadly at worst. As Joshi (2014) and Alder (2020) both point out, the weird of the 20<sup>th</sup> century derives its subject matter from the science of its time. As a byproduct of doing this, the weird appears interested in not only intertextuality but also the very notion of the text itself. For example, in the case of the weird mode haunted house stories examined in the present dissertation, nested narratives and epistolary narrative forms appear as a common denominator. Indeed, haunted house fiction in the weird mode also seems to invoke the idea of the *omphalos* (Jones 2009), a connective point between different dimensions atop which a weird mode haunted house is often built. Thus, the primary characteristics of the weird mode are the presence of uncanny realities and ontological uncertainty. Where the gothic reaches towards the sublime, the weird dwells with the numinous gone bad.

While the gothic and the weird have clear characteristics, the horror mode does not. In this sense, the horror mode is the abnormal to the norms of the gothic and the weird, defined through what it is not rather than what it is. Because of the sheer proliferation of texts in different media from the 1930s onward attempting to identify a singular defining characteristic of the horror mode is futile. Rather, I have argued that it is more productive to discuss the horror mode through its interactions and hybridity: in this dissertation, primarily through its connection to comedy and its relationship with the gothic and the weird. The spectral legacies of Gothic and weird fiction have shaped and continue to interact with the horror genre of today. In the 1970s, horror fiction began to prominently incorporate economic anxieties (Lukić 2022: 99), and the haunted house narrative was no exception. The horror mode is also the home of the ‘haunted house formula’ (Bailey 1999) which, I have shown forms the basis for contemporary haunted house fiction through its cultural impact and proliferation. Much like the gothic and the weird, the horror mode is in conversation with its context.

Through all the above, the first chapter of this dissertation argues that the history of the haunted house narrative throughout the gothic, weird, and horror modes is integral to understanding the haunted house narratives written in the present day. In particular, my aim has been to demonstrate the interconnectivity and intertextuality inherent to the haunted house motif. It is a complex structure not only in its literary function but, as demonstrated above, in how it allows one a glimpse into the fissures pervading the spatial, temporal, and cultural contexts in which it is articulated.

The second chapter of the dissertation discusses the theoretical framework of the analyses conducted in the three empirical chapters through theories connected to space, time, and experience. The first section of the second chapter, *Space*, relies on three key ideas: Gaston Bachelard’s topoanalysis or the phenomenological approach to space through the poetic image, Michel Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia, and the notions of space, place, and Thirdspace through the works of Doreen Massey and Edward Soja, among others. Bachelard’s (1994) approach to analyzing spatiality through the poetic image forms the cornerstone for the empirical analysis conducted in this dissertation. The concept of the always mobile oneiric house, along with its shifting meanings, is particularly relevant.

Working with Foucault's (2008) original writings on heterotopia, I claimed that the heterotopia is not merely Other space (e.g., Botting 2004; Hock Soon Ng 2018), but a multifaceted descriptor. I divided the organizing principles of the heterotopia into four categories: the anthropological axis, the imaginary axis, the temporal axis, and the itinerant axis. While the first three are found in DeHaene and De Cauter's (2008) notes on their translation of Foucault's text, the fourth is my own. I argued that the itinerant axis of the heterotopia subsumes the 'dark heterotopia' which Lukić and Parezanović (2020) describe as a separate form of heterotopia, capable of movement. I contended that the capacity for movement was already present in the principles Foucault outlined, and that the different axes of the heterotopia made it a more productive analytical tool. The central argument of the section is that the notion of space derives not only from the physical space but also from its temporal and experiential aspects, with home being an exemplary site in this regard. This is precisely why Soja's (1989; 1995; 1996) tripartite concept of space as perceived, imagined, and experienced, and particularly the concept of Thirdspace, which brings the three notions together, proves crucial to the argument built in the empirical section of the dissertation.

In the second section of the second chapter, *Time*, I focused on how Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology, the idea that ontology is always-already haunted, connects to time and hospitality which are crucial aspects of the haunted house narrative. The inclusion of hauntology into the theoretical apparatus serves a two-fold purpose: the specter-centric approach to hauntology explains the fundamental operations of the storyworld. The ontology of the storyworld is haunted by more than spectral entities. The notion of the specter allows these hauntings to be made legible and to demonstrate how a given narrative interacts with its own haunted ontology through the concept of (g)hos(t)pitality (Hägglund 2008; Coughlan 2016; Shaw 2018; Lampropoulos 2022). Secondly, the interpretation of hauntology posed by Fisher (2012; 2014) supports the argument I have made in the first chapter of the dissertation, that the haunted house narrative of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is inherently multifaceted. Fisher proposes that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time-less time because it is always-already nostalgic for that which never happened. The final subsection of *Time* discusses temporal disruptions in narrative through the work of Gerard Genette, particularly the concepts of order and anachrony. There, I established the terminology necessary to discuss the absent presence of the specter in the following empirical analysis.

In the third section of the second chapter, *Experience*, I discussed the transmission of affects and affective atmospheres based primarily on the works of Ben Anderson and Sara Ahmed, among others, as well as the specific affects of fear and anxiety. I suggested firstly that the affective atmospheres of texts are in conversation with their storytelling modes. The core argument was that affects are not only mobile but also potent enough in the context of a storyworld to have profound effects on not only the characters that experience them but, also, on the storyworld itself and are an active participant in shaping the setting of the haunted house narrative into something that is more than simple space.

The third chapter of the dissertation begins by discussing the broader trends in haunted house fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to situate the texts I examined into a context as examples of the broader trends in contemporary horror fiction. I argued that the storytelling modes discussed in Chapter One (the gothic, the weird, and horror) occur concurrently in contemporary fiction. The self-referentiality and intertextuality in haunted house narratives considers developments in literature and all media. For example, the proliferation of found footage horror films in the mid-2000s appears to be correlated with the emergence and growing popularity of ‘found footage’ horror in literary forms, to invoke a sense of authenticity that intensifies the audience’s affective experience (cf Kvistad 2020). I found that the broader trend of reinvention and reimagination of classical texts and narratives is popular across media. In addition to transmedial adaptations, medium-internal adaptations appear frequently in horror fiction: texts either use an existing narrative as a starting point or they recontextualize existing narratives and imbue them with new thematic foci. Another broad trend is the hybridization of horror narratives with other genres, with examples ranging from mystery/thriller and comedy to literary fiction and beyond.

The above informs the methodology for the empirical analysis conducted in this dissertation. Using the triad of space, time, and experience as the focal points for analysis, I examined three pairs of contemporary haunted house novels, chosen based on what I believed to be the primary storytelling modes present. I used both thematic and close reading techniques to examine the texts and compared the results to one another, finding that the texts I paired up exhibited similar approaches to constructing their haunted house narratives. I selected the texts from a corpus of around forty novels I encountered in the process of surveying the haunted house novels published over the past twenty-four years, preferring texts which had received some critical and/or commercial attention, were published through traditional publishing houses, and which, in one way or another, deconstructed the classical haunted house formula. I cannot contend that the overview I have created is comprehensive, but since, at the time of writing in 2025, no other overview of the 21<sup>st</sup> century haunted house narrative has been published, I have endeavored to provide examples of the sheer variety of approaches to the haunted house narrative available at this time.

In Chapter Four, I examined *Mexican Gothic* (2020) by Silvia Moreno-Garcia and *The Hacienda* (2022) by Isabel Cañas as examples of the haunted house motif in the gothic mode. Both are examples of postcolonial gothic, which is concerned with the threatened return of the (colonial) past. Indeed, both novels centralize the classically Gothic theme of dark family history haunting the present. Both narratives, however, also subvert classical approaches to victim/villain dichotomies found in gothic narratives. In *Mexican Gothic*, the traditional fungal weird narrative of white characters being the victims is disrupted and, in *The Hacienda*, the tragically deceased first wife is revealed to have been a perpetrator rather than a victim of the violent system. In this sense, both narratives are in conversation with the haunted house narrative at large. In the case of *Mexican Gothic*, what is being interrogated is the idea of the white, patriarchal family and its faltering

hegemonic position in a postcolonial Mexico whereas *The Hacienda* is in a conversation with gothic novels such as Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), which centralizes the same disturbance of victim/perpetrator positions. Time, history, and settings are integral to the plot: both narratives depend on not only the haunted house motif but the broader setting of Mexico with its historical and cultural context. Both problematize the imaginary and anthropological axes of the heterotopia through their narrative arcs, with heterotopias of compensation being revealed to be heterotopias of illusion and heterotopias of deviation becoming heterotopias of crisis. In both, moreover, the hauntings themselves function as the mobile aspects of the heterotopia both physically and metaphysically.

In Chapter Five, I analyzed Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) alongside Craig DiLouie's *Episode Thirteen* (2023), viewing both as examples of the haunted house motif in the weird mode since both novels problematize the benefits of epistemological inquiry and are concerned with deeply ontological questions, such as the disconnection between the perceived and true reality. Additionally, both novels feature a non-traditional haunting and invoke the cosmic horror tradition that began with weird fiction, depicting entities which cannot be understood either diegetically or extradiegetically through existing ontological paradigms. In the case of *House of Leaves*, the house on Ash Tree Lane appears to be one such entity whereas in *Episode Thirteen*, Foundation House is a conduit for such entities. Both novels are in conversation with earlier examples of weird mode haunted house fiction like William Hope Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland* (1908) for the former and H. P. Lovecraft's "The Dreams in the Witch-House" (1933) for the latter. Both *House of Leaves* and *Episode Thirteen* center on their characters' attempts to understand, categorize, and stabilize the haunted house within but conclude that this line of inquiry is foolish at best and downright deadly at worst. In doing this, the novels prioritize experience over space and time. However, it is important to note that space, especially in its weird forms, is an integral component of the narratives. The heterotopias found in both novels support this conclusion, with the itinerant heterotopias permeating through all layers of the nested narratives presented, creating affective atmospheres which augment the cosmic horror characteristics of the haunted houses within.

In Chapter Six, I examined *The September House* (2023) by Carissa Orlando and *Diavola* (2024) by Jennifer Thorne as examples of haunted house fiction in the horror mode. Both novels include comedic elements, which I have argued to be a variation of the hybridity characteristic of the horror mode. While both novels gesture towards the gothic – both occur, after all, in historical houses with unsavory pasts – they do not include other gothic conventions and do not invoke the philosophical debates of the weird. Rather, these narratives are close to home and in conversation with the haunted house formula of the 1970s, subverting it in some ways while affirming it in others. Most importantly, here, the haunted house does not break the family: in *The September House* and *Diavola*, the family is broken long before they ever step into their respective haunted houses. While the Hartmans and the Paces outwardly present the traditional nuclear family ideal of a husband and wife and their child/children, both novels quickly show it to be

artifice as both families are abusive, emotionally or physically. Thus, both novels challenge the norm of the happy nuclear family, with their main characters finding self-fulfillment and satisfaction only once they have rejected this norm.

Indeed, if there is to be a singular specter identified across all six novels, it is the specter of the happy family home. In each novel, the specter of this norm informs and affects the narrative, revealing the unresolved tension between the norm and the abnormal. Be it biological family (*House of Leaves*, *The September House*, *Diavola*), colleagues as found family (*Episode Thirteen*), or family in law (*Mexican Gothic*, *The Hacienda*), the norm is put under question in each iteration and found lacking. Moreover, the neoliberal ideal of individual responsibility and self-sufficiency is often revealed to be a fantasy: in most of these novels, the survival of the characters depends on their relationships with others and on being able to ask for and accept company and help. Only *Diavola* seems to affirm the neoliberal mode of being – while Anna ends up isolated by the end of the novel, she is happier alone. But love is there, always: even in *Diavola*, the love Anna eventually finds in and for herself is instrumental in the transformation she undergoes over the course of the novel. In the other novels, interpersonal connection becomes the lifeline of the surviving characters: the budding friendships and eventual love between Noemí and Francis in *Mexican Gothic* and Beatriz and Andrés in *The Hacienda*, the ailing but enduring love between Navidson and Karen in *House of Leaves*, the parental love of Jessica/Rashida for her son in *Episode Thirteen* and Margaret for Catherine in *The September House*. Because of this, the examples of haunted house narratives I have examined in this dissertation produce a surprisingly optimistic hauntology: whatever else these storyworlds are haunted by, they are also inhabited by love. Often it is love pushed into extremes – to obsession, a compulsion to possess, violence. But love also soothes, salves, and sometimes saves. Love is as multifaceted as the haunted houses it inhabits.

Throughout this dissertation, my aim has been to examine and systematize the development of the haunted house narrative in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's timeless time. I hypothesized that, instead of being a purely Gothic phenomenon as it is commonly approached, the haunted house motif is as complicated as the context in which it appears. Although I have primarily focused on supernatural horror literature, I believe that the storytelling modes I have proposed and the analytical approach I have built can be used elsewhere to help understand the compellingly interconnected space, time, and experience of storyworlds from a narratological point of view. Further research could apply this framework not only to other novels but texts in other media as well. Mine is naturally but one structuralism-inspired interpretation among an infinite number of possible readings. Other scholars may – and, inevitably, **do** – see the novels I have discussed here through different perspectives, not necessarily making references to the Gothic, the weird, and horror. While I would argue that the ideals of each mode I have described can be theorized, I do not believe they exist in reality: there are, after all, good reasons why structuralism has lost its authority as a source of definitive readings in contemporary academia. What has been started here, and what I hope will

continue, is an examination of how the haunted house story has evolved up to this point, acquiring new meanings and finding new possibilities along the way, but still remaining at its core the same as it has always been.

Because it is so intrinsically connected to its context, horror fiction can tell us a lot not only about the past and the present, but also, perhaps, about the future. At the time of writing in the mid-2020s, the haunted house novel appears to be having a surge in popularity: over the past few years, many new haunted house novels which I believe will in time become classics have been published to commercial and critical acclaim. Indeed, Clasen (2017) has contended that horror fiction is popular precisely because it offers a space in which to safely interact with things that frighten us, as well as a sense of catharsis otherwise unattainable without putting ourselves in real, physical danger. The haunted house, I would argue, is this space in its purest form, alien and familiar all at once. In a world as unsettling as the one we inhabit, there is something undeniably comforting about the almost minimalistic premise of the haunted house story: once, there was a house, and that house was haunted. It is remarkable to note that, over the course of millennia, that premise has remained the same, returning again and again, interconnected and recognizable yet still inventive in each new iteration.

Through these narratives, we can – even if for a moment – escape the world that is now and enter a world that could be: a world that might be frightening and disquieting but also re-enchanted, a world where the love we have for one another might actually be able to save us and where we were not alone. These narratives present us with worlds where the places we inhabit respond to us, where the convergence of space, time, and experience makes manifest the things we cannot otherwise admit, where reality itself is infinitely stranger and more interesting than the mundane crises of our fast-paced, stressful, neoliberal modern life. The desire to reach for something more is to me what lies at the heart of the haunted house. Through constructing these haunted houses as the antithesis of what a happy family and a happy home should be, we inevitably reinforce and recreate the norm. But norms are never static: they shift and change along with their contexts as does the haunted house. Much like reality itself, the house is always-already haunted not only by what was, what is, and what will be but also by what never came to pass. It is in the haunted house that the god of the gaps yet dwells, where the specter of impossible, horrible and yet marvelous things is both absent and present, both dead and alive. All we have to do is listen.

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## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Afektiivsed kummitamised / absoluutne reaalsus:  
aeg, ruum ja kogemus kummitusmaja narratiivis

Väitekirja fookuses on kummitusmaja (*haunted house*) motiivi ajalugu, tõlgendamine ja kasutamine 21. sajandi ingliskeelses ilukirjanduses. Väitekirja teoreetiline raamistik hõlmab ruumi-, aja- ja kogemusteoriatel põhinevat kolmetahulist käsitlust, et pakkuda võimalikult mitmekesisest ning uuenduslikku lähenemist tänapäevase kummitusmaja motiivi analüüsile. Kuigi üksikuid kummitusmaja narratiive on palju uuritud, on ülevaatlikke uurimusi kummitusmaja narratiividest seni vähe avaldatud (vt Bailey 1999, Janicker 2015). Sellised ülevaatlikud analüüsid aitavad aga heita valgust konkreetsete perioodide, näiteks kaasaegse neoliberaalse ühiskonna kultuurilistele painetele. Poliitilise ideoloogiana mõjutab neoliberalism meie mõtteviisi ja suhtumist meid ümbritsevasse maailma (vt Harvey 2005), seda peamiselt üksikisiku vastutuskohustuse (*individual responsibility*) ideaali kaudu. Olgugi et üksikisik ei ole kõikvõimas, püsib see idee siiski avalikus diskursuses ning võimendab seeläbi neoliberaalse mõtteviisi mõjujõudu, jättes vähe ruumi võimalikele alternatiividele (vt Fisher 2009). Õudusfiktsioon aga lagundab järjepidevalt fantaasiat üksikisiku võimekusest, näidates seda justnimelt fantaasiana. Väitekirjas lähtun seisukohast, et kummitusmaja narratiivides seatakse kahtluse alla nii neoliberaalne mõtteviisi kui ka pere ja kodu puudutavad normid, mille see on loonud. Kuigi iga narratiiv teeb seda omal moel ning lähedes oma kontekstist, on võimalik sarnaseid narratiive rühmitada, et tuvastada laiemaid trende. Väitekirjas pakun narratiivirežiimi (*storytelling mode*) mõistele tuginedes välja ühe võimaliku tüpoloogია, väites, et 21. sajandi kummitusmaja narratiivid jagunevad õudusfiktsioonis laias laastus kolme narratiivirežiimi, mis põhinevad varasematel kummitusmaja narratiividel.

Väitekirja esimeses peatükis käsitlen kummitusmaja narratiivi kujunemist ilukirjanduses alates 18. sajandi lõpu gootikast kuni 1970ndate populaarõuduseni ning annan ülevaate alažanri temaatikast ja olulistest teostest, mis on kujundanud tänapäevase kummitusmaja narratiivi mitmekesisuse. Peatüki põhiargument on, et tänapäevases kummitusmaja alažanris on samaaegselt kolm narratiivirežiimi, mis põhinevad gootika (*gothic*), kummastava ulme (*weird fiction*) ja õuduse (*horror*) narratiividel ning tehnikatel, jagades nendega nii vormilisi kui ka sisulisi omadusi. Siinkohal on oluline märkida, et väitekirjas ma ei väida, et tekst võib kasutada vaid üht narratiivirežiimi: vastupidi, ühe teksti sees võib korraga esineda mitu narratiivirežiimi, kuid neist üks võtab dominantse positsiooni.

Esimene peatükk alustab 18. sajandi lõpu gootikast. Toetudes Radcliffe'i ja Lewise loomingule, kaardistan, kuidas selle perioodi gootika tekstid üleloomulikkust kujutavad. Radcliffe'i puhul on tegemist nn lahti seletatud üleloomulikkusega (*explained supernatural*) (Spooner & McEvoy 2007): kuigi loomaailmas (*storyworld*) toimuvad sündmused, mida esmalt tõlgendatakse loomaailma sees üleloomulikuna, leitakse neile narratiivi lõpus siiski ratsionaalne selgitus.

Lewise looming aga väljendab loomaailma ehtsaid sündmusi, millele ei ole selles loomaailmas ratsionaalset selgitust. Gootika narratiivid toetuvad peamiselt kahele emotsioonile – õud (*horror*) ja õõv (*terror*) –, mis omakorda on seotud sümbolismi kasutamisega gootikas. Kui õud on reaktsioon käegakatsutavale, siis õõva alge pole nii lihtsalt leitav ja viitab millelegi abstraktsele. Mõlemad tekitavad aga hirmu (*fear*). Gootika kui narratiivirežiim keskendubki eelkõige hirmule ja sellele, mis on abjektne (*abject*), ebaõudus (*uncanny*) ja/või groteskne (*grotesque*). See aga ei tähenda, et gootika oleks staatiline.

Mida aeg edasi, seda rohkem soosis gootika narratiive, milles üleloomulik on vähemalt osaliselt millegi enama sümboliks. Seda arengut on näha 19. sajandil, kus vanu gootika malle (*gothic conventions*) taaskasutati viktoriaanlikes kummitusjuttudes aina uuesti, andes neile uue konteksti ja tähenduse. 18. sajandi gooti kummitusjuttude uhked ja väärivad lossid ning tüüptegelased asendusid ajapikku tavapärasemate keskklassi inimeste kodudega, kodulähedase ja lihtsa, kuid ülimalt efekitse õudusega (Fielding 2000). Tegevuspaik ei olnud ainus muutus: spiritualismi jms okultismiliikumiste mõjul olid gootika traditsioonilised üleloomulikud kummitused saanud 19. ja 20. sajandi vahetuseks kultuuris uue kuju. Selmet olla loomaailmas ehtsad, olid kummitused üha enam muutunud millegi enama metafooriks või loomaailmast hoopis kadunud. Näiteks Hay (2011) väidab, et 19. ja 20. sajandi vahetuseks (*fin de siècle*) ei sisaldanud narratiivid enamasti enam kummitusi kui ühiskonna murekohtade metafoori, vaid need esindasid puhast meelelahutust. Samas, nagu osutab Freeman (2018), ei pruukinud kummituslugudes enam kummitusi olla. Sajandivahetuse keskkonnas kujunes seetõttu välja nii nn gooti uus laine (*gothic revival*) kui ka psühholoogiline kummitusjutt (*psychological ghost story*). Viimane ei keskendu mitte sellele, mis toimub tegelaste ümber, vaid eelkõige sellele, mis toimub nende vaimus: minevik, mis peaks olema ammu unustatud, tungib vägisi taas esile. Sageli kasutab psühholoogiline kummitusjutt gootika malle, kuid annab neile uue ja/või metafoorse tähenduse.

Kontrastina ülalmainitule tekkis sajandivahetusel Briti kummastava ulme alajänr. Erinevalt Ameerika kirjanduse kummastavast ulmest, mis hakkas kuju võtma paarkümmend aastat hiljem, keskendus vanem Briti variant alguses pigem traditsioonilistele üleloomulikele olenditele, kuid lähenes neile uut moodi. Tihtipeale ei ole kummastava ulme kummitused enam tuttavate inimeste vaimud, vaid hoopis olendid, kes pelgalt näivad tuttavlikud (Lovecraft 2011). Siiski tuleb märkida, et kummastava ulme on raskesti defineeritav žanr, sest jääb teiste spekulatiivkirjanduse žanrite (st teadusulme, fantaasia, õuduse) piirimaile ning sellel ei ole selget kaanonit (vt Luckhurst 2017, Alder 2020).

Kuna sajandivahetus oli tänapäevase teaduse väljakujunemise aeg, andis see märkimisväärset inspiratsiooni ka kirjandusele: Alderi (2020) sõnul on kummastava ulme paradigmat muutustest tingitud ebakindluse tulemus ning olemuslikult eksperimentaalne. Oma mõju oli sellele ka 19. sajandi spiritualismil, mis pakkus välja, et kummitused võivad olla materiaalsed: seansitoa kummituslikud käed ja ektoplasma, mis otsapidi kirjandusse jõudsid, näitavad Banni (2009) hinnangul, et suhtumine kummitustesse oli muutunud. Lisaks materiaalsetele kummitustele

tõusis esile kummastava ulme kummitusmaja, mis käitus kui *omphalos* (Jones 2009) ehk pidepunkt eri dimensioonide vahel, tuues endaga kaasa nii ontoloogilised kui ka eksistentsiaalsed küsimused (nt Hodgsoni „The House on the Borderland“, 1908). Juba Briti kummastav ulme kasutas seega kummitusi filosoofiliste ideede uurimiseks ning see trend jätkus paar aastakümnet hiljem Ameerika kummastavas ulmes, mille panus seisnes eelkõige eemaldumises traditsioonilistest koletistest ning kosmilise õuduse (*cosmic horror*) kujunemises. See mõjutas omakorda kummitusmaja motiivi: enam ei pruukinud tegemist olla iidse suguvõsa iidse koduga, vaid murdepunktiga eri dimensioonide vahel, mida ei kummitanud enam surnu vaim, vaid hoopis midagi arusaamatut ja ebatuttavat (*abccanny*).

20. sajandi edenedes liikus õudusžanr edasi uutesse meediumitesse, alustades filmidest ja lõpetades videomängudega. Kuigi nii gootika kui ka kummastav ulme on teatud määral intertekstuaalsed ja tagasivaatavad, on õudusžanr märkimisväärne just selle sidususe tõttu. Muutused, mis toimuvad õudusfilmis, mõjutavad õuduskirjandust, mis omakorda avaldab mõju õudusteleviioonile, selle kaudu ka õudusvideomängudele ja seeläbi õudusfilmile. Kuna tekste, mis õudusžanrisse kuuluvad, on kumulatiivselt järjest rohkem, on ka õudust kui narratiivirežiimi keeruline defineerida. Käesoleva väitekirja kontekstis on selle kõige olulisem osa 1970ndatel välja kujunenud nn kummitusmaja narratiivi vormel (*haunted house formula*), mis on seotud eelkõige sotsiaal-majanduslike kitsaskohtadega ning käsitleb keskklassist perekonna kogemust ebamugava ajaloo vanas majas, mis on minevikust läbini kummitatud (vt Bailey 1999). Samuti nagu gootika režiim, sisaldab ka sedalaadi õudus lagunemist, kuid perekondlikul, mitte isiklikul tasandil. Seda näitlikustavad sellised tekstid nagu Kingi „Hiilgus“ („The Shining“, 1977), Anstoni „Amityville“i õudus“ („The Amityville Horror“, 1977) ja Marasco „Burnt Offerings“ (1973). Bailey (1999) sõnutsi on kummitusmaja narratiivi vormeliga suhestuvad tekstid otseselt seotud just keskklassi majandusliku ebakindlusega ning nn Ameerika unistuse (*American Dream*) diskursustega, seda eriti 1970ndatel, mil vormel välja kujunes. Kuna nii gootika kui ka kummastava ulme režiimis tekste avaldati 20. sajandi teises pooles samaaegselt kõige muuga, väidan, et õuduse kui režiimi panus kummitusmaja narratiivi arengusse toimuski alles sajandi kolmel viimasel kümnendil ja seda just kummitusmaja narratiivi vormeli kaudu.

Väitekirja teine peatükk, mis moodustab töö teoreetilise raamistiku, käsitleb kolmes alapeatükis ruumi, aega ja kogemust. Kuigi teooriaid, millele väitekirja toetub, on ka varem õudusfiktsiooni uurimiseks kasutatud (nt ruum Botting 2004, Lukić 2022; aeg Shaw 2018; kogemus Aldana Reyes 2016), seisneb väitekirja panus eeskätt ruumi-, aja- ja kogemusteooriate sidumises tervikuks ning selle rakendamises teostele, mida pole seni süvitsi uuritud (v.a Danielewski „House of Leaves“, 2000).

Ruumiteooria fookuses on eelkõige Bachelardi topoanalüüsi (*topoanalysis*), poetilise kujundi (*poetic image*) ja unelmamaja (*oneiric house*) ning Foucault' heterotoopia (*heterotopia*) mõiste, Massey ruumi-koha (*space-place*) dihhotoomia ning Soja kolmasruum (*Thirdspace*).

Bachelardi ruumipoeetika olulisim mõiste väitekirja kontekstis on *unelmamaja*, mis kujutab endast korruga nii kogetud kui ka väljamõeldud mõttelist kujundit. Unelmamaja on kihiline ning jaotub tähenduslikult vertikaalseteks kihtideks nii, nagu reaalsed majad, mida igapäevaelus kohtame, jagunevad korrusteks. Unelmamaja keldrikorrus on ürgne, irratsionaalne ruum, mis vastandub põõningule kui kõrgendatud, ratsionaalsele ruumile, niisamuti kui psühhoanalüüsis vastanduvad miski (*id*) ja ülimina (*superego*). Väitekirja kontekstis väljendub unelmamaja poeetilise kujundina, millest lähtuvalt olen valinud empiirilise analüüsi fookuseks just kummitusmaja, kuna see näitlikustab unelmamaja kihilisust ning pakub aluse, mille abil analüüsin väitekirja empiirilistes peatükkides kummitusmajade sümboleid.

Foucault' heterotoopia on väitekirja ruumiteooria teine fookus. Lähtudes eelkõige 1984. aastal avaldatud Foucault' originaaltekstist ning 2008. aastal avaldatud prantsuse-inglise tõlkest (Dehaene & De Cauter 2008), kuid toetudes ka Johnsoni (2006, 2013) tõlgendusele, kasutan *heterotoopiat* kui mitmetahulist, telgedel põhinevat mõistet. Väitekirja kontekstis koosneb heterotoopia neljast teljest: antropoloogilisest (*anthropological*), kujuteldavast (*imaginary*) ja ajalisest (*temporal*) teljest, mis on välja pakutud Dehaene'i ja De Cauteri tõlke kommentaarides, ning rändlevast (*itinerant*) teljest, mille olen neile lisanud. Väidan, et liikumise printsiip on olemas juba Foucault' originaaltekstis ning ei ole tingimata ainult omane nn tumedale heterotoopiale (*dark heterotopia*; vt Lukić & Parezanović 2020; Lukić 2022), mille keskne omadus on võime oma piiridest väljudes tungida teistesse ruumidesse. Kõik neli telge on otseselt seotud heterotoopia kuue omadusega, mida Foucault (2008) kirjeldab järgnevalt: 1) heterotoopiad on universaalsed ning neid on võimalik leida pea kõigis kultuurides, 2) heterotoopiate talitus tuleneb nende kultuurilisest kontekstist, 3) heterotoopiates on korruga võimalikud mitmed kohad ja paiknemised, 4) heterotoopiad on seotud aja ja ajalisusega, 5) heterotoopiad vajavad avamiseks ja sulgemiseks mehhanisme, 6) heterotoopiad suhestuvad neid ümbritseva ruumiga. Heterotoopia antropoloogiline telg on seotud Foucault' heterotoopia esimese, ajaline telg teise ja neljanda, kujuteldav telg kuuenda ning rändlev telg viienda printsiibiga. Siinse väitekirja kontekstis konstateerib heterotoopia kolmas printsiip heterotoopia võimalikkuse ning sisaldub seega kõigis heterotoopiates. Heterotoopia telgedel on kaks lõpp-punkti: antropoloogilisel teljel kriisi- (*crisis*) ja kõrvalekaldeheterotoopia (*deviance heterotopia*), ajalisel teljel kaduva (*festival time*) ja koguneva aja (*accumulating time*) heterotoopia, kujuteldaval teljel illusiooni- (*illusion*) ja kompensatsiooniheterotoopia (*compensation heterotopia*) ning rändleval teljel sissetungiv (*intrusive*) ja väljatungiv (*extrusive*) heterotoopia.

Ruumiteooria kolmas fookus on ruumi ja koha dihhotoomia ning kodu kontseptsioon. Massey ja Soja väidavad, et ruum on seotud ajaga (Massey 1994) ning nn kolmasruum koosneb korruga nii kujuteldavast (*imagined*), meenutatavast (*remembered*) kui ka kogetud (*experienced*) ruumist (Soja 2009). Seetõttu on ka kodu nii füüsiline ruum kui ka midagi enam, nt Morley (2001) sõnul on kodu fantasmagooriline koht, mis on tehnoloogia arenedes muutunud järjest

poorsemaks ning välistest jõududest lihtsamini mõjutatavaks. Sarnaselt täheldab Mallett (2004), et kodu on virtuaalne koht, milles sulanduvad kokku olevik ja mälestused kõigist varem olnud ruumidest. Loomaailmas on kummitusmajal enamasti ka kodu funktsioon, mistõttu on selle analüüsimisel oluline arvesse võtta nii selle ruumilisi, ajalisi kui ka kogemuslikke omadusi. Väitekirja analüüsis osas keskendungi peamiselt loomaailmasisele ruumile, ajale ja kogemusele, tõlgendades neid eelkõige poeetiliste kujundite kaudu.

Ajateooria keskmeks on Derrida tontoloogia (*hauntology*) ning sellega kaasnevad mõisted, nagu tont (*specter*). Derrida (1994) järgi on ontoloogia kummitunud, sest hegemoonilisi võimustruktuure, nagu kapitalismi, kummitab *a priori* see, mis võiks neid asendada. Derrida tondid eksisteerivad olemise ja olematuse vahel ning jälgivad kõike, kuid pole ise jälgitavad. Seetõttu on tontidega suhtlemiseks vaja keelt (*language*), kuna tontide keskmeks on teadmine. Tontidega suhtlemist vahendab lisaks kummituslahkus (*ghostpality*) ehk külalishukus kummituse vastu, nii tahe kui ka võime tontidega suhelda (vt Coughlan 2016; Shaw 2018). See suhtlus omakorda annab võimaluse jõuda arusaamiseni mineviku rollist nii olevikus kui ka tulevikus, sest tondid eksisteerivad kõigis hetkedes korraga. Seetõttu erinevad nad ka loomaailma kummitustest ning toimivad pigem sümbolsete kui loomaailmas reaalsete jõududena. Mark Fisher (2012, 2014) seostab tonte peamiselt luhtunud tulevike (*lost futures*) ja tänapäeva kui ajatu ajaga (*timeless time*). Fisher jaoks on tont virtuaalne, st ilma füüsilise vormita, kuid siiski võimeline tegutsema, korraga nii ette- kui ka tagasivaatav. Tuginedes nii Derrida kui ka Fisheri käsitlusele, kasutab Shaw (2018) tontoloogia mõistet uurimaks kirjandust ning tõlgendab tontoloogiat kui kultuurimineviku uurimise tööriista, kuna tontoloogia sõltub tontidest, mis omakorda on tähenduslikult seotud nii sellega, mis on, sellega, mida pole, kui ka sellega, mis võiks olla.

Väitekirjas kasutan tontoloogia mõistet kaheti: esmalt ajatu ajana (*timeless time*), et selgitada, kuidas erinevad narratiivirežiimid saavad koos dominantsed olla, teiseks selleks, et analüüsida empiirilisel eelkõige seda, mis lisaks üleloomulikele olenditele veel tekstide loomaailmu kummitavad. Et narratiivis aega praktiliselt uurida, olen ajateooria osana käsitlenud ka Genette'i narratoloogilisi mõisteid. Neist esimene on kolmeastmeline struktuur, mis selgitab, kuidas aeg tekstis töötab: järjekord (*order*), kestus (*duration*) ja sagedus (*frequency*). Nende mõistete abil on võimalik joonestada sündmuste järjekord narratiivis ning seda kirjeldada. Narratiivi olevikust eemaldatud sündmused on tuntud anakroonia (*anachrony*), mis omakorda jaguneb neljaks põhivariandiks: analepsiseks ehk tagasivaateks (*flashback*), prolepsiseks ehk ettevaateks (*flashforward*), parapsiseks ehk samaaegseks sündmuseks ning akrooniaks (*achrony*) ehk narratiiviajaväliseks sündmuseks.

Kogemusteooria fookuspunktiks on afektiteooria: peaaesjalikult Ahmedi (2004, 2014) lähenemine hirmu ja ängi afektidele kui dünaamilistele jõududele ning afektiivse atmosfääri (*affective atmosphere*) teooriad, mis väidavad, et afektid mõjutavad mitte ainult inimesi, kes neid kogevad, vaid ka ruumi nende ümber (nt Anderson 2009, 2014). Brown jt (2019) leiavad, et afektiivsete atmosfääride analüüsimiseks tuleb silmas pidada kolme ideed. Esiteks sõltuvad need

atmosfäärid nii inimestest, kes nendega suhestuvad, kui ka keskkonnast ning on seetõttu alati subjekti ja objekti piiril. Teiseks on afektiivse atmosfääri kujundamine pidev protsess, mis toimub sõltumatult ja iseseisvalt, st selleks pole vaja agenti ehk tegijat. Kolmandaks on atmosfääri ruumilised ja ajalised komponendid selle lahutamatu osa. Atmosfääri mõjutamiseks ja mõistmiseks on kõige olulisem kogemus (Anderson 2014). Brink (2016) sedastab Poe lühijutu „Usheri maja hukk“ („The Fall of the House of Usher“, 1839) analüüsi toel, et koherentses afektiivses atmosfääris liiguvad afektid vabalt ja tingimusteta. Ülaltoodu põhjal väidan, et eri narratiivirežiime esindavates kummitusmaja lugudes leiduvad afektiivsed atmosfäärid on režiimisiseselt piisavalt sarnased, et nende abil narratiive rühmitada, st näiteks gootika režiimis narratiivid sarnanevad omavahel kõige rohkem, isegi kui neil on ühiseid jooni kummastava ulme või õuduse režiimis narratiividega.

Kogemusteooria teine fookus on spetsiifiliselt hirmu ja ärevuse afektidel, mis on kummitusmaja narratiivides enim levinud. Kennedy (2011) väidab, et ärevus on ruumi uurimiseks äärmiselt sobilik, kuna sellel pole konkreetset objekti: ärevus on otseselt seotud ajaga läbi surma-suunas-olemise (sks *Sein-zum-Tode*), kuid on aja jooksul piisavalt loomulikustunud, et olla seotud Olemise endaga (vt Berlanti 2011). Berlanti jaoks on ärevus otseselt seotud nn julma optimismiga (*cruel optimism*), mis tekib siis, kui n-ö heaolufantasia (*good-life fantasy*) saavutamiseks vajalik muutub järjest kättesaamatumaks. Säärane optimism toob esile kriisi tavalisuse, sest selle eesmärk on kättesaamatu: kättesaamatus tekitab omakorda ärevust ainult juurde. Selle ärevuse täpsed piirid on aga hägused samamoodi nagu teiste afektide ja emotsioonide piirid (vt Ahmed 2004). Ahmed (2004, 2014) leiab, et ärevus on kleepuv (*sticky*) afekt, mille kleepuvus subjekti ja objekti vahel sõltub esiteks subjekti alateadlikust raamistikust, mis omakorda tuleneb kontekstist ning mis ei pruugi olla teadvustatud. Kleepumine toimub seega ilma subjektipoolse tahteta. Seevastu hirm tekib siis, kui selle objekt möödub (*passing by*): subjekt, kes hirmu kogeb, ei karda tingimata objekti ennast, vaid pigem seda, et objekt talle vastandub. Hirmu objekt muutub seeläbi instrumentaalseks subjekti (enese)loomes, sest see, mis subjekti hirmutab, näitab, mida subjekt ise pole. Väitekirja kontekstis on see idee tähtis eelkõige selleks, et uurida normatiivsust, kuna see seisneb samamoodi vastandumises: normatiivne ja mitte-normatiivne sõltuvad üksteisest otseselt, sest üheta ei saa olla teist (vt Butler 2004).

Väitekirja kolmandas peatükis annan esmalt lühiülevaate kummitusmaja narratiivi olukorrast 20. sajandi lõpus ja 21. sajandil, tuues esile olulisi tekste, mis on kas uuenduslikud või silmapaistvad näited pikaajalistest trendidest õudusfiktsioonis. See aitab järgnevatel peatükkides analüüsitavaid tekstid asetada laiemasse konteksti. Esimese alapeatüki keskne väide on, et tänapäevane õudusfiktsioon on nii intertekstuaalne, intermediaalne kui ka refleksiivne, nt 1990ndatel õudusfilmides toimunud nihkel autentsuse poole, mis on saavutatud nn leitud kaadrite (*found footage*) vormi kaudu, on märgatav mõju tänapäevasele õuduskirjandusele. Samuti võib täheldada, et üldine žanrihübridide (st mitut žanri, nt krimi/õudust, õudusulmet kombineerivate teoste) tavapäraseks muutumine kajastub ka õuduskirjanduses, kuna paljud tänapäevased kummitusmaja narratiivid on

hübriidsed kas teiste ulmežanritega või õudusžanri sees. Neist võib esile tuua õuduse / teadusulme (nt Barnesi „Dead Silence“, 2022), õuduse/*thriller*’i (nt Sageri „Enne pimedat koju“, 2020) ning õuduse / ajaloolise romaani (nt Paveri „Dark Matter“, 2010) hübriidid. Žanrisisestest hübriididest on märkimisväärsed näiteks kummitusmaja ja *slasher*’i hübriid (nt Thomase „Kill Creek“, 2017) ning gootika, kummastava ulme ja ajaloolise fantaasia hübriid (nt Starlingu „The Death of Jane Lawrence“, 2021). Kummitusmaja narratiive võib leida ka väiksemate üksustena teiste narratiivide sees, nt arvuti-rollimängudest. Samas on nad levinud ka digitaalses meedias ning veebipõhiste tekstidena (vt Kvistad 2020).

Kolmanda peatüki teine alapeatükk on empiirilise analüüsi meetodika ülevaade. Analüüsis kasutasin nii temaatilise kui ka lähilugemise tehnikaid, et uurida tekste teoreetilises raamistikus käsitletud vaatepunktidest ruumi, aja ja kogemuse kaudu. Väitekirja empiiriline osa hõlmab kuuest romaanist koosnevat tekstikorpust, mille valikuprintsiibid olid järgmised. Esiteks, tekst pidi sisaldama vähemalt üht kummitamise elementi, eelistatavalt hoonet, kus kummitab. Teiseks pidi iga romaan kasutama vähemalt ühte narratiivirežiimi, mida väitekirja esimeses peatükis kirjeldati, st gootikat, kummastavat ulmet ja/või õudust. Kolmandaks pandi võrdleva analüüsi tarbeks paari romaanid, mis lähenesid kummitusmaja motiivile sama dominantse narratiivirežiimi kaudu ning käsitlesid sarnaseid teemasid ja probleeme.

Väitekirja neljas, viies ja kuues peatükk sisaldavad empiirilist analüüsi, seejuures analüüsin igas peatükis kaht romaani esmalt eraldi ning seejärel võrdlevalt. Neljandas peatükis on vaatluse all gootika režiimis Moreno-Garcia „Mexican Gothic“ („Mehhiko õudusjutt“, 2020, eesti keeles 2022) ja Cañase „The Hacienda“ (2022), viiendas peatükis kummastava ulme režiimis Danielewski „House of Leaves“ (2000) ja DiLouie „Episode Thirteen“ (2023) ning kuundas peatükis õudusrežiimis Orlando „The September House“ (2023) ja Thorne’i „Diavola“ (2024).

Romaanide „Mexican Gothic“ ja „The Hacienda“ analüüsis toon esile eelkõige mõlema romaani sidususe gootika režiimiga, mis avaldub kasutatud gootika mallides, nt ajalooline kummitatud häärber; salapärase minevikuga perekond loo keskmes; gootika kangelanna; nägus, kuid pahatahtlik meestegelane; keelatud või õnnetu saatusega armastuslugu; traagiliselt hukkunud naised, kes surid mõistatuslikel põhjustel ning kelle surm on otseselt seotud narratiiviga, mida romaanid arendavad. Mõlemad romaanid, mille süžeed on ajalooainelised ning leiavad aset vastavalt 1950. ja 1820. aastate Mehhikos, suhestuvadki postkoloniaalse gootikaga just ajaloo kaudu. Läbi Doyle’ide perekonna maailmavaate ja käitumise on romaani „Mexican Gothic“ üheks fookuseks inglise kolonialism ning selle kaudu minevik, mis ähvardab tagasi tulla. „The Hacienda“ puhul on sarnases funktsioonis hispaania imperialism ning selle järelkaja. Seetõttu on just ajalugu see tont, mis süvitsi mõlemat häärberit kummitab: nii perekonnaajalugu kui ka vaiki-misi omaks võetud võimustruktuuride ajalugu. Sel põhjusel näitlikustavad mõlemad romaanid ajalisel teljel koguneva aja heterotoopiaid.

Käsitletavates teostes on keskseks ka ohvri rolli problemaatika. Romaanis „Mexican Gothic“ on Doyle’ide perekond nende häärberit reostava seene vardjad

ja kasvatajad (vt Keetley 2021), mitte selle ohvrid. „The Hacienda“ puhul on *Doña* María Catalina mitte oma abikaasa poolt mõrvatud süütu naine, vaid vägivallatseja, kes roimas veidi enne omaenda surma teenijatüdruku. Süžee käigus liiguvad mõlemad romaanid heterotoopia antropoloogilisel teljel kõrvalekaldeheterotoopiatest kriisiheterotoopiate suunas: see on ilmne naispeategelaste Noemí ja Beatrizi puhul, kuid on märgatav ka teistes karakterites. Kuna mõlemad romaanid keskenduvad kummitamise psühholoogilistele tagajärgedele ning kontekstidele, mis kummitamise selles vormis võimalikuks on teinud, väidan, et mõlemad romaanid seavad kahtluse alla range eristuse kompensatsiooni- ja illusiooniheterotoopiate vahel. Mõlemas romaanis ilmneb, et ka kujuteldava telje heterotoopiate range piiritlemine on probleemne, kuna eri karakterid tõlgendavad sama ruumi erinevalt.

Kahe vaatluseluse romaani vahel on siiski suur erinevus: kui „Mexican Gothic“ on sarnasem kummastava ulme kui gootikaga, sest selles kasutatakse nn seenekummastava ulme (*fungus weird*) võtteid, milles traditsiooniline kummitus asendatakse materiaalse, ihulise koolnuga (vt Keetley 2021), siis „The Hacienda“ kummitus on gootika traditsiooniga kooskõlas ja kehatu. Erinevalt romaani „Mexican Gothic“ häärberis on „The Hacienda“ San Isidro häärberis juba varem kummitanud. Kuigi viimase narratiivi keskmeks on *Doña* María Catalina kättemaksuhimuline kummitus, on romaanis välja toodud, et häärberis oli juba enne tema surma kummitanud ning need jõud, mis selles varem olid, polnud pahatahtlikud. Samas ilmneb romaanis „Mexican Gothic“ samuti kummituste kavatsuste probleematika, sest need, keda Noemí näeb ja kummitustena tõlgendab, ei ole tingimata tema suhtes pahatahtlikud, nt Ruth üritab järjepidevalt panna Noemí mõistma ohtlikku olukorda, millesse ta on sattunud.

Romaanide „House of Leaves“ ja „Episode Thirteen“ analüüsis keskendun eelkõige romaanide suhetele teadmistega (*knowledge*), mida ei ole võimalik sõnadesse panna ega täielikult mõista. Mõlema romaani keskmeks on lahendamatu mõistatus, mida karakterid üritavad lahendada: kummitusmaja toimib selles kontekstis tondina. Seeläbi on mõlemad romaanid seotud heterotoopia kujuteldaval teljel illusiooniheterotoopiatega, millel on probleemne suhe reaalsusega. Teoste „House of Leaves“ ja „Episode Thirteen“ narratiivid näitavad, et nende kummitusmajades on reaalsuse senised paradigmad sobimatud ning karakterid üritavad seetõttu kummitusmaja kontrolli alla saada, nt kaardistades selle võimatuid ruume või tehes teaduslikke mõõtmisi, et võimatut mõista. Selleks on omakorda tarvis kummituslahkust, kuid on tähelepanuväärne, et suurem osa karaktereid mõlemas romaanis ei suuda seda üles näidata. Erandid on Karen Navidson („House of Leaves“) ja Jessica Valenza / Rashida Brewer („Episode Thirteen“), kes on ka ainsad karakterid, kes näivad mõistvat, et nende kummitusmajade mõistatust pole võimalik lahendada.

Kuigi mõlema romaani kummitusmajad toimivad eelkõige kriisiheterotoopiatena, on nende suhestumine heterotoopia rändleva teljega erinev. Romaani „House of Leaves“ kummitusmaja on väljatungiv nii oma füüsilistes mõõtmetes kui ka läbi teksti enda, sest selle mõju ulatub romaani kesksest narratiivist ka kõigisse raamnarratiividesse. Romaani „Episode Thirteen“ kummitusmaja on aga,

vastupidi, sissetungiv, toimides pigem lõksuna ning lukustades karakterid endasse. Samas on ka romaani „House of Leaves“ kummitusmajal sissetungiv aspekt, sest see maja laieneb oma füüsilistes mõõtmetes sisse-, mitte väljapoole. Mõlemad narratiivid esindavad kiriromaani selle laiendatud tähenduses, st nende narratiivid on mitmetasandilised ning terviktekstid koosnevad fragmentidest (nt videotranskriptsioonid, meilid jm kirjavahetus, päevaraamatu sissekanded, blogipostitused), mida on loomaailmas toimetatud. Ehkki mõlema romaani keskmes on ruumiliselt ja ajalisel kummastav kummitusmaja, esitatakse seda karakterite kogemuse kaudu. Narratiivide fookuses on seega karakterite püüded kummitusmaja mõista.

Nii „House of Leaves“ kui ka „Episode Thirteen“ sisaldavad ebatraditsioonilist kummitamist: neist esimeses ei ole ühtegi olendit, mida oleks võimalik kummitusena tõlgendada, ning kuigi teises on kummituslaadsed olendid, ei ole tegemist traditsiooniliste kummitustega. Kuna romaanides puuduvad traditsioonilised kummitused, on nende suhestumine heterotoopia ajalise teljega vähem oluline kui gootika narratiivirežiimis, kuid mõlemad kummitusmajad sarnanevad kaduva aja heterotoopiatega. Vaatlusalused romaanid suhestuvad tihedalt just kummastava ulme tekstidega, milles samuti puuduvad kummitused jms üleloomulikud olendid ning mis sisaldavad (pseudo)teadust. Mõlema romaani kummitamisviisid meenutavad eelkõige kosmilist õudust, mille õudus tuleneb inimesele mõistmatutest fenomenidest ja olenditest. Kui romaani „House of Leaves“ raam-narratiiv toetab võimalust, et selle kummitusmaja on ise üks selline olend, siis romaani „Episode Thirteen“ kummitusmaja on pigem vahendaja rollis.

Õudusrežiimis romaanide „The September House“ ja „Diavola“ analüüsi keskmes on peresisesed suhted. Mõlemas romaanis pannakse kahtluse alla õnneliku tuumikperekonna idee. Romaani „The September House“ süžeeselgub, et peategelase Margareti abielu ei olnud õnnelik ega turvaline ning teadasaamine abikaasa surmast ei mõjuta negatiivselt ei tema ega nende ühise tütre elu, tundudes pigem kergendusena. „Diavola“ lõpplahenduses ütleb peategelane Anna oma perekonnast täielikult lahti, sest mõistab, et nendega suhtlemine ei tee tema elu paremaks. Kuigi mõlemas romaanis on traditsioonilised kummitused, on märkimisväärne, et nad toimivad narratiivides ka tontide tasandil, tehes nähtavaks süütunnet ja passiivsust, mis tuleneb agentsuse (*agency*) puudumisest. Mõlemad romaanid suhestuvad seega heterotoopia antropoloogilisel teljel kriisiheterotoopiatega, sest mõlema narratiivi tondid on peategelastele isiklikud ning mõlemad narratiivid tõstavad peategelaste ja tontide suhtluse kaudu esile kummituslahkuse.

Nii romaani „The September House“ kui ka „Diavola“ kummitusmajad toimivad kaduva aja heterotoopiatena, sest mõlemad hõlmavad kummitamist, mis ei ole tingimata püsivalt aktiivne. Kuigi romaani „The September House“ kummitusmajas kummitab aasta ringi, intensiivistub see tsükliliselt: Margaret näeb majas kummitusi iga päev, kuid maja ruumid muutuvad tõeliselt ohtlikuks vaid septembris, mil ka Margareti ajataju muutub hägusaks. „Diavola“ puhul toimub kummitamise eskalatsioon läbi süžee ning Anna (ja tema perekonna) ajataju objektiivsuse küsitavus süveneb. Tähelepanuväärne ongi siin see, et

mõlemas romaanis pole tegemist aja enda hälbega, vaid aja tajumise probleemiga. Seeläbi keskenduvad mõlemad narratiivid eelkõige kummitamise kogemusele ja mitte reaalsuse veidrusele või toimuva sotsiaalpoliitilise kontekstile.

Mõlema vaatlusaluse romaani kummitusmajad on vanad, tumeda ajalooga hooned ning seeläbi ka koguneva aja heterotoopiad, sest mõlemad kummitused (st Master Vale ja La Dama Bianca) on sajanditevanused ja majade vägivaldse ajalooga läbi põimunud. Erinevalt gootika režiimi romaanidest ei ole need kummitused romaanis kesksete perekondadega veresuguluse kaudu ühendatud, vaid on seotud majade endiga, toimides justkui keerisolendid (*vortex entities*), mis aheldavad teisi kummitusi enda külge. Nende keerisolendite kaudu ilmneb ka romaanide „The September House“ ja „Diavola“ narratiivide rändleva heterotoopia teljepositsioon: kui „The September House“ kujutab heterotoopiat, mis on äärmiselt sissetungiv ja üritab Margareti majja lukustada, siis „Diavola“ heterotoopia on väljatungiv, ulatudes Villa Taccola tornist aina kaugemale kuni Anna korterini New Yorgis. Liikumisvõime tingib ka mõlemas romaanis märgatava kujuteldava telje heterotoopia ebastabiilsuse, näidates seost heterotoopia rändlemisvõime ja selle kujuteldava telje positsiooni vahel. Mida liikuvad on heterotoopia negatiivsed omadused, seda keerulisem on narratiivis hoida kompensatsiooniheterotoopiat.

Väitekirja eesmärk on tuua esile tänapäevase kummitusmaja narratiivi mitmekesisust tekstide kaudu, millele on seni akadeemilises kontekstis vähe tähelepanu pööratud, ning süstematiseerida kummitusmaja narratiive, luues narratiivirežiimidel põhineva tüpoloogja. Kõiki kuut romaani ühendavaks tondiks on õnnelik perekodu. Selle normi tont kummitab kõiki kuut narratiivi ning näitlikustab normaalse ja ebanormaalse lahendamatu pinget: olgu pere kas bioloogiline, abielujärgne, kollegiaalne või leitud (*found family*), panevad need romaanid normatiivse perekonna idee järjepidevalt küsimärgi alla. Samuti on kuuest romaanist viies (st v.a „Diavola“) näha, et neoliberaalne üksikisiku vastutuse ideaal on petlik, sest karakterite ellujäämine ja pääsemine kummitusmajast sõltub otseselt nende sidemetest neid ümbritsevate inimestega.

Õuduskirjandus, nagu ütleb Clasen (2017), on populaarne seetõttu, et annab meile võimaluse turvaliselt suhelda sellega, mis meid hirmutab, ning pakub katarsist, mida pole ilma reaalse ohuta võimalik kogeda. Väitekirja kolmetahuline meetod, mis lähtub nii ruumi-, aja- kui ka kogemusteoriatest, võimaldab laiapindsemat analüüsi, mille abil uurida, kuidas kummitusmaja narratiivi ajalugu tänapäevast kirjandust mõjutab. Kujutades kummitusmaja normaalse perekodu vastandina, toimub normiloome, kuid see ei lõppe kunagi, sest normid ei ole staatilised (vt Butler 2004). Niisamuti kui kummitusmaja motiiv, muutuvad normid ajas ja kontekstis ning neid kummitab alati see, mis oli, mis on ja mis tuleb, aga ka see, mida kunagi ei tulnud.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Helen Roostma  
Date of birth: 23. 09. 1996  
Citizenship: Estonian  
Email: helenroostma@gmail.com

### Education

2015–2018 University of Tartu, Classical Philology, BA  
2018–2020 University of Tartu, European Languages and Cultures (English language and literature), MA *cum laude*  
2020–... University of Tartu, Germanic and Romance Languages and Literature (English language and literature), doctoral studies

### Employment

2023–2024 Junior Research Fellow, Department of English Studies, University of Tartu  
2025–... Information Specialist, Pärnu City Government

### Projects

2020–2024 Estonian Research Council project PRG934 „Imagining crisis ordinariness: discourse, literature and image” (01.01.2020–31.12.2024), research staff

### Continuing education

2015 International conference “Colloquium Balticum XIV Tartuense: Pontes ad fontes”, University of Tartu, participant  
2016 International conference “Colloquium Balticum XV Vilnense: Lupus in fabula”, University of Vilnius, participant  
2020 Winter school “Troubling Gender: Theory and Method”, University of Tartu, participant  
2021 Autumn school “Dialogues with Magic” (HV00.TK.022), University of Tartu, speaker  
2021 Summer school “Disturbances and Interventions: Contemporary Practices of Gender Research”, University of Groningen, participant  
2023 International conference “Current Research in Speculative Fiction 2023”, University of Liverpool, participant  
2023 International conference “Fear 2000: Horror Uncaged”, Sheffield Hallam University, participant

- 2024 International conference “Current Research in Speculative Fiction 2024”, University of Liverpool, speaker
- 2025 International conference “Haunting(s): Multidisciplinary Approaches”, Cardiff University, participant

### **Other professional activities**

- 2015 International conference “Colloquium Balticum XIV Tartuense: Pontes ad fontes”, member of organizing committee
- 2016–2018 University of Tartu Student Union student representative in the College of World Languages and Literatures
- 2020 Winter School “Troubling Gender: Theory and Method”, member of organizing committee
- 2020 HUMA Student Conference, panel moderator

### **Publications**

Roostma, Helen. Forthcoming. Thresholds to infinity: Towards a typology of haunted house narratives. *Interlitteraria*, 30: 2.

### **Research interests**

Contemporary fiction, transtextuality, transmediality, narratology, video games, franchises, popular and genre fiction.

# ELULOOKIRJELDUS

Nimi: Helen Roostma  
Sünniaeg: 23.09.1996  
Kodakondsus: eesti  
E-post: helenroostma@gmail.com

## Hariduskäik

2015–2018 Tartu ülikool, klassikaline filoloogia, BA  
2018–2020 Tartu ülikool, Euroopa keeled ja kultuurid (inglise keel ja kirjandus), MA *cum laude*  
2020–... Tartu ülikool, germaani-romaani filoloogia (inglise keel ja kirjandus) doktoriõpe

## Töökogemus

2023–2024 Germaani-romaani filoloogia nooremteadur, anglistika osakond, Tartu ülikool  
2025–... Infospetsialist, kantselei, Pärnu Linnavalitsus

## Projektid

2020–2024 Eesti Teadusagentuuri rühmagrandi PRG934 „Kriisi tavalisuse kujutamine: diskursus, kirjandus ja pilt” (01.01.2020–31.12.2024) täitja

## Akadeemiline enesetäiendus

2015 Rahvusvaheline konverents „Colloquium Balticum XIV Tartuense: Pontes ad fontes”, Tartu ülikool, osaleja  
2016 Rahvusvaheline konverents „Colloquium Balticum XV Vilmense: Lupus in fabula”, Vilniuse ülikool, osaleja  
2020 Talvekool „Troubling Gender: Theory and Method”, Tartu ülikool  
2021 Sügiskool „Dialog maagiaga” (HV00.TK.022), Tartu ülikool, esineja  
2021 Suvekool „Disturbances and Interventions: Contemporary Practices of Gender Research”, Gröningeni ülikool  
2023 Rahvusvaheline konverents „Current Research in Speculative Fiction 2023”, Liverpooli ülikool, osaleja  
2023 Rahvusvaheline konverents „Fear 2000: Horror Uncaged”, Sheffield Hallami ülikool, osaleja

- 2024 Rahvusvaheline konverents „Current Research in Speculative Fiction 2024”, Liverpooli ülikool, esineja
- 2025 Rahvusvaheline konverents „Haunting(s): Multidisciplinary Approaches“, Cardiffi ülikool, osaleja

### **Muu erialane tegevus**

- 2015 Rahvusvaheline konverents „Colloquium Balticum XIV Tartuense: Pontes ad fontes”, korraldusmeeskonna liige
- 2016–2018 Tartu Ülikooli Üliõpilasesinduse üliõpilasesindaja, maailma keelte ja kultuuride instituudi nõukogu, Tartu ülikool
- 2020 Talvekool „Troubling Gender: Theory and Method”, korraldusmeeskonna liige
- 2020 HUMA Tudengikonverents, moderaator

### **Publikatsioonid**

Roostma, Helen. Ilmumas. Thresholds to infinity: Towards a typology of haunted house narratives. *Interlitteraria*, 30: 2.

### **Uurimisvaldkonnad**

Tänapäevane kirjandus, transtekstuaalsus, transmediaalsus, narratoloogia, videomängud, frantsiisid, žanrikirjandus.

## DISSERTATIONES PHILOLOGIAE ANGLICAE UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

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