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The Hysterical Woman: An Analysis of Trauma in Gothic Women's Literature and Modern
Horror Film

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Molly Holdway
May 2023

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Dr. Scott Honeycutt

Keywords: hysteria, trauma, gothic, gothic horror, motherhood, isolation

ABSTRACT

The Hysterical Woman: An Analysis of Trauma in Gothic Women's Literature and Modern

Horror Film

by

Molly Holdway

This thesis explores trauma related to hysteria through themes of confinement, isolation, and motherhood in the works "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) by Charlotte Perkins-Gilman, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) by Shirley Jackson, and *The Babadook* (2014) directed by Jennifer Kent. Hysteria is explored first as a diagnosis and then as a weaponized term meant to keep women facing isolation and grief in a continuous state of oppression. The gothic and gothic horror genres display these themes through the dark nature of the human mind, which is vital in understanding the stories of the female characters discussed and the traumas they face. The setting of the home is used to acknowledge women's oppression related to trauma as it is a domestic setting that is known for confining women, particularly when trauma is explored through hysteria and the rest cure, the basis in which hysteria and isolation is explored.

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DEDICATION

For my dad—thank you for supporting me endlessly through every season of my life. This thesis would not have been possible without your never-ending encouragement, and I would not be where I am today without your love, patience, and grace.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
DEDICATION.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	8
History of the Hysteria Diagnosis and Gender.....	9
Trauma, Hysteria, and Gendered Oppression.....	12
Gothic Genre and the Gothic Home.....	14
Horror, Gothic Horror, and the Home Presented Through Film.....	16
Chapter Synopsis for “The Yellow Wallpaper,” The Haunting of Hill House, and The Babadook.....	17
CHAPTER 2. GOTHIC HYSTERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF “THE YELLOW WALLPAPER” AND THE REST CURE.....	22
CHAPTER 3. BECOMING MAD: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GOTHIC HOME AND FEMALE ENTRAPMENT IN SHIRLEY JACKSON’S <i>THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE</i> .	35
Eleanor’s Isolation Through Friendship.....	37
Identity and The Connection With The Mother Figure.....	41
The Mother House.....	45
CHAPTER 4. ISOLATING MOTHERHOOD AND <i>THE BABADOOK</i> : A PERSONIFICATION OF GRIEF THROUGH THE EYES OF MOTHER.....	50
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION.....	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY / WORKS CITED.....	73

VITA..... 78

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Readers of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century American literature are likely familiar with the hysterical woman character. One of the most well-known representations of a hysterical woman in American literature is Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's female narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper." The narrator in Gilman's short story follows many other female characters who are typically invalidated, overlooked, and treated as dangerous, fragile pieces of glass. Hysteria, of course, is not only found in women, but it became a "disease" primarily diagnosed in women after intense traumatic stress. Women who faced post-partum depression, anxiety, grief, or any type of extreme change were seen as hysterical if they acted on these emotions. Instead of being taken care of properly, many women were instructed by their doctors to practice the rest cure which scholars such as Vivian Delchamps explore as being "a treatment that kept women confined to their beds, restricting their bodily and mental freedoms" (105). The rest cure allowed for doctors to easily get out of helping women facing mental health issues, as helping them would cause these primarily male doctors to see women as equal beings in the medical field. By telling women to rest and refrain from engaging in any type of activity that could further their hysterical behavior, these doctors were furthering their control over women, their bodies, and their mental health. The gothic and horror settings are presented through confinement within the home in "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and Kent's Australian film *The Babadook* (2014) and this push for confinement arises from the basis of the rest cure. These women are all confined into the small spaces of their grief—the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is confined to her small room, Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House* is confined to Hill House, and Amelia from *The Babadook* is repeatedly encouraged to go home and rest to deal with her trauma. The setting of the home in all these stories' traps

women into their grief and trauma just like the men and doctors in their lives do. Through close analysis of the intersection of genre, trauma, and setting, this project argues that the use of confinement in these texts is significant in understanding the patriarchal control enacted in response to women's trauma.

History of the Hysteria Diagnosis and Gender

Hysteria is defined differently across time, but the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “overwhelming, uncontrollable emotion or agitation, especially as a collective reaction to an event of perceived importance or significance; behavior characterized by such emotion or agitation” (“Hysteria”). This applies from the nineteenth century when “The Yellow Wallpaper” was written to modern day as the patriarchal perception of women's emotions is still seen as an overwhelming disease even if it is not typically diagnosed. In the late nineteenth century when “The Yellow Wallpaper” was written, diagnosed hysteria was defined as “a woman's disease, a catchall malady for women who exhibited any of a multitude of symptoms, including paralysis, convulsions, and suffocation” (Shreve). These symptoms come from women's past traumas and the term of hysteria “has a long history of undercutting women's aspirations toward autonomy” (Shreve). This describes exactly what the female protagonists within all these works are dealing with, as they all have history with either being diagnosed as hysterical or labeled as such. Hysteria is a form of oppression to keep women from gaining autonomy and pushing back against the patriarchy as society thrives on the patriarchy controlling narratives for women. While a hysteria diagnosis is almost non-existent today, the term hysteria still sticks as an oppressive descriptor of women's behavior when related to their emotional states. “Hysterical” can be used for men when they are being funny, but for women the term is meant to acknowledge their defects as women. Women are still referred to as hysterical or insinuated to be

when acting upon intense emotion and this can be seen both in *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Babadook*. Both women face traumatic events that cause them to become intensely emotional at certain times and because of this emotion they are labeled as hysterical or mad. This label is extremely detrimental to women who are already facing trauma as it adds another layer of trauma onto what they are already coping with. Hysteria is a trauma within itself as it is a weaponized term that is meant to oppress women by belittling their emotions and experiences.

The diagnosis of hysteria during this time is almost ironic because women are seen as hysterical if they do not act on their womanly roles, but they are also seen as hysterical for showing hyper-femininity. This idea is explored in Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) when she states, "There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform" (9). This is what Friedan names The Feminine Mystique and it is seemingly a universal feeling across all women when it comes to hysteria. Friedan acknowledges that the idea of hysteria puts women in an even smaller box than they are already in by creating literally no way to escape scrutiny. It is a way for men and doctors to create an oppressive false reality that forces women into societal standards, taking away their individualism entirely. Hysteria can be seen by women as well, though most women that use this term in an oppressive nature do so because of internalized misogyny. This is not a term that women seem to use openly in the way that men and doctors do, especially in the nineteenth century as the term hysteria leads to a detrimental diagnosis. In *Women and Madness* (1972), Thomas Szasz analyzes hysteria as a "slave state" because the diagnosis "violates the legal and constitutional rights of the 'mentally ill'" (Qtd in Chesler 102). This analysis recognizes that hysteria is a gendered diagnosis that violates women's rights to proper mental health care as those who dictate this care, their husbands, fathers, and brothers, control their diagnosis to favor

their patriarchal needs. Laura Briggs acknowledges an important aspect of hysteria as it mainly applies to elite white women. In her article “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology” (2000), she states, “Hysteria implicitly participated in a discourse of race and reproduction, one which identified white women of the middle and upper classes as endangering the race through their low fertility, while non-white women, immigrants, and poor people had many children” (Briggs 247). This statement acknowledges that while hysteria is clearly oppressive, it is even more so oppressive to non-white women and poor women as they are characterized as “strong, hardy, and prolifically fertile” instead of “weak, frail, and nervous” which is just another form of oppression within an already oppressive patriarchal standard (Briggs 247).

The rest cure creates an additional trauma for women on top of what they have already experienced with hysteria. Male doctors during the nineteenth century were not well enough educated on women’s mental health to properly diagnose them, so hysteria became a way to oppress these women and force them back into vulnerable and dependent states. The rest cure also became a place for male doctors to take out their anger on female patients. Many women were physically abused by physicians before the rest cure was enacted as a form of treatment. In “The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th- Century America” (1972), Rosenberg-Smith writes on the heinous crimes happening to women when they had symptoms such as “...complaints of nervousness, depression, the tendency to tears and chronic fatigue, or of disabling pain” (660). These symptoms led to “painful therapy—to electric shock treatment, to blistering, to multiple operations, even to amputations” (Rosenberg-Smith 660). This type of abuse was allowed because male physicians decided it was the best way to rid of hysteria that came from mental health issues that they did not understand. Phyllis Chesler states, “Most

twentieth-century women who are psychiatrically labeled, privately treated, and publicly hospitalized are not mad... they may be deeply unhappy, self-destructive, economically powerless, and sexually impotent—but as women they're supposed to be" (25). These things, of course, were very detrimental to women but simply expected. Women were given poor medical treatment and poor treatment as human beings because they were not valued enough to be properly helped; instead, they were treated as beasts that needed to be tamed in order to obey.

Trauma, Hysteria, and Gendered Oppression

Trauma, according to Ann Kaplan in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005) revolves around living in terror. She states, "Such daily experience of terror may not take the shape of classic trauma suffered by victims or survivors, but to deny these experiences as traumatic would be a mistake" (Kaplan 1). She goes on to explore family trauma which is "traumas of loss, abandonment, rejection, betrayal" and quiet trauma which stems from family trauma and is "partly due to the implicit gendering of trauma studies, such that traumas of (and perpetrated by) men have been a main focus" (Kaplan 19). These definitions apply to all three works discussed as each heroine faces a trauma that causes her to be perceived as hysterical or mad by other characters and comes from loss, abandonment, and betrayal with the men in their lives. A term that can be applied to each work is traumatic hysteria—introduced by Freud and Breuer in Kaplan's novel, which is a connection between "ordinary hysteria and traumatic neuroses" in which "traumatic memories are not available to the patient in the way commonplace ones are but act as a 'kind of foreign body' in the psyche" (26). This means that women who are facing traumatic hysteria are unable to experience their memories correctly. Memories related to trauma are hidden from them or seen as an out of body experience in which it may not feel like it actually happened to them. This can be related to each of the female

protagonists discussed within this project. The unnamed narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” has trauma from post-partum depression and motherhood, but when diagnosed as hysterical this trauma becomes much more intense as it continues to be professionally ignored. Through this she falls into a state of madness and her traumatic experiences cause her to have this out of body experience with the woman inside of the wallpaper pattern. The same can be said for Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House* as she struggles with separating memories of her dying mother from actual events in Hill House. The out of body experience continues to Amelia in *The Babadook* as her insomnia creates current traumatic experiences mixed with her past traumatic memories. These experiences come from trauma that these women face before hysteria comes into the picture, but they also come from the trauma that hysteria pushes onto them. The traumatic hysteria presented in each of these stories comes from lack of treatment and help available to these women—the weaponized and oppressive term of hysteria pushes them further into intense emotional distress in which they either to struggle to escape from or never do.

Sandra Bloom, an essential scholar in understanding trauma, proposes a question in *Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies* (2013) that is crucial in understanding women’s hysteria and trauma. She argues we should ask, “What happened to you?” instead of “What’s wrong with you?” because the latter question places blame on the person with trauma (Bloom). When analyzing women in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *The Babadook* the question of “What happened to you?” is vital in understanding where their trauma comes from, and why this trauma is labeled as hysteria. These women already have traumas they are dealing with, but the diagnosis of hysteria, the “What is wrong with you?” question, places more trauma in their lives leading to the traumatic hysteria they encounter. This can be seen when characters close to the heroines discussed in this thesis

fail to show empathy when they are very much aware of the trauma these heroines face. For example, Amelia's sister Claire in *The Babadook* acts baffled that Amelia is still learning to cope with her husband's grief seven years later. Claire, who has a seemingly loving husband and daughter, does not stop for a moment to consider that Amelia's trauma does not mean that something is wrong with her, but rather that something happened to her that she is unable to deal with while raising a son who also faces his own trauma. However, it is worth noting that the women discussed here are fictional, so the question of "What happened to you?" is explored through past grief that we are only given glimpses of. What should be understood by this fictional grief is that the women are being treated as if something is wrong with them which compounds their trauma within the horror/gothic genre.

The women represented in this thesis are dealing with trauma from post-partum depression and grief. The hysteria we see, that gendered, oppressive diagnosis, is there as a form of horror. When these women are already struggling with trauma, the most terrifying thing imaginable is to have that trauma belittled and turned into a diagnosis that does not help and does not have a cure. Gothic and horror literature and film like "The Yellow Wallpaper," *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Babadook* explore trauma and hysteria through the setting of a house which is typically seen as a safe space. However, these pieces of literature and film show readers that the women inside of these houses are trapped inside of their grief, and their grief is personified through the house, furthering them into the traumatic hysteria they so desperately want to escape.

Gothic Genre and the Gothic Home

The gothic and horror genres can be similar in their characteristics, though they are not synonymous. Gothic typically has the suggestion of the supernatural and the uncanny, the

expressive use of landscape, the peril and oppression of the female protagonist, and critique of wide social structures (Rayner 92). These aspects of the gothic create “powerful emotions through the suggestion of pain and danger” that works for both literature and film (Rayner 96). One of the biggest differences between the gothic genre and the horror genre is that gothic typically uses terror for plot whereas horror uses terror for art. The gothic genre creates a plot within terror that comments on social tensions and anxieties while horror creates art within terror that explores the darkness of the human condition to get a reaction from the audience. The horror genre is supposed to make you uneasy and disgusted while the gothic genre gives off an aura of mystery and gloom. This is not to say that the gothic genre cannot be terrifying, because it can, but horror presents terror in completely different ways such as jump scares, gore, extreme expression, etc.

The works discussed in this thesis address the claustrophobic nature of the setting of the home. The rooms and houses that these women find themselves confined in are not evil or terrifying by nature, but they become that way once they become a source of oppressive trauma. The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is in a room in which she concludes that women before her have had traumatic experiences like her own. This realization forces her to understand the seriousness of her confinement. The same can be said for Eleanor while she is in Hill House—the house is said to be haunted, but only because of the experiences that have happened inside of it. The house itself is not inherently evil, but the trauma that occurs within its walls creates a terror that sticks for generations. *The Babadook* handles this a little differently as Amelia’s confinement is within her own home, but again this home is not evil in nature—it becomes haunted through the trauma and anger dealt with inside. So, while these rooms and houses are not particularly evil or sinister, the message behind them, the oppressive nature in which they

stand for, creates terror all in the same. In “Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors, and Things That Go Bump in the Night” (1990), Michelle Massé states, “The originating trauma is the prohibition of female autonomy in the Gothic, in the families that people it, and in the society that reads it” which acknowledges that the trauma comes from female experience in general and the space in which the women inhabit is just another oppressive factor on top of the lack of autonomy they already face (682).

Horror, Gothic Horror, and the Home Presented Through Film

As discussed previously, horror has many similar characteristics to the gothic genre, but the main difference is that the art of horror is found within the audience’s reaction to the horror on screen. Where with gothic the audience feels terror through societal anxieties, mystery, and overall gloom, the horror genre typically represents terror through visuals and sounds. Horror usually has monsters, demons, jump scares, loud sounds, abandoned environments, red herrings, imminent danger, and the “final character.” These characteristics may not apply to all horror—much like gothic, horror has many different subgenres. The horror pieces introduced in this project fall under psychological horror, which is a subgenre of horror that focuses on emotional and psychological states to frighten the audience. With horror, however, an important distinction is made through expression and reaction. Jonathan Rayner, author of “Gothic Definitions: The New Australian ‘Cinema of Horrors’” (2011), states, “The Gothic’s representation of mental disturbance and the narration (and evocation) of immoderate emotional reactions are mirrored in the horror film’s frequent resort to expressionistic mise-en-scene and its goal of inspiring terror” (91). This can be applied both to *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Babadook* as they both fall under the gothic horror genre. Both works, even though they are presented through different medias, depend on the audience’s reaction for terror. The sounds and jump scares within *The*

Haunting of Hill House bring out the terror and disgust that the horror genre calls for without presenting a literal monster to be afraid of. *The Babadook* uses loud sounds and jump scares to bring terror to the audience as well, but the film does so by showing the monster, The Babadook, instead of a metaphorical one which typically falls into the gothic genre.

Chapter Synopsis for “The Yellow Wallpaper,” The Haunting of Hill House, and The Babadook

The first chapter outlines the importance of “The Yellow Wallpaper” in conversation with hysteria and trauma. Author Charlotte Perkins-Gilman puts the unnamed hysterical woman in a gothic setting to show the terror that diagnosed hysteria brings. The gothic setting and elements such as “women in distress,” “women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male,” and “the metonymy of gloom and horror” are key to understanding how the female protagonist struggles with “losing her grip on reality” (Harris 1-2, Kröger 222). Readers can see this happening as the narrator is trapped in an unsettling room while struggling with post-partum depression. The main character finds herself becoming hysteric when she sees a woman crawling inside of the wallpaper pattern, a pattern meant to represent all the other women who have been in her place—one in which she is struggling mentally but is not receiving professional help other than the rest cure, which clearly does not help her. Gilman uses the small room with the horrendous yellow wallpaper as a form of entrapment for the narrator. Her trauma is trapped inside of that room with her—a room which is a nursery—and the narrator cannot escape her post-partum depression because it is quite literally in the walls around her. The gothic genre creates a terrifying space in which the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” cannot escape because of the patriarchal control around her. Her husband, who is a doctor, forces her to practice the rest cure, which forces her to stay inside of the walls that are causing her trauma. Her

hysteria diagnosis arises because of the assumption that she is not fulfilling her womanly roles by taking care of her child after birth, which leads to the rest cure that drives the narrator mad.

The gothic setting of the “The Yellow Wallpaper” plays the role of the narrator’s trauma. The room is literally holding her inside of the pattern of the patriarchy, and the woman crawling inside of the wallpaper is a representation of the suffocation she faces while being forced into this space. Gothic literature typically follows the characteristics of “gloomy, brooding, moody” but it also contains fiction that “deals with themes of isolation, vulnerability, and family strife” (Kröger 222). The narrator in this story clearly deals with isolation, vulnerability, and family strife all at the hands of the patriarch in her family. Her vulnerability is taken advantage of and through the rest cure she is isolated from the actual help she needs. Through her diagnosis of hysteria, the narrator’s rights as a human are taken from her and she is trapped in a room that represents her traumatic experiences that have happened and will likely continue to happen as she deals with post-partum depression. Being a mother is what starts the narrator’s traumatic experience and her disassociation with motherhood is likely shocking to readers during the nineteenth century. Women were, and still are, expected to be nurturers, so when the narrator refuses this role because of her post-partum depression her husband diagnosis her with hysteria. The trauma that comes from becoming a mother turns into something much larger as the narrator also must face the trauma that comes with a hysteric diagnosis.

Building off the gothic element, chapter two will take on views of women’s trauma in relation to hysteria as an oppressive, gendered diagnosis, but in a more subtle way. Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* does not explicitly diagnose Eleanor with hysteria, but the doctor in the novel, along with the other companions there, all refer to her as hysterical and look at her as a child who cannot contain her emotions. Eleanor can hear things that others cannot,

and she has an unpredictable way of thinking that sets her apart from the others. Jackson only gives the reader a slight insight into Eleanor's past, but her mother's death seems to impact many of her thoughts and feelings. The trauma that she faces over the loss of her mother and the complicated relationship she has with her sister seems to affect her in a way that she cannot understand. As the story progresses, Eleanor shows signs that she is not well through repeated phrases, uncharacteristic emotions, and still hearing things that the others do not. Jackson portrays Eleanor's trauma and supposed hysteria through gothic horror which, as Devendra P. Varma states in "Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson's Use of the Gothic" (1984), is "inseparably associated with the gothic castle, which is an image of power, dark, isolated, and impenetrable... the castle stands as a central image of the lonely personality" (Qtd. in Parks 25). Jackson using the walls of Hill House to represent Eleanor's trauma shows that she is wholly surrounded by loneliness, furthering her into the hysteric diagnosis that those around her continuously shove down her throat. She "surrenders willingly to its dark embraces" because of the fragile state her past traumas have left her in. Eleanor is seen as "fragile, self-dissolving and fusing with the substance of Hill House" as if the house is diagnosing her along with Dr. John, Theodora, and Luke (Parks 25). Hill House is the definition of a gothic haunted house with its old, dark, and gloomy ambiance. While the past of Hill House is not entirely revealed, readers can assume sinister things occurred there. It is a "terrible place... a location that is not-home" which is commonly used in the horror genre (Miller 4). This place radiates bad energy from the beginning and in the case of Hill House, it oppresses Eleanor by holding her and her grief hostage within its walls. It seems like Hill House, much like the room in "The Yellow Wallpaper," is a space that confines the trauma of those who reside inside of it.

Chapter three will explore the modern trajectory of the hysterical woman in the horror film *The Babadook*. Main character Amelia is dealing with the trauma of losing her husband in a car accident on the same day that she gives birth to her son. The film happens seven years after this loss but grieving over the loss of such a vital person does not simply stop, so Amelia finds herself struggling to deal with grief and her unusual son at the same time. When the Babadook, a personalization of Amelia's grief, starts to haunt her during the night, she becomes angry, violent, and presumably hysterical while trying to hold on to reality. This grief threatens to overcome Amelia in similar ways that trauma trapped Eleanor and the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper." All three of these women face trauma that is never properly dealt with which leads to their hysterical moments. These moments are typically brought on by the men in their lives who expect them to still be in line with societal standards even after such intense traumatic events take place.

The traumatic hysteria that comes with Amelia's trauma is connected to the hysteria seen in *The Haunting of Hill House* and "The Yellow Wallpaper"—the hysteria is not something that these women have, but it is something that they are believed to have. Through their trauma and intense emotional responses, these women are treated as hysterical to further oppress and confine them. The vulnerability each of these women faces with motherhood and mothering makes them targets for a gendered label as it keeps them in a state of vulnerability and fear. Hysteria within each of these works becomes a weaponized diagnosis and term that is meant to lock women inside of confined spaces until they succumb to true hysteria due to their traumatic experiences.

This project focuses on women's trauma from the nineteenth century into modern day through literature and film. The gothic and horror genres are chosen to represent trauma and hysteria specifically because of the predominately male audience that these genres attract.

Through attracting a male audience, these stories can reach those who are typically represented as the oppressors in these pieces of work. This is not to say that the women creators behind these stories are catering towards a male audience, because they are not. This research attempts to explore the importance of these stories reaching a male audience in hopes to shed light on women's trauma and the isolation that comes with it. In genres that do typically cater towards a male audience, these female authors and director create an authentic experience of women's trauma to break the expectations of gothic and horror and its representation of women. Women within these works are not exploited, instead they are authentically represented as are the delicate, yet very important issues that they face. In "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" (1991), Carol Clover states, "pleasure, for a masculine-identified viewer, oscillates between identifying with the initial passive powerlessness of the abject and terrorized girl-victim of horror and her later, active empowerment" (Qtd in Williams 7). With this statement, Clover explores the male interest in women in gothic and horror and how powerlessness plays an active role in this interest. Seeing a woman victimized, terrorized, and powerless raises interest for men because of its "sadomasochistic thrills" (Clover 7). This type of male experience with horror and gothic is what the women creators of the works discussed in this project are trying to avoid. These women create stories that make the genre inviting to all genders without oppressing women through violence and powerlessness in order to gain male viewership. Through exploration of the gothic and horror genre, women's trauma, and the confinement of setting, these works set out to acknowledge the isolation that comes with confinement from the patriarchy and societal and detrimental standards set for women.

CHAPTER 2. GOTHIC HYSTERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF “THE YELLOW WALLPAPER” AND THE REST CURE

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” follows an unnamed narrator who is trapped within a room to deal with her supposed hysteria. Readers never learn her name because she stands to represent all women during the nineteenth century who faced the hysteria diagnosis. The room is the narrator’s prison for the entirety of the story—it represents the confinement that a hysteria diagnosis places on women. The narrator’s husband, the patriarch of the family, controls her hysteria diagnosis and forces the rest cure for her treatment which, of course, is not a treatment at all. The rest cure was created to oppress women by taking away their human rights, which is acknowledged by Lorraine Sim when she writes, “The radical restrictions that rest cure practices enforced on a woman’s physical, social, creative, and intellectual activities has been interpreted by many feminist critics as a method of controlling women and limiting the intellectual and practical scope of their lives” (357). This diagnosis allows men and doctors in women’s lives to view them as objects instead of humans as women lose their right to social and intellectual activity, which is vital to being mentally and physically healthy. Gilman portrays hysteria in a weaponized way to show the long lasting affects this diagnosis has on women. The trauma faced before this diagnosis, post-partum depression for the unnamed narrator, is not cured by the diagnosis of hysteria—it is worsened. Hysteria as a diagnosis is a form of trauma in itself and this diagnosis met with the rest cure easily leads to worsening mental health issues. The narrator within “The Yellow Wallpaper” faces the hysteria diagnosis and the forced rest cure treatment that keeps her confined into a room that represents an ongoing pattern for women before her as she also faces trauma that comes from her new role as a mother.

The narrator has just had a son in which she does not feel a connection with due to her post-partum depression. While this illness is never stated, readers can infer that what the narrator is dealing with is post-partum depression and not hysteria. The narrator's husband, John, who is also her doctor, finds her behavior to be strange for a new mother, but instead of finding the help that she needs for her depression, John diagnoses her with hysteria and forces her to follow the rest cure. This treatment keeps the narrator in a confined space, which was once a nursery, something that continually reminds the narrator of her "failure" as a mother. The rest cure drives the narrator mad as she imagines a woman crawling within the taunting nursery wallpaper because she seems to be aware that other women have been in the same place that she is. The narrator is alone and forced to deal with trauma in an unhealthy way because her husband dictates her medical rights and refuses to get her proper treatment. The narrator, like many other women diagnosed with hysteria, is seen as a child who is simply acting out about having new womanly duties—John uses the rest cure as a form of weaponized control to punish her for not taking on the role of a perfect mother directly after giving birth. John likely assumes if he punishes the narrator with the rest cure, as the rest cure takes away her ability to do things that give her joy, such as writing, that she will cave and become a perfect nurturing wife and mother. Carol Rosenberg-Smith acknowledges this type of resentment towards women from their doctors when she states,

The resentment seems rooted in two factors: first, the baffling and elusive nature of hysteria itself, and the second, the relation which existed in the physicians' minds between their categorizing of hysteria as a disease and the role women were expected to play in society. These patients did not function as women were expected to function, and, as we shall see, the physician who treated them felt threatened both as a professional and

as a rejected male. He was the therapist thwarted, the child untended, and the husband denied nurturance and sex. (663)

This statement acknowledges where the anger towards these women stems from, and it revolves around fragile masculinity and the need to control women. Physicians who abused traumatized women and suggested the rest cure as treatment often sought to punish them for rejecting their feminine roles in society. They wanted to convince women they were physically ill so that they would not have to address their mental illnesses brought on by these societal expectations. If women didn't live up to these expectations, such as taking care of a child directly after birth, she was seen as childish and rebellious. These physicians, such as the narrator's husband, who chose the rest cure were proving that hysteria is a gendered oppressive system by taking away everything that makes a person human, even the ability to walk out of a room and take a breath of fresh air. Having control over women physically, socially, creatively, and intellectually takes away who they are which is exactly what hysteria does. It takes a very real, very human trauma, and turns it into something that is controlled and weaponized.

The idea of men and doctors creating a sickness to control women was common during Gilman's time. Mental health is very important in society today but in the late nineteenth century when "The Yellow Wallpaper" was written, doctors depended on the sickness of women with trauma. The oppression of women fueled the patriarchy and furthered their control in their field as well as their control as men in general. When women acted upon their emotions and rejected their expected roles they were fighting against those standards held in place by the patriarchy and therefore threatening their masculinity and superiority. The book *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (2011) discusses the connection between medicine and sexist oppression, arguing:

The doctors' view of women as innately sick did not, of course, make them sick, or delicate, or idle. But it did provide a powerful rationale against allowing women to act in any other way. Medical arguments were used to explain why women should be barred from medical school, from higher education altogether, from voting... Medical arguments seemed to take the malice out of sexual oppression: when you prevented a woman from doing anything active or interesting, you were only doing this for her own good. (Ehrenreich and English 58)

This statement acknowledges that doctors viewing women as sick forces them to feel as if they are in a constant state of sickness. Through this sickness, women are oppressed by not being able to achieve things such as medical school, which, of course, is for the advantage of male doctors. This point applies perfectly to "The Yellow Wallpaper" and most literature revolving around hysteria. The narrator in Gilman's short story becomes truly hysteric after being diagnosed because she is repeatedly told that she is sick. She tries to write and free her mind from the sickness, but even that she is not allowed to do. She is completely trapped inside of a narrative created by the men around her and in the end she has nothing else to do except to succumb to it. Even when her husband reminds her that he is only doing this to help her get better, the reader gets a sense that the narrator notices the sinister undertones of his character and his adamant want for the rest cure treatment.

The narrator's postpartum depression can be seen within the story when she states, "Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able,-- to dress and entertain, and order things. It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby! And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous" (Gilman 649). This statement does not outright claim that the narrator has trauma revolving around her son's birth, but it is insinuated as she

does not find herself able to be around him after his birth. Her husband finds her nervousness to be ridiculous because what she is experiencing is something that he never will—he has the privilege as the father to simply enjoy the child without dealing with the aftermath of what having a child does to one’s body and mental health. The narrator states, “John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him” (Gilman 649). This moment acknowledges that John is not willing to understand the narrator’s trauma related to post-partum depression as he finds that she is making it up in her head to avoid her roles in his life. Her trauma from post-partum depression is represented within the confined space of the room she is told to practice the rest cure in because this room happens to have been a nursery. Not only is the narrator trapped in a room without being able to freely write, as this seems to be something that allows her to clear her mind, but she is also stuck in a room that is itself a source for her trauma. She is surrounded by a room made by a likely adoring mother for her child, something the narrator simply cannot relate to in this moment. John expects her to bounce back quickly and continue to take on her expected womanly and motherly roles, but the narrator has traumas that keep her from being able to move on and since they are not properly dealt with they only get worse. The room becomes something much larger in the narrator’s life and her inability to leave it becomes one more thing in her life that she cannot gain control over.

The setting in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is crucial in understanding the oppression and trauma that the narrator faces. The setting is a confined room that the narrator cannot escape, and it represents a pattern that women are forced to fall into when diagnosed with hysteria. From the beginning of the story the narrator has a bad feeling about not only the room, but the house itself. The narrator states, “There is something strange about the house—I can feel it. I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window”

(Gilman 648). This gives the reader an insight into the gothic nature of the story as well as showing John's condescending nature. John manipulates his wife into thinking she is sick by telling her how she feels, and this leads to him manipulating her feelings about the room as well. John insists that they cannot leave the house because it has already been paid for three months, but when the narrator mentions moving downstairs the conversation is shut down. It is clear that John intends to keep the narrator in a space that makes her uncomfortable and weary for if she continues to worsen, his control over her grows. After having the conversation with John about moving downstairs, the narrator notices the wallpaper and states, "There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down" (Gilman 649). This moment points to the importance of the setting foreshadowing the narrator's life. Not only is John manipulating her into staying in a confined space in which her trauma engulfs her, the setting participates in this manipulation as it shows her the cruelty that the women in the wallpaper faced. Essentially, there is a threat in the air that if the narrator does not get better then John will continue to keep her in the room in which she will become a woman crawling in the wallpaper as well. She will suffocate both from her trauma and from her lack of autonomy within her marriage, society, and the room itself.

This manipulation can continue be seen through setting when the narrator is forced to stay inside of one room in the house, per the rest cure treatment. The room is described as

A big, airy room, the whole floor with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls. The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach...I never saw a

worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin. (Gilman 648)

This rich detail of the room the narrator stays in is not simply describing the room; this detail is put into place to draw attention to the sinister nature of what will occur in the room. It is already alarming to the narrator because of her post-partum depression and her husband making their room the nursery is almost like he is making fun of her trauma as if it is not a real thing she deals with every morning when she wakes up. The room is a reminder of how she has “failed” as a mother and to force her to stay in the nursery shows that John purposely wants to harm her through refusing to allow her to escape this “failure.” On top of that, the details about the wallpaper, the rings, and the patches about the head do not seem to really match up with what a reader might associate with a nursery. There is something about the imagery Gilman provides readers with that makes us think something sinister happened in that room and that the narrator can sense it right away. By the end of the story the reader can infer that the sinister feeling presented to us comes alive through the narrator’s oppression. The narrator begins to see a woman crawling in the wallpaper pattern that bothers her so fiercely and as this figure becomes more prominent so does her sickness. The more freedom John takes from her, the sicker she becomes, and the more the pattern drives her truly mad. All these things connect—John’s manipulation and control of his wife truly lead to her becoming sick in a way that she was not when she arrived at the house. John weaponized the hysteria diagnosis by manipulating it to work in his favor. If the narrator believes that she is sick and that he is the one who can fix her, she will do whatever it takes. John plays on his wife’s fear of loneliness and sickness to keep his control in their relationship, but once the sickness he created for her becomes true, he finds

himself the one without control as the narrator attempts to escape the pattern of the patriarchy that is suffocating her.

This pattern seen in the wallpaper comes from women who have experienced the hysteria diagnosis before the narrator in Gilman's story. She is not the first, and by the end of the story the reader realizes that she is unfortunately not the last either. Scholar Vivian Delchamps writes on the topic of the woman in the wallpaper when she states, "The narrator identifies with the woman she sees within it, and the symbol of her imprisonment is twisted into a symbol of liberation" (117). Through the narrator's understanding that she is not the first woman to become trapped within the hysteria diagnosis it is almost as if she finds comfort. The woman in the wallpaper once terrified her, but then they suddenly become connected when the narrator recognizes John's sinister plan behind the rest cure. Gilman writes, "... there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?" (656). This statement acknowledges the multitude of women who have been in the same place as the narrator, though the narrator wonders if they will ever escape like she feels that she herself has. The narrator has seen through the rest cure, the hysteria diagnosis, and her husband's intentions, but she still does not have the help she needs for her trauma with post-partum depression.

As much as the reader roots for the narrator and the women creeping in the wallpaper pattern, the ending is not a happy one. Once the narrator escapes the room and her husband faints she states, "Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time" (Gilman 656). The husband fainting seems like it might create an escape for the narrator, but it does no such thing. John is overwhelmed by his loss of control momentarily, but he is not dead, and he will awaken to take back his control over

his wife. In “Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (1984), Paula Treichler acknowledges this when she writes,

On the one hand, it testifies to an alternative reality and challenges patriarchy head on. The fact that her unflappable husband faints when he finds her establishes the dramatic power of her new freedom . . . On the other hand, there are consequences to be paid for this escape . . . The surrender of patriarchy is only temporary: her husband has merely fainted, after all, not died, and will no doubt move swiftly and severely to deal with her. Her individual escape is temporary and compromised. (67)

While this is not an ideal ending for readers, it is an honest one. Escaping trauma is not possible without actual help and the narrator never receives what she needs. She is isolated and driven a little mad so instead of truly escaping she becomes one with the women in the wallpaper. She becomes a figure who creeps instead of a person who can leave. At the end of the story the narrator is no longer just confined to a room, she is also confined to the wallpaper pattern in which the patriarchy has a tight hold on her. Another hold over the narrator is the birth of her son as she is entering a new life in which she is not seen as capable of making decisions for herself as a woman because of her refusal of “normal” roles for a mother. While her son is only briefly mentioned, it is worth noting that having a son insinuates a perpetual cycle of patriarchal control for the narrator. Her disconnect with her son may very well come from this—becoming a mother may have struck something within her that causes her to acknowledge the confinement she has been placed in by having a son. Not only is she confined to the room because of her lack of mothering skills, but she is also confined into the patriarchy on behalf of becoming a mother to a son.

The sinister feeling that the reader notices while reading “The Yellow Wallpaper” comes from the gothic genre—there is a supernatural feeling due to the woman creeping in the wallpaper and the tone of the story is mysterious and suspenseful. “The Yellow Wallpaper” sticks to one of the most prominent gothic themes, of course, by having an oppressed female protagonist who needs to be saved, except in Gilman’s story she breaks this tradition through the ending (Rayner). The gothic genre is not typically associated with women, especially in the nineteenth century when Edgar Allan Poe was popular for his work such as “The Fall of the House of Usher.” This changes during the nineteenth century, of course, when popular female authors such as Mary Shelley and Ann Radcliffe become popular within the Gothic genre, changing it completely and creating a place for women in what was previously acknowledged as predominately written and read by men. However, Gilman seemed to be aware that to raise awareness about hysteria and women’s trauma she would need to cater to a predominately male audience to be published. She wrote the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” as if she was a real person dealing with such a terrifying reality of the century and this bleeds through to female readers. If Gilman had been more blatant about the purpose for the story it is likely it would have been turned down, but the gothic elements within allow for a story that the public could find some type of interest in. It seems to help the story that Gilman herself had experience with a hysteria diagnosis—her own experience allows the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” to ring true even though it is not a direct representation of herself. In “From Reality to Fiction: How Women’s Mental Health was Portrayed in 19th Century Literature” (2022), Sara Mason writes, “The female characters in these works are not direct representations of their authors, but the authors used their writing to express themselves and their thoughts on the treatment of women” (6). Gilman’s story brings awareness to hysteria and the trauma that comes with such a diagnosis

and the importance of the issue likely comes from her own experience. It is important to separate author from character, of course, but the authenticity of the narrator's struggle with hysteria is brought to life through the rich details Gilman likely faced in her own life. The fact that Gilman needed to appeal to a male audience to get her experience and the experiences of many other women during the nineteenth century to be acknowledged is just another form of oppression, and this gendered conversation is explored through author's relation to their oppressed female characters. The novel *Wild Unrest: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Making of the Yellow Wallpaper* (2010) speaks on the relationship between author and character as well:

It is possible that Charlotte's varied and continuing use of drugs, such as cocaine, enabled her to blend sight and smell here, and in that writing this story she was able to recall in her imagination a wide range of drug-induced experiences of wallpaper or other objects that seemed to come alive. Or it may have been only that she was building on literary memory animated by the haunted-house stories of other writers. (Horowitz 185)

The gothic elements in Gilman's story likely come both from her experience and popular literature from the nineteenth century such as Poe. Poe seemed to be an inspiration for "The Yellow Wallpaper," especially the short story "Ligeia" (Horowitz). Regardless, Gilman's own relationship with hysteria is important to note as the reader experiences the narrator's own personal trauma with it. The story, of course, is fiction, but the elements of hysteria that affect women's lives need to be true to be valid to society and Gilman using her own experiences broke the tradition of the gothic genre and created a new space for female writers and female characters.

Other parts of the story come completely from gothic elements such as "the concomitant critique of wider social structures" (Rayner 92). This element is the most important within "The

Yellow Wallpaper” as Gilman is showing awareness on the issue of women being oppressed by powerful men in a patriarchal society. Another important element of the gothic genre is the gothic castle or home which is not entirely seen in Gilman’s short story, but the presence is still there. Seen more so in works like *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson, the gothic home is an overpowering presence much like the tyrannical male figure. Both demand to be seen and obeyed, but in the case of “The Yellow Wallpaper” the gothic setting falls into the confinement of a room instead of a large castle. The narrator, as stated previously, does find herself nervous with the house in general, but her confinement is even smaller than that of Eleanor Vance in *The Haunting of Hill House*. The unnamed narrator is truly locked inside of a box with no way to escape—something that isolates her in a way that others in the gothic/gothic horror genre do not face as prominently. A theme that runs the female characters in the genre together, however, is that they typically “lose grip on reality” due to the settings they are placed in (Kroger 222). This setting and the gothic genre itself are important in understanding hysteria across the centuries because of the ability to expose the darkness in society. Not only do readers get a glimpse into a gloomy setting that sends tingles down our spine, but we also get insight into the troubled characters and their traumas that make them individuals. They come from different backgrounds, most of which are tragic and add a deeper level to the traumas they faced before entering the story. The gothic genre is not just popular; it is crucial in understanding the depth of human nature and how trauma deeply affects people differently.

The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” does not have a hopeful ending, but she does teach readers a lesson about the importance of autonomy and how terrifying the loss of power is for women, which is an important reading of the text coming from a trauma standpoint. She spent the entire story searching for freedom only to find herself crawling in the walls with the

other women who faced traumas much like her own—but with these women she felt a sense of belonging, something she was missing until that moment. Through gothic elements the narrator of Gilman’s short story exposes the ugly reality of trauma related to hysteria and how the home can be as oppressive as the diagnosis itself. The heroines in Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and Kent’s *The Babadook* explore trauma related to hysteria in different ways as the women within these stories are not explicitly diagnosed with hysteria the way that Gilman’s narrator is. These women face the labeling of hysteria without the actual diagnosis which creates a different dynamic than what was presented in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Through horror elements, an entirely new experience for women with trauma will be explored with Eleanor and Amelia’s experience within the confinement of the home.

CHAPTER 3. BECOMING MAD: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GOTHIC HOME AND FEMALE ENTRAPMENT IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*

Following in the footsteps of "The Yellow Wallpaper," *The Haunting of Hill House* explores themes of women's trauma through the gothic genre, but author Shirley Jackson takes her exploration of trauma a step further by intertwining horror with gothic. Gothic horror is shown in *The Haunting of Hill House* through unseen supernatural elements within the home, whereas in "The Yellow Wallpaper" readers are introduced to a gothic setting where the story revolves around the narrator and the home, all seen by the reader. The addition of horror into the exploration of women's trauma adds a deeper level of understanding as the unseen supernatural threat can easily stand for the unseen trauma that women face. While the narrator's trauma from post-partum depression in "The Yellow Wallpaper" may not be blatantly obvious to the husband who diagnoses her, the trauma that arises from her hysteria diagnosis is apparent. Jackson's main female protagonist, Eleanor Vance, however, is quite the opposite. Eleanor clearly has past traumas that follow her into Hill House, which is represented in the supernatural elements of the story. The monster within the house follows Eleanor around for the entirety of the story, targeting her specifically, and while her Hill House companions have secrets of their own, Eleanor's trauma is explored through the supernatural entity within the house even though this entity is never actually seen. Through an analysis of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, this chapter will analyze how the home functions as an oppressive entity in the gothic horror genre specifically and how this genre contributes to the understanding of women's trauma.

The Haunting of Hill House follows Eleanor Vance as she leaves her small apartment to stay at a haunted place called Hill House for research with Dr. Montague, Luke, and Theo. Eleanor is invited to Hill House because she had experienced a supernatural event as a child

living with her mother which is what Dr. Montague's research revolves around. Coming to Hill House is hopeful for Eleanor as she wants to meet others with similar experiences as well as escape the guilt she has over her mother's death. Upon entering Hill House, Eleanor already has trauma to face with her mother and lack of family support, but after being there for just a short time she also faces trauma from those inside of Hill House who are cruel to Eleanor because of her nervousness. Jackson's use of gothic horror allows for readers to experience the unique aspects of the gothic genre such as a dark gloomy house, mysterious characters, and an odd female character who needs saving while also introducing the horror of the unseen threat that stalks Eleanor in the halls of Hill House.

One of the most important features within the gothic horror genre is the home and how it is presented to the reader. From the very first page of *The Haunting of Hill House* readers are introduced to the terrifying nature of the house even just through its description. Hill House is described to readers as:

... not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (Jackson 1)

This description, and particularly the last line, gives readers insight into the story that is about to unfold. While Hill House is a house that stands fully and is technically habitable, it is not a home, and the inhabitants of the house will quickly learn that they are not alone as they walk the dark halls—their traumas and deepest fears, the real monster of the story, will follow them with every turn. This is the identity of Hill House—the darkness in the house seems to bring out the darkness in those who enter. Eleanor, as the main female character, comes with trauma that

stems from the death of her mother, but readers only get a brief insight to this part of her life before she enters Hill House. She says things, mostly inside of her own head, that cause readers to pause and question her character and her reliability, but these thoughts clearly connect her to the darkness of Hill House as she comes from a dark past much like the House itself does, as it is seemingly haunted.

Eleanor's Isolation Through Friendship

Anyone would be nervous upon spending time in a house that is supposedly haunted, but what makes it worse for Eleanor is that the others around her such as Luke and Dr. Montague expect her to be nervous almost immediately. Then men are engaged in intellectual conversation about books from Fielding when the women, exhausted from boring talk, decide to go to sleep for the night. Both Dr. Montague and Luke make sure Eleanor and Theo know that they will be awake to protect them if anything goes bump in the night. After retiring to her room, Eleanor thinks, "... it might be the darkness and oppression of Hill House that tired her so" likely because this child-like treatment she has known her entire life has followed her to Hill House as well (Jackson 55). Eleanor is odd, readers know this from the start, but she is a grown woman and the oppression within Hill House is partly due to the way she is treated from the others. Although she seems to have a friend in Theo at the beginning, she is still the odd woman out as they all seem to tire of Eleanor and her self-conscious behavior. While Hill House is a form of oppression itself as Eleanor is forced to face her trauma with her mother, it is also a form of oppression through how she is isolated and treated like a child from the others. Isolation pushes Eleanor to a dark place and as the story continues, the new person that Eleanor becomes upon entering Hill House is just as dark and mysterious as the house itself.

Readers must keep in mind that Eleanor is only invited into Hill House by Dr. Montague because of the supernatural event she experienced as a child in her mother's care. Without this traumatizing experience, Eleanor would not have been invited into Hill House, which may have been a better alternative for her. Hilarie Ashton discusses Eleanor and her relationships in "I'll Come Back to Break Your Spell': Narrative Freedom and Genre in *The Haunting of Hill House*" (2018) when she states,

Eleanor's relationships with others throughout the novel range from nascent to deteriorating to nonexistent. The surrogate family she acquires upon arriving at Hill House, comprised of Luke and Theodora... does not live up to the hopes that sustain her before she arrives, hopes that unfurl primarily with regard to her movement away from her emotionally abusive biological family. Her world is suspended as close to the imaginary as she can sustain it, down to the singsong dialogues she carries on with herself in her head. (272)

As much as Eleanor craves relationships outside of her mother and sister, she cannot connect to Theodora, Luke, or Dr. Montague in a deep and loving way. When she arrives to Hill House there seems to be a connection between Eleanor and Theodora, however this quickly dies when Eleanor picks up on the sexual tension between Theodora and Luke. It may be that Eleanor has interest in Theodora sexually herself, but it is more likely that Eleanor feels betrayed after feeling even a small ounce of love and companionship by another female in her life. Eleanor's life has been filled with hatred and resentment towards her mother and sister, so Theodora breaks her out of that even if it is just for a little while. Theodora's very quick turn on Eleanor sends her spiraling even more than she was when she arrived. Eleanor was an unreliable narrator from the very beginning, but as her "friends" within Hill House turn on her, Eleanor finds herself going

mad as her mother seemingly did. On the topic of the connection between Eleanor's outside life verses her Hill House life, Ashton states, "... two structures that entangle her [Eleanor] throughout the course of the narrative—her home life and her Hill House life—turn out to be equally destructive and cruel to her" (273). The cruelty of Hill House is recognized by Eleanor as soon as she arrives, but the hopes that she will find companionship overcomes her first reaction to the house. This crave for love outside of her biological family is quickly crushed when she finds Hill House and those within it to be just as cruel to her as her family always has been. Once again Eleanor finds herself ostracized from society and struggling with trauma that she has been trying to repress for years.

Eleanor's mother consumes most of her thoughts within Hill House and when it's not her mother, it's Theo. Eleanor seems to have trauma revolving around the women in her life and it likely stems from both her mother and her sister. This unnerving relationship with women follows Eleanor to Hill House and to her friendship with Theo. There seems to be small moments of insinuation that Eleanor and Theo are more than just friends, such as when they are discussing their homes and Eleanor tells Theo about a cup with stars in it that she once had. In response to this memory, Theo states, "Maybe one will show up someday in my shop... Then I can send it to you. One day you'll get a little package saying, 'To Eleanor with love from her friend Theodora' and it will be a blue cup full of stars" (Jackson 54). Despite this clear connection between the two as soon as they meet, Theo turns her back on Eleanor and joins up with Luke to make her feel like the odd one out. Eleanor is odd—she has her quirks which she acknowledges in this same conversation with Theo when she states, "everything has to be exactly the way I want it" (Jackson 54). However, this oddness comes from her traumas that cause her to doubt herself and her reason for being among this group of people. Eleanor seeks companionship, something she

never had while taking care of her mother, but she cannot pull anyone in because of the influence her mother has on her every thought. Eleanor feels as if she failed her mother when she died and her response to her mother's traumatic death leads to her calling out for her mother while she's in Hill House. These moments in which Eleanor thinks her mother is in Hill House likely lead Luke, Theo, and Dr. Montague to labeling her as mad and crazy because of her emotional state. However, they use this perception to harm her and push her even further out of the group they've created together. Eleanor becomes crazy in their eyes and although she continuously fights to be seen as one of them, they quite literally push her into her own death by using perceived madness to forever confine her to the insanity of Hill House.

Readers are instantly nervous upon Eleanor's entering Hill House. This is not a good place to be, that is obvious, and the gothic horror genre always keeps readers aware of the house. Laura Miller, author of the introduction to *The Haunting of Hill House*, states, "The literary effect we call horror turns on the dissolution of boundaries, between the living and the dead, of course, but also, at the crudest level, between the outside of the body and everything that ought to stay inside" (Miller 58). This statement seems to acknowledge that trauma is meant to "stay inside" in societal standards, but that the gothic horror genre allows for a break of this boundary within the house. Eleanor, for example, is engulfed by her trauma and grief that stems from her mother's death, but this type of emotion is meant to be just for her. The more anxious she becomes about her mother's spirit reaching out to her through the strange things she is experiencing, the more the others isolate her. This can be seen when Eleanor finds "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME" written on the walls and she hopes that one of the others is just playing a cruel trick on her instead of her mother actually calling out for her (Jackson 90). They were indeed playing a joke on her, which can be seen by them immediately laughing at Eleanor

after she spirals in anger when Theo insists that Eleanor wrote her own name on the wall. Eleanor thinks, “I am outside, I am the one chosen” as if the evil inside the house is reaching out only for her, but in reality she is just becoming more and more traumatized by her “friends” while she is also trying to come to terms with her mother’s death. Theo and the others are very much aware that Eleanor is dealing with a lot, yet they continue to bully her and push her further into madness.

Identity and The Connection With The Mother Figure

As Eleanor is advancing on Hill House for the first time, she thinks, “... everything is different. I am a new person, very far from home” (Jackson 16). This statement seems to acknowledge Eleanor’s connection to Hill House before she even enters it. She has taken control over her own life, or at least so she thinks, upon learning about Hill House, and before entering the premise she is already a new person with a different life. However, the parts of her that most relate to her mother, such as nervousness, she still faces while in Hill House. This connection to Hill House is vital for Eleanor as she likely craves to connect to anything. Her life, readers learn throughout the story, revolved around her mother, and once her mother passed Eleanor was left alone and isolated in her small apartment. Upon driving up to Hill House, Eleanor connects to the darkness that already resides there. The house is haunted by past ghosts, at least it is assumed to be, and Eleanor is haunted by the ghost of her own mother. Hill House and Eleanor are both isolated because of their hauntings and through this Eleanor sees a connection immediately. She comes to Hill House to create a new identity and although the identity that she takes on is not what she arrived at Hill House to become, it is still a connection between her new identity and the house, something she did not have before as she was completely isolated and on her own.

As Eleanor first lays eyes on Hill House she thinks, “It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope” (Jackson 20). Despite this dark acknowledgement of the house, Eleanor still chooses to enter. She chooses to go inside of Hill House and not only live there for a while, but she goes there for hope and for love—something her life before Hill House was clearly lacking. Eleanor had a choice as she took in the darkness of Hill House and she chose to be one with it, to let the darkness of her grief and trauma and the darkness of the house combine because she simply had no other life to go back to after her mother’s death. She could stay in her apartment and be alone with the guilt over her mother, or she could enter a place without kindness and search for an ounce of hope and companionship from others with similar experiences. Many readers may find Eleanor to be mad from the beginning, but truly all Eleanor wanted was to be understood which can be seen through her crave for friendship with Theo. Darkness attracts darkness and because of this Eleanor entered Hill House and saw her traumas come to life on its very walls. The grief that follows Eleanor after her mother’s death is all around Hill House which causes her to spiral creating a connection with the house. As Eleanor feels her mother’s presence all around her, she also feels a connection with the house as it slowly becomes her only companion once the others become cruel to her. Dr. Montague says about the house, “I will not put a name to what has no name” which seems to refer to the mysterious nature of Hill House and its connection to the inhabitants (Jackson 45). Hill House is just a house, yet there is also a supernatural evil underneath the surface despite readers never being directly introduced to what is apparently already haunting it. It is never stated what could be in the house, but Eleanor’s mother’s presence haunts it as it targets her the entire time she is there. Her mother’s ghost is not literally in the house, instead it

is Eleanor's trauma dealing with her mother and isolation that seems to be the unnamed haunting reaching out to connect with Eleanor.

The narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," shows readers that keeping trauma inside is what drives someone to become mad, and Eleanor's companions in the house do this to her on purpose. Trauma needs special attention and care, not a blanket diagnosis or to be ignored, and horror in Hill House forces Eleanor's trauma to come to light. Her trauma seems to be what is haunting her, and the house personifies this haunting that follows Eleanor around. While *The Haunting of Hill House* does present itself as a ghost story, it is more so about ghosts of the past, such as Eleanor's mother, rather than literal ghosts or monsters haunting the halls. The ghost of Eleanor's past has followed her into Hill House to take full control over her body, mind, and soul and in doing this it shows Eleanor a completely new identity. Eleanor's identity changes during her stay at Hill House because she is forced, through the oppression of the house and those inside of it, to reckon with her trauma and her inner self. She comes to Hill House with similar traits to her mother as she is skeptical of those around her which can be seen when she has coffee with Dr. Montague. Eleanor states, "Perhaps the coffee was poisoned. It certainly looked it" even though Dr. Montague had given her no reason to think he had poisoned her coffee (Jackson 14). As Eleanor attempts to escape the issues of her past, she tries to leave behind her old behaviors of nervousness and paranoia. She constantly talks in her own head reminding herself not to do things. When she's first arriving to Hill House before meeting any of the others, it's stated, "She could already see losing her temper, which she did rarely because she was so afraid of being ineffectual" (Jackson 17). This fear of being ineffectual likely comes from the complicated relationship she had with her family, and going into Hill House she is already scared she will disappoint the others. Towards the middle of the novel, Eleanor comes to terms with who she has

become inside of Hill House when she states, “There’s only one of me, and it’s all I’ve got. I *hate* seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate so that I’m living in one half, my mind, and I see the other half of me helpless and frantic and driven and I can’t stop it” (Jackson 99). This is by no means Eleanor coming to terms with her trauma and grief, but it does seem to be a point in which she decides to accept herself despite the judgement of others around her. She clearly recognizes that she has an internal struggle and that nothing she does has been able to stop it. This is a point that Eleanor’s character seems to change because she becomes genuine to the others in the story. Readers are aware of the real Eleanor because we see her internal dialogue, but to Theo and the others she forces herself to put up a front to fit in. When she makes the above comment to Theo she is finally showing them her authentic self.

The reader is never fully informed about Eleanor’s trauma revolving around the relationship with her mother, but we are aware that Eleanor faces a lot of guilt about it. Jackson writes, “She could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life; her years with her mother had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair” (3). This is followed by Eleanor explaining that her mother always thought others were out to get her and that she had a “hysterical insistence” that those around her were always malicious (Jackson 3). This type of childhood with her mother has clearly affected Eleanor enough to follow into adulthood. Eleanor even takes on some of her mother’s tendencies by not trusting the others staying with her in Hill House. This can be seen in the scene where Eleanor is worried that the coffee Dr. Montague offers her has been poisoned.

This type of connection to the mother can be related to Freud and his idea of the mother. Lynne Evans states, “The individual mother of Hill House, as common with gothic narratives, is erased from the plot. Eleanor’s mother is already dead when the narrative opens; yet Jackson’s

interest in the culturally disruptive value of a Freudian-inspired mother is evident from the opening moments of her narrative” (103-104). With the Freud idea in mind, it would make sense for Eleanor to resent her mother, which readers do see, even if only in passing. Eleanor has a complex relationship with her mother and like Evans states, we only know this from small places where Eleanor brings her up as she is not actually present within the story. The resentment that Eleanor feels from her mother follows her to Hill House and instead of rejecting what she despised about her mother, she takes on those traits. This is likely due to Eleanor’s trauma never being properly dealt with. Eleanor comes from a closed off family, readers can see this from her relationship with her sister as well as her mother, and the trauma from her mother runs so deep that her mother’s traits become her own. Not only do these traits arise in Hill House because of the supernatural element of the home being trauma itself, these traits come out because of the idea of the “mother house” which takes on the role of the oppressive mother in Eleanor’s life even after her mother has passed.

The Mother House

The idea of the “mother house” appears in several of Jackson’s pieces of work as well as in much of gothic literature. The house, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, is a vital part of gothic literature. The home represents much more than just a space that the characters within the story inhabit, and in the case of *The Haunting of Hill House*, the house represents the unseen trauma of Eleanor as well as her mother personified. Roberta Rubenstein writes, “... the mother’s absence becomes a haunting presence that bears directly on the daughter’s difficult struggle to achieve selfhood as well as to express her unacknowledged rage or her sense of precariousness in the world” (311). This statement acknowledges that Eleanor is haunted by her mother’s presence which causes her to struggle in finding her new identity. Readers can see this

as Eleanor takes on her mother's paranoia despite her resentment for her. As her mother becomes the looming presence in Hill House, Eleanor becomes more and more wary about who she is and what her place in the world is. The isolation from those around her do not help this as she truly feels like she's going crazy with the reminders of her mother all around. The idea of the mother house is further discussed with Lynne Evans in "'Help Eleanor Come Home': Monstrous Maternity in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*" (2020) when she states, "Hill House, Jackson's fictional spectral maternal figure, evokes the gothic 'primal and engulfing morass of the maternal' of an embodied Freudian nightmare that spells Eleanor's doom from the outset" (104). This Freudian nightmare that Evans speaks on comes from Eleanor's trauma and how it not being treated properly leads to her doom. Instead of getting help to deal with her childhood trauma that comes from her relationship with her mother, she holes herself up inside of her trauma and that resentment leads her to her own destruction. Eleanor is driven mad as she becomes her mother through the paranoia and skepticism that follows her throughout the novel. While she is staying in a place that is her mother personified—she has no escape except for "the car that belonged entirely to her, a little contained world all her own" (Jackson 8). As readers learn from the end of the novel, Eleanor's escape from Hill House and her mother's presence within it comes only through death. The car is the only thing that belongs to her and the only place she can truly just be Eleanor without her mother's influence; however, this space cannot exist for her as a woman with trauma. Death is imminent, according to Freud, and the only way to escape this death would be to seek out help for her trauma.

Hill House becoming mother becomes more and more apparent the further Eleanor spirals out of control. Once she senses the hostility towards her from the others, she also begins to recognize the hostility towards her from the house itself. While there is a sense that they are

all in danger, Eleanor seems to be the prime target and her responses to the house tell readers why. When the strange, supernatural occurrences start to happen, such as the loud knocking in the night, Eleanor calls out “Coming, mother, coming” as if she is answering her mother’s demand (Jackson 127). There are other instances of Eleanor quietly whispering “mother” in response to the house pulling her in. Richard Pascal addresses this in “Walking Alone Together: Family Monsters in *The Haunting of Hill House*” (2014) when he writes,

Unquestionably for Eleanor the allure of the house, and also its horror, is bound up with the sense that it wishes to envelop her in a maternal embrace so comprehensive that her newly won independence and all vestiges of her individuality will be subsumed utterly... Eleanor is absorbed into Hill House—or else, at the very least, the promise of a return to such amniotic oneness is the delusion that lures her to her death there. (469)

This loss of individuality that Eleanor only got a glimpse into is too overwhelming to live without. Eleanor does become mad once she realizes that she is all alone with the mother house—her companions who are supposed to understand her trauma and the loneliness she feels are the ones who abandon her and label her as hysterical before she ever acts on it. Her madness arises from betrayal just as it does for the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Gilman’s narrator was diagnosed as hysterical and Eleanor does not receive this diagnosis, but she is called crazy and manipulated into seeming insane from the others in the house. They taunt her for most of the story and then they turn the narrative around and perceive her as crazy without acknowledging their own part in her story. Much like Gilman’s narrator, Eleanor is pushed to madness from those who are trying to control the narrative. These women do not arrive in the story hysterical or mad despite their being labeled this way—the betrayal from those they love most drives them to a madness that they cannot come back from. Eleanor is constantly seeking help, love, and

companionship, but instead she receives resentment that is all too familiar as it is the same she felt for her own mother. As stated by John Parks, “There is no place in the world for Eleanor... [she] has no resources to call on for survival” (25). Though readers likely root for Eleanor’s survival, she is too far gone in her trauma to be able to survive, especially since she is surrounded by those who basically push her directly into her demise.

The Haunting of Hill House is a novel that “goes considerably beyond the mere mechanism of terror by exploring psychological dilemmas that work upon protagonists from within” (Woodruff 162). Jackson’s novel is not simply meant to scare the reader—it is meant to shine a light on personal topics that are typically ignored in women’s fiction. Jackson herself faced issues related to trauma and bringing these issues to the attention of her readers was seemingly not only important to her, but to readers as well. Set in place by stories such as “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the gothic genre became a place for women to tell stories about women’s unseen trauma that they face both as authors and as fictional characters and that represent very real, weaponized emotions. The terror that lies within *The Haunting of Hill House* comes from real life experiences for women and although Eleanor’s story is told through supernatural aspects, it still reads as true when it comes to trauma and how trauma can lead to hysteria when isolated and ignored. Eleanor becomes one with Hill House and therefore becomes one with her mother as well—a separate evil entity in the story, but one that has haunted Eleanor before readers ever meet her. The trauma that Eleanor faces is an unseen monster that creeps in the back of Eleanor’s mind throughout the novel, and this monster is intensified when her supposed friends in Hill House join in on isolating her from the outside world. Jackson’s main female protagonist is screaming for help, yet she is met with darkness all around. The idea of the “mother house” presented in gothic horror captures the darkness within Eleanor by mirroring her mother.

Eleanor's resentment towards her mother for neglecting her as a child leads her to Hill House, a place void of kindness and life, much like her mother, in hopes she can rekindle something she never received as a child. Devendra P. Varma states, "the castle stands as a central image of the lonely personality" and though Hill House is not technically a castle, it is a house that attracts the lonely, and in Eleanor's case it is a house that has captured her mother's darkness as a form of oppression and entrapment (25). Eleanor has no way to escape the trauma that comes from her mother, and within the walls of Hill House she has no way to come to terms with that trauma either. Eleanor's only escape is through death and even this choice is not made by herself.

CHAPTER 4. ISOLATING MOTHERHOOD AND *THE BABADOOK*: A PERSONIFICATION OF GRIEF THROUGH THE EYES OF MOTHER

Following themes presented within the last two chapters, the Australian film *The Babadook* addresses women's trauma in the home. As a psychological horror film, *The Babadook*'s titular monster is the personified grief of the main female protagonist, Amelia, who lost her husband in a car crash on the day her young son was born. Her son, Samuel, struggles with trauma that comes from the absence of a father as well as his strange relationship with his mother. He seems to be very physically attached to Amelia in a way that makes her uncomfortable, likely acknowledging that he has a separation anxiety due to the loss of his father. The Babadook comes into play when Samuel wants a book read to him one night and Amelia randomly finds a horror book titled *The Babadook* on Samuel's shelf that has never been there before. Traumatic hysteria is clearly presented within the film as Amelia struggles with trauma, motherhood, and living in a home that her grief has ownership of. Differing from "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *The Haunting of Hill House*, *The Babadook* takes place in a true home—the home that Amelia shared with her husband before his tragic passing. The home, a place that was likely seen as a haven to Amelia and her husband before his death, is taken from her and overrun by the Babadook who represents the emotions that Amelia cannot bring herself to face. Through analyzing *The Babadook* and the horror genre, this chapter argues that the home becomes oppressive through trauma, grief, and motherhood.

The Babadook presents the horror genre with rather typical things such as dim lighting, dull colors, and a lot of hushed voices. The film itself is very dark—both in context of the theme as well as lighting and picture. Viewers are instantly aware of the genre due to these telling characteristics that typically follow horror films. Unlike the gothic genre which explores the

uncanny and the suggestion of the supernatural, the horror genre typically has monsters, imminent danger, and in the case of psychological horror, the horror aspects focus on the emotional states to terrify the audience. Although *The Haunting of Hill House* is a novel, the same feeling can be said about it: the eeriness is understood immediately and what is to follow throughout the story is unknown. The monster that follows Amelia and Samuel around is meant to terrify the audience because it terrifies the characters on screen. Again, as discussed in the last chapter, the true horror is the unknown and how trauma from isolation connects to the unknown through fear. We can see this in *The Haunting of Hill House* as well—Eleanor could not see what she was terrified of as it was her grief and that grief isolated her. The unknown creates a distance between Amelia and her son Sam because while Sam knows who the Babadook is, he does not understand its reasoning for being inside of their home. In *The Babadook*, the monster can be seen which is unlike the monster of Hill House. The Babadook is not an insinuated haunting or a ghost, his presence is in the film during the darkest times, both literally and metaphorically, and this causes Amelia to lose sleep as her nightmare is literally coming to life.

In “The Beak That Grips: Maternal Indifference, Ambivalence, and the Abject in *The Babadook*” (2017), Buerger explores how the horror that comes with the character of the Babadook has “almost nothing to do with the title fiend and everything to do with the unspoken, unspeakable impulses he represents. Remove the Babadook from *The Babadook*, in other words, and something plenty terrifying remains” (Buerger 34). The true terror in *The Babadook*, as we know by now, is the haunting of trauma. This type of horror is much different than a group of campers being slaughtered by Jason Vorhees in the popular horror franchise *Friday the 13th*. Slasher horror brings fear from gore, but psychological gothic horror films such as *The Babadook* scares an audience through true human experience which is in fact ordinary. While

films such as *Black Swan* (2010), *Hereditary* (2018), and *The Night House* (2020) represent psychological trauma through the horror genre, *The Babadook* was best fitted for this thesis because of its relation to motherhood and the intensity of trauma for mothers. Women, mothers, and those who deal with trauma from death can instantly understand Amelia's fear in a completely different way than other themes presented in the horror genre. Pamela Jacobsen states, "Although horror films are often regarded as being of rather low cultural value, I've often found they depict complex ideas about psychological distress and mental health difficulties through the use of metaphors in a very accurate and non-stigmatizing way" (1). This is quite true, especially when referring to women's psychological horror films directed by women. Jennifer Kent, as a woman, can properly explore women's issues in a sensitive way that still attracts the regular horror genre fanatic. The Babadook metaphor is a clever and complex way to address trauma and the haunting nature of grief and loss.

Amelia's lack of sleep seems to feed the Babadook—as she becomes weaker and aggressive due to insomnia, the monster becomes stronger and more present. The figure of the Babadook "is about coming to terms with the dark side of human experience: mortality, fear, anger, grief. There's no way to eliminate these aspects of life, but, in facing them head-on, in paying tribute... we can at least keep them under control" (Kidd). Amelia's problem with the Babadook, the problem that causes her lack of sleep, is her inability to face these problems head-on. This inability, of course, comes from her past trauma, trauma that causes her to basically sleep walk through life with Samuel as her only connection to reality. This false reality that Amelia seems to be living in comes from traumatic hysteria—a connection between "ordinary hysteria and traumatic neuroses" in which "traumatic memories are not available to the patient in the way commonplace ones are but act as a 'kind of foreign body' in the psyche" (Kaplan 26).

Simply put, “symptoms of hysteria are the result of trauma” and these traumas effect memory differently (Kaplan 26). This relates directly to Amelia as her trauma is a result of her husband’s death, a memory that she replays in her head at night that keeps her from sleeping.

Since losing her husband, Amelia’s life appears to revolve around caring for her son Samuel. She works endlessly to provide for him and tries her best to be patient and understanding about his ever-changing behavior. Her patience runs thin, however, and Amelia starts to resent her son as she falls deeper into her grief. Samuel’s book *The Babadook* scares them both, but his behavior seems to be more aggressive and erratic after being introduced to it. This, along with the seventh anniversary of her husband’s death, causes Amelia to spiral into a traumatic hysteria in which only Samuel can pull her out of. This “hysteria” is much different than what the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” faces. Her hysteria was incorrectly diagnosed and comes from a place of misogyny within society. Amelia’s traumatic hysteria relates more so with Eleanor though the term hysteria is never actually used to describe her. Eleanor falls into a madness because of her trauma with isolation and Amelia is much the same way. She is not hysterical as a diagnosis; she is hysterical in the sense that her intense trauma messes with her memory in a way that causes intense grieving—something that differs from hysteria related to women’s apparent “failures” in the eyes of a patriarchal society. Hysteria in this form is not a descriptor for Amelia herself but rather her experience with her traumatizing memory. Her husband’s car crash causes her traumatic hysteria, but it is not a diagnosis, or an oppressive term associated with who she is as a woman—it is entirely about her experience that keeps her in a continuous cycle of grief. While at some points it may not be abundantly clear, Amelia’s saving grace is the love and familiarity of her son who she realizes is not the direct cause of her trauma and grief. As stated by Briony Kidd, “Mothers are socially conditioned to restrain hostile feelings

towards their children, and, in turn, film audiences are not used to seeing expressions of these feelings” (8). This statement acknowledges how shocking and horrific tense scenes between Samuel and Amelia can be. One of the most disturbing scenes happens when Samuel goes to wake up Amelia because he is hungry, and she lashes out at him referring to him as a "little shit." Amelia is gritting her teeth as she says these hateful words to Samuel, something the audience is likely not used to seeing between a mother and her child. Amelia’s expression is truly violent and even though she immediately realizes what she’s done and goes to console Samuel, the damage has been done as Samuel does not want her to touch him. This intense scene shocks the audience as women are supposed to be naturally nurturing, so when Amelia lashes out at her son it is almost like an unnatural reaction.

Motherhood is explored in many different forms and fashions in cinema, but these different depictions still typically stray from showing the hostile and violent feelings that most mothers probably feel towards their children at some point. It is not acceptable to feel these emotions, as mothers are supposed to be nurturing and comforting, but as a single mother raising her rather abnormal son alone, Amelia has nowhere else to place her anger and hostility. The anger that arises with the anniversary of her husband’s death seems to only intensify as the Babadook comes into play. This creature is terrifying, evil, and represents everything that Amelia wants to avoid. Instead of facing the Babadook head on, which would mean facing her traumas caused by the tragic death of her husband, Amelia places this anger on the figure of the Babadook and on Samuel. When the Babadook comes into the lives of Amelia and Samuel, Amelia “seems to believe her son is evil” while Samuel is “traumatized by his mother’s erratic attempt at discipline” (Kidd 8). So, while the Babadook is very much a personification of

Amelia's grief and trauma from her late husband, it is also a figure of distance between Amelia and Samuel as their relationship becomes more aggressive when the Babadook enters the picture.

The distance created between Samuel and Amelia comes from the home as well as the Babadook himself. The Babadook is the big, scary thing they do not want to face, yet they are forced to due to the close proximity. The home, something they likely once cherished and saw as a safe space, as homes as typically seen as welcoming and intimate, becomes something that keeps them at a distance and oppresses Amelia specifically. The oppression Amelia faces in her own home comes from the manifestation of trauma that still occurs within the house. The basement, for instance, is a shrine to her dead husband and through that space Amelia keeps her trauma fresh through memory. This is when we can recognize the home as the oppressor—the very walls that keep her from the outside dangers bring new fears much like Hill House in Jackson's work. These gothic homes are meant to keep the heroines away from the outside danger, but within them they find even scarier realities. Paul Mitchell acknowledges the home as the oppressor for Amelia in "The Horror of Loss: Reading Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* as a Trauma Narrative" (2019) when he states, "... it is the specific materiality of Amelia's physical environment, the interior of the home she shares with her young son Samuel, that serves as a locus for the protagonist's acting out of her trauma, whilst also providing the context in which she can begin the process of her psychic recovery" (182). This recovery, of course, comes with facing the Babadook and facing the traumatic memory that causes her pain.

The memory of Amelia's husband comes to her in fleeting moments of flashbacks or even hallucinations. She typically relives this memory in the bedroom, a place that she tries to escape from Sam, The Babadook, and the outside world in general. The film starts with Amelia reliving this memory and then falling backwards into her bed as if the weight of the memory

pushed her back into reality. Upon opening her eyes, Amelia realizes she's back in her bedroom and that the dream or hallucination she had was not real. It takes Amelia the entire film to be able to fully face the car accident that killed her husband. When she has insomnia at night she will fall into her grief by reliving the memory and the sounds of the car crashing, but before she sees the entire memory she is always jolted back into reality, unable to face what she experienced seven years ago on the day her son was born.

The car, as one can imagine, is a place of trauma for Amelia. To get to work and to take Samuel to school Amelia must drive a car, something that had probably been a normal activity before the reoccurring date of her traumatic experience arises. Once this happens, the car becomes a space that causes intense hysteria—one instance of this is when Amelia lightly wrecks with Samuel in the vehicle with her. This scene seems to be the deciding factor for Amelia hiding away in her house. If she does not leave and does not enter a car, she likely believes two things: that she will not be forced to face the traumatic memory of her husband's crash and that she will not end up in a crash and leave Samuel an orphan. These thoughts may seem irrational, but the traumatic hysteria that Amelia feels is very quickly seeping in after this moment. Another difficult moment for Amelia inside of the car is when she picks Samuel up from school after speaking with the principal and he is having a screaming fit the entire way home. Amelia decided while discussing with the principal that she would have to find Sam a new school if they were going to isolate him from the other children, and this new responsibility of keeping Sam full time until she finds other care is likely weighing on her mind heavily as Sam takes his frustrations out in the car. At this point in the film, Amelia seems truly lost about how to handle Samuel and his behavioral issues. Samuel's issues likely stem from isolation within his own home, much like Amelia's grief does, and his instances of lashing out, crowding her personal

space, and physically grabbing on to her seems to be his way of attempting to escape that isolation.

Director Jennifer Kent takes advantage of the horror genre and uses dark lighting, dull colors, and creepy sound effects to make the house just as depressing as Amelia feels. The house is basically void of color, the lights are typically turned off or dimmed, and there's little to no noise unless Samuel is playing with one of his toys or Amelia is watching an old romantic comedy on television. The film also takes advantage of those typical horror film tropes by having a dark, looming, scary monster, big bugs crawling through a hole in the wall, and terrifying screams that seem to always come after long moments of pure, eerie silence. These attributes of the film only add to the terror of the home. Kent herself states, "gradually the film becomes just the house. But the house is alive" (Qtd. in Mitchell 186). For the house to be alive and truly add to the meaning of the film, everything that makes a house a home needs to change. The silence, for instance, shows just much the home has changed from what it likely once was—the silence is genuinely loud when it speaks to the oppressive nature the house has toward Amelia. She basks in the silence and forces herself to isolate because she is terrified of anything good or happy in her life. It is very possible that being genuinely happy and filling the home with light, laughter, and color feels like a replacement of her husband. This can be insinuated when Amelia watches older romantic television shows at night. It is almost as if she is punishing herself for not having a love life. Losing her husband forces her to remove the life out of the home to make up for the life of the husband that the home lost. This is also the reason for the "tidy but cheerless world" that Samuel lives in—it is a home "equipped with necessities but eschews decoration or whimsy" (Kidd 6). So, while it is very much a home, especially compared to the houses explored in the last two chapters, it still lacks the homey feeling. The kitchen, for instance, is the brightest place

in the home because of the light painting and white appliances. The light colors in this room still do not make it comforting because of the flickering light and the peeling wallpaper that has roaches crawling out of it. On top of that, the kitchen, much like all other rooms, lacks any type of decoration or personal artifact. There are a couple posters hung in the house, but other than that the house is void of any type of personality outside of Samuel's dangerous toys that litter the floor. This can be seen in relation to *The Haunting of Hill House* as Hill House is just as dreary as Amelia's. Hill House is void of colors except for the brightly colored bedrooms and even though it is literature and not film, the house is eerily silent. Both gothic houses lack life because of the trauma that resides within the walls. Through the dark and silent settings both houses draw attention to the elephant in the room: the untreated trauma that is slowly driving them mad.

The horror that Amelia is forced to face with the Babadook is intensified by the genre itself. There are certain expectations within the horror genre such as gore and eerie setting, and, of course, for the audience to be scared. Jennifer Kent tackles all these expectations within the horror genre while also tackling the very deep and human theme of grief that arises from trauma. The works discussed in the last two chapters dealt with these themes through literature, but with film the audience can see it happen before their eyes. They can see Amelia's face scrunch up in terror, see the Babadook and his threatening walk, and see how the house seemingly becomes darker and duller as Amelia falls further into her traumatic hysteria. Buerger states, "Throughout the film the horror of the ordinary is conveyed in intensely claustrophobic ways: most of the film takes place within Amelia's gloomy, decrepit terrace house, as the audience is compelled to experience the claustrophobia and seething frustration that permeate Amelia and Samuel's lonely existence in an agonizingly protracted manner" (27). This acknowledges that the audience feels horror as Amelia and Sam do because the film portrays Amelia's dreary home in an ordinary

way. It is dark and bugs are crawling on the wall, but this is rather understandable for a woman who has been grieving the loss of her husband for seven years. This can especially be understood when viewers see Amelia's sister Claire's house during the birthday party scene. Her family is whole, and her house is bright and beautifully taken care of. Claire does not like Amelia's home and makes a few comments throughout the film about how Amelia needs to go ahead and move on which is easier for her to say as she spends her days with her daughter and husband while Amelia struggle to handle Sam alone every day. The ordinary creates horror in the film and within the audience because it can actually happen. The audience may not see the Babadook outside their kitchen window at night, but it is extremely possible to experience an intense trauma like Amelia and let it overcome every aspect of your life, even your home.

To understand Amelia's character and the trauma she faces inside of the home that becomes alive through her grief, the audience must pay attention to narrative focalization. Edward Branigan uses this term to refer to how "a cinematic character experiences something through seeing or hearing" (Qtd. in Mitchell 183). He also explores external focalization which is "the specific technique through which the camera can depict what a character sees and hears, even if it is not always from his/her direct position in the frame" and internal focalization which is "perspective on experiences, including dreams, hallucinations and memories which adds greater depth to our awareness of emotional responses to them" (183). The latter, internal focalization, is quite important within the film as Amelia explores her trauma through memories and hallucinations. For instance, the film starts with a snippet of Amelia's memory of her husband's car accident and then shifts to her falling backwards onto her bed as the camera is pointed at the ceiling. This happens a few times within the film when directly related to Amelia's memories of this day. She will relive parts of what happened and suddenly the camera will either

shake to inform the audience that it is now morning or Amelia will fall onto her bed while the camera points at her bedroom ceiling. Both shots explore Amelia's lack of sleep as well as her inability to face that memory head on. She is up most of the night reliving this memory, taking care of Sam, or thinking about the haunting story of the Babadook and in a split second the sun has risen, and Amelia has once again lost another night of sleep. The same can be said for the shots of the bedroom ceiling—Amelia will catch herself thinking about this traumatic memory and quite literally fall out of the past into the reality of her new life without her husband. It seems vital that these shots are all in Amelia's bedroom which is her only private space as well as the space she once shared with her husband. Falling out of the terror of that memory brings Amelia back to the place that haunts her and the place that is now her new reality in which she is facing motherhood alone. Mitchell acknowledges that this type of experience is important for Amelia as a trauma survivor because she lives “in durational rather than chronological time” which causes her to “experience the horrors of the past through internal shifts in time and space” (184). This means that Amelia lives in the “now” instead of chronologically like past, present, and future. While she clearly experiences the memory of the car accident from seven years past, it is still not chronological as she is facing this memory amid her grief. This is seen towards the end of the film when Amelia sees her dead husband standing in their bedroom as she attempts to kill the Babadook. She is forced to face this memory head on and relive that trauma fully to rid of the monster that is her grief. Her bedroom becomes a central point for these shots as her private space is constantly invaded by Samuel, the Babadook, and her traumatic memories that keep her awake at night.

The bedroom becomes important in another part of Amelia's grief as well: her sex life. She abandons everything for her son and this lack of self-care, along with the trauma she cannot

yet face, leads to her life becoming terrifying and claustrophobic. Amelia does not neglect her home despite the dullness it brings to Samuel's life, but the lack of her own self-care makes her irritable and makes her insomnia even worse. The pressure of caring for Samuel and keeping the house alive leaves Amelia without any form of escape from the life that causes her so much pain. She is oppressed by her home, as there is a grief personified monster haunting her halls, and she is the sole caretaker of a child. Amelia has no space just for herself and this is represented through scenes with Amelia's bed, her "escape" through romantic TV, and her bedroom turning into a place of fear. Amelia's bed was once important before she was widowed because she shared it with her husband. Once her husband passes, this bed essentially becomes empty, and it is yet again something lifeless in the home. It's "a place which Amelia retires for sleep, escape, and isolation—especially from her son" yet sleeping is ultimately taken from her by the Babadook and Samuel both (*Film International*). Amelia does not have the privilege of privacy as a single mother and her bedroom, even the bed itself, is invaded multiple times throughout the film, taking the last thing of hers that allowed her to have a personal escape.

Much like Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House*, sexuality is repressed mostly by fear, but also by shame. Eleanor is unable to act on any sexuality because of the hysteria she falls into with her trauma personified inside of the house as well as the shame Theo and Luke throw her way when they suspect she has a deeper connection to Theo. Amelia presents this in *The Babadook* as well—she is trapped inside of her grief and trauma so much that she cannot truly escape to enjoy her sexuality, especially because that sexuality is part of her grief. She also finds her sexuality repressed through her son because he does not know boundaries and the importance of privacy. This can be seen when Amelia reaches for her vibrator in an attempt to masturbate, but this attempt is failed as Samuel barges into the room and jumps right on top of her. Another

instance of this is when the man Amelia works with comes to bring her soup thinking she is sick, and Samuel makes a scene when he is inside of the house. The man is not seen again in the film likely because he was scared off by Samuel which means this is another failed attempt at sexuality that has been stopped by motherhood. Through motherhood, Amelia is essentially shamed into putting her needs last when she desperately needs to care for herself. Furthering into this theory, the bedroom and her privacy as a sexual woman is completely ripped from her by the Babadook. His most haunted area is the bedroom, and the bedroom is “central to the final dissolution of the female, as the Babadook/male presence turns the room into a site of terror rather than pleasure” (*Film International*). The place of privacy that was once shared with her husband is now taken from her by the male figure of the Babadook—a terror that forces her into insomnia and takes any control she had out of her only place of solace. Not only is Amelia repressed sexually, but all control is taken from her once the Babadook inhabits the bedroom and forces Amelia to fear the only thing she has left outside of Samuel.

Gothic horror film differs from gothic horror literature simply because of the way it is presented on screen. *The Babadook* presents a literal monster that haunts Amelia and Sam in what is supposed to be the safety of their own home. In “The Yellow Wallpaper” and *The Haunting of Hill House*, however, the monster is never seen as they are metaphorical monsters. Gilman’s story differs even from the other two as the monster is another person and not a haunting. “The Yellow Wallpaper” can still be scary as women being forced into confinement against their will is a terrifying situation, but it doesn’t follow the conventional horror characteristics like *The Babadook* and *The Haunting of Hill House* in which monsters haunt the halls. Shirley Jackson uses gothic horror in her novel *The Haunting of Hill House* through the unknown terror that resides in Hill House. *The Babadook*, on the other hand, shows terror

through an actual personification of Amelia's trauma. While Hill House is terrifying, because the threat cannot be seen, the Babadook follows Amelia into every private space in her home, taking what was once a loving place and turning it into something she resents and cannot fully escape. This can be seen when Amelia is washing dishes in her kitchen and looks out through the window into her neighbor's house to see the Babadook's tall, dark figure hiding in the corner. The Babadook does not have any distinct qualities other than his top hat—an accessory that seems to represent the shape of Amelia's home. The Babadook being a large, dark figure is likely because grief is associated with darkness and therefore The Babadook's appearance reflects that. Everything that oppresses Amelia—her home, her grief—is seemingly personified within The Babadook. This figure is terrifying, and it scares Amelia as well as the audience because we have the opportunity to see what is haunting her. Donna McRae acknowledges that Amelia, like many other women characters in gothic horror cinema, “is concerned with the messy part of life that is defined by [her] gender and the place that is accorded in a patriarchal society” (150-151). Amelia's life had been filled by her husband before he passed, but after his death her life revolves around her son and then is overthrown by the Babadook. Amelia's escape from the patriarchy is necessary to her coping with her trauma and finding a space for herself as a person without the forced responsibilities of women. This, however, is easier said than done, especially as a mother. Amelia's character can be related to the unnamed narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” in this aspect—the unnamed narrator tries to escape the patriarchy by leaving the room her husband has trapped her in, but the birth of her son guarantees her a life of being stuck under the control of the men in her life. The same can be said for Amelia; while her husband passes and she seems to defeat the Babadook by acknowledging her trauma, her son still holds her in his control as she is his primary form of care.

The end of the film is just as important as the end of *The Haunting of Hill House* and “The Yellow Wallpaper.” The former two end rather tragically—the narrator in Gilman’s story is left in a continuous circle of the patriarchy and Eleanor’s story at Hill House ends in demise when her inner demons take control. *The Babadook* ends on a much happier note despite the Babadook living inside of Amelia’s basement and needing to be fed to stay under control. This ending avoids the idea that intense grief and trauma such as losing a partner just goes away by coping properly. Amelia finally faces her memory of the day her husband died while standing in her bedroom in a final standoff with the Babadook and while this is a nod to Amelia coping with her tragic memories, it is not by any means a solution to Amelia’s lifelong trauma. The Babadook stays alive because Amelia’s trauma does—something that intense and that important in a person’s life will simply never leave, so all Amelia can do is feed it and keep it in the space that she once forced all her memories of her husband into. Amelia and Sam rekindle their love for one another once the monster is out of the way as the anger they both had pent up is finally set free. They both experienced extreme pain and loss, but their lives are made whole again once they address this trauma together as a newly formed family.

This type of ending, one filled with hope and the escape of isolation, differs quite a bit from the endings of “The Yellow Wallpaper” and *The Haunting of Hill House* as the ongoing nature of trauma is not explored through their endings. It is simply acknowledged that trauma leads to patriarchal control through the hysteria diagnosis or that trauma ends in death with no hope. These endings are bleak, to say the least, and do not reflect what happens with trauma once it is addressed or coped with. The end of *The Babadook* explores the ongoing nature of trauma through Amelia and Samuel’s healing. The memory of the car crash that took a vital person from their lives will never go away, and this is acknowledged by the Babadook when he cannot be

defeated. The Babadook feeds off uncared for trauma and since Amelia has faced her traumatic memory head on, he can no longer feed on her. While he does still live in the house and stands for a threat that can pop back up at any time, this ending shows a hope that the others do not. While the film has a lot of tensions around Amelia and Sam's relationship, it ends on a high note as the two are seen outside in their backyard enjoying time together as a family. This need for a connection is vital for both as they both faced isolation in different ways. Through a conversation about whether the Babadook has been fed, they openly acknowledge that he still lives in the house while also finding a way to move from a life centered directly around that traumatic memory into one that creates a more open and comforting relationship between mother and son.

The Babadook continues themes explored in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *The Haunting of Hill House* by acknowledging women's trauma that comes from different forms of grief. All three female characters represented in these works are completely different while still sharing similar experiences, experiences that link them to trauma related to hysterias caused by the lack of professional help. The setting of the home is constant within *The Babadook* as Amelia's grief becomes the main inhabitant through a terrifying story book character. Through the figure of the Babadook, Amelia is forced to face fears related to the loss of her husband while still surrounded by the life she shared with him. Important aspects of cinema such as setting, lighting, and color play a large role in the representation of the house as something that is both alive and lacking liveliness at the same time. Forced into single motherhood, Amelia faces her worst fears as she attempts to come to terms with the loss of her husband, her lack of privacy as a mother, and the home she once knew changing into something separate from what she had previously known.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

This project explored the gothic and horror genres as groundbreaking in the study of women's trauma related to hysteria. In the nineteenth century, the gothic and gothic horror genres had predominately male audiences which is why the women writers and director discussed here move to not only change this but to offer perspectives on authentic female experiences. As the genres grew, however, women authors changed these male-dominated genres by inserting their own work that typically revolved around women's experiences in patriarchal societies, and particularly how difficult it could be to get such experiences published by men. Authors such as Mary Shelley, the Bronte sisters, Joyce Carol Oats, and Anne Rice are well known for the gothic and gothic horror genres—maybe even more so than men such as Edgar Allan Poe who previously seemed to dominate the genre. While women were excluded from these genres, and writing in general, for so long women now take up most of the “big” names' readers associate with gothic and gothic horror. Charlotte Perkins Gilman chose to write her story revolving around the traumatic experience of the hysteria diagnosis for women in the gothic genre because the gothic was mostly published and written by men. She had to appeal to the male audience to get her story about an important womanly experience into the world, and this set up a place for women after her to follow in these footsteps and continue writing in a genre that women were not openly accepted. Trauma connected to the diagnosis of hysteria and the weaponized labeling of the word comes from women being oppressed instead of supported by the patriarchal figures and standards around them. Hysteria as an oppressive terms adds another layer of trauma onto what they are already facing with grief, loss, isolation, and the expectations of motherhood. Women's experiences are rarely appreciated for what they are, but

Gilman, Jackson, and Kent create works that tell stories of women's traumatic experiences that have been alive in our society from the nineteenth century to current times.

This thesis inserts new scholarship into already existing conversations with scholars Carol Rosenberg-Smith, Paula Triechler, Ann Kaplan, Jonathan Rayner, Paul Mitchell, and many others mentioned. Their knowledge on the gothic and horror genres as well as the trauma presented in these genres through different medias is vital to this project. Through the conversations these scholars have already brought into academia, the importance of setting within gothic and gothic horror is discussed as a form of oppression for the women within the "The Yellow Wallpaper," *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *The Babadook*. The women within these works arrive in their stories with past traumas that the reader is unaware of, but by the end readers are introduced to their traumas related to hysteria and the patriarchal societies around them that weaponize the term. Through an exploration of the home as setting, the women characters discussed in this thesis are argued to be confined by the homes themselves, hysteria, trauma, mothering, and patriarchal standards.

Historically, Gilman creates a path for following female writers like Jackson and Kent who handle such topics in a sensitive and informing way. *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Babadook* follow themes that are set up by "The Yellow Wallpaper" despite straying away from confinement directly related to the rest cure. The rest cure was a common diagnosis for women in the nineteenth century, but as women's literature heads into the twentieth century when *The Haunting of Hill House* was written, the diagnosis for hysteria and the rest cure "treatment" that came along with it turns into isolation from friends, family, and society. This is explored through Eleanor's character in Hill House as she is not diagnosed with hysteria, but the companions around her insinuate her to be hysterical. Trauma that existed before she entered Hill House

becomes heavier as it is amplified by the isolation of those around her—they insinuate that she is hysterical, mad, crazy, and through this oppressive labeling she falls deep into grief and isolation with no way out. This transition from themes in “The Yellow Wallpaper” to *The Haunting of Hill House* also comes from the actual setting. Instead of a small room, particularly a nursery that represents the narrator’s trauma, Eleanor finds herself confined to a large gothic home with paranormal elements throughout. The paranormal elements add a horror aspect onto the gothic genre, much like we see in *The Babadook* with Amelia.

Amelia, another female character confined in a home through trauma, is seen with gothic horror elements due to the dark, gloomy, home she and her son live in. However, Amelia’s story differs from the last two because of the visual representation of the monster, The Babadook, who appears on screen. “The Yellow Wallpaper” does not technically have a monster, although it can be insinuated that her husband and the diagnosis of hysteria can be a monster for a woman with no autonomy. Eleanor’s monster is her grief for her mother, a metaphorical monster, but Jackson’s writing still leaves room for the threat of a monster in Hill House through the apparent haunting. Amelia, however, faces a real monster—The Babadook—who comes into her and her son’s life as their grief personified. Director Jennifer Kent uses the gloomy elements of the gothic genre while also uses prominent horror elements such as a literal monster, jump scares, eerie images, and dead quiet that will typically end in a scream of horror. These elements presented through film explore trauma in a different way than the last two works due to the intensity of motherhood trauma. Each story within this thesis deals with trauma from motherhood, but Amelia’s story makes the audience uncomfortable through the intensity of her struggling relationship with her son. The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” faces trauma from the diagnosis of hysteria as well as her untreated post-partum depression, Eleanor deals with

trauma related to her mother's death and her identity within Hill House while dealing with this grief, and then Amelia faces trauma from her husband's tragic death and being forced to raise their son alone. These women's experiences are told through the gothic and gothic horror genres particularly because their traumas come from the human experience of loss, grief, isolation, which can be terrifying both for the reader and audience as well as the characters within. These experiences happen to everyone at some point, but these women are oppressed through their loss, grief, and isolation because of the lack of support with these sensitive issues by those around them and society in general.

Sandra L. Bloom discusses the complexities of human nature and emotion when she states, "We seem reluctant to confront the reality of our human nature, that we are an exquisitely complex, interconnected, integrated, multidetermined social being with extraordinary sensitivity" (222). This can be applied to the works in this thesis as each of the main female protagonists have difficulty with facing human nature related to memory and emotion. Humans are complex, of course, and so is the trauma that humans face which the gothic and gothic horror genres capture authentically. Confronting the reality of human nature through trauma can be seen within these genres so well because they explore the dark side of human nature that is typically avoided—that complex part of humans that we want to ignore but must be addressed with sensitivity.

Bloom, explores the inability to face human nature and how it affects children when she states,

From the skewed, distorted, and damaged perspective of the adult, we do our best to turn our children into what we have become. What we fail to seriously consider is that what we have become is seriously flawed, maladaptive, fragmented, and sick. By the time we

are adults, we have lost a significant part of our own potential integration, and then we pretend that there is no loss—that this is the way things are supposed to be. (223).

This statement acknowledges, within the scope of the motherhood in this thesis and the trauma associated with it, how the domestic space of the home might add to this trauma. Adults who are damaged from past traumas before becoming mothers, according to Bloom, tend to ignore the reality and instead project this flawed viewpoint onto children, becoming a continuous cycle. This is not thoroughly explored in the works for this thesis, but it is acknowledged through the trauma with the patriarchal system in place and how this system oppresses mothers through impossible expectations, which leads to isolation. The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” for instance, struggles with motherhood after post-partum depression and through her hysteria diagnosis she cannot get better and become a mother to her child. The end of Gilman’s short story, as has been discussed in chapter two, explores how the narrator’s son leads to the assumption that he will take on the patriarchal role in her life once her husband is gone. Through this, the narrator’s son becomes a product of society not because of the narrator’s refusal to confront reality but instead because of her husband’s—his patriarchal control will likely be taught to his son and carried on from there.

This can be explored through Jackson’s work as well, even though Eleanor is not a mother. Eleanor’s mother has a heavy influence on her and within the walls of Hill House this influence becomes much more prominent. The darkness in Hill House connects to the darkness of Eleanor’s childhood as her mother likely could not face the darkness of her own human nature. The influence of Eleanor’s mother passes down onto Eleanor despite her crave and attempt at a completely new identity away from her mother. In *The Babadook*, Amelia’s experience as a mother also follows this pattern. While Amelia and her son do reconnect as a

family at the end, the audience faces the intensity of their relationship for much of the film. Amelia's trauma is directly related to her son, as she cannot face the reality of her loss while also facing the oppression coming from outside forces like her son's school, his doctor, and CPS. These oppressions come from outside of the home, but they are still enforcing a picture-perfect version of motherhood, something that is unattainable for every mother, but especially Amelia as she struggles with grieving over her husband. Samuel, not at the fault of Amelia, becomes neglected as the anniversary of her traumatic memory approaches and this neglect is directly related to Amelia's loss that she is not ready to face.

The women characters are neglected by the medical module which can be seen in each story. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the narrator is neglected by her husband, who is also her doctor. *The Haunting of Hill House* shows Eleanor being neglected by several forces, but one of them being the lack of professional help with her trauma, something that Dr. Montague blatantly ignores until it affects his research. Amelia in *The Babadook* is neglected, much like Eleanor, by those around her in her life, but also but the police and CPS who come to check on Samuel. On top of that, medical care in general is oppressive to women as women's issues are not taken seriously when they do choose to reach out for help. While it might be shocking to some readers that these women characters face their traumatic experiences on their own, it is likely because they fear they will not get proper professional help. This is an issue that is still present in society today which makes these works important. From "The Yellow Wallpaper" to *The Babadook*, the medical module continues to be oppressive to women. Within these works there is a change, though, and that change comes from the ending of *The Babadook* in which Amelia pulls herself out of her traumatized state. This ending, and this work being the most recently released leads us to believe that there is hope for women outside of the medical module created as a continuous

oppressive force. The hopeful ending comes from Amelia who learned to depend on herself and in turn is able to heal because of herself, not the medical module that ended up being the demise of the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” and *The Haunting of Hill House*.

Hysteria and the trauma that derives from its oppressive nature is directly related to motherhood and isolation within these works because patriarchal standards do not accept women struggling with human emotion and instead encourage women to hold their traumas in. The women presented in this thesis are all affected by the oppressive nature of hysteria as it evolves from a diagnosis to a label that directly affects their experience as mothers or with mothers. The setting within the gothic and horror genres enhances these themes as they approach trauma deriving from the darkness of human nature, particularly the human nature found in the patriarchal societies they live in.

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