



The Insanity of Reality in *The Haunting of Hill House*: Novel versus Adaptation.

Myrthe Neijns

6400663

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English Language and Culture

Utrecht University

Supervisor: Ruth Clemens

Second reader: Roselinde Supheert

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Abstract

Both Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* and its 2018 Netflix adaptation of the same name revolve around the theme of absolute reality and the influence it has on the characters, but the two media differ greatly in the way they present it. The main differences relate to the ways the two texts play with the themes of trauma, death, life, and love, and how they represent conventional gothic tropes. The novel conceives of trauma as a lonely and inescapable force inside of us, and death is the pointless death of it all. In the adaptation, trauma is shared and externalised, and love seems to be a way of thinking outside of the absurdity of life and death. This research shows that an adaptation is not merely a copy; in adapting a work into a different medium, the work itself can be utterly transformed on a fundamental level. At the centre of the two texts lie two different conceptualisations of life itself.

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Introduction

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

(Jackson 1)

The introductory paragraph of Shirley Jackson's American novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) presents to the reader the concept of absolute reality and links it to Hill House.

Likewise, this same excerpt serves as the opening of the first episode of the 2018 Netflix adaptation of the same name, narrated in the form of a voiceover. Both the novel and the adaptation revolve around absolute reality, the malevolent force embodied in Hill House, and the influence it has on the characters, but the two media differ greatly in the way they present it. Since it is such an abstract concept that is not explicated by Jackson in the novel itself, providing a clear definition of absolute reality is challenging and unsure work, though some groundwork has been laid. Wilson, in "Absolute Reality and the Role of the Ineffable in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*", defines it as a deeper layer of reality that, when perceived, can drive people insane. The novel has also been analysed in the light of trauma and family conflict (Hattenhauer; Roberts; Vinci), but not yet has the connection been made between the novel and the 2018 adaptation in the context of absolute reality. Doing so reveals two different reflections of the way death, trauma, and life are viewed, as this thesis shows. This thesis will answer the following question: how do the two different texts

represent the concept of absolute reality? This research shows that while in the novel absolute reality is presented as something that is final, meaningless, and with limited effects, in the adaptation it opens the door to an existence after death, while simultaneously being able to haunt occupants for the rest of their lives. While the novel emphasises the senselessness of life and the horrible power of death, the adaptation bears the message that love and hope can keep a person sane in an insane world. Following current theories of adaptation, an adaptation is not merely a copy; in adapting a work into a different medium, the work itself can be utterly transformed on a fundamental level (Hutcheon 7). My research shows that at the centre of the two texts lie two different conceptualisations of life itself, separated from each other by sixty years.

The novel tells the story of Eleanor who stays at Hill House for a short while with a small group of people for paranormal research. She carries with her the scar of a lifetime of abuse from her family, and she is looking for a place where she can belong and live in solitude. She mistakes Hill House for such a place and ends up taking her own life outside its doors, ostensibly driven to madness by the ambiguous and evil power that resides there, having seen unsettling visions but also having constantly felt that the house was targeting her and alienating her from the group. The adaptation, consisting of ten episodes, follows a very different plot, which is centred around a family of seven that moves to Hill House in order to remodel and resell it. The mother of the family, Olivia, meets a fate similar to the one Eleanor falls victim to in the novel, and she, too, kills herself at the house. The rest of the family immediately moves out and the different episodes show how the five children – Steve, Shirley, Theo, Luke, and Eleanor –, now grown up, are still trying to cope with their traumatic past and the tainted relationship they have with each other. One of the siblings, Eleanor, chooses to visit Hill House again after all that time away, but like her mother, she dies there. The question arises of what Hill House is exactly and whether the rest of the family can

overcome its malevolent power. The first section of this thesis will outline a theoretical framework, examining absolute reality, trauma, and gothic theory. The second chapter will be devoted to the connection between absolute reality and trauma, and the question how the two media differ in representing these connections, while the third chapter will look at absolute reality in the context of ghosts and life after death, to examine how the two texts so differently approach the theme of death, and centralise different sides of it. In the conclusion the final results will be presented of these comparisons between novel and adaptation.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

As shown in the epigraph to the introduction, Shirley Jackson creates an opposition between dreaming and facing absolute reality as the core conflict of her novel. In this case, the latter results in terrible suffering and madness, so that the former becomes the norm, and her characters can but resort to continuous denial and subsequently live in an idealised but false version of reality. As explained in the philosophy of absurdism by Sagi in *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, doing so is even a normal human instinct (33). Dreaming means applying reason and logic to situations in life that cannot be made sense of, and creating margins and patterns inside of which it is preferable to stay forever. It is both seeking refuge in rationality (science) and looking for some other more satisfying explanation (religion and philosophy). Jackson's idea of reality, following the theory of absurdism, is that it is devoid of meaning (Wilson 116). Hidden underneath the veil of dreams resides the truth that reality is absurd and pointless, and that none can face this truth without losing grip on the logical structure around which they have built their existence. Moreover, absolute reality lies so far outside of reasonable perceptions that attempting to make sense of it is a nearly impossible task. Wilson notes that "to perceive the ineffable accurately and to render it accurately into language is to risk destruction" (114). It is one thing to witness absolute reality, but another to try and find words to describe and give meaning to it, and in order to stay sane people have to stay within the boundaries of dreaming and their own reasoning.

This becomes significantly more difficult when a damaged and traumatised person enters the scene. The word 'trauma' stems from ancient Greek where it means 'wound', and in her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* Caruth explains how in psychology it refers to the pain a victim will carry long after an experience as long as they cannot narrativise and make sense of it (3-4). This pain is often suppressed to the subconscious, returning in ways the conscious mind cannot subdue. Because of this, the

haunted house is a fitting metaphor or the traumatised mind: a psychological space where the trauma then roams like an unwanted ghost, slamming doors and knocking pictures off the walls. By being a remnant of the past that stays behind for unfinished business, the ghost is similar to trauma, and both trauma and the supernatural do not make sense as they do not fit within logical frameworks. Hogle notes in “History, Trauma, and the Gothic in Contemporary Western Fictions” that, in gothic fiction, trauma is a widely used theme and usually serves as the basis of the horrors that arise throughout the novel (72). As Bailey shows in “June Cleaver in the House of Horrors: Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*”, haunted houses in particular often provide their inhabitants with an exhaustive look inwards, mirroring their mental scars and the circumstances that left them there (Bailey 34). Instead of literal ghosts haunting innocent visitors, there is a different kind of power that the gothic genre attributes to haunted houses (5-6).

Absolute reality in the two texts fits into this narrative and shows that the mind can be someone’s greatest enemy. The haunted rooms of the psyche, the places where trauma has caused a stir, are more vulnerable to the power of absolute reality than the minds of characters who have not experienced trauma in their lives. Trauma weakens certain characters’ abilities to dream and hold onto logical patterns, and the cracks and slits it has carved into the soul leave room for absolute reality to slip inside. Those whose reasonable structures have already been damaged do not have the tools to then properly grapple with reality. This analysis revolves around the link between trauma and Hill House as a haunted house, with its central malevolent force being absolute reality. How the two texts represent this force differs, with different repercussions for the characters. In doing so, both texts draw different conclusions about the nature of reality and the meaning of life.

Chapter 2: Reflecting and Creating Trauma

In this chapter I argue that in the novel absolute reality is only able to target Eleanor by serving as a mirror that reflects her existing trauma and manipulating her desire for a sense of belonging. In the adaptation, absolute reality causes the Crain family's trauma, attempting to tear a healthy and happy family apart for the rest of their lives. My analysis revolves around the depictions of trauma in the two texts and how characters deal with those psychological issues while also influenced by the haunted Hill House.

Jackson introduces Eleanor in the novel as a deeply traumatised character (6-7). Not only does she experience the early death of her father; her main trauma is the product of a life full of setbacks (Vinci 56-7). The constant abuse by her mother (and later her sister and brother-in-law) leaves her damaged and alienated, like a wave nipping a piece off of a pebble with each single motion for years. The result of this is a woman of thirty-two who claims that she has "never been wanted anywhere," constantly invading other people's spaces but never having had one of her own (Jackson 209). Bailey notes "the ease with which she slips out of reality and into fantasy" (35). On the road to Hill House, she loses herself in daydreams caused by her desire to occupy such a private space where she could indeed be wanted (Jackson 18-23). She places herself in the position of a protagonist of fantastic stories as she passes cottages and orchards, not aware that this, too, is an act of invading other people's spaces. Hill House is the first place she encounters that opens its doors to her and offers her a place to stay. While the rest of the residents – Dr. Montague, Theodora, and Luke – stay distant and wary of the house, Eleanor finds that her desire to belong somewhere is stronger than her sensibleness. Her ability to dream and stay sane when faced with absolute reality barely exists, because never in her life has she been given the opportunity to develop it. Her inability to process her trauma equals her inability to process absolute reality.

On the other hand, her three housemates have learnt how to rely on their sense of logic, which is an apparent theme throughout the novel. Dr. Montague explains that “the menace of the supernatural is that it attacks where modern minds are weakest, where we have abandoned our protective armor of superstition and have no substitute defense. Not one of us thinks rationally that what ran through the garden last night was a ghost” (140). His “protective armor of superstition” is representative of the idea of dreaming and finding alternatives for reality, even though they are far from the truth. The supernatural he describes is a violent force, and he is unknowingly describing absolute reality and the way it most strongly affects those who, like Eleanor, are defenceless and lack the ability to hide behind dreams and rationale. The doctor also notes the following: “Fear (...) is the relinquishment of logic, the willing relinquishment of reasonable patterns. We yield to it or we fight it, but we cannot meet it halfway. (...) I think we are only afraid of ourselves” (159). Indeed, Eleanor is most afraid of herself; she fears she is not likeable enough and she often fears her behaviour is inappropriate, due to the fact that her family has always made her feel cast out, but this only really became an issue when Hill House took those fears and projected them back at her (160). Her life is drained of reason and logic, and fantasies consisting of stone guardians and magic kingdoms and love potions are not enough for her to hold onto, so as the story progresses, she can be seen slowly descending into Hill House’s open, hungry maw.

The adaptation has a similar storyline linked to Olivia, the mother of the Crain family. As the plot progresses and reveals how she came to kill herself at the house through flashbacks, viewers learn that Hill House drove her towards suicide by manipulating her deepest fears. Here, too, it merely holds up a mirror in front of its victim long enough to make her conclude that life outside of Hill House is not worth living anymore. The metaphor of distorted reflection is present in both the novel and the adaptation. In a flashback in the adaptation, Olivia’s son, Steve, gifts her a dressing table, which he has found in the house’s

'Red Room' ("Screaming Meemies"). Looking into the mirror, Olivia is faced with a vision of her youngest children, Luke and Eleanor, who look like adults and seem to be in a distressed state. This is a direct reflection of her one true fear: losing her children. In the novel, Eleanor also finds that the house serves as a mirror reflecting her in an unpleasant way (Hattenhauer 159-60). Upon entering the house, she looks down at the floor and sees the "reflection of her hand going down and down into the deep shadows of the polished floor", and this happens directly after she finds that "her voice was drowned in the dim stillness" as she tries to speak (Jackson 37). Hill House immediately manages to take parts of her the moment she crosses the threshold and use them against her. The haunted house in the two texts serves to represent Eleanor and Olivia's own minds, and stepping inside means facing the psychological turmoil that they had previously repressed.

On top of absolute reality acting as a mirror of existing inner torments, the adaptation adds the idea that it has the power to play a big role in creating trauma too. Eleanor's suicide is the end of the novel, and there is no mention of any impression Hill House has left on the other characters; instead, they seem to move on from their experiences there (246). The doctor appropriately states: "At least it can't follow us, can it?" (124). The novel emphasises the idea that absolute reality cannot heavily impact those who still have their logical structures, and that therefore only an already damaged psyche risks further harm. The opposite is true for the adaptation, where a great part of the storyline revolves around the ways the Crain family tries to live a normal life after having moved out of Hill House while they can never really shake off the imprint it has left on them. When they arrived at the house, they were a happy family with parents who loved each other, and siblings who had their moments of bickering, but would always fight to protect each other in the end. Of the five siblings, it is Steve, the eldest, who repeatedly displays his inclination to take on the role of looking after his younger siblings and helping his father, Hugh, around the house. As an adult, Steve's attitude towards

his brother and sisters is much less caring, and he has turned incredibly hostile towards his father, frequently blaming him for his mother's death. The events at Hill House have divided the family members and damaged their relationships with each other, but none of them is as strongly influenced and traumatised as Eleanor.

In the first episode, young Eleanor starts seeing visions at Hill House of a disturbing apparition she calls the 'Bent-Neck Lady' ("Steven Sees A Ghost"). These visions follow her after she leaves the house, though she goes a while without seeing them from the moment she meets the sleep technologist Arthur, whom she eventually marries, until the moment he tragically dies from an aneurysm. It is revealed in the fifth episode that the Bent-Neck Lady actually is a vision of Eleanor's eventual death when she returns to the house ("The Bent-Neck Lady"). This supernatural force explicitly and strongly symbolises the concept of trauma: occurrences in the past will determine the future, and traumatic experiences will inescapably repeat in someone's present life, influencing its course. Eleanor is unable to break the cycles of her trauma and they lead her straight to her death. Mad and depressed from the loss of her husband and her miserable childhood, she wants to face the house once and for all, but instead she finds herself walking into a trap. Her worsened mental state now makes her an even more vulnerable target for the absolute reality at Hill House, as it is able to easily take all her pain and fears, and use them to push her over the edge. The house produces images of Eleanor's family members showing kindness and forgiveness to fulfil her wish of having a normal and happy family, as well as one of Arthur to bring back the greatest loss of her life. Either the ghost or the false version of Olivia kindly welcomes her daughter back and tells her, "you're expected" ("The Bent-Neck Lady"). In the novel, Eleanor is the one to often state, "I'm expected", as her reasoning for entering the house (Jackson 28, 36). It doubles as a sign that she, of all people at Hill House, is most vulnerable to the absolute reality there because of her traumatised mind, and that her madness comes from within herself. Since the

line is translated to “you’re expected” in the adaptation, it slightly changes in meaning. Here, the house shows agency and the power to influence people from the outside. Moreover, it is not Eleanor who kills herself at the house, but the house itself that kills her. The spectre of her mother ties the noose around her neck and pushes her off the stairs, as opposed to Eleanor in the novel who intentionally drives her car into a tree. This reveals a more nuanced idea of mental illness, where a traumatised person has no control over their suicide; instead, they are driven by the force of trauma.

The visual language of the adaptation works to show that the absolute reality at Hill House creates the Crain family’s trauma. “Two Storms”, the sixth episode, consists almost entirely of five long takes that revolve around two settings: the funeral home in the present where Eleanor’s body is displayed in an open casket and where her siblings and father have gathered to view her, and Hill House in the past where the younger version of the family experiences a hail storm. The first transition between the two is when Hugh wanders through the halls and suddenly finds himself in Hill House, looking at his younger self. The scene cuts, older Hugh has disappeared again, and now the scene is fully in the past. The other transitions between the past and the present are also visually focussed on emphasising parallels between the two settings, such as the cut between Hugh opening a door in the present and young Hugh opening one in the past; these types of transitions almost entirely get rid of any boundaries between past and present (“Two Storms”). In the light of trauma, the flashbacks reveal how the characters’ present weakened mental state is a direct result of the horrors they have encountered at Hill House (Robson 7). These horrors are not things that they can just leave behind in the past. Instead, the past is constantly looming over their shoulders, playing a big role in their present life. The photographic direction in the episode illustrates that the family members still carry Hill House and their glimpse of absolute reality with them.

In the end, the adaptation shows that the Crain family is able to come out of it all stronger and that recovery is indeed possible. Steve tries to mend his relationship with his wife and family, Shirley gets over her ingrained idea that she is incapable of making mistakes, Theo learns to open up and be vulnerable, and Luke finally overcomes his drug addiction. The reason for this can be found in the last lines of the voiceover in the final episode:

Fear is the relinquishment of logic, the willing relinquishing of reasonable patterns, but so, it seems, is love. Love is the relinquishment of logic, the willing relinquishing of reasonable patterns. We yield to it or we fight it, but we cannot meet it halfway. Without it, we cannot continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality. (“Silence Lay Steadily”)

The quote by the doctor from the novel is altered and a statement about love is added. The claim here is that there is a way to stay sane when faced with absolute reality, and that is to counter it with the power of love. Throughout the series, the family members constantly fight love by fighting with each other, but this changes at the end when they finally yield to it. When Hill House threatens to take Luke’s life, they actively work together to save him, after which there are some brief scenes showing that their relationships and their mental health have greatly improved. Steve is urged by his father to take on the role of big brother again and take care of the family, and there is no sign of senseless arguing anymore. The peace is restored and the Crains have finally managed to stay sane and cope with their trauma, despite the severity of it. The novel does nothing of that and gives none of the other characters a happy ending. Even though they are not heavily impacted by absolute reality in the first place, they also do not come out stronger because of it. Their only advantage is the chance that they might never face trauma. The two texts convey contrasting morals. While the adaptations bears hope and the notion that there are ways to battle absolute reality, the novel warns the reader of its power and only installs fear

Chapter 3: A Ghost is a Wish

This chapter will focus on the argument that in the adaptation ghosts are used to show that absolute reality exists beyond the borders of life, which offers the victims new opportunities and agency, while the novel lacks all signs that those who die at Hill House will then also stay behind as ghosts, strongly focussing on finality and overruling human agency. I will show this by analysing how death is represented in the two texts, and linking it to the concepts of agency and trauma, whereby the two texts use absolute reality to shed light on different aspects of death. In the novel, Hill House has claimed victims before it takes Eleanor, but they are never seen roaming the grounds afterwards, or heard communicating with the occupants. Jackson also ends the novel with Eleanor's death, and there is no suggestion of her spirit returning (246). It seems that the dead pass on, leaving Hill House a lifeless shell with no lingering spirits, so "whatever walked there, walked alone" (1). The end of the novel communicates to the reader a reality where death is an overpowering force that stands at the end of everything and that, in line with absurdism, opens no doors to a meaningful afterlife, keeping them sensibly shut instead.

The adaptation takes a different approach and adds the concept of ghosts with whom the characters are able to interact. Throughout the series it is established that anyone who dies at Hill House will then also leave behind their spirit indefinitely. The subtlest example is that of the hidden ghosts that can be found lurking in the shadows of Hill House. Almost every episode contains shots with a partly obscured figure in the background of the scene, constructing the gothic aesthetics of the series. One example of this is when Olivia is leaving the house to go and stay with her sister, and as she is saying goodbye to her family, a man dressed in black is watching them from the stairwell ("Screaming Meemies"). It becomes clear as the story progresses that these are people who have died at the house, though not all of them stay hidden in the cinematographic background as they move to the foreground of the

narrative. The malevolent ghost of a previous occupant named Poppy plays an important role in Olivia's death, as she is the puppet through which absolute reality influences Olivia.

During her time alive, she was declared insane and sent to a psychiatric institution ("Witness Marks"). Susceptible to the evil force, she ends up as nothing more than an instrument for absolute reality seeking to claim as many victims as possible.

The message that the first nine episodes of the adaptation convey is that those who have died under the influence of absolute reality have to live on miserably within the walls of Hill House, but this changes suddenly in the final episode, as the adaptation deviates from the gothic trope that haunted houses serve to represent their inhabitant's inner self (Bailey 34). Olivia risks meeting the same destructive fate as Poppy, attempting to murder her family like Poppy did without realising the destruction she is causing. Her actions are motivated by the fear Hill House has imbedded in her, replacing the logical structure that she has always lived by. She can no longer hold on to the comforting idea of her family, the love she feels for them, and her role as a responsible mother, as Hill House can only make her focus on her fear of losing them and the impossible task to counter the inevitable. Because of this, she can but sink deeper into absolute reality's dark claws. As a ghost, she tries to bring the family together in the afterlife by killing them, and she succeeds in doing so with her youngest daughter, Eleanor ("The Bent-Neck Lady"). As the remaining four siblings find themselves trapped in the house while Luke is on the brink of death, Eleanor's spirit shows up to pull him back to consciousness ("Silence Lay Steadily"). As a ghost, Eleanor battles the selfish behaviour of her mother's spirit and tries to save her siblings from her. On top of this, she uses the situation to give them closure about her death, which she herself has already accepted, and this helps them process the trauma Hill House has inflicted upon them. In a final conversation she has with them, she narrativises aspects of her life that she only in death has learnt to understand. When talking about the house, she says, "I feel a bit clearer now"

("Silence Lay Steadily"). When talking about her relationship with her siblings and the idea of losing someone in death, she says, "I learned a secret", explaining that the truth is that she will never truly be gone ("Silence Lay Steadily"). Thus, by making sense of their shared trauma, she manages to heal their wounds. Her love for her family reinforces her grip on reason and makes it stronger than absolute reality, and even though she has been traumatised and finally killed by Hill House, she does not let this weaken her spirit in the end.

This victory shows that death is an ambiguous force that is not inherently good or bad, and that victims can take control in death by ensuring they are persistent. This is also shown in the case of the father, Hugh, who believes he will be happier in death with his wife Olivia. He consciously makes the decision to commit suicide so that he can join her and their daughter Eleanor in death at the end of the final episode, as opposed to all those who have suffered death directly at the hands of absolute reality. In the novel, Eleanor's final thoughts as she drives her car into the tree are, "Why am I doing this?" (Jackson 246). Contrastingly, in the adaptation, Hugh has agency over how and why he steps into the world of the dead, showing no fear ("Silence Lay Steadily"). With a reparatory goal in mind, he can stay sane and give absolute reality no opening to poison his mind. Like his daughter Eleanor, he brings closure to others in death, and in this case that person is his son Steve. A great deal of Steve's trauma stems from his mother's death and his misunderstandings about it. He believes she had a mental illness that was purely genetic, and that Hill House had no influence on it, thereby also believing that the entire family is ill: a fitting metaphor for intergenerational trauma. Hugh chooses to show him the full truth through visions, namely that absolute reality plays a big part in Olivia's death, so that Steve can finally make sense of it all and process his trauma. Afterwards, Hugh states: "Some things can't be told. You live them, or you don't" ("Silence Lay Steadily"). This can be linked to Caruth and the idea that traumatic experiences in life are nearly impossible to make sense of and narrativise (3-4). Hugh decides that it is best to resort

to visual flashbacks to make them as clear as possible. While haunted houses in gothic literature are a trope for family trauma, the adaptation inverts it and shows how Hill House gives its occupants room to take steps towards healing from their trauma instead.

The two caretakers of the house, the Dudleys, are the last to prove that death can never break a truly strong bond. After losing their eldest child due to a miscarriage, which is implied to be because of absolute reality impacting the mother, they become terrified of Hill House and refuse to stay there after sunset, and this trauma causes them to keep their second daughter, Abigail, forever sheltered from the world (“Eulogy”). However, the accidental death of Abigail makes them realise that the house provides them with the possibility to stay together as a family, after which their fear of the house is overpowered by the love they feel for their daughter and their desire to stay with her (“Silence Lay Steadily”). Like Hugh, they seek to die on the grounds with the goal to remain with those they love the most, and not because absolute reality has managed to gain control over them. It even leads them to reconnect with their firstborn in the end and finally close that terrible chapter of their lives. They, along with Eleanor and Hugh, use their condition to actually heal the wounds caused by the past and rewrite the story of absolute reality at Hill House. The opening lines are repeated at the very end of the final episode, again narrated by Steve, though slightly changed. “Whatever walked there, walked alone” is no longer the case as the Crains and the Dudleys have shown that it does not have to be that way, and that there are means to avoid such doom. The episode ends with the message that there is hope and comfort in death at Hill House via the characters’ connection with others, and that “those who walk there, walk together” (“Silence Lay Steadily”).

This message contrasts the one in the novel, where finality and bleakness are all that define death. The two different outlooks on death also influence the readers and viewers in different ways. The novel shows a side of death that is final and overpowering. It includes no

hope that there is a way to live on and the ending is so terrifying because it confirms the existential fear that life is meaningless and death is inevitable. The novel gives the impression that it is eventually everyone's fate to be lost to time forever. The adaptation, on the other hand, conveys the message that no bond can be broken by death and that it is important to keep lost loved ones close. Ghosts exist, but they are not always to be feared, as they are an echo of love: remnants of the bonds we make with other people. The adaptation rephrases the term 'haunting' and shows that ghosts can bring comfort rather than install fear.

Conclusion

Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* shows a bleak outlook on the terrible reality of life, which is able to prey on the vulnerable and traumatised, and drive them towards death. The supernatural is an ambiguous force, and the novel uses it to mirror existing trauma, marking it as the root of the horrors that can be found throughout the story. It also presents death as a power that is final and impossible to counter. The adaptation, on the other hand, shows themes of hope and reunion, with the possibility of life after death. It also shows that with love and dedication, the cruelty that is absolute reality can be overcome. The supernatural forces of the haunted Hill House may be strong and capable of influencing and traumatising occupants, but they will eventually succumb to compassion and love. The adaptation, due to the later time it was made in, reflects a better understanding of mental illness and trauma.

Considering the limits of this project, defining absolute reality remains a difficult process, since it extends beyond the borders of the themes used in this research. I have also not included biographical information about Shirley Jackson, to which Wilson's article gives ample attention, since by doing so I would risk straying away from the main arguments, but this background on the author would shed an intriguing new light on the novel and explain why she wrote what she wrote. In terms of the haunted house, the adaptation deviates from the gothic conventions mentioned in the theoretical framework, and it would be interesting to take this analysis as a basis for further research into how the adaptation breaks expectations of the horror genre. Moreover, since beginning this research project another season has been released in the *Haunting* series which is also an adaptation of a classic gothic novel, *The Turn of the Screw*, which shows that there is room for further research in this area.

Jackson's depiction of the relationship between life and death in her novel emphasises the terrible powers both hold over people, while the adaptation gives prominence to the

agency people have and their abilities to overcome any struggle in life and death. These two different messages at the hearts of the two texts show that adapting a work does not mean that it is a matter of copying an entire work and placing it in a different medium. Adaptations leave room for creative freedom and altering ideas to fit different conceptions, as well as different times and places.

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