

The *Haunting of Hill House* enlarged on the small screen.

How the media format affects the adaptation process.

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Abstract:

This thesis cross-examines literature studies and adaptation studies in order to analyse how different media formats affect the process of adaptation. To achieve this, the thesis will combine literary review and a close reading of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. To examine any differences between film and television adaptations, the American film *The Haunting*, directed by Jan de Bont, and the Netflix adaptation *The Haunting of Hill House*, are compared and related to their source material as well as previous research on adaptation methods. All the while, the thesis is mindful of haunted houses as a conceptual trope formed in American Gothic horror.

The thesis approaches the topic from a DAS study perspective and determines the impact the inherent format differences between TV and film have on the adaptation production. Then the film and TV series' contemporary culture is examined, and this will relate to how it affected any changes in the original Gothic transhumanist spirit of the novel. Lastly, it is determined how influential the narrative structural differences between film and television are in the adaptation process.

Keywords:

American literature, Gothic literature, Adaptation studies, television adaptation, film narrative, television narrative, Netflix, *The Haunting of Hill House*, Shirley Jackson, Jan de Bont, Mike Flanagan, *The Haunting* (1999), *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018)

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## Introduction

‘[S]ilence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there walked alone’ (3). Shirley Jackson begins her book *The Haunting of Hill House* in a particular manner that immediately appeals to inquisitive literary theorists. From the first moments in her novel, she makes sure the reader is aware of the thematic foundation behind the horrors of her tale. Jackson offsets the materiality of Hill House, the undeniable physicality of architecture, with the paranormal allusion to ‘whatever walked there’. She unifies these two aspects in ‘silence’ and ensures a sense of solitude as she guarantees the reader that no matter who, or what, is there, it is ‘alone’. Jackson sets the stage for a Gothic tale when she deliberately chooses to introduce Hill House before she introduces her protagonist. No matter the agency of Eleanor Vance, from the first pages onward, the fact remains that she is overshadowed by Hill House itself.

*The Haunting of Hill House* is a 1950s Gothic horror novel with a topic that unites many influential authors. After all, writing about haunted houses may nowadays not be considered unique, they are nevertheless an intricate part of American literary tradition: a material remnant of dark romanticism. In his quest to scratch the surface of the scope this theme has to offer, Bailey describes haunted houses in his book *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, and hits the nail on the head why this trope, in particular, is so fascinating in American literature.

For the tale of the haunted house, while rooted in the European gothic tradition, has developed a distinctly American resonance; since Poe first described the House of Usher in 1839, the motif of the haunted house has assumed an enduring role in the American tradition. The House of Usher and its literary progeny have not lacked for

tenants in the last hundred and fifty years; writers from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Stephen King have taken rooms in the haunted houses of American fiction, and it's worth wondering why the archetype has such continuing appeal (6).

The novel thus roams in circles of other classic American literary works that handle these habitual horrors. Bailey mentions “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe, for example, but also Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-Paper” explores the theme of haunted enclosures. These enclosed spaces are not only shaped by physical walls but also by the tormented mind. As Bailey says, the notion of haunted houses continues to be a reoccurring theme in contemporary popular culture as well.

Its contemporary popularity is evident in the recent Netflix adaptation of Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, which goes by the same title. The novel has been adapted a few times before, some securing positive reviews, whereas others received less praise. This thesis discusses one from each category. One adaptation I discuss is De Bont’s 1999 adaptation *The Haunting*. *The Haunting* scores 5.0 on IMDb, has a metascore of 42 on Metacritic, a tomatometer score of 16%, and an audience score of 28% on Rotten Tomatoes®. Comparatively, critics and the audience scored Netflix’s 2018 adaptation *The Haunting of Hill House* much higher. With an IMDb score of 8.7, a metascore of 79 on Metacritic, a tomatometer score of 93%, and an audience score of 91% on Rotten Tomatoes®, it is obvious which holds the viewers’ favour. Both will bring insights into different approaches to adapting the same source text.

The television adaptation stands out compared to the 1999 adaptation. The spotlights of the current era of media entertainment are focussed on television to the point that the term the ‘golden age for TV’ is increasingly popular. Zebian uses this phrase in his essay “Cinematic

TV series” (4) in 2019 and he is not alone in the fact. Roughly ten years before Zebian, Zagalo and Barker also acknowledge the new status of television, They write about the aesthetic value of television narrative innovation and reference French author Olivier Joyard, who embraces the term ‘Golden Age of the American series’ (1) as well. The appreciation for television is above and, perhaps, beyond what it used to be. This appears to be a trend alongside the general growth in TV quality. In his article, “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television”, Mittell (2006) connects popularity and media industry budgets to the level of ‘rewatchability’ of a series (31) in order to, in part, explain this increase. We live in a digital age of Netflix, YouTube, online blogs and forums and entire fandom communities dedicated to analysing, theorizing, and building upon beloved material. For TV series, this means that every episode is a chance for the audience to analyse what they see and stimulate others to search for similar clues or ‘Easter eggs’ in other episodes as well or to review episodes to discover the findings for themselves. Unless a film belongs to a franchise with massive following due to the earlier popularity of the adapted work or extensive universes, such as *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*, this is a characteristic unique to TV series adaptations.

Specifically, for Netflix’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, Zebian discusses cinematography in film and television in his thesis and mentions specificities that aid production of popular TV shows. Using Mittell’s earlier remark on the need for rewatchability for the production to reach popularity in the digital age, Zebian discusses the mise-en-scène of the show. He argues that complex narration ‘encourages the audience to speculate and hypothesis[e]’, which is in line with his idea that ‘consumers of quality and cinematic TV series’ want to ‘validate their speculations’ in addition to simply following the story (83). This is reflected in how the complex narrative of the TV show is presented. By deliberately choosing to keep ghostly figures or spectres in dim light or someplace in the background, and highlighting Hill

House's mysterious Red Door for a jarring contrast, the TV series works to achieve maximum rewatchability by actively engaging with the audience and encouraging them to pay closer attention to the series they are watching to catch all secrets and understand the complete narrative (58-59). The 1999 film *The Haunting* did not have this digital fanbase that could assist or engage with the production that was being presented to them and the producers opted to show apparitions and scares in plain sight, without a need for fan-based debate or theorising. The general notion used to be that for artistic cinematography, it is best to look at films. Mostly, because they were the popular medium and got the most attention. Nowadays this is different. After all, television, as Zebian paraphrases academic and film scholar Thomas Leitch in his work, 'gained a status as the dominant medium for entertainment', which 'came with an upgrade in the quality of its products' (81). Cinematic methodologies such as longer durations of shots, creative applications of camera movements, depth of field and the mise-en-scène, make increasing appearances in TV series, boosting their artistic value and aestheticism previously only accredited to film. Zebian concludes his thesis with: 'as cinema has a dignity of art, it would be legitimate to think about the possibility of reaching the idea of art TV when contemporary quality TV series can be comparable to cinema' (88). With the two media becoming similar in that regard, the boundaries between them begin to fade. Then a question lingers: if both are similar, will one end up being favoured over the other?

That one medium seems to be increasingly popular does raise concern among critics, of whom Zebian mentions Bellour (2013), Aumont (2012), and Self (2010) (13). Zebian uses in his thesis the term 'the death of cinema' (12). In their book, *The End of Cinema?: a Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age*, Gaudreault and Marion (2015), explain this phenomenon in the sense that it is not the medium of cinema that is dying, as films will continue to be produced, but that it will lose its position as 'the form that dominated the

twentieth century' (1). This mindset does not just affect the production of new films or television series, but it also influences the choice between the media when it comes to adapting popular pre-existing works. Producers actively have to consider which format is not only best suitable but also most likely to be well-received among viewers.

This shift in a preferred form of media, production, public response, and viewership, also manifests in the form of adaptations. To find proof of this trend, there is no need to look far. An example, and simultaneously a breakthrough for TV adaptations, was HBO's *Game of Thrones*. And *The Haunting of Hill House*, despite its narrative completion at the end of its season, has yet to reveal all its cards. With a second season *The Haunting of Bly Manor* to be released in 2020, this time to adapt the 1898 novel, Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, the TV show is considered a conventional success at least. Or this can be assumed as much if its release sparked a second season of the *Haunting of Hill House* format. Clearly, there is a market for television shows, and the consumers are plentiful enough to bring TV shows to the centre of mainstream cultures, such as with *Game of Thrones*. Of course, this increased visibility comes with a larger group of viewers that will all have an opinion on the content they watch. And, much like it was for *Game of Thrones*, adaptations are inevitably compared to their source material. The same is true, additionally, for drawing parallels between preceding adaptations. How are they different and when that is explained, why is this the case?

That there will be changes to the plot of *The Haunting of Hill House* in an adaptation is in-and-of-itself a surprise to no one. But when the adaptations are compared, it quickly becomes obvious that each medium opts for deviating in different ways. As the novel is part of America's literary canon, the choices concerning its adaptation is a challenge accordingly. Producers have to decide when to be faithful to the original work, and when it is best to deviate, all under the added pressure of an audience who is already familiar with the material.

Although popularity is a relevant point of discussion, producers must also account for the different opportunities and limitations that each form of media brings.

This creates an interesting mixture of factors when it comes to analysing Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. In addition to being part of the literary canon, and thus being a source familiar to an already existing audience and a likely subject for scrutinization by literary academics, it is also part of an ongoing trend of adaptation in TV format. This sparked the interest into analysing the differences in adaptation of a literary classic between a more traditional film format and the more recently popular format of television. In response to this combination of the literary field and adaptation studies, the thesis aims to answer the following question: "How do the inherent qualities of film and television affect the adaptation process of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*?" The film chosen to make this comparison is director De Bont's 1999 adaptation *The Haunting*. This thesis does not look at the 1963 adaptation, because that film is part of British film history. For the most successful analysis, the choice has been made to remain within an American context. It is important to keep in mind that the streaming platform Netflix is different from aired television. The first chapter of this thesis will explain the fundamental differences between film and television as media, and approximate how these inspire inevitable deviation in adaptations. I will then look at the literary importance of the haunted house in American Gothic, and how this translates across media. Lastly, I examine how a medium can influence the narrative structure of a story and how this affects the choices a producer has to make when creating an adaptation from a different media.

## Chapter 1: The form guides the reinvention of a story

‘No one mode is inherently good at doing one thing and not another; but each has at its disposal different means of expression – media and genres – and so can aim at and achieve certain things better than others’ (24).

Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013) introduce the discussion on the suitability of certain medium formats. In their book *A Theory of Adaptation*, they express that there are differences in which form of the medium may or may not be more appropriate when it comes to creative expression depending on the inherent qualities of the medium. The differences in audience reach and affect between film and television adaptation may be acknowledged and explored, but they are not yet exhausted. In this chapter, I will engage with the theoretical framework behind the fundamental differences between film and television that can affect a producer’s choice of medium for adaptation. I will do this by tackling smaller deviations in separate paragraphs to construct a complete picture of the main differences. These topics are selected for the reason that they, for this thesis, are most significant to determine the differences between these two adaptations of Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*. First, this chapter will explain the methodology behind the comparative analysis between the chosen formats for the adaptations and the source material. By doing this, I stress that the thesis will not delve into any discussion of Auteurism or fidelity discourse. Second, I also discuss how the structure of film and television is another aspect that affects the production itself. And finally, this chapter will delve deeper into the rising relevance of television and the fall of the film format in current popular culture. This analysis is based on the domesticity of the formats and how this affects viewership. *The Haunting of Hill House* will be in the background for most

of this chapter, but does tie into the argumentation behind the theory and provide exemplary evidence.

To discuss the methodology of the applied form of adaptation studies, I initially stress that I avoid questions of faithfulness to the source material or authorship that arise in adaptation studies. Following the explanation of Cattrysse (2016) in his chapter “Descriptive Adaptation Studies: Why Do Systems Exist?”, this thesis aims to abide by the descriptive adaptation studies (DAS) method (2). This method is part of a ‘polysystem’ (PS) study that was developed in the 1970s. This approach aims to rely on systems and norms within adaptation studies and to distance itself from fidelity discourse and value judgements. Cattrysse writes that the PS approach ‘suggested looking at adaptations as adaptations, the production and reception of which are determined by multiple conditioners to be found in both source and target contexts’ (3). This approach allows the thesis to go beyond Auteurism and the discussion of personal preferences in the creative approach to the source material. Instead, I will look at the systematic differences in format and content to determine any fundamental differences in adaptation for film format, or TV show format on the Netflix platform. Though the thesis will not discuss this approach within adaptation study itself any further, I highlight the theory to explain the process of analysis of Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* and the two adaptations from each different media format and context.

This begins to explain the fundamental difference in experience between film and television that affect the thought process behind their production. These decisions inevitably affect the choice of medium when adapting existing works. Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013) write in their book *A Theory of Adaptation* that the idea that visual media bring unique opportunities with them, when compared to written material, is by no means recent. They have to look no further than canonical novelist Virginia Woolf, who, as early as in 1926, saw the potential of cinematography to develop into its own medium, rather than only being a

threat to existing literature (3). It is clear that cinematography's rise in popularity over the years is not a complete surprise. Aside from original cinematography, adaptations of pre-existing works became increasingly popular over the years and began to appear in various forms of media, such as short films, feature films, and TV series. Hutcheon and O'Flynn define adaptation using three descriptive perspectives. First, that the adaptation in question is an acknowledged transposition of a pre-existing work. Second, that the adaptation approaches the pre-existing work with creativity and as an interpretive act. Last, that there exists an 'extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work' (8). Both the film and TV series adaptations of *The Haunting of Hill House* match these descriptors. They both openly acknowledge the written source, which is apparent from the TV series' title alone. Interestingly enough, the film opted to change the title to *The Haunting*. This decision matches with the second perspective Hutcheon and O'Flynn mention in their book: both the film and the TV series approached the adaptation material differently, each with their creative interpretation. *The Haunting* opted to change the title to reflect its distinctive creative vision. However, for the sake of continuing with the earlier mentioned DAS method, any individual preference of the producer that may have influenced choices to deviate from the source material will not be discussed and the focus remains on the format of the media. This decision is made to avoid speculating on the producers' inner thoughts and to keep clear of pure guesswork. And lastly, *The Haunting of Hill House* has an extended intertextual engagement spanned over two feature films, a theatre play and now a TV series as well.

To discuss the structural differences between film and television, I look into the format of the media themselves. Primarily, TV series often have an episodic format, which is different from the common format for film. Thompson (2003) explains in her book *Storytelling in Film and Television*, that teleplay writers have devised a unique way when producing their scripts to create an ongoing narrative that survives commercial breaks, transitions between

episodes, or even between seasons. Television relies on causes and effects, she writes, that must be connected securely to the overall narrative to withstand this format and the limitations that come with it (37). Griggs (2018), in *Adaptable TV: Rewiring the Text*, expands upon this. She specifically discusses anthology series that allow correlation with a previous work through ‘stylistic and thematic points of continuity across seasons’ and ‘can connect with that prior text at the level of style aesthetic and thematic preoccupation rather than narrative and character’ (4). The TV series *The Haunting of Hill House* is such an anthology series in that it plans to discuss different stories altogether every season. This means that Mike Flanagan, the writer of the TV adaptation, had to account for telling the entire story of Jackson’s novel in such a way that it could survive episode-transition and that the story had to be completed in its entirety within ten episodes. These considerations are factored into what Flanagan could or could not achieve with his series, and are fundamental in the next part of discussing the differences between mediums. David Self and Michael Tolkin, the screenplay writers for *The Haunting*, had to consider fundamentally different issues than Flanagan. They had to work with a medium that is more often than not without interruption. When films are presented on television, commercial breaks can become clunky or off-putting for this reason, whereas TV shows are produced with this in mind.

This is slightly different for *The Haunting of Hill House* because it is not such a series. With media platforms such as Netflix, there is a new format available for TV shows when compared to traditional television. For one, Netflix does not need to consider commercial breaks when producing a series. Even so, it can be argued that the inevitable stops between episodes will affect the overall narrative and structure of a series’ plotline. However, as Jenner (2018) discusses this in her book *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television*, ‘Netflix puts all episodes of one series online at once, resembling more models of book, or, more accurately, DVD publishing’(4-5). This is a difference between traditional television and

Netflix. Another difference is that the flow of action has to be controlled and regulated differently than for TV series. Jenner explains that as of recent network television has had to ‘continuously emphasised its ‘liveness’’ (4), through fast-paced reality series such as talent shows or contests. Additionally, there is a timeframe of reflection for the audience that is necessary for them to fully immerse and familiarize themselves with a story, one that is dependent on the ‘autonomous scheduling’ (4) based on the viewers’ preferences. Depending on the complexity or subject matter of the film or TV show, screenwriters have to pace their Netflix TV shows during production to give viewers this opportunity. Despite these differences, Jenner explains that, academically, Netflix is still seen as television because of Netflix’ own decision when branding themselves (5). The thesis follows suit to academically refer to Netflix and its shows as the format of television.

This brings the chapter to the last difference between the two media of film and television this thesis will address: the domestic aspect of media consumption and how this affects the production of films and TV series. In her book *Television and Serial Adaptation*, Wells-Lassagne (2019) points out that television series are a ‘domestic format’, whereas films typically are not (11). TV shows are enjoyed at a preferred set of time, and from a preferred location. This is the case for both scheduled series on television as well as on media platforms such as Netflix. It can be argued that Netflix is even more ‘domestic’ in that sense, in that the added freedom of timing and location of viewing maximally optimises to the viewer’s preferred experience. Films, on the contrary, are primarily shaped for mass consumption on the big screen, before they are made available on a timed schedule on television or available for streaming on platforms such as Netflix or Hulu. Screenwriters have to produce a TV series in such a way to stimulate the viewer to actively choose to watch another episode of a show to follow the narrative, whereas for most films a single sitting, or a visit to the cinema, is enough. For Jackson’s novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*, this means

that the two media presented actively call for a different approach before production or writing of the script has started.

To summarize, this chapter discussed the theoretical methodology which I will apply to my analysis of the adaptations of Jackson's novel. This chapter is to ensure an objective evaluation between the chosen formats of the adaptations and to see how they affect the result of the end product significantly, even when television and film appear to be similar forms of visual media. First, I explained DAS analysis and separated the thesis from fidelity discourse. I highlight that it is essential to remember the underlying format differences that will affect the production of an adaptation. Next, I explained that an adaptation is bound by the structural limitations and opportunities that each format brings. For television, this includes inherent narrative breaks, which occurs because of commercials, or episodic breaks. As commercial breaks are not relevant in the discussion of Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House*, this affects the production of the adaptation differently than the traditional TV show format would. The structure in films, which are usually produced to be watched in a single sitting, is fundamentally different from their TV cousin. Lastly, I discussed that these structural differences affect the domesticity and platform of the media and, in turn, the viewer experience. For an adaptation, this calls for the immediate editing of the source material to better suit their style of public consumption.

## Chapter 2: The haunted house as the antagonist of American Gothic

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 the 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. (3)

This is the critically acclaimed first paragraph with which Shirley Jackson starts her novel and introduces what I would refer to as the antagonist of the story: Hill House itself. Hill House is Jackson's interpretation of the American haunted house, and the way this trope has been handled in each adaptation thereof is reflective of American culture at the time. This second chapter is a comparative analysis of the three formats of *The Haunting of Hill House*: Shirley Jackson's novel, De Bont's 1999 film adaptation *The Haunting*, and Netflix's 2018 TV show adaptation *The Haunting of Hill House*. This analysis discusses the translation of a literary trope to the visual screen. The focus lies on the concept of haunted houses as an American genre trope that was popular in Gothic novels. This chapter will also explore the cultural significance behind haunted houses and draw comparisons between how this trope is explored depending on the media format.

Haunted houses in American Gothic did not only stand the test of time but also survived being translated to other forms of media. First, I want to specify what I mean with the trope of haunted houses, and why this trope is important enough in American literature to substantiate its discussion in adaptation studies. The film and the TV adaptation are almost two decades apart, and the novel was written in 1959. American culture has changed

throughout the years, which would change how certain tropes in creative media are handled. American Gothic is commonly associated with dark Romanticism and authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson.

In his chapter on American Gothic in the book *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, Crow describes the genre's history from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century and how culture shapes the narrative. In its essence, Crow defines Gothic literature as a genre 'of borderlands, suited to a country defined by its frontier' as well as bordering on 'other shifting and unstable boundaries, and provid[ing] an index of American fears, anxieties, and self-doubt' (1). He names Charles Brockden Brown as '[t]he first great American Gothic novelist' in that most subjects in Gothic literature derived from his original works. These are 'madness, the terror of the wilderness, disease, political corruption, self-deception, and race' (2), and all subjects find themselves individually explored or compared to one another in sub-movements within Gothic literature. Crow ascribes Brown's view of the world as 'ambiguous and deceptive' (2) as the underlying inspiration for successive authors.

This leads to a trend of unreliable narration in novels, the moral ambiguity of characters and multiple contradictory points of view within a tale. American Gothic authors were also influenced by European trends of nature itself or a landscape obscuring and simultaneously revealing hidden truths or evils. Haunted houses were shaped by a more specified subset of Romanticism. Dark Romantics separated themselves from other authors in the Romantic Period in that the world how they imagined it was inherently splintered, and that any sort of pursuit for perfection within the environment or deeds would result in an individual's madness or downfall. Emily Dickinson took to this by, how Crow describes it, seeing no possibility for understanding between nature and the human psyche. Dickinson would 'explor[e] the haunted regions of the mind and confront[t] the reality of death and dying',

which was a small glimpse into what would form later and be known as ‘the age of realism after the Civil War’ (3). This does suggest the interrelatedness between reality and Gothic literature and opens the door for exploration of the taboo. This included ‘buried secrets of families’ (4) in postbellum Southern America; the powerlessness of humanity, and naturalism in the nineteenth century, with subjects such as sexuality, addiction, and disease (5). This also includes Poe’s incorporation of the supernatural that would later inspire H.P. Lovecraft and Jackson’s hints at the paranormal in her tale of Eleanor Vance’s mental deterioration.

Now that I have established the fundamentals and nature of American Gothic, this chapter moves to examine Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* in greater detail. Jackson was influenced by her predecessors when she wrote about a home isolated from civilisation, a family with a mysterious history and a protagonist whose mind seemingly deteriorates the longer she remains in Hill House. This last theme is explored further in Vinci’s (2019) article "Shirley Jackson's Posthumanist Ghosts: Revisiting Spectrality and Trauma in *The Haunting of Hill House*" in which he refers to protagonist Eleanor Vance’s declining psyche as Jackson’s take on trans-subjectivity, which can be simplified as a disconnect with physical reality and leaves readers ‘without a stable understanding’ of what transpired in Hill House (53). This is in line with the Gothic realisation of the landscape influencing a person’s identity. Vinci argues that Jackson ‘engages the ghost and spectrality as a means to grapple with the traumas inflicted by mid-century American ideologies that codify identity under the rubric of anthropocentric humanism’ (55). Other Gothic archetypes that present themselves in Jackson’s novel are the multiple, conflicting narratives of other characters that clash and increasingly contradicts Eleanor’s accounts. Of course, the Gothic genre, notably when a woman has a major role in the story, is often analysed as the representation of patriarchal society and female oppression that is hidden under the guise of hysteria. This thesis will look into the more generalised aspect of this trope: the transhumanist experience of incorporeal

trauma through the physicality of landscape and nature, and, subsequently, the personification of the haunted house.

In his book *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, Bailey analyses Jackson's haunted house in greater detail. He originates feminist themes within the symbolism of haunted houses to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper". He acknowledges that the thematic exploration of a home, as well as its gradually monstrous and abhorring transfiguration in horror stories, is appealing to female authors. He says that 'concentrating in graphic detail on the house itself rather than the ghosts which may or may not be contained there[,] (... ) enlarges the story's symbolic potential' within feminist writings (28). He continues to discuss the theme of horror and how it came to merge with gothic aesthetics. Jackson's contemporary authors began to shift the focus of horror inward, continuing with a theme of rising individualism in America, and that it blended well with the distortion of the material world. He says: 'the gothic setting continues to serve as a microcosm for the clash of good and evil' and 'that clash is increasingly dramatized on a personal, narcissistic level' (34). This explains the effect the house has on Eleanor in the novel. As Bailey writes, Eleanor is rather plain and ordinary. Her life, although tragic, is empty, loveless, and generally plain without a semblance of excitement or purpose since the passing of her mother. Hill House is her fantastical means of escapism that she latches onto by taking the car against her sister and brother-in-law's wishes. It emphasises how internalised Eleanor's emotions are. She outwardly expressing her desires by actively choosing to leave for the village of Hillsdale, and the only other time it is suggested she has this level of agency is when the novel suggests the possibility that she psychically made it rain rocks when her father died.

To get a better picture of the role of the house itself in the story, I first take a close look at the novel. As Jackson writes her tale, it is as though the house itself is a character in the story.

In his article, “Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson’s Use of the Gothic”, Parks ponders on the importance of houses in Gothic. The dark structures, especially castles, are symbols of loneliness, isolation and, most of all, power. With how unstructured and unhinged the architecture of the house itself is described in the novel, it explains how Eleanor’s ‘fragile self-dissolve[es] and fus[es] with the substance of Hill House’ (25). Based on this analysis, I argue that the weakening of the self and increasing madness induced by Gothic structures is what makes the haunted house so effective and iconic in American literature. The trope encompasses existentialism, transhumanism, supernaturalism, naturalism, and horror effectively, and often leads to a tragical, but inevitable demise. As Schneider writes in his article “Thrice-Told Tales: The Haunting from Novel to Film ... to Film”, Jackson indeed writes Hill House as though it is a character in and of itself. She does this by making sure the reader experiences the house as though it is not just alive, but also sickly, making the effect it has on Eleanor all the more intrusive and more within the realm of possibility. Jackson would have her characters talk about the house ‘in psychological, at times even physiological, terms’ (171). And in the book, Jackson does solidify this idea of Hill House as an evil entity when Dr Montague tells his guests about the history of the house:

“You will recall,” the doctor began, “the houses described in Leviticus as ‘leprous,’ *tsaraas*, or Homer’s phrase for the underworld: *aidao domos*, the house of Hades; I need not remind you, I think, that the concept of certain houses as unclean or forbidden – perhaps sacred – is as old as the mind of man. Certainly, there are spots which inevitably attach to themselves an atmosphere of holiness and goodness; it might not then be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad. Hill House, whatever the cause, has been unfit for human habitation for upwards of twenty years.

(70)

The doctor also proceeds to describe the house as ‘sick’ and ‘any of the popular euphemisms for insanity’ (70). To the reader, Hill House has become a sinister character within the novel. The television show does align itself with this approach as mentioned before, such as having the statues move almost seamlessly in the background, and personifying the Red Door as this mysterious space of madness and death, but what about the film?

When it comes to the presentation of *Hill House* as haunted, and the paranormal as the culprit, both the television adaptation as well as the film adaptation take a different approach: where one opts to blame the protagonist’s torment on the supernatural, the other leaves some room for interpretation. The film *The Haunting* appears to forego any semblance of subtlety by employing unmistakably palpable ghostly apparitions to justify Eleanor’s mental deterioration. The film changes the plot by including a physical connection, familial, between Eleanor and the Crain family of Hill House, which leads to the climax of self-sacrificial heroism, as she weaponizes her ancestral connection to the family to defeat the evil of the house. However, the television series takes the opposite approach. By keeping the spectres, although visible, ambiguous in nature, it could still be up to speculation whether the apparitions are manifestations originating from deep-rooted psychological issues in the Crain family. This idea is reinforced when Steven Crain, portrayed by Michiel Huisman, admits this theory plagued him enough to get a vasectomy as soon as he left college. This combines both the approach of supernatural haunting as well as the internalised aspect of Gothic transhumanism.

Although *The Haunting* insists on the evil of the house at first, the story progresses to reveal a clear culprit in the form of the evil spirit of the Crain patriarch, and so the film detaches itself from the transhumanist aspect of Gothic that Jackson applies in her novel. It

would be a disservice to cinematography to say that film could not have the means to convey this Gothic archetype and thereby being satisfied with that as the reason as to why this choice was made. As discussed before, I forgo trying to gauge the personal preference of the director and so turn to examine the state of American culture at the end of the twentieth century in order to rationalize these changes. By the end of the twentieth century, American culture, as Schneider describes early on in his article, just experienced a ‘wave of self- reflexive, Gen-X- targeted “neo-stalker” movies (including *Scream* [1997], *I Know What You Did Last Summer* [1998], and *Halloween H20* [1998])’ (168) that set the theme for popular films in the horror genre as it was at the time. It makes sense that De Bont changed the vision of the original story to have the house fit more into this genre than that of Gothic horror in the 1950s. Schneider argues that De Bont ‘takes a far more objective or literal approach to the task of giving Hill House life’, which fit in the genre trope of making Hill House into a stalker-type predator that hunts its victims down. In turn, this means that the scriptwriter, David Self, left less room for the characters to personify the house, establishing Hill House as a personal, intimate danger to their psyche. Schneider continues to say that ‘[l]ittle effort is made to visually disorient the audience’, (172) which could serve to similarly affect the viewer as picturing the house as something alive and inherently evil. The author criticises the camerawork in this regard with its lack of ‘creative cross-cutting, just a couple of mildly canted frames and conventional mirror imagery’ (172). He also blames De Bont’s choices in cinematography for actually depersonalising the house by mainly focussing in on the characters with ‘Steadicam’ where he could have used more overhead or panned-out shots, in what I argue would be as though the viewers see the perspective of the house’s consciousness. Schneider claims that ‘De Bont’s main interest seems to have been the creation of a few spectacular (but surprisingly unmoving) scenes in which parts of the house turn into living organisms that attack Eleanor and the others’ (172). De Bont shows the

audience the tangible ghosts and metamorphosis of the house through new computer and animation effects, which aligns perfectly with the trend of the neo-stalker in 1990s slasher horror, but arguably ends up contradicting Jackson's, and with it, American's Gothic, intended effect of a haunted house.

In comparison, the TV show *The Haunting of Hill House* was produced almost two decades after the release of the 1999 film, allowing for a subtle insertion of explicit supernatural visuals. Special effects and other forms of CGI are more sophisticated and have more opportunity to be subtly introduced in a shot. This has the immediate advantage that any visual presentation of the supernatural is less likely to break immersion or come off as depersonalisation of the sense of untouchable and living evil the house suggests. On top of that, the characters in the series, just like in the novel, have the chance to vocalise and discuss the nature of the house with other characters. A young Luke Crain, played by Julian Hilliard, classifies the house to a younger Hugh Crain (Henry Thomas) as follows: 'This house is bad, Dad. It's bad' in the fourth episode "The Twin Thing". Or, how the concept of haunting is brought up from the first episode that focusses on ghost hunting author Steven Crain, who reflects on what his father told the media about Hill House: 'He said it was haunted. Those are his words' in "Steven Sees a Ghost". More obvious in that aspect during the episode focussed on Eleanor 'Nell' Crain (Victoria Pedretti), sees a therapist Dr Montague (Russ Tamblyn) for her psychological problems. In the episode focussed on her, "The Bent-Neck Lady", she blames everything bad happening to her and her family on Hill House itself, to the point that Dr Montague appears to scold her for it: 'It's just a house'. Nell also gives human attributes to Hill House, further personalising it, even in the final episode, "Silence Lay Steadily", of the season: 'Mom says that a house is like a body. And every house has eyes and bones and skin. A face. This room is like the heart of the house. No, not a heart, a stomach'. In combination with the fact that the audience also sees apparitions in Hill House,

these reasons and the implication that the character of Theodora ‘Theo’ Crain has psychic abilities, bring more vitality to the existence of the supernatural and establishes Hill House as an entity of evil. This ability of the television series to slot into the theme of the novel is another point of support for Jenner’s (2018) suggestion that the Netflix format is naturally more similar to a novel than traditional television or film.

To conclude this chapter, the TV show combines in this way both the visual aspect that was, as Schneider would put it, overused in the 1999 film and the descriptive strength that is found in Jackson’s novel. In postmodern times, it may be suggested there is a desire to combine authenticity with nuanced special effects that have only recently become possible to achieve. In this, the TV series and the novel resemble each other more than the film does. Not only thanks to the visual aids but also because of the narrative of the story and how it accommodates as a visual form of media compared to the written format of Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*.

### Chapter 3: How is the story told? The narrative differences between media

TV has passed the time it could be overlooked in the academic scene due to the idea it is mediocre at best in quality when compared to film: its cinematic older brother. Mittel also acknowledges this in his 2006 article "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television". He works to attribute the sensation of television narrative as a manifestation of the overall cinematic increasing complexity of TV. Looking at more recent media, he discusses the increasing complexity of TV series that he argues began sometime between the late 1970s and early 1980s (32). And after this period, producers would innovate on their usual TV show style "by expanding the role of story arcs across episodes and seasons"(33). He describes how these complex narratives in television allow for different storytelling devices such as analepses and achronological depictions of events with flashbacks as an example (36). With television as a unique medium, producers discovered newfound freedom for creative exploration in their work. Griggs attests similarly in her 2018 book *Adaptable TV: Rewiring the Text* as she writes that, with the rise of successful TV shows, 'TV is no longer deemed the fall-back option for creatives working in the field of narrative adaptation' (4). She attributes television success in this 'golden age of TV'(1), from the 1970s up until now, to unique cinematic and narrative features that TV series apply to their work. Griggs argues that TV series adaptations are part of a creative process that calls for the reassessment of the influence society and popular culture have on existing media. The seriality of TV adaptation allows for narrative freedom in expanding and exploring pre-loved material for an already existing audience. In this chapter, I delve into the development and changes of narrative structure applied in each adaptation medium of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and establish how these directly affected the production and direction of the adaptations.

First, I describe the critical lens through which I will examine the narrative structures of both the film *The Haunting* and the TV series *The Haunting of Hill House*. In his 1980 book *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*, Chatman defines narratives as ‘communications’ from the author of a work to their audience (31). He divides a narrative structure into two modes, depending on the medium of work of fiction. These are ‘process and stasis’ (31), with stasis being the only mode available for literature. The story and plot that is being told likely are the same, fundamentally. After all, “[h]e stabbed himself” and a mime’s plunging an imaginary dagger into his heart manifest the same narrative process statement’ (32), but there is a difference. In a novel, a narrative may be stated and constructed with the author’s vocabulary and their skill to communicate their vision, whereas visual media can ‘state’ using dialogue as well as ‘act out’ the process. In an AS level textbook, *AS Film Studies: The Essential Introduction*, by Benyahia, Gaffney and White in 2006, states that the narrative can be as simple or complex as desired. Even so, it is a common aim that the viewer has ‘the sense of achievement [that] comes from eventually recognizing and understanding the shape and form of the narrative’ (45-46). Bringing together the story as fixated chronological events with the narrative’s freedom makes it possible to rearrange the chain of events to present a certain plot to the viewers. The narrative can be shaped so that the characters are presented in a certain light, depending on which role the character fulfils. In the same way, narrative structure affects the genre and delivery of a story. This is supported by Tan in his 2011 book *Emotion and the structure of narrative film: Film as an emotion machine*, who states that a narrative functions to ‘systematically manipulates fictional situations and aspects of those situations in such a way that they fulfill the requirements for the creation, maintenance, and modulation of emotions’ (4). He also highlights that film has a specific toolset, which illustrates how different the narrative structure may be affected depending on the chosen medium format alone.

The structuring by means of narration goes deeper than a simple ordering of events. The verbal narrative employs highly concrete vehicles of language, including syntax, vocabulary, and figures of speech. The film as narrative similarly manipulates individual and easily observable characteristics of the medium in order to convey subtle meanings and produce highly specific effects. Film technology, including the acting, directing, and camera work, serve to present fictional events in such a way that they produce the intended effect on the viewer. (6)

However, before I cross-analyse the different narrative structures between media, I look closer at the actual strategies Jackson's applies in the source of the adaptations. I address this because the haunted house as an American Gothic trope is a well-established concept in the literary academic field. However, the narrative structure and the genre of the novel are more difficult to pin down. In her article, "'I'll Come Back and Break Your Spell": *Narrative Freedom and Genre in The Haunting of Hill House*", Ashton writes that Jackson's novel fits the criteria of quotidian Gothic, part of a new 'hybrid genre', and overall a 'narratologically revolutionary text' (268). Ashton defines quotidian Gothic as 'the deep interplay of repression, fear, and disgust inside a more or less "normal" world as portrayed in a nonetheless indisputably Gothic text' (269). Jackson combines the concepts of the implied narrator, the character that the story focusses on, and the real narrator, oftentimes the author writing the novel. She does this by fully merging the concepts into her one protagonist Eleanor Vance (268-269). This creates a merge between the "normal" world and the inner thoughts of Eleanor in the form of 'a radically unreliable narrative point of view' (qtd. in Hattenhauer 155) (269). Ashton continues to describe how Jackson used text as a medium to

her advantage as she seamlessly transitions between verb-tense, pronouns, objective observation, and subjective paranoia (271). It is in this way that Jackson spun her narrative structure and shaped the horror in the form of a tortured mind, rather than a monster or preying stalker. That is the form of the novel, however, and with the text itself as such an integral aspect of Jackson's strategy to give a Gothic horror experience, visual media must find a different approach.

So now this chapter moves on to discuss the character of Eleanor Vance, and how different representations of her affect the story. Aside from discussing *Hill House* as a character, Schneider also analyses the various depictions of Eleanor Vance. For one, his analysis explains the fundamental differences between De Bont's reimagination of Eleanor compared to Jackson's and Flanagan's visions. Schneider disapproves of De Bont's depiction of Eleanor's inner thoughts. He compares this to Wise's adaptation of the novel in 1963, which uses narration to vocalise Eleanor's inner thoughts. In contrast, De Bont 'cuts out the bulk of Eleanor's soliloquies – most likely in an effort at rendering her a less introspective, less psychologically disturbed, more heroic figure' (172). Because of this, De Bont essentially closed an intentional narrative loophole that both Jackson and Flanagan left in their work. It changed Eleanor's tragic ending and the question of whether she committed suicide or was driven to death through paranormal possession, into a bittersweet victory. It also affected the character itself: De Bont's Eleanor is not the tortured and naïve character she is in the novel, but instead a heroic protagonist. By forgoing Eleanor's inner thoughts and importance as a narrator, she acquires more agency. These are all characteristics that could belong to a strong personality in a story. In this case, however, it seems to lessen the Gothic horror experience that the novel establishes.

Furthermore, this choice in narrative structure may even effectively undermine the American Gothic style of the original novel. The narrative structure of tragedy and the

psychological aspect of American Gothic is obscured in De Bont's film. To illustrate what I mean by this, I will use what Schneider quoted from Jack Sullivan, who writes that:

the depiction of intense loneliness and mental disturbance in an ambiguously supernatural context became Jackson's trademark. Reversing M. R. James' dictum that a ghost story should leave a narrow 'loophole' for a natural explanation, Jackson wrote stories of psychological anguish that leave a loophole for a supernatural explanation (qtd. in Keesey 307) (173-174).

There is no room for transhumanism, a psychological interpretation, and the subjective boundaries between reality and paranormality in De Bont's film because he opted for a more closed ending of defeating evil in the time of slasher flicks. As De Bont forgoes what was Jackson's signature style according to Sullivan, the loopholes of American Gothic, in his narrative structure, he essentially alienates the film from the experience of the novel. However, in her article "The tower or the nursery? Paternal and maternal re-visions of Hill House on film", Holt thinks differently. She quotes Ann McGuire and David Buchbinder as she describes how De Bont's Hill House portrays a 'central terror' that embodies a new form of Gothic narrative on the deconstruction of the family (172) and the physical manifestation of patriarchy and second-wave feminism: with the evil ghost of Hugh Crain, the domesticity of the house longing to entrap Eleanor, and eventually Eleanor's heroism that leads to the house's purification. Her arguments suggest that De Bont does bring forth the transhumanist element of blending physical reality with psychology. The house in the film, she argues, 'visualizes the home as a Gothic environment where apparently stable boundaries have collapsed through the dynamically antithetical *mise-en-scène* of the Hill House interior'

(173). But that is not the only way in which the film does abide by the Gothic genre. In *The Haunting*, Eleanor is the product of the combined forces of ‘contemporary female detective narratives and early female Gothic stories’ (174). She is both the woman entrapped in a domestic maze under the patriarch Hugh Crain’s authority and the female-turned-detective that shows off her heroism and increased agency in comparison to the character in the novel.

But how does the Netflix show fit into this picture? The narrative structure of the show is established in a way that every episode, save for the last few, focusses on one character and their relationship with Hill House, their family and loved ones. During this episode, the show transitions from the past spent in Hill House to the present multiple times. The episode “The Bent-Neck Lady” goes as far as to meld time to hint that time itself may be a subjective concept. In the greater scheme of the series, it becomes clear that the episodes themselves chronologically overlap each other as well. This is different from Jackson’s approach, who presents her tale in chronological order, from Eleanor’s introduction to her death, and uses trinkets of the past as tools to slowly reveal puzzle pieces to the mystery at hand. Even though the TV show has a more intricate narrative focus on individual characters, it does not approach the level of invasivity the novel has, in which the reader is privy to Eleanor’s musings and insecurities. I use the word ‘invasivity’, as I feel the text is purposefully trying to make the reader uncomfortable with how much they are forced to be intimately familiar with Eleanor. When watching the television show, the audience’s knowledge of the plot is entirely tied to what they see happening on the screen and hear the characters say to one another. For a certain amount of time, another character becomes the protagonist, with their perception of what happened in Hill House, their fears, and their form of trauma. While this does seem to create a certain limit to how much the viewer can come to understand a character, it also provides the opportunity for the previously mentioned functional loopholes to appear in the narrative structure of the television series. The audience does not know the

truth until they see it happening and hear it being said, but because they cannot indefinitely know whether the character is lying or delusional, the truth becomes subjective. Not only is this beneficial as a marketing tool to stimulate what Griggs describes as the ‘ongoing social interactions with reviewers and fans’ (6), it is also a way to commit to the Gothic archetype of the loopholes that occur when mixing narrative subjectivity and the suggestion of a paranormal explanation.

The unique narrative structure applied for the Netflix show is possible because of its format as a television series. The transitions between character-focus and chronological jumps would not have been as effective in a feature-length film, as this medium does rely more on the natural flow of storytelling than weaving complex narratives, further supporting Jenner’s assessment that Netflix is more similar of a medium to a novel than film or traditional television. And it appears that, where both the television adaptation and the film adaptation lose the aspect of an intrusive audience, only the TV show manages to substitute that loss through the means of its inherent structure as an episodic media.

## Conclusion

Depending on the choice of medium, aspects of the adaptation process, such as having to consider narrative breaks and structure, are inherently affected in several ways. This thesis is structured to answer the question: “How do the inherent qualities of film and television affect the adaptation process of Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*?”. I discovered that the choice of medium in and of itself already influences how the adaptation is to be structured and edited to compensate for the lack of literary devices that a novel has, as well as for the limitations of visual media.

This thesis sought to explain the main features of the descriptive adaptation studies (DAS) method. By distancing the thesis from fidelity discourse, value judgements, and Auteurism, the discussion is narrowed down to objective fundamental differences between a film format and TV show format on the media platform Netflix. I also discussed how the structure of film and television is another aspect that affects the production itself. This included the necessity of constructing a narrative pause in television shows, between episodes or commercial breaks, that should flow seamlessly to disrupt and weaken the viewing experience of the audience as little as possible. And, although Netflix does not need to keep commercial breaks in mind when producing a series, it is necessary to maintain a fast-paced tempo and to allow viewers to reflect on the show they watched. Most importantly, films are optimised for a single sitting, whereas television series keep in mind that there is a greater likelihood their form of media is viewed in sessions. These differences affect the popularity of a medium depending on its suitability for the dominant culture at the time of production. As television series are being received with increasing appreciation and popularity, it will affect the existing fanbase of the source material. These differences fundamentally affect the method of choice when it comes to the production of adapting pre-existing media.

In the second chapter, I explored the cultural significance of haunted houses in American Gothic. I approached this topic through a comparative analysis of the three formats of *The Haunting of Hill House*: Shirley Jackson's novel, De Bont's 1999 film adaptation *The Haunting*, and Netflix's 2018 TV show adaptation *The Haunting of Hill House*. I concluded that the TV show comes closest to the original intent of American Gothic, and I reasoned this difference occurs because of the dominant culture of each time period. The format differences between the novel and visual media are indeed too great to not expect alterations for the adaptations. The novel can count on the written narrative to create the house's animosity as the antagonist of the story, but the film and television series have to rely on visual aid to compensate. Whereas the film opted for opted to expose the haunting aspect of the house, the TV show stuck closer to the mystifying quality of paranormal activity with the option for a psychological explanation. It appears that the TV series and the novel resemble each other more than the film does. This ultimately supports Jenner's argument in *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television* that Netflix is most similar to the structure of a novel compared to film or traditional television.

For the final chapter, I examined the narrative structure of media platforms. When presented with visual media alone, the audience's knowledge of the plot is entirely reliant upon visual cues or explicit dialogue. In De Bont's case, who produced the film in a time of slasher flicks and stalker murderers, he opted for a definite ending in a conclusive battle between good and evil. The TV show presented a psychological approach of the evil presence of the house, and its effects on the mind of the protagonists, allowing for the transhumanist and subject interpretation of Gothic horror to bleed through. Whereas both adaptations have to tackle the lack of narration of the protagonist's innermost thoughts and feelings, they embraced different approaches in a visual representation of conveying an uncomfortably invasive Gothic horror experience for their audiences.

In conclusion, I evaluated how different media platforms affect the adaptation process. This happens in multiple aspects: it determines the flow of plot that must play into the viewing experience of a medium; the medium of choice affects the translation of novel tropes into visual media, and the narrative structure is dependent on the inherent qualities of either film, television, or Netflix TV. All these aspects are direct consequences of the choice of medium.

However, the conversation on the translation of a genre focussed on subjectivity and transhumanism into a visual production also opened the debate for cultural analysis of adaptation, rather than focus on the format of the medium. The differences between productions that alter the delivery of a pre-existing work are examined, but this thesis did not point to a cultural explanation for this shift but does hint that there may be one. In the second chapter on the discussion of haunted houses in visual adaptation, I realised that format alone cannot explain why the film *The Haunting* and the Netflix show *The Haunting of Hill House* opted for such different ways of presenting the trope to their audiences. With the topic of format discussed and accessible to peers for reflection, I leave the topic of cultural analysis between different visual adaptations of the same source material open for future research.

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