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“Whatever Walked There, Walked Alone.” Trauma in American Gothic Literature: A Case Study

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If I could bleed, or sleep! —
If my mouth could marry a hurt like that!

Or your liquors seep to me, in this glass capsule,
Dulling and stilling.

But colourless. Colourless.
— Sylvia Plath, “Poppies in July”

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Resumo

Com base no trabalho fundamental de Freud sobre trauma, vários investigadores tentaram defini-lo. Apoiando-se em Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk e na Teoria Pluralista do Trauma, esta dissertação entende o trauma como uma experiência perturbadora o suficiente para alterar as ligações naturais do cérebro de uma forma que dificulta o quotidiano e é difícil de processar. Devido à tendência do gótico em lidar com temas sombrios, o trauma é frequentemente representado neste género através de tropos recorrentes como a casa, a narrativa fragmentada, a morte e a violência. Embora tenham sido realizadas algumas pesquisas que estabelecem relação entre as duas áreas, a relação entre o trauma e o gótico continua a ser insuficientemente estudada. Além disso, na fase de investigação, não foram encontradas informações sobre o papel narrativo do gótico no processamento do trauma. Ao aplicar uma abordagem interdisciplinar de Estudos do Trauma, Estudos Góticos, Teoria da Perceção de Donald Hoffman e Estudos Literários Cognitivos, esta dissertação examina o papel do Gótico nesse processo. Além disso, o último capítulo sintetiza essas abordagens, culminando na estrutura teórica da Interface Gótica. Esta estrutura analisa como o gótico medeia o trauma coletivo e reflete as ansiedades culturais, provando que o género evoluiu em diálogo com a história. Argumenta ainda que os temas recorrentes do gótico funcionam como símbolos codificados, auxiliando no processamento do trauma.

Keywords: Literatura Gótica, Narrativa de Trauma, Perceção, Teoria do Trauma, Interface Gótica, Trauma Coletivo

Abstract

Building upon Freud's foundational work on trauma, several scholars have attempted to define it. Drawing on Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Bassel van der Kolk, and the Pluralistic Trauma Theory, this dissertation understands trauma to be a disruptive experience powerful enough to change the brain's natural pathways in a way that challenges everyday life and is difficult to process. Due to the Gothic's tendency to deal with somber themes, trauma is often depicted in this genre through tropes such as the house, fragmented narrative, death, and violence. Although some research has been conducted linking both fields, the relationship between trauma and the Gothic remains insufficiently examined. Furthermore, in the research phase, no information was found regarding the Gothic's narrative role in processing trauma. By applying an interdisciplinary approach of Trauma Studies, Gothic Studies, Donald Hoffman's Theory of Perception, and Cognitive Literary Studies, this dissertation examines the genre's role in this process. Furthermore, the last chapter synthesizes these approaches, culminating in the Gothic Interface framework. The Gothic Interface analyzes how the Gothic mediates collective trauma and echoes cultural anxieties, proving that the genre has evolved in dialogue with history. It further argues that the Gothic tropes function as encoded symbols, aiding in the processing of trauma.

Keywords: Collective Trauma, Gothic literature, Perception, the Gothic Interface, Trauma Narrative, Trauma Theory

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Introduction

Ever since Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) development of trauma theory within the psychoanalytic framework, psychology, cultural, and literary studies have been increasingly interested in this field. Over the years, scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Michelle Balaev, among others, have elaborated and expanded on the significance and importance of trauma within the cultural and literary traditions. This dissertation draws on the prolific account of definitions and categorizations that stem from psychological approaches, such as Freudian, Lacanian, Jungian, and Caruthian, while also encompassing pluralistic trauma theory. This is the trauma framework through which this dissertation explores trauma in American Gothic literature.

According to Balaev, in Caruth's pioneering trauma model in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (1996), "trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation" ("Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 263). Balaev further argues that Caruth's "model draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting that the traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche. Trauma is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation", while "imbuing trauma with a universal quality" ("Trauma Studies" 363). However, since Caruth, other scholars have proposed different views regarding the significance of trauma, and the so-called "pluralistic model of trauma" adds that the structural development of trauma dimensions lies not only with the dissociation of the mind, consciousness, and memory but also with the subject's cultural and narrative expression (Balaev "Trauma Studies" 366). In other words, following this model, trauma should not be taken out of context and analyzed on its own but rather should be considered within social and cultural contexts, since each individual might interpret and represent the same experience differently. The abundant scholarship dedicated to this field confirms the importance of trauma studies within literary analysis.

A wide range of well-known literary works might be analyzed within the scope of trauma studies. Although not part of the primary corpus of this dissertation, novels such as *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) by William Faulkner, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., just to mention a few, demonstrate how themes of war, personal and collective history are frequently linked with trauma stemming from violent experiences. Given the violent history surrounding the creation and expansion of the United States of America, violence and the consequent trauma have always been present in the American literary tradition. This is particularly noticeable in Gothic literature since, as observed by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, American literature is greatly based on the Gothic tradition (16).

The United States of America has experienced several cultural, social, and political challenges, which have severely influenced the country's general population. From the American Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the First and Second World Wars, to 9/11, and multiple other wars, Americans have grappled with the consequences of these historical events. Moreover, these events altered Americans' perspectives on the world around them, both individually and collectively. Given the significance of these occurrences, this dissertation will analyze the cultural and psychological impacts of traumatic experiences within the following novels: *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) by Shirley Jackson (1916-1965), which is a Gothic novel, and *The Devil All the Time* (2011) by Donald Ray Pollock, which is a Southern Gothic novel. The reason behind the choice of these novels lies in the relevance of trauma within the novels and how it is represented. In fact, the tendency of Gothic works to approach darker themes, such as hauntings and death, makes them a fertile literary ground to depict the horrors and, consequently, trauma experienced by the American collective. As Lisa Hinrichsen points out, "the gothic often functions as a literary analogue, dramatizing key issues central to traumatic memory" (220). Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* and *The Haunting of Hill House* have recently been the object of a resurgence of interest, as her two novels have been adapted to film and television, respectively (Anderson 2). Pollock's *The Devil All the Time* has also been recently adapted to film in 2020. Starring A-list actors Robert Pattinson, Tom Holland, Mia Wasikowska, and Bill Skarsgård, this adaptation proves the relevance of the novel in the contemporary literary landscape.

Furthermore, by analyzing a post-Second World War novel and a more contemporary one, this dissertation studies how and if representations of trauma evolved throughout history, while adding new knowledge to the field of trauma studies in literature, by proposing the Gothic Interface framework. The discussion on how trauma is represented in these gothic novels and what the collective cultural significance behind the individual trauma is will also be a focus of this dissertation. Furthermore, it will be suggested that the Gothic Interface framework, which aims to analyze whether the Gothic genre's potential proclivity to adhere to traumatic narratives, influences how the collective processes trauma. Although it would make sense to have William Faulkner's works in the main corpus, given his influence in the Gothic and particularly the Southern Gothic scope, this dissertation focuses on the second and the first half of the 20th and 21st centuries, respectively, so as not to have such a broad time distance.

Nevertheless, the two novels under discussion cover an extensive period of half a century. Although not explicitly specified, *The Haunting of Hill House* takes place during the 1950s, in post-Second World War America, whereas *The Devil All the Time*, set in a post-9/11

American society, delves into the consequences not only of the twenty-first-century contemporary world but also of the post-Second World War and pre-Vietnam War. Given the time frame, it is possible to explore different representations of the theme of trauma within Gothic Literature with some depth. Moreover, the corpus chosen for this dissertation allows for different types of protagonists to be analyzed within the connection between Gothic and trauma (women, men, and adolescents), as well as the reasons behind trauma and its consequences.

This dissertation is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter explores the definition, context, and history of trauma, demonstrating its interdisciplinary quality. Furthermore, it examines how the definitions of trauma have changed throughout history, and how differently the concepts have been approached. To do so, works by Freud, Cathy Caruth, and Michelle Balaev, among others, are used in order to establish a theoretical ground from which the following chapters develop.

The second chapter focuses on the Gothic aspects of the novels by providing definitions and important tropes of the genre and the differences between them, particularly between Gothic and Southern Gothic. It equally covers various aspects and methods through which trauma might be represented in different cultural and literary media. These include the trauma narrative, which often operates through stream-of-consciousness writing; fragmentation and repetition, the house trope, and depiction of death and violence are of particular importance to this analysis. Those aspects might be particularly visible since Gothic, in general, is an "elastic concept . . . deploying a temporality based on recursiveness, repetition, and doubling" while also offering "a means of registering effaced experience, reflecting the memory loss endemic to modernity and its reorganization of social relations" (Hinrichsen 219-20).

The third chapter proposes the interdisciplinary Gothic Interface framework built on Hoffman's Theory of Perception and on Cognitive Literary Theory. It applies this framework to the analysis of the novels. By focusing on the representations of trauma and perception in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Donald Rey Pollock's *The Devil All the Time,* this dissertation adds a meaningful and interdisciplinary contribution to literary studies. It applies the theory presented in the previous chapters, while analyzing how those concepts and methods are employed in the novels, and whether the possible differences reflect varied social, historical, and cultural contexts, thus confirming the evolution of the Gothic genre as reflective of cultural anxieties.

Finally, the conclusion integrates the main findings with the proposed framework to answer the following questions: Is the Gothic genre especially prone to depict trauma, and has

it evolved in dialogue with culture? How does an interdisciplinary approach assist in the processing of trauma?

Chapter I – Trauma Theory

Many field experts sought to find a definition that encompasses all the complexities surrounding the term "trauma". What is trauma? How does it develop, and why? Most importantly, what are its consequences? These are some of the questions this chapter will strive to answer, while also endeavoring to determine if literature itself is responsible for altering our perceptions of collective trauma. In other words, if collective trauma stems from historical experience that disrupts a collective identity — resulting in fragmentation and inability to break a vicious cycle of repetition — does literature, as a cultural instrument, challenge the authenticity of collective trauma or does it endorse a collective trauma narrative that influences our experiences?

To determine if literature might be used to inflate or devalue past traumatic experiences, it is important to present the various possible definitions of trauma. Widely accepted as the major pioneer of the psychoanalysis field, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) laid the foundation for establishing trauma as central to human existence. This is verifiable through the prevalence of his name in trauma studies works, such as Caruth's, Soshana Felman's, and Balaev's. Not only are his definition and development of trauma crucial to contextualize its meaning and importance, but also, without it, the literary analysis would be incomplete.

1.1. The Beginning

Having written several works on analyzing the human psyche, Freud's ideas on trauma "gradually grew in complexity and preciseness from the early *Studies on Hysteria* to *Moses and Monotheism*, the latter work bringing together finally the long nurturing of his early concepts into a theory that anticipates much that clinicians working on combat fatigue and PTSD are now researching" (Kaplan 32). Kaplan rightly emphasizes the relevance that Freud's ideas still hold in our time by further demonstrating his progressive views in *Studies on Hysteria*:

> Freud and Breuer specifically note that the symptoms of hysteria are the result of trauma. The physical phenomena they cite, including what happens to memory in

> trauma, anticipate by many years the now so familiar litany of effects labeled in American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: III-R as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD). (26)

The word trauma stems from the Greek, meaning literally "wound", an injury to the body (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 3-4). However, in the context of physiology or psychoanalysis, trauma is "understood as a wound inflicted upon the mind". (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 3). One of the major scholars in Trauma Studies, Cathy Caruth, argues that the experience of trauma is represented by a rupture in the "mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (*Unclaimed Experience* 3). As will be further explored in this chapter, Caruth argues that one of the pivot moments of the development of trauma is that, as the mind experiences this breach between time, self, and the world, it experiences this "too soon, to unexpectedly", which propels the violence of this event to remain in the unconscious "until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4).

In this sense, trauma "is generally understood as a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self's emotional organization and perception of the external world" (Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 360). This means that traumatic experiences disrupt memories, culminating in a rupture of identity as well. (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 1). To further illustrate trauma's disruptive capacity and highlight its division into three clusters of symptoms, Luckhurst supports his argument with information provided by the American Psychiatric Association:

> The first cluster of symptoms relate to the ways in which 'the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced' – through intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original. Weirdly, the second set of symptoms suggests the complete opposite: 'persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma' that can range from avoidance of thoughts or feelings related to the event to a general sense of emotional numbing to the total absence of recall of the significant event. A third set of symptoms points to 'increased arousal', including loss of temper control, hyper-vigilance or 'exaggerated startle response'. Symptoms can come on acutely, persist chronically, or, in another strange effect, appear belatedly, months or years after the precipitating event. (American Psychiatric Association 467-8).

These responses are highly common amongst, for example, war veterans or war survivors. After having experienced violent events, such as death, loss, and survivor's guilt, these veterans

often have recurring nightmares that force them to relive their experiences. However, some might also develop an avoidance of either talking or remembering these events, as the mind's way of protecting the individual against something that brought them colossal suffering. Frequently, victims of sexual abuse also have this type of response to their experiences; thus, repressing the violence inflicted upon the subject becomes a way of sheltering the victim's self. Thirdly, the victim of trauma equally responds in ways that might be seen as exaggerated to the common person when faced with stimuli that remind them of the traumatic event. For example, a war veteran might instinctively run or get down when listening to the sound of fireworks or a loud noise since the unconscious might interpret it as the sound of bombs or shooting, thus communicating to the individual that his life is in danger.

During his career, Freud concentrated on other aspects of psychoanalysis, and it was only due to the symptoms experienced by the soldiers after World War I that he returned to trauma (Kaplan 28). It was during this post-war period that medical practitioners were interested in war neuroses. Freud adds that "in the course of their duties as army doctors, they [doctors] were obliged to deal with war neuroses" (Freud, "Introduction to Psycho-Analysis" 207). He added knowledge to this field by arguing that the soldier's mind fragments into two opposite entities that seem to be in constant opposition between war and peacetime, because "in both cases there is a conflict in the ego" (Kaplan 29). These new identities present as an "old peaceful ego and his new warlike one, and it becomes acute as soon as the peace-ego realizes what danger it runs of losing its life owing to the rashness of its newly formed, parasitic double" (Freud, "Introduction to Psycho-Analysis" 209). The clash between the idea that the soldiers had of themselves and their sense of duty is what further propels them to develop a trauma response to the events they experienced. In his previous works, Freud established the connection between repressed sexuality and hysteria, but he went even further and stated that "what is feared is an eternal enemy" (210). In other words, Freud was questioning whether ordinary neurosis and trauma were any different from each other, which is still a relevant question in trauma studies (Kaplan 29).

Historically, the relation between trauma, war, and hysteria was not conjured from thin air. Trauma is closely linked to modernity and was significantly influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the bourgeois family (25). It was thought that the bourgeois family was the catalyst for female hysteria, whereas industrialization provided fertile ground for accidents related to industry, and later wars (25). This means that at this point, trauma was gendered, in the sense that the development of trauma from witnessing a disruptive event stemmed, in men, from accidents while in women, "from watching by the bedside of sick

parents or children or (at first only implied) from extreme sexual repression" (26). The idea that trauma for men stemmed from physical accidents related to their jobs, for example, while women's trauma derived from an emotional connection or response, might diminish the value of the experience. Since, for men, the accident is not something they can avoid or control, it happens to them and is physical, their response to this event becomes understandable. Nevertheless, women's reactions to an event that is not physically disruptive might easily be seen as an exaggeration, further cementing their reaction as overly emotional, since they were not in physical danger by tending to their dying loved ones; however, at this point, the question of whether men and women experienced trauma differently was not of concern (27). More importantly, it was the weight of the suffering resulting from the overwhelming event that the mind was not able to "cognitively register at the time it happened" that cemented the individual's emotional response as traumatic (30).

1.2 Trauma, Biology, Freud, and Caruth

Nowadays, trauma has gained interest from a natural sciences perspective, as opposed to a more cultural and social one. It is understood that "traumatic disorders reflect the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking-over-psychically and neurobiologically – of the mind by an event that it cannot control", rendering trauma as a "destructive psychic experience" (Caruth, "Violence and Time" 24). For example, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014), Bessel van der Kolk presents the history and development of trauma, from how it began to how it grew, and which methods were previously applied, and which methods are now applied. He argues that modern technologies have been crucial to help understand the implications of trauma on the body by showing what happens in the brain when someone goes through a traumatic experience, thus allowing Freud's findings on this subject to be finally tested. He starts by explaining the evolution of the notion of trauma that he believes first gained visibility and popularity through war veterans. Then he links it to reactions observed in other patients, such as sexual abuse victims, car accident victims, and adults who were child victims of emotionally abusive parents, sometimes due to alcohol or drug problems (172).

Van der Kolk affirms that one's ability "to protect oneself is a critical factor in determining whether or not a horrible experience will leave long-lasting scars" (70). This means that, due to certain situations from which the subject was not able to escape, the

traumatizing event will continue to manifest even after this disruptive experience, as the mind attempts to process it. (69-70). Furthermore, the brain's main job is to ensure our survival. For this to happen, it must do the following:

> (1) generate internal signals that register what our bodies need, such as food, rest, protection, sex, and shelter; (2) create a map of the world to point us where to go to satisfy those needs; (3) generate the necessary energy and actions to get us there; (4) warn us of dangers and opportunities along the way; and (5) adjust our actions based on the requirements of the moment. (70)

In this sense, if the brain is not able to perform these expectations, the disruptive experience will probably culminate in a traumatic response or PTSD. Caruth argues something similar when she expresses her argument about the latency period developed by Freud. The period of latency in Freud's theory is related to the period between the traumatic event and the exact moment when the victim begins to experience symptoms. For Caruth, however, the mind is shattered because it "cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 62). The trauma response is created due to the brain's inability to protect the individual from disruption, which might manifest in dreams or nightmares. She then argues that what relentlessly chases the mind of the victim is not necessarily the experience in itself, but the exact moment when the mind was unable to protect the subject:

> If fright is the term by which Freud defines the traumatic effect of not having been prepared in time, then the trauma of the nightmare does not simply consist in the experience within the dream, but in the experience of waking from it. It is the experience of waking into consciousness that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of the trauma . . . At the beginning of the drive, Freud suggests, is not the traumatic imposition of death but rather the traumatic "awakening" to life. Life itself, Freud says, is an awakening out of a 'death' for which there was no preparation. The origin of the [death] drive is thus precisely the experience of having passed beyond death without knowing it. And it is in the attempt to master this awakening to life that the drive ultimately defines its historical structure: failing to return to the moment of its own act of living, the drive departs into the future of a human history. (*Unclaimed Experience* 64,65)

After having taken exile in England, Freud developed his theories on the etiology of neurosis in his book *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) (Kaplan 32). He establishes a correlation between the latency experienced by a man walking away from a train accident, thinking it did not leave any repercussions, only to later find physical and motor symptoms resulting from the accident, with "'forgetting' of monotheism in the Jewish religion, only to have it return later as something insistent" (32). Thus, the latency period refers to the time between when the disruptive and overwhelming event occurred and the moment the symptoms of it begin to show or develop. Because Freud argues that not everyone has an equal response to the same event, it means that the emotional reaction to the actual event might be triggered by other events from the past, linking this latency period to the infant traumata (32). The addition of unresolved childhood experiences to the experiences of death, loss, and homicide that soldiers more often than not endure during wartime is what contributes to the escalation of the emotional response, thus resulting in trauma (32).

However, since Freud's time, several aspects surrounding trauma have changed. If previously, trauma was regarded as an individual experience, lived only by the victim of this event, Shoshana Felman argues that the listener plays equally an important role, not only to alleviate the isolation the victim might go through due to the hermetic quality of trauma, but also because the listener shares the hazards by proxy (Felman and Laub xvi). Although the listener might possess tools that help to understand and analyze trauma from an objective, analytical, and exterior point of view since many are from the fields of psychology, psychoanalysis, or psychiatry, possessing intensive training on how to deal with victims of trauma, they still find themselves as coming to "feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels" (58). She further notes that although the listener takes part in the trauma, he cannot become the victim:

> The listener, however, is also a separate human being and will experience hazards and struggles of his own, while carrying out his function of a witness to the trauma witness. While overlapping, to a degree, with the experience of the victim, he nonetheless does not become the victim – he preserves his own separate place, position and perspective . . . The listener to the trauma, therefore, needs to know the 'lay of the land' – the landmarks, the undercurrents, and the pitfalls in the witness and in himself. (58)

Given the establishment of the roles of victim and listener as connected but not equal, it is possible to conclude that trauma is a shared experience that transcends the individual quality it

once held. In her works, Caruth establishes this relation as collective trauma, which will be further explored later in this chapter.

1.3. Pluralistic Trauma Theory

As mentioned previously, Caruth is established as being part of a major traditional trauma theory group, along with Kali Tal. This initial take on literary trauma theory popularized the idea that trauma is irrepresentable (Balaev, *Contemporary Approaches* 1). They established that the inability to represent trauma is one of the main reasons why trauma is so detrimental and complex. In opposition to this, Balaev argues that it is possible to explore trauma within its relationships with language, "the psyche, and behavior without assuming the classic definition of trauma that asserts an unrepresentable and pathological universalism" (*Contemporary Approaches* 4). In other words, what Balaev describes in this excerpt is the main argument behind the pluralistic trauma theory. This theory argues that contemporary "approaches in literary trauma theory are more likely to acknowledge both the neurobiological and social contexts of the experience, response, and narratives, as well as the possibilities that language can convey the variable meanings of trauma" (*Contemporary Approaches* 1). This means that the structural development of trauma dimensions lies not only with the dissociation of the mind, consciousness, and memory but also with the subject's cultural and narrative expression (Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 366). In other words, following this model, trauma should not be taken out of context and analyzed on its own but rather should be considered within social and cultural contexts, since each person might interpret and represent the same experience differently. It is also more in tune with an interdisciplinary methodology where several fields of expertise may come together to understand more deeply the complexity surrounding trauma. This development also relates to Freud because after he paved the way for trauma theories, a vast number of other scholars and medical practitioners contributed their own discoveries to the field. These medical-related additions came to prove what Freud and Pierre Janet could not do, due to a lack of scientific tools. Kaplan points out that the psychiatrists Bessel van der Kolk and Otto van der Hart were able to prove that there is a neuroscientific link to trauma:

> These psychiatrists – sometimes seen as antipsychoanalytic – worked with neuroscientists to show brain mechanisms that support the thesis of trauma producing dissociated selves. In arguing that trauma is a special form of memory, they stated that

> in trauma the event has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions – terror, fear, shock – but perhaps above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. Only the sensation sector of the brain – the amygdala – is active during the trauma. The meaning-making one (in the sense of rational thought, cognitive processing), namely the cerebral cortex, remains shut down because the affect is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain. (Kaplan 34)

Furthermore, trauma might be described as an emotional response to a disruptive event that shatters the connection between the self and what surrounds it (Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma" 150). This, once again, can be ascribed to Freud since he held a distinct point of view regarding consciousness and unconsciousness. He was opposed to the idea that after experiencing disruptive events, the psyche would be split into two or more parts, creating a "split personality". (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 48). This was related to Janet's concept of dissociation, which was a "*horizontal* model where the self floats away from coherence into separate islands of consciousness, the subsidiary selves organized around traumatic memories", whereas "Freud's topography was a *vertical* model, in which the psyche is structurally split between conscious and unconscious systems, between manifest and latent ideas and affects" (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 48). These manifest and latent ideas were distinguishable by their place in the mind. The former were accessible by the conscious mind, while the latter were embedded in the unconscious, not easily accessed. However, repression prevents the latent ideas from reaching consciousness (48). Different things might become material for repression as long as there is strong emotional conflict, such as "violent emotions, fantasies of aggression unbounded wish-fulfilment, sexual desires" (48). In sum, although it may have seemed that Freud believed that the psyche would split after experiencing traumatic events, in reality, he thought that the already existing parts of the mind were responsible for assigning places to the experiences absorbed. This means that in the case of soldiers coming home from war, it was not their psyche splitting that propelled their trauma. It was rather the ascribing of specific moments to the unconscious, which was a necessary part of survival, that cemented their PTSD, or as it was called during this time, shell shock.

Trauma is a significant concept that might thrive within the literary fiction area. Novels offer a fertile ground for trauma to be demonstrated as they "represent this disruption between the self and others by carefully describing the place of trauma" (Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma" 150). Additionally, "the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character's identity

and the meaning of the traumatic experience" ("Trends in Literary Trauma" 150). Thus, the trauma novel conveys "profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world" (150).

1.4. Contemporary Approaches

In contemporary biology, Freud's ideas have been disputed, and even he, at some point, concluded that his psychic topography was not related to anatomy (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 49). Due to Freud's lack of proof outside of the realm of supposition, the biologist Patricia Kitcher argues that he "is widely regarded as the paradigm of bad science, a theory so obviously false that its proponents must be deluded or devious or perhaps both" (Kitcher 153), although Freud equally acknowledged that his development of repression was "a preliminary working hypothesis . . . crude and fantastic and quite impermissible in a scientific account" (Freud, *Introductory* 337).

Additionally, van der Kolk ran experiments that were crucial to rendering trauma as a physical experience felt in the body. It was discovered that if a person's brain, who underwent severe trauma, was scanned while the person was remembering the trauma, through re-telling or listening to the re-telling of it, then there were physical pieces of evidence of this reaction (56-57). As shown in Figure 1, there is increased activity in the limbic area and particularly in the amygdala, which is activated by emotional responses. The amygdala is what lets the individual know that they are in danger, as "bright spots in (A) the limbic brain, and (B) the visual cortex, show heightened activation. In drawing (C) the brain's speech center shows markedly decreased activation" (56).

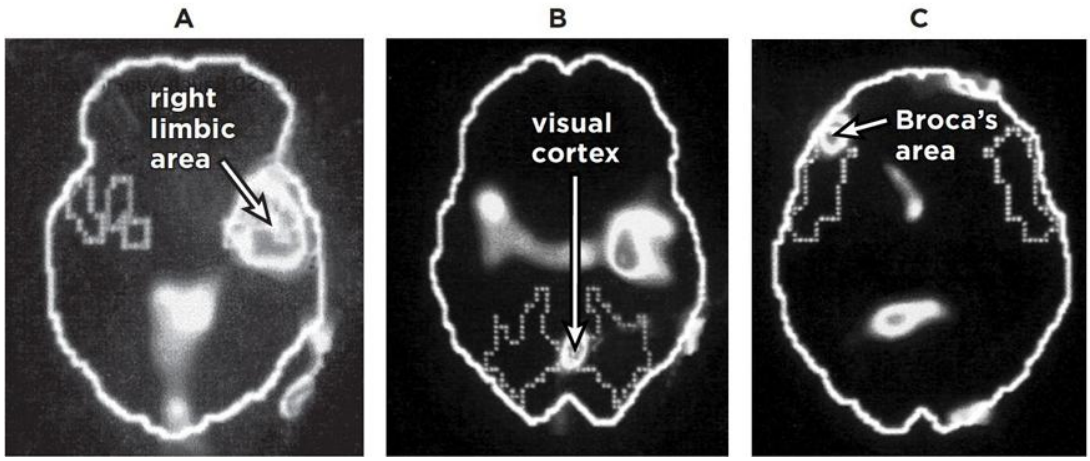

Fig. 1. Picturing the brain on trauma.

What is interesting is that this study brought clarity to the complexity surrounding trauma; after being exposed to triggers that reminded them of the disruptive experiences, the test subjects' reactions provided crucial information concerning trauma responses. Through the activation of stress hormones and nerve impulses prompted by heightened blood pressure, elevated heart rate, and difficulty breathing, the brain signaled to the body that it was in a fight-or-flight situation (56).

Additionally, Luckhurst proposes a theory on why Freud's ideas have been surpassed by other paradigms, such as Janet's, and describes him as being a victim of scapegoating, describing Freud as the "patriarch who denied the traumatic realities of his women patients" (*The Trauma Question* 49). He further states that this surpassing is due to the developments in the field of psychiatry, as psychoanalysis gradually becomes more challenging to reconcile the two:

> But in the end the rejection of Freud must be mainly due to the transformation of professional psychiatry since the 1970s by neuro-biological drug treatments and the rise of other therapies, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy. PTSD is a product of these changes in the 1970s and thus is a psychological categorization that is difficult to reconcile with psychoanalysis at all. What that psychiatric revolution displaced was the dynamic-conflictual model inaugurated by Freud, a paradigmatic model that had begun to dominate psychiatry in the 1920s and now embodied a metapsychology that needed to be superseded. (49)

In conclusion, many of Freud's theories have either been discarded as laughable or pseudo-scientific. Nevertheless, he laid down the basis for modern psychology and psychiatry[1].

Despite this, some concepts still have an impact on contemporary approaches and are used as a method for curing and understanding trauma. These include concepts, namely, defense mechanisms and the idea that early childhood experiences shape our personalities and mental health. Additionally, Freud's ideas continue to be employed in psychotherapy and psychodynamic therapy. Based on less controversial aspects of his theories, these therapies

[1] Due to the advances in these areas which required scientific approaches to cure patients, other more technical and verifiable techniques have been developed over time, such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT). This therapy focuses on changing patterns of thought and behaviors, which is highly different from traditional psychoanalysis since it focuses on the exploration of deeply embedded conflicts in the unconscious.

seek to continue to focus on exploring the unconscious, its motivations, desires, and depth (Petraglia et al. 1-11). As this dissertation will further explore, some of Freud's concepts, such as the role of the unconscious, repression, and belatedness, are predominant features in Gothic literature. The Gothic and Southern Gothic genres often draw on Freudian ideas to depict collective trauma and cultural memory.

1.5. The Trauma Novel

Coined as an "emerging genre" by Anne Whitehead (2004), the trauma novel has gained visibility since the 1980s and 1990s, having politics of survival, memory, and the erasure of trauma at its core (Whitehead 4; Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 87). During this period, literature reflected the repercussions of living out the traumatic events that had once been imposed on nations (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 87; Middleton and Woods 85). In the case of the United States of America, some historical events significantly contributed to the vast number of novels inscribed in this genre. For example, the American Civil War (1861-1865), the First World War, the Second World War, and later 9/11 are known to have produced inspiration for novels such as *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison (1931-2019), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) by Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969) by Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007), and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) by Jonathan Foer, just to name a few.[2]

The trauma novel framework is characterized by certain aspects, including temporal disruption, among others. This means that if the objective of the trauma novel is to convey the difficulty, pain, and suffering stemming from experiences that were a danger to the survival of an individual or nation, then it makes sense to use literary or narrative devices that corroborate this experience (Whitehead 6). Furthermore, the novels "also incorporate the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of trauma within the consciousness and structure of these works" (Vickroy xiv), which might manifest as non-linear storytelling, memory gaps, and fragmentation. Luckhurst argues that, according to Nicola King, "the past is open to

[2]Luckhurst further names other novels that he believes will be part of the trauma novel canon, such as "Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye (1988), Pat Barker's Regeneration trilogy (1991–5), Anne Michaels' Fugitive Pieces (1996), Binjamin Wilkomirski's memoir belatedly- turned-novel Fragments (1996), and incorporates the complete works of W. G. Sebald. Sebald's last novel Austerlitz (2001) explicitly embraced the organizing notion of traumatic dissociation and recovered memory to explore post- Holocaust subjectivity. New careers in trauma fiction are still being forged, such as Jonathan Safran Foer's tragi-comedies of the Holocaust, *Everything is Illuminated* (2002)" (87).

retrospective reinterpretation once occluded material has been recovered" (*The Trauma Question* 88), which further emphasizes the importance of understanding the past when dealing with the present. In addition, this seems to mirror Freud's idea of belatedness in the sense that trauma resurfaces unexpectedly, hindering its comprehension while also mimicking how trauma occurs in real life. Trauma is often not experienced in real time. Caruth explains it by stating that

> Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. (*Unclaimed Experienc*e 91-92).

What is more, some scholars argue that the idea of trauma being non-representable is what propels the individual to always be stuck simultaneously in the present and in the past, not allowing the mind to distinguish between past danger and present danger, as was also argued by van der Kolk. One good example of a literary text where this happens is *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) by William Faulkner (1897-1962), where the author exemplifies these characteristics through the disjointed narration of the three Compson brothers, especially of Benjy, whose reflections of trauma make themselves seen through sensory worlds, such as smell.

Divided into four sections, the novel narrates the unfortunate story of Caddy Compson, who, having lost her virginity and therefore pureness while unmarried, in an antiquated American South, casts a shadow upon her family. The expression of her sexual freedom is what seems to be the fulcrum of this story; however, Faulkner does not state that directly, he lets the reader listen to the story told mainly by her brothers: Benjy, Quentin, and Jason. Olga W. Vickery, like other scholars, points out that Caddy never ceases to be the central point of the actions and thoughts of her brothers. She adds that for "Benjy she is the smell of trees; for Quentin, honor; and for Jason, money or at least means of obtaining it" (1018). The smell, the noises, and the physical sensations also become the protagonists of the traumatic tale.

Drawing on the arguments of more recent approaches in the psychology field, or the fields that are concerned with the science of the mind, and what was already established above, the traumatic event might become disorganized in the mind, but the sensations that were experienced by the body remain in memory. For example, a rape victim might associate a certain perfume with the traumatic event of rape, and so if they ever smell this perfume again,

the body and mind will start to respond in a way that might protect the victim. It is as if they were experiencing it once again (van der Kolk 202). Furthermore, "normal" memories are usually defined as the ones where physical sensations and the chronological happenings are in sync, and it is possible to reconstitute the events with a logical start, middle, and end (202). In Benjy's case, there is also an association of the traumatic experience and agent with the smell of trees, or the smell of "impureness", as will be explored further ahead. On the other hand, in the case of trauma survivors, this link is shattered, and more often than not, they recall highly specific and disorganized details, and not the sequence of events (202). Thomas L. McHaney rightly calls attention to the idea that loss is what Benjy feels when he understands that Caddy's purity, once again linked to virginity, has been corrupted (170-71).

Because Benjy is described as a thirty-three-year-old idiot, he seems not to completely grasp what is happening most of the time. Nevertheless, he conveys this understanding through the sense of smell when he narrates that Caddy had lost the smell of trees, which are linked to her innocence. This connection is further supported by Wai Chee Dimock in her four-part Yale lecture, who adds that this link between smell and Caddy's purity and innocence was restored twice, but at the third time Caddy was not able to "clean" herself, thus shattering this link (00:24:00-00:24:12). Dimock establishes that the perfume, as a symbol of Caddy's gradual becoming into womanhood, is what upsets Benjy. She must clean it so that Benjy is at peace, but when she is not capable of doing so, she loses her "purity". When Benjy becomes peaceful, he says that "Caddy smells like trees" (Faulkner, *The Sound* 34, 35, 39,57). However, there is a third time when Benjy's attempts at coercing his sister into removing the smell of her symbolic perfume are not met, and Caddy is lost to him, embodying grief:

> We were in the hall. Caddy was still looking at me. Her hand was against her mouth and I saw her eyes and I cried. We went up the stairs. She stopped again, against the wall, looking at me and I cried and she went on and I came on, crying, and she shrank against the wall, looking at me. She opened the door to her room, but I pulled at her dress and we went to the bathroom and she stood against the door, looking at me. Then she put her arm across her face and I pushed at her, crying. (57)

It is important to note here that Caddy's smell is not associated with trees anymore. The absence of this smell is as important to understanding the trauma surrounding this family, and particularly Benjy, as its existence is to understanding that this is how Benjy experienced this event. Loss is central to trauma. When one experiences a traumatic event, it usually relates to

either the loss of innocence, of security, or of a sense of self. Although Benjy is incapable of explaining in words what he lived through and how his sister's loss of innocence traumatized him, he projects this through what he smelled and the loss of it, by default.

Another important aspect of the trauma novel is its impossibility of representation, as mentioned before. Some scholars, such as Caruth and Dominick Lacapra, have argued that trauma is not possible to represent, an idea linked to Janet's notion that the psyche shatters into opposite selves when confronted with a traumatic experience, while also deriving from a Lacanian perspective on the genesis of desire. This author tried to prove that from a young age, people tend to have an altercation between the Real and the Symbolic. When we, as babies, understand that we exist beyond our own body and notions of identity, a separation is instated, one that follows us around for the rest of our lives. This disruption is also what formulates a difference between the self and the Other, the Other being a "multivalent concept . . . culture, law, environmental and social structures, the Other as other people and the Other as language" (Coats 390).

Furthermore, Ellie Raglan-Sullivan states that Lacanian "literature operates a magnetic pull on the reader because it is an allegory of the psyche's fundamental structure" (381), which means that postmodernist literature, such as Faulkner's novel might tends to replicate the fragmented structure of the consequences of trauma upon the mind (381). Naturally, with blurry memories and confusing images in the mind, it becomes difficult to formulate a coherent story of what happened in the surroundings of any trauma. Such is the case with the event involving the Compson family. Due to the violence felt by the brothers because of Caddy's choice to involve herself in sexual relations outside of wedlock, and later even becoming pregnant without knowing who the father of her yet unborn child was, their story becomes as fragmented as their minds were. In this sense, Faulkner's novel seems to be anticipating what contemporary trauma theory scholars would argue later on about the intricacies of the trauma narration.

Freud's repetition compulsion theory, developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), is what stands behind the individual's need to relieve painful experiences, "master the unpleasant feelings, which aligns with Benjy's and Senior Quentin's compulsion and obsession on relieving the past" (Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 362). However, the relation between the actual event and what the mind consciously absorbs is not the same. Because of that, the evidence of trauma having taken place might appear in the form of a symbolic nightmare, flashbacks, or intrusive thoughts. According to Caruth, the traumatic return is an attempt of the mind to return to that exact moment where the disruption was felt and is linked to memory and history ("Violence and Time" 24-25). This happens because the mind is not able to fully

process the impact of the trauma upon the individual, which further makes it more non-representable. The difficulties surrounding the impossibility of explaining trauma in words or clear narration reflect the extremeness of the experience by fracturing language and consciousness, which contributes to a unique form of expressing the lasting impacts of it (Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 363). Furthermore, Balaev describes trauma as a "ghostlike presence in the consciousness", emphasizing its gothic quality (363).

Moreover, this is a crucial understanding of trauma studies, as established by Balaev, who asserts that "a traumatic experience challenges the limits of language, fragments the psyche, and even ruptures meaning altogether set the initial parameters of the field and continues to impact the critical conversation even while alternative approaches displace the notion", and renders it a dissociative and silencing quality. ("Trauma Studies" 360-365). From this point of view, Benjy's displacement of events in time would make sense and would be explained by the psyche's inability to deal with the loss of his sister:

> *Miss Quentin gave it to me. I knowed they couldn't keep me out. What you doing, off in here. I thought you done slipped back out doors. Ain't you done enough moaning and slobbering today, without hiding off in this here empty room, mumbling and taking on. Come on here to bed, so I can get up there before it starts. I can't fool with you all night tonight. Just let them horns toot the first toot and I done gone*. We didn't go to our room. 'This is where we have the measles.' Caddy said. 'Why do we have to sleep in here tonight.' 'What you care where you sleep'. (Faulkner, *The Sound* 60)

Benjy is constantly jumping from the past to the present, and so forth, as seen here, since this passage is from a part of the book titled "April seventh 1928", a date when Caddy did not live in the house anymore, and there is a reference to Miss Quentin, her illegitimate child who leaves with the surviving members of the Quentin family. Therefore, by not possessing the ability to clearly understand what has happened to the family, Benjy stays stuck in a liminal space between the present and what happened in the past, not allowing for a resolution to take place, perfectly illustrating the dissociative characteristic of trauma. This back and forth is also what demonstrates how the complexity of what he experienced is sufficient for him to not be able to put it in words, further cementing the idea of trauma being non-representable, and corroborating the traditional idea of trauma as a an event "preserved just beyond the limits of understanding in a timeless, wordless state" that "continues to inflict pain on the psyche"

(Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 363). Thus, there is a paradoxical relationship between language and the consciousness ruled by death and survival (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 7).

Similar to Faulkner's novel, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* depicts a man whose traumatized mind plays tricks on him. At the beginning of the book, Vonnegut/narrator explains that he returned home from the Second World War, and having decided to write a book on the matter, thought that the words would simply come. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Susan Vees-Gulani argues that the author's hardship in articulating and expressing the thoughts associated with the war experience is actually a piece of evidence of a disruptive traumatic experience (75). Although some critics have tried to diagnose the character of Billy Pilgrim with schizophrenia, Brown suggests that Vonnegut's characters are more emotionally damaged and suffer from the consequences of trauma than any others (101-102). Nowadays, his inner turmoil is associated with PTSD; however, PTSD had only gained independent classification in the DSM during the 1980s, which would explain the lack of association of the condition on the part of Billy Pilgrim.

Additionally, the protagonist's encounters with the Tralfamadorians and jumping back and forth in time, as if time were a physical space where one can enter and exit out of are reflective of how Benjy also travels back and forth from the moment that was traumatic to him. This is reflective of trauma's ambiguous, timeless, and incomprehensible characteristics (Felman and Laub 69). While Billy Pilgrim's trauma stems from a prolonged but singular event (war and, particularly, living through the bombing of Dresden while a prisoner in a slaughterhouse), and Benjy's trauma is rooted in the deeply cultural loss of her sister's impurity as a southern lady, both have transcendental experiences with time, which leave them incapable of living in the present. In a way, both exist in a third, liminal space that functions as a threshold between the past, the present, and the future. This is particularly evident in the case of Billy because he "is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun" and is described as finding himself in different places at the same time, albeit in different years because he has "simultaneously on foot in Germany in 1944 and riding his Cadillac in 1967" (Vonnegut 29, 74).

Interestingly, for both characters, there is a special association of traumatic events with physical sensations such as sound and smell, which, as was mentioned earlier, is also highly common among trauma survivors (Cortese et al. 1). Billy relieves his traumatic experience of war in his dreams, and Vees-Gulani rightly notices that the repetition of colors, such as "ivory and blue" or "orange and black" and smells like "mustard gas and roses" (Vonnegut 92, 88, 92) and siren sounds that remind Billy of the Dresden raid alarms are repercussions resulting

from the violence he underwent (Vees-Gulani 178). For Benjy, something similar happens as he associates water with being able to clean impurity from Caddy; his obsession with the smell of trees is reminiscent of Caddy's previous purity, and in some instances, this water is enough to cleanse her. Since traumatized people are in a constant state of survival propelled by the brain's inability to have protected the body in the first place, it is no wonder that if something happens out of order that the brain might go into an unconscious state of violent response in an attempt to protect the body from danger. This is the case with Benjy when they pass a monument from the wrong side:

> For an instant Ben sat in an utter hiatus. Then he bellowed. . . . Luster's eyes backrolling for a white instant. 'Gret God,' he said. 'Hush! Hush! Gret God!' He whirled again and struck Queenie with the switch. It broke and he cast it away and with Ben's voice mounting toward its unbelievable crescendo Luster caught up the end of the reins and leaned forward as Jason came jumping across the square and on to the step. With a backhanded blow he hurled Luster aside and caught the reins and sawed Queenie about and doubled the reins back and slashed her across the hips. . . . Then he struck Luster over the head with his fist. 'Don't you know any better than to take him to the left?' he said. He reached back and struck Ben, breaking the flower stalk again. 'Shut up!' he said. 'Shut up!' He jerked Queenie back and jumped down. . . . Queenie moved again, her feet began to clop-clop steadily again, and at once Ben hushed. . . . his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place. (Faulker, *The Sound* 271–72)

In this instance, Benjy's brain's response was to protect him from current danger, which is related to an original danger to the family. However, previously, no one was able to resolve the situation and protect the family's honor, as seen by the acts and thoughts of Quentin Senior, but in this passage, Jason is actually able to restore order and balance to the situation and consequently protect Benjy. This is corroborated by the last sentence, where his state is described as being calm and serene, specifically because the normal order was restored. Unsurprisingly, for the diagnosis of PTSD there is a required symptom of "persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness" and "persistent symptoms of increased arousal" (American Psychiatric Association 424) which explains Benjy's aroused response but also Billy's numbness expressed multiple times throughout the novel by the means of the expression "and so it goes" (Vees-Gulani 179).

From the point of view of trauma as an individual experience, these two characters go through their trauma alone, and their trauma is not contextualized outside of themselves. Gulani adds that "Billy thus falls victim to the previous tendency in psychiatry to underestimate the role of 'an external factor, something outside the person' in causing trauma and to focus instead only on 'individual vulnerability as the reason for people's suffering'" (Vees-Gulani 179). However, trauma is not only individual; there is a collective and historical one.

When interpreting Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) about the trauma and history of the Jewish people, Caruth argued that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we were implicated in each other's traumas" (*Unclaimed Experience* 24). This affirmation establishes the universal quality of trauma, possibly contradicting the isolation from trauma's standpoint (Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 365). On the other hand, this universality emphasizes the possibility of a transhistorical and intergenerational transmission, even if unconscious. Balaev adds that there is an infectious quality to trauma since it might be passed on from generation to generation without a clear understanding of it, which, it will be argued, might contribute to an inauthentic view of trauma:

> The infectious potential of trauma is paired with the timelessness of an extreme experience that refuses narrative assimilation into memory. From this perspective trauma's transhistorical potential means that a cultural group's traumatic experience in the historical past can be part of the psychic landscape of the contemporary individual who belongs to the same cultural group. ("Trauma Studies" 365)

In the case of *The Sound and the Fury,* this is reflected in the region's somewhat retrograde culture. Given the South's ill reputation as a backwards area haunted by the ghosts of a past associated with slavery, exploration, and strong hierarchical roots, it makes sense for the inhabitants to also have a more conservative view on the roles of women. For Quentin, his family honor was shattered by his inability to protect his sister's purity, and therefore, the family's legacy, and for Benjy, her emancipation confronted his own poor interpretation of the world. Due to the latter's condition, he was not capable of taking in the consequences of her actions as Quentin did, since for him it was not about honor but more about loss.

However, while the dissociative state of the mind propelled by a traumatic experience is crucial to analyze the reasons, implications, and consequences of trauma in an individual and historically collective context, it is equally important to acknowledge that one's response to trauma is, in fact, one's own, as opposed to the Caruthian model. Other contemporary

approaches have been trying to prove that the cultural and historical settings of the individual experiencing trauma have much more influence than the traditional trauma theory acknowledges. This is the premise behind the pluralistic trauma theory, which "challenges the unspeakable trope" and seeks to "understand not only the structural dimensions of trauma that often develop in terms of trauma's dissociative effects on conscious and memory, but also the cultural dimensions of trauma and the diversity of narrative expression" (Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 366). In other words, while the traditional trauma scholars might point out the fragmented and dissociative qualities of trauma, linking them to a collective trauma, the pluralistic trauma approach claims that before experiencing trauma, there is a specific predisposition of the mind to absorb the disruptive event as traumatic. The repercussions of such a statement are numerous and allow traumatic experiences to uncover "new relationships between experience, language, and knowledge that detail the social significance of trauma" (Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 366).

The example of war – a central theme in Vonnegut's novel – is highly illustrative of this perspective. If we consider that Billy Pilgrim's dissociative and fragmented attitude stems from his own perception of good and evil – of war as destruction and the deprivation of freedom – we must also acknowledge that he functions as a vehicle for their analysis. His perception of these values reflects the values of the culture he takes part in, which, conversely, dictates his reactions to the experiences he has. For example, Edgar Derby's death reflects the author's perception of the irony and absurdity of war, as the writer in the novel points that out:

> "I think the climax of the book will be the execution of poor old Edgar Derby," I said. "The Irony is so great. A whole city gets burned down, and thousands and thousands of people are killed. And then this one American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for taking a teapot. And he's given a regular trial, and then he's shot by a firing squad". (6)

Furthermore, although war was previously seen as heroic, the novel was written in 1969, during the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Thus, it is logical that America's perception of the nature of war might have undergone some revisions, modifying several perspectives. If, according to Vonnegut and the slowly evolving culture, killing and death were seen as strictly heroic, according to the pluralistic trauma theory, trauma might not have even occurred in the first place. For example, in pop culture, Vikings are represented as regarding war differently from contemporary society, and war for them might even be considered something heroic. Neil Price's *Vikings titled The Children of Ash and Elm* (2020) asserts that Viking nations were

made of "warlike people in conflicted times" whose "ideologies were also to a marked degree underpinned by the supernatural empowerment of violence" and that these "could take extreme forms, manifested in such horrors as ritual rape, wholesale slaughter and enslavement, and human sacrifice" (25). Although the point of this argument is not to state that they were unresponsive to events such as rape or death, since these were probably not highly desirable outcomes, they were possibly seen and interpreted by the mind through a different lens.

While Billy's trauma response time fragmentation, which is a reflection of Vonnegut's evolving culture, is due to the possibly disruptive experience of war, Quentin's and Benjy's cases are somewhat different but equal in terms of reason. Quentin's idea of honor is intertwined with his southern perception of honor. Through the course of his section in *The Sound and the Fury,* it becomes clear that his inability to save his sister's purity, and consequently his family's, is what propels him to eventually commit suicide. However, it is by analyzing his presence in another of Faulkner's novels, titled *Absalom! Absalom!* (1936), that a more definitive conclusion tying his trauma to a cultural setting might be reached.

In this novel, after seeking to understand the history of the Sutpen family, Quentin Compson and his friend Shreve conclude that the South is changing, and those who are incapable of accepting this progress will end up washed away or dead, as in the case of Quentin. They learn that Thomas Sutpen, a self-made man by today's standards, in his youth married a woman with African ancestry and repudiated her, not knowing that his son would, in the future, try to marry his daughter from his second marriage. This first child, named Charles Bon, ends up being of African ancestry as well, although it is not physically apparent, and ends up dying at the hands of his half-brother Henry Sutpen. By the end of the novel, Shreve mentions that African-Americans will eventually be unrecognizable because they will blend in with the white people, exposing the fear of miscegenation and the importance of cultural identity:

> "You've got one nigger left . . . You still hear him at night. Don't' you?" . . . "I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won't quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won't show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings. Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?" "I dont hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I dont hate it," he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the

> cold air, the iron New England dark; *I dont. I dont! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*" (Faulkner, *Absalom!* 378)

Charles Bon's African heritage opened the discussion for Quentin's own struggles with his identity, a highly present characteristic of trauma survivors. Being confronted with Shreve's premonitory monologue on the future role of race, and his interrogation of the reason for Quentin's hate for the South, albeit part of his personality, seems to be the cause of his unsettlement.

In all of his appearances throughout different works of Faulkner, Quentin struggles the most with his identity because he is stuck between the Northern progressive stance, represented by his studies at Harvard, and his moral beliefs that emerge as an emotional response to his sister's fate. Although he tries to be a different version of himself, in the end, he understands that he cannot repudiate his upbringing and blood, just as Thomas Sutpen was not capable of accepting a child with African blood – he is both a product and a victim of the South. The words coming from Shreve's mouth question why Quentin hates himself, as he is part of the South and represents the South. It is at the end of the novel that Quentin understands who he is and how he has been avoiding bringing the truth into the light by saying that he does not hate himself. This is similar to what happens to trauma survivors. As pointed out before, people who survive trauma often end up repressing the actual event, which may haunt them by the means of flashbacks, nightmares, or obsessive thoughts. Quentin's curiosity about the Sutpen family's decay mirrors his own struggle with the decay of his family, and his response is a cultural one representative of a disruption between the self and the others. According to the pluralistic trauma theory, the physical environment, the space, and the landscapes of the actions offer "the opportunity to examine both personal and cultural histories embedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and thus influence the meaning of the traumatic experience (Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma" 150). Additionally, the choice of tying Quentin's experience to the South's rich history with slavery and as a place opposed to progress anchors his traumatic experience and individuality to a cultural perception "and symbolic significance accorded by culture" (160).

The recurrence of this logic is also present in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987), where space mirrors the traumatic experience of the protagonist (Ng 232). Several scholars have pointed out the physical and emotional representation of trauma in Morrison's novel (Bast 1070). Her novel equally features the stream-of-consciousness fragmentation technique used to mimic trauma's descriptiveness, similar to Faulkner and Vonnegut. Drawing on Spivak's

idea that the subaltern African slave woman had no voice, and therefore no recognition of existence and pain, Luckhurst points out that this experience was silenced, and that it "was the identity politics of black women's experience that made *Beloved* possible . . . its formal and conceptual links to the trauma paradigm reinforced its influence on American culture" (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 90). Building on Homi Bhabha, Clifton R. Spargo states that some critics have been responsible for the embodiment of the ghost's figure as trauma (114). Given the trauma's disruptive characteristics, related to the interruption of the flow between consciousness and unconsciousness, a ghost becomes a perfect symbol of repressed events due to its liminal state of existing in the world of the living and the dead. Just as trauma exists in repetition and the incapability of understanding it, the ghost mirrors this effect as a protruding creature seemingly living off the chaos and suffering it brings to the victim.

However, the repetitiveness of trauma plays a crucial role in linking it to a more substantial historical meaning because "by virtue of this structure of repetition, trauma poses a challenge to historical knowledge, since it is always the symptomology of trauma that one confronts and never the event itself, much as it is always the lack of knowledge that perpetuates the traumatic effect" (Spargo 114) which links trauma to Caruth's idea of the incapability of understanding the truth behind a traumatic experience (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). In this sense, the ghost may function as a diversion, attempting to prevent the survivors from uncovering the real issue. Sethe's obsession with the ghost of her first child, whom she killed out of fear of her possible enslavement, tackles the major cultural problems of slavery. Beloved's reappearance in the flesh represents the repetitive characteristic of trauma, as rightfully pointed out by Andrew Hock Soon Ng (238). However, it is not only representative of the individual trauma of having killed her child but also of the horrors of slavery imposed on the African-American communities. Additionally, her response to this event and her need to repress it to the point that trauma resurfaces as a spiritual manifestation so strong that it loses the traditional transparent and amorphous body, only to become as real as a living human, reinforces the colonial idea that African Americans were not human beings but rather exploitable things. She did not allow herself to grieve appropriately the assassination of her daughter because she did not believe she had the right to it, further emphasizing the pluralistic trauma theory concept that trauma is "intergenerationally transmitted based on shared characteristics" (Farrel 3) and that one experiences trauma "based on one's ethnic, racial, gender, sexual, or economic background, thereby producing a 'post-traumatic culture'" (Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma" 152).

In this sense, the trauma novel may be seen in the light of what Spargo calls an "expression of the paradox of responsibility" (130). Since Sethe fails to acknowledge internally that her actions were representative of the cultural context she was living in, a splitting of the psyche happens where one side is battling the responsibility of the assassination of the child, and the other side is grappling with the consequences of not having been able to protect the child, and therefore herself from suffering. This mirrors what van der Kolk argues happens when the brain is not able to fulfill its purpose of protecting the individual from danger. Furthermore, Sethe's experience is a collective one and represents the struggles of slavery victims. Morrison's novel embodies an understanding of the struggles and traumatic events that have shaped our current perception of history and culture. This means that literature may function as a catalyst for analyzing the influence of past traumatic events on our perception, memory, and accepted narratives:

> In more Gothic terms, we may inherit the past fatalistically or achieve separation from it by accounting for its pathologies through the aberrations of subjective motive and perspective. But for Morrison it is clear that to stand in history is to stand within range of all its specters, to allow history to take measure of us in our inability and still to require our response where none is yet imagined. To the extent that history's practitioners forget this premise, much of what counts as history may be merely an avoidance of the injustices of the past. (Spargo 130)

Until now, trauma has been depicted as a mass weighing on the individual with seemingly no form of detachment from it. However, this is not entirely true. There is a transformative quality to it because, after dealing with the repercussions of cultural trauma, one can develop an accepted narrative much more appreciative of different cultures. Abu Shahid Abdullah argues that "it is by reimagining and rewriting the past that we can come to terms with trauma and (re)form our identity" (1). In analyzing the relationship between trauma and its representation in the novels mentioned in this chapter, as well as in other forms of media in general, such as movies and TV shows, it is possible to identify two main viewpoints. On the one hand, there are certain traumatic events that, at the time, may have been highly catastrophic but that have, until this moment, been downplayed or diluted due to their portrayal in the media, culminating in a minimization of their severity in the collective consciousness. Consequently, the skewed view of these events may lead to an erroneous analysis, barring the public from a correct understanding of their impact. On the other hand, the same idea behind this strategy may be

applied to the opposite situation. For example, sensationalizing or exaggerating events that were less traumatic by manipulating the narrative through literature or media frameworks influences our perceptions of them to be more devastating than they may have been in reality. This means that in both cases, the media plays a central role in interpreting, shaping, and distorting our responses to historical and cultural events by influencing how they are remembered and understood.

One highly well-known and studied case of collective cultural trauma is the Holocaust. The Jewish culture is recurrently used as an example of collective historical and cultural trauma. For instance, Freud developed his widely known theory on trauma in his book *Moses and Monotheism*. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's work, as that of Marianne Hirsch and Dominick Lacapra, equally focuses on the repercussions of the Holocaust. While attempting to understand the trauma induced in the survivors, Laub has determined that there are three parts to the process. Firstly, there is an individual who experiences the event and develops a traumatic response to it, and may have incomplete or unconscious memories, while not comprehending the extent of the injuries to the mind (75,76). Secondly, the listener of this trauma also holds a crucial role in collective understanding. The last process is the action of witnessing the witnessing of the trauma. Laub points out that there is a truth that both the teller and she are trying to reach because "the traumatic experience has normally long been submerged and has become distorted in its submission" (76). In this sense, when the narrative reaches the public, it does not necessarily reflect a true account, as it may be veiled by emotions felt at the time or by the brain's attempt to protect itself from inevitable recurrent danger.

Scholars such as Marianne Hirsch have argued that the Holocaust is something that is passed on from one generation to another, transforming it into a myth (1). This "myth of origins" is, in truth, a "crisis or catastrophe that disorients and harms the collectivity or the individual" while ending up serving "an ideological function" (Lacapra, *Writing History* xii). In this sense, the experienced trauma becomes part of the cultural collective identity of a nation. Memory and perception of the event hold a crucial role in shaping the inner wounds that dictate the future of trauma survivors and the perception others have of them. The existence of a third perception resulting from an exterior witness attempting to understand the trauma surrounding a nation's identity mimics the instances observed by M.D Laud (57-76).

Moreover, literature ranks highly in propagating trauma discourse, as demonstrated throughout this chapter. However, it is important to understand that the use of certain narration styles serves not only a stylistic purpose but also a politically strategic one. For example, by reading Faulkner's and Morrison's novels, the public forms an opinion, and therefore a

perception of the southern culture, which might seem as retrograde, incapable of progress, and overall, not in line with current world standards. This has been a popular narrative since the American Civil War. In *Slaughterhouse-five*, the dinner scene when Mary O'Hare, the wife of the narrator's colleague, lashes out, accusing the narrator of wanting to write an anti-war novel, but still propagating the idea of war, is telling of the perception and memory-changing power of literature and other media:

> "Well, I know," she said. "You'll pretend you were men instead of babies, and you'll be played in the movies by Frank Sinatra and John Wayne or some of those other glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men. And war will look just wonderful, so we'll have a lot more of them. And they'll be fought by babies like the babies upstairs." So then I understood. It was war that made her so angry. (18)

Historically, novels have been among the first works to suffer from censorship in times of political turmoil, such as wars or tyrannical regimes, because they possess the power to propagate ideals while also potentially adulterating them.

In conclusion, there is agency in the resurfacing and repetition of traumatic events, such as the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and 9/11, in cultural media, as will be discussed later in the following chapters, particularly in the final chapter. Additionally, certain narration styles and genres are especially appropriate for depicting trauma and its consequences, as is the case with the Gothic and Southern Gothic traditions.

Chapter II - The Gothic and Southern Gothic

The Gothic is a widely known, interdisciplinary genre mostly spread throughout Anglo-Saxon literature. Not only that, but due to its symbolic and often fantastical motifs, it is a fertile ground for psychoanalytical interpretation. Given its eerie nature, this genre functions as a perfect medium for echoing collective trauma and cultural anxieties, since both are concerned with the themes of "hauntedness, statis and entrapment, memory and the past, and emphasize the role of the unconscious" (Nadal 180). While trauma studies and the Gothic remain popular within academia, little is known about how the perception of collective trauma is depicted within Gothic and Southern Gothic American Literature. By identifying the quintessential tropes in both fields, examining their interrelationships, and their intended functions, this chapter aims to address the aforementioned gap.

2.1. The Beginning

Regarding beginnings, there is an academic consensus that the first official piece of Western Gothic literature is the novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole (1717-1797). Following this literary beginning, other authors from the same period come to mind, such as Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), Matthew Gregory Lewis (1785-1818), and William Godwin (1756-1836) (Lloyd-Smith 122). As evident by their dates of birth and death, the Gothic genre is "most usually applied to a group of novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s" (Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 1). Although authors from other countries were exploring this type of narrative at the time, the most popular works in the genre have been attributed to the North of Europe and the English soil (Cornwell 38). The narratives not only take place in geographical England, but they equally reflect, criticize, and deconstruct the English mindset (Botting 13). However, since the focus of this dissertation is on North American literature, this exploration will be brief, as its purpose is to contextualize quintessential tropes and themes that are present in Gothic and Southern Gothic American literature.

Before delving into the literary analysis, it is important to understand the roots of the Gothic genre itself. The *Cambridge Dictionary* provides different definitions for the word "Gothic". From "a language spoken in the past by the Goths" (def. 4), buildings "built in an old style that uses stone, very high ceilings, and lots of decoration" (def. 8), to "typical of or related to Goths (people who like to wear black clothes and pale make-up), or the type of music that these people often like, which is often about death or violence (def. 3)" the term seems to hold various meanings, highly related to the haunted and the unseen ("Gothic" def. 4, def. 8, def. 3). This last definition, although not directly linked to Gothic literature, is culturally reminiscent of it. Due to pop culture, Gothic aesthetics and music visually replicate Gothic themes. For example, the British Gothic band Bauhaus is notoriously known for being a staple of Gothic music. In one of their most famous songs, titled "Bela Lugosi's Dead", they address the themes of vampirism, violence of death, and sexuality while paying homage to an acclaimed Hungarian actor famous for playing the role of Dracula in cinema: "Bella Lugosi's dead/Bella Lugosi's dead/ Undead, undead, undead/ Undead, undead, undead/ The virginal brides file past his tom/ Strewn with time's dead flowers/bereft in deathly bloom/ Alone in a darkened room, the count" (Bauhaus).

Besides mentioning the classic gothic novel *Dracula* (1897), the lyrics equally allude to a cultural phenomenon made possible through the collective perception of the Gothic as mysterious and dark, further cementing this competent, albeit uninspired, adjectival definition offered by the Cambridge Dictionary: "used to describe writing or films in which strange things happen in frighting places" ("Gothic" def. 6). Thus, the Gothic remains relevant because it is a tradition of revival (Cornwell 38; Ringel 15). While the previous definition provides an ambiguous understanding of the role of the Gothic, David Punter presents a compelling and more complete argument that corroborates the intrinsic cultural connection between these lyrics and Gothic literature:

> When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant. (*The Literature of Terror* 1)

Another important definition by the Cambridge dictionary is that it might be said "of or like a style of building that was common in Europe between the 12th and 16th centuries and whose characteristics are pointed arches and windows, high ceilings, and tall, thin columns" ("Gothic" def.1). This description also mimics several house and castle descriptions in Gothic literature. The pointed arches, the grandiose stature of the ceilings, and the towering spikes all culminate in a hostile, uninviting environment that seems to be reflecting an internal turmoil of decay. For example, the Pyncheon house described in *The House of Seven Gables* (1851) by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which is a staple of American Gothic novels, displays similar characteristics: "Halfway down a by-street of one of our New England towns stands a rusty wooden house" (16). The narrator then proceeds to demonstrate how the physical aspect of the house mirrors the violence and trauma surrounding its history: "The aspect of the venerable mansion has always affected me like a human countenance, bearing the traces not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive also, of the long lapse of mortal life, and accompanying vicissitudes that have passed within" (16).

Interestingly, the high arches, stained glass, and soaring spikes were an attempt to convey the divine and the aspiration towards God and heaven. The play game of shadows, which serves as a form of drawing attention to the light and purity of God, is used in Gothic literature to demonstrate oppression. Instead of inspiring awe, gothic architecture in Gothic

literature mirrors the weight and power of fear, revealing the genre's enduring commitment to subversion.

Furthermore, Gothic architecture is a crucial component in understanding the crushing reality of trauma. Gothic and trauma are interconnected because "Similarly, both trauma and the Gothic are concerned with violence, fear, hauntedness, stasis and entrapment, memory and the past, and emphasize the role of the unconscious" (Nadal 178). By analyzing specific examples, theories, history, and aesthetics, this chapter will attempt to review the Gothic Anglo-American tradition, proving that this literary genre is particularly suited to express and examine trauma. Through haunted landscapes, architectural symbolism, doomed atmosphere, and interdisciplinary nature, the Gothic mirrors cultural anxieties resulting from a fragmented society collectively suffering from cyclical trauma.

2.2 The Gothic House as an Embodiment of Trauma

The Gothic literary genre remains a prolific one. According to Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman, Walpole was responsible for first establishing the "gothic house", but they also argue that "castles do not convey terror the way bottles pour wine", referencing the fact that it is the interpretation of the reader that transforms the object of fiction into the object of horror (279). This relates to the importance of perception. When referencing the term "house," this dissertation refers to a place of living or a representation of a home, such as a manor or castle. In this sense, the house description in the Gothic relies on the public's perception to attribute a negative quality to it. Similar to Gothic architecture, the house stands as a symbol of collective experience, as it can only be read in the light of cultural trauma. To demonstrate this argument, it is crucial to start with Dracula's castle description in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), one of the most prominent in Gothic fiction.

2.2.1. Dracula's Castle

The first mention of Dracula's castle is written by Jonathan Harker, a newly qualified English solicitor sent to the Carpathian Mountains to help Count Dracula purchase a house near London. His description of Dracula's castle is related to the fact that its exact location is unknown, which contributes to the attribution of a mysterious aura from the start:

> I find that the district he named is in the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia and Bukovina, in the midst of the Carpathian mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe. I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey maps. (7-8)

This stylistic employment is a remarkable strategy of the Gothic to put into juxtaposition the light and the dark, the known and the unknown. Keeping in mind that the main goal of the original Gothic architecture was to convey God's purity through the power and glory of light, Dracula's unknown location hints to the reader that his nature is not pure or positive. This is corroborated by the fact that the era of the Enlightenment is responsible for inventing the Gothic because the word "assumes its powerful, if negative, significance: it condenses a variety of historical elements and meanings opposed to the categories valued in the eighteenth century" (Botting 13). In this sense, Dracula's castle is representative of an era that was concerned with knowledge and science as a means of finding Truth. Furthermore, this description mimics the genre's origin, "as an ethnic and a cultural concept, of course originates in Europe, and manuals of European history tell us that Gothic settlement developed from the east to the south and west" (Cornwell 38). The allusion to his castle being located in a wild and unknown place also depicts the Gothic's "barbarous, medieval, and supernatural past" (Botting 13, Longueil 453-4).

Jonathan Harker's first physical acquaintance with the castle is when he arrives in the courtyard and sees that the castle is decayed and in ruins. The gothic conventions of mysteriously ruined and decayed houses, labyrinths, and traumatic pasts are also linked to romanticism (Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 211). The traveler's description fits all the Gothic characteristics attributed to houses, while also embedding the castle with a traumatic quality:

> Moreover, the walls of my castle are broken; the shadows are many, and the wind breathes cold through the broken battlements and casements. I love the shade and the shadow, and would be alone with my thoughts when I may . . . The castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice. . . But I am not in heart to describe beauty, for when I had seen the view I explored further; doors, doors, doors everywhere, and all locked and bolted. In no place save from the windows in the castle walls is there an available exit. The castle is a veritable prison, and I am a prisoner! (Stoker, 31, 33)

The characterization of the castle reflects a spiritual and psychological descent into madness. The character feels his life is in danger, without any control whatsoever over the subject. Interestingly, since the Gothic initially went against the conventions and values of the eighteenth century (Botting 13), Harker's misfortune may be interpreted in the light of the female imprisonment dictated by societal rules. Besides being physically entrapped by the oppressive figure of the castle, as often happens to female characters, the character's "descent into madness" mimics what Elaine Showalter calls the "female malady" – a term for female insanity often depicted in English Literature. This concept of female insanity arose in opposition to men's rationality (3), suggesting that women lacked the ability to perceive the world in the same rational form as men. Thus, Harker's emotional reactions might equally echo the widely known female hysteria symptoms, further cementing his character as an embodiment of female physical and metaphorical imprisonment.

Moreover, the castle carries a sepulchral quality, as if the visitor were slowly dying and confined to his grave. Every door is closed, and the only way out of the castle seems to be through the windows. However, due to his traumatic experience of being terrorized by the count, he is unable to remember that he must have entered somehow. This matches trauma's inaccessibility of the unconscious. Nadal rightly correlates this idea to "Freud's notion of the uncanny, its terror and dark origins, and its recurrent and failed attempts to locate 'the precise point' of absolute commencement from which everything derives" (180). Representing trauma's fragmented notion of time, Harker becomes an agent without agency, which is demonstrated by the castle's personified locked doors. They are locked because he is locking out his memories from his consciousness. Punter describes this process as prior traces left within our minds that are "sunk in a primal past which is not recoverable by conscious means but which continues to influence, and perhaps even determine, our sense of our place in the world" ("The Uncanny" 132). This castle, an embodiment of traumatic experiences and perception, establishes a framework for understanding other famous Gothic houses that will be explored in this chapter.

2.2.2. *The House of the Seven Gables*

Such is the case with the house in the novel *The House of the Seven Gables*. It is no coincidence that Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a work depicting the lasting repercussions of an immoral past. Indeed, the author's own great-great-great-grandfather, William Hathorne, was

a Puritan who moved to Salem and became an important member of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. There, he worked as a magistrate and judge, becoming known for imposing ruthless sentences. His son, John Hathorne, was one of the judges of the Salem witch trials. Then, it is hardly surprising that Hawthorne's works are concerned with this theme.

In addition, as one of the main authors of the early American Gothic, Hawthorne is considered by Lesley Ginsberg a transatlantic author of the Gothic (31), which means that his work is a good example of the blending of European and American Gothic traditions. When establishing a connection between the early American Gothic and European Gothic, Faye Ringel mentions that the former is "ahistoric" because it "'revives' a time and place that never existed. New World peoples did not share Europe's medieval period; Great Britain's colonies had no Inquisition (though New Spain did), nor other trappings of the first Gothic Revival – no decadent aristocracy, castes, dungeons, ruined abbeys" (15). Thus, in a first instance, there is a difference related to the symbols used to describe the fear of the past. Europe's Gothic drew inspiration from the medieval era, while early American Gothic focused on adapting the Gothic tradition to its own cultural framework: Puritanism. Related to the Puritanism's concern with God, the Salem Witch Trials are embedded in American culture, as proven by several media portrayals that were produced in the twentieth century, as for example, the renowned Grant Wood's painting, *American Gothic* (1930), as well as others twenty first century productions, namely, *American Horror Story: Coven* (2014), and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020). According to Ringel, the Salem Witch Trials, as a period, are a symbol of the Puritans' fear of Satanic conspiracy (Ringel 18).

In Hawthorne's novel, the house personifies cultural anxieties through its description, its past, and the actions happening there. The land on which the house was built belonged to Matthew Maule, a man accused of witchcraft and sentenced to death by Colonel Pyncheon. Before the rise of the Pyncheon house, the house of the seven gables was a primitive "hut, shaggy with thatch" (17). After his death, Colonel Pyncheon became the owner of the land, where he built the family mansion known as the House of the Seven Gables. However, this house would not be built on innocent, free soil. It would be built on the grave of Matthew Maule, which forecasts the Pyncheon family's demise:

> After the reputed wizard's death, his humble homestead had fallen an easy spoil into Colonel Pyncheon's grasp. When it was understood, however, that the Colonel intended to erect a family mansion—spacious, ponderously framed of oaken timber, and calculated to endure for many generations of his posterity over the spot first covered

> by the log-built hut of Matthew Maule . . . he was about to build his house over an unquiet grave. His home would include the home of the dead and buried wizard, and would thus afford the ghost of the latter a kind of privilege to haunt its new apartments, and the chambers into which future bridegrooms were to lead their brides, and where children of the Pyncheon blood were to be born. The terror and ugliness of Maule's crime, and the wretchedness of his punishment, would darken the freshly plastered walls, and infect them early with the scent of an old and melancholy house. (Hawthorne 18)

The recurrence of the image of death, a ghost haunting the mansion, and Maule's infection are reminiscent of the Gothic European tradition, and although some critics have described Hawthorne as part of the English Gothic tradition, there are others who, along with Edgar Allen Poe, are considered to be original American writers (Elbert and Marshall iii). Hawthorne's and Poe's literary visions are "deep-rooted" in American history (More 2454). Additionally, what separates Hawthorne and Poe from the Europeans is a mastery of the "weird" (More 2453). In the above citation, it is possible to observe America's concern with prosperity and the formation of a collective identity opposed to the vast history of Europe.

Since American Gothic ranks highly in the use of American history as a prompt to analyze and expose cultural anxieties, the union between Matthew Maule's and the Pyncheon family's bloodlines may serve as a depiction of the massacre of the Native American people and how it still haunted America in the nineteenth century. Contingent on Frederick Jackson Turner's description of the Native Americans' status as "a common danger" (15), David Lewis demonstrates how they were thought to be "faceless obstacles to be overcome and subdued in the process of westering" (213). Furthermore, the Pyncheon family is described as the perfect Puritan family, as opposed to Maule, whose aspect and house are far more "wild" than "proper". Consequently, as a symbol of a traumatic past currently embedded in American culture, the House of the Seven Gables remains as haunted as the American population: its legacy lies in the successful representation of America as afflicted by a violent history.

2.2.3. "The Fall of the House of Usher"

The haunted house as a depiction of a larger cultural symptom is also present in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), which some consider to be the first Southern Gothic short story. Eino Railo attributes this imagery to a genre of "horror

romanticism", while also arguing that the idea of a castle or a mansion meeting a violent ending stems from older romances (Railo 7). Thus, Poe's House abides by the same rules of the "horror romanticism", as the house of the Usher family meets a violent end, and is described as "melancholy" with "bleak walls" and "vacant eye-like windows . . . upon a few white trunks of decayed trees", provoked a "sense of insufferable gloom . . . with an utter depression of soul" upon the narrator (Poe 242). From the beginning, it is clear that the ruin of this house seems to be linked to the Usher family, due to the self-explanatory title, and to the family's incestuous, archaic ancestry:

> I was aware, however, that his very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament . . . I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. (243)

The imminent fall of the family is disclosed to the narrator through a letter sent by Roderick Usher, the only living male descendant. He urges the narrator, a childhood friend, to visit him due to an illness that has also killed his sister, Madeleine. Upon entering the house, the narrator notices that the decay of the house appears inconsistent, as some parts remain intact, while others are crumbling into destruction. However, the most important aspect is a premonitory passage related to the beginning of the destruction of the mansion: "Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn" (244).

Although different from the Pyncheon family house, the Usher mansion is equally linked to the family's destiny and past. While the Pyncheon family in the end was able to free themselves from trauma, the presence of a disintegrating house that symbolizes the destruction of the human body mimics the brain's function in traumatic events. It explodes the house from the inside out, just as the brain is responsible for setting off the body in a chain of reactions aimed at controlling the lasting effects of the event, such as nightmares, flashbacks, or psychosomatic symptoms. Additionally, the feeling of despair, hopelessness, impending doom, and the violent death of a female figure are all characteristics of the Gothic and Southern Gothic. Moreover, the "Fall of the House of Usher", as a short story of the "once-grand

mansion, finally devoured by the flame or sinking into flood, has become a pervasive image in Southern Gothic fiction" (Moss 177). This iconic short story that portrays the rottenness that plagues a decadent aristocratic family, interlacing it with the grotesque and the uncanny, lays the foundation for multiple American Gothic works.

2.2.4. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

Another important Gothic house, albeit more contemporary, is the Blackwoods' castle in the novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) by Shirley Jackson (1916-1965). As discussed, up until now, the Gothic house functions as a physical representation of trauma, memory, and latency. It follows the perception of the characters, their fears, and their destiny. In Jackson's novel, the two sisters, Mary Katherine "Merricat" Blackwood and Constance Blackwood, live secluded with their impaired uncle Julian, after their parents' deaths. Everyone in the village fears them because they believe the older sister, Constance, murdered her parents by poisoning the family's sugar bowl with arsenic. Although they receive occasional visits from a friend of the family, the only person who ventures beyond the property is the obsessive-compulsive narrator, Merricat.

Her obsessive compulsiveness is observable in her attempt to control her surroundings through magical thinking, which "refers to beliefs that defy culturally accepted laws of causality" (Einstein and Menzies 539). She displays these characteristics by explaining how she protects the house: "On Sunday mornings I examined my safeguards, the box of silver dollars I had buried by the creek, and the doll buried in the long field, and the book nailed to the tree in the pine woods;" and concludes that these actions provide them security from whatever threats may appear, as she states that " so long as they were where I had put them nothing could get in to harm us" (Jackson, *We Have Always* 58). In addition, it seems that there is a correlation between trauma and "a range of psychiatric disorders, including obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)" (Destrée et al. 345), and that the "rate of OCD is considerably higher among those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)" (Wadsworth et al. 6937), suggesting that, at least Merricat, underwent some form of trauma in her life. Reaching the end of the novel, the reader learns that it was Merricat who poisoned their parents, and not Constance, "'I [Merricat] put it in the sugar.' 'I [Constance] know. I knew then.' 'You never used sugar.' 'No.' 'So I put it in the sugar'" (Jackson, *We Have Always* 167). These words, once more, indicate that some form of trauma must have been present in their lives, which

propelled Merricat to murder her family, apart from her sister, who accepts this and agrees to never talk about it again (167). The novel ends with Merricat stating, "Oh, Constance,' I said, 'we are so happy" (186), which corroborates her fragmented and delusional grasp of reality, as she insists that their current appalling living situation is better than their previous lives.

Furthermore, contrary to the houses analyzed previously, the castle seems to function as a refuge, rather than a prison, as argued by Dara Downey: "*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, goes some way towards battling against this abusive relationship between women and houses, refiguring the Gothic house as a refuge, a site of control and safety for women rather than of exposure and imprisonment" (298). She explains that the idea of the home functioning almost as a sanctuary for the sisters is an act of subversion because, instead of the house being a symbol for oppression, it gains dual status, which confers the sisters into a state of acceptance, as opposed to madness:

> In reversing the power dynamic, so that the community of suspicious townsfolk fearfully worship rather than torment them, the Blackwood sisters in Castle reappropriate the home's dual status as fairy-tale refuge and Gothic prison, transforming it into an impenetrable if ruined fortress while transforming themselves into the very malevolent supernatural beings that terrorize more conventional heroines. The movement of Jackson's two most overtly Gothic
> novels is from pessimism (even despair) to a kind of optimism that, far from dispelling the Gothic gloom of the earlier work, goes so far as to claim it as a site of independence and empowerment. (Downey 291)

Nevertheless, the description of the house is rather oppressive. The castle, described as having "tall windows" that "looked narrow and thin", giving the castle a gaunt high look, is never inviting or comforting (Jackson, *We Have Always* 37). Constance and Merricat follow a strict regimen serving the purpose of sustaining an immaculate domestic environment, as if no tragedy had ever occurred, as seen in the citation below. This happens frequently to trauma survivors who try to control their surroundings to the extreme, as a form of bringing order in the confusion they felt due to the traumatic events (Ojalehto and Abramowitz 661), while also reflecting the obsession-compulsion mentioned previously. Furthermore, each new wife's role when moving to the Blackwoods' house, furnishing the house with her belongings, and embracing her new life within the Blackwood family, demonstrates perfectly the abrasively oppressive atmosphere:

> Blackwoods had always lived in our house, and kept their things in order; as soon as a new Blackwood wife moved in, a place was found for her belongings, and so our house was built up with layers of Blackwood property weighting it, and keeping it steady against the world . . . Mondays we neatened the house, Constance and I, going into every room with mops and dustcloths, carefully setting the little things back after we had dusted, never altering the perfect line of our mother's tortoise-shell comb. Every spring we washed and polished the house for another year, but on Mondays we neatened; very little dust fell in their rooms, but even that little could not be permitted to stay. (Jackson, *We Have Always* 11, 59)

Similar to Quentin and Billy Pilgrim, the sisters appear to be stuck in time, and the castle symbolizes their inability to move forward. This is verifiable, for example, by specific rooms not being used, which is reminiscent of having inaccessible memories when trauma happens. In this sense, Caruth's argument that "What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (*Unclaimed Experience* 6) supports the role of the castle as a physical manifestation of oppression, as opposed to haven. Another interesting aspect related to their discomfort towards the house is their preference in spending time outside, and specifically in the back of the house, where they remained even more secluded from the rest of the village, isolating themselves further, as trauma survivors often do:

> Constance waited inside the tall front door while I came up the steps behind her, and then I put my packages down on the table in the hall and locked the door. We would not use it again until afternoon, because almost all of our life was lived toward the back of the house, on the lawn and the garden where no one else ever came. We left the front of the house turned toward the highway and the village, and went our own ways behind its stern, unwelcoming face. Although we kept the house well, the rooms we used together were the back ones, the kitchen and the back bedrooms and the little warm room off the kitchen where Uncle Julian lived; outside was Constance's chestnut tree and the wide, lovely reach of lawn and Constance's flowers and then, beyond, the vegetable garden Constance tended and, past that, the trees which shaded the creek. (Jackson, *We Have Always* 33)

2.2.5. Comparing Hawthorne, Poe, and Jackson

While the gothic house may represent the weight of trauma, its destruction also determines the outcome of the traumatic event. For example, in Hawthorne's novel, the house remains physically undestroyed after the death of Judge Pyncheon. It is due to his death that the remaining Pyncheon family is finally free from the curse instilled by Maule. Additionally, Colonel Pyncheon's scheme to become proprietor of Maude's land is historically linked to the witch trials, as argued previously, and equally reflects the greed for the land, reflecting a culturally dense collective trauma. Here, the family is freed from the curse by refusing the ancestral hereditary home, as it is the only way to recover from intergenerational trauma. Whereas the house continues to decay with its "ruinous portal" (Hawthorne 226) and "ruinous porch" (226), Alice Pyncheon witnesses the "happiness, of her kindred mortals" (227) which allowed her spirit to finally be freed from the mansion, and consequently family trauma, as well: "[Alice Pyncheon] had given one farewell touch of a spirit's joy upon her harpsichord, as she floated heavenward from the House of the Seven Gables!" (227).

While this house is successfully disentangled from the family's ultimate fate, the same cannot be said about the Usher and Blackwood residences; they remain inextricably bound to their. With the destruction of the Usher mansion, which consumes both the property and the family's last descendants, Poe establishes a hallmark of the gothic tradition:

> The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened . . . there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher." (Poe 259-60)

Following Punter's argument about the Gothic's concern with the past, and the "possibility that the past can be laid to rest" so "that we can move without the ghosts" (Punter, "Gothic, Theory, Dream" 23), the Pyncheon family seems to be able to do exactly that, while the Usher family demonstrates an inability to move forward, to overcome collective trauma.

Furthermore, Punter argues that Judge Pyncheon dies "of intensive bourgeoisification, while the effete Clifford remains blameless and harmless. Jaffrey is crushed under his own weight, which is the weight of the edifice of respectability around his rotten core" (Punter, *The*

Literature of Terror 175), whereas in "The Fall of the House of Usher" "the narrator is giving vicarious vent to his psychological triumph over the dying Roderick; or, the writer is celebrating his victory over the now disorganized perceptions of his readers" (Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 179). The primary distinction between the two appears to be related to their representation of trauma: in Hawthorne's case, there seems to be a reflection on the collective trauma of a society advancing towards capitalist pressures, whereas Poe offers a skilled portrayal of the perpetrator's perspective, offering insight into how the mechanics of trauma work. In this context, the narrator may be interpreted as a reflection of society itself. In other words, the former depicts a collective trauma linked to the history and culture of the American nation, and the latter, although also tackling the theme of intergenerational trauma, places greater emphasis on the individual psychological aspect.

Confirming that both aspects can coexist, the partial destruction of the Blackwood castle synthesizes the collective with the individual by Merricat's first-person narration and the burning of the castle by the village people: "I tried to think clearly. The house was burning; there was fire inside our house" (Jackson, *We Have Always* 135). Less abstract than the fissure consuming the Usher mansion, the destruction by fire might convey different meanings. Firstly, it is reminiscent of the witch trials discussed previously, which contributes to propagating the perception of America as a place of massacre and haunting. Indeed, Merricat mentions once how she and her sister resembled witches while cleaning: "When we had neatened the upstairs rooms, we came downstairs together, carrying our dustcloths and the broom and dustpan and mop like a pair of witches walking home (82).

Secondly, it might possess a cleansing and regenerative quality. After the fire, the sisters attempt to reconstruct their lives, and the villagers are kind to them for the first time. Deemed outsiders due to their socioeconomic status, odd habits, and tumultuous past, the Blackwood family becomes a target for the act of destruction that symbolically obliterates their home and identity. The event possesses a transformative dimension because it marks the people's assertion of dominance over the family they had resented for so long. Although burned, the castle remains there.

However, the castle itself never provides asylum, nor even physical shelter, as it is unable to protect the sisters. As time passes, the residence appears to become wilder from the outside: "This was the day that we learned that the vines were growing over the burned roof of our house, because one of the women glanced sideway at the house and said that the vines almost hid the marks of burning. . . . 'Now it looks like a tomb,' the other woman said" (179). If, before, this place represented safety for them to hide while appearing majestic to others, it

now entrapped the sisters, as if they were living in a prison. The allegory of it looking like a tomb, besides drawing a connection with death, also connects their fate to Madeline Usher, the murdered sister of Roderick Usher, who was enclosed alive in a tomb by her brother.

Merricat's last description of the house, based on the outside perceptions, concludes that their place of living gradually develops into ruins:

> We learned, from listening, that all the strangers could see from outside, when they looked at all, was a great ruined structure overgrown with vines, barely recognizable as a house. It was the point halfway between the village and the highway, the middle spot on the path, and no one ever saw our eyes looking out through the vines. (185)

Nevertheless, these ruins are inhabited by them, as opposed to the house of the seven gables, from which the family escapes, and the house of the Usher family, which completely disappears with its descendants. The Blackwood castle remains alive, lulling its residents into staying there, even in deplorable conditions. They further isolate themselves from others, rendering them more dangerous than the house. Merricat says: "'Tomorrow I will barricade the sides of the house. Tomorrow Jonas will catch us a rabbit. Tomorrow I will guess for you what time it is'" (164), implying that the way for them to survive this final traumatic event is to withdraw even further from the outside world. Instead of freeing themselves from the trauma they endured, their progressive descent towards more isolation throughout the novel suggests that exactly the opposite is taking place. The castle represents their inability and unwillingness to move forward.

So far, the three iconic houses of the American Gothic share with their predecessor, Dracula's castle, similar characteristics, such as the haunting literal or metaphorical qualities, traumatic events, the edifices as sites and symbols for trauma, and Gothic architecture and endings. What differentiates them from Dracula's castle is the Gothic American concern with intergenerational trauma and guilt, which is linked to the historical and Protestant culture. Because of this, these novels contribute to a wider panorama of the Gothic tradition, paving the way to analyze the genre in the light of trauma studies. While Hawthorne's and Poe's works are rooted in an earlier historical period, Jackson's novel corroborates how it is possible to maintain certain hallmarks of the narrative while adapting it to modern anxieties, which in her case relate to the role of women and mothers in a post-Second World War United States of America. All represent intergenerational trauma, with the *House of Seven Gables* emphasizing the collective trauma experience, and the "Fall of the House of Usher" and *We Have Always*

Lived in A Castle accentuating a more individual collapse of the psyche. The three examples were chosen to highlight different important aspects of the Gothic narrative. They all demonstrate how the house often holds an oppressive, traumatic meaning, rather than a positive one, while concurrently laying the groundwork for the analysis related to memory, perception, and American wounds.

2.3. Memory, Perception, and American Wounds

So far, the focus has been on the intricacies and interconnections between Gothic literature and trauma. To that end, several of the most influential works have been chosen to exemplify how this type of narrative is best suited to portray contemporary concerns and, consequently, collective trauma. Additionally, several scholars believe that the Gothic genre is itself indistinguishable from American Literature. They support their opinions on Fiedler's argument that American fiction is "a gothic fiction" and a "literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation" (29). Indeed, a closer examination reveals that many of the most acclaimed American novels demonstrate characteristics of the Gothic. However, before this, the works of the Gothic genre were regarded "as both anomalous in their nature and 'low culture' in their aesthetic status, even when the focus has been Edgar Allen Poe" (Hogle 3). Therefore, some questions emerge, such as: what changed the collective perception of the Gothic as an inferior "low culture" genre to a narrative capable of illustrating the complexities of human existence through the representation of trauma? How has it adapted old cultural wounds to modern psychological and cultural tensions?

To answer these questions, it is important to establish a connection between the Gothic, memory, and perception. Firstly, it is essential to emphasize the Gothic's concern with origin, as Punter argues:

> The theory of the Gothic is always a theory of origins; of beginnings which have been obscured, written over, overwritten, and which therefore invite us as readers into the fiction of a return, of a set of moves which might (at last) make the inheritance clear, might reveal that behind the dust and cobwebs of age-old, disputed (and frequently mangled) texts there may be a purer writing, a title deed, which will give us the keys to the castle and enable us to set about our necessary work of modernizing it and rendering it fit for presentation within the ideological boundaries of modernity. ("Gothic, Theory, Dream" 23)

Here, the author rightly underscores that not only is the Gothic's preoccupation with understanding the religiously symbolic "original sin", but also its potential as a vehicle for examining what happens in our contemporary world; thus, the Gothic is a genre of appropriation and transformation. Additionally, it has equally long been established that one of the main reasons for traumatic responses to develop is based on the primary traumatic event that the consciousness buries in the unconscious. Therefore, to unpack the trauma is to fully dive into the beginning of trauma, to the beginning of the original sin. Without knowing the origin of trauma, the mind is predisposed to repeat the same pattern, trying to understand the reason behind it (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 65); thus, repetition becomes an obsession to return to the beginning (Derrida 91). Forgetting, leaving, and returning are fundamental to the act of processing trauma (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 185). Accordingly, "Just as trauma implies 'a disorder of memory and time,' and points to an 'enigmatic core' that originates in the past, the Gothic explores the tricks and gaps of memory and is also obsessed with remote events" (Nadal 180).

Additionally, Punter's image of Gothic texts as keys to a castle reinforces the emphasis of the house or castle as a crucial trope in the Gothic tradition, as demonstrated previously. At the same time, it also highlights another important aspect of the Gothic: its capacity for assimilation, transformation, and output. In other words, the Gothic text reflects social tensions, adapts them to a symbolic interpretation, exposing important criticism; finally, it disseminates the altered version, which then modifies the reader's perception. This happens because, as Derrida argues, when discussing the relationship among history, memory, trauma, and psychoanalysis, that in the human mind there is a focus on the act of archiving: like psychoanalysis the archive "focuses on events that are constituted by the way they disappear: they are remembered (archived), but also forgotten (erased)" (qtd. in Nadal 180).

The search for origin, the beginning, is correlated to the notion of self, and consequently of identity. Historically, the discrepancy between a person's notion of inner and outer selves is psychoanalysis's main objective of study (Coats 386). While Caruth claims trauma to be a phenomenon that extends beyond time, as it continues to exist exteriorly, Lacan situates it in infancy and ties it to the formation of the ego itself. He argued that the relationship between subject, Other, and literature is a multivalent concept where this relationship takes on an allegorical characteristic, permitting the Other to assume multiple entities, as Coats explains: "the Other as culture, law, environmental and social structures, the Other as other people, and the Other as language. For Lacan, it is our relationship with the Other that initially and

continually structures the subject" (390). The Other is created before birth; however, the pivotal moment where the relationship between the Self and Other is established is in the mirror phase: when an infant recognizes itself in the mirror, "it forms an identification with this specular image that differs from, and is more attractive to, the infant than the fragmented body he experiences" (390). So far, the fragmentation is what drives the child to understand that there are two separate beings, the one he imagines in his head, and the one he sees in front of him. Lacan stresses that this is what constitutes the ego:

> this form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality. (Lacan 76)

Here, Lacan exposes his idea that the child will continue to distance themselves further from the original Real into the Imaginary. Additionally, the child creates a distinction between himself and the Other, where the Other might be culture or language, but also the Self:

> Instead, the child will form an identity lived in the Imaginary, the register of images and dyadic identifications between the self and others as well as the self *as* other, and the Symbolic, the register of the big Other of culture and language where the subject first asserts himself as "I" among other subjects. But what also emerges in this entry into Imaginary and Symbolic registers is a sense of loss; Lacan says the child is "jubilant" in his misrecognition of himself as a coherent, bounded being, but he also comes to realize his essential separateness from others and the environment. Prior to this vision of his own limited form, he could imagine the world as an extension of himself. He now knows that he is "not all," and in that moment the Other is born for him as a force with which to reckon. (Coats 390)

The disruption of the Self within the Self is the first traumatic event we experience as humans. It is the first moment that our consciousness buries information that might be too complex to process into the unconscious. Thus, the relationship of confrontation between the Self and the Other is not always related to an external other, as it is sometimes the other within the Self that provokes the conflict. The concept of internal enemy Vs. The external enemy is crucial to understanding collective trauma in American Gothic literature because its culture is historically

connected to the massacre, domination, exploitation, and cultural guilt. This internal Other, who may take on the role of a Racial, Cultural, or Gender Other, is often depicted in media related to slavery, the role of women, and even children.

To illustrate how our perception of this Other might be influenced by certain depictions of it, a brief analysis will be made of: two William Faulkner's short stories, which include his well-known portrayals of a decayed South – the Other within America; a 2023 television adaptation of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" to demonstrate how the Gothic is able to assimilate tradition while translating it to modern perceptions and crises; as well as Ti West's *X trilogy*, a Neo-Gothic portrayal of the Woman as Other.

2.4. Southern Gothic

Charles L. Crow argues that although a relatively high amount of the Southern Gothic genre is related to slavery and its repercussions, it would be a mistake to attribute this characteristic to a regional problem, seeing as it is a national one ("Southern American" 141). He further demonstrates the difficulties arising from this line of reasoning by opposing Fiedler's argument that "the proper subject for America gothic is the black man" (397) because according to Justin Edwards it "negates gender, homosexuality, incest, genocide, rape, war, murder, religion, and class as 'proper' subjects of the nation's gothic literature" (xvii). To these themes of the Southern Gothic, Crow adds others, such as "disease, addiction, physical deformity, and degeneration or atavism . . . Indian removal, rebellion, proud defeat, reconstruction, a long and bitter struggle to justify and restore white supremacy, and the erosion of the system of segregation into our own time" ("Southern American" 141). So far, the Southern Gothic genre can be described as built on conflict, as well as on specific Gothic and regional aesthetics. Due to this internal antagonism, a relation of Otherness is created, as argued by Goddu:

> The American Gothic is most recognizable as a regional form. Identified with gothic doom and gloom, the American South serves as the nation's 'other', becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wishes to dissociate itself. The benighted South is able to support the irrational impulses of the gothic that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideals, cannot. (8)

Thus, the South in itself, as a symbol for the wild, the retrograde, the anti-modern, comes to embody the symbol of the Other within America. It becomes the Domestic Other, an idea that is disseminated through literature and increasingly through other mediated platforms.

Before diving into the analysis of Faulkner's short stories, it is important first to provide a historical and cultural context in which they were written. "A Rose for Emily" was published in 1930, and "That Evening Sun" in 1931. They were written during the Jim Crow laws, which were in power between 1877 and 1964. These were laws of discrimination to segregate the black and white population in the Southern States, which prompted an era of extreme violence and aggression towards the African American population (Warren).

The South's relationship with slavery has suffered discrepancies relating to the perception of its positive or negative impact. For instance, for some white Southerners, the relationship between the slaves who worked on the plantations and their "masters" was a happy one (Anderson 110). However, this was not the reality, as slaves were, obviously, not content with their social condition (112).

2.4.1. "That Evening Sun"

The dichotomy between the master's satisfaction and the slave's dissatisfaction with societal rules is evident in some of Faulkner's short stories, such as "That Evening Sun". Faulkner's short story centers on the story of an African American woman named Nancy and her unplanned pregnancy. Throughout the story, it is uncovered that the biological father of her unborn child is a white man. It is alluded that Nancy is a prostitute, on top of being the Compsons' family maid. Most of the narration revolves around Nancy being afraid of her husband, Jesus, killing her. The story is narrated in flashbacks from the perspective of Quentin Compson at the age of twenty-four. During one of these flashbacks, Jesus complains about the lack of rights he has as an African American, in comparison to white Americans, as seen here:

> I can't hang around white man's kitchen," Jesus said. "But white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I can't stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I ain't got no house. I can't stop him, but he can't kick me outen it. He can't do that." Dilsey was still sick in her cabin. Father told Jesus to stay off our place. Dilsey was still sick. It was a long time. (Faulkner, "That Evening Sun" 292)

Here, Faulkner exposes the South as a place of the past. At this time, slavery had already been abolished, although several African Americans continued to work essentially as slaves to aristocratic families, such as the Compsons. Jesus is the Domestic Other because he is ostracized and marginalized, but he is himself American. He is not a foreigner who comes to disrupt the societal order by imposing different cultural rules. And so, the author denounces the region as opposed to the progressive stance of the North, further cementing the idea of the South as an Other within the progressive America.

2.4.2. "A Rose for Emily"

In "A Rose for Emily", it is possible to analyze not only the racial Other but also the female Other. In this case, we are first presented with the death of Emily Grierson by a fourth-person narrator. The story then follows a non-linear structure, a staple of the Gothic narrative, through which the readers get a glimpse of her life. She is a woman who represents the old southern aristocracy, and her family has ties with the founder of this fictional town (119-120). She is seen as an unearthly creature by her community, as it is clear in the following instances told by the narrator:

> When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows – sort of tragic and serene. . . . She gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays. (124, 128)

This means that the townspeople were unable to see Emily as a real human being. She was a symbolic historical figure to them. Throughout the story, we also see the opposition between the North and the South and how Miss Emily represents the Southern aristocracy: "the ladies all said, 'Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer'" (124). This northerner is Homer Barron, the speculated fiancé of Emily. In this passage, it is possible to grasp how strong the opposition between the North and the South is. Southerners could not get their head around the idea of a representative of Southern culture having a romantic relationship with someone from the North. Floyd Watkins corroborates the presence of the opposition between the North and the South: "Conflicts in the story between the past and the

present, the South and the North, the old and the new, the traditional and the traditionless, and the gentility and the middle-lower class" (508). Emily's secret of poisoning her fiancé and keeping his dead body further ostracizes her and illustrates her inability to overcome the past, and consequently, the South's. As a result, the South is also an Other in its country. A South with a dark past and a South that has let the past take over the present turning it into a stale thing that doesn't advance or regress until finally, it dies: "At the center of the story is the indomitableness of the decadent Southern aristocrat, and the enclosing parts reveal the invasion of the aristocracy by the changing order" (Watkins, 510).

Furthermore, as the brief analysis of these short stories demonstrates, the South, which is often regarded as backwards, is inevitably linked to violence and trauma: the trauma of slavery, of poverty, of targeted gender bias. Despite its cultural inequality, the South still maintains a specific culture, and in a certain way is forced to do so, as this is what allows the North to create a crafted image of itself, as opposed to the South, as argued by Orville Burton: "Sadly, the idea that the South is an exceptional and racist Other has functioned to allow white northerners to deny their own racism" (8). Thus, the process illustrated in these short stories is fairly similar to Lacan's image of the child being exposed to the mirror for the first time. Similar to the child, America is confronted with an image of itself, from which it chooses to form an identity based on the Imagined, as opposed to the Real. Consequently, as this choice is, to a point, an arbitrary one, what stands out here is the manipulation of a culture's perception. The South in itself is not inherently "evil" or "retrograde" in contrast to a "positively modern" and "progressive" North. Such a distinction was carefully crafted to disseminate a particular discourse of the South that benefited the North, although both are part of the whole. This dissertation is not, in any form, trying to justify the violent and abhorrent years of slavery and domination of the African American population. Instead, this argument serves to demonstrate how perceptions are easily altered based on the implementation of specific tropes and narratives.

After establishing how Faulkner's Southern Gothic short stories contribute to the construction of racial and gendered Otherness, two modern reinterpretations that may yield some interesting perspectives will now be analyzed. These re-imagine the classical Gothic by intertwining it with horror, culminating in Neo-Gothic narratives shaped by contemporary tensions, fears, and identities.

2.5. Contemporary Media

2.5.1. The TV Show *The Fall of the House of Usher*

The television miniseries The *Fall of the House of Usher* (2023) is divided into nine episodes, and while it takes on the name of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, it includes other Poe's plots, as well as characters, such as Roderick and Madeline Usher, Arthur Gordon Pym, among others. The narration follows the Usher family as its members succumb to unexpected deaths. In the end, it is revealed that the Faustian figure Verna proposed a pact to Roderick and Madeline Usher in the 1970s, granting them immense wealth in exchange for the eventual extinction of the Usher lineage. All episodes depict the death of a family member, analogous to some of Poe's stories. For example, in episode 4, titled "The Black Cat", Roderick's son Leo accidentally murders his boyfriend's cat and replaces it with another one, which is responsible for his death. The perpetrator of these deaths is Verna, who shapeshifts into different forms. In the last episode, titled "The Raven", Roderick murders his sister and leaves her in the basement while confessing all of his crimes to August Dupin. After this, Madeleine emerges deranged and blind, and while Dupin exits the house, it collapses into itself with a figure of a woman emerging on top of the ruins, followed by her transformation into a raven. While the Raven and Verna's figures are a reference to death, it is also important to explain how it relates to the contemporary world.

In this imagined realm, the Usher family is responsible for the development of the Fortunato Pharmaceutical Company. This company is responsible for the production of pharmaceutical opioids that have been the cause of several deaths across the United States of America. Interestingly, this fictional family is, in fact, a fairly explicit representation of the Sackler family (Gopesh). The Sacklers owned Purdue Pharma, a company responsible for the proliferation of the prescription of addictive pharmaceutical drugs, such as OxyContin, a powerful opioid, and have faced several lawsuits regarding this question (Ellis and Schuman; Perraudin and Neate). Considered as one of the most severe public health crises, the opioid epidemic may have had different roots, spanning from social and economic conditions to limited access to effective healthcare (Volkow and Blanco 1-2). Nevertheless, this ongoing opioid crisis is seen as a repercussion of careless medical prescription, related to the Purdue Pharma lawsuits: "Increases in the rate of opioid prescribing followed the identification of undertreatment of pain in the 1990s as an important clinical problem and the mistaken belief, based on anecdotal evidence, that patients in pain were not at risk for OUD" (2).

In this sense, the television adaptation of Poe's classic Gothic texts into modern concerns, such as the opioid crisis, demonstrates perfectly the Gothic's ability to adapt specific tropes, namely diseases, hereditary evils, spiritual persecution, and historical consequences, into cultural anxiety and problems related to the future of the population. The Gothic focuses on legacies, on the past that remains hidden within the membranes of our unconscious, and on the obsessive cultural happenings; however, it does so to highlight modern difficulties and obstacles arising from the consequences of an unresolved past. Indeed, the Gothic resurfaces and reimagines the past to emphasize collective trauma, which mimics the Freudian obsession-compulsion trauma survivors often experience. It equally serves as a medium for changing our perception of certain cultural events. For instance, by applying the story of Purdue Pharma to classical Gothic horror texts, the producers of this TV Show are establishing a negative connection between this company and their actions from the beginning.

2.5.2. *X*, *Pearl*, and *MaXXXine*

While this TV show takes place in the twenty-first century, the X trilogy, *X* (2022), *Pearl* (2022), and *MaXXXine* (2024) spans from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1980s. According to Abugharbieh, there are distinctive roles depicted in these movies that reveal one continuous story:

> This three act story depicts the process of media overwriting reality for its own nourishment, in a continuous exchange of codes, roles, standards and expectations in which the adherence to a specific female role – the puritan, the good wife, the all-American-girl, the vamp diva – overlap with the individuals' value and desirability.

Pearl, the first movie in the trilogy, follows the protagonist Pearl, a daughter of German parents, as she and her family attempt to keep their farm afloat in the rural South of the United States of America in 1918. With a father stricken by the Spanish flu, leaving him incompetent, the mother must contain the presumed psychopathic daughter on the farm to prevent her from spreading death. Although the public is not aware of Pearl's tendencies from the beginning, they become clear throughout the movie. Her ancestral background of German descent is, of course, another tool that foregrounds her as an Other; however, the contrast between Pearl's southern accent and her mother's Germanic accent stresses the fear of a Domestic Other born

out of miscegenation. Pearl's character serves as a threat to the American identity, externally fully belonging to the culture, but internally, still the enemy.

Whereas the aesthetics of the TV show *The Fall of the House of Usher* remain traditionally gothic, with purposefully dark, dim scenes and dark colors, Pearl blends the ultra-feminine coquette through colorful, ruffled, lacy clothing with the remarkably intense violence of the typical slasher movie, full of explicit death, masculine violence at the hands of Pearl, in a Southern Gothic landscape. Granted, *Pearl* becomes the symbol for the popular movement in media discourse described as female rage. Her monologue at the end of an audition where she gets rejected echoes the words of a Gothic heroine, as she screams: "Please, just give me one more chance . . . I'm a, I'm a star. No, I'm a star! Please, I'm a star! Please, somebody help me!" (01:13:19-01:13:28). Indeed, Pearl feels constricted by societal rules of what was expected of her throughout the movie. She is screaming at the patriarchal world, which holds her prisoner to a set of values, attributes, and in the end tosses her for not being able to follow them appropriately. She is punished because she does not conform to these rules, as she is sexually promiscuous by committing adultery. She places her well-being and desire before her family's needs, showing ambition, and she murders people throughout the movies by blunt force, with the help of props such as an axe, which is a typical masculine form of murder. In this sense, Pearl is the representation of the Gothic heroine: one who, as argued by Michelle Massé, is enclosed "in the encapsulation social systems that engender repeated trauma" (19).

The protagonist of the other two movies, Maxine, played again by Mia Goth, seems to function as Pearl's double, as she achieves what Pearl was not able to. Working as a pornography actress, she and her movie crew, directed by her boyfriend, rented a cabin on Pearl's farm in 1979. Sixty years have passed between Pearl and X, and she continues to murder people, now with the help of her husband. Eventually, they both murder the other characters, besides Maxine, who, in the end, escapes after Pearl accidentally kills herself. In the second movie, Maxine evolves into a much more self-reliant character and trades her career in pornography for one in horror movies. The rise of the far right is central to understanding how the events depicted in the movies relate to current cultural anxieties.

With Donald Trump's presidencies, Europe's concerns about immigration and its toll on Western values, it is no surprise that movies such as the X trilogy are equally gaining popularity, as they oppose the movement. Moreover, social media movements, such as the Tradwife movement seems to be setting women back, as it is grounded in misogynist ideals, and may be defined as "A subculture prevalent with conservative, anti-feminist thought . . . predominately comprised of white heterosexual women who nostalgically interpret and

advocate past traditional values, norms, and practices" (Perliger et al. 9). Furthermore, Perliger et al. underline that misogynist movements foment violence and hostility toward female empowerment because the pose a threat to masculinity (11). In this sense, Pearl's violence becomes subversive, as it challenges the conservative ideals of womanhood.

The woman who does not adhere to societal constrictions based on patriarchal values suffers in the end. A masculine woman whose objective is to be independent instead of languidly and obediently waiting for her husband to return home from war must be punished. Since Maxine is "actively reclaiming tools which are usually men's status symbols of power like sex, cars and guns," (Abugharbieh), she belongs to this group of women who must be punished for their nonconformity to societal rules. Indeed, there is a correlation between the Gothic heroine and how she is encouraged to seek love above all else, which is also "a form of culturally induced trauma" (Massé 4) disguised as "normal feminine development" (Ellis 274). This romantic discourse demonstrates how it is imperative that we "awaken someday from the Gothic nightmare that is our own as well as our culture's" (Massé 9). Albeit Massé's argument was written in 1992, it remains relevant. However, as previously mentioned, in the final movie, Maxine's character becomes a horror actress. It is her father, a famous preacher, who tries to kill her in the end. Representing puritanical values, he believes that pornography is degrading and a sin. She murders him in the end while forcing him to repeat the words he so outwardly spoke and taught her as a child: "I will not accept a life I do not deserve" (01:30:38-01:30:50). Consequently, Maxine has agency; she uses her body to become a movie star and is not constricted to a vulnerable position waiting on someone to save her. In this sense, Maxine is able to awaken from the Gothic nightmare, signaling a transformation within the Gothic tradition that Massé described, which indicates that the cultural context it reflects is, in fact, evolving.

2.6. Conclusion

All the examples previously mentioned serve to emphasize how different types of media have the power to influence our perception of the collective trauma belonging to a culture or nation. Through literature, movies, and TV shows, it is possible to construct a narrative that either shifts perspective or strategically draws attention to certain points of view. Additionally, this contributes to the creation of a cultural, historical, and national identity. Furthermore, the recurrent employment of time displacement in the Gothic narrative allows for

the symbolic interpretation of modern anxieties within the past, effectively foregrounding how they do not seemingly materialize without precedent; rather, they remain as a seed in the collective unconscious, developing until emerging as a full crisis.

This chapter has attempted to provide a critical approach to the development and evolution of the Gothic and Southern Gothic Genres. As argued, the current Gothic tradition has roots in the European Gothic, commonly associated with English or even northern-European literature. American writers such as Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthrone, and Edgar Allan Poe are often regarded as precursors of the American Gothic, and Southern Gothic. Although difficult to define, Castillo and Crow characterize Southern Gothic literature as possessing "a strong sense of place, nostalgia for a lost past and a Lost Cause, and a history of defeat, articulated by white male writers" (1). To the genre, other contemporary views have been added by African American authors, adapting it from the original white male centered narrative (1). Several scholars have attempted to distinguish between the two, focusing on the productiveness or unproductiveness of separating the two due to regional differences, questioning the repercussions of this mentality (2). Indeed, the two are similar because they share the same, and both kept evolving as reflections of cultural anxieties. While the Southern Gothic might more openly adhere to the grotesque, exacerbated violence, and racial framework, both tackle these subjects as a mirror of cultural perceptions and trauma.

In this sense, the last chapter aims to evaluate this development and evolution by analyzing two specific novels: one set in post-Second World War II America, and the other written in 2012, after 9/11, with the narrative unfolding from the 1950s to the 1960s. The *Haunting of Hill House* and *The Devil All the Time*, classified as Gothic and Southern Gothic, respectively, will be dissected in the light of perception theories to assess the Gothic genre's role in facilitating the processing of trauma.

> Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat. He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; […] (Faulkner *Banquet Speech*).

Chapter III – The Gothic Interface, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and *The Devil All the Time*

Prior to this chapter, several key factors of the main argument of this dissertation have been pointed out. The two previous chapters addressed the definition of trauma and the Gothic genre. Starting with the definition of trauma and a focus on its diachrony, trauma has evolved from the darkness of the unknown into a more developed and interdisciplinary area of study. Initially a concept associated with males, in the form of shellshock, or with females, in the form of hysteria, trauma gained the attention of experts in fields such as psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, biology, cultural studies, and literature studies. This allowed the different fields to be intertwined, culminating in what is currently known as trauma studies.

In the second chapter, the Gothic genre has been presented as a narrative concerned with the occult, the unseen, and the fragmentation of the psyche when exposed to certain traumatic events, including entrapment, familial trauma, war, loss, and death. It was argued that this genre's unique ability to merge literary techniques, namely, stream of consciousness, symbolic tropes, macabre motifs, fragmentation, decay, familial disease, and inability to overcome the past, is ideally suited to transpose into words and images the disruption of the mind, the unconscious responses to triggers, the emotional volatility, the fragmentation of the psyche, the death of the Self, as well as both the resurgence of unwanted images related to the traumatic event and the mind's compulsion to relieve it. Hence, regarding the Gothic's ability to depict trauma, a conclusion has been reached. However, there are still two important questions to dissect, which are: why is the Gothic able to depict trauma in such a verisimilar way, although trauma, as argued by Caruth, is unrepresentable, and how is that related to our perception of trauma and the world around us?

To answer these substantial questions, this dissertation will now draw on the Interface Theory of Perception by Donald D. Hoffman and its take on how humans perceive reality as not necessarily a real, true depiction of what exists in this world, but as a simplified and encoded version of it to help us cope with reality. After the explanation of his theory, this chapter will focus on demonstrating how the same applies to the novels *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Devil All the Time*, where certain tropes will be analyzed in the light of their mediated meanings and how they might also change our perception of the weight of the collective trauma. Furthermore, it will explore how the Gothic mimics the irrepresentability of trauma, not through a concrete inability to represent it but through the lens of Hoffman's Interface, which culminates in the framework of this dissertation: The Gothic Interface. In other

words, trauma's irrepresentability does not occur because of the mind's inability to process and cope with it, but because humans engage in a complex cognitive process to simplify reality to navigate life and survive. The Gothic engages with trauma by rendering it cognitively accessible, thus working as an interface for the traumatic real. Consequently, while trauma remains resistant to a concrete representation, the Gothic renders it accessible through narrative by employing a cognitive interface.

3.1. The Interface Theory of Perception

Hoffman's Interface Theory of Perception refutes the conventional evolutionary argument that we perceive reality as veridical to the object's existence in this world (Hoffman "The Interface"; *The Interface*). To support his argument, the author employs insights from cognitive and computational science while anchoring them in game theory (*The Interface* 18-20). This allows him to demonstrate that evolution favors humans who perceive reality in a way that yields more benefits for their survival, as opposed to an accurate perception of the object, since veridical representations drive species to extinction (*The Interface* 20). To substantiate his theory, he asserts that humans possess a natural interface that functions as a survival tactic, enabling the species to survive and propagate more efficiently:

> A goal of perception is to estimate true properties of the world. A goal of categorization is to classify its structure. Aeons of evolution have shaped our senses to this end. These three assumptions motivate much work on human perception. I here argue, on evolutionary grounds, that all three are false. Instead, our perceptions constitute a species-specific user interface that guides behavior in a niche. Just as the icons of a PC's interface hide the complexity of the computer, so our perceptions usefully hide the complexity of the world, and guide adaptive behavior. This interface theory of perception offers a framework, motivated by evolution, to guide research in object categorization. This framework informs a new class of evolutionary games, called interface games, in which pithy perceptions often drive true perceptions to extinction. (*The Interface* 1)

In other words, humans have evolved to prioritize benefits to the species as superior and more valuable than a true representation of any given object. Furthermore, this process is motivated and not arbitrary. Hoffman elaborates on this by claiming that our perception operates in a

similar mode to that of a computer since it simplifies the true form that encompasses several difficultly perceived parts into a more straightforward form: the icons, which operate as the interface. Nevertheless, such manifestations occur beyond the technological and natural worlds. Just as the "interface provides you with simplified symbols intended to help you interact with the computer successfully, while remaining blissfully ignorant of the complex reality of the computer" ("The Interface" 178), the Gothic narrative serves as an interface for the depiction of trauma. What is too hurtful and painful to be directly represented and processed in the brain resurfaces through a rather simplified but simultaneously encoded interface that allows the mind to communicate what otherwise had the potential to suffocate it. The process remains a motivated one due to readers' collective perception of certain tropes and symbols that those readers associate with the Gothic and trauma.

It should be noted that Hoffman understands why "The standard argument for veridical perception is based on evolution", since "those of our ancestors who saw more accurately had a competitive advantage over their contemporaries who saw less accurately, and this were more likely to pass on their genes that coded for the more accurate perceptions" ("The Interface" 157). However, he rejects this notion by arguing that "veridicality is irrelevant to adaptation" and by adding that mathematics shows that these correlations are generic which proves that "natural selection does not, in generic cases, favor veridical perceptions", and that, indeed, "if a veridical perception happens to appear as a result of some mutation, then natural selection will, generically, work to remove it from the population" ("The Interface" 178).

In this sense, the same might be applied to the Gothic. There is an evolutionary reason why the Gothic narrative has evolved to be an ideal canvas for narrating trauma: it might be too violent for the mind to deal with unresolved trauma; instead, the mind searches for a mediated palimpsest where it may liberate its traumatic experiences into a convoluted and simplified representation of the confusion that is felt. As argued by Caruth, "It is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony of the impossibility of living" (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). Therefore, and building on Caruth's argument that the "history of trauma . . . is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; . . . a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" ("Unclaimed Experience" 187) the Gothic becomes, paradoxically, the primary form through which trauma finds its representable manifestation.

In another moment, Hoffman argues that defenders of the conventional evolutionary argument often confuse fitness and veridicality (*The Interface* 5). He mentions that "The two

are distinct, and, indeed, can be at odds. In evolution, where the race is often to the swift, a quick and dirty category can easily trump one more complex and veridical" (*The Interface* 5). To illustrate this, he introduces his example of the beetle *Julodimorpha bakewelli*. This beetle scans its surroundings for females with certain characteristics, such as shininess and color. Unfortunately, some people throw empty beer bottles from their cars that resemble these characteristics, and the beetles, thinking the bottles are females, swiftly engage in sexual intercourse. They get hurt and stuck, which allows for *Iridomyrmex discors* ants to attack them and eat them (*The Interface* 1-2). Consequently, this example is crucial to understand how competitiveness between organisms operates: "This competition is predicated, in large part, on exploiting the nonveridical perceptions of predators, prey and conspecifics, using techniques such as mimicry and camouflage" (*The Interface* 5). Thus, fitness here is related to the species' ability to distinguish the real and the perception of it. If the beetle had a better interface, it would have been able to perceive the bottle as a hazard; instead, its interface was not capable of simplifying its perception correctly, leading to the beetle's extinction. Additionally, "If (as Dawkins argues) deceit is fundamental to animal communication, then there must be strong selection to spot deception" (Trivers xx), meaning that the fittest one is not the one who perceives objects more accurately, but rather, the one whose interface helps to better navigate reality, sometimes in the form of recognizing deceptive tactics, such as camouflage. Consequently, "by conflating fitness and accuracy", defenders of vision as the ultimate form of true perception fail to comprehend that these concepts "are not highly correlated" (Hoffman, *The Interface* 5).

In conclusion, according to Hoffman's Interface Theory of Perception, our species' perception of reality is not motivated by a faithful representation of it because it would go against our best interest of fecundity (*The Interface* 21). In place of valuing accuracy, our interface values simplicity, not in terms of being less but by fostering "perceptions that act as simplified user interfaces, expediting adaptive behavior while shrouding the causal and structural complexity of the objective world" (*The Interface* 21).

It is not only in the cognitive field that the perception of reality and its relation to memory is important. In trauma studies, there is a need to "approach the topic [of trauma] without opposing history and memory in a binary fashion but instead inquiring into more complex and challenging relations between them, including the role of trauma and its effects" (Lacapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity" 375). Additionally, Caruth argues that "The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all"

("Unclaimed Experience" 187). By intertwining the cognitive, historical, cultural, and literary approaches, it is possible to reach a consensus regarding The Gothic Interface. Memory and history are merged because one cannot exist without the other, and perception, in some form, is also linked to both.

Thus, adapting to one's historical and collective trauma is equally crucial to survive and thrive as a species, since otherwise we could become extinct either by descending into madness or annihilating each other. The lack of a good interface suggests extinction. However, what happens when the members of the same species do not possess an equally strong collective interface? Does it become individual, just as individual trauma exists in collective trauma? In the case of the beetles, although some lack such a strong interface as others, they still survive as a species, demonstrating that even within the same culture, there are interfaces that work better than others. This is the case for Eleanor and Arvin, the protagonists of the two novels that will be analyzed throughout this chapter. Eleanor, as this dissertation suggests, is reminiscent of the beetle that is incapable of distinguishing between a female beetle and an empty beer bottle, leaving her prone to being attacked by predators, which in her case are embodied by the house itself. Arvin, on the other hand, seems to possess not only a stronger interface than Eleanor but a stronger one than any other character he encounters, allowing him to survive in the end, as opposed to Eleanor's tragic fate. Through Hoffman's lens, Arvin is the fittest of both.

In essence, Hoffman's Interface Theory proves that perception is not truth-based. It is, indeed, based on the need for survival and propagation of the species. By applying this concept to trauma studies and the Gothic tradition, a highly interdisciplinary approach that bridges the gap between memory, cognition, history, and trauma, there is a possibility of bringing into representation what was before unrepresentable. However, to do so, it is necessary to introduce some key notions of cognitive literary studies, which allow the Gothic to be studied in the traditional narrative form, as well as through the lens of cognitive literary studies. Linking these approaches and broadening cognitive aspects will enable this dissertation to examine in detail and analyze the novels *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Devil All the Time*. By laying the groundwork for the Gothic Interface, these novels will demonstrate how cognition, trauma, perception, history, and the Gothic are linked.

3.2. Cognitive Literary Studies

"Cognitive" is a broad term referring to "an overriding interest in the active (and largely unconscious) mental processing that makes behavior understandable" (Richardson 1). Additionally, cognitive science encompasses "interdisciplinary ventures loosely held together by a set of common interests, allegiances, and reference points rather than a coherent discipline unified by shared paradigms and methodologies" (Richardson 2). However, "Tough 'vitally interested' in cognitive science, cognitive literary critics work not toward consilience with science but toward a richer engagement with a variety of theoretical paradigms in literary and cultural studies" (Zunshine 2), meaning that the field of Cognitive Literary Studies is highly interdisciplinary. Furthermore, the importance of this field remains crucial to the framework proposed in this dissertation, given its focus on perception and memory, core features of trauma. Indeed, as argued by Mary Thomas Crane, "It is the interaction of human brains with historically specific circumstances that produces literary and cultural artifacts, so a criticism that attends to both the cognitive and the historical can, in theory at least, provide an illuminating account of those artifacts" (15). Building on pre-existing theory, she also argues that several scholars draw on evolutionary psychology to explain the reason behind literary texts being the way they are (15). Since cognitive studies and cognitive literary studies have a strong link to linguistics (Richardson 1-2), it is reasonable that research in "cognitive linguistics and psychology has established the complex ways in which categorization is fundamental to human thought and also the ways in which it works differently than rule-based or classical logical systems" (Crane 16).

In this sense, categorization is innate to the human species. If not clear in the latter sub-chapter, Hoffman places a strong emphasis on the power and need for categorization. The reason why we categorize reality is to be able to perceive and process it. Caruth would probably argue that concerning trauma, the mind cannot fully categorize the traumatic experience, thus rendering it unprocessable. Crane further draws on other scholars' work to demonstrate that our perception relates to an intuitive idea: "We don't recognize a chair as a chair because it matches a list of features that all chairs must have, or because it is different from a table. We recognize it as a chair because it resembles our intuitive idea of a prototypical chair" (16). To bridge these ideas together, the Gothic Interface offers a mediated framework built on Hoffman's Interface Theory, Caruth's paradoxicality, and Cognitive Literary Studies. For example, Eleanor shows concern with categorizing the world around her by constantly comparing herself to other visitors of Hill House and their social status, echoing the mind's need for categorization, especially in moments of or resembling traumatic experiences. It seems that in the moment that the mind needs it the most that, paradoxically, this categorization fails

to happen, which highlights her paltry interface's inability to perceive the world in a way that guarantees survival. On the contrary, Arvin's cognition seems to work perfectly since even in moments of social humiliation, he is able to categorize his social value adequately and, on top of that, refuse to give less social value to himself and his family because of it (Pollock 169-173). Additionally, his mind uses this example to categorize the preacher as dangerous, which underscores the value of his interface. Thus, both characters echo characteristics of the trauma response, perception, and categorization of reality.

This theme opens a broader discussion about the reason behind our species' need for using media, such as literature, through which we can begin to process our trauma, and it is related to a need for balance:

> Although life tends continually toward entropy, it also possesses the resources to maintain homeostasis. By signaling disorganization and increased indeterminacy, gaps and failures invite compensatory repair. Because human life is porously receptive to all kinds of representations—to verbal urgings in sermons and poems, to paintings that prompt memory or desire, dramatized models of action—works of imagination are included in the feedback loops that maintain cognitive homeostasis. Quite independent of authorial intentions, a culture's most valued works of imagination can just occasionally be caught in the act of responding to structural failure by re-representing difficult issues in locally significant forms—forms that themselves evolve to adumbrate new possibilities. (Spolsky 35)

In other words, even in confusion, our brain tends to seek balance because it is the natural way in which the human species wants to live. Cognitively, we achieve a state of homeostasis by being exposed to different forms of art media, such as literature. What these fields have in common is creativity and imagination. This capacity of the human mind to take specific symbols and associate them with others mimics Caruth's argument that "the repetitive experience of nightmare and reliving of battlefield events that is experienced like a neurotic pathology" ("Violence and Time" 24). The residues of the traumatic experience, such as nightmares, flashbacks, and heightened emotional responses, are an attempt of the brain to bring balance to the confusion set after the trauma. Thus, when creativity is present, it is more likely that the trauma might be either overcome or at least mitigated. This is corroborated by a study developed by Dana Wehle, where she defines creativity as having "the capacity for spontaneous symbol formation and play" (197). To help children overcome cult related trauma,

she observed in her psychotherapy group that creativity is often linked to the formation of an identity. Furthermore, she states that "Extreme suppression of creativity in harmful cults provides a backdrop against which to assess the psychological impact of any degree or form of undue influence on creativity" (198), meaning that there is a strong correlation between suppressing creativity and suppressing identity. Albeit interesting, Wehle's detailed methodology is too dense for the scope of this dissertation, still her findings are particularly relevant because they establish a link between the matrix of symbol formation and creativity by demonstrating how they serve as mechanisms of resilience in trauma recovery.

One needs creativity to deal with traumatic events, and according to Wehle, one equally needs the capacity to form and understand symbols, which equally corroborates Spolsky's last sentence in the above citation. She mentions that one of our species' most valued capacities is to reintroduce "difficult issues in locally significant forms— forms that themselves evolve to adumbrate new possibilities" (Spolsky 35). This means that there is a necessity for our brain to do this to survive, just as there is a need for our brain to code our surroundings into a simplified version of what we see. Hence, the human mind uses literature, specifically Gothic literature, to creatively invent and recognize symbols that bring homeostasis to an entropic mind.

In the light of the Gothic Interface, it becomes simpler to analyze why specific symbols are applied and what their purpose is. For example, the search for homeostasis through the mind's obsession with linking symbols and giving meaning to them to surpass confusion is clearly visible in the case of *The Haunting of Hill House*, in Doctor Montague's reason for choosing his visitors since "he assembled a list of names of people who had, in one way or another, at one time or another, no matter how briefly or dubiously, been involved in abnormal events" (Jackson 5). These abnormal events, as will be dissected further, must be interpreted in the light of having experienced traumatic events that the mind has, in some way or another, repressed in the form of a symbolic value.

As for *The Devil All the Time*, although a less abstractly symbolic novel, there is still a symbolic value in Arvin's rugged masculinity resulting from repressing the violence and trauma he encountered when he was a young boy. In sum, the Gothic Interface proposes a somewhat meta-reading of the phenomena of these novels: how to read them, and how it affects the reader. Just as trauma is collective, so is the reading. The lens through which the reader understands and interprets the content of these Gothic novels is very much linked to the readers' own experiences. The readers, similarly to the characters, give meaning to symbols when analyzing them, while also using their creativity to link difficult issues to regain balance and create healthy coping pathways after confusion. After this brief contextualization in how

cognition plays a significant part in The Gothic Interface framework, the next section will cover historical and cultural basis, as well as provide a summary of the novels for better contextualization.

3.3. The Novels

The *Haunting of Hill House*, published in 1959, depicts the unravelling psychological state of Eleanor Vance, narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator. As she leaves her sister's home for a sojourn at a haunted house, invited by Dr Montague, she finds herself worrying about her role in a society that is not quite fond of women's independence. The Doctor rents this mansion, intending to invite a girl named Theodora, and Luke, who is the heir to Hill House. As the novel progresses, Eleanor stands out as the protagonist of the plot, although she is not the narrator. Her thoughts become more fragmented as the house becomes more aggressive. Obsessive thoughts regarding how others perceive her and how she perceives herself become more prominent until she finally tries to link herself further to the house by trying to commit suicide. Stopped in time by her colleagues, she is then convinced to leave Hill House, against her wishes, only to finally commit suicide by crashing her car into a tree. Throughout the novel, there is a strong, albeit not explicit, insinuation that supernatural forces are present. This dissertation deconstructs this idea by suggesting that these instances serve the purpose of depicting trauma responses through encoded meanings, a common characteristic of the Gothic narrative, as argued up until now.

Eleanor's final moment of clarity appears in her last moments, as she has a fleeting realization of what is happening, as if awakening from a traumatic trance: "In the unending, crashing second before the car hurled into the tree she thought clearly, *Why* am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me?" (Jackson 245-246). It is as if Eleanor spends the whole novel in confusion while delving deeper into her trauma, and only at the end is her brain capable of signaling to her that danger is present. It is unclear what happens to the rest of the characters besides a brief mention of their immediate return to normal lives; however, it is clear that the house remains present and alive, ready to continue to spread its disruption.

The Devil All the Time echoes a different America, one still traumatized by wars and difficulties in a different way. Published in 2011, but set in the rural parts of the American South, the novel's time ranges from the end of the Second World War to the beginning of the sixties. Starting with the prologue, the third-person omniscient narrator introduces a pivotal

experience in Arvin's life. He follows his father while he violently attacks citizens who had made sexual comments about his wife. Arvin's ingrained violence, stemming partly from this experience, is what saves him throughout the plot. Following the prologue, the novel is divided into 7 different parts that, through a fragmented narrative, tell the story of different characters, such as Arvin's family, Carl, Sandy, and her brother. They all become linked in the end by Arvin's assassination of the last three characters. Once more, the violence, the recurrence of the theme of death, and a disjointed narrative that culminates in the end are not random themes, but rather an echo of the divided nation of America. Arvin pursues his freedom, still marked by an intergenerational trauma, as well as his own, while representing a collective trauma of the poor, marginalized America that lives in a havoc created by previous wars and the present claustrophobic atmosphere resulting from 9/11.

3.4. Cultural and Historical Context

Taking place in the 1950s, both novels navigate the challenges faced by multiple marginalized communities, often seen as the Others of society. These Others are differentiated by their gender and social status, as opposed to race. This happened because, after the Second World War, the country finally had time to be concerned with other important aspects of society besides the immediate threat of Germany and Japan. Hence, time and restructuring of society led to a division of people into their pre-assigned roles. There was an atmosphere of fear, and paradoxically the idea of a free country under the assumption that the political, domestic Other could pose a threat to their new way of living:

> Two contrasting narratives sum up the paradox of the 1950s: on the one hand, marvelous consumer abundance and the realization of the "American Dream" for millions of families; on the other, political anxiety and enforced unity, all under the shadow of the Cold War. Two images are often used to represent this incongruity, that of new suburban lawns all over America being dug up to build bomb shelters, and of happy, well-fed children learning to "duck and cover" in their classrooms as a futile protection against Soviet nuclear attack. (Gosse 10)

The economically prosperous era was promising since a white middle-class male was able to own a house and support a family, which contributed to the idea of upward mobility that helped

propagate the American Dream. Nevertheless, it remained an era full of suspicion that this prosperity might just as easily be taken away by communism (Gosse 11-15).

In consequence, it comes as no surprise that this dynamic appears in media and literature. One author whose works frequently deal with the difficulties to which people, especially women, were exposed during this period is none other than Shirley Jackson. As Michael Jr. Dalpe states, the success of her stories "stems from the corruption of expectations, whether it is the corruption of a normal private life or the inversion of expected power dynamics of the pre-1970s America" (44). Women were expected to return to the role of a supporter, seeing their rights diminished instead of augmented. They were expected to attend to their families' requirements and find happiness in the domestic sphere. For this reason, in Jackson's work, "domesticity is a form of power; inasmuch as domestic spaces are powerful, they are also traps, both for those who live within expectations of 'normalcy', and for others who seem to be betrayed by the perceived security those spaces offer" (44), revealing subversion instead of conformity. Her works mimic the confusion and dissatisfaction felt by many women who found themselves cloistered by the gendered expectations of her contemporary society, as well as the times of fear and political instability. Here, the Gothic functions as an Interface in the sense that while analyzing the house trope, it is possible to observe the suffocating effects of domesticity upon women while simultaneously understanding the atmosphere of fear during this time. The Gothic Interface becomes a cognitive tool that renders trauma navigable.

The Devil All the Time also uses the post-Second World War imagery to explore the repercussions of war on American Society. However, the author's arbitrary choice to set the novel seventy years before it was written raises the question of what was happening in the United States of America in 2011. The extreme violence and death are not random, as they echo a deeper, more frightening reality felt in the aftermath of 9/11. As suggested in one of the previous sections, the human species tends to turn to media forms such as literature to process the lasting effects of a traumatic event. Since trauma resists direct representation, there is a need to encode the real in the symbolic. Hence, several artists felt that they could contribute to this. John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec, in their article about the repercussions of 9/11 in the following years, highlight several artistic exhibitions. Some of these include a statue of a naked woman falling to pay tribute to those who leapt into death during the attack, by Eric Fischl, the cutout silhouettes in positions of free fall, as well, by Sharon Paz, and in 2006, an oil-painting by Graydon Parrish was exhibited at the New British Museum of American Art, titled "The Cycle of Terror and Tragedy: September 11, 2001" (Duvall and Marzec 382). They continue to demonstrate how this traumatic event keeps resurfacing in other works and novels,

while also emphasizing that several other scholars have linked the trauma surrounding 9/11 to the horrors of the Holocaust, opening the connection between 9/11 and World War II, whereas others deconstruct this idea by stating that trauma aesthetics are not the central point of this event (396).

It was not only in the realm of fine arts that this event was depicted. Several popular culture media, for example, the TV show *Homeland* (2011-2020), have been successful in highlighting how the government dealt with enemies under Obama's administration during the War on Terror. Furthermore, similar to what happened during the Cold War, the post 9/11 period feeds on the notion that everyone might be an enemy (May 35, 52). A neighbor, a teacher, or a clerk at the supermarket could be a communist or a terrorist, thus threatening freedom and security. This highlighted even more the difference between the "good" people and the domestic Other. Consequently, it is in this context that the novel presented in this case study revolves around characters who, by circumstance or identity, occupy the position of Other. Additionally, after 9/11, a heightened religiosity could be observed in America, particularly in conservative subcultures, another key feature of the novel. Thus, although not explicitly mentioned in *The Devil All the Time*, 9/11 is soundly present through the gloomy atmosphere of the presence of domestic terrorism and fear. The obscure presence acts as a ghost of an unresolved past, further cementing the southern Gothic novel as one where the repercussions of a traumatic event are encoded in symbolic characters ready to be interpreted in the light of the Gothic Interface, to help readers engage with collective trauma in a cognitively manageable way.

3.5. The House: Where Trauma Meets Physicality

As discussed during the second chapter of this dissertation, in Gothic literature, the house is one of the most important tropes. Through its description, adaptation to moods or supernatural qualities, many conclusions might be ascertained regarding the state of the characters. This is exactly what this section proposes to do regarding Hill House and Arvin's family house in Knockemstiff, Southern Ohio. Although completely different in terms of description and agenda, both houses seem to participate in crucial turning points in the characters' lives.

3.5.1. *The Haunting of Hill House*

Starting with the *Haunting of Hill House*, it is important to note that several scholars have accentuated the connection between the importance of the house and domesticity in many, if not most, of Jackson's works. Indeed, Ruth Franklin emphasizes that the tensions of the 1950s of instability, uncertainty, the threat of nuclear bombs, and communism are "palpable in Jackson's work, which channels far-reaching anxiety about the tumultuous world outside the home even as it investigates the dark secrets of *domestic* American life" (6 emphasis added). Additionally, one of the prominent aspects of her work regarding the house is how it actively participates in the plot (Reid 78), almost becoming a character itself. Besides being present in the title, there is a description of the house right on the first page, signaling to the reader that it will be a crucial theme throughout the novel:

> No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed to, 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. (1)

Firstly, this opening line suggests that Hill House is a place where death reigns, where there is no space for imagination and therefore creativity, as opposed to reality. This previously mentioned dichotomy concerns the importance of creativity in the formation of identity. The observation regarding larks and katydids is, on one hand, ironic and humorous, but on the other hand, it establishes a relation between the Self and the Other where the Self oppresses the Other. As small and lacking consciousness animals, these birds and small insects might be interpreted in the light of a gendered Other oppressed in a patriarchal society, since women were also considered to be small and intellectually inferior for a long time. However, larks, as birds are widely known for their singing abilities, and the katydids are equally known for their ability to produce sounds that might differ in their purpose, being either reproductive, territorial, aggressive, or defensive in nature" (Rogers), accentuating the fact that even those considered inferior by society still possess a voice, and therefore, agency.

Secondly, there is a mention of the temporality of the house, which might serve two purposes: to highlight the house's permanence and continuous success throughout different

periods, while also drawing attention to what was happening in the country eighty years ago and how formative that period must have been. By the end of the 1880s, the United States of America was experiencing moments of upheaval and growth. Just over a decade after the end of the Civil War, the Reconstruction Era began. Rapid industrialization and the Gilded Age also contributed to a wider gap between rich and poor Americans. In this period, there was a large transition from a rural, agrarian society to a more modern and industrial one. Additionally, Victorian or Gothic-style houses, similar to Hill House, were being built, further reflecting wealth and accentuating status. Hence, by signaling from the beginning that this house was built during this time, Jackson is able to draw attention to the fact that many of the challenges faced by the American people during the 1950s have roots in the distant past, while also predicting that these challenges will persist. Then, similar to how post-war America inherits unprocessed trauma from the Civil War and Reconstruction Era, Hill House emanates the endurance of collective trauma spanning generations.

Thirdly, building on the rest of the description, the climax of the last two sentences is what foreshadows the tragic end of the novel. Even in chaos, disturbance, and the possibility of rupture of the status quo, the house remains thriving. The transformation of silence as something physical plays into the cognitive action of attributing a creative characteristic to reality. Silence cannot lie, as silence is not materialized. However, the mind's association with silence being so heavy that it holds physical power suggests that there was a cognitive necessity to do so to deal with a traumatic experience. Hence, the Gothic interface proposes that, in Gothic literature, it is fundamental to bring the unmaterialized to the materialized as a way to cope with what remains unseen in the unconscious. Furthermore, the choice of voice and silence further emphasizes the search for agency felt by many oppressed women who, being no match in strength, found their voice to be one of the main tools to survive.

The paragraph ends with the title of this dissertation by stating that “whatever walked there, walked alone”. This sentence encompasses all that was argued about trauma, perception, and cognition until now because it perfectly demonstrates how traumatic experiences remain in the body, in the unconscious, and how trauma thrives in isolation. The movement created by walking also adds an imagery related to plotting, resurfacing the notion that the brain must constantly deal with the fact that it was not capable of protecting the victim in the first place, as discussed in chapter one. Nevertheless, there is still hope in this paragraph, the reason being that there is an evident search of the mind to overcome these challenges, as the narrator materializes the challenges faced during this period.

Eleanor's first encounter with the house possesses an ominous quality. Right in her first exploration of its surroundings, Eleanor's "car cracked against a rock and reeled back across the road with an ominous scraping somewhere beneath" (Jackson 27). As if not premonitory enough of the dangers of Hill House, this is followed by tree branches that difficult the car's passage, as well as darkness that envelops her path. Eleanor remarks that "Hill House likes to make an entrance" and wonders if "the sun even shines along here" (Jackson 27), signaling that the House not only guards something obscure, inaccessible, but that it is also, for some reason, against Eleanor's presence.

At first glance, this idea seems plausible; however, if linked to traumatic responses, this materialization of an unmaterial presence is not coming from Hill House. It is Eleanor's brain that, by trying to keep her safe, recognizes a similar pattern to other traumatic events in her life, and by wanting to protect her, engages in extreme cognitive deception. One of these events is related to her father's death:

> Her name had turned up on Dr. Montague's list because one day, when she was twelve years old and her sister was eighteen, and their father had been dead for not quite a month, showers of stones had fallen on their house, without any warning or any indication of purpose or reason, dropping from the ceilings, rolling loudly down the walls, breaking windows and patterning maddeningly on the roof. . . . Eleanor and her sister were removed to the house of a friend, and the stones stopped falling. (Jackson 7)

Once again, the traumatic experience becomes physical and, this time, quite aggressive. The direction in which the rocks fall also suggests that this is a phenomenon representing mental struggle, rather than supernatural. The direction in which they fall provides an important insight into the biology of trauma. Falling from the sky to attack the outside structure of the house, which should be a form of protection from the world, the rocks mimic the brain position of superiority and ascent in relation to the body. Just as the brain should be the protector of the body, the rocks symbolize the attacking quality of trauma, which is stored in the brain, against the body. Since they are able to create damage, it means that Eleanor's mind has also experienced trauma before coming to Hill House. Her continuous apprehension corroborates this when she enters Hill house and thinks, "Why am I here? She thought helplessly and at once; why am I here?" (Jackson 28).

After the incident in her youth, Eleanor and her sister accused each other of being responsible for it. However, further scenes in the novel suggest that this is related to Eleanor's trauma, as something similar happens throughout her short stay at Hill House, and her feelings of guilt. After settling, she meets Mrs. Dudley, one of the caretakers of the house, who tells her that she and her husband do not spend the night there (Jackson 39). Implicitly, the night is when the unconscious gains enough power to resurface, which is why on their first night there, Eleanor and Theodora, whose room is next to hers, both experience what at first might seem a supernatural event, but after further analysis might be interpreted as a resurfacing of the same phenomena Eleanor experienced after her father's death. They hear a pounding on the door, as if someone was trying to get into the bedroom:

> "Something is knocking on the doors," Theodora said in a tone of pure rationality. . . . they heard the crash against the door across the hall. It was louder, it was deafening, it struck against the door next to them (did it move back and forth across the hall? did it go on feet along the carpet? did it lift a hand to the door?) . . . "Go away, she shouted wildly. Go away, go away!" (Jackson 128-129)

This incident is only the first, since the other nights are also filled with dreadful scenarios that resemble a physical attack. It is important to remember that one of the most prevalent symptoms of trauma victims is the repetition of the traumatic situation, often encoded in symbolic dreams. Before this knocking on the door incident, Eleanor was dreaming about her recently deceased mother, whose caretaking was up to her until her mother died, and she resented this role bestowed upon her. Seeing as after her father's death, rocks started falling on their house, and after her mother's death, she came to a supposedly haunted house where there are, again, seemingly supernatural incidents of a similar nature, it is safe to say that Eleanor's mind is materializing her trauma by trying to process it. It is also implicit that, similarly to her mother's death, she feels guilt regarding her father's death, since she confesses to feeling responsible: "'It was my fault my mother died,' Eleanor said. 'She knocked on the wall and called me and called me and I never woke up. I ought to have brought her the medicine; I always did before. But this time she called me and I never woke up.'" (Jackson 212), once again, repeating the pattern of obsession-compulsion. This pattern is not only linked to her obsessive thoughts about death and belonging, but also in her speech, as she often repeats the same words, as demonstrated by the quote.

The materialization of her guilt reaches the climax as the group notices, written in chalk, the word “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” (Jackson 146), which Eleanor denies having written. Spiraling into confusion, she attempts to understand the reason behind this. At this point, it becomes clear that Eleanor has gradually been fusing with the house. Her emotions and doubts about whether to stay or leave Hill House, if others think she belongs or mock her, might not be exactly real, but rather projections of her past traumatic experiences of motherly rejection, for example. This fusion becomes even more apparent as the novel reaches its end with Eleanor sitting, listening to the sounds of the house as if she were the house itself:

> Eleanor sat, looking down at her hands, and listened to the sounds of the house. Somewhere upstairs a door swung quietly shut; a bird touched the tower briefly and flew off. In the kitchen the stove was settling and cooling, with little soft creakings. An animal—a rabbit?—moved through the bushes by the summerhouse. She could even hear, with her *new awareness of the house* the dust drifting gently in the attics, the wood aging. Only the library was closed to her; . . . In the little parlor she could hear, without raising her eyes, Theodora’s small irritated tappings and the quiet sound of the chessmen being set down. (Jackson 223, emphasis added)

Eleanor is capable of hearing noises in the house as if she were part of it, except in the library. Interestingly, when learning of the tragic history of the house, the group learns that one of the previous owners had committed suicide in the library (Jackson 103). Thus, in her own final moment of fusion with the house, and therefore engulfment by trauma, she is finally capable of entering the library, as she experiences a sense of belonging: “don’t let him see me, she thought beggingly, and turned and ran, without stopping, into the library. . . . I am home, she thought, and stopped in wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought; now to climb” (Jackson 231-32). The moment of her death, although not at the house, as she is saved by the group in time, happens when she attempts to leave the house. Unfortunately, at this point, the house and Eleanor are not separate beings, hinting that trauma has consumed Eleanor entirely, leaving her without a sense of identity. Symbolically, the death of the psyche is a crucial part of understanding trauma. By going through a metaphorical death, Eleanor represents the cognitive inability to overcome traumatic experiences, as will be more thoroughly discussed in the following section. Her symbolic connection to the house, which is often demonstrated by the house's architecture, is also representative of the collective traumatic experience of women in the 1950s.

In his chapter titled “Endless House, Interminable Dream: Shirley Jackson’s Domestic Architecture and the Matrophobic Gothic”, about the symbolic architecture of Hill House, Reid argues that its structure resembles the maternal, opening the discussion on motherhood and gender expectations. He interestingly points out that Jackson subverts the dynamic of motherhood by using the Gothic genre: “Rather than simply depicting the toxic mother as monstrous, she uses the gothic genre to excavate the cultural scapegoating of this figure” (83). Reid’s cultural analysis links history to the Gothic, but it fails to find the connection between the cognitive and perceptive fields, which, through the lens of the Gothic Interface, enlarges the scope of how collective trauma is encoded also in the mind’s architecture. In the house, Eleanor finds a physical embodiment of her trauma, just as Jackson uses this symbol to illustrate the effects of a patriarchal society, further proving how the Gothic transforms the real into the symbolic as a means to process what ails the unconscious. Reid situates the architecture of Hill House as representative of the repressive maternal whereas the Gothic Interface demonstrates how that same architecture transforms the brain’s altered perception under trauma, by rendering it performative.

Punctual incidents that reverberate past traumatic events are not the only important aspect of this novel. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, architecture serves the purpose of a medium that bridges the gap between the unconscious and conscious. The house is described as having a “faulty design,” which contributed to walls looking “always in one direction a fraction longer than the eye could endure” (Jackson 40). To the wrong angles is added a peculiar feature related to the visitor’s inability to situate themselves in the house, as Theodora mentions that “‘I can’t possibly tell where the dining room is’” to which she adds “‘*That* door leads to the long passage and then into the front hall’” (Jackson 63). She is swiftly corrected by Dr. Montague, who, having studied the odd manifestations of Hill House, understands that the house’s architecture is fallacious and answers: “Wrong, my dear. That door leads to the conservatory” (Jackson 63). At first glance, and in line with Reid’s argument about post-war architecture consumed by the feminine by subjecting it to a breeding machine (89), it seems that the house’s instability mimics the instability of the time and the struggles of the gendered Other in navigating these challenges. To some point, that is correct; however, by applying the Gothic Interface framework, it is possible to argue that the architectural instability mimics the brain’s instability.

During the first chapter of this dissertation, it was mentioned how van der Kolk concluded that the brain’s pattern activity changes when undergoing a traumatic experience. Many trauma survivors end up with a dysregulated amygdala, which contributes to a chronic

sense of stress and anxiety, as if the brain's architecture also changed. Additionally, he argues that these lasting consequences remain in the body, insinuating that there is still a place of consciousness where balance is attempted. Indeed, such a place exists in Hill House. In the parlor, Dr. Montague mentions that they should regard that room as central: "As a matter of fact, I think we ought to regard this room as our center of operations, a kind of common room" (Jackson 62). This part of the house appears to be situated at the center, which further contributes to the idea of control and consciousness. Additionally, there is one other mention of this idea, this time related to the entrance of the house: "the center of consciousness was somehow the small space where they stood, four separated people, and looked trustingly at one another" (Jackson 58), which signals that the house, in fact, possesses a consciousness. Further cementing the materialization of the collective trauma felt by women in the 1950s, the house seems to retain consciousness and body. The center part of the house that mimics the brain is where the visitors do not experience the violent attacks, whereas the bedrooms represent the body being attacked by the mind. Moreover, the fact that the house is unstable with doors "off center", the stairs "not level", and rooms within other rooms might also represent the patriarchy's fallible premise (Jackson 106).

Finally, by the end of the novel, Eleanor is dead, and the other members of the group return to their usual lives. It is in the last paragraph, however, that the novel circles back to its beginning, hinting that nothing has changed, and that the house will continue to materialize the unconscious collective trauma:

> Hill House itself, not sane, stood against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, its 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 246)

The quotes' similarity reiterates one of the central characteristics of trauma: its repetition and obsession-compulsion. Not only is the house representative of the patriarchal trauma imposed on the gendered Other, but it is also representative of the horror originating in its timelessness. Through the Gothic narrative and the house trope, Jackson exposes the colossal consequences of a collective cultural trauma that has been developing in the United States of America for a long time. Although several scholars have rightly pointed out the relation of her stories and novels to feminism, another important aspect that should be highlighted is the repercussions of

Othering and marginalization. Eleanor struggles constantly with feelings of belonging, as she repeats to herself, as if needing to convince her psyche of it, "I am one of them; I belong" (Jackson 60).

The house, thus trauma as well, keeps her isolated and incapable of bridging the gap between herself and others, which ironically, might have saved her in the end. But this isolation might be extrapolated to the society of the time, which, instead of helping people who deviated from the norm, would more quickly shun them out. *The Devil All the Time* deals more explicitly with this idea than with the trope of a haunted house as an encoded icon to represent trauma. Instead of depicting trauma as an unstable architecture of the mind, symbolic of gendered oppression, Pollock's house embodies trauma through decay and intergenerationally inherited violence.

3.5.2. *The Devil All the Time*

At first sight, the house trope in this novel might be easily overlooked. There's no apparent haunting, and no supernatural hints. There are, on one hand, several characters whose lives drastically change after encountering Arvin, and on the other hand, there is Arvin, whose violent upbringing and father's intergenerational trauma link him to the house where his mother and father died. This house is described as already in decay:

> They rented the farmhouse on top of the Mitchell Flats for thirty dollars a month . . . Though at first Charlotte had been against it, she soon fell in love with the leaky, run-down house. She didn't even mind pumping her water from the well. Within a few weeks after they moved in, she was talking about someday buying it. . . . All her life, she'd lived in gloomy, roach-infested apartments rented by the week or month. . . . Owning the farmhouse would finally mean some stability in her life. . . (Pollock 36-37)

Up until now, although in bad condition, the house seems to be a prospect of stability and security. This echoes the prosperity mentioned previously in this dissertation regarding the economic boom experienced after World War II. Willard, Arvin's father, a veteran of World War II, imagined their lives would be hopeful at this point, as did Charlotte, Arvin's mother. The contrast between Hill House, this farmhouse, and Charlotte's previous living quarters is evident, as it demonstrates the difference between rural Southern America and other wealthier

regions. Indeed, the South is widely viewed as a retrograde place. This narrative has been continuously developed through years of cultural and historical media, mostly starting in the period of the American Civil War. Paul Theroux, for example, in *Deep South* (2015) shows how several places in this region have been abandoned to the point of becoming deserted cities, or people living in complete deterioration (212-13). The "backwardness" of the South has been depicted by several novelists, such as William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers, among others. Then, it comes as no surprise that the collective perception of the South is physically represented through decay, rot, and dirtiness.

The Russells' house is not only represented by this building. Although not a highly religious man before, Willard felt the need to turn to God after having witnessed the horrors of war and built a prayer log in the farmhouse's territory. This prayer log, at first, was described as a place of peace, where he went to decompose: "Willard thought about the prayer log he'd fixed up in the woods, about the peace and calm it would bring him once he got home and ate supper and made his way over there" (Pollock 37), but rapidly becomes the exact opposite of that. His search for faith, besides being a cognitive representation of looking for balance in times of confusion and uncertainty, also draws attention to the important aspect of the novel related to religion. Theroux argues that "A church in the South is the beating heart of the community, the social center, the anchor of faith, the beacon of life, the arena of music, the gathering place, offering hope, counsel, welfare warmth, fellowship, melody, harmony, and snacks" (3). Hence, Willard's decision to build the prayer log means that he was searching for positivity in answer to what he witnessed, but ironically, this place becomes the exact opposite.

The next time this place is mentioned is after discovering Charlotte has cancer, which triggers his descent into madness and eventual suicide. He believes that by cleaning up the log (Pollock 43) and praying extensively to God, He might save her. Similar to Eleanor's case, Willard's action seems to stem from unresolved guilt, possibly linked to the atrociousness he witnessed during the war. The prayer log, as an encoded characteristic of the Southern culture, functions as an icon for repressed trauma. He and Arvin even spend "hours praying at the log every day" (Pollock 43). As time passes and Charlotte's condition worsens, Willard turns to more extreme methods, just as the house did with Eleanor: "Willard began picking up animals killed along the road: dogs, cats, raccoons, possums, groundhogs, deer", which he hangs in crosses around the prayer log (Pollock 45). Because the animals are dead, their corpses rot quickly, and there is a horrible smell, accompanied by ground "muddy with blood" (Pollock 45). Amidst this, Arvin gives up trying to fight against his need to stay clean and embraces fully trying to save his mother by the power of prayer, although she "kept fading" (Pollock 45).

In complete despair, eventually, Willard kills the landlord and uses his blood as a sacrifice, similar to what he did with other animals (Pollock 51). However, the most impactful death to Arvin is the death of a dog that appeared at the farmhouse that Arvin fed and named Jack. Willard "shoved Arvin away from the dog, then shot it between the eyes while the boy begged him not to do it. He dragged it into the woods and nailed it to one of the crosses" (Pollock 53). This act has an immense impact on Arvin. At the end of the novel, he finally buries the dog's bones, symbolizing his possible healing from trauma, as opposed to Eleanor. After Charlotte's death, Willard commits suicide by the prayer log, which at this point is horrifying:

> Animals in various states of decay hung all around them, some in the branches and others from tall wooden crosses. A dead dog with a leather collar around its neck was nailed up high to one of the crosses like some kind of hideous Christ-like figure. The head of a deer lay at the foot of another. (Pollock 68)

Despite the grotesqueness, Arvin answers the horrified officer in a calm voice, "'It's a prayer log . . . But it don't work'" (Pollock 68). From a cognitive point of view, Arvin's response represents a mind that has shut down in the face of complete chaos and feelings of fear. Because of his father's violent outbursts, he eventually dissociated in a way that allowed his survival, proving that his interface is, in reality, successful in protecting him. However, this situation has lasting effects on his identity since his mind is set to navigate challenges through violence, as observed by Willard's mother: "Though Arvin never caused her any serious trouble, Emma could easily see Willard in him, especially when it came to the fighting" (Pollock 107), something the next section of this chapter will discuss in more depth.

Since Arvin was eleven years old at the time of his parents' death, he moved to his paternal grandmother's house, where he lived until he was a teenager (Pollock 105). It is only at the end of the novel that he returns to the farmhouse, after having killed the preacher, Carl, and Sandy, only to find out that the "house burned down a couple year ago" (Pollock 247). He returns to the house, hoping to find closure before running away completely. Similar to Eleanor, who finds comfort in Hill House, albeit its oppressive quality, Arvin equally seems to find solace and sanctuary by returning to the place where his trauma started, reflecting the mind's obsession-compulsion with re-living traumatic events. Although the "brush was thicker now along the edge of the woods" (Pollock 253), Arvin is able to find the path to the house. His arrival is highly different from Eleanor's at Hill House because in her case, the path offered

resistance, almost as if her mind did not want her to go there, whereas in Arvin's case, there is slight resistance that is quickly overcome, suggesting that his mind is neither fragmented nor is his psyche about to die. His experience starts at the house, followed by the burying of Jack's remains at the log depicts his willingness to deal with and heal from intergenerational, collective trauma:

> The house was gone, just like the storekeeper had said. He set his bag down and walked in where the back door used to be. He continued on through the kitchen and down the hall to the room where his mother had died. . . . The barn was nothing now but a shell. All the wood siding had been torn off. The roof was rusted through in spots, the red paint faded and peeled away by the weather. Arvin stepped inside out of the sun, and there in a corner lay the feed bucket in which Willard had once carried his precious blood. (253)

The overgrown vegetation, marks of the passing of time, and decay are representative of Arvin's own process of processing trauma. Trauma remains unconscious, meaning that it is difficult to access it because it is hidden in the depths of the mind's architecture, echoing Caruth's argument about the irresponsibility of trauma. However, since the house is almost gone, there is a high probability that the building itself does not represent trauma as much as the prayer log does. As he finds his way there, the path to the prayer log is deteriorated, filled with "snakeroot and wild fern", and his father's crosses also stood out as damaged by time, full of rust (Pollock 254). As he reaches the log, he sees Jack's remains nailed to the cross, and he

> gathered up all the remains he could find on the ground—the thin ribs, the hipbones, a single paw—and pulled off the brittle pieces still attached to the cross. He laid them gently in a small pile. With the sharp end of a tree branch and his hands, he dug a hole in the moist, black dirt at the foot of the cross. He went down a foot or so, arranged everything carefully in the bottom of the grave. (254)

Given this fact, the symbolic burying of the dog's bones might be interpreted as different cognitive trauma responses. On one hand, his action might represent the psyche's attempt to bury something deeper inside the brain, even further into the unconscious, due to the trauma being too painful to process, and on the other hand, this action might constitute an act of processing trauma itself. Additionally, this trauma remains fragmented, as he finds scattered remains of the dog, as opposed to the whole body, signaling that although buried, it is most

probable that the trauma has not been fully processed. Hence, this part might demonstrate Arvin's effort to process and overcome trauma from his past.

The effort described above is not haphazard. It embodies the collective experience of the American people concerning war. Indeed, the farmhouse and the prayer log are only a fraction of the sense of the house presented in this interpretation. The house, as an anthropological concept, is not only a physical structure that provides shelter, but it is also a corporate institution defined by its material and immaterial capacity to be transmitted to descendants (Lévi-Strauss et al. 174). Therefore, if a house can be an immaterial concept, it means that the "house of Russell" is also open to interpretation. As mentioned previously, Arvin's character, besides individual trauma stemming from violence, also represents intergenerational trauma passed down by his father's experience in the war. In this sense, it is important to analyze the passages related to the horrors he witnessed in the Pacific and how the prayer log becomes an embodiment of those. Besides that, the excerpts provide context of how these characters also embody the Others created by the long feud between the South and North.

Between 1861 and 1865, the United States of America fought the American Civil War. According to Robert Kagan, this war was crucial to the development of America's way of war and the creation of a national identity (270). After the end of the Civil War, the North had to reconstruct the South in its image and saw the opportunities in "this civilizing project" (Kagan 271). By viewing the South as a "civilizing project", the North created a distinction between the regions, permitting them to apply the colonial discourse used by the Europeans to colonize other nations. Nayar defines colonial discourse as relying on the image of the Other as being savage and uncivilized: "Colonial discourse . . . is seen as offering particular kinds of images of the non-European: as savage, effeminate, primitive, vulnerable, child-like, superstitious, illiterate, apolitical, etc" (32). Thus, the representation of these characters as inferior is demonstrative of the collective perception of Americans toward the southern regions. However, the Russell family characters represent not only the repercussions of the American Civil War.

World War II is reflected indirectly in Arvin's character, insofar as his father served as an American soldier in the Pacific. Willard is deeply traumatized by what he experienced during the war. As a matter of fact, the Pacific is regarded as a highly atrocious battlefield, where the opposition between the uncivilized Other and the American Self has been highlighted. Martins argues that in the Pacific, due to its locations and mainly battles happening on islands, contact with the Japanese soldiers was mostly impossible, and that as a result, the Japanese were often depicted as animals, wild and uncivilized, in literature ("The Crusaders" 157-160; "Fiddle-Dee-Dee" 77-82), similarly to how various characters of *The Devil* also are. Because it was

crucial to represent the enemy in a horrible light to create more contrast with the "good" American soldier, some of the descriptions of what they did were extremely shocking and traumatizing, and such is the case of what Willard witnessed:

> On one of the Solomons, he [Willard] and a couple of other men from his outfit had run across a marine skinned alive by the Japanese and nailed to a cross made out of two palm trees. The raw, bloody body was covered with black flies. They could still see the man's heart beating in his chest. His dog tags were hanging from what remained of one of his big toes: Gunnery Sergeant Miller Jones. Unable to offer anything but a little mercy, Willard shot the marine behind the ear, and they took him down and covered him with rocks at the foot of the cross. The inside of Willard's head hadn't been the same since. (Pollock 12)

Here, it is noticeable how Willard carries the trauma of war throughout the rest of his life, passing it down to Arvin. Furthermore, the Japanese are depicted as viciously cruel men, who not only have skinned a man alive and left him to a slow, dreadful death, but they also seem to mock Christian beliefs by leaving the marine in a crucified position, resembling the death of Jesus.

However, the American soldiers also display ruthlessness when encountering the enemy by taking justice into their own hands and killing them:

> A couple of hours after they buried Miller Jones's flayed body, four starving Japanese soldiers with fresh bloodstains on their machetes came out of the rocks with their hands up in the air and surrendered. . . . the soldiers dropped to their knees and started begging or apologizing, he didn't know which. 'They tried to escape,' Willard lied to the sergeant later in the camp. 'We didn't have no choice.' (Pollock 14)

To kill them was a conscious, revengeful choice that marked Willard for the rest of his life. Willard's experience with graphic violence and death turned him into a violent man himself, and although he did not treat his wife aggressively since he was madly in love with her, he was rather violent with his son, especially when Charlotte developed cancer: "He'd [Willard] strike and kick the boy [Arvin], and then later sink into remorse" (Pollock 44). As seen by these examples, from an early age, Arvin's life is surrounded and determined by violence, war, and aggression, resulting in trauma.

In sum, both novels, albeit through different narratives, demonstrate how the house trope is capable of embodying not only cultural anxieties but also psychological ones. While the haunted house in *Hill House* is explicit from the outset, the haunted house in *The Devil* is more encoded., as the "hauntedness" is depicted not only through the farmhouse but also through the prayer log. In the latter or in both it is through repressed and intergenerational inherited trauma that the weight of collective trauma is depicted. Additionally, it is on these sites that both characters get attacked. For Eleanor, this place leads her to death, whereas for Arvin, it is where he is attacked and might have died but ultimately survives. Therefore, the house, once again, mimics the brain's attempt to resurface what stays repressed, hoping to process it successfully.

As seen in the second chapter of this dissertation, the Gothic's ability to depict traumatic events through traditional tropes, such as the haunted house, serves the purpose of depicting trauma through encoded symbols. What the Gothic Interface addresses here is that it is especially because of trauma's unrepresentable and unprocessable characteristic that our species uses this cognitive tool to help the mind process trauma. The house, as argued by Claude Lévi-Strauss et al., is "a corporate body holding an estate" (174), and it is a concept present in a wide variety of cultures. This concept becomes a filtered perception of reality that readers interpret and perceive in a way that reflects trauma's direct irrepresentability. By engaging with this recognizable Gothic motif, Jackson and Pollock reveal literature's capacity to re-imagine and reshape collective trauma perceptions by exposing the dangers lurking behind domestic spaces. Having established the role of the haunted house, this dissertation now proposes the analysis of another constant aspect of the Gothic tradition: death and violence.

3.6. Death and Violence

As a species, we want to survive. Hoffman's Theory of Perception argues that the interface is what helps us survive by adapting our perception of reality, not to veridicality but to simplicity. What is possible to conclude here is that death is to be avoided at all costs, because it means annihilation of identity. While Hoffman's argument is related to philosophical cognitive scaffolding, van der Kolk and Caruth add a psychoanalytic and biological perspective. Kolk's statement that the brain's obsession with attempting to prove that it is capable of keeping the body alive and Caruth's building on Freud's death drive intertwine with the Gothic's unique capability of helping to process trauma, as the latter argues:

> What one returns to, in the flashback, is not the incomprehensibility of the event of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival. . . . It is this incomprehensibility of survival, I would suggest, that is at the heart of Freud's formulation of the death drive. . . . that trauma is constituted not only by the destructive force of a violent event but by the very act of its survival. If we are to register the impact of violence we cannot, therefore, locate it only in the destructive moment of the past, but in an ongoing survival that belongs to the future. ("Violence and Time" 25)

From the repetition to the annihilation of identity, there remains one possible conclusion: that the possibility of death is in itself a traumatic event. Death, as corroborated by several works, is a central motif in the Gothic tradition. Indeed, in the introduction to *The Gothic and Death*, Carol Margaret Davison states that "The threat of death, in different manifestations, has since served as a key feature in Gothic works across various media (1). Since the Gothic thrives on embodying themes of survival and annihilation through symbolic forms, it becomes an ideal medium through which these paradoxes are displayed. Having briefly established the relation between Gothic, death, and cognition, the next section analyses the theme of death in *The Haunting of Hill House*.

3.6.1. *The Haunting of Hill House*

As previously discussed, the novel's tragic outcome is established at the outset. From the ominous first paragraph to the moment Eleanor's need for Hill House is first mentioned, "Eleanor had been waiting for something like Hill House" (Jackson 7), and the first time the quote "Journeys end in lovers meeting" (Jackson 36) is written, to the last time Eleanor thinks of it (Jackson 245) it is impossible to overlook the concern with death. While Eleanor's death has been previously interpreted as a return to the initial trauma of the daughter and mother bond (Roberts 67-8), in this dissertation it has been argued that her death symbolized the traumatic oppression felt by women in the 1950s, by relying on Reid. With frequent episodes of daydreaming that resemble dissociation, Eleanor's fantasies are often filled with images of salvation, occasionally by men: "Then, coming down from the hills, there will be a prince riding bright in green and silver with a hundred bowmen riding behind him, pennants stirring, horses tossing, jewels flashing…" (Jackson 20).

This fantasy is not uncommon, especially in a society that placed value on the financial security men could provide for women in a time where they were expected to be supports, rather than highly achieving independent career women. These ideas were propagated, for example, through children's fairy tales (Lieberman 183-95). Eleanor's case is similar, as she spent the last eleven years taking care of "her invalid mother", and hoped that "someday something would happen" (Jackson 6-8). Additionally, after marriage, women changed their last name, symbolically forfeiting their identity, further contributing to the notion of death. Eleanor seems aware of this, as during her meeting with a family whose girl wants her "cup of stars", she projects her own desires and expectations of life and tells the girl, "Don't do it . . . insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again" (Jackson 22). Reflecting the atmosphere of the novel, this scene demonstrates how Eleanor's ambivalence in wanting to be saved, as well as understanding she has a right to agency, is what leads her to her death.

Her projections stemming from a fragmented mind are also seen in her thoughts about the house, for example, when she thinks that "her deep unwillingness to touch Hill House for the first time came directly from the vivid feeling that it was waiting for her, evil, but patient" (Jackson 36). Since the house, as discussed before, is a conceptual symbol into which writers project meaning, it is understandable why Eleanor attributes human features such as being "evil" and "waiting for her", despite animate characteristics being reserved for humans.

Moreover, her inability to perceive the world in a way that guarantees her survival, as opposed to Arvin's, is consistent with systematic exposure to traumatic situations, such as the death of her father and her tumultuous relationship with her mother, whom she hated, suggesting a weaker interface. Cruz et al., in their study related to developmental trauma, concluded that children who have been exposed to significant adversity are more likely to develop PTSD and experience a noteworthy disruption in their cognitive trajectory (1). They conclude that "Disturbances in attachment, emotion regulation, self-perception, and worldwide assumptions are precipitated by trauma and cause a broad range of correlated psychological and medical disorders" (8). Eleanor experiences all of these dysregulations throughout the novel through her social ineptness and progressive dichotomous thinking:

> I think I'm going to cry, she thought, like a child sobbing and wailing, I don't like it here . . . What did I do; did I make a fool of myself? Were they laughing at me? . . . Eleanor, running and laughing, came around a curve of the veranda to find Theodora going in another door, and stopped, breathless. . . . We can't afford to have anyone but

> Theodora in the centre of the stage, Eleanor thought; if Eleanor is going to be the outsider, she is going to be it all alone. She reached out and patted Theodora's head and said, "Thanks. I guess I was kind of shaky for a minute." (Jackson 37, 94, 110, 148)

Through this revealing sequence of thoughts, it is possible to observe Eleanor's unstable notion of self. Her feelings escalate quickly depending on how she interprets the actions of others around her, which impacts not only her perception of reality, for example, Hill House getting more aggressive, but also her self-esteem. When comforted by the group, her first reaction is to become aggressive and attack the person she thinks is attacking her, as in the case of Theodora. The ambivalence demonstrates a fragmented mind that seems to be, with each occurrence, getting closer to annihilation. The closer the annihilation is, the more dramatic, perception-altering, and borderline delusional the scenes get, as it is impossible to understand if they are happening or if her perception is modified to the point of hallucinations.

For example, when walking together, Eleanor becomes "suddenly absurdly sure that Theodora had put out a hand to her unseen", and tells her, "'I'm no good at talking to people and saying things'", followed by "Theodora laughed. 'What *are* you good at? she demanded. 'Running away?" (Jackson 174). What at first seems a rather jarring statement, is immediately followed by "Nothing irrevocable had yet been spoken, but there was only the barest margin of safety left them; each of them moving delicately along the outskirts of an open question, and once spoken, such a question – as 'Do you love me?' – could never be answered or forgotten" (Jackson 174). What is interesting is that Eleanor experiences cognitive disruption, emotional dysregulation, and disturbances of attachment all at once. All appears well, but in a moment, something is triggered, and Eleanor imagines that the person closest to her in Hill House secretly loathes her and sees her as a person unworthy of value. To this adds the unexpected and rather incongruous question of whether they love each other, whereby her mind's link to value and love is exposed. Her lack of normal attachments is put into evidence, further emphasizing her brain's inability to process trauma. However, her brain's obsession with putting her in situations where her fears of lack of love and acceptance are underscored mimics Freud's death drive conception that Caruth builds on.

It is not only Eleanor's cognitive and psychological conditions that are responsible for her demise. During the last instances of the novel, the reader witnesses Eleanor's death, which until then had been ruled a suicide. Mona Ali argues that Eleanor's intention in ending her trip in the violent annihilation of self seems previously planned through repetitions such as "I am really doing it, I am really doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really really

really doing it by myself" and her anguished thought of why they do not stop her (Ali 505; Jackson 245-46). While intentional, Ali also adds that in her mind, Eleanor cannot fathom ceasing to exist since it is a contradictory notion (Ali 506). This further cements the brain's necessity to keep the body alive. Nevertheless, as demonstrated throughout this section, her mind, similar to Hill House, is "not sane", which explains why she so easily overcomes the contradiction. The extent of this insanity might be measured by the degree of violence in her death, as she crashes her car into a tree. This violence is not meaningless and serves the purpose of depicting the weight of trauma itself.

Indeed, Davison argues there is a tendency in contemporary Anglo-American gothic to depict more violent scenarios related to a cultural phenomenon, since these texts rely on the grotesque "very self-reflexively, almost daring their viewers, who are violence- and death-saturated as a result of sensational news and other media, to watch bloody, gruesome horrors unfold as the protagonist hovers on the brink of death" (14-15). Hence, Eleanor's violent death embodies the crushing load of a life lived in trauma while also reflecting the cultural reality of contemporary fiction in presenting trauma in a cathartic form, corroborating the Gothic Interface's central argument. Her death is the unescapable final stage of the death drive, which renders her survival impossible because it remains the only solution for her fragmented self. Her inept interface is not capable of keeping her alive because death is the sole resolution through which her fragmented self might overcome the repetitive trauma loop cycle. Where Eleanor lacks success, Arvin possesses it. His character uses violence as a means to overcome annihilation, as opposed to other characters such as Carl, Sandy, Bodecker, Roy, and Theodore. *The Devil All the Time*, though to a greater extent, also situates violence in a cultural way that reflects the current dissatisfaction with the direction the United States is headed. Through death, graphic violence, and sexual brutality, this novel embodies the collective trauma of a region plagued by war and oblivion.

3.6.2. *The Devil All the Time*

Besides the intergenerational violence inherited by Arvin, this novel features several instances where violence is taken to the extreme, ending in death. However, the first violent instant in *The Devil* takes place in the first few pages when Willard tells Arvin that he does not "'condone no fighting just for the hell of it, but sometimes you're just too easygoing'", and adds "'Them boys might be bigger than you, but the next time on of'em starts his shit, I want

you to finish it" (Pollock 2). Although Willard mentions that he is against gratuitous violence, it is clear that he encourages his son to use violence when there seems to be a justification for it. During this conversation taking place in the prayer log, two hunters pass their farmhouse, and not knowing that they were listening, one of them jokes that "now would be a good time to pay his old lady a visit. She probably laying over there in bed right now keeping it warm for me'" (Pollock 3). Nevertheless, he does not act impulsively and waits for an opportunity to attack the men while ensuring that Arvin is exposed to this episode, telling him that he only must "pick the right time" (Pollock 6-7). In this sense, while Eleanor's suicide might be interpreted as a breakdown of her perceptual system, Arvin's violence is integrated into his cognition as a defense mechanism to guarantee survival. Hence, in this scene, there is a glimpse of not only one of Arvin's continuous exposures to violence, which eventually shapes his personality and perception of the world, but also of how violence and death are physical materializations of a collective trauma stemming from alienation, marginalization, and fear.

Indeed, the use of the violence motif is not fortuitous. Drawing on several scholars, Bjerre demonstrates that Southern Gothic literature possesses a long-standing link to violence, decay, and death, stemming from cultural anxieties (78-9). This idea of the South results in a simplistic view that emphasizes the working white southern male as redneck (Reed 40), further situating the South as inferior. Additionally, several scholars have linked the resurgence of violence in genres such as gothic to the heightened state of fear and instability progressing ever since the traumatic 9/11 (Liénard-Yeterian and Monnet 2). Danel Olson also argues that contemporary gothic "invokes all those concerns articulated in contemporary trauma theory of the last 30 years" and that "the Gothic might lend itself now as the most useful and appropriate mode for representing terror post 9/11" (20). Moreover, characters might also echo pre 9/11 concerns (Olson 23) that are represented through exacerbated violence to underscore the collective cultural state, which are equally present in *The Devil*, such as "a return to organized religion, a belief in spirits, a call for vengeance, psychotherapy, substance abuse, splitting with a partner, rampant sex with nearby strangers, and bloody torture of unlikely suspects" (20).

Several instances in the novel depict the repercussions of organized religion and spiritual beliefs, as mentioned by Olson. For example, Arvin's grandmother's religious belief that Willard's unwillingness to marry Helen will result in tragedy ultimately guides the entire plot. Having promised God that if he brought her son back from war, he would marry Helen, Emma's concerns are somewhat put to rest when Helen marries Roy, a preacher from out of town. As Helen gives her the news, she stands with Willard's letter and thinks about "the promise she's been unable to keep. She'd been dreading a violent accident, or some horrible

disease, but this was good news. Maybe things were going to turn out right after all" (Pollock 26). Unfortunately, as discussed in the house section, Willard dies a violent death, and so does Helen. After being bitten by a spider in one of his preaching sessions, Roy is convinced that "he could raise the dead" (Pollock 29). After some convincing from his cousin Theodore, who did not like Helen, Roy decides to kill Helen in order to revive her. The gruesome description adds to the violent atmosphere of the novel, also connected to death:

> Thinking he was being affectionate, she turned to kiss him just as he plunged the sharp point deep into the side of her neck. He let go of her and she fell sideways, then rose up, grabbing frantically for the screwdriver. When she jerked it out of her neck, blood sprayed from the hole and covered the front of Roy's shirt. Theodore watched out the window as she tried to crawl away. She went only a few feet before falling forward into the leaves and flopping about for a minute or two. He heard her call out Lenora's name several times. He lit a cigarette and waited a few minutes before he hauled himself out of the car. (Pollock 32)

After this incident, Roy spends three hours trying to revive her, obviously not successfully. He finally says, "'Jesus, I think I killed her'", to which Theodore answers "'She's dead, all right'" (Pollock 32). Ridden with guilt, Roy seems to come out of his delusional religiosity, and from this point forward fully assumes his façade as being fake. This death is one of many that illustrate that there are no deaths without violence in *The Devil All the Time*.

Moreover, the obsession with religious corruption stems from a cultural characteristic, as previously discussed, but it also might be interpreted in the light of a traumatic response to 9/11. Due to the Islamist association with the attacks of 9/11, it is plausible that, in response, the importance of Christianity began to be heightened. Then, it is logically consistent that, in response to the heightened Christianity, several media portrayed the institution of the church as corrupted.

In Roy's case, the situation seems different since he hallucinates talking to God, genuinely thinking he held the capacity to bring people from the dead. However, the pedophile character, Preacher Preston Teagardin, fully depicts the corruption of the institution of the church, as he takes advantage of the poor and young women. It is through his first interaction with Emma and Arvin that he is framed as materially concerned with wealth by publicly humiliating her choice to bring chicken livers to his welcome party (Pollock 172-3). After this incident, Emma says that she has "never been so embarrassed in my whole life", followed by

Arvin's remark, "'Hell, Grandma, that fool ain't no preacher.' Arvin said. 'He's bad as them they got on the radio begging for money'" (Pollock 174).

Although his comment foreshadows the preacher's monstrosity, it is his abuse of Lenora that propels him to murder Teagardin. He seduces her by coercing her into sexual intercourse with the promise of helping her become more attractive, resulting in her getting pregnant (Pollock 178-84). When confronting him with this situation, he tells her, "'How could I be the daddy? I've never touched you, not once'" and advises her to "get rid of it" while also thinking how another teenage girl "had proved to be the finest piece he'd had since the early days with Cynthia" (Pollock 185). As a response to her situation, Lenora commits suicide, fueling Arvin's stalking that culminates in him killing Teagardin, as he learns that the preacher is a sexual predator: "A fragment of the bullet came out right above his nose and landed with a ping on the dashboard. His big body pitched forward, and his face banged against the steering wheel" (Pollock 180). Again, the violence associated with death appears as a materialization of collective trauma stemming from the country's long-standing relationship to religion. This circles back to Olson's argument regarding the Gothic's encapsulation of previous concerns of organized religion and a call for vengeance, only now rendered extreme.

Another aspect mentioned is related to sexual violence and bloody torture, which are also present in the characters of Carl and Sandy. For twelve years, they pick up hitchhikers, who they then force to have sexual intercourse with Sandy while Carl takes pictures, and then murder them:

> He called Sandy the *bait*, and she called him the *shooter*, and they both called the hitchhikers the *models*. . . . After they carried and dragged the army boy's naked body a few yards (74) . . . Personal items had to be disposed of properly. . . . Carl thought about the way that Sandy had wrapped her arms around the army boy . . . Six was the number of models they had worked with this trip; . . . Then Carl suggested that they got out of the car, and while he spread a blanket on the ground, she [Sandy] reluctantly began taking off her clothes. . . . Carl took his time and managed at least twenty photos of junk sticking out of various places: lightbulbs and clothes hangers and soup cans. The light was starting to fade by the time he set the camera down and finished things off. He wiped his hands and knife on the boy's shirt . . . They folded the boy double and crammed him inside the refrigerator, then Carl insisted on one last photo, one of Sandy in her red panties and bra getting ready to close the door. He squatted down and aimed the camera. (71, 75, 76, 79, 85, 86)

The structural nomination of their roles projects a ritualistic component onto their murders. Furthermore, the attribution of the term "models" to their victims allows for a dissociation from their humanity, rendering their crime cognitively less horrible. In addition, the disposal of the body acts as an attempt to erase their existence, while Carl's obsession with photographing the act and keeping the photographs suggests the mind's inability to move on, to return to the loop of trauma. Particularly important is Carl's concern with catching the exact right light, which fades, emphasizing the fragmented relationship between trauma and time. Hence, photography functions as a materialization of death and violence.

Indeed, Hannah R. Bacon observes that photography's ongoing relation to depicting trauma through a fetishized lens is due to how "the camera came to occupy an elevated status in its ability to capture, represent, endlessly duplicate, and disseminate the real—and thus also to capture, represent, and repeat the traumatic event" (101). Bacon highlights the photographic images' temporal quality by stating that it is able to capture a particular moment in time that keeps resurfacing with every view of the photography, "making the past or spatially remote present" (106). She continues by suggesting that through the media, people are able to relate to the violence and trauma present in them, not because they resemble their own traumatic experiences, but because of their symbolic capacity (109). This underscores the encoding characteristic of Hoffman's perception theory while also supporting the Gothic Interface in the sense that Carl's grotesque relationship to death and violence mimics the brain's necessity in keeping it alive. Since Carl's character seems to be fixated on death as a means of coping with his own, his mind found an encoded form through which it might process the concept of death. This form is extremely violent, propelling the narrator to comment that "To his [Carl] thinking it [his ritualistic killing] was the one true religion, the thing he'd been searching for all his life. Only in the presence of death could he feel the presence of something like God" (Pollock 76).

Unfortunately for Carl and Sandy, Arvin is the last hitchhiker they pick up. Running away after killing the preacher, and as he is returning to his traumatic house and prayer log, Arvin shoots Carl, as he tried to coerce him into having sexual intercourse with Sandy: "Before it registered in Carl's mind what the boy held in his hand, the first blast had torn through his stomach" (Pollock 231). His death is highly symbolically violent as it suggests he is descending into hell: "He felt his body start to sink into a hole that seemed to be opening up beneath him in the ground, and it scared him, that feeling, the way it sucked the breath right out of him" (Pollock 231).

After this incident, Arvin finally arrives at the farmhouse, where he is quickly chased by Sandy's police brother, Bodecker, who is trying to kill him. As said above, Arvin shoots him

and stays with him as “One bullet had shattered his wrist, and the other had gone in under his arm. From the looks of it, at least one of his lungs was pierced” (Pollock 260). This, once again, is a violent death at the hands of Arvin, and might be interpreted as a physical materialization of his trauma loop, since he continues to propagate his father’s ideals of violence. This time is different, however. As mentioned previously, the mind’s compulsion with re-enacting the initial traumatic event is seen as an attempt to overcome the trauma by successfully protecting the individual from annihilation. For Arvin, this is the case. As he kills Bodecker and buries his dog’s last remains, his mind had finally succeeded in keeping him safe, in the place where it initially became fragmented. His final action in the novel suggests peace, as the narrator observes that “He would never see this place again”, as he begins “walking north toward Paint Creek” thinking that “If he was lucky, someone would give him a ride” (Pollock 261), implying, that finally, to some extent, and through gruesome violence he was able to overcome his trauma. Death and violence also materialize through fragmentation. For example, in her article about the fragmented narrative in Morrison, Vonnegut, and Spiegelman, Mariyam Farzand states that “The examination of trauma through fragmented narratives invites readers to engage empathetically with the psychological and social dimensions of memory, identity, and historical suffering”, highlighting the connection between the reader and their cultural and historical-based perception (23). She equally adds that through this technique, the authors expose how trauma “disrupts linearity in storytelling and challenges conventional forms of representation” (23). Thus, in Eleanor’s case, this fragmentation, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, is mostly in her head: as her mind collapses, so does her perception of reality and time. In Arvin’s case, this is shown through the novel's fragmented structure. Starting with the prologue (1), which depicts a moment from Arvin’s childhood, *The Devil All the Time* is then divided into six parts: Sacrifice, On the Hunt (69), Orphans and Ghosts (103), Winter (133), Preacher (165), and Serpents (203). It is in part one, Sacrifice, that Arvin’s story intertwines with Sandy and Carl’s through her brother, Bodecker, as he is the police officer responsible for finding Willard’s dead body. After this, their stories separate, coming together only in the last part, Serpents, where Arvin finally murders them. This fragmentation serves a similar purpose to *The Haunting of Hill House*, as it echoes the fragmentation felt not only through individual trauma, but also the post-war and post-9/11 collective trauma. Hence, Eleanor’s fragmented inner monologues mirror trauma’s disruption of time and self in the chaos of a culturally oppressive history, whereas in *The Devil All the Time*, a multi-threaded, fragmented structure reflecting the collective trauma of war and hate stands out. Fragmentation emerges as an adaptive

narrative, supporting readers' acceptance process by encoding meaning to tone down complexity, or, in Hoffman's words, to simplify perceptions.

3.7. Conclusion

As a highly interdisciplinary approach, trauma studies have merged with several genres, such as Gothic (Joyce 219), allowing us to reflect on our history, culture, and inheritance (Davison 15). According to Luckhurst, through gothic tropes, trauma studies might be useful to examine tumultuous times because fantasy, although possibly a form of escapism, is also related to history ("Beyond trauma" 11, 19). Thus, much has been discussed regarding the Gothic's suitability, especially in the last two chapters, as well as by several scholars, meaning that there is no doubt that the Gothic tradition is particularly appropriate to analyze past and current collective and individual trauma. This argument has been one of the main reasons responsible for the structure of this chapter.

Nevertheless, during the research phase, little was found regarding Cognitive Literary Studies and the Gothic, and nothing linking Hoffman's Theory of Perception to literature's role in the human interface. For example, in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, Patrick C. Hogan argues that neuroscience has been applied to literary texts and that literature is capable of helping understand emotion (273, 287). In the same work, Natalie Philips demonstrated the differences in neurological responses to pleasure reading and close reading by observing the processes through an MRI machine, concluding "that there is a way for literary scholars to enter into a productive dialogue with cognitive science – not by raw importing or by applying its insight, but in fact shaping its studies; reshaping its methods" (73). However, specifically, the Gothic narrative's potential to be interpreted in the light of a cognitive process that might aid in processing trauma is not mentioned anywhere. Finally, although James Phelan analyzes Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" from a literary cognitive perspective in his chapter, he does so based on the rhetorical narrative theory, and not the Gothic (120-33). As a result, this chapter has attempted to establish the Gothic Interface as a way of bringing together the concepts discussed in this dissertation, to bridge the gap between Trauma studies, Gothic studies, and Cognitive Studies.

Conclusion

In difficult times marked by political instability, a growing sense of lack of security, apparent regression in women's rights, and the popularized threat of the Middle Eastern Other, it is no surprise that the Gothic genre has experienced emerging significance in the last decades of the 21st century. In addition, difficult times foment trauma, as during this period several impactful events occurred, as for example, 9/11. Indeed, as argued here, there is a strong correlation between the Gothic and Trauma, since "trauma implies a crisis of representation, of history and truth. It remains in the mind like an intruder or a ghost, foregrounding the disjunction between the present and a primary experience of the past that can never be captured" (Nadal 178).

If previously the Gothic genre was considered prone to sensationalism (Howells 1), several authors, alongside this dissertation, have attempted to prove the opposite. Punter has argued that "exploring Gothic is also exploring fear and seeing various ways in which terror breaks through the surface of literature" (*The Literature of Terror* 18). To examine how trauma affects literature and vice versa, the first chapter of this dissertation dealt with the definition of trauma, which, in simplified terms, might be defined as anything that constitutes an event disruptive enough to change the cerebral pathways, resulting in a heightened response in the face of fear. Several approaches have been discussed, such as Freud's psychoanalysis theories, Caruth's traditional Trauma theory, and Pluralistic Trauma Theory, which were then applied to mostly Gothic texts to exemplify how narrative forms, among other characteristics, mimic trauma's fragmented and disruptive quality. How trauma is passed down from one generation to another, creating a collective myth of origins, as argued by Hirsch, is of particular importance.

Linking Trauma to the Gothic genre served the purpose of demonstrating that this narrative genre, indeed, evolved to reflect the collective and individual trauma of the periods in which the novels were written. On top of that, the Gothic has evolved not only to address certain topics of cultural concerns, but it has also evolved to mimic the atmosphere of the current world state. The more violent our reality becomes, the more media depict reality as violent, i.e., *The Devil All the Time*, The *X* Trilogy. However, the link between what is reality and what is represented in literature and movies and TV shows is not aimless, as it serves the purpose of helping the collective to process both collective and individual trauma, in the age of political instability and perpetual insecurity. To corroborate the hypothesis, the last chapter

focused on establishing a relation between Hoffman's Theory of Perception while drawing on cognitive literary studies.

As a result, it has proposed the Gothic Interface framework by incorporating cognitive studies and the theory of perception in trauma and Gothic studies, leading to increased interdisciplinarity. Through the analysis of certain characters and their relation to the Gothic motifs of fragmentation, house, death and violence, this dissertation attempted to analyze not only their cultural, historical, cognitive, and psychological aspects, but also those same aspects in the meta context of the encoding of cultural anxieties through the Gothic narrative. Certain Gothic motifs mirror trauma's modus operandi, such as the house.

As a physical materialization of trauma, the house embodies the inheritance of previous traumatic events and their effects on the present. Although *The Devil All the Time* and *The Haunting of Hill House* were published 50 years apart from each other, it is possible to observe two things: 1) the Gothic has evolved to a more violent approach, which might stem from current violent times of post 9/11, and 2) that although there has been a change in approach, the Gothic still maintains its mimicking and encoding quality by applying similar tropes and motifs, such as the house, death and violence. Both novels emphasize historical and contemporary configurations of trauma through the house, violence, and death, underscoring how the Gothic's cognitive and symbolic modes retain the ability to influence beyond the literary world, affecting cultural and historical narratives that would otherwise escape representation.

As an original framework, the Gothic Interface is born out of an attempt to synthesize several existing areas into a more interdisciplinary approach, as has been done, for example, with trauma studies. In addition, due to the scope of this dissertation, it was not possible to apply this framework to a wider range of objects of study; however, it would be interesting to analyze how it manifests by using a more extensive number of novels, movies and TV shows. By doing so, this project could provide more useful information for literary studies, trauma studies, and psychology studies. It could also be possible to bring this project into an even more integrative perspective by adding statistical data from self-reports regarding whether subjects, for example, undergo any transformation after reading Gothic novels. Furthermore, in Philips' study, it was concluded that it is possible to observe how the subjects manifest different responses regarding pleasure reading or close reading through MRI screening and behaviors (71), which enables a more cross-disciplinary approach to take place. She points out that hard-science fields work together to develop a new language for research on the brain (73). Thus, with further interdisciplinary approaches, it would be possible to reach a more comprehensive

depth of research regarding the Gothic Interface, our perception of trauma in literature, and how the Gothic genre influences the processing of trauma.

Ultimately, what remains concealed in the shadows of our limited knowledge of trauma is the motive behind our reason to seek further wisdom about it.

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