

NECESSARY EVILS: THE ROLE OF HORROR IN MODERN AND
CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

by

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To my wife, Kathi. I love you.

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by

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In my extensive studies of horror, I have found that the genre of horror has typically not been taken seriously in its own right. This can be extended to the occurrence of horror in other types of literature. Horror, if recognized at all, is viewed as a component of the story, and not necessarily as significant or as relevant as other aspects of the book. This dissertation approaches the problem of how literary horror can, genre or otherwise, be recognized as a part of legitimate and influential academic study and why such study is important. To do so, I examine multiple works of both genre horror and literary horror, using established literary theories to analyze and understand these written works. I also examine multiple works not classified as horror yet contain instances of significant horror to show that horror exists past the genre. I utilize literary theories such as the uncanny, the monstrous, Kristeva's theory of abjection and the Jungian shadow to show the literary merits of these works.

To not read horror is to ignore aspects of life that act as a mirror reflecting society and individual fears at any point in time. Such willful evasion can be detrimental. Dismissing horror as merely entertainment avoids the social and cultural deceits it can expose. Horror is an interpretation of

what is both desired and feared in our lives. Its omnipresence makes it critical to be understood as a vehicle used to acknowledge and understand our fears, and ultimately determine the best way to handle them.

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INTRODUCTION

Horror existed in some of the earliest written records long before it was classified as a literary genre of its own – for example, in the tale of Beowulf conquering the monster, in children’s fairy tales with the hero saving the Sleeping Beauty, and in foundational religious works such as the Bible. However, the horror genre established in literature and film has historically been viewed as “popular” literature or lowbrow work that caters to the masses, a form of entertainment unsuitable for a more educated and discerning populace. The existing scholarship on horror in literature has primarily been on the Gothic and some of the horror “classics,” which, in most cases, are not classified as horror until years after initial publication. The amount of scholarly study on horror films far exceeds any done on horror literature, or more importantly to my argument, horror in literature. Much of the scholarship on horror emerges from genre fiction. Even when a text contains undeniable elements of horror like monstrous human actions, behavior, and social structures, such acts within canonical literature are either not viewed as horror per se or are viewed as merely one aspect of a more important story. I believe, however, that horror is not just an aspect of life nor a mass-produced genre but an integral component of life and literature and that many of our best writers have relied upon it as a necessary component of their work.

While this dissertation will neither examine horror in the gothic or film nor examine horror as a self-contained genre, it will take that tradition of horror scholarship and make the case that horror is central to mainstream North American literary fiction. By utilizing different literary theories such as the abject, the uncanny, the fantastic, and the Jungian shadow, I will

show that these theories about horror not only contribute to the existing scholarly work but expand upon our understanding of the literary practice.

The scholarly work that has been done on literary horror can primarily be found in three sources – Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*, and H.P. Lovecraft’s essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature.” Carroll focuses primarily on the aesthetics of horror and what he calls the paradox of horror, which poses the question of how a person can be frightened or scared by what one knows does not exist and how pleasure can be taken from this horror. Carroll examines horror starting from the first recognized work in the horror genre – Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1765 – to 1990, when his book was published. He analyzes and provides information about horror over the centuries. He also delves into the subgenres of horror, such as body horror, psychological horror, and gothic horror – the most prevalent form of horror and, consequently, the most analyzed. Carroll’s work is the preeminent scholarly landmark in horror because of the sheer amount of his knowledge of the genre and its works, his philosophical perspective and examination of the analytic aesthetics of horror, and his study of the emotions generated by horror. I believe this work is limited by his belief that horror must contain some type of supernatural monster. In my opinion, human behavior can be monstrous without being supernatural; similarly, psychological horror and fear can exist only in oneself, even when in an idyllic setting or surrounded by friends and loved ones. This dissertation argues that horror can exist in any place at any time to anybody in any story, particularly in North American literature.

Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* is arguably the first true literary theory focused on horror. Before Kristeva, criticism that examines horror – such as

Lacanianism, gender studies, and culture studies – is more generic. Kristeva develops an explanation of the fear of the abject, the fear of something that causes disorder or chaos. This concept states that one is disgusted and horrified when what was once inside a body is now outside the body. It is our human reaction (horror, vomiting, expulsion of bodily fluids) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between the self and the other. What was normal in the world has changed or is gone. Kristeva’s primary example is the corpse – the symbol of the separation of life from death, a reminder of our limited existence, what Kristeva calls “death infecting life” (Kristeva 4). However, other items can elicit the same reaction: an open wound, feces, sewage, and even the congealed skin that forms on liquid food such as gravy. As blood is one of the most explicit forms of bodily fluid that is supposed to stay inside of a body, the multiple aspects of horror tend to regularly invoke blood coming out from a body, such as let by a vampire or a serial killer. Many of these hemorrhages end in death for a character or characters in the story – again, a common component of a result in the interaction with the horrific. However, Kristeva’s theory is limited: to be considered horrific, there must be an environment with societal, physical, or cultural boundaries that demand acceptance because it is violating these boundaries that instill horror. Like Carroll’s monsters, these limitations and boundaries do not exist in every situation. The horrible can exist in an environment that does not change and yet can still instill fear in the reader.

Even though H.P. Lovecraft would not be recognized as a master of horror until after his death, his essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature” is viewed as one of the finest historical surveys of horror literature. Published in 1927, it analyzes horror as it appeared in ancient literature, the Renaissance, the Gothic, and the contemporary. He does this not just as an author

of original fiction but also as an analyst with deep knowledge of horror. In addition, he explains horror and separates its higher level of physical fear from what he calls the mundanely gruesome and claims that it instills genuine fear rather than describes only the disgusting, or as Kristeva has it, the abject. The first sentence in Lovecraft's essay is one of the most quoted sentences in horror analysis: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft 25). Of course, Lovecraft's analysis focuses solely on horror literature published before 1927. Despite its continued relevance, there is now a century's worth of literature that does not all fall into the different areas of horror he analyzes, and my dissertation, therefore, seeks to contextualize the study of horror and its role in significant canonical literature.

The first chapter explains the fear of the abject, as explained in Kristeva's work. This fear is the human reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by losing the distinction between the self and the other. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* illustrates this in the character of Pecola and her "rejection" of her own eyes and her desperate need for blue ones, ending with her insanity. As the reader experiences this with Pecola and hears it in Claudia's observation of the abject horror: "A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 204). Even more examples of the fear of the abject appear in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, a novel about a young investment banker who, in his efforts to be the best, kills everyone in his way. He then broadens his scope to include others that he feels are unworthy of his attention but whom he entices to his apartment so he can kill them in a myriad of ways. His rejection of what is normal in society and catering to his violent desires shows a depth of the

abject unseen in most novels. As he cannibalizes one of his victims, the thought goes through his head that “it does sporadically penetrate how unacceptable some of what I’m doing actually is; I just remind myself that this thing, this girl, this meat, is nothing” (Ellis 345). His downward spiral into worsening depravity only increases until the book ends with the faint comfort that all of what the reader has witnessed may be just the thoughts of an unwell individual.

The second chapter explains Freud’s theory of the uncanny, of what is frightening because it is unknown. His concepts of the *unheimlich* and the *heimlich* - of what is familiar and known compared to what is unknown and, therefore, something that we fear – anticipate Lovecraft’s observations. Examples of the uncanny can be found in works such as Shirley Jackson’s *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, a story about two women with different ideas of safety. One of them killed a family member, and their fellow townspeople are afraid of them. Overcome by this fear, they destroy the girls’ house. It is no surprise that the girls want to stay inside: “What place would be better for us than this? Who wants us outside? The world is full of terrible people” (Jackson 78). The uncanny works for both. Even when initial efforts are made to bridge the gap, the fear of the unknown – how will someone act, am I safe, can I find safety again – is ever-present in the book. The uncanny can also be seen in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the story of Scout and her interaction with and understanding of Boo Radley. The mysterious Boo Radley, a neighbor of Scout’s, is described in multiple horrific ways simply because no one knows him. He is a personification of the uncanny, and this can be seen in Jem’s description of Boo, even though he has never seen him:

Boo was about six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that’s why his hands were bloodstained—if you ate an

animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time. (Lee 14)

It isn't until the end of the book, when Scout and Jem are saved by Boo that she sees him for who he really is – still somewhat unknown but not to the monstrous level initially described.

The third chapter begins with Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic. It is like the uncanny, yet it adds the component of not just the unknown but fear of the inexplicable or impossible – aspects of the supernatural. This may be in the form of a monster, such as described by Carroll, or even more inexplicable, such as a ghost or interaction with the dead. As Todorov explains, "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (Todorov 25). Morrison's *Beloved* can be seen as an example of this theory in practice. The ghost of Beloved is the supernatural component of the story; she was killed as a baby, but she appears out of the water as a fully grown woman, and she slowly, over time, sucks the life out of her mother. She remains part of the fantastic even after she disappears, and the last section of Morrison's book tells how everyone made an effort to forget her "like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep" because "it was not a story to pass on," even though the novel is a story passed on to the reader (Morrison, *Beloved* 324). The fantastic can also be seen in Victor LaValle's *The Changeling*, showing the necessity of the fantastic in literature. The story begins with the creation of a family unit yet foreshadows possible issues in that "The wildness had only begun" (LaValle 7). Throughout most of the book, family units are shown to be havens of safety and security. Based on historical events, this fantastic shows not just the absolute horror of a parent losing a child but

also the horror experienced by the supernatural ghosts that inhabit the bardo that they may never escape. What appears to be postpartum depression felt by Emma about her son Brian escalates to her murder of her child. It begins with her in the middle of the struggle of the fantastic – the exhausted mother seeing supposedly impossible things. Emma admits to Kim that Brian may not be her son: “Maybe it’s his eyes...Or the way he puckers his lips? He looks like the Brian I gave birth to, but it’s like he’s someone else. When I hold him with my eyes closed I can almost feel the difference” (LaValle 115). The fantastic shows that not everything is as it appears.

The fourth chapter analyzes Carl Jung’s concept of the shadow, which is a part of the primordial aspect of our humanity – dark because it tends to consist predominantly of primitive, negative, socially, or religiously depreciated human emotions and impulses. Humans experience sexual lust, power strivings, selfishness, greed, envy, anger, or rage, yet we often suppress them from our consciousness. Whatever we deem as evil, inferior, or unacceptable and deny in ourselves becomes part of the shadow (Diamond), and that shadow has an undeniably real power to embody and create horror. Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* shows how this human shadow takes over the Glanton gang and causes their horrendous slaughtering and scalping for money of the Native Americans. One scene shows how the leader Glanton, “was the first to reach the dying man...he rode back to the camp at the fore of his small column with the chief’s head hanging by its hair from his belt. The men were stringing up scalps on strips of leather whang, and some of the dead lay with broad slices of hide cut from their back to be used for the making of belts and harness” (McCarthy 165). This is an example of not just the shadow but also the uncanny. *Fight Club* is a novel that has two individuals – a somewhat meek unnamed protagonist and the strong and anarchistic Tyler Durden. Like *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll*

and Mr. Hyde, where two different personalities inhabit the same body, two different and separate individuals are within the same body; readers do not discover this until the end of the book, despite an increasing number of clues throughout the book as they get closer to the discovery. Like readers, the narrator is unaware of this. Tyler does know about it, and the narrator learns this fact from him: “‘There isn’t a me and a you, anymore,’ Tyler says, and he pinches the end of my nose. ‘I think you’ve figured that out.’ We both use the body, but at different times” (McCarthy 164). The narrator believes Tyler is a separate person, though the outside world believes the narrator is Tyler. He is both Self and Other.

The final chapter of this dissertation examines what we readers gain from the use of horror in canonical modern North American literature. It is a critical part of the story that impacts the reader – directly or indirectly, mentally and emotionally. Examination of scholarly work that focuses on the aesthetics of horror, such as from Terry Heller and Marian Eide, will bring additional scholarly assessment of the necessary functions of horror in canonical literature. This aesthetics can come from an individual’s life experiences or, as Eide explains, the impact of historical horror dating back to Plato and Nietzsche. Examples of these in the twenty and twenty-first century are World War II and the Nazi regime, racism and race riots, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It can also be the death of a child, the mistreatment by others due to being different, or losing someone to Covid because they were unvaccinated. Exploring the aesthetics of horror will illustrate how these aesthetics – visual or otherwise – are designed to produce elements of discomfort, fear, disgust, or any sort of imagery that can trigger the "fight or flight" response people naturally have. It is the aesthetics that directly contribute to what makes horror real and necessary. In *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosinski, each chapter is like a vignette in the

protagonist boy's life. Within every chapter is an example of the horror man inflicts upon man. From "simple" violence and beatings to rape and extreme and shocking retribution, the non-supernatural horror of man is the core of the book. It is the loss of safety that can be so paralyzing and horrifying. Similarly, in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver, horror comes not from the supernatural but instead from other people. A teenager, Kevin, has killed other students and a teacher at his school, and the book is an epistolary view from Kevin's mother to her seemingly estranged husband to explain how she feels and, significantly, how she may have contributed to his actions and behavior, from his birth up to the point of the mass murders. This feeling of being alone is a personal experience and suffering that can be easily understood, making the horror real. This scholarly examination of aesthetics, the abject, the uncanny, the fantastic, and the shadow set out a multivalent approach to the subject of horror in canonical literature.

CHAPTER 1

ABJECTION: JULIA KRISTEVA, TONI MORRISON, BRET EASTON ELLIS

Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* can be argued as the first true literary theory focused on horror. Before Kristeva, no specific literary criticism approached horror on any scholarly level. What did exist – such as Lacanianism, gender studies, and culture studies – was more generic. Kristeva's groundbreaking theory of the fear of the abject is focused on waste, or more specifically, waste from the self and disgust of that waste. As she states in her book, abjection is “the repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck” (Kristeva 2). I will use Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* to show the existence of the fear of the abject.

The very concept of the abject at its most basic level is disgust. Kristeva's concept states that one is disgusted and horrified when what was once inside a body is now outside the body. It is the human reaction to the expulsion of bodily fluids or a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between the self and the other. What was expected as typical in the world has changed or is gone. Abjection, or fear of the abject, is the repulsion and disgust of what is supposed to be inside the body being outside – blood, semen, vomit, feces, urine – along with how it came to be outside of the body. Other items can elicit the same reaction: an open wound, sewage, and even the congealed skin that forms on liquid food such as gravy or milk, which will be discussed later in this chapter. As blood is one of the most explicit forms of bodily fluid that is supposed to stay inside of a body, the multiple aspects of horror tend to regularly reference blood coming out from a body, such as being drained by a vampire or

because of a serial killer. Many of these hemorrhages end in death for a character or characters in the story – again, a standard component of a consequence in the interaction with the horrific. Kristeva’s primary example of the abject and the subject of the fear of the abject is the corpse – a symbol of the separation of life from death, a reminder of our limited existence, or as Kristeva states, “it is death infecting life” (Kristeva 4). Death itself is an extreme form of abject disgust. It is not the individual’s fear of death that is the abstract. Death can be a relief from pain and suffering. The individual may worry about the abjection of their own body, especially if they have lost control of it, such as with ALS or Parkinson’s. The primary group that feels this disgust are those individuals who must “clean up the mess” – not just when the person is alive but also in death. They not only have to find a way to move the corpse, the ultimate sign of the abject but then clean any bodily fluids that may have been expelled from the corpse when the death occurred. The corpse is a reminder of what we will all become upon death – a final fear of the abject. The corpse represents not just the final expulsion of bodily fluids but the arrival of life’s final border. As Kristeva notes, “It is no longer I who expel, ‘I’ is expelled” (Kristeva 3-4).

Food and its transformation from acceptable to the abject is an aspect that can be both corporeal and incorporeal. From a corporeal perspective, food that is rotting, moldy, or contaminated for various reasons generates a level of disgust on a broad scale, with a fear of eating or even touching it. However, there is food that can be a source of sustenance and life for some that others would consider abject, typically based on cultural norms. For example, insects are viewed as pests by many, and yet are a source of protein and perfectly acceptable as edible, generating a level of disgust held by specific cultures. Organs and other “unnatural” components of an animal’s body – the brain, eyes, and intestines – are also, by some, as untouchable.

However, other organs are deemed perfectly acceptable as edible – liver, heart, gizzard – especially around the American Thanksgiving holiday. From an incorporeal fear of the abject or this “inedible” food, there is the spiritual aspect of what is and is not acceptable. For instance, in the Jewish faith, food must be “kosher,” which has rules such as land animals must have cloven hooves and eat grass, seafood must have fins and scales, and non-kosher food cannot be prepared with the same utensils and appliances as kosher food. For Catholics, there are certain specific religious-based Fridays where eating meat is prohibited. Those that follow these religious-based rules fear punishment from God or another powerful deity or being. At the same time, those not of these faiths do not have the same restrictions and therefore do not fear this particular abject. In the horror genre, fear of the abject of food is seen in instances such as cannibalism, the monster eating the victim – typically after tearing a body apart, and the prototypical zombie, which, thanks to George Romero, is focused on eating a victim’s brain, along with the rest of the organs.

This concept of the abject, seen in works classified in the horror genre, is a common factor in the stories. Typically known as “body horror,” it is the part of the horror that is most associated with that genre. It can be in the form of a monster that violates a body in its attempt to defeat and possibly consume its victims. It can be seen in a typical “serial killer” novel where, depending on the cruelty applied to the victim, the “disgust” seen and felt by the reader can involve not just blood but internal organs being removed and now outside of the body. Numerous examples of body horror in the horror genre make it more of a norm than an exception regarding a monster – supernatural/human/undefinable – and its attitudes and actions toward the victim(s).

The abject goes beyond the specifics and meanings lined out by Kristeva, as she focuses on the body and the expulsion of bodily fluids. It is also the difference between corporeal waste and incorporeal waste. As corporeal waste generates a level of disgust over physical items that are supposed to be within the body and have been expelled, incorporeal waste is the fear of the abject in terms of the Other, as defined by an individual or society. Incorporeal waste is much more unique, and even if many share similar beliefs about the Other, the meaning behind these beliefs can differ. Corporeal waste does not reference a type of individual. It can generate the same fear and disgust regardless of the source, although there can be a difference between one's expulsions compared to someone else's waste.

The abject can be the Other as defined by an individual. The fear of the abject is also a fear of the unknown or the Other. It can be what is different in someone's physiology, psychology, personality, or a combination of these. Essentially, a person can become the abject to another individual. This can be based on gender, race, disability, or any form of difference from the individual that causes fear of this abject and, in many cases, disgust. Sexism, racism, and religion – can all generate external disgust for these aspects of the abject. There is a fear of those who are “different” – as if getting close to one of them or allowing them to function in the “right” kind of society – and this fear results in actions ranging from disdain and ignorance to verbal abuse to physical abuse and death.

I contend that the abject of the Other is as powerful as what is defined as the typical abject as described by Kristeva. As mentioned previously, those that are different can influence the fear felt by those that do not allow for the Other to exist in their level of status – economic, racial, gender, etc. This fear explains why violence towards the Other has been so prevalent in history,

including the timeframe covered in this paper. For instance, with some - primarily males - there is the fear of the abject of the female. It is not just menstruation, which is a standard component of Kristeva's description of the abject and disgust. It is the fear that this abject – the female – cannot just break the proverbial “glass ceiling” but surpass the primitive ideals of that which this “object” is capable of.

The theory of abjection put forward by Georges Bataille in the 1930s is not used prevalently as “it is Kristeva's use of the term, not Bataille's, that has been influential in the recent theorization of this concept in relation to contemporary artistic practice” (Kraus 91). Bataille's definition of the abject differs from Kristeva's in that he believed the abject focused and is “rooted in the socio-political where it accounts for the dynamic of rejection and exclusion in relation to the socially disenfranchised” (Arya 72). He believed in the waste products of the human body. However, they were eroticized, and they could be overcome to achieve union - between individuals as well as between socio-economic groups. His short text, “The Solar Anus,” published in 1931, exemplifies his beliefs regarding the abject. This text lists numerous instances of the abject, the actions to get to the abject, and abject actions that almost all lead to some form of disgust, even though they do not all require some expelling from the body and in many cases, has nothing to do with the body itself. Examples from this text include: “Human eyes tolerate neither sun, coitus, cadavers, nor obscurity, but with different reactions”, “An abandoned shoe, a rotten tooth, a snub nose, the cook spitting in the soup of his masters are to love what a battle flag is to nationality” and “A dog devouring the stomach of a goose, a drunken vomiting woman, a slobbering accountant, a jar of mustard represent the confusion that serves as the vehicle of love” (Bataille). Kristeva, however, explains the fear of the abject, which causes

disorder or chaos on an individual or broader scale, and which is cast out. The abject is both a means of unification as well as a means of separation. Kristeva agreed with Bataille on what she referred to as the “logic of prohibition” - what is abject is linked to what is prohibited. However, she does state that “abjection is above all ambiguity” and this must be considered in the analysis of the two novels – *The Bluest Eye* and *American Psycho* (Kristeva 9).

The abject does not have to be real for one to fear it. As Kristeva notes, “fear and object are linked” - regardless of the object (Kristeva 33). Readers of books like those discussed here can experience the fear of the abject. First, it can be the highly graphic acts of violence and what is done to and with the bodies, as seen in *American Psycho*. Bateman believes these acts occur, and as we see into his mind over the last several pages of the book, we understand he is losing his mind and control – what is seen throughout the book as a form of the abject. It can be the rape of Pecola and the subsequent insanity seen in *The Bluest Eye*. These books are written so that one must figuratively dive into the abject to appreciate and understand the story entirely. The reader becomes the silent observer of the abject taking place right before them, with no absolute control over what takes place. The only power the reader has is not to read the book. These books exist because of the abject and are robust due to the authors’ ability to convey that fear to the reader. Fear is the “upsetting of a bio-drive balance” where fear and the object are in a zero-balance state (Kristeva 33). This balance, regardless of precariousness, continues until the object becomes the abject, thus instigating fear in the reader, overwhelming the balance, and what was distant or fictional now has become the fear of the abject. This balance, or the breakdown of the balance, is central to *The Bluest Eye* and *American Psycho*.

There are many situations where one person's abject is another person's object, and that object can transform into pleasure. Based on Kristeva's theory, the excretion of bodily fluids is abject and what causes disgust for most. However, these secretions can become eroticized and perverse. Instead of the fear of the abject, the "erotization of abjection" is not only seen by Bateman in *American Psycho* and may not be seen nor understood by the reader, but it does not stop that reader from moving forward in the novel. Proust wrote, "If the object of desire is real, it can only rest upon the abject, which is impossible to fulfill" (Proust 141). The necessary evolution of the abject is demanded to continue fulfilling the horror, increasing the pleasure or jouissance. Without this, what was abject has now become stale and rote. It is this "disturbance of sexual, social, and moral categories [that] is thus not simply the effect but also the unseen locus of symbolic economies" (Botting 50-51). It is this evolution of what is abject and prohibited that Barbara Creed contributed with her view that "identifies a 'confrontation' that serves 'to eject the abject' and 'redraw' boundaries of humanity" (Creed 72). This evolution from "earlier, traditional Gothic fictions seems to be replayed in contemporary horror, while presenting new objects of cultural anxiety" – what determines the abject has evolved (Botting 50).

This evolution can be seen in how the abject is defined by Kristeva's belief that the abject is related to perversion. She sees the abject as "perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law: but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life...it lives at the behest of death ...it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit" (Kristeva 15). The abject can evolve into the "*deject*." This is one:

Who places (himself), *separates* (himself), and therefore ...divides, excludes, and without properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations. (Kristeva 8)

This may be in not getting his way, or something is not good enough, but his cruelty grows throughout. He is a personification of what Kristeva calls abjection: “immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles...a friend who stabs you” (Kristeva 4). This is where this type of disturbed individual draws his *jouissance* or pleasure.

Kristeva stated, “today’s universe is divided between *boredom* ...or... *abjection* and *piercing laughter*” (Kristeva 133). This view and commentary on abjection stands out because it differs from her primary definition of the abject. She believed that “it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order...the traitor, the liar, the criminal” (Kristeva 4). What was considered abject in earlier works – from the horror genre or not – is not necessarily still considered abject. Kristeva states there can be “a world in which the Other has collapsed” (Kristeva 18). This can be a world where the subject again - religious-based, gender-based, racial-biased - has changed and is no longer always defined as the Other or the object. However, even in this “new” world, the object and the subject still battle for primacy as defined by primal repression. It is a never-ending battle in which they “confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject” (Kristeva 18). The abject can become a new perversion that increases demand for more thrills and sensation and “operates insofar as it is spectral, superegoic, commanding enjoyment, liberating desire from prohibition and simultaneously

rendering its object impalpable and unsatisfactory” (Botting 54). This abjection and fear of this abject today is just as prevalent and horrific and continually transforms into new variations that will still elicit the same level of disgust, horror, and perversion.

In Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, this fear of the abject – the Other - can be seen in the horrors of racism and slavery to the cruel mistreatment of one little Black girl. Even those of the same race view Pecola as the abject, and though the fear does not exist, the disgust does. The townspeople view her as abject due to her ugliness, and despite being raped and impregnated by her father, there is simply no sympathy. Instead, “They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story” (Morrison 190). It is a testament to how strongly Pecola is viewed as the abject - even more strongly than the racial and economic separation of the “whites” from the “blacks.” In her mind, Pecola’s mother, Pauline, is justified in calling Pecola ugly. She learned late in her life that “physical beauty [is] probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both [romantic love and physical beauty] originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion” (Morrison 122). However, Pauline never let the fear of this particular abject – physical beauty – drive her actions, which showed when Pecola was born. Instead of the expected motherly view that her baby was perfect - she believed Pecola was ugly upon birth: “*But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly*” (Morrison 126).

The only ones in the book that even treat Pecola as a person instead of the abject are her two friends, Claudia and Frieda, who have a different type of abject they fear - beauty. Pecola is the “pleated wing” that Claudia wants to save and “spit the misery out on the streets” as if misery was part of the body that had to be expelled and thus meets part of Kristeva’s initial definition of

the abject. (Morrison 73-74). Beauty is the abject that deserved “intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made her beautiful, and not us” (Morrison 74). Pecola can never overcome the multiple challenges that she has no control over – race, gender, and in her case, “ugliness.” Pecola’s family – the Breedloves – take the abject and make it part of who they are. Pauline, in her role as the servant at the Fisher house, hides this ugliness and keeps the Fisher’s view of her – this beauty – “for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into her storefront, or to her children” (Morrison 128). When it comes to Pecola, she is not a threat, even though she is “different” than the others, different in her mannerisms and behavior. It is she and her family that are viewed as ugly. Their:

Ugliness was unique. No one could convince them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly...The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement... “Yes,” they had said. “You are right.” And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (Morrison 38-39)

Instead, she taught them fear: “into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life” (Morrison 128).

Pecola’s experience with those who are white or light-skinned enough to be considered superior only increases her confirmation that she is that abject. It is:

Pecola’s, Claudia's and Freida's interactions with Maureen diametrically opposed means of constructing a racial identity. For a young, black female like Pecola growing up in a black community that idolizes everything Maureen represents, she believes the only

recourse left for her is the community's racial preference and then withdraws into an isolated community of the self. (Mahaffey 160)

Claudia and Freida become, in a sense, as ugly as Pecola because they do not meet this abject standard of beauty. What makes it worse are the situations where what one considers abject is forced upon an individual. This typically results in violence. As an example, Claudia received as a gift a white doll with the meaningful-laden “ Here, they said, this is beautiful, and you are on this day ‘worthy’ you may have it” (Morrison 21). This infers that Claudia is not beautiful and not worthy of not just the doll but also white people. Therefore, her reaction makes sense in its own horrific manner – she dismembers the doll: “I was physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair...It was a most uncomfortable, patently aggressive sleeping companion...I had only one desire: to dismember it” (Morrison 20). She has an intense hatred of the doll and what it represents, “Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspaper, window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured” (Morrison 20). Claudia was presented with a gift that showed her what was deemed beautiful and a standard that portrayed her as ugly.

What is horrific about this is that these feelings towards a white doll carry over to feelings of white girls, with the only difference being that she does not act on these thoughts. So, she breaks and tears the doll, the proxy for the white girl’s beauty, apart, as if to see what was special about this doll- this image – to the world. So, she would “break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around...remove the cold and stupid eyeball...take

off the head, shake out the sawdust, rack the back against the brass bed rail, it would bleat still” (Morrison 21).

Pecola’s mother treats Pecola with disgust as the abject, as can be seen when she pushes Pecola and her “ugliness” away and reprimands Pecola for her interference in Pauline’s role of serving the Fisher family. This white family views Polly/Pauline as a servant. For Pauline, this attempt at pushing away the abject is not just about race and her view and interactions with beautiful white people. However, her body gradually rejects pieces of itself, as if to eliminate them to change into a new person. It starts with a tooth, “the weakened roots, having grown accustomed to the poison, responded one day to severe pressure, and the tooth fell free, leaving a ragged stump behind. But even before...there must have been the conditions, the setting that would allow it to exist in the first place” – a direct example of the existence of the abject as defined by Kristeva (Morrison 116). When Pecola’s accident at dropping the pie that Pauline had made, Pauline:

With the back of her hand knocked her to the floor...Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication...Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread. (Morrison 109)

Claudia also saw that the young white Fisher girl called Pauline by “Polly,” while Pauline’s daughter called her “Mrs. Breedlove.” Pecola is not treated like a servant but as an embarrassment and an abject problem that must be tolerated. Her parents, mistreated as children, unleash their self-hatred and hatred from others onto their child.

To overcome this testament to her ugliness, Mrs. Breedlove spends more time with her new “family.” She slowly transitions to a new woman, tolerating Pecola and abusing Cholly, including hoping for his death: “once when a drunken gesture catapulted Cholly into the red-hot stove, she screamed, ‘Get him, Jesus! Get him!’” (Morrison 42). Pauline has her abject in the form of Cholly as she believes that “the lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became” (Morrison 42). She continued this “growth” throughout the book: “She came into her own with the women who had despised her, by being more moral than they; she avenged herself on Cholly by forcing him to indulge in the weaknesses she despised” (Morrison 126). Thus, the lack of sympathy by Cholly or even recognition of the rape of Pecola.

Cholly’s belief of women as the abject fosters these actions and, ultimately, the rape of his daughter. In its subconscious recognition of the horror of this act, his body continues the horror by forcing the involuntary expulsion of Cholly’s disgust and shame – in this case, liquid stools. In the case of Cholly, it is early in his sexual development that he is scarred by two white men who force him to continue a sexual act as if he were on stage. This event becomes a critical moment in his life, and his inability to fight back warps his view of women. To Cholly, Pauline “was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact” (Morrison 42).

It is these significant actions, or inactions at times, that “The Breedloves-in spite of the name-are unable to show Pecola the love that would mitigate her rejection by society” (Klotman 124). The abject of race is seen to be overcome or accepted by the characters in *The Bluest Eye*.

However, Pecola is not only a member of this abject, but she is also associated with “everything associated with the poor, struggling African masses: their physical appearance, their behavioral patterns, their lifestyles, and their speech patterns” (Mbalia 31).

The abject of gender generates fear that first comes with the transition of a female from being a child to becoming a woman is, as earlier stated, an example of the fear of the abject, with the bodily fluid of menstrual blood being expelled, defined by the abject as that disgust in what should be inside of the body being outside. Most girls are taught what to do, but Pecola was not:

Suddenly Pecola bolted straight up, her eyes wide with terror. A whinnying sound came from her mouth...Then we both looked where Pecola was staring. Blood was running down her legs. Some drops were on the steps...“Am I going to die?” she asked. “Nooooo. You won’t die. It just means you can have a baby.” (Morrison 27-28)

Even though she is still ugly to all others, Pecola desperately needs blue eyes, and the associated beauty keeps her in a state of self-induced insanity and brokenness. Nonetheless, she considers herself beautiful; all others still consider her part of the abject and use her as an example for them to fear the abject to avoid becoming like Pecola. Outside of her control, she transitions from a girl to a woman. However, she was then “punished” for this transition by being raped. So, she not only withdrew, physically and mentally but became desperate in her need not just to escape the pregnancy and the baby’s death but to become the object of beauty as she defined it instead of her abject ugliness.

Pecola stays as the abject of the Other due to her ugly eyes viewing the beauty that is her “mother's blurred vision of the pink, white, and golden world of the Fishers; Pecola learns that

she is ugly, unacceptable, and especially unloved. Pecola believed that: “if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different... Maybe they’d say, ‘Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.’” (Morrison 46). This example of familial horror of not being loved – hated even – and being abused physically and emotionally develops into a driving factor for Pecola as she becomes her form of the abject. Finally, however, she desires to change into something that will be more than just accepted but transformed into a form that instead of hearing and feeling the disgust from others, she will feel and hear how beautiful and accepted she can be – due to her eventual blue eyes.

The only tenderness she receives is actual horror – the rape from her father. This becomes more than just disgust, but a form of grotesque. It is not just the rape but the rape by the father, who then abandons the family once the baby is born: “The baby comes too soon and dies, but Pecola has by this time retreated into herself into a kind of psychic death. For all she has learned about herself from school, from her peers, from her family and the world around her is that she is black, poor, and ugly, the antithesis of all that society values” (Klotman 124).

She becomes a sacrificial abject so everyone else can feel better about themselves because they are not her – the girl expelled from the body of the society. She is abjection since an “Other has settled in place and instead of what will be ‘me’” (Kristeva 10). As Keith Byerman argues, “Pecola is a grotesque Messiah; she gives the world not grace but the illusion of relief from intolerable circumstances. She is sacrificed so that others may live with the perversions of society. She is a grotesque within a grotesque” (Byerman 452). The impregnation of Pecola by her father is not just horror but a situation where the unborn baby becomes abject and, as seen in

Kristeva's work, must be eliminated from the mother's body. This, though, is overshadowed by the corporeal abject - Pecola's eyes – or at least to Pecola, they are abject and viewed with disgust. The character of Soaphead Church ultimately is his "treatment" and understands Pecola's view of the abject and grants these "blue eyes" to her. Soaphead, despite his inappropriate attraction to little girls, knows something is wrong with him. He believed "that since decay, vice, filth, and disorder were pervasive, they must be in the Nature of Things. Evil existed because God had created it, "so it becomes his duty to correct God's mistakes (Morrison 172). His belief in these multiple instances of the abject enables him to "cure" others of these "mistakes." One of those mistakes is Pecola's eyes. Her desire for blue eyes is so strong that she, in a symbolic sense, suffers under a mental and emotional representation of the Bible's "if the eye sins, rip it out." In his cure of Pecola and giving her blue eyes, he has her destroy an example of these abject to reward her with the belief that she is as pure as Pecola. He believes that "of all the wishes people had brought him – money, love, revenge – this seemed to him the most poignant and the most deserving of fulfillment" (Morrison 174). Therefore, he has her unwittingly kill a suffering dog: "the dog was mangy; his exhausted eyes ran with a sea-green matter around which gnats and flies clustered...He regarded this wish for the dog's death as humane, for he could not bear, he told, to see anything suffer" (Morrison 171). Pecola does this for him as part of the "cure" he describes. She desperately wishes her eyes were blue, and when she finally achieves this dream, it is because her mind has broken and she has gone insane.

The fear or disgust with the abject of her brown eyes is now resolved. They no longer become abject but produce a sense of completion and beauty. Nevertheless, even in this state of

insanity, Pecola is happy. She has no need for others but the streets, talking to herself solely about her new blue eyes:

Ever since I got my blue eyes, she look away from me all of the time. Do you suppose she's jealous too?

Could be. They are pretty, you know.

I know. He really did a good job. Everybody's jealous. Every time I look at somebody, they look off.

Is that why nobody has told you how pretty they are?

Sure it is. Can you imagine? Something like that happening to a person, and nobody but nobody saying anything about it? They all try to pretend they don't see them. Isn't that funny? (Morrison 195).

Despite the mental break into insanity and ignoring others, she is happy. She has her blue eyes, and nothing else matters. Nevertheless, the horror of her warped belief of changing from her self-abject form into an object that meets her requirements for beauty warps her mind, and she is still the abject they need to feel better about themselves. Claudia observes, "A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the hearts of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (Morrison 204). It is this book that shows the prevalence of horror in human life. It exists not just in racism, sexism, and child abuse; it exists even in the trusting, innocent minds of children.

A significant component of Kristeva's theory of the incorporeal abject involves narcissism – the next step in the evolution of the abject. According to Kristeva, “abjection... is a precondition to narcissism” – a key component of *American Psycho* (Kristeva 13). She also observes that they are mutually tied together: “abjection is therefore a kind of *narcissistic crisis*: it is witness to the ephemeral aspect of the state called ‘narcissism’ with reproachful jealousy” and that “two seemingly contradictory causes bring about the narcissistic crisis that provides along with its truth, a view of the abject. *Too much strictness on the part of the Other*, confused with the One and the Law. *The lapse of the Other*, which shows through the breakdown of objects of desire” (Kristeva 15). Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho* is the personification of narcissism. He has established his own Law, and his lack of tolerance of this self-defined abject is not just disgust about what they are but also the abjection of their actions.

However, as in *The Bluest Eye*, the abject dismemberment of the eyes is accepted, and yet this same concept is viewed as horrific in *American Psycho*, where actual dismemberment takes place more than once – not just due to worthiness but from a level of superiority instead of subservience. The thoughts towards others are acted upon and not held back. The same mindset and viewpoint towards the abject – white girls – with one different detail – one exerts violence as a representation of the Other. In contrast, the other individual exerts violence on the actual individual viewed as the Other.

This abject narcissism is seen in Bateman's actions of seemingly inconsequential events. Every item of clothing must be of the acceptable brand, the hair in just the right style with the right product, and the skin the right shade of “healthy” tan. Multiple times in the book, his group of colleagues, typically at a bar, discuss what is acceptable, such as when a pocket square is

appropriate, how a cummerbund should be worn, and the proper wear and knot of a tie. Bateman is typically the source of answers to those questions because, throughout the book, even his colleagues recognize his narcissistic tendencies, knowledge, and beliefs of what is acceptable. However, it is not just Bateman with these narcissistic beliefs. Near the beginning of the book, one of his compatriots states, “In essence what I’m saying is that society *cannot* afford to lose me. I’m an *asset*” (Ellis 3). These individuals are interchangeable, as seen by the numerous times Bateman is called the wrong name simply because of what (or what brand) he is wearing. He is untouchable, yet, as the stereotype of the Eighties yuppie broker, he is one of a group of well-dressed individuals with a lot of money, regular use of “acceptable” drugs, and someone people want to be like. However, he is not safe and can easily be disposed of, which we see extensively in the actions of Bateman.

He acts upon those that are abject to him – they are less than he, not good enough, and basically a commodity. He believes he is superior and will remove those who get in his way or need to be removed for his success, like the slasher in the horror genre, thus postulating the primary narcissism that Kristeva argues is a follow-up to autoeroticism. It is not just the *jouissance* but the sexual release and power we see in Bateman. In the character of Paul Owen, we see an individual that is a threat to his position, a component of what Bateman terms the “Everyyuppie.” Bateman must surpass Owen, first in business and then in his place in life, when he murders Owen. He continues this replacement by committing multiple murders in Owen’s apartment – a continued separation of the self from the Other.

Women and those he sees as beneath him or in his way to success are the Other and therefore deserve to be removed – to negate the abject from existence. This abject of the “poor”

or blatant differences in society can also be seen in the incorporeal abject of men over women. This “ritualization of defilement is accompanied by a strong concern for separating the sexes, and this means giving men rights over women” (Kristeva 70). Women are passed around and are viewed as commodities, regardless of to whom they “belong.” The women also serve only one function as far as Bateman is concerned. They are the desired victims Bateman uses to subtly hide his increasing violence and psychopathic tendencies, with each mention being more severe than others. What starts as thoughts soon becomes increasingly violent and murderous actions, with an extremely graphic description of these actions. Bateman is a near-perfect personification of Kristeva’s observation of abjection and its immoral and hateful tendencies, and the book’s subtle undertones more concretely support this.

Throughout the book, Bateman refers to his favorite movie – *Body Double* – which features a “driller killer” who murders a beautiful woman in full view of the protagonist and the audience, along with his favorite musical, *Les Miserables*. These forms of entertainment, along with multiple pornographic movies – increasingly violent in nature – are a reminder of the escalation of Bateman’s narcissism being enacted upon others. The outside observer of the killings in the movie is pronounced in his murders of the beautiful women, or hardbodies, that he brutally tortures and kills. In *Les Miserables*, whether it is a poster, a billboard, music, or references to the musical itself, it is no coincidence that this is tied to Bateman’s abject narcissistic tendencies, especially since the English translation of the title has been *The Wretched*, *The Poor Ones*, and *The Victims*, just to name a few. Each subject in these translated titles represents those classes considered abject or are direct correlations to Bateman and those he kills – the victims.

The actual example of Bateman and his treatment of those he considers abject is the constant mention and evolution of *The Patty Winters Show*, a fictional talk show reminiscent of the actual shows that took place during the Eighties – Geraldo, Sally Jesse Raphael, and Jerry Springer. It represents Bateman’s increasingly disturbing mental state. This show is mentioned in practically every chapter of the book and is a subtle guide to Bateman’s current mental state and cruel and murderous actions. Episodes start simply, such as perfumes and makeup or discussions of nuclear war. However, the episode subjects become increasingly disturbing. There is an episode of women with multiple personalities and an episode of women with big breasts – symbols of the different women he interacts with. This is exemplified in Bateman’s conversation with two of his compatriots, “‘The only reason chicks exist is to get turned on like you said’...After a deliberate pause, I say, ‘Do you know what Ed Gein said about women?’...’ He said’, I begin, ‘When I see a pretty girl walking down the street I think two things. One part of me wants to take her out and talk to her and be real nice and sweet and treat her right...[the other part is] what her head would look like on a stick’” (Ellis 92). He laughs it off as a joke, yet inside he knows it to be how he truly feels.

This fictional show is a mirror of the horror within Bateman as well as the horror he exerts externally. The episodes become more violent – “Donner Party,” “Nazis,” “Women Who Have Been Tortured” – and parallel the actions Bateman is taking – cannibalism of the women he has tortured and killed. Near the end, the episodes become somewhat ridiculous, almost an emulation of Bateman’s mental confusion and uncertainty about who he is - “Men Raped by Women,” “People Raised with Half a Brain,” “An Interview with a Cheerio,” and the final telling episode, “Does Economic Success Equal Happiness.”

In *American Psycho*, violence is prevalent and a vital point of the novel. To some, the amount of violence in the novel can border on excessive or obscene. Yet, “the problem here, of course, is that such distinctions do not apply comfortably to that category of utterance termed the literary, and especially to the use of figurative language, where ‘art for art’s sake’ can be seen precisely to resemble the nonproductivity of obscenity” (Freccero 44-45). Bateman is a representation of this, and his violent cruelties are actions taken, via proxy, for us, even so far as getting the tools “we” will need, and they have to be the best: “I spent most of the afternoon buying myself early Christmas presents – a large pair of scissors at a drugstore near City Hall, a letter opener from Hammacher Schlemmer, a cheese knife from Bloomingdale’s” – all potential weapons to be used (Ellis 118-119). He is the abject that is our means of recognition of the abject, but also a way to rid us of this disgusting “creature” – human or otherwise. He is an abject that we may fear but serves our purpose in being “able to locate the violence in his disorder rather than in ourselves or in the social order” (Freccero 48). This is another reason that makes horror a necessary part of the novel. The killer or monster acts upon our darker thoughts that we would not put into actual action yet may consider the joy and relief that could come from taking those actions oneself. Freccero continues by stating that “*American Psycho* is narrated for the most part in the first-person voice of a serial killer...a popular American figure of dementia, regarded as potentially unthreatening precisely because of his singularity, the nonrationality of his pathology, and the individualized and eccentric nature of his violence” (Freccero 48).

The corporeal abject in this book is not just the bodily fluids described by Kristeva. *American Psycho* has instances and scenes of the abject in nearly every chapter, surrounded by significant narcissism. No one is safe from Bateman’s analysis – and psychosis – as to whether

they will satisfy his craving for the abject and whether they meet his standards for his narcissistic lifestyle. Everything about him is a judgment of others, including himself. The constant mention and analysis of brands, whether clothing, restaurants chosen, food selected, and type of tableware and glassware used, are always at the forefront of his mind. One such example of this is:

I'm sitting in DuPlex, the new Tony McManus restaurant in Tribeca, with Christopher Armstrong, who also works at P & P... We, inexplicably, could not get reservations at Subjects, so Armstrong suggested this place. Armstrong is wearing a four-button double-breasted chalk-striped spread-collar cotton shirt by Christian Dior and a large paisley-patterned silk tie by Givenchy Gentleman. His leather agenda and leather envelope, both by Bottega Veneta, lie on the third chair at our table, a good one, up front by the window. I'm wearing a nailhead-patterned worsted wool suit with overplaid from DeRigueur by Schoeneman, a cotton broadcloth shirt by Bill Blass, a Macclesfield silk tie by Savoy and a cotton handkerchief by Ashear Bros. (Ellis 137)

As we see in Bateman's actions, the incorporeal abject is those that do not meet his standards of respectability and acceptability. Those beneath him appear to grow exponentially, and it becomes increasingly difficult "to control myself, here in a room that contains a whole host of victims, lately I can't help noticing them everywhere – in business meetings, nightclubs, restaurants, in passing taxis and in elevators... everywhere, all of them having one thing in common: they are *prey*" (Ellis 347). This can be evidenced by the abject and how it fits into the id, the ego, and the super-ego. According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, "the id is the primitive and instinctual part of the mind that contains sexual and aggressive drives and hidden

memories, the super-ego operates as a moral conscience, and the ego is the realistic part that mediates between the desires of the id and the super-ego” (McLeod). Based on Freud’s theories, the id drives Bateman and his murderous and violent actions, and the super-ego is his warped sense of morals (one should not exist if one does not meet standards) and an ego that combines these concepts into one truly disturbed being.

Kristeva comments that “the ego of primary narcissism is thus uncertain, fragile, threatened, subjected just as much as its [uncertainty] as it is to [pleasure/pain]” (Kristeva 62). Bateman assesses every individual he comes across and internally lines out each person’s clothing brand. If it is not “good enough,” that person is abject. Constant brand mention shows extreme narcissism. This narcissism is “laden with hostility and which does not yet know its limits...dealing with imprecise boundaries” (Kristeva 60). There is a significant “distaste” or “disgust” for common brands. This can be a distraction from his homicidal tendencies but can be the fuel for his psychotic actions. He is the ultimate narcissist – the extreme version of the abject. As Kristeva noted, “abjection is, therefore, a kind of narcissistic crisis” and this is a constant internal battle of Bateman’s, one of which often results in violent and homicidal tendencies. Even though this may be a reason for his homicidal tendencies, they are never fully established as to when and why they began, only a reference such as his raping of a maid on his fourteenth birthday. One of the instances where he loses control is when he is told his hair is out of place. The way others view him is of prime “narcissistic” importance. When he feels nervous about meeting an old flame, he cannot understand why:

Though I worked out for nearly two hours this morning and even lifted weights in my office before noon, I’m still extremely nervous. The cause is hard to locate but I’ve

narrowed it down to one of two reasons. It's either that I'm afraid of rejection (though I can't understand why: she called me, she wants to see me, she wants to have lunch with me) ...or, on the other hand, it could have something to do with the new Italian mousse I'm wearing. (Ellis 230)

The narcissism is so extreme that his fear of the abject is fear of being viewed as less than he knows he is. He views her paying the check for lunch as a slap in the face of who he is – essentially emasculation – and this leads to him suffering from his fear of his abject: “she waits on the sidewalk while I'm in the men's room throwing up my lunch spitting out the squid, undigested and less purple than it was on my plate” (Ellis 242). Something as simple as this can be seen as an example of “primary narcissism,” where “aggressivity appears to us as a rejoinder to the original deprivation” (Kristeva 39). His ultimate reaction to this forced confrontation with his abject is to torture and kill his ex in some of the book's most graphic and horrible ways. This, along with his continued elevation of the fear of his abject, is a driver for Bateman suffering an internal crisis as to whether any of these events actually occurred or if they are figments of his imagination. We see this with the “death” of Peter Owen. Bateman discusses what he does to Owen by killing him and then the future killings that he does in Owen's apartment. However, this comes into question when Owen's apartment is shown to potential buyers, with no mention of gruesome tales of what supposedly occurred.

Bateman spends most of the book and his actions towards his goal of being the best, from the best “Everyyuppie” to the best serial killer. To be any less is unacceptable. He continually separates himself from others- his prey – by wearing a Walkman so he cannot hear them and continually using the excuse of needing to return videotapes to the store. It may not just involve

business cards, on which paper stock is a source of pride and an object to hold over others. It is a subtle guidance of others on how they should treat him: “‘No, really Patrick. What do you want me to call you?’ King, I’m thinking. King, Evelyn. I want you to call me King” (Ellis 339). In addition, it involves not just the removal of the abject but the removal of the Other. It is a journey towards psychosis. Kristeva notes that “narcissism...becomes the unleashing of the drive as such, without object, threatening all identity, including that of the subject itself” and is, therefore, “in the presence of psychosis” (Kristeva 44). For Bateman, this psychotic break may be real, or it may be a hallucination. However, the narcissistic psychosis detailed by Kristeva does occur in Bateman’s mind and is like the mental break Pecola experiences in her psychosis. For Bateman, what sets him off is a viewing of himself covered in blood and parts of the latest victim:

The smell of meat and blood clouds up the condo until I don’t notice it anymore. And later my macabre joy sours and I’m weeping for myself, unable to find solace in any of this, crying out, sobbing ‘I just want to be loved,’ cursing the earth and everything I have been taught: principles, distinctions, choices, morals, compromises, knowledge, unity, prayer – all of it was wrong, without any final purpose. All it came down to was: die or adapt. (Ellis 345)

This questioning of himself, his worth, and his mental state can be seen when he talks about himself in the third person. It is this psychotic break and his confrontation of all the horrors he has enacted upon others that lead him to become a “lesser” individual – one in which narcissism is not the primary driver. This takes place while he believes the police are chasing him and happens mid-stride: “I shift into reverse, screech down the street, turn on the windshield wipers,

realizing too late that the blood sprayed across the glass is on the inside, attempt to wipe it away with a gloved hand, and racing blindly down Greenwich I lose control entirely, the cab swerves into a Korean deli...Patrick tries to put the cab in reverse but nothing happens, he staggers out of the cab, leaning against it, a nerve-racking silence follows...Patrick surprises him by lunging out before the cop can get to his gun and he knocks him over onto the sidewalk” (Ellis 349). Once he has determined the chase is essentially over, he switches back to the first-person mid-sentence: “towards the darkness of his floor, calm is eventually restored, safe in the anonymity of my new office...looking through my Rolodex...I decide to make public what has been, until now, my private dementia” (Ellis 351-352). Even though his “confession” is not believed, and he is never caught for all that he is done, here is when the psychotic break occurs. Despite this, the final words in the book - “THIS IS NOT AN EXIT” - seem to indicate that his current life has the potential to revert to his homicidal existence.

Kristeva believes that great modern literature, such as that written by Proust, Kafka, and especially Celine, has the potential to help the reader confront abjection, which is managed by the Other. However, Kristeva believe that contemporary literature cannot replace the guiding principles of society – Religion, Morality, and Law. Instead, modern literature “acknowledges the impossibility of [them]...but instead, takes advantage of them, gets round them, and makes sport of them” (Kristeva 16). She also states that “all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being...or desire is founded” and “this want itself as logically preliminary to being and object...then one understands that abjection, and even more abjection of self, is its only signified. Its signifier then is none but literature” (Kristeva 5). I contend that based on this truth, canonical contemporary literature is doing precisely what it is supposed to do – confront the

reader, force the reader into self-introspection, and challenge their beliefs – create new forms of the abject. René Girard stated that “the very idea of mediation encourages literary comparisons at a level which is no longer that of genre criticism or thematic criticism...It may illuminate the works through each other” (Girard 23). This can be initially viewed today in “body horror.” This can be seen in the multiple instances of Bateman’s violent actions and how he treats his kills progressively horrendously. However, it is not the body parts that are abject to him. The other person is abject and deserves to be expelled or removed from life and society. If they do not meet his standards, they do not deserve to live – they are both the corporeal and incorporeal abject.

Kristeva’s concept and fear of the abject primarily focus on bodily functions and the fluids that leave or are forced out of the body. In this “new” world, the object and the subject still battle for primacy as defined by primal repression. It is a never-ending battle in which they “confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject” (Kristeva 18). The abject can become a new perversion that increases demand for more thrills and sensation and “operates insofar as it is spectral, superegoic, commanding enjoyment, liberating desire from prohibition and simultaneously rendering its object impalpable and unsatisfactory” (Botting 54). However, it is more than that, as seen in the two literary examples in this chapter. Without the abject, *The Bluest Eye* loses its impact. The verbal abuse piled on Pecola could still exist for other reasons, but the primary abject – and what gives the novel its title – is the abject of Pecola’s eyes. There may still be an intense desire for blue eyes or to be as pretty as she sees others, but she and her friends would accept her own brown eyes. Without abject narcissism, there is no *American*

Psycho. As the entire novel is a judgment by Bateman of others and whether they deserve to live or not with the result that could quell his homicidal tendencies, without this abject, there exists no violence – at least not this particular of violence and reason for it – and there is no narcissism, the very base of Bateman’s behaviors. Combining this with his constant fear and reaction to his abject is the story. Without this and without the horror that comes from this, *American Psycho* would not exist. These two novels, not labeled as horror but as fiction, would not exist without horror. It is the horror that makes them powerful and lasting. What was considered abject in earlier works – from the horror genre or not – is not necessarily still considered abject. Kristeva states there can be “a world in which the Other has collapsed” (Kristeva 18). This can be a world where the subject – religious-based, gender-based, racial-biased - has changed and is no longer always defined as the Other or the object. However, there is still an evolution in what is considered the abject and the Other. Just because what constituted these concepts has changed, the ideas and theories have not. The abject will always exist, and there will always be the Other, regardless of how biased they may be. This is the horror that continues to appear in fiction published from around the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE UNCANNY: SIGMUND FREUD, HARPER LEE, JEFF VANDERMEER,

SHIRLEY JACKSON

An often-quoted line from H.P. Lovecraft is, “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (Lovecraft 25), and the unknown is the key component of the uncanny. The uncanny is seen throughout works of the horror genre and can range from a stranger in the house, being followed by an unknown person or on a dark night, the potential monster underneath the bed or in the closet, or death. The initial concept of the uncanny was first mentioned by F.W.J. Schelling in 1837 but expanded upon in 1906 by Ernst Jentsch. However, it is Sigmund Freud who elaborated on and developed the uncanny in his essay “The Uncanny,” published in 1919, in which he states that the uncanny “undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (Freud 1). His concepts and examination of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* describe how both what we do and do not know can directly contribute to fear and dread. Freud states that the “uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (qtd. in Weinstock 60). Freud’s work on the uncanny expanded to literature and can be viewed as a common trope in the horror genre. However, it is the unknown and uncertainty that are critical components of the uncanny, and they are not tied to any specific genre. In this particular chapter, I examine examples of the uncanny in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Annihilation* by Jeff Vandermeer, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson, each of which depends for its success on the author’s handling of this concept.

Nicholas Royle argues that the uncanny is “the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home...a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience oneself as a foreign body”. A co-mingling of the known and the unknown, the homely and the unhomely, a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself as a foreign body. (qtd. in Levina 166). This concept of the homely or unhomely – *heimlich* or *unheimlich* – is not related to intellect to be effective. Intellectual uncertainty can be heightened to an increased form of the uncanny. Freud states the uncanny goes “beyond the equation of *unheimlich* with unfamiliar” (Freud 2). The uncanny can be experienced or controlled by an item that is kept from sight or hidden – the example of the unknown. Regardless of what is being hidden, the fact that it is unknown makes the object uncanny. It may be harmless, but it is the very idea of not knowing that instills that uncertainty, and depending on the specific scenario, a level of danger and fear can be intensely experienced. It is the intellectual uncertainty that raises the uncanny to a level of fear not necessarily exhibited due to other means. Freud states that “the theory of intellectual uncertainty is thus incapable of explaining that impression” (Freud 7). It is, what appears backward, that the more intellectual the individual, the worse the uncanny. The intellect knows how things operate, what is “normal,” and how individuals and society act. However, a violation of any of these items – what should not happen does happen – is a large source of the uncanny to the intellectual. The more they know, the more likely they experience the uncanny, as the unknown disturbs the accepted norm.

The uncanny does not have to be supernatural. It is not just what is known that is missing, but the uncertainty of the result of the exposure of the hidden known. Freud stated that “This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between

imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on. It is this factor which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices” (Freud 13). The more knowledge one possesses, the more likely they are affected by the uncanny, and the more disturbing the uncanny can be.

Freud’s belief in the uncanny is that it is based on something familiar but repressed within the ego, and that is why ideas of horror produce mixed feelings of fear and safety, which both attract and repel us. The uncanny can produce both physical and psychological effects. Freud believed that every affect has an emotional impulse, and if it is transformed or repressed into anxiety, then in “instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny, and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether carried some other effect” (74). He claims that horror is aroused primarily by something which succeeds in bringing back to life repressed sensations of anxiety from childhood, something familiar which has been repressed and made alien. Freud sees anxiety as an affective state of dissatisfaction that is triggered by the danger that the ego wants to avoid or escape, resulting in particular physical reactions. Anxiety can be triggered by both external and internal stimuli. Reactions to these stimuli by anxiety show a potential reaction to the same in real life or in literature. Realistic anxiety can be triggered by known external danger, while neurotic anxiety can be triggered by an unknown, instinctively sensed danger (Leffler 241). For many, it is the feeling of uncertainty that can bring acute discomfort. For others, it is a general inability to process ambiguous situations, which can even fuel chronic anxiety disorders.

“Uncertainty can intensify how threatening a situation feels,” explains psychologist Ema Tanovic (Tanovic qtd. in Robson). It is this physical and psychological reaction to the uncanny that is seen in the horror genre as well as “legitimate” fiction. Some scholars believe that the horror story involves us emotionally in such a way as to awaken something repressed within us. This view implies that we are frightened by something very familiar to us, rather than something strange. (Leffler 81-83). Our reactions to uncertainty may have made sense in evolution. The brain is constantly trying to predict what will happen next, allowing it to prepare the body and mind in the most effective way possible. In uncertain situations, that planning is a lot harder – and if you’re potentially facing a predator or a human foe, the wrong response could be deadly. As a result, it could pay to err on the side of caution – either by avoiding the uncertainty altogether or by putting the brain and body in an aroused state that is ready to respond to a changing situation. An inability to process the unknown could also increase rumination – another known contributor to many mental illnesses – as the mind cycles through every possible outcome of the situation at hand. “In most cases, uncertainty appears to be a core element of anxiety,” says psychology professor Nicholas Carleton (Carleton qtd. in Robson).

The primary component of the uncanny is uncertainty based on two primary concepts – the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*. The primary definition of the *heimlich*, and the start of the uncanny, is that this is a public concept. *Heimlich* means homey or home-like; it is the familiar, the intimate, the comfortable. The primary definition of its opposite, the *unheimlich*, is the initial baseline of the uncanny. The non-private un-homey or unfamiliar establishes a level of discomfort backed by the eerie and the strange. Still, it is not just this that is the sole source of the uncanny.

The second definition of *heimlich* somewhat contradicts the first. It is the private matter, that which is known but desired to keep hidden or concealed from sight. It, therefore, continues its opposition or contradiction to the second definition of the *unheimlich* – that which is exposed or revealed. This is still a part of the uncanny. In this particular case, it is like the family secrets that become exposed to the world, which can be horrified by what it sees – the outward appearance of the family does not correlate to the horrors experienced by the family – abuse, disease, etc. All of these contradictory definitions and explanations, comprise the uncanny, defined not solely as the class of the frightening but as everything “that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light” (Freud 4). Freud uses the term *heimlich* to “conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is frightening” (Freud 2). Yet, the reverse of this, the *unheimlich*, does not automatically mean the exact opposite. It refers to what might be uncomfortable in the idea or concept being analyzed yet doesn’t necessarily exist. The *heimlich* in this case refers to what is unknown to the outside world - what is novel or original. It is this unknown that can instill the fear in both those that have kept the secrets and those that expose them. An individual who knows this *heimlich* now exhibits *unheimlich* – what is “homely” or what is known. Freud identifies the *unheimlich* or uncanny as the key horror strategy. “Places, people, our sense of reality and justice, and the comfortable stories we tell ourselves to stay sane and directed are all prime victims for horror’s dislocation and destabilization effect” (Wisker 146). The uncanny can be a very personal experience that can differ from and not be shared with any other individual.

There can be a sadistic component of *heimlich*, one in which an individual “looks on with *heimlich* pleasure at someone’s discomfiture” such as an affair, theft, and other actions harmful

to another (Freud 3). The *heimlich* can instill a level of uncanny simply by an individual not knowing what is coming or unable to identify what does. Freud lines out multiple situations in which *heimlich* can be seen and in many cases, depending on the individual, the uncanny will be experienced. One such example he uses is that “at times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is *heimlich* and full of terrors for him” (Freud 4). Freud does change his direction of the *heimlich* and uncanny by stating that “it is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence” (Freud 4). Consequently: “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *Heimlich*” (Freud 4). In other words, it’s not unfamiliarity itself, but the inability to tell whether something is familiar or unfamiliar, which is so unsettling and threatening. Freud uses anecdotal evidence from literature and his own and patients’ lives to support this idea. Uncertainty can be uncanny, especially when we can’t tell whether someone or something is animate or inanimate. It’s how most people feel when seeing a dead body, and Freud thinks that it’s vestigial, from a time when most of our ancestors believed in ghosts.

Examples of the uncanny can revolve around known, typically innocent, and safe items – for instance, a doll. A doll can be a simple toy, played with and loved by a child – played with as if were alive. However, that same doll at night can convey a very different feeling of fear and unease. It becomes uncanny by instilling in one’s mind – “Will the doll come alive?” Whether it be a doll, a mannequin, or some type of automata, Freud quotes Jentsch in which he states that “one of the most successful devices for easily creating the uncanny effect is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton” (Freud 5).

The animation of the inanimate in *Beauty in the Beast* or *The Nutcracker* can hardly be considered uncanny to most. They can be examples of what is known to be a “safe place” or protection against the fear of the unknown. However, there is that fear of the inanimate coming to life, and there are multiple examples where this has taken place in the horror genre. The uncanny arises when childhood beliefs we have grown out of suddenly seem real. Freud called it “the return of the repressed”. This concept is called the uncanny valley - used in reference to the phenomenon whereby a computer-generated figure or humanoid robot bearing a near-identical resemblance to a human being arouses a sense of unease or revulsion in the person viewing it.

There are examples of human behavior that drive the uncanny. Freud lines out “the uncanny effect of epileptic fits.” Visually experiencing this medical issue can be an example of the uncanny, especially if one does not know what to do to help the individual. It is an unknown, a person is suffering, and there may be nothing the typical individual can do but watch. One can only hope that someone will arrive to help, or that the situation will resolve itself peacefully. The uncanny can also be seen in the loss of a limb or other body part. Freud goes into detail about losing part of one’s body, specifically the eye. He states that “the fear of damaging or losing one’s eyes is a terrible fear of childhood” (Freud 7). I concur with Freud regarding the eye, but I would contend that it is the fear of losing any part of the body that is uncanny. Like Kristeva’s concept of disgust at the expulsion of what outside should be inside a body, such as blood or one’s body parts belong attached and not removed. Thus, the common experience and reaction of the “phantom limb.”

One experience of the uncanny felt by most is the unknown of death, or more specifically what happens after death – it is the complete unknown. Is it an after-life of peace or one in

which the dead haunt the living, or simply a state of non-existence? Intellect plays no part in this. This fear of the unknown – what happens after death – appears in most organized religions. It can be the concept of a Heaven, reincarnation, or simply the unknown – follow the light to the final end. This uncanny can be so extremely powerful that a person can live based on this faith of the unknown, or the number of last-minute deathbed confessions, just to cover all the bases. Since there is no way to definitively prove what happens after death, it is an unknown shared by all – a rarity in and of itself.

It is not just the spiritual, the unseen unknown or uncertain that is uncanny. A living person can be uncanny – they are the Other: “We do so when we ascribe evil intentions to him” (Weinstock 76). Racism, genocide, and abuse are still rampant in the 21st century – one reason being the unknown and the risk of the uncanny. Assumed beliefs are assigned to different groups of people; the effort to know and understand does not exist, and therefore the fear of the Other results in the mistreatment of these other groups. It may be based on race, gender, sexual preference, and even something so trivial as intelligence or success. The fear of the unknown cannot be tolerated, so unsupported actions and reactions occur. Instead of learning about and thus dismissing the uncanny aspect of the Other, it can be magnified by preconceptions and assumptions. Scientific work has been done regarding the uncanny and uncanny valley, and, to no surprise, the most uncanny things, according to Grace Lapointe, “including marionette puppets and automata, were found in the middle of the curve...other entries right in the middle of the curve included ‘prosthetic limbs, ‘disabled people’ and even ‘the way a physically disabled person moves.’” Lapointe goes on to state that “Freud repeatedly uses disability and physical and mental illnesses to illustrate the uncanny. His examples include epilepsy and

‘dismembered limbs’ (14). People with other disabilities have also connected ableism to the uncanny. If we feel repulsed by something or someone, it’s often necessary to examine why and ask whether the root is prejudice” (Lapointe).

The final component of the discussion of the uncanny is the doppelganger – not necessarily one’s own double, but if so, that much more powerful the fear and unease. The concept of the doppelganger is not a concept past its time. One sees one’s double in the mirror daily. That double has the same feelings, the same knowledge, and the same physical attributes as the original, yet this double is one in which the original person can pass negative feelings or beliefs to in a safe manner. The uncanny that comes from this double is the fear that it will operate differently than the original. Another aspect of the doppelganger is “the ‘immortal’ soul [that] was the first ‘double’ of the body” (Weinstock 70). In many religions, the soul that makes the person who they are. Upon death, the soul is released, yet it still retains all memories and situations that made the now corpse a unique individual. It is this double, believed by Freud to be a projection of the ego, that causes “the quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the ‘double’ being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect. The ‘double’ has become a vision of terror, just as after the fall of their religion the gods took on daemonic shapes” (Freud 10). It is also believed that the uncanny of the double comes from memories of the past. Simple memories can be devastating, especially if they are connected to an experience with the unknown, the traumatic, or the negative. What sadistic experiences or traumatic events, or even memories of fear, occurred bring the uncanny to the forefront? Will it happen again, and if so, will I be able to overcome the fear?

Freud did state that there is a difference “between the uncanny that is actually experienced, and the uncanny as we merely picture it or read about it” (Freud 16). He believed that “the uncanny as it is depicted in literature, in stories and imaginative productions, merits in truth a separate discussion” (Freud 18). He explains, “that in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life” (Freud 18). Whether it be the souls in Dante’s *Inferno*, the multiple ghostly apparitions in Shakespeare’s plays, or even some unknown or *unheimlich*, the uncanny appears throughout literature. Freud called the uncanny “the disturbing feeling of familiarity and strangeness that, was at the root of most successful horror fictions.” For Freud, “the uncanny represents some disavowed or repressed uncomfortable identification – that manifests itself in strange feelings of fascination and repulsion, compulsive thoughts or behaviors, the imparting of ‘doubling’ or pursuit by one’s own shadow, reflection, or mysterious twin” (Ahmad 233). We want to know that there is a happy ending and that everyone gets what they deserve. And yet, it is the uncanny and the “defamiliarisation [which] destabilizes issues in a range of ways, splitting the self, causing the body to morph, leak, implode, and explode” (Wisker 147). This is a mirror of real life, whether we like it or not.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there are two examples of the uncanny, as well as the evolution of the uncanny from *unheimlich* to *heimlich*. The first is the unknown Other in the form of Boo Radley, and the second is the known Other of Tom Robinson, a Black man falsely accused of a crime. In the first example, Boo Radley is the unknown Other – the representation of the *unheimlich*. Some of the adults, such as Atticus Finch (Scout’s father), the town doctor

Reynolds, and the sheriff Tate, have actual knowledge of Boo and call him by his real name, Arthur Radley. However, to Scout and other children - as well as most of the other adults - Boo is the mysterious “boogeyman” who will get you if you get too close to his house. The lack of actual knowledge regarding Boo has others filling in the blanks with their own assumptions and fears – what they define as the *unheimlich*. As Scout believes, “The Radley Place was inhabited by an unknown entity the mere description of whom was enough to make us behave for days on end” (Lee 7). Scout imagines what he looks like and why he is never seen. It is not just Scout who believes in this unknown Other; her brother and other children do as well. Jem described Boo as being “six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that’s why his hands were bloodstained – if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time” (Lee 14). Even though Scout and Jem have never seen Boo, they are convinced of the horror of his physical appearance because the scary, the unknown, has to be physically deformed. What Scout does not know about him she assumes – the blanks filled in with assumed appearance, personality, and actions towards others. Briefly seen although never clearly, he is assumed to be the one behind the curtains of the Radley house, but they never view him as recognizably “human”. Even though he is “seen,” he is still the unknown.

Not only the children make the assumptions about Boo and the unknown; most of the adults do the same or base their opinion on gossip. According to Miss Stephanie Crawford, Boo was a danger to his own family: once Boo’s father entered a room, and “as Mr. Radley passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent’s leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants, and

resumed his activities” (Lee 12). These assumptions, half-truths, and gossip contribute directly to the continued uncanniness of the Other - the tendency to fear the unknown, regardless of the validity of the “factual” statements. Even new residents believe these stories, such as when Scout and Jem’s new friend, Walter, who firmly believed that he “almost died first year I come to school and et them pecans – folks say he pizened ‘em and put ‘em over on the school side of the fence” (Lee 26). This exaggeration of the unknown increases the uncanny to a level that becomes a part of the town culture and lore. Regardless of the truth, the stories that escalate about Boo and what he looks like have created an unknown monster that should be feared, and those who have never made an effort to learn about the unknown are stuck in the uncanny, adding a level of unnecessary fear to their lives.

In most situations of the *unheimlich* transforming to the *heimlich*, the object does not change but perceptions of it do. However, in his own way, Boo tries to reduce the level of fear and unknown beliefs. Boo attempts to communicate and show he is harmless by leaving gifts for the children in a tree near the front of the yard. Initially, they do not know that these are from Boo, and at first view them as possibly dangerous, but nothing happens to Scout or to Jem after they take the objects. At one point in the novel, Jem and Scout run through the Radleys’ yard and Jem’s pants get caught in the fence they try to climb. The fear of Boo is so great that Jem leaves his pants hanging on the fence so he can escape the imagined clutches of Boo. However, when Jem goes back to retrieve his pants, Jem finds that “when I went back, they were folded across the fence...like they were expectin’ me” and that “they’d been sewed up. Not like a lady sewed ‘em, like somethin’ I’d try to do. All crooked. It’s almost like...somebody was readin’ my mind...like somebody could tell what I was gonna do” (Lee 66). The progression from the

unknown to the known continues – the migration from the *unheimlich* and the *heimlich* seen throughout the novel. During the instance when Miss Maudie’s house is on fire, Jem and Scout go to watch. Scout, without realizing it, now has a blanket around her to keep her warm. Her father Atticus says that “someday, maybe, Scout can thank him for covering her up...[it was] Boo Radley. You were so busy looking at the fire you didn’t know it when he put the blanket around you” (Lee 81-82). This is the first known instance to Scout that Boo may not be completely a monster, and her fear begins to decrease. The more the uncanny – the Other – is known, the less *unheimlich* and more *heimlich* it becomes. This change becomes a major component near the end of the novel, where Boo – the uncanny Other – comes to the rescue of the children. The unknown Boo defeats the known Ewell and takes the two children to safety to receive medical help. It is the final step toward the change of the uncanny Boo; he is now the known *heimlich*. When asked who saved them, Scout points to the man in the corner. She sees him for who he truly is:

As I pointed he brought his arms down and pressed the palms of his hands against the wall. They were white hands, sickly white hands that had never seen the sun, so white they stood out garishly against the dull cream wall in the dim light of Jem’s room. I looked from his hands to his sand-stained khaki pants; my eyes traveled up his thin frame to his torn denim shirt. His face was as white as his hands, but for a shadow on his jutting chin. His cheeks were thin to hollowness; his mouth was wide; they were shallow, almost delicate indentations at his temples, and his gray eyes were so colorless I thought he was blind. His hair was dead and thin, almost feathery on top of his head.

(Lee 310)

Despite the possible fearful description of Boo, Scout finally meets the unknown and is no longer afraid. He has transformed from the *unheimlich* to the *heimlich*. He is a kind, mentally disabled individual named Arthur who saved the lives of Scout and Jem. The disappearance of the uncanny can be seen when Scout takes care of Boo by taking him back to his house, and even though Boo is never seen again, he is now a known person – an example of the *heimlich* – to Scout, and an example of how the Other can become known and so no longer feared.

This is not what happens to Tom Robinson. He represents a different view of the uncanny in the novel – the Other – solely because of his race. He is not a hidden unknown, but he is viewed by much of the town as someone or something to be feared because he is different from the “normal” white people. Because he is Black, he can be automatically distrusted, accused of a crime he did not commit, and for the purposes of this chapter viewed in Freud’s terms as both the known and unknown representation of the uncanny. Lee uses the example of Tom to show that monsters of the known - the prejudiced white townspeople - are worse than the innocent but unknown Tom. Those associated with Tom, such as his lawyer Atticus, are also viewed as the uncanny and therefore wrong. Many, especially Bob and Mayella Ewell, view Tom as a convenient explanation for a crime they reported that never actually occurred. Even though the Ewells were viewed in a negative light – the known Other in this case – they have the power of racial prejudice, which results in the unfair treatment and lynching of Tom. Even the children recognize this as unfair. For example, when Scout states “Well, Dill, after all he’s just a Negro,” Dill immediately comes back with his view that “I don’t care one speck. It ain’t right, somehow it ain’t right to do ‘em that way. Hasn’t anybody got any business talkin’ like that – it just makes me sick” (Lee 226). The known *heimlich* of the human monster overrides the

innocent, as still *unheimlich*. As Atticus states, “They’ve done it before and they did it tonight and they’ll do it again and when they do it – seems that only children weep” – a testament to the horror of humanity. It is not a supernatural uncanny but destructive human prejudice that dooms this man and this community (Lee 243).

In Harper Lee’s mirror readers are forced to view their doppelgangers and determine what they believe. It may be as Atticus states, “There’s nothing more sickening to me than a low-grade white man who’ll take advantage of a Negro’s ignorance. Don’t fool yourselves – it’s all adding up and one of these days we’re going to pay the bill for it” (Lee 252). This prejudicial horror becomes more obvious to the children such as Jem. When Scout states that she heard Miss Gates say: “it’s time somebody taught ‘em a lesson, they were gettin’ way above themselves, an’ the next thing they think they do is marry us”, Jem becomes furious and angrily forces Scout to not view Blacks as the *heimlich*: “He leaped off the bed, grabbed my by the collar and shook me. ‘I never wanta hear about that courthouse again, ever, ever, you hear me? You hear me? Don’t you ever say one word to me about it again!’” (Lee 283). This is a breaking of the firm belief that what is known is safe and what is unknown is hazardous. Jem shows Scout that what they assume to be *heimlich*, such as Ewell, can be unsafe, while someone like the *unheimlich* Tom, can not only be innocent but harmless as well. For Scout, the uncanny has changed. She learns that Tom is not any different from nor should be treated differently than any other person, regardless of his race; he is a victim of prejudicial treatment – the known Other. To her, Boo also is no longer the *unheimlich*. He is not a fearsome ghoul but a quiet, fragile individual who just wants to be safe at home. Lee’s pairing of Boo and Tom shows us that racial

prejudice is a horror that exists throughout the world, and this horror can exceed that which is in the fictional horror genre: reality can be more horrific than fiction.

In Jeff Vandermeer's *Annihilation*, the representation of the uncanny appears repeatedly throughout the book, starting with the section of land known as Area X, and this constant exposure – one could say barrage – of the uncanny leads members of the team to insanity. Multiple expedition teams have entered, but only a few individuals have ever returned, and in a condition significantly different from their previous selves. The narrator is part of the latest team to enter, and though Area X is part of the Earth, some changes have made it unrecognizable. It is the team's mission to "continue the government's investigation into the mysteries of Area X" (4), a direct examination of the unknown.

Within Area X, the team is exposed to uncanny architecture – unfamiliar to the team, including the anthropologist, and is unsettling at best, disturbing at worst. In other examples of the uncanny, the team reaches their goal of the primary architectural structure. The narrator sees it as a tower, while the rest of the team sees it as a tunnel. Despite the same actions of entry and exploration – going down into the structure – the structure continues to be seen differently by individual team members. Its interior is unlike anything any of them have ever seen. When they begin to receive messages, the medium of the organic message – words made of vines and other organic flora – is unlike anything any of the team members have seen. There is uncertainty in everything, whether it be the team, the base camp, the tower, or the messages. They are not the first exploration team, yet there is growing uncertainty about Area X, especially as those very few returning members from earlier teams are described by their family members as "uncanny or frightening" (VanderMeer 34) – a common component found in horror. The final line of the

chapter, when the narrator states that those that have returned from Area X have blank faces and look like examples of “a death that would not mean being dead” (VanderMeer 35), is reminiscent of Stephen King’s line in *Pet Sematary*: “Sometimes, dead is better” (King 144).

Similarly uncanny, rules require no contact either with the outside world or in Area X, and these lead to a view of the team in the story as all alone, even though they are still on Earth. The team itself is an example of purposeful uncanny and is a representation of the chapter title – “Initiation.” They stay unknown to each other of the belief that ‘anything personal should be left behind.’ Names belonged to where we had come from, not to who we were while embedded in Area X” (VanderMeer 9). This team is an unknown entity itself with members who are viewed as uncanny by others, and the sense of uncanny increases as one of these “known” team members – the team leader, the psychologist – has implanted hypnotic suggestions into each of the other team members as a form of controlling their emotions and resulting actions.

Trying to understand this, the narrator travels to the lighthouse, the one structure on the map that has stayed consistent for all the expedition teams and their maps. As she reaches it and climbs to the top, she finds the belongings of the missing psychologist, as well as a repository of all the journals made by previous expedition teams that were supposedly brought back from Area X to be studied to help better understand the uncanny area. She re-examines the entire structure of the expedition, and comes to the realization that “human lives had poured into this place over time, volunteered to become party to exile and worse... Why did they keep sending us? Why did we keep going? So many lies, so little ability to face the truth. Area X broke minds, I felt, even though it hadn’t yet broken mine” (VanderMeer 119). Their work is the exploration of the uncanny to learn about the unknown in an effort to find some type of order and knowledge, but

in her continued reflection on Area X, the narrator shows the permanence of the uncanny in there: She states that she is “aware that all of this speculation is incomplete, inexact, inaccurate, useless. If I don’t have real answers, it is because we still don’t know what questions to ask. Our instruments are useless, our methodology broken, our motivations selfish” (VanderMeer 192-193).

The team members are in an unknown place following an unknown entity, with no idea of what danger they might be in or of the unknown Other they are seeking. Again, the narrator sees the structure differently. She sees the walls of the tower breathing, as if “the walls were made of living tissue” (VanderMeer 42), leaving her with the fear they are in the body of an unfathomable beast (VanderMeer 47). What can certainly be viewed as uncanny is the message itself because it is made of literally living words – whether by moss or small organisms, and “the sense of unease in ignoring the ominous quality of those words was palpable. It infected our own sentences when we spoke, as we tried to catalogue the biological reality of what we were *both* seeing” (VanderMeer 47). The uncanny is forcing the team to confront the *unheimlich*, even if Area X and its unnaturalness never truly become *heimlich*. Even when English words and phrases appear, the unease continues due to not only the words but their descent within the structure. The narrator is still the only one to experience the uncanny of the tower – “the tower’s heartbeat still throbbed against my eardrums, the letters, the words, swayed as the walls trembled with their breathing” (VanderMeer 51). With her, the team progresses until they determine that “something below us is writing this script. Something below us may still be in the process of writing this script” (VanderMeer 51), and that they were “exploring an organism that might contain a mysterious second organism, which was itself using yet other organisms to write words

on the wall” (VanderMeer 51). It is an increasing barrage of the unknown upon the team, which begins to come apart and either disappear or die. The body of the anthropologist is discovered within the tower but no one understands why she took it upon herself to go down into the proverbial belly of the beast. Her body is found at the foot of the most current form of the message with no understandable explanation as to how she died: “There wasn’t much left of her face, and odd burn marks were all over the remaining skin. Spilling out from her broken jaw, which looked as though someone had wrenched it open in a single act of brutality, was a torrent of green ash that sat on her chest in a mound. Her hands, palms up in her lap, had no skin left on them, only a kind of gauzy filament and more burn marks. Her legs seemed fused together and half-melted” (VanderMeer 61). Even after her death, her previously known body is being transformed into an unknown form, a body that is “indistinct...[and] a faint golden glow arose from her body” (VanderMeer 60). The known is slowly being converted to the unknown.

Later, we learn that the psychologist utilized a hypnotic phrase to guide the anthropologist to continue the descent on her own. The narrator herself recognizes that the team is outmatched: “we were scientists, trained to observe natural phenomena and the results of human activity. We had not been trained to encounter what appeared to be the uncanny” (VanderMeer 69). She begins to understand that the uncanny has transformed previous expedition teams and made them into shells of their former selves – most ending in death, by suicide or otherwise. She believed in the unknown before volunteering as she needed to understand what happened to her husband, and she knew she “would never know what it was like without going there” (VanderMeer 83). The narrator gives a name to the unknown entity – the Crawler – not just for a better identification but for control purposes. In myth, to know the

name of a person or entity gives one a sense of power and control – factual or not – over that individual. Naming gives credibility to the entity and might well reduce the uncanniness of this creature. As the narrator enters and descends into the uncanny tower for the third time and descends until she finds the Crawler, an amalgamation of components that do not naturally fit together, she comes to understand the psychologist who says of the creature that “I never saw it. It was never there. Or I saw it too many times. It was inside me. Inside you. I was trying to get away. From what’s inside me” (VanderMeer 126). When the psychologist dies, her body begins a transformation like the archaeologist’s: “the sponginess of her shoulder had bothered me, and I saw I’d had good reason to be concerned. From her collarbone down to her elbow, her arm had been colonized by a fibrous green-gold fuzziness, which gave off a faint glow” (VanderMeer 133). In the Crawler the narrator finds a “kind of tan mask made of skin, half-transparent, resembling in its way the discarded shell of a horseshoe crab. A wide face, with a hint of pockmarks across the left cheek” (VanderMeer 140). This mask made of a human face is at least something that is recognizable, and not completely foreign – not completely *unheimlich*. However, further exploration finds more “detritus from a kind of molting: a long trail of skin-like debris, husks, and sloughings. Clearly, I might soon meet what had shed this material, and just as clearly the moaning creature was or had once been, human” (VanderMeer 140). This recognition creates a more knowable, less uncanny creature.

The final chapter of the book focuses solely on the narrator and her state of mind. She has read her husband’s journal and found in it another example of the uncanny – the doppelganger. Her husband wrote that “they saw a ghastly procession heading into the Tower: seven of the eight members of the [expedition], including a doppelganger of my husband...And

there before me, myself. I walked so stiffly; I had such a blank look on my face. It was so clearly not me...and yet it was me. A kind of shock froze both me and the surveyor. We did not try to stop them. Somehow, it seemed impossible to try to stop ourselves – and I won't lie, we were terrified...We were ghosts" (VanderMeer 165-166). When she exits the tower, Area X continues its transformation into the uncanny as she sees that the stars are in different positions, "strewn across the dark in chaotic new patters, where just the night before I had taken comfort in their familiarity" (VanderMeer 170). After she is finally able to escape back to the lighthouse, she attempts to describe the Crawler again, yet can only do so in a combination of impossibilities. In addition to an overwhelming blue-green glow, there is a "crescendo of ice crystals shattering," "a burning smell, as of late fall leaves or like some vast and distant engine lose to overheating," and a "taste like brine set ablaze" (VanderMeer 176). Her description of the Crawler doesn't finally move the unknown to the known. She continues her description: "the Crawler kept changing at a lightning pace, as if to mock my ability to comprehend it. It was a figure within a series of refracted panes of glass...It was a great sluglike monster ringed by satellites of even odder creatures. It was a glistening star...Then it became an overwhelming *hugeness* in my battered vision, seeming to rise and keep rising as it leapt toward me. The shape spread until it was even where it was not, or *should not have been*...a wall of flesh that resembled light, with sharp, curving elements within it and textures like ice when it has frozen from flowing water" (VanderMeer 176-177). Such descriptions could be found in any Lovecraftian story dealing with cosmic horror and the so-called Elder Ones – those that cannot be described or successfully understood by the human mind. An individual lost in a strange place with the mind creating an unknown danger just out of reach is terrifying and one all too real.

We Have Always Lived in the Castle by Shirley Jackson is widely considered to be an example of the gothic. However, the story taking place in the gothic trappings of the castle could just as easily happen in a two-story home in suburbia. There is no family curse, no powerful love or romance, no haunting, and definitely no supernatural creatures or beliefs. What makes the uncanny different in this book is the *heimlich* in the story in which the family has a secret they do not want to have exposed. The uncanny – the unknown – is central to the story: why most of the family are dead and how the remaining members of the family function internally and interact with the external townspeople. The constant exposure to the uncanny has inflicted mental disorders in the different family members. Constance suffers from agoraphobia and anthropophobia, Uncle Julian has severe OCD and is disabled from his small ingestion of the poison, and Merricat wishes for those that mistreat her and her family to die. This pattern starts in the very first paragraph where Merricat explains who she is so that the reader can better understand her narrative, even with an undertone of darkness: “My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf...I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and *Amanita phalloides*, the death-cup mushroom. Everyone else in my family is dead” (Jackson 1). The homey known house and family keep Merricat, Constance, and Julian safe from the outside, regardless of any mental issues seen in family members. A routine exists where each family member performs the same duties – daily and weekly – as they persist in excluding the outside world and keeping their home and lives safe from it. They keep a schedule of cleaning, even for areas that don’t need this type of regularity; Julian focuses solely on the deaths of the family for his memoirs, and Merricat always goes to the town for groceries

on the same two days. This self-imposed family version of OCD is strange and *unheimlich* to the townspeople - they are the unknown to others.

Six years before the story begins, the majority of the family was poisoned at dinner, with Constance, though acquitted, taking the blame for the murders. Merricat clearly understands that “The people of the village have always hated us” (Jackson 4). It is their unsupported fear – the fear of the unknown killer – that drives this hatred. Yet they never stop gossiping about or “ignoring” Merricat, the only one that goes to town for groceries and necessities. She is ridiculed by a poem that all the children sing:

Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?

Oh no, said Merricat, you’ll poison me.

Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep?

Down in the boneyard ten feet deep! (Jackson 16)

The aspect of death – the ultimate unknown - is in Merricat’s mind regularly, such as when she “thought about burning black painful rot that ate away from inside, hurting dreadfully. I wished it on the village” (Jackson 6). For her, these continued thoughts of violence and hatred are not only a mentally safe place away from outsiders. She continues to wish harm towards others, regardless of Constance’s pleas. Merricat “wished they were dead. I would have liked to come into the grocery some morning and see them all, even the Elberts and the children, lying there crying with the pain and dying. I would then help myself to groceries, I thought, stepping over their bodies, taking whatever I fancied from the shelves, and go home, with perhaps a kick for Mrs. Donell while she lay there. I was never sorry when I had thoughts like this; I only wished they would come true” (Jackson 8-9). Similarly, Merricat continues to wish death upon Charles,

wishing that she “could turn him into a fly and drop him into a spider’s web and watch him tangled and helpless and struggling, shut into the body of a dying buzzing fly; I could wish him dead until he died...I could bury him in the hole where my box of silver dollars had been so safe until he came; if he was under the ground I could walk over him stamping my feet” (Jackson 89). Yet, even then, only the sane statements of the doctor and friends indicate it was not Constance but the destroying of the house that ultimately killed Charles. Here, Merricat focuses on the death of others by stating that she will “put death in all their food and watch them die” (Jackson 110) so reveals to the reader that Merricat killed the family. Constance knew and protected Merricat so she would not be punished by the law or by the town.

There is an unclear chronology of the appearance of the unknown stranger, who upon arrival, brings fear to Merricat: “I had only a minute or two left before I saw him. I might have used that minute or two for so many things: I might have warned Constance, somehow, or I might have thought of a new, safer, magic word, or I might have pushed the table across the kitchen doorway” (Jackson 55). The unknown stranger claims to be their cousin Charles Blackwood and despite Constance’s recognition of Charles, Merricat doesn’t know or remember him and blames his arrival on the failure of the wards she has set up around the perimeter of the house to protect the family from harm. She sees him as a ghost, and so “Cousin Charles was a ghost, but a ghost that could be driven away” (Jackson 61). Merricat does everything she can to drive him away – he not only breaks their routine but dares to introduce change into the household. She reverts to the phrases and thoughts that bring comfort to her, despite the darkness. Once around the dinner table, when a change is introduced that Charles would go with Merricat to the store, she begins to proclaim that “the Amanita phalloides...holds three different

poisons,” proceeding to explain each poison in extreme detail (Jackson 72). This threat angers Charles but the rest of the family considers it as normal; Constance says throughout the book, “Silly Merricat,” almost a ritual calming of Merricat before she can cause harm.

Charles introduces the outside ridicule of the Blackwood family into the safety of the house, destabilizing their routines. He ridicules Julian and his disability. He shows anger at anything Merricat says that he deems in any way as inappropriate. He attempts to drive Constance not to permit these things in the family house. Throughout his stay at the house, Merricat does everything she can to drive him out. She puts leaves and twigs into his bed and drenches it with water. She breaks and destroys items in his room, continually making him angry and not understanding the family. He sees actions and results that he simply cannot understand, such as Merricat’s drive to bury items. This is the first indication that Charles is after something else – he has a hidden agenda and wants to remove the items in his way. The eventual realization of the family’s eccentricities becomes too much for Charles. He threatens Julian and Merricat, pleads with Constance to do something about them, and states that he is not leaving, thereby insisting changes be made. Here, Merricat “accidentally” starts the fire that soon takes over the house. As the fire spreads and the rescuers arrive, Charles focuses only on saving the safe and its contents, never mentioning or doing anything to save the other family members, even responding to questions about them with the retort that “They had plenty of warning...they’re all right,” despite Constance’s fear of being outside and Julian being in a wheelchair (Jackson 103). Once the fire dies down, the true feelings of the townspeople come to light as they work to destroy everything in the house that hasn’t already been damaged by the fire, breaking windows, smashing furniture and mementos - all with the mob mentality, all with Charles only worried

about the safe. The children's poem is changed by many throughout this destruction and the demolition only stops once it is announced that Uncle Julian has died.

Constance and Merricat stay in the partially destroyed house and work to put things back together and reinstitute their routines. As they do this and plan to never leave the house or go outside again, the townspeople take care of them by bringing food and other necessities out of contrition for their heinous acts. The girls refuse to acknowledge or respond to those that were their friends, nor do they allow Charles back into the house, even after he realizes his mistaken focus on the wrong thing during the fire. Over the years, the girls never venture outside; they rely only on each other for the unknown future. The murders are never discussed again, and they both repeatedly tell each other how happy they are. They have survived the attack of those that could not understand or did not want to understand the uncanny.

The consistent efforts by different villagers to understand why the murders occurred is their way to move the *unheimlich* to the *heimlich*, but they do so in a way insulting to the Blackwood family. There are those few that visit the Blackwoods regularly and could be considered, if not friends, then friendly and understanding. The rest of the villagers that have a desperate need to have their questions answered as to what happened and why the murders occurred. One of them, Mrs. Lucille Wright, shows no delicacy or decorum when she confronts the family: "I cannot seem to remember that that pretty young girl is actually – well. Your mass murderer must have a reason, Mr. Blackwood, even if it is only some perverted, twisted – oh, dear. She is such a charming girl, your niece; I cannot remember when I have taken to anyone as I have to her. But if she is a homicidal maniac" (Jackson 38). That a pretty girl could be a killer confuses and astounds the villagers, and their inability to know the Blackwood family continues

to assign attributes and stories to fill in the blanks of what they do not know. In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Jackson shows readers that this bi-directional fear - being ridiculed and gossiped about by others for who they think you are, the way you look, the way you act, and even your name - has all too often led to violence, to murder, to suicide.

Without the horror of the uncanny, all three books treated here would significantly change or not exist. The mysterious *unheimlich* figure of Boo in *To Kill a Mockingbird* contrasts with the uncanny view of the Other in terms of the racism that kills Tom. In *Annihilation*, Area X literally is and contains the uncanny. The hiding from the uncanny is the story of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Lee, Vandermeer, and Jackson show us that elements of the horrible are important to our culture and our understanding of life – good and bad – that a more protected life could not provide.

CHAPTER 3

THE FANTASTIC: TZVETAN TODOROV, TONI MORRISON, VICTOR LAVALLE

If the primary theme of the uncanny is uncertainty, then the theme of the fantastic builds upon that uncertainty with a primary theme of hesitation. This hesitation is about whether something is real or not. It is a hesitation by the reader or primary character as to whether a particular item or event is supernatural (the marvelous) or something real (the uncanny). The primary source of the examination of the fantastic, published in 1970, comes from Tzvetan Todorov. Todorov defined the fantastic as “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov 25). He goes on to state that the individual

must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us...[it] occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. (Todorov 25)

The fantastic is not an issue regarding a person’s sanity or mental health, but rather more of an open mind as to what could be supernatural and what is just an illusion or misunderstanding. An attempt can be made to understand both the “rational” uncanny and “irrational” supernatural explanations, but this attempt, or a lack of understanding, leads to that moment of hesitation to which Todorov refers to: “the possibility of a hesitation between the two [that] creates the fantastic effect” (26).

Others have attempted to define this break in the natural order of things that causes the fantastic. For example, Louis Vax believed that “The fantastic narrative generally describes men like ourselves, inhabiting the real world, suddenly confronted by the inexplicable,” and Roger Caillois stated that “the fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an interruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality” (qtd. in Todorov 26). Regardless of these other definitions, they all conclude that a choice must inevitably be made between the uncanny but explainable and the unknown supernatural. According to Todorov, “the reader’s hesitation is the first condition of the fantastic” (Todorov 31). Without this hesitation, the fantastic would not exist. If the reader believes completely in the supernatural or completely does not believe, then there is no fantastic. Todorov was very clear that the fantastic cannot exist in all forms of writing. Specifically, the fantastic cannot exist in poetry or allegorical writing as these are writings that are open to interpretation by the reader, and therefore there is no hesitation. In Todorov’s completed definition of the fantastic, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world and hesitate between natural and supernatural explanations; a character may also experience the hesitation; and the reader must adopt a certain attitude regarding the text (Todorov 33).

Even though the work of H.P. Lovecraft came decades before Todorov’s examination of the fantastic, Lovecraft fittingly stated that “we must judge the fantastic tale not so much by the author’s intentions and the mechanisms of the plot, but by the emotional intensity it provokes...A tale is fantastic if the reader experiences an emotion of profound fear and terror, the presence of unsuspected worlds and powers” (qtd. in Todorov 34-35). Both showing how of

the fantastic and makes these books so important in American literature. The novels under examination with this theory are *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Changeling* by Victor LaValle.

The main story of *Beloved* is not only an expanded struggle between knowing what may be real and what may be supernatural; it is also a question whether the character of Beloved is the uncanny or the marvelous, or even both depending on the reader and the specific character in the novel. Her appearance is at first, a gift to Sethe, but over time it becomes a personified retaliation for actions taken several years ago. In *Beloved*, the horror develops quickly and is specifically directed towards Sethe, all stemming from when Sethe killed or attempted to kill her children so that they were not abducted and forced back into slavery. The only child killed was Beloved, and it is she who returns as a supernatural entity in the form of Sethe's daughter, at the age she would have been had she lived.

When the slavecatchers appeared, "a pretty little slavegirl had recognized a hat, and split to the woodshed to kill her children" (Morrison 186). Sethe did not want her children to become enslaved, so she made every effort to kill them so they would not suffer. She is found in a shed with "two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a ... woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time" (Morrison 175). Despite the violent actions, Sethe feels justified in what she has done. She would kill her children to save them: She "collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil out, away, over there where no one could hurt them" (Morrison 192). Sethe refused to have

her children suffer the way she had suffered, and so took every action possible, regardless of how horrific, to save them.

Beloved's appearance in physical form was not the first supernatural event attributed to her; rather, her "residence" in the house at 124 Bluestone Road appears in the first line of the novel as "spiteful," "Full of a baby's venom" (Morrison 3). The house made life miserable for all of its residents until only Denver and Sethe were left and Denver assumed that the infant spirit of Beloved caused the haunting. Denver believes that she sees this haunting foreshadowed in her vision of the white dress draping itself over Sethe, and later in the novel is "certain that Beloved was the white dress that had knelt with her mother in the keeping room, the true-to-life presence of the baby that had kept her company most of her life" (Morrison 140-141). The spirit of Beloved controlled what actions could take place inside the house, and so Sethe, Denver, and Paul D "waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place" (Morrison 4). Yet, these supernatural events, even though unexplainable, are viewed as sad, and not necessarily as evil. The "haint" would not allow Sethe to leave, nor did Sethe want to leave where her dead child is buried. Sethe's guilt over her killing of Beloved never dissipates, and to leave the grave of her dead daughter is inconceivable. A recent writer explains, "The emotional blow associated with child loss can trigger a wide range of psychological and physiological problems including depression, anxiety, cognitive and physical symptoms linked to stress, marital problems, increased risk for suicide, physical pain, and guilt. All these issues can persist long after the child's death" (Vitelli). There is nothing so terrible to a parent as losing a child, and so Sethe's soul remains bared for the suffering she feels she deserves.

Denver's brothers can hear the sounds of a baby crawling, and eventually, Denver hears "the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs...from then on the presence was full of spite. Instead of sighs and accidents there was pointed and deliberate abuse" (Morrison 122). This is the first indication of the potential hostility this unknown "haint" carries with it and the suffering it imposes on those in the house is its desire to make those who lived to suffer as well. Others, such as Paul D, try and fight the evil spirit resident in the house. Even unable to be seen, the spirit is "fought" by Paul D who does everything he can to challenge the spirit, yelling "You want to fight, come on! God damn it! She got enough without you. She got enough" (Morrison 22)! His battle against the supernatural has moved his belief into the uncanny. The moment of hesitation as to what he is facing is based on the knowledge of what or who is haunting the house and Sethe. This eventually quiets or banishes the spirit, and yet Denver is sad and miserable that she is the only family member left with Sethe. Denver reminisces about this battle and how Paul D "had beat the spirit away the very day he entered her house and no sign of it since. A blessing, but in its place he brought another kind of haunting" – in this case, *Beloved* (Morrison 112-113). The battle has now changed from the known uncanny back to the hesitation of the fantastic and what appears in its place.

Denver is viewed as a special child – one who cannot be harmed and therefore can stand against *Beloved*. Sethe explains that "nothing bad can happen to her. Look at it. Everybody I knew dead or gone or dead and gone. Not her. Not my Denver" (Morrison 50). She has now taken the fantastic hesitation of the ghost or "haint" and believes *Beloved* to represent the marvelous. She views the supernatural and is not afraid: "What was unusual (even for a girl who had lived all her life in a house people by the living activity of the dead) was that a white dress

knelt down next to her mother and had its sleeve around her mother's waist" (Morrison 35). Denver views this action, and yet can foresee this as potentially evil, as when described to Sethe. Denver believed that "the white dress holding its arm around her mother's waist was in pain. If so, it could mean the baby ghost had plans" for Sethe and shows itself more as a supernatural than an uncertain situation of the fantastic (Morrison 42).

The unseen spirit hauntings end when Beloved walks out of the lake, and Morrison describes her appearance as a birth, exhibited by Beloved's infant-like behavior and Sethe's suffering the symptoms of childbirth. Sethe's need to urinate is sudden and uncontrollable; an unnatural amount of water comes out, which parallels how much Beloved drinks. Beloved emerges from the lake as a fully dressed woman, and it takes her days to "grow up," all the while exhibiting a newborn's constant need for care and support. Beloved is exhausted when she emerges from the lake and needs significant rest; upon examination, her skin is flawless and appears brand new, like a baby's, with "feet that [were] like her hands, soft and new" (Morrison 62). Sethe continues to exhibit signs of new motherhood as her breasts continue to generate milk for her "baby"; she still sees Beloved as her baby, and therefore will do everything in her power to take care of her, reminding herself that "the baby was dead. She had not died in the night, but the baby had. If that was the case, then there was no stopping now" - another example of Sethe re-raising Beloved starting as a baby, feeling as if she has received a second chance (Morrison 97). The continuation of Beloved's rapid growth into a young girl can be seen in her obsessive reactions to Sethe: "Beloved could not take her eyes off Sethe. Stooping to shake the damper or snapping sticks for kindlin, Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (Morrison 68). This allusion to cannibalism foreshadows the future dynamic where Beloved is in charge of

Sethe. She follows Sethe everywhere, and when she cannot follow her physically, she waits at the window for Sethe to return. Sethe treats Beloved differently, as “the same adoration from her daughter (had it been forthcoming) would have annoyed her; made her chill at the thought of having raised a ridiculously dependent child. But the company of this sweet, if peculiar, guest pleased her the way a zealot pleases his teacher” (Morrison 68). Sethe’s actions and emotions regarding Beloved are exaggerated and significantly different from her treatment of Denver. As in life, the needs of the newborn tend to supersede the older lives of those around it.

At this point, Denver becomes increasingly suspicious of who (or what) Beloved is. Beloved begins to ask questions about things that she could never have known, such as where Sethe’s “diamonds” are. These do not raise any suspicion in Sethe, but Denver can see that they do not arise from anything this person could know. This is an instant of the fantastic for Denver as to whether Beloved is a reincarnation of the original child or something supernaturally worse. This mystery of Sethe and her relation to Beloved continues to increase. As Sethe remembers her time of early motherhood with Denver, Beloved begins to hum a song that Sethe herself made up. It is as if Beloved existed before she was born and in that status. The fantastic to Morrison is not static but dynamic; it exists fluidly, primarily in the knowledge of the reader or character. The unexplainable supernatural can become an object or person of the uncanny. As in the case of Beloved, the dynamic can occur more than once, and it ends with Beloved on the side of the marvelous instead of the uncanny. She is the known moving to the supernatural unknown.

Paul D also experiences the fantastic because he does not know what Beloved is – is she a manifestation of the spirit that had haunted the house or is she something more sinister? He has great hesitation about whether she is good or bad for Sethe. Since he couldn’t “beat up a

ghost...nor could he throw a helpless colored girl out in territory infected by the Klan,” he goes with what he knows and questions Sethe about Beloved’s motives (Morrison 79). He cannot explain why he suspects something is wrong with Beloved, nor does he understand why Beloved bothers him so much. He practices what to say to Sethe about Beloved, but begins to question not only himself but what Beloved actually may be: “A grown man fixed by a girl? But what if the girl was not a girl, but something in disguise? A lowdown something looked like a sweet young girl...it was not being able to stay or go where he wished in 124, and the danger was in losing Sethe because he was not man enough to break out” (Morrison 149). The foreshadowing of what Beloved will do to Sethe appears at the time of her actual birth. She causes Sethe to suffer, and as Baby Suggs sees, “roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe’s shoulders” – a testament to what Beloved will do to Sethe upon her return from death (Morrison 109). More understanding and answers about Beloved start appearing, such as when Denver questions Beloved about her name, and Beloved answers “in the dark my name is Beloved,” a reference to the grave where her body is buried, as well as the headstone that only says “Beloved.” In terms of the fantastic, Denver too has hesitation regarding Beloved. The explanation about being in the dark, unable to breathe amongst all the people there, and finally escaping through a bridge, all to see Sethe, is a hint that Beloved has not forgotten what happened to put her in a grave and has that planned for Sethe. This is when Denver begins to suspect that there is more danger in Beloved than initially believed. As Denver attempts to protect Sethe from the truth about Beloved and her origins, Beloved clearly states that “she is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have” (Morrison 89). Beloved moves in the fantastic from the uncanny to the marvelous as evidenced by her

mysterious appearance to her taking on the role of the lost daughter, as if initially to forgive and even reward Sethe.

Beloved's conquering of Sethe is gradual. One of the first examples of resentment on behalf of Beloved toward Sethe was when Beloved makes it clear that "she don't love me like I love her. I don't love nobody but her" (Morrison 137). However, is this love like the earlier actions of Sethe – does Beloved love her "enough" to kill Sethe? This belief stems not just from a mother and child dyad, but more so from what Sethe did to Beloved. As Sethe views a sleeping Beloved and Denver, she believes that Beloved has forgiven her for her actions: "She even looked straight at the shed, smiling, smiling at the things she would not have to remember now. Thinking, She ain't even mad with me. Not a bit" (Morrison 214). For a while, Sethe believes that everything that has occurred was not only right but has been rewarded by the return of one of her children. For a short amount of time, she is happy because she believes her actions have been forgiven: "I thought you were mad with me. And now I know that if you was, you ain't now because you came back here to me and I was right all along: there is no world outside my door. I only need to know one thing. How bad is the scar?" (Morrison 217).

However, the guilt that has stayed with Sethe is what Beloved uses to take advantage of her. Beloved's plan begins when she first acknowledges to herself that her body may not be natural – a decision within the realm of the fantastic. As she pulls out a tooth, she is convinced that "this is it. Next would be her arm, her hand. A toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once," like Frankenstein's monster – an amalgamation of parts (Morrison 157). It is now that Beloved's work in taking over Sethe begins. Beloved has moved from a gift to a curse – the angry and possessive entity - who crosses the fantastic from a newborn in the

shape of a regular woman to an angry young woman out to retaliate against Sethe. Her refusal to take the blame for the choking of Sethe leads to a fierce confrontation with Denver. Denver has seen Beloved choke and nearly break her mother's neck, but then at the last minute, stop and "save" her. Despite Denver's arguments that Baby Suggs would never do something like that, Beloved takes the position that she saved Sethe from death. Near the end of the novel, it becomes clear that Beloved is retaliating against Sethe. She grows bigger and heavier, surviving almost solely on sweets and rich food, but her true nourishment is her draining the life from Sethe. As Denver sees this, it appears "the women had arrived at a doomsday truce designed by the devil" (Morrison 294). Even so, Sethe refuses to leave Beloved; her everlasting guilt as to how she killed Beloved drives her to give Beloved everything, including her own life. The antagonism and control over Sethe's life now have become so pronounced that no one else matters to Beloved, including Denver.

The role of authority in 124 has changed. Instead of Beloved helping her mother, Sethe now serves Beloved: "it was Beloved who made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire" (Morrison 283). The supernatural is now in charge with Beloved taking over the role of Sethe to an extreme. She is "dressed in Sethe's dresses...she imitated Sethe, talked the way she did laughed her laugh and used her body the way down to the walk, the way Sethe moved her hands, sighed through her nose, held her head" (Morrison 283). Denver's role has now changed from "protecting Beloved from Sethe, to ... protecting her mother from Beloved" (Morrison 286). It is apparent that Sethe is dying, and Beloved is thriving, as is seen by the townspeople, with Beloved noticeably whipping Sethe. Beloved stops being she and becomes It: "It's sitting there. Sleeps, eats and

raises hell. Whipping Sethe every day” (Morrison 301). Denver returns to the empty shell of her mother and now believes that Beloved is not the human daughter but a supernatural “It” playing the role of daughter, with a plan of supernatural revenge. The ladies of the town feel they need to rescue Sethe from Beloved. As they arrive at the house, Sethe runs to defend her, and Beloved stands on the front porch, naked, pregnant, and grinning as if she has won the battle, yet she believes that Sethe has abandoned her again. Shortly, she disappears, leaving an empty nightmarish mystery in her place. Once Beloved disappears, eventually, she disappears from memory and from legend. Regardless, and despite the efforts to forget her and what she has done, the last line of the book is her name – “Beloved” – which indicates the memory of her will never be truly gone.

The theme of the fantastic drives this novel. It exists in the uncertainty of who specific characters are or pretend to be and in the movement between the two sides of the fantastic, specifically of Beloved. The fantastic can be seen in the thoughts of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved. Sethe believes that Beloved has come back to her “of her own free will and I don’t have to explain a thing” (Morrison 236). Denver sees Beloved as her sister and her protector, keeping Sethe from killing her as she had killed her other children. We become part of Beloved’s thought stream – the wandering thoughts of this supernatural being. In the chapter with no punctuation (Morrison 248-252), we are in the middle of Beloved’s thoughts as she moves back and forth between the fantastic and the supernatural. Her references to the dead men without skin, as well as the one that eats her face, exhibit the fantastic – a movement between the marvelous and the uncanny, and this is unable to be clearly discerned. The reference to Sethe is real and can be viewed as marvelous, and yet the instances and images of the dead men can be

viewed as uncanny. Morrison leaves it to the reader to discern what is real and what is supernatural. This uncertainty and hesitation stem straight from Todorov and his belief about the hesitation of the individual, with the question never truly answered, and thus the hesitation, as to what is supernatural and what is a natural state of being.

With Victor LaValle's *The Changeling*, the fantastic is not as clear-cut as it is in *Beloved*. The story begins with the creation of a family unit yet warns that "The wildness had only begun" (LaValle 7). Throughout most of the book, family units are shown to be havens of safety and security. Dinner with family and friends, trips to see in-laws, planning the futures of children, and other similar events contribute to a sense of normalcy. Yet this book moves from white-collar suburbia to the setting of a fairy tale with a protagonist named Apollo, named after a Greco-Roman supernatural deity. There are multiple dreams and what could be called "premonitions," though no one in the book takes those seriously. And yet those very dreams pull from a memory of the real with the supernatural to become a type of foreshadowing, such as the nightmare Apollo suffers in which his father arrives with a "face that looked blue. He had no nose or mouth, only eyes. He pushed his way inside. The man knelt in front of Apollo and pulled off his blue skin. Underneath it was his daddy's face" (LaValle 105). This is the first hint of parents killing their children that is later realized to contain a significant amount of truth behind it. Near the middle of the book, we see the first hint of cracks in the family unit when what appears to be Emma's postpartum depression about her son Brian escalates to her possible murder of her child – we do not see it actually happen, nor know the result much later in the novel. In the middle of the struggle of the fantastic, the exhausted mother sees things as supposedly impossible. Emma admits to Kim that Brian may not be her son: "Maybe it's his

eyes...Or the way he puckers his lips? He looks like the Brian I gave birth to, but it's like he's someone else. When I hold him with my eyes closed I can almost feel the difference" (LaValle 115). Emma's struggle shows where and how one's perspective can be seen as completely wrong by someone else, even to the point of not even being seen at all, such as Apollo's inability to see what Emma describes as her "baby." This disbelief finds Apollo chained in the kitchen by Emma, doing everything he can to do to get through to her. This action brings about a significant overreaction by Emma as she grabs "the claw hammer off the counter. She stepped toward Apollo with one fluid motion and drove the hammer's face into the side of his head" (LaValle 127). After this attack on Apollo, Emma leaves the kitchen with a kettle of boiling water and heads to Brian's room. Though the exact means of murder is not spelled out, the circumstances lead Apollo and the readers to believe that Emma burned her son alive with that boiling water, stating "It's not a baby" (LaValle 128). Here, Apollo's fantastic hesitations need to be addressed quickly; he must determine whether Emma's actions are part of the uncanny – normal regardless of how horrific is the part of the previously unknown supernatural. This ever-growing question or hesitation plagues Apollo, Patrice, and others, believing as they do that no supernatural is at play. It takes another woman killing her baby, which Apollo foresees when she uses the same words that Emma used when she murdered Brian, to change that belief. They begin to think that there may be another part of the story: "Apollo pointed directly at the priest now. 'If you don't call the police on her, she's going to go home and kill her baby. You can't say you didn't know this time.' His words had the force of revelation...Behind him the woman sobbed. 'It's not a baby,' she muttered" (LaValle 176). Shortly after this, he meets William, an individual who adds

to Apollo's view of the fantastic, and here LaValle reveals the supernatural in the form of the "Wise Ones," better described as Witches.

Before the meeting with Cal and the Wise Ones, Apollo is shown virtual chat rooms – both that support him, such as "Tribute to Baby Brian" led by Green Hair Harry (his friend Patrice) to those accusing Apollo and Emma of everything from bad parenting to horrifically insensitive comments led by Kinder Garten (the false friend William), such as "Dinner plans tonight. A meal inspired by Baby Brian. BOILED VEGETABLES!" (LaVale 219). It is here that Apollo states what is horribly the truth and doesn't need a literary theory or horror genre to be true: "*They live in hell, these people. So they act like devils...* What had he been worrying about earlier?" Fucking witches? Why worry over witches when the Internet could conjure so much worse?" (LaValle 189-190). In this world, the age of anonymity can destroy a person currently in a much more despicable and believable manner than a supernatural creature could. A character's view or a reader's viewpoint may be so misunderstood that those on the "other" side of the fantastic often ridicule and debase these people, simply due to a lack of knowledge or belief.

Apollo does not realize he is back in the fantastic when he sees Emma for the first time in the park. The blue light surrounding her, the trees parting for her, and the levitation for the food are all elements of the fantastic. He must decide whether this is the wife he knows or his wife or his wife the one that is hiding and becoming a potential witch. At this point in the story the fantastic remains in a suspended state, where the moment of hesitation can last longer than a brief second or minutes; it can last days or weeks and include additions of components of the fantastic. In this particular case, Todorov's aspects of the fantastic include a hesitation between

what is natural and what is supernatural, and evident in Apollo's hesitation about the people in his life. Similar to the concept of Schrodinger's cat, it is hesitation and the unknown that makes the cat alive and dead – a supernatural situation. Todorov's belief was that, "we might indeed characterize such events as supernatural, but the supernatural, though a literary category, is not relevant here. We want to find the crux – not between real and the supernatural, but in which 'the hesitation occurs between the real and the imaginary'" (Lem and Abernathy 234). This hesitation is seen throughout the book. However, it resolves when Apollo comes to the realization that "everyone had a disguise, so who or what could you trust" (LaValle 223). We face the fantastic in everyday life when we hesitate in deciding what is safe and known and that which is unknown with an equal amount of risk and reward. As LaValle states through the head witch Cal, "fairy tales are not for children...These were the stories peasants told to each other around the fire after a long day, not to their kids. This was how adults talked with each other" (LaValle 244). And yet, as the decisions are made regularly, the hesitation between the uncanny and marvelous becomes clearer. What contributes to this answer is the knowledge held by the decision-making individual of the disguises, and in this case, a magical change, specifically from this story, called the "glamer" – "an old kind of magic. An illusion to make something appear different than it really is. A monster might look like a beautiful maiden. A ruined castle appears to be a golden palace. A baby ..." (LaValle 247). This is the core of why mothers attempted to kill their children, all the time stating that "it is not a baby." One of the subtle components of the novel that discusses the killing – real or otherwise – of children is the names of the boats, specifically *Child's Play* and *Merricat*, both references to child killing. Specifically, *Child's Play* is a horror movie where a child-size doll comes to life, kills multiple adults, and eventually goes after the

young child himself. Merricat is a reference to the character from *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, earlier addressed in this study, who kills members of her family.

In the majority of the cases regarding the women on the island, they are escaping abuse or a situation outside of this commune that the residents, specifically the glamour they alone can understand. The women escape to this island and in the story of William and his wife Getta, where William consorts with the Wise Ones, the necessity of using the “glamer” that is being put over those on the outside upon the corpses of their children. It is this glamour that changes the initial view of the fantastic to the “norm” of the child being dead instead of the supernatural character in the coffin being something completely different. These women never deny who they are: “William was right about at least one thing. We are witches” (LaValle 260). However, the impact on the fantastic requires some semblance of the truth. As Cal continues, “Let me tell you what else is true. The man in that cage consort with monsters” (LaValle 260). The decision of the choice of the fantastic does not have to be an individual process; it can be influenced, especially by “false” manipulative friends, such as William, who has much control over Apollo. Once William is discovered to be a conundrum of lies with the sole focus on destroying not just his wife but also the entire island itself, it is discovered that he is not only the hateful poster Kinder Garten but actually, the primary leader and voice of the group focused on hate. William has transitioned from a solid source of understanding and reliance to one of complete hatred and untrustworthiness, and these directly contribute to Apollo’s decision on the fantastic. It is actually quite interesting that Cal can more truthfully sum up the “enemy” of the witches: “The only real magic is the things we’ll do for the ones we love” (LaValle 284). In the language of the fantastic, the supernatural still operates, but not as first believed. Thus, Cal instructs Apollo

to go to his son's grave, that "you have to see it for yourself so you have no doubts" (LaValle 288). This is where the true fantastic lies. Apollo knows that "whatever lay buried in that grave existed as the farthest landmark on this new map of the spectral territories... Would he go insane if he opened that casket? Would he burst into flames? Turn to stone?" (LaValle 300).

When Apollo digs up the grave, he initially sees the corpse of his young dead son. However, as soon as the corpse is touched, the glamour disappears showing its true form, thereby showing Emma's statement that Brian was not a baby as true and not insane. Here, where the resistance to the supernatural breaks and Apollo's decision is made of the fantastic in favor of the supernatural side. The body inside the casket is not his young boy Brian. What he sees practically defies description: "It looked like clotted hair. The stuff you'd fish out of the bathtub drain in a house that had been abandoned and overtaken by the elements, matted, and gnarled. What made it monstrous was the size, as big as a six-month-old. Pounds and pounds of hair – fur? – looped and twined so tightly, it looked more like barbed wire" (LaValle 314). And the situation becomes progressively worse. There is movement from the "dead" creature. It moves due to what is inside, "the inhuman mouth spewed a mass of water bugs, at least a dozen, each one as big as a silver dollar" (LaValle 315). Even after the baby continues to gradually move, as Apollo and Patrice rebury the body, Apollo has accepted his decision and states "'You deserved better than you got,' Apollo said. 'I'm sorry if you felt any pain.'" (LaValle 317). He feels a sense of calm and now views "the magic of the world had been revealed. All the deceptions were gone. To believe in only the practical, the rational, the realistic was a kind of glamour as well... Monsters aren't real until you meet one" (LaValle 318). It is the supernatural that is the safe decision of the fantastic, and reality or the uncanny that is dangerous.

This demand and need to make a decision from within the fantastic is seen throughout the novel, and, as practically a reference source, in the children's book *Outside Over There* by Maurice Sendak. The story of the book refers to goblins stealing children and leaving replacements of ice changelings behind; it's a guidebook to what can happen, and Apollo's family becomes direct recipients of this, albeit through witches, including his wife, Emma. As Sendak's book shows: "So the goblins came. They pushed their way in and pulled baby out, leaving another all made of ice. Poor Ida, never knowing, hugged the changeling and she murmured: 'How I love you'" (Sendak 7-9). This correlates directly with what happens to Apollo and what he has to do to find Emma and receive an explanation about Brian's death. When he sees her at the top of a set of stairs in Little Norway in New York, she both is and is not herself is: "His wife stood at the top of the stairs. But it wasn't her. Not exactly. A witch. That's what he saw...As she stepped out of the woods, she seemed to walk in a cloud, an actual nimbus of blue energy. She cast off a color almost as bright as the blue police lights flashing on the patrol car; it was as if she wore sparks of electricity" (LaValle 334). Even though no one else sees this, he continues to face the decision of the fantastic scenario. He has seen personally how "people can choose ignorance, can't they?" (LaValle 362). The general populace can prevent themselves from making decisions as to whether something is supernatural or not, and in many horror novels, the villain must be invited into the house in order to have power. However, today's world has interconnectivity through the Internet, essentially allowing full access to their homes and lives, and in LaValle's novel, this makes the job of "evil" much easier.

Even in *The Changeling*, it is not a given that within the fantastic that evil will prevail, despite the battle of the supernatural against the natural. The character of the troll represents that

struggle. The existence of the troll is not fully disclosed until the second half of the book, and the battle answers some of Apollo's questions – specifically, why his wife is doing such horrible things. Tricking and defeating the troll results in keeping it from eating the townspeople's babies, just as Grendel is defeated in *Beowulf*. The troll first came into being through Norse mythology, and in this novel, those in Little Norway must defend themselves against its modern avatar. In *The Changeling*, the women use the glamour as a protective device against the troll wandering and potentially rampaging in the rural forests. This makes the job of replacing the baby with the offspring of a troll significantly easier, thus hopefully saving the human children, and better explains why there is a history of mothers that not only attempt to kill the changeling babies but make the statement that “it is not a baby.” However, in addition to the troll digging up bodies of humans and eating them, the glamour is unsuccessful in saving all the human babies. It is the hesitation from the fantastic as to whether it will finally work or not, but more often than not, the troll believes it is eating its own actual offspring due to its failure as a parent when in actuality, it is eating some of the human babies. If a child dies before the troll devours the human baby, the true burial sites of the human babies are hidden to use the natural to overcome the supernatural. It is a use of magic and the supernatural to overcome the supernatural, regardless of what our character or the reader believes.

Further examples of the fantastic are the discovery that William Wheeler runs his website so that others will pay money to watch a child be devoured by a troll online – a reference to him first being called a troll himself (LaValle 192, 318) - essentially benefitting off the supernatural aspect of the fantastic. In this case, he is not an actual troll, but the “accusation” is more of an insult than a representation of the supernatural. He instills hesitation in Apollo as to his true

nature until it is discovered that he is a human troll – an insult rather than an actual supernatural creature. Lavalle shows this by describing Apollo’s thoughts about Wheeler: “Then he’s out on his porch in some saggy-ass boxer shorts and no T-shirt and is surprised when people think he looks like a troll” (LaValle 192), an insult of pity as compared to his later beliefs that with Wheeler, “Apollo had met a monster...He’d met his enemy. He knew its true name” (LaValle 318). Despite Wheeler’s monetary efforts, Apollo and Patrice make efforts to kill the troll through Daylight (a computer app that simulates actual daylight) – the use of technology to overcome the supernatural (new overcoming old). Even though Emma and Apollo attempt to use the app, they are unable to conquer the troll. The troll arrives and swallows Brian. However, in bringing the troll outside of its cave, the use of actual sunlight on the troll outside turns it into stone, and Brian’s parents can save him before the petrification is complete. This is a final example of the fantastic. It is the use of the belief in what is real – daylight – conquering what is supernatural – the troll.

Belief is used to decide, yet throughout *The Changeling*, decisions of the fantastic are made based on false information, false “friends” as well as sheer desperation. Whether it be in the horror genre or general fiction, the fantastic is prevalent throughout a significant amount of canonical literature. It is the supernatural being fought using myths – daylight petrifying the troll, cutting open its stomach to find Apollo’s and Emma’s son, Brian. It is a nightmare overcome by the morning. Or it is simply turning on the light to see that it was a pet making noises at the bottom of the stairs instead of something supernatural or misunderstood. This is seen in *Beloved*’s hesitations of decisions – the very nature of Todorov’s fantastic. The decisions made – regardless of the outcome – all rely on not just the characters in a novel and the choices

they make, but what the reader interprets at that moment in the book and the feelings generated – fear, uncertainty, and anxiety. It is a testament to the quality of these novels that they impel the reader to choose and face any challenges and in the process ask – “What would I do?”

CHAPTER 4

THE JUNGIAN SHADOW: CARL JUNG, CHUCK PALAHNIUK,

CORMAC MCCARTHY

“Everyone has an identity. One of their own, and one for show.” (Susann)

The concept of the Jungian shadow – those elements of our personalities which we wish to hide from the outside world - is more of a psychological than a literary theory. We all have a light and a dark side; while Jung did believe that the shadow could be good or bad, it is primarily known for the negative: “Because one tends to reject or remain ignorant of the least desirable aspects of one's personality, the shadow is perceived to be largely negative. There are, however, positive aspects that may also remain hidden in one's shadow (especially in people with low self-esteem, anxieties, and false beliefs)” (Young-Eisendrath, P. and T. Dawson 319). As one scholar explains, “This archetype is often described as the darker side of the psyche, representing wildness, chaos, and the unknown. These latent dispositions are present in all of us, Jung believed, although people sometimes deny this element of their own psyche and instead project it onto others” (Cherry). According to Jungian analyst Aniela Jaffe, the shadow is the "sum of all personal and collective psychic elements which, because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in life" (cited in Diamond 96). In other words, we tend to repress the shadow. Yet even though negative thoughts exist only in the mind and don't produce actions, they are insights into one's own shadow. Moreover, Jung described the shadow as “a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any

kind of self-knowledge” (Jung, *Aion* 8). This knowledge is kept to ourselves for fear of showing anyone else who we are inside.

Jung called these social masks our “personas.” These are the masks we all wear to project who we want to believe we are and what we want others to see:

Unfortunately, there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected. (Psychology and Religion)

As Jung wrote in *Psychology of the Unconscious*, it frightens us and shakes our stability to know that inside us is all we hate, fear, or despise. He stated that “The individual seldom knows anything of this; to him, as an individual, it is incredible that he should ever in any circumstances go beyond himself. But let these harmless creatures form a mass, and there emerges a raging monster; and each individual is only one tiny cell in the monster’s body, so that for better or worse he must accompany it on its bloody rampages and even assist it to the utmost” (Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, 35). Jung indicates that under certain circumstances, all human beings have the capacity to do horrible, brutal things. This is like Kristeva’s fear of the abject – disgust at what comes out of the body that should stay in. Paradoxically, familiarizing ourselves with these dark potentialities and accepting them as part of us is perhaps the best way to ensure that they are never actualized. But again, it’s profoundly difficult to do this, particularly because

we desperately don't want to think of ourselves as "bad" people. Connie Zweig explains this when she notes that "when we come face-to-face with our darker side, we use metaphors to describe these shadow encounters: meeting our demons, wrestling with the devil, descent to the underworld, dark night of the soul, midlife crisis" (Zweig xix). Jung stated that the shadow is immune to conscious control and that the shadow becomes part of our instinct – our second nature – towards self-preservation.

The shadow is an amalgamation of behaviors, attitudes, and generally "unacceptable" viewpoints. It is a component of humanity that is hidden – consciously or unconsciously repressed – so that a person can operate in a socially acceptable fashion. As Karen Mock explains: "Freud utilized the concept of the shadow as a metaphor of the object's descent into melancholia. Partially obscured by the object and in the darkness of its own projection, the ego is transformed: 'The shadow of the object fell upon the ego'" (Mock, 158). According to Robin Robertson, the shadow "presents a dark outline of our total being" (Robertson 111). This outline is one that we try to keep hidden. However, as psychologists have shown, these qualities don't go away. Instead, they are transferred and repressed in our unconsciousness and become part of our shadow. Robert Bly compares the shadow to a long bag we drag behind us that is continually filled with the parts of ourselves, and "The bigger the bag, the less the energy" (Bly 25); yet we keep loading it. Sometimes the contents become so repressed and unacknowledged that they appear in our nightmares, at first as horrible supernatural creatures. Still, as time progresses, these components of the shadow come to resemble others until finally, we "see the extreme shadow figures, that seem so loathsome to us, only appear when something has gone wrong with this impression and recognition process" (Robertson 116). Over time, we stop seeing the shadow

as supernatural but as part of us. As stated by Master Commandant Perry and then modified by the comic strip *Pogo*, “We have met the enemy, and he is us” (Kelly). Or to put it in Jung’s terms – we have seen the shadow persona, and it is us.

In addition to carrying the shadow and attempting to keep it hidden or restrained, we project this shadow onto others, seeing them in an abhorrent light because we see the part of ourselves that we find reprehensible. This approach has negative repercussions. Robin Robertson states that “the more we deny that we have any such evil desires, the more energy gathers around that shadow,” thereby not diminishing one’s own shadow, but instead increasing its power over the individual and those they project these thoughts and actions upon (Robertson 120). To deny the shadow inside is to view oneself dishonestly. With the shadow unacknowledged, “we are at the mercy of the worst that lies with us...that way leads to atrocities” (Robertson 126).

A healthier way in which we can attempt to overcome these bags of rocks is within our dreams, where we can battle the shadow. Within the dreams, “the more repugnant or disagreeable you find the other person, the more likely that this is a shadow figure” (Robertson 130), and we can use it to reach “that stage of our development where we are forced to consciously admit that some unwanted personality traits are part of us” (Robertson 134). Not just in our dreams can we face down our shadow.

We can also look to the horror genre to help us do this. Within most horror, “the monster is readily identifiable as an image reflecting the shadow archetype” (White 204) - demonic possession, for example, or an individual with multiple personalities, a serial killer, a psychotic individual who enjoys enacting pain and suffering on their victims. In horror, the shadow does

not hide and cannot be denied. Herman Hesse acknowledged that “If you hate a person, you hate something in him that is part of yourself. What isn’t part of ourselves doesn’t disturb us” (Alexander). Horror can therefore become a celebration of the shadow and what can happen if the shadow is released. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn noted:” If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?” (Blum). Moreover, “Rather than confront the possibility of being wrong, therefore, people often go to extreme lengths to prove to themselves and others that they are right—even if it means hurting someone else” (Blum). Literature often traces these processes. Robert Louis Stevenson and C.S. Lewis incorporated the concept of the shadow in their own works, such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* respectively. The shadow also appears in more modern literature - Stephen King’s *The Dark Half*, J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* series, and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. In these and other works, some characters live in their shadows voluntarily. The rest of this chapter will examine and analyze the different archetypes of the Jungian shadow, such as the critic, the victim, and the saboteur, in *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk and *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy.

Fight Club focuses on two individuals – a somewhat meek unnamed protagonist and one Tyler Durden, strong and anarchistic. This dichotomy can be seen as a representation of both Freud and Jung. Tyler represents both Freud’s uncanny as well as Jung’s shadow. However, it is Jung’s shadow that constantly battles Freud’s ego throughout the novel. Like *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, where two different personalities inhabit the same body, two

different and separate individuals occupy the body of the narrator, and the reader does not discover this until the end of the book. The narrator is unaware of this, but Tyler knows it well throughout the entire novel. He can be considered a supernatural element – the existence of a separate entity within the same body. To use a Jungian archetype, he represents the rebel, and surprisingly enough, as the shadow archetype of the hero, he benefits and strengthens the narrator. Yet, this is not exposed until the latter part of the book when the narrator hears from Tyler that, “‘There isn’t a me and a you, anymore,’ Tyler says, and he pinches the end of my nose. ‘I think you’ve figured that out.’ We both use the body, but at different times” (Palahniuk 164). The narrator believes Tyler is a separate person, though Tyler and the outside world know they are one and the same.

As a representative of one of the archetypes of Jung’s shadow, Tyler is a creator; he creates Fight Club with our unnamed protagonist. The protagonist, here representing the innocent archetype, talks about everything he learns from Tyler – making soap and lye, explosives, and who the true enemy is, never realizing these are thoughts from within his own head and subconscious – the representation of the shadow archetype of the innocent. Tyler is the representative shadow of the pair, but he is the shadow that is exposed, directs, and controls others, all for the cause that he defines. This raises the question of whether the narrator is the original individual and Tyler the shadow, or is the narrator the shadow to Tyler? Did Tyler create his own shadow of a good person – the representation of the innocent archetype of the shadow according to Jung - or did the protagonist, lost amidst the humanity, create and release the shadow of Tyler to stand out and be seen? Unlike the base explanation of the shadow and the repression of violent or dark tendencies, it is the shadow representation of the hero archetype that

is seen and not repressed. Based on the story and the narrator, it is the narrator who is first made aware of the character of Tyler, yet without knowing or understanding that Tyler is part of himself – the shadow component that not only causes havoc and mayhem is Tyler and by the end of the novel, has hundreds of “worshippers” ready to follow Tyler’s actions and directions. What starts off the relationship is Tyler telling the narrator “I want you to hit me as hard as you can” (Palahniuk 46); he is representative of the rebel archetype. They then begin a purposeful fight – not out of anger but of building themselves. Others see this and want to be involved, especially as it appears to others that it is just the narrator/Tyler hitting himself. It’s a dissociation from the real world, with the shadow being the creation of Fight Club. Fight Club has three rules:

- 1) You don’t talk about Fight Club.
- 2) You don’t talk about Fight Club.
- 3) When “someone says stop or goes limp, even if he’s just faking it, the fight is over” (Palahniuk 48-49).

The overpowering of the abject of blood is just one part that makes Fight Club a huge success as it helps the participants feel more alive and reorganizes in their minds what is most important. The narrator comes to the realization that ‘maybe self-improvement isn’t the answer...maybe self-destruction is the answer’ (Palahniuk 49). This can be seen not only in those in the Fight Clubs but the destruction of the things that tie a person down. The narrator’s apartment blew up, which later we found was caused by Tyler – acting as the rebel archetype - with the narrator losing all his ultimately unimportant things. As Tyler whispers to the narrator, “ I’m breaking my attachment to physical power and possessions...because only through destroying myself can I

discover the greater power of my spirit” (Palahniuk 110). He continues whispering to the narrator at the same time the police detective is working to determine who or what caused the narrator’s apartment to blow up: “The liberator who destroys my property...is fighting to save my spirit. The teacher who clears all possessions from my path will set me free” (Palahniuk 110). This is a natural progression from the destruction of the body to liberate man to the destruction of worldly things to liberate him from the world – the archetype of the rebel. Continuing with the rebel archetype, the fights are the first step in Tyler’s approach to anarchy. He shows the narrator how to create soap using animal and human body fat and lye, selling the soap, and thus raising money for the cause. This is a representation of Kristeva’s fear of the abject – human body fat belongs inside the body, not outside of the body, and certainly not to be used in the creation of a product spread to others. As Tyler states, “‘Without their death, their pain, without their sacrifice,’ Tyler says, ‘we would have nothing’” (Palahniuk 78). This illustrates the necessity of the horror of death for the improvement of society, voluntary or not - the change from the masochistic to the sadistic. Tyler finds ways to humiliate others without their knowledge, such as urinating in the soup at a party. Through the novel, the number of individuals that become part of the Club grows at a nearly exponential rate, and the acts of violence go beyond the underground fights but now become destructive towards big business and other “deserving” individuals and companies that should be torn down. This is a representation of the Jungian archetype of the creator; the creation of Fight Club is an introduction to the anarchy later seen in the novel.

These subtle yet poignant actions continue and grow in magnitude. It is here when the narrator begins to see Tyler as “a service industry terrorist. Guerrilla waiter. Minimum-wage

despoiler” (Palahniuk 84). Tyler begins talking about bringing corporations and their buildings down and having them equal to the others in the Fight Clubs. It’s the essential antithesis of Project Hope to Project Mayhem; created with different committees such as the Assault Committee, the Misinformation Committee, and others, each with a separate agenda that together will result in horrific actions toward others. According to Tyler, the goal of Project Mayhem “had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn’t care if other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world” (Palahniuk 122). This is very similar and a logical next step from the Fight Club where the fights were there to make real men and show them all that they could do and what they could survive. It is here where the self no longer suppresses the shadow and becomes the self.

At the novel’s end, the narrator attempts to kill himself and Tyler, but he fails. The shadow exists within each entity, and the split personality continues where the narrator still exists, yet all others, other than Marla, the woman both the narrator and Tyler love, see him as Tyler. The fantastic can be seen by the joining of the two separate personalities into one whole person with the strengths of both “individuals”. The obvious Fight Club members that work in the hospital continue to see the narrator as Tyler, continuing his work of anarchy and destruction: “Somebody with a broken nose pushes a mop past me and whispers: ‘Everything’s going according to the plan.’ Whispers: ‘We’re going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world.’ Whispers: ‘We look forward to getting you back’” (Palahniuk 208). It is the final destruction of the ego by the shadow.

By contrast, the story in the novel *Blood Meridian* starts with a normal person - the protagonist called “the kid” – who has a typical shadow of the dark, and moves to Glanton, whose shadow is one of light, and finally, to the horror of the judge who has no shadow at all. The kid runs away at fourteen, eventually joining the extremely cruel Glanton and his gang. The kid’s name is never mentioned, and the book begins with him as a young boy in a group of men, working to prove himself as an adult. He drinks, and he shoots to kill, yet he does not scalp every dead body like the rest of Glanton’s gang does for money. His shadow is twofold. There is the part of his shadow that is horrified and prevents him from scalping, raping, and horrifically mistreating prisoners and innocent immigrants and travelers. Instead, he performs tasks that take him away from the gang, such as when “he crossed the river to cut willow poles at a place where they grew upstream from the encampment of immigrants” (McCarthy 274). He shoots to kill those out to kill him and his group, such as the Apaches or the Yumas. Glanton seeks mainly to earn money for the scalps of Native Americans. This desire eventually spirals out of control when they begin scalping anyone they come across – Native American or not. Glanton, for the most part, gradually appears to have no morals or healthy guidelines for his or his gang’s actions. Once Glanton’s gang takes over the ferry from the doctor, “Ultimately all pretense was dropped, and the immigrants were robbed outright. Travelers were beaten and their arms and goods appropriated and they were sent destitute and beggared into the desert...Horses were taken and women violated and bodies began to drift past the Yuma camp downriver” (McCarthy 273). They become a group of monstrous individuals that kill, rape, rob, and violate anyone they come across, with no fear of retribution or consequences.

The true antagonist of the novel is Judge Holden, a self-proclaimed god. He is a very large man “suffering” from alopecia who does what he wants, whenever he wants, and in whatever method he wants. He has no shame or embarrassment or sense of limits, as can be seen by how often he appears naked, regardless of the appropriateness of those actions. He is the truly dangerous antagonist as regardless of how violent or kind an action may be, it does not matter as long as it meets his needs. It can be his inexplicable killing of two dogs, the Apache boy he “adopted” and then killed, or his treatment of the idiot by saving him from drowning: “He stepped into the river and seized up the drowning idiot, snatching it aloft by the heels like a great midwife and slapping it on the back to let the water out. A birth scene or a baptism or some ritual not yet inaugurated into any canon” (McCarthy 270). His name is Holden, but he is addressed as “the judge.” He has abilities that seem to be supernatural, such as when he walks through a fire to save a woman from Glanton: “The judge like a great ponderous djinn stepped through the fire and the flames delivered him up as he were in some way native to their element” (McCarthy 101). He is the mysterious antagonist that has no fear, no remorse, no shadow. As Jung describes the shadow as a repression of the dark feelings and actions, the kid possesses this traditional shadow. He is happy to join the gang and become a man. He also does not treat others as less than him, nor in a way that can be construed as pure darkness, or possessing a darkness of the soul, as seen with Glanton and the judge. As the old man he first meets on his path states, “A man’s at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he don’t want to. Rightly so. Best not to look in there” (McCarthy 20). The kid’s actions do not match his future accomplices in Glanton’s gang. He has moments where, if he was of darkness himself, he could have killed people for whatever meager reason.

However, in a situation where he could have killed a bartender who tried to kill him, “He swung twice at the kid and the kid stepped twice to the right. Then he stepped backward. The barman froze. The kid boosted himself lightly over the bar and picked up the pistol...He raked the frizzen open against the bar top and dumped the priming out and laid the pistol down again” (27). He does end up killing the bartender, but more out of a sense of pride – part of the dark shadow showing itself. It was never his initial intent to kill the bartender, but when the bartender dismisses him and will not serve him, the darkness of the kid’s pride comes out: “[The bartender] made a shooping motion with the back of his hand. The kid’s face clouded. You son of a bitch, he said” (McCarthy 26). It is still pride but then self-defense as the barman comes after him with a weapon: “When the kid approached him he raised the bungstarter. The kid crouched lightly with the bottles and feinted and then broke the right one over the man’s head...he backhanded the second bottle across the barman’s skull and crammed the jagged remnant into his eye as he went down” (McCarthy 27). The kid’s pride at not being treated with respect is what uncovered or unleashed his shadow.

His experience with the Indians is one of violence and fear. The kid hides among the dead so that he will not be killed. The Indians do not have shadows – they have enemies, and they begin “stripping the clothes from the dead and seizing them up by the hair and passing their blades about the sills of the living and the dead alike and snatching aloft the blood wigs and hacking and chopping at the naked bodies, ripping off limbs, heads, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals, some of the savages so slated up with gore they might have rolled in it like dogs and show who fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows” (56). Despite this horrific scene, the kid refuses to kill and

can run away with a fellow traveler. The kid is not a killer at heart. He gives up three different chances to kill the judge, and the judge recognizes what is in the kid's heart: "I know you would not hide. I know too that you've not the hearts of a common assassin...No assassin, called the judge, and no partisan either. There's a flawed place in the fabric of your hearts. Do you think I could not know? You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen" (McCarthy 311-312). This recognition of the kid by the judge shows how the kid retained his humanity by not slaughtering the innocents, killing only in self-defense, and brave enough to face his fears head-on.

Glanton's gang, on the other hand, ride horses fully armed, "and the trappings of the horses fashioned out human skin and their riddles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears" (82). It is here at the beginning of meeting Glanton we see the horror that exists within him comes naturally. His shadow is one of light and not of darkness. The shadow of light is the fear of being caught for what is known to be wrong and be unable to execute whatever horrible atrocities the darkness holds. It is the treatment of individuals as people and not as bounty. All his actions, from the original scalping for money to killing for the sake of killing, are all acts of true darkness, actions deemed reprehensible to normal society. There is no guilt or fear of retribution. Glanton's mission is to meet a contract where he gets paid a hundred dollars a scalp, with the idea being that the scalps are of their enemies or of violent Native Americans. Regardless of what tribes attack him or what he attacks, he continues to scalp dead bodies: "Lastly he seized the dark locks and swept them up from the sand and cut away the scalp" (116-117). At first he scalps only those that are their enemies or have killed personally; however,

Glanton ultimately kills all Indians, including an old woman, where he “took a skinning knife from his belt and stepped to where the old woman lay and took up her hair and twisted it about his wrist and passed the blade of the knife about her skull and ripped away the scalp” (McCarthy 103). This is the first real indication of how far Glanton will go for scalps.

Glanton and his gang continue the scalping adventure to wretched excess. As they tear through a camp of Gileños, they kill everyone: “Within that first minute the slaughter had become general. Women were screaming and naked children and one old man tottered forth waving a pair of white pantaloons. The horsemen moved among them and slew them with clubs or knives ...[and] one of the Delawares emerged from the smoke with a naked infant dangling in each hand and squatted at a ring of midden tones and swung them by the heels each in turn and bashed their heads against the stones” (162). Once the massacre is over, “they moved among the dead harvesting the long black locks with their knives and leaving their victim rawskulled and strange in their bloody cauls...Some lay coupled to the bludgeoned bodies of young women dead or dying on the beach.” (163). After a battle with a group of Mexicans who are all killed, ten minutes later when Glanton and his gang leave “they had scalped the entire body of the dead sliding about in a floor that had been packed clay and was now a wine-colored mud. There were twenty-eight Mexicans inside the tavern and eight more in the street” (188). However, after Glanton and his gang gun down this now unarmed group of Mexican soldiers and villagers, they take “the scalps of the slain villagers...[and] strung from the windows of the governor’s house and the partisans were paid out of the all but exhausted coffers and the Sociedad was disbanded and the bounty rescinded” (193). The more they kill, the more they want to kill.

Glanton and his gang eventually come to their foreseeable end. They come to a ferry, and Glanton offers to protect the ferry owner from the Yumas and yet “conspired with the Yumas to seize the ferry” (267). Glanton and his gang kill the Yumas after the “attack” on the ferry and proceed to scalp them all, even though there is no longer a cash bounty for scalps. They then take over the ferry, overcharge the customers, and eventually “all pretense was dropped, and the immigrants were robbed outright. Travelers were beaten and their arms and goods appropriated and they were sent destitute and beggared into the desert. Horses were taken and women violated and bodies began to drift past the Yuma camp downriver” (273). The Yumas eventually kill Glanton, and the judge takes over. The fact they are too afraid to kill him indicates that his power is greater than all of their shadows together.

The kid has a second shadow, and that is the judge. While the kid does his best to blend in with the rest of the gang, the judge stands out from everyone else. The judge represents what the kid is not – an amoral individual without a conscience - and when the opportunity presents itself, the kid escapes the gang with the ex-priest Tobin. The kid has a moral line; the judge does not. They are connected in the city of Janos, a name invoking the two-faced god: The judge represents the beginnings of the conflict, while the kid represents its end in his escape from the judge. However, just as one cannot escape one’s own shadow, the judge kills the kid in a manner that horrifies all that see the result: “The first man watched him go and then opened the door of the jakes. Good God almighty, he said. What is it? He didn’t answer. He stepped past the other and went back up the walk. The other man stood looking after him. Then he opened the door and looked in” (McCarthy 348). The judge then goes right back to being himself – dancing naked, free of shame or concern.

There is nothing that the judge will not do, including taking an Apache boy to protect him and then shortly after that, killing and scalping him. He believes that he is a god, which thus overcomes any shadow he might have, as a god will not have a shadow. The only aspect of the shadow that is seen that may exist within the judge, specifically the shadow of light, never truly appears. The only concern he has about being caught is not fear of but the interference with his next day's plans.

Men on watch recall that "someone had reported the judge naked atop the walls, immense and pale in the revelations of lightning, striding the perimeter up there and declaiming in the old epic mode" (124). He is unafraid of the lightning and weather as if he is in control over all of it. Tobin, the ex-priest, tells the kid to study the judge. "I've never seen him turn to a task but what he didn't prove clever at it." (129). The judge speaks different languages. Tobin states that, "The gifts of the Almighty are weighted and parceled out in a scale peculiar to himself. It's no fair accountin and I don't doubt but what he'd be the first to admit it and you put the query to him boldface" (129). The judge is naked most of the time, inferring he has nothing to hide. He can preach sermons that enrapture his audience: "no one spoke. There was none to curse and none to pray, we just watched" (139). They see him as a mystical or mysterious being, like the biblical Jesus. As in the Bible, where Jesus was seen both alive and after death, some swear to have seen him: "Tobin smiled. Every man in the company claims to have encountered that sootysouled rascal in some other place" (130). He revels in power. In one instance in a battle with Indians, he waves the white flag, and then when the Indians approach for the surrender, the judge "had the pistols stuck in his belt at the back and he drew the one in each hand and he is as either-

handed as a spider...and he commended to kill indians. We needed no second invitation. God it was a butchery” (140).

Also, the judge draws pictures of nature and of others in his ledger and views them as if he were their creator and their executioner – “the judge smiled and said that it was his intention to expunge them from the memory of man” (147). The judge has very specific feelings about God: “If God meant to interfere in the degeneracy of mankind would he not have done so by now?... His spirit is exhausted at the peak of its achievement. His meridian is at once his darkening and the evening of his day” (153). He is viewed “yet so like an icon was he in his sitting that they grew cautious and spoke with circumspection among themselves” (153). He performs acts of horror and depravity that put Glanton and his gang to shame. For instance, the judge has “adopted” an Apache boy after the gang killed all the Apaches in the one tribe and protected him. However, “Toadvine saw him with the child as he passed with his saddle but when he came back ten minutes later leading his horse the child was dead and the judge had scalped it” (170). On another occasion, he purchases two puppies and within minutes crossed a bridge and throws them in the river, killing them. The judge truly believes he is a god – “Whatever exists, he said. Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent...The judge placed his hands on the ground. He looked at his inquisitor. This is my claim, he said. And yet everywhere upon it are pockets of autonomous life. Autonomous. In order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur upon it save by my dispensation.” (207). Essentially, he has replaced God with himself, and all should recognize him as such. Based on this, his actions of removing all evidence of Glanton and his gang, including Tobin and the kid, seem almost natural, so nothing gets in the way of others believing he is a god.

There is only one scene that shows any hint of a shadow. While the kid is recovering from surgery, the judge visits: “A great shambling mutant, silent and serene...In the white and empty room he stood in his bespoke suit with his hat in his hand and he peered down with his small and lashless pig’s eyes wherein this child just sixteen years on earth could read whole bodies of decisions not accountable to the courts of men and he saw his own name which nowhere else could he have ciphered out at all logged into the records as a thing already accomplished” (322). He sees someone who could be better than he is. So, the judge finally kills the kid in the outhouse: “He was naked and he rose up smiling and gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh and shot the wooden barlatch home behind him” (347) and left him in a way that disgusted and scared those that found his body. For this he feels no guilt: “Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing, his small feet lively and quick and now in doubletime and bowing to the ladies, huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant. He never sleeps, he says. He says he’ll never die” (348). The book ends with the judge: “He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in light and in shadow and he is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die” (349), just like a god with no shadow. He has no shadow because he has no fear. He is not just amoral, but conducts himself as superior to all others, and therefore cannot be stopped in anything he wants to do; this could be dancing naked after just killing the kid, taking hospitable care of the imbecile, or any of his other violent and horrific actions seen throughout the novel.

The shadow, as seen by Kristeva and Jung, is inside the body, and many fight to prevent it from being released, but in these novels this is not always the case. *Fight Club*’s shadow – Tyler Durden – is what makes the narrator strong and survivable because it comes out. The

shadow not only makes the novel horrifying, but it also brings out the characters in powerful ways. In *Blood Meridian*, the shadow is almost never hidden, and the reader sees the impact and effect this has on the Native Americans, the weak travelers, and ultimately, the narrator. Both novels are representative of the Jungian shadow, with Tyler Durden inside the narrator and the Judge outside of the Kid, ever looming. Within *Fight Club*, the horror is what you supposedly do, or more accurately, in this case, your other personality does, while you are asleep or unconscious in some manner. The naïve, simple protagonist becomes an anarchistic terrorist, hell-bent on destroying the existing society. The representation of the different archetypes ranges from the hero to the rebel to the innocent. It is this shadow that is thought of as sleepwalking by the narrator, not knowing any differently. However, the true horror is what else is done in his sleep that is abhorrent, destructive, and hurts those around him – in this case, literally with the Fight Clubs. The character of the judge in *Blood Meridian* is the shadow archetype of the sage and the ruler, fully comfortable in his own skin in this role. However, as the novel progresses, we see the judge's horrific actions – such as with the puppies or the Apache boy he “adopts.” True horror is not supernatural by any means, and that is perhaps the most horrifying element of these two books - the worst kind of horror is that of man against man.

CHAPTER 5

AESTHETICS: CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, JERZY KOSINSKI, LIONEL SHRIVER

Most famously addressed by the art critic John Ruskin and French writers Gautier and Baudelaire, aesthetics, the study of the beautiful, initially centered on visual art but then expanded not to just literature but architecture and fashion. With literary aesthetics, significant symbolism can be expected to generate the feelings and emotions of the reader, whether it is pleasure, sadness, or simple happiness. In “all literature that we value and keep performs these [human] functions and so offers aesthetic pleasure, the pleasure of using our uniquely human mental faculties without pursuing a practical goal in the world” (Heller 17). Why, then, do we ignore the aesthetics of horror in canonical literature without leaving our self-created role as implied readers? Because typically, they and the characters matter to the reader. Matt Hill states, “When viewed...theory has to be taken as an effort to influence and persuade, affect and move its experiencing, embodied readers” (M. Hill 149). He continues by contending that “reading theory as aesthetic...remains a cultural-political practice of disqualification within academic arguments. It represents an attempt to position rival theories as improper and monstrous forms of non-theory” (M. Hill 146) and this will be explained below.

The aesthetics of horror can be very different than what is typically expected in canonical literature. These specific aesthetics are typically not used in novels to bring happy feelings, joy, or romance. Horror aesthetics exist to make the reader feel uncomfortable, fearful, possibly disgusted, and have an overall sense of wrongness. Matt Hill suggests that “‘Disturbing’ horror appears to be discursively constructed by these fans as a textual aesthetics that deals with extreme and unsettling representations, without necessarily showing gore (hence it is not

‘disgusting’ horror) or necessarily scaring the fan” (M. Hill 82). Yet, despite this, there are countless readers who delight in the aesthetics of horror. They actively look for horror novels that will bring these aesthetics to life, bringing the reader into the novel, essentially removing the aesthetic distance between the reader and the story. The aesthetics of horror can be beautiful as well as horrifying.

What separates horror aesthetics from all others is the aesthetic distance and the concept of the implied reader created by Wolfgang Iser. He stated that “no matter who or what he may be, the real reader is always offered a particular role to play, and it is this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader” (Iser 34-35). Excellent literature will create the implied reader, who is committed to not just finishing the novel but to be involved: to play a role in the story itself. Unlike real life, entering the novel is voluntary, and the reader can step away from it and become a critic. A true reader of the novel becomes part of the novel – an analogous comparison to Alice falling down the rabbit hole. If one disconnects from the novel or does not let go of their ego to become part of the book, they can now critique and work to better understand why the novel works in the way it does.

Aesthetics offer pleasure to the reader, regardless of the aesthetic, and create a path into the novel to become the implied reader. Terry Heller demonstrates this when he says, “the novelist also typically wants the reader to become deeply engaged with characters and to care about their situations, values, choices, and fates... [the elimination] of any aesthetic distance” (Heller 7). Finally, as Schneider contends, “aesthetic approaches, though seeming to negotiate a path through thickets of prior theoretical assumptions, still tend to fall back on cognitive or psychoanalytic frames” (Schneider 2001). This aesthetic distance allows a horror novel to be

read, knowing what is coming. However, when horror appears in canonical literature, the reader is not prepared for this, and the aesthetic distance that has already disappeared if the reader is heavily involved with the novel now forces the reader to suffer through the horror along with the characters. As Heller wrote, “the real reader feels the anxiety of entrapment and the threat of transformation...the aesthetic distance is violated” (Heller 170). Horror in this type of literature becomes a trap for the reader and changes them into an implied reader with an unwanted role. The horror aesthetic changes the dream sequence of a novel into a nightmare one cannot escape without giving up on the novel and closing the book.

A horror novel is expected to have the same type of fear along with the applicable aesthetics and end in a typically satisfying closure. However, that is not the case with horror that appears in other types of literature. Because horror is essential to the story, there is no closure, and “laboring for closure, however, only intensifies the experience of entrapment and terror” (Heller 178). However, if one can “survive” the horror in the novel, “alongside the ‘aestheticization’ of horror, there are a range of ways in which horror’s pleasures are narrated and constructed by fans” (M. Hill 73). The readers come out the other side - the end of the novel - with an increased aesthetic feeling of pleasure. They have overcome the obstacles of horror and read a novel that can be better appreciated: “Terror leads to liberation; liberation ends in beauty,” as Heller puts it (Heller 197).

These horror aesthetics have been regularly dismissed by academics and other critics alike, yet they display their own beauty. Despite observations such as “true crime displaces true horror as a culturally viable classification” (M. Hill 145) and James B. Twitchell’s viewed it as “cautionary tales for adolescent readers, rather essentializing the genre’s audiences, if not

imputing a certain childishness to horror” (M. Hill 1), horror goes above “childishness” as it so regularly appears in respected canonical literature. Hill argues that “It is the ‘anti-fan’ [that] can iterate discourses of moral panic and horror’s perversion, calling into question its pleasures, while fans can cite discourses of aesthetics and genre history to legitimate ‘their’ pleasures” (M. Hill xi). The aesthetics of horror have been seen as aberrant or perverted, rather than part of popular culture and academia. On the contrary, the beauty of horror does not have to be perverse or violent. Rather, it can be life-inspiring and motivational to improve oneself. What operates the aesthetics of horror is its attempt to make the reader feel emotions ranging from happiness and relief in addition to fear and relief at survival. It is not an emotionless aesthetic, but one that can go beyond others and force emotion to occur. Bordwell asks, “How can the intellectual argue that the activities of others are culturally constructed while arrogating to him or herself a position that purportedly escapes this?” (Bordwell 1996:13). The continued beauty of the horror aesthetic is one of survival and of life. If one can “survive” a piece of horror, the reader can come out the other side relieved and with a better appreciation of one’s own life, which cannot be as bad as what they just experienced. I compare this to the image of a suspension bridge. One feels fear over the height of the bridge, the terror of having to cross it, and horror when part of it breaks. However, once the task crossing is completed, there is a sense of relief and of survival, and this is what the aesthetic of horror aims to produce.

The examples of canonical literature examined in previous chapters are not viewed as aberrant, but as necessary, despite the limitations certain scholars want to place because of the “typical” horror aesthetics. As Matt Hill states, “the horror genre is not where it is; it exists,

intertextually, rhetorically, and as a “principle of contamination outside its major and explicitly labeled generic traditions/sites/texts” (M. Hill 6). Annette Hill states that

social thresholds indicate participants identify a type of violence they find personally disturbing, but this violence is a common fear shared by a number of other participants...personal thresholds indicate participants identify a type of violence they find personally disturbing, but unlike social thresholds, reasons for this can be traced to a subjective experience unique to that individual. (A. Hill 1997, p.51)

Horror does not have to be supernatural or include a monster, as Carroll states. Instead, “if there is any feature which all horror texts share, it is probably the position of the victim – the figure under threat rather than the position of a threatening and impure monster that is ‘not believed to exist now according to contemporary science’” (Jancovich 1992, p. 118). Horror can include psychopathic humans that cause the death of others, ecological horrors, or even life itself.

However, this is true of mystery, science-fiction, “true crime,” and, as I contend, canonical literature. Fear and disgust are not limited to horror texts – they can be seen in every other genre of literature, thus having the reader experience the aesthetics of horror they may actively avoid.

As Hill suggests, “Fan practices of aestheticization – indicating a desire for horror to be taken seriously as art – have repeatedly worked to frame horror’s pleasures within discourses of fan agency, discrimination, and expertise” (M. Hill 89). I contend that these very same feelings and aesthetics of horror exist in canonical literature and operate effectively in *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosinski and *We Need to Talk about Kevin* by Lionel Shriver.

In *The Painted Bird*, each chapter is like a vignette in the protagonist boy's life and an example of the horror man inflicts upon man. From "simple" violence and beatings to rape and retribution in previously unimaginable ways, much of the novel's violence is due to the boy's physical differences from everyone else. This appearance is further emphasized by the title of the novel, of the character Lekh, who would paint one of his birds in bright colors and then release it into a crowd of normal-colored birds. At first, the flock was confused, with the painted bird "vainly trying to convince its kin that it was one of them" (Kosinski 51). Eventually, the flock did not just shun or drive the painted bird away but attacked and typically killed it. This story recurs throughout the book with different characters representing the painted bird and the "normal" flock, beginning when the boy is sent away by his parents during World War II – a common practice to save the children from the war. Being sent into the unknown is frightening enough but combined with what the boy directly experiences, the novel pursues an aesthetic of horror. In each chapter, the boy meets someone new – each with their own Jungian shadow and often a reaction of violent retribution or misunderstanding.

Throughout the novel, the types of horror the boy directly experiences range from beatings from his "foster parents" to cruel and brutal punishment simply because he differs from the rest of the society in each specific village or town. The aesthetic of horror does not appear as one of beauty, but rather a sense of fear and loneliness. However, even alone in the world, the boy runs from one place to stay to another, always hoping for some safety and warmth – the aesthetic of horror beauty. Because of his black hair, black eyes, and darker skin, all believe he is either a gypsy or a Jew and therefore deserves punishment and physical attacks. In Chapter Five where the meaning of the title of the book is first explained, the character of Stupid Lumila

represents the painted bird. She is the painted bird - prettier than the other women – primarily because she shows off most of her body, thus inviting men to be with her. However, the rest of the women in the village eventually tire of this and brutally torture and kill Lumila; they kill the beauty that differs from the rest of the flock. They “sat on her hands and legs and began beating her with the rakes, ripping her skin with their fingernails, tearing out her hair, spitting into her face” (Kosinski 54). Reading this chapter is incredibly horrific especially because for what is done to Lumila after these beatings; the act of reading and considering such brutality triggers fear and horror in the reader. The aesthetics of horror are at work, however, when viewing Lumila as the painted bird despite what happens to her from the other women.

The beauty of the horror aesthetic continues to be seen, not despite of, but because of each chapter presenting its own horror, often related to what the boy looks like. He sees the cruelty of other boys to his “pet” squirrel as they torture it and then set it on fire. Then he sees the death of his “foster mother” Marta, who dies and then is burned with the rest of the house: “I stood by the door, ready to run, still waiting for Marta to move...The flames sparkled like a Christmas tree, and they burst into a high blaze, forming a peaked hat of fire on Marta’s head. Marta became a torch” (Kosinski 12). After that, he is truly alone for the rest of the novel, starting when he is six years old to when the book ends with him at twelve, all the while running from one location to another – each chapter bringing him to a new place for him to rest and perhaps live in peace. In Chapter Two, the boy is the painted bird because of his appearance. He is viewed as a gypsy and is beaten mercilessly by the villagers. He is whipped, for now he believes that “although I could not understand very much, I heard the word ‘Gypsy’ many times” (Kosinski 17). He is bought as a slave to Olga, the local healer, who is convinced an evil spirit

possesses him because of his appearance; she calls him the Black One, and makes accusations that ghosts surround him. When he falls ill, she buries him up to his head while ravens attack him. Despite his being cured and causing no further trouble, eventually, the villagers throw him into the river to leave their village.

Every time he finds a new place, he finds a new horror. When he ends up with “Jealous,” the local miller, he sees Jealous’ constant whipping of his wife for flirting with other men, specifically the plowboy. Once the good-looking plowboy is invited to dinner, and it is obvious the flirting exists; the miller grabs the plowboy and gouges out his eyes, “with the cats [rolling] the eyes around...and passed them to one another gently with their padded paws” (Kosinski 38). This example of the plowboy is another instance of the painted bird being killed for looking different and trying to be a part of the flock. It is the beauty of the horror aesthetics being overruled by the very act of horror itself. However, after this incident, the boy runs away again and ends up with a carpenter and his wife. The beauty of the horror that can be seen when the carpenter is convinced the boy’s black hair attracts lightning and they chain him out in the field: “he placed me on a cart...drove me outside the village to a distant field and left me there. I was far from trees and human habitation, and the carpenter knew that the chain and harness would prevent him from returning to the hut” (Kosinski 58). When lightning does occur and sets fire to the barn, the boy is blamed and beaten unconscious. However, in the first instance of the boy fighting back, he initiates his own horror upon the carpenter by pulling him into a bunker filled with rats that eat him alive: “I tugged suddenly at the string, so hard that it cut my wrist to the bone...[pulling] the carpenter forward...The massive body of the carpenter was only partly visible. His face and half of his arms were lost under the surface of the sea of rats” (Kosinski

63). As the boy begins to stand up for himself and face some of the different horrors set upon him by other people, Kosinsky shows the origins of the horror of man's inhumanity to man, evident even in a child. This horror aesthetic can show the beauty of the survival of the boy from this inhumanity.

These instances of brutality and cruelty to the boy continue throughout the book, each new and, at times, more vicious than what he has experienced before. The cadavers of the birds are a direct reference to the painted birds – they look and are different, so they are driven away and assaulted, with the adults chanting, “Beat the Jews, beat the bastards” (Kosinski 111). The historical horror continues near the end of the novel, when the different villagers learn that the Germans are losing but that the Allied front is coming, and so they must prepare. However, before this can occur, they are attacked by a squad of Kalmuks:

deserters from the Soviets. Hating the Reds, they joined the Germans, who permitted them to loot and rape in the manner of their war customers and manly traditions. This is why the Kalmuks were sent to villages and towns that were to be punished for some noncompliance, and, particularly, to those towns that lay in the path of the advanced Red Army. (Kosinski 175)

The horrors and brutalities enacted upon the villagers are sickening, and only the arrival of the Soviets saves the village and the rest of the villagers. The boy is “adopted” by two Russian soldiers, Mitka and Gavrila, who teach him about not just the Soviets but about communism, and how “every man is important, and why it was crucial that each know what to do and what to aim for” (Kosinski 187). Despite his protestations, the boy is sent to an orphanage away from his two new “friends,” and it becomes obvious that he has finally learned to stand up for himself and

refuse to be a helpless punching bag any longer. He remembers his teachings from Mitka that “a person should take revenge for every wrong or humiliation,” and so the boy fights back as needed, including as a Communist who takes recrimination against those who disagree with or ridicule him (Kosinski 214). His experience - not just communism but the physical beatings, the witness of the atrocities, and even the trains filled with Jews destined for concentration camps by the Germans – make him no longer the weak Gypsy boy tolerating beatings and humiliations. Whether breaking his brother’s arm for annoying him too much or retaliating against a ticket attendant by dropping bricks on his head, his innocence is gone, and he is no longer the painted bird.

The horror in this book is not what is written but what is not written. The acts themselves are horrific, but the implied reader fills in the blanks about how to feel about each action – the very feeling the aesthetic of horror implies. The boy’s feelings and attitude are never described – it is just him telling a story about what occurs, so readers must use their own feelings, which contribute to the horror and make it grow. This has the effect of numbing the reader to so much violence that when the boy stands up for himself and commits his own acts of violence, it is easier to cheer him on because of all that he has suffered than to feel any similar type of disgust at what the boy has done. This is an example of, regardless how perverse, the aesthetics of happiness. There is a catharsis at seeing the boy stand up to the horror he has experienced so far, and a beauty in the violence that takes place – the revenge the protagonist - the boy - enacts on others.

A similar horror aesthetic operates in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver. In this novel, a teenager, Kevin, has killed other students and a teacher at his school. The book is an epistolary account from Kevin's mother to her seemingly estranged husband. She tells him what she is going through, and how she fears that she may have contributed to Kevin's actions and behavior, starting at his birth up to the point when the mass murders occurred. The book is made up of two intertwined parts – the raising and maturation of Kevin and the visits to Kevin in prison. The aesthetics of horror work to disturb the readers – to make them uncomfortable and unsettled. In this novel, the mass killing at the school is the obvious disturbance. However, the mother, Eva, and her behavior and attitude towards Kevin since birth bring the horror aesthetic into the recurring debate of the points of nature and nurture; was it Eva's fault Kevin became the person he was or was he born with this perverse defect within him that only Eva could see? These questions are never fully answered, yet the two sentences of the last paragraph are, "This is all I know. That on the 11th of April 1983, unto me a son was born, and I felt nothing," which may well be this is the real horror of the book and the primary reason for Kevin becoming the person he is (Shriver 400).

From the novel's beginning, Eva states she does not want to be a mother and was terrified of having a baby. She believed that there are "[multiple] reasons to remain barren," and once she does become pregnant, she realizes she did not look forward to motherhood: "Whatever the trigger [of maternal hormones], it never entered my system, and that made me feel cheated" (Shriver 26-27). She even lied to her husband, Franklin, about how excited she is to become pregnant, "when later that month I got my period, I told you I was disappointed. That was my first lie, and it was a whopper" (Shriver 50). When she does give birth, she does not accept any

painkillers and ends up blaming Kevin for her suffering during the pregnancy and birth and her defeat at not wanting to be a mother: “In the very instant of his birth, I associated Kevin with my own limitations – with not only suffering, but defeat” (Shriver 76). Because he wouldn’t suckle, Eva feels angry and cheated at the birth and blames Kevin, a newborn, for this. Eva lies to say what is expected of her: “‘He’s beautiful,’ I mumbled; I had reached for a line from TV” (Shriver 82). To exacerbate the situation, as the baby Kevin squalls at trying to be forced to suckle, as soon as his father picks him up, he quiets down, and thus the antagonistic relationship and divisiveness begin.

The stress continues with her significant postnatal depression, according to the doctor, which is magnified because Kevin refuses to have her milk, even though she has pumped, and she is not asking for Kevin to suckle. As Eva believes, “I shouldn’t have taken it personally, but how could I not? It wasn’t mother’s milk he didn’t want, it was Mother” (Shriver 86). She does not trust him, believing he is more cunning and intelligent than he lets on, even as a baby. He decides whom he will and will not torture with his demands and screaming. When the father, Franklin, is gone, Kevin never stops screaming, regardless of what Eva attempts to pacify him, almost as if it is an outrage at not being wanted and punishing his mother for this. As she puts it, “though a rage that lasts for six to eight hours seems less a fit than a natural state, from which the tranquil respites you witnessed were bizarre departures. Our son had *fits of peace*” (Shriver 89). Yet, once his father returns home, he is a happy baby – or at the very least, acts the part. It soon becomes a division between Franklin / Kevin against Eva, or at the very minimum, an antagonistic relationship between Kevin and Eva.

However, it is not just toward his mother that Kevin is “different” or antagonistic. Franklin and Eva go through a succession of nannies, a few that last more than a week. The first nanny, Siobhan, who worked for them for months, begins to “fear” Kevin, even stating to Eva that “‘He has like, beady eyes, so he does!’ She laughed nervously and qualified, ‘I mean – intense.’ ‘Yes, they’re unnerving, aren’t they,’ I rejoined, as neutrally as I knew how”. (Shriver 99). After a few months, Siobhan finds an increasing number of reasons not to come over and take care of Kevin - to his constant screaming and maliciousness, such as pulling Siobhan’s hair so hard it hurts and destroying a silk muffler of hers. It becomes so bad that Siobhan before she finally quits, states, “‘I used to want a big family,’ she said, turning away. ‘Now I’m not so sure’” (Shriver 103). After Siobhan, Franklin and Eva go through different nannies, never finding one that would last.

At this point, Kevin changes his tactics, stops screaming, and becomes eerily silent, never making any noise. Eva’s mother recognized that there was something wrong with Kevin. As she told Eva, “*That boy had something missing*, she pronounced, in the past tense, as if he were dead. She was trying to make me feel better, though I worried that what Kevin was missing was a mother like mine” (Shriver 110). And he was. It becomes glaringly obvious that Kevin and Eva never want each other. Kevin enacts destruction on Eva, and he knows that she still does not want him. Kevin is consciously antagonistic toward his mother, and he will do whatever he can to make her suffer. At one point, she takes away his squirt gun, and despite his body not showing any tension or anger, Eva sees that “the mask gave him away: Inside he was raging. He hated me with all his being, and I was happy as a clam” (Shriver 151). Once he gets his squirt gun back from his father, he loads it with grape juice and fires it at his mother’s white clothing.

He also, with his squirt gun, “destroys” her special wallpaper she created for her office by defacing it and making it “spidery with red and black ink,” including the ceiling, which now dripped over a priceless carpet. He purposefully stays in diapers until he is almost six years old, defecating so his mother must clean up his “mess.” Eventually, Eva throws Kevin across the nursery, breaking his arm: “I threw him halfway across the nursery. He landed with a dull clang against the edge of the stainless-steel changing table” (Shriver 194). This horrifies her, not because she has hurt him but because now, Kevin has power over her. As long as she “behaves,” he won’t tell Franklin the truth about the “accident.” Finally, Eva tricks Franklin, and she becomes pregnant again, just to prove she can be a good mother, or as she puts it, “I have to find something out.’...’About -,’ I decided not to apologize for the word, ‘about my soul’” (Shriver 216). Once her daughter, Celia, is born, it is as if the baby who was supposed to exist the first time now exists with her. In Franklin’s eyes, it is now Franklin and Kevin against Eva and Celia, and although Celia knows of no division, she loves everyone, especially her mother. This divisiveness eventually begins the process of unraveling the marriage of Franklin and Eva. As he grows up, Kevin continues to be antagonistic and cruel, now spreading his bile to his classmates. One instance occurs at a school dance where Kevin goes to a girl, dancing by herself. The girl immediately becomes self-conscious and leaves the dance floor after several seconds. Eva now recognizes that even though she wasn’t at the school when the mass murders occurred, “two years before, I was witness to its harbinger in that same gym, when a lone graduate of Gladstone Middle School was assassinated” (Shriver 254). Even though it is not proven, Eva suspects the disaster that impacts her daughter Celia is Kevin’s fault. Somehow, drain cleaner was poured into one of Celia’s eyes and her face, thus causing Celia to lose the eye

and be scarred from this acidic compound. Eva is convinced Kevin did it, and Franklin is appalled that Eva would blame him for this horrible accident. However, later, Kevin shows no sympathy since she still has one eye – “Ceil’s just gonna have to suck it up” (Shriver 295). Eva was convinced that it was an act for Franklin, “a candy-coated savagery for your consumption...if you looked into his pupils they were thick and sticky as a tar pit,” an impression then exacerbated by the sight of Kevin eating lychees; fruit that just happened to look like eyes with cataracts (Shriver 295).

The final act of Kevin’s antagonism is his mass killing of specific classmates and his teacher. He has obviously been planning this for months, and before he goes to school, he kills his sister and father. Throughout the novel, Eva visits Kevin in juvenile prison, where, even behind bars, Kevin attempts to continue to antagonize her. She views it as an unending circle of events: “You make me feel bad; feeling bad makes me mad; ergo, you make me mad” (Shriver 40). It is a constant battle between the two – his arrogance versus her attempts at being the dutiful mother visiting her son in prison. However, during one visit, he calls her out on it: “But don’t be dragging your ass back here on my account.’ Then he added, ‘Because I hate you” (Shriver 43). Eva’s response is equally as brutal: “So I said instead, in the same informational tone, ‘I often hate you, too, Kevin” (Shriver 44). This hatred is not just because of how she has felt about him since birth or the killings; because of him, she has lost everything – her family, what she called home, and any peace of mind of what kind of mother she was or could have been. As she says in one of her letters to Franklin, “You think I was mean to him, and that’s why he withdrew. I don’t think so. I think he wants me to be to him ...and if anything, he slacked in

disappointment that here I was finally pitching a few halfheartedly injurious remarks, and he felt nothing” (Shriver 57).

He is famous in prison for his crimes, and he brags: “Are you kidding? They fucking worship me, *Mumsey*...I’m the only one with the stones to [kill] in real life” (Shriver 41). He takes pride in what he did and how it differed from all others because of how he planned everything and the number of people he killed, taking it personally that twelve days later, the Columbine incident produced a higher number of deaths – “how he grieves Kevin that Littleton has won the generic tag over Gladstone” (Shriver 159). Anytime Eva tries to initiate a conversation about “Thursday” (what she calls the murders), Kevin continues to boast and show contempt towards her, even so much as stating that he made her life interesting: “‘But I went out of my way,’ he said with a smile that lifted lifelessly as if by hooks, ‘to keep you entertained’” (Shriver 57). His antagonism and torture of Eva during her visits include subtle reminders of what she has lost when he killed his sister - her daughter Celia. For example, during one visit, he rolls around some type of marble or worry bead. When his smugness reaches its completeness, he shows he has been playing with Celia’s glass eye, the one that replaced the eye she lost to the drain cleaner incident.

During the time between the visits, even without Kevin’s antagonism, Eve is antagonized by the rest of society. Shunned, vandalized, and essentially blamed for her son’s actions, she is often asked why he did it, and she never has an answer, or even the same answer. When visiting her in-laws, while they try to understand, the death penalty is brought up, and Eva is very clear when she tells them that “‘honestly, there are some days,’ I looked balefully out their bay window, ‘I wish they would give him the death penalty. Get it all over with. But that might be

letting myself off the hook” (Shriver 142). Even with her in-laws insisting it wasn’t her fault, she continues to be honest with them, stating what we know from earlier – “I never *liked* him very much” (Shriver 143). When asked about the crime by a fellow mother of an inmate, she states, “‘I expect it’s my fault,’ I said defiantly. ‘I wasn’t a very good mother – cold, judgmental, selfish. Though you can’t say I haven’t paid the price’” (Shriver 165). Nothing can shake Eva’s belief that her “failure” caused the death of so many. She still tries to understand why he not only killed all these people but why he chose the specific ones he would kill.

Kevin is finally happy to explain this, along with the specific plans he made for this to work. His use of the crossbow to kill doesn’t violate any gun laws, and besides, it was a gift from his father. He chose those specific classmates for a variety of individual reasons; according to him, he just didn’t like them. However, when Eva does some research on her own, she found that the list of victims was chosen to encompass each part of the school society – “a basketball player, a studious Hispanic, a film buff, a classical guitarist, an emotive thespian, a computer hacker, a gay ballet student, a homely political activist, a vain teen beauty, a part-time cafeteria worker, and a devoted English teacher – a slice of life” (Shriver 246). It isn’t until Kevin will be transferred to the adult penitentiary that he begins to show true fear and actually states that he would appreciate Eva’s visits, something that has never happened during her previous visits. He gives her the gift of the eye within a box he has created as an effort of contrition and then agrees to hug her goodbye. As Eva hugs him, she is not sure, but she would “like to think that he choked, ‘*I’m sorry.*’ Taking the risk that I’d heard correctly, I said distinctly myself, ‘*I’m sorry, too, Kevin.* I’m sorry, too’” (Shriver 398). Despite the macabre gift, it is still a moment of beauty where the wall between the two family members may have finally cracked and started to

break down. Instead of the horror of the eye, it is the aesthetic of horror that is present at the end of the book.

The aesthetics of horror can be difficult to explain, confronting as it asks the question, “How can there be beauty in horror?” Bullock, building off of Kant, states that : “beauty is a universally understood feeling that transcends our conception of an object or artwork [and] is vital to create a clear distinction between subjective and objective observation” (Bullock). Both of these books cause the reader to feel. In *The Painted Bird*, the reader feels for the boy and the multiple instances of horror that befall him. Likewise, in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the feelings of fear give way to the unification of the mother with the son. In both, one can appreciate the waking dawn after suffering through a nightmare. The horror aesthetic is present in the beauty of survival, whether from that nightmare, or the instances of horror within the novels.

Horror, in its own sense, can make the reader feel fear, terror, disgust, but ultimately beauty prevails, even if it’s not always with a happy ending. Edmund Burke wrote that “the feeling of beauty is akin to that of love,” and with horror being so much of a dichotomy of emotion with beauty and love, it is no surprise that the aesthetic of horror can operate so powerfully on readers (Bullock). Fear and love are two sides of the same coin, and so to feel one is to be able to feel the other; one emotion can overcome the other, but without the other, neither would truly exist. In *The Painted Bird*, the love that the boy feels towards those that are kind to him is just as powerful as the horror that has befallen him throughout the story. The same dichotomy of feeling exists with Kevin and his mother – the love finally overriding the horror.

In both novels, the power of the horror aesthetic comes from our connection to the primary characters, specifically the boy from *The Painted Bird* and the mother from *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. The reader feels what the characters feel – the dread of the horror and the catharsis of survival or restitution. The boy exemplifies beauty when he not only survives the torture from all of his “saviors” but is able to enact revenge or his own method of justice on his antagonists. We cheer at what is horror because we see the horror aesthetic, the beauty of not just surviving but enacting just punishment on those who tortured him. With Eva, the beauty of reconciliation stemming from the horror aesthetic overrides all the horror she has had to face from not just the killings, but from those others who pointed at and spoke about her. The aesthetics of horror is the beauty of the unexpected emotion.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gavin Cox began his education and earned his high school diploma at Coronado High School in El Paso, Texas. Gavin then earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance in 1990 from The University of Texas at Austin. He then spent the next eighteen years working in the IT fields ranging from an IT director to a Global CIO. During this time, he earned a Master of Business Administration from The University of Texas at Dallas in 1995. In 2021, Gavin continued his education and earned a Master of Arts in English, specializing in Literature from Southern New Hampshire University in 2018. He then attended The University of Texas at Dallas to earn his PhD in Literature in 2019.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Gavin Cox

Accomplished professional with dedication to academic excellence and strong commitment to enhance business and IT experience in the education sector. Expertise in delivering comprehensive instruction, training students, and contributing to curriculum development. Track record of engaging in scholarly research, publishing in reputable journals, and presenting at conferences. Excel in creating an inclusive classroom environment, while adapting teaching methodologies to accommodate learning needs. Proven success in inspiring the next generation of learners in line with the institution's mission and values. Able to collaborate with faculty, administration, and diverse student population. Possess excellent critical thinking, public speaking, project management, editing, writing, and leadership skills. Proficient in using Canvas, Brightspace, Camtasia, Microsoft Teams, and Stream.

Education & Credentials

Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities & Literature

University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, 2023

Dissertation: Necessary Evils: The Role of Horror in Modern and Contemporary Literature

Master of Arts in English & Literature

Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH

Master of Business Administration

University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX

Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance

University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX

Professional Experience

The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX

2019 – Present

Teaching Associate

Serve as the Instructor of Record for delivering the course of LIT 2331, RHET 1302, rhetoric, and world literature in virtual, hybrid, and in-person formats. Instruct the classes, conduct student consultation hours, and develop the course outlines. Produce any required instructional materials based on the chosen mode of teaching.

- Received positive responses from students towards both teaching and courses that fostered an atmosphere of openness.
- Encouraged extensive discussions and supplemented by relevant lectures for majority of students that enhanced comprehension of the subject, as reflected in improved essay grades and progress.

Collin County Community College, Frisco, TX
Adjunct Professor

2018 – 2019

Conducted ENGL 1301, Freshman English composition, while working within a classroom setting. Conduct course instruction, offer student consultation periods, and develop course outlines. Generate recordings based on the instructional method in use.

- Received positive feedback and evaluations from students.

Career break due to working to earn Master in Literature

2016 – 2018

Trinity Basin Preparatory School District, Dallas, TX

2015 – 2016

The Beck Group, Dallas, TX

2013 – 2015

ASSA Abloy Hospitality, Richardson, TX

2007 – 2013

Corporate Trainer

Provided training to every global office member and staff on novel technologies aimed at enhancing student service. Created training manuals, staff evaluations, and presentations tailored to various audiences. Secured transparent channels of communication and enacted enhancements to foster collaboration.

- Established and conveyed uniform IT protocols, policies, and processes both orally and in written form.
- Implemented innovative international software, and ensured successful effective utilization.

Additional Experience

Writer, Graduate Work, UTD, 2018 – Present

- Author and submit multiple papers for publication in scholarly journals and presentation at various conferences.

Professional Development

Lecture Creation Certificate (Online)

UTD, 2023

Advanced Graduate Teaching Certificate | Advanced Online Teaching Certificate

UTD, 2022

Teaching Certificate (Online) | Graduate Teaching Certificate

UTD, 2020

Affiliations

- The International Gothic Association, Member, 2019 – Present
- Horror Writers Association, Member, 2019 – Present
- Modern Language Association (MLA), Member, 2019 – Present
- The International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, Member, 2018 – Present
- Sigma Tau Delta, Member, 2016 – Present
- The National Society of Leadership & Success, Member, 2016 – Present

Awards

- Travel Award, Betty & Gifford, 2023
- Travel Award, Bremer, 2022

Conferences & Presentations

1. Pet Sematary, Horror Genre & Horrors of Modern Life. Fandom & Neomedia Studies Association, 2022
2. Horror Viewed in Life as Represented by Literature, International Gothic Annual Conference, 2019
3. Phantoms, Medusas, & False Selves: Abjection in Film & Literature, International Gothic Annual Conference, Panel Chair, 2019