

A Posthumanist Reading of *The Haunting of Hill House*

Project Report

Submitted by

Sandra Hemanth Chandragiri (Reg. No. SB21CE001)

Under the guidance of

Ms. Allu Alfred

In partial fulfilment of requirements for award of the degree

Of Bachelor of Arts

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam



College With Potential for

Excellence Accredited by NAAC with 'A++' Grade

Affiliated to

Mahatma Gandhi University

Kottayam – 686560

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Declaration

I do affirm that the project “A Posthumanist Reading Of *The Haunting Of Hill House*” submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Communication Studies has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Ernakulam

Sandra Hemanth Chandragri

22 March 2024

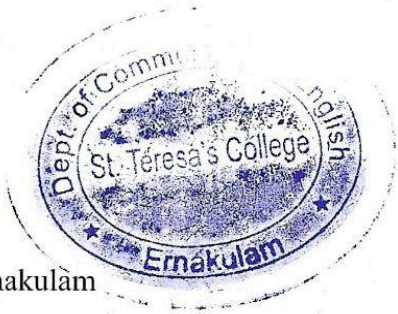
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B.A. English Literature and Communication Studies

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Certificate

I hereby certify that this project entitled “A Posthumanist Reading Of *The Haunting Of Hill House*” by Sandra Hemanth Chandragiri is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.



Ernakulam

22 March 2024


24/4/2024
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Department of Communicative English

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Acknowledgement

I take this opportunity to offer my humble prayers and thanks to God Almighty for His mercy and blessings for the completion of this project.

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Sandra Hemanth Chandragiri

Abstract

This dissertation inquires into Shirley Jackson's novel 'The Haunting Of Hill House'. The fictive is analysed in such a manner so as to unveil various elements that are deemed as posthumanist in nature. Mainly observed is the disposition of the eponymous house. Its actions give rise to the assertion that Hill House is the central agency governing over everyone within the vicinity, almost with an iron hand. The other aspect of the book most noticeable is that of queer identity. Queer theory and posthumanism go hand in hand since both seek to deconstruct a society based on the ideals of the white, cisgendered and heteronormative male. Thus, the field of queer studies, too, plays a role in reinforcing the posthumanist character of the novel.

The Haunting Of Hill House blurs all boundaries, creating a fluid narrative that cannot be studied using a framework of strict delineations, whilst being sorted into categories of black and white notions. That, in itself, is the essence of posthumanism.

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Chapter I

Introduction

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (Jackson 3)

The main purpose of this dissertation is to give a new perspective on *The Haunting Of Hill House*. Although the original story is largely driven by the individuals in the novel, a posthumanist reading will enable the speculation of new analogies which can be drawn between *Hill House* and the relatively new and dynamic theory.

The idea that the *homo sapiens* are a superior species, owing to their innate intellectual and moral capabilities, is a core belief of what has come to be known as ‘humanism’. In this outlook, they are considered to be the most perfect beings and thus, meant to represent the vast universe itself. This is also termed as anthropocentrism, which

literally means human-centred, but in its most relevant philosophical form it is the ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value. In contradistinction, all other beings hold value only in their ability to serve humans, or in their instrumental value. From an anthropocentric position, humans possess direct moral standing because they are ends in and of themselves; other things (individual living beings, systems) are means to human ends. In one sense, all ethics are anthropocentric, for arguably humans alone possess the cognitive ability to formulate and recognize moral value.

This agency places humans at the centre of whatever ethical system we devise, and this moral reality drives some scholars to claim that anthropocentrism is the only logical ethical system available to us. (Goralnik & Nelson 145)

To contest such centredness of humanity, came along ‘posthumanist’ thinking. It involved questioning the assumed threshold of what it means to be human and detaching the importance ‘naturally’ assigned to being one. Furthermore, posthumanism explores nonhumans and the relationship they share with humans, the former including animals as well as the environment.

The concept of posthumanism is introduced aptly by N. Katherine Hayles:

Think of the Turing test as a magic trick. Like all good magic tricks, the test relies on getting you to accept at an early stage assumptions that will determine how you interpret what you see later. The important intervention comes not when you try to determine which is the man, the woman, or the machine. Rather, the important intervention comes much earlier, when the test puts you into a cybernetic circuit that splices your will, desire, and perception into a distributed cognitive system in which represented bodies are joined with enacted bodies through mutating and flexible machine interfaces. As you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screens, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become posthuman. (Hayles)

Written by Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting Of Hill House* is a tale recounting all that transpired in an allegedly haunted house whilst it was inhabited by four unwitting guests. Mr. John Montague, an academic scholar whose true interests lie in exploring the supernatural, decides to rent the house and invite intrigued people to experience and study the dread that seems to pervade it. Only two – Eleanor Vance and Theodora – agree to participate in this

experiment that is to last over the summer. The fourth and final member is Luke Sanderson, a representative of the Sanderson family who owns the estate.

The Haunting Of Hill House is essentially a ghost story. It seems like it would contain the usual archetypes found in the horror narrative. But that is where Jackson's novel differs and succeeds. The frightening events that take place are all spectral; they are, however, rooted in the deep seated traumas of the human minds present.

In *The Haunting Of Hill House*, the house is the nucleus around which the characters revolve. It does not take too long for the reader to realise that Hill House has human characteristics of its own which elevates the horror aspect to a more personal level. The characters are also influenced by the house through the exploitation of their behaviours, their pasts and the relationships they share with each other. Moreover, a significant portion is kept intentionally vague and unconfirmed. Most of the supernatural elements are left to the imagination of the reader. And that, in a way, ensures the potency of the fear since there is no other better instrument than our own minds to conjure up the worst of the macabre. Repeated readings will reveal more clues and yet, *Hill House* can never quite be completely comprehended. This is the same for the book as well as the eponymous house.

Likely to be written in the year 1958, the book is almost a direct reflection of the life Shirley Jackson had been living until then. Growing up, Jackson was under the shadow of a harsh and unyielding mother who made it very clear about her disapproval of everything her daughter did. She was let down by Jackson's apathetic attitude towards acting the American socialite. In the words of Barry Hyman (Jackson's youngest child), his grandmother was "just a deeply conventional woman who was horrified by the idea that her daughter was not going to be deeply conventional" (Franklin 33). Despite moving away from home, Jackson was still unable to gain any relief since her mother kept up the hounding through letters.

During her time at Syracuse University, Jackson thrived creatively and published a story in the college's magazine which would draw the attention of Stanley Edgar Hyman, her future husband. He was struck by her genius and would be the encouragement for her to write more. To Hyman, she was his "personal discovery" (101), one who was capable of producing masterpieces – a diamond in the rough. And it was apparently his job as her own personal critic to oversee the polishing of her talents, even if it was to the point of excessive pedantism. This may have arisen due to his feelings of inferiority in the simple fact that Jackson was the more gifted of the two and the sole breadwinner of the family.

The couple ended up having four children. The warm family life was embraced by Jackson but it was not without any painful troubles. Her husband would be knee deep in his own academic work, leaving her struggling between writing and taking care of the brood. The wages Jackson generated were meted out to her as Hyman saw fit. To add to this was his indulgence in infidelity with other women, a lot of them his own students. As a result, she grew increasingly dependent on cigarettes, alcohol and amphetamines. There are numerous mentions in her journals of her desire of leaving behind Hyman and making a life for herself.

Such circumstances surrounding her life can be seen running in parallel to that of Eleanor, the leading character of *Hill House*, the story of which will be explored in the following chapters.

The first chapter of this thesis will explain the historical beginnings of posthumanism. The aim of the first chapter is to highlight the various principles proposed by different scholars across the years. It is required in order to denote the basic outline of the posthumanist idea. This will in turn establish the framework within which *The Haunting Of Hill House* can be analysed in the subsequent chapter.

The power of Hill House as a non-human agency is explored in the second chapter of this thesis. This is because Hill House seems to be a complete entity on its own, acting on

what are usually considered to be ‘human’ tendencies. How the house exhibits powers is such a substantial manner and the dominance it exerts over those who inhabit Hill House is comprehended

The third chapter analyses the queer subtext in the novel. Similarities will also be drawn between the queer theory and posthumanism as well since both challenge binary systems and traditional norms. The two theories seek to deconstruct the traditional limitations that define humanism.

Finally, the conclusion ties together the novel and posthumanism in a fashion that demonstrates how the former can very well be elucidated through the means of the latter. It becomes plausible to establish that the book contains posthumanist elements, just as much as the more commonly interpreted psychoanalytic and feminist features. The house as the dominant agency and the queer aspect are the two main approaches through which such a deduction is achieved.

This project, therefore, aims to probe Jackson’s novel through a new perspective by comparing it to the interinfluence between humans, nonhuman animals and the inanimate, within the context of a paranormal setting.

Chapter II

Of Posthumanist Nuances

The Enlightenment came about fittingly into the 17th century. The period leading up to it was rife with religious disillusionment. It was the result of a series of scientific revolutions and clear evidence of immoral Catholic practices. Both formed fissures in the faith of many ordinary people, prompting them to cast aside their blind trust in an omnipotent being to guide their lives. Instead, they turned to their natural intellectual capabilities and herein, occurred the realisation that one is in control of one's own destiny, unhindered by any external forces. The most infamous example of this sentiment is Rene Descartes's statement, *cogito, ergo sum*, (Latin: I think, therefore I am).

The philosophical movement placed logic at the forefront; logic, which was deemed a cognitive component presumably only present in human beings. Naturally, this led to the centering of humans in every sphere. Individual human freedom was given utmost importance since it was beginning to be considered as a birthright. But 17th century Europe was still largely made up of colonial empires that functioned using resources from their colonies around the world. These resources included slaves and indentured labourers. Suffice to say, human freedom was limited only to the whites; specifically to white men, since this can be attested by Rousseau's enlightening words:

Thus the whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to council them, to console them, and to make life agreeable and sweet to them—these are the duties of women at all times, and should be taught them from their infancy. (“Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*”)

Nevertheless, it would be the principles of Enlightenment that would inspire the French common folk to take up arms against their oppressive monarchy, to fight for their

welfare rights. The vacuum left behind by the overthrown French king would result in power struggles between two major political factions, resulting in a period of bloody massacres and public executions.

This outlook that viewed humans as the prime focus in all matters comprised the notion of humanism. There was, however, an extent to who received privileges under that label, one that was decided by an elite category of individuals.

The term ‘posthumanism’ was first used by Ihab Hassan in 1977, where he said:

We need first to understand that the human form – including human desire and all its external representations – may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned.

We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthuman. (Hassan 843)

In his article, Hassan uses the mythological figure Prometheus to explain the concept of posthumanism. The Greek titan is well known for being a trickster after stealing fire from the Olympian gods and giving it away to humans. He also dispersed among them scientific and technological knowledge, leading to their advancement. Prometheus, however, does not get away with it. He faces Zeus’s punishment by being tied to a rock, where an eagle would peck at his liver. Overnight, the organ would grow back, upon which, it will be eaten again – eternal torment for Prometheus’s transgression.

The Prometheus myth, therefore, represents the blurring of the boundaries between many believed divisions such “as the One and the Many, Cosmos and Culture, the Universal and the Concrete” (838). Prometheus is someone willing to use deception for his personal purposes; conversely, he is also the one to bring emancipation to the humans from their dependence on the gods. Thus, “Prometheus may prove himself to be a figure of flawed and evolving consciousness, an emblem of human destiny” (838).

Posthumanism can be further discussed by analysing Donna Haraway's groundbreaking essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto". A cyborg is any living organism that receives cognitive or physical augmentation through additions to the body, such as prosthetics and implants. In the essay, Haraway talks of three major perceived boundaries that were later broken down.

The first is the boundary apparently separating human and animal. Haraway credits evolutionary theories and biological studies for revealing that humans, like any other living organism, is a product of millennia of biological advancement. There is no innate factor separating and assigning superiority to the human race. Haraway remarks, " Within this framework, teaching modern Christian creationism should be fought as a form of child abuse." (Haraway 10)

The "second leaky distinction" (11) is between organisms (humans and animals) and machines. The latter was simply a creation of the former; an imitation. It could never achieve autonomy and is a copy of the "masculinist reproductive dream" (11). But technological growth in the previous and current centuries have contested the above claims. In fact, machines are improving at an exponential rate, so much so, that they are "disturbingly lively" (11) while humans remain "frighteningly inert" (11). Technology has hence become an inextricable aspect of human life.

The third breakdown is related to the second. Here, Haraway says machines have emerged to be sophisticated and miniscule, resulting in them being invisible. The miniature devices are portable and move around freely, as opposed to people who are "nowhere near so fluid" (13). They have been integrated into everyday lives in all aspects that it is difficult to clearly mark the point where technology bleeds into human spheres.

Haraway believes that by the end of the twentieth century, humans are cyborgs themselves. Man and machine are not lines running parallel to each other; instead, they have intermixed to such an extent that it is hard to say one ends and the other begins. She states:

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. (7)

Posthumanism does not mean the end of humans or the human body in the physical sense. It is the end of what had been considered to be human conventionally and realising that human identity is dynamic, influenced by the natural environment, non-human animals and machines. It simply signals another step in human evolution.

Neuromancer, by William Gibson, is a celebrated work of scientific fiction where posthumanism can be observed. Written before the theory had gained much momentum, the novel belongs to the cyberpunk genre and features a futuristic world where humans and technology have intermingled irreversibly. The book disregards anthropocentrism as it introduces AIs as characters with their own personal objectives they wish to achieve; therefore, moving away from a human viewpoint.

In it, humans interact with cyberspace, which is a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding... (Gibson 49)

The term 'cyberspace' was coined by Gibson himself, and used first in his previous short story, *Burning Chrome*.

While having almost no relation to the sci-fi genre or with cybernetics, *The Haunting Of Hill House* also manages to bring about a narrative that is centred around a non-human entity. Most posthumanist theories explain the futility of marking boundaries regarding what it means to be human, in proportion to the influence that modern machines hold over the species. But Hill House, as the main posthuman element, alludes to the verity that there are more factors other than technology that can smear the absolute certainty with which humankind is defined. Most noticeable is the sheer authority Hill House commands. Its dominance over everyone who steps inside highlights a sentient existence, evil or otherwise.

In a mode similar to that of Haraway, several delineations are ruptured or given ambiguity in the story.

Chapter III

The Patient House

After most of the characters are introduced, the book's first chapter goes into detail about Eleanor Vance's journey to Hill House. She seemed to have been more keen on savouring the actual drive rather than reaching her destination. In fact, Eleanor wanted to prolong her trip as much as possible, even if it meant stopping at Hillsdale – the town where the house was situated – despite Dr. Montague's advice to not do so.

Upon reluctantly entering a diner for a cup of coffee, Eleanor is met with a girl behind the counter and a male customer. She makes forced conversation with the girl; however, the latter and the customer are overly dismissive of her and are more interested in each other. Both are evidently not too fond of the town and only barely conceal the ridicule they hold towards Eleanor and her innocuous questions. Right before the man leaves, he remarks, “People *leave* this town. They don't *come* here” (Jackson 26).

This meeting, as a result, sets a dismal tone even before Hill House has properly come into the picture.

The house itself is described in vivid detail. It was supposedly awake, watching with glee with its wicked visage. Unlike other houses which were built according to the plans drawn up by the builders, this one seemed to have built itself, “flying together into its own powerful pattern” (35). It was the embodiment of hubris and provided no special favours to humankind. The house held no room for love, hope or people for that matter; it was “a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in” (35).

An agency,

understood broadly to include living beings as well as such forces as radioactivity, solar energy, weather, gravity, and flows of matter, is thus a distributed, emergent

force that can create order or disorder with or without intentionality. Willpower exists,

but it functions in response to many factors including linguistic, cultural, biological, chemical, and ecological ones. (Duerbeck et al. 122)

Since Hill House is inanimate and exerts immense intentional control over its occupants and perhaps, even over Hillsdale, it is a non-human agency. This is also why as Eleanor finally comes face to face with the old house, panic grips her. She finds it to be enormous and dark, unwilling to look at it any longer. To her the residence is authoritative, looming. As Eleanor steps into her new and temporary abode, she thinks that “her deep unwillingness to touch Hill House for the first time came directly from the vivid feeling that it was waiting for her, evil, but patient” (Jackson 36).

When all of the main characters have eventually met, they settle down in the parlour. After much persuasion, Dr. Montague recounts the history of Hill House. It was built some eighty years ago by a man named Hugh Crain for his family as a sort of stately home, where his descendents could reside in extensive luxury. Only, it so happened that the Crains’s first tryst with their new dwelling was mired with misfortune. Their carriage overturned minutes before they could catch a glimpse of the house, leading to the death of Hugh’s wife. He was a “sad and bitter” (75) man, left alone to provide for two very young girls. He would go on to marry twice, but was unlucky with both. The second wife passed away unexpectedly from a fall; the third would die from tuberculosis while the couple was travelling in Europe to find treatment for the same. Following the tragedy, Hugh decides to settle abroad and sends his daughters to live with their mother’s cousin. The two had been living in Hill House up until then with their governess.

In the wake of Hugh’s death some time later, the house was left to the shared ownership of the sisters. They reached an agreement where the older sister could have Hill House to herself. She came to be called ‘Miss Crain’ amongst the villagers and was said to resemble her father strongly. After living in isolation for many years, she took a Hillsdale girl

as a companion. Nonetheless, peace was never attained as Miss Crain had constant quarrels with her sister over a few heirlooms that she had agreed to cede. Miss Crain would then pass away from pneumonia, although the circumstances surrounding her demise have varying versions. Subsequently, there was a lawsuit between the companion and the younger sister, regarding the possession of the house, with the former insisting that she had been granted it by Miss Crain herself. Dr. Montague accounts:

The companion swore in court—and here, I think, is the first hint of Hill House in its true personality—that the younger sister came into the house at night and stole things. When she was pressed to enlarge upon this accusation, she became very nervous and incoherent, and finally, forced to give some evidence for her charge, said that a silver service was missing, and a valuable set of enamels, in addition to the famous set of gold-rimmed dishes, which would actually be a very difficult thing to steal, when you think about it. (79)

The companion ended up winning the case but the younger sister's persistent hounding never stopped until she was forced to seek out police protection. She was also ostracised by the villagers, who perhaps felt envious of one their own living in such opulence. Moreover, she was convinced that someone was stealing from the house at night and became demented with fear. Her fragile state of mind resorts to suicide as the only solution; the house is passed on to the Sanderson family (cousins of the companion). Interestingly, the younger sister, until her death, insists that she never burgled. And although the Sandersons were to move in, they left Hill House as quickly as they had come, citing dubious reasons. The same can be said for any other family that tried to occupy the house.

With the Crains's story, it is clear that the house has been malignant from the onset. While the family probably never realised, Hill House has been devouring anyone who dared to inhabit there. Many tenants would, after a time, discern the corruptive nature of the house

and immediately depart. Others, like the companion and Eleanor, would choose to stay even at the cost of their sanity.

Eleanor, for her part, was mentally troubled as a result of caring for her invalid mother for more than a decade. The two had been living in near seclusion after Eleanor's elder sister decided to leave them behind and start a family of her own. Eleanor spent most of those years dealing with slights and passive aggression from her mother. Later, as she finally passes away, Eleanor is riddled with guilt because she believes it was her purposeful inaction that led to it. With her mother gone, it is as though Eleanor lost an anchor – albeit, one she despised the most – that she expected would remain standing for eternity. She is left unmoored, drifting with nowhere to cling on to. This resonates with the story of the companion who possibly felt the same way after the death of Miss Crain.

Both were deeply damaged individuals to whom Hill house, with its equally skewed form, was the sole refuge. It didn't help that the old house knew exactly what it was that they wanted – a sense of security which they were never able to find in others or in themselves. Thus, it manipulates, by welcoming them with open arms. Eleanor gets over her intense terror and soon finds false comfort at Hill House. Like a loving abuser, the house tantalises them into complete submission.

Hill House is also capable of conjuring different realities to its inhabitants. This allowed it to keep them under its control in order to effectively trap Eleanor. The 'truth' as she experiences it is different from that of the others, driving a wedge between her and them. As a result, Eleanor loses the initial companionship she finds with Luke and Theodora. For the house, this is optimal as it ensures her absolute dependence.

Towards the end, when Eleanor cannot stop herself from yielding to Hill House, she describes it as "disappearing inch by inch into this house" (201). Once she has been fully assimilated into it, Eleanor recognises that she is able to sense every touch and noise around

the house. There are instances near the climax where the occupants are put in frightening situations apparently involving the paranormal. However, Eleanor herself is incapable of confirming whether it was her own mind or the house that was behind them. It becomes hard to comprehend as to where Eleanor as a person ends and the influence of Hill House begins. They seem to become one with each other.

Hill House is a case in point. It possesses individual characteristics that grants it equal footing with humans. The house is calculating and very much adept at bending people to its own will. The best way to illustrate the nature of the house is expressed by Dr. Montague: “Essentially, the evil is the house itself, I think. It has enchained and destroyed its people and their lives, it is a place of contained ill will” (82).

Chapter IV

Lavender Tears

Posthumanism thwarts the concept of binary notions, as was elucidated in the first chapter. But another school of thought that operates in the same manner, is the queer perspective. Concerned with gender, sex and sexual orientation, queer theory dismisses binary systems as social constructions that were conceived through collective agreement. It broadens the lens through which the world is perceived, one that is unrestrained by heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

While it can't be said for certain as to whether Jackson intended for her characters to be queer, reading into the subtext offers a very compelling argument.

Stepping into Hill House, Eleanor thinks of a phrase which would be repeated throughout the novel for a total of fourteen times – “Journeys end in lovers meeting”. It is a line from Shakespeare’s play, *Twelfth Night*, one which she is only able to remember when standing on the steps of Hill House. With regards to it, Eleanor was sure that “the words must be most unsuitable, to hide so stubbornly from her memory, and probably wholly disreputable to be caught singing on her arrival at Hill House” (Jackson 32).

The lovers in question are left unnamed although, near the end, their identities can be clearly understood to be Eleanor and Hill House itself. Despite this being a statement that can be deduced through the analysed elements contained in the previous chapter, what has yet to be discussed is the fact that Eleanor went searching for a sanctuary not in the house first, but with her fellow housemates, especially Theodora .

During her introduction, Theodora or Theo, is described as “not at all like Eleanor” (8). From her brief history, she is implied to be an empath, thus being much more in touch with her surroundings and the people in it. In all likelihood, it is also this ability of hers which

causes her to hold an immediate dislike towards the house, one she relentlessly upholds throughout the entire novel.

From the outset, Eleanor is drawn to Theo due to the simplest reason of them being polar opposites. The two women seemingly form a very intimate bond easily enough while understanding each other's idiosyncrasies. While Eleanor believes Theo enjoys being the centre of attention, it is also clear from their interactions that Theo is sensitive to Eleanor's anxieties and constantly tries to alleviate them. One instance of this is when both are reposing in Theo's bedroom. She is applying red nail polish on Eleanor's toes and innocently comments that her feet are dirty. Eleanor is immediately shocked into an abrupt panic and in her distress, alludes to Theo that her mother would disapprove of her unkempt state.

Eleanor looked at her feet again. "It's wicked," she said inadequately. "I mean—on *my* feet. It makes me feel like I look like a fool."

"You've got foolishness and wickedness somehow mixed up." Theodora began to gather her equipment together. "Anyway, I won't take it off and we'll both watch to see whether Luke and the doctor look at your feet first."

"No matter what I try to say, you make it sound foolish," Eleanor said.

"Or wicked." Theodora looked up at her gravely. "I have a hunch," she said, "that you ought to go home, Eleanor." (117)

After this exchange, Eleanor is left feeling mocked by Theo and concludes carelessly that the latter finds her unfit to stay. But the matter was only Theo being concerned when her psychic perception indicated the danger Eleanor would find herself to be in.

Their relationship truly begins to strain after an episode in which Theo finds her room stained with what seemed like red paint, her clothes tattered and the words "Help Eleanor Come Home Eleanor" written in the same red across the wall. She is quick to assume that Eleanor is playing a practical joke on her as retaliation for her behaviour during an earlier

incident. However, the truth is that Eleanor has no memory of doing so whatsoever. It is more than likely that Hill House used its influence to commit this act since it is very much aware of Eleanor's inner workings. The resentment she did harbour towards Theo was exploited by the house in order to contrive situations where the distance between them would only grow. Furthermore, Eleanor's past showed signs of her being able to do poltergeist-like activities; this too could have been a tool to the house for pulling off this occurrence, and maybe even all the paranormal happenings the inhabitants experience.

Later, after yet another confrontation, the two find themselves walking outside Hill House in the dark. At first they keep reproaching each other, too proud to admit their faults. In due time though, they quiet down, conscious of what the other wants to stay; even so, both only wait passively for a resolution:

Nothing irrevocable had yet been spoken, but there was only the barest margin of safety left them; each of them moving delicately along the outskirts of an open question, and, once spoken, such a question—as “Do you love me?”—could never be answered or forgotten. (174)

Hill House, at any rate, grows hungrier by day for Eleanor. On the first night of Dr. Montague's wife's arrival, everyone except for her and her assistant, Arthur, undergo a dreadful encounter with the house. The four are huddled in Dr. Montague's room, when the house quite literally somersaults. Doors open and shut, wind whooshes through and harsh pounding noises could be heard. Most are led to believe that the house is angry because of Mrs. Montague and her planchette (a tool used to apparently communicate with spirits); instead, it is quite possible that what pushed Hill House to act in such a violent manner were Theodora's words: “I swear that old biddy's going to blow this house wide open with that perfect love business; if I ever saw a place that had no use for perfect love, it's Hill House” (198).

With whatever twisted (and false) form of love Hill House holds towards Eleanor, it drives her into a corner from which she sees no escape. Eleanor is led to believe that the only choice she has left is to abdicate herself willingly over to the house; and that is indeed what she does.

Later on, Eleanor still believes that she has a chance to be saved. She admits to Theo that after leaving Hill House, she wants the both of them to live together. When asked why, Eleanor replies she has never had anyone to care about and nowhere to belong to. This is probably the first time in the novel where Eleanor has been sincerely honest with not just herself, but another person. Nonetheless, Theo rejects the idea because she maintains the notion of them having separate lives which just happened to intertwine for a few weeks. They'll keep in touch of course, but what they shared at Hill House will not remain forever. Upon realising that Eleanor is well and truly alone, she gives in. In the wake of this, she shifts her dependence onto the house, never wanting to leave.

Where Theodora is confident, Eleanor is diffident. Where the former is rooted, the latter is unsteady. Where one abhors Hill House, the other is only scared of it.

An excerpt from the writing of Judith Butler perfectly explains the actions of Eleanor and her association with Theodora and Hill House:

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so when we speak about my sexuality or my gender, as we do (and as we must), we mean something complicated by it. Neither of these is precisely a

possession, but both are to be understood as modes of being dispossessed, ways of being for another, or, indeed, by virtue of another. (Butler 19)

Hill House was a medium which allowed Eleanor to easily and greatly project her painful solitude. She was in grief of the near pathetic life she had led and more so of the colossal space left behind as a result of her mother's death. Note that this is a morose and darker side of Eleanor that carried all her insecurities as well. The house, a being of evil, found it effortless to latch on to her psyche.

Grief affects her because desire had already done so a long while ago. In this case, it was her desire to lead a happier future, one that did not bear the insufferable weight of her past, preferably one with Theodora.

In the end, Eleanor's feelings culminate in her coming undone. She loses herself owing to her intense connection towards both Theodora, as well as Hill House.

Chapter V

Conclusion

In his book *Posthumanism*, with regards to the human identity, author Pramod K Nayar proposes that “literary texts that have since the Renaissance always shown us how humans behave, react and interact – indeed it has been said that literature 'invented' the human – have now begun to show that the human is what it is *because* it includes the non-human” (Nayar 2).

The story starts off with Eleanor going on a journey after having cast away her past and family, to a place where she will form new relationships and build a better future. While it is gratifying to imagine Eleanor accomplishing her wish of leading a quiet and content life, her arrival at Hill House reinforces the chance of her digressing from her original desire.

Within the context of *The Haunting of Hill House*, the house is the central and single most important non-human agency. It is the element which, towards the end, defines the identity itself of the protagonist, Eleanor. Over the course of various instances, Eleanor feels singled out from the rest of her fellow housemates. She realises that she does not belong anywhere, underpinning her internal belief that all she was ever needed for was to care for her ailing mother.

But what Eleanor fails to understand is her disillusionment’s true cause: Hill House. During their first ever inexplicable encounter at the house, Dr. Montague assumes correctly after their ordeal is over, “doesn’t it begin to seem that the intention is, somehow, to separate us?” (Jackson 55). As their stay continues, the initial camaraderie present amongst them, especially between Eleanor, Theodora and Luke, begins to strip away slowly. Hill House, with its powers, is very much aware of all that has been accumulated over the years in order to shape Eleanor into the person she was at the beginning of the story. With the knowledge it possesses, the house conveniently contrives situations where the friends are sure to turn on

each other. An example of this was when Theodora's clothes were torn and covered in a substance that looked like blood. Sure of Eleanor to be the perpetrator, the two quarrel, leading to the very first breach in their relationship. However, later on, they all discover the clothes to be clean and unmarred.

Thus, the house's greatest power is its hegemony over reality itself. It behaves like a spider, setting up convenient traps to lure in its victim. It simply throws out a web that Eleanor will undoubtedly latch onto and ultimately surrender to, so that she can be a part of a 'reality' in which she will rightfully belong. So much has she been subject to that acquiescing to the house seems to be the only plausible solution. Following this, Eleanor becomes a part of Hill House, flowing according to its whims and wishes. The house lays down an iron hand in making sure that Eleanor never becomes capable of leaving. The house plants and strengthens the idea in Eleanor that she has no other to run towards, except for Hill House.

Christopher Watkin traces Bruno Latour's notion of humanity in a manner that can be applied to Hill House as well:

The human is an amalgam of multiple modes of existence and cannot be isolated within any single mode. Latour also avoids the problems inherent in a host capacity approach by distributing both capacities and substance across human and nonhuman actors in unatomisable collectivities. Whereas the host capacity and host substance approaches seek to understand the human by looking within, Latour insists that the human only becomes comprehensible when we look outside and around. (Watkin)

An aspect of posthumanism that is prevalently exercised in the story is ambiguity. In posthumanism, the concept of binary networks are deconstructed and challenged. The traditional thinking of categorising thoughts into dualisms. The theory encourages the exploration of the fluid and dynamic manner in which many systems are interconnected. The first of this distinction that is shattered is Eleanor/Hill House. The house and Eleanor

intermingle to a point where it becomes difficult to separate the two and mark a difference between them.

The second distinction that is present is related to the queer identities of the characters of Eleanor and Theodora. While the nature of their relationship is not spelled outright, the available subtext is enough to consider their relationship as belonging to beyond the boundaries of heteronormativity. One may argue that Eleanor was only looking for somewhere to belong to, be it a person or a place, and Theodora happened to be there at the opportune moment. She was the complete contradiction to who Eleanor was; therefore, Eleanor sought to rise to her level by acting in a manner that was unlike her.

This argument can be countered by the truth that Eleanor never felt a companionship to this amount with Luke. In actuality, she was dismissive of him due to her understanding that Luke was self-centred and inconsiderate of others' sentiments. Instead, she actively sought out an intimate connection with Theodora. There is also the fact that the two women were still concerned about each other seemingly during Hill House's moments of blind spots.

Both, the queer theory and posthumanism, "transcend boundaries, upset dichotomies, and challenge the cisgender heterosexual male as the foundational figure of humanism" (Henry 19) as put forward by Claire Henry. The intersection of two hence, can be observed in the novel. Thus, the second dismantled distinction is heteronormativity/non-heteronormativity.

The last element that sheds light on the underlying posthuman elements in *The Haunting Of Hill House* is consciousness. According to Robert Pepperell,

The human body is not separate from its environment. Since the boundary between the world and ourselves consists of permeable membranes that allow energy and matter to flow in and out, there can be no definite point at which our bodies begin or end. Humans are identifiable, but not definable. Things around us, like food, air,

light, smells and sounds are absorbed into our system, become part of us and are expelled. How can we define precisely what it, or isn't, part of us. The notion that each of us is a discrete entity can be called the 'boxed body' fallacy. This assumes that the human body has a fixed delimitation; the mind resides inside the brain, inside the walls of the box whilst the reality upon which mind reflects lies outside. The box is perforated to allow sensations to flow in and waste to flow out. According to this model, each side of the box is discrete and retains its own identity. Philosophers then argue about the relationship between the two sides — Can one really know what's outside the box from the limited data we receive? If not, where does that data come from, etc? All such questions are avoided if we simply accept the continuity between body and environment— dispense with the box! Nothing can be external to a human because the extent of a human cannot be fixed. (Pepperell)

Hill House shares its consciousness with not just Eleanor, but with other members as well. It is only that all of their minds are caught in a quagmire from which their actual individual traits cannot be differentiated. With the house having a malevolent character, it pushes the negative attributes onto the characters as well. When Mrs. Montague decides to use her planchette to communicate with the 'ghost' that has been apparently haunting the mansion, what comes through is someone claiming to be 'Nell or Eleanor'. The being cooperates with the communicative device, giving vague answers, confessing to be "lost" and alluding to a mother and child. The irony is that Eleanor is witnessing the event along with everyone else, awake and aware. It is a case where Hill House has been tapping into Eleanor's mind without her knowledge and revealing her innermost inclinations.

This occurs when one evening, Eleanor and Theodora walk away into the woods after a disagreement as well. Still exchanging bitter words with each other, both realise that they are being forced upon a path, one from which they are unable to stray. The pair then come

across a garden, where a family consisting of a father, mother, child and a puppy are having a cheery picnic. The scene is that of utter bliss; until Theodora lets out a scream, yelling at Eleanor to run and not look back. This is where the reader discerns that the picturesque scene was only witnessed by Eleanor. For her, it was an unfulfilled wish. But for Theodora, the scene was terror inducing, although it is never divulged what she glimpsed. Here, the nature of Hill House is put out on display: while it would manifest anything to make Eleanor stay, it would do just as much to drive away anyone who would be a hindrance to acquiring its object of fancy.

The introduction of this thesis began with a quote which was also the opening passage of the book. It sets the tone of the story that would unfold; additionally, it also alludes to the haunting nature of the house. What makes the words even more important is that they are also employed as the closing passage to the novel. Doing so signifies that the house will remain standing just as it had before. No human interference could rise strong enough to topple its stature because, ultimately, Hill House holds the most extraordinary power of authority, even as a non-human entity.

Although *The Haunting Of Hill House* is interspersed with ambiguities, it is those very ambiguities that defines the novel, leaving readers with the indisputable certainty that all things are not knowable. Even without providing many answers, the story has enough layers which can be analysed. One of the more unexpected lenses through which the story is scrutinised is that of posthumanism. Hill House, with its potential as a non-human agency, is the characterising feature of the novel. It single handedly proves that the story can be interpreted by applying posthumanism to bring out elements that go beyond the anthropocentric.

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