

# Gothic Inheritances: Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Carmen Maria Machado's "A Hundred Miles and a Mile" and *In the Dream House*

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**Gothic Inheritances:**  
**Shirley Jackson's Legacy in Carmen Maria Machado's**  
**"A Hundred Miles and a Mile" and *In the Dream House***

Carolin Jesussek

When Carmen Maria Machado submitted an early draft of the short story "The Resident" to a writer's workshop, its participants told her that the protagonist's drive to an artist's residency in the mountains reminded them of Eleanor's journey to Hill House in Shirley Jackson's foundational Gothic novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959).<sup>1</sup> In both stories, a strong sense of hope surges through the women during their respective journeys on which they encounter sites of welcome as well as hostility that set the eerie tone for their respective unfolding narratives. Eleanor's "solitary road trip [...] allows her to begin imagining a future outside the norm" (Banks 2020, 172) and a home of her own, while C-, the protagonist of "The Resident," fantasises about completing a novel at the residency. Both women bring invitations to the places they are going to and both encounter constellations of stars. In Eleanor's case, they appear when she stops at a roadside restaurant and witnesses a little girl refusing to drink from anything but her cup of stars at home. For C-, the constellation appears on the face of the adolescent clerk behind the counter of a gas station in the form of "pustules [...] in the elliptical shape of the Andromeda galaxy" (Machado 2017c, 170). As becomes clear later in the story, C- previously has been to the mountains where the residency takes place, as a young girl in scout camp. In revisiting a lake, she somewhat reluctantly accesses a long-forgotten and suppressed memory. She recognizes that "knowledge was a dwarfing, obliterating, all-consuming thing, and to have it was to both be grateful and suffer greatly" (212). The conscious suppression of memories and the ambiguous feeling elicited by the knowledge acquired upon remembering it are equally crucial to Machado's short story "A Hundred Miles and a Mile"<sup>2</sup> from Ellen Datlow's edited collection *When Things Get Dark: Stories Inspired by Shirley Jackson* (2021).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, *Hill House*.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, "Hundred Miles."

<sup>3</sup> The collection itself is named after Jackson's short story "When Things Get Dark," published in *The New Yorker* on December 22, 1944 (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1944/12/30/when-things-get-dark>).

“Hundred Miles” merges the themes of “The Resident” with the narrative universe of Jackson’s *Hill House*, as if to explore the connection Machado’s workshop cohorts saw. Prior to this comparison, Machado was not familiar with *Hill House*. This is not necessarily surprising, as, with the exception of “The Lottery” (1948), most of Jackson’s work has only recently sparked a noteworthy surge in scholarship and adaptations. Jackson’s influence on Machado has since extended beyond *Hill House*, with her short story “The Tooth,” collected in *The Lottery and Other Stories* (1948), also informing Machado’s “Blur” (2017).

Jackson’s work rises to new relevance with such contemporary responses and adaptations. As Datlow states in *When Things Get Dark*, which also includes stories by Joyce Carol Oates and Stephen Graham Jones, “Jackson’s influence has filtered—consciously or subconsciously—into the work of many contemporary fantasy, dark fantasy, and horror writers” (2021, 1). Alongside two biographies, Judy Oppenheimer’s *Private Demons* (1988) and Ruth Franklin’s recent *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (2016), many of Jackson’s fictional texts have been adapted for film.<sup>4</sup> *The Letters of Shirley Jackson*, edited by her son Laurence Jackson Hyman, was just published in 2021. Academically, Jackson’s work has sparked studies such as Bernice M. Murphy’s edited collection *Shirley Jackson: Essays on Literary Legacy* (2005), which includes Lynette Carpenter’s “The Establishment and Preservation of Female Power in Shirley Jackson’s *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*” (1984). This essay, along with Emily Banks’ “Insisting on the Moon: Shirley Jackson and the Queer Future” (2020), an examination of Jackson’s work through the lens of queer futurity, have informed this article.

In line with the rising scholarly and cultural interest in Jackson, a closer examination of how her work inspires the contemporary writer Machado allows for new insights into Jackson’s legacy. Machado’s deviance from realism blurs the lines between memoir and fiction. Jackson blurs these lines in her autobiographically informed domestic fiction and her comedic family memoirs *Life Among the Savages* (1952) and *Raising Demons* (1957) as well (Franklin, 2016). She weaves real-life experiences into her Gothic fiction, representing her own difficult relationship with her mother through figures like Eleanor and her dead mother’s haunting throughout *Hill House*. Machado works fiction into real-life experiences in her memoir *In the Dream*

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<sup>4</sup> *Hill House* has been adapted for film twice, in 1963 and 1999, and has further become a Netflix series by Mike Flanagan (2018). Jackson’s novel *Castle* has been made into a film (2018) as well (see Giannini in Woofter, ed., 2021). The thriller *Shirley* (2020) is a recent fictionalized account inspired by Jackson’s life. For studies of *Lizzie* (1957), adapted from Jackson’s novel *The Bird’s Nest* (1954), and *Long Twilight* (1997), adapted from her story “The Bus,” see Dodson and Woofter, respectively, in Woofter, ed., 2021.

*House* (2019)<sup>5</sup> by framing it as a queer(ed) Gothic text that relies on the haunted house trope. She also echoes Jackson's penchant for allusiveness, annotating the memoir using Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955–58) to point out parallels between her life story and classic fairy tales, reimagining her abusive queer relationship as the fairy tale in the chapter “*Dream House* as the Queen and the Squid” (232–35). This shared interest in merging reality and fiction, in part signalled by allusion, invites an examination of how Machado “inherits” and reapplies Jackson's legacy in her work.

This literary legacy is particularly visible in Machado's “Hundred Miles.” The short story imagines what became of the little girl who insisted on her cup of stars in the brief but essential moment in Jackson's Gothic *Hill House*. In “Hundred Miles,” the girl, now the adult Lucy, becomes the story's central figure. The narrative begins with Lucy and her fiancé Pete's visit to a wedding hall, where Lucy drinks tea from a cup that reveals the Cassiopeia constellation at its bottom, a direct reference to Jackson's cup of stars. The title “A Hundred Miles and a Mile” alludes to the above-referenced scene in the restaurant where Eleanor “stopped for lunch after she had driven a hundred miles and a mile” (Jackson [1959] 2009, 20). An obscure memory insistently tries to return to Lucy through objects such as the cup. The reemergence of suppressed knowledge is central to the Gothic, as is the materialization of fear and trauma through material artefacts.

At the wedding venue where Lucy first encounters the cup as an adult, it causes “nausea and panic,” and a voice whispers, “*Once they have trapped you—*” (Machado 2021, 64) as a warning of the planned marriage. These are Eleanor's exact words from *Hill House* (Jackson [1959] 2009, 22). The intermissions in Eleanor's voice continue throughout the story (Machado 2021, 65). The nausea the protagonist experiences is linked to the recognition of “marriage as yoke” and “the realisation [that] no amount of ceremony could make Pete to Lucy's liking, not in the necessary way” (64). Lucy cancels the wedding and begins a relationship with Meredith that indicates her queerness. The cup is connected to a moment of realization for Lucy: “But why that moment in the wedding hall?” (64), she wonders. This moment reveals that Lucy does not want to marry Pete, and the cup of stars alerts her to it, extending the meaning of the cup from independence and indulging one's own desires in *Hill House* to more explicitly embracing queerness. Like Eleanor in *Hill House* and Merricat and Constance in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962),<sup>6</sup> Lucy distances herself from heteronormative familial bonds and remains unmarried. When Lucy's

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, *Dream House*.

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter, *Castle*.

psychotherapist asks her: “Was it simply the reality of the wedding intruding on the fantasy?” or was it, “she said this carefully, pointedly – the cup” (Machado 2021, 64), she opens the possibility that it is the same cup that appears in Jackson’s novel and points to the role attributed to the artefact in Lucy’s decisions regarding her future.

While the cup has been imbued with hopes of independent futures in *Hill House*, its reappearance in Machado’s story draws out the queerness in Jackson’s text. Connecting the cup to imaginations of queer women’s futures is the legacy that Machado inherits from Jackson and incorporates into “Hundred Miles.” In drawing inspiration from Jackson, an intertextual lineage of connected stories, shared knowledge, and reappearing objects, which symbolize a continuous insistence on imaginations of queer(ed) futures in contemporary texts like Machado’s, is created.

## I. Legacy and Inheritance in Gothic Literature

Legacy and inheritance are common themes in Gothic literature that offer a way to explore the continuation of the past in the present as well as a possibility to criticize heteropatriarchal norms. Rebecca Munford outlines how “[f]rom its beginnings, the Gothic has been preoccupied with questions of dynastic ambition, wrongful inheritance, and ancestral guilt” (2016, 225). Anthony Mandal also sees inheritance as “one of the most central motifs of Gothic literature” and points to the Gothic’s “varying configurations of inheritance—as property, as genealogy [and] as supernatural disturbance” (2016, 345) haunting its heirs. Mandal further states that “[i]t is no coincidence that the Gothic emerged during a period of massive transformation in the dispensation of wealth across social structures and within families. Property and legitimacy were fundamental to the construction of identity in Western society” (344). In this context, Horace Walpole’s Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is an oft-cited example, as it addresses “illegitimate inheritance and aristocratic primogeniture” (Munford 2016, 225). In Walpole’s novel, Prince Manfred’s illegitimacy is rectified by reinstating Otranto’s rightful heir Theodore. Anne Williams points to the Gothic’s concern “with genealogy” (1995, 13), and elaborates on the meanings of “house’ as ‘structure’ and as ‘family line’” (45), the linkage of property to the family inhabiting it. The family in Gothic tales acts as a “microcosm for broader social structures of patriarchal government” (Munford 2016, 225). Patriarchal structures deprive women in particular of the right to own property, instead isolating them in Gothic castles, as Kate Ferguson Ellis argues in *The Contested Castle* (1989). Machado’s awareness of tropes such as the “madwoman in the attic” and the “lunatic lesbian”

becomes apparent in “The Resident,” as writer C— resists recreating these tropes in her fiction and even embodying them herself (2017c, 202–03).<sup>7</sup> As Mandal states, “[t]he problematic manner in which property succession is imbricated with gender politics” (2016, 344) is evident in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) as well. Radcliffe’s texts “[r]epeatedly [...] [confront their] readers with young, vulnerable women whose inheritances are forcibly sequestered” (344). In *Udolpho*, the character Montoni seeks to sabotage the heroine Emily’s inheritance of her aunt’s properties in Toulouse. Concerns about the preservation of the patriarchal family line and inheritance also remain pervasive in contemporary Gothic novels, such as Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s *Mexican Gothic* (2020).

In Jackson’s fiction, inheritance and legacy are equally crucial. In “The Lottery,” inheritance means the community continues the tradition of killing one of its own by lottery, despite that tradition’s violence and oppression. Even the title of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* suggests the prominent position inheritance holds in the novel, as it indicates that the Blackwood estate has been in the family’s hands forever, passed down from one man to another. Fittingly, Carpenter describes Merricat and Constance’s father, John Blackwood, as “a man of property” (1984, 32) whose “power in his family and his community derived not only from his gender but also from his material wealth” (32). Women’s inheritances, in turn, consisted of dowries brought to the husband’s family. Carpenter states that in the novel, the women function as “the family preservers” who have built a “cellar legacy” (33) of “jars of jam made by great-grandmothers, [...] and pickles made by great-aunts and vegetables put up by our grandmother” that “would stand there forever, a poem by the Blackwood women” (Jackson [1962] 2009, 42). This act of domestic archiving links the material legacy of the preserves with the textual one of the poem. Instead of “the legacy of the Blackwood men,” Constance and Merricat “value [the] Dresden figurines [and] dishes brought to the house by generations of Blackwood brides” (Carpenter 1984, 35) brought into the family as dowries. Merricat’s “poisoning [of her family] has resulted in a transfer of power from

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<sup>7</sup> In *Dream House*, Machado further addresses the stereotyping of queer women in relation to her psychologically abusive partner: She feels “unaccountably haunted by the specter of the lunatic lesbian” and states that “I did not want my lover to be dogged by mental illness or a personality disorder or rage issues” (2019, 145). Due to the portrayal of the “insane homosexual” in the media, “villainy and queerness became a kind of shorthand for each other” (49), as shown, for example, in Disney’s character Ursula. When Machado’s partner manipulates her, she starts doubting herself: “[Y]ou begin to wonder if you’d exaggerated the events of that trip, whether perhaps you are remembering them wrong” (154), reminiscent of George Cukor’s *Gaslight* (1944) that Machado references in her memoir as well (107). In the movie, Gregory uses gaslighting, a term derived from the film’s title to mean psychological manipulation, to secure Paula’s dead aunt’s valuable possessions and to commit Paula to an asylum.

Blackwood men to Blackwood women” (32) and the “women’s forceful establishment of power over their own lives” (32). With all potential male heirs deceased or unfit, the unmarried older sister Constance becomes the head of the estate, ending the patriliney. Carpenter states that women’s “self-sufficiency, Jackson suggests, [...] threatens a society in which men hold primary power and leads inevitably to confrontation” (32), as also portrayed by Montoni’s interference with Emily’s inheritance of her aunt’s properties in Radcliffe’s *Udolpho*. In *Castle*, Cousin Charles’s appearance and interest in marrying Constance “would [...] bring [the sisters] and their wealth back into the realm of masculine control and restore patrilineal inheritance” (34–35), but in the end, the matrilineal heritage of the Blackwood household wins out over this patriarchal lineage. After Merricat sets fire to her family’s estate, “the preserves of the Blackwood women stand undisturbed in the cellar, emblems of the sisters’ survival” (36). Merricat further inherits knowledge of poisonous plants from her sister Constance forging a “deeper bond between the two women” (33), showing how in addition to material artefacts immaterial knowledge is passed on between women as well, much like in Machado’s “Hundred Miles.” Constance and Merricat are self-sufficient and uninterested in continuing the patriarchally structured family line, replacing “heterosexual romance with sisterhood” (34), comparable to Lucy’s and Eleanor’s hesitant stance towards heteronormative marriage and their pursuit of queer relationships, in “Hundred Miles” and Jackson’s *Hill House*, respectively.

With Jackson’s depiction of women’s inheritance in *Castle* in mind, Machado displays a similar understanding of legacy as both material, such as the canned goods in the Blackwood cellar or the mink coat that Lucy inherits from her mother in “Hundred Miles,” and immaterial, such as in the form of knowledge passed down between women. To exemplify, Machado addresses women’s inheritance in the collection *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017). In “The Husband Stitch,” the opening short story, stories become cultural heritage passed on. The protagonist shares other women’s folktales while telling her own tale, insisting that this “may not be the version of the story you’re familiar with. But I assure you, it is the one you need to know” (Machado 2017b, 24). Her retellings show the divergent “intended lessons” (Hood 2021, 997) between the narrative women are told by society versus the knowledge they need to survive and which they share with one another. By telling her version of the tales, the protagonist creates an immaterial heritage, a Gothic legacy that she passes on to the reader as well as to her son, who is another recipient of her stories. The passing down of stories and experiential knowledge occurs not only between characters in the stories and between the narrator and its readers, who are directly addressed in “The

Husband Stitch,” but also between writers, as Machado draws on Jackson in writing a continuation of Jackson’s *Hill House* in “Hundred Miles.”

Inheritance in its historical and literary senses lends itself to analysis through the Gothic lens, as it suggests the lingering of the past in the present through material artefacts. While women were historically excluded from inheriting fortunes and estates due to a patriarchal familial system, Jackson and Machado’s texts suggest alternative systems of heritage consisting of knowledge imbued in objects and narrative. The intergenerational passing down of knowledge often seems to be tied to material artefacts in particular, indicating that there is haunting information passed on with inheritances beyond the artefact itself.

Inheritance and legacy hence often become both a source of power and a burden that characters must contend with. To describe the contradictory nature of the knowledge passed on between women, which encompasses hope for the future and experiential disappointment simultaneously and is transmitted verbally or through objects such as the cup, I introduce the term “Gothic inheritances.” Such Gothic inheritances establish a continuity between women and their stories. They are therefore decidedly directed towards the future and bear out in Machado’s continuation of Jackson’s legacy. Fictional examples include Eleanor’s knowledge transmission to the little girl in *Hill House*, a conversation between Lucy and her future mother-in-law, and the little girl that Lucy in turn implores in “Hundred Miles.” This alternative heritage shows the hope for a queer future that is connected to the urge to pass on knowledge and continue storylines that diverge from traditional mother-daughter lineages. Alternative forms of inheritance and heritage further surface through Jackson’s legacy in Machado’s fiction and non-fiction. In both material and immaterial form, Gothic inheritances transmit the hope of queer futures and the burdensome realization that such futures are not here yet. This dynamic indicates that these inheritances and the women’s epistemology embody hope and horror at the same time, denying an unambiguous resolution in a typically Gothic manner while maintaining an insistence on imaginations of queer futures.

With a focus on the intertext “Hundred Miles,” I trace Jackson’s influence on Machado’s work, from the mode of psychological Gothic both engage to the stark contrast between fantasies of non-conformity and sobering reality that are central to Jackson’s *Hill House* and *Castle* and reappear in Machado’s short fiction and her memoir *Dream House*. Inheriting modes and themes from other writers creates not only intertextual narrative universes but alternative queer lineages that exist beside traditional patriarchal and heteronormative heritage systems. The passing on of knowledge is crucial to these queered familial bonds. Banks states that



“Jackson depicts a resistance to futurity—in Eleanor’s death and Merricat’s destruction of the family line simultaneously illustrates new possibilities for productivity that deviate from the standard of *re*productivity” (2020, 181). I see this productivity at work in the establishment of an intertextual lineage of connected stories by passing down the cup of stars from Jackson to Machado, which symbolizes a continuous insistence on imaginations of queer futures.

## II. Machado’s “A Hundred Miles and a Mile” as a Continuation of Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*

The intertextual “Hundred Miles” consciously works as a continuation of Jackson’s *Hill House*. The short story deals with the passing down of knowledge connected to the experience of being a woman in a heteropatriarchal world. Machado’s protagonist Lucy suppresses painful memories and rids herself of their burden by bequeathing them to a young girl, echoing the scene in *Hill House* in which Eleanor, in her thoughts, implores a little girl to not give up her cup of stars. Both scenes establish fantastical imagination, whimsy, and desire as essential for ensuring hopeful futures in a dominantly heteronormative world that makes peripheral figures of women seeking queer(er) futures. In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz points to the insufficiency of the present and calls it “impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and ‘rational’ expectations” (2019, 27), which makes such conceptualizations of queer or queered futures vital. Muñoz further states that “a queer feeling of hope in the face of hopeless heteronormative maps of the present [is necessary] where futurity is indeed the province of normative reproduction” (28), suggesting a need for alternative conceptualizations of futures beyond the heteronormative one. In her story, Machado creates a parallel map of Eleanor’s trajectory from houseless wanderer to Hill House in the novel, using a heteronormative setting as a starting point of the respective narrative, a confining family home in Eleanor’s case and a wedding hall in Lucy’s case, only to then move away from it and onto the open road, which provides distance from the normative places and engenders a sense of mobility. Both stories include stops at roadside inns and both feature an important moment of knowledge exchange between a woman and a young girl, showing how Machado traces Jackson’s plotline.

In *Hill House*, the moment of shared experience between Eleanor and the young girl, whom she urges to insist on her own fancies, takes place at the roadside inn Eleanor stops at on her way to Hill House. Inside, she

witnesses how a young girl refuses to drink her milk from an ordinary cup. Eleanor overhears the mother's explanation to the astonished waitress that instead, the girl "wants her cup of stars" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 21). In her thoughts, Eleanor implores the girl to not give in: "Don't do it, [...] insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see [it] again" (22). The girl gives Eleanor a "wholly comprehending smile" and continues to refuse the milk. Eleanor calls her a "wise, brave girl" (22) for holding on to her own desires and dreams before continuing on her journey to Hill House. In *Hill House*, the cup represents hopes of independent futures and its reappearance in Machado's story links it more strongly to queer(ed) futures beyond heteronormative expectations. The cup further seems connected to the simultaneous acquisition of potentially traumatic and disappointing knowledge, expanding its symbolic meaning from the stars as metaphors of a queer future (Banks 2020, 169). Queer futures represent existences beyond the norm and outside of the confines of heteronormative expectations for women, shown in Eleanor's imaginations of alternative concepts of life when she is by herself on the drive to Hill House. On this drive, she "[imagines a] life beyond the patriarchal domestic structure but also evokes the vision of a possible queer future, achievable only through the destruction of traditional concepts of lineage and production" (169).

Machado's Lucy does not want to recuperate horrific memories and thus decides to pass them on to another young girl before remembering them herself. Mary Angeline Hood discusses the passing on of knowledge through storytelling in *Her Body and Other Parties* as the creation of a "feminist epistemology" (2020, 1002).<sup>8</sup> The continuous transfer of experiential knowledge between women through intertextual storytelling creates alternative epistemologies and heritage systems alongside patrilineal forms of knowledge transfer and inheritance.<sup>9</sup> In these texts, the women do not have to be related to pass down experiential knowledge to one another, which also constitutes a queering of traditional familial bonds. The way Machado draws on Jackson's literary heritage indicates not only the intergenerational passing on of experiential wisdom from writer to writer but also within the literature.

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<sup>8</sup> In the chapter "Feminist Epistemology" in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (2017), Helen Longino provides an in-depth discussion of the term.

<sup>9</sup> Hood examines how old wives' tales offer "alternative ways of knowing" (2020, 992). Making sense of the world and one's experiences through tales is an important element in Machado's short story "The Husband Stitch" as well.

### III. Imaginations of Queer Futures

Muñoz theorizes queer futurity as “something that is not quite here” (2019, 7). He conceptualizes queerness as “an ideality” (1), making the argument that queer futures are still in the process of being created. This ongoing process links perfectly to the contradictory knowledge that the cup of stars holds in Jackson and Machado’s texts. The intrusion of a future that is not here yet in the present in Jackson’s *Hill House* constitutes a reverse Gothic sentiment, as it is usually the past that intrudes on the present. Muñoz states that “[q]ueerness is a [...] mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1). His “theory of queer futurity [...] is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present” (18). Working towards queer futurity by drawing on what lies in the past to engender transformation in the present, as Muñoz suggests, allows one to take Gothic inheritances into account when talking about queer futures (1). Potentiality, according to Muñoz, is “imbued within an object” alongside the object’s past and “represent[s] a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening” (9). “[U]topian feelings,” such as Eleanor’s imaginations of non-normative futures on her drive to Hill House, are “indispensable to the act of imagining transformation” (9) and an invitation to fantasise, imagine, and indulge one’s cup of stars. The “queer aesthetic” that Muñoz describes “frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity” and displays “an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). This aesthetic is part of Eleanor’s imagination of ideal futures grounded in the cup of stars.

Passing on knowledge to younger women is an act of hope that enables queer futurity as well. Juniper Fitzgerald states that “[q]ueerness means surviving and escaping the spaces we were not meant to survive or escape. *To answer death with utopian futurity*, [Alexis Pauline] Gumbs writes, *is a queer thing to do*” (2022, 76–77). While what is passed on contains the traumatic burden of feminine experience, the survival of characters like Lucy does point towards a potential future that was out of reach for Eleanor.

Material artefacts, such as the cup, are imbued with experiential wisdom or with societal norms. A counter-object to the cup that represents heteronormative societal norms is the mink coat that Lucy’s mother has passed on to her daughter, indicating that she should follow in her steps to live a normative life. For Machado, the cup of stars in turn is “a reminder that you are allowed your own fantasies, the particular fancies of your own mind” (2017a). Eleanor indulges in these fancies of her own mind<sup>10</sup> on the

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<sup>10</sup> Other queer(ed) futures Eleanor fantasizes about include driving to the end of the world, “until the wheels of the car were worn to nothing” (Jackson [1959] 2009, 17), imagining an entire lifetime

ride to Hill House and, once in Hill House, in her conversations about her (imagined) apartment with Theodora. As Banks outlines, Eleanor imagines collecting things and acquiring them for the home she pretends to have (2020, 181), telling Theodora how her own material heritage would be made up of “[w]hite curtains [...] little stone lions on each corner of the mantel [with] my books and records and pictures” (Jackson [1959] 2009, 88). The apartment of her dreams is “exactly the way [she] want[s] it” (88). In her fantasy of it, she lives in it by herself. This apartment exists only in her fantasies, much like the “blue cup with stars painted on the inside” (88) she claims to have owned, showing her desire to have what the little girl at the roadside inn had: the ability to indulge her personal wishes. The cup of stars materially represents the fulfilment of Eleanor’s dreams, the conceptualization of a functional feminine space of her own that does not follow societal expectations. When Eleanor tells Theodora about the cup, the latter promises to send one like that to Eleanor after their stay at Hill House (89). Eleanor imagines an alternative life with Theodora, although she constantly suppresses her feelings for her and does not act on them, as they would constitute a divergence from heteronormativity. On an exploration of Hill House’s garden, they “each privately and perversely accused the other of taking, deliberately, a path they had followed together once before in happiness” (174). Eleanor continues to imagine life at Theodora’s side, as she tells her “I [...] am going to follow you home” (208). Eleanor’s underlying queer desire to be with Theodora is conceived of as impossible: “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). This “margin of safety” and the “outskirts of an open question” show how the outside spaces they are moving in allow for the imagination of a queer future.

While Theodora has her apartment to return to after the stay (87), Eleanor has no such option. She still asserts her right to a future: “I have a right to live, too” (173). When a family picnic epitomizing the heteronormative ideal appears to her on the grounds of Hill House, she spots “what might have been a broken cup” (177). While it contains Eleanor’s hopes in the beginning, it is broken by the end, indicating that her dreams of forming a family outside the norm will not be fulfilled and will remain in the realm of imagination instead. According to Banks, the cup is imbued with “a fantasy only a child can truly believe in,” in “the same way lesbian desire was, at the time, dismissed as immaturity” (2020, 178). Like Eleanor imagines creating an ideal home, Machado envisions an imaginary life in the

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pass by in a house guarded by stone lions (18), and living a fairy tale life in a palace hidden behind poisonous oleander bushes (19–20).

Dream House, projecting her fantasy onto the material structure: “We have a beautiful home; the sort of home that has its own library” (2019, 57). She, too, imagines a life that diverges from the norms of heteronormativity, as she pictures “[e]xplaining to [her] children that other families may not look like [theirs], but that [this] doesn’t mean something is wrong” (43). Machado becomes enamoured with domestic scenes of a heteronormative family when apartment-hunting. In one house, she imagines the “fantasy” of a polyamorous relationship and “catch[es] [herself] mourning already” (43), the daydream immediately halted by a sense of improbability. While Jackson’s work depicts the reality of a queer relationship as impossible from Eleanor’s viewpoint, Machado’s imagined queer space cannot be made material due to her partner’s psychological violence, rather than as a consequence of their queerness.

The impossibility of Eleanor’s dreams of a queer home is further foreshadowed during her second stop on the drive to Hill House in Hillsdale, a parallel version of the scene at the inn. This much-less hopeful scene, occurring at a grim diner, is often neglected in analyses, but importantly underlines the argument of the contradiction inherent to the cup of stars. Eleanor tells the skeptical waitress behind the counter that Hillsdale seems like a place to which people would come to build or renovate a house of their own, while the woman insists that people leave Hillsdale and no one would think of building a house there (Jackson [1959] 2009, 26). As Eleanor drinks her unappetizing coffee from a cup without stars, her initial hope of creating a home in Hillsdale diminishes, foreshadowing that the expectations she connects to the cup of stars will not become a reality for her: Hill House does not become a home, a brief interest in its future heir Luke does not last, and her love interest Theodora already has “a friend with whom she shared an apartment” (9). The roommate’s gender remains unspecified. Although not explicitly stated, it is insinuated that the roommate is her partner. Theodora states that “[w]e found an old place and fixed it up ourselves,” and adds that “We both love doing over old things” (88), indicating that she has already fulfilled Eleanor’s dream with another person while Eleanor’s musings remain a fantasy. Eleanor’s queer future remains out of reach as she cannot find a home for herself but instead dies on Hill House’s grounds. While for Eleanor a life outside heteronormative norms does not seem possible, Theodora might have been successful to an extent. When Eleanor asks whether Theodora is married, she replies “No [...] You’re funny” (88), pointing to the fact that the possibility of queer marriage lies in the future in *Hill House’s* narrative universe. While queer relationships are possible for Lucy, her queer(ed) future seems to depend more on the success in passing on the memories she represses before having to remember them. She states that “[w]hen someone offers her milk” it “became less about broken

ceramics and dairy products and, inexplicably, quaint roadside restaurants” (Machado 2021, 63–64). While at first glance, this seems to indicate a return to a time in which the cup and the possibility of queer futurity are still intact, Machado complicates this notion by making the roadside inn the site where the unpleasant memory intrudes on Lucy the most persistently. At the end of the weekend trip with Meredith, Lucy finds herself in a restaurant like the one in which she communicated with Eleanor in Jackson’s novel as a girl. Upon crossing the inn’s threshold, she “realize[s] something [is] wrong, terrible” and goes on to touch several objects in her vicinity. She “held the napkin against her cheeks; she traced the velvety contours of the fork at her place setting” (65).<sup>11</sup> Lucy stares at the waitress with “naked *something*, not desire” (65), but potentially recognition, indicating the difficulty to escape the insistent memory. Lucy “ate in a daze (refusing milk, of course)” (65), like she did as a little girl in *Hill House*. Her therapist wonders “if there was something special about the inn, the table setting, the waitress” (65) and asks, “Perhaps you went there as a child?” (66), opening up the possibility that it was the same inn and the same waitress that threatened to set off her memory. “Nothing I put my fingers on,” Lucy replies (65), showing that she still represses the memory even when therapy would be the place to recuperate it. Lucy’s reluctance to remember, on the one hand, and the urge to pass on her knowledge to another young girl, on the other, comments on the slim chance for queer(ed) futures to become reality, reminiscent of Eleanor’s fate in *Hill House*.

#### IV. Memory and Knowledge

For Lucy, memory appears to be passed on through objects. The places and objects in the story invite Lucy to access the intangible memories of the women before her who have passed on their knowledge to her: “When china shatters. When someone offers her milk” (Machado 2021, 63), moments that can be read in relation to the cup of stars. Even “[t]he sky was the colour of milky tea and scattered with a handful of stars” (66), as if it implores her to remember as well, with increasing urgency. These bouts of memory are connected to spells that turn into “[m]ore of a mood than a fear, a sense of oncoming doom, like the seconds before death by drowning” (64). In *Hill*

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<sup>11</sup> Fascinatingly, in Mike Flanagan’s Netflix adaptation of *The Haunting of Hill House*, Theodora’s character wears gloves, as she can access the memories stored in things when she touches them. While this is a gift in her career as a children’s therapist, it is also a burden, as she relives her patients’ most traumatic moments. In Machado’s story, Lucy looks at gloves at the Gimbels department store (67), so she might be looking for the gloves to shield the resurfacing of memory through touch as well.

*House*, Miss Crain's companion inherited Hill House, to the outrage of Crain's younger sister who felt she had a claim to it instead due to her family relation, unwilling to accept Miss Crain's decision. The companion is described as one of "those tenacious, unclever young women who can hold on desperately to what they believe is their own but cannot withstand, mentally, a constant nagging persecution" (Jackson [1959] 2009, 80). This "nagging persecution" describes the knowledge that queer futurity and the hope of a non-normative life in a patriarchally dominated world might remain a utopian fantasy.<sup>12</sup> Eleanor's experience proves to be similar. Lucy describes this state as "knowing-not-knowing" (Machado 2021, 63) and refuses to accept the intruding memory. She finds it to be persistent as it "twitches like something that won't die" (63). In Lucy's case, this suppression is depicted as a choice, but ultimately the character is haunted by the memory as it continues making itself present to her. The theme of choosing to know also features in Machado's graphic novel *The Low, Low Woods* (2020), where women can decide to remember a traumatic past or not by ingesting a potion. Remembering as an act of choice is a topic equally important to "Hundred Miles," in which the memories, knowledge, and their passing on can be a burden, on the one hand, and, on the other, are essential for Lucy to rid herself of the "nagging persecution" that Dr. Montague describes in *Hill House*. Lucy's insistence on oblivion seems necessary to survive in a Gothic world and is presented as a way for her to have a queer future.

While the story's settings, such as the wedding hall, are often steeped in heteronormativity, the car offers an alternative place imbued with the potentiality of freedom and independence. After her cancelled wedding, Lucy leaves behind the city and goes on a car trip with her new lover Meredith (Machado 2021, 65). They stay at a motel that is described as "lousy with honeymooners" (65), which shows the insistent presence of heteronormativity in Lucy's life even upon distancing herself from Pete. In *Hill House*, the car represents Eleanor's mobility and the ability to choose her own path. This freedom sparks the imagination of her future, which stands in contrast to the confinement of the domestic setting of her family home. The sense of hope she feels is at its height on the drive to Hill House, where she imagines all kinds of homes and how she would furnish them. She wishes for her imagined utopia to become reality but, in the end, cannot create it for herself. When Machado, her partner, and the partner's girlfriend at the time look for houses to move into, Machado indulges in a very similar version of Eleanor's musings: "[T]he three of you will be together" (2019,

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<sup>12</sup> Heather Love underlines that "[s]uch utopian desires [of better futures] are at the heart of the collective project of queer studies and integral to the history of gay and lesbian identity" (2007, 3) as well.

43) she thinks while they are in the car and “[a]s farmland scrolls past you, you find yourself imagining a whole new life, a perfect intersection of hedonism and wholesomeness” (43). In the chapter “*Dream House as Choose Your Own Adventure*<sup>TM</sup>,” the car becomes a means of escape from the house that has turned from a queer fantasy into a haunted place. Machado provides an additional option to escape her circumstances by driving away, which is “not how it happened” (203) at the time of the incident: The “car keys are already in your hand and you drive away with a theatrical squeal of the tires, never to return again” (202). This made-up option shows how Machado blurs the lines between fiction and memoir, indicating a fictional option in which Machado left her partner at this point of the narrative, which constitutes a queering of narrative possibilities used in memoir.

The insistence upon fantasy and imagination as a counterpart to horrific everyday experiences is essential for queer futures in both Machado and Jackson’s work. *Hill House* opens with the lines: “No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality” ([1959] 2009, 3). Machado states that “non-realism can be a way to insist on something different” (2017a), on experiences that feel surreal and can be grasped through a mode of unreality. In *Dream House*, Machado states that “[f]antasy is [...] the defining cliché of female queerness” (2019, 124), indicating its importance for queer futurity. Muñoz argues that “queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be [...] used to imagine a future” (2019, 1), which also seems to make the present more liveable. For Lucy and Eleanor, the key seems to be to indulge in fantasy and not live entirely in reality. Lucy decides to relieve herself of the burden of her memories and to deliver her message to a young girl that she encounters at a department store, questioning the practice of inheritance upon death. Lucy does not understand why “people choose to wait,” stating that it is “unfair that inheritances so often hinged on death” (Machado 2021, 66). She criticizes heteronormative heritage practices and decides to pass on her memories to a young girl in an attempt to free herself.

Lucy reflects on the mink coat she is wearing, passed down to her after her mother’s death (Machado 2021, 66). The mink coat signifies normative familial inheritance in terms of class position and femininity and makes Lucy resemble her mother visually. She tells herself that she was “technically an adult” when her mother died and “such things could not be helped” (66), rationalizing her grief. Lucy further compares herself to people “who wore their past miseries like a winter coat, subtly altering their shape” (66) and states that she is not like them. When Lucy tries to find a girl to pass her knowledge on to, she chooses one that wears a “smart white coat” that seems to set her apart from the ones who wear their “past miseries like a



winter coat” (67). As mentioned, the coat appears in the story as a traditional heirloom and a counterpart to the cup.

Lucy does not pass on a traditional object, but rather a message. In the department store, she lures a girl away from her mother, “whispering something frantically” (Machado 2021, 67) and “telling her something *urgent*” (67) that “she simply needed the little girl to understand” (68). The girl listens with “solemnity and intent her own mother would not have recognized” (67), indicating the moment’s exceptionality. After the little girl has become an adult and remembers this moment, she describes Lucy as “a hulking, sorrowful creature – red-mouthed and sleek as an otter” (68), indicating that Lucy is not a regular woman anymore and instead a “creature” in a distant memory. While the story does not give answers as to what Lucy’s life looks like after she has passed down the repressed knowledge, the possibility that she has freed herself of the burden exists. Lucy decides to pass on her knowledge and chooses oblivion for herself. However, she makes a point of transmitting her urgent message to another girl before forgetting it herself.

In “Hundred Miles,” it is not her own mother the little girl thinks of as she gets older but Lucy and her message. While the creation of an alternative epistemology can lead to a sense of community and understanding among women, in Eleanor’s and Lucy’s case, the aspect of intrusion of reality on a fantasy they wish to uphold to survive is a crucial aspect as well. As an adult, the girl “would, on occasion, think back to her own past and come across the memory of the department store for reasons she did not fully understand. Her mother. The watch [...] Only when she looked at it sideways would she remember that it held something else entirely: [Lucy] extending her hand and whispering the thing she needed to hear” (Machado 2021, 68), a line that rings familiar to “But I assure you, it is the [version of the story] you need to know” (Machado 2017b, 24), from “The Husband Stitch.” “Looking at [something] sideways” suggests an uncommon perspective to unveil further details of the memory and a queering of memory, knowledge, and heritage.

The alternative to patrilineal and matrilineal legacy portrayed through the queer familial bonds between Eleanor and the little girl in *Hill House* can be linked to Jackson’s challenging relationship with her own mother, whose frequent criticisms throughout her life led her to establish an alternative in her fiction (Franklin 2016). Jodey Castricano points out that mothers are “invasively present – even when deceased – in the daughter’s life” (2009, 42–43) as insistent, haunting memories. The relational bond created between Eleanor and the little girl at the roadside restaurant reaches into the following generation when Lucy passes on her knowledge to yet another little girl, establishing a queer lineage. For Eleanor, the group at Hill House bears the “tantalising possibility that family may be created rather than inherited”

(Banks 2020, 173). In Machado's "Hundred Miles," such queer bonds are formed between Lucy and the woman who almost becomes her mother-in-law as well, when she admits to her that if not marrying had been an option for her, she would have made the same choice as Lucy: "I wish I could have done the same," her fiancé's mother says to Lucy (Machado 2021, 64). Their newly formed bond suggests mutual understanding and community between women through shared desires.

## Conclusion

Machado's "Hundred Miles" is an intertext that continues Shirley Jackson's literary legacy. The short story thematizes the ongoing, albeit contradictory, knowledge that is passed on from woman to woman. As a reimagination of *Hill House's* cup of stars scene, the transfer happens both verbally and through objects. This comments on how both the capacity to hope and the burden of intergenerational trauma are transmitted. The cup of stars connects *Hill House* and "Hundred Miles," representing utopian ideas that sometimes must remain a fantasy, in line with Muñoz's argument that queer futurity is not yet here. Therefore, Gothic inheritances embody hope and horror at the same time, maintaining an insistence on imaginations of queer futures alongside an awareness of queer women's often horrific everyday experiences of sexism, misogyny, and queerphobia. This alternative form of heritage between women who are not related further results in a queering of traditional familial bonds. Gothic inheritances hence establish a continuity between women and their stories and form an intertextual lineage between Jackson and Machado. Jackson's influence in Machado's work can be traced through her interest in the psychological Gothic, queer futures and familial bonds, the passing on of knowledge between women to create alternative epistemologies, and the realms between reality and fantasy. Jackson's legacy in contemporary literature indicates an intergenerational passing on of wisdom, both within and beyond women's literature.

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