

“The Haunting of Hill House” by Shirley Jackson [B2]

Molto più di una storia di fantasmi, questo romanzo è considerato uno dei capolavori dell'horror psicologico, più volte adattato per il cinema e la televisione e fonte di ispirazione per autori come Stephen King.

Born in San Francisco in 1916, Shirley Jackson was a prolific short story writer and novelist, renowned for her works of horror, mystery and the supernatural. Her reputation was established by the story The Lottery, first published in The New Yorker in 1948. It [prompted](#) over three hundred letters from readers, many [outraged](#) by its [unflinching exposé](#) of the dark side of human nature. Published in 1959, the novel The [Haunting](#) of Hill House is a [brooding](#) gothic suspense, inspired by real-life [psychic researchers](#). It tells the story of a small group of investigators who stay at an [isolated](#) house [reputed](#) to be haunted.

PARANORMAL

The academic leader of the project, Dr. John Montague, has a strong interest in the supernatural. He invites a select group of people, with a history of paranormal or psychic sensitivity, to take part in his research. Although built as a family home, Hill House has a [eerie](#) reputation: “No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against the hills, holding darkness within... 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.” “Nessun organismo vivente potrebbe conservare a lungo la sanità mentale in condizioni di realtà assoluta. Alcuni sup- pongono che persino le allodole e le ca- vallette sognano. Hill House, insana, se ne stava sullo sfondo delle sue colline racchiudendo dentro di sé l'oscurità... dentro, le pareti erano ancora dritte, i mattoni ben connessi fra loro, i pavimenti erano solidi, le porte giudiziosamente chiuse. Il silenzio

gravava perenne sul legno e sulle pietre di Hill House e qualunque cosa vagasse sin lì vi andava sola”.

LONELY

The first [guest](#) to arrive is Eleanor Vance, who sees her stay at Hill House as an opportunity to reinvent herself. Fragile and lonely, Eleanor had been [caring](#) for her invalid mother, until her recent death. The mysterious house makes an immediate impression on Eleanor, despite the [warnings](#) of Mrs. Dudley, the [housekeeper](#): “We live over in the town, six miles away... So there won’t be anyone around if you need help.’ ‘I understand.’ ‘We couldn’t hear you, in the night.’ ‘I don’t suppose—’ ‘No one could. No one lives any nearer than the town. No one else will come any nearer than that.’ ‘I know,’ Eleanor said tiredly. ‘In the night,’ Mrs. Dudley said, and smiled outright. ‘In the dark...’” “— Noi abitiamo in città, a sei miglia da qui.. sicché qui non c’è nessuno, se doveste aver bisogno d’aiuto. — Capisco. — Di notte, non vi sentiremmo nemmeno, se chiamaste. — Lo immagino. — Nessuno vi sentirebbe. Nessuno abita qui vicino. Nessuno verrebbe ad abitare più vicino. — Lo so — rispose stancamente Eleanor. — Di notte — replicò la Dudley, sorridendo addirittura. — Nel buio...”

TERROR

Eleanor is [joined](#) by Theodora, a bohemian free spirit, and Luke, the owner’s [nephew](#) and [heir](#) to Hill House. Dr. Montague’s wife and friend arrive to help conduct experiments. As in all convincing ghost stories, the true terror of the novel is in its psychological [depth](#). Readers may wonder if the strange voices, apparitions, cold [draughts](#), [dripping](#) blood and ghostly writing are real or imagined. For the characters Eleanor and Theodora, listening in the dark, they certainly seem real: “It started again, as though it had been listening... waiting to hear if they were afraid. So suddenly that Eleanor leaped back against the bed and Theodora gasped and cried out, the iron crash came against [their](#) door, and both of them lifted [their](#) eyes in horror... the sickening, degrading cold came in waves from whatever was outside the door....” “Il rumore riprese, quasi che si fosse fermato per ascoltare le loro

voci... per scoprire se erano spaventate. Così improv- viso che Eleanor balzò di colpo contro il letto e Theodora prima trattenne il fiato poi urlò a squarciagola, il frastuono metallico s'abbatté contro il loro uscio e tutte e due alzarono gli occhi inorridite... quel freddo insopportabile, pauroso, filtrava a ondate da qualunque cosa ci fosse là fuori..."

TIME TO LIVE

The longer she stays at Hill House, the more Eleanor seems to lose her grip on reality. In a trance, she feels compelled to climb a dangerous iron staircase, and has to be rescued. Finally, Dr. Montague recognises the risk the house represents to Eleanor's mental health. It is clear to everyone that she should leave, except Eleanor. "She smiled brokenly up at the house, looking at her own window, at the amused, certain face of the house, watching her quietly. The house was waiting now, she thought, and it was waiting for her; no one else could satisfy it. 'The house wants me to stay,' she told the doctor, and he stared at her." "Sorrideva alla casa, col cuore sanguinante, guardava la finestra della sua stanza, studiava l'espressione divertita della casa che la fissava tranquilla. La casa attendeva; Eleanor lo capiva. Attendeva, e nessun altro, all'infuori di lei, l'avrebbe soddisfatta. — La casa vuole che rimanga — disse al dottore".

MYSTERY

Described by the author Stephen King as "one of the finest horror novels of the late 20th century", The Haunting of Hill House explores themes of sexuality, gender, mental health and family. Adapted for film twice, the novel also inspired the hit 2018 Netflix series of the same name. In 1962, Jackson published the mystery novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, also to critical acclaim. She died in 1965.

Glossary

- **psychic researchers** = investigatori del paranormale
- **caring** = ospite
- **dripping** = sgocciolare
- **staircase** = scalinata
- **finest** = migliori
- **late** = tardo
- **brooding** = inquietante
- **Haunting** = maledizione
- **reputed** = riputato
- **nephew** = nepote
- **depth** = profondità
- **lose her grip on reality** = perdere il contatto con la realtà
- **compelled** = mettere in obbligo
- **unflinching** = coraggioso, audace
- **eerie** = cupa
- **guest** = ospite
- **warnings** = avvertenze
- **to climb** = scalare
- **acclaim** = acclamo
- **outraged** = scandalizzati
- **exposé** = esposizione
- **housekeeper** = governante
- **joined** = unirsi
- **heir** = erede
- **draughts** = correnti di aria
- **prompted** = provocare