

Fuelled by Bodies, Fed by Souls: Exploring “Hangry” Houses in Horror Fiction

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Introduction

When we think about food and horror fiction, we can easily recall the most obvious relationship: the relationship between food and death. Indeed, within the horror framework, food assumes an almost intrinsic connection to death that can be summarised as follows: either it is used as a weapon to cause death, or death is used as a medium to obtain food. From poisonings and deathly potions to flesh eating cannibals and zombies, when food takes a more central position in a horror book or film, it is usually to invoke the horrors of death. The connection between food and horror, however, can be explored in a variety of different ways, starting with the horrors of the food industry and advancing to the use of (disgusting) food in horror stories. In this essay, I intend to consider this complex relationship, especially regarding a sub-genre of horror literature that Dale Bailey called “the haunted house tale” (Bailey 1999: ix).

After more than two hundred and fifty years since the publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*,¹ the motif of the haunted house is still very powerful and popular, transcending the realm of literature to invade other media such as cinema and television. From the seventh art to the most recent technology of streaming TV, it is almost impossible not to come across a horror movie or series that depicts a scary mansion or castle.² The last adapted version of Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, for instance, proves that the haunted house formula is still very popular, refurbishing itself to speak to a new public that craves the horrific sensation brought on by these stories, a public whose grandparents could have been scared by the first publication of the book in 1959 and that is now entertained by the same gothic motifs.³ For its part, Jackson’s book draws an interesting parallel with Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Fall of the House of Usher”, published in 1839, making an analysis that combines these two works of literature an interesting and almost irresistible pursuit.

Bearing these ideas in mind, with this essay I intend to explore the relationship between food and horror, with particular reference to these two texts, comparing Shirley Jackson’s Hill House and Poe’s House of Usher in an approach that will, hopefully, combine Food and Horror

Studies and shed new light on the works of these two American writers. I start with an overview of the different ways in which food and horror can merge in fictional works for the sake of achieving the effect of terror. Afterwards, I discuss the specific topic of the haunted house in its relationship to food by focusing on Jackson's story to, finally, compare the two works and show the ways in which both used food or food-related metaphors to achieve horror.

Food in Horror, Food Horror, Food and Horror

As we enter the domain of food and horror there are two initial paths that can lead us to two different destinations: we can think about food *in* horror or about what Lorna Piatti-Farnell described as “food horror” (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 2). In the first instance, we are closer to Horror Studies, considering food's important yet accessory role in the development of horror fiction. The second path, however, leads us closer to Food Studies and we begin to think about food not as a mere accessory to the narrative, but as an essential part of its development. Further down that path, we start thinking about what the depictions of food add to the narrative, providing a glimpse of social, economic, cultural and gender relations that transcend the text *per se*. In other words, when we think about food *in* horror, we focus on horror and push food to a secondary role, whereas when we think about food horror, the focus remains on food, pushing horror to a more subsidiary role in the study of a specific work of literature.

In this sense, when considering food in horror, we are not necessarily interested in the analysis of food itself but in its participation in the creation of the horror experience. Here, for instance, cannibalism plays an important role, especially when further away from a metaphorical sense or as a source of nourishment and closer to a more psychological aspect of the self, such as psychopathy. Nonetheless, (human) meat eaters such as cannibals, zombies, and even vampires, reveal the relationship between food and horror in a more explicit way, prompting analysis from both areas of study. In its turn, in her book *Consuming Gothic: Food and Horror in Film*, Lorna Piatti-Farnell defines food horror as “the narrative that links the idea of food and consumption to notions of horror, disgust, and even fear” (*ibidem*). Food horror involves the food that goes wrong or that brings us closer to notions of disgust, danger and even death. In this respect, Piatti-Farnell is not concerned about what she calls “traditional horror movies”, but about a horror effect that can be achieved by a specific manipulation of the topic of food even in movies not canonically taken as part of the horror genre, such as *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (*ibidem*).

The connection between food and horror can appear even when we are seemingly far removed from Horror Studies. Thus, an idea intrinsic to food, the notion of food as *Other*, can also be terrifying, even when we are not specifically considering a horror story. According to Lorna Piatti-Farnell, “[a] promise of dark discovery lurks behind every meal, a suggestion that could easily take the subject through a tunnel of horror, disgust, and (de)generation” (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 12). This possibility of “horror, disgust and (de)generation” arises because the act of eating

involves adding something strange, extra-corporeal – alien if you will – to our bodies, making it part of ourselves. And therefore, once again considering Farnell's ideas, consumption is “steeped in horror, for we do not truly know the foods we are allowing into our bodies until it is too late: once the oral threshold has been breached, we have been colonised by the food” (*idem*: 15). In the realm of horror, this unknown aspect of food is usually explored by narratives that revolve around the possibility of fatal food poisoning, from crime fiction to fairy tales.

Another perspective of horror and food that is closer to the realm of the latter is the consideration of the horrors of the food industry, especially the meat industry, and the ways in which it influences works of horror fiction, such as the so-called slaughterhouse narratives that usually contain a profound critique of culturally approved eating habits.⁴

In the context of this essay, I set out to merge these two different paths to show how one approach does not overshadow the other; indeed, on the contrary, how an analysis of such works can benefit from a perspective that combines both Food and Horror Studies. With this idea in mind and to better organise and elucidate the most common ways in which food appears as a part of horror narratives, we will start by considering three separate but interrelated categories.

The first one is closer to the first path mentioned above and, as such, approaches the domain of Horror Studies: food as accessory. The second category is closer to a Food Studies perspective and deals with a conception of food closer to our everyday reality. The third and final category lies between these two perspectives and involves what I am calling hangry⁵ monsters and monster-like creatures or entities.

The first category, food as accessory, is self-explanatory and coincides with an approach focused on the horror aspects of the work of literature, where food is seen as an accessory to better describe characters, situations and places or functions simply as a plot device without, at least apparently, any other role in the narrative, so it is seemingly incidental to the text. Here, we can find classic horror movie clichés such as the whistling of a boiling tea kettle or the popping of a bag of popcorn on the stove as means to create suspense in the stories. This use of food is especially explored by horror movies, since the use of sound effects only enriches the achievement of the desired effect; take, for instance, the *Final Destination Franchise* or the iconic Drew Barrymore participation in the opening scene of the movie *Scream*.⁶

But this category is not exclusively related to horror fiction; it shares a common ground with other genres and it can also be said to permeate the great majority of literary works. If a work of literature involves food, it is quite possible that it is part of at least this category. We must just pause a moment to think about how food is in the background of a variety of romantic encounters, meetings, family conversations and other commonly found moments in literature.

Besides this, this group encompasses a metaphorical use of food and food-related activities, where eating certain types of foods in certain ways can be a metaphor or symbol for something else. Here, food references can symbolically represent present-day issues such as the destructiveness of contemporary consumption habits or the assimilation and adaptation of the *Other*.⁷

This category is also one of the most fluid ones, since what at first can be seen as merely accessory can actually be more complicated and involve complex social, cultural and economic

relationships that are essential not only to the development of the narrative's plot, but also to the formal structure of the literary text itself. This is the case, for instance, of the ghost story formula, where the narration of the scary and mysterious story usually starts after or during a pleasant meal, preferably where a generous amount of wine is involved. Likewise, despite it being seemingly a simpler perspective, it can work as a starting point for the consideration of food in literature in general and, more specifically, of food in horror fiction.

The second category involves a treatment of food and horror that works in the vicinity of Lorna Piatti-Farnell's idea of food horror. This time, however, I am interested in those works that do take part in horror as a genre and, more specifically, in horror fiction. Taking Piatti-Farnell's food horror as a starting point, this category involves works where horror is connected to a more "conventional", "ordinary", or, at least, culturally accepted sense of food, closer to our everyday reality. This category is defined by the opposition between edible and inedible⁸ and as such is extremely dependent on a broader cultural framework, since this opposition is responsible for deciding what is appropriate or not in terms of food (*idem*: 14).

The duality edible-inedible inevitably opens up the possibility of disgust, an aspect relentlessly explored within horror fiction. As pointed out by Piatti-Farnell, disgust has a dual quality: it refers both to "nature and nurture" (*idem*: 16), to the possibility of physical harm and to culturally structured ideas that deem certain types of food as disgusting and others as pleasant, which leads Stephen Mennel to assert that "disgust has very little to do with rationality" (apud *idem*: 17).

Bearing these ideas in mind, when dealing with disgust, horror works must consider the audience's cultural framework in order to effectively achieve the desired effect. When this framework is not effectively considered, or when the author of horror fiction deliberately wants to provoke horror through the exaggeration of disgusting images, we enter the realm of what Stephen King called "the gross-out" (King 2012: 17). In his book *Danse Macabre*, King thus defines different levels of what is generally called horror fiction: the gross-out, horror and, finally, terror.⁹ Most of the examples presented by the author in relation to the gross-out are related to food or, to be more specific, to the feeling of disgust. For instance, King describes and exemplifies the gross-out as a "wanna-look-at-my-chewed-up-food?" level, calling it the "YUCH factor" [sic] (*idem*: 218). Curiously, the cinematographic references given by the author to exemplify this type of horror are also examples of haunted house narratives, such as "The Exorcist" and "The Amityville Horror".

Through this "gross-out" we are more evidently looking at what Dale Bailey called "Gothic's central truth and attraction", which is the fact that "nothing, no bonds of steel or prayer, can restrain the Dionysian forces that lurk just beneath the placid surface of everyday life" (1999: 3). In horror, even when we are facing foods that resemble the normality of our everyday eating habits, the possibility of it being something else, dangerous, evil, is almost always present. This leads us to the last category that encompasses figures well known by any Gothic enthusiast or specialist: what I am calling "hangry" monsters. This category embraces not only what Fabio Parasecoli called "voracious monsters",¹⁰ such as vampires, but also monster-like entities, as we will see.

Despite their being the most popular figures in relation to the connection between food and horror or, at least, the most recalled ones, these "voracious monsters" are not considered in the

scope of this essay, since, as Piatti-Farnell does well to remind us, these creatures are "culturally subversive from the on-set: as such, they do not lend themselves to an interrogation of how food – a common and commonplace presence in our human lives – can shift conceptual boundaries and cross the threshold between 'common' and 'uncommon', 'familiar' and 'unfamiliar', which is where, I argue, the true horror lies" (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 26).

As previously mentioned, this category also involves monster-like entities: inanimate objects and even spaces that can assume a monster-like aspect in order to take part in the human activity of eating or, rather, consuming. It is in this particular category that the haunted house fits better, with its tendency to prey upon its inhabitants to fulfil its hunger for revenge, justice, or simply Evil.

Before considering the houses themselves, it is worth mentioning that these three categories are not independent or exclusive, they coexist and complement each other. The first one approaches the second, since food as accessory and food as what is edible or inedible both share the same common ground: our culturally ordinary references to food. The second and third categories, food horror and hangry monsters, can encompass what Jennifer Park called "strange eating", defined as "presumed aberrant or atypical eating habits – eating strange things or eating the strange or strangers" (Park 2018: 271). We are here still facing a more ordinary reference to food as a background, even though the ways in which food is being used or consumed are distorted. Finally, the first and last categories can merge since specific types of food can be used as accessories merely to describe a particular monster-like creature.

The volatile nature of these categories also means that it is possible to find, within the same narrative, a variety of motifs whose boundaries intersect. This is the case of at least two very popular gothic motifs: the figure of the cannibal and the haunted house.

At the same time as a cannibal can be seen as a hangry monster when associated with a psychopathy or a perverse instinct, it can also navigate through the first category, when descriptions of food are being used to better characterise the cannibal's habits or habitats, and even through the second one, when we are considering cannibalism from an anthropological, historical or sociological perspective. Cannibalism can also be considered from a metaphorical or symbolic viewpoint as, for instance, the idea of assimilation of other cultures brought by Oswald de Andrade's *Anthropophagic or Cannibalist Manifesto*.¹¹

A haunted house, meanwhile, can be described by the type of food served and prepared within its walls. It can also, as we will see, serve as the perfect place to display instances of food horror, and, of course, it can be personified into a monster-like entity, as it is in fact in both works that are considered here: "The Fall of the House of Usher" and *The Haunting of Hill House*.

The Haunting of the Hangry Hill House

Following in Poe's footsteps with respect to the haunted house formula, Shirley Jackson published *The Haunting of Hill House* in 1959. Indeed, the book seems to echo Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" in a number of passages throughout its development, especially when Jackson is describing Hill House. Nevertheless, for a range of motives, from the cultural framework to which the work belongs to the peculiarities of the formal aspects of the novel as opposed to the short story, *The Haunting of Hill House* offers a broader spectrum for the analysis of food and horror than does "The Fall of the House of Usher". For this reason, in this first part of the analysis I will focus on Jackson's book.

Hill House is the perfect example of the haunted house that navigates through the three discussed categories that summarise the relationship between food and horror. One of the episodes that can be regarded as part of the first category, food as accessory or metaphor, is found at the very beginning of the story, even before Eleanor arrives at Hill House, at the symbolically charged scene of the "cup of stars". When the protagonist stops at a restaurant for lunch in the middle of her journey to Doctor Montague's experiment, she observes a family sitting nearby (Jackson 2006: 14). The mother and the father have a little disagreement regarding their daughter's demand for her cup of stars in order to drink her milk. Observing the scene, while the parents insist that the girl drink the milk without her special cup, Eleanor thinks to herself: "Don't do it [...]; insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again; don't do it; and the little girl glanced at her. And smiled a little subtle, dimpling, wholly comprehending smile, and shook her head stubbornly at the glass. Brave girl, Eleanor thought; wise, brave girl" (*idem*: 15). Different interpretations have been derived from this episode. In short, Eleanor's pledge for the little girl not to accept her milk without the "cup of stars" can be seen as a symbol of her absence of control over her own life: the cup of milk was never just a medium for the achievement of the little girl's nourishment, it was a symbol of the longing for independence and control.

Moving on to the second category, two spaces take on great importance when considering a more ordinary use of food in fictional works: the kitchen and the dining room. The latter is already part of Eleanor's digressions during her journey to Hill House and sets the tone for the description of her thought process, which is then developed throughout the narrative. Her characteristic longing for home, peace and love is here presented to the reader through the description of an imaginary dinner as seen in the following passage: "I took my dinner alone in the long, quiet dining room at the gleaming table, and between the tall windows the white panelling of the walls shone in the candlelight; I dined upon a bird, and radishes from the garden, and homemade plum jam" (*idem*: 12). After spending eleven years taking care of her invalid mother, Eleanor longs for a simple and solitary dinner. Before that, however, she also imagines that "[a] little dainty old lady took care of me, moving starchily with a silver tea service on a tray and bringing me a glass of elderberry wine each evening for my health's sake" (*ibidem*). Here, food mediates her perception of love and care, in an inversion of her duties regarding her mother: now she is not taking care of "a cross old lady", "setting out endless little trays of soup and oatmeal"

(*idem*: 4), but, instead, a "little dainty old lady" takes care of her, bringing her tea and wine, thinking about her health for a change (*idem*: 12).

Within the walls of the house, the dining room seems to meet Eleanor's imaginative expectations, since it is described as "the pleasantest room they had seen so far, more pleasant, certainly, because of the lights and the sight and smell of food" (*idem*: 46). The aspect of the dining room contrasts so drastically with the rest of the house that it is even seen as a sort of recovery from a "non-civilized" state when Doctor Montague gladly acclaims: "I congratulate myself," he said, rubbing his hands happily. "I have led you to civilization through the uncharted wastes of Hill House" (*ibidem*).¹²

The dining room is also perceived as the space responsible for bringing peace and protection to the group. Later in the novel, the importance of this chamber is emphasised when the characters try to interpret the peculiar decorations of a marble statuary object in the drawing room. After being seen as "Venus rising from the waves" by Doctor Montague, as "Saint Francis curing the lepers" by Luke and after Eleanor detects a dragon in the strange piece, Theodora, jokingly or not, identifies it as the portrait of the family and the house (*idem*: 79). What attracts our attention, at least in the scope of this paper, is the identification of some grass-like "stuff" in the statuary piece as the dining room rug. Theodora asks if they had ever noticed the dining-room carpet, asserting that "It looks like a field of hay, and you can feel it tickling your ankles" (*ibidem*). On top of that "field of hay" is what Theodora describes as an "overspreading apple-tree kind of thing" and what Doctor Montague promptly identifies as "[a] symbol of the protection of the house" (*ibidem*).

The symbolic sacred protection of the *apple* tree and the remembrance of the dining room brought by the carpet is immediately interposed with the possibility of the instability and potentially dangerous characteristic of the house, when Eleanor interrupts the Doctor to wonder: "I'd hate to think it might fall on us [...] Since the house is so unbalanced..." (*idem*: 80).

Whereas on the one hand, Lorna Piatti-Farnell considers food horror as the narratives that emphasise the relationship between food and horror, disgust and even fear (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 2), in *Hill House*, on the other hand, food, as experienced in the dining room, is identified as an escape from the horrors brought by the rest of the house and, when the place where food is prepared, the kitchen, is considered, the idea of escape assumes a quite literal significance.

When we come to look at the space of the kitchen, our attention must turn to the cook, Mrs Dudley, the mysterious housekeeper who is a key figure in the consideration of the relationship between food and horror in the narrative. When the reader meets Mrs Dudley, her role as the household's cook is emphasised, because the first thing the reader knows about this character is that she wears an apron (Jackson 2006: 25). Her role is even clearer since some of the first words she shares with Eleanor concern her duties within the house, as the following passage confirms:

Mrs. Dudley turned aside to let Eleanor come in, and spoke, *apparently to the wall*. "I set dinner on the dining-room sideboard at six sharp", she said. "You can serve yourselves. I clear up in the morning. I have breakfast ready for you at nine. That's the way I agreed to do. I can't keep the rooms up the way you'd like, but there's no one else you could get that would help me. I don't wait on people. What I agreed to, it doesn't mean I wait on people." (*idem*: 27)

Mrs Dudley is always described in a sinister and scary way, contrasting with the comforting nature of her food, always praised by the group. For this reason, in *The Haunting of Hill House* the meals do not seem to be an extension of the cook, and even her presence in the dining room seems to deprive it of that status of the pleasantest room in the house, as we can see in the following passage: “and a little chill went around the table, darkening the light of the silver and the bright colors of the china, a little cloud that drifted through the dining room and brought Mrs. Dudley after it” (*idem*: 84-5).

The contrasting duality between the meals she prepares and her character seems to be in tune with a duality intrinsic to the space of the kitchen in general and, more specifically, to kitchen appliances. At the same time that the kitchen is the space of food preparation, something necessary to human survival, it is also where violent aspects of eating take place. As Lorna Piatti-Farnell points out: “the kitchen is full of instruments of ‘violence’, aimed at chopping, cutting, mashing, and, overall, the complete physical disintegration of matter” (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 183).

In an ordinary house, kitchen appliances can bring us face to face with violence and horror; in Hill House, the kitchen itself seems to achieve this effect, assuming the duality safety-danger. The kitchen, like the dining room, is also described as pleasant, yet one particular of its architecture suggests the possibility of it being a site both of safety and vulnerability, as expressed by Eleanor when she first sees it:

I wonder if she had Dudley cut extra doors for her. I wonder how she likes working in a kitchen where a door in back of her might open without her knowing it. I wonder, actually, just what Mrs. Dudley is in the habit of meeting in her kitchen so that she wants to make sure that she'll find a way out no matter which direction she runs. I wonder— (Jackson 2006: 82)

It is interesting to note that Eleanor goes from the more negative to the more positive aspect of the kitchen's doors; from the idea that something dangerous could enter the kitchen through one of those doors without being noticed to the idea that those doors could mean a way of escaping, of surviving whatever supernatural thing might be a presence in the house.

More interesting, however, is the active role Eleanor ascribes to Mrs Dudley. She wonders if the housekeeper herself is responsible for the placement of those extra doors. Even though she attributes the installing of those doors to the cook's husband, the unfinished last “I wonder...” at the end of her thought process could also indicate a more intimate relationship between house and housekeeper.

Curiously enough, that thought process is interrupted by Theodora's mention of the more common aspect associated with cooks and the food they prepare: “‘Shut up,’ Theodora said amiably. ‘A nervous cook can't make a good soufflé, anyone knows that...’”, suggesting that Mrs Dudley could be listening behind one of those doors (*idem*: 82), or perhaps implying that, just like Hill House, the cook could hear them.

Mrs Dudley seems to work well with the house, in symbiosis, as long as she, like her husband, doesn't stay there “in the night, in the dark” (*idem*: 26). While she is clearly afraid of the house,

she, more than anyone else, understands and coexists with it. For instance, in the passage mentioned above, when the housekeeper shows Eleanor to her room, Mrs Dudley seems to be talking not to Eleanor, but to the house, since she talks, as the narrator lets us know, “apparently to the wall” (*idem*: 27). This idea is confirmed later in the novel when the housekeeper shows Theodora to her room and Eleanor feels that maybe Mrs Dudley thinks that the house can hear them (*idem*: 31). In the same way, her emphasis on not waiting on people could be seen as a trait of her personality, pride perhaps, as shown in the following passage: “I don't wait on people. What I agreed to, it doesn't mean I wait on people” (*idem*, 27). However, if we shift the focus from the action to its receiver, we open up the possibility that what Mrs Dudley is denying is not the act of waiting itself, but of waiting on *people*: if she does not wait on people, does she wait on anyone or anything else? The house, maybe?

Haunted Houses or Houses that Haunt: The Case of the Hangry Houses

Going back to the categories that summarise the relation between food and horror, we are left with the final one: the hangry monsters or monster-like creatures or entities. This is where both Hill House and the House of Usher share a common ground and it is in this aspect that the influence of Poe can be more clearly perceived in Shirley Jackson's book.

According to Dale Bailey in the book *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne influenced the contemporary haunted house tale, including Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, by shifting the traditional European gothic tradition in two particular ways. First of all, both writers, especially Hawthorne, transformed the classic European castle into the common American House or, as Bailey describes it: “a magnificent house with a storied history, to be sure - but a mere house nonetheless” (Bailey 1999: 23). Secondly and most importantly, both nineteenth-century American authors “displace[d] the supernatural focus of the text from the figure of the ghost - the revenant spirit of a human being - to the house” (*idem*: 21).

Bearing this last aspect in mind, we can conclude that the house ceases to represent a haunted place and takes a more active role in the process of haunting; the houses themselves haunt their inhabitants or visitors, despite the presence of ghosts, demons or spectres. Bailey thus distinguishes between the ghost story represented, for instance, by Henry James and Judith Wharton, and the haunted house tale represented by Poe and Hawthorne.

Unlike the traditional ghost story, in Poe's “The Fall of the House of Usher” and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, the focus is not on possible ghosts or demonic forces that inhabit the house; in this case the house itself becomes a ghost-like figure, personified, assuming human characteristics in order to devour and ultimately consume its inhabitants. As once again pointed out by Bailey, the sentient character of the houses “does not possess the house, but derives from its very structure” (*idem*: 22).

This sentient character intrinsic to the dwelling's own structures is made clear by both narratives, so we find Roderick Usher blaming this character on the very stones of the house: "The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones — in the order of their arrangement..." (Poe 2006: 136). This is even more evident in *Hill House*, where the narrator even considers that the house has formed itself: "This house, which seemed somehow to have formed itself, flying together into its own powerful pattern under the hands of its builders, fitting itself into its own construction of lines and angles, reared its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity." (Jackson 2006: 24).

The two houses are also presented to the reader in a very similar way, especially regarding the tumultuous feelings they cause to the observers. For instance, Hill House is first described as follows:

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice. Almost any house, caught unexpectedly or at an odd angle, can turn a deeply humorous look on a watching person; even a mischievous little chimney, or a dormer like a dimple, can catch up a beholder with a sense of fellowship; but a house arrogant and hating, never off guard, can only be evil. (*ibidem*)

This passage seems to echo Poe's narrator's first encounter with the House of Usher, especially if we consider his experiment of observing the house from its reflection in the tarn to see if the horrible impression of those "badly turned angles" would change:

It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down — but with a shudder even more thrilling than before — upon the re-modelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows. (Poe 2006: 127)

In both cases, the narrators come to the conclusion that the impression of evil cannot be dissipated by a mere change of angles and must be intrinsic to the houses themselves, especially regarding their human-like features.

Later on, however, we find out that the personification is not exclusive to the face-like appearance of the houses and extends to their adoption of human actions. In this context, Hill House seems not only to listen to Doctor Montague's party, but also to want to devour them or, as pointed out by Eleanor in relation to her blue room: "I am like a small creature *swallowed* whole by a monster, she thought, and the monster feels my tiny little movements inside" (Jackson 2006: 29). Just as Hill House seems to be alive and invoke the possibility of eating, swallowing, Eleanor,

the House of Usher opens one of its "ponderous and ebony *jaws*" to reveal Madeline Usher just before her final collapse with her brother. (Poe 2006: 143) The sentient and personified houses, however, seem to want not only to devour their prey, but also to assimilate them, making them part of their own structure, as is noted by Theodora and Eleanor: "The sense was that it wanted to consume us, take us into itself, make us part of the house..." (Jackson 2006: 102).

At the end of the stories, both hangry houses achieve their goals; more than simply embodying Eleanor and the Usher twins, they seem to merge with them in a subtle yet persistent way. At the end of the narratives, their victims are unable to escape their fate, remaining in the houses' grounds in one way or another. Poe summarises this consubstantiation by asserting, right at the beginning of his story, that the name of the mansion merges the house and the family (Poe 2006: 128).

Regarding *Hill House*, although Mrs Dudley, the cook, is the one who is described throughout the narrative in a symbiotic relation with the house, at the end of the story it is Eleanor who is in that position, even using the kitchen as medium of escape, this time not from the perils of the house, but from her companions who intend to separate her from the mansion. On the one hand, Mrs Dudley survives Hill House by coexisting with it, but Eleanor, like Roderick and Madeline, does not survive and the hangry house finally achieves the ultimate act of consumption by killing her within its confines.

Curiously, in Poe's tale, where the house does not survive, the more ordinary aspect of food is brought to the narrative not by the characters sharing a meal or by the description of the kitchen or dining room, but by the house itself becoming material to nourish the fungi on its stones. The hangry monster, capable of consuming human lives, is also consumed by the fungi spread all over it almost as an omen of its ultimate destiny – the final consumption of the house by the tarn. Hill House, on the other hand, survives, as strong as it was before Doctor Montague's party arrived. The cyclic narrative, ending as it began, could indicate the cyclic character of the hangry monster itself, with Hill House standing there, as it was at the beginning of the narrative, possibly awaiting new victims.

Final Considerations

It was my intent with this essay to show how horror fiction can be fertile ground for approaches that wish to combine horror and food studies. In fact, the complex relationship between food and the achievement of the effect of horror is usually taken for granted. Within horror literature, the presence of food is more than a mere accessory or symbol; it actually works in the construction of horror itself. Furthermore, it is important once again to consider Lorna Piatti-Farnell's ideas about the relationship between food horror and a larger context which covers the social aspects of the communities where this food horror is developed or on which it is based. That is to say, by analysing food and food-related activities in works of fiction, we can find out more about them besides the texts themselves. In this respect, Piatti-Farnell asserts that food horror relies on "a conceptual exploitation of the audience's visceral responses, which are inevitably mediated

by their cultural context” (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 23). This visceral response is essential not only to food horror, but also to horror itself and even, to go back to Stephen King’s *Danse Macabre*, to gross-out and terror stories. Food, for its part, seems to be one of the first and foremost ways of appealing to human visceral responses, even though that is taken to a more extreme degree within horror fiction, where it appeals quite literally to human viscera.

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Notes

1. *The Castle of Otranto* was first published in 1764 and republished the next year with the subtitle “A Gothic Story”.
2. A recent example of the continuing popularity of the haunted house formula is, for instance, the success of the movies belonging to the world of *The Conjuring*, with multiple films being released yearly.
3. The book has received a couple of different cinematographic adaptations since its first publication at the end of the 1950s. The first one in 1963, called *The Haunting*, was directed by Robert Wise. The movie was then remade in 1999 by the director Jan de Bont. The 1963 movie also influenced the 2002 *Rose Red* mini-series scripted by Stephen King. The last adaptation, premiered on 12 October 2018, restored the original title, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and was directed by Mike Flanagan for Netflix.
4. Regarding the slaughterhouse narrative and its relation to food studies, see Lorna Piatti-Farnell’s “A Taste for Butchery: Slaughterhouse Narratives and the Consumable Body” in her book *Consuming Gothic: Food and Horror in Film*.

5. The term “hangry”, an official entry in renowned dictionaries such as *The Oxford English Dictionary* and *The Cambridge Dictionary*, is a portmanteau of the words “angry” and “hungry” and indicates the feeling of being angry because of hunger. The origin of the word dates back to the 1950s.
6. The preparation of food or the place where it is prepared is repeatedly used in the *Final Destination* movies to create the effect of suspense thanks to the possibility of harm being caused by food preparation instruments. Take, for instance, the scene of the death of the teacher in the first movie or the agonizing fire scene at the lottery winner’s apartment in the second one. In the opening scene of the first *Scream* movie, the popping of the popcorn on the stove creates the atmosphere of suspense that accompanies the mysterious call that the Drew Barrymore character receives from the iconic murderer.
7. Regarding the relation between horror and contemporary consuming societies, see Lorna Piatti-Farnell’s *Consuming Gothic: Food and Horror in Film* (2017).
8. According to Piatti-Farnell, edible can be defined as “what is acceptable within the human cultural framework” (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 13).
9. Stephen King summarised this distinction in a 2014 Facebook post in which he stated: “The Gross-out: the sight of a severed head tumbling down a flight of stairs, it’s when the lights go out and something green and slimy splatters against your arm. The Horror: the unnatural, spiders the size of bears, the dead waking up and walking around, it’s when the lights go out and something with claws grabs you by the arm. And the last and worse one: Terror, when you come home and notice everything you own had been taken away and replaced by an exact substitute. It’s when the lights go out and you feel something behind you, you hear it, you feel its breath against your ear, but when you turn around, there’s nothing there...” (King 2014).
10. Regarding these “voracious monsters”, see Fabio Parasecoli’s book *Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture*, especially the chapter “Of Breasts and Beasts: Vampires and Other Voracious Monsters” (Parasecoli 2008: 37).
11. The “Manifesto Antropófago” translated by Leslie Bary as “Cannibalist Manifesto” was a manifesto published in 1928 by the Brazilian Modernist author Oswald de Andrade in the context of Brazilian Modernism. It was an update on Andrade’s previous manifesto “Poesia Pau-Brasil” that argued for a more nationalist approach to literature. With the “Cannibalist Manifesto”, Oswald de Andrade proposed the assimilation of other cultures and their adaptation while still maintaining typical characteristics of national culture in Brazilian literature.
12. In light of Shirley Jackson’s book *Life among the Savages*, the use of the term “civilization” can easily assume a colonial connotation, especially when read together with the word “uncharted” that follows it (“through the *uncharted* wastes of Hill House”). In this context, the dining room could be seen as the place where the guests of the house felt more in control, almost taming the unwelcoming characteristics of the house after Dr Montague figured out how to transit throughout all of its rooms. It can also assume the sense of the word as used by Lorna Piatti-Farnell in relation to food, when she claims that “cooking is a civilized practice” employing the term “as a signal to those ritualistic practices that we subconsciously regarded as essential for our cultural constructions of appropriate behavior” (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 24).