

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This Introduction chapter is the first chapter of the research study of Literary Criticism for the final task in the English Literature Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung. The chapter contains an explanation and a general description of the paper. The parts consist of Research Background, Problem Statements, Research Objectives, Research Significance, and Definition of Key Terms.

### 1.1 Research Background

Horror is a genre that aims to frighten or disgust its audience. These elements are the standard for this genre to determine how good the horror is. At the beginning of its appearance, horror was of two kinds, a story told in oral and written form. The oral is in the form of folk tales, myths, or legends about a certain place or person who is told as something that is threatening and dangerous to society (Dixon, 2010). For example, in Indonesia, there is an urban legend about the specter known as '*Kuntilanak*', a ghost of a woman who haunts men for her tragic death, she always heard by the laughing or crying. Her signs of appearance are based on how she died, she mourned her death and the baby she carried. Then in written form is in the use of stories contained in the bible or Al-Quran that tell the woes of humans when they sin. It described how they were tortured in the realm after death or a text version of some folktales that were considered as cautionary tales for the children.

In literature, Horror has become a major genre since its first appearance, which then penetrates the film and once again becomes big and popular with the audience. Then what makes horror such a popular genre? Of course, by its formula on showing disturbing, disgusting pictures that makes uneasy feeling. To simplify, the genre that makes people uncomfortable by it. "Such is the appeal of disgust to

an audience” (Blake & Bailey, 2013, p. 2), these pictures of uncomfortable are like an abandoned place, a corpse, a ghost, or an unidentified object. By means, that once it is a subject, then it becomes an object is terrifying: We as the audience are very pleased to be feared and feel disgusted by what we watch even though it makes us uncomfortable. That is what becomes interesting for horror enthusiasts.

The thing that needs to be considered in this case is that the researcher looks for what is the basic instinct of the fear that exists in humans, how something becomes an object to be feared, hated, and avoided. If someone wasn't taught that it was a scary thing, they would take it as a usual object. In Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, this experience occurs when the child is separated from the mother (Kristeva, 1982). This phrase can mean that a person gets it since he is born (from his mother's womb), or separates as an adult (leaves or dies). These two meanings have the same effect: they face the reality. Reality can be very dreadful and agonizing. As an adult, they face this abject continually and get used to it. However, how they deal with and solve them has a different and personal way from their respective characters. Abjection theory refers to the human reaction to the destruction in the meaning of the differences between oneself and others (Felluga, 2015). The primary example of this is the reaction of a horrifying scene of witnessing a body waste (corpse, blood, mucus, or feces). This reaction is present when humans are born into the world, then they learn it along their way through life that is then threatening. In a world mostly in the culture of patriarchy, it is the role of women who are the victim to be blamed for the discomfort experienced by their children. Men are threatened by women that they are playing as the ones who wield power yet are powerless to the feminine body (Thomas C. , 2008), it hurts their pride and their masculinity for falling over them, then they turned them into a dangerous kind of human. Women are the cause they exist, love, and live, and so will the reality of their life. This female role is always presented in horror literature and films as monstrous-feminine, especially to a mother figure. They are not cruel, evil, or frightening, but it is the society and the surroundings that make them so. A woman is the source of life, they are the one who gives birth and raises the child, and teaches them how to see the world. Man makes women scary and makes them

being full of hatred. Look back at history on folktales, legend, or any other kind of story from the past, women are the real embodiment of horror, kind of like an old witch or a mermaid who seduces its victims to sink to the bottom of the sea.

On the abjection theory, apart from corpses or other disgusting things, the figure of the mother is also considered to be feared. According to Rina Arya (Arya, 2014), a mother who is initially a source of comfort but also a source of tragedy and wickedness. This strengthens the statements in the previous paragraph and from the abjection theory that women (mothers) are like that, especially in every horror story. A mother's love is very warm and full of tenderness, but once something happens that gets out of her control, a mother will be very frightening and dangerous, to the child as well as to those around her. And it is also applied to herself, she could be a danger to her own life by her doings.

This monstrosity of a female character becomes one of the basic templates for story development in the horror genre to later be adjusted to the theme of the story whether she is an antagonist or a protagonist to the main plot. To illustrate, take an example of the character Carolyn Perron in *The Conjuring* (2013). Carolyn's character is depicted as a loving and caring mother who then tries to kill her child under the influence of an evil ghost named Bathsheba. Or in 1980s remake of Indonesian horror classic *Pengabdian Setan* (2017) where the character of mother (Ibu) is revealed was the member of a satanic cult who prey their young child to present them for the devil to be a sacrifice for its demand as a trade for the member's fortune in life. And by her doings also doomed her family that was terrorized by the devil's followers after her passing. These two examples are of how the horror genre uses the mother character to be the embodiment of the abject itself as they were carrying love and nurture, but also a horror and destruction, to herself and others. This is what the researcher will be trying to convey on the research object of this research study.

The limited TV series *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) from the online streaming service Netflix was released in 2018. The story is an adaptation of the classic Shirley Jackson's novel with the same name. The original story is about a

group of people investigating supernatural events in a haunted house. However, in this loose adaptation of Jackson's work, Netflix's version tells the story of the Crain family who experiences some gruesome events within Hill house and after. The family consists of seven members, there is Hugh the father, Olivia the mother, and their children Stephen, Shirley, Theodora, and twins Luke and Eleanor. The story switching between the past and the present day which are interconnected to each other where the Crain children experiencing trauma and horror of the past that haunts their adulthood after the events at Hill house and the death of Olivia, their mother, which is still a mystery to the cause of her death. Then the trauma of the past begins to rise to the surface as they face the death of Eleanor that brings them back together after long years separated.

The show focuses on the aftermath of Olivia's death that is filled with mystery and the last memory of her being insane and emotional. From this incident, the Crain children responded to the trauma in their characters which developed throughout the story, and this goes to the father as well. Mental Illness and past trauma are the main focus of this show, but somehow it is more like a psychological family drama with horror as its instrument. Since this is a horror series, of course, the supernatural aspects are more highlighted in the story than the psychological state of the characters. Therefore, any logical explanation of the characters' mental state always pointed to the supernatural dimension where ghosts or monsters caused them to be. Of all the explanations above, it is the reason that this horror TV show is chosen by the researcher to be the object of research. From the reasons above, it is what the researcher will be analyzing this research object the theory of abjection by Julia Kristeva. The abject is assumed to be the main cause of the events that happened to the Crain family in the film. It could be in any form by the explanation of the abject, which it could be a disturbing and disgusting image, the ghost or the mother character. From the mother, it is not just from her appearance, but by her nature and gesture. It is a horror too by the bad things of the mother's doings to the children. It can be shown such abject in Carolyn's murder act in *The Conjuring* (2013) and Ibu's dark secret in *Pengabdian Setan* (2017), their doings are considered an abject by her child that it might be a danger to their lives, the mother is

threatening them. And so to Olivia's character in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Her doings in the past and her tragic death is scarred the Crain children. It is a horror to them that they witnessed strange behavior from her mother then lost their source of love and comfort of a mother at such a young age.

This work is aimed at analyzing the horror genre film *The Haunting of Hill House* with Julia Kristeva's Abjection theory to the reason of what makes the fear and disgust (the abject) to the Crain family characters and how they are shown in the film. And the theory provides everything that is contained and used in horror works. Many other horror films use similar issues such as *The Babadook* (2014), *The Conjuring* (2013), *Hereditary* (2018), or *Case 39* (2009).

To strengthen the reasons for choosing the materials for this final research and also references in object selection and the theory used in this paper, the researcher found several paper studies related to it. The purpose of this is to learn more about the objects and theories used and how they are applied in research analysis, looking for what has been found from the research materials and looking for what has not been done yet from those previous studies. There are several papers that the researcher read for understanding the studies used in it and looking for what they have not analyzed about the theory or the film involved in this paper. From the focus of the analysis mentioned above, the researcher intends to identify the points of the abjection theory contained in the film *The Haunting of Hill House*. With a focus on the mother-child relationship as the topic of discussion in this paper, there are three scientific papers that the researcher included as references that have been used as a study in their works.

First, an article journal titled *Hill House or Something More? Horror, Abjection and Mental Illness* by Zachary Sheldon. This journal article uses the same theory and research object as the researcher is currently working on. From Sheldon's work, the researcher felt more inspired and also helped form the ideas for how this paper would be processed for the final project. The mother-child relationship raised in the paper is the same as the ideas and thoughts that the researcher will analyze in this work and certainly does not copy on how Sheldon

deepened the abjection theory and the film *The Haunting of Hill House* from the view of his paper.

The role of mother, which women in horror are often monstrous, is also stated in the second paper by Shelley Buerger in *The Beak That Grips: Maternal Indifference, ambivalence and Abject in The Babadook*. In the paper, Buerger discussed the main character is struggling to raise her child after the passing of her husband. The mother's role in *The Babadook* is a type of mother who is unprepared, incompetent, and haunted by her trauma of losing her loved one. The character is very easy to turn into an unstable mother and make the mother-child relationship not good to contain, this is an example of the abjection that the character is willing to fall into. Another thing with the objects Sheldon wears, they are the opposite example of a mother character who does terrible things as an excuse for the good of her child, she has a good relationship with her child.

And the last is also an article journal by Tasia Alexopoulos and Shannon Power titled *What Did Your Mother Do To You?: The Grotesque, Abjection And Motherhood in The Others (2001), Mama (2013), and The Conjuring (2013)*. In their paper, they are showing some differences that can be seen from the intentions of the good mother and the bad mother. The good mother knows what is good for her child even though it will kill her, and the bad mother cares more about self-interest and doesn't care about her child. But both have one point in common which is that whatever reason they intended to do, it is a danger to their child.

From the three examples above, the study of abjection theory regarding the monstrous-motherhood proves how weak the mental defenses of women in these horror films are. All the unfortunate events they experience are the results of the social influences and the demands for them to be a good mother and make their minds waver and fall on her demise. And in the end, the children are the victim by their doings in reason to protect them. Depart from this, the researcher feels that it is a starting point on how to analyzing the elements of abjection in horror works.



## 1.2 Problem Statements

From the explanation of the research background, it was decided that this final research project will be analyzing the limited TV series titled *The Haunting of Hill House* by using the psychoanalytical approach by Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection. This theory is withdrawn from her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. This study focuses on the past trauma experienced by the Crain family when they were staying at the Hill house that led to Olivia's death. The trauma then shaped the characteristics of each of the Crain children when they grew up. The issue of this raises debate whether the Crain family experienced ghost experiences during their stay in Hill House and afterward or indeed they had a mental illness so that two of the seven members of the Crain family died by suicide. What is certain from those two possibilities is that they experienced an upsetting terror, ignorance of the mystery of Olivia's death which ultimately led the Crain children to think their mother was a monster and the influence of the past trauma on the behavior and attitudes on building the character of the Crain children into adulthood and so on after the tragic events. From the statements above, it can be concluded that the problems to be answered in this research study are as follows:

1. How are the Monstrous-Mother characters represented in *The Haunting of Hill House*?
2. What do the Crain siblings fear and disgust (abjection) in *The Haunting of Hill House*?
3. What are the effects of the abjection on the development of the Crain siblings' characters in *The Haunting of Hill House*?

## 1.3 Research Objectives

The purposes of this research study are to find the elements of horror in *The Haunting of Hill House* with the psychoanalytical approach by Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection. For the specific purpose of this research study which is based on the three questions above, it aims to:

1. To find on how the Monstrous-Mother characters are represented in *The Haunting of Hill House*.
2. To find the fear and disgust (abjection) by the Crain siblings in *The Haunting of Hill House*.
3. To find the effects of the abjection on the development of the Crain siblings' characters in *The Haunting of Hill House*.

#### **1.4 Research Significance**

The main purpose of writing this work is to finish the researcher's study in the English Literature Department, Adab and Humanities Faculty, State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. Besides that, the researcher has two targets to fulfill. The targets are academically and practically. In academics, this research study is expected to make a new contribution to the education of English literature in the English Literature Department. This research leads to the subject of Literary Criticism, Psychoanalysis, Film Studies, and Popular Literature. With the new information from the sciences mentioned, practically this research study can be a forum for information about the sciences studied in English literature and their criticisms. Also expected to be a new reference on the science of psychoanalysis from the theory of Abjection by Julia Kristeva, since this theory is first used in this work. And for the researcher himself, the making of this research is a measure of his ability in processing the knowledge, data, and information that the researcher has been working on.

#### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

To avoid misunderstandings about the terms used in this research study, it is necessary to provide explanations so that these terms can be understood following the researcher. The first is the term **The Haunting of Hill House**. *The Haunting of Hill House* is a horror series that is a loose adaptation from the novel of Shirley Jackson. This classic horror story has already had film adaptations of its original



works, such as *The Haunting* (1963), and *The Haunting* (1999). This Netflix production version is a loose adaptation, so in terms of the story and some other parts, it has nothing to do with the original story. However, some intrinsic elements taken from Jackson's original work, are the setting of Hill House location and several characters and characterization such as the character of Eleanor, Theodora, Luke, John Montague with different roles. But the character of The Dudleys, the housekeeper of the Hill House is the only one based on the novel.

The second term is **Abjection**. Abjection or The Abject is a theory from Julia Kristeva referring to human reactions to threats that eliminate meaning between subject and object, or between self and other people. “The abject has only quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1), A reaction of disgust and fear towards the irregularities in gesture or the parts of one's body that one can see or touch are not one's own, a corpse or just a lump of flesh, is an example of the abject.

The third term is **Monstrous-Motherhood**. The term is taken from the “Monstrous-feminine” and is used to describe a certain female character (mother) in the horror genre. The term is from the book titled *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* by Barbara Creed. In the book, the term Monstrous-feminine defines as the depiction of a female monster in a patriarchal culture (Creed, 1993). Patriarchy often portrays women as monster creatures through their sexual and reproductive functions. Creed takes the idea from Kristeva's book about these monstrous females and how they are often used in horror films as a defense against masculinity. A series of defenses were used to guard against men's fear and hatred of feminine figures.

The fourth term is **Mental Illness**. Mental Illness is a form of behavioral deviation from emotional distortions that cause irregularities in behavior. Many types of mental illness can be suffered by humans, one of the complaints in the form of bad moods, anxiety disorders, irregular sleep patterns, thinking disorders, and hallucinations. The emergence of mental illness in a person is caused by irregularities in living a lifestyle and controlling emotions.

The fifth term is **Trauma**. Trauma is the result of any event that causes physical damage to the body or severe shock to the mind or both (Matsumoto, 2009). These events become a wound for someone who experienced it and will not go away even though from time to time the bad memories fade away.

And the last term is **Characterization**. Characterization is the depiction of a person's character in a work of fiction (Minderop, 2005). In its depiction in a story, a good character requires character development in the form of clear thoughts/ideas, traits, and physique/appearance.

