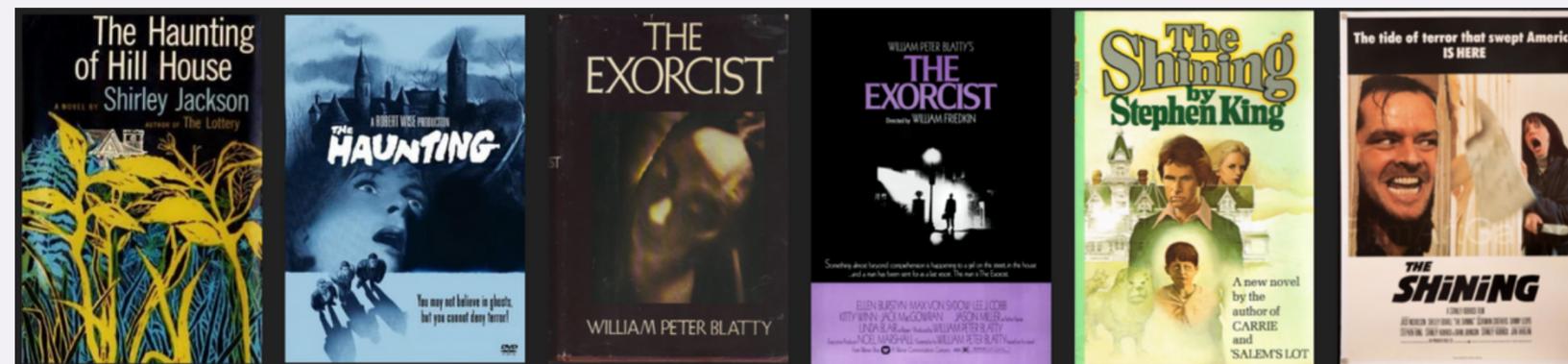


ELIZA LETTENEY

HAUNTED HOUSEHOLDS: ADAPTATION, GENRE, AND GENDER POLITICS IN HORROR AND THE GOTHIC DURING SECOND WAVE FEMINISM



Defining some terms:

THE GOTHIC

Values emotion over logic, has an atmosphere of ambivalence, uses occult elements, discusses social norms (can either challenge them or reinforce them)

HORROR

A branch of the gothic; discusses social norms but relies more on violence and bodily harm.

SECOND WAVE FEMINISM

(1960s-1980s) A movement to improve women's educational, vocational, personal, and sexual freedoms.

ADAPTATION

The process of creating a new product (book, film, etc.) inspired by elements of a previous text.

THE ARGUMENT

During second wave feminism, writers used horror and the gothic to make arguments either for or against changes to patriarchal post-WWII family structures. In the adaptation process, filmmakers had the power to either reinforce or challenge the gender politics in the source text, often altering the use of genre as well.



#1

**DE-CENTERING
ELEANOR**

ERASING SUBVERSION

HAUNTED HOUSEHOLDS

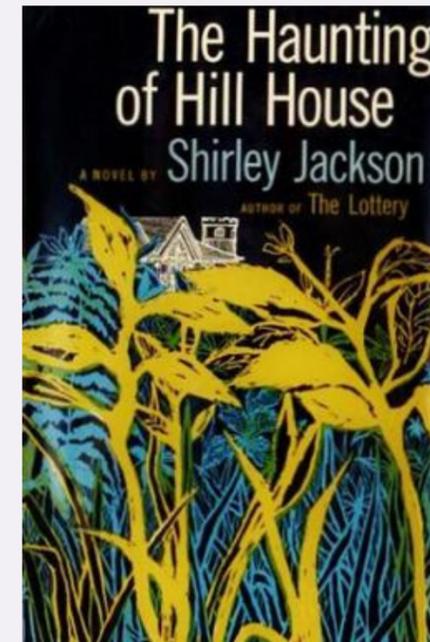
THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE (1959)

by Shirley Jackson
&

THE HAUNTING (1963)

dir. Robert Wise

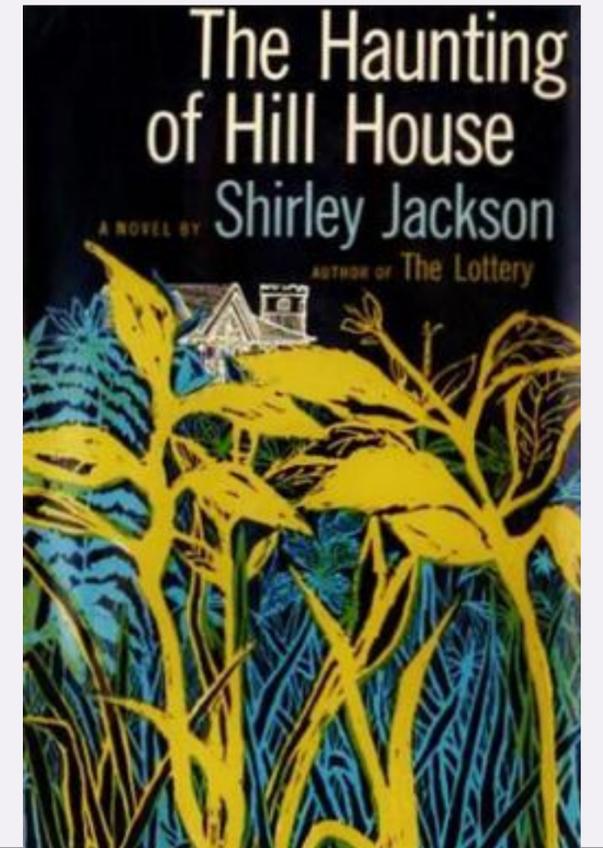
DONALD NORMAN



JACKSON CRITIQUES DOMESTIC GENDER ROLES WITH GOTHIC TROPES

- Eleanor (the protagonist) is vulnerable like most gothic heroines but her vulnerability doesn't come from inheritance -- it comes from women's lack of property rights and lack of options for work and housing outside of marriage, which Eleanor doesn't want.

- Hill House is a gothic castle but the evil comes from its creator: a controlling, tyrannical patriarch, Hugh Crain. Crain models the house after Victorian gender roles.



WISE SUPPORTS GENDER ROLES, WEAKENS GOTHIC TIES

- Wise portrays Eleanor as childish and difficult to root for, interfering with her status as a protagonist. Wise also makes it seem like her problems come from failing to get a husband rather than struggling under the patriarchy.

- Dr. Markway, is portrayed as a beacon of logic and his point of view permeates the film, interfering with both Jackson's feminist messaging and also the film's gothic atmosphere (the gothic is about uncertainty and emotion over logic)





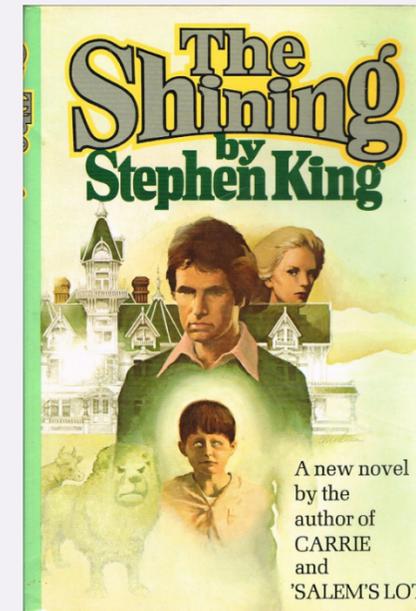
WENDY: MAKING A GOTHIC HEROINE

CREATING SUBVERSION

HAUNTED HOUSEHOLDS

THE SHINING (1977) by Stephen King & THE SHINING (1980) dir. Stanley Kubrick

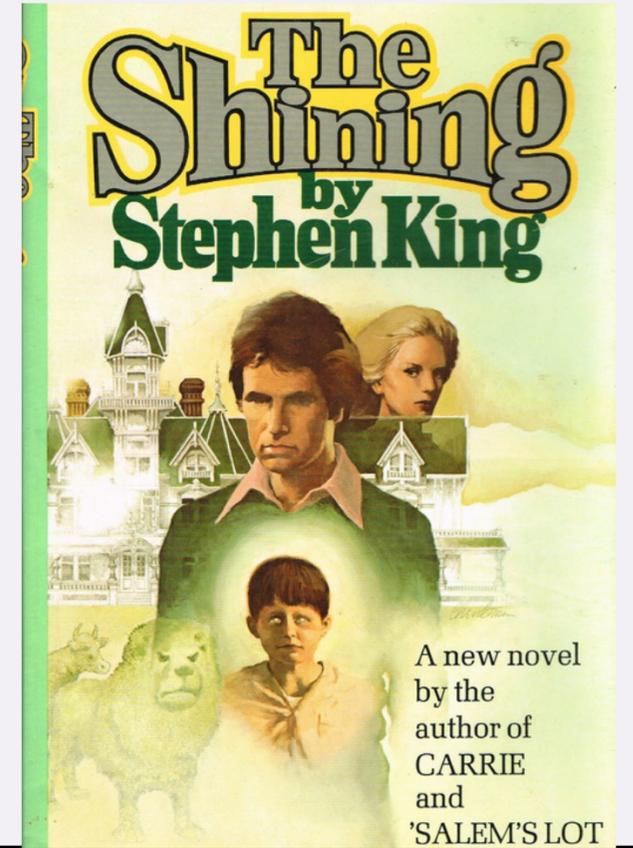
DONALD NORMAN



KING DEHUMANIZES WENDY, RUINING HER GOTHIC HEROINE STATUS

King initially tries to set Wendy up as a gothic heroine by emphasizing her isolation at the Overlook Hotel, a gothic castle. He sabotages this characterization by objectifying Wendy and using graphic violence to degrade her.

King's portrayal of domestic abuse upholds the patriarchal structures of power that enable this abuse -- he blames Wendy for not leaving Jack, implies that she is weak, and replaces Jack with a new father figure in the end, supporting traditional family structures.



KUBRICK EMPOWERS WENDY, RESTORING HER GOTHIC HEROINE STATUS

Kubrick removes King's body horror and objectification, allowing

- Wendy to become a gothic heroine. He also offers a far more progressive portrayal of domestic abuse, clearly establishing that Jack is responsible for him abusing his family, not Wendy.

Kubrick shows throughout the film that Wendy and her son,

- Danny, are a complete family without their patriarch. In the end, Wendy saves herself and Danny, and their little family escapes together.





HYSTERICAL CHRIS

REINFORCING CONSERVATISM

HAUNTED HOUSEHOLDS

THE EXORCIST (1971)

by William Peter

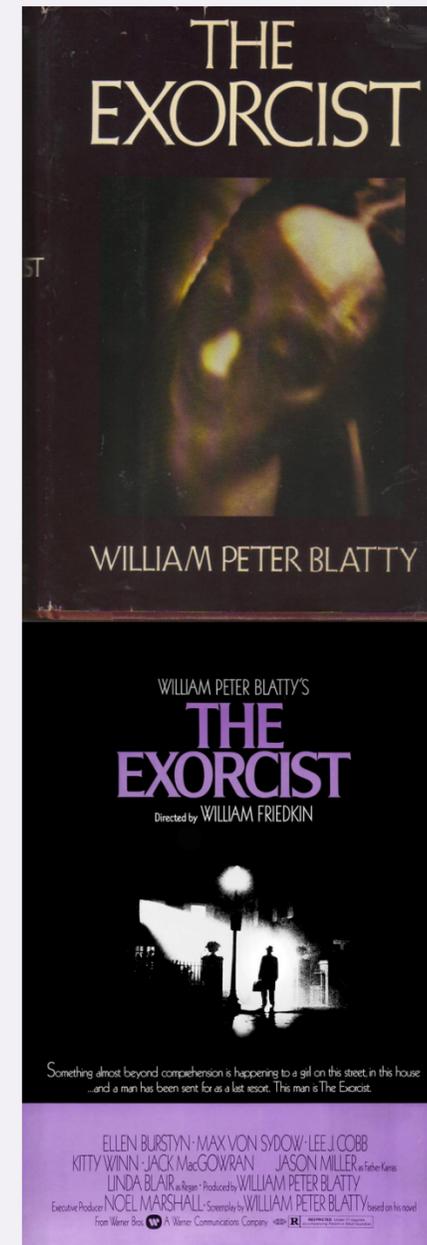
Blatty

&

THE EXORCIST (1973)

dir. William Friedkin

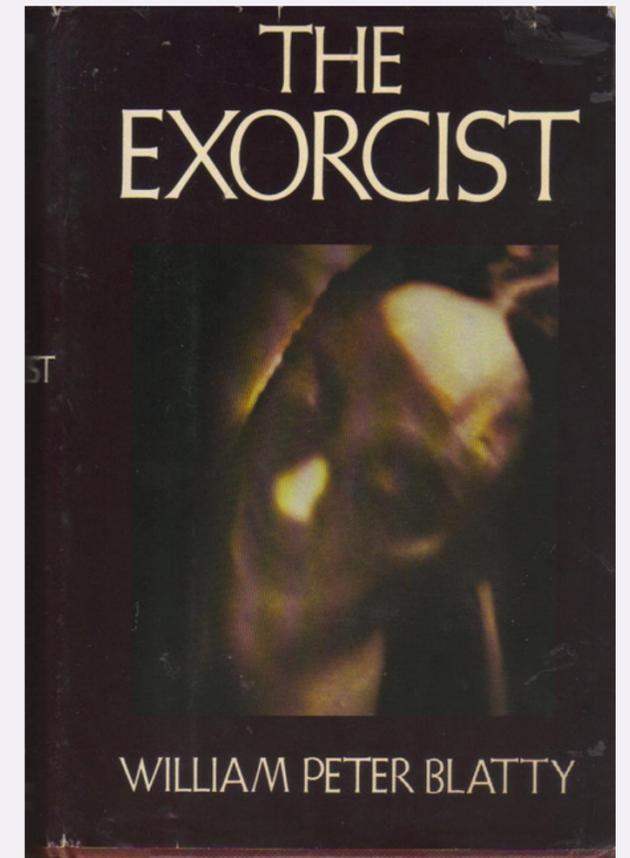
DONALD NORMAN



BLATTY TIES REGAN'S POSSESSION TO CHRIS'S FAILURE AS A BREADWINNER

- Blatty does not immediately make clear that Regan's possession is supernatural and not medical but for both, he supplies multiple reasons for Regan's suffering that tie back to Chris's incompetence as a single working parent and as head of her family.

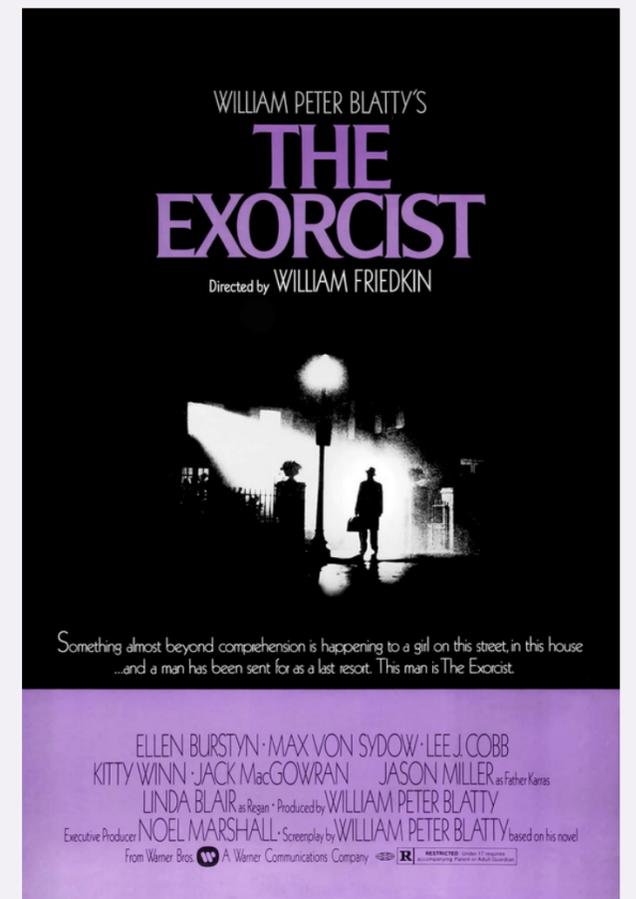
- Blatty uses graphic descriptions of Regan's body to create horror out of Chris's failure to protect Regan or make Regan conform to traditional gender roles.



FRIEDKIN STRENGTHENS BLATTY'S CRITICISM OF CHRIS AND HER NONTRADITIONAL FAMILY

- Friedkin directed the adaptation but Blatty actually adapted his novel into the film's screenplay. In this example of adaptation, the film reinforces the book's use of genre and gender politics.

- Friedkin and Blatty alter Chris's characterization, heightening her emotional reactions to the point of hysteria and making her look even less like a competent parent. They also greatly increase the sexual violence in Regan's possession, further emphasizing Chris's failure to protect her daughter.



CONCLUSIONS



#1 HORROR AND THE
GOTHIC CAN BE USED
TO DEFEND POLAR
OPPOSITE IDEAS AND
SHOULD BE JUDGED
BY THEIR SOCIAL
IMPACT

#2 ADAPTATIONS
SHOULD LIKEWISE BE
JUDGED BY THEIR
SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL IMPACT
INSTEAD OF
FAITHFULNESS TO
SOURCE MATERIAL