While gruesome monsters and gory imagery are undoubtedly terrifying, it is the ambiguous nature of the paranormal or unexplainable events that truly evokes the sensation of fear. By closely examining Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, we can observe just how terrifying it can be to remain ignorant of the danger that surrounds us. Both Jackson and Poe use ambiguity to heighten themes of terror in their stories, with a common theme of psychological horror, in addition to supernatural and ghostly elements. Through unreliable narrators, vaguely explained supernatural occurrences, and a slow descent into madness, these authors create a world where fear comes from not what you see, but rather what you cannot explain.

The character of Eleanor in Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* presents a perfect example of the unreliable narrator, as her thoughts and feelings described by Jackson, are fairly subjective. Throughout the novel, we get a glimpse into her inner monologue as it begins to fuse with the house, gradually taking over her sense of self and psychological stability. Conversely, in *The Tell-Tale Heart,* the narrator begins with an insistent statement questioning his sanity, suggesting "it is impossible to say how the idea first entered my brain" (Poe). Both Jackson and Poe employ the unreliable nature and psychological instability of their narrators to integrate a sense of ambiguity deeply embedded in their work, where the reader cannot even be fully sure what to believe.

The absence of tangible horror is another common theme in both these stories that showcase the true terror of vaguely explained supernatural instances. Most evident in *The Haunting of Hill House*, we never see or are told of an explicit incident involving a ghost or a creature; only the aftermath or disturbances they cause. Whether it is the mysterious writing on the wall persuading Eleanor to "come home" or the persistent knocking on doors in the middle of

the night, we as readers are never provided with an explanation for these events; only that it is the result of the house itself. The fear of something unknown to us, or known but incomprehensible or indescribable, makes Jackson's novel a classic depiction of the uncanny and ambiguous use of terror in Gothic Literature.

The conclusion to each of these stories also provides an excellent example of ambiguity or uncertainty as a memorable yet terrifying concept in Gothic literature. In Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, we are left with a profoundly ambiguous conclusion, and aside from the confession of murder from the narrator, we have no knowledge of what will become of him or the remainder of the story. Similarly, Jackson's ending sentence to the novel leaves us with an unsettling feeling of curiosity as she vaguely states: "...and whatever walked there, walked alone," suggesting that there is even more terror embedded in Hill House than we were ever exposed to. This lingering sensation of psychological fear, coupled with unresolved conclusions, makes both these stories complete with open-ended terror, an element integral to Gothic literature.