

Introduction



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“The Gothic has always had links with adolescence,” Glennis Byron and Sharon Deans maintain (Hogle, 2014), arguing that the teenage character, whose mind and body are marked by growth and transformation, may be construed as a gothic trope, as a metaphor for disturbance and liminality.

Borrowing from Victorian iconography and gothic literature, Goth subculture(s) emerged in Britain and the USA in the early 1980s, in the latter days of the punk movement. Pervading a variety of cultural productions, from music to fashion and films, Goth and teen culture coalesced in rebellion against the prevailing *zeitgeist* of the time.

However, in the 21st century, Goth is no longer considered a transgressive subculture, but, rather, as part of mainstream pop culture, especially with the explosion in teen-gothic television. A form of Gothicisation of popular culture seems to have taken place, with the central figure of the vampire, trapped in the forever young body of a teenager or young adult, the – literally – undying image of a tortured individual who struggles to come to terms with his/her new identity.

This publication is part of a wider project that aims to further Chloe Buckley and Catherine Spooner’s work on the Gothic in respectively children’s fiction (Buckley, 2019) and the “teen-marketing machine” of the post-millennial Gothic (Spooner, 2017: 84) by exploring the multifaceted connections between children and teenagers and contemporary Gothic productions. In that respect, young adults and children are to be understood as either the primary targets of those literary, television and film productions or as the fictional constructs around which the Gothic plot is articulated. Our project is therefore located at the crossroads of fan culture studies and generic studies, between reception and production, just like the contemporary Gothic productions we are interested in jeopardise

the commonly assumed superiority of content (the Gothic story) over form (the Gothic look). Since recent Goth pop productions blur the lines between rewriting and ‘cashing in’ on over-used motifs, while relentlessly advocating for cultural and generic hybridity, one may wonder to what extent the child and teenage figure is both the herald and the consumer of this rebranding of Gothic popular culture.

This project thus encompasses a series of issues ranging from the legitimization of the Gothic by the cultural and educational establishment to its hybridisation with other narrative forms and/or aesthetics such as comedy and romance (Spooner, 2017). The latter phenomenon is particularly questioning as it may seem to contradict the defining features of Gothic in diluting the uncanny into mainstream syrupy pop culture. What happens to the transgressive – and unsettling – dimension of the Gothic when it is described – as is often the case with contemporary productions – as cheerful and joyous? True, the Gothic is intrinsically unstable but isn’t its shift towards “positive” and even “happy” Gothic fiction (Spooner, 2017) oxymoronic? In moving away from the margins and in being appropriated by mainstream audiences, is the Gothic still reflecting the fears and traumas of our time as the canon would? Such critics as Fred Botting contend that the Gothic is now reduced to mere aesthetic and stylistic conventions (Botting, 2013) as it has become “a staple of consumer culture” (Buckley, 2019: 4). The uncanny (and also, to some extent, horror), being thus commodified, is said to have become too repetitive and familiar (Botting, 2013). In the context of the release of the *Twilight* film series, in 2012, *The Guardian* deplored the exhausted Gothic narrative form and format, mostly putting the blame on female and *younger* fans (quoted in Spooner). That is exactly what the ambition of this long-term project is about: examining the impact of younger readers and viewers on Gothic fiction while assuming a radically opposite position: we aim to demonstrate that, on the contrary, younger consumers of gothic narratives have prompted the rejuvenation and renewal of those stories and their storytelling strategies without necessarily debasing their original features. Unlike Botting, whose nostalgic stance towards postmodern Gothic considers its evolution as a form of decline, we wish to highlight the contemporary meaning and contemporaneous significance of today’s Gothic. The purpose is to explore a wide range of works and mediums in an attempt to define the intimate connection between youth and the gothic in the production of uncanny and horrific stories with, about, and for younger audiences. The first part of the project, which still welcomes additional contributions, focuses on Gothic teen culture in serial audio-visual fictions, whether the latter are seen on a TV screen, a tablet or phone screen. The second part aims to explore contemporary children’s gothic literature, textual and graphic, while the third part of the project is to delve into gothic

and horror films for and/or with children and teenagers, be they the intended viewers or the main protagonists.

The four pieces published in the present issue constitute the first step of this project as it focuses on Gothic TV series for teens as much as teens in Gothic TV series from 2000 till today. The contributions present in this volume discuss lost children, hunted and haunted children but also their antagonists – mad scientists, toxic mothers, absent fathers. They are also interested in the relationships between teens, space and time, exploring the liminal borders of haunted houses or on the contrary focusing on homeless children, wandering and nomadic teens.

Caroline Starzecky's paper opens this inaugural thematic cluster. It focuses on the Netflix adaptation of Lemony Snicket's book series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and examines the transmedial and intertextual strategies used to convey gothic aesthetic onscreen. Her paper entitled "Rethinking Gothic Stereotypes with Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*" ("Repenser le stéréotype gothique avec *Les Orphelins Baudelaire* de Lemony Snicket (1999-2006 ; 2017-2019)) eventually what is meant by the very term "gothic" when it qualifies a story for younger audiences.

Yannick Bellenger-Morvan then proposes a study of the "gothicized" places and young characters of the Netflix horror show *Stranger Things*. In "Reconstructing and/or Deconstructing the 1980s. Gothic and Horror Tropes in *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016-)", she demonstrates how the feeling of otherness and the uncanny are utilised as metaphorical representations of the marginalisation of the children that the Reaganite ideology considered as underdogs.

Valeria Emi Sgueglia and Camilla Stortini's article, entitled "Injustice, Discrimination and the Structuring of Sensitivity: Some Insights From *Shadowhunters*", explores the notion of subjective formation and the structuring of sensitivity in the TV series *Shadowhunters* (2015-2019), adapted from Cassandra Clare's novels *The Mortal Instruments* (2007-2014). It examines how both the books and the series reinscribe gothic themes in the modern world by engaging with (post-)feminism and exploring issues such as queerness and asexuality.

In "The physiology of thresholds in Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018)", Marine Galiné investigates the concept of adolescence through Mike Flanagan's specific use of boundaries and thresholds on the

level of space, body and direction. It also considers how the series revives gothic paraphernalia with the trope of the haunted house as sentient entity.

Overall, authors in the present publication point to the enduring capacity of the Gothic to express anxieties as regards one's changing mind and body (changing bodies, menstrual blood, newly experienced sexual drive), but also in a wider context of 21st century changes, crises and instability. The unavoidable burden of the past seems at times to encroach upon the fear of a looming and potentially threatening future, hence the troubled temporality in most of the texts under study – the 1980s, the 1990s, an indeterminate time...

Further readings

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