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Gothic, Teen, and Pop Culture

edited by MARINE GALINÉ
and YANNICK BELLENGER-MORVAN

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Dans ce numéro

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 "gothicity" when it qualifies a story for younger audiences.

Yannick Bellenger-Movan 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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Repenser le stéréotype gothique avec les orphelins Baudelaire de Lemony Snicket (1999-2006 ; 2017-2019)

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Résumé : L'ensemble romanesque *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999-2006 ; *Les Désastreuses Aventures des orphelins Baudelaire*, 2002-2007) de l'auteur américain Daniel Handler (Lemony Snicket) a été adapté sur la plateforme de *streaming* Netflix entre 2017 et 2019, plus de dix ans après la fin de la parution des volumes. L'œuvre de Snicket, tant littéraire que télévisuelle, s'adresse en priorité aux enfants âgés de 9 à 12 ans et interroge les stéréotypes du genre gothique, notamment au XXIe siècle où la notion d'esthétique prévaut sur son contenu. Ceci permet de créer une nouvelle forme de relation entre forme et fond dans les médias visuels adressés aux jeunes. Cette étude se veut double : bien qu'il ne soit pas strictement comparatif, l'article se propose d'analyser à la fois les thèmes et la structure de *A Series of Unfortunate Events* sur le papier et dans l'adaptation à l'écran du point de vue de la « gothicité ». Nous verrons que l'œuvre de Snicket est gothique à travers son utilisation de l'intermédialité et de l'intertextualité. Il s'agit ainsi d'examiner la manière dont les oeuvres fictionnelles gothiques pour le jeune lectorat peuvent être lus et comprises à travers le prisme de la notion de « l'esthétique ».

Mots clés : Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, gothicité, adaptation, esthétique

Abstract: The thirteen-book series *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999-2006) by the American author Daniel Handler (Lemony Snicket) has been adapted on the streaming platform Netflix between 2017 and 2019, more than ten years after the last volume was published. Both on paper and on screen, *A Series* mainly targets children aged 9 to 12 and testifies the popularity of the genre for young readerships and audiences – even crossover ones. It further questions the stereotypes of the Gothic genre, especially in

the 21st century which seems to put more emphasis on the notion of aesthetics than on that of content. A new relationship between form and substance in visual media for the young is thus created. This study has a dual purpose: although not a comparative analysis, the article shall analyse the themes and the structure of *A Series* on paper and in the TV adaptation from the perspective of 'gothicity'. A few aspects of the reasons why *A Series* is a Gothic work shall be discussed here, as for instance its use of intertextuality and intermediality, but also the use of visual and sound aesthetics. We shall see how contemporary Gothic fictions for young audiences are to be understood nowadays through the spectrum of 'aesthetics'.

Keywords: Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, Gothicity, Adaptation, Aesthetics

Introduction

« I am sitting in my room, in the middle of the night, writing down this story and looking out my window at the graveyard behind my home. »
(Snicket, 1999c : 80-81)

De nombreuses productions pour la jeunesse au XXIe siècle ont hérité des traditions du genre gothique du XIXe siècle, notamment en empruntant images et motifs à des œuvres influentes comme *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley (1818) ou *The Fall of the House of Usher* d'Edgar Allan Poe (1839). Ces traditions se retrouvent dans des œuvres populaires comme la nouvelle « The Gashlycrumb Tinies » d'Edward Gorey (1963) ou comme le film en noir et blanc et *stop-motion Frankenweenie* (2012) de Tim Burton[1]. Des romans *Coraline* (2002) et *The Graveyard Book* (2008 ; *L'Étrange Vie de Nobody Owens*) de Neil Gaiman ou *The Vanishing Trick* (2020) de Jenni Spangler prouvent tous que le genre gothique a su traverser les époques et plaire à un lectorat plus ou moins jeune. De la même manière, les adaptations télévisuelles des fictions gothiques pour la jeunesse sont aujourd'hui populaires car elles jouent sur les représentations stéréotypiques du genre, ou les subvertissent. Depuis le début du XXIe siècle, il y a également une plus grande attention portée sur l'esthétique gothique, comme le note Catherine Spooner (2017 : 10) :

> *While demonstrating multiple variations, twenty-first-century Gothic style can be recognized by a combination of features* […]. *In terms of*

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1. Le réalisateur se serait inspiré des œuvres de Gorey ; voir par exemple : Lackner, 2013.

genre recognition, what Gothic looks like is increasingly becoming as important as the stories that it tells[2].

Il convient donc de s'intéresser à la représentation du gothique à l'écran à l'aune du siècle, puisque le genre est en constante évolution et son entremêlement avec la littérature de jeunesse permet de réfléchir à ses stéréotypes. Cette étude sera centrée sur l'œuvre de Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*[3], qui a su prouver son originalité, comme le rappelle Buckley :

A Series of Unfortunate Events *is a landmark text because it inaugurates a new form of Gothic writing for children in the postmillennial period that challenges assumptions about Gothic and children's literature alike.* A Series *positively reconfigures Gothic exile, but also resists the cosy restitution associated with children's literature. The mystery of the fire remains impervious to hermeneutics; neither the Baudelaires nor the readers find any answers about the unexplained deaths that precipitate the adventure*[4].

La suite littéraire a été adaptée une première fois au cinéma en 2004. S'adressant en premier lieu aux enfants[5], il s'agit d'une adaptation libre des trois premiers tomes de l'ensemble romanesque de Snicket. L'auteur souhaitait initialement écrire un roman gothique pour adultes, mais il ne parvenait pas à trouver de protagoniste à son goût ; une fois décidé à écrire pour un public plus jeune, il craignait de ne pas pouvoir trouver de maison d'édition pour publier de tels textes (Chainani, 2019). Cette peur illustre la stigmatisation qui entoure la fiction gothique pour la jeunesse et qui a hanté l'œuvre de l'auteur. En effet, en 2006, un secteur scolaire au Texas

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2.   « Tout en présentant de nombreuses variations, le style gothique du XXIe siècle peut être reconnu par une combinaison de traits distinctifs [...]. En termes de reconnaissance du genre, l'esthétique du gothique prend de plus en plus le pas sur l'histoire qu'il raconte. » (toutes les traductions seront personnelles, sauf indiqué).

3.   En quelques mots, l'ensemble romanesque suit les aventures de Violet, Klaus et Sunny (Prunille) Baudelaire, devenus orphelins après avoir perdu leurs parents dans un incendie. Ils sont adoptés par le comte Olaf, qui, avec sa troupe théâtrale (et criminelle), en a après la fortune qui leur a été léguée. À la suite de l'échec de ses premiers plans, les enfants sont replacés, mais le comte ne cesse de les poursuivre de tome en tome. Le fait que l'intrigue porte sur des orphelins et orphelines rapproche d'ailleurs l'œuvre du genre du mélodrame (Charles Dickens) mais également du genre gothique.

4.   « *A Series of Unfortunate Events* est un texte majeur car il inaugure une nouvelle forme d'écriture du gothique pour les enfants dans l'époque post-milléniale qui remet en question des hypothèses établies, que ce soit sur le gothique ou sur la littérature de jeunesse. *A Series* reconfigure de manière positive l'exil gothique, mais résiste toutefois à la restitution réconfortante associée à la littérature de jeunesse. Le mystère de l'incendie demeure imperméable à l'herméneutique ; ni les Baudelaire, ni le lectorat ne trouvent de réponses concernant les décès inexpliqués qui lancent l'aventure. »

5.   Bien qu'il n'y ait aucune information officielle à ce sujet, le site https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/lemony-snickets-a-series-of-unfortunate-events indique que le film s'adresse aux enfants de plus de dix ans ; le site https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/63140 indique qu'il s'agit de « *children's works* » ; et sur le site https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0339291/parentalguide?ref_=tt_stry_pg, le film est conseillé « PG » aux États-Unis, soit « *Parental Guidance Suggested (mainly for under 10's)* », c'est-à-dire s'adressant aux enfants mais avec présence d'un adulte. Il est conseillé « tous publics » en France sur ce même site (les trois liens ont été consultés en dernier le 17 août 2022).

avait banni les romans de Snicket pour cause de violence et d'horreur excessive (Flood, 2014). Pourtant, 65 millions d'exemplaires se sont vendus dans le monde entre 1999 et 2015, ce qui démontre bien la popularité de la fiction gothique au XXIe siècle, comme le rappelle Cross (2008 : 57) :

> *Snicket's* A Series of Unfortunate Events *has, in a large way, contributed to the increase in popularity of the genre, spawning many imitators. This planned series of thirteen has achieved huge sales and many critical plaudits, which generally acknowledge the complexity and sophistication of the self-reflexivity and intertextuality of the darkly witty texts, which are full of narrative tricks*[6].

Souvent rapproché du genre *steampunk*, l'esthétique du film de 2004 reprend pourtant des éléments esthétiques stéréotypiques du genre gothique : l'histoire se déroule dans un monde qui rappelle l'ère victorienne, les enfants portent des vêtements d'époque de couleur neutre et sombre, allant du beige au noir, et les décors, en particulier le manoir du comte Olaf, évoquent la terreur et le mystère. La bâtisse possède une tour, évoquant le château gothique, et lorsqu'elle apparaît à l'écran pour la première fois, c'est sur fond de nuages menaçants et d'arbres morts et tentaculaires. Ces motifs se retrouvent à travers le film d'une heure et demie, soulignant ainsi l'aspect visuel du gothique.

Dans la continuité du film, l'adaptation Netflix[7] des romans (2017-2019) reprend quelques-uns de ces éléments mais subvertit davantage les représentations du genre. Plus complète, la série télévisuelle offre trois saisons de huit, dix et sept épisodes de 35 à 55 minutes. Chaque volume est adapté en deux épisodes, donnant ainsi plus de place à l'intrigue que dans le film. Seul le dernier tome, *The End* (2006 ; *La Fin*, 2007) a été adapté en un seul épisode de 55 minutes.

Étant donné que l'adaptation est récente, elle nous permet de réexaminer la manière dont le genre gothique est perçu à la fin des années 2010 et comment sa représentation a évolué à l'écran. Puisque le genre a toujours été à la fois transgressif et excessif (Botting, 2005), l'analyse de l'adaptation ouvre de nouvelles manières de comprendre le genre gothique au XXIe siècle. Comme l'avance Spooner, le gothique n'a cessé d'évoluer avec les siècles : « *Gothic has adapted and changed with the*

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6.   « *A Series of Unfortunate Events* de Snicket a contribué en grande partie à la popularité croissante du genre, engendrant de nombreuses imitations. Cette série de treize tomes planifiée à l'avance a réalisé d'importantes ventes et a reçu de multiples éloges de la part de la critique, qui reconnaît en règle générale la complexité et la sophistication de l'autoréflexivité ainsi que l'intertextualité de ces textes à l'humour noir, qui regorgent de petites pépites narratives. »

7.   Notons que l'auteur, Daniel Handler (Lemony Snicket) a fait partie de l'équipe d'écriture du script de la série.

times, […] *why should this now end?*[8] » (2017 : 10) Cette étude nous permettra d'analyser de quelle manière *A Series of Unfortunate Events* est une œuvre de l'entre-deux qui s'inscrit dans une lignée indubitablement gothique (« *the genre's acknowledged ambiguity, instability and boundary-crossing*[9] » [Cross, 2008 : 65]). Plus largement, nous démontrerons que la particularité de *A Series of Unfortunate Events* est sa force intertextuelle et intermédiale : Handler/Snicket illustre la plasticité du genre gothique en l'adaptant aux contraintes des médias contemporains, *c'est-à-dire* en déployant les stéréotypes gothiques de ses romans dans le film et la série télévisuelle susmentionnée. Les trois supports se complémentent, à la frontière de la transmédialité[10] (Jenkins, 2006). Nous définirons d'abord ce qu'est le gothique en littérature de jeunesse, avant d'analyser *A Series of Unfortunate Events* sous le spectre du cliché gothique. Nous déroulerons ensuite le genre en trois parties pour en comprendre les tenants et aboutissants dans le contexte de l'adaptation de l'œuvre de Snicket. Nous nous interrogerons ainsi sur la valeur esthétique du gothique dans l'adaptation télévisuelle de l'œuvre à destination d'enfants et d'adolescents et ce que cela nous apprend sur la fiction gothique pour la jeunesse à la fin des années 2010.

Le gothique en littérature de jeunesse : quelques clés

Avant de se plonger dans le monde fictionnel de Snicket, penchons-nous sur quelques concepts et limites. Tout d'abord, clarifions ce que nous entendons par le genre gothique. Sans entrer dans les détails théoriques, le gothique est un genre artistique dont les auteurs se sont peu à peu approprié les codes à partir du xviiie siècle en Grande-Bretagne dès la parution de *The Castle of Otranto* de Horace Walpole (1764). Le genre n'a cessé de gagner en popularité durant le xixe siècle, à la fois en évoluant et en gardant les mêmes images significatives à travers les œuvres illustres de Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft et d'autres. Le gothique questionne les frontières entre la littérature populaire et « intellectuelle », et examine ce que Kilgour appelle la collision du passé et du présent (1995 : 17-18). De plus, le gothique a une histoire tumultueuse et a été tout autant apprécié que dénigré pour ses thématiques

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8. « Le gothique s'est adapté et a changé avec le temps […] pourquoi cela s'arrêterait-il maintenant ? »
9. « L'ambiguïté, l'instabilité et le dépassement des limites reconnues du genre ».
10. L'intermédialité qualifie la relation qui existe entre chaque média/support et qui peut modifier la cohérence de l'ensemble fictionnel. La transmédialité, quant à elle, est ici à comprendre dans le sens où chaque média apporte des informations uniques à l'ensemble fictionnel. Le point de vue est plus large. Selon Jenkins (2011), « *Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.* »

allant de l'étrange (*unheimlich*) à l'exploration de ce qui hante un individu, en passant par les apparitions supernaturelles. Ceci va de pair avec la prépondérance des endroits clos et isolés, par exemple l'image du château. La peur émane de l'extérieur, comme dans le roman *Dracula* de Bram Stoker (1897) avec la figure du vampire. Quand le genre s'est étendu outre-Atlantique, le « *New American Gothic* » a déplacé le curseur, et l'exploration de la psyché humaine a pris plus de place dans les œuvres, puisque comme le dit Durot-Boucé, « c'est que l'horreur vient maintenant de l'intérieur, du moi » (2013 : 99).

Le gothique dans les œuvres de jeunesse réutilise tous ces codes mais avec un ton généralement différent. Selon Jackson, Coats et McGillis, le lectorat jeunesse est naturellement attiré par ce qui fait peur : « *fear or the pretence of fear has become a dominant mode of enjoyment in literature for young people*[11] » (2008 : 1) ; et d'ajouter (2008 : 2) :

> *Perhaps the really strange development of the eighteenth century was the transformation of the Gothic narrative into an adult genre, when it had really belonged to children's literature all along*[12].

Il y aurait un lien fort entre gothique et littérature pour la jeunesse, et nous constatons une accélération des publications gothiques ou d'inspiration gothiques à destination d'enfants et d'adolescents depuis la fin du xxᵉ siècle, notamment en littérature *Young Adult* (*YA*)[13]. Deux éléments peuvent expliquer l'attrait du lectorat jeunesse pour des œuvres *a priori* lugubres et terrifiantes. D'une part, la lecture (et par extension le visionnage) de fiction gothique pour la jeunesse permet au lectorat (et spectatorat) visé de tester ses propres limites : il y a une forme de jeu (« jouer à se faire peur ») tout en restant en sécurité, puisque tout se déroule à distance dans le monde fictionnel (*ibid* : 11) :

> *Everyone likes a good shiver because it shakes us free of security while leaving our security intact. The appeal is the appeal of danger, beckoning us to be just a bit more daring, a bit more wild than our normal lives might allow for*[14].

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11. « La peur ou la simulation de la peur est devenu un mode de plaisir dominant dans la littérature pour la jeunesse. »
12. « L'évolution la plus étrange du xviiiᵉ siècle a peut-être été la transformation du récit gothique en un genre pour adulte, alors qu'il avait en réalité toujours appartenu à la littérature pour enfants. »
13. Notons ici trois grands phénomènes à la fois éditoriaux et cinématographiques/télévisuels qui sont à l'origine des romans gothiques/à influence gothique pour la jeunesse/*YA* : *Harry Potter* (1999-2007) de J. K. Rowling ; *Twilight* (2005-2020) de Stephenie Meyer et *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-1992 ; 2009-2014) de L. J. Smith.
14. « Tout le monde aime ressentir un bon frisson parce que cela nous libère de la notion de sécurité tout en la laissant intacte. L'attrait ici est celui du danger, nous encourageant à être un peu plus audacieux, un peu plus sauvage que ce que nous permettent nos vies de tous les jours. »

D'autre part, le « tournant comique » du gothique (Horner et Zlosnik, 2004) désamorce certains éléments intimidants propres au genre. Selon Cross, la juxtaposition d'éléments grotesques[15] et lugubres permet de contrebalancer la frayeur que peut ressentir le lectorat/spectatorat (2008 : 65). Les œuvres de Roald Dahl, par exemple, font preuve d'humour noir tout en mettant en scène des situations cruelles mais exagérées, comme dans *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) à travers les deux personnages adultes, Aunt Sponge et Aunt Spike, détestables mais ridicules.

La popularité de la fiction gothique pour la jeunesse croît donc, et les similarités entre le gothique et la littérature pour la jeunesse sont nombreuses. La sérialité est par exemple un facteur de vente important dans les deux domaines, car les romans gothiques des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles étaient souvent vendus sous forme de « *chapbooks* » ou « *shilling shockers* », tout comme la littérature pour la jeunesse, de manière générale, l'est aujourd'hui avec ses multiples séries et cycles littéraires[16]. L'association des domaines ne leur donne cependant pas nécessairement une bonne image. En effet, le genre gothique a longtemps été considéré comme étant de la « paralittérature » destinée à de l'amusement populaire, et non comme une forme littéraire à part entière (Davison, 2009 : 6). La littérature de jeunesse souffre elle aussi de ce stigmate, tantôt qualifiée de littérature de genre, de littérature populaire voire commerciale (Besson, 2004 : 5). Pourtant, la popularité de la fiction gothique pour la jeunesse prouve son importance à la fois en termes économiques et éducatifs. En incorporant de l'humour dans les romans gothiques, les auteurs d'œuvres pour la jeunesse peuvent confronter leur lectorat (et spectatorat) à un niveau métaphorique et linguistique plus élevé, les rendant ainsi plus actifs dans leur lecture (et visionnage) (Cross, 2008 : 64 ; Coats, 2018 : 160). Le développement de capacités cognitives illustre donc en partie l'intérêt de ces œuvres pour un jeune public.

À la frontière de différentes influences, notamment du morose et du comique, les œuvres gothiques pour la jeunesse sont à l'image du genre qu'elles représentent. Au-delà de l'objectif concret que cette liminalité apporte, elle donne aussi à voir l'adaptabilité et la popularité du genre, qui s'adresse à un public plus large. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* est une œuvre du tournant du XXIe siècle qui joue pleinement de l'écart qui peut exister entre le terrifiant, le morne et l'amusant à travers l'absurde, le grotesque voire le ridicule.

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15. Le terme « grotesque » est à comprendre ici comme « prêt[ant] à rire par son côté invraisemblable, excentrique ou extravagant » (CNRTL, « grotesque »).
16. Pensons par exemple à la série littéraire *Goosebumps* de R. L. Stine (1992-1997 ; *Chair de poule*, 1995-2001) qui a été diffusée sur Fox Kids de 1995 à 1998. Elle reprend les codes stéréotypiques du gothique : vampires, fantômes, château, chauve-souris, etc.

A Series of Unfortunate Events et ses clichés gothiques

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L'œuvre intermédiale de Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, est indubitablement gothique. Bien qu'il n'y ait pas de vampire, de monstre ou de château, de nombreux autres motifs centraux du genre font partie intégrante de la construction de l'univers fictionnel. L'un de ces motifs est la mort, presque omniprésente[17]. Dans le premier épisode, pour ne citer qu'un exemple, les Baudelaire sont à la plage *Briny Beach* lorsqu'ils apprennent par M. Poe, le banquier de leurs parents, que ces derniers sont décédés. Il est introduit par un grand angle statique de quelques secondes, et la brume l'accompagne. Il descend les escaliers le menant à la plage, et s'arrête près d'un panneau « DANGER », présageant la suite[18]. Klaus ne peut s'empêcher de se rassurer d'un euphémisme : « *It only seems scary because of all the mist*[19] » (S01E01, 7'58"). M. Poe leur annonce d'un ton très léger, presque en souriant : « *It is a very nice day. I have some very bad news for you children. Your parents have perished in a terrible fire*[20] » (S01E01, 8'32"). Cette juxtaposition exemplifie l'effet d'incongruité dont parle Cross, créé par le décalage entre le glauque et le comique (2008 : 65). Toute une imagerie décalée est élaborée autour de l'annonce concernant la mort des parents Baudelaire, donnant à M. Poe le rôle d'un ange de la mort absurde, ce qui renforce paradoxalement le motif de la mort.

De plus, les protagonistes sont constamment en décalage avec le monde qui les entoure, ce qui met en lumière une forme de malaise et qui explique le rejet qu'ils subissent. Au début du premier épisode, les Baudelaire se rendent à Briny Beach alors qu'il ne fait pas spécialement beau. Le conducteur de tramway est étonné car il y a une fête foraine en ville au même moment (S01E01 : 3'45"-3'53") :

> TROLLEY MAN. *Hey kids! Aren't you going to the Festive Fun Fair, with all the jolly rides and games and snacks?* […]
> VIOLET. *Thank you, but it's a perfect morning to go to the beach.*
> TROLLEY MAN. *It's gray and cloudy.*
> VIOLET. *That's what makes it perfect*[21].

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17. Notons que la mort est un motif central en littérature de jeunesse de manière générale, notamment aux XIXe et XXIe siècles.
18. M. Poe tousse énormément. Mis à part l'effet comique de répétition et de gestuelle, il s'agit d'un clin d'œil au poète Edgar Allan Poe (onomastique), dont certaines rumeurs voudraient qu'il soit décédé de la tuberculose.
19. « Cela paraît terrifiant à cause de toute cette brume, c'est tout. »
20. « J'ai de très mauvaises nouvelles à vous annoncer, les enfants. Vos parents ont péri dans un terrible incendie. »
21. « CONDUCTEUR DE TRAMWAY. Hé les enfants ! Vous n'allez pas à la Festive fête foraine, avec ses manages, ses jeux et ses glaces ? […] / VIOLET. C'est gentil à vous, mais c'est le matin idéal pour aller à la plage. / CONDUCTEUR DE TRAMWAY. Il fait gris et nuageux. / VIOLET. C'est pour cela que c'est idéal. » (sous-titres de la plateforme Netflix).

Le fait que les Baudelaire préfèrent passer du temps entre eux et non au milieu d'une foule les sépare des enfants de leur âge et leur donne un statut marginal, à l'image du genre gothique qu'ils représentent. Leur origine sociale ainsi que leurs intérêts accentuent cette séparation. Les enfants sont issus d'une famille « *upper-middle-class* », ou grande bourgeoisie : ils vivent dans un grand manoir et ont toujours eu accès à des cours privés ainsi qu'à une éducation privilégiée, notamment l'ingénierie pour Violet[22] et la littérature/recherche pour Klaus. Ils héritent également d'une large fortune à la mort de leurs parents. Au cours de leurs aventures, les enfants ne sont jamais contactés par d'autres pairs de leur âge, ce qui prouve potentiellement qu'ils ont toujours été isolés du monde extérieur[23]. Les seuls compagnons qu'ils parviennent à se faire sont Isadora, Duncan et, plus tard, Quigley Quagmire, d'autres orphelins partageant leur statut et leur situation. Ces notions d'isolement et de différence peuvent procurer au lectorat un sentiment de réconfort (littérature de jeunesse) juxtaposé à celui de l'inconfort (gothique).

L'œuvre a été critiquée d'un côté pour sa répétitivité (Butt, 2003) et d'un autre pour sa violence (Rathing, 2010[24]). Pourtant, ces aspects font partie intégrante de la popularité du genre gothique, que ce soit sur la page ou à l'écran (Sottiletta, 2017 : 7). L'adaptation de *A Series of Unfortunate Events* prouve ainsi à travers les motifs qu'elle aborde qu'elle est une œuvre gothique pour la jeunesse à part entière qui cherche à interpeller son jeune spectatorat et à le faire réfléchir.

Intertextualité et intermédialité au service du gothique

L'œuvre de Snicket est de ce fait gothique dans les thèmes qu'elle aborde, mais le genre se retrouve également à un niveau plus large, puisque le gothique s'alimente d'autres genres pour évoluer et plaire à un lectorat/spectatorat plus large (Kilgour, 1995 : 4) : « [*the Gothic*] *feeds upon and mixes the whole range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself* [25] ». Nous analyserons la force intergénérique de l'œuvre ci-dessus ; il s'agit ici de remarquer que les romans *A Series of Unfortunate Events* sont souvent catégorisés comme

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22. Notons le renversement traditionnel des rôles ; Sunny, la jeune sœur de moins de deux ans, est également plus manuelle que son frère.
23. Une seule mention est faite d'amis potentiels des Baudelaire avant l'incendie qui a causé la mort de leurs parents, mais elle est si brève qu'elle en devient anecdotique (1999a, 34).
24. La chercheuse ne critique pas à proprement parler la violence présente dans les œuvres, mais démontre que cette violence est exagérée et mise en parallèle avec de nombreux éléments métafictionnels afin de développer la pensée critique du jeune lectorat.
25. « [Le gothique] mélange et se nourrit de la multitude des sources littéraires dont il émerge et dont il ne parvient jamais totalement à se libérer. »

appartenant au sous-genre *steampunk*, qui appartient lui-même au gothique néo-victorien, comme Julie Cross le remarque :

> [*The books*] *can be classed as a variation of historical fiction termed "Victorian Steampunk" or Neo-Victorianism – a sub-genre in which young people with modern sensibilities struggle against great odds in an anachronistic society, which often contains some forms of modern technology*[26].

Les œuvres *steampunk* reprennent des styles visuels de l'ère victorienne voire édouardienne mais incorporent des éléments technologiques plus modernes, et sont néo-victoriennes en cela qu'elles n'apportent pas qu'un regard nostalgique sur le passé mais également un désir de réinvention (Arias & Pulham, 2010 : xii). Il y a dans *A Series of Unfortunate Events* une démarche postmoderne de subversion des clichés utilisés. Le comportement du narrateur, Lemony Snicket, dont la présence peut être perçue comme didactique, prouve l'importance des traditions victoriennes dans l'œuvre. Toutefois, l'absurdité des interventions du narrateur, son décalage avec d'autres figures semblables ainsi que la conscience qu'il a de lui-même feraient de lui un narrateur néo-victorien. En complément, voitures, tramways, télégraphes, téléphones et même ordinateur (S02E01-02) se côtoient tout au long de l'œuvre dans une esthétique contemporaine au niveau de l'architecture et des tenues. Contrairement au film, peu d'éléments rappellent visuellement l'époque victorienne ou édouardienne dans l'adaptation télévisuelle, qui est néo-victorienne dans son acception plus large.

Selon Hogle, la fiction néo-victorienne est « méta-gothique » puisqu'elle est une sorte de « manifestation » ou « d'apparition » du gothique obsédant et récurrent (2012 : 4). Kohlke et Gutleben, de leur côté, estiment que les deux genres sont liés par leur exploration du passé (2012 : 4), et selon Sottilotta, le gothique (et le néo-victorien, donc) l'est notamment à travers l'intertextualité et l'intermédialité : « *the adaptability of the Gothic and its tendency to surpass the verbal margins of literature is determined by the intrinsic intertextual and intermedial quality of this genre*[27] » (2017 : 2). *A Series of Unfortunate Events* fait en effet preuve d'une grande variété intertextuelle et générique. D'innombrables exemples peuvent être notés, mais nous pouvons nous appuyer sur un produit dérivé prenant la forme d'un livre qui apparaît plusieurs fois dans la série,

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26. « [Les livres] peuvent être catégorisés comme étant des variations de fiction historique appelé « *steampunk* victorien » ou « néo-victorien », un sous-genre dans lequel de jeunes personnages dotés de sensibilités modernes luttent contre de grands dangers dans une société anachronique, qui contient généralement des formes de technologies modernes. »
27. « La capacité d'adaptation du gothique et sa tendance à surpasser les frontières verbales de la littérature sont déterminées par les qualités intertextuelles et intermédiales intrinsèques de ce genre. »

commercialisé en 2018, soit en plein milieu de la diffusion de la série : *The Incomplete History of Secret Organizations: An Utterly Unreliable Account of Netflix's* A Series of Unfortunate Events de Joe Tracz. Bien que ressemblant au livre « originel » que l'on peut voir à l'écran (la couverture est identique), les différences sont majeures. Le volume est bien moins épais, mais surtout, le sous-titre supplémentaire indique sans équivoque qu'il s'agit d'un produit dérivé de l'adaptation, le génitif accolé au nom « Netflix » étant significatif[28]. Le volume est rempli d'interviews et d'explications, tantôt véridiques, tantôt détournées à propos de la série et de son élaboration. L'avant dernière demi-page du livre, « The Awful Allusions » (204-205), permet de relever quelques exemples concrets d'intertextualité[29]. Il ne s'agira pas ici de détailler une liste exhaustive[30] mais de se concentrer sur les références faites au poète français Charles Baudelaire et à l'auteur et poète américain Edgar Allan Poe. Les deux auteurs sont liés car Baudelaire a participé à la popularisation des œuvres de Poe en France à travers la traduction de poèmes et nouvelles. Les références à ces deux hommes dans la série passent notamment par l'onomastique des protagonistes et de la famille de leur banquier, ainsi que les stéréotypes associés au « spleen » (et donc au malheur) pour le premier. De plus, les épisodes 5 et 6 de la saison 2 se déroulent dans un village où se trouve l'arbre *Nevermore Tree* et où d'innombrables corbeaux séjournent la nuit, rappelant le fameux poème de l'auteur « Nevermore ». La mention du livre *Wuthering Heights* d'Emily Brontë (1847) rappelle également le lien de l'œuvre au genre gothique, comme le rappelle l'entrée : « *if Esmé had actually read this Gothic novel by Emily Brontë, she would know that it does not end as happily as she seems to believe*[31] » (Tracz, 2018 : 205). Il y a donc une autoréflexivité gothique évidente à travers l'œuvre (littéraire comme télévisuelle) : cela permet d'établir un dialogue, une connivence avec le spectatorat à travers des clins d'œil que jeunes et moins jeunes peuvent comprendre, et ancrer l'œuvre dans de multiples traditions littéraires et culturelles afin d'attirer un public plus large.

L'intertextualité (ainsi que l'intermédialité et la métafiction, qui ne seront pas analysées ici) donne du pouvoir au jeune spectatorat, qui est accompagné vers l'adolescence voire la vie adulte à travers le tissu linguistique. Le narrateur est peu fiable : toutes ses interventions sont teintées

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28. Notons l'effort autoréflexif de cette démarche : malgré la modification de l'objet télévisuel une fois commercialisé, il y a une continuité ainsi qu'un jeu sur la frontière entre le « réel » et le « fictif » à travers la supposition que l'univers fictionnel n'en est en réalité pas un ; Snicket ne serait pas un narrateur-personnage mais bien l'auteur réel de son univers fictif. Le livre mentionné (*The Incomplete* […]) serait judicieusement placé à la lisière des deux univers (voir par exemple Andrews, 2022)

29. Le terme « allusion » est utilisé dans le volume car, au-delà des références intertextuelles, il y a aussi des références culturelles plus larges. Par exemple, l'entrée « Sonic Youth » indique qu'il est ici question d'une référence à un groupe de rock alternatif.

30. Pour une liste plus exhaustive de l'intertextualité dans l'ensemble romanesque de Snicket, voir Atvara, 2012, ou Barton, 2011.

31. « Si Esmé avait en fait lu ce roman gothique d'Emily Brönte, elle aurait su qu'il ne se termine pas aussi bien qu'elle semble le croire. »

à la fois de mélancolie et d'ironie pour développer la confiance et la vigilance du lectorat/spectatorat. Nous savons par exemple que Snicket, à la fois personnage et narrateur, raconte l'aventure des trois Baudelaire des années après les faits. La distension temporelle est présente tout au long de l'œuvre, aussi bien à l'écrit qu'à l'écran, puisqu'il y a une superposition de narration ultérieure, simultanée, antérieure et intercalée[32] (Genette, 1972 : 229 ; 1983, 55). Snicket rapporte les paroles des orphelins à chaque tome, mais avoue pourtant ne pas tout connaître de leur histoire : « *Despite my many years investigating the case of the Baudelaire orphans, there is still much I do not know*[33] » (S03E02, 39'01''). Le narrateur est lui-même liminal, entre focalisation interne et omnisciente : comme l'affirme Burnes (2016 : 6),

> *The Gothic bridges the gap between the child and the adult through the role of the fictive adolescent, and formulates within and even outside of its pages the model to be copied by the young reader who yearns for a maturity they do not yet possess; that such a model, too, is what authors of such figures were themselves copying*[34].

Le lectorat/spectatorat est donc à moitié accompagné dans la narration et doit démêler le vrai du faux à mesure que l'histoire avance, et le gothique semble être un moteur supplémentaire à cette croissance.

Une esthétique de contraste à l'écran

En termes de contenu, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* oscille entre le glauque et le comique, faisant écho à ses racines gothiques. Les « *penny dreadfuls* » du XIXe siècle dont l'œuvre s'inspire étaient très populaires grâce aux illustrations qui les accompagnaient (Sottiletta, 2017 : 6). Il convient donc de se tourner un instant vers les illustrations qui constellent l'ensemble romanesque original, notamment les couvertures. Elles ont toutes été réalisées par Brett Helquist, un illustrateur américain. Ces couvertures donnent à l'ensemble romanesque son esthétique victorienne voire édouardienne, c'est-à-dire qu'à travers les illustrations et l'apparence globale des livres[35], l'œuvre imite le type d'image que l'on pouvait trouver

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32. Narration ultérieure : l'histoire racontée est située dans le « passé » ; narration antérieure : récit prédictif, postérieur à l'histoire raconté ; narration simultanée : le temps de l'histoire coïncide avec celui de la narration ; narration intercalée : mélange de narration au passé et de narration au présent.
33. « Malgré toutes les années que j'ai passé à mener l'enquête à propos des orphelins Baudelaire, il y a tellement de choses que j'ignore encore. »
34. « Le gothique jette un pont entre l'enfant et l'adulte à travers le rôle de l'adolescent fictif, et formule à l'intérieur et même à l'extérieur de ses pages le modèle à recopier par le jeune lecteur qui aspire à une maturité qu'il ne possède pas encore ; ce modèle, de plus, est ce que les auteurs de ces figures copiaient eux-mêmes. »
35. Nous prenons ici pour référence l'édition reliée des romans. Notons d'ailleurs que le format relié est plus généralisé dans la langue originale qu'en français.

dans les *Penny dreadfuls*. Une cohérence est créée grâce à ces éléments. Les illustrations des couvertures des tomes 1, 3, 7 et 8 reprennent par exemple quelques codes des illustrations d'époque, notamment à travers l'idée de l'extravagant : les couleurs utilisées sont sombres, majoritairement du gris, du noir et du marron ; les tenues des personnages sont choisies avec soin et fluctuent entre vêtements d'époque et costumes de scène ; la couverture du tome 8 affiche des objets aujourd'hui désuets (du matériel médical) ; enfin, toutes les illustrations connotent le danger d'une manière ou d'une autre. En effet, du comte Olaf qui paraît démesurément grand et menaçant lorsqu'il fait face aux enfants sur l'illustration du tome 1, à Klaus sur une échelle dans les airs qui se fait visiblement attaquer par des corbeaux sur celle du tome 7, en passant par Violet qui se tient face à une fenêtre brisée avec vue sur un lac avec tempête en fond sur celle du tome 3, toutes les couvertures ou presque connotent le gothique dans sa représentation stéréotypique, et donc la peur.

La qualité visuelle de l'œuvre de Snicket est néanmoins très différente d'un média à un autre. Là où le film de Silberling (2004) restait relativement proche des illustrations originales en termes d'atmosphère gothique, la série télévisuelle, elle, s'éloigne des représentations stéréotypiques du genre. La particularité principale de l'adaptation Netflix est son utilisation des couleurs et des contrastes. Notons qu'il y a depuis plusieurs années une réelle prévalence des teintes sombres, d'un filtre grisâtre apposé sur les images des *blockbusters* et des séries populaires (Saint-James, 2022). L'adaptation de l'œuvre de Snicket utilise en partie cette tendance mais apporte quelques éléments supplémentaires. Il y a un style assez reconnaissable au sein des séries sur la plateforme de *streaming* : les images sont très nettes, sans grain visible, donnant aux acteurs et actrices une apparence immaculée, et des couleurs souvent très vives[36]. L'adaptation de l'œuvre de Snicket n'échappe pas à cette esthétique. Par exemple, les Baudelaire ont un visage exempt de toute imperfection, leur donnant presque une apparence de poupée. Le comte Olaf et sa troupe se démarquent davantage des enfants à cause de leurs visages et vêtements sales, même si cette saleté paraît artificielle.

Les couleurs des vêtements portés par les enfants sont de bons indicateurs de cette tendance. Dans l'épisode « The Wide Window : Part 2 » (S01E06), les trois Baudelaire enfilent des anoraks avant de monter à bord d'un petit voilier pour traverser le lac Lachrymose en pleine tempête. Violet porte un anorak rouge, Klaus un bleu et Sunny un jaune. Ces couleurs très vives entrent en contraste avec leur environnement, qui est

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36.   Le même type de procédé est utilisé dans une autre adaptation télévisuelle gothique pour les adolescents, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (Netflix, 2018-2020 ; *Les Nouvelles Aventures de Sabrina*), où les images paraissent lissées et les couleurs saturées au maximum pour donner plus de force aux scènes.

sombre et menaçant à cause de la tempête. Le spectatorat retrouve les protagonistes à l'épisode suivant dans une forêt (S01E07). Les couleurs lumineuses sont de nouveau en contraste avec le décor qui paraît terne. Ceci permet de souligner que les Baudelaire ne sont pas à leur place ; ils ont non seulement fui, mais ils sont loin de leur foyer d'origine. Dans l'épisode 1, ce contraste était d'ailleurs déjà visible pour mettre en avant la perte et la qualité contre-nature de l'incendie qui a touché leur manoir : les Baudelaire arborent les couleurs rose, bleu et jaune au milieu des cendres noires et grises de leur ancien foyer (S01E01, 10'30''). Le contraste entre la maison de Justice Strauss et le manoir du comte Olaf est également une parfaite illustration du déracinement que connaissent les enfants[37] : la caméra qui se déplace de gauche à droite, de la maison blanc immaculé de la juge douce et naïve au manoir terrifiant d'Olaf[38], et l'apparition du corbeau et de la foudre dénotent le changement de vie qui attend les Baudelaire et présagent leurs mésaventures de manière visuelle. La luminosité joue un rôle primordial ici.

L'oscillation tout au long de la série télévisuelle entre couleurs ternes (notamment pour les uniformes que les enfants vont porter et l'environnement de manière générale) et couleurs vives prouve ainsi que la qualité visuelle de l'œuvre adaptée à l'écran est d'une grande importance. Bien que le générique du début répète la phrase « *Look Away* » (« regardez ailleurs »), il semble difficile de ne pas être attiré par le contraste créé.

De plus, les acteurs et actrices portent une vaste palette de costumes qui sont à la frontière du gothique. L'une des costumières, Cynthia Summers, avoue cependant qu'elle ne s'est inspirée ni des illustrations de Helquist, ni du film (Hofferber, 2019) : elle s'est appuyée sur la manière dont l'un des réalisateurs, Barry Sonnenfeld, a compris les livres (Britt, 2018) :

> "The [*Snicket*] *books are written through the memory of children*" [*Sonnenfeld said*]. *And so, if you think about that when you're a young child, and you're remembering adults, or you're remembering places, what you're remembering is pictures. And it's not always accurate as to what you know. Instead, it is more how you remember it. So, the*

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37. Cela ajoute également une dimension au personnage du comte qui se veut être un grand acteur de théâtre.

38. La première apparition du comte Olaf est d'ailleurs un clin d'œil au genre gothique de manière très directe : au-delà des motifs stéréotypiques liés au manoir, il est lui-même présenté comme un vampire. En effet, il est au dernier étage de son habitation, à la fenêtre de sa tour, et se tient les bras en croix sur la poitrine, comme dans un cercueil à la verticale. Cette image lui convient bien, puisqu'il cherche à aspirer toute la fortune des enfants sans leur laisser de répit, à la manière d'un vampire suceur de sang. Un désamorçage comique a lieu, puisque M. Poe sonne à sa porte, et Olaf sort de son « personnage » pour aller ouvrir, rappelant ici l'incongruité mentionnée dans le texte.

> *costumes are based on reality from a time period, but it's through a child's filter*[39].

La série télévisuelle est donc elle-même en contraste avec l'œuvre originale et le film, quand bien même ce dernier a popularisé une représentation stéréotypique, ou du moins attendue, de l'univers de Snicket. Les couleurs et les costumes sont exagérés afin de donner l'impression que tout est un souvenir d'enfant, mêlant encore une fois le genre à la jeunesse. Cette démesure est particulièrement visible à travers les costumes portés par le personnage d'Esmé Squalor, qui rejoint la troupe d'Olaf en devenant sa compagne après avoir trahi les Baudelaire à la fin de l'épisode 12 (S02E04). Les styles et les inspirations de ses tenues varient pour le plaisir du spectatorat : rétro dans l'épisode « The Vile Village » (S02E05) ou « The Carnivorous Carnival » (S02E10), années 1920 dans « The Ersatz Elevator » (S02E03) ou encore costume de poulpe dans « The Grim Grotto » (S03E04). L'objectif est de ne pas pouvoir situer précisément l'époque de l'intrigue. La costumière ajoute qu'elle a eu recours à des *fan-arts* : « *I actually was inspired by a lot of fan art for Carmelita, and spun it into her very character-y outfits*[40] » (Britt, 2018). Cet élément est important car il montre l'influence que peuvent avoir les productions du public sur la représentation d'un univers à l'écran. Un *fan-art* est une œuvre de nature variée produite par un fan ; il peut s'agir d'un dessin, d'un collage, d'une bande-son, d'un court-métrage et bien d'autres. Le fait que l'équipe technique et artistique de la série télévisuelle ait été davantage inspirée par des productions tierces que par des œuvres « officielles » (illustrations ou film) prouve que le jeune spectatorat peut avoir un pouvoir d'action et d'influence sur les œuvres qu'il visionne, rapprochant encore davantage les objets gothiques et leur public[41].

L'aspect visuel de la série télévisuelle *A Series of Unfortunate Events* joue donc un rôle tout aussi, voire plus important, que son fond. La « gothicité » de l'œuvre est omniprésente, que ce soit dans les motifs et thèmes abordés ou dans la manière de représenter le genre. L'adaptation Netflix, bien qu'elle joue sur l'idée de contraste entre couleurs vives et ternes, transmet la tradition gothique *et* décalée que l'on retrouve dans plusieurs œuvres gothiques pour la jeunesse qui peuvent résonner avec le jeune spectatorat visé. La généralisation de cette tendance visuelle, de plus, semble prouver que le jeune public recherche, ou du moins apprécie, ce type d'esthétique.

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39. « "Les romans [de Snicket] sont écrits à travers la mémoire d'enfants", [a dit Sonnenfeld]. Et donc, si vous réfléchissez à quand vous-même étiez un enfant, et que vous vous souvenez d'adultes ou d'endroits, ce qui vous revient à l'esprit sont des images. Et ce n'est pas forcément aussi précis que ce que vous savez réellement. Il s'agit plutôt de la manière dont vous vous en souvenez. Ainsi, les costumes sont basés sur la réalité d'une époque, mais à travers le filtre d'un enfant. »
40. « J'ai en réalité été beaucoup inspirée par des œuvres de Carmelita produites par des fans (*fanart*), et j'en ai tiré des tenues très caractéristiques. »
41. Sur le pouvoir des productions de fans, notamment en *fantasy*, voir Besson, 2015.

« L'atmosphère » gothique : de l'importance de la bande-son à l'écran

Au-delà de l'esthétique à proprement parler, il semble nécessaire d'analyser l'ambiance gothique créée par l'adaptation. Nous allons nous attarder sur la bande-son originale de la série télévisuelle, car elle permet non seulement de fidéliser le spectatorat mais aussi de créer une ambiance liminale – tantôt gothique, tantôt comique[42]. Notre imaginaire de la musique gothique a été construit par le cinéma hollywoodien et des séries américaines notoires. Les studios Hammer en particulier ont popularisé l'atmosphère morose et angoissante du gothique dans les années 1940 avec leurs neufs films sur Dracula (*Dracula*, ou *Le Cauchemar de Dracula* en français, de 1958) et leurs bande-son angoissantes ; d'autres films comme *Beetlejuice* (1988) ou *Sleepy Hollow* (2000) de Tim Burton, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* [*L'Étrange Noël de Monsieur Jack*, 1993] de Henry Selick, des productions américaines telles que *The Addams Family*[43] (séries et films entre 1964 et 2022) et leur esthétique sombre et leur humour cynique ou encore l'anthologie télévisuelle *The Haunting* (2018-2020) héritent des stéréotypiques visuels mais surtout sonores du genre gothique cinémato-graphique et télévisuel.

Concernant *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, notons que la musique est un élément clé de la vie de l'auteur, Daniel Handler, et elle accompagne en effet toutes les adaptations de son œuvre littéraire. La musique du film de 2004, composée par Thomas Newman, est un orchestre symphonique traditionnel mais dont l'utilisation est savamment détournée grâce à des associations de timbres différents qui créent des textures de sons singulières. L'introduction de l'accordéon ou de sonorités électroniques dans certaines pistes rend la musique excentrique et caractéristique (Horn, 2007 : 11). Un album conceptuel avec treize chansons officielles (plus deux addition-nelles) inspirées de *A Series of Unfortunate Events* était également à l'ori-gine inclus à la fin de chaque livre audio. Intitulé *The Tragic Treasury: Songs from* A Series of Unfortunate Events (2006), il est interprété par le groupe *indie pop* The Gothic Archies, avec la participation de Daniel Handler à

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42. Nous pourrions également approfondir les questions de lumière et de cadrage, qui connotent à la fois un sentiment de suffocation et de liberté qui désoriente les jeunes protagonistes. Certaines scènes sont par exemple tournées dans les égouts, transformés en tunnels sophistiqués permettant de traverser de très longues distances et desservant les bâtiments principaux de l'organisation phare de l'univers fictionnel, dont le sigle est VFD, tandis que d'autres plans larges montrent des espaces vastes, presque infinis, notamment à partir de la moitié de la saison 2 avec la fuite des enfants dans les « Hinterlands ».

43. Cet exemple en particulier est intéressant car les éléments stéréotypiques du gothique sont présents, mais l'humour noir et cynique des personnages a séduit son spectatorat. Cette subversion fait écho à l'œuvre de Snicket dans laquelle il y a également un jeu sur les images traditionnelles du gothique et une présence forte d'un humour décalé. Nous pourrions imaginer que Handler s'est inspiré de Barry Sonnenfeld, qui est le réalisateur de deux films de *The Addams Family* (1991 ; 1993) et qui a d'ailleurs réalisé la série télévisuelle *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

l'accordéon. Outre le nom du groupe qui fait directement référence au genre gothique et à sa conception sociétale actuelle, les musiques de l'album partagent quelques similitudes avec celles composées pour la série télévisuelle que nous allons voir ci-après. Le gothique est présent sous des formes surprenantes tout au long des épisodes, car il y a une atmosphère tantôt taquine, tantôt oppressante grâce à l'utilisation de l'accordéon, des clochettes et de quelques instruments à corde aux sonorités cristallines.

Les musiques de la série Netflix ont été composées par Nick Urata et Jim Dooley, et le générique d'ouverture de chaque épisode s'intitule « Look Away » : il s'agit probablement de la chanson la plus mémorable de la série télévisuelle. Elle est chantée par Neil Patrick Harris, l'acteur qui interprète le comte Olaf, et seul un couplet change d'un épisode à un autre pour annoncer les événements majeurs à venir[44]. Bien que l'instrumentalisation soit relativement enjouée et dynamique, les paroles sont quant à elles assez terrifiantes, en accord avec le personnage qui les vocalise. Prenons par exemple le premier couplet et le refrain du tout premier épisode (S01E01, 0'14''-0'43'') :

> […] *This show will wreck your evening, your whole life and your day*
> *Every single episode is nothing but dismay*
> *So, look away*
> *Look away, look away*
> *Three children lose their home and go to live with someone awful*
> *He tries to steal their fortune with a plot that's not quite lawful*
> *It's hard to fathom how the orphans manage to live through it*
> *Or how a decent person, like yourself, would even want to view it*[45].

L'autoréflexivité et le méta-commentaire (« *this show* ») ont pour but de favoriser une connexion avec le spectatorat, chose qui est renforcée par l'emploi du pronom « *your* » (« *your evening, your whole life and your day* »). Le jeu sur la répétition des sonorités (*day/dismay*, *away/away*, *awful/lawful*, *it/it*) va de pair avec la répétition du refrain et des éléments diégétiques eux-mêmes. L'image n'est pas à ignorer, puisque le générique prend des faux airs de programme télévisé *vintage*, avec grésillements, couleurs sépia et alternance de scènes des épisodes et documentaires fictifs. L'incorporation d'un générique, et non plus seulement d'un *jingle*,

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44. Notons que ce générique joue le même rôle que les lettres intitulées « *To My Kind Editor* » dans les romans : ce sont de « fausses » lettres que Snicket adresse à son éditeur fictif dans lesquelles il annonce les événements à venir dans le tome à paraître. Le procédé a été adapté sur la plateforme.

45. « Cette série va vous gâcher vos journées, vos soirées / Chaque épisode visionné vous fera déprimer / Faut s'résigner / Et éteindre vos télés / Trois petits orphelins sont adoptés par un homme affreux / Il joue la comédie mais c'est à leur argent qu'il en veut / On a du mal à croire que les enfants aient pu l'supporter / Et encore moins que vous soyez toujours assis à les regarder » (sous-titres de la plateforme Netflix).

permet au public de mémoriser et de chanter les paroles simples et itératives du refrain, « *look away* », et ainsi de le fidéliser à l'esthétique gothique.

En plus des très nombreux « thèmes » musicaux que l'on peut qualifier de « *background music* »[46] (Hoeckner *et al.*, 2011), cinq chansons ont été composées pour la série : « It's the Count » (S01E01), « That's Not How the Story Goes » (S01E08), « Keep Chasing Your Schemes » (S02E01), « Volunteers Fighting Disease Song » (S02E07) et « House of Freaks » (S02E10). Seule la quatrième chanson existe dans l'œuvre originale ; les autres sont des rajouts pensés expressément pour le média en question. La deuxième chanson en particulier est jouée à la fin de la première saison et permet de donner un aperçu de l'épisode à venir, qui, à l'époque de sa diffusion, était un an plus tard (2017 pour la saison 1, 2018 pour la saison 2). La participation dans cette chanson de final de saison de différents personnages, allant de Lemony Snicket lui-même à M. Poe en passant par le comte Olaf, offre au spectatorat un sentiment de clôture et de continuité à la fois, entre amertume, ironie et optimisme. Toutes ces musiques permettent de développer une partie de l'intrigue ou d'être source d'émotion pour le spectatorat : selon Cohen, ce type de musique construit la compréhension du spectatorat au-delà des interactions des personnages et des émotions montrées à l'écran (2001). De manière plus globale, au-delà de l'esthétique pure, il y a dans l'incorporation de musiques et de chansons une logique gothique. Le gothique est censé rebuter à travers des images et motifs glauques et moroses, mais c'est la fascination du lugubre et du mystique qui captive l'attention du spectatorat et plus largement du fan. Le générique et les chansons semblent être la quintessence de cette idée de rejet gothique : bien qu'étant déconcertantes, elles attirent immanquablement leur public à elles.

Il est intéressant de noter que, dans l'imaginaire collectif, la musique « gothique » est souvent apparenté au rock et au (*heavy*) métal (Mueller, 2008) qui ne sont pourtant pas les genres employés dans les adaptations des œuvres de Snicket. Pourtant, les mêmes types de procédés (notamment lyriques) sont employés dans les chansons de l'adaptation télévisuelle, à savoir que les paroles des chansons sont crues, violentes et peut-être choquantes si l'on convient que l'œuvre s'adresse à un jeune spectatorat. Selon Baudrillard, les enfants sont exposés à trop d'informations et d'images et réfléchissent de plus en plus tôt comme des adultes, signalant une sortie précoce de l'enfance (2002 : 104). L'œuvre de Snicket reflète peut-être effectivement cette anxiété, mais la décision de ne pas utiliser de la musique métal mais plutôt folklorique permet d'atténuer le pessimisme ambiant et, peut-être, de dénoncer une société trop dépendante de la technologie, comme le souligne le philosophe (*ibid*, 102).

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46. « Musiques de fond » ou « musiques d'ambiance ».

Les sonorités mélancoliques, sinistres ou encore joueuses des thèmes et des musiques créent une ambiance gothique, dans sa conception stéréotypique et décalée, qui complète parfaitement l'esthétique visuelle de l'adaptation ainsi que ses motifs abordés. Ces musiques permettent également de créer un lien direct avec le public visé, qui peut s'avérer friand de refrains, répétitions et contenus dérivés. L'esthétique de l'œuvre gothique pour la jeunesse, de ce fait, joue un rôle important dans la représentation du genre mais également dans sa réception et son interprétation.

Conclusion

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Les œuvres gothiques pour la jeunesse sont aujourd'hui plus populaires que jamais. Avec des adaptations à l'écran, des jeux-vidéos et moult produits dérivés, le genre continue de s'étendre et d'attirer le jeune public, que ce soit pour des raisons ludiques ou didactiques. L'esthétique du gothique, quant à elle, s'est affirmée à travers des représentations stéréotypées ou un jeu subtil de codes subvertis et détournés, ce qui diffère de plusieurs adaptations similaires. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* de Lemony Snicket est une œuvre gothique mais également néo-victorienne qui s'inscrit dans des traditions littéraires, médiatiques et culturelles variées grâce à une toile intertextuelle, métafictionnelle et générique plurielle. Son unicité tient notamment de sa force intermédiale voire transmédiale, car à chaque adaptation l'œuvre dévoile de nouveaux aspects du gothique, stéréotypé ou non. Son histoire, pourtant héritée des *orphan stories* de la tradition de Charles Dickens, met en scène de nombreux motifs gothiques qui résonnent avec le jeune public : comment trouver sa place ? Comment déceler le vrai du faux ? Comment gérer l'isolement, la solitude mais aussi la peur ? La mort et la métamorphose sont omniprésentes dans la série télévisuelle, et la question du monstrueux, qu'il soit extérieur ou intérieur, permet au jeune spectatorat de s'identifier aux protagonistes malgré la fictionnalité de l'œuvre. L'esthétique léchée et affirmée de l'adaptation Netflix, de son côté, remet en question la vision stéréotypique du gothique : le jeu de contraste permanent entre couleurs vives et ternes, atmosphère comique et morose ou encore musique enjouée et angoissante contribue à questionner les précédentes représentations du genre, notamment celles du film de 2004. La « gothicité » de l'œuvre passe donc avant tout par le visuel et l'ambiance créée tout au long des épisodes ; le style de la série, lui, permet d'imaginer un nouveau type de gothique, plus liminal.

A Series of Unfortunate Events est un objet du public avant tout : il est malléable et peut influencer d'une part l'imaginaire de l'univers de Snicket et la conception du genre gothique lui-même. Le gothique

à l'écran est donc ici un assemblage de références et de visuels qui entrent en contraste pour le plus grand plaisir du public. Cette différente manière de voir le genre à l'écran en cette fin des années 2010 peut ouvrir de nouvelles voies pour d'autres adaptations ou œuvres sérielles originales, avec des influences moins victoriennes mais plus contemporaines et donc plus en accord avec le jeune public d'aujourd'hui.

L'importance de l'esthétique et des visuels va grandissant sur les réseaux sociaux tels qu'Instagram ou TikTok, majoritairement utilisés par les 14-24 ans (Beer, 2019), cible majeure des adaptations d'œuvres gothique pour la jeunesse à l'écran. Il s'agit sur les réseaux d'esthétique (*aesthetics*), à entendre presque au sens de « mode de vie ». Il y a une tendance pour ces jeunes populations à se montrer, souvent de manière artificielle d'un point de vue extérieur. C'est par exemple le cas du style « *dark academia* »[47] que l'on retrouve sur TikTok, et qui se mélange à la culture des fans. On la retrouve à travers les figures de Klaus Baudelaire et d'Olivia Caliban : vestes en tweed, col roulé, omniprésence de la couleur marron, lunettes, livre à la main… Les personnages sont particulièrement attirés par la littérature (surtout classique), la connaissance et l'apprentissage en général. Il y a dans l'esthétique *dark academia* un désir de recréer une atmosphère avec des objets, des musiques et des figures, presque à l'image d'un décor de série ou de film. Cette artificialité rappelle le gothique, et nous pouvons nous demander quelle influence peuvent avoir des œuvres (littéraires et/ou visuelles) sur ce type de tendance, et vice-versa, et dans quelle mesure ceci vient redéfinir notre rapport aux genres et aux représentations.

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47. Pour une définition et une explication plus approfondie de cette tendance, voir : Bateman, 2020.

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48.   Seule cette référence sera faite à cette œuvre multi-sérielle.

Reconstructing and/or Deconstructing the 1980s. Gothic and Horror Tropes in *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016-)

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Abstract: This article focuses on the gothic and horror tropes utilised in the Netflix series *Stranger Things* to offer a critical discourse on 1980s cultural, economic and social norms. To do so, the emphasis has been laid on the construction of tween and teen characters as "Gothicised" heroes, whose relations to borders, thresholds and in-between places enable them to define themselves as marginal(ised) if not altogether "othered" creatures. Relying on Deleuze's nomadism and Foucault's heterotopy, this essay wishes to demonstrate that Gothic does not merely provide an aesthetic to give Netflix viewers thrilling and horrific entertainment but also, and above all, a rhetoric that helps the Duffer Brothers to counter any nostalgic view on a decade marked by Republican President Reagan's conservatism.

Keywords: Gothic, TV Series, Reaganism, Heterotopy, Nomadism

Résumé : Cette étude s'intéresse à la façon dont les tropes gothiques et d'horreur sont utilisés dans la série *Stranger Things*, diffusée sur Netflix, pour porter un regard critique sur les normes culturelles, économiques et sociales des années 1980. Pour ce faire, l'accent est mis sur la construction de personnages adolescents « gothicisés », dont les relations avec les frontières, les seuils et les lieux intermédiaires leur permettent de se définir comme des créatures marginales, voire totalement « autres ». En s›appuyant sur le nomadisme de Deleuze et l'hétérotopie de Foucault, cet essai s'attache à démontrer que le gothique ne limite pas à une esthétique offrant aux abonnés de Netflix amateurs de frissons un divertissement horrifique, mais aussi et surtout que le mode gothique donne aux frères Duffer des outils rhétoriques leur permettant de désamorcer tout regard nostalgique sur une décennie marquée par le conservatisme du président républicain Ronald Reagan.

Mots clés : gothique, séries télévisées, reaganisme, nomadisme, hétérotopie

Introduction

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"The Monster and the Superhero". The title of episode three, season four, of *Stranger Things* reflects the ambivalent identity of the show's main female protagonist, Eleven, who has been questioning her own nature since season one: is the shaved-head girl fond of Eggo waffles a child hero or a monstrous child? Her unsettled identity, ever more changing as she enters adolescence, sets the girl – and the viewers with her – on a quest to understand the origins of her supernatural abilities but also the roots of the evil menacing the small town of Hawkins, Indiana, where she finds friendship and shelter. Set in the 1980s, the Duffer Brothers' Netflix series was critically acclaimed as a recreation of Spielberg's films when it premiered in 2016. Besides its obvious Spielbergian undertones,[1] the show is also appreciated for its horrific atmosphere that borrows its themes and aesthetic from renowned masters of horror of the 1980s such as film maker John Carpenter and novelist Stephen King.[2] While the series most evidently pays homage to the horror films of the 1980s,[3] it also offers a nod to the period's iconic teen comedies, in the way the social hierarchical roles and relations between the various characters are upheld or contested.[4] For all those reasons, *Stranger Things* has been hailed, perhaps hastily, as a nostalgic mashup of 1980s pop culture and Reaganite entertainment.[5]

Yet, whereas Hollywood films under the Reagan administration tend to be considered as conservative works, scholars identify *Stranger Things*, with its 21st century hindsight, as a critical *de*construction (rather than a faithful *re*construction) of a decade marked by Republican President Reagan's New Right ideology and conservative backlash.[6] How is

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1. *E.T.* (1982) and *Close Encounter of the Third Kind* (1978) are the most obvious references: the band of tweenagers riding bikes and Eleven hiding in a closet with a blond wig concealing her cropped hair to escape scientists and the military seem to come straight out of *E.T.*; red glows from the Upside Down are reminiscent of the lights of alien spaceships in *Close Encounter*.
2. The series' original soundtrack is a nod to Carpenter's own synthwave scores while Eleven's telekinetic powers are evocative of King's 1980 novel *Firestarter* (the title of which was printed on the book cover in gothic font, as is the case in most King books – the series recycles the same typeface for its credit title). The novel was adapted for the big screen in 1984 and the film featured young Drew Barrymore as Charlie. The same Drew Barrymore could also be seen in *E.T.*
3. In season four, Wes Craven's 1984 *Nightmare on Elm Street* is notably and extensively referred to: not only are teenagers harrowed by deadly nightmares, but Robert Englund, who plays Freddy Krueger, makes a brief appearance in season four episode four.
4. In season four, the rebellious figure of Eddie Munson categorises students of Hawkins High using social labels the audience has been familiar with since John Hughes's 1985 *Breakfast Club*: the superficial cheer leader, the muscular but brainless athlete, the marginal geek, etc.
5. Britton defines Reaganite entertainment as "a general movement of reaction and conservative reassurance in […] Hollywood cinema" whose formal and thematic features could already be found before Reagan was elected. The phrase, Britton contends, nonetheless seems to be apt to represent "the tendencies in American society which have been consummated in the Reagan Administration" (Grant, 2009: 97). More generally speaking, Reaganite entertainment refers to film and television productions that offered an idealised representation of American society in the 1980s.
6. Beyond Stranger Things, Netflix's nostalgia for the 1980s is interpreted as a "basis for renewal", as "a way to rewrite history", as a way to "question traditional structures of

this change of perspective on – and perception of – the 1980s made visible/ possible in the series? One hypothesis is that the eighties are depicted as a time of terror and danger for the young protagonists in *Stranger Things*, a feeling mostly conveyed through the recycling of gothic motifs and tropes. Interestingly, Chloe Buckley explains that Gothic is identified as "*radical, subversive and excessive* by critics who situate Gothic on the *margins of hegemonic culture*" (Buckley, 2009: 3, my italics). Since children's fiction and Gothic appear to have been "connected since their inception" (Buckley, 2009: 17), it may thus make sense that the Duffer Brothers should develop the initiation story of marginalised child protagonists or "Gothic children",[7] especially as the narrative takes place in a slightly revisited, if not displaced, version of the eighties, thus subverting the hegemonic discourse conveyed by Reaganite entertainment.

This study will address the Gothic traits and features of *Stranger Things*' young heroes, paying close attention to such characters as Eleven, the lab girl with telekinetic abilities, and Will, the boy haunted by a mysterious creature from a dangerous parallel world. We shall see that the gothicisation of tween characters seemingly modelled on the conventions of 1980s pop culture is connected to their (and the show's) relation to space and places – from their apparently banal and ordinary hometown to the marginal space of the woods where children are lost and found, and, eventually, to the Lovecraftian hellish dimension they name the Upside Down.

The "Othering" of Hawkins: Panic on Main street

Except for season four, partly set in California, and a couple of episodes in season two situated in Chicago, the story of *Stranger Things* takes place in the fictitious small town of Hawkins, Indiana. The place seems familiar and uneventful, with its city hall, its middle school, its drugstore, its shopping mall and multiplex cinema, all of which serve as the background for the adventures of a gang of tween and teen characters (Mike, Lucas, Dustin, Will, and their older siblings Nancy and Jonathan). Hawkins is their hometown, where they are supposed to belong. Quite conventionally, thus recycling a recurring *topos* of 1980s blockbusters, they are seen scurrying through the streets of Hawkins on their bikes. The Hawkins community seems stereotypical of Reagan's America, at least as it was – idealistically – depicted in Hollywood blockbusters. At first sight, the pretty bungalows and the well-tended lawns, decorated with posters

authority, [to] reflect the strain of society and expose cultural sensitivities" (Mollet and Scott, 2021: 9).

7. Buckley also contends that "Gothic helps the children grow" (18) – the initiation story developed in ST is thus served by its Gothic dimension.

promoting the 1984 Reagan-Bush ticket (season 2), appear as a safe place where children can play unattended. Yet, not only is this hometown constantly threatened by an evil force that boils under its surface, but the children of Hawkins are definitely not protected by their community. In Hawkins, riding a bike is not an innocent playful activity but a moment when children are left on their own and fall prey to alienating monsters.[8] Young Will disappears mysteriously while riding back home from a Dungeons and Dragons session with his friends, and is believed to have been killed; the gang of tweens also get on their bikes whenever they are hunted down by their enemies, be they government agents or supernatural creatures. Far from being grounded to their home-not-so-sweet-home, the characters seem constantly on the move, in a desperate attempt to protect it as well as themselves.

Furthermore, two of the main protagonists are portrayed as homeless children. Just like Will, who loses his home when trapped in the Upside Down, his female counterpart Eleven is also initially deprived of a home: torn from her mother's womb, she grows up in a government facility and is nothing more than a lab rat, even if the scientist in charge is called "Papa". This idea of homelessness, Chloe Buckley contends, has been a significant feature of contemporary Gothic fiction for children since the beginning of the 21st century and has been reconfigured as nomadism or "nomadic subjectivity" in the sense given to the concept by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaux* (Buckley, 2009: 1). Eleven's homeless or nomadic feature is made manifest in the difficult construction of her identity, as her self "is continually in the process of becoming" (3). Her characterisation thus follows numerous "lines of flights" (Deleuze, 1980: 15), shifting from the androgynous badass run-away to the stereotypical damsel in distress, wearing a pink satin dress and a blond wig; from the terminator-like warrior to the self-conscious schoolgirl; from the fearful victim to the fearless killer; from the superhero to the monster. Her multiple and unstable identity seems to be defined by the multiplicity and instability of the places she feels trapped in and needs to escape: the laboratory she is being experimented on, the makeshift tent where she is hiding[9] in the Wheelers' basement, the cabin in the woods where she is protected, but also held captive, by the Sheriff. Each of those places determines who Eleven is supposed to be. The girl's characterisation takes on a metanarrative dimension as Eleven, before she grows into a fully-fledged and fleshed-out individual, is the result of the juxtaposition of several stories, or fictions, in other words, a discursive construct. Even her name varies according to who (and where) she is expected to be: Eleven (her identification number tattooed on her

8.   In that regard, *IT Part one* (after Stephen King's eponymous novel), which came out in 2017 and is now set in 1989 when the original story took place in the 1960s, follows the same idea.
9.   The nod to Spielberg's 1982 *E.T.* is not anecdotal. The girl is explicitly equated with the kind extra-terrestrial, the intertextual reference signalling how Eleven does not belong, how she is here "deterritorialised" in Deleuzian terms, unable to fit in one singular fixed identity.

wrist in the laboratory), Elve (the nickname given by her male friends who are fond of fantasy tales when hiding in the Wheelers' basement), Jane Ives (the name given by her mother on her birth day in hospital), Jane Hopper (when adopted by the Sheriff of the same name and living in the woods) and, eventually, Jane Byers (when fostered by the Byers family, Joyce, Will, and Jonathan in California). The problematic naming of things and people is often found in the series and points to the grotesque, unfixed, in-between characteristic of those creatures opening a breach in the normal and apparently balanced world of Hawkins, thus introducing instability, strangeness and horror.[10] The phenomenon also applies to Will Byers, who is both dead and alive, present and absent, as he haunts his mother's house while trapped in the Upside Down and then is haunted, in his turn, by the Upside Down once back to his supposedly familiar home. Will is identified as "Will the Wise" by his friends on the model of Dungeons and Dragons characters but is also "Loser" and "Zombie Boy" for the other children of Hawkins who resent his being a "stranger thing", especially as he is portrayed as being "othered" by the experience of his symbolic death in the Upside Down.[11]

Although a fictional town, Hawkins is the site of the same types of moral panics that shook the nation during the Reagan era. Sensational news stories about abducted children and satanic cults hit the headlines,[12] fed by the country's social anxieties for which women entering the workforce and rising divorce rates were held responsible (Butler, 2018: 73). That *Stranger Things* should rely on Gothic tropes seems all the more relevant in such a context. Buckley indeed explains that Gothic discourse, historically, equally transcribed social and cultural anxiety (Buckley, 2009: 6). However, she says, 21st-century Gothic texts, "while […] acknowledging the continuing effects of oppressive discourses and uneven power relations" (6), take on a more positive dimension as monstrosity and "othered" characters are seen through a radically different lens, thanks to children's nomadic subjectivity. In season four, Eddie Munson is the most representative manifestation of this phenomenon. A leading member of the Hellfire Club,[13] the long-haired teenager living in a trailer with his uncle

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10. Eleven opens a gate between Hawkins and the Upside Down when using her power to run away from the laboratory; as she gets out of the lab, Will is swallowed into this alternative dimension. Later on, he brings back with him a minute larva from the Upside Down that will grow into a formidable and unsettling monster. The "thing", like Eleven and Will, will be given different names. When it is fed and loved by Dustin like a puppy, it is called "D'Artagnan", thus reflecting the sources of the boy's imagination (here Dumas's adventure novel). As the creature grows, its name shrinks into "Dart", signalling its increasing dangerousness. It eventually loses its name and becomes indeterminate/anonymous when blending in a group of similar monsters. It is then reduced to the generic name given by the children to those beasts and is identified as a "demodog".
11. Will is a wan, sickly boy, with big brown eyes.
12. The showrunners admitted in a tweet that the character of Eddie Munson was loosely based on real-life Damien Echols, a teenager clad in black and listening to heavy metal music accused of having killed three children in Arkansas in 1993. After being sent to death row, Echols served eighteen years in jail and was eventually released thanks to new DNA tests.
13. The Hellfire Club is a gang of Dungeon and Dragon players, among them Mike and Dustin.

is considered as a threat by the self-righteous inhabitants of Hawkins, who accuse him of having killed a cheerleader in cold blood. Tracked down by the Hawkins Tigers (the players on the high school basketball team), Eddie is forced to hide and he escapes in the Upside Down where he [spoiler alert] will eventually die. At first sight, Eddie appears as the *epitome* of the period's social, economic and moral anxieties. He is a financially impaired underdog. A low-achiever at school, he is not a popular student but rather acts as some sort of misfit, a Dungeons and Dragons adept with a penchant for heavy metal, refusing to play the game of social conventions, which he denounces in pointing – and ridiculing – the different groups and stereotypes that other teens choose to embrace (S04E01). Turned into a social monster that has to be hunted down and killed to preserve the peace and quiet of the town, Eddie may be said to be "gothicised" by his rejection of and his being rejected by Hawkins's mostly bourgeois community, cemented by their trust in American Lockeanism (to put it simply, the immovable belief in individual property),[14] which may be construed as the cornerstone of Reaganite bourgeois ideology. Gothic Eddie, with his black scraggly hair, his black leather jacket above a black and white Hellfire club T-shirt, is constructed as a nomadic character in several ways. In Deleuzian terms, Eddie is a nomadic force insofar as he is seen resisting the social and economic laws of Hawkins.[15] As a result, he becomes a nomad (or a Gothic wanderer), geographically speaking, as he has to move around to escape his pursuers and eventually leave Hawkins for the Upside Down. However, far from embracing the moral judgement of Hawkins's inhabitants, the TV series takes side with Eddie and transforms the outcast into a tragic hero who sacrifices himself in the hope of saving Hawkins from nightmarish creatures, intent on invading and conquering the small town. Just as Buckley contends, the monstrous child or teen takes on a positive dimension (Eddie is actually a world-saviour and not a menace to society) and that reversal of values enables the showrunners to offer a critical view of Hawkins's Reaganite community. The stereotypical peaceful and idealised Spielbergian suburbs is here depicted as a threatening environment for marginal and marginalised characters.

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14.   On American political culture and the Lockean legacy, see Richard J. Ellis, "Radical Lockeanism in American Political Culture", *The Western Political Quaterly*, Vol. 45, No. 4, December 1992, p. 825-849.

15.   Deleuze speaks of the State and its laws in terms of "war machines", remarkable for their immobilism. In contrast, nomadism and deterritorialization are seen as contesting and subverting impulses.

Gothicised Tweens Haunting Hawkins's Geographical and Social Margins

Will is a ghostlike character haunting the margins of Hawkins's Reaganite society. Even before he vanishes in the Upside Down, Will is represented as a marginal child, whose imagination is fed by fantasy stories and who is eager to retreat to his shed made of junk wooden planks to read comics, far from the madding crowd of bullies. Located in the woods, on the edge of the family's ground, the shed, pompously named "Castle Byers" and surmounted by the star-bangled banner, is an example of Foucault's "counter-space" defined as a place that is radically different from and in opposition to all other places, and whose purpose is "to erase, neutralise and purify them" (Foucault, 2009: 24, my translation). Foucault explains that children are particularly familiar with those utopian sites, which they find "at the back of their gardens or in their attic" (24, my translation). Castle Byers definitely offers Will a utopian escape from the real world while apparently defending core American cultural values (such as the belief in self-reliance for instance), erasing/neutralising some Reaganite economic, political and social beliefs, and somehow purifying the US flag: although the son of a low-income single mother (the scourge of the nation from a New Right perspective), Will is not a juvenile delinquent but a dreamy child who is reluctant to grow up, thus refusing to sacrifice his imagination and artistic talents (he is a gifted draughtsman) to consumer society and teenage seduction.[16] Not only is he isolated by his refusal to grow out of childhood, when he shuts himself away from the rest of the world in his Castle, but he is also even more marginalised when wandering in a parallel dimension, finding refuge in the Upside Down version of his childish construction. From that radically heterotopic position in the Upside Down, he manages to communicate with his mother Joyce, the only one who does not give up on him and remains convinced that her boy is still alive and worthy to be saved. Haunting the family house, Will turns his familiar home into something "unhomely", strange and uncanny. The house walls are no longer a solid protection against the outside world, instead they seem to melt to take the shape of Will's face or hands, again signalling his liminal situation: the wall is no longer a limit but a threshold, a site of passage between two dimensions. The characterisation of Will matches Margarita Georgieva's definition of the gothic adolescent who "open[s] doors, cross[es] passages, discover[s] portraits, manuscripts and daggers, suits of armours, tapestries and bloodied scarves" (Georgieva, 2013: 89). Season after season, the definition can be extended to most of the other adolescents in the show, even if the portraits, daggers

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16. Unlike his friends Mike and Lucas who give up on their Dungeons and Dragons games to go out with their female friends, Eleven and Max, Will is not interested in forming a traditional, conventional couple.

and various gothic props mentioned by Georgieva are adapted to the 1980s and replaced by a grandfather clock, a patient file found in a psychiatric hospital, a wooden door, with a coloured glass panel, opening onto a Victorian-like hallway, etc. Will nonetheless remains the most gothic of all as he is defined from the start by his uncanny character, as his story is marked by something *Unheimlich*. Freud's concept describes how what is unfamiliar, strange or unknown, when introduced in an otherwise familiar environment, becomes weird and unsettling, frightening even. Will's mother's living room becomes unhomely when she uses Christmas light garlands to receive messages from her son: the banal decoration, originally the symbol of family reunions, filled with the memories of the Byers' past, has now become a means of communication with Joyce's supposedly dead boy. The living room thus combines, or juxtaposes in Foucault's terminology, several radically different and potentially incompatible places in one site: the ordinary space dedicated to the family routine is contaminated by the extraordinary, deadly space the child is trying to escape (Foucault, 2009: 28-29). Will's house transforms into an uncanny heterotopia all the more easily since the family has already been relegated to the (social) margins of Hawkins. As has already been said, the Byers family apparently does not meet the expectations of Hawkins's normative Reaganite community: Joyce[17] is a divorced mother of two, a working woman living on a low-paid job, wearing worn-out jeans and jumpers, inhabiting a clean but decrepit house that seems located outside the middle-class suburban neighbourhood where the other families are to be found.[18] Jonathan Byers, her elder son, is constructed in opposition to the other stereotypical male characters of his age in the show: he is not popular nor muscular, he is not on the school's football team, does not wear fancy clothes or a fashionable haircut, and he drives a rusty old car; an amateur photographer, he is considered a voyeur and is rejected by the other students in his school. In the same way, Will is mocked for his old-fashioned clothes and is seen as a weirdo. The Byers are literally outsiders if not outcasts: not only do they inhabit the economic, geographical (and, to some extent, ontological) borders of Hawkins but they are eventually expelled from the small town and have to settle elsewhere, in California.

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17. On the character of Joyce Byers and the performance of actress Winona Ryder, see Lisa Morton, "Not a Princess Anymore: How the Casting of Winona Ryder in Stranger Things Speaks to The Essential Falsehood of 1980s Media Depictions of the American Working Class", in Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. (ed.), *Uncovering Stranger Things*, Jefferson (NC): McFarland, 2018, p. 93-102.

18. In that regard, Joyce is to be opposed to Karen Wheeler, a stay-at-home mother of three, whose house is well-decorated and who obviously is a Republican voter (see the 1984 Reagan-Bush poster in her front yard). At first sight, Mrs Wheeler seems to embody the figure of the model mother as defined by the conservative new right (this ideology expected women to stop working and go back to their homes in order 1) to make jobs available for men and 2) to look after their offspring so they also stayed at home and thus could not risk running into trouble and becoming juvenile delinquents). Ironically, Mrs Wheeler (and her husband) often know nothing of their children's activities and whereabouts; she is more concerned with the way she looks (exaggerated make-up, bleached curly hair) and is often represented as a desperate housewife.

Hawkins's geographical margins (Castle Byers, Joyce's remote house, Brenner's laboratory, for instance) can be interpreted as places of exile and non-conformity. The woods, in particular, play a significant part in the marginalisation and gothicisation of the young heroes that find themselves wandering in that fearful space. Will and his friends call the woods Mirkwood, after Tolkien's enchanted forest in *The Hobbit* (1937) and they happen to be indeed as dangerous and mysterious in Hawkins as they are in Middle Earth. Strange creatures like the Demogorgon can be encountered there; Mirkwood might offer shelter to lost children (Will and Eleven); tree trunks might be gates opening onto another supernatural world where time runs at a different pace. But, more importantly (and interestingly), they are also places of transition and "sublimation"[19] of the child (Georgieva, 2013: 94). Margarita Georgieva emphasises the importance of rituals ennobling the child in Gothic fiction. Images of baptism and rebirth are thus recurring tropes in Gothic tradition. The same motif can be found in *Stranger Things* when Will's drowned body is found in the lake in the middle of the woods. Georgieva explains that in Gothic fiction, drowning or falling into a lake is like baptism, the equivalent of a symbolical death and spiritual rebirth for the child who is irremediably changed (70). This experience of death (for Will) and mourning (for his young friends) can be understood as a rite of passage and, as such, that phenomenon prompts the readers of a Gothic tale and the viewers of *Stranger Things* to analyse the story as a Bildungsroman (69-70). Will is indeed transformed when his corpse is pulled out of the lake's dark waters. However, this dead body is a fake, a manikin meant to stop the Byers family from looking for Will. As a manikin, a simulacrum for the actual boy, Will is turned into a passive object, a mere prop in the staging of his own death. Whether as a dead boy or a manikin, Will is transformed, radically alienated even, but is nonetheless refused the right to grow up and learn from his experience, unlike his pals who go through loss and mourning. He is apparently condemned to remain in a state of powerlessness and in-betweenness, as he becomes an intermediary between two worlds. As with traditional Gothic child heroes, the ritual of Will's drowning, of his symbolic baptism, has turned him into an almost mythical figure, as he has unwillingly become a gate between two dimensions, a channel of (uncontrolled) communication between two planes of being, "a hero close to God that receives otherworldly messages" (Georgieva, 2013: 94). Mirkwood, as a marginal space, situated outside the boundaries of Hawkins's civilised world, is the site for testing the characters' strength. While Will emerges as a passive otherworldly if not altogether ethereal creature, thus endorsing traditionally Gothic female characteristics, girls who go through Mirkwood appear to be challenging gender stereotypes of

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19. Sublimation is to be understood as the "ennobling" process through which the child's character becomes a hero endowed with "noble ideals and high principles" (Georgiva, 2013: 94).

Gothic tales in their refusal to conform to whatever fate 1980s society had in store for them.

Georgieva contends that Gothic, as genre, "may render the role of the two sexes interchangeable", "effeminate", "weak": male youth are thus depicted languishing in dungeons (or in castles of their own making as far as Will is concerned), whereas young women are strong and active, refusing forced marriages or disguising themselves into men (86). The description may particularly apply to two female characters in the series, Nancy and Eleven. While Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers are combing the woods in search of Will and Nancy's friend Barbara – whom, the viewers know, has been killed by a demogorgon (S01E03) –, they lose their sense of direction and fail to keep track of time. Deprived of her spatial (and social) landmarks, the teenage girl allows herself to express her wishes for the future for the first time. Far from her middle-class neighbourhood, she admits to socially ostracised Jonathan her desire to break from the gender role promoted and upheld by her mother, a visibly desperate housewife, obsessed with maintaining her physical appearance, married to a man more interested in reading the newspaper than looking after his children. The four seasons seem to test her subversive character. Although originally portrayed as a hard-working bookworm, Nancy soon deviates from the gender stereotype of the screaming girl horror film fans are familiar with. Karen Sturgeon-Dodsworth, relying on a concept coined by Carol Clover in 1987, identifies Nancy as one of the many "Final Girls" to be found in the show:

> In *Her Body, Himself,* Clover establishes some useful first principle. She extols the virtues of the Final Girl, describing her as 'intelligent, watchful, level-headed' […]. In terms of the formulation of strong, independent and agentive young women striving to ensure positive narrative equilibrium, *Stranger Things* could be seen at a glance as a highly progressive text, not least because the show presents the audience with a multitude of female characters of just the 'stature' Clover suggests. (Sturgeon-Dodsworth, 2021: 69)

While Will is depicted as a "male damsel in distress, powerless in his castle", Nancy is a "female knight", a "questing hero" plotting "rescue and revenge" (74).[20]

First appearing as a genderless character (with her shaven head, she is initially mistaken for a little boy), Eleven can also be considered as a

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20. Her femininity and sexuality are never questioned: not only is she the object of the desire of two boys, Jonathan and Steve, but she is also the subject of this desire and, unlike traditional screaming girls, she is not punished for it and killed soon after making out. She is the first on the war path, she carries guns and is the best shooter!

resisting female character whose marginality eventually enables her to break free from conventional social codes and to develop her own (counter-) narrative. Eleven's various "homes" ("Papa"'s lab, Hopper's cabin in the woods, the Byers's) also occupy the margins of Hawkins and can equally be interpreted in Gothic terms. The maze-like laboratory, located in the woods on the outskirts of town, is the natural environment of the girl's "Papa", Dr Brenner, who is reminiscent of Gothic mad scientists. Kaufler contends that "Dr Brenner is essentially Dr Frankenstein with Reagan ideals" (87). Drawing from a tradition that can be traced back to the horror films of the 1930s, the figure of the mad scientist plays God with women's bodies, using their wombs for science (Kaufler, 2018: 87). Dr Brenner is indeed a father, despite his circumventing women for reproduction (89). He claims *his* rights over women who are reduced to mere powerless pregnant bodies and whose unborn babies can be altered without their consent and stolen at birth.[21] Eleven thus appears as the repressed daughter of an eminently Gothic father figure, who reduces any potential female opposition "by enclosure, imprisonment [...] and by forcefully inflicting on [women] the burden of pregnancy" (Georgieva, 2013: 85). However, Eleven, who is also reminiscent of the Gothic stolen child figure, eventually rejects Dr Brenner's godlike authority: as in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the nameless creature (referred to by her number or by "Jane" as in "Jane Doe" thus signalling her lack of – pre-defined – identity) breaks free from the scientist who created her and leaves him to die, without acknowledging his last-minute fatherly affection (S04E08).

Will, Nancy and Eleven can be interpreted as exiled adolescents in the literal and metaphorical sense as they will not or cannot comply with Reaganite social determinism. Although Will escapes from the Upside Down, he remains stuck in the closet of his homosexuality (at least until season four when he leaves for California); although Nancy is fighting evil in a parallel dimension with all her might and bravery, she is nonetheless relegated to an ancillary position when working for the local newspaper, the Hawkins Post, serving coffee to her male colleagues; although Eleven can kill a man with her mind, she is nonetheless bullied by her classmates because she is different. As they are exploring, haunting or wandering around Hawkins's borders, the teenagers' liminal and Gothicised selves reveal and highlight the reterritorializing[22] potential of the Upside Down

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21. Ronald Reagan is considered as a pro-life champion. In his 1984 "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation", under the pretext of assessing the consequences of the Roe vs Wade ruling after ten years of implementation, he fiercely attacked women's right to abortion and jeopardised their freedom of choice. He thus declared: "over the first two years of my administration, I have closely followed and assisted efforts in Congress to reverse the tide of abortion – efforts of Congressmen, Senators, and citizens responding to an urgent moral crisis." R. Reagan, "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation", *The Catholic Lawyer*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Spring 1986 (https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/tcl/vol30/iss2/2, last accessed on 10/12/22).

22. In Deleuzio-Guattarian terminology, deterritorialization is the process by which social, cultural, political, and/or linguistic articulations are disarticulated. Conversely,

version of Hawkins, insofar as those characters are given the opportunity to leave their familiar (frustrating) territory in order to reterritorialise their selves where and how they wish.

The opportunity for "self-fashioning" is made possible thanks to Gothic "nomadic subjectivity" (Buckley, 2009: 7). The character of young Henry Creel, appearing late in the show (in season four) although his storyline begins early in the diegesis's timeline (1959) is chronologically the first child in Hawkins to be able to deterritorialise his self and reterritorialize his home in the Upside Down. This process enables him to become who/what he is: Eleven's arch-enemy and the source of the "curse"[23] that threatens Hawkins, named 001 by Dr Brenner (Henry is the first child he has experimented on) also known as Vecna (a name given by the gang of tweens after one Dungeons and Dragons character). His characterisation is intimately connected to the house he lives in in Hawkins. Inherited from a distant uncle, the Creel House is presented as the place where the Creel family can have a fresh start. It is, at the same time, the legacy of the family's past and the promise of a better future for the parents, Victor and Virginia, and their children, Henry and Alice. The narrative significance given to the Creel House prompts the viewers to interpret the whole series in Gothic terms. On arriving in the house, the two children express opposite reactions to the 19th-century house's architecture: with a name obviously borrowed from Lewis Carroll's Wonderland tales, Alice sees the Victorian mansion as a fairy-tale house. As for Henry, who explores every nook and cranny of the ancient building to capture spiders, the place is soon turned into a house of horror, as he kills his mother and sister with his telekinetic power in order, his adult self explains, to tear the veil of hypocrisy that conceals the real. The Creel House looks like the conventional haunted house of classic horror films. Its architecture is based on that of the Claremont House, an actual Gothic Revival style mansion built in the 1880s and located in Georgia. More specifically, the Creel House is Carpenter Gothic style, which was quite popular for domestic buildings in the United States in the mid-19th century and can be defined as "an eclectic and naive use of the most superficial and obvious motifs of Gothic decoration. Turrets, spires, and pointed arches were applied, in many instances

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reterritorialization refers to the process of re-articulating, or "re-doing" what has previously been undone or "deterritorialised" without going back to a previous, primitive, territory (Deleuze, 1980: 214, 434-527). I am using those terms here to analyse the deconstruction and reconstruction of teenage characters notably through their relation to space and places.

23. The word is used repeatedly season after season to explain Hawkins's exceptionally high death rate.

with abandon, and there was usually no logical relationship of ornamentation to the structure of the house".[24] The Creel House is thus remarkable for its juxtaposition of Gothic features (dark wooden panels, creaky stairs, wooden beams covered in cobwebs), whose lack of "logical relationship" is made literally visible in the Upside Down as the house's architectural elements seem disassembled and disarticulated: a wooden door, a glass panel, a broken window frame suspended in the air. Those fragmented ruins are covered in vines that seem to stem out of Vecna's scarred body: he is the one who controls and shapes the Upside Down. Minute details glimpsed in the Creel House confirm that the Gothic building is Vecna's source of inspiration for his fashioning of the alternate dimension: the flower-patterned wallpaper heralds the shape of the demogorgon's head; the eight-legged Mindflayer is evocative of the black widows the boy is fascinated with. When he reveals his story to Eleven (S04E07), Vecna admits he "didn't fit with the other children. Something was wrong with me. All the teachers and the doctors said that I was *broken*" (my italics). It thus makes sense that a broken mind should build a broken world, born of the pieces of the Gothic architecture of the Upside Down version of the Creel House, a broken world that is a utopia for the misfit villain. This idea of deconstruction and broken structures is central to the creation of the Upside Down by Vecna, who explains that he was obsessed with black widows as a child because:

> They bring balance and to an imbalanced ecosystem. But the human world was disrupting this harmony. You see, humans are a unique type of parasites, *multiplying* and poisoning our world, all the while enforcing a *structure* of their own. A deeply *unnatural structure*. Where others saw order, I saw a straight jacket, a cruel, oppressive world dictated by made up rules, *seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades*, each life a faded, lesser copy of the one before. Wake up, eat, work, sleep, reproduce and die. Everyone is just waiting. Waiting for it all to be over. All performing in a silly terrible play *day after day*. I could not do that". (S04E07, 1:21:54 - 1:24:55, my italics)

This human "unnatural" "structure" that Vecna sets himself to annihilate is intrinsically connected to one specific perception of time, defined in Vecna's speech in terms of linear time ("seconds, minutes," etc., "day after day"), marked by the passing of generations (cf. the biblical "multiplying"). As a result, the destruction of the human world also means the destruction of *Chronos*, classically understood as chronological time. In the Upside Down, taken as Vecna's psychic construction, time is also suspended and broken.

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24.   https//www.britannica.com/art/Carpenter-Gothic, last accessed 10/29/2022.

In classic horror house films, this focus on time is meant to translate the threatening persistence of the American past. In that matter, the Creel plotline is reminiscent of *The Amityville Horror* (1980). The same emphasis is put on historic or "revival" architecture reminding the houses' modern inhabitants of the country's colonial history and problematic European roots. In *the Amityville Horror*, based on a true story, the Lutz stepfamily settles in a neo-colonial house, where, as the opening credits inform the viewers in capital letters, "[a] mother, father and four of their children [have been] murdered… no apparent motive". At first sight, *The Amityville Horror* seems to provide a matrix for the Creel storyline. In the film's opening sequence, a red filter is colouring the sky beyond the house in blood red, the same colour as in the Upside Down. The presence of insects is also important in both works: flies in the film, signifying evil decay but also the biblical multiplicity of the devilish entity that haunts the house ("My name is Legion, for we are many", Mark 5:9); spiders in the series, which are described as both "solitary" and multiple, in the image of the evil boy that will destroy his home. In both cases, as an homage paid to Gothic literary tradition, the house is also like a body. In the Amityville old mansion, blood is oozing from the walls and the stairs. The façade is reminiscent of a menacing face: the gable windows are eyes watching the family, the brick chimney wall looks like a nose, and the row of downstairs windows is made to look like teeth ready to devour the newcomers. Fiedler affirms, "beneath the haunted castle lies the dungeon keep: the *womb* from whose darkness the ego first emerged, the tomb to which it knows it must return at last" (Fiedler, 1966: 132; quoted in Kahane, 1980: 47, my italics). Domesticity is here threatened by an evil force that is to be found in the cellar. The "womb" of darkness lies in the very foundations of the Dutch colonial house, represented as unstable, since the house seems to have been built on some sort of black oily goo that nearly swallows the family's stepfather. Menace here comes from the lower parts of the house, of mankind and its history. First, the father gets violent with his newly wed wife and her children (he nearly chops them into pieces with an axe), then the viewers learn that the neo-colonial house was home of a satanic cult in the 1920s. However, the menace remains non-descript as it is never individualised and clearly identified.

Comparing the Creel plotline to the 1980 film offers many interpretive keys, especially thanks to the series's divergence from the canon set by *The Amityville Horror*. First and foremost, to recycle Fiedler's wording, the darkness from which Vecna's ego emerges does not come from the cellar considered as the "womb" of the house, but from its upper part in the attic, from its head or mind. This special situation points the psychic ability and literal superiority of the boy. Unlike the Amityville non-descript menace from the past, the evil presence haunting the Creel House is clearly identified and individualised. It is the deranged mind of the

contemporary child, considered as different and unable to fit in, which is going to dismember the Creel family (and their house in the Upside Down). In other words, the menace comes from the Creel's present, not from the house's past. In dismembering the wooden family house, Vecna also chops down the family tree. No new generation is born of him as time is stopped in the Upside Down, "multiplying" is replaced by the rhizomatic proliferation of the same individual under different forms that are all connected. Vecna's power expands like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, defined by two principles: "connection" and "heterogeneity", "any point of a rhizome can be connected and must be" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 13, my translation). The horizontality of Vecna's influence seems to thwart the verticality of historical, chronological time. The family branch is thus replaced by Vecna's vines[25] corrupting whatever they are spreading over (see, for instance the rotting pumpkin field in season two). In the Upside Down, *Chronos* (linear, chronological time) gives way to *Kairos* (non-linear, frozen time). In Greek mythology, kairotic time represents a tipping point, the specific moment when choices are to be made and opportunities seized. It is thus not anecdotal that the last date in Nancy's diary in the Upside Down version of her teenage bedroom should be November 6th 1983. The day is that of Will's disappearance in the woods and that of her friend Barbara's murder by the Demogorgon. In the Upside Down, time has not moved on beyond that symbolic and traumatic moment, when Nancy chose to leave her friend alone and unprotected to have sex for the first time with Steve. When guilt-ridden Nancy confronts Vecna for the first time (S04E06), he keeps repeating that *he* remembers what *she* seems to have forgotten (her responsibility in Barb's death). What is dis/membered in Hawkins is re/membered in the Upside Down, where past traumas prevent time from passing and teenagers from healing and moving on.

> The gothic children, literally, are the children of the gothic edifice because of its capacity to contain and preserve memory. To the gothic child, the gothic edifice (as a structure of and within the text) is a receptacle of history, a monument, a place for remembering and a place to remember. (Georgieva, 2013: 19)

The whole of the Upside down can be said to work as a heterochronic "gothic edifice". The ruins that fill the Upside Down landscape are as many "receptacles" of what is lost and left behind by the unfortunates

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25. Those slimy bloody red vines are definitely organic as they look like intestines digesting Hawkins but also like umbilical cords feeding deviant creatures (demogorgons, demodogs, demobats and the mindflayer, which are eventually identified as mere extensions of Vecna's mind and body).

that are trapped in the alternate dimension, which preserves (and feeds on) traumatic memories.[26]

Conclusion

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In *Stranger Things*, the gothic mode is not merely utilised to create a sensational horrific atmosphere. Gothic enables the showrunners to build changing characters, caught in in-between situations and conditions, in other words adolescents, in the etymological sense, *adulescens* – children on their way to becoming adults. Gothic thus appears to be the proper narrative and generic tool to draw the tortured portraits of (in this case American) teenagers, already scarred by a traumatic past.[27]

Gothic is manifest in the excess of the architecture of the ancient Creel House, quite conventionally, but it is also used, and this is less traditional perhaps, to transcribe the excess of teenage characters, who oscillate between monstrous identities and super-heroic figures.

In the end, *Stranger Things* teenage heroes are *gothicised* insofar as they are represented as grotesque creatures roaming the liminal spaces – in the literal and metaphorical sense – of Hawkins. They embrace Gothic margins and in so doing are marginalised by their home community (parents and schoolmates for instance). Experiencing heterotopias (and even heterochronies, as far as the Upside Down is concerned), they develop heterogeneous individualities, for better (Nancy, Eleven, Eddie) or for worse (Vecna and even Will to some extent), which go beyond the stereotypical, univocal norms set by 1980s US society, which do not seem that remote from Victorian standards of traditional Gothic and horrific tales (if one thinks of "the angel of the house" or middle-class economic success, for instance). As gothicised adolescents, they are free to construct themselves "against" Reaganite social determinism and parental role models.

In the end, the 1980s as they are experienced by the Duffer Brothers' gothicised young protagonists are definitely not worth the viewers' nostalgia since the decade is depicted as socially and economically oppressive, unable to accept and absorb what Reaganite culture considered as "other".

Otherness is yet what the show's heroes long for.

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26. All of Vecna's younger victims have some guilty and traumatic event they wish to forget: their responsibility in a car accident or in a brother's horrible death, for instance.
27. Which might be interpreted as a metaphor for the US at large, whose national identity relied on its being a young, innocent country, traumatised (and guilt-ridden) by the horrors of the Vietnam war.

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Injustice, Discrimination and the Structuring of Sensitivity: Some Insights from *Shadowhunters*

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Abstract: As part of a broader reflection on the role that television series are playing in everyday life, in education and cultural debates, on how they support democratic values and polyphonic identities, this paper will explore the way in which the television series *Shadowhunters* deals with identity concerns and confronts prejudice and exclusion. It will analyse the patterns this series and the books behind it have elaborated to talk about the configuring of the self and, more specifically, the structuring of sensitivity. *The Mortal Instruments* (2007-2014) is a series of six young adult fantasy novels written by Cassandra Clare. It follows a group of Nephilim, humans with angelic qualities known as Shadowhunters, who fight demons and live in a world invisible to human eyes. In 2014 the decision was made that *The Mortal Instruments* would become a television series. The main character is Clary Fairchild, a seemingly ordinary human adolescent aged sixteen, who is led to discover her heritage as a Shadowhunter. The Shadowhunters' society is not exempt from perpetrating injustice and discrimination towards other beings, such as vampires, werewolves, fairies, warlocks (who are the Downworlders, a metaphor for despised minorities), and reinforces a climate of prejudice and distrust. Clary, however, starts questioning and addressing values and behaviour from a different perspective.

Keywords: Gothic, Order of Axiological Priority, Personal Identity, Prejudice, Sensitivity

The Mortal Instruments (2007-2014) is a series of six young adult fantasy novels written by Cassandra Clare. It follows a group of Nephilim, humans with angelic qualities known as Shadowhunters, who fight demons and live in a world invisible to human eyes. The main character is Clary Fairchild, a seemingly ordinary human adolescent aged sixteen,

who is led to discover her heritage as a Shadowhunter. With 36 (perhaps as many as 50) million copies in print worldwide, the book series, translated into 35 languages, has become one of the most popular within the young adult genre of urban fantasy. More than 20,000 fanfictions already exist, which continue telling stories about its characters. Such a fertile production can attest to the fact that Gothic narratives seem to particularly encourage teenagers to pour their imagination as spectators into concrete pieces of writing.

In 2014 the decision was made that *The Mortal Instruments* would become a television series. From March 2015 to May 2019 three seasons were released. Due mostly to inexperienced actors and actresses, to an insufficient budget, to extremely commercial aesthetic choices and to low quality special effects, the three seasons of the Nephilim saga, especially the first one, do not succeed in transposing the complexity of the plot and characters of the books, nor in dealing with the rich imaginary worlds depicted by Cassandra Clare. Stereotypes are abundant and the narration often lacks coherence. On top of that, essential scenes in the books that make visible the progressive personal and psychological transformation of central characters have simply been suppressed.[1] Nevertheless, the series, receiving a moderate approval among teenagers, has enlarged the audience of the books.

As part of a broader reflection on the role that television series are playing in everyday life, in education and cultural debates, on how they support democratic values (Laugier, 2023) and polyphonic identities, this paper will explore the way in which the television series *Shadowhunters* and the stories told in Clare's books deal with identity and diversity concerns, confronts prejudice and exclusion, discusses law-abiding attitudes, and addresses the conditions in which compassion, freedom and mutual understanding can grow. It will analyse the patterns this series and the books behind it have elaborated to talk about the configuring of the self and, more specifically, the structuring of sensitivity. This essay therefore sets out to examine some of the stages of the journey that brings a small group of singularly fated adolescents to deepen their sensitivity and structure it according to a moral order. As Steven Bruhm puts it, « we *are* what we have become in response to the threat of violence from anything like the figure of the father », and the Gothic is a mode of enacting « a narrative of prohibitions, transgressions, and the processes of identity construction that occur within such tensions » (Bruhm, 2002: 263). This study thus seeks to highlight how the young protagonists of the Shadow World overcome that initial violence and engage in a transformative process that

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1. A telling example comes from the last episode of the series when, according to the source material, the vampire Simon should have reverted to his original human condition, which is not the case in the television series.

will enable them to structure their identity according to an order of moral values.

The organisation of the Shadowhunters' society is based on a strict set of laws and rules whose motto is *dura lex, sed lex*.[2] Despite its noble function, this statutory legislation is frequently used by Nephilim (human beings with angelic blood in their veins) to justify immoral actions, which perpetrate injustice and discrimination towards other beings, such as vampires, werewolves, fairies, warlocks, the Downworlders, and reinforce a climate of prejudice and distrust. Clary, who is a "fair child", starts questioning and addressing values and behaviour from a different perspective. With Simon, her beloved friend, who chooses to follow and support her in the Shadow World, Clary falls into a dimension populated by demons and demon hunters. Raised in a loving and caring family, she is led to interact with her new companions from her personal perspectives, shedding a compassionate and innocent light on abnormal circumstances and incidents. Clary and Simon will progressively befriend Alec, Isabelle and Jace, three Shadowhunters already used to fighting dangerously and risking their lives. They will also gradually become familiar with Magnus, a four hundred years old warlock who « thinks of himself as a freewheeling bisexual » (Clare, 2012: 389).

The whole young company is composed of typical Gothic characters, rootless, hidden, ambiguous selves, « no longer [children], not yet [adults] » (Byron & Deans, 2014: 91), borderline beings who, walking on the edge of their multiple nature (human, angelic, demoniac), subvert any ideological assumptions. They eschew, each according to their own disposition and singular condition, the dominant social and moral paradigms. By exercising their imaginative freedom, they constantly push the limits of what is acceptable and authorised. It is in this respect that *The Mortal Instruments* can be read as Gothic novels, for they « offer the adolescent a different choice: the possibility of subversion and transgression, or else the "safety of conformity." » (Byron & Deans, 2014: 93) The protagonists of Clare's novels choose insubordination, the only posture that makes it possible for them to express the conflicts inherent to their interior life. The latter being « a major theme of the Gothic » (Bruhm, 2002: 262), this naturally suits adolescents in their need to explore and simultaneously shape their interior depths, as well as to « address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural […]. » (Hogle, 2002: 4)

In the course of their adventures, the five teenagers and the warlock Magnus get closer and closer, interlace their personalities and begin

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2. The law is hard, but it is the law.

to structure their sensitivity according to an axiological[3] order of priorities. Witnessing on the screen the full range of sentiments, expectations, aspirations, beliefs, and fears which generate such kinds of body and soul transfigurations, it seems that the spectators in front of their devices participate actively in what can be defined as an educational and moral evolution. This communion process is one of the main reasons for the huge popularity of television series among teenagers. According to the « *absolutisme sériephile* » of Sandra Laugier, television series:

> are constitutive of human life forms; […] they are resources for our scientific and moral education; […] they give us access to reality in new and unimaginable ways. From this point of view, […] it is outdated and useless to see television series as tools of mass manipulation that impose dominant visions of reality, or as "mirrors" of society that reveal its contradictions and problems. The interest and strength of television series lie primarily in their capacity to provide moral training and to foster the appropriation of reality.[4] (Laugier, 2019: 21)

The French philosopher thinks that the integration of television series into daily life makes the spectators develop an emotional connection with the characters (Gefen & Laugier, 2020). The strength of television series, she believes, lies in « their ability to educate us and make us progress, through the attachment to characters over the course of their lives and to groups whose interactions both include and move us. »[5] Thus, television series' characters are « the vehicles or accomplices of the conversation that the viewer constantly engages in with his or her own moral conceptions while watching what is being watched. »[6] (Laugier, 2019: 15)

Our analysis of the main characters of the saga, four Shadowhunters, one human and one warlock, will necessarily draw from the books where their personalities have enough breadth to be investigated.

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3. *Áxios*: what has worth. Axiology: the theory of moral values, the discourse on what has worth. Axiological: relative to values. Cf. *Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales*, "Axiologie" (https://cnrtl.fr/definition/axiologie, last accessed 25/01/2023).
4. "[…] *les séries* […] *sont constitutives des formes de vie humaines;* […] *elles sont des ressources pour notre éducation scientifique et morale;* […] *elles nous donnent accès à la réalité de façon nouvelle et inimaginable. De ce point de vue,* […] *il est suranné et inutile de voir les séries télévisées comme des outils de manipulation de masse qui imposeraient des visions dominantes de la réalité, ou des 'miroirs' de la société qui en révèlent les contradictions et problèmes. L'intérêt des séries télévisées et leur force sont prioritairement dans leur capacité de formation morale et d'appropriation de la réalité.*"
5. "*C'est leur capacité à nous éduquer et nous faire progresser, à travers l'attachement à des personnages au long cours de leur vie et à des groupes dont les interactions nous incluent et nous animent.*"
6. "*Ce sont les supports ou les suppôts de cette conversation que le spectateur engage constamment avec ses propres conceptions morales en regardant ce qu'il regarde.*"

In the books as well as in the television series, a Shadowhunter can have and can be a parabatai, a sort of warrior soulmate, himself or herself a Shadowhunter. The word parabatai appears from the outset of the saga as a key notion to understand the strong and deep bond that will be built amongst the young protagonists in the course of the story. Clary has recently broken into the world of the Shadowhunters. As she fears for her mother's safety, she returns home only to find the place ransacked and her mother gone. After fighting and defeating for the first time a ferocious demon with the help of Jace, she is plunged into a state of unconsciousness and is taken care of by Isabelle, Alec and Jace for three days. It is here, in the Institute, a safe house for Shadowhunters, where the three teenagers live, that she first hears the term parabatai, uttered by Alec during a squabble with Jace: « "We may be parabatai," Alec said tightly. "But your flippancy is wearing on my patience." » (Clare, 2007: 69) Shortly afterwards at her home, where she is back with Jace who wants to help her understand what happened to her mother, she gets the following explanation: « "Parabatai," said Jace. "It means a pair of warriors who fight together—who are closer than brothers. Alec is more than just my best friend. […]." » (Clare, 2007: 87) In ancient Greek *parabátai* (παραβάται) is a nominative plural of *parabátes* (παραβάτης), which designates the warrior who fights on the chariot beside the charioteer (*aurige*). The corresponding verb is *parabaíno* (παραβαίνω), from "*para*", "next to", "by the side of", and "*baino*", to walk or to march, to proceed. The *parabátes* or side-man cannot leave the charioteer and fights to protect the latter, while the charioteer drives: the one is essential to the other. In the Shadow World, two Shadowhunters can choose to unite their lives forever and to become a couple of combatants operating in symbiotic coordination. In the direct sequel *Tales from the Shadowhunter Academy*, Magnus explains:

> Some people are uniquely suited to be parabatai […]. Born to it, you might say. People think it's about getting along, about always agreeing, being in sync. It's not. It's about being better together. Fighting better together. Alec and Jace haven't always agreed, but they've always been better together. (Clare & Johnson, 2015: 407)

The idea of being in deep union with someone, weaving indestructible and everlasting bonds of mutual understanding and support has always been, regardless of cultures and historical periods, one of the most powerful and meaningful levers for the imagination of young adults. The more this imperishable love is devoid of *éros* (erotic love) and filled with *philía* (friendliness, amiability)[7] and *agápē* (brotherly love)[8], the more it

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7. "Affectionate regard, friendship, usually between equals". Liddell, Scott, Jones, "Philía", *Ancient Greek Lexicon* (LSJ, https://lsj.gr/wiki/φιλία, last accessed 03/02/2023).
8. In Christianity, *agápē* is the highest form of love, charity. Cf. Liddell, Scott, Jones, "Agápē", *Ancient Greek Lexicon* (LSJ, https://lsj.gr/wiki/ἀγάπη, last accessed 03/02/2023).

affects adolescents in their difficult "navigation". Considering that the parabataic relationship forbids amorous feelings by law (*dura lex, sed lex*), it becomes even clearer how much it embodies the ideal purity of a union that allows adolescents to explore love in its highest form, that which the absence of erotic attraction makes disinterested. Clare picked up from the Bible (Ruth 1: 16-17) the words pronounced by the two Shadowhunters during the parabatai ceremony. In these verses, Ruth shows her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, after the death of her husband:

> Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following [after][9] thee
>
> For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge
>
> Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God
>
> Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried
>
> The Lord [Angel] do so to me, and more also, if aught but death shall part thee and me.[10] (Webster Bible translation)

Again from the Bible, albeit from the New Testament, Paul's words in the first letter to the Corinthians may well be the very ones that resonate in the young minds of the small group of protagonists grappling with the construction of their relational identity:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7. New International Version)

This is the ideal of love that drives them, even when *éros* is an integral part of it, as in the case of the paradigmatic relationship that Simon and Isabelle build throughout the story.

The concept of parabatai can provide us with an interesting perspective for interpreting the transforming dynamic existing between the five teenagers and a centuries-old warlock. The experience of coordinating one's actions and thoughts in parabataic union (a concept that conveys the strength of *philía*) sheds light on the nature of the relations that will allow a company of timid, unconfident, vulnerable, *sui generis* young people to

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9. In brackets are added the words that Cassandra Clare chose for her own version of this passage.

10. During the time of the judges, an Israelite family from Bethlehem – Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their sons Mahlon and Chilion – emigrated to the nearby country of Moab. Elimelech died, and the sons married two Moabite women: Mahlon married Ruth and Chilion married Orpah. After about ten years, the two sons of Naomi also died in Moab. Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She told her daughters-in-law to return to their own mothers and remarry. As Orpah reluctantly left, Ruth declared her intent. The significance of this oath appears even more clearly when remembering that Ruth is the great-grandmother of David the King.

progressively overcome what sorrowfully holds them back. At the beginning of *City of Bones* (the first novel of *The Mortal Instruments*), the five members of the « Team Good », as Simon ironically calls them, appear as stereotypical characters, each of them embodying standard qualities and flaws: Jace is reckless, Isabelle is a heartbreaker, very comfortable with her body, Simon is a geek, Clary is an idealist, Alec is the opposite of Jace and they are parabatai. Magnus, who is at once in and out of the Team, plays the role of a frivolous and nonchalant young/old man. In the course of their journey, they will discover and *activate* many other layers of their personalities, of their singular sphere of sensitivity, and will therefore discover a more appropriate order of values, that is to say a broader moral horizon.

Italian philosopher Roberta De Monticelli (2012) calls *ordo amoris* (love order, order of the heart) the value priority system that each person elaborates over his/her existence: « [The] order of the heart [is a] concrete personal order of axiological priority activated in every response more or less appropriate to the demands of reality [...]. »[11] (De Monticelli, 2012: 208) Such a personal order of axiological priority has not only been developed through reasoning and conceptualisation but also through the faculties related to sensitivity which is « a modality of experiencing reality, and by no means a realm of subjective arbitrariness ».[12] (De Monticelli, 2012: 71). The value priority system of each individual tells us about his/her moral identity; our moral identity becomes visible in our choices and behaviour; the way we are affected by the world motivates those choices and that behaviour. As De Monticelli explains, we perceive the richness of the world as an ensemble of axiological qualities which affect us positively or negatively and move us more or less profoundly. The responses we give to the « demands of reality » are rooted in the experience of values (De Monticelli, 2012: 75). Emotional sensitivity is not given once and for all but needs to be activated and structured according to an axiological order. The activation can only be progressive, layer by layer, from the most superficial or outer strata to the inner ones. A person, De Monticelli points out, will feel, will be affected by a greater or lesser "amount" of reality depending on the greater or lesser amount of activated layers of his/her sensitivity. The sphere of sensitivity is therefore susceptible to maturation. The maturity of a person is ultimately the maturity of his/her sensitivity (De Monticelli, 2012: 77), the way he/she perceives, understands and is affected by the world. This article's aim is to identify the founding stages of the maturation process that the five adolescents undertake *together*; the maturation of the sphere of sensitivity indeed cannot,

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11. "[*L'*]*ordine del cuore* [*è un*] *ordine personale concreto di priorità assiologica attivato in ogni risposta più o meno adeguata alle esigenze del reale* [...]." All translations are ours.
12. "[...] *una modalità della nostra esperienza del reale, e per nulla affatto un regno dell'arbitrarietà soggettiva.*"

by definition, be an individual or solitary path since it is always thanks to or because of the other that sensitivity is refined and deepened. Life, De Monticelli argues, consists essentially in the responses, more or less suitable, we give to the demands of reality: usual or exceptional behaviour, decisions, commitments, struggles. The gang of steadfast and subversive types we are following in this paper will prove to be intelligent and imaginative in rejecting the discriminatory and corrupted socio-political system. Their maturity reflects the maturity of their sensitivity as well as the structure of their *ordo amoris*. A very large part of what we call "understanding", De Monticelli underlines, is indeed related to the activation and structuring of sensitivity.

Jace is the first character whose evolution we will follow by analysing a few key events that activate deeper layers of his sensitivity. In this maturing process the relationship with Clary plays a decisive role. Not aware of his origins, Jace seems not to care about his past and his future; he lives in the moment, looking for the next combat. He meets Clary and they fall deeply in love. Raised in a loving family, far from the world that the war between demons and Shadowhunters makes unstable and terrible, Clary acts towards Jace as the one who opens a way to new modes of perceiving and understanding. Clary, however, is able to fulfil this function precisely because Jace is in love with her. Jace's love for Clary makes him apt to contemplate Clary's *ordo amoris*, for « [a]ll positive relational feelings are precisely dispositions to sense the reality of others and the axiological universes connected to it. »[13] (De Monticelli, 2012: 194) The relationship between Clary and Jace resembles the one existing between *parabatai*, but *éros* occupies the place of *philía*. One of the scenes that can illustrate this angle of analysis takes place at the end of the first book. Valentine, the villain and Clary's biological father, is about to put to death Clary's adoptive father (who is a werewolf) and he is manipulating Jace who erroneously believes that Valentine is his father. Jace's ambivalence towards Valentine traps him in the psychological dynamic that Hogle identifies as characteristic of the Gothic: « In some way the Gothic is usually about some "son" both wanting to kill and striving to be the "father" and thus feeling fearful and guilty about what he most desires » (Hogle, 2002: 5). Realising, at least intuitively, that Jace is struggling within a destructive *ordo amoris*, Clary, very wisely, appeals to Jace's sphere of affectivity and manages to make him perceive her sorrow and despair, as well as to bring out his own thoughts and fears:

> "You have a family", she said. "Family, those are just the people who love you. Like the Lightwoods love you. Alec, Isabelle-" Her voice cracked. "Luke is my family, and you're going to make me watch him

13. "*Tutti i sentimenti relazionali positivi sono propriamente disposizioni a sentire la realtà altrui e gli universi assiologici a essa collegati.*"

> die just like you thought you watched your father die when you were ten years old? Is this what you want, Jace? Is this the kind of man you want to be? Like –"
>
> She broke off, suddenly terrified that she had gone too far.
>
> "Like my father", he said. (Clare, 2007: 455)

It is relevant to note that Clary, by encouraging Jace to break a negative and disruptive pattern, which often consists in inflicting upon others the sufferings we ourselves have endured, initiates a process that will lead the boy to sharpen his sensitivity and, as a consequence, his moral skills.

A second excerpt takes us to the fifth book where Jace's maturation is more visible. In this scene Jace is once more under influence, dominated by forces that try to shrink his axiological horizon. In the heat of the battle against Sebastian, the son of Valentine, Clary is once more called to recalibrate Jace's sphere of values. In doing so, she remembers the boy who had learnt, through progressive transformations, to care about himself and others: « She was seeing Jace and not-Jace: her memories of him, the beautiful boy she'd met first, reckless with himself and others, learning to care and be careful. » (Clare, 2012: 489)

To finalise the portrait of Clary and Jace and of their structuring relationship, one last salient dialogue needs to be quoted. The two valiant Shadowhunters have walked their initiatory path to the end. The bonds of indissoluble friendship they have forged with the rest of the company during tragic vicissitudes have enabled Jace to build a less negative vision of himself and others. While Clary, Jace and the whole company are enjoying a moment of peace in idyllic surroundings, Clary gives to Jace the ring of his true family, something of his past that he thought was forever lost. The passage that follows is indicative of the type of "parabataic" connection that the two teenagers have interwoven: « "Every time", he said quietly. "Every time I think I'm missing a piece of me, you give it back." » (Clare, 2014: 724) This short passage captures two interrelated ideas that important twentieth-century philosophers have been most concerned to investigate (Parfit, 1984; Ricoeur, 1990; Cavarero, 1997). The first assumes that personal identity is a constantly evolving phenomenon. The second that personal identity is a fragmentary and intermittent reality in whose elaboration those who know and love us participate. Clary seems to be able to catch and restore to Jace parts of the unique drawing of his life, as if the meaning of Jace's identity had been entrusted to Clary's telling of it. The resulting story is not the framework of a compact and coherent identity; rather, it reveals the sketch of a precarious unity.

Apparently very different from Clary is the second female character we wish to shed light on: Isabelle. She calls into question the problematics

of postfeminism. The term postfeminism, « widely accepted as a backlash to second-wave feminism » (Bae, 2011: 39), does not have an unambiguous meaning, although scholars agree that it spans feminism and antifeminism: « [b]ecause post refers to after, beyond, and past; postfeminism, having to do with the pastness of feminism, means a revolt against feminism. In reality, it is a set of values embracing both antifeminist and feminist values. » (Bae, 2011: 39) Incarnating the complexity inherent in postfeminist theory, Isabelle enacts well

> the 1990s phenomenon of Girl Power, which reclaims once disparaged elements of femininity and resignifies them in feminist and emancipatory terms. Girlies insist that feminism and femininity are not mutually exclusive but can be combined in a new, improved blend. (Genz, 2007: 72)

This approach to feminism is usually opposed by the previous generation of feminists[14], represented in the *Shadowhunters* series by Isabelle's mother, Maryse Lightwood. Two examples: one from the television series, season 1, episode 5, where Maryse openly disdains Isabelle's dressing style and the other from *City of Bones*. In episode 5, Isabelle's mother makes her appearance for the first time. In the New York Institute (the Lightwoods' home base), Clary and Isabelle are discussing how to find Valentine; Isabelle wears a tight short black dress whose low-cut neckline, not covering her bra, accentuates the curves of her breasts. She also wears black knee-high boots. A portal (a five-dimensional door) is opened inside the Institute and Maryse walks in with determined strides. Although she too is wearing a black dress, it is a classic sober suit. Her severe gaze seems to be void of maternal love. She inspects her daughter with a disapproving glance and utters: « Isabelle, dressed to impress, I see ». Openly contesting her daughter's dressing style, Maryse condemns Isabelle's seductive attitude and the idea of femininity associated with it. A closer look, however, reveals that, through the uninhibited and exuberant exercise of her femininity, Isabelle « seek[s] both to appease and to free [herself] from the excesses of male and patriarchal dominance » (Hogle, 2002: 5). Despite a lack of culinary skills, Isabelle enjoys cooking. She is however terrible at it because her feminist mother wanted her not to be trapped in the comfortable domestic prison « that revolves around the traditional triangle of "*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*" (children, kitchen, church) » (Genz, 2007: 71). As Jace says:

> Because […] it's only been recently that women have been Shadowhunters along with men. I mean, there have always been women in the Clave – mastering the runes, creating weaponry,

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14. Second wave feminism "commonly refers to the emergence of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s" (Brabon & Genz, 2007: 5).

> teaching the Killing Arts – but only a few were warriors, ones with exceptional abilities. They had to fight to be trained. Maryse was a part of the first generation of Clave women who were trained as a matter of course – and I think she never taught Isabelle how to cook because she was afraid that if she did, Isabelle would be relegated to the kitchen permanently. (Clare, 2007: 84)

That Robert, Maryse's husband and father of Alec, Isabelle and Max (the youngest brother), has been relieved by Cassandra Clare of any possible role in the transmission of the family's culinary art, tacitly provides the reader with an insight into the state of the Shadowhunters society's practices of exclusion. In order to be admitted to the public and political arena, women like Maryse have also adopted its flaws and constraints.

Maryse and Robert are thus representative of a narrow-minded, snobbish and discriminating society. Their oldest son, Alec, is not only gay but also guilty of being in love with a warlock, Magnus. Alec is totally terrified about the possibility that his parents would learn about his homosexuality. Only Isabelle knows and protects her sibling's secret. While Isabelle seems to pay much attention to the attractiveness of her body, she is extremely caring, maternal and considerate towards her friends and family, thus proving to be in search of a more complex identity and gender dimension, freer from predefined moulds. The scriptwriters of the television series decided to make more explicit the conflict between generations about homosexuality and class belongingness using the popular plot twist of a wedding interrupted by the discriminated lover. In season 1, episode 12, Alec Lightwood, in spite of his love for Magnus, has decided to marry Lydia Branwell, a respected Shadowhunter, in order to please his parents. This emblematic scene deserves to be described in its entirety not only because it makes clear the profound complicity existing among the members of the Team Good, together with the respect and support they vow to one another, but also because it captures and makes palpable (with the techniques proper to the cinematic medium) a moment of axiological structuring, during which a deeper layer of Alec's sensitivity is activated and positioned according to a moral order. It should be stressed that it is thanks to Alec's love for his friends and his sister that he is able to orient his moral sensitivity in the direction of a more authentic *ordo amoris*. At the acme of the nuptial ceremony, Magnus makes his appearance. Isabelle, radiant and visibly moved, admits that she invited him. Alec's parents are outraged and Maryse, barring the way to the warlock, tries to make him leave. Magnus, majestic and unyielding, exclaims that he will leave if Alec asks him to. On the altar, Alec, perceptibly shaken, stares dumbstruck at the gorgeous and intelligent young woman who is to become his wife. A joyous trepidation shines in the eyes of Alec's friends. Far from reacting with anger and lack of understanding, Lydia intercepts Alec's disoriented

gaze and encourages him to embrace his feelings for Magnus. Alec, out of breath, stumbles over an apology. From the altar, the young Lightwood turns his eyes to Magnus in the aisle. Alec is struggling because he understands that he is called to give an appropriate response to that specific « demand of the reality », that is, to clarify to himself which *ordo amoris* he has been elaborating: truthfulness over pretence, acceptance of his feelings' nature over acceptance of social decorum, his ideals over his parents' beliefs. « [It is] reality, with the demands it poses, » De Monticelli affirms (2012: 156), « which decides the fate, let us say, of our soul: its gradual dulling and dying, or its painful and blissful awakening and living. »[15] Alec slowly leaves the altar, his eyes settled on Magnus. With a newly discovered determination, he resolutely dismisses his mother's attempt to prevent him from reaching the warlock. He seizes Magnus and passionately kisses him unconcerned about the appalled Shadowhunters who have come for the wedding. His friends' and his sister's radiant faces smile timidly. Cassandra Clare tells the story of Alec's coming out towards the end of book 3, *City of Glass.* Although very concise, the scene does not lack intensity and, just like the nuptial ceremony from the series, it makes visible the maturation of Alec's sphere of sensitivity, as well as the incapacity of Alec's parents to dismiss their judgmental posture:

> Alec had his arms around Magnus and was kissing him, full on the mouth. Magnus, who appeared to be in a state of shock, stood frozen. Several groups of people – Shadowhunters and Downworlders alike – were staring and whispering. Glancing to the side, Simon saw the Lightwoods, their eyes wide, gaping at the display. Maryse had her hand over her mouth. (Clare, 2009: 423)

Alec, a gay, sexually inexperienced half-angel, and Magnus, the bisexual son of a demon having had thousands of partners, embody two main themes of gothic literature: abnormality and queerness (Palmer, 2012; Westengard, 2022). Clare describes Magnus as an eccentric creature, who likes to dress flamboyantly and does not hesitate to make use of nail polish, make-up and glitter. The figure of the warlock, who by definition deviates from the normal, allows Clare to give life to a character who, not being bound by the criteria of acceptability, can freely subvert the canons of what is permitted or forbidden. Alec, for his part, embodies a less conspicuous but equally subversive queerness since, by not recognising and not accepting the separation that exists between Shadowhunters and Downworlders, he questions one of the cornerstones of the society to which he belongs. By pairing Alec and Magnus in a romantic storyline, Cassandra Clare takes a

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15. "[È] *la realtà, con le esigenze che pone, che decide del destino, diciamo così, della nostra anima: del suo graduale ottundersi e spegnersi, o del suo doloroso e felice rinnovarsi e vivere.*"

stance against discrimination and exclusion[16] while claiming for her work Gothic inheritance. Hybridising, indeed, angelic and daemonic aspects of nature, Clare not only explores divergence instead of rejecting it, but she also elaborates her poetics beyond normality and abnormality. The last words of Nick Groom's essay, *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (2012), remind us, tragically, of the insanity of any attempt to understand reality through notions such as normality and abnormality:

> The culture of blame […] is symptomatic of how Western society treats difference, of how "normality" is aggressively imposed. This is not simply reactive, it can be brutally proactive. In 2007, a twenty-year-old woman named Sophie Lancaster was beaten to death in a park in a Lancashire town simply because she was dressed as a Goth. […] Her death is a chilling reminder that dissent, the lifeblood of a liberal and democratic society, can come at an awful cost. (Groom, 2012: chapter 13)

In *Shadowhunters*, the discriminations that the Downworlders still suffer from are never unquestioned, in Clare's novels as well as in the television series. As McCallum pertinently points out, the contemporary Gothic genre reflects better the complexity and the conflicts of modern societies because, by its nature, it must keep detecting the displacement of the line discriminating between what is perceived as normal or pathological, natural or aberrant, admissible or shocking. He writes that

> The binaries of heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine, perverse/normal, even subject/object […] have all been contested, reinforced, and reconfigured in significant ways in both theory and social practice since 1960 […]. These shifts have had an impact on the Gothic as well, since changing frontiers of social acceptability recalibrate what shocks, thrills, or horrifies. (McCallum, 2014: chapter 5)

Through the vampire Raphael Santiago, whose asexuality is clearly underrepresented in the media, the television series *Shadowhunters* further investigates queerness:

> To "queer" means to destabilize the settled and normative meaning (of a word, notion, or text), to pervert that meaning (given the etymological root of "perversion": to "turn away"), just as queer sexuality perverts or turns away from heterosexual norms. (McCallum, 2014: chapter 5)

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16.   In 2019, Cassandra Clare published *The Red Scrolls of Magic* and, in 2020, *The Lost Book of the White*. The protagonists of these two books are Alec and Magnus, who in the meantime have adopted a newborn warlock.

Raphael is the respected leader of New York's vampire clan; he was transformed into one of the Night Children when he was fifteen. Raphael's asexuality is confirmed during episode 10, season 2. Raphael and Isabelle have become very close due to Isabelle's addiction to a substance which, giving temporary relief from pain, causes a feeling of healing and euphoria. Since its active ingredient is the venom present in a vampire bite, Isabelle quickly starts to depend on Raphael to assimilate the drug. The two of them begin to learn more about each other and they become close friends. When the vampire eventually declares his feelings for her, Isabelle enticingly asks him to kiss her. Raphael winces and shyly backs away, claiming that he is not « like that » and that he is « just not interested in sex ». Even though the flirtation between Raphael and Isabelle does not exist in the books, the vampire's coming out is consistent with the character depicted by Cassandra Clare. As a queer character, Raphael fits well in the gothic genre (Fincher, 2007); his asexuality however exceeds stereotypes concerning vampires, including those created during the last three decades. As Groom (2012: chapter 13) states, « [t]he sexual politics of vampires have also been romantically reinvented for teenage boys (*The Lost Boys*, Joel Schumacher, 1987) and teenage girls (*The Twilight Saga*, 2008-12). » As for Simon, the nerdy mundane transformed into a vampire, he conveys some stereotypical traits better than Raphael. Although Simon is described as being more seductive than his human self, his sex appeal could not be compared to that of a conventional vampire. His physical appearance would hardly impress; on his face still linger infantile characteristics, while his body betrays his insecurity and his feeling of inadequacy. Isabelle muses on what attracts her to him:

> She couldn't help staring at Simon as if he were some exotic species of animal. He lay on his back, his mouth slightly open, his hair in his eyes. Ordinary brown hair, ordinary brown eyes. His T-shirt was pulled up slightly. He wasn't muscular like a Shadowhunter. He had a smooth flat stomach but no six-pack, and there was still a hint of softness to his face. What was it about him that fascinated her? He was plenty cute, but she had dated gorgeous faerie knights, sexy Shadowhunters… (Clare, 2012: 172)

As the reader will discover all fifth and sixth books long, where the relationship between Isabelle and Simon grows deeper, what fascinates Isabelle is Simon's *ordo amoris*: « She couldn't remember a time when she hadn't loved him or trusted him, and he'd never given her a reason not to do either. » (Clare, 2014: 378) The axiological structuring of sensitivity is, indeed, vividly voiced, we believe, in Simon's trajectory. First of all, he proves to be a faithful friend who willingly follows Clary into her dramatic new life and does not hesitate to lay down his life for her. In love with her since their childhood, he joins in his experience the three aspects

of love we mentioned (*éros*, *philía* and *agápē*). Furthermore, he has the privilege and the curse to belong to and traverse all dimensions of being. Born as an ordinary mundane, he dies because of Clary's new life, is buried and reborn as a vampire. He then becomes a powerful Daylighter, a vampire able to stand in the sunlight without burning. To protect him from Raphael, who wants to barter his life for the vampire clan's alliance in the battle against Valentine, Clary scars Simon with the first mark, the mark of Cain[17], making him invincible. In many ways, Simon incarnates the purity, the innocence, the integrity of adolescence which make him incorruptible, out of reach of any inequitable political power. When the Inquisitor Aldertree (as powerful as a Prime Minister) throws him in prison and tortures him into making a false statement, Simon refuses categorically (Clare, 2009: 107). Aldertree's manipulating logic within the *Raison d'État* cannot undermine Simon's moral order.

In the course of his ascending trajectory, Simon deepens and axiologically structures his sensitivity and, therefore, his identity. According to De Monticelli, this process of deepening and structuring highlights precisely that sensitivity has an identity nature: « in the *ordo amoris* resides one's identity »[18] (De Monticelli, 2012: 81). Emotional life, De Monticelli very incisively writes in the preface to the 2012 edition of her work, is of enormous importance in the emergence of personal identity, of « an unmistakable style in responding to the demands of reality »[19] (De Monticelli, 2012: I). The personalities of the six members of Team Good are so endearing precisely because their « unmistakable style » is permeated with courage, selflessness, loyalty, compassion. These are the character excellences that determine their responses to the « demands of reality ». At the apex of his personal growth, Simon begins his descending trajectory which, as a freely made sacrifice, leads him to be downgraded, to lose his immortality, his powers, his strength and all his memories of the Shadow World. Such an absolute renunciation, offered to save his friends' lives, will give him access to a novel ascension towards, this time, the semi-angelic condition.

In the analysis we have conducted so far, Simon certainly emerges as the character who best exemplifies the kind of axiological structuring of sensitivity that this study has sought to highlight. Besides, the choices that Simon makes on each occasion and the actions of which he is the agent emphatically reveal the intimate nexus between personal identity and *ordo amoris* that De Monticelli pinpoints. A convergence therefore appears

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17. "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. / And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." (King James Version)
18. "*nell''ordine del cuore' risiede l'identità delle persone.*"
19. "*uno stile inconfondibile di risposta alle esigenze della realtà.*"

between Simon's order of moral values and the words from Milton's *Paradise Lost* that Cassandra Clare put at the end of her six-book long story. Remembering the ruinous decision of fallen angels to reign in hell rather than to serve in heaven, it seems to us that Simon incarnates the opposite destiny since, loving Clary freely, he freely served her ideals:

> Freely we serve
>
> Because we freely love, as in our will
>
> To love or not; in this we stand or fall. (Milton, 1667: 5, 539-540)

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The Physiology of Thresholds in Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018)

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Abstract: The present article focuses on Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Hill House*, a ten-episode series released on Netflix in 2019 and which the writers claimed was partly inspired by Shirley Jackson's acclaimed novel of the same name. Both narratives are articulated around the towering and bleak presence of Hill House and its crippling influence on a variety of characters. However, questions pertaining to the notion of adaptation or faithfulness will not be tackled here. Instead, we wish to examine the concept of adolescence through the study of boundaries, thresholds and, more generally, liminality. Our discussion will be informed by concepts aligning space and body with a view to shedding new light on the gothic paraphernalia of the show. It will first deal with the bleak and labyrinthine setting of Hill House as a porous and crumbling structure whose cinematic transcription challenges the traditional understanding of space. This contribution will then study the different members of the Crain family and how their characterisation borrows from gothic readings of the ailing and failing body. Finally, we wish to go beyond familiar (albeit fascinating) analyses of liminality (with, for instance, the heterotopic space and the liminal neophyte, our focal points in parts one and two respectively) and apprehend formal and stylistic playfulness through the study of thresholds and transitions in the very fabric of the television narrative.

Keywords: Haunting, Liminality, Threshold, Heterotopia, Gothic Body

Introduction

"A house is like a person's body: the walls are like bones, the pipes are veins, it needs to breathe, it needs light and flow, and it all works together, to keep us safe and healthy inside" (Olivia Crain, episode 2 "Open Casket"). Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Hill House* perfectly

fits the generic codes of the haunted/gothic house story which Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel so perfectly celebrated,[1] despite the numerous departures from and betrayals of the original content.[2] Released in 2018 as a ten-episode series, Flanagan's creation focuses on Hugh and Olivia Crain and their children (Steven, Shirley, Theo and the twins, Nell and Luke) as they move into a derelict house which they aim to recondition and sell during the summer of 1992. Throughout the ten episodes, the narrative shifts back and forth between 1992 and 2018, while showcasing each character's journey before and after their last night in Hill House – the night when Olivia Crain was last seen alive. The show therefore relies on templates of the gothic and most specifically of recent gothic cinema and television – trauma, depression, abject motherhood, addiction, and anthropomorphic spaces to name but a few – while offering new takes on the cinematic treatment of the haunted house itself.[3] Indeed, Hill House is "cold" (Theo, episode 3 "Touch"), it was "born bad" (Steve, episode 10 "Silence Lay Steadily"), a carcass which smells of ruin (Hugh, episode 7 "Eulogy") and watches every move one makes (Shirley, episode 2). It is a nodal space to which the Crain family keeps returning, after having tried so hard to flee it in their past. As Olivia's aforementioned words (as well as the promotional posters) suggest, the 2018 series toys with the familiar motif of the house-as-body.[4] Matt Bernico details for instance the anthropomorphic (as well as animal) patterns one might glimpse on the wallpapers, doorknobs and pieces of furniture in Hill House (Bernico, 2020: 42). Flanagan even offers to explore this theme further by aligning house, body and filmmaking techniques, inviting the viewers to appraise the plasticity and flexibility of the surface, joints and thresholds of the television narrative itself. As Giuliana Bruno contends in "Bodily Architectures", "[h]ouse, body, and the 'film body' are erotic surfaces. Their interior can be explored, analyzed, anatomized. Their exterior is clothed." (Bruno, 1992: 110)

While the gothicity of Flanagan's work doesn't need substantial justification or argumentation, the inscription of the present article in a collection dedicated to gothic television and teenagers certainly does. Indeed, the whole first season of the show is articulated around two timelines

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1. Zachary Sheldon argues for a shift in genre: the show "beginning as a haunted house story with supernatural forces acting upon its characters and ending as a psychological horror drama, with the horror located in the minds and bodies of its central characters as affected by the pervasiveness of mental illness" (Sheldon, 2019: 45).
2. It has been countlessly argued that the show is loosely adapted from, or a reimagining of Jackson's novel. Two years later, Flanagan released a second season which drew its inspiration from Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*), and is currently working on a third instalment, this time based on Edgar Allan Poe's works and most specifically "The Fall of the House of Usher". The present article does not wish to comment on the adaptation process nor will it refer to the critical reception of the show, be it positive or negative.
3. See for instance *Crimson Peak* (Del Toro, 2015), *The Hole in the Ground* (Cronin, 2019), *His House* (Weekes, 2020), *The Midnight Club* (Fong and Flanagan, 2022), etc.
4. "The house is more than a monstrous mother – it is a monstrous family" (Wetmore, 2020: 2).

– that of the Crain siblings when they were children and living in the title house and that of the family members two decades later, struggling to cope with the violent death of the mother, Olivia (who killed herself in the same house). Therefore, the very period of adolescence seems, at first, to be missing (even if one may argue that young Shirley and Steven are in their early teenage years in the first timeline). However, what this contribution aims to put forward, is how the essence of adolescence permeates the whole show in its various acceptations and meanings, but also how the absence of the Crains as teenagers further exemplifies the ghostly subtext of the series. Indeed, the contrast between the show's smooth transitioning from one timeline to another and the characters' struggle to move on in life actually illustrates and complicates what adolescence stands for: evolution, growing up, maturing, crossing boundaries and thresholds; or, in the words of Glennis Byron and Sharon Deans, "that time of disturbance, change, and growth, […] when there is as much an inversion of boundaries as there is in the Gothic" (Byron and Deans, 2014: 87).[5] We therefore wish to contend that while the teenager as a thematic compound remains spectral, off screen and extradiegetic – at times the characters mention their stay with Aunt Janet, Olivia's sister, and the progressive estrangement of their father, but these elements are never shown – it becomes a structuring device when applied to the symbolic and formal levels. What's more, the numerous ghosts which prowl around Hill House are "unstable interstitial figures" (Weinstock, 2013: 63) that articulate the show's discourse on leakage and porousness, as well as its innovative take on the motif of the threshold becoming a fruitful liminal zone baffling and playing with temporality, spatiality, narration and even more traditional television codes.

The following paper will thus analyse gothic adolescence in *The Haunting of Hill House* as a liminal construct, both temporal and spatial, in the broader framework of liminality theories, with a specific focus on the threshold as object and concept. Arnold van Gennep's seminal *Les Rites de Passage* (1909), which famously determined three phases in the individual's moving from one social position to another (the separation, transition and incorporation phases), considered puberty, alongside birth, marriage and death, as a key moment in life, a rite of passage (van Gennep, 1981: 13). According to Victor Turner, who further expanded van Gennep's theories, while in the transition phase (the *limen*, or margin), the "neophyte" (or here, adolescent) remains structurally if not physically invisible (Turner, 1967: 95). This systemic invisibility naturally begets images of ghosts, haunting and spectrality, even death ("a neophyte is structurally 'dead'" Turner, 1967: 96) and fits within a gothic narrative of

social annihilation and subject dissolution. Conversely, more recent discussions on liminality tend to analyse occurrences and situations of instability in textual, filmic and television narratives as states of "perpetual adolescence" (McHugh, 2010: 5), which again bolsters the analogy between the two notions.

This paper wishes to explore the fertile interaction between space, body/family and film through the motif of the threshold. We will first examine the porousness of the structure of Hill House before focusing on the physiological and psychological thresholds between the Crain family members, and finally explore the "fruitful darkness" (Turner 1967: 110) which the breaching of boundaries begets in the filmmaking itself.

Porous membranes: the leaking house

The first shot of episode 1 does not shy away from its almost overwhelming legacy of cinematic gothic houses (from Robert Wise's *The Haunting* to Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* or Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak*) as it introduces Hill House at night, towering and organically alive. It playfully meets the viewer's expectations with its steady walls, silent halls and angular geometry, as evidenced in the opening words (Jackson's first lines quoted almost verbatim but here attributed to Steven Crain's novel which – just like the house – feeds on the terror shared by the family members):

> Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within. It had stood so for a hundred years before my family moved in and might stand a hundred more. Within, walls stood upright, bricks met nearly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut. Silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House. And whatever walked there, walked alone. (episode 1, "Steven Sees a Ghost")

Unsurprisingly, the gothic setting of the house borrows from Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space since its basement is mostly a place of fear and danger as it is illustrated in episode 4, "Twin Thing", when Luke gets trapped in the cellar after having used the dumb waiter.[6] The building up of tension is facilitated by an alternation of shots showing the Crain parents trying to rescue the boy and the terrifying apparition of a decomposed creature. As Bachelard argues, downward movements illustrate the descent into one's subconscious, where deepest fears are repressed and

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6.　"Childhood experiences within the labyrinth of the gothic home are determined by increasing terror" (Georgieva, 2013: 173).

threaten to overwhelm one's sanity: "*la cave est alors de la folie enterrée, des drames murés*" (Bachelard, 1957: 37). Similarly, Maurice Lévy contends: "*La descente d'un escalier est toujours descente vers l'irrationnel.* […] *Plus on s'enfonce profondément en nous-mêmes, plus totalement on s'affranchit de la tutelle de la Raison*" (Lévy, 1995: 630). However, in episode 3, the basement becomes a place of revelations: when she lies on the basement sofa, Theo understands the sexual abuse which her young patient, Kelsey, has been the victim of, despite the painful toll it takes on her. This argues for a fruitful confrontation with one's repressed fears. However, despite embracing Bachelard's reading of the outside space as dangerous and threatening, the show eventually disrupts his conception of the home as a safe haven ("*maison natale*", Bachelard, 1957: 32), as will be argued later.

However impenetrable the house may seem, most thresholds in Hill House are eventually breached: windows are smashed with rocks and hail (episode 6 "Two Storms"), characters sneak in and out of it (Abigail in episode 10). Moreover, the house turns out to be filled with airlocks, phones, dumb waiters, hatches, all of which many ways of trespassing and crossing boundaries. Thus, the motif of the threshold is reified in the topography of the Crains' home – as the opening credits suggests. During the one-minute opening titles, the camera focuses on crying statues before zooming out and revealing the labyrinthine aspect of a miniature version of Hill House. A backward tracking shot then positions the viewer as a voyeur peeking through the keyhole of the Red Room door. Relying on gothic templates (domestic horror, scopophilia), the opening credits also suggest a disruption of traditional dialectics: the lure of the locked door and the secret room is reversed, as the viewer is almost expelled from the locus of revelation (the womb/stomach of the house, where Olivia tries to trap her children forever). The quest for knowledge, typical of 18th and 19th century gothic fiction heroines, becomes a constant movement back and forth, a never-ending crossing of thresholds which begets fear and terror. As Anne Louvat and Hélène Machinal contend, "*la terreur se développe dans les lieux de passage*" (Louvat, 2002 : 13). Passageways and overlapping settings are also a source of terror in episode 6 when Nell is temporarily spectralised on the screen. While the family members gather in the hall after a hailstorm broke out, Nell suddenly disappears from the screen (representing the subjectivity of the whole family) and reappears several minutes later. As Melanie Robson argues, "[d]espite the continuity offered by the long take, it is not possible for the viewer to witness the various disappearances and reappearances enacted in the episode" (Robson, 2019: 13). During this long take, Nell's feet are first moved to the fringes of the frame as she is seen standing next to the carpet where the rest of the family (except Theo) are sitting, before vanishing completely. While Robson argues for a traditional reading of the opposition margin/centre, whereby

"the potential threat [is placed] at the edges of the frame" (Robson, 2019: 13), one can also point to the horrific potential of this in-between space. Nell, even though she claims having been there all the time, seems to have been lost in the "dark fabric of the house" (Sheldon, 2020: 58), momentarily sucked in by the threshold which the camera materialises.

Similarly, the Crains quickly discover that the once imposing walls of the house are actually penetrable and "squishy". When Hugh and Steven try to get rid of the black mould which is progressively invading the foundations of the house, they knock down a load-bearing wall in the basement and discover that its insides are rotten and contaminated with the black substance (episode 7). The further they look, the more mould they find while exposing their lungs to its damaging spores. Here the black mould is seeping both into the walls and lungs of the family, threatening their health and sanity. As Dawn Keetley convincingly argues, black mould as microbial life "unmakes what we think is the fixed and impermeable border between life and death" (Keetley, 2020: 116). The image of corrupted foundations and seeping evil reaches its climax when father and son discover a corpse, that of mad William Hill who immured himself back in 1948. Flanagan here toys with the conceited motif of walls teeming with pest and evil (Lovecraft's rats, Poe's black cat)[7] or hiding the ugly truth of the death of previous tenants. By doing so, the narrative anticipates Olivia's final act of despair and madness while highlighting the porousness of human, physical and mental frontiers: "*Si l'ordure signifie l'autre côté de la limite, où je ne suis pas et qui me permet d'être, le cadavre, le plus écœurant des déchets, est une limite qui a tout envahi*" (Kristeva, 1980: 11). Not only does the abject corpse signify the impending collapse of the house (and the family), but it also manifests the Crains' incapacity to exist beyond the limitations of the house: "*Étrangeté imaginaire et menace réelle,* [*le cadavre*] *nous appelle et finit par nous engloutir.*" (Kristeva, 1980: 12)

The family's obsession with Hill House is therefore one of the main subplots of the 1992 timeline, and culminates in the mystery surrounding the red door which appears locked in and impenetrable. It is however revealed in episode 10 that the mysterious room which seemed at first to resist trespassing is actually a shapeshifting place adapting to every family member's inner wishes – a dance studio for Theo, a tree house for Luke, a toy room for Nell, a game room for Steve, etc. The Red Room can therefore be read as both heterochronia and heterotopia, a place that is "outside of all places," characterized by "temporal discontinuities" (Foucault, 1994: 179).[8]

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7. Hugh believes the scratching sound he hears is made by rats, but he soon discovers that it was probably made by the corpse trying to "scratch his way out" (episode 7).
8. More generally, the show is rife with heterotopic spaces: apart from Hill House, the series features a motel room, a graveyard, a mortuary and a night club. Even Shirley's car could be seen as a heterotopia.

According to Bertrand Westphal, "[*l*]'*hétérotopie est l'autre nom de la sphère d'intimité, que les codes éprouvent les pires difficultés à décrire et que chaque individu s'efforce d'étendre à loisir*" (Westphal, 2007: 108). The room's fluidity reaches its visual climax during the revelation scene as Flanagan uses a still frame and quick editing to express both the timelessness of the place and its morphing capacities. Such an overlapping of intimate spaces is once again reminiscent of Foucault's heterotopia (the theatre stage, he argues, "juxtapose[s] in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves […] a whole succession of places that are unrelated to one another," Foucault, 1974: 181), while the window being the only common point to all those shots ties once again the Red Room to the liminality of the threshold. More specifically, this room is a heterotopia of compensation, "creating a different space, a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is disorganized, badly arranged, and muddled" (Foucault 1994: 184), the entry to which is necessarily ritualised, albeit differently for each sibling/family member. The central room of the show's main setting therefore offers a continuum of space, it is a liminal space which encapsulates all the fringes and margins of Hill House and where young characters risk being entrapped forever and thus denied the possibility to grow and mature.[9]

Between limes and limen: the leaking body

It is generally contended that liminality originates from the Latin word *limen*, as Westphal reminds us: "*On aurait à garder à l'esprit que la liminalité relève du seuil (*limen*) et non de la frontière (*limes*): le seuil suppose le franchissement libre, contrairement à la frontière, qui peut se révéler étanche,*" (Westphal, 2007: 163), but the homophonic proximity between *limen* and *limes* expands the hermeneutic scope of our understanding of thresholds in the show. The series indeed thrives on this etymological ambivalence, especially through its treatment of time. Despite alternatively exploring the two timelines, the series counteracts gothic expectations of explaining the ghosts of the present by looking into the trauma of the past. Rather, the storyline is adamant in showing the importance of intersubjective relationships, but it also lays the emphasis on each of the characters' adult trajectories in a centripetal movement around the haunted house. By choosing to give the Crain couple five children, the perception of whom is the focus of the first five episodes, Flanagan and his writers explore different ways of dealing with one's own haunting. Somehow, each child appears as a dysfunctional limb or organ of a broader structure – family and society – which, just like the house, is transcribed on screen with the

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9.   Also explored in Georgieva's study: "borderline spaces outside of society – forests, islands, abandoned cottages, ruins, prisons," (Georgieva, 2013: 197).

language of the body and of physiological thresholds. Steve, the eldest of the Crain siblings, is the first character to be introduced to the viewer. The contrast between young Steve's role as the comforting big brother, which he appears to pride on, and adult Steve's capitalising on his past, with his successful novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, provides a guideline to the mechanics of the Crain family throughout the show. Steve ties the family together in his book which appears as a fraud, and one of the reasons why it dislocates (Shirley and Theo resent him for using the traumatising events in their childhood for profit). His own marriage is on the verge of collapsing, and the vasectomy he secretly gets further points to his dysfunctional body. He could be analysed as the (short-sighted) eyes of the Crains – however well he pretends to see through ghosts, he remains blind to his inner tragedy. Shirley, as a mortician, tries to restore the integrity of corpses – their skin and appearance, "filling their wounds with modelling material" (Laredo, 2020: 67) – and thus to capture the picture of the dead as they used to be. Her job constrains her to remain on the margins of society and of her own house. The show cleverly exploits the ambiguous continuity between her house and mortuary in space, time, but also in her identity, as there is no radical distinction between her job and personal life (she works with her husband). Shirley is the brain, constantly processing death, feeling responsible for her younger siblings and family's safety. And yet, she turns out to be lying about her own integrity (moral and physical), since it is revealed that she had an affair a few years earlier and never told her husband (which she does in episode 10, asking him to forgive her). As for Theo, her skin is no barrier as it can be penetrated by the feelings and the past of someone or something she touches. Despite using this preternatural gift to assist her young patients, Theo feels plagued by it and constantly wears gloves even in moments of intimacy.[10] Theo obviously embodies the hands of the Crain body, her sensitivity forever hampered and controlled by her angry and aloof attitude – Steve ironically describes her as a "clenched fist with hair" (episode 8 "Witness Marks"). As for Luke, he is a drug addict, living off his siblings' limited generosity (Shirley pays for his rehab for some time, but eventually gives up on him). His liminality is also explicit in his relation to space (he is mostly seen outside, in the street, in other people's homes) and in his obsession with the Bowler Hat Man's feet, which metaphorically lay the emphasis on his always running away from responsibility, his family, his rehab centre. Finally, Nell is also pictured as an outcast (her job remains ambiguous), battling depression in her messy room. It seems that she is expelled from the heteronormative structure when her husband dies (after a short-lived marriage). Nell's sleep paralysis also suggests a disrupted boundary between slumber and wakefulness, a liminal space in which she loses control of her body. Her

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10. The treatment of her lesbianism has been much discussed, as well as her commitment to a long-term relationship at the end, which places her once again in an ambiguous societal position.

disturbingly large, open and silent mouth translates Nell's inability to be listened to by her own family,[11] as well as her marginalised position within the show itself (in most shots of her ghost, she appears in the background or to the side of the frame) and within linear time itself. In other words, not only do the Crains embody the diversity of physical and psychological responses to trauma (depression, denial, anger, addiction…), but they also remain "betwixt and between all the recognized fixed points in spacetime of structural classification" (Turner, 1967: 81), failing to meet both family and societal expectations.

Unequivocally, *The Haunting of Hill House* ties the liminality of the Crain siblings to their conflicted relationship with their mother. Olivia, just like the other mother figures of show – Poppy, one of the previous tenants of Hill House, Mrs Dudley, the housekeeper – embodies the anxious, overprotective and devouring mother figure whose obsession with her children's untimely deaths (which she keeps having visions of) sets the story in motion.[12] While the first episode lays the emphasis on the mystery surrounding Olivia's disappearance, the penultimate ("Screaming Meemies") adopts the mother's point of view to account for her anxiety verging on pathological insanity.[13] As the show progresses, her mental deterioration translates in sleepwalking, dreadful headaches and a growing obsession with her abode. For instance, when she shows to her husband the master blueprint she has been working on for days (episode 7), Olivia doesn't understand why Hugh points to her that what seems to be mere doodles are actually miniature houses endlessly replicated inside the master print, an "endless extension of surfaces" (Link, 2020: 126). Such fractal vision of entrapment, containment and oppression betrays Olivia's determination to create a forever house for her family, to the point when Olivia becomes the house (or is it other way round?).[14] Hill House is hailed as a fortress by Olivia, a protective skin which, in the words of Ian Conrich, becomes "a layer that is part of the integumentary system, that protects and retains the body within" (Conrich, 2017: 181), here the body being the Crain children. Olivia's red dress is a cinematic cue to her becoming a ghost haunting the equally Red Room. Borrowing from the Terrible Mother archetype its "destructive and deathly womb, which appears most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth" (Neumann, 2015: 168), Olivia/Hill House wishes to protect her children against the hungry world out as she is urged to "hold the door" by Mrs Dudley (episode 9). However,

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11. "I was right here and I was screaming and shouting, and none of you could see me." (Younger Nell, episode 6)
12. "Violence wrought upon the young child is the necessary stage through which all narratives pass so that the plot can be set in motion." (Georgieva, 2013: 176)
13. "I wish I could just freeze them. Keep 'em just like this forever" (episode 9). In the same episode, she actually sees her twins dying as adults (Nell's corpse on Shirley's mortician table, and Luke having an overdose).
14. Aguirre reminds us that fractal objects are "inbetweeners" which "challenge the neat contours of Euclidian geometry" (Aguirre, 2000: 70).

Olivia's Red Room/Womb is equally hungry and seeks to absorb the Crain children,[15] when she desperately attempts to protect the twins by giving them tea with rat poison in the middle of the night to wake them up from the horrid dream of life which she equates with sadness, solitude, disease, and loss.[16] Luke and Nell are fortunately rescued by their father, but the latter cannot save Abigail, the Dudleys' daughter who had snuck out of her bed in order to play in the Red Room with the twins and their mother.

Abigail's ghost appears to her grieving parents in the aftermath of her poisoning. The makeup used on the young actress testifies to her spectral nature, but it doesn't make her inhuman. Just like Nell's, the ghost of the little girl carries inculpatory information about Olivia's actions and appears as a solacing, albeit mute, presence to the Dudleys. In that respect, spectral corpses in the show, the most prominent of which being obviously Nell, are "nodal figures" (Rabaté, 1993: 51-52), connecting characters' subjectivities with places and timelines. At times, they can elicit horror and disgust (Nell's gaping mouth, her bent neck), but abjection and rot are usually not shown and retained in the liminal space of the in-between. The abject nature of Nell's corpse is hinted at when Theo touches her with her bare hands, it is in the words of the mortician whom Shirley remembers from Olivia's funeral: "I ripped out [Nell's] organs and eyeballs, and I sucked out the blood and the shit, and plugged her holes so she wouldn't leak" (episode 10), it is in the corners of the frames, it is what the viewers' imagination fills those liminal spaces with: « *Frontière sans doute, l'abjection est surtout ambiguïté* » (Kristeva, 1980: 17). The liminality of the abject resonates with the Crains since they are most of the time portrayed as mourners – both timelines being articulated around the death/suicide of one (female) family member. Dara Downey posits that:

> [t]hose in mourning are caught in the indeterminate position between life and death, as figured by the uncanny presence of the corpse. In this sense, liminality is disorientating; the limits and borders of personality and/or cultural and social identity become ambiguous or dissolve, as do the limits and borders of space and/or time, as the mourners enter into and pass through the mourning period, and assume new structural and relational identities to the deceased. (Downey, 2016: 7)

However, one could argue, alongside Arpad Szakolczai, that some mourners can be "permanently stuck in rites of separation" and experience

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15.   As Nell says of the Red Room: "This room is like the heart of the house. No, not a heart, a stomach." (episode 10)
16.   In Poppy Hill's words: "A dream about sick and sad and disease and rot and loss and darkness. If they was stuck in that dream, you'd wake 'em." (episode 9)

permanent transitioning (Szakolczai, 2000: 212), which the show is keen to exploit in its aesthetics.

The Autonomous Territory of the Margin: Thriving in this In-between

In his introduction to *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*, Hein Viljoen borrows from van Gennep's theorisation of liminality and defines the boundary as a demarcation between zones of meaning. He even contends that borders are like membranes, filters opening up to liminal spaces and margins which can widen and become autonomous zones (Viljoen, 2007: 10). In *The Haunting of Hill House*, thresholds can not only be analysed as visual props, but also as innovative filming devices.

First, it should be noted that the show's *mise-en-scène* also participates in its overall gothic paraphernalia. The twins, Luke and Nell, fit the liminal gothic child pattern as they experience the horrors of oppressive spaces: endless corridors barely lit at night, towering closets and their creaking hinges, inaccessible basements concealing monsters in the shadows, etc.[17] The gothic display of terror is constructed around the children's fantasies and fears – which they either speak out or which the camera materialises by adopting their perspective. This is obvious in episode 4, when young Luke awakes at night and catches a glimpse of a tall silhouette in the corridor. A series of shot/reverse shots invites the viewer to hide behind Luke and to discover that the man is merely gliding a few inches above the floor, blindingly looking for the young boy with the tapping of his walking stick. Terrified, Luke then hides under his bed and waits for the ghost to leave – but he is eventually discovered. The scene ends with the ghost putting on a hat which he has just found on Luke's bed and bending down, his long fingers reaching out for a screaming Luke. The hackneyed trope of the child hiding under the bed allows for a distorted and unnatural perception of space (the bedroom) but also of the human form as it is reduced to its metonymic and gigantic feet. The obfuscation of meaning and vision reflects both the child's terror and the viewer's inability to make sense of ghost from a rational perspective. In his adult timeline, Luke is also haunted by the Bowler Hat Man who appears as a towering presence behind him. Despite the director no longer using low angle shots or floating spectres, the scene conveys the same sense of oppression

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17. "the gothic child is thus always to be found in some sort of transition between one state and another, something that, far from being contradictory, follows the lines of Hegel's dialectical combining of opposites which, on a spiritual and psychological level, is frequently termed 'liminality'" (Georgieva, 2013: 196).

as it focuses on the character's subjectivity and inability to find closure. Is the Man a metaphor of his trauma and subsequent addiction? Or is Luke haunted by his future plight right from his early days in Hill House? Are "young people […] vessels for adult projections, hopes and fears" (Georgieva, 2013: 186)? Or is it the other way round? Similarly, Nell is confronted with the reversal of chronological time, as episode 5 ("The Bent-Neck Lady") reveals that the ghost who had terrified and persecuted her in her childhood is actually a manifestation of her death by suicide. The twins, even more than their brother and sisters, embody liminal time and the "short-circuiting [that] is bound to happen between the different time periods of one's life"; in other words, "the present becomes past and the past present" (Szakolczai, 2000: 41). The notion of crossing thresholds and moving on is thus negated and this impossibility is materialised in the fabric of the show. Ghosts as generic props are like threads piecing the two timelines together even more efficiently than the characters themselves.

The constant narrative shift between past and present either manifests itself in hard cuts between the young and adult versions of the characters, or with smoother transitions such as the traditional doors opening and closing, characters falling asleep, etc. But the show also offers a variety of transitions which more than often suggest breaching physical and material boundaries. Flanagan uses match cuts with sound continuity for instance: when Shirley's husband, Kevin, nails a picture on the wall, the banging overlaps with the clanging of metal pokers inside the chimney in Hill House, when Hugh and Mr Dudley try to unclog it, in episode 1. He also uses voice continuity when young Shirley says "you fixed her" to the mortician who took care of her mother and then transitions into her older self standing in front of her dead sister's body while the same voice whispers "you fixed her" another time (episode 2). One character can also cross temporalities: in episode 4, a terrified Luke jumps over the last steps of the grand staircase after seeing a ghost on the phone and is seen landing on his adult feet in his rehab dorm; likewise, Nell hears the banging of fists against her hotel room door before the camera moves to reveal a younger version of Hugh, about to enter the same space decades earlier (episode 5). Sometimes, as critics have noted, the past and the present are intertwined in the same shot, the most conclusive illustration being the technically challenging sixth episode, "Two Storms", which lasts 55 minutes and is composed of only five sequence-shots. In this episode, older Hugh is given a peculiar role as he is physically able to move from one dimension to another: looking for the bathroom, he crosses the corridor of the funeral parlour and finds himself in 1992 Hill House, travelling through "a kind of architecture of anachronism," as Mark Fisher suggests in his analysis of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* (Fischer, 2012: 20). Earlier, as the camera is circling around him, he interacts with his children in their young form and in the few seconds that they are offscreen, they become

their adult selves. Thanks to this technical tour de force, Hugh is staged as the one who was supposed to accompany his children through their process of maturing (their teenage years) but who failed (his children went to live with their aunt Janet, and barely reunited with their father after that). Alternatively, the same movement will provide visual and sound continuity: older Steve seems to be trapped in Hill House as he sees the door of the Red Room closing on him (episode 10), but he concomitantly shuts down his laptop back in his home. In this sequence, again, the frontier between reality and dream/nightmare is blurred, and what seems at first to be an anecdotic conversation between a husband and his pregnant wife is unveiled as a grotesque vision of marital bliss (due to Steve's vasectomy, Leigh cannot possibly be pregnant). The signifiers of dream and reality become interchangeable: the vision of Leigh's pregnancy belongs to the realm of nightmare, while the congregation of the remaining Crains in the bleak setting of Hill House is the reality to which the eldest child must cling. The shows goes even further when some actors are seen in scenes where they are not supposed to appear: Olivia's hallucinations of her dead twins are haunted by Luke and Nell in their adult and ghostly form – once again, the past is haunted by the future. Finally, Steven quoting Shirley Jackson at the beginning and the end annihilates more borders (mediums, writers, genders, the realms of the real and the imaginary) and testifies to the self-reflexive nature of the show. As Olivia states in episode 2: "when we die we turn into stories… we're all stories in the end". Mike Flanagan not only acknowledges his literary legacy and influences through Steven's words, but he also endows his creation with a playful self-reflexivity which jars at times with the realistic treatment of the main themes of the show.

The filming technique therefore toys with the very notion of boundary: the fragmented narrative which the show relies upon is at times complicated by the absence of cuts, material limits and frontiers, and artificially reassembled with what Melanie Robson qualifies as "seamless transitions" (Robson, 2019: 9). Not only does the show explore further the notion of point of view and character projection (Robson, 2019: 9), but it also unsettles the traditional coding of time, space, memory and reality. Limits in the show are narrative and diegetic blanks filled with uncanny voices, corpses, black mould, ghosts and camera tricks (the face of an elderly woman on the phone used by Luke and Nell in episode 4 for instance), thus becoming autonomous territories, zones of creativity. What's more, the unlimited availability of Flanagan's production which Netflix provides (as well as the possibility to consume and digest the television narrative without the imposition of any time or space limits) opens up new perspectives for viewers. While freed from physical constraints, they are encouraged to breach barriers and to remove filters or skin layers until the very object of mystery and terror is laid bare. For instance, many YouTube videos offer to spot the numerous hidden ghosts, which are an

estimated 43 according to several of them, thus prompting new ways of navigating those liminal spaces in an anachronic and asynchronous experience of temporality mimicking that of the series itself.

Conclusion

The Haunting of Hill House as a television narrative is not naïve in its exploitation of gothic conventions (Spooner, 2007: 45), while tentatively playing on ambiguity: despite Steve's claims that the tendency of his family to see ghosts can be genetically accounted for, the eldest sibling acknowledges their presence in the last episode, as she shuts the main door on a variety of spectral presences, including his dead family members. This hermeneutic ambiguity could be seen as a template of gothic television, as Eddie Robson argues about X-files:

> The entire series can therefore be seen as a labyrinth in which Mulder is trapped by the oppressive relics of an earlier regime, pursuing cases which may or may not be significant to the bigger picture, and *never able to locate the definitive truth: a rendition of the Gothic narrative which is specific to television, and specifically to post-1980s television*. (emphasis mine, Robson, 2007: 248)

The truth about Hill House's ghosts is likely to remain hidden; instead, viewers are given gothic margins: creative, even playful but most of all vividly real. Filled with modern society's deepest fears and traumas, they resist the either/or logic and encourage new debates: about margins and marginals in our lives (society, family, sexuality, health, etc.) but also margins of and on the screen (hidden, unsaid, undisclosed). This wilful relinquishing of assumptions resonates with modernity's tentative grappling with present fears: "*La modernité est spectrale parce qu'elle s'expose au retour sans fin d'un passé infiniment révolu, dont elle ne peut néanmoins faire le deuil.*" (Guidée, 2009: 12)

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