The Queer and Gender Dynamics of Gothic Horror in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*

by

Valentine Sauvage

Sous la direction de Mme Cristelle Maury

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INTRODUCTION

When the pandemic hit the world in 2020, daily life changed massively. Work and school routines were deeply modified, if not entirely displaced from their original location. With travel plans put on hold and cinemas closing to avoid close-contact, people found themselves stuck at home, increasingly turning to cable and, more importantly, streaming platforms to consume movies and TV series: The Nielsen's Total Audience report found out that adults over 18 spent more than 37 hours per week watching television[1]. This increase in viewing was especially strengthened by streaming platforms offering the possibility to join "watch parties", which allows several people to watch the same program simultaneously.

With a wave of viewers seeking comfort and escapism, it is interesting to consider the manner in which media provided for this new demand – and how it echoed the everyday struggles that COVID had put into perspective. Organizations such as GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) observed how productions worked on the inclusion of minorities despite the context of the pandemic. Megan Townsend, GLAAD's Director of Entertainment Research & Analysis, said that "LGBTQ-inclusive shows dominated the conversation in 2020, with series like *Schitt's Creek, Batwoman, The Haunting of Bly Manor, Veneno, She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, and others celebrating high viewership, critical acclaim, and passionate fanbases."[2] Their 2020-2021 "Where We Are on TV" study found out that 9.1% of characters on broadcast primetime television were LGBTQ: this is a slight decrease compared to the previous year, due to the impact of the pandemic on productions; it increased again to 11.9% in 2021-2022. Moreover, their study observed a stable percentage of female characters and an increased inclusion of characters of color, including LGBTQ people of color. Those numbers once again increased in the 2021-2022 season, which seems to point at a genuine and continuous effort in including minorities in mainstream media, especially when it comes to underrepresented communities such as transgender and non-binary people.

So, statistically, groups that diverge from figures of power and influence in Western societies (male, white, cisgender, heterosexual… etc) are increasingly represented in TV programs. However, while these numbers are helpful to understand the evolution and inclusion of minority rights, it also seems crucial to consider the manner in which they are represented. After all, LGBTQ characters could

[1] Lasky, Matthew. "GLAAD'S Where We Are On TV/ 2020-2021 Report: Despite Tumultuous Year in Television, LGBTQ Representation Holds Steady." GLAAD. 2021.

[2] Ibid.

be included in a story in a way that is, even unwillingly, harmful or stereotyped. Their inclusion is arguably not enough; their depiction is equally, if not more important. GLAAD even argues that positive representation is crucial to oppose discrimination: according to them, the depiction of characters living with HIV, for instance, helps fighting the still-present stigma around the topic. With only three characters in 2020 (all from the same show, *Pose*) depicting such an issue, there is close to no hope for normalizing and de-stigmatizing HIV and the people suffering from it.

If one takes the several shows mentioned earlier by Megan Townsend, it is clear LGBTQ representation now exists in numerous genres, such as drama, realistic and biographical fiction, superhero stories and even children's media; thus all of these examples could be the topic of analysis of queer depiction in mainstream media. However, it is *The Haunting of Bly Manor* that caught my attention above all others.

The Haunting of Bly Manor is an American TV series which was released on the Netflix platform in October 2020. It was created by Mike Flanagan as part of *The Haunting* anthology: the first part, *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), was based on Shirley Jackson's novel of the same name, while *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is based on several of Henry James' stories, but mostly follows the intrigue of *The Turn of The Screw* (1898). The story follows Dani, a young American woman who is hired to work as an au-pair by Henry Wingrave to care for his niece and nephew. She soon notices strange things occurring on the grounds of Bly Manor: the children's behavior is erratic and off-putting and she sees people who no longer work here – or who have been dead long before she arrived. The series, comprising nine episodes, follows several storylines centered around the inhabitants of Bly: Dani, of course, as well as her relationship with Jamie, the gardener; Hannah Grose, the housekeeper and Owen the cook, and finally Peter Quint and Rebecca Jessel.

The reason I chose this specific series over another is because of its transgressive potential. The show could fit a number of different genres, including drama or romance for instance, but it is first and foremost a Gothic – and by extension a horror – work. Both these genres include, by definition, themes and elements that are disturbing in the eyes of society: blood-thirsty killers, terrifying monsters, tales of death and afterlife. The fact the series uses the supernatural constantly allows it to be a place where anything can happen: in a world where death is not definite and characters can be haunted by frightening specters, transgression is directly woven into the fabric of the narrative. Realism is not the main goal: emotion is.

The series includes themes such as marriage, abuse, trauma and guilt, often depicted through supernatural metaphors. Often based on motifs such as the cyclical nature of evil and the haunting quality of the past, as well as using recognizable aesthetic and narrative elements such as the ghost and the haunted house, the show undeniably re-uses codes that characterize the Gothic genre, to which Henry James' works belong. However, the series also breaks away from that original material by including elements which were not present in it, especially the inclusion of characters of color and the representation of the LGBTQ+ community. So not only is the show part of two genres that are undeniably transgressive in their themes, it also adds "modern" elements to centuries-old works. By modern, I mean to refer to topics which were incredibly taboo at the time Henry James wrote, and were either highly criticized or simply censored. Moreover, it is worth reminding that the series, despite not taking place in the original context of James' works, is not an entirely modern reworking either: the story occurs in the late 1980s, and not in the 2020s, or the 21st century in general.

The series has not yet been the subject of any kind of academic essay or book: perhaps because it is too recent or because its cultural impact was arguably mild. Its analysis is then based on a study of its narrative and various secondary sources about the Gothic. Indeed, much has been written about the genre and its double nature, as both potentially transgressive and highly traditional. For instance, works by Xavier Aldana Reyes (*Twenty-First Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* released in 2019 with Maisha Westers and *Gothic Cinema* in 2020) helped define the series' aesthetic and narrative elements as utterly Gothic. Focusing on more precise themes, Donna Heiland's *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction* (2004) or William Hughes and Andrew Smith's *Queering the Gothic* (2009) helped compare the series' depiction of femininity, motherhood or queerness to that of older Gothic works. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is not a work that stands alone, untethered to any literary and cinematographic traditions: it is part of a bigger movement that made the Gothic so popular, even today, and to study it without taking this into account would be pointless. Moreover, the works cited above took on the point of view I wish to adopt, that is through an intersectional perspective. By this I mean that, more than studying the literary depiction of characters and themes, I wish to consider the manner in which the series represents real groups in society – and especially minorities. The works used to support any argument of this thesis thus emphasize the presence of multiple identities such as womanhood, race or queerness – and thus the possible marginalization of such identities – in the Gothic current. The series was released in 2020, in a time when movements such as #MeToo or Black Lives Matter urged to focus on societal topics that are still too ignored today. The question is not to ask whether or not its creators

were influenced by such discussions, but to wonder how the show exists in that context, and how it takes part in a literary tradition that used to be extremely hostile to such topics.

Thus, what I mean to do is study the way in which the series uses Gothic conventions to portray gender, otherness and the traumatic experience they create. By this, I mean I will both comment on the manner the show pays homage to the Gothic genre by using its aesthetic and narrative codes, and to what extent it tries to subverts its prejudices.

First, I will focus on the Gothic in the series as a whole. I will discuss the use of popular Gothic elements such as the haunted house, the ghost, the sublime and the uncanny in order to establish the show as fundamentally and undeniably Gothic. This part will also serve as a first step to understand the dual nature of the series and wonder how a work that relies so heavily on tradition can also be modern and transgressive.

Then, I will consider gender in the series. I will first study the characters from a feminist point of view – that is in which both women and men are represented – and see how they both play in Gothic and horror tropes, and not. Then, I will discuss the depiction of heterosexual relationships and marriage, especially when it comes to abuse. Finally, I will focus on the representation of motherhood in the series and question the motif of maternal self-sacrifice.

Finally, I will turn my attention to what I call the “Other”: by this, I mean topics that according to Gothic norms (and even modern ones) are still considered outside mainstream society (so predominately male, white and heterosexual.) First, I will study the figure of the monster in the series, represented by Viola, the Lady of the Lake. Then, I will consider the depiction of people of color in the narrative, and especially of black women. I will end this thesis by studying the “queer” in its modern, sexual sense and thus consider the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in the Gothic narrative.

PART I: THE GOTHIC FRAME AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS

1) A TYPICAL GOTHIC STORY: DESTINY AND EMANCIPATION

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this paper is to consider the modernization of the Gothic genre in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* and the discussions it opens about social topics such as feminism, queerness and race. But before one turns their attention to those subjects, it is necessary to first answer an important question: what makes the series Gothic? Indeed, the themes of emancipation and representation discussed here cannot be studied outside the frame of the show's genre, whose complex and multifaceted nature not only defines the story, but explains the reach and limits of what it means to achieve – that is modernize a very traditional and codified literary tradition to include 21st century discourse.

To begin with, it is agreed that the Gothic movement was born between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th: for instance, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is considered as the first "Gothic" literary work. Other examples might include Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Usually (but not always), a Gothic plot involves a young heroine arriving in a foreign and ancient place (often a castle or manor, a monastery or even ruins) in which she is eventually trapped, tormented by its dark secrets. The Gothic novel does not always have to include supernatural elements, as works such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) create suspenseful and frightening atmospheres only by using their protagonist's warped perception of the world, or even by playing with the reader's imagination or expectations, such as in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). However, Xavier Aldana Reyes and Maisha Waters argue in their book *Twenty-First Century Gothic* (2019) that the Gothic has become increasingly harder to define with time:

> "by the 2010s, the Gothic no longer refers to a historically specific strand of 'terrorist' and/or romance writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It no longer demarcates simply a fantastic retrojection to barbaric pasts either, although this is still the one area where the Gothic manifests in a clearer manner. In the Anglo-American world and, increasingly, the global sphere, the Gothic has become a wider term to designate non-realistic modes of writing and now encompasses horror, certain strands of science fiction and speculative fiction, especially the weird tradition, magical realism, the supernatural more widely (even fairy tales) and all generic hybrids that contain elements traditionally associated with the Gothic (such as monstrous figures like the ghost and the vampire or grotesque and macabre tableaus). Whereas in some areas of the continent, such as France and Spain, other umbrella terms – 'le fantastique', 'le roman noir', 'lo fantástico' – have prevailed, the Gothic, as a mode no longer constrained by fixed settings, time or characters, has freely materialised beyond the borders of generic ascription or emotion-generation in the English-speaking world" (Reyes-Waters 1-2).

This overlapping and blending of different genres is particularly accurate in the case of the series: because this format is longer than a film, it arguably has more time to explore different themes and atmospheres. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* could indeed be part of several genres: its dark and frightening aspect reminds of horror, whereas its focus on human relationships and struggles uses tropes and storylines also found in genres such as drama, melodrama and romance. If one considers Reyes' definition, the Gothic has become, over time, a large umbrella term which is not permeable to other genres but directly connected to them through similar themes.

Still, critics and scholars continue to try to define what makes the Gothic what it is. Reyes theorizes in his book *Gothic Cinema* (2020) that the Gothic genre is defined by its capacity to be "neatly fenced in aesthetically" (Reyes 25) and adds that "the images, themes and effects that recur in Gothic cinema rarely appear in isolation, and they normally function by accumulation, conjuring up certain atmospheres and pervasive moods" (17). Indeed, the genre has come to be recognizable as a set of aesthetic and narrative elements that, used together, are immediately seen as "Gothic". Such images are recurring in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*: for instance, the Gothic nature of Rebecca Jessel's death in episode 7 "The Two Faces Part 2" (32:00) is immediately recognizable. The young heroine faces a dark lake, the black outline of her silhouette wading into the water through thick mist, as blurry moonlight illuminates the scene in a ghastly glow. Rebecca's story, that of an innocent young woman losing her life to evil forces, is characteristic of the genre, and the use of particular visual elements together, emphasized by the melancholic and mellow music playing during the scene, is what characterizes the genre at its core. Another example of these crystallized aesthetic traditions is the eight episode of the series, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" (named after and inspired by Henry James' 1868 short story.) The episode retraces the story of Bly Manor back to its original owner, as well as to the source of the curse binding deceased souls to the grounds of the property. Occurring in the seventeenth century and entirely shot in black and white[3], the entire episode immediately evokes a literary tradition which blended family secrets and mysterious forces with a moody and shadowy backdrop. To summarize, Reyes argues that "although the Gothic's images and characters are not monolithic or employed homogeneously in every film, they tend to evoke certain ideas and elicit specific emotions" (Reyes 17).

Those elements are recognizable as Gothic because of their repetitive use through time, but this does not mean they have not been used in other genres. Indeed, stormy weathers raging over dark and inhospitable homes, as well as the use of fear and suspense, are not strictly confined to Gothic narratives, and can very often be found in works of horror – which has in turn made the distinction between the two genres difficult. According to Reyes, this blurring of boundaries is understandable:

[3] Director Mike Flanagan was inspired by Jack Clayton's adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Innocents* (1961).

"the collapse of Gothic into horror, or vice versa, is understandable: both the horror genre and Gothic aesthetics are invested in darkness and in negative affect. Generally speaking, the Gothic novel can also be seen as the first manifestation of horror literature as we know it today, as a form that harnessed horrific motifs and crystallised them into fearful, but crucially also suspenseful, entertainment" (Reyes 7). The distinction also lies in the feelings that are meant to be awakened in the reader or viewer: J.A Cuddon explains in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (2013) that the Gothic intends to "to chill the spine and curdle the blood" (Cuddon 308), while horror "shocks or even frightens the reader, and/or induces a feeling of repulsion and loathing" (339). Reyes too states that "the Gothic is haunting and favours mood over grisly spectacle; it is interested in recurring motifs and in setting up atmospheres of gloom and unease that may also play with shadows to create a pervasive sense of threat. […] Horror, by contrast, is seen as heavily graphic and explicit: it confronts viewers with terrifying images and cinematic 'numbers'. Gore (especially of the gratuitous type) and violence are its tools" (Reyes 8). This idea is also notably found in Ann Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror in her posthumous essay "On The Supernatural in Poetry" (1826): "terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them."

Let us first consider this particular distinction. Those definitions seem to agree that both the Gothic and horror genres have a frightening purpose: the reader or viewer is not meant to be reassured by those narratives, but deeply unsettled, for they not only confront them with unreality such as the fantasy or fairytale genres might do, but also depict a fictional reality that is actively malevolent towards the characters. This effect of fright is often achieved through the use of somber atmospheres and dark colors, but also through the inclusion of supernatural creatures linked to violence and death: vampires, werewolves and ghosts, for instance. However, critics argue that the two genres, despite their similarities, diverge when it comes to the use of such horrific tools. Horror is a bloodbath; it is what Georges Bataille called "the cult of cadavers"[4], which John Cunnigham defines as "the surplus of destruction, a madness of death, pools of blood uselessly spilled, terror, laughter, corpses, antique occultism, ruins, parasitical zombies, demons, vampires, diseases, deadly materiality revolting against productive use in the most absurd ways" in "Reproducing It: Speculative Horror and the Limits of the Inhuman"[5]. On the other hand, "the Gothic is subtle and suggestive; it hints at occluded or only partially visible terrors, thus offering half-glimpses of bloodcurdling images which, because they are seldom fully shown or described, allow our imagination to run wild and fill in the gaps." (Reyes 8)

[4] Bataille, Georges. *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (2001).

[5] From *Diseases of the Head: Essays on the Horrors of Speculative Philosophy* (2020).

So where does *The Haunting of Bly Manor* stands? As a whole, it is undeniable that the series wishes to frighten the viewer: it is after all, the story of a haunted house and its ghostly inhabitants which are such popular figures in horrific stories and legends that they instantly conjure fear, or at least unease. Because of these elements, the show could be seen as a horror work; however if one uses the definitions previously mentioned, it becomes clear it lacks an essential component: shock. Indeed, Cuddon and Reyes explained that horror means to provoke disgust through intense body horror and violence: the viewer is meant to be disturbed and physically affected by what they see. The Gothic, on the other hand, plays on a more psychological and spiritual level: the spectator is not frightened by what they see, but by what they do *not* (and by extension, what the characters do not perceive either.) For example, the first time the viewer is confronted with Viola, "the Lady of the Lake", in the fourth episode "The Way It Came" (45:15 – 48:39), she is barely visible[6]. Indeed, her presence is first hinted at when Flora notices that one of her dolls has moved and that the one representing Dani is not in bed: while more subtle moments linked the dollhouse to the manor[7], it is now undeniable that what happens in it, also happens in the real world – as Flora calls urgently for her brother when she notices the dolls have moved, her fear emphasized by a close-up on a frightening-looking toy and a rare moment in which the soundtrack uses shrill strings to signify danger.

Consequently, the next shot follows Dani walking drunkenly through the halls of the house. The scene is incredibly dark, her silhouette and the corridor ahead of her barely illuminated by the moonlight. The camera lingers on places she has just left and even changes the perspective from inside one of the rooms to watch her walk down the corridor, as if hinting at someone or something watching her from the darkness. When the children arrive, the horror of the scene is entirely depicted through their eyes: as Flora tries to distract Dani, Miles stares at something off-screen while Flora gives it quick, frightened glances. Both of them seem distraught, the close-up on Miles' face showing him breathing rapidly, gulping as his lip trembles in obvious fright. When the camera turns to Dani again, who is crouching in front of the children with her back to the source of their fear, there is nothing at first. The scene is just as dark and the non-diegetic sounds resemble the faint blowing of the wind outside. It only changes to a deeper, ominous vibration when a silhouette walks into frame in the background: it is blurry and its only distinctive characteristic is a long white dress. The being does not attack Dani or the children, and its features are never shown as it slowly walks out of the frame – and this is where its frightening quality lies. Dani never sees or even hears the being and because the show follows her story,

6 Reyes talked of "occluded or only partially visible terrors" (Reyes 8).

7 For instance in the first episode around the 28:00 mark, in which crosscut editing parallels Dani moving towards Flora's room to Flora moving a blonde doll through her dollhouse. One of the ghosts standing in the background, dressed as a plague doctor, is even visible in both the house and its toy miniature.

the viewer does not see the being fully until she does. For now, its depiction relies on other characters and their reaction to it. The horrific aspect of this scene plays into what is almost invisible, on the knowledge that something is there, even if it is just out of sight. As Reyes mentioned, true frightening elements are rare in the Gothic: instead of scaring the viewer all at once, the genre creates an enveloping sense of dread that maintains tension all the way.

Moreover, it is interesting to take a closer look at the use of violence in the series to accept its utter and undeniable Gothic nature. The series is a narrative woven with death (and even murder), pain and suffering, yet violent acts are rarely depicted on screen and when they are, violence is never overly emphasized. In the fifth episode, "The Altar of the Dead" (39:30), Peter Quint is attacked by the faceless ghost haunting the property, Viola. Her arrival very much plays into horror codes: she emerges out of the shadows without a warning and her hand clasps at Peter's throat in a cold act of brutality as the music booms darkly. The children, as well as the viewer, are forced to watch her slowly walk away, medium shots on her face showing her impassible expression, Peter reduced to a set of clawing hands as he gasps for breath. Larger shots dehumanizes him still: he is but a powerless bag of flesh and bone in the grip of a powerful being that defies imagination and comprehension. He is dragged away as the soundscape still vibrates ominously and tension rises as the children and Hannah stare at the door through which both Viola and a now unconscious Peter disappeared. At that point, a horror production would have emphasized the violence of his death, perhaps by including his agonized screaming as he is being brutally killed by Viola, and blood would have made an appearance by either splattering the walls or flowing out of the doorway. Here however, the tension breaks when a seemingly living Peter comes out of the room, visibly unaware of what just happened (he was killed and came back as a ghost.)

In the same manner, and in the same episode (46:30-48-16), Hannah is killed by Peter, whose ghost inhabits Miles' body: furious that she came between him and Rebecca, he pushes her down a well. Though it only lasts a second, the viewer witnesses Hannah's tragic fall as she breaks her neck and lies still at the bottom of the well, gasping her last breaths as blood floods her eye. By definition, those two deaths could belong to the horror genre: they are utterly brutal and horrific. However, it is the very lack of gratuitous and abundant violence that keep them *Gothic*. There are no revealed bones or innards; Peter and Hannah choke and fall respectively, they are not stabbed or clawed or torn apart. Similarly, Dani's fiancé is run over by a truck, but the series refuses an overly-graphic display of a mangled body. Finally, when it comes to Dani's and Rebbeca's death, both of them drown. While Rebecca is arguably extremely distraught and frightened, her death is not violent, and Dani's doom is not shown on screen.

What distinguishes the Gothic from horror then is perhaps its distance to the body and the graphic details of its destruction. Instead, Xavier Aldana Reyes argues that it is a "highly psychological and preoccupied with hallucinations, vivid dreamscapes (often nightmares) and other provinces of the warped mind" (Reyes 8). The Gothic deals with death and violence, but the purpose of their depiction in that case is not to shock the reader or viewer and push their limit as to what they are able to bear, but to turn the death of the corporal self into an examination of life itself. When faced with the brutal death of a mouse in a trap, Owen (or rather the version of him that has been created by Hannah, who is dead and looking for answers about the reality of her existence), does not comment on the physical pain of the animal or the decay of its body, but says, "Does a mouse really know when it's over? Do we?" (episode five: "The Altar of the Dead" (32:56)). The disembodied form of the self, that is the mind or soul, is the focus when it comes to death in the Gothic – and in the series, which uses the sublime to honor the highly spiritual aspect of the genre.

Donna Heiland explains in her book *Gothic & Genre: An Introduction* (2004) that, "as theorized by Burke and Kant, the sublime is an experience that involves a confrontation between a perceiving subject and an overwhelmingly powerful object, the confusion of boundaries between subject and object, and finally a transcendent or totalizing vision that results from the confusion or blurring of those boundaries. According to Burke, the subject disappears involuntarily into the object, while according to Kant the subject asserts his or her superiority over the object by containing the object (or at least its idea) in his or her mind. In both cases, however, what matters most is that the difference between subject and object is to some degree effaced. That effacement of difference is the essence of the sublime experience as defined by these two thinkers." (Heiland 33) Moreover, she argues that "sublime experience leads us toward transcendent experience, but in the end does not quite get us there. Nor would we want it to. Because the transcendence associated with the sublime might also be described as self-loss, one must wonder whether it is a truly desirable experience." (34) The series thus defines itself as Gothic by distancing itself from more "primal" perceptions of the world, linked to the body, and by emphasizing the power of the mind – especially through what is called "dream skipping" in the world of the show with characters being "tucked away" into memories so their consciousness cannot interfere during the possession of their bodies by ghosts. Without analyzing the more metaphorical dynamics behind it just yet, the way the series depicts reality, consciousness and even life itself is purely Gothic and sublime. The characters learn that death is not the end and that time is not linear, and they are suddenly confronted with what they always believed to be real. It does not mean possession or death is depicted in a positive light in the story: as Heiland argues, the sublime experience is transcendental and

pushes back the limit of human knowledge, but it is not enviable, for it means losing one's own humanity in the process.

The Gothic is also closely tied to the idea of the "uncanny", that is what is both familiar, and not. *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (2007) explains that:

> "this remains the crucial point in the definition of the uncanny: namely, that it represents a feeling which relates to a dialectic between that which is known and that which is unknown. If we are afraid, then more often than not it is because we are experiencing fear of the unknown: but if we have a sense of the uncanny, it is because the barriers between the known and the unknown are teetering on the brink of collapse. We are afraid, certainly; but what we are afraid of is at least partly our own sense that we have been here before. It is perhaps easy to guess how Freud pursues this argument: namely into the idea that the uncanny is occasioned when an event in the present reminds us of something in the (psychological) past, but something which cannot be fully remembered, a past event, or situation, or feeling, which should have been locked away or buried but which has emerged to haunt the current scene." (Spooner-McEvoy 145)

This leads to the idea that the series, and the Gothic genre in general, is profoundly human despite its interest in the dramatic, otherworldly experience and that it invites the reader or viewer to feel for the characters being hurt by forces they cannot fight – which in turns makes it a fertile ground to discuss social topics such as gender or sexuality, for instance. Indeed, what is crucial to mention is that Mike Flanagan, by including some of those themes in a "modern manner" (that is for example to depict queerness explicitly and in an arguably positive light) in his work, did not bring transgression to the Gothic genre. In the introduction of her book *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction* (2004), Donna Heiland argues that "the stories of gothic novels are always stories of transgression. The transgressive acts at the heart of gothic fiction generally focus on corruption in, or resistance to, the patriarchal structures that shaped the country's political life and its family life, and gender roles within those structures come in for particular scrutiny." (Heiland 5). Indeed, Heiland explains that the birth of the Gothic movement took place during "a period characterized by massive instabilities in its sociopolitical structures", with "a shift in the organization of family structures, as men were drawn into the workplace, women were increasingly confined to the home, and gender roles were insistently codified even as they were insistently resisted" (Heiland 3). The Gothic genre is characterized by its aesthetic codes, but also by its criticism, or at least examination, of the social norms ruling society.

However, it is also important not to exaggerate the transgressions of the Gothic: in their book *Queering The Gothic* (2009), William Hughes and Andrew Smith argue that "on the one hand, Gothic has both maintained and displayed many of the stylistic and structural devices associated with the non-Gothic literatures which have preceded and accompanied it from the mid-eighteenth century to the present. On the other, these possibly superficial appropriations tend to mobilise unpalatable if not actually taboo issues – such as sexual deviance, arbitrary power, miscegenation and apostasy – even

where a fearful publishing industry demands that these troubling things should be contained by the eventual triumph of a familiar morality. In consequence, the genre frequently espouses a characteristically conservative morality, and frequently a conventional and rather public heterosexuality" (Hughes-Andrew 1).

Both Heiland's and Hughes and Andrew's point of view thus explains why *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, specifically as a narrative and aesthetic homage to the Gothic, is from the beginning bound to imitate both the transgressive and traditional aspects of the genre. Because the Gothic deals with themes such as imprisonment, isolation or difference, it has the possibility to examine various power dynamics, notably between the individual and other people, or even institutions (religion, marriage, labor...). On the other hand, the Gothic genre is very much rooted into the past: it deals with family secrets and buried traumas, and their unearthing rarely ends well. Its characters wander blindly through the maze-like aspect of its plot and settings, and those who manage to see through the veil (be it supernatural or not) are often punished for their transgression. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* honors the Gothic genre by both liberating characters (especially women, people of color and queer characters in that case) to a certain degree but also by trapping them – a dichotomy that is emphasized by their apparent freedom of choice. "Miss Jessel found herself, as she walked the grounds of Bly for the first time, wishing that she might never leave. And it turned out… she never would", says the narrator in the third episode of the series "The Two Faces (Part 1)" (11:23). This particular quote already begins to question how the series can modernize the Gothic, when fate and predestination are already such an important part of its narrative structure.

2) THE HAUNTED HOME

It is first interesting to consider the decision Flanagan made by titling his series *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, instead of keeping the novella's original title, *The Turn of the Screw*. While the latter evokes the building of pressure and intensity within the plot, the former is arguably much more straight-forward and already reveals the main focus of the story: a ghostly presence within a home. Before turning one's attention to these spectral inhabitants and what they represent, it is interesting to consider the frame in which they are navigating.

It is first important to understand that the tale of the haunted house existed under the form of oral legends and myths, long before the birth of popular literature as we know it. The Leviticus 14:33-57 mentions, for instance, a *tzara'ath*, a "spot of leprosy" placed upon a home and its inhabitants and

that could only be cleansed by a priest. The massacre of Native Americans birthed legends of "Indian burial grounds", haunted by tormented spirits coming to seek revenge. Stories from all over the world talks of a "foundation sacrifice", which refers to "the practice of burying a human being in the foundation of a new building as an attempt to ensure that it stands. Building a structure was an affront to the spirits and deities of the land. To appease them, you had to offer a sacrifice. In turn, the sacrificed person was transformed by death. They became a protective spirit, bound to guard the building that had become their tomb, an idea that some scholars have argued is the root of our modern haunted-house tales."[8]

Those stories were not meant to be sold as entertaining fiction, but were merely testimonies of people believing they had witnessed the supernatural: the development of the haunted house story as a proper literary motif came much later. In *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore* (2007), Sylvia Ann Grider argues in her chapter "Haunted Houses" that while fictional haunted house stories already existed in Ancient Rome, the house itself had "little importance beyond providing a setting for the interactions between the ghosts and humans" (Goldstein et al. 144). It only became a significant in the Romantic era – and especially in Gothic novels. Europeans writers took inspirations in the ancient castles and ruins of the continent, while American artists turned to Victorian and Second Empire mansions and houses. Grider explains that "what went on inside these mansions was the subject of much speculation by the general public. Since these were the dwellings of the super-rich, most Americans never set foot inside these mansions, which gave the buildings a sort of other-worldliness, anonymity, and mystery analogous to that of ruined European castles" and "attracted the attention and imagination of passersby in a way that they never had when they were glittering and new." (146). This explains why the Victorian house in particular has become one of the most known form of haunted building in fiction and popular culture.

Now that the origins of such motif have been explored, it is important to wonder why it has been and continues to be such an extremely popular theme in fiction, and especially in Gothic and horror works. To try to understand this fascination with the haunted home, Grider explains that "we humans have an incredibly powerful psychological attachment to our houses – our sanctuaries – and the intrusion of a threatening, otherworldly force in that otherwise safe setting is terrifying to consider" (143). The possibility that the place we are most comfortable in, hidden away from society, its dangers and judgment, might actually be as malevolent as the outside world then explains the birth of so many stories where the reader's terror directly comes from that unsafe home. Indeed, part of Freud's

[8] Soth, Amelia. "There's Someone Buried under the Floor!" Daily JSTOR.

definition for the uncanny is based on the negation of the home (from the term “unheimlich”, un-homely): the familiar place becomes the site of horror.

Author Dale Bailey however goes even further by arguing that the haunted house is not just a mere source of fear, but a true backdrop for real-life topics. He writes in his book *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (1999) that “the house is our primary marker of class and our central symbol of domesticity, touching upon everything from women's rights (the angel in the house, not to mention the homemaker) to the deterioration of the nuclear family (the broken home)” (Bailey 8) and that “as long as houses remain a central symbol of American culture, our writers are likely to inhabit them with the anxieties that haunt our day-to-day lives” (ibid). Thus, “they [haunted house novels] often provoke our fears about ourselves and our society, and, at their very best, they present deeply subversive critiques of all that we hold to be true-about class, about race, about gender, about American history itself. In part because of their formulaic construction, such novels frequently employ their settings not only to indict American culture, but to suggest ways it might be profitably reformed” (6).

Sylvia Ann Grider also describes the experience of a haunted house as something that could be linked to the sublime:

> “By crossing the threshold from the safe natural world outside into the interior of the haunted house, the human characters have moved horizontally from one reality into another. The liminal staircase, which is neither up nor down, enables the human characters to move vertically between the levels of horror within the haunted house. The attic and the basement are the extreme or most remote locations within the house and, therefore, the farthest away from reality. The attic or garret is at the top of the house, closest to the roof and the safety of the reality outside. But that roof or vaulted ceiling is still an impenetrable barrier that traps the human in the supernatural realm. The basement is organically at the bottom of the house; it is below the ground, in contact with the forces of the underworld. Whereas the roof or windows of the attic provide tantalizing hopes for escape and reunion with the outside world and reality, escape from an earth-dug cellar is hopeless and impossible, psychologically analogous to being buried alive. These locations within the haunted house are spatially unambiguous and favor tight, well-defined, enclosed spaces. To a viewer outside of a house, the general floor plan of the building may be ambiguous, but the top/attic and bottom/basement are unmistakable. The relative position of horizontal bedrooms, sitting rooms, parlors, and so forth follows no logical pattern and cannot be discerned from observing the outside facade of the house” (153).

In Flanagan’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), the house is one of the most important elements of the series. It is not just a location, but an almost anthropomorphic presence: in it, objects and statues move, rooms appear, disappear and change to fit each character’s needs, and the house itself has a pull on the characters years after they leave, giving it a strong supernatural force. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, the house is never given an unnatural power on its own. Its architecture and composition are never a mystery, as Dani is given a tour of the property on her very first day there. However, as Grider mentioned, both the extreme parts of the house are used to strengthen the sense of danger within the home. Symbolically, this evil was born in the attic, in which the ghost of Viola killed her on sister in

an act of violent revenge, and it is used again at the end of the series when the ghosts of Peter and Rebecca trap Dani and possess the children. This attic, as well as the basement, are not shown often but they are the most frightening part of the haunted house, mostly because of the well-known horror images the viewer might expect (full, impenetrable darkness with flickering lights, discarded objects of an ancient time, silhouettes that move a mere second after the character left the room…) However, many scenes in which the ghosts appear and frighten the characters occur during daytime in the living room or bedrooms for example, which perhaps emphasizes the idea that danger lurks everywhere, and not just in the shadows and cobwebs of the attic. As a whole, Bly Manor as a home crystallizes Freud's description of the uncanny, the *unheimlich* ("unhomely"), with both its familiar and unfamiliar axis: it is not dark or in ruins as many other fictional haunted houses are and present a hospitable front, while using enough horror and Gothic tropes to create a sense of tension and fear, which should not belong to a home.

What is first worth noting is that with the rare exceptions of a few scenes, most of which are analepses, the entire action of the series happens on the grounds of Bly. From the moment Dani, the protagonist, crosses the threshold of the property, the outside world disappears: the children are home schooled, the characters are never seen visiting the city or grocery shopping for instance, and the employees are never shown at home. Bly is away from the town, lost amid the lush countryside, perched on its isolated hill. In the first episode (15:44), most of Dani's journey from an urban setting to the property itself is lost. She hands her bags to Owen and the scene immediately stops: similarly to her running away from home, she does not have a moment to settle down. The viewer is presented with an extreme wide shot of a bright green landscape which contrasts with the blurry, rosy-toned filter used in the city scenes. This shot, filled with nature untroubled by human activity but for the tiny dot of Owen's car, visually feels like a breath of fresh air for the spectator – and by extension, Dani – but the soundtrack playing over it is somber and melancholic, for the simple reason Dani is not witnessing it. Indeed, the wide shot cuts again on her asleep face and when she wakes, shaken by a bump in the road, she is stunned to realize she has been unconscious for a long time. While she talks with Owen, her eyes turn to either side of the road, but the camera never shows the viewer what she is seeing: the only glimpses of landscape we get is that of a blurry rush of green passing by. Then, almost immediately after, the road which had been entirely straight until that point curves abruptly and Bly appears: hidden behind bushes and trees, only the top of the roof points to the sky before it disappears again. Thus, from Dani's point of view, Bly Manor is the only human place that exists in this part of the country: everything else has been obscured.

From that very apparition of the home, it is clear Bly functions as a kind of heterotopia. A heterotopia is "a concept elaborated by philosopher Michel Foucault to describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow 'other': disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside. Foucault provides examples: ships, cemeteries, bars, brothels, prisons..."[9] Bly Manor stands out in the green countryside, a remain of a passed age and its secrets. Moreover, it especially fits Foucault's idea of a "world within world", in the sense that it is almost entirely self-sufficient. When a home usually shelters a nuclear family of parents and their children, Bly functions as a miniature of a city: it replaces the school with its classroom, its grocery stores with its mysterious endless supplies and even possesses its own cemetery and chapel. Bly, by its very topography, traps the characters by providing everything they need to live, learn and eventually die. Moreover, it functions as a whole society as each character has their purpose and turns into the cog of a perfectly oiled machine: Owen cooks, Dani takes care of the children and Jamie of the gardens, while Hannah oversees the good functioning of the whole house. This organization is summarized by Pier Vittorio Aureli in his essay "Familiar Horror: Toward a Critique of Domestic Space":

> "The house as a specific mode of dwelling originates in part from a desire for stability. Unlike other species, the human animal lacks specialized instincts and is thus permanently uprooted from its environment. As Paolo Virno has noted, humans are subject to a sensory overload that often compromises self-preservation. If there is a fundamental character of the human being, it is its feeling of not being at home. For this reason, we can argue that the invention of the house as an architectural apparatus is motivated not only by the need for protection from a hostile territory but also by a desire to settle and to give ritual form to life. A ritual is a set of actions performed according to a prescribed order. Its function is to provide an orientation and continuity on which patterns of behavior can be established and preserved."

Thus, the characters in Bly are reassured by the way the property *needs* them, as they are both given purpose and protected from the rest of the world, often oblivious to the fact they have no choice being there. Moreover, chaos and tension begin to unravel when the characters realize their quiet life hides many a dark secret: Aureli explains this condition as "'familiar horror', a term coined by Virno. This is the horror that arises when one realizes how the domestic has been constructed as the very root of many social and economic issues: it is the horror of realizing that society is caught in a tangle of psychological constraints and needs that are not natural or unavoidable at all, a tangle in which people are subjugated through their very desires."

While Bly Manor is at first sight not malevolent on its own, it is still a haunted home and the series a haunted house story at its core. Dale Bailey, still in his book *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, establishes a "formula for the haunted house

[9] Definition provided by Wikipedia.

tale" (Bailey 56), which fits the show's narrative in almost all points. Indeed, it features a house "with an unsavory history, with an aristocratic name, disturbed by supernatural events", a dual structure which features "an escalating series of supernatural events which isolates the family physically and psychologically" and "the discovery of the provenance for those events." It ends in a climax with "the escape of the family and the continued existence of the house" and "a twist ending which establishes the recurring nature of evil". Finally, it features themes often found in haunted house stories, such as "class and gender conflict", "consequences of the past (especially unpunished crime)" or once again, "the cyclical nature of evil." *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is a Gothic work, not a horror one, so the approach to certain themes in Bailey's formula is more nuanced (for example, the "Manichean clash of good and evil" is debatable in the series: while there definitely are "heroic" protagonists and villains, both are given qualities and flaws that make them more than "good" and "bad" and the boundaries between the two is often blurred.) However the core narrative remains the same: the cursed house is a place of danger, which can only be "purged" through traumatic events, and in the series' case, a sacrifice.

Bly thus cannot be a safe shelter; it plays in the haunted house motif on almost every point. Still in the first episode, Owen expresses his hatred for the town of Bly: "I've actually never liked Bly. The people here, most of them, they're born here, they die here. The whole town is one big gravity well. And it's easy to get stuck" (13:56). This quote plays into the series' use of tragic motifs by foreshadowing Dani's ending, but it also depicts the dark side of the home, that is of a trap one cannot escape. Dani naively believes Bly will be the place for her to hide and escape the life she left in America, but Owen, who has been dragged back to it, knows there is nothing there for her to thrive. If the town of Bly is a gravity well, the manor is its epicenter. It is not only a place that challenges the character on a psychological level, it is also one that mirrors their inner complexity and struggles.

In her essay "The Haunted House in Contemporary Filmic and Literary Gothic Narratives of Trauma", Monica Michlin explains that "the haunted house motif has become prevalent in contemporary postmodern narratives staging the "haunted self" of survivors of trauma, and try to show how these Gothic texts or films play on circularity and repetition, blanks and blackouts, fragmentation and incoherence, both in the character's psyche and in the work's "unveiling" of the truth, so that attempts to put together the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle and to see our way out of the maze—most of these works at least allude to the myth of the Minotaur—are more often than not thwarted. Both clue and decoy, projected symptom and fantastic "reality," the haunted house entraps us and casts its spell, even as we see or read through it. Ultimately, these works play on their being a "haunted house" of images and/or words, keeping us in suspense to the end as to whether there can be either catharsis or exorcism, or whether, in an ultimate Gothic twist, we as readers or viewers are to be entrapped in

haunting without end, in the "ghosting" of the text or film itself." The image of the Minotaur is particularly fitting for the series: Viola is undeniably the monster of the maze, every night walking the same steps and taking the life of anyone who stands in her path. But the Minotaur of the series is even more than that: Dani is essentially trapped in a maze of her own making, running frantically away from the past, and the "ghost" of her deceased fiancé is the monster that chases her endlessly.

In many ways, the house functions as a physical depiction of Dani's psyche, and this connection is established during her first night at Bly (episode 1: "The Great Good Place" (29:53)). Dani cannot find sleep and the narrator tells the viewer:

> "It was as Flora had said. The rooms were larger at night, as though the house itself had inhaled deeply as the sun disappeared, expanding as it held its breath for the morning. The sense of expansion wasn't only indoors, either. Gazing out, she found that the terrace and the whole place, the lawn and the garden beyond it, and all she could see of the park were empty, with a great emptiness. An emptiness that called out to be explored."

This monologue plays over a moment of intense solitude for Dani: she is unable to sleep, alone in a dark room. The only familiarity she has in that moment is her covered mirror, a habit she has only picked up out of fear. Similarly to the personified description of the house, her mind and her being are bigger at night, when she does not have to pretend in front of other people, and she too holds her breath at the prospect of putting the mask back on in the morning. Moreover, the dual nature of the emptiness described here depicts her emotional state in that moment: Dani feels hollow and without a purpose, but she too knows, perhaps unwillingly, that that emptiness deserves to be explored. The sequence that follows is utterly Gothic in all points: Dani explores the house on her own, the house plunged in darkness and barely illuminated by the moonlight. The scene plays on heavy suspense and the camera lingers on supposedly empty parts of the rooms. The viewer feels as if something is about to happen and that Dani is going to be harmed – but the tension breaks off with the whistling of the kettle. Dani goes back to her task, one that is particularly symbolic: as a foreigner, she felt ostracized by her inability to make tea earlier in the day. The fact the house allowed her to move through darkness and work on this ritual shows that Dani is perhaps not so rejected by this new environment. Throughout the series, the house is sometimes frightening to her, but it can also represent her struggles: the children locking her in the closet might be a rather heavy metaphor for her queerness but it is also telling of her fear of being alone and facing herself. Similarly, the "forbidden" wing, in which the furniture is covered in white sheets as to look like ghosts, might represent the part of herself she is trying to lock away – that is the one she thinks led to her fiancé's death.

Dani's link to the house is undeniable: by taking on Viola's curse at the end of the series, she purges the Bly grounds of its *tzara'ath*. The house is not destroyed and continues to live on – just as Dani does, as a ghost. The first sub-part of this thesis already established that the series is undeniably Gothic, and that the genre itself is deeply concerned with themes such as societal norms, morality and gender, for instance. Seen through that lens, the house stands as an important structure for the characters to evolve in. As a heterotopia, it represents the possibility of escape from mainstream society and the development of reversed or no gender norms (when it comes to the chores, for example) and other family dynamics (with no biological links and a queer couple).

3) GHOSTS AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Monsters are one of the most popular elements in Gothic narratives: in these stories, readers and viewers can often encounter creatures such as vampires, werewolves and more importantly, ghosts. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'ghost' has its origins in West Germanic—although its roots are Proto-Germanic. Pre-Germanic and early English understandings of the term define it in association with "fury, anger," (ghoizdo-z); "to rage," (Old Norse geisa); and "to terrify" (Gothic usgaisjan, usgeisnan). Moreover the English verb to "haunt" is believed to come from the Old Norse *heimta*, which means to bring home or to bring back. The ghost is almost always a humanoid form and represents the spirit form of the deceased that remained after their passing.

The Haunting of Bly Manor is replete with ghosts and a majority are main characters in the story. Viola is the central horrific figure of the series and, as the only one being able to interact with the real world, the most powerful of the specters (see III.1). Then, there is Hannah: her being deceased is a major plot point in the series as all characters, including herself, were unaware of it (see III.2). Rebecca, Peter and eventually Dani are also part of the main cast of characters that become ghosts at some point during the narrative. Dani's fiancé and Henry's doppelganger can also be considered spectral apparitions. Finally, it is learned at the end of the series that the manor was haunted by dozens of ghosts, all killed by Viola's hand and thus trapped on the grounds of Bly. These spirits are not visible until the end, although glimpses of them can be noticed throughout the series. It is a choice made by Flanagan similar to that in *The Haunting of Hill House*: ghosts are hidden in the background of scenes without being acknowledged so to create another level of horror for the viewer when they notice them.

With such a high number of ghosts within a narrative, especially when some are not even directly visible or known as such by the viewer, it raises the question as to what their purpose is. Some

are undeniably tied to the definition of a ghost given before: characters such as Viola or Peter Quint are deeply resentful and unhappy with their condition, and their anger is what put the other living characters in danger. Moreover, they are used in the Gothic sense to terrify: Viola's featureless face and her cold, repeated killings make her a suffocating presence in the narrative, one that is actively distressing and harmful to the characters. Similarly, the apparitions of Dani's fiancé and Henry's "double" are tormenting them but are not physically horrific and can arguably be interpreted as guilty fragments of the characters' psyche rather than real supernatural manifestations – but even with figures that are pointedly toxic to the protagonists, the narrative lingers on their past and origins and deconstructs the very nature of a ghost as a horror motif. In his book *Spectres de Marx* (1993), Jacques Derrida said, "ce qui paraît presque impossible, c'est toujours de parler du spectre, de parler au spectre, de parler avec lui, donc surtout de faire ou de laisser parler un esprit" (Derrida, 32).

The specter in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is not just a tool to frighten the viewer, but an emphasis on certain themes present in the story: in that case, guilt, trauma and the desire for past wrongdoings to come to the light (see III.1: Viola became a ghost because she refused to move on from her sister and husband's betrayal, and she is not appeased until someone else feels her rage and pain.) The series is not the first to use the ghost figure to comment or criticize upon a social theme; it is but a participant in a long Gothic tradition of taking horrific elements and make them deeply physiological and metaphorical: this concept is what Derrida coined as "hauntology" (fusing haunting and ontology, the study of what being is, together), that is the study of the ghost and its haunting. Thus, by making the ghosts more than silent observers without a story or a past, the series opens a discussion around death and inevitably, life.

In their book *Twenty-First Century Gothic* (2019), Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes explain that "during the Victorian Gothic revival, the ghost story served as a prism for thinking about empire, modernity, gender and a plethora of other topics, and it would remain so into the twentieth century and beyond. In recent decades, the neo-Victorian and related literary movements treat the past itself as a kind of haunting force for which the ghost is a powerful figure" (Wester-Reyes, 132). Similarly, they argue that "ghosts are versatile, adaptable metaphors. The new century reveals them as simultaneously domestic and global, with national particularities but subject to the international flows of media. They are rooted in the past – an old-fashioned figure linked to an old-fashioned kind of storytelling – but they are endlessly adaptable to new contexts and, especially, new technologies, often revealing the dark, Gothic aspects that trouble narratives of progress, connectivity and convenience" (140-141). Indeed, while the living goes on to experience what the future has to offer, the specter is

forced to observe from a distance, unable to have any kind of influence onto reality. The ghost is essentially the most extreme kind of outsider, as it is not only pushed away from society, it is completely invisible to it. This failure in connecting to the real world often leads the ghost to give in to madness and despair, which then makes it the perfect threatening and violent figure to a horrific narrative.

However, ghosts are not only used as tools to create terror, for most ghost and haunted house stories often reveal the reason behind the specter's acts. Ghosts exist and act out of grief, regret or revenge, to remind or warn the living that a morally reprehensible action in their past has not yet been judged, or even acknowledged. Gina Nordini explains in her thesis "Haunted by History: Interpreting Traumatic Memory Through Ghosts in Film and Literature" that the ghost is by its very nature a transgressive presence, for it turns the laws of nature and reality upside down: "the deceased does not go to a quiet grave, where he or she ceases to disturb the living outside of their own recalled memories. The deceased, instead, returns to the world of the living, where it exists in a half-state of neither fully living nor deceased. The ghost comes back to haunt because it represents a past that has not been resolved. The ghost-witness relationship forms because the past that a person is connecting to by way of the ghost is one of trauma. The ghost is not a representation of the past alone; it is a representation of memories from a traumatic past" (Nordini 16).

In the series, Viola becomes a ghost simply because she refuses to let go. Her pain and her anger not only bound her to the grounds of Bly, they cast a curse upon the whole estate, so that anyone who should die there should remain as a spirit for eternity. This is then the explanation given by the series as to why the deceased remain on Earth, tied to Bly Manor. The narrative plays into tragic and Gothic motifs by depicting the endless creation of new ghosts: as long as the original wrongdoing (Viola's betrayal by her sister and husband) is not made right, then the curse cannot be broken. The past in Gothic stories is a powerful force which disturbs the present and forces the characters not only to acknowledge the evil that has been done, but also often the one that is currently being done and break what Bailey called the "the cyclical nature of evil" (Bailey 56). Thus, Viola's death is but the trigger to a long line of wrongful deaths that even involves characters living centuries after her, such as Peter, Rebecca or Hannah.

There are two ghostly figures in the series that cannot be explained by the curse on Bly: Dani's fiancé and Henry's "double". The former did not die on the grounds of Bly and can visibly move from one location to another as it pleases, while the other is not the spectral depiction of a deceased soul but a copy of someone who is still alive. They are never acknowledged by characters other than Dani and

Henry and even at the end of the series, it is not clear what their real nature was. However, it does not seem to matter: what does is the effect these "false" ghosts have. They terrify and torment the characters just as much as Viola does and are incredibly tied to a traumatic event: this is what Andrew Smith explains in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (2007) when he argues that "the spectre is an absent presence, a liminal being that inhabits and gives shape to many of the figurations of trauma that characterise the Gothic" (Spooner-McEvoy 147). As a supernatural and fictional entity, the ghost becomes a very malleable entity that can be used in numerous ways, especially in Gothic narratives where concepts such as death or reality are often deconstructed and questioned. In the series, the "logical" specifics of those two ghosts are not questioned merely because their purpose is identical to those that are known to be real supernatural manifestations.

According to Anthony J. Fonesca and June Michele Pulliam in their book *Hooked on Horror: A Guide to Reading Interests in Horror Fiction* (2003), "ghost and haunted house stories are tales of guilt thought to be long buried in the unconscious mind. The ghost or haunted house serves as a reminder to the person guilty or repressing knowledge of wrongdoing, as well as a portent to the others who know nothing of that person's sin" (Fonesca-Pulliam 23). When it comes to Dani's and Henry's ghosts, the idea of a *reminder* is interesting: the ghosts do not appear to anyone but them, when they are most vulnerable, and alone.

In the sixth episode, "The Jolly Good Corner", the viewer meets Henry's alter ago for the first time. The scene (3:20 – 5:20) begins by using popular horrific tools to create a dark and oppressive atmosphere: Henry is alone in his office, at night, and we see him finally relaxing after his secretary leaves. He sighs and leans back, undoing his tie, but the tone of the scene is still very tense. The character is not only framed by a wide shot which shows the dark room surrounding him on all sides, but he is also framed multiple times by the wall and hanged frames behind him. From what the viewer has seen so far, Henry is a serious and cold man, which explains the rigid and neat lines of his office, but in that case such room design emphasizes how stuck Henry is: it is worth reminding Henry is never seen outside this room until the very end, to the point he might have been a ghost haunting it. To go back to the scene itself, suspense and tension are created through the camera slowly zooming on Henry, but also by cutting back and forth between him and the only other room in the light, acting out as a visual representation of his nervous glances. It is only when he looks away and leaves that the ghost appears as a lone black figure accompanied by a dark, vibrating sound. The viewer does not need to see his face: the fact this is a threatening intrusion is made clear by the mise-en-scène. The supernatural is also made explicit as the figure moves without a sound, simply standing a few feet behind Henry when

the camera cuts back to him. The stranger is silent, still hiding in the dark in the background, and tension keeps building – until Henry talks to him.

This familiarity comes as a surprise: from the darkness of the scene to the ominous score, one naturally expected this to be a violent, or at least threatening encounter, but the dialogue shifts that tone by making Henry aware of the presence, and neutral to it. However, the horror atmosphere continues and the ghost still moves without a sound when the camera pans away and the horrific nature of the scene thus only relies on the sense of danger the viewer is feeling. The tonal change between familiarity and horror is used once again to reveal the ghost's identity: the camera focuses on Henry pouring himself a glass of scotch before it slowly turns around to show a hand reaching for it. The climax of the scene is contained in those few seconds in which the camera slowly moves up this hand and arm to reveal another Henry, who seems more put together than the real one but whose twisted smile immediately betrays as a malevolent entity. The focus on this gripping hand is used again later in the episode, as the entity lurks in the doorway (21:05) before stealing Henry's drink once again.

On its own, this scene is confusing, as it does not explain the presence of this double and even Henry's perception of it seems to shift, from offering it a drink to not even looking at it directly. This consequently goes back to the question asked earlier: how real is that apparition? Is it really a supernatural intervention to which the character is apparently accustomed, or is it, perhaps, just a figment of his imagination or even a mental disorder? What is once again important to understand is that this question is never answered: it could have been both, but most importantly its true nature does not matter. Whether Henry truly dealt with an inhuman being or simply imagined it does not change the fact he is the victim of a haunting. However, if the true nature of this specter is not clarified, its source is: as already foreshadowed by the numerous shots on Henry's office phone, he one day gets a call telling him both his brother and his wife died during their trip to India. Henry backs away from the phone, visibly distraught – only to face himself. This time he is terrified and walks back towards the phone, falling down screaming, only for the double to present a gentle hand to help him up. Thus, if one follows the idea that ghosts often represent guilt and trauma, this double immediately appearing after such news is but a corporal depiction of Henry's feelings – and more precisely, his guilt. Indeed, as the story keeps unraveling in a non-linear fashion, it is revealed Henry had an affair with his brother's wife and that Flora is not his niece, but his daughter. Moreover, it is interesting to consider that the depiction of Henry's double directly comes from what his brother told him in episode 6, "The Jolly Corner": "And yourself, Henry… your real self…. he's an evil shit. A grotesque little demon, isn't he? I pity you,

‘cause you have to live with him. You have to live with yourself. And he’s a shit, grinning, fucking monster. Isn’t he?” (45:22)

The Haunting of Bly Manor is a series that, while using visuals to convey horror, also relies heavily on what is *spoken*. Characters talk, they express themselves and words have weight. After all, the whole story is presented by an omniscient narrator, a disembodied voice that gives shape to the plot and motive behind the characters’ actions. Curses and promises are at the center of the story, they bind the actions and characters together. Thus, by claiming Henry is now banished from Bly, his brother makes it real and Henry is confined to his dark, empty office. Moreover, the description he makes of him – as a selfish, ridiculed person – is the form his haunting takes. Henry is so plagued by guilt upon hearing the news of his brother’s and lover’s deaths that everything that has been told to him becomes reality and serves as a reminder of what he has done wrong. While there is no scene in which the ghost visibly disappears, it does not appear again after Henry goes to the children and finally decides to be a part of their life: by confronting his guilt and regret, he “banishes” the ghost born from those emotions.

The same kind of storyline is also used for Dani, who is relentlessly tormented by the apparition of a man with luminous glasses. As the story progresses, the viewer eventually learns that her fiancé, Edmund, has died in an accident and that it is him “haunting” her. Similarly to Henry, his ghost is introduced by very small glimpses: in the first episode, he briefly appears on the reflection of a car’s window just when Dani is about to cross the street (6:13). The image is so fast that it can easily be missed and Dani’s reaction – of stepping back, rather distraught – might be attributed to her fright of nearly getting run over. Later in the same episode (15:08), the same ghost appears for a split second longer behind Dani as she looks into a mirror but even though his arrival is emphasized by a low booming sound, Dani immediately looks away. Her lack of a violent reaction, which would translate her fear and shock, already lets the viewer know she is used to this vision. From that point, the ghost keeps appearing when Dani seems to least expect it, often through reflections in mirrors – until its origin is finally clarified.

In the fourth episode “The Way It Came”, it is revealed Dani and Edmund were going to get married, until Dani voiced her doubts and told him she did not want it anymore (the scene is ambiguous, but it is certainly due to her queerness). Edmund is furious and gets out of the car, and the last image Dani has of him alive is of his glasses, full of the trucks’ headlights. This particular appearance is the one the ghost takes from that point: he first appears to her a moment after she has learned he died in the

hospital (34:48-35:41). Dani rushes to the bathroom and the camera lingers on her face in the mirror, gasping for air as she washes her hands. There is no blood on them, still she scrubs them frenetically, as if to wash an invisible stain. When the camera moves up again, Edmund is standing behind her in the mirror, and her violent reaction of fright proves it is the first time she has seen him.

This pattern of mirror is highly present in the series: Kate Siege, who plays Viola, even points it out in her character's narrative: "she is a person mired in self-reflection, which is why there's a lot about staring into the water and mirrors — the show has tons of that imagery."[10] The mirror represents self-introspection in its most simplified form, in which one is forced to look at oneself. Metaphorically, it forces the individual to confront who they are, and what they have done. This then explains why mirrors are so prevalent in Dani's narrative. In the same episode, she attends Edmund's funeral and the mirrors are like a passage for his ghost to interact with her. Alone and plagued by remorse, she is frame by that small glass, and even when the camera turns back to face her, another frame in the background, as well as the people on either side of her, keep her in a tight, confined space which emphasizes her distress. The pressure only intensifies, until Dani's emotions burst out and she rushes to cover the mirror (36:40) – a habit the viewer sees her perpetuating throughout most of the story. Covering mirrors is a tradition found in many cultures: it is often meant to avoid the deceased's soul to be trapped in it. In Dani's case, it acts as a means to protect herself from the haunting, but also from having to look at herself in the eyes and acknowledge something she believes is her fault.

Similarly to Henry, Dani tries to fight this haunting, even by allowing herself to feel love and happiness in kissing Jamie. Still, the pressure of her own guilt is too strong to ignore: Edmund still haunts her and forces her to be alone by the end of the fourth episode. For the first time, the viewer is confronted with the heaviness of his presence on Dani: he is not just a glimpse but a full physical apparition that stares at her without a word (49:47-50:28). A few scenes earlier, Jamie had explained that in the past, people used to build pyres and throw offerings into them to ward off evil spirits and that these pyres were often made out of bones, hence the name bon(e)fire. Dani tries to purge herself from her ghost by throwing Edmund's glasses into the flames, to no avail. Just like Henry's double, her haunting has no clear ending: Edmund disappears so gradually it is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment he is truly gone: this slow exorcism thus represents Dani coming to terms with her own past and making peace with what was out of her control.

As a whole, the ghosts in the series are not just tools to frighten the viewer, but depictions of a conversation that has yet to be had. Valentina Sturli argues in her article "Terreurs (Imp)ensables:

[10] "'The Haunting of Bly Manor': Kate Siegel Breaks Down Viola's Tale in Episode 8". SkyeSquad News.

Surnaturel, Famille et Trauma dans Quelques Films d'Horreur Contemporains" that ghosts almost always have this double meaning:

> "si on regarde quel type de «monstres» sont ces fantômes qui reviennent pour signaler la présence d'un trauma irrésolu, on pourrait dire que les instances qu'ils portent en eux sont celles des dynamiques de séparation des propres objets d'amour, des difficultés d'élaboration, de défenses mentales toutes centrées sur le refoulement et la négation. La famille, aussi bien dans le passé que dans le présent, est toujours au centre de ces dynamiques. Si une violence qui n'a été ni découverte ni élaborée a en effet eu lieu dans le passé, celle-ci demeure en quelque sorte sans que l'on puisse la verbaliser ni la penser: toute la douleur et l'angoisse liées à l'événement funeste sont représentées sous la forme, terrorisante et dans un premier temps incompréhensible, de l'invasion surnaturelle."

Once again, the series uses horror and Gothic metaphors to discuss societal topics, and especially guilt when it is linked to themes such as gender, sexuality and relationships. On one hand, ghosts are used to frighten: they strengthen the sense of danger and tension in the characters' lives, especially when it comes to their transgressions (for example, Dani refusing to commit to a heterosexual lifestyle, or Henry's affair.) However, they are also used to depict those transgressions and in general, feelings of trauma and guilt, through supernatural metaphors: the past haunts the present and is an obstacle to growth and healing as long as it is not resolved.

PART II: GENDER DISRUPTIONS AND CONFORMISM

1) TRADITIONAL AND SWITCHED GENDER ROLES

In her book *Gothic & Gender*, Heiland argues that "to inhabit a woman's body is to be a gothic heroine" (Heiland 158). By this, she means that a woman's gender is often acting as a prison, especially in older Gothic works. Female Gothic heroines try to break free from the man-made cage that is the gender roles attributed to them, and this struggle is often depicted through the metaphors of their attempted escape from a labyrinthine castle or ruin (one might also think of the heroine in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, clawing at her walls to free her metaphorical self.) Those attempts are often failed ones, for how can the female character escape her condition, which is so linked to her gender, and so her body? Heiland says: "what are the narrative options? [...] What would it mean to escape one's body, and is such a thing possible, or even desirable? These are questions that gothic novels are well equipped to answer, replete as they are with supernatural beings whose disembodied state is arguably a large part of their power, and what they tell us is that if one can imagine life beyond the body, the reality comes at too high a price. One can temporarily move beyond one's body through some sort of transcendent experience, perhaps (recall Radcliffe's heroines), but the only real way out is death (recall Dacre's)" (158). What is once again interesting to remember here is that the Gothic is always characterized by its double nature, both as liberator and oppressor.

Indeed, Sara Schoch explains in her essay "Gothic Monsters and Masculinity: Neutralizing The New Woman in Victorian Gothic Literature" that "Gothic literature of the nineteenth century was deeply concerned with threats to masculinity", especially as society experienced a change from Baconian to Darwinian science, in which God was no longer the source of everything. Schoch continues by saying that many Gothic novels "explore and attempt to neutralize the social threat of the emerging dominant female figure, as well as that of the scientific revolution's subjection of the male scientist to a feminized nature, by using the villainous monster as a representative of the autonomous and assertive New Woman figure, while celebrating textual representatives of the angel in the house as integral features of a happy and healthy society and family." Thus, the inclusion of female characters, and more importantly independent and courageous ones, does not mean the genre was particularly favorable to their behavior (which explains why so many either perish or end up getting married and building a family at the end of the novel.)

With time, writers and later filmmakers leaned more into the liberating potential of the genre, which eventually led to the creation of "The Female Gothic", which Xavier Aldana Reyes defines in his book *Gothic Cinema* (2020) as "a subgenre of the Gothic that stands out in its configuration of monstrosity, as the main villain tends to be a man who embodies the oppression of patriarchal systems" (23). Reyes also argues that the birth and expansion of The Female Gothic came directly from a shift in views about gender, but also in cinema itself:

> "The Female Gothic film updated Radcliffean heroinism by planting the seeds of discord into a previously sacrosanct institution, marriage. Men and their violent and abusive behaviours began to be doubted and women given the narrative, and thus imaginative, space to dispute them. Their victories and the fact that the heroines tended to prosper or else cure their husbands point to more than a simple case of crowd-pleasing entertainment. Cinema had to evolve to suit changing attitudes towards women, propriety, accountability within marriage and sisterhood. If the domestic space became the new Gothic castle – and the dark cinematography, carried over from the old dark house film and influenced by film noir, certainly suggests this – then Gothic artifice moved from the buildings' trappings to the machinations of patriarchal figures who treated their wives as a means to wealth" (146).

Similarly, Alison Milbank explains in her chapter "Gothic femininities" in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (2007) that "when Gothic fiction came to modern scholarly attention in the 1970s and 80s, its rise coincided with the second wave of feminism, and criticism was often driven by feminist concerns. The Gothic heroine thus became a proto-feminist in her resistance to patriarchal control" (170).

The Haunting of Bly Manor, released in 2020, comes at a time when concepts such as gender, feminism and femininity are at the center of social debates just as they were during the 1960s and 1970s, renewed by movements such as #MeToo. The series is undeniably centered around women: out of the eight main characters, five are women, six if we include the young Flora. The story is then centered around women, but it is arguably not enough to call it feminist: Gothic works during the Victorian period focused on women, who were very often courageous and resourceful, yet they did not advocate for women's liberation. As mentioned by Sarah Schoch previously, the figure of the "New Woman" was very much rebuked: in *Dracula* for instance, Mina is a strong and clever character which could be read as feminist today, but she is explicitly hostile to the New Woman within the text – a female figure that is characterized by her violence and her lust in the novel.

A large cast of female characters is then not enough to call a series a feminist instance of cinema: what could be, on the other hand, is its inclusion of certain themes that are at the center of feminist discussions, such as gender roles, marriage or motherhood. Again, it is the argument here that, as a homage to the Gothic, the series is by nature bound to the restriction of the genre; thus, some

aspects are arguably modern and "transgressive" to a certain extent, while others are more traditional. As a whole, it is possible to consider it as an instance of Postfeminist Gothic, which, Maisha Westers and Xavier Aldana Reyes argue in their book *Twenty-First-Century Gothic* (2019), "revitalises feminism's broader issues, including gender equality, inclusivity and diversity. It destabilises complacent certainties of relationships, of identity and wholeness of self, undermining seemingly safe places, revealing false dreams, violence and oppression. It also radically reimagines familiar Gothic figures of fear – the witch, mermaid, puppet/doll, vampire, monster, zombie and werecreature – to expose the objectifcation and commodifcation of bodies, unfinished dark business and new threats to women's existence. It troubles what is taken as achieved and settled to scrutinise and rewrite history and everyday narratives" (Westers-Reyes 52). It could also be considered as an example of neo-Gothic cinema: Helen Hanson explains in her book *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (2007) that "the neo-Gothic films are simultaneously 'old' and 'new'. They use literary and filmic Gothic modes as central reference points, they are organised around what Claire Kahane identifies as the typical literary Gothic plot structure. These include the gothic house, 'an imprisoning structure', a female protagonist, and her compulsion to 'seek out the center of a mystery' while she is subjected to threats from a 'powerful male figure'" (Hanson 176).

Donna Heiland argues that "the gothic novels [...] generally adhere to a highly predictable structure, tracing the protagonist's movement from sheltered innocence through fearful entrapment to grateful liberation. Events turn on the righting of a wrong that offends the clearly cultural order as well as the seemingly natural one" (98). The series would correspond to that pattern if it was not for Dani's past. Indeed, while Dani is very much unaware of the danger she is in by entering Bly, she is not innocent or sheltered either – contrary to Rebecca, who apparently never had any experience with the supernatural, or death and violence in general. Helen Hanson argues that "it is this double move that is at the heart of the neo-gothic's ambivalent relationship to feminism. On the one hand, the films solicit sympathy for the story of a suffering woman, inviting the idea of an understanding between women which connotes essential femininity, 'what all women know about bad men'. On the other, the survival of the heroine depends upon her not being like the woman in the story, and upon determining a different narrative outcome for herself" (192). However, the series does not oppose the two women, or any of the female characters for that matter. There is no moment, at any point, in which one protagonist is deemed "better" than another, in which a woman has learned a lesson, while another died because of her mistakes. Instead of being narrative foils to each other, the female heroines create an ensemble that paints the picture of what it is like to be a woman in a patriarchal society, while highlighting the

different nuances in those experiences. Moreover, the fact that the story is narrated not only by a woman, but by one who lived the events (Jamie), the series gives voice to those heroines by letting them recall their experience from their point of view and thus make sure it will neither be distorted nor disappear.

The most post-feminist quality of the series is then, perhaps, its polysemic aspect. By this, I mean that a woman's experience is not depicted through only one female character or storyline, possibly giving only one way to consider femininity and gender in the story, through her point of view. By focusing on several female protagonists which are at the very center of the narrative, the series explores the different ways they experience their gender. Furthermore, as the series also includes queer women and women of color, those identities create a more diverse depiction of femininity, and those stories can thus be analyzed through an intersectional point of view, often used by post-feminist critics.

In other words, the series is made of several narratives that highlight the complexity and diversity of a woman's experience, while also recognizing all women are very often the victims of a male-dominated system. However, the show too seems to refuse to characterize its female characters as mere victims and nothing else. As Hanson explains, "the reworking of elements of the female gothic narrative on film, from the 1980s to the present, allows women's sexual and domestic life to be revisited in ways that rearticulate and renegotiate feminist concerns. Their significance is in stylising and exploring the experience of female victimisation and its relationship to women's socio-cultural place in the post-feminist moment" (179). The series explores victimization by stating that it is not related to a particular experience or personality. For instance, Jamie is arguably the most "masculine" female characters of the series: she tends to the garden, dresses in comfortable, practical clothes and has no interest in children whatsoever. She is almost similar to the "final girl" of horror slasher movies, as she is the only female character who escapes Bly while remembering everything that happened there, but even her roughness and apathetic approach to relationships (as something that requires a lot of effort but gives little to no result) is not used to "save" her from being a victim. By the end of the series, Jamie is mostly alone (which is immediately depicted in the series, as she arrives late to a wedding, placing her as an outsider) and the hurt of losing Dani (who is, unbeknownst to her, still by her side) has followed her all those years.

In general, the theme of the victimization is central in the series, as it blurs the boundaries between those who harm and those who are harmed. In her book, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (2015), Carol Clover argues that "the functions of monster and hero are far more frequently represented by males and the function of victim far more garishly by females. The fact

that female monsters and female heroes, when they do appear, are masculine in dress and behavior (and often even name), and that male victims are shown in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity, would seem to suggest that gender inheres in the function itself—that there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero functions that wants expression in a male" (Clover 12). It is extremely clear in the series that it is not the approach it takes: monsters and victims are sometimes the same person in the story. Viola's example is so striking it will be studied later on, so I wish to focus on a particular aspect of the show: its male characters.

Indeed, when a work empowers its women, it is almost automatically deemed feminist (and it can often be the case). However, it is arguable that, from a post-feminist point of view, the depiction of male characters is just as important as that of female characters, especially if it studies the effect of patriarchal society on men and the gender roles it pushes on them, too. According to Joanna Russ in her book *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (1995), there are usually two archetypes of male characters in the Gothic genre: the "Super-Male" and the "Shadow Male". The Super-Male first appears as cold, distant and even threatening, but is by the end of the story revealed to be a hero. On the other hand, the Shadow-Male is "represented as gentle, protective, responsible, quiet, humourous, tender, and calm" (97) but is eventually "revealed to be a murderer" (ibid). First, the series distances itself from this trope by cutting any relations between the heroine (Dani) and the men in the series. Her fiancé is already dead when the story starts and she has no romantic connection to any of the other men. Secondly, it is mostly impossible to put these male characters in a single category. Owen, for instance, is the opposite of what is usually considered "masculine" traits: he is gentle and kind and a natural caregiver, especially as a cook who feeds the entire family. While fitting the portrait of the Shadow-Male, his innocent nature is never revealed to be a mask as he continues to care for the children and honor Hannah's memory years after the events.

The complexity of the characters is more salient when it comes to Henry and Peter. Henry is the epitome of the Super-Male, especially during his first meeting with Dani: he is cold and haughty, and does not seem to care much for the children. But as the series progresses, his facade crumbles and reveals the guilt and regret he feels. Moreover, the supernatural is used in a subtle manner as he correctly *feels* the children are in danger, a trait often attributed to a motherly instinct. On the other hand, Peter appears as a blend between the Super-Male and the Shadow-Male, in the beginning at least. He first appears as polite and charming, seductive even, but his darker side is soon revealed: Peter has no interest in the children or in the rest of the household, and plans on robbing them before leaving to

start a new life far away. The climax of this dark revelation obviously comes when he manipulates Rebecca, the woman he supposedly loves, and leads her to her death (see II.2 "Heterosexual Relationships and Marriage). In episode seven, "The Two Faces Part 2" (37:55-41:46), however, Peter's memories of childhood abuse and trauma surface through the metaphor of a door. While he tries to talk with Rebecca, the banging on the door keeps distracting him and he is visibly afraid of crossing that threshold. If we go back to the idea that the haunted house is but a parallel to the characters' feelings, the room behind the door he refuses to access is simply parts of himself or memories he refuses to face. The trauma that was created from the sexual abuse he experienced as a child comes back as a haunting, even when he is a ghost himself, for the psyche in the Gothic is utterly transcendent. Mike Flanagan comments on that particular point by saying that "interestingly, Peter Quint is only being stuffed back into the worst memory of his life, which I think as a proper little atheist like I am, that to me is hell. It's not a lake of fire. It's that when we're dead, we live in our moments of the most shame or regret and if we're stuck there, the repetition of that I think is about as hellacious as anything I can imagine."[11] This idea of a temporal loop is very present in the series: characters, such as Hannah or the children, are often stuck in memories or dream-like experiences which repeat endlessly – until they, or the people inflecting the loop on them, have exorcised their own secrets and demons.

To go back to Peter, his actions are never forgiven nor justified – they are given perspective. Oliver Jackson-Cohen, who plays Peter, explains that to him, "Peter had this incredibly rough upbringing and it damaged him to a point that his will to good and his will to sense has been permanently damaged."[12] Moreover, he argues that the complexity of his character and the feelings it would create in the viewer was at the center of his story: "I feel that with Peter Quint, it was very, very important that we show the human aspect of him and the fact that he has come from something so horrific and has never experienced any kind of safety in his life. And then the moment he finds someone that he feels safe with and that he loves deeply, he dies. And so what does that do to someone? He's suddenly in prison for the rest of his life. He was just about to start his life. He was just about to get out. He had all of this excitement and hope and it was shattered. […] We wanted [the viewers] to jump from, even in the middle of an episode to going, 'Oh god, he's a piece of sh*t,' to 'Oh, f*ck. That poor man,'" he said. "And I think that's kind of what we do in life; there's only so much sympathy—the fact is, he does something horrific; he kills the person that he loves. It makes sense to him. And then he attempts

[11] Taylor, Drew. "'Haunting of Bly Manor' EPs on That Ending, Ghost Rules, Horror Fandom, and Much More." Collider. 2020.

[12] Boyle, Kelli. "'The Haunting of Bly Manor': What Oliver Jackson-Cohen Really Thinks of Peter Quint". Showbiz CheatSheet. 2020.

to kill these children, and it makes sense to him because of his desperation for what it is he's seeking."[13] Once again, Peter's storyline is by nature extremely Gothic: the genre is defined by its emotional effect on the viewer and often deals with the weight of the traumatic past. Moreover, the resolution of the story always ends the same: by the purge of the "evil". Contrarily to the novel in which Miles die after the governess points the ghost of Peter Quint to him, the children are safe at the end of the story, and Peter was not able to harm anyone else. Moreover, Dani's sacrifice in taking over Viola's curse released all the ghosts trapped on the grounds of Bly, thus allowing Peter to move on.

As a whole, the series does not transgress gender by simply switching the roles of victim and monster between men and women, but by blurring the boundaries between them. Victimization is explored on both sides, from the point of view of the abuser and the one of the abused. Femininity is an experience all the female characters share, whether they suffered from it or rejected it (like Jamie), and on the other hand masculinity is deconstructed to let the characters be vulnerable in a way society usually struggles to allow – without ignoring the impact patriarchal abuse has on the female and queer characters.

2) Heterosexual Marriage and Relationships

"It's just that romances don't fare well at Bly, do they?"

Hannah utters that line in the second episode (26:52), and thus summarizes all the relationships portrayed in the series. The most important and central dynamic is arguably Dani and Jamie's, which will be explored later on (see III.3, "Queerness"), but several other romances (all heterosexual) gravitate around their relationship. As the series continues, it is clear each of them is strained, dangerous or even impossible in one way or another: Hannah and Owen never admit their feelings for each other, and Hannah is already dead; Peter manipulates and eventually murders Rebecca; Henry and Charlotte are having an affair; and Dani and Edmund's idyllic love story eventually fails when Dani becomes aware of her own queerness. It has already been established in the previous part that the series does not present women strictly as victims and men as abusers; however it still highlights the damage of patriarchy over women, and especially through the romantic relationships they have with men.

This emphasis on women fractured by their experiences with men perhaps directly comes from the context in which the Gothic genre was born: Heiland explains that "in terms of intellectual history,

[13] Ibid.

the eighteenth century is generally seen as a period of "enlightenment," a "modern" era that privileged the powers of reason, experience, and the individual over superstition, an unquestioning adherence to the teachings of the "ancients," and willing submission to the dictates of authority. In terms of economic history, capitalism was on the rise, as was a middle class capable of challenging the authority of the ruling aristocracy. At the same time, there was a shift in the organization of family structures, as men were drawn into the workplace, women were increasingly confined to the home, and gender roles were insistently codified even as they were insistently resisted. It was a period characterized by massive instabilities in its sociopolitical structures" (Heiland 3). The Gothic was then born during an unstable period and as explained earlier, is both defined by its ability to resist *and* adhere to societal norms. So while most early Gothic works did not – or could not – explicitly question things such as the place of women in society or the pressure of marriage, these tensions and anxieties were still translated into the text.

Michelle A. Massé argues that Gothic heroines are a direct representation of women at the time, and more generally of gender roles. She explains:

> "when we extend our consideration of what we are willing to recognize as trauma, we begin to see a revised analysis of the Gothic in which the stimulus, suppression of identity, exists not only in the past but also in the present and in the implied future of the narrative, when the heroine wakes from a dream of trauma to find it re-presented in the real world. The iteration assures that the dreaming and waking cycle will be repeated; the source of trauma, after all, remains unchanged. Although we usually think of trauma as a specific incident with exterior causation, it can also be a situation that endures over time, shaping individual identity and ways of dealing with the environment. Nowhere is this more obvious than in gender expectations, and nowhere is the trauma of those expectations more fully presented than in the Gothic." She continues by explaining that, "the heroine of marital Gothic […] will always reawaken to the still-present actuality of her trauma because the gender expectations that deny her identity are woven into the very fabric of her culture, which perpetuates her trauma while denying its existence. […] The Gothic plot is thus not an escape from the real world but a repetition and exploration of the traumatic denial of identity found there. Both the nightmare stasis of the protagonists and the all-enveloping power of the antagonists are extensions of social ideology and real-world experience. The silence, immobility, and enclosure of the heroines mark their internalization of repression as well as the power of the repressing force. Indeed, their frequently commented-on passivity, lack of differentiation, and lack of development through experience only emphasize this point." [14]

As a Gothic work, the series then inherits a tradition of exploring and stylizing women's fear and trauma. More precisely, it comes at a time when critics have clearly established the parallels between the heroines' imprisonment within gloomy castled and dungeons, and marriage. As a homage to the genre and released in a post-MeToo era in which media has increasingly questioned or at least included discussions around gender and feminism, it is then unsurprising to find the show focusing on the struggles of (heterosexual) romantic relationships and marriage.

[14] Massé, Michella A. "Gothic Repetitions: Husbands, Horrors, and Things that Go Bump In The Night." 1990.

The first instance of such a dynamic is between Dani and her fiancé, Edmund. At the beginning of episode 4, "The Way It Came", the series dives into the tropes of the romance genre: indeed Dani and Edmund are childhood sweethearts and the beginning of the story focuses on the innocence and gentleness of their bond. They are talking together in Edmund's bedroom, both the picture of perfect and well-behaved children (and especially Dani in her floral dress, polished shoes and girlish hairstyle). The sepia and rosy tones and slight blurry focus give the sequence a soft, nostalgic atmosphere, and the transition between young Dani pushing Ed's glasses up his nose to the same gesture in the present when they are now adults emphasizes their connection and the (apparent) understanding they have of one another. As a whole, this sequence is the antithesis of the rest of the show: there is no darkness and no ominous, vibrating score to create a sense of pressure and danger (and it is also worth noting it is the first and only instance in which popular music is used: Cyndi Lauper's "All Through the Night" replaces the usual orchestral score, grounding the series in a temporal context while strengthening the innocent and carefree atmosphere of the sequence.)

After this brief scene of introduction, the viewer learns they are now adults and engaged. The gap between these two periods of their lives is summarized through photos, in which they pose together: there is only one photo of Dani alone, surrounded by all the other reminders of her life with Edmund. The scene moves on to their engagement party and Edmund tells the story of how he kept asking Dani to marry him, again and again over the years. The tale is portrayed and tender and endearing, but the camera keeps cutting to Dani's face and her reaction is strained, her expression nervous. In parallel, Dani is often the victim of such insistence as people use, perhaps unwillingly, her gentleness to get what they want: for example, Edmund's mother first convinces her to wear her own wedding dress and then later on to take Edmund's glasses as a memory after his death, no matter how much Dani insists she does not want to.

During the party, the focus is put on Dani's effacement in what is supposed to be her party, alongside Edmund's. First, she does not have a speech of her own: after listening to Edmund recalling their journey as a couple, the scene immediately moves on to the party in which the guests are dancing and celebrating. Among this crowd, Dani is not shown dancing, only limping away to take off her shoes and admits to Edmund's mother she is rather tired. Moreover, her personality and own interests seem to be dismissed by the people she loves. From the very first episode (12:46 – 14:03), it is clear that Dani cares about the children she teaches, as she tells Henry, "you take to them. You love them. Even the worst ones. And you try to help but there's just too many of them. And too little of you" and "I could make a difference, a real difference." However, this devotion, which is perhaps her strongest character

trait among all the other choices that have been made for her by someone else, is criticized by others. Still during the engagement party, Edmund's mother tells her "you'd better take care of yourself as well, you know. Save them all if you can, but put your own oxygen mask on first" (4:30), to what Dani replies that Edmund says the same thing, "all the time" – her expression more aggrieved than amused. Still, she does not fight back and accepts Edmund's mother's own wedding dress when she insists that she takes it. Other characters' perception of Dani and her romantic relationship with Edmund is key to understand the pressure that is on her. The idealized depiction of her childhood, as the beginning of the episode portrayed, is actually the idealized version the other characters have of her (for example shown when Dani is at loss for words and Edmund's mother suggests she just repeats the first words she has ever said to her, when she was a child. The memory of this innocent and young Dani is so strong that she still projects it onto an adult Dani with her more developed desires and aspirations.)

In her essay "Women, Power and Conflict: The Gothic heroine and "Chocolate-box Gothic"", Avril Horner talks about philosopher novelist, Iris Murdoch and her novel *The Unicorn* (1963), and how she used the Gothic "to explore how women make ghosts of themselves. Her heroine, the young and beautiful Hannah Crean-Smith, accepts the desires and romances that other characters project onto her and comes to collude with them. These finally render her insubstantial and she becomes "a figure so blurred and uncertain that it might have been a ghost" (Murdoch 244). Like Beauvoir, Murdoch here highlights the danger to women of internalising idealised and mythical constructions of woman. That way lies loss of agency and power."[15] At the moment of their engagement, Dani is young. She has no experience and her own parents' marriage was visibly a failed one. She thus has no choice but to observe and accept what is around her, what is given to her as the truth, and erase the parts of herself that may be an obstacle to this ideal domestic life. All women in the series seem to make concessions in order to fit gender norms and societal expectations: for instance, Hannah blames herself when she finds out her husband has left her for another woman, and Charlotte Wingrave is the one denying her own desires to fix her marriage and family – which will eventually lead to her death.

It is particularly interesting to take a moment to consider Charlotte, for very little is actually known about her. Until the sixth episode, she is but a narrative tool to emphasize the tragic aspect of the story, a beloved motherly figure, departed too soon. When the viewer finally meets her (13:20), this perfect image is shattered: she opens her bedroom door to Flora, visibly caught off-guard and dressed in an open burgundy silk and lace nightgown, very different to the dark velvet robe she is later shown wearing, when her husband is back home. Moreover, it is through her child's eyes that her fault is

[15] Horner, Avril. "Women, Power and Conflict: The Gothic heroine and "Chocolate-box Gothic."" Caliban.

revealed: the camera peaks behind Charlotte to reveal Henry getting dressed, and so their affair. The myth of the "perfect" mother falls apart to be replaced by a flawed woman and wife. The wrongness of the situation is especially strengthened by Flora's point of view, who is actually re-living a memory: her conscience is older and she is thus more aware that something she does not quite understand is happening. Moreover, Flora is a physical, living proof of this fault: Charlotte not only broke her wedding vows, but conceived a child with her lover, and hid the truth from her husband.

The consequences of this lie as they are shown in the series are complex. On one hand, there seems to be a sympathetic effort to understand Charlotte's actions. Still in the sixth episode (37:50-40:59), she is shown walking through the house at night, mirroring the other Gothic heroines of the show (Viola and Dani): her restlessness is similar to theirs, and especially Dani's, possibly because of the guilt she lives with. When she arrives in the kitchen, the atmosphere briefly shifts to horror: a figure is shown sitting at the table, still in total darkness, making her gasp in fright when she turns on the lights and sees her husband there. As mentioned before, and especially in relation to Dani, the house is more than an environment for the characters to wander through: it is often a direct depiction of their inner world. Her husband is thus a frightening haunting in her mind, something she tries to avoid but cannot escape when returning to reality (metaphorically, by turning on the lights, by being aware of his return home). He is still an ominous presence in the scene that follows: the shot is cut in two with Charlotte on one side with the warm light of the open fridge beside her, and Dominic blurry in the background at first, before the camera focuses on him to show his closed expression and clenched fist on the table, framed by the dark fireplace behind him, as well as sharp antlers on the wall. Despite the lack of a score of any kind, the tension is palpable: the more he speaks, referring to Flora and her birth, the more the viewer expects him to burst in anger. This expectation is directly influenced by Charlotte's demeanor: once she closes the fridge, she stands in semi-darkness, silent, lowering her head and crossing her hands together. When she comes to sit in front of her husband, her gestures are slow, as if trying not to anger him.

But surprisingly, there is no anger in that scene and as mentioned before, there seems to be a sympathetic or at least neutral approach to Charlotte's actions. The scene presents her and Dominic as equals: they are sitting at the table in front of each other; there is no demonstration of power from either of them, and especially not from Dominic. Extreme close-ups with pitch-black backgrounds emphasize the emotions on both their faces: Dominic is visibly upset, but so is Charlotte. More importantly, Dominic never puts the blame on her, and even acknowledges he was never really present for his family and that she must have gotten lonely in such a big house. His anger is only directed at his brother, whom

he resents deeply for his betrayal and thus banishes from the family. It is worth noticing that Dominic never takes Charlotte's capacity of choice away from her: he never alludes to Henry "stealing" her from him, for instance. He is aware that certain circumstances have led her to what she did and even recognizes his part in it. Because of his reaction, the viewer is more inclined to sympathize with Charlotte and understand how her loneliness has led her to an objectively wrong decision.

However, this sympathy has limits, in the sense that the series often leans towards the more tragic aspect of the Gothic genre: it does not depict women as powerless victims who suffer without complaining, but it does depicts the consequences of their insurrections. Charlotte gave in to her desires, and she is eventually punished for it. By the end of the episode (49:48), she comes to see Henry and it is implied this is a secret visit, in the dark, almost empty frame of his office. Her hair is pulled back and she is dressed in a stiff white coat, perhaps reminding of a wedding attire. And indeed this shift in her demeanor is explained by her return to spousal duties: one of the closest shots of her is on her wedding ring that she touches nervously. As she tells Henry, "*I*'m going to make this work. My husband, my family" and "*I* can fix it." The use of *I* and not *we* (as in her and Dominic) shows that she takes the full blame, and that even if her husband is willing to forgive her, she takes on the full responsibility to fix their family again (it is also worth noticing that she says "*I*'m taking this trip" and not *we*, once again: she seems to see it as a cure to her wrongdoings.) Moreover, she acknowledges that she also lied about Henry, making him believe Flora was his niece, instead of his daughter. She says, "I should have told you. I should have done a lot of things differently", which once again brings me to what I demonstrated in the first part. The Gothic genre is interested in humanity, but perhaps more than that, in the obstacles the characters face, especially when they are greatly beyond their control or comprehension. As fate seems to be a great part of the narrative, the characters clearly expressing their regret in not having done something differently represent their struggle to break free – and metaphorically, for women to be liberated from what is expected of them.

Indeed, Charlotte's words even echo through another character: Dani. In the fourth episode, "The Way It Came," Dani and her fiancé Edmund talk about their wedding and Dani finally gathers the courage to admit this is not what she wants, despite what her fiancé and his family expect of her: "I should've said something sooner. I didn't wanna hurt you… or you mom. Or your family. And then it was just what we were doing. I just… thought I was being selfish. That I could just stick it out, and eventually, I would feel how I was supposed to" (27:38-29:05).

Victoria Pedretti, who plays Dani, said that to her dismay, a large part of the scene had not made the final cut. However, she still insists on Dani's action in it, that is to stand for herself and express her

desires for perhaps the first time: “she’s also coming out as a feminist and somebody who’s interested in existing beyond what’s expected of her as a woman in that place, in that time,” she said. “It’s more that this isn’t her truth, that’s she’s not living fully in her truth. Part of that is her sexuality, but another part of that is her capabilities and utilizing her capabilities to the highest degree.”[16] The series thus allows the character to challenge the societal order. Up to that point in the flashbacks, Dani was the picture of the Victorian “angel in the house”: in a poem dedicated to his deceased wife, Coventry Patmore relates the life of what he considers the perfect spouse. Sara Schoch explains that “the poem idealizes this passive, purely domestic female figure, providing a definition for the perfect woman in contemporary British society. Patmore’s poetic exploration of the angel in the house both describes the private and maternal qualities that each woman should display, and ranks her as inferior to her male spouse by using the love between man and wife as a metaphor for that between man and God. Patmore’s poem depicts the ideal relationship between man and woman as one of a “superior” who “delights” in the “smallness and weakness of his beloved” (Dunn 210).”[17]

However, the series also reminds the viewers of the difficulty of being an assertive woman, especially in the Gothic genre. Edmund is first visibly (and understandably) upset by the news, before he lashes out and insults her. More interestingly he tells her “you’ve done enough”: Edmund is undeniably far from being as villainous as Peter, but he depicts the smaller attacks of patriarchy on women by turning the narrative towards himself (“why are you doing this to *me*?”, he asks) but also by once again keeping Dani from expressing her thoughts and feelings. The question of fate, will and self-determination is at the core of the show, and bodily autonomy and identity are closely linked to it. I previously theorized the presence of ghosts as a reminder of the traumatic past, but under the lens of a feminist approach, haunting and possession also become patriarchal tools to keep control over the female characters’ bodies and lives.

This idea is particularly depicted in a sequence that is fragmented between two different episodes. In episode three (37:54:41:10)-, Rebecca and Peter share a romantic, intimate moment: Peter gifts her a luxurious fur coat and tells her how beautiful she is to him – but the scene is not without its darkness. First, the two of them are in the bedroom which the children’s deceased parents used to occupy, in the wing that is now off-limit. Flora mentions in the first episode that no one goes there

[16] Sopelsa, Brooke. “Bly Manor' star Victoria Pedretti on her character's queer journey and surprising inspiration.” NBC News. 2020.

[17] Schoch, Sarah. “Gothic Monsters and Masculinity: Neutralizing The New Woman in Victorian Gothic Literature.” Explorations. 2013.

Dunn, John J. “Love and Eroticism: Coventry Patmore’s Mystical Imagery.” Victorian Poetry. 1969.

anymore: symbolically this part of the house has become an altar to the dead, just like the chapel or the cemetery, and it is no longer a place for the living. Moreover, the area is also visually separated from the rest of the house as it is obscured by shadows even during the day and all furniture is covered in sheets (which can also remind us of the old depictions of ghosts).

Then, Peter is constantly in the shadows while Rebecca is in the light, and the difference of power dynamics is highlighted in the way she is constantly shot over his shoulder, looking up at him (Patmore's poem spoke of a relationship between man and wife like one between man and God; such influence over Rebecca is directly portrayed as such in this scene.) Even as they share a kiss, the soundtrack is dark and ominous with an almost vibrating quality to it, before it mellows into a melancholic melody on top of an eerie music box. When the scene is used again in episode seven, the dialogue and shots are identical, but the atmosphere is even more somber. Indeed, the second time the scene plays, Peter has actually possessed Rebecca and "tucked" her away into one of their happy memories, while he drowns her. Rebecca has agreed for Peter to use her body, but she has never accepted to die to be with him forever: her absence of consent makes the sequence an almost explicit metaphor for rape. Moreover, the scene in which the ghost of Rebecca sees her own lifeless body floating in the lake is played as a tragic moment: she only has fragmented memories of what happened and now has to witness the damage that has been done to her. Meanwhile, in the fake dream, Peter does not acknowledge what he has done: he only walks in circles around Rebecca, repeating "let me show you how beautiful you are". By this cyclical movement, Peter seems to try to recreate the past and a memory that made them both happy – except their relationship has now been broken by his crime. When he takes a picture of the two of them, their faces are no longer suffused with love and joy, but deadly pale with veiled eyes.

Possession is made more horrific in the series because of what it implies, that is the total loss of self-control. The characters experience the sublime by living outside of the linear flow of time, but they are also self-effaced to the point they are no longer aware of their surroundings, or themselves. Possession in the case of Rebecca is depicted as *penetration*: her body is violated to satisfy Peter's desires; in the case of the children it is depicted as *pollution*: the adults directly repeat their mistakes through the younger generation. Miles, for instance, seems to be prey to erratic moods which turn him violent and haughty, when in reality it is just Peter speaking through him. Similarly, the female characters are never sexualized in the series but there is one voyeuristic instance in which Miles (or rather Peter) watches Dani as she is about to undress: the male gaze is portrayed through that disturbing look from a child which instead of combining "the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters

[…] without breaking narrative verisimilitude"[18], emphasizes the wrongness of an adult pulling the strings of a child's mind. In general, possession and haunting in the spectral sense are seen as a tool to control others: by taking away their free will or standing in the way of their happiness (such as the ghost of Edmund does when Dani kisses Jamie), the male ghosts of the show depict the influence of a patriarchal society over its women – and even its children.

As theorized in the first part, ghosts are metaphors for trauma as they represent an evil that has not yet been purged. What this part demonstrates is that spectrality and possession as a whole can also be seen as metaphors for power dynamics and gender inequality, especially within heteronormative relationships. Peter and Rebecca were not married, but the way Peter loves – or thinks he loves – her can only be described as possessive, which is directly translated into the series through supernatural possession. Similarly, the possession of the children depict the hierarchical order parents wish to enforce, as well as the traits and mistakes they pass onto them. This evil, which is repeated through the younger generations, is particularly dangerous as it targets and corrupts the future protectors of history, as the next part will prove.

3) Children, Motherhood and the Motif of Self-Sacrifice

In terms of plot, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is a rather close adaptation of the original work, *The Turn of the Screw*, in the sense that despite the several added characters and details (some borrowed from other works by Henry James), the core of the story remains the same: the children. Indeed, it is arguable that the children are the pulling force that start the story: Dani wants a new life, away from her traumatic past, and because of her experience as a school teacher, she is immediately interested in Henry Wingrave's job offer. Moreover, it seems that her desperate wish to be chosen to care for Flora and Miles both comes from a genuine care for children and a desire to repair what was broken.[19] Dani is certain that this position could be an opportunity for her to start anew, while also helping the children through their mourning in a way no one seems to have done with her. What she does not foresee is that these children will unfortunately be the cause of her doom.

To put it simply, children are the heart of the story – of every Gothic story, Margarita Georgieva argues in her book *The Gothic Child* (2013):

[18] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Screen. 1975.

[19] Remember what Dani tells Henry in the first episode: "You take to them [the children]. You love them. Even the worst ones. And you try to help but there's just too many of them. And too little of you", adding,"I could make a difference, a real difference." (12:46 – 14:03)

> "If the Gothic plot has a certain shape and direction and a definite moral purpose, it is to confront good and evil on a stage where representatives of all social strata challenge and antagonise each other. However, if we do not add to these the character of the Gothic child, the Gothic plot is incomplete. The importance for authors does not reside in an abstract struggle between good and evil but in a concrete moral example involving plausible personae, a model that can be applied to real life. The experiment of choosing between good and evil when the two are offered as equal possibilities to a developing character during a process of maturation defines the nature of the plot. Hence, the Gothic novel is a true-to-life experiment about children turning to good and children turning to evil, about the freedom to choose and the impossibility to act when fate imposes its due. The struggle between good and evil in a child's soul is among the recurrent preoccupations of the genre. [...] An evil child is thus either destined to die or to grow into a Gothic villain. A good child is destined to die or to suffer, fight and grow into a Gothic hero or heroine" (Georgieva 39-40).

So according to Georgieva, the child is not only an important element of the Gothic story, but a crucial one. First, she argues that the Gothic itself is based on childhood fears: "the dark, monsters under the bed, spectres in the attic, chains rattling in the basement, and the unknown, unseen, nameless things that stand in the shadows, that stalk, watch and follow. The Gothic atmospheres seem to feed freely on childhood nighttime fears and daytime phobias, something Joseph Addison remarked as early as 1712 in an article which is now considered as one of the founding texts of Gothic aesthetics: '[they] bring up into our Memory the Stories we have heard in our Child-hood, and favour those secret Terrours and Apprehensions to which the Mind of Man is naturally subject' (Clery, 105)[20]" (175-176). Moreover, the genre is characterized by its deep examination of the human mind and its possibilities, whether they are good or evil. The child, being at the very beginning of its journey, thus represents a starting point where all things are possible, and the Gothic plot uses it to question the idea of choice and free will for instance. The Gothic is deeply concerned with the past, and so the children are used to examine, and even criticize it: when Peter's abuse is revealed to the viewer, it is possible for them to shift their perception and opinion of him. What he lived as a child is not an excuse, but an explanation, or rather a possible source for his present wrongdoings. Additionally, the cyclical nature of evil is portrayed through his own abuse of the children: he lies to them, does not genuinely care for them and eventually uses them to get his own happiness. Other children suffer because of their parents' actions or behaviors: Dani's mother is only visible on screen once and their relationship seems extremely strained and distant; Owen's mother is not negligent but her illness kept him from living his dream.

Georgieva argued that "the struggle between good and evil in a child's soul is among the recurrent preoccupations of the genre" (40). The series, and the Gothic in general, emphasizes that struggle by putting the child characters through extreme situations that can often have a marking impact on their life: "they are orphaned, abandoned, lost, stripped naked by ruffians, and deprived of heritage,

[20] Clery, E. J. and Miles, Robert. 'Addison for *The Spectator*'. In *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook*, *1700–1820*. 2000. Cited in: Georgieva, Margarita. *The Gothic Child*. 2013.

escaping or running" (197). Moreover, they are often faced with death, which "entails a transformation and frequently exercises a direct influence on the child's character and situation. […] After witnessing scenes of death, children are at liberty to make their own choices and either revel in their new independence or become its prey. Death is the greatest opening of possibilities for the gothic child and, as such, becomes the indispensable twist in any gothic narrative" (68). This relationship with death and the macabre is depicted in two different ways in the series, representing the two possible outcome of this trauma (leading to goodness, or evil).

On one hand, Miles has a close relationship with the dead as he is possessed by Peter: this possession corrupts him and even marks him with violence as Hannah dies by his own hand. This particular scene, in the fifth episode "The Altar of the Dead" (46:30 – 48:25), precisely depicts the extreme situations that children face in Gothic stories, and how they might influence their future for the worst. When Hannah notices Peter talking to Miles, the young boy seems afraid and submissive, looking down at the ground and avoiding the adults' eyes. The transition between him and Peter is both vocal and visual: Peter circles around him, his presence overbearing and as soon as he touches Miles' shoulder, Miles finishes his sentence in the same harsh tone. There, the dialogue pauses and the camera slowly moves behind Peter until there is only Hannah and Miles facing each other. The possession is thus made clear by that emphasis on that moment of tense silence, which is only broken when Miles (Peter) shouts and curses at Hannah. The wrongness of this possession is expressed through the cross-cuts between the shots on Miles – his face distorted in anger, his body shaking – and Hannah – wide-eyed with shock.

Moreover, the location of the scene helps building an otherworldly atmosphere: though most of the forest is blurry behind the characters, it still creates a pocket of space far away from society where wild instincts might overpower oneself. The eeriness of the scene is, once again, created through the use of a discreet but ominous score which drowns out the birds and nature sounds as soon as Peter touches Miles. A deep, wind-like vibration fills the scene, creating a vacuum in which both nature and the viewer hold their breath, waiting to see what is going to happen. This silence only makes Miles' violence more shocking as the score suddenly booms and breaks into shrill strings as he pushes Hannah down the well, before returning to the same vibration once she is dead, emphasizing the shock of the scene. Miles has been polluted by the dead, in the sense that he was completely overwhelmed by Peter's past and his desire for vengeance.

On the other hand, Flora has a more respectful and emotional approach to death: she is seen spending time in the family's graveyard, sketching the tombstones and even conversing with the ghosts

of Bly. Flora acts as the healing possibility of the present and future: for instance, in the symbolic gesture of "giving a face" to the faceless ghost of a child, she repairs the damage Viola's curse has done, whereas Miles/Peter portrays the haunting and threatening power of the past over time by creating more ghosts. Indeed, the first time Flora sees the ghost child, she is justifiably afraid, and runs away to her mother ("The Jolly Corner" 13:12). The second time she sees him (same episode, 59:09), she offers a gentle "hello?" when she notices him playing with her dollhouse, before following him when he runs away. Now, the scene is first played as slightly horrific: the child's features have almost entirely been smoothed away and the score is still an almost imperceptible vibrating hum as Flora runs into a pitch-black corridor. However, the gentleness that follows is foreshadowed by the several warm lights in the first corridor, as well as in the attic. As mentioned in the first part, "The Haunted Home", the attic is often used in horror and Gothic stories as an ideal setting for horrific scenes, as it is the place farthest away from the living area, home to dangerous beings living in the shadows. But in that case, the attic is warm and rather well-lit, and as the viewer follows Flora's point of view, her discovery of the faceless child is not meant to frighten. The ominous soundtrack mellows and gives a tragic aspect to the scene as Flora apologize for having been scared and offers the child a doll's face to replace its own. It is then revealed Flora is actually relieving a memory, which means she was still only five years old when this moment occurred: her desire to care for this ghost as if it was a friend, as well as offering him both a face and a story, shows the children's ability to repair the past and their ancestors' wrongdoings.

Georgieva argues that through these encounters with death, the children can access the sublime: "they are temporarily given access to borderline spaces outside of society – forests, islands, abandoned cottages, ruins, prisons. This is a necessary step in the determination of the Gothic child's personality type but it also allows the child to become what the adult in Gothic cannot become. Adults in Gothic look upon childhood with mingled feelings but they are also represented with their sensorial limitations brought on by experience. The child, however, is depicted as able to experience sublimity to its fullest and capable of appropriating for itself the sublime part of nature. […] the Gothic child represents a rethinking of the sublime not only as an experience of the senses but as a state of being within the mind, something that instead of coming from without can be reached from within." (197). In the series, the children's experience with the sublime, especially through possession, is traumatic but at the end of the story they are able to break free from this pattern of abuse and self-loss, meanwhile the adults perish or repeat the cycle (such as Dani does).

Perhaps one instance of the series breaking away with the Gothic's focus on the past is the forgetting of the children. Georgieva explains that "the child figure stands for the regularity of historical time and is treated as a guarantee of immortality on account of its capacity to restore and preserve human memory. Thus, the child becomes the carrier of human history. The presence of the child figure produces effects similar to those evoked when a character in the plot contemplates a Gothic ruin. If the Gothic ruin stands for memory and history because of what remains after centuries of decay, the Gothic child stands for the beginnings of history and for what remains despite centuries of decay" (111-112) and that "since Gothic children are seen as the future guardians of history, they embody the relationship between past and present" (140). In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, the children only act as reminders of history: the adults of the story take on the responsibility of caring for them and making sure they are not ingested into the cycle of evil. The children themselves forget, about Bly, about the ghosts and even about the people who cared for them during that time: now that the traumatic past has been exorcised, they are a clean slate for the future to be written on. As Georgieva insists, "the child is the only character we find in a state of constant becoming" (68), who embodies "the indeterminateness of the self in its purest form" (197).

The presence of those children then naturally entails that of parents. Georgieva argues that the presence of children in Gothic tales also often comes from an interest in family dynamics: "Gothic sought to explain the phenomenon of parents rejecting, hating, abandoning and killing their offspring. It examines family secrets, social backgrounds, cultural shifts and the consequences of politico-religious turmoil" (65) and thus, "authors integrated models of abandonment, adoption and protection into the Gothic genre as a result of a long process which sought to regularise the structure of society, a structure in which everyone had a hierarchically defined place." (66). As mentioned in the part concerning the house, life at Bly is based on a system which gives purpose to every character: each is given a particular task that helps the house (and family) functioning. Georgieva goes as far as to say that "filiations and family relationships are only important as far as the bloodline is carried over into the new generation by at least one child. The figure of importance is always the child. This explains the presence of parent substitutes – of adoptive parents, of guardians, teachers and nurses in large numbers. In fact, the Gothic novel depicts the adoption of an orphan or a foundling as a must, as an obligation and a duty. If there is one rule that Gothic heroes and heroines obey once they grow up, it is the rule of preserving the child" (129). Symbolically, the adults are the protectors of the future and their guidance of the children is at the center of the narrative.

Because the series is so centered around women, it is then interesting to consider the figure of the mother. In her essay "The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode", Ruth Bienstock Anolik argues that "although all Gothic women are threatened, negotiating their place in the world at their peril, no woman is in greater danger in the Gothic than the mother." According to her, the mother is almost always absent in some way: dead, imprisoned or effaced from the story. In the series, all biological mothers are only presented through analepses or though another character, and almost all of them are dead. All mother substitutes (Rebecca, Hannah and Dani) all know the same fate: death and transformation into a ghost. Anolik explains that motherly absence by theorizing that "the mother promotes the Gothic narrative. A number of critics note that the figure of the mother exerts social control and order, providing the resistance to deviance that is beneficial to society but detrimental to narrative. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong suggests that the surveillance of the mother within the family exerts a form of social control; to reframe this in Foucauldian terms, the mother plays the role of panopticon within the family. Carolyn Dever notes the narrative implications of this, stating that 'the mother is constructed as an emblem of the safety, unity, and order that existed before the very dangerous chaos of the child's Gothic plot. Gothic novels rely on fractured domestic structures in order to construct the erotic crises that eventually produce stability.[21]" In other words, "the mother is the enemy of the narratable": the "instances of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to arise… opposed to the "nonnarratable' state of quiescence assumed by a novel before the beginning and supposedly recovered by it at the end.'[22] Hence the problem posed by the figure of the mother to the excessive, plot-driven Gothic narrative."

Indeed, the elimination of the mother and her absence in the series is what emphasizes the danger. In the analepses in which the children's mother is alive, the ghosts are never depicted when it is clear Viola has been haunting the estate for centuries. As soon as the mother leaves and dies overseas, the haunting becomes more solid and malevolent, and the children are left alone with dealing with the ghosts. Rebecca is their protector for a certain amount of time, but she is "stolen" away by Peter and then eliminated. Dani, whose devotion to children has already been pointed as one of the most important and developed part of her character, becomes her successor but never replaces their mother.

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[21] Dever, Carolyn. *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins.* 1998.

[22] Miller, D. A. *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*. 1981.

Both cited in:

Anolik, Bienstock Ruth. "The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode." *Modern Language Studies. 2003*

Moreover, an important change that has been made to the original story is that neither of the children die at the end: it is Dani who sacrifices herself to save Flora, as well as Miles. This sacrifice is depicted as utterly selfless, as the children forget all memory of Dani after they leave Bly. Only Hannah and Jamie remains as possible mother figures, but neither can fit the role (Hannah is dead and cannot leave the grounds of Bly, and Jamie has no interest in children whatsoever.)

Motherhood, which was a sacred duty during Victorian times, is arguably both depicted in a modern and a traditional manner in the series. On one hand, the story highlights the links that are created between people who are not related by blood and the concept of motherhood becomes the act of "mothering" as defined by Emily Jeremiah, that is not "a fixed, static state; rather [...] a set of ideas and behaviours that are mutable, contextual."[23] It could even be argued that the mother figures are actually just protective female characters. On the other hand, the story is very much based on the devotion of those women for the children: Rebecca gives up freedom to save them, as do Hannah and Dani. Georgieva argued that the tragic fate of mothers in Gothic tales was often linked to the historical context in which the genre was born: "all through the period 1764–1824, the Christian point of view presented maternal suffering and death as the physical consequence of the fall from Paradise" (183); and whether or not the show was influenced by religious undertones does not change the martyrdom of its female characters. There is a clear, repeated motif of self-sacrifice that is not present for the male characters, or at least not permanently.

Indeed, in the beginning of the last episode "The Beast in the Jungle" (4:30 – 13:43), all the possible "paternal" figures are cast aside as Henry violently tries to save Flora from Viola and is only hurt in the process – which forces Owen to stay behind to save him. Only the mother figures gather to save Flora, sacrificing themselves in one way or another. Hannah holds onto her remaining humanity to warn them of the danger Flora is in, before she is no longer corporeal enough to interact with the living. Rebecca, who is unable to help physically, reassures Flora as she is dragged into the lake and even takes on her pain – and together with Viola in this misty, moody environment they paint the portrait of tragic Gothic heroines through generations. Dani, the only one left alive, is ultimately facing an impossible dilemma: living but letting Flora die, or taking on Viola's curse and saving her. Except there does not seem to be any hesitation from Dani: Viola's slow gliding into the water, surrounded by fog, is broken away by Dani rushing into the water, panting – and there comes the moment motherhood could be interpreted as a natural instinct.

[23] Jeremiah, Emily. "Motherhood to Mothering and Beyond: Maternity in Recent Feminist Thought." 2006.

The camera lingers on Flora's face as she is slowly taken deeper into the water, and the narration explains Dani spoke something she did not understand "but felt, in her bones". There is no explanation as to how she knew how to speak the words that would bind her to Viola ("It's you, it's me, it's us"), it only came naturally to her when Flora needed it, and indeed she succeeds in stopping Viola. Moreover, it is the first time ghostly possession appears as a fracture of the self, and not a replacement. The camera focuses on Viola's featureless face as "it's us" echoes in disembodied whispers around them, and crosscuts with closer and closer shots on Dani's eyes – as one of them turns from blue to brown, the music intensifying in shrill tension. It is clear from her behavior afterwards that she is still in control, but that she sacrificed a part of herself, willingly letting a spirit violate her body to save Flora. Finally, as mentioned before, there is no self-sacrifice of the kind from the male characters and more importantly, they are the ones benefiting from the women's sacrifice, as Henry is the one shown having emotional moments with the children, before leaving with the both of them.

The first part ("The Gothic Frame and Social Questions) established that the series was indeed Gothic at its core, especially through its use of supernatural metaphors to discuss societal topics such as abuse or trauma. This second part focused on the manner it depicts gender, as female characters and romantic relationships are undeniably at the center of the story. What comes out of this analysis is once again the double nature of the genre, and the show itself: on one hand, it seems to examine gender roles and the pressure of marriage in a way that is arguably sympathetic to women and their struggles, while, on the other, the depiction of victimhood eventually turns into martyrdom. In other words, what this part made clear is that women are at the center of the narrative, but even more importantly, so are children – and both are so connected that themes of marriage and motherhood are inevitable. The show, because it is Gothic, is interested in what is "Other", that is who does not belong or struggles to (thus, characters that are "other" often fail to find belonging and/or happiness.) The way it ultimately portrays women (and especially those who do not fit or resist gender norms) as victims of societal expectations reflects reality, but also, perhaps, romanticizes the appeal of a self-sacrificing heroine in a sensational work of fiction.

PART III: THE "OTHER"

1) THE MONSTROUS FEMININE

As explained before, the Gothic is a genre that is often defined by its aesthetic codes, as well as certain themes that often deal with the sublime and the uncanny. Unlike most horror fiction, the Gothic frightens not with what is absolutely unknown, but with what is both familiar, and not. The genre establishes a line between what is "I" and what is "them" and though that line is often blurred, the fear of the "Other" which is just different enough, while also just similar enough to oneself, is at the center of those narratives.

In *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (2015), Carol Clove argued that in horror films monsters and villains are almost always male, while victims are almost always female. The Gothic genre is no different: most, if not all, monsters and villains are men: think about *Frankenstein, Dracula or The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Gothic novels are fond of the male monsters, vampires, werewolves and evil spirits (as well as human, but malevolent villains) who torment the young heroine. Less has been written about female monsters, even by literary critics: Barbara Creed notes in her book *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) that, "wife, mother, daughter, virgin, whore, career woman, femme fatale – these are the most popular stereotypes of woman that have been addressed by feminist theorists in their writings on popular cinema. Very little has been written on woman as monster" (Creed 151).

It first seems important to consider the "monster" of the series, Viola, before she even became that monster. Indeed, the origins of her haunting are revealed in an entire analeptic episode dedicated to her backstory (the eighth of the series, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes", named after Henry James' 1868 novella) and even the transition between her featureless face in the present and her real appearance in the past in this episode is a visual act of both examining and fixing the concealed and traumatic past.

Viola is the older sister to Perdita, and their story begins when they lose their father. Viola seems to be the most independent and resilient of the two, as shown by the close-ups on her sister and her: while Perdita is overcome with grief, Viola is calm and stoic. As young women left with a consequent property and wealth in the 17th century, they have no choice but to marry to secure this heritage. Viola never seems to consider marriage a something that would trap her: as explained by the narrator, her first appearance to her future husband, Arthur, is staged in such a way she has full control

over the situation. Her portrait, hanging above the scene, might be restrained by its frame (as is Viola by her obligation to marry) but it too acts as an all-seeing-eye and a reminder of that control: "He may marry her, or marry her sister, but there should be no mistaking the true authority of Bly Manor, nor the way things would be done", the narrator comments as Viola offers Arthur a charming smile, before she lets go of his hand and walks away. What is also worth noting is the difference in the sisters' dynamic between Henry James' novella and the series: while the sisters compete ruthlessly for the man's affection in James' work, the seduction was based on a mutual agreement between them in the adaptation.

Viola's story is arguably one of the most transgressive part of the series, in which the condition of women, especially at the time, is highlighted as based on deep inequalities. Barbara Creed explains in *The Monstrous Feminine* that "the monstrous-feminine is constructed as an abject figure because she threatens the symbolic order. The monstrous-feminine draws attention to the 'frailty of the symbolic order' through her evocation of the natural, animal order and its terrifying associations with the passage all human beings must inevitably take from birth through life to death" (83). Viola is *perceived* as a monster even before her death and transformation, for she challenges the authority that has been imposed on her by a male-dominated society. This is particularly depicted through her relationship with religion: during her wedding ceremony in Bly's chapel, Viola vows to love and cherish her husband, but does not promise to obey him, even when the vicar points out her omission (6:44-7:30). Even as she is dying from an illness that leaves her bedridden, she refuses to say her last rites, telling the vicar, "I do not go. Tell your God, that I do not go" (15:23). Viola refuses to accept her death, but also separates herself from society and even religion (note the use of *your* God, and not *our* God, or simply God: through this linguistic choice, Viola refuses to submit to this divine authority or even acknowledge that she believes in it, just as she refused to submit to patriarchal power).

Her fate after her death can be seen as highly biblical: she metaphorically reproduces the first murder (Cain) by killing her sister and the first sin (Eve) by condemning generations to her curse. Finally, her status as a ghost that is physically present but no longer aware is her last affront to religion: as Creed explains, "within a biblical context, the corpse is also utterly abject. It signifies one of the most basic forms of pollution – the body without a soul. As a form of waste it represents the opposite of the spiritual, the religious symbolic" (10). However, as the creator Mike Flanagan explained, he did not approach the series with a religious angle: although it uses the highly spiritual codes of the Gothic and the sublime, questions of life and death are not linked to faith. Hell is not a lake of boiling fire, but a time loop in which one relives their worst memories. Viola's fate is not a narrative punishment for her

heresy, but a depiction of the unfairness of the "symbolic order": had Viola not been forced to marry, the jealousy and betrayal of her sister would have never occurred, and the curse would have never existed.

Viola is an interesting "monster" to consider: Creed mentions vampires, witches, violent and incestuous mothers and sexual predators (such as the "vagina-dentata"). Female monsters are depicted as such because they reject the natural order that places women as caregivers and victims: they are selfish, cold, violent and sometimes lustful. Gothic stories too use the same depiction: for instance, the transformation of Lucy Westenra into a vampire in *Dracula* is emphasized by her shift from a pure and innocent woman to a lustful seductress. Moreover, Creed argues that most of the time, the female monster is often defined by her "abject nature of her maternal and reproductive functions" (Creed 151). Creed explains that female monstrosity is often linked to un-motherness: women become monsters when they reject their "natural" predisposition of caring for their child by abandoning or even killing them.

Viola is none of those things. She is a ghost and her violence is not voluntary: she is merely retracing the steps she used to take before she died and pushing away everyone who stands in her path. The series already established that Viola is a character that is in constant movement re-evaluation: even when she was alive, she defied the natural order by waking at night and walking around her home. Though she is no victim in that moment, her constant, aimless wandering transforms her into a Gothic heroine, in the sense that she is trapped, but does not know the exact nature of her trap. In a sense, she was already haunting Bly long before her death, which only gave her the explicit status of a ghost.

Moreover, she is not defined by her "un-motherness", on the contrary. Viola does not appear as a ghost at first, even after she has been murdered and betrayed by her younger sister: she only becomes physical and violent when Perdita tries to steal Viola's child's legacy. Indeed, Viola was trapped in a chest full of luxurious dresses and jewels, stuck in a loop with only thought: that one day her daughter would profit from that gift and at the same time, set her free. Perdita's ultimate betrayal occurs when she tries to take that gift for herself, and Viola's disembodied arms burst out of a dress, the last symbol of their mutual trust, to kill her (35:34 – 35:50). It is worth noting that this murder is not explicitly depicted in James' original work: in it, Lloyd (Arthur in the series) seeks Perdita in the attic after she left there and never came back, and finds her lifeless body with ghostly fingerprints upon her skin. This added scene in which the viewer witnesses Viola's anger and violence for the first time emphasizes her despair and her devotion to her child, for whom the chest was meant. Finally, Viola's haunting truly begins when her husband decides to throw the chest into the lake, thus depriving his own daughter of

her mother's legacy. That exact moment is the epicenter of Viola's curse, her grief and rage so strong it creates a "well of gravity" that will imprison every soul that died on the grounds of Bly.

Viola is undeniably a horror element in the series: her appearance frightens and she is an evident danger to the character the viewer is meant to care for. However, the insistence on her story and the deeply psychological reasons behind her haunting makes her more than a mere monster without a story, to be killed or exorcised at the end of the series. When the context of her life and death is brought to light, her haunting since the beginning of the series is put into perspective. The Gothic and the show focus on emotion and the effect it has on the reader and viewer: the episode dedicated to Viola shifts the audience's perception of her from fright, disgust and hatred to compassion, or at least, understanding. The genre often plays on the dichotomy between light and dark and good and evil, but it also often leaves space to consider a middle ground: it is particularly interesting to consider in Viola's case because, while she does evident harm to those around her, her lack of awareness also raises the question of accountability. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that while Viola is powerful, she is also her first victim.

Indeed, when it comes to Viola, the identities of monster and victim overlap: she is both the Minotaur in the maze and the prisoner of that maze. By condemning herself to that entrapment, Viola embodies the effect of patriarchal society on its women. Before her death, Viola was pure transgression, defying male and religious authority and because of this, she was punished. Once again, her absence of clear consciousness makes it difficult to put the blame on her alone. More interestingly, the slow deterioration of her physical features depict how women may lose their identity in a world ruled by men. As Viola is stuck back in the loop of sleeping, waking and walking she experienced when she was alive, her identity begins to fade away. Not only does Viola forget about her past and motivations, she also forgets about herself, as explained in the eighth episode "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" (49:51 – 50:24):

> "She would sleep, forget, and forget, and forget. And with the forgetting, an ailment altogether monstrous. All things fade. All things. Flesh, stone, even stars themselves. Time takes all the things. It is the way in the world. The past recedes, memories fade, and so, true, does the spirit. Everything yields to time, even the soul."

This part of the narration plays over a continuous shot on Viola, asleep at the bottom of the lake. As the camera slowly zooms in, Viola's features gradually melt away until only a half-obstructed nose and a mouth remain (the absence of eyes is clearly linked to the idea they represent the soul). Viola thought she was in control when she arranged her marriage but the societal order of the time was perhaps stronger. She experiences a transcendental experience over time and reality, but as Donna

Heiland argued about the sublime, the spirituality of such experience does not always mean it is a positive one. A series of events linked to male society (more specifically, Viola's father's death and her marriage to her husband) lead her to first lose her identity as a human being, and then as herself altogether. Centuries later, her story has been lost and she is perceived by the inhabitants of Bly as nothing more than a menace. Moreover, this self-effacement also follows the Gothic pattern of cyclical evil and affects everyone around Viola. As her own facial features disappeared, so did all the others' too.

The end of Viola's story appears as a contradiction: the cycle of hurt is both healed and conserved. On one hand, Viola finally seems to be able to move on. Kate Siegel, who plays her character, explains in an interview:

> "The show is a Gothic romance, and the root of that is the dark corners of love — the cobwebs in the unseen spaces of love. It's not your romantic comedy, it's the depths of the underneath of the feeling. We've all been selfish in relationships, we've all, in our own way, fallen into that myopic vision of what we need, and who we have to get through to get to it. After a certain point, reality sets in. You have to look at yourself, and you're either alone, or just surrounded by the bodies of the people you have devoured. And I think Viola saw that. She came to a place where she realized who she was. She is a person mired in self-reflection, which is why there's a lot about staring into the water and mirrors — the show has tons of that imagery. And at that moment, I think Viola was ready to change, decades later, centuries later from when she became this gravity well. She was ready to become something else."[24]

Viola's story is one haunted by grief, rage and unfairness. As a woman, her obligation to marry eventually leads to her demise: in another reality, she would have perhaps lived a long life in harmony with her sister. Instead, she is forced to watch her life spiral out of her control (which, considering the ruse she used on her husband to keep control over her life, must be upsetting) as she is rendered weak and vulnerable by illness, before watching the only people she loves drift away. Even her "monstrous" actions are complicated to judge: the viewer witnesses Viola murder a string of people, including a child, while being reminded she too is the victim of her own curse and loses her identity until she no longer remembers who she is or what she is looking for. In a way, she is very similar to Dani: both have been victims of societal expectations and transgress natural laws because of a child they care about. This shared devotion thus makes it possible that Viola did not see Dani as a mere willing victim, but rather an equal, a kin spirit.

However, as mentioned before, this ending is both healing and tragic depending from whose point of view one sees the story. For Viola, Dani's possession was a way to escape her prison and eventually move on. But when Dani accepts to be possessed by Viola, she is both penetrated and polluted by her: as time passes, Dani's identity shrinks away to leave more room for Viola's restless

[24] "'The Haunting of Bly Manor': Kate Siegel Breaks Down Viola's Tale in Episode 8." SkyeSquad. 2020.

spirit. There is a rather long sequence in the beginning of the episode in which Dani tries to explain the feeling to Jamie: close-ups insists on her worried eyes and tears, the walls of the room a blue blur around her (perhaps a hint at her fate at the bottom of the lake, as a brief shot shows Viola underwater a moment later.) Moreover, she feels a presence inside her, which she compares to a beast in a jungle. This links back to what Xavier Aldana Reyes explained in *Gothic Cinema* (2020), that the Gothic "hints at occluded or only partially visible terrors, thus offering half-glimpses of bloodcurdling images which, because they are seldom fully shown or described, allow our imagination to run wild and fill in the gaps." (Reyes 8) Unlike the ghost of her fiancé, Viola's possession is more than a visual haunting: it is an indescribable fear that only Dani can understand. I compared her to the house itself earlier, because of the parallels between its shadowy, forbidden rooms and Dani's shameful secrets: now she embodies the house as the frame holding the haunting, Viola.

Moreover, it is interesting to consider what actress Kate Siegel mentioned about Viola and mirrors, for I have already mentioned how prevalent they also are in Dani's journey. The first time Dani stops seeing her fiancé in them, it is a turning point: she has finally been able to move on from her guilt, especially through her relationship with Jamie. However, her healing backtracks after some time, as her reflection is then entirely replaced by Viola's image several time throughout the last episode (in a glass door, in the water in the sink, in the reflection of a pitcher[25] and finally in a bathtub, where she seems entirely entranced by Viola's reflection.) As the haunting becomes more and more dangerous and she nearly harms Jamie, Dani has then no choice but to blur entirely with Viola, and become the new haunting of Bly. This is a direct depiction of the sublime when subject and object overlap in a transcendental experience, but it is also another loss of identity. Dani still exists, but she is also the Lady of the Lake, and her features and memories too will fade. The only difference is that she will leave "the only trace of who she once was in the memory of the woman who loved her most", as Jamie explains at the end of the series. Once again, the series uses Gothic ambivalence by exploring the complexity of human and supernatural experiences: while Viola's story ends in healing and by breaking the cycle she was stuck into, her liberation only comes at the price of Dani's freedom.

The first part of this thesis established that the series undeniably belonged to the Gothic genre. The second part took a feminist approach to study themes such as gender, marriage and motherhood, which already began to establish the show both transgressed and repeated "traditional" Victorian

[25] It is also worth noting that during that scene in Owen's restaurant, Dani is smoking, something she has never been shown doing before. This hints at the unraveling of her well-being and a possible attempt at soothing her pain through destructive means.)

Gothic depictions of such concepts (especially when it came to the importance of motherhood and children). As a whole, the series, being Gothic, is deeply interested or perhaps more precisely, *intrigued* by what and who is "Other" – that is what does not fit the norm and disturbs the established order. Viola is *other*, in the sense that she defies societal codes as a woman. As actress Kate Siegel explained, Viola is in constant search of novelty and rebirth; she is never satisfied by what the world gives her and knows she deserves more. Moreover, the series uses supernatural metaphor to emphasize her singularity: her status as ghost is just a continuation of her defiance against the natural order, and her refusal to move on after her death perhaps directly references her disdain towards religion. As a whole, Viola stands as the most powerful female figure of the series: while parts of her story focuses on her otherness being punished, she is also given agency to challenge societal and natural laws – even though the sublime is, once again, not fully liberating. Moreover, the harm she does to Dani is not negligible as it still perpetuates the circle of hurt once more.

2) Race & the Gothic

As explained before, the Gothic is often interested in the "Other", that is a figure that is similar to oneself or mainstream society, but still different enough that a line separates them from it. While this separation is often translated through metaphors with the supernatural (such as the ghost or female monster of Gothic fiction which represented the fear of the New Woman of the Victorian era), more modern works now establish parallels with the perception and rejection of minorities.

In *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion* (2007), Maisha Wester dedicates a chapter ("Gothic in and as Race Theory") to the depiction of people of color in the Gothic genre. She writes: "often masked by a monstrous visage, racial minorities appear throughout traditional Gothic texts as figures around which authors spin debates about civilisation, enlightenment, freedom and human nature. Minority bodies in such texts act as objects of discourse, rather than as social agents, allowing white subjects to meditate upon complex realities and behaviours without having to claim them" (Hogle-Miles 53). Wester also quotes Saidiya V. Hartman, who explained in her book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-century America* (1997) that, "blackness provided the occasion for self-reflection as well as exploration of terror, desire, fear, loathing, and longing." (Hartman 7). In addition, Wester writes: "[H.L] Malchow similarly addresses the Gothic's abjection of racial others in his discussion of cannibalism in such texts, concluding that 'like assertions of racial inferiority, accusations of cannibalism establish the community of the virtuous by projecting

onto others evils feared within' (Malchow 1996: 43)[26]. Thus, while texts (and society) shuddered for centuries in fear of brutal black rapists, the tales actually projected the institutionally sanctioned, violent consumption of black bodies – apparent in the regularised sexual assaults committed by white colonists and slave owners – on to the criminalised bodies of their victims" (Hogles-Miles 57).

Those quotes then argue that while characters of color are not entirely absent from Gothic narratives, they are depicted in a monstrous way that separates them from the white, "human" character. This monstrosity is used to terrify the reader, but also used as a tool to question themes such as civilization and humanity: the characters of color are not actors in those narratives but figures through which authors can write their anxieties. As Malchow theorized, those figures not only acted as a backdrop to emphasize colonialist and imperialist power, but also to transfer morally reprehensible acts to a group that was already feared by mainstream, white society. As mentioned before, the Gothic is interested in supernatural and spiritual experiences, but is in the end deeply rooted into society and its complexities – which is why the racial discourses of those works is not surprising.

Horror, which often uses the same tools as the Gothic, is known to torment and torture its characters almost indiscriminately – especially when they try to seek the truth. However, Linda Williams argued in her essay "When the woman looks" that the "the woman's gaze" in particular, "is punished […] by narrative processes that transform curiosity and desire into masochistic fantasy". Moreover, Niela Orr argues in her essay "The Women Who Knew Too Much: Horror cinema punishes its inquisitive black female characters" that black people, and especially black women, are more targeted by this punishment than the other characters: "Black women have been humiliated and punished, in horror cinema as in life, for our incisiveness, for wondering aloud, for trying to get some answers." She too argues that the black character, and especially the black female character, is often used as a tool to save the white hero: she quotes, for example, Ashless Backwell who explains in the documentary *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror* (2019), that the trope of "the sacrificial n-gro" is a black character who "puts themselves in the face of danger and dies in order for the white character to survive." So while the black characters are not the monstrous ones in those horror productions, they are still "othered" and pushed aside from the narrative, especially because of their desire to seek out the truth and help others, no matter the cost.

[26] Malchow, H.L. *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century England*. 1996
Cited in: Wester, Maisha. "The Gothic in and as Race Theory." *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion.* 2007.

To go back to the Gothic, the prejudiced views against people of color inevitably led to its re-appropriation. In the following decades, black writers used the Gothic genre to create what is sometimes known as "Black Gothic", that is a sub-genre of the Gothic centered on Black narratives. For instance, W.E.B. Du Bois used the idea of "double consciousness" (which, incidentally, can be found in Henry James' *The Jolly Corner* (1908), and so in the series under the name of "dream-skipping") to depict the African-American condition as a "veil that hides the black subject from the white world and vice versa, obscuring the vision and perceptions of both, arises already redolent with Gothic suggestiveness. This metaphorical veil 'conceals the black subject as human, much like a concealed skeleton in a classic gothic novel' (Smethurst 2001: 30)".[27]

When it comes to *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, race is never alluded to, despite the fact three of its main characters are people of color (Owen, Hannah and Rebecca). In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Toni Morrison (who is also one of the most famous Black Gothic authors) argues that,

> "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse. Evasion has fostered another, substitute language in which the issues are encoded, foreclosing open debate. The situation is aggravated by the tremor that breaks into discourse on race. It is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body. According to this logic, every well-bred instinct argues against noticing and forecloses adult discourse." (Morrison 10)

By this, Morrison argues that instead of creating discourse and introspection, what we now call 'colorblindness' keeps a work from even posing the question. Now, it is perhaps easier to include people of color in a visual work than it is in a literary one, as description would be obligatory in order to make it explicit on the page, while those characters just *are* on screen. However, to go back to the series, the place of the characters of color in a genre that used to depict them as vile monsters is never questioned. Characters of color are even absent from the only analeptic episode set in the 17th century, which could have used the era as a way to include a discussion around race in the narrative. However, it is interesting to consider the presence of certain tropes used by authors of the Black Gothic genre: if the series does not address race and racism directly, it, possibly unwillingly, echoes depiction of the black experience that such authors used in their own works.

[27] Smethurst, James. 'Invented by Horror: The Gothic and African American Literary Ideology in Native Son' 2001.
Cited in: Wester, Maisha. "The Gothic in and as Race Theory." *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*. 2007.

Throughout this thesis, most of the characters of color of the series have been analyzed in a certain way, but never in connection to their race: for instance, Rebecca depicted the consequences of patriarchy and abusive relationships, while Owen portrayed a more sensitive and vulnerable side of masculinity, in comparison to characters such as Peter. Indeed, it is first difficult to approach race when it comes to the characters, for they have no explicit national, cultural or religious connections that could shape their identity. T'Nia Miller, who plays Hannah even argues that "when you look at Hannah, she is quite whitewashed. She doesn't have any cultural grass or grassroots, she shares no family. She has no pointer to fall back to go back to."[28] It is then complicated to approach that side of their character when so little is known about them and their past. Moreover, as mentioned before, the emphasis in their story is put on other topics than race, such as masculinity or abuse, and while parts of it could be seen as a depiction of racism (for example, Peter's abuse and murder of Rebecca) – the focus is never directly referencing to it.

Thus, this particular part wishes to focus on Hannah, as she is perhaps the character with whom themes of race and racism resonate most. Hannah is the groundskeeper of Bly: she is presented as a strict but kind person, who makes sure the children are safe and the house is functioning correctly. Always dressed in an impeccable, feminine way, she is the only character that is also seen praying in the small chapel of Bly. Hannah thus escapes the old stereotypes used in Hollywood to depict black women, especially the more sexualized, lustful "Jezebel". T'Nia Miller admits however that she was first worried she would fall into the "maid" stereotyped because of Hannah's role as an employee to a wealthy, white family:

> "[The issue] came up, but then — [the main characters on the show] are all the help, but if I'd been the only help?
>
> I mean, the help are the central characters to this story. Everybody [at Bly] is there to serve this man. And had it been in any other premise, I would have been like, 'no way,' because I've always said I would never play the help.[29]
>
> For me playing that role, I came to terms with it... because, you know, [Hannah] was just as important as everybody else. It wasn't like the maid in 'Tom and Jerry," or whatever it was when you just see the feet, and it wasn't the stereotypical [character]. Hannah had status and class and all those things. Poise."[30]

The series then avoids playing into that trope by placing Hannah as just another member of the help in the same way as Dani or Jamie, for example. It is however worth noting it is perhaps difficult for

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[28] Damschenas, Sam. Bly Manor star T'Nia Miller: "We have a very important role in the media and as entertainers to show the truth." GayTimes. 2020.

[29] In another interview with Entertainment Weekly, Miller indicated she would have refused for "for political and historical reasons."

[30] Torres, Libby. "T'Nia Miller on why she's not afraid to play a Black housekeeper on 'The Haunting of Bly Manor'." Insider. 2020.

Hannah to be stereotyped, for very little is known about her and her past. This lack of background or link of any kind is however interesting to consider in a Gothic context: as a ghost, Hannah no longer has any physical anchor to reality; she is adrift. By taking Du Bois' use of the split consciousness, Hannah thus appears as a character that is both cut away from mainstream society and any kind of cultural root (possibly referencing the experience of later generations of immigrants).

Hannah's drifting is depicted through the use of the Gothic sublime, which both allows and condemns her to experiencing time in a non-linear manner. In episode five, "The Altar of the Dead", the house becomes a physical manifestation of the psyche once again. Hannah is relieving some of her memories by moving from room to room, each door representing a threshold to a new moment. Slowly, her story at Bly is completed: Hannah's relationship with the Wingraves is warm and friendly, her husband has cheated on her and she has had feelings for Owen from the first day they met. Moreover, Hannah seems to be witnessing memories that are not hers: she finds herself observing intimate moments between Rebecca and Peter, as well as watching Peter as he is killed by the Lady of the Lake. All those sequences are stitched together by small symbols: the walking in the house as mentioned previously, but also the crack on the walls Hannah keeps seeing, as well as the pain she feels in the back of her head, emphasized by a ringing sound. These are elements of foreshadowing (the crack was at the bottom of the well in which Hannah died by breaking her neck), but Hannah is as confused by their meaning as the viewer. It is not that she does not understand something is wrong, as she was always portrayed as the most *aware* character of the series (for example, when she is the only one seeing through Peter's mask), but that she refuses to accept that this tormenting doubt is actually founded.[31] Her realization that she is actually dead comes slowly, and the more she accepts it, the more confusing her reality becomes.

Mike Flanagan explains that the ghosts in the series first go through a period of denial, in which they do not realize they are dead. They can sometimes still interact with the living, but as soon as they are aware of their state, reality falls apart. Flanagan says that:

> "once you accept the fact that you're dead like Wile E. Coyote running off the cliff, at that point, a whole bunch of the rules immediately change. Once that realization kicks in, you're no longer able to reliably affect the world physically, and at that point, your experience of your life as you try to experience this new way of living becomes very non-linear. At that point, you're kind of involuntarily bouncing back and forth between what is the present, what is the past, what is the future because of what Nellie said in season one that moments aren't linear,

[31] It seems Hannah's subconscious has already accepted her death: one particular scene shows her lighting candles in the chapel of Bly. She explains that it is for the Wingraves, but there are *three* candles – one for each of them, and one for her.

they aren't like dominoes; once you're on the other side of death your entire life falls around you like rain or like confetti."[32]

Hannah is playing pretend during the entire series, ignoring her own desires (especially her feelings for Owen) to care for the house and children. This self-effacement is directly represented by her being a ghost, without even being aware of it. Her denial and will are so strong she simply refuses to acknowledge she is now dead: she imagines new outfits which change from scene to scene, and takes part in daily life as if nothing had happened. One of the most important instances of this denial is perhaps during meals. The scenes in which the characters come together to eat are always depicted as a moment of peace and conviviality: food is what binds them in that moment, with Owen at the center, taking care of them. Hannah is always present in those scenes but if one looks closely, she is never shown eating or drinking. She holds her fork or teacup, and much like the dolls in Flora's dollhouse, she pretends to be taking part in this ritual, without actually doing so.

An invisible barrier is separating her from the rest of the world, and Hannah is certain she is on the "right" side of it. This pretending could be a metaphor for mental health, but the veil theorized by Du Bois could also represent her desire to fit in, as well as the obstacle she faces as a woman and a black person. She is deeply isolated and her journey towards truth and acceptance is a difficult one, for the reality of it is brutal: Hannah was killed by a white man in a violent burst of rage and she is the only one who knows about it. Both episodes nine and ten emphasize the tragic aspect of her story, as she was doomed from the beginning: the tender moment she shares with Owen in the beginning of "The Beast in the Jungle", in which she confesses her feelings to him, is but a fragment of her imagination. When Owen tells her they both know she is not "so selfish to remain hidden in a memory", it is Hannah speaking. When she turns around, she is framed by shadows, as if watched from a dark hallway: the next scene shows her running out of the house, proving she has entered that hallway leading from her comforting memory to a harsh reality. Still, she is shown standing up to Viola, the red of her clothes standing out in the cold blue of the scene, framed by the wooden door and illuminated by a warm light above her head: Hannah refuses to be powerless and tries to protect the others no matter the cost. She is first hurt when Viola walks through her, leaving her gasping and choking. She is then only able to say a few words to Owen and Jamie, before she is no longer visible to the living. When Dani takes on Viola's curse and the ghosts fade away, Hannah can only pass a message to Owen through Henry, a message that she cannot finish before Henry awakes again.

[32] Taylor, Drew. "'Haunting of Bly Manor' EPs on That Ending, Ghost Rules, Horror Fandom, and Much More." Collider. 2020.

Hannah's last moments are undeniably shown as being utterly tragic: the score is soft and sorrowful as Owen looks around in worry, asking where Hannah is. The scene then cuts to daylight but is as moody as the one before, which was set by the dark and foggy lake: the camera slowly travels up the side of the well in which the viewer already knows Hannah is to reveal Owen and Jamie looking into it, visibly upset. The last shot of Hannah in the series is from their point of view, the camera slowly zooming onto her broken body at the bottom of the well. The presence of this particular sequence, as the overlapping narration explains her death was ruled out as an accident, is interesting to consider. As mentioned before, the spectator already knows Hannah is there and the scene of her death was already greatly graphic. Still, the series chose to emphasize its brutality once more, instead of keeping her message to Owen as the last image of her. Hannah's funeral is never shown and no justice seems to have been given by the end of the series as Peter is dead, and it is never acknowledged by the other characters that they are aware of what he did to Hannah. She is only remembered by a few people and immortalized by a single photo in Owen's new restaurant: the absence of any roots or cultural background gives it the appearance that no one outside of Bly cared for her.

As a whole, while the series is not an explicit depiction of racial injustice, Gothic tropes and their re-appropriation by black authors make it possible to read her journey as a ghost as a depiction of a black experience in a society in which power is predominantly white. Hannah is a beloved character, who is both shown as caring and warm, and strong-willed. However, her story also plays into the tragic aspect of the genre and as mentioned in the second part about gender, the sensational aspect of such a devoted and kind-hearted character sacrificing herself to save the children and the people she loves is perhaps stronger than the desire for a true transgression of Gothic norms. In other words, it seems that the series is more curious about observing and pointing at the manner in which the "Other" is treated by society, rather than using its fictive narrative to liberate them.

3) QUEERNESS

In his definition of the Gothic, Gilles Menegaldo writes:

> "Le gothique est [...] le lieu de la quête identitaire du héros rebelle reniant son statut ou dépassant sa condition humaine, ce qui entraîne la remise en cause de toutes les contraintes morales, sociales ou religieuses qui régissent le comportement de l'individu et freinent son ambition comme ses fantasmes de domination politique et sexuelle."[33]

[33] Menegaldo, Gilles. "Gothique Littérature & Cinéma." Encylopaedia Universalis.

As demonstrated before, the series features elements that might not have been possible to include during the 18th and 19th centuries (especially explicit and "positive" representation of minorities), but its interest in the "Other" is just another trait it borrows from the Gothic genre. In their book *Queering The Gothic* (2009), William Hughes and Andrew Smith argue that "Gothic has, in a sense, always been 'queer'. The genre, until comparatively recently, has been characteristically perceived in criticism as being poised astride the uneasy cultural boundary that separates the acceptable and familiar from the troubling and different. Gothic is, in this respect, a compromise, a balance between the conflicting tastes and aspirations of orthodoxy and heterodoxy" (Hughes-Smith 1).

This quote uses the term "queer" as its first meaning, that is of something strange and unusual, outside of what one is used to. As Hughes and Smith explained, the Gothic genre is queer at its very core because of its interest in what is "Other", such as secluded places, secrets, outcasts and unnatural beings. While such topics have been analyzed by critics as valuable metaphors for queer experience in the sexual term, it does not mean the Gothic genre allowed queer characters and discussions to roam free in its narrative – on the contrary. Indeed, "Gothic writing […] is tightly bound up within the heteronormative, even 'heterosexist' ideals attendant upon the romance form" (12), and "in by far the majority of cases, heterosexual marriage, in which hero and heroine are united to one another in a monogamous, peculiarly asexual emotional bond, appears to be the teleological goal to which most early Gothic fictions aspired. To effect a happy marriage between its sentimentally betrothed hero and heroine, we might say, became the raison d'être of many an eighteenth-century Gothic romancer" (13). More importantly, if homosexual and homoerotic relationships were hinted at in Gothic novels, it was to portray yet another form of monstrous otherness: "like incestuous sexuality, homoerotic activity challenged the cherished distinctions of cultural existence with a threatening lack of differentiation, not least of them the differences between the two sexes. Both incest and homoerotic couplings constituted forms of erotic activity that were procreatively unfeasible, flagrantly non-reproductive manifestations of desires that each in their own ways threatened the Utilitarian principles slowly accreting around the productive monogamy of the heterosexual couple." (23-24)

The situation is the same in horror, one of the genres closest to the Gothic. In the introduction of his book *Monsters in the Closet* (1997), Harry M. Benshoff explains that, "like an evil Mr Hyde, or the Wolfman, a gay or lesbian self inside of you might be striving to get out. Like Frankenstein's monster, homosexuals might run rampant across the countryside, claiming "innocent" victims. Or worst of all, like mad scientists or vampires, who dream of revolutionizing the world through some startling scientific discovery or preternatural power, homosexual activists strike at the very foundations of

society, seeking to infect or destroy not only those around them but the very concepts of Western Judeo-Christian thought upon which civil society is built" (Benshoff 1). Although more recent horror productions now feature queer representation in which the characters are not monstrous, or at least not because of their queerness, the genre still has a history of using sexual and gender "transgressions" to create frighten and disgust in the viewer.

To go back to the Gothic genre, its fascination for the "Other" was arguably not sympathetic when it came to queerness, but like Black Gothic authors reappropriating its codes to depict their struggles, queer readers and academics pointed at the potential of Gothic (as well as horror) texts to be metaphors for queer experiences. One one hand the vampire or werewolf was the monstrous and villain of the story, but on the other a queer audience recognized itself in its marginalization from society, in its "otherness". Hughes and Smith also argue that "Gothic texts are replete with marginal spaces, the kind of spaces which might be considered ambivalent sites of queer possibility, critical power and danger, because, away from the hegemony of dominant institutions, sexual subjects are least stable" (46). Paulina Palmer mentions those marginal spaces (or heterotopias) in her book *Queering Contemporary Gothic 1970-2012* (2016) as she writes "the heterotopia has both Gothic and queer associations, linking it, as a result, to two different discourses, the literary and the sexual. Commenting on the Gothic associations of the motif, Botting refers to its traditionally labyrinthine structure. […] Foucault, clarifying the homosexual connotations of the motif, describes how heterotopic locations can serve as 'counter-sites'[34] where queer people congregate illicitly in search of social and sexual contact" (Palmer 161-162). In other words, the Gothic as a genre is, because of its themes and structure, both hostile to and replete of queerness.

In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, queerness is almost as implicit as race. Dani and Jamie, two main characters, are explicitly queer – in the sense that their romantic relationship makes it obvious they are both attracted to women. Their individual sexuality is never clarified, in the sense that Jamie's is never discussed and Dani's is only alluded to through small, implicit scenes. For instance, Dani's mother saying that her daughter "does not share her taste in men" or the scene in which Dani has a panic attack when she is locked in the closet could possibly be a way to briefly hint at it (episode 1 "The Great Good Place" 47:11- 49:25). Indeed, under the rather obvious metaphor of the closet to describe the queer experience, this small and oppressive space could eventually mirror the stifling institution of

[34] Foucault, Michel. 'Of Other Spaces'. 1986.

Cited in: Palmer, Paulina. *Queering Contemporary Gothic 1970-2012*. 2016.

heterosexual marriage closing around Dani. She is shown crying and struggling to breathe as she begs the children to let her out, her panic becoming agonizing when she sees the ghost of her fiancé in the mirror. What she does not know is that the children are actually protecting her from Viola: she only sees them trapping her. Following the metaphor of this closet for societal expectations, the children's actions could have been Dani's mother's for instance, forcing her to stay in a heterosexual lifestyle to protect her (from homophobia) – without understanding the damage it did to Dani herself.

In the fourth episode, "The Way It Came", her possible queerness is portrayed for the first time during her dress fitting for her wedding (15:40 – 16:25). While Dani's and Edmund's mothers chat in the background, Dani seems nervous, pined in the frame of a narrow mirror which in that context might represent societal pressure about the married life she is going to enter, but does not want. However, a bubble of sorts is created as the camera focuses on Dani and the seamstress: lingering shots and close-ups insist on the numerous touches and glances the latter is offering her. Dani's response to those attentions is evidently conflicted: she is visibly flattered by the compliments, but the shots on her face point at the manner in which she keeps looking away, down or straight into the camera (the mirror from her perspective). A shift seems to have occurred in that scene, which ends on Dani still framed by the mirror, but this time with the seamstress by her side in the reflection. Shot behind her shoulder, the image invites the viewer to consider those two Danis: one, physical, in the real world in which her mother and mother-in-law talk about their failed marriages, and the other, almost spiritual, in the mirror in which she has to confront her own image, and so her desires. Again, mirrors are a running motif in Dani's story: they insist on her self-introspection, but also on her conflicted feelings (which is why she covers them after her fiancé's death.)

Dani's fiancé, and especially his haunting, is a direct reference to her struggle as a traumatized woman, but also as a queer person. The series takes place during the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, and while the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community was evidently easier than during the Victorian period, it still was an era of tension, notably because of the AIDS crisis. Once again, there is no reference to that particular context: most of the story happens in the secluded Bly estate, and even when the characters leave at the end, Dani and Jamie are rarely, if not ever, shown in contact of the real world and other queer people they might connect with. In the analepses, this isolation is depicted through Dani's marriage, and especially during the restaurant and car scene mentioned before (25:36 – 29:06). The sequence is organized in such a way that when the camera cuts from the street to the inside of the car, the discussion has already happened. Dani is visibly emotional and Edmund is clearly upset, and the restricted, dark space of the car emphasizes the tension in the scene. The viewer needs to fill in the gaps

to understand Dani not only expressed her doubt about getting married, but also talked about her queerness for the first time. Utterances such as "I just thought I was being selfish. That I could just stick it out and eventually I would feel how I was supposed to" or simply "I can't" when referring to getting married (both in "The Way It Came") are implicit ways of depicting Dani's struggle with her sexuality and more precisely, her struggle in expressing it. In a series in which narration, dialogue and communication are so prevalent, Dani's inability to express what she desires and what she *is* is telling.

Dani's journey towards self-acceptance is long and complicated, and made even more difficult by the supernatural events she lives through. Indeed, while the vision of her fiancé is perhaps a depiction of her guilt, it can also be a visual depiction of society standing between her and her identity. As Andrew Smith explains in his chapter "Hauntings" of the *Routledge Companion to Gothic* (2007), "Ghosts are never just ghosts; they provide us with an insight into what haunts our culture. Ghosts, of course, cannot die and as such are a persistent reminder of what a culture can only express in oblique terms" (Spooner-McEvoy 153). In the context in which Dani lives, and especially considering her sheltered life, it is safe to assume queerness was never a topic she could openly discuss. Only when did she come to Bly, both a dangerous home and a heterotopia of possibilities, could she begin to explore this identity – through her romance with Jamie.

Paulina Palmer explains in her article "Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive Fictions" that,

> "As critics increasingly perceive, reference to same-sex female desire and erotic relations between women occurs in eighteenth and nineteenth-century gothic literature. In addition, Daphne Du Maurier in her 1930s novel *Rebecca*, and Shirley Jackson in *The Haunting of Hill House* published in 1959, wrote Gothic fiction with lesbian resonances. However it was in the 1980s and 1990s, in the context of the lesbian feminist movement, that Lesbian Gothic emerged as a specific form. During this period Anglo-American writers moved from prioritizing realist forms of fiction, such as the 'coming out' novel and bildungsroman, to experimenting with the recasting of popular genres, some involving fantasy. Gothic fantasy is one form that attracted them. Novels and stories of this kind, while differing in narrative line, have features in common. They all employ gothic motifs and imagery as a vehicle to represent and explore lesbian sexuality and experience. Well known motifs that they utilise include the witch and the vampire, as well as different forms of spectrality, including the ghost, the spectral double and the haunted house."

As mentioned before, queerness was extremely taboo during the Victorian era, and perceived as as shocking as incest. Thus, there could be no story explicitly depicting queerness or queer romances, and especially not in a sympathetic light. However, what Paulina Palmer's quote reveals is that, because of its interest in the "Other" and the strange, the Gothic was as curious about queer desire and sexuality as it was horrified by it. Close and ambiguous relationships between women can now be read as depictions of same-sex attraction, although it was often used to horrify: in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla,* published in 1872, Carmilla's queerness is almost as terrifying as her vampirism, and is

eventually punished by killing the monster. However, as Palmer mentions, the Gothic genre was recuperated by queer authors to depict their own experience as a marginalized group. By the end of the 20th century, Gothic images were used to depict the way in which queer women were rejected from society.

As a 21st century Gothic production, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* took an interest in the "Other", but in an arguably more positive light. Because the story mostly follows Dani's point of view, her romance with Jamie is at the center of the series. Their relationship follows known cinematic tropes of romantic dramas and melodrama: Jamie ignores Dani the first time they meet, but Dani feels as if they have met before; Jamie is the only one who can calm Dani when she is having a panic attack, and is eventually the one to make the ghost of Edmund disappear. Indeed, their relationship builds up with several kisses until they spend their first night together in the sixth episode, "The Jolly Corner": the scene itself is not shown but the morning after depicts a moment of peace and quiet for Dani. The narrator explains that "the au pair could not remember the last time she'd slept this well. And she thought perhaps she never had" (41:05). Supernatural and frightening night scenes are always tinted in blue in the series, but the cold blue hues in that particular moment depicts a rupture with the blurry and sepia tones of the rest of the show: it acts as a visual shift in Dani's internal struggle, as she is finally able to breathe (it is also the first time Edmund does not appear when she looks at herself in a mirror.)

Perhaps unlike other genres such as the romantic comedy or the melodrama, the story does not stop after the culmination of Dani and Jamie's relationship (their kisses and night together). While the series never hides that their romance is doomed from the beginning, it still allows them a certain amount of time together: as Dani explains, love is akin to the moonflowers Jamie grows; it is hard to tend to and extremely ephemeral, but the beauty and rarity of it is what gives it its worth. In the final episode, "The Beast in the Jungle", Gothic tropes are used to emphasize the transcendent and devoted nature of their relationship. For instance, during the montage of their years spent together (starting at the 23:00 mark), the camera seems to move through walls as time passes. The house is once again a depiction of the psyche and the intimate, but no longer to represent trauma and struggle. Dani and Jamie share intimate, domestic scenes with contrast with the rest of the story by their gentleness and lack of supernatural. Despite Viola's haunting, Dani has been able to create a stable, fulfilling life and become a more assertive person (for example, when she proposes to Jamie). Her constant self-introspection (represented by the repetitive shots on reflective surfaces in which she can see Viola's image, and not hers) is what keeps the circle of evil from repeating: when Dani realizes she is no longer in control of

her actions and could hurt Jamie (35:30-36:50), she leaves, and thus breaks the pattern of destructive or abusive romances in the series.

Dani and Jamie's romance nonetheless ends on an utterly tragic note: Dani goes back to Bly and let Viola drag her to the bottom of the lake. Jamie tries to save her, or at least save her body from the water, but she is unable to. The scene shows her desperately reaching and screaming for Dani, repeating the words that could bind Viola to her instead, but it does not work. The melancholic score swells as an invisible force seems to be keeping Jamie from Dani, the water dark all around her except where light shines on Dani, at the bottom. As the narrator explains, the Lady of the Lake refuses to take Jamie for there is a part of Dani in her too now: as proven by the several shots from Dani's perspective, she is aware of what is happening despite her lack of reaction, and she refuses to let Jamie die too ("Dani wouldn't. Dani would never.") Jamie has no choice but to go back to the surface: she is shown crawling towards the shore before sitting in the shallow water, panting and sobbing as she touches her engagement ring. Jamie survives but she is haunted by Dani's death and never finds love again, even leaving water in her sink and her door open at night in hope Dani might find her way back to her.

This ending arguably plays into the "Bury Your Gays" trope, which Haley Hulan defines in her essay "Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context" as:

> "a literary trope which originated in the late 19th century, gained traction in the early 20th century, and persists in modern media. The pattern of this trope's usage states that in a narrative work (novels especially), which features a same-gender romantic couple, one of the lovers must die or otherwise be destroyed by the end of the story. Many instances of this trope draw a direct correlation between the couple confessing their feelings for one another, kissing, having sex for the first time and the character's death; they often die mere moments or pages after their relationship is confirmed for the audience. The surviving lover will then realize that their attraction amounted to an experiment or temporary lapse in judgment—or even insanity, as homosexuality was classified as a mental illness until 1974—and they then fall into the arms of a heterosexual partner to live happily ever after and lead a normal, straight life."

Hulan explains that the trope has many layers and can often be grouped under four categories: as "Refuge", that is when authors used it to include queer characters in their works without risking censorship or ruining their career or reputation; as "Exploitation", that is to directly portray queerness as the cause of unhappiness and even death; as "Catharsis", often used to depict the struggles of the queer community (notably during the AIDS crisis) and finally as "Spectacle", in which the character often dies moment after kissing or having sex with their lover, usually in a brutal, shocking manner.

Dani's ending plays into the trope in the sense that Dani does die in a tragic, perhaps unfair way in order to save the other characters. This, however, partially fit Hulan's "Spectacle" category, for Dani's death is not portrayed as punishment for her sexual identity. Moreover, her romance with Jamie

is central to the narrative and she spends years by her side before her time comes. Jamie, too, does not follow the typical pattern of the trope, as she does not abandon her queer identity to settle in a heterosexual relationship. This resolution is often what happens in Gothic narratives: Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz argue in their book *Postfeminist Gothic: Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture* (2007) that "most famously exemplified by Ann Radcliffe's romances, the Female Gothic plot is traditionally resolved by explaining and rationalizing supernatural elements and affirming a happy ending that reintegrates the female protagonist into a wider community through marriage, symbolizing her "wedding to culture" (Williams 103)[35]" (Brabon-Genz 5). Jamie's own "wedding" *back* to culture and mainstream society was evidently always impossible: her queerness always kept her from being part of it.

Contrary to this pattern, Dani and Jamie's relationship takes on a transcendent aspect. It is revealed at the end of the last episode that the narrator of the story had been Jamie all along: a shot of her looking into the mirror slowly fades into the present when she is telling the story to the wedding guests (39:45). It is the first and only time their romance has been shown to people outside of Bly: the fact it is a same-sex relationship is never brought up and the guests only seem saddened and fascinated by Jamie's tale. The bride – who happens to be a grown Flora – comments that what was supposed to be a ghost story, was actually one about love, to what Jamie replies "same thing, really". This echoes the very first scene in the first episode in which an older Owen tells the young couple that "to truly love another person is to accept that the work of loving them is worth the pain of losing them." By now, I have already pointed out at the importance of the narration and dialogues in the series: the fact the camera lingers several time on Jamie's face in that scene, as well as her pained expression, proves that romantic relationships, and love in general, is as versatile as the Gothic in the series, as a source of both joy and pain.

Jamie makes sure Dani memory lives on, while, unbeknownst to her, Dani is still by her side. Indeed, the series ends on a sequence that is mundane at first sight, but symbolic in context: the camera follows Jamie around her hotel room, particularly focusing on her reflection in the bathwater, in the mirror and finally in the water in the sink. This repeated action coupled with the cool colors and melancholic soundtrack (*I Shall Believe* by Sheryl Crow, the only other song used in the series after Cyndi Lauper's title playing during Dani's engagement party) emphasize the character's loneliness and

[35] Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. 1995
Cited in: Brabon, Benjamin A. And Genz, Stéphanie. *Postfeminist Gothic: Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture*. 2007

grief. Moreover, as such reflective surfaces always connected the living to the dead in the series, the viewer understands she is still trying to make contact with Dani after all those years, even leaving her door ajar for her to enter. A rather long continuous shot slowly zooms on Jamie's face as she falls asleep, building tension as the viewer wonders whether something is going to happen or not. As expected, the next shot is from behind Jamie and as the camera slowly moves back, a hand can be seen on her shoulder, bearing Dani's ring. The episode (and series) ends on this image and so a last tragic note: it is up to the viewer to wonder whether or not Jamie was aware of Dani's presence in that moment, or not. Moreover, it is possible the scene did not show more than Dani's hand to remind of her spectral nature, as well as possibly hinting that her face is no longer human.

In her article "Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive Fictions", Paulina Palmer draws parallels between the queer (and especially lesbian) experience and ghosts by stating that "spectrality is especially well suited to articulating ideas of lesbian invisibility and the capacity of lesbian desire to survive oppression and 'return' in the manner of the Freudian concept of the repressed." Thus, despite the tragic aspect of Dani and Jamie's love story, this last scene can also be interpreted as a sign of hope and a depiction of the sublime in which the character experiencing it is still allowed humanity.

As a whole, the queer representation in the series follows the same pattern as the inclusion of female characters fighting against patriarchal rule, or characters of color. The show is arguably not voluntarily discriminatory and the queer relationship is at the center of the story. In an interview, Mike Flanagan claims that the input of a queer writer was necessary to write a respectful story for Dani and Jamie:

> "Julia Bicknell who wrote the finale of this season, she and her wife, who also works in the industry, this was something as she put to us, this was the kind of story that she wished she had seen when she was growing up, and so when it came to Dani and Jamie, it was very important to me that we always were looking very closely at the expressions Julia was making at the table, and just asking her what was important about it. What would she specifically have wanted her younger self to see?"[36]

This quote then seems to prove there was an effort to include queerness in a way that was relatable to at least a part of the queer community. However, this ending can only be described as bittersweet as Dani and Jamie were able to experience happiness together for several years, only to lose one another to supernatural forces they cannot control. On its own, it is a tragic story of devotion, which plays on the public's fascination for impossible and doomed love – that is to say the effect would have

[36] Taylor, Drew. "'Haunting of Bly Manor' EPs on That Ending, Ghost Rules, Horror Fandom, and Much More." Collider.

been the same if Dani and Jamie were a heterosexual couple. However, if placed in a historical and political context in which queerness has long been deemed taboo enough to be compared to monstrousness or spectrality, the series, perhaps unwillingly, embraces the more traditional aspect of the Gothic genre.

As Haley Hulan explained in her article, the “Bury Your Gays” trope has long been used to minimize queer representation. If the inclusion of Dani and Jamie’s romance seems sincere, it definitely leans more towards the opportunity for a shocking and emotional finale, rather than an attempt at overturning tropes used in the Gothic genre centuries before – similarly to the inclusion of transgressive women and characters of color such as Hannah, for instance.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction of this thesis I presented my argument as such: examine and analyze the manner in which *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, a 2020 production, used Gothic codes to portray gender, trauma and "otherness". Because of its depiction of certain themes such as marriage and motherhood, as well as its inclusion of minorities (people of color and the LGBTQ+ community), I centered my analysis on comparing its representation to Gothic tradition – and to what extent it tried to "modernize" the latter to fit a 21st century context in which diversity in media is increasingly questioned.

The first step of this demonstration was to consider the series as an adaptation of Henry James' works, which have long been recognized as part of the Gothic genre. The starting idea was that, although the show changed the temporal context (from the 19th century to the 1980s and 1990s) and modified certain plot points of *The Turn of The Screw*, it was essentially a homage to the source material and the Gothic as a whole. Academics still disagree nowadays on what constitutes the Gothic for it often refers to a mutable set of ideas and images and not a neatly fenced literary genre with strict rules and codes. However, it is still possible to gather these aesthetic and narrative elements to create an idea of what the Gothic is: a story often led by a young heroine who faces frightening events in isolated or abandoned places, such as ruins, castles or ancient manors. Moreover, the Gothic is often recognized by its aesthetic devices: images such as cemeteries, foggy landscapes and moody weathers create a desolate frame in which ghosts, supernatural or metaphorical, might roam. Such ideas are the foundation of *The Haunting of Bly Manor*: the series follows Dani, a lost heroine running from a terrible past, as she navigates the dark and unnerving grounds of Bly (the manor in the particular, but also the graveyard, woods and misty lake). Moreover, the series uses both the uncanny and the sublime – elements that are almost always woven in early Gothic works – the first is conveyed through the haunted house and the faceless ghosts (both familiar and not), while the latter is portrayed by the series' interest in spectral possession and dreams. Thus, while the show also borrows elements of other genres (especially horror, but also drama and romance for instance), it is first and foremost a work continuing the aesthetic and narrative traditions of the Gothic, as well as its interest for the psychological and the traumatic experience.

Once it has been established the series is indeed part of the genre, it is possible to consider its elements in relation to those literary and cinematographic codes. In the second part, I turned my attention to questions surrounding the characters and the relationships between them. Indeed, much was

written about gender dynamics in the Gothic: writers such as Donna Heiland and Sara Schoch explained that the genre was born in a period of instability in which gender roles and tradition clashed brutally. As mentioned before, the Gothic is deeply spiritual and psychological, and often translates society's anxieties through the metaphor of the past haunting the present and even the future. Women in Gothic literature are tormented and persecuted by both supernatural and human threats that put their innocence and purity at risk. Men have cold and unfathomable personalities and are often revealed to have been hiding behind a mask and false pretenses. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* does follow certain of those tropes: Dani is running away from marriage and societal conventions and she goes through several trials and hardships in the process; and men such as Peter Quint embody a toxic and dangerous patriarchal presence. It is clear the series depicts such harm from the men onto the women, especially through the romantic relationships (Dani and her fiancé Edmund and Peter and Rebecca Jessel). However, women are not powerless victims and men are not cold-blooded killers: the first are given agency to combat the evil of the narrative, while the latter are given nuance as to make them more than mere villains. The series is centered around women and the struggles they face, while also including men fighting societal expectations about their masculinity (Owen as the caregiver and Henry as accepting his responsibility of the children at the end.) However, it does not escape certain ideas found in earlier Gothic works, especially when it comes to motherhood. Mothers are undeniably either absent or erased from the narrative in an omnipresent motif of self-sacrifice. So, on one hand, women are made more than wives and mothers and men are held accountable for the hurt they create, but on the other, each gets punished or rewarded for things they did not deserve – especially when it comes to the driving force of the story, that is the children.

In the examination of the Gothic in the first part, it became clear that the genre is interested by everything that is "Other": by this I mean everything that is outside societal norms and that disturbs the majority by its differences. This fear of the uncanny (what is different from oneself or what oneself knows, but just similar enough to be puzzling) is translated by the castles and houses away from the city, heterotopias such as graveyards, as well as the unnatural beings such as ghosts. In this third and final part I turned my attention to what is "Other" enough in the series that it disturbed society when the Gothic was born – and today. I first considered Viola, the Lady of the Lake: I had voluntarily omitted her from the part about ghosts and the one about gender for both those identities converged in a unique way when it came to her story. Indeed, Viola is perhaps the strongest proof of a feminist attempt within the show: her refusal to accept patriarchal and religious rules, as well as her transcendental power makes her one of the central forces of the story. Moreover, the end breaks the usual cycle of evil that is

found in horror and the Gothic, allowing Viola to be healed and to move on – although it was at the expense of another woman, Dani. Then, I moved on to the characters of color in the series, and Hannah in particular. As critics pointed out, the Gothic genre had been plagued by racial prejudice in the past, using black people in particular to inspire fear and disgust, as well as strengthening imperial and colonial power. The inclusion of characters of color in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is never pointed out within the narrative, even if some instance such as Peter's treatment of Hannah and even Rebecca can be perceived as racist: the show seems to stay in a neutral ground, being neither antagonizing of characters of color nor overly transgressive of the Gothic's history. However, it is possible the works of Black Gothic authors inspired the show: Du Bois' approach to spectrality and "double-consciousness" is central to Hannah's story, symbolizing her isolation as a black woman. Finally, I focused on queerness in the show. Rather similarly to people of color, the inclusion of queer characters in early Gothic works often resulted in their monstrous depiction as an evil to be eradicated from society. The fact *The Haunting of Bly Manor* made two of its main characters queer, as well as making their romance central to the plot then seems to point out at a desire to change that history. Once again, that representation is dual: it is undeniably sympathetic to queer struggle and allows the character moments of peace and happiness in a tragic narrative – but it also repeats a popular motif in media, one that erases queer character from the story to make it more sensational. As a whole, it seems a lot of the representation that could not have been in earlier works is still haunted by the same traditional tropes that punish inquisitive women, mothers, people of color and queer people.

In *The Gothic Child* (2013), Margarita Georgieva argues that "it is rarely possible to view the gothic genre, in its entirety, as either subversive or politically correct simply because it is both at the same time" (Georgieva 122). Indeed, the Gothic is, by nature and because of the historical context in which it was born, a complex and paradoxical genre. On one hand, it explores the outskirts of society and is interested in what is "Other". Many critics have then argued that Gothic metaphors such as the ghost or the haunted house were often used to depict real-life anxieties and taboo subjects – struggles minorities could relate to. But on the other hand, the Gothic was also based on traditions and societal conventions, which means the resolution of the story is often much less transgressive than what it depicted along the way.

The Haunting of Bly Manor seems to follow that pattern. As Georgieva explained for the Gothic, it is difficult to consider the show as either transgressive or conventional, for it is both at the same time. Elements such as the inclusion of minorities and discussion around the societal pressure

around marriage and gender norms are arguably very “modern” and seem to point out at a genuine desire to be inclusive and sympathetic to everyday struggles. However, elements such as the motif of motherly sacrifice or queer tragedy are very “traditional” when compared to the Gothic genre and its history. The series does not seem to be deliberately copying those harmful patterns to teach a lesson to transgressive women and those who are “Other”, but it definitely echoes some of those tropes, often in an attempt to be sensational.

The show’s recuperation of Gothic norms is then what perhaps limits its liberating potential. As an homage to a genre that is often based on the past and the dramatic, it constantly shifts between two poles without settling on either of them. Even if it makes the effort to include topics and groups that had been mistreated by earlier Gothic works, it copies its traditions in more ways than just aesthetically. As critics and academics repeat, it is perhaps pointless to see the Gothic as transgressive or restrictive for it is constantly both. In the case of *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, it is more relevant to consider the ways in which it tried to diverge from the genre’s tropes – and how it sometimes failed. Indeed, while its inclusion of queer people and people of color seems to come from good intentions, it is perhaps not enough in a post #MeToo and Black Lives Matter context. Minorities are present in the series, and organizations such as GLAAD agree that such representation is important to fight discrimination – however, the show’s taste for spectacular tragedy keeps this inclusion from being entirely transgressive, as women (and in particular women of color and mothers) and queer people are all victims of intense trauma, both metaphorical and spectral haunting and self-sacrifice – thus repeating the traditional codes and motifs of the Gothic genre.

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