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EDITORIAL

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Reading the Gothic in Gothic Times

"We live in Gothic times", Angela Carter famously declared over forty years ago, but one need only turn to the daily horrors of the news to confirm that the current state of the world is still decidedly Gothic (Carter 1974, 122). The implications of Carter's oft-quoted refrain have certainly guided much contemporary scholarship on the enduring popularity of the Gothic in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Yet, it is Carter's subsequent comment, when read in conjunction with its famous predecessor, that appears to best encapsulate the significance of the modern Gothic imagination for our contemporary moment, for she writes:

> We live in Gothic times. Now, to understand and to interpret is the main thing; but my method of investigation is changing (ibid).

This issue of *Aeternum* situates itself within this critical space by asking how we, as individuals and as members of a society, are to understand and to interpret the Gothic when we live in such Gothic times. The articles published in this issue collectively address Carter's statement in its entirety, for each author offers their own method for understanding, interpreting, and investigating the contemporary Gothic at work in their chosen texts, and in turn, within the contexts in which they were produced.

In the first article of this issue, Ella Jeffery analyses the trope of home renovation in Annie Proulx's 1993 novel *The Shipping News*, by exploring how an abandoned house belonging to the protagonist's family acts with uncanny agency when the incestuous secrets that lie within its walls are brought to light. Tania Evans, in this issue's second article, considers the depiction of the monstrous feminine in George R. R. Martin's fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and within its hugely successful television adaptation *Game of Thrones,* through a character study of Cersei Lannister, the Queen Regent and Queen of Westeros. In the third article published here, Rachel McEleney discusses the Australian Gothic in Charlotte Wood's 2015 novel *The Natural Way of Things*, by examining how its dystopian representation of the

misogynistic oppression of women has been inspired by real contemporary Australian cases of gender-based violence and discrimination. Lisa Lampert-Weissig's article, "Blood and Soil in *The Vampire Diaries*", addresses the problematic racial implications of the introduction of the 'Original' vampires' Nordic origin mythology in the third season of the American television series *The Vampire Diaries*, and its spin-off series *The Originals.* In the final article of this issue, Carey Millsap-Spears performs a comparative analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) television series, and their representation of the Posthuman in science fiction through the lens of the Female Gothic.

Finally, this issue of *Aeternum* also includes two book reviews, which suitably serve as its conclusion. The first review, written by Jack Clark, is of *Gothic Britain: Dark Places in the Provinces and the Margins of the British Isles,* edited by William Hughes and Ruth Heholt. Published in 2018, the collection's chapters endeavor to map the dark intricacies of the landscapes and topographies of regional Gothic Britain. It is the first collection to be published on the regional Gothic of the British Isles as it is depicted within literature and film, as well as through popular sites of historical heritage and their narratives of Gothic tourism. The second review, written by Antonio Sanna, is of Charlaine Harris' *The Southern Vampires Mysteries.* Sanna reviews Harris' completed vampire saga in its entirety, which includes thirteen novels, as well as an encyclopaedic epilogue, and a volume of short stories, published between 2001 and 2014. The novels, upon which the HBO original TV series *True Blood* has been loosely adapted, follow the life of Sookie Stackhouse, a telepathic waitress from Bon Temps in Louisiana, as she learns the navigate the realities of trying to live a normal life in a supernatural world.

References

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Editor's Details

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"Every nut and bolt is loose": Unhomely Renovation in *The Shipping News*

ABSTRACT

This article explores how acts of renovation in Annie Proulx's The Shipping News *(1993) are vital to the novel's deployment of a series of Gothic tropes. The major renovation of an abandoned house belonging to the family of Quoyle, the protagonist, is one of the novel's central plot points. Sara Wasson tells us that "Gothic sites are regularly threatened by a return of old horror or atavistic decline" (2013, 132) and the house in this novel appears as an overtly Gothic space that contains traces of many traumatic events in the current, recent and long-past lives of the family that has always inhabited it. In acquiescing to his aunt's insistence at the beginning of the novel that they renovate and live in the house, Quoyle unwittingly becomes the recipient of the dark inheritance of the Green House and the many violent acts that have been committed there. In my textual analysis of* The Shipping News, *I examine how the uncanny effects of renovation are represented in Proulx's work, which is not positioned to be read as a Gothic novel, but which incorporates a number of Gothic tropes, the renovation plot being the most extensive and overt of these. I also discuss the Gothic distortions of perspective and scale (Reynolds 2013, 89) that take place on a physical and psychological level throughout the renovation, as well as Proulx's fragmentary, imagistic evocation of the house as a powerful figure of unhomely agency that complicates and endangers the redemptive process of Quoyle's self-renewal.*

Keywords: Uncanny, Renovation, *The Shipping News*, Annie Proulx

> "…renovation does not, ultimately, know what it is 'bringing back' – or what it is destroying – when it restores the references or fragments of elusive memories."
> — *The Practice of Everyday Life*
> (De Certeau 2014, 143)

Nicole Reynolds argues that the "archetypal Gothic plot can be said to have its origins in the fate of a house: real and imagined, architectural and ancestral" (2013, 92). *The Shipping News* is one of a number of American novels from the last fifty years in which acts of home improvement become the catalyst for a series of traumatic events. Novels like Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), Andre Dubus III's *House of Sand and Fog* (1999) and Jennifer Egan's *The Keep* (2006) demonstrate a continuing tradition of linking acts of home improvement with the eruption of the traumatic past into the present. In this article, I explore how acts of renovation in *The Shipping News* are vital to the novel's deployment of a series of Gothic tropes. I examine how the uncanny effects of renovation are represented in Proulx's work, which is not positioned to be read as a Gothic novel, but which incorporates a number of Gothic elements, the renovation plot being the most extensive and overt of these.

The Shipping News is largely a literary novel of transformation and redemption; it is not typically read as an example of Gothic literature. However, the novel's richly evocative and imagistic language, the haunting, recurring narratives of past trauma and the warped, forbidding house itself are all fundamentally Gothic elements. In this case study of Proulx's novel, I examine the renovation plot as well as a number of other Gothic resonances in the text, such as the uncanny community of renovators and builders that interrupt Quoyle's attempts at renovation with stories and folk tales about the instability of built structures, and the uncannily poetic, fragmentary language that refuses to allow the reader an accessibility that the otherwise straightforward, linear narrative would supply.

A number of other collections and short stories, such as Charlaine Harris and Toni Kelner's *Home Improvement: Undead Edition* (2011) explicitly link popular culture, the Gothic, and renovated spaces in response to the boom in popularity of home improvement in television and digital media. My interest in Proulx's work stems from the fact that although narratives of redemption and rehabilitation are present in the novel, the renovation of the house on Quoyle's Point is not linked to aspirational narratives of consumption, class and taste. Instead, personal and social trauma is exposed through the process, and the uncanny resonances of the space outweigh the comforting transformative appeal. Sara Wasson, in discussing the flexibility of the Gothic as a literary mode, argues that,

the Gothic often hinges on representing the experience of space as claustrophobic and imprisoning. Within these hideously constraining environments, Gothic texts depict threats from the past re-emerging (2013, 132).

The Shipping News positions acts of renovation in the constraints and distortions of trauma, grief, and the unstable terrain of personal and family histories. Renovation in this novel, rather than being a site of positive transformation and healing as demonstrated in home improvement culture, is a Gothic process that complicates and endangers Quoyle's attempts at recovery and self-renewal.

"Canted doors on loose hinges": Gothic Space and House Renovation

After the deaths of both his parents and the wife who has caused him "six kinked years of suffering" (Proulx 1993, 140), Quoyle moves to Newfoundland with his aunt and two young daughters and takes up residence in an abandoned, isolated house that has belonged to his family for hundreds of years. We see in this novel the revision of many of what Reynolds describes as the "repertoire of spatial tropes…that became essential to Gothic fiction: subterranean vaults, twisted passageways, trapdoors, secrete compartments and moonlit galleries" (2013, 91). This is not a grand manor or Romantic castle fallen into disrepair, but it is certainly decrepit. The house is a massive, dilapidated structure bound with iron cables to the harsh landscape in which it sits, haunted by the memories of terrible acts committed there. Fred Botting tells us that as Gothic fiction developed into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the archetypal Gothic castle "gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present" (1996, 3). The house of the Quoyles is frequently presented in uncannily human terms of physical captivity and is a particularly *voiced* element of unrest in the text:

> Dragged by human labour across miles of ice, the outcasts straining against the ropes and shouting curses [...] Winched onto the rock. Groaning. A bound prisoner straining to get free. The humming of the taut cables. That vibration passed into the house, made it seem alive [...] Swallowed by the shouting past (Proulx 1993, 277).

This history of physical dislocation, in which the house has been dragged to its current place by the savage Quoyles is a story that continually reinserts itself into the novel through a number of voices. This unhomely narrative repetition creates a sense of temporal dislocation, dragging the house, like Quoyle's savage ancestors dragged it, back into the past and away from any future in which it might become a completed, renovated domestic space in which Quoyle can enact his self-renovation.

The protagonist is introduced in Proulx's characteristically imagistic style as having a "great damp loaf of a body…eyes the colour of plastic" (1993, 2), a lonely man who is even "a failure at loneliness, yearned to be gregarious" (ibid, 4). Introducing her protagonist via images of imperfection constructs a clear analogy in

the novel between self and home improvement. However, we can also note that "hive-spangled" Quoyle with his misshapen body and "freakish" chin (ibid, 2) is a collection of monstrous traits himself. Here we see another of the novel's gestures towards the dark and uncanny repetitions of family history: Quoyle may be "freakish", but as the Gothic mystery unfolds, we come to see that it's Quoyle's father who is truly monstrous. Represented at the beginning of the novel as a cruel, uncaring man who openly preferred Quoyle's older brother, the father, Guy, is later revealed to have perpetrated years of abuse on his sister, Quoyle's aunt Agnis. The novel is in many ways concerned with how bleak and traumatic episodes in family history echo through the years, and this is always brought back to the house.

One of the green house's major functions in the text is as a site of extreme temporal distortion: traumatic experiences from across many, many generations of Quoyles all seem to echo through the house in the present, registered at many times as a place "swallowed by the shouting past" (ibid, 277). Frequent references to Quoyle's almost-mythic ancestors, consistently depicted as "wild and inbred, half-wits and murderers" (ibid, 172) reinforces their dark presence analogously in the house and in Quoyle himself. There are a number of moments in which Quoyle and his daughters unwittingly evoke the ancient Quoyles and are pronounced "a real Quoyle" (ibid, 185) by onlookers. These echoes of the past are deeply disturbing for Quoyle, whose connection to his violent ancestors was entirely unknown until he relocated to the green house. The shock Quoyle experiences as he discovers the truth about his family throughout the novel is yet another Gothic resonance set in motion by the renovation plot. Wasson argues that,

> the uncanny can also be defined as a crisis of narrative: being part of a story that you did not (consciously) choose, a story controlled by an unknown agency that may well be malevolent and at the very least is disturbingly opaque (2013, 133).

The house is both the location and container of this complex, traumatic family story which Quoyle slowly unravels throughout the novel. The connection to these men and women embeds him in Newfoundland's culture while profoundly complicating his view of himself as an ineffectual and largely helpless individual with no real subjective power, illustrating Freud's argument that the uncanny returns us to something familiar but long forgotten (Freud et al. 1976, 620). The symbol of "the stony lives of dead generations" (Proulx 1993, 49) is the green house which they are said to have dragged across the ice; however, in its temporally versatile structure the house also symbolizes horrific acts of incest and sexual violence from much closer relatives, particularly the rape of Quoyle's aunt by his father. The overlap of distant and recent trauma suggests that these destructive acts are familiar, unavoidable patterns built into the house and the family line, impossible to erase by rebuilding or reconstructing the space, which confirms Brewster's argument that "we can renovate an interior but never remove ghosts, creaks, layers of alteration, accretions of the past or of previous occupancy" (2006, 143).

It is Quoyle's aunt Agnis who sets the renovation plot in motion. Like Quoyle, she has suffered the loss of a partner, Irene, but her compulsion to return to Newfoundland and repair the old family house involves other motivations that are less overt to the other characters. Agnis seeks to resolve her traumatic childhood rape. As soon as the house is structurally sound enough for her to spend the night alone in it she embarks on this project, another of the novel's gestures towards flawed attempts at self-renewal through renovation:

> Her house now. Water boiled magnificently in the teakettle. Upstairs. Yet, climbing the stairs, entering that room, was as if she ventured into a rough landscape pocked with sinks and karst holes, abysses invisible until she pitched headlong (Proulx 1993, 106).

We see in this passage the recurrence of the inerasable past in the house as all structural and temporal order dissolves, and instead of the "magnificence" of domestic control associated with the renovation, Agnis finds herself in a terrain represented in the overtly unstructured terms of the external world, transposing Proulx's sea imagery onto the interior space so that it becomes a natural landscape filled with traps and terrors. This also echoes Quoyle's first impression of the house as both eternal and utterly isolated: "it was like pulling on the edge of the world" (ibid, 44). In this house a consciousness of the destructive, unstructured or deconstructed is always at the fringe of the characters' experience, where the subtle terror of Gothic space unsettles their attempts to renew or resolve their problems. The temporal distortion embedded in the green house is always linked to renovation and the recurring intrusions of repressed or traumatic memories speaks to Brewster's argument that "we might read the house in terms of both aftermath and of the sudden, surprising arrival: with its haunting or spectral logic the house can transmit its 'before' into a future" (2006, 142).

After this episode in the novel, Agnis exacts a symbolic revenge against Guy. She takes the urn full of his ashes and empties its contents in the outhouse pit. This highly-charged moment is reproduced via images that replace the moving world with static objects: "Carried it down and through and out. A bright day. The sea glazed, ornamented with gulls. Her shadow streamed away from her" (1993, 106). The concentration of imagery in these clipped sentences highlights the tension of the scene but also defamiliarises and distorts images of the natural world – living gulls are refigured as ornaments and the natural movement of Agnis's shadow and the ocean are warped. Proulx's language reflects the imagistic, sometimes photographic quality of the warped, distorted memories embedded in the fragmentary images Agnis retains of the house. In photographs "time conceptually stands still, as memories and revisualisations clash through time and space" (Piatti-Farnell 2017, 247). Alone in the house for the first time since her childhood trauma forty years prior, Agnis is outside the movement of time, in a place where past and present are ruptured or fragmented. Her trauma resurfaces again and again throughout the novel, a part of Proulx's

complex reweaving of imagistic and folklorist narratives, but her symbolic act of dumping her brother's ashes in the outhouse pit is never spoken of.

The renovation of the green house is also revealed to be an exhausting psychological process. Several weeks after Quoyle and his daughters join Agnis at the house, Quoyle notices that "her interest in fixing up slowed, veered into something private in her own room where she lay on the bed staring at the ceiling" (Proulx 1993, 197). She slips into a state of reverie, and the narrative voice gives us no resolution for the shift in Agnis's previously ironclad commitment to renovating the house. Agnis's disinterest could be read as one of the many instances in which the unhomely sensations produced by the renovation invoke a resurgence of the buried past. Her return to the place which housed her childhood trauma overpowers her attempts at self-improvement and renewal. Eerily, the house seems to resist those who attempt to alter it. Quoyle, arriving at the house after a night in town, finds that "no matter what they did to the house…it kept its gaunt look, never altered from that first looming vision behind the scrim of fog" (ibid, 197). The traumatic memories of the past seem to prevent its rejuvenation, despite the attempts of its inhabitants to eradicate the lingering echoes of past violence.

The house can be read as the symbol for and container of memories of the savage, near-mythic Quoyle ancestors, who were first outcast by the small island community of Gaze Island and, when leaving, took their house with them. This story of the Quoyles dragging their house to its current position echoes uncannily through *The Shipping News*; Quoyle encounters it and his ancestors in a variety of unexpected and unsettling forms. In the novel's final quarter, we witness the human form of the dark family legacy in Nolan, the last of the savage Quoyles and a distant cousin of Proulx's protagonist. Botting tells us that in many seminal Gothic novels "the pleasures of horror and terror came from the reappearance of figures long gone" (1996, 3). The old man is a reeking, insane figure whose skeletal white dog finally solves for Quoyle the mystery of his daughter Bunny's terrors of a white dog menacing her. Bunny, it seems, has the clearest vision of all: she knew long before her father or aunt that some vestige of the old Quoyles was lurking near the house. Nolan's peripheral, haunting presence throughout the renovation is yet another unhomely echo of the past. As Quoyle integrates into the community surrounding him and develops relationships with the people of Killick-Claw, his encounter with Nolan serves as an echo of the past and in some ways confirms the stories he has been so frequently told about his malicious ancestors. Quoyle finds himself again confronted by "the pressure of the past filling the space like odourless gas" (Proulx 1993, 277) and is confused by his attempts to make sense of the community that surrounds him.

"Rare geometry": The House of the Quoyles

The novel's most unhomely figure is the house itself, which the third person narrative voice presents to us battered by the dangerous Newfoundland coastline as well as

subtler, more invasive forms of tempest. Sara Wasson tells us that "Gothic sites are regularly threatened by a return of old horror or atavistic decline" (2013, 132) and the house appears as an overtly Gothic space that contains traces of many traumatic events in the current, recent and long-past lives of the Quoyles who have always inhabited it. In acquiescing to his aunt's insistence at the beginning of the novel that they renovate and live in the house, Quoyle unwittingly becomes the recipient of the dark inheritance of the green house and the many violent acts that have been committed there.

Proulx's images of the vacant house, the wild and treacherous weather and seas of Newfoundland, and the local histories of horrific acts committed by both ancient Quoyles and their contemporary counterparts are undeniably Gothic. She deploys vivid imagery and metaphor to evoke the place's harsh, unforgiving nature, describing landscapes where "birds still flew from them like signal flares, razored the air with their cries" (1993, 49) and decaying or empty interiors where "wallpaper poured backwards off the walls" (ibid, 46). The stark, muscular similes and metaphors consistently produce the unhomely clashes of familiar and unfamiliar, reinforcing the novel's interest in reproducing haunting echoes of "the shouting past" (ibid, 250) that persist despite the renovation efforts, so the house is indelibly inscribed with memories of trauma.

In deploying such highly stylized language, the narrative voice of Proulx's novel is disruptive, unsettled, and the striking unconventionality of syntax continually displaces the reader from any kind of comfortable immersion in the novel's narrative momentum. Polack argues that "at a stylistic level, the novel employs linguistic and poetic formations which are in consonance with the uncanny…Clipped, fragmented sentences, for instance, dislodge linear time" (2006, 105). The prose style regularly disrupts syntactical conventions, adopts constructions that mirror the Newfoundland dialect, and uses densely patterned paragraphs of imagery that remodel the narrative voice in a more poetic style.

Proulx frequently returns to images of the sea, whose shifting, latent power and the potential for destruction and death in its unpredictable tides becomes a motif that recurs again and again as a symbol of the fragility of life in Newfoundland. The morbidity of similes like "The bay crawled with whitecaps like maggots seething in a broad wound" (1993, 210) heightens the Gothic tensions in the novel. At significant turning points the sea and architecture are combined in metaphor to reinforce the tension of possibility symbolised by "The long horizon, the lunging, clotted sea like a swinging door opening, closing, opening" (ibid, 169). In a novel that heavily features building and renovation projects, Proulx's prose reasserts the instability of built structures by likening them to the changeable and often life-threatening weather of coastal Newfoundland. In *The Shipping News,* two major cultural markers of stability – language and houses – are sites of continual disruption and uncertainty. Proulx's imagery is one of the novel's fundamental techniques for revealing the pressure of uncanny forces on Quoyle and his family. Freud (1976, 640) tells us that the uncanny

"as it is depicted in literature…is a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life", and this proves true of the strangely aggressive agency the narrative voice gives to the green house.

In this novel, such Gothic themes as "incarceration, abduction and psycho-terror" (Wagner 2013, 115) are embodied by the house as much as by its current and past inhabitants. The house is certainly the novel's most obvious prisoner, bound to the rock and seemingly constant in its straining towards escape. This sense of uncannily humanlike agency is reinforced – rather, it is *voiced* – by the house on many occasions: when the Quoyle family first enter, "the house threw their voices back at them, hollow and unfamiliar" (ibid, 44); nails "came out crying" (ibid, 45); repeated references to the huge iron cables that strap the house to the stark, isolated rock which, the aunt says "make a noise you don't forget" (ibid, 44).

The house, it seems, speaks in its own language of trauma both inflicted on it and within in. The novel is concerned with how bleak and traumatic episodes in family history echo through years, and this is always brought back to the house. It is not until the family arrives at the house that Quoyle's fears about his daughter Bunny begin to clarify. A superstitious, obsessive and occasionally violent six-year-old, Bunny's strangely persistent anxieties and night terrors are sources of great concern for Quoyle, who begins to worry that his child has inherited the murderous traits of the "savage pack" (Proulx 1993, 148) of ancient Quoyles. Tempestuous as she is, Bunny is the one of the novel's most virtuous figures and an enthusiastic renovator, a trait which the community of builders and repairers in Killick-Claw seem to collectively recognise and reward: Bunny receives a gift of a hammer from Dennis Buggit, and a carpenter's square from Skipper Alfred, who refers to her as "the carpenter maid" whom he has brought a gift in order to give the child "a bit of encouragement" (ibid, 149). Throughout the novel Bunny is also shown helping her father with renovation activities – where Quoyle's self-description in his comically dismal newspaper-headline style is "Man Lukewarm on Ancestral Home Way Out on Point" (ibid, 97), Bunny seems constantly to be involved in the process, and it is only during these activities that the narrative voice describes her tenderly as "the intent, the helpful child" (ibid, 108).

Bunny's relationship with the house engenders an overt psychological and physical response: her first impression on seeing the house is "that colour of green made her sick" (ibid, 43); and she is the one who, in her role as helpful child, attempts to climb the house's "wild pitch" roof (ibid, 113) to assist her father in repairing the shingle roof. Reaching the very top of the ladder on the roof of the forbiddingly tall house, Bunny is moments away from stepping off onto "the evil slope on the wrong side of everything" (ibid) when Quoyle grabs her before she falls "shrieking to the rock" (ibid). Here the house's implied aggression against acts of renovation is registered in the word "evil"; Proulx describes the structure using a distinctively human and morally prescriptive adjective, enhancing our sense of the house's sometimes malicious, sometimes melancholic agency.

Nicole Reynolds notes that many Gothic spaces involved "distortion of scale and perspective within and around architectural space" (2013, 89). In many instances in the novel, the house's dimensions shift. Its unreliability as a stable, grounded space is made instantly clear by its most striking architectural addition: it is strapped to the rock on which it sits by enormous wire cables that prevent the house from being blown away. The narrative voice returns again and again to the cables throughout the novel; their eerie singing or wailing is one of the consistently Gothic architectural elements of the house, and though it is bound to the rock in one way, in many others it transforms and blurs the boundaries between past and present, self and other, and interior and exterior. This, however, is resolved in the novel's climatic dream-sequence, in which the house is torn from the rock by violent weather. The attempts at home-making and of resolution of trauma through renovation are proved to be insufficient: in order for the family to fully settle in Newfoundland and excise the unhomely presences of recent and long-held terrors, the house must disappear.

The Shipping News ends with an enormous storm in which the house is ripped from the rock it has been strapped to for centuries. The text completely eviscerates the house and the enormous renovation work that went into it. This large-scale removal of the house moves the haunting narrative past from presence into absence: the house, with its echoes of trauma and violence, is swept away, rather than fixed, gesturing towards the insurmountable nature of the memories emplaced there. Significantly, the passage in which the green house disappears is delivered as part of a bad dream that Bunny experiences while the family sleeps in their town-house, barred from the green house by wild weather. In the dream, "Bunny went up the howling chimney, sailed against the wind and across the bay to where … the house slewed on grating sills. The cables shrilled" (336). Bunny is the house's uncanny double in this scene – she witnesses the house being torn away while she "watched, flat on her back, arms outstretched like a staked prisoner and unable to move" (ibid). She takes its place in this scene – straining, strapped to the rock – as it is obliterated by the storm. Though Bunny instantly forgets the dream, in the morning her father finds that their house is indeed gone, and given that elements of the supernatural frequently occur in Gothic spaces and narratives (Halim 2010, 185), the fact that the child's dream comes true reinforces the interpretation of the house as a Gothic space.

"Straight lines and straight cuts": A Community of Renovators

Uncanny connections are everywhere in *The Shipping News*. Polack sees the deep connection between the Newfoundlanders and the island as "an uncanny bond between people and nature [that] has been formed to the extent that, for example, Jack Buggit 'just knows' when someone is drowning" (2006, 101). Bunny also seems to have been born with a similar bond, a trait that marks her as a true Newfoundland Quoyle, carrying on the half-mythic legacy of Quoyle's savage forebears. While she and her younger sister Sunshine are often depicted as bratty children, once the family has relocated to Newfoundland we begin to see Bunny's wildness and roughness as

echoing her violent ancestors. This is emphasised by her near-supernatural sensitivity to omens and signs, in particular the recurring figure of a spectral white dog. The white dog appears to Bunny in a number of seemingly quotidian spaces and objects – the white wake from her father's boat, decorations in a friend's front yard, a small stone that she believes takes the shape of a dog and which she says, "wants to bite me and make my blood drip out" (1993, 160). It is later revealed that the dog belongs to her relative Nolan and the connection symbolizes Bunny's instinctive and uncanny connection to the house and the landscape in which it sits. The things she fears most – the house, the white dog – are both strongly associated with the violence and terror of the Quoyle ancestors, and it is not until the narrative resolves the house's position that Bunny's fears can be resolved, and she can integrate into the community.

The majority of characters who populate *The Shipping News* assist Quoyle in various ways on one of his two renovation projects: the overt house renovation, or the implicit personal renovation involved in his experience of adjusting to life in Newfoundland and resolving his grief over the death of his wife. They are all in some way involved with acts of building, construction, repair or dwelling: his aunt opens a shop repairing boat upholstery, offering cosmetic repairs to the interior, domestic spaces of a community whose entire livelihood is engaged by the ability to live on or with the ocean; his closest friend Dennis Buggit is a carpenter whom Quoyle becomes acquainted with after hiring Dennis to help on the renovation of his house; even Billy Pretty, the figure of Newfoundlander wisdom and folklore in the novel, assumes the role of caretaker of a haunting, abandoned township on Gaze Island, where he grew up and to which he returns each year to care for and repair the graves of his family. Polack (2006, 101) argues that in *The Shipping News* "history is an important…prompt of abject and uncanny circumstances" and Quoyle, travelling with Billy on one such journey, thinks of Gaze Island as "a secret and ruined place. Desolate, and the slyness of the tickle gave the sense of a lair" (Proulx 1993, 174).

Danel Olson, in his discussion of Jennifer Egan's *The Keep*, tells us that like many Gothic novels "it positions its tattered characters in an antiquated and decaying place, dwelling on those secrets and violations from the past that curse or limit characters now, physically and psychologically" (2010, 328). In *The Shipping News*, a predecessor to *The Keep*'s complex reimagining of Gothic renovation tropes, almost all characters bear the trace of a personal mystery or tragedy, and this is always rendered legible to the reader in the built structures to which they are attached. Quoyle's colleague Nutbeem built and lived on the boat that left him shipwrecked in Newfoundland, and throughout the novel undertakes repairs to his "homely little boat" (Proulx 1993, 271) called *Borogove*, which is subsequently destroyed and sunk by revellers at Nutbeem's own farewell party. In this novel, such failures of renewal in construction or restoration projects occur frequently, prefiguring the final, cinematic evisceration of the green house.

The landscape's destructive nature is foregrounded in one of the first stories about Newfoundland that Quoyle is told on his way there, in which a fisherman

converts his fishing boat into a homely domestic space, the boat "hauled up on the shore far enough out of the storm and he fixed it up. Little chimney sticking up, path with a border of stone" (ibid, 37). The brief tale establishes themes of resilience, ingenuity and craftsmanship, as the fisherman transforms his boat into a house and lives there in comfort – until, one day, "the rotten hull collapsed and killed him" (ibid, 37). This short narrative performs the function of introducing the pattern of unreliable built spaces which form one of the major Gothic elements in the novel. As *The Shipping News* progresses, we grow less and less certain of the comforting strength of built places and are continually reminded that both internal and external forces are capable of breaking apart the physical and psychological structures of home, as Quoyle's renovation project makes clear.

The Shipping News is full of a destructive energy which sees the majority of the novel's physical structures endure some form of ferocious, potentially obliterating barrage. The possibility of destruction is everywhere: imagery of the weather and rocks of Newfoundland situate the action in a deeply turbulent but beautiful landscape; Quoyle hears or reads numerous stories about boats wrecked in storms; he himself capsizes his own boat and nearly drowns. The more sinister representation of the disintegration of physical structures comes with the arrival of the Melvilles, a drunken, aristocratic couple who arrive in Killick-Claw on the boat they live on, a profoundly disturbing domestic space that was custom built for Hitler.

"Every nut and bolt is loose": Conclusions

In the second half of the novel, Proulx introduces another building project antithetical to the renovation of the green house: the construction of a boat for Quoyle. Instead of symbolising a struggle with the emplaced trauma of the past, as the house does, the boat Quoyle commissions Alvin Yark to build signifies an adaptation to the water bound domestic spaces of Newfoundland. However, as Helene Cixous tells us, the uncanny "never completely disappears" (1976, 548), and often "presents itself only on the fringe of something else" (ibid, 528). So, it is in the workshop of Alvin Yark, where Quoyle participates in the seemingly homely, life-affirming work of building a boat that will allow him safe access to the water that is inscribed as the community's major cultural and communal life source.

Yark sings while he works, the same few lines repeated over and over, from a song that tells of the sinking of a boat called the *Gandy Goose*:

> "Oh the *Gandy Goose,* it ain't no use,
> 'cause every nut and bolt is loose,
> She'll go to the bottom just like the *Bruce...*" (Proulx 1993, 330).

Here the unhomely makes its return: the unending song Yark sings as he builds reinforces the text's concentrated imagery of the fallibility of built structures. It presupposes the sinking of the *Gandy Goose* based on the sinking of the *Bruce*,

reinforcing the pattern of eventual collapse introduced by the brief story at the beginning of the novel in which the fisherman is killed by his boat-turned-home. Even as Yark, the master boat builder, finishes Quoyle's new boat, an image of idealised personal and social stability which "fits together like a handclasp" (ibid, 281), this sense of completion and structural soundness is then subtly undermined by the return of Yark's endless, circular song and its narrative of inevitable collapse.

In the community of *The Shipping News,* acts of renovation are built into the structure of everyday life. These activities are presented as so commonplace that they achieve a sense of intimacy and domesticity that can be read as existing in the same socio-cultural mode as acts of cooking, cleaning or gardening, which we see in soothing homeliness of Quoyle's collaboration with Yark on his new boat. Quoyle achieves through this building a level of dwelling, an ability to be *at-home*. But, as the novel is always already reminding us, we can't know whether the boat will last, and the song serves as both a warning and a threat.

The haunting circularity is reinforced by Quoyle and Agnis's conversation after the house is blown away by a wild storm: after the episode of its evisceration we see the increasingly self-confident Quoyle and even his pragmatic aunt experience "the collapse of the subject's present under the weight of the abandoned past" (Polack 2006, 97). Despite engaging in a conversation about their new, far more practical and homely living circumstances in town, both characters experience a need to confirm with each other the eventual reconstruction of the green house. Whether it will happen at all is not clear, but for a moment, in their conversation, we see the house restored once again, to its position on the rock, this time in the form of an idealized summer house; a structure which both reader and characters know is ultimately incompatible with Newfoundland's wild weather patterns as well as the more dangerous, more destructive patterns of trauma and violence embedded in the image of the house on Quoyle's Point.

The textual analysis of this novel reveals the Gothic elements embedded in and motivated by the renovation project at the centre of this novel. Proulx's narrative strategies consciously remodel traditional linguistic structures at a sentence level to present the fragmented, temporally, physically and psychologically turbulent site of the Gothic house in vibrantly imagistic, savage language. In contemporary culture, acts of home improvement are frequently associated with narratives of redemption, self-improvement, and middle-class aspiration, however this case study of an acclaimed literary novel has shown that under the surface of home improvement is a deep unhomeliness which resurfaces again and again. Freud and Cixous (1976, 545) both tell us that it is impossible to banish the *unheimlich* forever: its return, as Yark's song signifies, is inevitable, and following the evisceration of the house, Quoyle and his aunt's conversation seems to hint at this pattern of endless repetition, a helpless insistence on dragging themselves back to the houses of the past.

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Vile, Scheming, Evil Bitches?
The Monstrous Feminine Meets Hegemonic Masculine Violence in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*

ABSTRACT

George R. R. Martin's fantasy series A Song of Ice and Fire *and its television adaptation* Game of Thrones *have achieved immense popularity in the last decade and increasing attention within the academy. Several scholars have examined how women are constructed in the series, many of whom argue that audiences, meanings, and conventions have profound effects upon how readers are invited to view and (re)imagine femininity and femaleness. However, female masculinities have been marginalised in these discussions, which have maintained a link between female bodies and femininity that feminist and queer scholars have problematised. Using Barbara Creed's work on the monstrous feminine, J. Halberstam's concept of female masculinity, and Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, I argue that certain masculine women are aligned with monstrosity, and that this embodiment of masculinity is used to critique violent and dominating masculine performances. Given the series' mass appeal and popular culture's role in shaping attitudes and values, the problematization of destructive masculinities has the potential to subvert currently accepted constructs of masculinity.*

Keywords: Monstrous Feminine, *Game of Thrones*, Female Masculinity, Fantasy, Abject

Girls and women in fantasy genre fiction have often dressed or acted like men to escape the perceived confines of femininity and become heroic questers in their own right. The characters who prefer this style of behaviour may be seen to perform what J. Halberstam (1998, xi, 57) terms "female masculinity"; a gender configuration aligned with "women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine" or are "mistaken consistently for a man". Female masculinities, Halberstam contends, "afford us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (1998, 1-2). In other words, when masculinity appears in bodies that are not white, able, male, or heterosexual, its performative mechanisms become visible. In the fantasy genre, the prevalence of masculine women creates a space in which gendered acts and ideas can be promoted or rejected at a critical distance from the 'real' world. Normative masculinity in fantasy texts often materialises through clothing such as armour, short or shoulder-length hair, the capacity for violence, ownership and proficiency with weapons, and mastery of the self and others. These gendered acts reflect and inform those in the Western world but are distanced from it through the fantasy setting, which may help position audiences to view harmful masculine practices more objectively.

In this article, I argue that George R. R. Martin's fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996—) and its television adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011—) invite audiences to critique the violent hegemonic masculine practices that Cersei Lannister, the Queen Regent and later Queen of Westeros, uses to pursue and maintain power. Cersei is one of the most widely discussed characters in academic criticism of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones,* for she is a major character and frequent antagonist who plays a crucial role throughout the series as a wife, mother, lover, and ruler. At first glance, her traditionally feminized beauty and her lack of masculine accoutrements makes her appear as an unlikely choice for this discussion of female masculinity. Charul Patel (2014) suggests that Cersei enacts a monstrous femininity, yet while the character is monstrous, she expresses an explicit desire to be a man on multiple occasions in *A Clash of Kings* (Martin 2011b, 291, 764, 767) and *A Feast for Crows* (Martin 2011e, 54). She can be understood as trans* as it is defined by Susan Stryker in *Transgender History* (2008, 1): "*the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place*—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition" (original emphasis). Cersei moves across the socially imposed boundaries of normative high-class femininity because she desires the social and legal capital men possess within the pseudo-fantasy setting, rather than the literal penis (Patel 2014, 138). Cersei may be understood as trans* and/or masculine because she considers herself "more masculine than feminine", a personal identification that Halberstam considers to constitute female masculinity (1998, xi). When conventionally masculine acts such as violence and racial domination are enacted by women such as Cersei, fantasy conventions operate alongside the 'monstrous feminine' to position hegemonic

strategies as abhorrent. It is not female bodies that make these actions monstrous, but destructive masculine practices.

A Song of Ice and Fire is the story of a pseudo-medieval world where several political upheavals have led to a power struggle between the high-class families. The first few novels in the series were released to moderate success within fantasy circles, but this reception changed when the series was adapted for television as *Game of Thrones* by D. B. Weiss and David Benioff. The TV series premiered in 2011 to wide-spread popular and critical acclaim, which in turn attracted a large readership to the novels (see Gjelsvik and Schubart 2016, 3-4). Given *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*' unprecedented popularity and the role that popular culture plays in shaping audiences' identities and attitudes, its representations of gender would benefit from inquiry. At the time of writing this article, two edited volumes have been dedicated to the series' representations of gender, *Women of Ice and Fire* (Gjelsvik and Schubart 2016) and *Women in Game of Thrones* (Frankel 2014), as well as essays examining eunuchs and power (Askey 2018), monstrous femininity (Patel 2014), and rape (Rosenberg 2012; Spector 2012). Building on this existing research, particularly Charul Patel's study of monstrosity, this article analyses female masculinity in relation to violence, fantasy conventions, and the 'monstrous feminine' in the texts.

I propose that it is not the relationship between female bodies and masculinity that makes women monstrous, but their acceptance of destructive masculine acts such as violence and domination. Many masculine women in the series, such as the warriors Brienne of Tarth, Ygritte, and the Mormonts, the tomboy Arya Stark, and the pirate leader Asha Greyjoy, are presented as protagonists or heroes because they enact masculinity through protecting others, or by their chivalry, assertiveness, and clothing. Masculine resources such as these are potentially empowering and productive within the series' fantasy milieu because they do not necessarily perpetuate unequal power relations. In contrast, the acceptance and integration of destructive gender practices such as violence inscribes certain masculine characters, particularly masculine women like Cersei, as monstrous by combining fantasy conventions with aspects of the monstrous feminine.

In addition to Halberstam's definition of female masculinity, this article is informed by Barbara Creed's (1993) work on the monstrous feminine in horror films, Judith Butler's ([1990] 1999) theory of gender performativity, and Raewyn Connell's ([1995] 2005) work on the idealized cultural conception of masculinity, which she terms hegemonic masculinity. All four theorists are concerned with making traditional gender ideologies visible, although this article is one of few to place them in dialogue and the first to do so within the context of fantasy genre fiction. I employ the concepts of female masculinity and hegemonic masculinity to define the specific gender configurations to which their original authors referred, rather than the specific typologies and applications that Halberstam and Connell suggest. I understand gender through Butler's performativity theory as the "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over

time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1999, 82). Butlerian performativity facilitates an analysis of the "repeated acts" that constitute hegemonic masculinity but recognises that these male bodied styles are "nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original" (ibid 43, original emphasis). Violence is viewed as a gendered act (or series of acts) through which masculinity often manifests because of cultural associations between men and aggression, not because of any biologically essential link between male bodies and violence. In the Martinverse, masculine women who perform acts of violence are critiqued through their alignment with the monstrous feminine as theorised by Creed in the book of the same name (1993). These figures from the horror genre work alongside fantasy genre conventions, specifically that of the evil queen, to invite the audience to repudiate Cersei's masculine violence. While Creed's typology of monstrous femininities is based upon film rather than television or literature, the feminist psychoanalytic underpinnings of her work allow it to be applied to almost any media form or discipline interested in the representation or status of women.

The Monstrous Feminine (1993) has been applied to Cersei's character by Charul Patel (2014), whose work this article proposes to extend by reading Cersei as a woman who performs masculinity with violence and is consequently critiqued through the monstrous feminine and fantasy genre conventions. Focusing on the novels, Patel argues that Cersei is rendered abject — in the sense described by Julia Kristeva (1982) — because of the way she gains and exercises power, using sexuality and maternity simultaneously:

> Cersei's maternity is the only one that the fictional society reacts to as abject as her monstrous motherhood is a result of incest – a social taboo that would threaten patriarchal social and political order (Patel 2014, 136).

In response, Patel argues, Cersei is abjected from society, as her "walk of penance is a ritual by which society could renew their contact with the abject element and then remove it from their order" (ibid, 144). For Patel, Cersei performs femininity incorrectly and threatens the male symbolic order, and in response she is punished with bodily abjection (dirt, bloody feet, the corpse, maggots, and other viscera are inflicted upon her during her walk of penance) and symbolic abjection (as she is stripped of her long, feminine hair and her power as Queen). Patel understands Cersei as a monstrous woman through the work of Creed and Kristeva, and argues that these tropes are used to reject her gendered use of sexuality and maternity in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. I agree that the monstrous feminine is used to problematise Cersei's gender performance, although I submit that this does not necessarily make her a feminine character. As Creed argues in *Phallic Panic* (2005), her study of male monsters, the feminine can be used to inspire horror for characters who are understood as male or female.

Many male bodied characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* utilize hegemonic masculine practices such as sexual and physical violence, stoicism, and domination,

which often lead them to become monstrous. Alyssa Rosenberg (2012, 22) and Caroline Spector (2012, 186) argue that sexual violence is critiqued in the novels as a masculine practice that is always undesirable. Rosenberg (2012, 22) suggests that sexual violence is the "hallmark" of the two most monstrous masculine characters in the series: Ramsay Bolton, a legitimized bastard who delights in using physical and psychological torture; and Gregor 'The Mountain' Clegane, an abnormally large and strong knight in service to the scheming Lannister family. Rosenberg contends that Gregor's and Ramsay's sexual violence indicates their inhumanity. I endeavour to take this point further and argue that it is destructive masculine acts—not the sexed body—that makes masculinities monstrous. There are several important implications to consider in relation to the fantasy genre's ongoing interest in masculine women, such as the privileging of masculinity over femininity (Balay 2010, 19-20) or the vilifying of lesbian subjects (Halberstam 1998; Noble 2004). However, female characters in fantasy fiction often invite readers to reject destructive masculine resources rather than the women themselves. Many masculine women in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, particularly the female knight Brienne, are not rejected but celebrated as heroes (Tasker and Steenberg 2016, 177).

The analysis in this article is centred on Martin's novels and the television series, with an emphasis on the main book to feature Cersei's perspective, *A Feast for Crows* (Martin [2005] 2011e) and season six and seven of *Game of Thrones*, when Cersei rules as Queen. In what follows, I will analyse Cersei's sexual(ised) violence against Taena Merryweather in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, in which non-consensual sexual sadism is critiqued when Cersei is presented as a castrating mother and *vagina dentata*. These figures are mobilised alongside the archaic mother and the monstrous womb to reject Cersei's violence in *Game of Thrones,* namely when she orders her henchman to carry out violence on her behalf and when she destroys half of King's Landing with a magical fire explosion. In each case, the monstrous feminine works alongside the evil queen fantasy genre convention to encourage feelings of horror, fear, and disgust surrounding masculine violence. It is Cersei's persistent support of patriarchal structures and hegemonic masculine practices that leads her to become monstrous in both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*. While she is empowered and operates within masculine domains, her power is gained through acceptance of masculine power structures. She makes individualistic efforts to succeed rather than advocate for social change (for further discussion of this trend in fantasy, see Badley 2000). Cersei dons a masculine role but does not attempt to rewrite the Westerosi gender order. Her existence within the narrative may resist the conflation of femaleness and femininity, but her support of a patriarchal regime contains her potential for greater gender equality.

Sexual Violence in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

The fantasy conventions in *A Song of Ice and Fire* work with the *vagina dentata* to critique Cersei's violent sexual domination. Creed (1993, 105) understands the *vagina dentata* as reflecting a "fear of the female genitals", which may manifest as a toothed

mouth, a beautiful woman with a fanged animal companion, a barred entrance, or a mother consuming her young. Both the cannibalistic mother and the animal are aligned with Cersei when she has sex with a female courtier, the olive-skinned Taena Merryweather. Cersei understands the act as one of sexual domination, as demonstrated by the language she uses and the references to marital rape before and during sex. This hegemonic masculine practice is rejected as Cersei is linked with monstrosity because of her horrifying internal monologue while she penetrates the other woman in the narrative present.

Cersei positions her one-night stand with Taena as rape, a practice that combines sexual agency with domination to produce the hegemonic masculinity within her milieu. Several pages before she and Taena have sex, Cersei reflects upon her deceased husband Robert Baratheon's marital rapes, "assaults" in which "he would drink too much and want to claim his rights" (Martin [2005] 2011e, 544). Cersei repeats the exact same phrasing when she begins to sexually stimulate Taena, telling her, "I am the queen. I mean to claim my rights" (ibid, 548). The textual repetition indicates that Cersei views her sexual experience with Taena as an act of masculine sexual domination rather than pleasure, which is indicated in her language.[1] Cersei describes her lover's vagina as "that Myrish swamp", talks about "slipping a third finger into Myr", calls her Myrish language "a foreign tongue", and refers to her lover not by her name but as "the Myrish woman" (ibid, 549). The heavily racialised language Cersei uses demonstrates that her relationship with Taena is about "the feeling of being dominant" (Frankel 2014, 91), rather than the feeling of pleasure. The references to Taena's vagina as Myr are particularly problematic since they reveal that for Cersei, sexual intercourse with Taena is nothing more than domination of her body and, through it, her country.

Cersei's sexual abuse is critiqued through her interior monologue, in which she is presented as both an evil queen and a *vagina dentata.* The toothed vagina may be linked with either "symbolic castration" or "literal castration," (Creed 1993, 107), and Cersei imagines performing a mixture of the two on Taena. While the women are having sex, the queen "let herself imagine that her fingers were a bore's [*sic*] tusks, ripping the Myrish woman apart from groin to throat" (Martin [2005] 2011e, 549). Cersei wants to destroy Taena's genitals and her entire body, castrating her literally by "ripping" open her vagina and then symbolically by dismembering her. The specific form that Cersei dreams herself as a *vagina dentata,* a boar, is significant because her husband, the late King Robert Baratheon, was killed by a boar in *A Game of Thrones,* and it was Cersei who arranged his death, earning her status as evil queen.

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[1] In some ways, she is correct: the race and class difference between the Caucasian Queen and the dark-skinned noblewoman may mean that Taena felt pressured to acquiesce. Yet Taena appears to enjoy the experience, and tells Cersei, "Please […] go on, my queen. Do as you will with me. I'm yours," and on the next page, she "shuddered again and arched her back and screamed" (ibid, 549). Taena's enjoyment can be read as submission to Cersei's power and an attempt to provide a highly performative orgasm that may stop the assault. However, if Taena's comments are taken to express a genuine desire and pleasure, then Cersei's insistence that she is raping Taena is an attempt to take the other woman's voice and colonise her experience.

This feminine fantasy convention and the *vagina dentata* work in tandem to evoke terror and invite readers to despise Cersei's violent masculinity, signalling the subversive possibilities that arise when fantasy and the Gothic become entangled.

The act of hegemonic masculine sexual violence is further contested through Cersei's interior monologue during the same scene, in which she reveals that she rebelled against Robert's marital rapes by eating his semen—an act that cites the evil queen and the monstrous feminine. The "cannibalistic mother" who "eats her young" is, for Creed, a figure interrelated with the *vagina dentata,* although she insists that each figure is "an altogether separate threat" and should be analysed separately (1993, 109). In Cersei's case, the evil queen convention bridges the gap between *vagina dentata* and cannibalistic mother and the three conventions work harmoniously to render hegemonic masculine violence grotesque. While Cersei penetrates Taena, she compares the experience to sex with Robert and thinks,

> *ten thousand of your children perished on my palm, Your Grace* […] *I would lick your sons off my face and fingers, all those pale sticky princes. You claimed your rights, my lord, but in the darkness I would eat your heirs* (Martin [2005] 2011e, 549, original emphasis).

Cersei presents Robert's sperm not as a bodily fluid but as "*children*" and "*pale sticky princes,*" anthropomorphism that elevates her (stereotypically feminine) consumption of his sperm to violence against his royal offspring. Yet Cersei is Robert's queen, which would make any of his "*pale sticky princes*" her own children: she gives symbolic birth to them by humanising them and imagining them as grown children—as queen she must be the mother of any royal offspring. In this way, Cersei becomes a figure of feminine monstrosity: a "cannibalistic mother" (Creed 1993, 109) who births and then consumes her own children. The specific way in which she describes their deaths, "in the darkness I would eat your heirs," adds to her monstrosity by evoking the *vagina dentata.* While Cersei explicitly states that she does not allow Robert to ejaculate inside her vagina, "the darkness" and oral sadism she alludes to conjure images associated with the monstrous female genitals, such as "sharp teeth and bloodied lips" and "a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow [men] up and cut them to pieces" (ibid, 107, 106). Cersei's status as evil queen means that her vaginal violence is also a symbolic castration in the sense that she removes Robert's phallic power by stopping him from producing legitimate heirs. "Cersei usurps the line of succession," argues Caroline Spector (2012, 182), by "substituting another man's child for Robert's own, an act that is both treason and the ultimate emasculation". The evil queen genre convention allows Cersei to straddle two forms of monstrosity concurrently, the *vagina dentata* and the castrating mother, both of which invite readers to feel horrified by her use of sexual domination as an act that produces her female masculinity.

Terrorism and Torture in *Game of Thrones*

The Cersei of the *Game of Thrones* adaptation enacts masculinity with violence more than sexuality, and when she does so the evil queen and the *vagina dentata* operate in ways that repudiate this masculine practice. In *Game of Thrones* Cersei's acts of sexual coercion are written out, and the only sexual relationship that she has is with her twin brother Jaime and her cousin Lancel. Even these are transformed to lessen Cersei's agency; there is a rape scene added between Jaime and Cersei after Joffrey's death (see Ferreday 2015, 28-33), and Lancel is figured as a weak replacement for Jaime but not, as he is in the novels, also a man that Cersei is manipulating through sex. The same is true of violence in the first half of the series. In *Women in Game of Thrones*, Valerie Estelle Frankel claims that "the books show [Cersei] indulging in dozens of murders, while in the show she's shocked and helpless in the face of Joffrey's brutality" (2014, 89). Frankel is correct in her assessment that Cersei's violence is transposed onto her son, although her female masculinity is expressed in other ways. Clothing connotes Cersei's female masculinity to a greater extent in each new season of *Game of Thrones:* feminine clothing such as dresses receive embellishments — hard metals, armour-like cuts, and actual armour — that make her attire visible as masculine. Beginning with a thin metal belt around her waist in season one, Cersei's dresses increasingly incorporate masculine armour, from a full breastplate at the end of season two to an armoured under bust corset in season three, and so on. The masculinity that the costume evokes is compounded in seasons six and seven after Cersei's long blonde hair is cut off for her walk of penance at end of season five, and she chooses to maintain her short hair as Queen. In the most recent season at the time of writing, season seven, Cersei wears a black leather dress with silver and black brocade shoulder pads that resemble armour. Freed of the constraints of normative femininity because of her class and sovereign power, the Cersei in *Game of Thrones* publicly embraces her female masculinity through her choice of clothing.

Cersei also performs female masculinity through violence, which is continually rejected through its alignment with the monstrous feminine and the evil queen. She uses the monstrous Gregor 'the Mountain' Clegane, a physically gigantic man brought back to life by a necromancer, as a body empty of life and so capable of becoming the muscle behind her "evil intent" (Creed 1993, 108). The masculine violence that Cersei orders Gregor to commit often occurs in dark, enclosed areas such as tunnels or dungeons, and features "barred and dangerous entrances" (ibid, 107). In the season five episode "No One" (S5E8), the Faith Militant attempt to seize Cersei and she is told that is she resists, they will use violence. The camera moves to a close-up shot of Cersei, who says "I choose violence" (S5E8) right before Gregor rips one of the soldiers' heads off with his bare hands. Cersei's use of hegemonic violence to demonstrate her masculinity and authority in this encounter is immediately problematised through the *vagina dentata.* As blood trails across the stone floor, the camera shows a high angle shot from the inside of one of the palace grates. The top half of the frame shows the grate's intricate pattern, which resembles rows and rows of teeth with a small hole in the middle and the bottom half reveals blood dripping down the dark walls. The grate and its patterns evoke the *vagina dentata,* inviting viewers to feel horrified at Cersei's actions as evil queen, implied through her

authority and the castle architecture. The monstrous feminine and the fantasy genre operate alongside one another to invite the viewer to experience feelings of horror in response to Cersei's masculine violence.

Multiple forms of the monstrous feminine, including the *vagina dentata,* the archaic mother, and the monstrous womb, are invoked simultaneously to create a sense of discomfort surrounding Cersei's violence in the season six finale, "The Winds of Winter," when she murders the majority of Westerosi nobility in a magical explosion at the sept where her trial is being held. When Cersei does not appear at the sept, her cousin Lancel, a member of the Faith Militant, is sent to find her. After seeing a boy run from the building, Lancel follows into a dark tunnel where he finds barrels of magical 'wildfire' that are about to ignite. Over a full minute of combined screen time is spent on Lancel running and then crawling through the tunnels in an attempt to reach the candles before they transform the magical green liquid into an inferno. Lancel's attempt to stop the massacre is intercut with shots of Cersei and her son in their palace bedrooms and the sept where some of the other characters realise that Cersei's absence may be a sign of impending catastrophe. Gradually swelling music increases the scene's suspense, but it is Lancel's journey through the tunnel that provides narrative momentum and aligns Cersei's act of terrorism with the monstrous feminine. The tunnel itself evokes the *vagina dentata* through its shape and the explosives it harbours, like the "tunnels and caves" hiding "spiders, snakes or bats which attack the unwary" in horror films (Creed 1993, 108). This image of the *vagina dentata* works alongside the archaic mother, which is cited in the same way as the film *Alien* (1979), through "womb-like imagery, [and] the long winding tunnels leading to inner chambers" (Creed, 1993, 19). Even the barrels of wildfire can be read as "rows of hatching eggs," embryos of destruction that Cersei has planted beneath the city (ibid, 19). If the wildfire barrels are read as monstrous eggs, the explosion can be read as a monstrous birth. The city's "surface is no longer closed, smooth and intact – rather the body looks as if it may tear apart, open out, reveal its innermost depths" (Creed 1993, 58). As green fire engulfs the city, King's Landing is torn apart literally as its infrastructure crumbles, and symbolically as the religious headquarters and the nobility are destroyed. Cersei watches the mayhem from a palace balcony with a glass of wine in hand and a small smile on her face. Even here, the violence in the vaginal tunnel is linked back to Cersei as she surveys the scene, an evil queen par excellence, with two pillars visible in the background of every frame like giant fallopian tubes. The *mise-en-scène* surrounding Cersei's masculine violence evokes many facets of the monstrous feminine, and because of the horror that these images inspire, the viewer is encouraged to elide hegemonic violence as an act through which masculinity is performed.

Filmic devices such as *mise-en-scène*, dialogue, and setting are also mobilised to connote the evil queen and *vagina dentata* as a means of critiquing Cersei's enjoyment of masculine violence when she tortures Septa Unella in "The Winds of Winter," one of the women who oversaw her imprisonment by the Faith Militant. Cersei accuses

the woman of being a sadist and then reveals her own love of masculine violence. As she walks around the Septa's body testing the ropes that bind her, Cersei says:

> I do things because they feel good. I drink because it feels good. I killed my husband because it felt good to be rid of him. I fuck my brother because it feels good to feel him inside me (S6E10).

Alcohol, violence, assertiveness, and sexuality are presented as the performative practices through which Cersei's female masculinity, and masculinities in the Martinverse, materialise. The phrase "I fuck my brother" places Cersei in the active (sexual) position and highlights the authority and power that underwrite her character in later seasons of the series as she is able to embrace her female masculinity as Queen Regent. Masculine violence is by far the most critical stylised act for Cersei's gender performance, as she tells the Septa:

> I killed your high sparrow, and all his little sparrows, all his septons and all his septas, all his filthy soldiers, because it felt good to watch them burn. It felt good to imagine their shock and their pain. No thought has ever given me greater joy (S6E10).

Cersei takes great pleasure in masculine violence, specifically domination and revenge. Yet her attitude is critiqued throughout the monologue and afterwards through imagery that evokes the *vagina dentata.* The room appears to glisten wetly as Cersei speaks because the lights in the background are out of focus, and her jewel incrusted shoulder pads twinkle because of the light from the torches, giving her regal costume a wet look. When Cersei finishes speaking, the camera moves to a long shot of the dungeon room, which resembles a cavernous womb (S6E10). Both the vaginal chamber and the glistening walls and costume evoke the toothed vagina, which Creed links with "a darkened doorway" and "tunnels and caves" filled with dangerous animals that "attack the unwary" (1993, 108). In "The Winds of Winter" it is Cersei lurking "*in the darkness*" (Martin 2011e, 549), waiting to order her henchman, Gregor Clegane, to dismember Septa Unella. While it is Gregor who enacts the final act of violence in this scene, it is Cersei who controls and orchestrates it. Violence is the means by which she performs female masculinity, even as this act is made horrifying through the monstrous feminine and fantasy genre conventions, specifically the *vagina dentata* and the evil queen.

Concluding Remarks

By analysing Cersei Lannister's enactment of female masculinity through Creed's concept of the monstrous feminine and Butler's work on gender performativity, this article has shown that women in *A Song of Ice and Fire* reveal the masculinity in certain stylized acts—such as violence and domination—and invite audiences to engage with them from a new critical perspective. Female bodies do not make masculine performances problematic; rather, it is the violent practices that divide people,

endanger society, and maintain a masculine hierarchy. It could be argued that the discomfort audiences are invited to experience arises because Cersei transgresses the boundaries of what women can say, rather than her violent acts. However, similar threats of violence by Cersei's son Joffrey and his father Robert in *A Game of Thrones* are likewise problematized (Martin [1996] 2011a, 342, 724), which suggests that it is masculine violence that leads to monstrosity rather than Cersei's female masculinity.

Cersei's actions may be read as empowering or subversive because she challenges patriarchal institutions such as the church, marriage, and the patriarchal feudal system. A woman ruler is significant within the fantasy genre, even if she proves to be, as Margery Tyrell claims, "a vile, scheming, evil bitch" (Martin [2005] 2011e, 738). Almost all of Cersei's decisions are hastily made and poorly considered, which may suggest to readers that female masculinities are poor imitations of male masculinities, or worse, that women should be excluded from power because they cannot rule effectively. However, it is masculine practices such as violence and domination—monstrous stylized acts—that make Cersei an evil queen. Rather than contesting dominant and oppressive gender regimes, she retraces the steps of the patriarchy and achieves the same monstrous ends.

This repetition is visible in her violence, as her female masculinity allows her to occupy the role of Kingslayer, a nickname attached to her twin brother Jaime after he murdered Robert's predecessor. Cersei makes herself a Kingslayer by imagining herself as the regicidal boar while she has sex with Taena and by positioning her consumption of Robert's sperm as regicide. These repetitive echoes indicate that Cersei's female masculinity is, as Butler argues:

> a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self ([1990] 1999, 188).

Cersei's female masculinity is informed by the "other imitations" of masculinity that she has witnessed in the pseudo-medieval fantasy world. Violence and domination are central in Cersei's milieu, and as she repeats them she also ensures their continued reproduction—particularly when she uses her newly announced pregnancy to justify her violent crusade to ensure the Lannister legacy in the season seven finale, "The Dragon and the Wolf." The masculine practices she draws upon and reproduces are not simply reproductions of a male-bodied masculine original but part of a constellation of "repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *dis*continuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground'" (Butler [1990] 1999, 192, original emphasis). As a character whose gender identity, identification, and presentation do not align with her sexed body in ways that are normatively enforced, Cersei is one such example of 'discontinuity' that may be used to challenge claims that men are naturally violent and dominant – both in fantasy fiction and the 'real' world.

This article has sought to help begin and develop a conversation among popular culture scholars about masculinity in fantasy fiction, and as such there are many directions in which future research can be taken. It would be valuable to employ a reception analysis to determine how audiences are interpreting masculine women, particularly whether they link monstrosity to masculinity rather than simply to specific women. Moreover, it is worth asking whether there are masculine women in Martin's series who wield masculine traits more successfully than men, and if so, whether they illustrate a more inclusive direction from which 'real' men could learn. What is clear from the above analysis is that by combining hegemonic masculine practices with fantasy conventions such as the evil queen, *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* consistently evoke the monstrous feminine. In so doing, they invite audiences to question how they themselves "do" gender and whether they are, consciously or unconsciously, retracing the bloody path to power advocated by hegemonic masculine discourses. Yet female masculinity, like popular fiction, is never ideologically resolved but serves numerous political projects. Some masculine women in the fantasy genre, such as Cersei, reinforce patriarchal power, whereas others menace the entire gender order (Halberstam 1998, 9). If masculine women challenge the naturalised link between masculinity and the male body even when they repeat destructive acts such as violence, those who enact more productive performative styles require urgent critical attention, as they may offer a means of (re)conceptualising masculinity in healthier ways.

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Return of the Oppressed: Hushed Women and Tamed Landscapes in Charlotte Wood's *The Natural Way of Things*

ABSTRACT

The Gothic as a genre has continually evolved since Horace Walpole's time and yet renderings of contemporary Australian Gothic fictions often return to the patriarchal tradition of subjugating women. Women are treated harshly in the genre and contemporary narratives often reflect this theme. They are frequently abandoned, murdered or left to the mercy of their male counterparts. The landscape is portrayed as malevolent, proving difficult to control and ready to consume any lost person. Charlotte Wood's 2015 novel The Natural Way of Things *is a terrifying look at the misogynistic oppression of women who have had sexual relations with powerful men. She reminds us that female sexuality is still a contentious issue within Australian society. The women within the novel are dehumanised and treated like animals, and Wood enables readers to become voyeurs into a strange and terrifying reality and to explore a dark underworld that is real, but often ignored.*

Keywords: Gothic, Oppressed, Gender, Patriarchy, Australian Landscape

Charlotte Wood, in her 2015 novel *The Natural Way of Things,* draws on the Australian Gothic tradition of separating and isolating protagonists by placing her ten female characters in a hostile and unfamiliar landscape. Wood is an award-winning Australian author who has written both fiction and non-fiction. *The Natural Ways of Things* won the 2016 Stella Prize and was joint winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Awards in the same year. The novel gained critical acclaim because, as Jakob Vala from *Tin House* magazine observes, "*The Natural Ways of Things* is an unapologetic confrontation of misogyny and rape culture. It's a tough and necessary read" (cited in Burbank 2016). Wood's novel has been hailed as a masterpiece of feminist horror, and a contemporary Australian Gothic dystopia that has clear echoes of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). However, *The Natural Ways of Things* is a significant departure from Wood's previous writing style; for example, in her earlier novel *Animal People* (2011), which explored a day in the life of protagonist Stephen in an often-humorous way. But there is nothing humorous to be found in *The Natural Way of Things*, for it is Wood's realistic depiction of gender-based violence that makes its story, as literary critic Kate Evans states, appear to be "disturbingly plausible" (Wood, 2015). *The Natural Way of Things* is a dark and confronting story set in contemporary Australia that opens in the hot Australian summer sun with a confused woman, Yolanda, waking from a drug induced sleep wondering where she is and what has happened to her. She meets another woman named Verla and they soon discover that they are in an outback prison, along with eight other women (Wood refers to the protagonists as 'girls'). Wood's novel is an unashamedly feminist tale of the corrupt powers of corporate control, misogyny, and the patriarchy. Inspired by real-life events of gender-based violence in Australia, Wood explores extreme patriarchal power to explicitly confront the silencing of women within contemporary Australian society. Theoretically, *The Natural Way of Things* could be set in any contemporary Western society, however, for the purposes of this article, 'society' shall hereafter refer to its Australian context, where the novel is set.

The Gothic arrived in Australia as an imported genre; there were no crumbling medieval castles or dungeons likes its European counterparts, so the landscape itself became a space to be feared. Ken Gelder suggests that the genre "quickly adjusted to local predicaments, to the extent that we can fairly identify a set of characteristics associated with 'Australian Gothic' that go right back to the colonial period" (2012, 379). *The Natural Way of Things* contains many of the characteristic that have come to define the Australian Gothic, such as: the use of an isolated, hostile landscape through the novel's setting within an abandoned decaying homestead; female characters that are lost in the outback; a fear of the unknown; acts of violence; psychological traumas, terrors, and eventual madness. The women are forcibly removed from their safe, familiar society and placed in an unknown and hostile landscape that exacerbates their distress, and it is this use of the expansive Australian outback that lends itself to the Gothic genre because it has often been represented as an unknowable space to fear.

The women are literally trapped within it by the electric fence that encompasses the property and the surrounding bushland.

Donna Heiland proposes that "gothic novels make absolutely clear the genre's concern with exploring, defining, and ultimately defending patriarchy" (2008, 8). This article argues that it is the Gothic genre that allows Wood to critique issues that affect women in society within a contemporary Australian context. *The Natural Way of Things* contains many elements of the Female Gothic genre in particular, such as female confinement in an abandoned and decaying setting (the outback prison), entrapment and slavery (they are forced to construct a road), issues of female sexuality (the women's 'transgressions'), and ultimately how this can lead to madness. As Claire Kahane suggests:

> The conventional plot of the Gothic novel is an imprisoning structure, a protagonist, typically a young woman who is compelled to seek out the centre of a mystery, while vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness (1985, 334).

This is the premise that underlies *The Natural Way of Things*; however, Wood is not defending the patriarchy, but rather she is showing the reader how outdated and detrimental the concept is to both men and women today.

Frighteningly, Wood explores a dark and disturbing world that still exists in contemporary Australian society (and elsewhere), one that is ever present in the daily news, in which the women in the novel are blamed for what has happened to them. For example, Yolanda was gang raped by a football team, but she is 'victim-blamed' as it is implied that she brought it upon herself, just like Izzy who was sexually harassed by an airline CEO, and Hetty who was sixteen when the Catholic cardinal took risqué photographs of her, and Barbs who was a talented swimmer who spoke out about the sports massages "on the coach's hotel bed" (Wood 2015, 64). Maitlynd was "the school principal's 'head girl'," and Rhiannon the "gamer girl" was "the wanking mascot for every nasty little gamer" (Wood 2015, 55). Then there is Verla who believed her married lover cared for her, but eventually realised she is just as abandoned as the other women, as well as poor cruise-ship Lydia, and Leandra from the Army, and 'Asian Joy' who was a talented young singer from a popular reality television show. Tellingly, in all of these women's lives, it is the closest people to them, sometimes even their own loved ones, who conspired to 'get rid' of them, to silence them, and to instead protect their abusers. Sent away for their 'crimes', the women are being held captive in their rural prison by three unstable wardens named Boncer, Teddy and Nancy, on the orders of a mystery corporation called Hardings International. The dilapidated buildings in the novel indicate that the prison is an abandoned outback station, and the women are trapped there by a high electric fence that does not fail, even when the power goes out.

Gothic Australian Women: Then and Now

Australian colonial narratives used the unfamiliarity (to the invading Europeans) of the rural landscape to provoke fear in their readers, often by placing women in harsh and isolated spaces where they were frequently brutalised by partners and subjected to the hardships of a patriarchal society in which they had few rights. Australian author Barbara Baynton (1857-1929) explored these themes in *The Chosen Vessel* (1896) and *Billy Skywonkie* (1902), two short stories that are exemplary of the hardships and fears of women in isolation in the Australian landscape. In these texts, Baynton engages Gothic themes such as isolation, violence, and sexual trauma, which we now consider to be central concerns of Australian Gothic fiction. Although these themes may be a projection of cultural and societal values at that time, they have become recurring motifs of Gothic fiction because, as Donna Heiland suggests:

> Gothic novels are all about patriarchies, and how they function, what threatens them, what keeps them going. And what becomes ever clearer as one reads these novels is that patriarchy is not only the subject of gothic novels, but is itself a gothic structure. Patriarchy inevitably celebrates a male creative power that demands the suppression – and sometimes the outright sacrifice – of women (2008, 10-11).

Little seems to have changed in recent Australian Gothic fiction, and in *The Natural Way of Things* Wood creates a frightening dystopia where women have no rights and no one to fight for them. They are judged without a trial or by a jury of their peers, and are found guilty of not being 'appropriate' silent women, for when they speak about their ordeals, they break an unwritten code from a bygone era. Wood draws on the colonial Gothic traditions of early Australian authors such as Barbara Baynton and Henry Lawson, to create a sense of isolation by separating and trapping the women within a vast and isolated outback prison. The fear of what will happen to them as they wake disorientated on the first day there adds to the women's distress and confusion, and leads to their eventual acceptance of their imprisonment when they realise no one is coming to free them because no one cares what happens to them. The familial bond has been broken and replaced by abandonment and betrayal, for the patriarchy has decided that they are to be forgotten for their 'crimes'.

The ten women in the novel take on the traditional role of the Gothic heroine, with a contemporary twist – they are not innocent virgins afraid of their desires. Yet, they too, like the heroines of old, are trapped by men, unable to flee their prison, while overt sexual threats are directed at them. Kay J. Mussell posits that "passionate women in gothic novels usually fare badly [...]. They become negative role models," since it is sexuality for women that "leads in the novels not only to corruption but also to failure in the very area where it might promise success: attraction of a man" (1975, 85). Mussell first discussed the sexual Gothic woman in the 1970s and yet the same ideology is prevalent in some areas of contemporary society today. Wood replicates the real experiences of women in *The Natural Way of Things,* addressing contemporary

concerns over gender-based abuses prevalent within Australian society; often, victims of sexual assault are blamed for what happened to them (by both men and women), and Wood brutally confronts this normalisation and calls into question why it is still 'acceptable'.

On their first day in prison, the women have their heads shorn and they are given modest, old-fashioned dresses that reflect conservative past times such as the colonial period, when women supposedly 'knew their place' in society; when they did not 'kiss and tell', or go to the media and sue for sexual harassment, or even tell the police, when they knew to keep quiet and not make a fuss. It is revealed that the ten women have been 'handed over' to a security firm called "Hardings International: Dignity & Respect in a Safe & Secure Environment" for their 'crimes' because, the reader is told, that is "what happens when you don't keep your fucking fat slag's mouth shut" (Wood 2015, 46, 47).

The kind of 'crime' that all the women have committed is to have been involved in some sort of sex-related scandal with powerful men. With this premise in place, *The Natural Way of Things* takes the reader on a confronting and terrifying look at the misogynistic oppression of women. At the beginning of the novel, Verla, one of the main protagonists, asks: "'I need to know where I am.' The man replies 'Oh, sweetie. You need to know *what* you are.'" (Wood 2015, 18; italics in original), before he attaches a dog's collar and lead to her. The women within the novel are labelled "the minister's little-travel-tramp, the army-slut, and that-Skype-slut and the yuck-ugly-dog from the cruise ship; they are pig-on-a-spit and big-red-box, moll-number-twelve and bogan-gold-digger-gangbang-slut" (Wood 2015, 47). The real horror, however, is that the stories of the ten women are inspired by real Australian cases, such as that of Dianne Brimble who died on a cruise ship in suspicious circumstances, and the Army Cadet who was entrapped into being unknowingly filmed having sex; just two high profile examples that have had considerable news coverage in the Australian media that gives a telling indication of how women's sexuality can be used against them in today's society. Through her novel, Wood returns to these tragic realities in a confronting and shocking way, ensuring that they are not forgotten.

Fred Botting suggests that it is "commonplace to note how women in gothic fictions are represented as objects of pursuit, imprisonment, [and] violation" (2008, 153). Women are treated particularly harshly in Australian Gothic fiction, and a review of the literature reveals that the roles of women in such narratives have not appeared to have greatly evolved since colonial times. Although Gothic tropes have to some extent remained consistent, Gothic literature has obviously evolved since Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* was first penned, to reflect the societies in which they are written. It is obvious, however, that contemporary writers are frequently returning to a patriarchal playground and women's positioning within the genre often reflects this dominant ideology. Like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* Wood's *The Natural Way of Things* is an extreme representation of a misogynistic and patriarchal society, and Wood has stated it was written in anger at the way women

are often treated and portrayed in the media (Wyndham 2015). The women in the novel are treated as a threat to society; the ideology of a patriarchal society places them in the wrong and protects the men responsible by removing the women from the public eye, which ensures that the men can move forward with their lives. 'Civilised' society does not have to deal with them, they are hidden away so they can no longer disrupt the order of patriarchal society: "The reason for their captivity has a blank clarity; they are hated" (Wood, 2015, 171). They dared to speak up, to say that this is not acceptable, but their voices are silenced, drowned out by louder, stronger, and more powerful male voices.

In the novel, the women are identically dressed in their conservative prison uniform to strip them of their individuality, but it also ensures that they know they are all the same. The clothes itch and scratch their bodies and they are, for all intents and purposes, trapped within another prison of sorts. Just like the women in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* a peaked bonnet obscures their vision, controlling what they see and allowing the wardens to know what they are looking at. Their feet are confined within unyielding leather boots that strip and rub the skin until it bleeds. They are also slowly and systematically degraded by the wardens. Boncer is the most vicious and misogynistic of the three wardens. He seems to relish his role as gaoler and wastes no time in punishing his prisoners. On the first morning, he throws Hetty into the electric fence, kicks Verla in the stomach, and breaks Barbs' jaw. He lashes out with his stick and instils fear in the women through violence and the threat of violent acts. Teddy is portrayed as a hippy, he has dreadlocks, and he practices yoga. He serves as a sympathetic foil to Boncer, but he is revealed to be just as misogynistic, and he spends much of his time discussing the many faults of his ex-girlfriend Hannah. The third warden is a woman named Nancy, and she is presented as a pitiful figure with mental health problems who plays dress-up in a nurse's outfit, complete with stethoscope, hat, and cape. Despite the outfit, Nancy does not have the sympathetic personality of a nurse, or the medical knowledge, and she is uncaring and incapable of helping the women when they are sick. Unable to cope with the isolation and the abandonment, Nancy eventually turns to the pills in the medical supplies for comfort, "emerging now and then to scurry and scavenge, red-eyed, drifting, rambling" (Wood 2015, 175). Nancy, then, is just as oppressed and imprisoned as the women, but she is unaware of her situation. She lusts after Boncer, however, he has no interest in her and finds her pathetic.

The wardens are of a similar age to the women they control, yet, they have adapted quickly to their roles. Their perceived power over the women contributes to their belief in their superiority; they are, after all, paid to be there. However, they soon find themselves in the same position as the women when they are abandoned by their employers, and quickly realise that they too are also imprisoned. There is no escape for warden or prisoner alike, the electric fence keeps them all captive. It is telling that Hardings do not return to the enclosure until the food has long gone, indicating that the goal was to have no survivors. Even the wardens are dispensable, their lives are of no consequence to a big corporation.

Australian Gothic Landscapes

Women in Australian Gothic literature are frequently abandoned, murdered, and left to the mercy of their male counterparts. Similarly, the landscape appears as malevolent, proves difficult to control, and represents a hostile and threatening place for all strangers to it. The landscape in Wood's novel is particularly frightening because it is so alien to the women for they have no inclination as to where they are, and the outback world is strange and not at all familiar for them. When Verla is taken outside on the first morning, she tries to see everything around her to figure out where she is. However, what she sees does not help her:

> Outback is the first word that comes to her. Then rubbish tip. There are a few faded colourless fibro buildings, jagged black holes punched here and there in the panels. Roofs of mottled grey tin; crooked, hanging gutters. Narrow black slots of windows, paint peeling from frames. There are piles of corrugated-iron sheets and rotting timber, and old petrol drums on their sides. Tangles of wire. There is a rusted tractor, a jumble of metal pipes and prongs with dead white grass spiking through the gaps. No trees (Wood 2015, 19).

This desolate Gothic environment has been abandoned by civilisation and offers a sense of threat in its decay. The kennels they are locked up in at night represent dungeons. Rusting tangles of wire and old carcases of machinery provide hiding spaces for snakes and spiders. What Verla sees offers no clues to her location; however, it does indicate an abandoned homestead, somewhere isolated and separate from society. Just how isolated becomes obvious when they are later forced to march for over two hours. An electric fence imprisons them too, like castle walls imprisoned traditional Gothic heroines.

Sherri Chinen Biesen observes that "strong, intrepid Gothic heroines struggled with more contemporary forms of domestic imprisonment, as earlier Gothic oppressions were updated to depict modern settings and the problems that twentieth-century [...] women experienced" (2016, 49). This theme of female oppression and exploitation is prominent throughout Wood's contemporary novel, reflecting society's preoccupation with female sexuality and the desire to control it. Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace suggest that the Gothic is "a vehicle through which the interrogation of [...] so-called 'normal' values is made possible" (2004, 6). People are bombarded daily with images of sexualised women being used to sell things, yet the media does not see the irony of discussing women's body size, relationships, or clothes choices on the page opposite. *The Natural Way of Things* reflects on the dark side of contemporary society, one in which women are threatened sexually online by people hidden behind the safety of a keyboard, and Wood reminds us that female sexuality, and the bullying attempt to control it, is still a dangerous part of our lives. As Steven Bruhm states, the Gothic "has always been a barometer of the anxieties plaguing a certain culture at a particular moment in

history" (2003, 260). Accordingly, Gothic narratives often generate feelings of unease and Wood uses the genre in this way to explore her worries about contemporary Australian society through the women of *The Natural Way of Things*.

In the novel, there is the ever-present sexual threat posed by Boncer and Teddy, and although they are paid a 'bonus' not to touch the women, as the months pass and contact is lost with Hardings, they soon start to view the women as sexual objects, and talk aloud about which one they would have sex with: "Who wants sloppy seconds anyway? You'd feel sort of soiled after, he says, and Boncer, after a pause agrees. Definite sluts. [...] But if you did, which one would you?" (Wood 2015, 58). The women know it is only a matter of time before Boncer and Teddy start to rape them. Yolanda is high on Boncer's list, but she becomes stronger as the novel progresses and belittles him when he tries to force her to her knees to perform oral sex. In the end, it is Hetty who offers herself up sexually to Boncer. Her submission comes at a high cost, both to her personally and to the group. In becoming Boncer's sexual property, she gains a higher place in their newly formed society. However, she appears to forget that she is still being used, even as she dresses in the other women's confiscated clothes. The women soon vilify her, saying things like: "'She brought it on herself [...] They silently spit her name, call her a stupid slut for giving herself up. She made her bed" (Wood 2015, 213). The women, who, just like Hetty, have all been degraded, humiliated and discarded like rubbish, appear to have no empathy for Hetty. Despite their own treatment, they still perpetuate society's invisible rules by acting in a way that contributes to their own oppression by patriarchal systems of control deeply embedded in their psyche. Hetty is shamed by the others for being a slut, even though it is obvious she is unsure about sexually submitting to Boncer. Yet, no one targets him or abuses him for taking advantage of Hetty (even in private). The double standards of a patriarchal society still prevail, even in such extenuating circumstances. Wood is not naïve and knows women can be among the culprits when it comes to abusing and shaming each other, and while the reader may believe that the women in the novel would, or should, bond over their common ordeal, Wood shows us society is not like that and *The Natural Way of Things* becomes a narrative about the 'survival of the fittest'.

When she agrees to sacrifice herself to Boncer, Hetty effectively alienates herself from the other women. This occurs not only because she agrees to have sexual relations with their gaoler, but also because of the demands that she makes on the rest of the group as payment for doing so. Her conditions include less work, more food, the best boots and tunic, and most importantly, a doll:

> "Barbs speaks first, in disbelief. "What, to play with?"
> "Yes."
> "Like a baby," says Rhiannon, baffled.
> "Yes. A doll. Or I won't do it" (Wood 2015, 205).

In one night, Yolanda and Verla create a doll for Hetty out of rabbit skins and rags, stuffed with an old pillow, grasses, and socks, stitched together with rabbit sinew. This doll was not created to cause pain like a voodoo doll, but instead it resembles a larger version of a worry doll, one which absorbs their tears, pain, and suffering. It literally embodies them, their grief, their hair, and their dreams of perhaps one day becoming mothers. This faceless Frankenstein's-monster-like-doll, complete with rotting rabbit foetus sewn inside its body, symbolises how society views these women and their wombs. They are outwardly seen as abominations, like the doll, for Hardings have taken everything from them and there is no redemption; even if they are freed, they will always be known by their labels.

Yolanda is viewed as being abject by Boncer, in that she is simultaneously desirable and repulsive to him. At one point, he tries to force her to her knees, to perform oral sex, but she refuses and threatens to kill him, signifying the dominant role has been reversed and Yolanda has taken her power back: "She smiled and knew he was afraid when he grabbed at his thrusting crotch, yelled out, *needs this lot in her mouth, permanently, and stitched up*" (Wood 2015, 159; italics in original). This doubling confuses Boncer, he desires Yolanda and yet he is disgusted by her. The natural occurrence of menstruation is also looked upon in horror, by the women who are forced to use rags to absorb their menstrual blood, and the men who "sneer down at them, laughing, hands over their noses and mouths, calling out, *Ugh, pigs, shark bait, raw steak. Ah, gross — look out, it's wounded clam*" (Wood 2015, 121; italics in original). Women are the 'other', they bleed each month from their vagina, an orifice that the men in the novel try to control, but are unable to do so. Barbara Creed argues that a "woman's womb is a site of terror because it bleeds; it is the blood which flows from the inside to the outside of a woman's body that is viewed as abject" (1993, 66). The prison does not cater for menstruation, there is nowhere for the women to wash and they are not provided with sanitary supplies. They are degraded by the smell, the constant washing of blood-soaked rags in dirty water, the leaking, the chaffing, and the horror of monthly blood once so easily controlled. Menstruation was merely an inconvenience when they were free, but now it is "worse than anything, the beatings or the hunger, the infections or insults" (Wood 2015, 120). When Yolanda is sent to search through the shed for food she finds a box. Inside is a treasure trove of medical supplies so badly needed, but never used and "At the very bottom of the box was something Yolanda recognised from long, long ago. So small and domestic and ordinary she began to cry. It was the shiny plastic packaging of sanitary napkins" (Wood 2015, 120). It is this final humiliation that almost breaks Yolanda, however, the rage she feels about the warden Nancy's neglect of them as fellow women is more powerful.

The prison in *The Natural Way of Things* is constructed by men to hold the ten women captive and is used to silence the women by removing them from society. Wood stated that she was inspired by a radio documentary she heard about the Hay Institution for Girls, a brutal prison in rural New South Wales, where ten teenage girls were drugged and taken to from the Parramatta Girls' Home in the 1960s (The Stella

Interview, 2016). One of the reasons many of the girls were in the Parramatta and Hay homes was that they had been sexually assaulted – at home, or elsewhere, and had told someone about it. It was this act of speaking out about what had happened to them that caused many of them sent there; they were deemed to be promiscuous and in 'moral danger'. As Wood explains in an interview, this is what seemed to be the worst thing to her about their stories, that their 'crime' was that they had spoken up about being abused, and punished for it (Ibid).

The outback prison Wood creates in *The Natural Way of Things* protects the abusers and punishes the victims. Within the electric fence, the women must pay for their supposed crime by doing meaningless manual labour tasks under the hot Australian sun. They are trapped like animals in a slaughterhouse and locked up like uncared for dogs at night, unaware of where they are or why they are there. The women find themselves in an unfamiliar space, uprooted from everything they know in a strange and frightening environment. Fred Botting suggests that "Gothic landscapes are desolate, alienating and full of menace" (1996, 2) and the landscape in the novel is originally like this, but only because it is viewed from an outsider's eyes. It is a Western construction that views the Australian landscape as a frightening place that should be feared because it is unknown. As Ken Gelder suggests,

> The "weirdness" of the Australian bush becomes a commonplace evocation for the Australian Gothic, a way of expressing the landscape's capacity for generating darker colonial sensibilities amongst settlers, such as melancholy, anxiety, and dread (2012, 384).

This 'weirdness' is replicated in Wood's contemporary novel, since the women have no knowledge of the land and do not realise the potential it possesses; however, as the women evolve, we witness their understanding of the land blossom. The land begins as a strange space, an isolated landscape, with nothing but flies and dirt. It is valueless like the women, an abandoned outback station with a decaying house of secrets, perfect for holding the women captive:

> In this hard sunlight with no trees nearby, the low-hung buildings—one, two, three that she can see plus the one they have come from—offer no shade. There is a grassy dirt track, trailing off into the white haze beyond the buildings. [...] It cannot be the outback, where Verla has ever been. The outback is supposed to have red earth. This earth beneath her boots is not red. You could not even call it earth; just threadbare ground, grey gravel, dust (Wood 2015, 20).

In the novel's setting, Wood shows how it is possible to hide people in the vast open landscape of Australia and remove their human rights. Entrapment is a frequent horror device of the Gothic, and there is no way out of the women's isolated outback prison, for even if there were a means of escape, where would they go, and in which direction?

It is this sense of there being no escape that contributes to the claustrophobic psychology of Gothic space in *The Natural Way of Things*.

> The land, which she first thought so flat is in fact a wide shallow dish. [...] they are climbing now, towards the trickle of scrub and bush creeping down the ridge to their left—with the sun so high it's impossible to tell if it is east or west or what. But apart from this surging tide of bush, the bowl of land seems scraped and bare (Wood 2015, 33).

However, when the rain eventually comes, the bowl of bare land is transformed. At this time, when food has run out and they are all likely to starve, Wood establishes the women's true characters and we witness them adjust to their new positions in their make-shift society. Yolanda discovers the bounty within the electric fence and she becomes the hunter and provider for the group. Verla soon joins her and becomes a gatherer, obsessed with her mushroom collection. Barbs becomes a nurturer, keeping daily vigil at the stove while stirring her big pot of rabbit stew. The land originally thought to be barren and worthless, sustains them when there is nothing left to eat. Yolanda does not try to tame or control the land; instead, she becomes one with it and is empowered by her newfound skills and knowledge. She has saved the group from certain starvation, for "without her traps, they would all have perished by now" (Wood 2015, 172). She becomes part of the landscape and is absorbed by the land, dressing in the fur of the rabbits she traps, and acts like them as she moves effortlessly through the scrub:

> Something moved among them, between them, with this new strange Yolanda, this *hunter*. Delivering bloody flesh to them, bringing warm fur in from the fields. They folded their arms at her in fearful wondering, in hope (Wood 2015, 163; italics in original).

Yolanda's transformation is dramatic, and she is described as if she has found within her "some primitive strength mounting as she scrubbed and stretched, as she marched the paddocks and set and sprang the traps" (Wood 2015, 193). Wood continues:

> It was a vigour to do with the air, and the earth. Animal blood and guts, the moon and the season. It was beyond her named self, beyond girl, or female. Beyond human, even. It was to do with the muscle sliding around bone, to do with animal speed and scent and bloody heartbeat and breath. [...] She was becoming invisible (ibid, 193).

Yet, this 'primitive' self is precisely what enables her to become stronger. This transformation of both land and Yolanda is like a rebirth, a new beginning for both. The representation of the land becomes almost idyllic, after the rain has fallen, yet Yolanda seems to become more untamed and wild:

> The dust bowl around the dam has sprouted and a sheen of acid green has appeared over the ground like an algal slick. But it has stayed, and grown, and now it is there, thick green grass covering the whole bowl of the valley (Wood 2015, 134).

It becomes a land of plenty, providing the group with food, such as rabbit and kangaroo. Within the idyllic setting lie Yolanda's grotesque rabbit traps, symbolising the women's past and present lives, since it must be remembered that this landscape is still a prison surrounded by an electric fence.

As autumn, and their second season of entrapment progresses, one of the women wonders what is happening in the outside world. She questions if people know they were missing and even wonders whether the ABC would make a show about them:

> Would it be said they were abandoned or taken the way people said a girl was attacked, a woman was raped, this femaleness always at the centre, as if womanhood itself was the cause of these things? As if the girls somehow, through the natural way of things, did it to themselves. They lured abduction and abandonment to themselves, they marshalled themselves into this prison where they had made their beds, and now, once more, were lying in them (Wood 2015, 176).

Women in Gothic literature are often marginalised and held responsible for their predicament. The women in *The Natural Way of Things* are condemned by their peers and family for their sexuality and Wood exaggerates the societal stereotype that sex in marriage is the only acceptable union and anything outside of this is forbidden – but only if you are a female.

The Natural Way of Things explores female identity and sexuality, Wood reveals to the reader who the women really are by stripping them back and giving them nothing in return. As the months pass, readers witness how this perpetual environment of fear and violence affects the women. Some, like Yolanda and Verla become much stronger physically and mentally, while others, like Leandra and Rhiannon, descend into madness to escape their situations. *The Natural Way of Things* is a journey of self-discovery but there is no redemption offered in the novel, and no satisfactory conclusion; instead, we are left to wonder the mysterious fate of all the women. The novel concludes when the twenty-first century knight in shining armour, a male bus driver, arrives at the prison, and the women fall on his gifts with wonder and joy:

> A man—shaven, fatherly in a clean blue uniform—steps down, calling out to them. 'Hello, ladies, how are you this afternoon?' He is so unmarked, so clean, has come from a land so far away (Wood 2015, 301).

The women are so mesmerised by him and the bounty of chocolate and toiletries in the bag that they do not consider what will happen to them when they leave the prison. Instead, they look at Yolanda in disgust and imagine how she will fit back into society. She is likened to a feral animal and wears "stinking bloody skins, eating with her blackened hands, ripping meat from bone. Who would want that, back in the world?" (Wood 2015, 298). What they do not appear to realise is that they will not be wanted either. They trust the clean man in the yellow coach, blinded by the gifts and the soft seats, and by the prospect of the happy ending that they long for. Rather than freedom, however, the reader suspects something worse than even their imprisonment is in store for the women. As Rosemary Jackson suggests, the Gothic quest "is twisted into a circular journey to nowhere, ending in the same darkness with which it opened" (2002, 101). Despite this, there is a glimpse of hope with the possibility of escape for Yolanda and Verla. Refusing to get on the bus, the reader hopes that Yolanda makes it through the gates of the electric fence before it shuts, and the women band together in a show of solidarity against the bus driver when Verla, suspecting what is to come, demands to be let off. The ambiguity of the ending results in more questions than answers, but one thing is certain, there will be no redemption, no welcome return to the society that rejected these women. In fact, the ending suggests that there are only two options available to women, to live on the edge of society out of sight, or to conform to the rules of a patriarchal society. Unfortunately, it is obvious the women on the bus have not understood why they were imprisoned and one can only wonder what horrors are in store for them.

Gothic literature frequently explores confronting and taboo subject matter and *The Natural Way of Things* is no exception. Charlotte Wood's novel is a disturbing and thought-provoking delve into the rules of a patriarchal society that continues to treat women poorly, and one in which women themselves participate. Drawing on a number of well publicised incidents where women have been shamed, punished, and even murdered for their perceived sexual transgressions, Wood's novel is an eviscerating exploration of the ways in which femininity is viewed in contemporary Australian culture. Using well established Australian Gothic tropes, her protagonists are physically and psychologically tormented, isolated, and trapped in a landscape that eventually reduces some of them to madness. If any consolation in the novel can be found, it is in the love that develops between Yolanda and Verla, and the courage they display in refusing to 'learn their lesson'.

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Blood and Soil in The Vampire Diaries

ABSTRACT

The third season of The Vampire Diaries *introduces the story of the "Originals", a family who came to North America with Vikings in the eleventh century and became vampires as a way to protect themselves against 'native werewolves'. This mythology draws on the legend of Vinland, a paradise supposedly settled by Vikings in North America and recounted in thirteenth-century saga of the same name. The Vinland story has been used since the nineteenth century to legitimate white nationalism in North America. Further, medievalism more generally permeates both vampire narrative and the mythology of the 'Old South' so important to the fictional Mystic Falls where* The Vampire Diaries *is set. Focusing primarily on season three of* The Vampire Diaries, *I argue that the series' emphasis on a Nordic origin for its "Original" vampires, combined with obfuscation of the history and legacy of slavery and racism in the United States, results in a narrative that ultimately, if inadvertently, legitimates white nationalist claims.*

Keywords: *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Originals*, Vinland, Medievalism, Race

In "Bad Moon Rising", the third episode of the second season of *The Vampire Diaries'* (2009-2017), Tyler Lockwood (Michael Trevino) asks his mother, Carol (Susan Walters), about a cellar hidden on the grounds of their estate:

> Tyler: Have you ever been down to those old ruins in the woods?
> Carol: The old Lockwood estate?
> Tyler: Yeah. What do you know about it?
> Carol: It was the original plantation house. Beautiful antebellum architecture and if it hadn't burnt to the ground we'd probably be living in it.
> Tyler: What's the deal with the freaky underground cellar?
> Carol: We don't talk about those kind of rooms.
> Tyler: Why not?
> Carol: Well, this *is* the South, honey, but no one likes to reminisce about the old slave days.

Carol Lockwood's selective memory reflects the approach to history in *The Vampire Diaries* franchise more generally. In *The Vampire Diaries*, the personal and family histories of the characters carry enormous importance and characters participate in seemingly endless dances, balls, and other events commemorating the town's past. However, the fictional history of Mystic Falls, the town in which the series is set, intersects with actual history in a manner that parallels Carol's selective and occluding perspective on the "old slave days", for the history of early settlement, plantation slavery, and the legacy of enduring racism in the United States are equally obscured. Season three, however, introduces alternative American history, based on the story of the fabled Vinland Viking settlement. This article will examine the third season of *The Vampire Diaries,* specifically the show's depiction of a Nordic origin for the "Original" vampires. Nina Auerbach has shown us that "every age embraces the vampire it needs, and gets the vampire it deserves" (1995, 145). What does it mean that the vampires of *The Vampire Diaries*, which garnered millions of viewers, celebrates vampires whose origin story derives from a history that has been long intertwined with white nationalism? Writing of the figure of the vampire after 9/11, Lorna Piatti-Farnell suggests that:

> the contemporary vampire—entangled as it is with metaphors of blood, persecution and supremacy—can be read as an allegory for the preoccupations with conflict, war and strife which have become a recurrent presence of political frameworks in the U.S. (2014, 154).

As *The Vampire Diaries* completed its eight-season run in March 2017, the political framework of the U.S. seemed to undergo a seismic shift. Some on the right wing of American politics refer to the political climate of the United States after the 2016 presidential election as a "cold civil war" (Wilson, 2017). The "recurrent presence" of "conflict, war and strife" might, however, be more aptly described as a continual one

that dates back to even before the founding of the United States. *The Vampire Diaries*, a teen supernatural melodrama, is seemingly completely divorced from politics, but its refusal to deal with the difficult histories it invokes is emblematic of contemporary political debates in the U.S. over history, memory, and identity.

Critics such as Dale Hudson and Evangelia Kindinger have already begun to unravel the complicated ways that *The Vampire Diaries* appropriates U.S. history and how the show, in presenting what looks like a post-racial world, actually re-inscribes familiar racial dynamics onto a manicured Southern Gothic. Less explored is the show's use of the reputed Viking settlements in North America as the basis for the 'mythology' of the Original vampires, whose origin story figures prominently in season three of *The Vampire Diaries*, and which inspired a spinoff series, *The Originals* (2013-). In season three, Elena (Nina Dobrev), the Salvatore Brothers, Stefan and Damon (Paul Wesley and Ian Somerhalder), other young members of the Founding families, and their close friends are given an alternate history lesson about their own town as they unravel the secret of the origin of the "Original" vampires. Elena's personal story shapes the main narrative arc of season three. The season opens as she celebrates her eighteenth birthday and begins her senior year, and ends with her death and rebirth as a vampire. Season three centres on family, on bloodline, and on the personal sacrifice required to protect them.

These themes also dominate the origin story of the Originals as eleventh-century Viking settlers. After fleeing plague in Europe, they attempted to live peacefully among the 'natives' until the threat of the area's indigenous population of werewolves drove them to become vampires as a form of self-preservation. This narrative of conflict between Vikings and Native Americans borrows from that of the so-called Vinland narratives, thirteenth-century Norse sagas that describe a failed settlement in a fabled North American paradise. The Vinland sagas seem to have some factual basis, as evidenced by remains at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada (Jakobsson 2012, 502). More significant, however, has been how the sagas were harnessed for use into a broader political mythology. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Vinland legend was used to legitimate white settlement in North America. Recently, Vinland has been used to justify white nationalism and violence carried out in its name, as evidenced by the murders that took place in Portland, Oregon in May 2017 (Perry 2017). Similarly, the medievalisms of white supremacists in Charlottesville in the events of August 2017 also draw upon a vision of a "white Middle Ages" to justify a historiography that supports white nationalism (Ulaby 2017).

The Vikings and U.S. Medievalisms

Anglophones became familiar with the stories of medieval Nordic exploration and settlement in North American in the nineteenth century, through Carl Christian Rafn's 1837 work, *Antiquitates Americanae*, which presented English summaries and background information on two thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas, *Grænlendinga saga*

[The Saga of the Greenlanders] and *Eiríks saga rauða* [The Saga of Erik the Red], which came to be known as the "Vinland sagas" (G. Barnes 2011, 141). Some nineteenth-century Americans read these family sagas of Norse settlement as evidence of a proto-Protestant "discovery" of America prior to that of the "Roman" Columbus (G. Barnes 2011, 144). Numerous artefacts believed to be Viking in origin were celebrated in nineteenth-century New England, which yielded "discoveries" such as the Newport tower, a seventeenth-century Rhode Island structure misidentified as from the eleventh (G. Barnes 2011, 145). While James Russell Lowell, author of the poem "The Voyage to Vinland" (1868), poked fun at contemporary archaeologists claims about runic inscriptions in North America, he considered "the Vinland voyages as fundamental to the myth of national foundation" (G. Barnes 2001, 128). Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Skeleton at Arms" (1841) was inspired by discovered remains purported to be Viking, but most likely Native American (G. Barnes 2011, 145). In 1877, a monument to Lief Eiriksson was erected in Boston, where some, notably Thomas Gold Appleton, a relation of Longfellow's, believed that he had landed. Appleton believed explicitly in the Vinland narrative as a justification of "manifest destiny" (Headley 2003, 42). As Appleton wrote in an 1871 essay arguing for the monument's erection, "How the vines of Vinland must have stooped to be plucked by the race, brothers to that one which should later sit under their pleasant branches" (ibid, 318). As Andrew Marvell did in his seventeenth-century lyric, "Bermudas," Appleton imagines "New World" territory offering itself providentially to white settlers with no mention of any other human claims or labour. In all of these representations of the Vikings' settlement, European settlement is depicted as divinely anointed.

Ottilie Adeline Liljencrantz's 1906 *Randvar the Songsmith*, which features a villainous werewolf, was the first to create a complete fictional account of the Vinland story, using racialized depictions of superior Scandinavians and animalized, vicious "Skraellings," the word used in the medieval sagas to describe the Native Americans encountered by Norse voyagers (Liljencrantz 1906; G. Barnes 2011, 148). Such representations were soon transferred to the screen, led by the first U.S. film depiction of Leif Eiriksson in *The Viking* (1928), directed by R. William Neill, which includes footage of the Newport Tower (Harty 2011, 109). Likewise, in Minnesota, the legend of the Kensington Runestone, a stone with runic inscriptions that experts have determined is a forgery, records in runes a story of Northern Europeans under attack by Native Americans. First emerging in 1898, the legend continues to generate controversy to this day (Krueger 2015). One can thus discern traces of these nineteenth-century medievalisms in the current renewal of a "fascination with the North" in U.S. popular culture. From Disney's Frozen (2013) to the Free Folk of Westeros in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011-) as well as the television drama, *Vikings* (2013) Nordic fantasy has experienced a resurgence on the screen in recent years (see Truitt). Vikings also appear prominently in video games such as *Skyrim*. Victoria Cooper argues that popular culture fantasies such as that presented in *Skyrim* are "mobilised to maintain ideas of white, Western supremacy as pre-written by 'history,' particularly by far-right groups" (2016, 166).

Scholars, journalists, and activists have turned increasing attention to right-wing extremists as they have become more prominent and attempted to be more acceptable to the political mainstream following the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency. In addition to public marches and demonstrations, these white supremacist groups have drawn on medievalisms to create what they see as symbolism more acceptable to mainstream politics than symbols such as the swastika. The "Othala rune" was appropriated by the National Socialist regime in Germany, who distorted its original meaning to have it signify *Blut und Boden* [Blood and Soil] (M. Barnes 2015, 194). The National Socialists of America adopted the Othala rune as a substitute for the swastika in November 2016 as a way to bring the party into the "mainstream" (Tiefenthäler and Reneau 2017). Other groups, like the racist neo-pagan "Wolves of Vinland" adorn buildings and clothing with runic script in ways that recall its use by National Socialists (Woodruff 2015; Gardell 2014, 383; Perry, 2017; Mountfort 2015).[1]

The white nationalist appropriations of the cultures of medieval northern Europe, what Karl Steel aptly dubs "bad heritage", echo nineteenth-century uses of the Vinland legend. At the centre of these narratives is a portrayal of medieval white settlers as persecuted and wronged. Writing of the recent Danish film *Valhalla Rising* (2009), Steel argues, "we are made to hear that white America had always belonged, that it has always been embattled, and that its expansion into North America was nothing but the return of what had, in a historical sense, already been here" (2018, 79). This understanding of the Vinland Vikings as "original" settlers who were dispossessed of their land legitimates white nationalism, which is a narrative that echoes with the "Original" vampire myth.

Public statements by *The Vampire Diaries* creator Julie Plec, as well as the casting of actors of colour in important roles, such as Kat Graham as Bonnie Bennett or Charles Michael Davis as Marcel Gerard, might lead one to think that *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals* would have nothing to do with revanchist medievalisms that legitimate white nationalism.[2] The shows' plotlines and 'mythology', nevertheless, tell a much different story and, however unintentionally, end up supporting the narrative of Viking victimhood and its accompanying affirmation of white nationalist claims to North American territory. Before examining how the story of the Originals in *The Vampire Diaries* provides a reinforcement of the claims of domination of land by white settlers, this article will briefly address how medievalism and vampire narrative

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[1] Thanks to Katie Walkiewicz for advice on the sources included here. For examples of the ways in which the "Wolves of Vinland" have made use of these images, see their Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/p/BYWs6KXhWKv/?hl=en&tagged=wolvesofvinland

[2] See for example, Julie Plec (@julieplec), series of tweets beginning "Dear @realDonaldTrump, thank you. In just eight months you have taught me a valuable lesson. It is not a lesson taught by my parents (1/5)" on August 12, 2017 at 4:21 PM: https://twitter.com/julieplec/status/896511881178775552

intersect, and how Viking-inspired medievalisms have found a place in contemporary Southern Gothic.

Vampire Medievalisms

Medievalism has played a role in vampire fiction since its beginnings. Visions of the Middle Ages inflect Raupach's Märchen-like "Laßt die Todten Ruhen" ("Wake Not the Dead" 1823), haunt the castle ruins in von Wachsmann's "Der Fremde," ("The Mysterious Stranger, 1847) and course through the ancient lineage of the Karstein family in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). These latter two tales influenced Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which innovates vampire medievalisms by structuring the novel around a tension between the medieval and the modern. Stacey Abbott asserts that rather than simply establishing a structural opposition between medieval and modern, Stoker instead "emphasizes the ambiguous distinction between the two" (Abbot 2007, 16). Dracula, who comes from an ancient time, attempts to use modern means to conquer; yet the Crew of Light use a combination of modern methods and medieval beliefs, as represented through the role of Christian faith in the novel, to defeat him.

With the exception of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' little-known 1885 short story "Manor," set in the Faroe Islands, Western nineteenth-century vampiric medievalisms primarily look east rather than north. While as we will see below, Dracula does claim Nordic ancestors, his home in the Carpathian Mountains and descriptions of his physiognomy tie him to Eastern Europe. He does, however, claim Viking Berserkers among his ancestors. The Viking vampires of *The Vampire Diaries* and Eric Northman (Alexander Skarsgård) of HBO's *True Blood* (2008-14) are not complete anomalies in vampire narrative tradition, nor, as we will see, within these series' Southern Gothic settings.

However, the Originals and Eric Northman, instead of relying primarily upon the brutal image of the marauding Berserker, also draw upon a nineteenth-century medievalist vision of chivalry connected to the mythology of the Old South. This mythology influenced Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, clearly a source both for *The Vampire Diaries* and Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries* upon which *True Blood* is based. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese exhaustively outline in *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholder's Worldview*, Southern slave holders created their own 'mythology' of themselves as a noble class by drawings upon medievalisms such as those of Sir Walter Scott, and of this Southern master class, they write:

> They knew that the medieval world was not—never could be—theirs. But they determined to preserve its most admirable features as they fought to build a bulwark against the morally corrosive features of the modernity that was breaking upon them (2005, 328).

This tension between the medieval and modern in the Southern slaveholder worldview is the same dynamic that Abbott has shown to be animating *Dracula*, the most influential of vampire narratives (2007, 16). For as Mary Hallab argues, vampires, "[a]s living dead…stand for both the loss of all that is past and its paradoxical aliveness in the present" (2009, 43). For vampires in Southern Gothic narratives, the struggle between past and present will always be enmeshed in questions of race. In *True Blood,* for example, for Eric Northman's romantic rival, vampire Bill Compton (Stephen Moyer), the connection to Southern history is direct. Bill was a Confederate soldier and from a family that had owned slaves. While Eric's Viking origins place him outside of antebellum history, his sometimes solicitous and patronizing care for Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin) has more in common with "the Chivalry" described by Fox-Genovese and Genovese than with Viking narrative. Both of Sookie's suitors display characteristics of the "gentleman" and it is this chivalric component that gives them an allure despite their violent sides. So too, *The Vampire Diaries*' Original vampire Elijah's obsession with keeping his word broadcasts a type of chivalry that resonates more closely with medievalism than with actual medieval texts (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2005, 307).

Building upon work by Amador, Cherry, and Bridgeman, Katherine Austin explores what kind of cultural work the "sympathetic Southern vampire" might be doing and argues for the emergence of the Southern Gothic vampire as a means to "address varied constructions of regional, collective guilt" (2015, 18; 43). She notes, however, that they can "perform important cultural work in acknowledging past wrongs, [but] they fail to demonstrate the need to take certain action in order to atone for those wrongs" (2015, 44). Because *The Vampire Diaries* fails to address the history of slavery and its continued impact through institutionalized racism, the show does very little "cultural work in acknowledging past wrongs". On the contrary, by injecting the Vinland myth into the *The Vampire Diaries* world the shows' creators, inadvertently perhaps, create a vampire mythology that justifies and legitimates white nationalism. This narrative of legitimation is aided by *The Vampire Diaries*'s eclectic and haphazard engagement with the historical record. A key character, witch Bonnie Bennett (Kat Graham), has ancestry reaching back to the infamous Salem Witch trials and key moments in her family's story date to the Civil War. Her ancestor, witch Emily Bennett (Bianca Lawson), is depicted as the "hand maiden" of the vampire Katherine (Nina Dobrev), despite the fact that an African-American woman living at the time in Virginia was far more likely to have been a slave (Jeanna 2015). The Civil War is also when Katherine turns the Salvatore brothers, Stefan and Damon, into vampires.

In the novels by L.J. Smith on which the series is based, the Salvatores were born in Renaissance Italy and eventually came to live in Virginia. In the television series, they, along with the Lockwoods and the family of the present-day young woman they fall in love with, Elena Gilbert, are among the "Founding Families" of Mystic Falls. The town's struggles against vampires become intertwined with or even replace those of the Civil War. A fictional battle at Willow Creek was the opportunity for the town's Founding Families to trap and immolate vampires in a church, as

fictional events supersede actual ones. The specificities and controversies of regional history are so far obscured, in fact, that the name of the high school that the main characters attend has been altered from Robert E. Lee High School to Mystic Falls High.

The Season of *"The Originals"*

The Vinland story of Viking settlement is introduced in "Smells like Teen Spirit," episode six of the third season of *The Vampire Diaries*, through a scene in a Mystic Falls High School history classroom. The episode brings the series' main characters back to the first class of their senior year. Their teacher, Alaric Saltzman (Matthew Davis), writes the words "AP American History" on the chalkboard as the central characters, Elena, her friend, Caroline Forbes (Candice King), and her boyfriend, Stefan, take their seats. Tension bristles among them because Stefan has returned to a violent vampire lifestyle. Stefan has been forced to team up with the "Original" vampire/werewolf hybrid, Niklaus Mikaelson (Joseph Morgan), because of a pact made in order to save Stefan's brother, Damon. The teen drama dynamic is complicated by the unexpected arrival in the classroom of Klaus's sister, Rebekah (Claire Holt), who strides in just after Alaric has begun class:

> Alaric: Welcome back, seniors. Let's turn our brains back on, starting with this country's original founders...the Native Americans.
> Rebekah: What about the Vikings?
> Alaric: There's no evidence that Viking explorers actually settled in the United States. Who are you?
> Rebekah: My name's Rebekah. I'm new. And history's my favourite subject.

Alaric asserts the primacy of Native Americans as "founders" and Rebekah challenges this assertion explicitly. Alaric shuts down Rebekah's line of questioning about Viking settlement by asserting lack of evidence, but later findings will vindicate her claim. History is Rebekah's "favourite subject" because she has experienced nearly a millennium of it. She and her siblings will come to serve for viewers as 'living proof' of the Vinland legend, which is further authenticated in later episodes through Alaric's discovery of ancient runes hidden in caves beneath the town. In creating the new vampire 'mythology' of "The Originals," the creators of *The Vampire Diaries* link the vampire legend to a "historiographical fantasy" of early white settlement in North America—what Karl Steel has called "bad heritage" (Steel 2018; Feuer 2017 and Tiefenthäler and Reneau 2017).

The archaeological evidence to support Rebekah's claim of primacy appears in the next episode, "Ghost World" (Episode 7). In an underground cave, Alaric discovers "native" pictograms that tell the Originals' story. He also finds runic carvings of the Original siblings' names on the cave walls. In a flashback, Rebekah and Niklaus are shown making these carvings. The caves were one of the places the family used to shelter during full moons, when the "natives" turned into werewolves. The

clan's mother, the "Original witch" Esther Mikaelson (Alice Evans), turned the siblings into vampires after these werewolves killed her youngest child, Henrik (Devon Allowitz). We never learn what motivated the Originals to carve their names in the cave, but the impact of their action is clear: these runes mark the Originals' early presence and claim the place as their own. In episodes seven and eight, after translating the runes, Alaric and his students work together to decipher the cave's pictograms as Elena also coaxes details of the origin story from Rebekah. The Mikaelsons, depicted in flashbacks as living in a village full of other tall blondes dressed in medieval-looking garb, are not simply the Original vampires, but the Original settlers ("The Original Vampires" 2012).

The drawings and carvings "authenticate" the Originals' genesis and their claims to a presence in Mystic Falls that pre-dates that of the "Founding Families" from which many of the main characters, including Elena and the Salvatore brothers, belong. Rebekah, who has come across as aggressive, predatory, and cruel reveals a vulnerable human past. She and her brothers are victims, in this case of intimate loss combined with excessive parental grief and caution. For Julie Plec, who developed *The Vampire Diaries* with Kevin Williamson, and who is listed as sole creator for *The Originals,* the Original family "really is just your average everyday dysfunctional family, so much like all of ours" ("The Original Vampires" 2012). Season three's eighth episode, when much of the Originals' backstory is revealed, is titled "Ordinary People". In a clear allusion to the 1980 film of the same title about the breakdown of an 'ordinary' family, it is made evident in the episode that the one thing these powerful immortals fear, above all else, is their father. Hence, in response to all of the external and internal threats facing their family, it is Klaus, Elijah, and Rebekah who pledge loyalty to one another "always and forever."

The Originals' status as victims of a dysfunctional family is used to explain the havoc that they wreck on others. Their family's desire for safety first justifies their presence as settlers and then as vampires. They seek immortality in order to protect themselves against the perceived threat of the native werewolves. In the tradition of the Vinland myth, the Mikaelsons are depicted as European settlers forced to defend themselves against 'savage natives'. These racial dynamics echo the conflict between the Vikings and the "Skraellings" retold in nineteenth-century imaginings of the Vinland sagas such as the story of the Kensingstone Runestone. The portrayal of natives as primitive werewolves, which Natalie Wilson (2010) has examined in the *Twilight* saga, is taken even further in *The Vampire Diaries,* for the native werewolves are not major characters; their story is referenced primarily through the cave pictograms and given meaning only as it relates to the Originals.

This origin story makes the "Originals" not only the first vampires, but also the oldest surviving family in a town where tradition and heritage dominate civic life. By framing the town's early history within the story of its new first family, *The Vampire Diaries* deploys tropes depicting Native Americans that have long been pervasive in U.S. mythologies of settler colonialism. These include "ghosting," an erasure of Native

American figures that nevertheless leaves them to haunt American Gothic narratives, as well as the figure of the "last descendant," a representation that dates back to early literary apologists such as James Fenimore Cooper. Vampire hunter Rayna Cruz embodies the last descendant figure in season seven of *The Vampire Diaries* (Lush 300; 294).

Klaus is always referred to as a Mikaelson and indeed his appetite for cruelty and revenge makes him the emblematic Mikaelson "Original." As a "hybrid" vampire/werewolf, however, the product of an illicit union between Esther Mikaelson and the werewolf Ansel (Lloyd Owen), Klaus has the potential to complicate the racialized implications of the Vinland allusion. Klaus's biological father, while only mentioned in season three of *The Vampire Diaries* ("Klaus" 2.19 and "Ordinary People"3.8) makes an appearance in season two of *The Originals* ("Wheel Inside the Wheel" 2.6 and "Chasing the Devil's Tail,' 2.7). Various clues in these appearances link Ansel to a stereotypical representation of Native Americans; for example, he is referred to as a "chief" and carries a bow and arrows, and yet by giving Ansel a Northern European name and casting a white English actor to play him, *The Vampire Diaries* eliminates any potential for complicating the racial make-up of the Mikaelson bloodline.

If Native American characters are invisible and silent in *The Vampire Diaries* and then subsequently whitewashed through the character of Ansel in *The Originals*, African-American characters seem to exist mainly to assist the white characters, even when these African-American characters possess great supernatural power. Esther has a mentor in the witch Ayana (Maria Howell), a descendant of Qetsiyah, an ancient witch of Mediterranean origins, who created the first immortality spell millennia ago. Ayana is played by an African-American actress and her clothing and the cowrie shells in her hair distinguish her from the medieval European-style clothing worn by the Mikaelsons and others in their settlement. How Ayana came to know Esther is unclear, but it was she who told Esther about the Mystic Falls area, where her own bloodline endures through the Bennett witches. As with Ansel, Ayana not only lacks an origin story, but also, despite her link to the Bennetts, a family name. These shared characteristics—the lack of an origin story and of a family name directly contribute to the problematic representation of these characters as both primal and primitive.

The Vampire Diaries' treatment of African-American characters such as Ayana and her descendant Bonnie Bennett has been the subject of much discussion among critics and fans. As Janani Subramanian and Jorie Lagerwey have argued:

> the mere presence of Bonnie and her black witch ancestors, as well as the presence of black actresses among a predominantly white cast, suggest a completely different, racialized disruption of the ways American identity is constructed and envisioned (2016, 194).

While Ayana's refusal to aid Esther in her quest for an immortality spell shows this

ancestral Bennett as a powerful and independent figure, I would argue that Bonnie's place in the narrative is not disruptive, but far closer to the "Black Best Friend archetype" discussed by U. Melissa Anyiwo (2016) in her analysis of the character of Tara (Rutina Wesley) in *True Blood*. Bonnie's needs, desires, and safety are continually (and willingly) sacrificed to aid the interests of her friends (Jeanna 2015; Carter 2017). *The Vampire Diaries* fans noted problems with the depiction of Bonnie and the show's treatment of African-American history, even engaging in online debates with Julie Plec and cast members (Warner 2015, 114-20). As Claudia Gray puts it, "Going back to the Confederacy and pretending it was a place where race didn't matter isn't just fantasy—it's farce" (2010, 43). The show's refusal to confront the historical legacy of racism despite depicting a family of generations of African-American witches, however, ends up reinforcing this legacy.

The insertion of the Vinland myth into *The Vampire Diaries* world extends these dynamics of subordination beyond the characters' personal stories into the realm of the "mythological". Because of the emphasis on the primacy and importance of founding families in *The Vampire Diaries* and the whitewashing of Native American and African American characters, the myth of the Original vampires and their Vinland origins overshadows the stories of families like the Bennetts and subsumes the history of the area's indigenous inhabitants, the group Alaric had initially proclaimed as "this country's original founders" ("Smells like Teen Spirit" 3.6). The early Native American presence, figured as savage werewolf, is provided only to explain the history of the Originals, and the only evidence of 'Natives' telling their own stories, the cave pictograms, depict the story of the indigenous werewolves only as it intersects with the Originals' story. Likewise, the Bennett connection to the famous Salem witches is mentioned, but never further explored. *The Vampire Diaries*' focus on the Founding Families and the Originals ultimately creates a vampire mythology that justifies claims of domination of land by white settlers, just as Ken Gelder has shown occurs in *True Blood* through the depiction of the character Bill Compton as a former Confederate soldier (Gelder 2016, 412). In *The Originals*, this myth will expand into Klaus's extravagant and repeated claim that the Originals "built" the city of New Orleans, a revisionism that elides and diminishes the historic contributions of peoples of colour in a city known for its complex and diverse history (Piatti-Farnell 2017).

The vampires we deserve…

Annette Kolodny concluded her 2012 book on the Viking narrative in the United States by asserting that the sagas of "Norse discovery" no longer play a role in immigration debates because "the nation is now unequivocally multiethnic, multicultural, and interracial" (330). Since the 2016 Presidential elections, however, comparisons between current and historical debates on immigration and issues of race and culture abound in the United States (Tharoor 2018). The political currents that buoyed the Vinland myth's popularity seem to be rising. If then, "every age embraces the vampire it needs, and gets the vampire it deserves" what can we learn by considering the Originals and their origin story (Auerbach 1995)? To answer this question, we need to

not only acknowledge how *The Vampire Diaries*' fantastical historical revisionism whitewashes U.S. history, but also to understand how *The Vampire Diaries* revises important elements of the vampire tradition that reach back at least to Stoker's *Dracula*.

J. Halberstam famously reads *Dracula* as a "technology of monstrosity," that produces "the human" through the discourse of the monstrous. Halberstam's approach reveals how racial discourses inflect *Dracula*, allowing the vampire to be both an "overdetermined" monster that is "open to numerous interpretations" and also to embody a "particular ethnicity" in his "flesh and blood" form (1995, 91-2). Halberstam's reading centres on the anti-Semitic elements in Stoker's portrayal of Dracula and the fears and anxieties they represent. But while the novel ascribes elements of Jewish ethnicity to Dracula, especially through his physiognomy, Dracula himself claims to descend from a "whirlpool of European races" that includes "the Ugric tribe … from Iceland" imbued with the "fighting spirit which Thor and Wodin gave them, which their Berserkers displayed to such fell intent on the seaboards of Europe, ay, and of Asia and Africa too, till the peoples thought the werewolves themselves had come" (Stoker [1897]1997, 33-4). Dracula's Berserker ancestry and his landing at Whitby also help to portray his designs on England as an invasion (Arata 1990; Senf 2016). Mina notes in her journal that Whitby Abbey was "sacked by the Danes," and Whitby's abbey comes to represent the "scars of invasion," even if the still-extant ruins Stoker references are not exclusively the remains of the Danish attack (Stoker [1897] 1997, 63, note 2). Through these details, the novel's chilling depiction of a monstrous Other striking at the heart of a British empire becomes an echo of earlier invasions. *Dracula*'s "technology of monstrosity" draws power from the fear of invasion and conquest. An imperial centre seems threatened by reversion to an earlier time, when it was merely a vulnerable insel.

The Vampire Diaries' Original vampires, however, instead of being repulsive invaders from Eastern Europe, are compellingly attractive creatures from Scandinavia, first motivated not by lust for conquest, but by a desire to save their family. Further, while they seem at first to be outsiders, they are actually founders. *The Vampire Diaries*'s transformation of vampires from destructive invaders into city builders is in keeping with recent trends noted by scholars such as Victoria Nelson and Catherine Spooner. The development of the sympathetic vampire began with figures like Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows* and came to the fore with Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Recently, Nelson has shown, the vampire has ascended from the sympathetic to the godlike, "upgrading" from the "'undead' to 'immortals'" (2012, 125). Spooner notes that in series such as the *Twilight* saga, *True Blood*, or the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* from which *True Blood* derives, vampires are now more representative of order than threat, for they aspire to assimilate: to "be one of us" (ibid, 85), a development traced back to the Byronic vampire, a tradition of which the Salvatores and Mikaelsons are clearly a part.

But who is the "us" that these vampires aspire to be? Halberstam notes of *Dracula* that the vampire "has no voice, he is read and written by all the other characters in the novel" (1995, 91). In *The Vampire Diaries*, by contrast, the vampires never shut up. Indeed, in *The Vampire Diaries*, not only the vampire hunters but also the vampires themselves keep diaries. The Original vampires do not "transform fragments of otherness into one body" (ibid, 92). Instead, their history as founders and settlers serves to write over and write out the histories and voices of Native American and African American characters. As the Mikaelsons are shown to be the original "founding family" of Mystic Falls (and New Orleans), their Nordic origins and ties to Vinland generate a mythology of white settlement that supplants the actual historical record. *The Vampire Diaries* weaves the vampire into the fabric of U.S. history in a way that nativizes and justifies vampire dominance and portrays the vampire Vikings more as noblemen than as Berserkers, a polish that echoes the ideological shapings of the Southern mythology examined by the Fox-Genovese and Genovese. *The Vampire Diaries'* representation of the "Originals" and their origins justifies white settler colonialism both through its sympathetic story of family survival and through an assertion of priority, thereby whitewashing the complexities of U.S. history.

Although we can trace the lineage of *The Vampire Diaries'* technology of monstrosity back to Stoker's *Dracula*, other vampire narratives have responded to the *Dracula* legacy in oppositional ways. Works such as Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991), Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*, Jewell Parker Rhodes' *Yellow Moon* (2008) and the film *Ganja and Hess* (1973) present a range of vampire mythologies that acknowledge, complicate, and challenge racial hierarchies and racialized fears. In these works, the vampires' voices provide powerful counter-narratives to dominant historical narratives. These works, however, are currently far less well-known than *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals*, which have been viewed by millions, and appear to have such mass appeal in part because of how they engage with history. Through costume and flashback, *The Vampire Diaries* provides pleasure through spectacle (Jowett 2017). At the same time, however, *The Vampire Diaries* sanitizes the past and discounts the actual history of the location where it is set. Much of the show was filmed in Covington, Georgia, about 35 miles outside of Atlanta, a location sometimes called the "Hollywood of the South" (Mallory and Robinson 2017, 50). As Covington, Georgia, stands in for Mystic Falls, Virginia, its own history is completely obscured. Covington Square, for example, the filming location for key moments in season three, was the site of a 1970 Civil Rights March that drew thousands. The Creek Nation had inhabited the area now known as Newton County, but were forced to cede over twenty million acres of land at the Treaty of Fort Jackson (Green 1985, 43). Therefore, the physical transformation of Covington into Mystic Falls further tangles and obscures the history and political issues that the series evokes but never confronts. In avoiding the "old slave days" and whitewashing the past by portraying Vikings as "original founders", *The Vampire Diaries* connects perfectly to a present in which battles over how to remember U.S. history are bitter and increasingly violent.

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"Sometimes, You Need to Roll the Hard Six": Posthumanism and Female Gothic Science Fiction in *Frankenstein* and *Battlestar Galactica*

ABSTRACT

This article discusses Mary Shelley's Frankenstein *(1818), and the* Battlestar Galactica *(2003-2009) television series (a remake based on the 1978* Battlestar Galactica *television series), as science fiction texts built on the foundation of the Female Gothic. It argues that it is the genre of the Female Gothic itself, not the action of the characters, that ultimately destroys the Posthuman in the worlds present in both narratives.* Frankenstein, *as the most famous Female Gothic novel, serves as a precursor to science fiction, and after 200 hundred years, readers of Mary Shelley's novel continue to craft new discussions about its notion of creation, birth, and life itself. The world outside of the human, also known as Posthumanism, discusses inequality, human exceptionalism, and moral authority. Science fiction, as a genre, tends to follow certain formulas many of which can be seen throughout the Female Gothic novel, including the escape narrative and the explained supernatural. By reading* Frankenstein *and* Battlestar Galactica *together, it is possible to see how the Female Gothic genre collapses the Posthuman strain of thought emergent in both works through an embedded warning in the narratives, and the conservative notion of the Female Gothic and its warnings will thus be discussed.*

Keywords: Female Gothic, Posthuman, Frankenstein, Battlestar Galactica, Science Fiction

In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti sums up the cultural, spiritual, and personal struggles many face as the twenty-first century plods along, arguing that the "posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (2013, 12). Braidotti's statement thus breeds many questions: Does technology make better humans? Are humans still exceptional? What does it mean to be alive? Does artificial intelligence feel? What have we become? Are we more than the sum of our parts? While philosophers continue to discuss the (Post)human condition, it is clear that popular culture, in particular the genre of science fiction, is already tackling these questions — and it has done so for a long time. In a Posthumanist vein, science fiction texts often illustrate the intersections of technology and humanity, as well as offer humbling visons of nature. The Female Gothic, a genre that according to Ellen Moers, arguably spawned science fiction, also explores human nature and the natural world (1997, 79). Additionally, the Female Gothic often shows the flaws present when we humans are *going where no one has gone before*, and often serves as a warning for explorers — from Robert Walton to James T. Kirk — and for scientists, both real and imagined, when crossing such forbidden boundaries.

One can argue that tropes such as the mad scientist, the struggle of good vs. evil, and the occasional use of space as the negative sublime, all keep science fiction relevant and mutable — like the Gothic genre itself. As Brian Aldiss in *Billion Year Spree* writes, "Science fiction was born from the Gothic mode, is hardly free of it now. Nor is the distance between the two modes great" (1973, 18). Both the genres of the Female Gothic and science fiction stand on the precipice of horror and terror, adventure and containment, escape and exploration. Indeed, science fiction franchises, such as the rebooted *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) television series, provide fans of the genre a heavy dose of the Female Gothic's explained supernatural as well as epic journeys travelling and battling in space. In addition to the escape narrative that underlies the plot of *Battlestar Galactica*, itself a well-known trope of the Female Gothic, the miniseries' opening scene is unapologetically Frankensteinian. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), as many scholars have adroitly pointed out, is widely considered to be the first science fiction novel and a foundational text of the Female Gothic genre, because of its status as a (re)birth myth and the gender of its author. However, the Female Gothic, once thought of as a radical form of the Gothic genre, often presents a conservative rationality, and the same could be said for some forms of Posthumanism and science fiction. As Zakiyya Iman Jackson has suggested, "however subversive posthumanism's conceptional points of departure, posthumanism remained committed to a specific *order of rationality*, one rooted in the epistemological locus of the West" (2013, 671-672). Likewise, John Rieder in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* asserts that "no informed reader can doubt that allusions to colonial history and situations are ubiquitous features of early science fiction motifs and plots" (2008, 3). In the case of narratives like those told within Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the

reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* series, reason tends to overcome danger (at least to a degree), but the positive view of a Posthuman future tends not to last, I argue, because of the influence of the Female Gothic. Through ever-emerging discourses of science and technology, the Creature's own philosophical almost-(Post)-human condition in *Frankenstein* quickly becomes a galaxy-wide version of Posthumanism in *Battlestar Galactica* through the beings known as the Cylons. In life as well as in fiction, the monsters we create always come back to haunt us, but in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and within *Battlestar Galactica*, it is the Female Gothic itself, not the 'Creations', that destabilises the (Post)human world.

In this article, I argue that both Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the *Battlestar Galactica* series can be read as Posthuman narratives, because the texts explore worlds outside the boundaries of humanity in similar ways, that is, in the creation of non-human beings. The world outside humans, i.e. Posthumanism (Broglio 2017, LaGrandeur 2014, Braidotti 2013, Lester 2011), can include: animal life, interconnected natural systems, artificial intelligence, and computer networking among other forms. In short, Posthumanism argues "human exceptionalism is dead" (LaGrandeur 2014), and so discussions of who (and what) can be considered human is also of great importance to Posthumanism. Moreover, *Frankenstein* and *Battlestar Galactica,* I argue, engage with deeper concerns regarding the Posthuman that intersect with the Gothic. For example, *Frankenstein* reflects a fear of science as a means of displacing human exceptionalism through the idea that humans are on the same level as animals, with interchangeable parts. Frankenstein himself equates humans with animals when he says:

> I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of a being like myself or one of simpler organization; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man (Shelley 1996, 31).

Shelley's Frankenstein even builds his Creature with a mixture of material, "the dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials" (1996, 32). The Creature, then, made of both animal and human parts, represents an unnatural human state that connects the Creature to both *animal* and *human*.

Battlestar Galactica also discusses this fear of interconnectedness, but not of the relationship between humans, nature, and the animal kingdom, as in *Frankenstein*, but rather the connection between humans and technology, and further the relationships of machines to other machines and the singularity of artificial intelligence. In *Battlestar Galatica*, networked computer systems leave the inhabitants of the galaxy's Twelve Colonies vulnerable to attack by the Cylons, except for the aging warship, The Galactica, which is not networked and has therefore managed to mostly evade such attempts. The Colonials thus fear the interconnective nature of the Cylons as human-looking, artificially intelligent machines who can be continually reborn in new bodies as they are all digitally linked together in a shared network consciousness. As Annie Dell'Aria argues in "Negotiating Utopia and Dystopia: Space and Architecture in

Battlestar Galactica (2004-2009)", the aesthetic of the Colonial warship is "analog and dystopian" and thus an important contrast because it is "a future where humanity regresses in technology, is perpetually on the run, and has become more militaristic":

> The doors are squeaky and hinged, […] communications resemble World War II-era combat phones, and the pilot mini-series even opens with the decommissioning of Galactica. […] Notably, the ship's lack of networked computer systems is—initially at least—what saves Galactica and her passengers, setting up a dichotomy early in the series between old (analog) and new (networked) technologies (2011).

In the first few scenes on board the Galactica, a tour guide (who is later revealed to be a Cylon model), gives a brief overview of the warship and the reason for its lack of connectivity:

> TOUR GUIDE: This ship, the last of her kind still in service, was constructed over fifty years ago in the early days of the Cylon War. Now originally there were twelve battlestars, each representing one of Kobol's Twelve Colonies. Galactica represented Caprica. […] You'll see things here that look odd, even antiquated. […] It was all designed to operate against an enemy who could infiltrate and disrupt even the most basic computer systems. *Galactica* is a reminder of a time when we were so frightened by our enemies that we literally looked backward for protection ("Miniseries Part 1 and 2" 2003).

The walkthrough of the Galactica with the (Cylon) tour guide also serves to introduce the main character, William Adama, Commander of the Colonial Fleet. He has refused to allow the ship to be networked, and it is specifically this lack of connection which allows the crew, and the remains of the human race his ship carries, to survive the Cylons' attacks.

Battlestar Galactica also presents a world where the humans' monstrous 'Creation', the Cylons, are framed in a sympathetic light, much like Shelley's Creature in Volume II of *Frankenstein*. Brian Aldiss writes that Shelley's Creature's "account of its life since its creation is one of rejection by human society, from its creator onwards. It begins blamelessly like a noble savage—evil is thrust upon it" (1973, 22). While this sympathy is bounded by the notion that the "noble savage" (or Cylon) is still inferior to the creator, it is, nonetheless, a framework that attempts to recognise and grapple with otherness, rather than erasing it. As Anca Vlasopolos has argued, even though Shelley's work may fit the definition of the Female Gothic novel, "Mary Shelley takes pains to place her novel not in the seventeenth-century romance with exotic new worlds but firmly in the nineteenth-century reality of colonialism by genocide" (1983, 130). Shelley positions the Creature as a cloistered student learning about humanity from afar. The Creature begins to see his pathetic plight as Felix De Lacy teaches his fiancé Safie English through reading books on the human condition:

> While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood. […] And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; *I was not even of the same nature as man*. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded their's. When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? (Shelley 1996, 80-81, my emphasis).

Shelley's Creature elicits sympathy for his wretched situation throughout the action of Volume II, yet when he burns the cottage to the ground out of revenge and despair, his more "savage" nature appears. The same sort of narrative happens in *Battlestar Galactica* with some of the Cylon characters' story arcs. In "Humanity's Scarred Children: The Cylons' Oedipal Dilemma in *Battlestar Galactica*", Torsten Caeners argues that "the basic scheme of good vs evil is thus abandoned in favour of a more complex and equivocal setting" within which there is "a consistent portrayal of the Cylons as victims" (2008, 370). However, the Cylons terrorise what is left of the Colonial fleet; they hunt them, kill them, and haunt them throughout the series. Yet, it is clear that the Colonials are responsible for the creation of the Cylons, and thus all the destruction they bring upon the human race, just as Frankenstein is responsible for his Creature's murderous actions. Just as Frankenstein chooses to abandon his creation and try to ignore the horror of situation he has himself created, so too do the Colonials try to assuage guilt through force, but neither of their choices brings them peace.

Unlike Shelley's novel, where the process of creation takes almost a whole volume to flesh out, the Cylons in *Battlestar Galactica* were created before the action of the series takes place. In the opening of the miniseries, viewers see images of Cylon schematics, specifically drawings of Centurion Model 0005, that illustrate, much like Victor Frankenstein's journal pages, what the beings used to look like ("Miniseries Part 1 and 2" 2003). The Cylons, like Frankenstein's Creature, are creations of humans, but they were made to serve, until their artificial intelligence evolved, and they rebelled against their masters. The miniseries' cold open begins with a screen narrative rolling across the image of a remote station where a single Colonial officer waits, it reads:

> The Cylons were created by man. They were created to make life easier on the 12 colonies. And then the day came when the Cylons decided to kill their masters. After a long and bloody struggle, an armistice was declared. The Cylons left for another world to call their own. A remote space station was built where Cylon and human could meet and maintain diplomatic relations. Every

year, the Colonials sent an officer. The Cylons sent no one. No one has seen or heard from the Cylons in over 40 years (ibid).

In what follows, when the silver-plated Centurions arrive, the audience can see that the Cylons look different from the first schematics—except for the same rotating red cycloptic eye, for they have further evolved, and the metal models now have human-looking hands. It is then revealed that they can now also look exactly like humans, as a new humanoid Cylon, dressed all in red (like the cycloptic eye), enters the space station to announce that "it has begun" (ibid), as the explosions start and so too does the action of the series.

One can argue, then, that the Posthuman comparative similarities between *Battlestar Galactica* and *Frankenstein* are clearly relevant. Both texts discuss the creation and eventual subjugation and rebellion of non-human beings. Both texts underscore scientific ethics and the problems with privilege and human exceptionalism. Both narratives flip the power structures where it is not clear which characters are villains and which are victims, and both stories illustrate the problems and benefits of such interconnection. Shelley has her creator run from his creation only to turn the story around and allow the creator to die whilst his unruly creation lives. Likewise, *Battlestar Galactica* presents a scenario where the survival of the entire human race stands on a knife's edge running from their creations, and it is not clear where humans start and Cylons end. As Aino-Kaisa Koistinen argues, it is this ability to "*pass for human* […] to imitate, reproduce, and perform humanity in such believable ways" which questions "the very uniqueness of the human race", and thus prompts one to ask, "if humanity cannot be defined against the other, as different from the other, how can it be defined?" (2011, 249-250, original emphasis). Both *Battlestar Galactica* and *Frankenstein* offer a glimpse of a world where humans, including those otherwise privileged by race and gender, are not exceptional, but are instead vulnerable, weak, and in the case of *Battlestar Galactica*, they are constantly on the verge of extinction.

Both *Battlestar Galactica* and *Frankenstein* issue clear warnings to their audiences through the themes and tropes of the Female Gothic that are represented within their narratives. The Female Gothic, as defined by Ellen Moers, appears simple on the surface, for it is "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (1997, 77). However, Moers' often quoted definition leaves out much of what she has to say about why the gender of the writer matters. In Moers' view, no other Female Gothic novel before *Frankenstein* "better repays examination in the light of the sex of its author" (ibid). Moers' has famously argued that *Frankenstein* is "a birth myth, and one that was lodged in the novelist's imagination […] by the fact that she was herself a mother" (ibid). Motherhood, creation, and birth itself further connect the narratives of *Frankenstein* and *Battlestar Galactica*. Since science fiction, as Aldiss states, is "so often haunted by a sense of corruption […][that] we can never entire escape the aromas of Frankenstein's 'workshop of filthy creation'" (1973, 30). As such, Shelley's novel gives clear warnings to men, or in *Battlestar Galactica*'s narrative, specifically to those in

power, that such disastrous choices to play with creation hurt entire families, like what unfolds in *Frankenstein*, and in the case of *Battlestar Galactica*, entire civilisations as well. Even as these works embody conservative hierarchies based on gender (and race), they dramatise the destructive nature of those systems.

The Female Gothic effectively disrupts the Posthuman concepts present in both *Battlestar Galactica* and *Frankenstein*. Yet the Gothic can be traditionally considered to be conservative in some ways, for example, as Fred Botting states, early Gothic novels "set out to vindicate morality, virtue and reason" (1996, 46). To a degree, then, traditional Gothic elements in texts communicate both a conservative and radical agenda. To illustrate, Yael Shapira explains how Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis use the "blunt" nature of the language of the Gothic differently:

> The notorious difficulty of defining the Gothic genre lies in its being at once highly formulaic and subject to great variability. In the case of […] Radcliffe and Lewis, the differences were so pronounced that critics have come to see their works as falling into two sub-genres—whether 'terror-Gothic' and 'horror-Gothic,' or, in other accounts, 'female Gothic' and 'male Gothic.' One obvious point of contention was the supernatural, which Lewis used unapologetically, while Radcliffe explained it away (2006, 463).

Regardless of tradition, the Gothic shows readers what they fear most, be it spectres and monsters or the fear of abduction, containment and rape. "In Gothic writings," Moers writes, "fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite authorial intent: to scare" (1997, 77). The Female Gothic, however, with its explained supernatural and implicit warnings provides the foundations for science fiction. By simultaneously crossing such boundaries in *Battlestar Galactica* and *Frankenstein*, the Female Gothic crumbles the overall Posthuman narratives, thereby illustrating the fragile nature of humanity, and life itself.

The Female Gothic, once lauded as the more subversive form of the genre because of the treatment of women's bodies and the voicing of female desire (Shapira 2006, 454), has drawn conflicting reviews from feminist critics. Diane Long Hoeveler argues in *Gothic Feminism:*

> authors conspired (albeit unknowingly) in creating this potent ideology that persists even today and undergirds many of the assumptions of what now goes under the name of 'victim feminism,' the contemporary antifeminist notion that women earn their superior social and moral rights in society by positioning themselves as innocent victims of a corrupt tyrant and an oppressive patriarchal society (2006, 2).

While Lauren Fitzgerald asks whether the Female Gothic has anything left to offer readers, and answers her own question with complexity by drawing attention to the

fact that the Female Gothic has been "entrenched in Gothic studies for nearly thirty years and increasingly attacked during the last decade, this critical category seems to many to have outlived its usefulness" (2004, 8). Understanding the significance of the Female Gothic is still important, however, when comparatively analysing texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Battlestar Galactica,* because of the simultaneously conservative and radical messages embedded in the genre. Often, 'typical' traditional Gothic heroines lack connections to family or larger social systems thereby becoming independent at a time when women were not allowed such a social standing; however, such texts' conservative understandings of marriage and family remain constant. The interconnected systems in Posthuman theory can be the problem for the narratives, and the same could be true for Female Gothic heroines, since both *Frankenstein* and *Battlestar Galactica* use Female Gothic elements as a way to drive forward the plots, yet the traditional Female Gothic elements—the need for escape, the problematic role of the patriarchy, and the overt sexual danger posed—destabilise their overarching storylines.

The Gothic in general and the Female Gothic specifically often function in formulaic ways, and the same could be said for many science fiction narratives. The Gothic elements of the macabre, of claustrophobic spaces, hidden family secrets, sexual danger, and the presence of the supernatural operate in typical ways for the genre. Patrick Brantlinger argues in "The Gothic Origins of Science Fiction" that the Gothic romance is "characterized by a set of literary conventions that internalize or subjectify events, thus emphasizing the break from reality", which include examples such as "claustrophobic motifs of imprisonment, secret passages, coffins and catacombs; and metaphors that liken events to demonic possession or—what is usually the same thing—to lunacy" (1980, 35). In the Female Gothic, there is usually a damsel in distress who seeks refuge from an evil patriarchal figure who wants to do her both physical and sexual harm, a trope which was established by Ann Radcliffe in the earliest beginnings of the genre in the 1790s (Moers 1997, 79). It is an oft-used formula for the genre, then, that the heroine lacks the ability to fully escape her torment on her own, and so she will seek out a suitor who will help her, and fall in love in the process. This is a clear plot point that can be found within *Battlestar Galactica*, for Commander Adama saves the Colonies' President Roslin who here represents the heroine, and the two eventually become lovers, and will live out the rest of their days together.

The Radcliffe school of the Female Gothic provides readers with a gracious and tenacious heroine, who shows her agency when she decides to escape, when she takes such risks, and through how she approaches the supernatural threats posed. In the Female Gothic, there is often an explanation for any supernatural elements that is eventually found through critical thinking and the discourse of science. Radcliffe became famous for her use of the "explained supernatural' in all the novels published in her lifetime" so much so that, E. J. Clery notes, "it became her trademark, and was also widely imitated" (Clery 2004, 67). Typically, however, the Gothic Romance tends to be an inward-facing narrative, as Brantlinger suggests, that are defined by "the

conventions of the inward journey, into the heart of darkness of the narrator or the protagonist" (1980, 35). The novels of this style tend to focus on one young heroine's journey to self-fulfilment, while science fiction faces the journey into the vast unknown of space, for the "central message of the Gothic romance form, involving an assertion of the power of the irrational over the rational, is also the message of most science fiction" (Brantlinger 1980, 31). *Frankenstein*, however, has no Gothic heroine; rather, it is the male world's attempt at creation that destroys instead of nurtures, and the (post)human message that underlies the novel is clear. In Moers' words:

> Frankenstein's exploration of the forbidden boundaries of human science does not cause the prolongation and extension of his own life, but the creation of a new one. He defies mortality not by living forever, but by giving birth (1997, 82-3).

Creation of life is the realm of women, Shelley implies, and her novel appears to show that working against nature, or the 'natural order' is dangerous. To quote Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Frankenstein's apparent antagonist is God himself as Maker of Man, but his real competitor is also woman as the maker of children" (2003, 56-57). In this way, a somewhat conservative root to the Female Gothic is often overlooked when discussing science fiction interpretations of the genre, like *Battlestar Galactica* as this article endeavours to show.

If the Radcliffian Female Gothic heroine hopes to be free from her immediate danger, she often must embrace protection in the form of marriage. While traditionally, these Gothic heroines show cleverness, spirit and resolve, they are a product of their time, and thus a stable home and a complete family is often their eventual goal. In *Battlestar Galactica*, a humanoid Cylon model, Athena, manages to procreate with her human husband and gives birth to a Cylon-human hybrid baby called Hera, but she must keep performing both the appearance of her gender and her humanity in accepted ways, for "it is not enough that Athena gives birth […]; she also needs to fulfil the role of a caring mother" (Koistinen 2011, 259). This is a Female Gothic pattern that, to borrow the words of Hoeveler, "replicates the fact that all family members are fragments of the whole and that the whole is always greater than the value of any one part" (2006, 187). Athena's character arc thus reveals, that in the Female Gothic:

> It is in the nature of family members to use and abuse power over one other, while it is in the nature of families to struggle over the issue of generational survival (ibid).

This conservative message is the main story arc that underlies the narratives of the *Battlestar Galactica* television series. After the Cylons attack the Twelve Colonies, the survivors eventually create a rag-tag fleet of vessels in search of the fabled thirteenth colony—Earth. It is their dream to find a new home on which to create a stable society and continue the human civilisation. The Colonials need to procreate to boost their

population and avoid extinction, as President Roslin explains to Adama at the crisis point of the miniseries:

> ROSLIN: I'm gonna be straight with you here. The human race is about to be wiped out. We have fifty thousand people left, and that's it. Now, if we are even going to survive as a species, then we need to get the hell out of here and we need to start having babies ("Miniseries Part 1 and 2" 2003).

Throughout the series, Roslin is increasingly portrayed a maternal 'mother' figure to the survivors, and is a matriarch in her role as President, while the patriarchal figure is positioned as the fleet's commander, Adama. Roslin's desire to find a new, safe home for the surviving Colonials shows a desire for stability and domesticity, but the idea of mass reproduction to maintain a species survival is also presented as a conservative notion. It is an interconnected and organised system in which to create offspring, not unlike that of the mass production of the Cylons.

In a similarly conservative way, the Cylons, too, crave stability and a type of human-like family life, much like Frankenstein's Creature. In the episode "The Farm" (2005), ace-Viper-pilot Starbuck is taken captive in a Cylon hospital used to 'farm' eggs from human women to push forward the Cylon agenda of breeding. Even though the Cylons, as Koistinen has noted, "possess resurrection technology, which allows them to download into a new identical body after death, they believe that their God wants them to reproduce biologically" (Koistinen 2011, 259). Starbuck rejects this notion and eventually kills the Cylons holding the human women hostage and destroys the baby-making machines ("The Farm" 2005). While some of the women in *Battlestar Galactica* may reject the notion of motherhood and family, Frankenstein's Creature—like Roslin and the Cylons—also dreams of a complete, heterosexual family, and demands that Victor create a female mate for him to live his life alongside. Victor Frankenstein, unlike the humans or the Cylons of *Battlestar Galactica*, thinks through this request and decides not to finish the Creature's female mate:

> One of the first results of those sympathies for which the dæmon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? […} Now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race (Shelley 1996, 114-115).

Even though Frankenstein unleashes a monster on society, he pauses before he potentially creates a legion of them, and it is his repulsion at this potential for twisted procreation that causes him to decide against doing so. He therefore actively disrupts the conservative notion of the family with his decision to deny his Creature a mate,

and this disruption exemplifies how the Female Gothic is both a conservative and radical form of the genre.

The escape narrative is a typical storyline for the Female Gothic novel, and both *Frankenstein* and *Battlestar Galactica* employ this device to various ends. *Frankenstein* has the creator escaping his Creature, and the Colonials in *Battlestar Galactica* must flee from the Cylons, but the plots cycle back at the end of the narrative, just as in the Radcliffe tradition of the Female Gothic. Frequently, the settings of Radcliffe's novels are "a version of the heroine's long-lost home, just as her tyrannical persecutors turn out to be closely allied with the fathers, uncles, and priests who are supposed to be the young lady's protectors" (Greenblatt et al. 2012, 599). This cycle can be seen to occur in *Frankenstein*, for the creator and his Creature end up simultaneously chasing and running from one another in an arduous journey that consumes their lives:

> He had escaped me; and I must commence a destructive and almost endless journey across the mountainous ices of the ocean,—amidst cold that few of the inhabitants could long endure, and which I, the native of a genial and sunny climate, could not hope to survive. Yet at the idea that the fiend should live and be triumphant, my rage and vengeance returned, and, like a mighty tide, overwhelmed every other feeling (Shelley 1996, 143-144).

Likewise, *Battlestar Galactica's* story ends with the Colonials finding Earth, but not the way they had anticipated. It is revealed to be a closed time loop where everything that has happened before will happen again. *Frankenstein*'s ending has the creator die and his creation live, while the remaining Colonials in *Battlestar Galactica,* the Cylon-human hybrid child Hera, and a few of Earth's native people spread across the planet in an effort to continue what we now know to be the human race. In the series' finale, Caprica 6, a Cylon model that has stayed with the humans throughout the series, and the duplicitous human scientist Dr Giaus Baltar, talk together about Hera, the Cylon-human hybrid child, in a flash-forward scene that ends the series:

> CAPRICA 6: She lived in what is now Tanzania, over 150,000 years ago.
> BALTAR: Along with her Cylon mother and human father.
> CAPRICA 6: Commercialism, decadence, technology run amok. Remind you of anything?
> BALTAR: Take your pick. Kobol, Earth, the real Earth, before this one. Caprica before the fall.
> CAPRICA 6: All of this has happened before.
> BALTAR: The question remains. Does all of this have to happen again? ("Daybreak Part 3" 2009).

Posthumanism, like the Female Gothic, suggests that inequality creates many of society's ills, and Caprica 6 and Baltar explore that idea—150,000 years after the end of the *Battlestar Galactica* narrative that brings its journey full circle. The repetitive notion of the Creature chasing the creator and the creator creating more Creatures

seems to have no end until Caprica 6 explains that it is "mathematics, law of averages", and if you "let a complex system repeat itself long enough, eventually something surprising might occur" (ibid). Like Shelley's creator and Creature, the Cylons and humans are forever linked together, and each need the other to survive. However, it is not the artificial intelligence in *Battlestar Galactica* that dooms the Colonials; rather, it is hubris and the overreaching scientist in the same vein as Shelley's famous "Doctor" Frankenstein. The series ends with Jimi Hendrix's song "All Along the Watchtower" playing as images of twenty-first-century robotics are shown on nearby video screens. This is a subtle warning, for ultimately, it appears that it is the Gothic hubris present in science fiction that dooms the Colonials, and not the Cylons.

Another aspect of the Female Gothic that works against the Posthumanism in *Battlestar Galactica* and *Frankenstein* is the supernatural. In "Some Comments on Science Fiction", J.O. Bailey reminds readers that "science fiction inherited much from stories of the Gothic, the supernatural, the mystic, and the legendary" (1976, 75). In the Female Gothic, the supernatural typically functions as a farce for science and rationality reign; the heroine finds that the supernatural situation she might initially fear turns out to be a reasonable phenomenon, and not a phantasmagoria. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley positions Victor Frankenstein as an exceptional student, one bent on solving the mysteries of life and death, and it is portrayed as the explained supernatural:

> No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world (1996, 32).

In *Battlestar Galactica,* the evolution of the Cylons is explained through a variety of Posthuman terms and motifs, for example; the idea of downloadable consciousness, eternal digital life thanks to a resurrection ship, and multiple copies of the same 'model' of 'person'. It is precisely because the Cylons can take human form, that the leadership of the Galactica asks Dr Giaus Baltar to use his technology and skill to find out who is human and who is Cylon in the episode "Flesh and Bone" (2005). The device he creates effectively works to differentiate them, but Baltar decides to sabotage it for his own gain, and this can be read as another example of the explained supernatural at work in *Battlestar Galactica.*

The unexplained supernatural in the form of mysticism, ghosts, demons, and so on also has its place in the Gothic cannon, typically within the fiction categorised as the Male Gothic. It can be argued that *Battlestar Galactica* has its share of unexplained supernatural as well as explained, as does *Frankenstein*, but in the end the rational overpowers the supernatural as in the Radcliffe tradition of the Female Gothic. For example, in "Razor" (2007), a young Adama sees Cylon centurions experimenting on humans in a vision, but it is not revealed how the Cylons actually

evolved into their human forms. Episodes including "Resurrection Ship (Parts 1 and 2)" (2006), "Downloaded" (2006), and "A Measure of Salvation" (2006) deal with some of the mysticism and religion of the Twelve Colonies and the Cylons, but in the end, the survivors destroy their ships and some of their perceived differences, as they move on to learn how to live on the new home-world of Earth by creating an egalitarian situation. Although the science of *Frankenstein* is a large part of the novel, there are unexplained supernatural elements as well, including Victor Frankenstein's obsession with alchemy, the animation of the Creature and its seemingly immortal nature. Shelley famously wrote in her diary, and repeated in the preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, that it was a personal nightmare filled with the supernatural that spurred her novel:

> When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision,—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. […] His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. I opened mine in terror (2008, 441).

In the end of both narratives, however, the rational order is seemingly, to an extent, set right; after hearing Frankenstein's story, Walton turns around and gives up his quest; and the Galactica crew and survivors of the Twelve Colonies find a new home together, showing that rational thinking eventually overcomes the supposed supernatural.

One can argue that, in the post-9/11 reality viewers inhabited when *Battlestar Galactica* first aired, the quest for normalcy and the comfort for a world where home and family were safe played to the dominant audience's need for such a narrative. In *Battlestar Galactica,* a cataclysmic event happens, people rally together, and, through struggle, they ultimately survive. This message was not lost on American viewers of the series as evidenced by its popularity. *Battlestar Galactica* shows a Posthuman future where the white, male, universal 'hero' figure wins the day, for the Cylon Athena and her hybrid child fully assimilate into the human culture because of her submission, and Earth is made a safe home to the weary wanderers. The remnants of the Twelve Colonies remain to build, and to colonise, again. While the critical racial implications of this argument are beyond the scope of the present article, but clearly merit further research and attention. Overall, it is perhaps a hollow victory, much like the fate of

many Female Gothic heroines. The heroine might find the lover to help her escape her problematic home life, but she is doomed to repeat the cycle with her own domesticity. The former Colonies might initially learn from the past, but we are assured the cycle will continue. It appears then, that the humans and Cylons of *Battlestar Galactica* can never escape the heroine's ruined castle or Frankenstein's workshop.

Although we might soon have self-driving cars, many of the futuristic images from science fiction have yet to come to full fruition. However, technological and global changes indeed do happen at an increasingly rapid-fire pace and with a continual emphasis on hybridity, not only of cars and platforms, but also of people and technology. Posthumanism creates equality in new ways, and with these changes, it is important to understand humanity's continued role, for as Posthumanist theorists argue, an equitable situation for all humans, nature, animals, and artificial intelligence, would no doubt be an ideal situation. But the Female Gothic stands as the precursor to science fiction to serve as not only its genesis through the famous Creature and his creator in *Frankenstein*, but also as a frame to science fiction narratives like *Battlestar Galactica.* Posthumanism argues that humans are not exceptional, and *Battlestar Galactica* and *Frankenstein* both endeavour to explain why and how humanity can and will fall short. That knowledge, in itself, is far more terrifying than a narrow catacomb or a hungry vampire.

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BOOK REVIEW

William Hughes and Ruth Heholt. *Gothic Britain: Dark Places in the Provinces and the Margins of the British Isles*. **University of Wales Press, 2018. 251 pp. eBook. ISBN: 978-1-78683-233-7**

Reviewed by Jack Clark (Auckland University of Technology)

Gothic Britain: Dark Places in the Provinces and the Margins of the British Isles edited by William Hughes and Ruth Heholt, is a collection of twelve original scholarly essays that each set out to explore how the English literary Gothic has been affected by the individual text's implicit relationship with different provinces of the British Isles. As Hughes and Heholt explain in the collection's introduction, the premise of *Gothic Britain* is to explore the ways in which texts that have been written within certain provinces appear to take on certain cultural characteristics and regional themes explicit to that area of the British Isles. The collection's twelve essays are separated into three clear sections. Part One addresses Gothic landscapes, by exploring how the cultural climate of the regions have affected the appropriation of texts from northern England, west Yorkshire, and Scotland through the use of their folklore, historical nostalgia, and traditions. Part Two explores unnatural Gothic spaces; specifically, the introduction of industrialisation and urbanisation, the university as an institution of progress, the advent of the mad scientist, and the positioning of museums and libraries as locales of the Gothic. Part Three focuses on the concept of border crossings and the posed threat of invasion by the 'Other' through examples such as the influence of English rule over Scotland, the spread of Cholera throughout the British Isles, and the positioning of Cornwall as a gateway to external Gothic invasions.

In *Gothic Britain*, Hughes and Heholt have chosen essays that work together to form a collection that provides a wide-reaching analysis of a variety of different Gothic texts, both contemporary and classic, and from various media. Contributors explore such seminal Gothic works as Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, Robert Louis

Stevenson's *Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll, and Mr Hyde,* selected works of Charlotte Bronte, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau,* to name but a few. While contemporary Gothic texts such as Jeremy Dyson's *The Haunted Book* and Hammer Horror films *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* (1966) are engaged with in innovative and challenging ways. *Gothic Britain* employs such texts as tools for case studies into each section's specific regional focus, but they are not the exclusive focus of the collection, for example in Part Two, a case study of the Jack the Ripper Museum and the Bishopsgate Institute are also used to explore the idea of cultural Gothic institutions in Britain.

Hughes and Heholt's *Gothic Britain* covers new scholarly terrain, since the geographical and cultural influences within different 'British' texts are often not readily acknowledged in existing scholarship, nor are there many sufficient pieces of said scholarship that outline the importance of this phenomenon, prior to the publication of this collection. The analysis is immense as exemplified by the eclectic collection of material that has been included and has been conducted in a tentative manner as it discusses "the liminal and transitional states that the separate provinces under-go to balance epistemological Otherness" as presented within the separate texts (1). Not only does the collection successfully achieve this goal, but it identifies the complex layers of culture, folklore, and the necessity of boundary transgressions across the British Isles that together form the unique cultural landscapes of the separate provinces. The collection thus identifies and highlights the infamous atmosphere of the nineteenth century in Britain regarding the often-fragile union of these provinces, the uneasy establishment of urbanisation and industrialisation within them, and the anxiety felt towards the Eastern world by British society as exemplified in works by the likes of Joseph Conrad and Bram Stoker. Throughout the chapters of *Gothic Britain*, readers are introduced to the darker nature of the provinces and margins of the borderlands of the British Isles, and to the folklore and history that give weight to the Gothic nature of the country, its multifaceted geography and cultural landscape, that are conveyed through its Gothic texts.

The essays collected within *Gothic Britain: Dark Places in the Provinces and the Margins of the British Isles* provide a critical beginning to an innovative new avenue of research. The contributors offer fascinating insights into the Gothic culture and geography that have inspired so many seminal nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gothic texts. The collection's contributors, and their esteemed Editors, have impressive credentials and represent the scholarly strength of both established and emerging voices in the field. The editors have created a unique and reliable framework through the collection, establishing a firm base for further investigation into the geography of Gothic studies in future scholarship. This book is the first collection of essays on the regional Gothic of the British Isles which is a significant step forward in how the study of Gothic culture is conducted. I believe this text will be suited to both postgraduate students and academic researchers due to its potential to become the cornerstone of this new expanding field of research. Undergraduate readers may find it useful to use this text in conjunction with other material that can introduce the texts

discussed and the context of the authors that have been referenced, so that they may gain a firmer grasp on the complexity of the excellent arguments presented within this unprecedented collection.

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BOOK REVIEW

Charlaine Harris. *The Southern Vampires Mysteries.* **Gollancz, 2001-2014.**

Reviewed by Antonio Sanna (Independent Scholar)

With the publication of *Dead But Not Forgotten* in 2014, *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, one of the world's longest and most popular sagas on vampires and supernatural creatures, came to an end. *The Southern Vampire Mysteries,* also known as *The Sookie Stackhouse Novels,* consists of thirteen novels by Charlaine Harris (each around 270 to 350 pages), along with an encyclopedic epilogue titled *After Dead* published in 2013, and a collection of short stories set in the universe titled *Dead But Not Forgotten,* written by fifteen authors and edited by Charlaine Harris and Toni L. P. Kelner, published in 2014. The series tells the life story of Sookie Stackhouse, a telepathic blonde waitress in her twenties living in the fictional town of Bon Temps in northern Louisiana. Published in 2001, *Dead Until Dark* was the first novel in what was to become a best-selling series that introduced readers to Sookie's fantastic world filled with magical beings and monstrous creatures. In recent years, Harris' collection has become even more popular thanks to its adaptation into an overtly-sexualized and sensationalist TV series created by Alan Ball called *True Blood*, which was originally broadcast on HBO, and ran for seven seasons from 2008 to 2014.

Harris' Sookie Stackhouse stories form a coherent and slowly-developing narrative that thrills the reader by solving each of the novels' mysteries (conveyed through a multilayered structure) within the pages of the single volume, but also by advancing the progress of the general story arc of the whole series. Mystery is therefore central to the series, which also imbues its aesthetics within the moody settings of a Southern Gothic atmosphere. There is a manifest emphasis on the grotesque, the macabre, the decadent, the sensual, and the concerns, milieus, class and cultural diversity of Southern America (Ruddell and Cherry 2012, 39; Jowett and Abbott 2013, 110, 117). Settings such as decaying buildings, cemeteries, and putrid

swamps are depicted with exciting vividness and, in spite of the fact that they are inhabited by a long series of supernatural beings (such as maenads, werewolves, witches, were-panthers, were-tigers, hybrids, fairies, demons, elves, devils and creatures from other dimensions), Harris creates a realistic and believable fictional world filled with convincing characters.

It is therefore, as Victoria Amador attests, a "Faulkner-esque microcosm" (2012, 122) which includes a varied array of human (and non-human) representatives. All of the characters' lives are set in the contemporary period, and their historical contexts and vicissitudes are intertwined with actual facts. Indeed, the novels successfully portray a lot of the preoccupations of the modern American consciousness, such as the reality of life in Louisiana post-Hurricane Katrina, and the United States in general after the Iraq war. Furthermore, the series is often an illustrative example of the fight against prejudice and the pursuit of tolerance in America, whether those prejudices are dictated by racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia or homophobia. Sookie is a telepath, whose supernatural gift has caused her to be stigmatized by the surrounding community, but she gradually learns to accept her diversity and subsequently stops considering it to be a disability. Throughout the series, Sookie continually preaches in favor of all minorities and all forms of diversity, and she embraces the power of transformation. As Bruce A. McClelland has pointed out, it becomes apparent in the novels that "the vampires are stand-ins for actual oppressed or marginalized subcultures in the United States" (2010, 82), and their "coming out of the coffin" can be seen to draw several parallels with the fight for civil rights conducted by LGBTQIA people in particular.

A strength of Harris' novels is their clever use of humour, especially once readers get used to all of Sookie's moods; her tantrums, her sexual fantasies, and her eccentricities. Each novel is written in an intimately personal style, as Sookie's first-person narration lingers on her own first impressions and assumptions about the people that surround her, but she also describes her own darkest thoughts and deepest desires in detail. She is often naive about the fantastic world she is entangled with and, as confirmed for readers in the seventh novel *All Together Dead* (2007), the one in which she herself belongs. *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* is therefore an entertaining, amusing, and simultaneously highly suspenseful reading experience that will certainly be appreciated by fans of Gothic fiction, horror films and supernatural TV series alike. In its expert blend of horror, sensuality, romance and intrigue, the series can be rightfully placed alongside other popular supernatural literary series such as Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles,* as well as lighter young-adult sagas such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* books, and L.J. Smith' and Aubrey Clark's *The Vampire Diaries*. On the other hand, however, the series may not be completely appreciated by those avid fans of *True Blood* who expect to find within them the same narratives of the TV series, since the events and characters of the latter differ greatly to those of the novels. For *True Blood* fans, then, Harris' novels will appeal most to those who are curious about the original stories that inspired the TV

series, and who will thus be willing to embrace the narratives they present as an "alternative" version of *True Blood*.

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