

Wandering Monsters. Serial Peregrinations and Transfictionality

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Abstract

The post-modern gothic simultaneously makes reference to already well-grounded experience, such as the repertoire of motifs and narrative prefigurations which have entered the artistic canon of the convention for good. A lot of figures and characters identified with horror become a part of the transfictional process of allocating them in new settings and re-designing their fictional biographies. Although in TV series reinterpretations of classical literary narratives quite often focus on instilling a positive image of erstwhile impersonation of numinosum, they do offer in return a construal of more contemporaneous fears, aligned with today's socio-political-economic landscape. This article will include the following series based on literary prototypes representing the very canon of gothic fiction: *Dracula*, *Penny Dreadful*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Second Chance* and *Sleepy Hollow* as well as elements of productions connected with literary narrations of horror, such as *Once Upon a Time*.

Keywords

transfictionality, TV series, horror, literature, gothic fiction, narrative

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The Gothic has had a uniquely rich cultural tradition, with the history of its changes simultaneously inscribed in a chronicle of civilization and cultural transformations. As the authors of *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2012) emphasize, certain motifs are closely related to the subversive character of this aesthetics, which – on the other hand – was shaped by the paradigm of social discourse resulting from common, yet hidden fears and worries associated with the given age. In the article *The Contemporary Gothic: Why we Need it* Steven Bruhm asks a very significant question about the need of examination and justification the way the narrative convention¹ of horror is realised. While addressing this issue, the scholar points out not only its aesthetic appeal, but also stresses the non-artistic implications such as economic, political, or ethic contexts. As he concludes:

Since its inception in 1764, with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic has always played with chronology, looking back to moments in an imaginary history, pining for a social stability that never existed, mourning a chivalry that belonged more to the fairy tale than to reality. And contemporary Gothic does not break with this tradition: Stephen King's *IT* (1987) and Anne Rice's vampire narratives (begun in the 1970s) weave in and out of the distant past in order to comment on the state of contemporary American culture. (Bruhm 2002: 259).

Thus, the sources of contemporary horror should be examined among a number of discourses. As Bruhm elucidates:

One of these anxieties, taken up by Stephen King is his nonfictional *Danse Macabre* (1982), is political and historical. He discusses at length the degree

¹ In this article it has been used use a „narrative convention” or „artistic convention” to avoid framing gothic or horror fiction as a genre or, even more structurally, as a subgenre of fantastic fiction.

to which the Second World War, the Cold War, and the space race gave rise to particular kinds of horror in the 1940s and 1950s. Central to this horror is the fear of foreign otherness and monstrous invasion. [...] Another anxiety, not unrelated to the first, is the technological explosion in the second half of the twentieth century. Advances in weaponry – both military and medical – have rendered our culture vulnerable to almost total destruction [...]. Third, the rise of feminism, gay liberation, and African-American civil rights in the 1960s has assaulted the ideological supremacy of traditional values where straight white males ostensibly control the public sphere. In the midst of this onslaught comes a further blow to Euro-American culture: the heightened attack against Christian ideology and hierarchy as that which should “naturally” define values and ethics in culture (Bruhm 2002: 263).

At the same time, Bruhm indicates a problem of connecting this motif of popular social fears, or even traumas, with an overlying narrative related to an individual, making this relation significant to the viewer or the reader.

The postmodern gothic, however, despite commonly reflecting contemporary social or economic perturbations, simultaneously makes a reference to the well-grounded experience, such as the repertoire of motifs and narrative prefigurations which have entered the artistic canon of the convention prenamently. Many figures and characters identified with horror genre became a part of transfictional process of allocating them to new settings and re-designing their fictional biographies. As Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon accurately observe, “Popular culture has accustomed us to narratives that refuse to leave the stage, returning repeatedly for another round of applause and for another pot of gold” (Ryan & Thon 2014: 1). Indeed, although in TV series reinterpretations of classical literary narratives quite often focus on instilling a positive image of the former *numinosum* impersonation, they do offer in return a more recent interpretation of current fears, aligned with today’s socio-political-economic landscape. Fred Botting, among others, notices the aforementioned predilection towards a “bonization” (from Latin *bonus*, ‘good’) of incarnations of evil, indicating that these trends have appeared in our culture until the end of the twentieth century. Images of characters have been explicitly transgressive until they underwent a distinctive softening. As the scholar states:

Where the restoration of symbolic, normative boundaries was celebrated in the violent climaxes to older tales of terror, monstrous figures are now less often terrifying objects of animosity expelled in the return to social and symbolic equilibrium. Instead, they retain a fascinating, attractive appeal: no longer objects of hate or fear, monstrous others become sites of identification, sympathy, desire,

and selfrecognition. Excluded figures once represented as malevolent, disturbed, or deviant monsters are rendered more humane while the systems that exclude them assume terrifying, persecutory, and inhuman shapes. The reversal, with its residual Romantic identification with outcast and rebel, alongside its feeling for liberation and individual freedom, makes transgression a positive act and diffuses the negative charge of spectral paternal prohibition. Transgression becomes just another permitted social activity (Botting 2002: 286).

In the process of these transformations, the “otherness” is no longer the untamed “alienness” and becomes a standard or an element, a subject to parodical interventions. In the similar contexts, the present analysis will include the following series based on their literary prototypes representing the very canon of gothic fiction: *Dracula* (2013-2014, prod. Universal Television, Carnival Films, Flame Ventures, Playground Entertainment for NBC), *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016, prod. Desert Wolf Productions, Neal Street Productions for Showtime and Sky), *Jekyll and Hyde* (2015, prod. ITV Studios for ITV, STV, UTV), *Second Chance* (2016, prod. Teakwood Lane Productions, Kara Inc., 20th Century Fox Television for Fox) and *Sleepy Hollow* (2013-, prod. Mark Goffman Productions [seasons 1-2], Sketch Films, K/O Paper Products, 20th Century Fox Television for Fox) as well as the elements of productions connected with literary narrations of horror, such as *Once Upon a Time* (2011-, prod. ABC Studios, Kitsis/Horowitz for ABC).

However, in order to precisely indicate the elements contributing to a transfictional relationship between all the mentioned television narratives, the term has to be specified and defined in the most optimal way. According to Ryan, transfictionality “refers to the migration of fictional entities cross different texts, but these texts may belong to the same medium, usually written narrative fiction. Transmedial storytelling can be regarded as a special case of transfictionality – a transfictionality that operates across many different media” (Ryan 2013: 366). Methods of transferring the well-known elements to new narratives, following her definition, are recalled after Lubomir Doležel, who, operating from the perspective of possible worlds theory, has distinguished between expansion, modification and transformation (Ryan 2013: 366). Although, this classification clearly does not exhaust the creative potential of transfictionality. That is why – also due to its complex relation to transmediality – I would suggest acknowledging the definition proposed by Richard Saint-Gelais, who maintained that:

Two (or more) texts exhibit a transfictional relation when they share elements such as characters, imaginary locations, or fictional worlds. Transfictionality may be considered as a branch of intertextuality, but it usually conceals this

intertextual link because it neither quotes nor acknowledges its sources. Instead, it uses the source text's setting and/or inhabitants as if they existed independently (Saint-Gelais 2008: 612).

Transfictionality then, includes in particular cross-overs, retellings, reboots, or any other narrative phenomena requiring knowledge transgressing the boundaries of a given diegetic representation (i.e. a story or a plot), for instance one that can be derived from an encyclopedic manual for a traditional table-top RPG. In short, transfictionality occurs when two or more storyworlds, or, to be strict, their encyclopaedias (as Umberto Eco likes to call them), interfere with each other. For example, when Alan Quatermain from well-known Haggard novels appears in comic book and movie adaptation *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, it is an example of transfictional "character migration" as it does not point at an intertextual deixis 'Alan Quatermain', but the whole Alan Quatermain character in his fictional entirety. Similarly, it works also for reappearing locations, worlds, universes, or even aesthetic codes.

Furthermore, the definition proposed by Saint-Gelais meticulously describes a variety of ways that affect or shape the elements of the given text, or – more broadly – the universe. Since the relations binding new plots with the reinstatement of well-known characters are multi-level, it is worth examining which of these rules can be applied to the classical gothic. In order to comprehend the motives that often run the creators engaging in a transfictional play of relocations, it is necessary to explain what factors determine the creation of new biographies of established literary (or non-literary) characters. Obviously, a peculiar receptive sentiment and the awareness of an influence that literary works have had on the evolution of the gothic conventions remain a key factor here. Perhaps referencing the familiar imaginarium as a set of motives that can be linked, merged, or connected freely and, thereby, refreshed thanks to the shift in the focalising perspective, has been equally important. Unquestionably, the fact that many gothic and horror figures embody universal rules and dilemmas is not without significance either – and framing them in the contemporary discourse has, consequently, a far greater meaning than designing new ones and attempting to implant them in the collective imagination. TV series representations offer thus an opportunity to tell something new about heroes with whom almost every erudite recipient is already familiar with – in a way different, sometimes even perverse or contrary to the one used in the past. The pleasure flowing from dipping in a seemingly familiar context or setting all the more favours immersion, which "literally means [...] sinking or plunging, however, metaphorically describing an act of reception which boils down to getting lost in the storyworld" (Maj

2015: 372). This idea of getting lost or losing oneself seems to be at the very centre of screenwriters' endeavours, who in a more or less successful way strive for making the viewers take part in a transfictional play of ideas.

It is worth adding that the possibility of functioning a related model of TV series communication is addressed also in a relatively comprehensive way by Henry Jenkins in his famous monograph *Convergence culture*. He claims that:

Convergence does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives. Because there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their head, there is an added incentive for us to talk among ourselves about the media we consume (Jenkins 2006: 3-4).

It is convergence that – through bringing closer to itself and, in consequence, blending, intertwining, and matching a variety of factors to one another – is based on the foundation of the multilevel existence of individual elements of culture. Moreover, the transfictional modal frame of TV series is constituted by more than the very properties of a serial narrative itself, which were analysed by Elisabeth Evans:

A television drama series constructs a narrative world in which potentially hundreds of episodes can be situated, the locations and characters that inhabit this world binding the events of individual episodes together. Drama invites a particular form of engagement from its audience, one that is based on their interaction with a fictional world. [...] The dramatic camera works to bring the audience into that world in a way that seems natural. [...] this kind of engagement, best described through theories of immersion, was particularly important to how the participants in this research engaged transmedia drama (Evans 2011: 10-11).

Identification of different semiotic or aesthetic codes is possible also due to the transmedial nature of such implemented communication. As Evans underlines:

Transmediality plays with this central construct of a fictional world in terms of what Matt Hills has called a 'hyper-diegesis', or 'the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, *only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encoun-*

tered within the text' [...]. With moments of transmedia storytelling new media platforms such as the internet or mobile phone are used to provide access to the parts of the text that are not available through the television episodes. Transmedia storytelling makes particular use of fictional worlds, exploiting the fact that the viewer only sees part of that world and will be encouraged to subsequently seek out information on those hidden parts via the extensions onto multiple platforms (Evans 2011: 11).

Viewers, thus, do not have to affirm a full-scale encyclopaedic knowledge and readily recognize allusions or quotations, as they can predict a transfictional character of the given production, for instance by readdressing the knowledge granted throughout different media channels. The scene from *Penny Dreadful*, in which an old actor brings Frankenstein's Creature to the theatre, where they are just rehearsing *Sweeney Todd*, can serve as a good example here. Although the title of the play is mentioned only once, that recall is linked to the violent picture of false blood gushing out of the sham slit on the actress's throat. The visual aspect may incline the viewer to reference another medium in order to find information on the play itself and fill-in the diegetic gap. Paradoxically, the fact that the very series itself (even if the title evokes the nineteenth-century penny dreadful novels) exemplifies a transmedial tendency to comment on the situation of the protagonists by the means of theatrical representation, only alluding to the problems they encounter in the first place. Almost in every episode of the first season, the authors execute an exegesis of the characters' vicissitudes with the use of staged performances at the theatre. Meanwhile, in the second season the crimes which one of the heroes – the werewolf Ethan Chandler – is involved in, as well as attacks launched by the witches – who, in this way, put their intrigues into effect – are transposed onto dioramas displayed at the wax figures exhibition, where Frankenstein's Creature is also employed.

Transmedial communication remains significant also in the case of linking the series with literary texts widely acknowledged as gothic fiction classics. After all, over the decades each of the analysed narratives has acquired its film or serial versions, which are frequently alluded to or referenced by contemporary producers or screenwriters. Visions or images of characters encoded in the collective imagination are, thus, migrating from one narration to another, while current attempts to pivot them around a transfictional nexus are often entangled in aesthetics or motifs present in the former interpretations. For instance, the laboratory of the doctor appearing in the series entitled *Jekyll and Hyde* largely resembles the representations of this topos that were present in the cinematography of the past. Similarly, the appearance of Frankenstein's laboratory in the second season of *Penny Dreadful* is a reflection of the series' former instantiations. Yet, these details do not testify to a lack of competence

or poor creativity on the part of contemporary screenwriters, as “transmedia texts have become less about promoting a central television programme or film, and more about creating a coherent, deliberately cross-platform narrative experience” (Evans 2011: 20).

It is worth to emphasize that, while writing about transmediality, Colin B. Harvey has also pointed to transfictionality in the context of relocating characters’ practices or the adaptation’s aspects. The author claims: “We ordinarily think of adaptation as retelling *existing* stories, whereas transmedia storytelling tends to be characterised as telling *new* stories in different media but set within a consistent diegetic world. Yet since the very nature of adaptation involves some elements of invention, the distinctions are not as clear cut as they might initially seem” (Harvey 2015: 3). Indeed, the notion of transfiction reflects the specifics of reference to prototypes of the cultural texts in a better way, encompassing in a much more detailed way all the aspects of functioning of not only the very narrative itself, but also the problem of transposing a character. Transfictionality broadens the range of possibilities associated with summoning codes connected with the given storyworld, by more means than only a concrete character or elements of a diegesis.

That was the way the screenwriters tried to make amends vampire motifs in the TV series *Dracula*, wherein they attempted to explore the subversive potential of the literary prototype, referring directly to the question of sexual identity of women. Therefore, they have interpreted Bram Stoker’s oeuvre as addressing the issue of emancipation and pointed at the aspects conditioning the above-mentioned endeavour. The construal rendered by the screenwriters did not depart too far from the concept of transgressive sexuality, widely discussed as an integral part of the gothic romance (Cameron 2010; Glennis, Townshend 2014; Muskovits 2010) as a result of accumulation of fears associated with eroticism and implications of physical love (also the homosexual one). In the series, these questions are pictured by the following relationships: Mina-Dracula, Mina-Lucy and Mina-Jonathan, where the binding point is the character of Miss Murray as the one, to whom various eventualities of the choices related to erotic love are being revealed. What is interesting, the homosexual aspect was exposed in the series in the relationship between Lucy and Mina (the first one shows a strong, yet unrequited, inclination towards the other), not – as acclaimed interpretations of Stoker’s novel suggest – with reference to Dracula himself.² Although sexual-affection motifs are a very important story component in the production, the new biography of Dracula gains an intellectual and world-view-related dimension, since vampire is

² This is the approach taken, among others, by L. Andrew Cooper in the book entitled *Gothic Realities. The Impact of Horror Fiction on Modern Culture*, Jefferson, North Carolina and

fascinated by sciences, in particular due to the problem of electrification among urban agglomerations. Such exposure of the character is nothing more but a transfictional excuse for creating a new biography of the widely-recognized character, which harmonizes with the tendency shown by contemporary authors to instil a positive image of the departed embodiment of *numinosum*. Transgressive elements not only lose their primary meanings (since it is difficult to sustain, in the postmodern version, e.i., the nineteenth-century fear of homosexuality as a deviation ruining the socially binding heterosexual order), but what is more, the showrunners try to reassess the characters' motivations that were heretofore considered negative, so that they could attract the attention of recipients.

Revitalization of the old monsters does not negate, on the other hand, the existence of a more universal context, especially visible in the construction of the show's version of *Dracula*. It is hard to decide to what extent the screenwriters got familiar with the different readings of Stoker's novel, but in the context of the unsuccessful and sabotaged project of electrification, which was finally proposed by *Dracula*, it seems only too suitable to mention Franco Moretti's conception, according to which the vampire makes:

an excessive form of capitalism – its surplus which reveals its origin at the same time. The stench rising in the places of the vampire taking shelter [described in the novel – K.O.] may be the stench of money and hidden (impure and primitive) accumulation. *Dracula*, in Moratti's opinion, is not [...] a noble, but degenerated aristocrat. [...] He is rather a monstrous, greedy and predatory entrepreneur, or indeed [...] a despotic monopolist (Marcela 2015: 66).

Meanwhile, the actions of the vampire appearing in the series resemble a fight with the resistance to the technological progress and, simultaneously, reveal the capitalist weakness in this character.

In the TV series *Second chance* (akin to *Dracula*, merely one-season-long, though), the transfictional life was also given to Frankenstein's monster, who – as interpreted by the showrunners – was transformed into an officer of the law, having, moreover, an entirely different origin story from its literary counterpart. As L. Andrew Cooper argues, "Shelley's Gothic imagination makes it possible to make a success by Frankenstein's reproduction method, still this success of »evil education« cannot be an »effective achievement«. Instead of the divine light, Frankenstein can generate merely terrifying darkness" (Cooper 2010: 64). Nevertheless, in the version proposed in the series,

London 2010, or by Eszter Muskovits in the article under the title *The Threat of Otherness in Bram Stoker's Dracula*, "Trans" 2010, no. 10.

the experiment is carried out by a rich genius not in order to – as Anne K. Mellor (Mellor 1988) suggests when analysing Shelley’s novel – violate the order of reproduction, but to obtain a medicine for the terminally ill twin sister. The very aim of the experiment itself is founded on noble motives, yet a penetrating analysis of the plot allows grounding it in the corporational paradigm. The research project becomes the object of desire for the company-behemoth which competes with the one run by the executor of the experiment and sends another version of Frankenstein’s creature on a spying mission. In the interpretation offered by the creators of the series – rather freely dealing with the source material – these creatures called to life are simply younger, genetically improved clones of deceased elderly people. The heroes do not have much in common with Shelley’s literary conceptions, which invests them – in spite of everything – with a new fully transfictional profile. After all, the creature itself that is called to life³ is placed in the screenwriters’ version of a criminal procedural in the character of an avenging vigilante. What is more, the appearance of this hero often has a comic reflection, associated for instance in the need of hiding the identity of the resurrected one from the other family members or with its inclination to abuse an alcohol.

A decidedly more doleful and, at the same time, profound in the philosophical-ethical dimension entourage was attained by the version proposed by the authors of the show *Penny Dreadful*, wherein the Frankenstein’s creature, abandoned by Victor as soon as it was brought to life, compensates this abandonment by immersing in writing poetry and drama. Furthermore, following the initiation of contacts with the outside world, it initially makes use of the alias ‘Kaliban’, borrowed from William Shakespeare’s drama, to subsequently take on the name of ‘John Clare’, after the nineteenth-century English poet. In Creature’s talks with another heroine of the series, Vanessa Ives, quotes from Alfred Tennyson’s, William Wordsworth’s, John Keats’, or Percy Bysshe Shelley’s (the husband to the authoress of *Frankenstein*) poetry frequently appears – which simultaneously proves a liking for literary works expressed often by the showmakers. This also finds confirmation in the case of some other references. For example, in one of the scenes of the sixth episode, season first, Victor Frankenstein quotes a poem by Shelley and at the moment Abraham Van Helsing (in the series featuring as a haematologist) is disclosing to him the existence of vampires, he is looking at the first (as implied by the cover which is iden-

³ I.e. the police officer obtaining the eponymous “second chance” and being involved in a scandal, who is given the chance of redemption on both the professional and private grounds, through reconciliation and cooperation with his formerly neglected son.

tical with the original) edition of *Varney the Vampire* by James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest – which, again, shows a world-building and referential power of subtle, transfictional references.

The variety of literary connotations is also visible in the series entitled *Sleepy Hollow*, referring to the writings of Washington Irving, such as *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*, but also to some historical events or mythology. The Headless Horseman, well-known for its literary and film realizations, was given by the screenwriters an extensive biography fitting in the aforementioned tendency of taming monstrous representations. Thus, while it is true that the Headless Horseman is a transgressive being, making a pact with evil which binds him with its forces, he is also a deeply hurt human being who has transgressed: it was the unfulfilled love to Katrina Van Tassel which lays at the source of his decision and his vicissitudes as shown by the screenwriters in a close relation with the lives of Ichabode Crane and Katrina. Thereby, a demonic manifestation of the power of darkness is presented as Abraham Van Brunt – an ill-fated individual seeking revenge on his rival (Ichabode), who later on, as a result of coincidence which turns out fortunate to the protagonists, becomes a loyal ally to Crane.

Transfictional predilections could not have omitted the iconic prefiguration of the duality of human nature from Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In an ingenious way, once again going along with the trend of taming the horror, the screenwriters of the series *Once Upon a Time* managed to relocate Jekyll and Hyde, interpreting the original dualism in a literal manner. After introducing in the fifth season the figure of Jekyll and his alter ego, Hyde, they have split the hero into two separate beings functioning in dedicated physical bodies. Implications of a similar conception are fairly obvious: the recipient is given a clearly outlined monster which – having come out of, nomen omen, his retreat – becomes an imminent threat devoid of any mysteriousness or psychological sophistication. This framework, however, remains linked to Cooper's most compelling interpretation, which assumes that Jekyll is an uterus from which Hyde – like a satanic spawn – emerges to free himself (Cooper 2010: 74). This ghoulish birth does not come about exclusively in the symbolic sphere, but is transferred onto the biological frontier, entering the territory of literality, so significant to the artistic convention of *Once Upon a Time*.

The showrunners entitled *Jekyll and Hyde* treat ambivalence of human nature slightly more thoughtfully, though still not sublimely enough. They did not so much recreate the happenings of the characters known from the literary prototype as presented the history of their descendants. This is an inventive operation, however not easy to realize, since Jekyll's young offspring does not bring anything new into the novel, bereaving it of any suspense. The

series, therefore, despite its potential – does not make full use of possibilities offered in transfictional modules and falls into a procedural banality.

A fairly characteristic feature of transfictional narratives widespread in TV series based on gothic fiction, is the creators' predilection towards intertwining fictional biographies of individual characters, sometimes in a surprisingly complicated manner. At the foundation of similar decisions one may see an underlying belief that the more plausible and coherent the relationships between characters from different (narratively, aesthetically, psychologically) storyworlds are, the greater "cognitive investment" (Ryan 2013: 385) the viewer may contribute to the show. It is necessarily to remind that figures firmly inscribed in the culture often represent simply a set of traits or values, constituting many a time a symbol or a metaphor of a specific discourse. This issue is exemplified in the most multiparametral way by *Penny Dreadful*, where ties and interactions between the characters are constructed in a very advanced manner. May it be enough to say that these relations are not always direct and evident to the other protagonists, which builds up an atmosphere of secrecy enveloping the existence of each of the transfictional heroes.

When writing about transfictionality, one should not forget the aesthetic codes and artefacts (culture, art, mythology) which identify the given message, often contributing to its recognisability, and "passing" it altogether to another narrative. This principle is scrupulously observed by creators of the majority of series' reinterpretations of literary prototypes, who consequently allocate the diegesis in a space temporally adjusted to its original instantiation. This predilection is connected with the concern for meticulously designed costumes and scenography (alongside with the artefacts that can be associated with the given character⁴), which are reproduced by specialists employed by the creators and world-builders.⁵ Details of this sort are characteristic for *Penny Dreadful*, and become all the more significant in this context as they often go beyond the mere reproduction of the visual entourage of the given period of time. An important role is played here by visual codes connected with concrete char-

⁴ As long as they function as a designate. I agree here with the comment put forward by Christina Ljungberg, who writes: "In the triadic semiotics of Peirce, a sign is anything that stands for (represents) something, called its object, to generate another sign as its interpretant. According to this definition, the sign is itself a mediator or medium, acting, so to speak, as a translator between its object and its so-called interpretant, which is the result of its interpretation. [...] The sign initiates a process which makes it interact relationally or *functionally* with its object. Signs are not necessarily material objects, nor even a class of objects: they exist in the mind of their interpreters, in other words, they have a cognitive *effect* on their interpreters. In signification, a sign dialogically interacts with its various sign aspects, the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic, in an ongoing flow of signs mediating between the life-world we live in and our interpretation of it" (Ljungberg 2010: 83).

⁵ Aesthetic visualizations make the key world-constituting element in realizations. As Alli-

acters, since each of them is complemented by suitable props – not only ones ascribed to the prototypical storyworld, but also those closer to the recipient's reality. Hence, for instance, Dorian Gray's house is filled with genuine works of art: portraits and self-portraits coming from different epochs. The viewer who is intent on searching for information on the collection will find there such masterpieces as Jan van Eyck's *Portrait of a Man* (also known under the title *Portrait of Man in a Red Turban* of 1433), John Everett Millais's *Dorothea Thorpe* (1882) or Frédérique O'Connell's *Rachel dans le rôle de Phèdre* (1850). They are – like the references to the literary works mentioned earlier – deeply hidden allusions, which give the chance of unravelling their heteroreferential nature only to those educated and erudite enough.

The theatre plays the role of an aesthetic identifier and, at the same time, a source for the commentary on the social roles that the heroes of *Penny Dreadful*, being different from the majority of humanity, must perform. In the first season, it provides shelter to Creature, whose (mis)fortunes are in many details convergent with the biography of the title character of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910). Similarly to Eric, Creature also has his lodgings in the theatre and like his elder counterpart bestows his unreturned love upon a young beautiful actress. However, as *Penny Dreadful* is a production maintained in a very pessimistic aura, in the end Creature's chosen one turns out – in contrast to the innocent good-hearted artist from Leroux's novel – to be a petite woman who rejects the protagonist's advances and contributes to his dismissal from work. Moreover, she shows an affection for this equally petite and egocentric young actor.

The circle of props which identify specific characters as transfictional individuals includes also objects from Victor Frankenstein's laboratory, reproduced in compliance with movie representations of the creators of the cinema in the first half of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, inclinations towards copying the style of scenography, costume, and makeup of the day manifest themselves also in images of the vampiresses that attack the protagonists in the first season of the series. The pallid-faced long-haired blondes with their eyes encircled by black lines and with tinted lips bring to mind the representations of the vampiric seductresses of old.

son Oddey and Christine White write, "The potentials of spaces for performance are necessarily spaces where the reality and illusion are both a simulation of the material world but also, and simultaneously, real. Therefore, there is a combination and interaction of fictional events, actions, all global utterances and presentational means that construct and present these two senses of reality, and which mark the segmentation process at all levels. Subsequently, it is this interplay between language, space and scenography which is then activated. What remains meaningful and global to some extent (in terms of the event's communication), is made significant within the space" (Oddey & White 2006: 15).

Furthermore, we need to count the gothic styling of the witch's place in the second season of *Penny Dreadful* into the circle of transfictional imaginations. Its maze-like corridors are filled with figures of lurking gargoyles and piles of human skulls. The mist enfolding the manor and the characteristic low-lying full moon complement this composition well-known in the classics of horror. Similar aesthetic procedures are applied by the creators of *Sleepy Hollow* when showing the heroes struggling against the forces of evil. The nineteenth-century London featuring in the series *Jekyll and Hyde* appears misty and illuminated with a pale light of the moon.

All these visual codes representing the storyworld are presented to the perception of the recipient, who recognizes the aesthetic model of the prototype which is revealed in well-known elements. Ryan and Thon comment on this phenomenon as follows:

David Herman describes narratives as “blueprints for a specific mode of world-creation”, but it would be more appropriate to say “world imagination,” for while the author creates the storyworld through the production of signs, it is the reader, spectator, listener, or player who uses the blueprint of a finished text to construct a mental image of this world. The convergence of media around a common center that we may call “narrativity” – a center that is itself organized around a storyworld – will serve as an opportunity to capture their distinctive narrative resources. In this case it is not convergence per se that we are interested in but the divergences that the common center reveals (Ryan & Thon 2014: 3).

It should be noted that I use the term “storyworld” as interpreted by Ryan, that is as a narratological concept that:

differs from this interpretation of “world” in at least three major ways. First, it is something projected by individual texts, and not by the entire work of an author, so that every story has its own storyworld [...]. Second [...] it requires narrative content, so the applicability of the concept of storyworld to lyric poetry is questionable. Finally, it cannot be called the “world of the author” because in the case of fiction, authors are located in the real world while the storyworld is a fictional world. If a storyworld is anybody's world, it is the world of the characters. [...] Storyworld is a broader concept than fictional world because it covers both factual and fictional stories, meaning stories told as true of the real world and stories that create their own imaginary world, respectively (Ryan 2013: 32-33).⁶

⁶ This interpretation can be complemented by the well-known statement of David Her-

The presented instances of transfiction examined throughout a number of TV series seem to exemplify the definition in its full meaning, since their creators do not merely invent new biographies of well-known figures, neither allocate them into new plots, but transpose them along with visual, temporal, and topical narrative components, reconstructing certain elements in compliance with eventual aesthetic needs of recipients, tailored to the chosen convention. The multiplication of transfictional narratives in gothic – or horror-themed TV shows is not linked exclusively to the rise in the demand for productions of this kind, but also to the extra-aesthetic aspects of the functioning of TV industry, which is closely connected with nowadays problems. As Evans puts it:

The development of transmedia narrative strategies speaks to the industry's desire to regain control in this changeable media landscape and demonstrates the intersection between narrative and the industrial and technological context from which it emerges (Evans 2015: 112).

The consciousness of possible ways of distribution of serial narratives and an increasing interest in this type of storytelling creates a solid creative base for the showrunners. Producers set out to look for plots which could satisfy receivers' expectations and fit precisely within the current aesthetic trends. The post-gothic that has been so fashionable of late, appears to constitute a perfect foundation for horror narratives sustaining their intertextual liaisons with classical source material. Solutions of the transfictional ilk – increasingly present in popular culture – seem an apt choice, although their realizations are not always (even if because of omission or unfortunate exposure of concrete discourses) satisfying to the majority of recipients, the proof of which are low viewer ratings, or taking off a series after merely one season.

Transfictionality, as an aesthetic mechanism, is not the key to immediate success itself, since it has to be realised in a multi-level, multi-parameter way, engaging not only the stem of the given plot or characters of the key

man: "I use the term *storyworld* to refer to the world evoked implicitly as well as explicitly by a narrative, whether that narrative takes the form of a printed text, film, graphic novel, sign language, everyday conversation, or even a tale that is projected but never actualized as a concrete artifact – for example, stories about ourselves that we contemplate telling to friends but then do not, or film scripts that a screenwriter has plans to create in the future. Storyworlds are global mental representations enabling interpreters to frame inferences about the situations, characters, and occurrences either explicitly mentioned in or implied by a narrative text or discourse. As such, storyworlds are mental models of the situations and events being recounted – of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what manner. Reciprocally, narrative artifacts (texts, films, etc.) provide blueprints for the creation and modification of such mentally configured storyworlds" (Herman 2009: 106-107).

importance to it, but also the setting and other strata – all of this in order to create a mosaic, though internally coherent narrative steeped in psychologically justified and feasible character motivations and avoiding clichéd or second-tier storytelling. As a result, only two of the discussed series fulfil the given assumptions, *Penny Dreadful* and *Once Upon a Time*, since their creators make use of transfiction with expertise, joining in a balanced manner biographies, fictional universes, and aesthetic codes alike. The references proposed by them are not always obvious or readable – however, this is precisely due to the fact that they are not intertextual clues which, when deciphered, offer an intellectual satisfaction, but transfictional links expediting immersion in the storyworld, exploration of its frontiers, and identification of all its intertwined narrative components.

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