Wet Land, Dark Water, Crimson Blood:
Liquid Fear and Fluid Threat on the Contemporary Gothic Screen

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Abstract

This thesis evaluates the place occupied by liquids, flows and fluidity in contemporary English-speaking Gothic film and television texts. Historically, studies have approached the Gothic through the medievalist etymology of the word 'Gothic', pointing to a type of architecture associated with the supposedly barbaric past, leading to readings of the genre focusing on the return of the past within an antiquated space. Going beyond these tendencies, I read the Gothic through an overwhelmingly forgotten etymology of the word 'Gothic', that is, 'to pour, to flow', and , as such, focus on the overlooked fluids and fluidity. The various liquids permeating the contemporary Gothic (sea water, spring water, blood, clay, mud, etc.) materialise the suggested threat and unanchored fear specific to the mode. This thesis thus recontextualises and legitimises liquids and fluidity as a key feature of the contemporary Gothic mode. .

While liquids as embodiments of fear are comparatively absent in twentieth century cinema and television, they pervade the postmillennial Gothic and, more widely, Horror screen. Primarily relying on post-millennial Gothic films and television series, this thesis also considers surges of liquid-coded threats in other genres and modes, e.g., Horror and Gore, across the same period. Close readings and materiality-driven analyses delineate a shift in the depiction of threat at the turn of the millennium. The drastically heightened visibility of fluids and focus on fluidity in contemporary fear-inducing cinema and television, what I call the gothicisation of Horror, reflects the liquefaction of threats and fears in the wider culture. Building on Zigmunt Bauman's rich concept of Liquid Fear within an essentially post-modern liquid culture, I demonstrate that the materially and symbolically liquid threats and fears of the Gothic reflect the unanchored and free-floating anxiety permeating contemporary culture.

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Introduction

Reading Radcliffe, Lewis, or Maturin is like being dumped into a turbulent ocean with only a puny life vest to keep you afloat. Wave after giant wave of catastrophic plot turns break over your head as a strong undertow of dread pulls you ever farther from solid ground. Catharsis, when it comes, never fully dissolves the accumulated tension. By the time you surface, gasping for breath, at the story's end, the air that's available is insufficient to recover from the anxiety of almost drowning.

Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka*, 2012, p. 3.

I.1 Genesis

I.1.1 Martine's Gothic

Picture a six-year-old girl. She is peacefully reading the popular children book series *Martine.* She likes reading *Martine.* She is reading *Martine: L'Accident.* She brings her face closer to the book. 'She really likes reading *Martine*,' her mother thinks. The girl's eyes get too close to the page and her mother notices something. She notices the girl's hands, firmly holding the hard cover. The girl's hands, which have not moved since they opened up the book. Because she is not turning the pages. She is not reading. She is staring. She has been staring for several minutes now. The girl's parents grow uneasy as they see what is on the page. The girl has been staring at Martine's bleeding leg. A worried whisper fills the room. The girl likes blood a bit too much. 'Maybe she'll be a doctor…', the father says, reassuringly.

From Martine, and through the years, the girl finds a neutral territory to express her blood-drive, one between life-saving surgeries and first-degree murders: horror cinema, starting with a particular inclination for Tim Burton's Gothic universe, which is where this thesis begins. In Burton's *Ed Wood* (1994), Belà Lugosi (played by Martin Landau) explains to Ed Wood (played by Johnny Depp) that 'The blood… the blood is horror.' This line sparked the original hypothesis for the present study, namely that Gothic horror on screen is all about blood. Through the sinuous, and often frustrating, path of research, the hypothesis evolved. Blood, but also water, lakes and seas, storms and floods, drops and waves, slime and mud, poisons and antidotes, and stains and bleach drown the contemporary Gothic film and television text. Perhaps to the disappointment of a six-year-old girl, the Gothic, then, is not just about blood; it is about liquids.

I.1.2 A Slippery Definition: The Ungraspable Gothic

As this hypothesis suggests, my exploration of the Gothic started as a genre study, whose goal was to delineate the famously undefinable Gothic cinematic and televisual genre through liquids, supported by a generally overlooked etymology of the word 'Gothic': its hypothetical and potential roots in a verb that means 'to flow' or 'to pour' (explored below). While generic boundaries are often conducive to new ideas, the turbulent ocean of the Gothic refuses to be contained. Monographs and edited collections on the literary, cinematic or televisual Gothic are congested with attempts at defining the Gothic genre, driven by a desire to be the one to capture this famously elusive genre. Such attempts follow an overall inclination for picking out semantic elements of the genre, in which two distinct methodologies emerge. The first one aims at providing a short and highly applicable definition, answering the question 'what is the Gothic?' Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for instance, places the Gothic at the congruence of its complex plot, oppressive space, unspeakable quality, and emphasis on surface (1986). More recently, Dani Cavallaro efficiently defines the Gothic as comprising 'tales of obsession and haunting which employ images of disorder, alienation and monstrosity for the purposes of both entertainment and ideological reflection' (2002, p. 8), while David Punter carefully lists what motifs Gothic literature 'speaks of' – 'phantoms', 'specters', 'the uncanny' and 'bodily harm and the wound' (2012, p. 2) – rather than taking the risk of defining what it might be. In Film Studies, scholars including Misha Kavka and Heidi Kaye prominently describe the paranoid fear experienced by the implied audience, with Kavka centring on the effects of the threat on both characters and audiences (2002), and Kaye highlighting the striking visuals, focus on sexuality, the importance of audience response as well as the use of technical innovations within the genre (2012).

The second method of definition aims towards specificity, answering the question 'what is the Gothic made of?' Such approaches consistently define the Gothic through long lists of figures, themes, or motifs to encompass the elusive complexity of the genre, on the basis that short definitions might be reductive. Maggie Kilgour explains that it is 'easier to identify a gothic novel by its properties than by an essence, so that analysis of the form usually devolves into a cataloguing of stock characters and devices which are simply recycled from one text to the next' (1995, p. 4). In her own 'catalogue', she includes the castle in ruins, the 'gloomy mountains', 'a haunted room' as well as 'a passive and persecuted heroine, a sensitive and rather ineffectual hero, a dynamic and tyrannical villain, an evil prioress, [and] talkative servants' (1995, p. 4). Establishing one of the

most cited and exhaustive catalogues of what he calls 'stock features' of Gothic literature, Fred Botting points out that

> [t]ortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits predominated in the eighteenth century. Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscape as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats. This list grew, in the nineteenth century, with the addition of scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double signifying duplicity and evil nature. Gothic landscapes are desolate, alienating and full of menace. In the eighteenth century they were wild and mountainous locations. Later the modern city combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest. (1996, pp. 1-2)

Although highly thorough, this definition only encompasses eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. One might think that defining the specificity of the Gothic in visual media, which only encompasses a century of productions, might make for an easier endeavour. One would be proven wrong by Helen Wheatley, who defines the genre by looking specifically at its translation to television in her monograph on the televisual Gothic, generating the following list:

> [A] mood of dread and/or terror inclined to evoke fear or disgust in the viewer; the presence of highly stereotyped characters and plots, often derived from Gothic literary fiction […]; representations of the supernatural which are either overt […] or implied […]; a proclivity towards the structures and images of the uncanny (repetitions, returns, déjà vu, premonitions, ghosts, doppelgangers, animated inanimate objects and severed body parts, etc.); and, perhaps most importantly, homes and families which are haunted, tortured or troubled in some way. In addition, these narratives are likely to be organised in a complex way, structured around flashback sequences, memory montages and other narrative interpolations. Gothic television is visually dark, with a mise-en-scène dominated by drab and dismal colours, shadows and closed-in spaces. Programmes of this genre are also inclined towards camerawork and sound recording taken from a subjective perspective […] Gothic television is thus highly impressionistic at times. (2006, p. 3)

Wheatley tries to include *all* of the Gothic idiosyncrasies – rather successfully – but, like most attempts following this approach, the result is at once uncontainable and rigid. It cannot be contained because of the wide range of affective, aesthetic, semantic and syntactic characteristics of the Gothic, yet it is inflexible because a long list of characteristics creates an unintentionally misleading sense of exhaustiveness.

At times restrictively vague, at times excessively lengthy, but always asymptotic, these definitions demonstrate the ungraspable fluidity of the genre itself. My initial attempt to solidify the Gothic into a delineated genre by providing an essential definition through fluids thus quickly proved antithetical. Just like the liquids it depicts, the Gothic leaks and changes, adopting the shape of the medium, time, place, and, significantly, genre in which it appears. The scope of the present study thus shifted to embrace the fluidity which it champions. I model my approach to the Gothic on Xavier Aldana Reyes', who, in his retracing of the history of Gothic cinema – and, when relevant, television – frames the Gothic as an aesthetic *mode*, marked more strongly by visuals, motifs and figures than by affect or intended emotional outcome (2020, p. 14). This approach allows him to navigate what he describes as the 'interstitiality and indeterminacy' (2020, p. 6) of the Gothic mode through time and space. Framing of the Gothic as mode rather than genre provides a strongly needed analytical flexibility in a contemporary context of generic boundary-crossing and cross-contamination in screen culture. A mode can, and will, appear across genres – Gothic romance, Gothic horror, Gothic comedy, Gothic fantasy, etc. – and yet remain highly recognisable and definable. Aldana Reyes lists, for instance, 'the crumbling Victorian estate, the candle-wielding heroine, the proliferation of spectres' as Gothic 'trappings' (2020, p. 10), existing alongside gory incidents in *Crimson Peak* (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2015).[1] Following Aldana Reyes' approach, the Gothic is thus defined in this thesis as a fluid cinematic and televisual mode, slithering between affirming itself within immediately recognisable Gothic texts and oozing into other modes of Horror, such as slasher or gore films.

Describing the Gothic as a mode of Horror is a controversial endeavour in Anglo-American scholarship where, as underlined by Katharina Rein in her study of Gothic cinema, the long Gothic tradition in architecture, literature and culture has helped cement the Gothic into a genre with its specific field of Gothic Studies (2023, p. 13). Stubbornly refusing to read the Gothic as mode

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[1] Aldana Reyes mentions the clay-red ghosts and the 'bloody incidents', e.g., Thomas being stabbed in the cheek, as instances of gore, both of which I read as instances of gothicity in my chapters (see Chapter 2 in particular).

highlights a proud affirmation that the Gothic is not 'inferior to', 'dependent of', 'lower than' – especially compared to Horror, which came chronologically later than the Gothic. Nonetheless, other European horizons such as, in Rein's case, Germany, widely read the Gothic as a mode of the more widespread Horror – if the Gothic is acknowledged at all (2023, p. 12).[2]

These wide-ranging definitions and debates around the nature of the Gothic hint at the mode's inherent fluidity. Definitions of the Gothic as 'unstable, unfixed, and ungrounded' (Botting, 1996, p. 111), 'pliable and malleable' (Kaye, 2012, p. 250), 'unstable' (Hogle, 2002, p. 1), or 'highly mobile' (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 3) all denote its fluid ungraspability. Some critics address questions of fluidity within the Gothic more thoroughly, though still indirectly. Kilgour, in *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, has famously argued for the ghostliness of the Gothic, reflecting one of the genre's most famous monsters. Kilgour sees the Gothic as a 'shadowy and nebulous […] genre, as difficult to define as any gothic ghost' (1995, pp. 3-4). The notions of nebulousness and formlessness echo that of fluidity through common associations with ungraspability and changeability. Judith Halberstam[3] hints at the malleability of the Gothic by reading it primarily as the genre of the Monstrous, understood as a boundary-breaking body (1995, p. 23), a perspective echoed in Ian Conrich's monster-coded description of the Gothic film as a 'repeatedly hybridising and mutating' form (1998, p. 76). The complexity of the Gothic thus allows studies underlining its malleability to spread, both contradicting and complementing each other. The Gothic revolves around ghosts; it is also ghostly. The Gothic features monsters; it is also monstrous. The Gothic displays bodies; it is also corporeal. The Gothic gives prominence to risings; it also rises. And now, the Gothic oozes with fluids; it is also fluid. Far from weakening each new and seemingly contradicting approach, this proliferation is unified by the strength of the Gothic, as a multifaceted, complex, mutable mode which, perhaps, most importantly, contains its motifs, aesthetics, structures, and narratives as much as they contain it. It possesses them as much as they possess it. In the midst of this never-ending mise-en-abyme rises a plethora of points of view, perspectives and approaches which, while distinct, all point to the same inherent malleability of the genre, a

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[2] In France, monographs on the Gothic film simply do not exist. Even browsing Horror scholarship for studies of Gothic films often proves unfruitful. See, e.g., Éric Dufour's study, where, to define Horror, the author uses a distinction with the Fantastic rather than the Gothic – as might happen in English-speaking scholarship (2006, pp. 55-68).

[3] Judith Halberstam at the time of publication, now Jack Halberstam.

malleability which I read, because of the genre's etymological root, mechanics of fear, and prominence on the contemporary screen, as fluidity.

Therefore, from genre-defining, this study mutated, again, into an investigation of fluids and fluidity seeping into contemporary Gothic films and television, as well as an exploration of the surges of the Gothic mode, understood as a mode featuring liquids and fluids, within Horror-inflected texts. Gothicity, synonymous throughout this thesis with an emphasis on 'fluidity', is read as a reflection of contemporary Western liquid culture. My understanding of the Gothic is thus that of a fluid mode, surfacing when the mechanics of horror and fear rely heavily on both literal and metaphorical fluidity. As such, Gothic liquids function as harbingers of a fluid and unanchored fear. This study thus constitutes an inquiry into the shape of contemporary fear, exploring the depths of current fluidity- and fluid-related anxieties on screen. Therefore, my aim is to look at what the overwhelming presence of liquids and liquid threats on the Gothic and Horror screens tells us about the contemporary Gothic, but also about cultural fears in the post-millennial era. The following questions consequently guide this research: What can the representation of fluids and fluidity tell us about contemporary Gothic texts? To what extent are we currently experiencing a cycle of liquid Horror and Gothic, and why? What can the contemporary design and materiality of timeless horror motifs – the landscape, the house, the ghost, the blood – tell us about the current state of fear in Western culture? Before providing answers to these questions, I start my investigation, in this introduction, as is customary, by reviewing the current literature influencing, nourishing and surrounding this thesis. I focus on three main aspects of scholarship, namely the state of Gothic and Horror Studies, research on fluidity and fluids, and scholarship on contemporary fear. Underlining this review of academic work is the overall lack of interest in fluids and fluidity in scholarship and the reasons for such a lack. Both aspects are instrumental in establishing this thesis, and permeate the entirety of the study; nevertheless, more specific and motif-oriented scans of literature will appear at the start and within each chapter to promote, in line with the overall enterprise, a fluid and organic situating of my readings within wider scholarship.

I.1.3 The Fluid Etymologies of the Gothic
This research knows many starting points. Martine's leg, Burton's Lugosi, and a generic enigma, all nudged and nourished instinctual reflections. What solidified the instinct into an argument, my 'there is definitely something here' moment, was digging into the etymology of the word 'Gothic' and discovering that it too was marked by fluidity. First, because the history of the

word 'Gothic' itself is highly malleable, as underlined by Jerrold E. Hogle, who links the difficulty of isolating a monolithic definition of the Gothic genre to the history of the word, as its meaning 'has been quite deliberately fraudulent and shifty ever since the term was first used to describe a medieval architectural style and, from there, a vaguely medieval way of life more or less connected to that style' (1999, p. 2). Hogle sees the fraudulence, shiftiness and vagueness of the word as constitutive of the indefinability of the genre itself. Hogle's mention of medieval architecture and medievalist style hint at the widely accepted historical meaning of Gothic, i.e., 'barbarous.' This definition follows the Renaissance understanding of the word, used famously by Giorgio Vasari in the prefix[4] to his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* first published in 1550 and updated in 1568 – the latter constituting the basis for most current translations into English or French. In the body of his *Lives,* Vasari compares the 'barbarous' and 'outlandish' nature of the Goths, the supposed destroyers of 'all the finer arts' of Italy (1912-1914, p. xliv), with painters like Giotto, the precursor of Renaissance art. It is in the introduction to the three arts, however, that Vasari expresses his disdain for Gothic architecture most vehemently, a vehemence of the 'German Work' (1907, p. 83) (i.e., Gothic Work) that deserves the only extensive quotation of this entire thesis:

> We come at last to another sort of work called German, which both in ornament and in proportion is very different from the ancient and the modern. Nor is it adopted now by the best architects but is avoided by them as monstrous and barbarous, and lacking everything that can be called order. Nay it should rather be called confusion and disorder. In their buildings, which are so numerous that they sickened the world, doorways are ornamented with columns which are slender and twisted like a screw, and cannot have the strength to sustain a weight, however light it may be. Also on all the façades, and wherever else there is enrichment, they built a malediction of little niches one above the other, with no end of pinnacles and points and leaves, so that, not to speak of the whole erection seeming insecure, it appears impossible that the parts should not topple over at any moment. Indeed they have more the appearance of being made of paper than of stone or marble. In these works they made endless projections and breaks and corbellings and flourishes that throw their works all out of proportion; and often, with one thing being put above another, they

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[4] This introduction is often excluded from translations of Vasari's *Lives* (the 1912-1914 edition by Macmillan and the Oxford 1991 and 1998 editions). Punter and Byron, using a commentary on Vasari's work rather than the primary source, overlook this fact when discussing the origins of the Gothic (2004, p. 32), which can lead to wasted hours of research. A separate reference therefore appears here.

reach such a height that the top of a door touches the roof. *This manner was the invention of the Goths, for, after they had ruined the ancient buildings, and killed the architects in the wars, those who were left constructed the buildings in this style.* […]

May God protect every country from such ideas and style of buildings! They are such deformities in comparison with the beauty of our buildings that they are not worthy that I should talk more about them, and therefore let us pass on to speak of the vaults. (1907, pp. 83-84) [my emphasis]

The italicised sentence of this fervent condemnation of the Germanic style of architecture – a fervour that scholars of supposedly lower cultural forms such as, say, Gothic films and television, might have experienced – constitutes the first known description of this type of architecture as a 'Gothic' invention. While Paul Frankl explains that Vasari merges several distinct architectural styles in this paragraph, coalescing the twisted columns of Cosmati and the pointed arches of the Gothic (1960, p. 291), the association of these 'deformities' with the fifth-century Germanic *Goths*, points to the prejudices held against the late medieval pointed-arch architecture. This thinking crystallises the dichotomy, in both art and architecture, between Classical and Northern, clear-cut and formless, order and confusion to reiterate Vasari's ideas, or, perhaps in more Gothic terms, between a 'living, breathing body and a skeleton' (Worringer, 1957, p. 107). From the eighteenth to the late nineteenth century in Britain, the term 'Gothic' comes to refer to a cultural reconstruction, designated as a revival, of a medieval fantasy combining romanticism and primitivism, which facilitates the emergence of Gothic as a literary genre. Extending beyond the architectural sphere, the word 'Gothic' becomes a synonym for the archaic, pre-Enlightenment past as a 'general and derogatory term for the Middle Ages which conjured up ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness' (Botting, 1996, p. 22). This etymology has proven fructuous in both Gothic production and research, especially in Botting's seminal approach to the genre as fascinated with a fantasised pre-Enlightenment time embodied, amongst others, by the medieval Gothic castle (1996).

As fruitful as this definition has been, especially in the pioneering academic studies of the genre in the 1980s, it does not cover the specificities of post-millennial Gothic. Hoping to offer new ways of approaching the Gothic mode, this study recovers an overlooked possible etymological meaning of the word that is, 'to pour, to flow'. This etymology is often underlined in indexes of Germanic languages. Moritz Schönfeld, in his *Wörterbuch der Altergermanischen*

Personen- und Völkernamen, published in 1911, relates the word to 'Gutones', which produces on the one hand the root *Gutans, generating the ethnonyms Ostrogoths and Visigoths, and on the other hand, 'giutan' giving the Geman 'Gießen', to flow (1911, pp. 120-121). Later, Julius Pokorny asserts in his Indo-germanic etymological dictionary that the prefix *ĝheu- gave the proto-germanic word 'geutan' or 'giutan', that is 'to flow', 'to pour' (1948, p. 447), which then produces an entire word family across Germanic languages, linked to fluidity and containers of fluids such as, in German, 'gießen', 'fließen' (to pour, to flow), 'goot' ('gutter, drain') in Dutch and, in English, 'gut'. In his English edition of *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Gotischen Sprache* by Sigmund Feist, Winfried Lehmann details the kinship of the root, regrouping years of etymological traditions into one entry, for *Gut-þiuda, i.e., 'people of the Goths' (1986, p. 164). Lehmann explains that 'gut- is generally related to *giutan *pour*' (1986, p. 164) [emphasis in the original]. He clarifies that, while some critics situate the origins of the word in the idea of inseminators (applied to people or horses), and therefore, in that sense, of *pourers* of semen, others reject this explanation and trace the etymology back to 'a transfer from the place of settlement: Go **gut sea, bay -- *Gut- þiuda are the people on the *gut*' (1986, p. 164) [emphasis in the original], or to a river name or a flooded homeland (1986, p. 164). While hypothetical, this etymological thread between the Gothic and fluidity constitutes the ignition of the idea into research. The etymological link is widely overlooked or unknown, only mentioned in scholarship by Adam Roberts in his study of the relation between Gothic and Horror literature (2012), to underline the echoing fluidity of the Goths as a people and of the Gothic as genre: 'Gothic literature, like the Gothic people, has demonstrated a restless fluidity of situation, and signification that is as much a part of its meaning as its more familiar props, setting and metageneric conventions' (2012, p. 22). Roberts thus links the fluidity and mutability of the Gothic genre back to the etymology through ethnographic considerations, but quickly returns to 'the conventional way to draw the connection between the Goths and the Gothic novel', i.e., architecture (2012, p. 22). My etymological focus on Gothic liquids and fluidity allows this study to go beyond the Gothic as fear-of-the-medieval-past, and contextualise it within a culture whose anxieties lie, not in the supposed barbarisms of the past, but in the uncertainties of the future.

I.2 Gothic Criticism

I.2.1 The Gothic: Key Influences

Through this focus on liquids and fluidity, I aim at expanding the confines of Gothic scholarship by applying key critical influences to the lesser-known territory of liquids and fluidity.

Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick constitute three of the most influential and productive thinkers for Gothic Studies, while working, for the most part, outside of the field.[5] Such authors form, for contemporary criticism, 'a key body of writing that continues to inform our understanding of the Gothic' (McEvoy & Spooner, 2007, p. 128), and will therefore inform the present thesis. One key author whose name will be virtually absent from this thesis, revered in Gothic scholarship (through concepts such as the Uncanny) and especially instrumental in Kristeva's work, is Sigmund Freud. This absence is nonetheless relative, as two Freudian concepts appear in this study: anxiety (as opposed to fear) and the Uncanny. While I detail both concepts in my analyses, and, as such, am indebted to Freud, I distance myself from the generalising and, arguably, pathologising tendencies of psychoanalysis, Freudian, Lacanian, or other, to contextualise the recurring liquid motifs of current film and television texts as expressions of contemporary anxieties. While my approach to Gothic fear is close to that of Freudian anxiety (detailed below), the culturally widespread use of the dichotomy legitimises my shift from the psychoanalytical reading of fear and anxiety towards a cultural and topical reading of this distinction. Similarly, I shift my analysis of the Uncanny away from the psychoanalytical to the material in order to focus on the material meanings of the home. This shift away from psychoanalysis also responds to a certain, and non-negligeable, need in the neo-liberal academic context for highly contextual research as a marker of marketable value.

I.2.2 Surfacist and Material Turn

Nonetheless, this distancing from psychoanalysis also relates to the essentially surfacist perspective of this thesis, as liquids are primarily read through their materiality. This is to avoid a common tendency in Gothic Studies, relating to the psychoanalytical tradition, to discuss the Gothic 'as having a preoccupation with uncovering "real" horrors behind surface appearances and proprieties' (Walsh, 2007, p. 183), as in, for instance Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Preoccupied with the deep, hidden and often monstrous truth beneath, scholars tend to overlook the materiality and surface. In her monograph on the Gothic surface, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1986), Sedgwick challenges the distinction between form and content common in Gothic scholarship throughout the twentieth century, which, less of a distinction, in fact constitutes an excuse to open discussions of the depths. Sedgwick argues that such readings place the value of the Gothic in the inner workings of the space and the

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[5] Sedgwick's arguably most influential work within Gothic Studies is not her work on the Gothic surface but her work on gender and queerness (see, e.g., Sedgwick, 1985).

human mind, the hidden symbols, and the 'metaphors of interiority' (1986, p. 140). She cites three reasons for this phenomenon: the texts' own thematic and structural focus on depth, the psychological paradigm of the self, built around an inside (irrational)/outside (rational) dichotomy, and an 'eagerness to write about content' which overlooks the emphasis on surfaces in the novels themselves (1986, p. 140). Sedgwick challenges the impatience with the surface of twentieth century Gothic scholars, and calls attention to the materiality of the Gothic by arguing that recurrent motifs, such as the skin, the veil and the stain, reflect the Gothic language.

By doing so, Sedgwick initiates a surfacist and materialist turning point in Gothic scholarship, bringing the attention back from the depths of the repressed and the unconscious to the visible surface and the conscious, as manifested, for instance, in the current Gothic love of objects such as dolls, dresses, keys, tombstones, vaults, mirrors, doors, portraits, food, or even body parts (objects to an extent). Sedgwick's veil and, since then, Catherine Spooner's work on Gothic fashion and the body (2004), Lorna Piatti-Farnell's work on food and horror (2017), Ian Conrich and Laura Sedgwick's work on body parts (2017), and, most recently and thoroughly, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's monograph on *Gothic Things* in the Anthropocene (2023), all point to the current tendency toward uncovering the surface materiality and thingness of the Gothic. This thesis reiterates this surface- and materiality-driven approach, by consistently placing the starting point of all in-depth analyses, for analyses still dig towards deep meanings, in the representation, the superficial, the aspect, the materiality, the shape of the motif studied, which, in turn influences and guides conclusions about the trope's signification within the texts and beyond.

I.2.3 Current Research

In addition to reaching from the depths back to the surface, current Gothic criticism energetically spreads, perhaps in a horizontal manner, away from traditional areas of the Gothic as an Anglo-centric literature of terror and towards marginal territories. Botting addresses this vigorous dissemination of the Gothic mode in the introduction to his monograph on the *Limits of Horror*, stating that

> [e]ven as [the Gothic] implodes as a genre, it continues to expand in a pulsive movement across cultures, screens, texts, and criticism.[…] Modern Gothic, Postmodern Gothic, Female Gothic … Queer Gothic, Imperial Gothic, Postcolonial Gothic … Scottish, Irish, Welsh Gothic, Gothic bodies, Gothic technologies, Gothic culture, digital Gothic … Southern Gothic, American Gothic, Indiana Gothic, Minnesota Gothic […]. (2008, p. 12)

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This proliferation, which Botting claims to be capitalistic and, as such, inexhaustible (2008, p. 12), relates principally, I would argue, to an exploration, rather than a capitalistic or colonial exploitation, of marginalised territories of the Gothic. Some of these 'Gothics', such as Female Gothic, are now well-established subjects, as key texts of Horror Studies, written in the 1990s by female academics (e.g., Barbara Creed and Carol J. Clover), extensively addressed gender in the Horror film, and, in turn, fuelled a scholarly tradition, still alive today (e.g., Harrington, 2018; Pisters, 2020). Other Gothics, such as the inevitable timely updates on criticism, 'Modern Gothic, Postmodern Gothic', do not in themselves constitute a separate strand of academic work, but a prolonging and necessary updating of research.

However, other strands mentioned by Botting, namely geographies, technologies, bodies and, I would add, tones constitute the fastest developing subjects in contemporary Gothic Studies. Such topics explore the marginal territories of a well-established academic subject in Anglophone scholarship and reaffirm what Rein describes as the Gothic 'affinity for minority discourse' as a historically marginal and transgressive mode itself (2023, p. 106). As underlined by Botting's extensive list, current scholarship primarily explores the Gothic through geographies, focusing, regardless of medium, on historically marginalised territories of the mode. Studies thus shift away from Euro- and, more specifically still, Anglo-centric Gothic, and towards inter- or trans-national perspectives (e.g., McDonald & Johnson, 2021), or towards specific regions or cultures, such as South America (e.g., Edwards & Guardini Vasconcelos, 2016), Asia (e.g., Ancuta & Valančiūnas, 2021) or Oceania (e.g., Gildersleeve & Cantrell, 2022). This tendency also surfaces in issues of *Gothic Studies* and *Horror Studies* dedicated to Thai (*Horror Studies,* 2014) and Hispanic Horror (*Horror Studies*, 2019), or to decolonising the Gothic (*Gothic Studies*, 2022), and translates into edited collections, with, for instance, Punter devoting the fifth part of his *New Companion to the Gothic* (2012), to what he titles 'The Globalization of Gothic', with chapters including 'Global Gothic', 'New Zealand Gothic' and 'Japanese Gothic' (Punter, 2012). This section, the only full section added to Punter's original *Companion to the Gothic* (2000), follows historical and conceptual sections on the origins or concepts of the Gothic, suggesting the increased importance of globalised Gothic in current research and its integration in key concepts of the mode.

The current scholarly attention to historically marginalised Gothic territories expands beyond geographical considerations and to new technological territories. The affinity of the Gothic with technology constitutes a key theme of the mode, as underlined throughout Justin D. Edwards

recent *Technogothics* collection (2015). In the collection, alongside themes of technologies and monsters, the question of new Gothic media arises, for instance, in Joseph Crawford's analysis of the anxieties induced by new media and technologies, such as the Slenderman meme infecting the internet (2015). The Gothic finds a home in new, unknown and, as such, daunting media. Over the past three decades, with the rapid proliferation and metastasing of new technologies and digital media, the Gothic and its criticism has spread beyond literature and films, into video games (e.g., Kirkland, 2022), podcasts (e.g., Hancock, 2018) and online communities in a transmedial context, as shown in Crawford's example. Other examples of studies of constructions of online communities and memes through the Gothic include Jessica Balanzategui's analysis of 'Creepypasta', a vernacular and community-based mode of Horror storytelling (2020) and Lorna Piatti-Farnell's study of the relationship between online fan communities and Gothic fiction, as related to vampiric characters as celebrities (2015). This new strand of digital Gothic investigates the hybrid shapes of the twenty-first century Gothic, interrogating the fearsome potentials of the digital media in relation to the mode.

Often constructed through or as fearsome technology (see Botting, 2008; Edwards, 2015), the Gothic body constitutes another key trend of current research. In the 1990s, the spectral turn, initiated by Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* (1993), resulted in the Gothic being constructed around concepts of spectrality and hauntings, triggering the marginalisation of the body in Gothic Studies. During this time, counter-research on the body emerged, generally within gender or queer studies, as in Halberstam's revaluation of the monstrous body as Gothic technology (1995) or Kelly Hurley's material reading of the ruination of the human body (1996). Contemporary research focuses more widely on the body as visceral and corporeal, as a reaction to both the disembodying tendencies of the spectral turn and the torture porn Horror cycle of the early 2000s. While studies are mostly anchored in graphic Horror, studies of specific Gothic bodies, such as Burtonian bodies (Hockenhull & Pheasant-Kelly, 2021), coexist with contemporary scholarship on the corporeality of bodies, like, for instance, Aldana Reyes's *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (2014), which extensively reasserts the role of corporeality and viscerality within the mode, placing them as an affirmation of key mechanisms of eighteenth-century Gothic. Marie Mulvey-Roberts' investigation of Gothic corporeality in canonical literature and films relates the imagined bodies to the real-life persecutions by clerical, medical or governmental bodies which generated them (2016). Bodies are affirmed as corporeal entities. Beyond full bodies, body parts have concomitantly gained attention and visibility in

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academic analysis, with Conrich and Sedgwick's *Body in Parts* focusing on each part of the body, from the head to the guts to the feet and their representation in Horror (2017) or Wasson's medically-inflected study of tissue transfer (2020).

Bodies and viscerality instinctually point towards the unsettling or horrific quality of the Gothic. Nonetheless, increasingly, the assumption of a link between fear and Gothic is being questioned. Adventures into the marginal inflections of the Gothic are on the rise. A current strand of scholarship reassesses the role of comedy in a mode traditionally understood as horror- or terror-coded. Approaches, built against the accepted gloom of the Gothic, revolve around genres, modes, or inflections not traditionally associated with Gothicism, such as Gothic teenage romance (Aldana Reyes, 2020, p. 226), family-friendly Gothic (Rein, 2023, p. 126) or musical Gothic (Petermann, 2015), as well as the wider notion of 'happy Gothic' as developed in Spooner's monograph on contemporary Gothic culture (2017). An upcoming Edinburgh Companion on the Comic Gothic will solidify this tendency into a fully formed field of enquiry deserving of its own collection of introductory readings.

The present thesis, while highly topical in its linking of the threats displayed on the contemporary Gothic screen to contemporary fears, is therefore not scholarly fashionable. I choose to focus on Anglophone cinematic and televisual works within the field of Gothic horror, focusing on fluids over bodies, and often overlooking the potential for minority or marginal discourses within the texts, to focus on the materiality and mechanics of fear. This choice to overlook the areas of the Gothic currently and productively being uncovered relates to the overall objective of this study, namely, to establish the field of Gothic liquids and fluidity, to create a primary, walkable trail, from where other, more adventurous sideways can be found. The originality and innovation of this research therefore does not lie in its geography, corpus, medium or inflection, but in its approach to liquids.

I.3 Liquids

I.3.1 An Overlooked Critical Area

Liquids, an obvious and integral part of the Gothic, are not fashionable in Gothic scholarship because they do not obviously relate to currently developing research fields. They also elude long established research categories such as the trinity of race, class or gender, despite their potential significance within each field. The one-drop rule, the notion of blue blood, or the waters of the feminine, all link this trinity of scholarship to liquid studies with potential Gothic

applications. Liquids are also, and perhaps most importantly, overlooked, in Gothic and wider research, because they are not counted as *objects.* Objects, including, usually, objects of study, are solid, they can be held, and they can be manufactured. Liquids do not easily constitute objects of study as they are neither solid nor stable enough to be studied as objects. They lack the sought-after solidity of bodies, of spaces, or of things. This makes them unfashionable in scholarship, where the primary focus is, for instance, the solid body rather than the fluids within the body. Fluids are liminal in contrast to the solid bodily object. In their study on body parts, Conrich and Sedgwick even unapologetically spell out that '[p]riority has been given to *solid* anatomical features as opposed to the *associated fluid*, sense or expression; therefore, we are interested primarily in the nose before a study of mucus and smell' (2017, p. 2) [my emphasis]. Not only are fluids set aside in favour of solid things, they also cannot exist independently of solids. This is often an unspoken rule of Gothic studies, and the reason is straight-forward: fluids are not as valued as solids. Whether because liquids are too volatile to study or cannot exist independently from a solid object, studies in Gothic and Horror and the body privilege the wound over blood, the monstrous mouth over saliva, the castrated phallus over semen.

The subtext here is clear and echoes feminist theorist Luce Irigaray's remark in her essay 'The Mechanic of Fluids' published in her seminal *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), where she points out that the lateness of the interest in the mechanics of fluids is linked to the bias of patriarchal sciences in favour of what is traditionally associated with masculine ideals, i.e., the mechanics of solids over that of fluids. While Irigaray's context is highly different from that of the present study, her comment is highly applicable: scholarship, within and outside Gothic Studies, has not picked up a thorough interest in fluids because fluids are supposedly a woman's affair, and, as such, not worthy of analysis. Therefore, when generated, studies of fluids appear in Feminist, and later, Queer Studies, where fluids primarily appear in adjectival positions, or under the more sanitised concept of fluidity. Margrit Shildrick, in her *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* (1997), an approach to the marginalised female body, famously argues for the undermining of bodily boundaries and stable bodies through her investigation of feminine Otherness. Following a postmodernist framework, she deconstructs and questions the validity of established boundaries in favour of fluidity: the body is a constructed entity which only mimics fixity when, in truth, it is fluid. This is similar to Elizabeth Grosz's feminist approach to *Volatile Bodies* (1994), where she argues, building on Deleuzian philosophy, that identities are flowing rather than fixed and stable. The relatively recent emergence of Queer Studies generates a new body of work around sexual or

gender fluidity, with Judith Butler at the forefront of the theorisation of gender as an inherently fluid construct (1990). Shildrick, Grosz and Butler epitomise a scholarly bias: women, supposedly more at home than men in the proximity of fluids, study fluidity.

Beyond conceptual fluidity, a small corpus of work on bodily fluids exists. In Queer Studies, an entire issue of the journal *Interalia* has been dedicated to the question of bodily fluids and fluidity (2014). This special edition's goal was specifically to shift the focus of queer studies from a 'proximity to fluids' to 'treating them as objects of enquiry in their own right' (O'Rourke, 2014, p. 5). One of the rare frontal studies of bodily fluids, this entire issue provides a body of knowledge on bodily, often sexual, fluids (tears, mucus, slime, menstrual blood, etc.), with a drop of repugnant fluids[6] within mainstream and erotico-pornographic visual arts. In Feminist Studies, Kristeva's highly influential *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur : Essai sur l'Abjection* (1980) theorises the Abject as the feeling of disgust that arises at the sight of – primarily bodily – fluids, such as urine, faeces and blood, which cannot be defined as either subject or object. Kristeva's psychoanalytical analysis has proven extremely useful to feminist theorists focusing on forms of what I would call 'wet femininity', such as Barbara Creed, one of the most prominent scholars of feminist Film Studies, who examines the horror film monster in relation to femininity and motherhood in her monograph on the *Monstrous Feminine* (1993). Building on Kristeva's notion of the abject, Creed argues that the abject in Horror films such as *Carrie* (dir. Brian de Palma, 1976) or *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979) is coded as utterly feminine and monstrous, as both share boundary-defying characteristics challenging the human/male norm. Creed highlights the importance of bodily fluids, or as she calls them, 'bodily wastes' such as 'shit, blood, urine and pus', in Horror, and links the Horror film's obsession with bleeding women to a male castration anxiety. She builds her argument on the historical association of the female body with materiality and leakiness. This construct of the female body as unbounded and leaky puts the female on the margins of normality, neighbouring the marginalised monsters.

Male-led scholarship on liquids also exists, with a highly noticeable emphasis on non-bodily, and therefore, supposedly more worthy, liquids. This work includes, for instance, Gaston Bachelard's study of water, *L'Eau et les Rêves: Essai sur l'Imagination de la Matière* (1942), the second instalment in his rich elemental quadriptych. In this work, Bachelard enquires into the literary, poetic and psychoanalytic meanings of water as appearing, for instance, in Edgar Allan

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[6] See for instance, and if you dare, Ian Haig's 'The Darkness Within' on mucoid plaque (2014).

Poe's work. Although Bachelard does not focus exclusively on Gothic works, he demonstrates Poe's obsession with water, and in particular with 'l'eau des morts [water of the dead]'[7], a vital concept for the second chapter of this thesis. Klaus Theweleit's first volume of his *Male Fantasies* (1987), evocatively subtitled *Women, Flows, Bodies, History,* constitutes an extensive reflection on fascism, offering readings of water through its historico-cultural association with women. Another vision of femininity and liquids through a male perspective is Sartre's psychosexual analysis of slime in his *Being and Nothingness* (2002), originally published in 1943. Used in Gothic scholarship such as Hurley's study of the Gothicity of matter (1996), Sartre's analysis of slime focuses on the materiality of this viscous liquid, and in particular, on its stubborn and vivifying stickiness. This study of slime is relatively short relative to the six-hundred-page volume that encompasses it, but it remains a productive account for this study as it dwells on the qualities of the slime as texture rather than as delineated fluid – the slimy over mucus.

In another context, Rod Giblett, in his monograph on wetlands (1996), applies Sartre concept of slime to swamps and marshes, reading the need to eradicate and dry up such spaces as ultimately male- and imperialist-driven. His postmodern reading of the wetland constitutes an important source of reflection for the present study, as a consideration of the otherness of the wetland space and its meaning within ecology and culture. Giblett's study points to a wider ecological turn seeping into cultural studies and driving the emergence of Blue Humanities, a recent field of inquiry designed around planetary waters, both in themselves and in their relationship to the Human. This area has gained momentum in the first decades of the new millennium, as a response to the climate crisis, with a first monographic *Introduction to Blue Humanities* published recently by Steve Mentz (2024). Significant studies include Erica Gies' *Water Always Wins: Thriving in an Age of Drought and Deluge* (2022), which draws a portrait of the undeniably agential water in the Anthropocene and our vain attempt to control it. A radically different study, Astrida Neimanis' feminist reading of water, *Bodies of Water* (2017), constructs water as body and bodies as water, all intrinsically tied, from the oceanic water to the water that makes our and others' bodies. Both Gies and Neimanis decentre the human experience in our understanding of water by highlighting the human body's submission to, dependence on and participation in bodies of water.

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[7] All bracketed translations from English to French are my own.

I.3.2 Liquids in Gothic Studies

Such topical readings of the – potentially threatening – agency of water can readily be applied to Gothic media, as will be shown in this thesis, but remain overlooked in Gothic Studies despite the importance of, for instance, restless seas, ominous storms and stagnant lakes in Gothic texts. Within the wider scholarly emphasis on eco-criticism, the response of Gothic scholarship is to focus on the dry and solid EcoGothic landscape, underlining the relevance of the mode in capturing eco-anxieties born of a rapidly approaching environmental catastrophe, as the 'Gothic seems to be the form which is well placed to capture these anxieties and provides a culturally significant point of contact between literary criticism, ecocritical theory and political process' (Smith & Hughes, 2013, p. 5). The first extensive exploration of the Gothic through ecocriticism, Andrew Smith and Willliam Hughes' *Ecogothic* (2013), highlights both the historical concern of the Gothic with the environment, and the contemporary incorporation of environmental threats and losses in Gothic narratives (2013, p. 5). While icy, urban or forest landscapes and their associated monsters (Frankenstein, witches, zombies) are studied in depth, the collection completely overlooks water as a potential field of enquiry. Another, more recent, collection, *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene* (Edwards, et al., 2022) interrogates the power of the Human within the Anthropocene, including studies of monsters, plants and dry landscapes. Only one chapter, Jennifer Schell's study of the Gothic representation of megalodons as affirmation of male power, dives into water (2022). Nonetheless, as the focus on giant sharks indicates, the aqueous environment is the container of the real, solid, object of study, the monster-coded shark.

This is symptomatic of Gothic Studies in water. As Emily Alder argues in her article on the nautical Gothic, '[t]o date, landscapes and buildings tend to do rather better in Gothic criticism than ships and the sea' (2017, p. 3). While Gothic Studies are just starting to turn their eyes to the sea and oceanic spaces as a productive and topical space of liminality, transgression and fear, water remains a supporting act in such works. A special issue of *Gothic Studies* on the Nautical Gothic (2017), opened by Alder's aforementioned study, falls victim to this tendency, with articles ranging from sea monsters and ghost ships to nautical child figures. These solid objects of study, again, crystallise the scholarly eagerness to hold on to solid things (monsters, ships, children), even within studies of the oceanic Gothic.[8]

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[8] See also Alder's study of Dracula's ship (2016).

While bodies of water are getting noticed, the historically preferred fluid within Gothic and, more widely, Media Studies, is blood. Blood studies are often hidden within other fields of inquiry such as the Body, as shown above with the example of Creed. Works on blood are even harder to spot with titles using blood as an evocative and attractive metaphor, rather than as true object of study, such as Jack Hunter's *Eros in Hell: Sex, Blood and Madness in Japanese Cinema* (1998), or, in Horror Studies, Eddie Falvey, Jonathan Wroot and Joe Hickinbottom's collection *New Blood: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Horror* (2020). For instance, Hunter's monograph does not investigate blood for itself; the blood mentioned in the title is only a synonym for violence to the female body in erotic Japanese films. Similarly, 'new blood' is a favoured expression in Horror studies to define a contemporary trend in a poetic and evocative manner (see e.g., Pisters, 2020).

Nevertheless, studies of blood do exist. Extensive studies of menstrual blood such as Lauren Rosewarne's *Period in Pop Culture* (2012) offer insight into the depiction of uterine blood on screen, within a feminist framework interrogating the sexual and cultural politics around menstruation. Alongside the openly gendered politics of menstrual blood, studies of violent blood appear. A major work on the matter of violent bloodshed on screen is Kjetil Rødje's *Images of Blood in American Cinema* (2016), which focuses on the shift from narrative to affective blood representation in 1950s and 1960s cinema. Rødje's research is symptomatic of a tendency amongst such studies to focus on the emergence of violent cinema across genres. The films of Sam Peckinpah are conspicuous in this kind of study, which includes Stephen Prince's *Savage Cinema* (1998), and, later, his study of *Classical Film Violence* (2003). In Horror Studies, research on blood is surprisingly rare given the commonly accepted idea that blood is horror. Philippe Rouyer's illuminating study of blood, *Le Cinéma Gore, une Esthétique du Sang* (1997), traces the history of gore through depictions of blood in horror films. Rouyer's study constitutes an invaluable, if dated, basis for the study of blood for itself in Horror. Another such study, focused more specifically on women filmmakers, is Patricia Pisters' *New Blood in Contemporary Cinema: Women and the Poetics of Horror* (2020), which investigates the visual, affective and symbolic qualities of blood within contemporary Horror, through a primarily aesthetic and formal lens. While blood is not Pisters' main object of study, it is the guiding motif linking women and Horror throughout the monograph, as the author takes us through different blood types in their relation to key subjects of Horror, such as rage, lust, birth, violence or death. Pisters' study is therefore the only available study revolving, although not exclusively or, for that matter, necessarily in-depth, around

contemporary blood with an emphasis not on the history but on the aesthetic qualities of the liquid in itself.

A more specific branch of Gothic scholarship deserves to be mentioned here: Vampire Studies, which revolve around blood motifs, although the liquid rarely lies at the core of research and, instead, constitutes a tangential subject. Vampire Studies tend to focus on the psycho-sexual (e.g., Baker, et al., 2017) and societal aspects of the creature (e.g., Chaplin, 2017; Abbott, 2017). Blood nevertheless appears, for instance in Leonard Wolf's introduction to his anthology of vampire literature post-Stoker – alluringly entitled *Blood Thirst* (1997) – as he swiftly retraces a few of the cultural meanings of blood (bond, taboo, salvation, identity, etc.). Despite Wolf's own admission that 'any vampire fiction has blood as its primary metaphor' (1997, p. 2), his treatment of the bodily fluid only spreads over a handful of paragraphs. Overall, there has been no exhaustive study of blood in vampire films, despite the many forms and meanings that the sanguine fluid has assumed over the several hundred years' worth of vampiric texts. Blood is discussed in shorter studies, such as Marie Mulvey-Roberts' article, '*Dracula* and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo and the New Woman' (1998), where she demonstrates the gendering of blood between bad menstrual female blood and good healing masculine blood in Bram Stoker's paradigmatic novel, and argues that the vampire figure functions as a symbol for female menstrual blood. Her approach is characteristic of a scholarly problem that the present thesis tries to address: blood is treated as a symbol. No mention is made of the materiality of blood, its place within the narrative structure, or its aesthetic qualities. Therefore, just like other, less evocative liquids, despite the omnipresence of blood in Gothic fiction, it is rarely extensively studied for itself. This thesis therefore fills the gap in Gothic research by investigating the key aesthetic, narrative, structural, cultural and symbolic role of bodily, non-bodily, aqueous, bloody, etc. liquids within contemporary Gothic and gothicised Horror, aiming to open new perspectives on the Gothic mode as distinct from other modes of solids (gore, slasher, etc.)

I.3.3 Liquid Fear

Starting from their surface and materiality, I dive into liquids through the spectrum of fear, in two principal ways. First, liquids are understood as harbingers of a pre-conscious or, as Arne Öhman calls it in their study of the biology of fear, 'functional' fear, a fear which is embedded in our 'biological evolution' (2012, p. 36). The fear of large bodies of water stems from a fear of drowning or being attacked by underwater creatures. The fear of blood stems from the fear of being

wounded and, from there, dying. The fear of dirty water stems from the fear of getting infected or debilitated. Such fears, while intrinsically shared by most, are not assumed to be shared by all, and are therefore read as tendential. Second, and more topically, liquids are read as embodiments of a conceptually Liquid Fear, a strand of Zigmunt Bauman's wide-ranging and far-reaching theories of the postmodern liquefaction of formerly solid things, subjects, habits, threats, etc. While his ideas were developed in the early 2000s (*Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Fear* (2006), *Liquid Times* (2007)), they have only grown more relevant as the liquefaction of every aspect of life has accelerated. An evocative and highly topical example of this liquefaction is the now well-known liquefaction of the gender binary, an aspect of liquid life which, having gained drastic visibility over the past decade, is only quickly mentioned in Bauman's *Liquid Love* (2003, pp. 54-55). What was once thought by the vast majority to be a solid binary, indisputably feminine or masculine, is now grasped within all its boundary-erasing subtleties. Such fluidity, on what is now often referred to as the gender spectrum, causes a very conservative uproar, which I like to read as an anxiety regarding the liquefaction of solid notions (for what is conservatism but a fear of seeing hard things go soft?).

Liquid Fear, the concept oozing throughout this study, is described by Bauman as an 'unanchored, free floating' fear whose menace 'can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen' (2006, p. 2). Liquid fear has no certain cause; it surrounds and envelops the subject and, as such, cannot be tackled. Bauman's liquid fear corresponds, in a medically oriented approach established by Freud in his *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1920), to 'anxiety', a fear detached from a circumscribable object, as opposed to fear and its solidified object (1920, p. 344). Freud's influential distinction now commonly appears in cultural discourses.[9] In Gothic Studies, the distinction is used to build the Gothic in contrast to Horror in genre-defining research. For instance, Misha Kavka, in her study of Gothic cinema, defines the Gothic threat as not clearly exposed on screen but suggested or hidden, and the Horror threat as completely visible but potentially too terrifying to be looked at (2002, p. 227). By hiding the threat, the Gothic makes it

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[9] While the Freudian distinction between fear and anxiety is the most common, and the one used in this study as it provides a basis for the distinction between Gothic and Horror threat, other frameworks exist outside of medical or psychological studies. Bourke, for instance, as a historian, does not base her distinction on the stimulus but on the societal group's 'ability to externalise threat' through, for example, scapegoating (2006, p. 190). In an individual-focused framework, Öhman differentiates fear and anxiety on the basis that fear arises when there is hope that one can act against the threat, while anxiety arises from the lack of such hope (2012, p. 37). Others build their distinctions on temporality, arguing that fear responds to an immediate threat while anxiety rises at the prospect of a threat (e.g., McNally, 2012, p. 17).

all the more palpable. It is nowhere and therefore I see it everywhere. Similarly, Aldana Reyes states that

> [a]ccording to the popular dyad, the Gothic is subtle and suggestive; it hints at occluded or only partially visible terrors, thus offering half-glimpses of bloodcurdling images which, because they are seldom fully shown or described, allow our imagination to run wild and fill in the gaps. The Gothic is haunting and favours mood over grisly spectacle; it is interested in recurring motifs and in setting up atmospheres of gloom and unease that may also play with shadows to create a pervasive sense of threat. […] Horror, by contrast, is seen as heavily graphic and explicit: it confronts viewers with terrifying images and cinematic 'numbers' (2020, p. 8).

In this sense, Gothic fear absolutely mimics liquid fear in its indefinability, emerging from an ungraspable threat. This fluidity of the threat is literalised on the contemporary Gothic screen because it is embodied by liquids, which, in the Gothic, do not function as terrifying occurrences from which one might avert their gaze, but as unanchored suggestions of a wider horror, i.e., the real and very solid threat (a secret, a murderer, a monster, a house, etc.). Gothic fear becomes, conceptually and materially, liquid fear.

It must be acknowledged here that Aldana Reyes qualifies the all-powerfulness of this dyad in Gothic and Horror Studies, arguing that instances of spectacular violence occur in the Gothic, the descendant of Grand-Guignol theatre, itself famous for explicit display of gory violence, just like instances of psychological threats permeate Horror texts (2020, pp. 8-10). These challenges to the all-powerful dyad of fear successfully highlight the context of genre and media hybridisation and of increased visibility of violence in contemporary media. Nonetheless, in this thesis, just as I equate 'gothicisation' and 'liquefaction', I equate the terms 'anxiety', 'liquid fear' and 'Gothic fear' as instances of free-floating and fluid fear whose object cannot be pinned down, thus spreading uncertainty in its path. More specifically, 'anxiety' constitutes a neutral semantic ground while 'liquid fear' openly refers to Bauman's model and 'Gothic fear' to its application to the Horror spectrum. This somewhat defiant application of a contestable genre-defining model stems from the perspective of this study, which focuses primarily on instances and occurrences of fluidity and fluid threats. The dyad therefore reinforces the affiliation I establish between the Gothic and liquids, but does not function, on its own, as a way to define either the Gothic or Horror.

Current cultural studies repeatedly acknowledge the increased shapelessness of fears post-9/11. Joanna Bourke, in her monograph, retraces the Anglo-American landscape of fear from the nineteenth century to post-9/11, marking a clear shift from the attacks which intensified the feeling of living in an 'Age of Anxiety in which fears are ubiquitous' (2006, p. 363). In the same year, Peter N. Stearns details the distinctiveness of American fear through the notion of 'high anxiety' with September 11 providing key data in his understanding of shifting fears (2006). A decade after the attacks, Benjamin Lazier and Jan Plamper's *Fear Across Disciplines* (2012) and Michael Laffan and Mark Weiss' *Facing Fear* (2012) still exist under the ever-present shadow of 9/11 as a catalyser of a highly contemporary free-floating fear. More specifically in Horror Film Studies, Kevin J. Wetmore, in his study of *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* mentions the rise of an 'ephemeral and ghostly fear associated with terrorism' from 2001 (2012, p. 16). Wetmore underlines the shift from outside threats to inside threats, i.e., from the outside object of fear to the anxiety within, both in terms of the Other hiding in the midst of the self (terrorism threatening the national body) and the self becoming monster (the national body abusing power through acts of unjustified war and unspeakable torture) (2012, p. 5). The importance of 9/11 in intensifying anxious fears does not only rely on the terrorist threat itself, a liquid threat which does not lie everywhere but *can* hide anywhere, but also on of the often mentioned 'war on terror' declared by the Bush administration after the events, ultimately leading to shifting the fear of terrorist attacks (a specific object of fear) to a form of exploitative free-floating fear making extreme executive decisions seem more acceptable (McClintock, 2015, pp. 39-40). The early millennium thus constitutes a key cultural shift in terms of the liquefaction of fears.

Beyond 9/11 and its consequences, liquid fear spreads in current society because of the drastic increase in fluidity and informational, commercial or social fluxes and, therefore, of possibilities. Daniel Freeman and Jason Freeman, in their work on paranoia, argue that the rise in popularity of fear-fuelled conspiracy theories, for instance, is due to the heightened circulation of both reliable and unreliable information via the Internet (2008, pp. 64-65). When newspapers, the radio or, later, the single channel on the TV in the living room used to provide one source of information, that one had to seek (buy the paper, turn on the radio or the TV), the internet drowns the individual in a constant flux of notifications calling our attention to information, real news, fake news, articles, videos, pop-ups, AI-generated images, all of it contained in one's TV, laptop, tablet, phone, always only a glance away.

Another often mentioned culprit for the rise of liquid fear is the collective or lack thereof. Bourke, in her short chapter on anxiety, links the rise in anxious fear in the late twentieth century to

> the conversion of fear into anxiety through the therapeutic revolution. Whereas in the past the frightened individual might turn to the community or a religious institution for advice and comfort — a process that often involved the delineation of an evil 'other' — as the twentieth century progressed, the emotion became increasingly individualised, appropriated by the therapist or, in the most isolated fashion, the contemporary 'self-help' movement. (2006, p. 191)

Anxiety rises because, as the exodus to the anonymity of cities takes place and the sense of community becomes eroded, patriarchal or pastoral answers are no longer readily available, and one has to turn to oneself for answers. This phenomenon is only amplified in post-millennial culture by the constant availability of things, content, activities or services via the internet. One does not need to leave the house anymore, and therefore, one only has oneself to turn to. Alain Ehrenberg's quasi-medical study of modernity, an overlooked text in Anglophone academia due to the limited translation of his work into English, also highlights this aspect of contemporary life. Ehrenberg uses the French notion of 'malaise', i.e., discomfort, unease, to define the modern feeling of loss of identity, arguing that, within the modern *malaise*, 'les souffrances seraient *causées* par cette disparition de la vraie société, celle où il y avait de vrais emplois, de vraies familles, une vraie école et une vraie politique, celle où l'on était dominé, mais protégé, névrosé, mais structuré [suffering would be *caused* by the disappearing of real society, where there were real jobs, real families, real education and real politics, where one was dominated, but protected, neurotic, but structured]' (2012, p. 15) [emphasis in the original]. Ehrenberg understands contemporary uncertainty as linked to the shift from '*l'empêchement à devenir soi à l'obligation de le devenir* [*being prevented from becoming oneself to being forced to become oneself*]' (2012, p. 22) [emphasis in the original]. The contemporary emphasis on possibilities and initiative rather than tradition and duty leads to a depressive state linked to the individual's insufficiency. Bauman raises a similar comment when focusing on the building of the self, stating that '[t]he pain which used to be caused by unduly limited choice has now been replaced by no less a pain – though this time the pain is caused by an obligation to choose without trusting the choices made and without confidence that further choices will bring the target any closer' (2007, p. 106). Bauman argues that humans

living in liquid times revel in the constant rethinking of the self, in the options offered, and as such, choose to remain in the limbos of choice, rather than settle on a definitive answer, a chosen contentment. One chooses the hunt over the hare to use Bauman's analogy: '

> Catching a hare would be an anticlimax; it would only make the prospect of another hunt more seductive, since the hopes that accompany the hunt have been found to be the most delightful (the only delightful?) experience of the whole affair. Catching the hare presages an end to those hopes – unless another hunt is planned for the next day and started the next morning. (2007, p. 107).

Both crushed by and enthralled by the inexhaustible options and choices available, humanity dwells in a pervasive doubt.

Despite Bauman's framework relevance in contemporary culture, it has not been used to the full extent of its possibilities. Bauman is often mentioned in passing or referred to in notes, such as in Mark Weiss' introduction to *Facing Fear* where a mention of 'liquid' or ever-present fear in contemporary society' (2012, p. 7) refers the reader to a note stating that '[t]he reference to "liquid fear" is, of course, owed to Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear*' (2012, p. 219). Bauman's influence is generally, like his liquid threats, felt rather than seen. It is as if Bauman is to Fear Studies what Freud is to Gothic Studies: a source too obvious to even linger on. Perhaps this explains why Bauman's theories have percolated so little into Film Studies despite what I, from the comfort of my highly academic potential confirmation bias, see as a clear correspondence between Bauman's concepts and Gothic films. The only developed example of Bauman's theories being applied to film that I have come across is Julia Echeverría Domingo's article on *Children of Men* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2006), where she uses the notion of liquid threat to reflect on the depiction of terrorism in the film and uses the notion of fluid cinematography as formal reinforcement and embodiment of the liquid fear present within a police state (2015).

Another reason for the rarity of Bauman's theories in Film scholarship, despite their relevance, is the common use of a more recent concept, Timothy Morton's 'hyperobject' (2013), which displays similarities with Bauman's liquid fear. Hyperobjects are popular in current scholarship, more so than Bauman's liquids,[10] for their highly malleable theoretical paradigm.

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[10] A Google scholar search for both concepts shows that, since 2013 (the year Morton's book was published), Bauman's *Liquid Fear* has been cited 1932 times across disciplines while Morton's *Hyperobjects* has been cited 4303 times. [search conducted on 26 June 2023].

Indeed, Morton defines them as 'things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans' (2013, p. 1). They cover a wide range of 'things,' from single material objects (a planet) to multiple physical objects (the sum of all the plastic bags on Earth) to global systems (capitalism) and global threats (climate change). When defining hyperobjects, Morton explains that

> [t]hey are *viscous* which means that they 'stick' to beings that are involved with them. They are *nonlocal*; in other words, any 'local manifestation' of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to. […] Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. And they exhibit their effects *interobjectively*; that is, they can be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects. (2013, p. 1) [emphasis in the original]

Parallels with liquid fear emerge when Morton mentions the non-locality (they are everywhere and nowhere) as well as the phased quality (they can always be felt even when they are not there) of hyperobjects. Morton even quotes another philosopher, Levi Bryant, who explains – in highly liquid terms: '[h]yperobjects are thus like our experience of a pool while swimming. Everywhere we are submersed within the pool, everywhere the cool water caresses our body as we move through it, yet we are nonetheless independent of the water' (2010). In these terms, hyperobjects come even closer to liquid fear. This coagulation of the two concepts leads to readings of essentially liquid threats in terms of the hyperobject[11] because hyperobjects encompass a wide range of things which include, but are not limited to, threats. Hyperobjects are almost infinitely applicable, which, in turn, makes them, I would argue, less valuable than liquid fear. If everything can be a hyperobject, then perhaps, nothing is. Therefore, while acknowledging that this might not be very fashionable, I choose to focus on liquid fear as the most adequate concept to grasp the liquid specificities of free-floating fear in contemporary Horror.

I.4 Methodology

The present research revolves around analyses of the literal liquids and the symbolic fluidity of the chosen texts, systematically starting from the materiality of the fluids and asking questions such as what does each liquid look like? What colour is it? How does it move? Is it thick or viscous? From there, close textual analyses and comparative readings constitute the groundwork for further

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[11] See, for instance, Howard's eco-reading of *IT*'s Pennywise, an ungraspable, mutable and liquid-coded threat, as a hyperobject (2021).

theoretical developments, underlining the wider sociological or philosophical implications of the chosen liquid. This research therefore isolates liquid-coded motifs and digs deep into their visuality and meanings, but, most importantly, it overall highlights our undeniable fear of liquids and fluidity, be those literal liquids (pre-conscious fear of drowning, contemporary fear of rising sea levels) or symbolically liquid threats (viruses, surveillance, impurity, etc.). Each motif is selected on the basis that it revolves around liquids, fluids and fluidity, and that it exists across texts, as echoes and reiterations imply analytical value and cultural relevance. Such echoes indicate that the texts, and therefore their makers, audiences and contexts, are haunted by similar images, words, or ideas. My close readings constitute exemplary instances of the representation of liquids within the Gothic. As exemplary instances, they do not suggest that such motifs exist in every single Gothic text, but they provide a metric for reading the overlooked yet substantial role of liquids in Gothic texts, when they do appear. Therefore, these examples and motifs constitute singularities which can be extrapolated and generally applied to a wide range of texts, thus drawing out tendential patterns. Choosing a hermeneutic methodology will, without a doubt, be considered a potential weakness for this thesis, as textual analysis cannot flawlessly reflect audiences' experiences of fear. However, this research argues less that liquids in themselves are sources of fear for audiences and more that films and television in post-millennial culture constitute a cycle of Gothic and gothicised Horror which focuses on liquids and liquid threats and, in turn, hint at wider contemporary cultural paradigms of fear. I do not aim to provide an air-tight theorisation of spectatorship or contemporary fear, but rather, at exploring and opening new ways to look at Gothic and Horror texts in term of post-millennial fears. The coherence of the overall system through the correspondences between texts and theories will hopefully fill the holes left by the absence of quantitative and audience-derived data.

By developing a new approach to the Gothic based on the overlooked etymology of the word, this research fills the theoretical gap in contemporary visual horror media. It not only departs from existing theories of the Gothic found in Horror, Literature, Film and Television Studies, but also deepens and joins these existing theories through its focus on flows and fluidity. This thesis also extensively uses under-translated or under-exploited French works and theories, beyond Kristeva and Foucault. Mixing the groundedness of the English-speaking traditions with the free-floating lyricism of the French one, this thesis aims to build a creative yet mindful approach to liquids and fear in contemporary Gothic. Further, the study does not limit its scope for the sake of creating an absolutely coherent theoretical framework. Scholarship is chosen to support the

generation of ideas through the motifs rather than the motifs being chosen to confirm ideas already existing in scholarship. This pragmatic use of scholarship and theory leaves room to read the prevalence of fluidity in Gothic media as a reflection of contemporary culture, fears and anxieties, particularly in relation to Bauman's theories of liquid fear, liquid threat and liquid times, which percolate through every chapter, guiding the thesis to reinforce both the project's highly specific motif analyses and broader theoretical engagement. Overall, this work thus aims at dusting off the Gothic using under-exploited or overlooked motifs and theories, stripping it of its haunting psychoanalytical undertones and showing the value of a materialist and often surfacist approach to contemporary Gothic and Horror film and television.

I.5 Corpus methodology

This study relies on a primary corpus of Gothic film and television texts. The choice to merge filmic and televisual texts reflects the current blurring of boundaries between the two media through digitisation. Since the 2010s, the increased prominence of streaming platforms such as Netflix, Prime Video and Disney+ has globalised the production and distribution of audiovisual media by making films and television series accessible anywhere at any time. To legitimise and integrate these digital platforms to the wider audio-visual production and distribution landscape, film policies are transferred to a television context through macro- and micro-actions (Mitric, 2024, p.77), which blur the statutory line between film and television. Beyond policies, this digitisation increases the overlap between film and television in terms of aesthetics, narrative structures, and production values, with, for instance, record production budgets for television per episode.[12] Less clearly divided, film and television now belong to what Jean Chalaby calls a 'video ecosystem' (2023, p. 2), in which the contours of film, television or even social-media video content increasingly overlap both in terms of production and of consumption (Vinuela, 2024, p. 12). As media themselves become increasingly liquid, and accessible at home, fear seeps into the domesticated space of the audience, with less opportunities to distance oneself from the medium, through the lack of division between cinema and home space or through practices such as binge-watching rather than waiting for the weekly release of an episode on linear television.

The parameters that guided the selection these texts are multiple. First, because this research primarily relies on textual analysis, I have chosen films and television series which do not

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[12] For instance, the first series of *Rings of Power* (2022-) cost Amazon $715 million (Schwartzel, 2022) for 9.3 hours of television, while the complete cinematic trilogy *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) only cost $300 million to produce (Dawson, 2021, p. 10) (equivalent to less than $500 million in 2022) for 9.283 hours of film (theatrical versions).

necessarily exhibit close kinships (same universe, same director, same production company, etc.), but all illustrate at least one aspect of my hypothesis. In order to tighten this sometimes arbitrary assemblage, this research focuses on films and television texts which are, in Andrew Tudor's words, 'universally recognized' (2003, p. 6), or intuitively identifiable, as Gothic, and as such all share narrative, thematic and stylistic elements which relate to liquids and/or fluidity. Furthermore, as mentioned above, all chosen texts belong to the Horror genre, understood, on a very simple and broad approach as primarily fear-inducing.[13] On a basic level, all Gothic films and television series studied display three syntactic elements, most often cited in scholarly definitions of the Gothic:

- a Gothic castle or castle-like space, what I define as the domesticated castle, i.e., a space with medieval Gothic characteristics (extensive spaces, ornaments, arches, etc.), to exclude films taking place in suburban or cabin spaces, whose dynamics differ from the Gothic locus;

- a revenant, be it a ghost, a vampire, a resurrected or undead entity, as the essential supernatural Gothic entity, as suggested by Kilgour's study emphasising the importance of the rising motif in the Gothic (1995). As the supernatural element is key, Victorian detective stories with Gothic undertones such as the television series *The Alienist* (2018-2020) or the film *The Pale Blue Eye* (Cooper, 2022) will not be included;

- a haunting secret or character which should have remained hidden in the past and/or away but is revealed/returns during the course of the narrative. This constitutes another key element of the Gothic text in which revelations arise along with characters and revenants. Such secrets most often relate to the space, the revenant, the characters, or the bloodline.

These Gothic tropes have been appropriated by Horror films and television, so much so that they became, in themselves, less specific to the Gothic. Therefore, to qualify for discussion in this thesis, these tropes must be structured around a specifically Gothic syntax, e.g., a Gothic serpentine narrative, or jumping between places and/or times. In aesthetic terms, every work must represent

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[13] *Dark Shadows* (2012) is the only text of the corpus which, while it does belong to the Horror genre to an extent, its principal aim is not to arouse fear. However, its affinity to the Gothic and Horror, its existence as a pre- and a post-millennial text, its inclusion of all other criteria of selection and its reliance on liquids, all justify its inclusion in the main corpus. Furthermore, the analysis will focus solely on instances anchored in fear, dread or threat as related to liquids within the film.

the dark, labyrinthine and excessive Gothic style, expressed in a sombre cinematography, twisted and highly referential spaces, as well as grand decors – aristocratic, ancient, or crammed. From there, the list of titles in the main corpus excludes modern Horror and slasher film, as well as psychological thrillers, which do not meet all of the above requirements. While some of these discarded texts might still present instances of gothicisation, priority was given to the coherence of structural, aesthetic, narrative and thematic conventions through liquids found in Gothic texts.

Keeping a coherent corpus in mind, the research centres around productions from an anglophone UK/Irish/North-American context, to align with Bauman's US-oriented studies and to ensure a limitation of cultural specificities. While these cultural specificities do not necessarily prevent a global appeal because of a recognisable plotline (Aldana Reyes, 2020, p. 223), overlooking such specificities would undoubtedly challenge the integrity of the argument. This is not to say that the reflection of liquid fear in contemporary horror in other geographies would not apply in non-English-speaking films such as *The Devil's Backbone* (del Toro, 2001; Spain, Mexico), *Saint Ange* (Laugier, 2004; France), *Thirst* (dir. Park Chan-Wook, 2009, Korea), *Decision to Leave* (dir. Park Chan-Wook, 2022, Korea), *El Conde* (dir. Pablo Larraín, 2023, Chile), *La Llorona* (dir. Jayro Bustamante, Guatemala), but to restrict the width of research.

Time constitutes another defining factor in choosing texts for the main corpus of this thesis which excludes texts released before 2010. This choice to situate my corpus a few years after the publication of Bauman's key works relates to the accelerated liquefaction of life and, therefore, Gothic and Horror media from 2010. Indeed, the increase in global population, which passed the seven-billion threshold in 2011, the heightened urgency of the climate crisis, as crystallised by the failure of the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference, and the spreading access to internet technologies, reaching a third of the world population in 2012, all point to the relevance of Bauman's readings in the 2010s. Furthermore, the first decade of the twentieth century was characterised in Horror media by the prominent place of torture porn from 2003 (Jones, 2013) with films such as *Saw* (dir. Eli Roth, 2004), *Hostel* (dir. Eli Roth, 2005), or, near the end of the cycle's popularity, *I Spit on Your Grave* (dir. Steven R. Monroe, 2010). In 2010, after a sequel every year, the release of the first 'final' chapter of the *Saw* series before a seven-year hiatus also points to the loss of interest in torture porn at the end of the 2000s. Again, this does not suggest that instances of gothicisation do not exist before 2010 (for instance, *The Descent* (dir. Neil Marshall, 2005) features a gothicised use of blood)), but it limits the temporal boundaries of the main Gothic

corpus.

Taking all these characteristics into account, this thesis therefore primarily unfolds around the following films: *Dark Shadows* (dir. Tim Burton, 2012), *The Woman in Black* (dir. James Watkins, 2012), *Byzantium* (dir. Neil Jordan, 2013), *Crimson Peak* (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2015), *A Cure for Wellness* (dir. Gore Verbinski, 2017)*,* and *The Lodgers* (dir. Brian O'Malley, 2017). In terms of television series, the main texts are: *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), *The Hauting of Bly Manor* (2020), *Dracula* (2020) and *Midnight Mass* (2021). These texts are likely to appear across more than one part or subpart of the research as they constitute epitomic examples of Gothic fluidity. Other Gothic texts will be studied when relevant within a comparative framework, such as *I Am The Pretty Thing that Lives in the House* (dir. Osgood Perkins, 2016) in terms of mould and space in chapter 1. Outside the Gothic mode, *Evil Dead* (dir. Fede Álvarez, 2013), *It Chapter One* (dir. Andrés Muschietti, 2017), *It Chapter Two* (dir. Andrés Muschietti, 2019), *The Curse of La Llorona* (dir. Michael Chaves), *The Grudge* (dir. Nicolas Pesce, 2020) and *Evil Dead Rise* (dir. Lee Cronin, 2023) are also analysed as examples of gothicisation within gore or slasher films to nuance and strengthen the argument.

I.6 Structure of the thesis and synopses

This thesis is built around three chapters, each exploring the ways in which a key motif of the Gothic – i.e., roughly, the space, the haunting and the blood – relates to notions of fluids and fluidity. The overall chapter progression follows an inward movement, starting with the outside (the space), moving on to the inside (the haunting and the ghost) and, finally, what would traditionally be the inside of the body (the blood), echoing the goal of the thesis, which is to start with the surface, i.e., in the Gothic, the House and its environment. Each chapter then contains an overview of the evolution of the motif studied, intertwined with motif-specific reviewing of scholarship, which fits more coherently within each individual chapter than in the general thesis introduction.

Chapter 1 focuses on the Gothic environment of fear. After a brief overview of the evolution of the Gothic castle on screen, the chapter approaches the landscape surrounding the Gothic space as essentially liquid, defining it as a dangerous wet-scape using Foucault's and Giblett's frameworks. I also draw on Kristeva's theory of the Abject to understand the threat posed by the oxymoronic liquid landscape. In a second movement, using Bauman's theories of liquid fear and liquid threat, I argue that the contemporary domesticated Gothic castle (manor or stately home)

constitutes the perfect space to spread liquid fear, both literally as liquids ooze into the space, and metaphorically as the unanchored and anxiety-inducing threat spreads through every room of the house, supported by a fluid cinematography. These considerations will lead to a reading of the house as essentially fluid, applying theories of the architecture of flows to a horror space turned into a material body, but more specifically, turned into a stomachic house, oozing with toxic liquids and murderous rot, slowly poisoning the house-dwellers. Such readings of the fluid and bodily space in turn contests assumptions about the Gothic space as solid and frozen in time.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the motif of the lake as the quintessential body of what I call Gothic water, a still water holding death within. I draw on Bachelard's theories, and, in particular, on his concept of the 'death of water', an anti-water which I connect with typically Gothic waters in all their darkness, toxicity and violent agency. These unfathomably deep waters shelter wet ghosts, who resurface as an embodiment of contemporary liquefaction. After retracing the history of the wet ghost and its transnational manifestations on screen, this chapter demonstrates that contemporary horror uses liquids and fluidity to materialise the ghost and give it a highly threatening agency and, more specifically, grasp. To understand the fluidity of the contemporary ghost, I dive into the different ways this liquefaction is expressed, through wetness, leaks, fluidity, etc., linking it back to structural, thematic and narrative concerns of the Gothic. These questions link the female wet ghost to the assumed and threatening fluidity of the female body, as studied by Theweleit in particular. Dwelling on two specific motifs, the 'endlessly floating woman' in the substance space, inspired by the Deleuzian 'any-space-whatever', and the underwater female scream, a variation on Chion's reflection on the 'point de cri', this chapter underlines the instrumentality of water in female limitation and liberation.

Studying motifs such as blood floods, blood drops, blood-filled spaces, bloody things and moving blood, chapter 3, in a first movement, highlights the drastic gothicisation of blood horror between pre-and post-millennial media in relation to the liquefaction of modernity, using remakes and reboots spanning across the millennial boundary. This chapter primarily applies the groundwork of blood scholars such as Rouyer and Rødje to trace the history of blood in the Gothic and Horror, using a surfacist and highly material approach. In a second movement, I examine the specificities of Gothic blood in terms of debiologisation and the liquefaction of relationship and things. Using Thing theory, I enquire about the relationship between blood, bodies, and objects in the Gothic and about the functions of blood within the narrative and visual structures. Etymological

and historical considerations of the word 'blood' lead this chapter into explorations of the visual, physical, narrative and contextual differences between beautiful and abject blood by considering their relationship to bodies, things, and disgust and beauty. The examined blood therefore lies at the crux of beauty and horror, a specificity which is primarily achieved through its surface, depiction and configurations of attachment to bodies and things. In the last part of the chapter, I reach back to the Gothic waters of the first and second chapters to consider the meanings of the motif of blood in water and its biological and cultural resonances in relation to contemporary understandings of the circulation of power.

Chapter 1. The Gothic Space: Liquid Fear Always and Everywhere

> Well look at Ahab's whale. Now there's a great symbol. Some say it stands for god, meaning, and purpose. Others say it stands for purposelessness and the void. But what we sometimes forget is that Ahab's whale was also just a whale. The same is true with this house you created. It could represent plenty of things but it also is nothing more than itself, a house – albeit a pretty weird house.

> Steve Wozniak in *House of Leaves*,
> Mark Z. Danielewski, 2000, p. 361.

The 'pretty weird house' constitutes the quintessential space of Gothic horror. The mode derives its name from its original medievalist setting, the haunted or ominous castle, which imitates and dramatises medieval architecture in literature, films, and television. Jerrold E. Hogle's seminal definition of the literary Gothic places at the centre of the genre the 'antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large old house or theatre, an aging city or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public buildings' (2002, p. 2). As Hogle's list shows, the antiquated Gothic castle has evolved and mutated, but it remains 'one of the most stable and defining characteristics of the Gothic' (MacAndrew, 1979, p. 48), a famously mutable mode. The castle as Gothic space appears as early as 1764 with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), the Gothic Ur-text, which relates the story of Manfred, lord of the Italian castle of Otranto, and his obsessive struggle to save his title and property by attempting to force his dead son's fiancée, Isabella, to marry him. As she tries to escape Manfred, Isabella runs through the labyrinthine castle, which becomes at once prison and shelter. With the help of Theodore, the unsuspected heir to the castle, Isabella survives and becomes Lady of the castle as Theodore reclaims his throne. In this primeval Gothic text of family, lineage and secrets, the castle not only contains the entire plot but also crystallises the lineage's safe keeping.

This importance of the space is still reflected in current texts. In her chapter on Gothic cinema, Misha Kavka argues that the house constitutes the basis of the language and sign system of Gothic films (2002, p. 210). Therefore, although the medieval castle has been domesticated since *Otranto*, it remains strong in the form of the Victorian(-looking) house or aristocratic manor, which

participates in ideas of the (secret) past, aristocracy and lineage among others. The domesticated castle appeared recently in *The Others* (dir. Alejandro Amenábar, 2001)*, Jane Eyre* (dir. Cari Joji Fukunaga, 2011)*, A Cure for Wellness* (2017)*,* and on television in *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020), to name but a few. The Victorian manor imitates the labyrinthine and derelict qualities of the castle, while taking away the need to tell tales of kings and queens. This shift from medieval- to Victorian-coded architecture points to the synthesis in contemporary culture between the nineteenth century, when most famous and cinematically exploited Gothic texts were written, and the barbaric, i.e., medieval, past referenced in said texts, in turn, reducing the assumed distance between the enlightened present and the barbaric past (Aldana Reyes, 2020, p. 220). Aldana Reyes explains that 'the (Victorian) haunted house supersedes some of the older settings, especially as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries become the modern equivalents of what medieval times represented to Enlightenment Gothic writers – suitably distant, superstitious and barbaric by today's standards' (Aldana Reyes, 2020, p. 18). The medieval castle of Gothic writers thus becomes the Victorian manor. In *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), as they step into Hill House, the Crain children marvel at the size of the space and exclaim 'it's like a castle!' ('Screaming Meemies', 2018), thus underlining the castle-like qualities of the property known as Hill *House*.

Following this domestication further, we enter the common house whose lack of fluency in the Gothic language often makes it a space of horror rather than Gothic. While in literature this shift from castle to house took place during the American romantic period in the nineteenth century, where the haunted house becomes 'a new site for gothic narrative' during a period of innovation in the mode (Lukić & Parezanović, 2020, p. 1137), in films, the house as space of horror gained popularity with the rise of slashers in the 1980s. As Barry Jordan demonstrates in his study of Amenábar's *The Others*,

> at the turn of the 1980s, the subgenre of the classical, haunted house story and its more sedate, psychological thrills seemed rather remote, outmoded and destined for the television movie and cable. […] [A] 'ghost story' film such as *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982) revamped old formats, adding modern effects and gory scares to the haunted house tale, now relocated in middle-class suburbia, on new housing developments built on top of Indian burial grounds. (2019, p. 167)

The imposing and antiquated house, which Jordan calls 'one of the most overused conventions in the horror lexicon' (2019, p. 159), thus lost its impact due to the intensive exploitation of Gothic texts and settings in the 1960s, with works such as Roger Corman's film series based largely on Edgar Allan Poe's oeuvre, including *House of Usher* (1960) and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964). In the late 1970s, the castle was consequently replaced with the haunted house, with films such as *The Amityville Horror* (dir. Stuart Rosenberg, 1979) and later, as highlighted by Jordan, the suburban house of *Poltergeist* (dir. Tobe Hooper, 1982). These films imitate the isolated and/or suburban setting of the popular slasher formula, featured in films like *Halloween* (dir. John Carpenter, 1978) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (dir. Wes Craven, 1984), and translate it onto the haunted house film. To this day, the haunted house still stands with films such as *Insidious* (dir. James Wan, 2010) or *Hereditary* (dir. Ari Aster, 2018), for example. The 1980s thus became a watershed moment for the haunted space as it split between the mansion with, to reiterate Jordan's dichotomy, its 'more sedate, psychological thrills' and the house with its 'modern effects and gory scares,' or more simply, as the boundaries between Gothic and Horror solidified.

The endurance of the castle in the form of the Gothic manor led critics such as Botting to argue that the Gothic castle has been 'made clichéd and formulaic by popular imitation' and consequently 'ceased to evoke terror or horror' (1996, p. 7). Botting's indictment of the evolution of the Gothic castle nonetheless overlooks the fact that clichéd story elements can still be terror-inducing, especially in post-millennial times, which display a renewed and self-aware use of the outmoded castle and its formulaic properties, following what Aldana Reyes describes as 'a cultural transvaluation' of the mode in the 1990s, which 'relied heavily on consumer knowledge of formulas' (2020, pp. 214-215). Conscious of the fear mechanics of the castle, television and cinema put to work and surpassed its archetypal devices, thus transcending familiarity through innovation. As Monica Michlin explains, in her study of modern Gothic narratives of trauma, the postmodern Gothic self-consciousness contributes to the mode's poetics of terror (2012, para. 50). The post-millennial Gothic house's return to a more traditional, i.e., castle-like, shape further from the suburban house and closer to the medievalist manor, therefore, does not impede the terror-inducing possibilities of its stones, dark rooms, creaking doors and winding stairs.

Despite the significance of the appearance and aesthetics of the Gothic space, the highly recognisable rooms, doors, stairs, etc., scholarly attention has focused on its symbolic meanings. About the cliché of the Gothic castle, Botting argues that where castles 'remained, they continued

more as signs of internal states and conflicts than of external threats' (1996, p. 7). This semiotic reading of the castle as a symbol of the psyche is symptomatic of research on the Gothic. For instance, MacAndrew points out, in her work on the Gothic tradition, that the castle in the aforementioned *Castle of Otranto* is 'a manifestation of Manfred's mind' (1979, p. 14). Psychoanalytical and feminist studies have approached the Gothic castle as the symbolic space of the repressed or the uncanny (e.g., Vidler, 1992; Creed, 1993). More recently, trauma studies have framed the Gothic space as a symbol of the violent past (e.g., Michlin, 2012). Such critical traditions further strain the link between the castle and its materiality. Andrew Hock Soon Ng underlines this, in his study of space in horror fiction, when he states that such critical approaches only acknowledge said space 'in a narrow sense' which 'ultimately privilege[s] the figurative role performed by architecture and rarely address[es] its material implications' (2018, p. 442). The present chapter, while acknowledging that the Gothic space *does*, as mentioned in the epigraph above, 'represent plenty of things,' demonstrates that it is also, and, perhaps, more importantly, a material house.

I therefore approach the Gothic space as physical object whose materiality facilitates the spread of what Bauman defines as 'liquid fear' (2006) as generated by a 'liquid modernity' (2000), two overarching concepts in his research. On the postmillennial Gothic screen, as liquids engulf the architecture, it becomes the environment of liquid fear, where a threat is perceived everywhere, yet found nowhere. Therefore, generating an environment of fear relies on the materiality of the Gothic house – its size, darkness, humidity, labyrinthine qualities, etc. Using the examples of the Gothic manors and houses of *Dark Shadows* (2012), *The Woman in Black* (2012), *Crimson Peak* (2015), and *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018),[14] this chapter argues that liquids not only surround the Gothic space to create a liquid and unmanageable landscape, but also penetrate its walls. These ubiquitous fear-inducing liquids within the house in turn materialise the unrepresentable Gothic threat and the oozing of the past suffocating the present. In pervading the Gothic space, liquids create a damp atmosphere and diffuse their toxic effects throughout the house, including its inhabitants.

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[14] Throughout this thesis, regarding homonymous titles, when no mention is made of date or director, the film or television title refers to the post-millennial iteration listed as part of the main corpus.

1.1 Gothic Wetland: Boundaries and Abjection

1.1.1 Liquid Environment: Gothic Atmosphere and Isolation

Surrounding the Gothic house is a characteristically liquid environment. *The Castle of Otranto* is set on the Italian coast with Isabella trying to reach the sea – and freedom – to escape Manfred. A century later, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), when Jane discovers Rochester's secret and flees Thornfield, she finds herself desperate and starving, in a marshy land under the freezing rain before being finally rescued. In Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), the property lake constitutes a nodal point blurring the line between troubled madness and enlightened sanity in the governess. Stormy seas, diluvian rains, waterlogged grounds and still lakes later become key signifiers of Gothic cinema and television texts, many of them being adaptations of literary texts. Amna Haider explains, in her analysis of the role of sites in war trauma narratives, that the microcosmos surrounding the house contributes to the '[f]ear, terror or horror [which] requires the right setting to make their [*sic*] crippling impact' (2012, p. 56). The 'right setting' in the Gothic relies on liquids, with wet weather (rain, storms, sea mist) and – often correlated – liquid locations (coasts, lakes, wetlands) accentuating the feeling of fear. In purely pragmatic terms, these liquids darken and blur the image (through a grey, autumnal and sombre setting (Hanich, 2010, p. 178)), making the uncovering of the threat more difficult. Liquids also make the environment less reliable, with slippery rocks and quicksand-like paths, making the long escape from the isolated space a futile enterprise.

Indeed, as MacAndrew points out, in the Gothic, 'the very purpose of the setting […] is to create an isolated environment' (1979, p. 48). Liquids and isolation feed into each other. Isolation allows for preternatural liquids to have more impact on the Gothic space as Bachelard, in his *Poétique de l'Espace*, underlines when stating that a storm has more bellicosity against a single, isolated house than against the grouped houses of a city (1961, p. 43). Nonetheless, preternatural liquids also reinforce isolation as rain often turns into a thunderstorm as it 'breaks loose at the most intense point of the film' (Hanich, 2010, p. 178). The storm dramatises climactic scenes with its striking visual and aural breaks, and its violence isolates the characters who would not dare face it. The storm makes the threat within the house appear as the lesser evil, thus trapping the characters inside. Julian Hanich, in his analysis of constricting and isolating atmospheres in Horror films and thrillers, asserts that

[w]hen all hell breaks loose, it changes the atmosphere inside the house. It is as if a second wall was added, a natural, stormy wall that makes it impossible to escape. The house besieged by a storm is confronted by the combined loudness of wind, rain and thunder. [...] The house, often haunted before, seems to come fully alive now. [...] Doors slam shut, windows won't open, phone lines are dead, thus further isolating the occupants. (2010, pp. 178-179)

The preternatural storm thus acts as a liquid amplifier of the threatening and solid Gothic space. In the sixth episode of *The Haunting of Hill House* ('Two Storms', 2018), the storm over Hill House cuts off the lights and traps the Crain family in the space among ghostly threats (dogs with red glowing eyes, moving statues, the Bent-Neck Lady, etc.). The storm even breaks the solid boundary of the house, breaking the chandelier and smashing windows, thus intensifying the threat of the space itself. In *Crimson Peak*, as Edith finally learns about the siblings' plans and exclaims as she runs away 'I have to get out of here!' she opens the manor's front door and is stopped by a violent snowstorm. The howling wind and the accumulated snow push her back inside, left at the mercy of the Sharpe siblings. The liquid boundary of the storm becomes more uncrossable than the solid boundary of the house.

The liquid boundary indeed actively imprisons the characters. Bachelard's bellicosity of the rain is therefore an external quality, depending on the isolation of the house, but also an internal quality of the liquid. Mick Smith explains, in his chapter on rain conceptualised in Heideggerian terms, that 'rainfall resists being reduced to a passive object' (2017, p. 232). He adds that 'rain precipitates experiences, poetic understandings, and forms of appreciation that take us outside of any narrowly bounded self-interests and also bring *things* home to us in unexpected and sometimes uncomfortable ways' (2017, p. 232) [emphasis in the original]. Smith suggests here that storms and rain are the quintessential setting of higher emotional and intellectual experiences. Applied to the Gothic, the rain sometimes heightens melodramatic experiences (of loss for instance) as well as sometimes forcing the characters into such experiences by leaving them at the mercy of the threat. Smith also suggests here that rain can expose certain hidden truths – for better or worse. In his framework, this idea that rain can 'bring *things* home' means that 'rainfall [...] has the potential to call us, however momentarily, out of technology and capital's narcissistic economy' (2017, p. 232) [emphasis in the original]. In the Gothic, however, rain literally brings things back home. In the 'Two Storms' episode of *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), the storms link two places and times, the funeral home in the present and Hill House in the summer of 1992. While young Nell disappears

during the storm in Hill House, her ghost appears in the funeral home where her wake is taking place. The rain washes Nell away from Hill House and brings her back to her family. It also brings Hugh, Nell's father, back to Hill House, in a seamless transition between the present time in the funeral home and the past in Hill house (figure 1.1). Rain is the symbolic harbinger of the return home. In *It Chapter Two* (2019), rain functions as the material carrier of the return home. As adult Beverly leaves her abusive husband and walks out in the rainy streets of a big city, a shot of the storm drain cuts to a shot inside the sewers. In a static shot, rumbling echoes before a wave washes over the camera (fig. 1.2). The shot cuts to the outside of the sewers of Derry spitting out the wave. A bird's-eye shot follows the waves as it carries bodies of missing children out of the sewers. The wave created by diluvian rains in the city brings the children of Derry 'home', i.e., out of the sewers (fig. 1.3). Therefore, the rain is a boundless liquid moving freely between space and time and bringing the past back to the characters who cannot escape the Gothic space (Hugh and Nell are attached to Hill House and Bev is bound to Derry).

Figure 1.1: Long take creating a seamless transition in *The Haunting of Hill House*: Hugh moves from the funeral home in the present into Hill House in the past within the same shot. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.2: The rain becoming wave in the city's sewers in *It Chapter Two…* [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.3: … to the wave exiting from the sewers of Derry and exposing the bodies of missing children.

Like rain, the sea provides an unpassable border around the Gothic space, trapping the characters in an insular domain. This form of isolation is often used in prison narratives where the insular situation of the prison is used as reinforcement of its supposed inescapability as is the case in *Shutter Island* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 2010), set on the eponymous island, or *Papillon* (dir. Michael Noer, 2017), set on Devil's Island. The sea and, indeed, other bodies of water such as

lakes, mould the Gothic landscape and create fantastic arrangements in the Gothic environment, derived from imagined literary and pictorial rather than actual or natural settings (MacAndrew, 1979, p. 48). In *Dark Shadows,* the house overlooks the ocean, with a boundary embodied by the high cliff of Widow's Hill. This delineates the Gothic space in opposition to the small town of Collinsport, as well as creating a dangerous boundary from which Josette and Barnabas are forced to jump twice. In *The Woman in Black*, the house is surrounded by marshes. When the tide is high, the house becomes completely isolated as the road linking the village and the island is flooded. This sense of isolation contributes to the Gothic mode's reliance 'on the dynamics of space' within this absurdly inhospitable environment 'as an actively participating element of the storyline' (Lukić & Parezanović, 2020, p. 1138). Dynamic and malevolent liquid elements, such as storms and tides, thus actively mark the border between Gothic and non-Gothic space.

Botting considers that the mode's 'wild landscapes' contribute to the representation of the Gothic locus as a heterotopia (2000, p. 9). Heterotopia is a concept coined by Michel Foucault and defined as 'des lieux réels, […] qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées [real places, […] which are sorts of counter-sites, sorts of effectively realised utopia]' (1994, p. 755). These heterotopias are by definition 'absolument autres [absolutely other]' (1994, p. 756) to the real world. Nevertheless, the heterotopic quality of the Gothic landscape essentially emerges not from its 'wild' but from its *liquid* characteristic. The Gothic liquid landscape constitutes a liquefaction of the conventional space. The trusted and solid norms of the conventional space melt as the landscape becomes a fluid and ungraspable threat: the rain is heavier, the sea more violent, the ground more porous. Perhaps the most heterotopic characteristic of Gothic landscapes is that they assumes '[u]n système d'ouverture et de fermeture qui, à la fois, les isole et les rend pénétrables [a closing and opening system that both isolates them and makes them penetrable]' (1994, p. 760). The liquid landscape sustains this dialectic of openness and isolation. The tide of the sea surrounding Eel Marsh House in *The Woman in Black* lets Arthur in and keeps him in, while keeping help away. The snowstorm in *Crimson Peak* keeps Edith from fleeing and help from coming. One does not go in the Gothic landscape to wander; one needs a 'certaine permission [certain permission]' (Foucault, 1994, p. 760), often in the form of a contract (a marriage in *Crimson Peak*, a job in *Dark Shadows, The Woman in Black* or *The Haunting of Hill House*). Most importantly, perhaps, one should not dwell. These last two characteristics of the Gothic landscape bring it closer to Marc Augé's notion of the 'non-lieu [non-place]' (1992, p. 118), a space which is only and unavoidably passed through, not dwelled in (a station, or a motorway).

This is overtly mentioned in *The Woman in Black,* as the inhospitable inn owner immediately warns outsider Arthur that the cold brought about by the sea mist makes the village unwelcoming and unsuited for holiday-seekers. The Gothic landscape is not one to dwell in; it is too liquid to rest on.

Therefore, the liquid environment demarcates itself from the solid world, often materialised as a crowded city (Buffalo in *Crimson Peak*, London in *The Woman in Black*). The liquid landscape constitutes a place where conventional spaces are at once 'représentés, contestés et inversés [represented, contested, and inverted]' (Foucault, 1994, p. 755). Hence the busy streets of London contrast with the isolation of Eel Marsh House in *The Woman in Black*. The environment marks the reversal of the space. The smog of London – suggesting a certain modernity – is replaced with the downpour of the Northern village. The paved streets of the city seen early in the film (fig. 1.4) turn into marsh once Arthur crosses the Gothic space's boundary (fig. 1.5). This shift crystallises a treacherous liquefaction of the landscape, appearing solid but revealing itself as liquid once it is already too late – hence, the accidental drowning of the Woman's son. In *Crimson Peak*, the mirroring dichotomy between the New World, embodied by Buffalo, and the Old World, in England, is also marked by liquids. In the opening of the film, Edith walks through a bustling square in Buffalo, where vendors, machinery and train tracks all mix on an unpaved, muddy ground (fig. 1.6). A close-up shot showing Edith's boots emphasises the muddiness of the streets. This setting suggests that America is still in the process of modernisation. Horse carriages and mud coexist with cars, electric wires and train tracks being built while the whistle of a train and the hissing of machinery almost silence the sounds of the bustling crowd. America is liquid waiting to become solid. In contrast, as Edith arrives at Allerdale Hall, the land appears barren and dry with dead trees and sand-like moors (fig. 1.7). This impression is deceptive, since, as soon as snow falls, the landscape liquefies. An echoing close-up on Edith's boots in Allerdale Hall, after she secretly enters the forbidden cellar, shows the red stains of the liquid clay, suggesting a mirrored yet reversed world falling into wetness. The liquid landscape of Allerdale Hall materialises the decay of a once prosperous land; liquids take over rather than being conquered by cement; hope is non-existent; Thomas' machines fail. The Gothic landscape is thus, overall, an anti-landscape, a land which lies about being solid, a space of treacherous fluidity and liquids.

Fig. 1.4: Foggy London in *The Woman in Black.*

Fig. 1.5: Rain on the marsh viewed from the house's window in *Woman in Black.* [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.6: Soon-to-be-solid landscape of Buffalo in *Crimson Peak.*

Fig. 1.7: Soon-to-be-liquid landscape of Allerdale Hall in *Crimson Peak.*

Therefore, the Gothic landscape constitutes the reversal of the centre, relocated and marginalised as a 'scapeland' as described by Rod Giblett in his study of the wetland, borrowing a concept from Jean-François Lyotard. Giblett argues that '[w]etlands are more 'scapeland' than landscape, the geographical equivalent of the scapegoat' (1996, p. 13). The Gothic paradoxical

liquid *land*-scape is thus more precisely what Giblett calls the 'scapewetland' (1996, p. 13), an oxymoronic liquid land which lies at the margins of the solid land. Indeed, most Gothic scapewetlands are built in the margins of civilisation: an island in the far North in *The Woman in Black*, an isolated hilltop in *Crimson Peak* and *Dark Shadows*, away from villages and town in *The Haunting of Hill House*. The solid civilisation with its strong walls and paved roads melts into liquid landscape as soon as one ventures too far away and finds oneself in the Gothic scapewetland. In this chapter, I use the shortened 'wetland' to describe the Gothic in all its oxymoronic and, more importantly, material sense, removing the 'scape-' prefix as the Gothic space is necessarily marginalised. I also use 'wetscape' to describe a broader kind of wetland outside of the concept of *land*, e.g., a damp house can constitute a wetscape in Horror.

1.1.2 The Contemporary Gothic Wetland: Liquefaction of the Landscape

Although the liquid environment appears since the beginning of Gothic literature, as mentioned, the liquefaction of the environment on screen is a recent phenomenon. For instance, in the 1963 adaptation of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House,* Robert Wise's *The Haunting,* there is no storm in the narrative. The story takes place mostly indoors, and the threat emerges from within rather than without, while in the 2018 version, the storm extends to an entire episode (one tenth of the total discourse time), marking the beginning of the materialised threat (the leak and mould spreading from the Red Room). Similarly, in an episode of the original *Dark Shadows* television series, Josette jumps from Widow's Hill under the spell of Angélique ('425', 1968). Josette and Barnabas stand on top of the cliff as he tries to stop her, but there is no visible suggestion of the sea. For budget and format reasons – the original *Dark Shadows* was a soap opera, with a live-to-tape format – the characters are filmed in a medium still shot of the top of the hill in a foggy night setting and Josette jumps from the cliff off camera with subsequent wave sounds to suggest the liquid landscape (fig. 1.8). In the 2012 version, however, the sea holds a key place in her fall as the waves crash on rocks around the characters, drenched with sea water, intersected with multiple shots of the stormy sea (fig. 1.9). Again, in the 1989 version of *The Woman in Black* (dir. Herbert Wise), the liquid environment holds a secondary role. The sea and the marsh are shown, and still hold a role in the narrative (the son of the Woman did drown in the marsh), but the environment is depicted as cold and foggy, with no rain and a story largely unfolding indoors, unlike the 2012 version where the marsh and its mud play a major part in the haunting.[15] The

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[15] See Chapter 1.3.3. for the role of mud in *The Woman in Black.*

mysterious fog used to suggest horror in the twentieth century has been liquefied within the threateningly wet environment, shifting the suggestion of the supernatural from dense vapour to liquid.

Fig. 1.8: The foggy landscape as Josette falls from the cliff in the original *Dark Shadows.*

Fig. 1.9: The sea at the heart of Josette's jump from the cliff in *Dark Shadows* (2012). [Modified brightness]

The liquefaction of the landscape in contemporary Gothic reflects the modern fear of a threat which we can no longer manage. This is what Bauman calls the 'horror of the unmanageable' in his chapter on natural and manufactured disasters such as climate change and Hurricane Katrina. This horror is the overwhelming 'awe and trembling caused by the sublime and tremendous, by the sight of giant mountains and boundless seas evidently immune to human efforts to scale them' (2006, p. 94). The mention of the sublime suggests the complete powerlessness of the individual facing such sites since, as Cavallaro explains, 'the sublime defies definition due to its tendency to exceed acceptable levels of either magnitude or energy' (2002, p. 4). The sublime Gothic wetscape is excess trying to swallow whatever attempts to settle on it. Perhaps more accurately then, Bauman describes here a *terror* rather than *horror* of the unmanageable. Indeed, recalling Edmund Burke's seminal framing of Sublime and Terror, where the sublime, the highest of emotions, is defined as terror which 'does not press too close' (1998, p. 42), i.e., terror at a distance, what Bauman describes as 'the sublime', and especially, in the case of Katrina where distance was far from assured for the most vulnerable parts of the population, is in fact *terror*. The Gothic wetscape does not deal in distancing boundaries with the characters who enter it. Hence, the immensity of the sea constitutes a key Gothic element present in both *The Woman in Black* and *Dark Shadows* where extreme long shots of the landscape repeatedly emphasise the sea's un-scalability. In *The Woman in Black*, Eel Marsh House and its surrounding wetscape are introduced through aerial long shots

with a dolly-out movement, evoking an infinite landscape, ever-exceeding the frame and crushing the characters within (fig. 1.10). In *Dark Shadows*, the infinite energy of the sea is underlined, once again, through long shots, especially those around Widow's Hill (fig. 1.11). As the sea is 'deaf to the human cries for mercy' (Bauman, 2006, p. 94), sounds communicate the excessive and humbling energy of the wetscape as the sounds of crashing waves drown the soundscape in both scenes where Josette and Barnabas jump from the cliff. As they hit the rocks, the sea completely saturates the shots in a quasi-comical effect. To accentuate the energy of the stormy sea, the camera obsessively cuts to shots of the water crashing against the rocks. In the first cliff scene for instance, from the moment Barnabas hits the ground following Josette, until the end of the scene, there are 22 shots in total. 21 of these shots feature the sea or its splashing waves. Furthermore, 10 out of the 22 shots exclusively feature the sea hitting against the rocks with no characters in the shot, thus emphasising the energy of the water (e.g., fig. 1.12). The sea drowns the characters, saturates the frame, and takes over the montage. The mind is therefore 'entirely filled' with the sea as object of both terror and sublime (Burke, 1998, p. 53). Thus, in long and in close-up shots, the Gothic wetscape is presented as making 'some sort of approach towards infinity' (Burke, 1998, p. 58), in terms of scale, energy and power over the characters it crushes.

Fig. 1.10: The crushing landscape of *The Woman in Black*. The characters disappear in the centre of the shot.

Fig. 1.11: Josette jumping from Widow's Hill, merely a speckle in the infinite landscape. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.12: Medium shot of the sea in *Dark Shadows* emphasising the saturating energy of the sea.

1.1.3 Abject Wetland and Loose Water

This infinite quality, in turn, makes the Gothic wetland ungraspable: it escapes categorisation. In this sense, the wetland is utterly abject. Julia Kristeva famously defined the abject

as the feeling arising when one is confronted with matters such as faeces, menstrual blood, or cadavers. Because they transgress the limits of the body, of the self, of what is and is not, these matters elude categorisation and are, just like the Gothic wetland, ungraspable, hence Kristeva's famous idea that the abject is 'ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles [what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules]' (1980, p. 12). The matters described in Kristeva's analysis are in majority liquids, and often imperfect ones, lumpy, slimy, coloured or stained, such as sweat, pus, urine, faeces, blood etc. These are the liquids symbolically found in the Gothic wetland. Such liquids are abject because they materialise '[l]'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte [the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite]' (1980, p. 12). The marsh from *The Woman in Black* and the clay from *Crimson Peak* are neither solid nor liquid and, in their respective brownish and bright red colour, symbolise abject liquids such as faeces for the former and menstrual blood for the latter. The wetland is thus abject in itself because it is both liquid and solid, but also because it often harbours skeletons and cadavers, which Kristeva coins as the epitome of the Abject. As she famously states, '[l]e cadavre – vu sans Dieu et hors de la science – est le comble de l'abjection. Il est la mort infestant la vie. Abject [the cadaver – taken without God and outside of science – is the utmost abjection. It is death infesting life. Abject]' (1980, pp. 11-12). The idea that the corpse infests life with its deathliness suggests that, as the corpse invades the wetscape, its abject qualities spread to the ground. Therefore, the sea, which harbours corpses in both *Dark Shadows* and *The Woman in Black,* becomes a space of the composite abject, despite its categorically liquid quality.

The more bodies inhabiting the wetland, the heavier it becomes, or as Bachelard points out about water, '[q]ui s'enrichit s'alourdit [what becomes richer becomes heavier]' (1942, p. 80), to the point where the wetland becomes so heavy and slow, that it becomes viscous. The wetland exudes sliminess, it becomes pure substance: one sees what it is made of rather than what it is. The wetscape's boundlessness becomes formlessness, highlighting the materiality of the wetland, uncomfortably lying between solid and liquid grounds. This inbetweeness leads the sublime into slime. As Giblett asserts in his study of wetlands, the sublime is 'inevitably haunted by its slimy other' (1996, p. 30). The sublime yet slimy Gothic wetland slips into abjection. The abject sliminess of the wetland is manifested through the close-ups on the matter constituting the landscape, such as that on the clay as Thomas mines the land in *Crimson Peak*. The audience is immersed in the slimy, clotted, and bright red wetland. As the point of audition matches the point of view, the close up emphasises the organic suction sound produced by the clay as it is mined. While the sublime is

vast, these close-ups force the implied audience to come in too close a contact with the wetland, irrevocably crushing the distance required for the Sublime to arise. Visual and aural close ups reduce us to ground level and limit the scale. We are face down in the slimy mud. The wetscape is therefore not only unmanageable (the siblings struggle to mine their land), but it also becomes abject and slimy.

This abject quality of the wetscape is particularly underlined with the marsh from *The Woman in Black*. As Arthur decides to end the ghostly killings of children around the village, he believes he must reunite the Woman, Jennet Humphrey, with her child so that she can finally be at peace. However, the child's body lies in the marsh, never recovered after his accidental drowning. At night, as the tide allows for safe passage across the sea, Arthur and his newly made local friend, Samuel Daily, make their way to Eel Marsh House. Arthur, attached to Daily's car by a rope, plunges inside the marsh. The darkness highlights indistinction between solid ground and the liquid mud, suggesting the treacherousness of the wetscape. The thickness, darkness and clottedness of the mud contribute to the feeling of abjection as Arthur enters a semi-liquid which suctions to his body, forcing him to fall over to advance. His movements are hindered and his progress difficult and slow as the mud covers his mouth. The thick liquid becomes completely still as the lawyer dives in, creating the sense of a malevolent landscape, easily hiding both living and dead bodies, as well as contributing to the terrifying paradoxical idea that one would choke on – rather than drown in – this abject liquid. Arthur resurfaces several times, completely covered in mud, almost indistinguishable from the marsh. Once Arthur finds the carriage supporting the boy's body, extracts himself and said body from the mud, despite the car, the suction power of the marsh is too strong and the carriage is sucked back into the active liquid, which covers the carriage like disappointed jaws closing their teeth back on a lesser prey.

The sliminess of the wetland indeed confers agency onto the environment. In his analysis of slime in *Being and Nothingness* (2002), Sartre compares slime with the clinging leech, as it is a 'fluidity which holds me and which compromises me; I cannot *slide* on this slime, all its suction cups hold me back; it cannot slide over me, it clings to me like a leech' (2002, p. 630) [emphasis in the original]. This personifying approach to slime makes it a sentient and purposeful matter. Slime lingers on and actively sticks to surfaces such as, most threateningly, the skin 'like a leech'. As underlined in *The Woman in Black* as Arthur struggles to progress in the marsh, slime impedes movement, it holds me back. This is also mentioned by Bachelard who briefly mentions 'rêves

gluants dans un milieu visqueux [sticky dreams in a slimy milieu]', dreams where viscosity prevents the dream from moving forward (1942, p. 143). Although Bachelard does not exactly personify viscosity, he does suggest that the viscous has the capacity to impede human trajectory. Through this emphasis on the liveliness of matter, Sartre argues that slime 'is like a liquid seen in a nightmare, where all its properties are animated by a sort of life and turn back against me' (2002, p. 630). The slime of nightmares – or 'rêves gluants' – provokes an utterly sensorial fear of the thing which should not be alive, and yet lives and threatens the living body. Slime thus possesses the malevolent will to engulf, to close its teeth on whatever steps on it.

The Woman in Black's retrieval-of-the-body scene highlights the slimy wetland's unbreakable will to engulf all, including the Gothic house and its inhabitants. The houses of *The Woman in Black* and *Crimson Peak* both stand on unsteady grounds of abject liquids (muddy marsh and clotted clay). The houses sink in the liquid grounds, and the overgrown vegetation stretching over the facades furthers this impression of the house being pulled down. The wetland is therefore actively trying to swallow and engulf the house. Evangelia Kindinger explains, in her analysis of the ghosts in *Crimson Peak*, that '[t]he house is literally devoured by the red clay it is built on' (2017, p. 60). Indeed, as Thomas discloses to his new bride, 'with the mines right below, the wood is rotting, and the house is sinking'. The wetscape reclaims itself and the house with it. The house is sucked into the quicksand of horror. The environment becomes an infestious force seeping into the house and its inhabitants. In the 1982 English translation of Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, the notion of the corpse as 'infestant la vie', cited above, is translated as 'infecting life' (1982, p. 4). The concept of infection and pollution in relation to the corpse is present in the book, when Kristeva describes the corpse as 'la pollution fondamentale [the fundamental pollution]' (1980, p. 127). Nevertheless, in this preliminary discussion, the corpse is not described as infectious but indeed as *infestious*. This single letter shift is not as trivial as it might seem. Kristeva explains that the corpse 'finit par nous engloutir [ends up engulfing us]' (1980, p. 12). This suggests that the corpse does not contaminate (infect) but engulfs. The wetland is not infected with corpses but it is infested with them. This shift not only renders the corpses as actively assailing the wetland – just as it actively assails the protagonist –; it also underlines the spatiality of the contamination of the wetland. Hence, rather than contaminated, the wetland is engulfed by the corpse until it becomes corpse in itself rather than wetland infected by corpse. Indeed, the idea of 'engloutir' in the original text underlines the complete swallowing of the wetland by the corpse. The corpse, and by extension, the wetland thus become a gaping mouth, a hole.

From there, the abjection of the Gothic wetland also relates to the landscape being coded as feminine. For instance, Marine Galiné, in her study of *Crimson Peak,* refers to Thomas' machines as raping the grounds (2020, para. 26), thus positing a penetrative/penetrated and thus traditionally male/female dichotomy upon the wetland. In his study, Giblett reads the wetland as a space coded as feminine and maternal, linking it to birth and, in particular, to the placenta, stating, 'the placenta is the wetland of the maternal body; the wetland is the placenta of the Great Mother (Earth)' (1996, p. 40). Wetscapes are often studied as feminine and intrauterine spaces, as famously shown in Barbara Creed's damp house as manifestation of the monstrous feminine in Horror (1993, p. 55), but what is perhaps more original in Giblett's reasoning is the idea of water as *loose* woman: '[w]ater is thus a kind of promiscuous substance that gets around, even sleeps around, too much with earth and air' (1996, p. 14). As water 'sleeps' with earth, it creates mud. As it sleeps with air, it creates fog. The Gothic wetland is therefore also abject because it is feminised but, more importantly, because it is not motherly water but debauched water. The wetness of the landscape is not that of the motherly bosom (a life-giving liquid); it is that of the promiscuous vagina engulfing everything around and mixing with other matters indiscriminately to create an abjection that sticks to the skin. The corpse-infested Gothic wetland is thus of the wetness of the *petite mort* of the self and of clean matter.

The promiscuous landscape is therefore intrinsically porous. Porosity is a condition common to all matter as argued by Gilles Deleuze in his study of the *pli*, where he demonstrates that matter 'présente […] une texture infiniment poreuse, spongieuse ou caverneuse [presents an infinitely porous spongy or cavernous texture]' (1988, p. 8). This spongy and porous quality allows flows, for instance, to circulate within and between matter. Manuel De Landa, in his philosophical history book retracing a millennium on Earth, explains that 'despite the many differences between them, living creatures and their inorganic counterparts share a crucial dependence on intense flows of energy and materials' (1997, p. 104). The porosity of the Gothic landscape allows it to engulf the house and characters. Nonetheless, if porosity affects all matter, even 'inorganic' matter, the house is not spared; the wetland also seeps into the house. The seemingly solid walls of the house, traditionally the primary defence against threats, become penetrable. As Mentz analyses in his chapter on seeping, once something seeps into something else, '[t]here's no way to keep these things out once they're in, and no way to stop them getting in. There's no inside or outside: just slow, inexorable seeping' (2017, p. 282). Mentz considers that, rather than a failure of 'ideal solid materiality', seeping reveals the 'essential fluid property of matter itself' (2017, p. 283). In short,

just like and, also, because, for Deleuze, everything is porous, '[e]verything seeps' (2017, p. 283). The house seeps into the wetland and the wetland seeps into the house. As Galiné demonstrates about *Crimson Peak*, '[t]hroughout the movie the red clay is an element always in motion, always threatening to transgress boundaries, especially those of the supposedly secure space of the castle' (2020, para. 26). The clay penetrating the house highlights its porosity and therefore weakens the walls' supposed impermeability. Thus, Gothic architecture's 'quality of sharpness, its precisely pointed forms without relaxation or flabbiness' (Vidler, 1992, p. 73), suggesting a fortress-like, defensive house that cannot be penetrated, are in fact undermined by porosity.

Nevertheless, boundaries remain. Porosity does not mean dissolution, where the inside and the outside correspond perfectly, since '[w]hen things seep together, they infiltrate each other but don't merge' (Mentz, 2017, p. 282). Therefore, as the house and wetscape seep into each other, their boundaries become blurry and malleable, but they do not disappear. Nancy Tuana calls this type of boundary blurring 'viscous porosity' (2008). This notion translates the material and semantic flows between house and landscape, while underlining the resistance of boundaries and the slowness of the process:

> *Viscosity* is neither fluid nor solid, but intermediate between them. Attention to the *porosity* of interactions helps to undermine the notion that distinctions, as important as they might be in particular contexts, signify a natural or unchanging boundary, a natural kind. At the same time, 'viscosity' retains an emphasis on resistance to changing form, thereby a more helpful image than 'fluidity,' which is too likely to promote a notion of open possibilities and to overlook sites of resistance and opposition. (Tuana, 2008, pp. 193-194) [emphasis in the original]

In *Crimson Peak*, arguably the most obvious example of viscous porosity, the house sinks into the ground and the ground, the clay, seeps through the walls of the house. At no point does the house dissolve into the wetscape and vice-versa. Nevertheless, where they meet, the clay makes the wall organic, i.e., alive with movement, and the house makes the clay uncanny, i.e., confers upon it a sense of stubbornness and strength as it penetrates the stone walls. Similarly, in *The Haunting of Hill House*, the water seeping into the walls after the storm does not erase the boundaries of the walls. It nonetheless highlights their porousness as the walls become squishy and exude black mould spores as Hugh fights, in vain, to stop the leak. In turn, the house in the shape of the unopenable Red Door, an absolute boundary, keeps the leak and mould spreading.

Both porous and penetrative, the wetscape thus becomes highly threatening. Against the active and abject wetland, humans are helpless. Bauman argues that the fear of the unmanageable is linked to our own 'incomprehension' or our lack of 'know-how for tackling' a threat greater than us (2006, p. 94), such as, I would argue, the Gothic wetland. Therefore, Bauman concludes, '[w]hat we are *not* able to manage is "unknown" to us; and the "unknown" is frightening. *Fear is another name we give to our defencelessness*' (2006, pp. 94-95) [emphasis in the original]. The Gothic wetland is unmanageable and frightening because it is utterly unknowable. It is liquid and solid. Isolating and incorporating. Terror and sublime. It is engulfing and penetrative, and therefore of a masculine femininity. The Gothic wetscape lies at the unmanageable junction of all these things and therefore reinforces the threat of the ghosts haunting the space. The very unmanageability of the liquid landscape penetrating the house thus drags fear from the outside to the inside of the house.

1.2 The Gothic House as Harbinger of Liquid Fear

1.2.1 Liquids as materialisation of Liquid Fear

The wetscape thus seeps through the supposedly strong walls of the Gothic house, blurring the stark demarcation between the abject outside and the solid inside. Jordan draws an apt comparison when analysing *The Others* (2001), arguing that, in the film, the Gothic house functions as 'a kind of ghost ship', 'a vessel which keeps out the daylight, as a ship must keep out the water' (2019, p. 154) as the children supposedly cannot be exposed to light. As the narrative progresses, however, the tight ship-house grows increasingly porous and lets light, threats and revelations seep in. In water-coded Gothic, this metaphor is literalised as liquids, such as mud from the marsh in *The Woman in Black*, clay from the mines in *Crimson* Peak, water from the storm in *The Haunting of Hill House*, slowly seep in and expose the truth about the space. This corresponds to Bauman's perspective on modernity, where 'the possible always lurks, restlessly, inside the protective carapace of impossibility, waiting to irrupt' (2006, p. 15). As the environmental liquids penetrate the house, safety and protection fail. The threatening supernatural becomes possible, and with it, fear spreads.

The liquids spreading around the house indeed make it the harbinger of what Kavka, in her study of Gothic cinema, defines as the Gothic 'unspeakable, or unrepresentable' threat (2002, p. 226). Kavka's comparison of horror and Gothic film relies on the 'popular dyad' (Aldana Reyes,

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2020, p. 8) conflating the Gothic and the liminal or suggested threat, and associating Horror to what is seen 'head-on' (2002, p. 226):

> There is, in other words, a world of difference between not being able to see something that remains shadowed or off-screen (the Gothic), on the one hand, and being able to see something terrifying placed before our very eyes but from which we want to avert our gaze (horror), on the other. (Kavka, 2002, p. 227)

The Gothic, according to this dichotomy, thus relies on a 'shadowed,' i.e., a suggested, shapeless and undefinable threat. This distinction is contestable especially within the contemporary context of mixing modes and genres creating horror films with suggested threats and gruesome Gothic films (see Aldana Reyes, 2020, p. 9). I use this distinction as a point of reference rather than as an indisputable, genre-defining division. My argument, unlike Kavka's, is not that the Gothic is principally defined by its suggested threat, but that liquids, which mark a Gothic sensibility, especially when detached from bodies (seawater, mud, clay, rain, etc.), materialise the suggested, shapeless and undefinable threat.

This suggested/head-on dyad roughly corresponds to Freud's own medically inflected understanding of fear. In this distinction, exposed in his *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1920), fear and anxiety essentially work as distinctive concepts. Putting aside the technical and psychoanalytical discussion, which does not enrich the present thesis, Freud draws a distinction where, on the one hand, anxiety corresponds to 'a condition of free-floating fear' able to attach itself to any object, creating a constant expectation of a possible disaster (1920, p. 344). On the other hand, fear is 'psychologically more circumscribed and bound up with certain objects or situations', whether presenting actual or imagined danger (a venomous snake or a housecat) (1920, pp. 344-345). In the Freudian understanding, which, after a century of use and reuse, is now more common than Freudian, anxiety does not have a circumscribed object while fear does. In this sense, in the Gothic, liquids in themselves are not fear-inducing or horrific, they are not circumscribed or circumscribable, but they do create an expectation of disaster. Uncontained liquids in the domestic space always point towards a loss of control and, therefore, towards an upcoming threat to normality, routine, safety or life. Liquids are thus perfect on-screen materialisation of the free-floating, unrepresentable, vague yet ubiquitous threat, harbinger of anxiety. They spread easily but cannot be grasped, and, because they cannot be stopped, they always threaten to ultimately engulf the characters.

This free-floating threat and resulting anxiety echo Bauman's concept of 'liquid fear' (2006), a ubiquitous fear which is

> diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no clear rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen. 'Fear' is the name we give to our *uncertainty*: to our *ignorance* of the threat and of what is to be done – what can and what can't be – to stop it in its tracks – or to fight it back If stopping it is beyond out power. (2006, p. 2) [emphasis in the original]

Perhaps openly reiterating Freud's idea of 'free-floating' fear, Bauman's liquid fear has no defined 'address or cause,' it is everywhere yet nowhere, constantly on the verge of actualisation. Freudian anxiety becomes materially liquid in Bauman's framework and materially liquid in the Gothic, where a threat can emerge from anywhere under any form, hiding in the dark corners of the intricate Gothic architecture, ready to 'leak out of every nook or cranny' (2006, p. 4). The materially and conceptually liquid threat suggests horror in a non-horrific way and stands in for the unspeakable threat until the climactic reveal, i.e., the confrontation with the source of horror. For instance, mud stands in for the ghost of the Woman in Black, clay stands in for the evil of the siblings in *Crimson Peak*, and the leak stands in for the greater evil of Hill House.[16] These eerie liquids are visible everywhere (oozing from the walls, spitting from taps, seeping from the floor, etc.) but, in themselves, could simply hint at the worryingly decaying state of the Gothic space. They subtly materialise the actual threat. Hence, liquid fear emerges from a threat which 'can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen' (Bauman, 2006, p. 2). Once the threat is actualised, i.e., given a circumscribed object, 'at long last, we come to know what was standing behind that vague but obstinate feeling of something awful and bound to happen' (Bauman, 2006, p. 1). This highly anxious fear thus emerges, not from the threat itself, as it remains hidden for most of the narrative, but from the knowledge, the expectation, that this threat will, at some indeterminate point, erupt. The actualisation of the menace which would allow the liquid fear to anchor itself and thus solidify – and lose its anxiety-inducing power – only emerges in or near the climax with the revelation of and confrontation with the real source of evil (the ghost of the Woman in Black and her child, the murderous siblings in *Crimson Peak* and the House itself in *The Haunting of Hill House*). The

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[16] *The Haunting* also embodies liquid fear without liquids in both series with ghosts hiding in the shots' background, unnoticed by the characters and hardly noticeable for the audience. For a detailed study of the background ghosts in Flanagan's series, see Trotry, 2024.

suggested threat of the Gothic film creating a free-floating anxiety, i.e., a liquid fear, has become, in contemporary horror, materially liquid.

1.2.2 Contemporary Gothic and Liquid Modernity

The emphasis on materially liquid fear in contemporary Gothic is not coincidental but reflects current liquid conditions of existence, as demonstrated by Bauman in his extensive reframing of postmodernity through the metaphor of 'liquid' modernity. In this liquid existence, society's and its members' ways, actions, or conditions of life, change faster than is necessary for these ways, actions, or conditions to consolidate into habits, meaning that '[l]iquid life, just like liquid modern society cannot keep its shape or stay on course for long' (2005, p. 1). Liquid modernity is essentially constantly fluctuating and, as such, uncertain. Bauman applies this conceptual fluidity far and wide, to modernity (2000), love (2003), life (2005), fear (2006), times (2006), surveillance (2012), or evil (2016), showing that fluidity and ubiquitousness define all corners of contemporary culture. On the one hand, everything is now malleable, be it ourselves, our bodies, our place in society, our institutions, etc., providing arguably more freedom than at any other point in history. On the other hand, malleable and fluid things do not hold their shape for long, and one needs 'constant vigilance and perpetual effort' to keep what has been shaped in place (2000, p. 8). Freedom becomes burden. Liquid times are lived in anxious expectation of seeing what we hope is solid melt, and, as such, permeated by this liquid fear since 'liquid life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty' (2005, p. 2). Stability and solidity have virtually disappeared from postmodern liquid life, not only on the individual scale (habits and routines) but on a greater scale of social forms such as institutions (2007, p. 1). While Bauman links his liquid fear to free-floating yet real threats, such as terrorism or climate catastrophes, the fluid state of life and society itself contributes to an overwhelming sense of anxiety in the postmodern condition permeated by uncertainty.

Although Bauman coins his first 'liquid' concepts in the early twentieth century, his analysis has only grown more relevant, and, most importantly, more material. What were once metaphorically liquid times are quickly turning into materially liquid times. Writing in 2017, Mentz, in his chapter on seeping, ponders:

> What can we do in a world of seep? Some might say we can only endure, and perhaps cease to wish that seeping would stop happening. But in an effort to get somewhat ahead of such

dismal prognostications, I'll offer a perhaps counterintuitive suggestion: learn to swim. It's the only way to engage an increasingly fluid world. (2017, p. 293)

Mentz offers sound advice to embrace and navigate this 'increasingly fluid world'. Perhaps more than yesterday and less than tomorrow, we live in materially liquid times. Mentz' grounds his analysis in an ecological framework, where melting icecaps and rising seas make liquid fear even more real and threatening, and states that '[t]he world isn't drowning yet, except in some human-dense areas near its warmer coasts. It's seeping: places we thought were dry are becoming moist and unreliable' (2017, p. 294). Therefore, Bauman's figurative liquefaction of fear, relationships, institutions or times becomes a literal, and therefore, arguably, much more pressing, liquefaction of the ground under our feet, as the permafrost melts and the sea levels rise. This liquifying condition 'conjures up potent fears of groundlessness' (Mentz, 2017, p. 293) as it threatens our physical as well as emotional, territorial, economic, political, etc., stability. Bauman's cleverly metaphorical liquid fear now encapsulates a very material yet ubiquitous fear of liquids.

The anticipation of a global catastrophe participates in the spreading of liquid fear/anxiety,[17] growing during economic, political, social, and now environmental crises, but also through 'the fast spreading of paranoiac mentalities via the Internet' (Langdon, 2020, p. 976). The internet is often cited as culprit for the growing anxieties of liquid times as information and content are shared as fast as they are created. In his analysis of Gothic consumption in a virtually focused world, Botting links the constant state of anxiety to the overwhelming information and image flows: '[a]ll the pleasures, sensations, and excitements of simulation are thus underpinned by an emptiness, a lack of content, substance, resolution, or meaning. Despite the instantaneous gratifications of virtual life, anxiety continues to circulate freely' (2002, p. 293). The multiplication of possibilities in entertainment, potentially anxiogenic information, or data, thus contributes to this free-floating anxiety. Botting adds that, 'invited to choose, the subject is overwhelmed by the choices available' (2002, p. 294), which relates to Alain Ehrenberg's idea that the individual is crushed by possibilities, and, therefore, by a feeling of 'insuffisance dépressive [depressive insufficiency]' (2012, p. 13). This is also picked up by Bauman who, basing his argument on author and illustrator Sławomir Mrożek, explains that '[t]he pain which used to be caused by unduly limited choice has now been replaced by no less a pain – though this time the pain is caused by an

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[17] Google trends shows that the number of searches for 'anxiety' in the United Kingdom has grown significantly since 2004 (the earliest data available), roughly quadrupling in popularity (100 corresponds to the peak popularity for the term and 0 means that data was lacking for the term). [Search conducted 26 January 2024]

obligation to choose without trusting the choices made and without confidence that further choices will bring the target any closer' (2007, p. 106). When the individual liberated themselves from God and became their own manager, they got charged with the burden of responsibility and choice on a day-to-day basis. Who will they be today? Who will they be tomorrow? Who will they be in fifteen years? What can they do to be better? To make the world a better place? Where should they start? Wars? Famines? Cancer? Racism? Animal cruelty? Climate change? The choice is theirs, for better and worse, as none of these questions offer a clear, circumscribed answer. Influenced by the options constantly offered to them, via the media and the internet, to change their mind, body, diet, style, soul, ways, hobbies, status, career, country, etc., and the possibility, through the globalisation and intensification of economic, social, political, human, etc., flows, to immediately act on these options, the individual has no guarantee that these decisions will bring their target any closer. Faced with overwhelming choices and possibilities yet no circumscribed or certain answer, the inhabitants of liquid modernity fall prey to liquid fear.

This heightened liquid fear in contemporary culture is mirrored in the Gothic whose reflective and reactionary capacity has often been commented on (see e.g., Jackson, 1981; Punter & Byron, 2004; Chaplin, 2011). David Langdon explains in his analysis of digital anxiety and Gothic literature:

> [T]he Gothic seems uniquely located to focus on the prevailing concerns of its day. From its origins as a reaction to the Enlightenment scientific boom, through the urban terrors of the fin de siècle and beyond, the Gothic has always served as a bellwether for the society of its day, reacting to change and creating literary thought experiments exploring possible consequences, concerns, and fears. (2020, p. 975)

The Gothic, in literature but also on screen, is bound to and defined by, and, as such, reflects upon, the cultural moment that produces it. However, scholars such as Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall have argued that the Gothic is 'in principle the *least* reliable index of supposedly "widespread" anxieties' as it has a '*generic obligation*' to produce fear (2012, p. 280) [emphasis in the original]. Others have also argued that the fear produced by the Gothic is not specific but transcends 'specific historical moments' by addressing existential or universal fears (e.g., Kavka, 2002, p. 213). While both arguments are sound, they overlook the fact that fear can be induced in endless ways. The end, i.e., to produce fear, is an essential constant of the genre but the *means* evolve and transform over time and space. And while any specific fear can be linked back to an existential fear – fear of

aliens can be read as a fear of pollution of the self for instance –, again the way this existential fear is depicted changes. Monsters become aliens, which in turn become humans, and, later, post-humans and technological threats, before becoming monsters again. Therefore, despite the generic need to produce fear and the possible universality of said fear, horror always functions in cycles which correlate 'the social stress and the anxieties' of their times as noted by Noël Carroll (1990, p. 210). Hence in liquid times, the Gothic mode of fear prevails to reflect the liquefaction of threats.

1.2.3 Liquid Cinematography and Extensive Space

The liquid poetics of fear primarily rely on the Gothic space. In highly material terms, the size and darkness of the Gothic house produce considerably large, open and uncircumscribable spaces, creating an expanding and, as such, fluid space. Large rooms are demarcated by open arches, which, unlike space-defining doors, expand the space and let the threat seep in from dark corners. While examples abound, I will focus here on two instances of liquid fear which illustrate the fluid expansion of the space through the ghostly, first horizontally and then vertically. In *The Woman in Black*, an apparition of the Woman both uses and guides the expansion of the space horizontally. The scene starts with Arthur working in a large room (room 1) (fig. 1.13). His back is turned against the door, opened onto another room (room 2), itself with another open door. In the blurred background, the farthest door in room 2 slowly opens. The ghost of the Woman appears and stares at Arthur. The ghost expands the space horizontally by bringing action (the haunting) to room 2. A counter-shot from the back of room 2 shows Arthur's back through the doorframe of room 1, unaware of the apparition (fig. 1.14). It also shows a mirror placed in room 2, appearing in the top-left corner of the counter-shot. The mirror faces the camera but shows parts of room 2 which exist outside the shot. The veiled Woman haunts the mirror, almost unnoticeably still, blending in as she stands next to draped furniture, before making herself known by moving outside of the space framed by the mirror. There is therefore a double expansion of the space: from room 1, the centre of the action (Arthur), to room 2 (the Woman in the doorframe), and from room 2 to the mirror space (the Woman in the mirror). The Gothic space fluctuates, constantly opening up to facilitate ghostly apparitions. The ghost therefore uses the expansive space of the house, by hiding in corners and backgrounds, as well as creates it by directing the gaze toward said corners and backgrounds.

Fig. 1.13: Horizontal expansion of the space as the Woman appears in the background behind Arthur. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.14: Horizontal expansion of the space as the Woman features in the mirror space in the top left corner of the shot. [Modified brightness]

This horizontal expansion is systematically reinforced by objects vertically expanding the space and spreading fear. Objects such as monumental staircases and landings participate in the

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collective imagined vision of the Gothic house, as immediately recognisable signs of wealth and power, and, as such, feature in *Dark Shadows*, *Crimson Peak*, *The Lodgers*, *The Woman in Black*, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, amongst many others. In *Crimson Peak*, as Edith first sets foot in Allerdale Hall, she approaches a mirror and takes off her hat. A close-up shot of the mirror shows the blurry reflection of a ghost passing behind Edith, in the adjacent room (fig. 1.15). Edith is startled, turns around, and a counter-shot hints at a ghostly presence exiting to the left as Edith, now in the background, stands, dwarfed by the imposing entrance with its front door opened on the bleak countryside (fig. 1.16). The space expands horizontally. Soon after, a tracking point-of-view shot from the landing, looking down on Edith as voices resonate from the upper levels and boards creak eerily, opens the space vertically and suggests the threat permeating it (fig. 1.17). This is reinforced near the end of the scene, as Edith arrives in the kitchen and finds the elevator going up, already almost out of shot, carrying a clay-coloured presence (fig. 1.18), followed by a bird's-eye shot from the elevator shaft as Edith looks up giving a glimpse of the forbidden mines below (fig. 1.19). Again, the space opens up vertically and the shots from the opened space suggest the threatening presence of the ghostly. The Gothic interior thus constantly expands horizontally and vertically, corresponding to what David Punter and Glennis Byron define, in their analysis of the Gothic, as 'the failure of the map,' the 'loss of direction, the impossibility of imposing one's own sense of place' (2004, p. 262). Being in the Gothic house is being lost in an ever-expanding space, incapable of finding a way out.

Fig. 1.15: Close-up shot of the mirror as a ghost appears behind Edith, expanding the space horizontally.

Fig. 1.16: Counter-shot of Edith as the ghost, in the foreground, exits the space to the left.
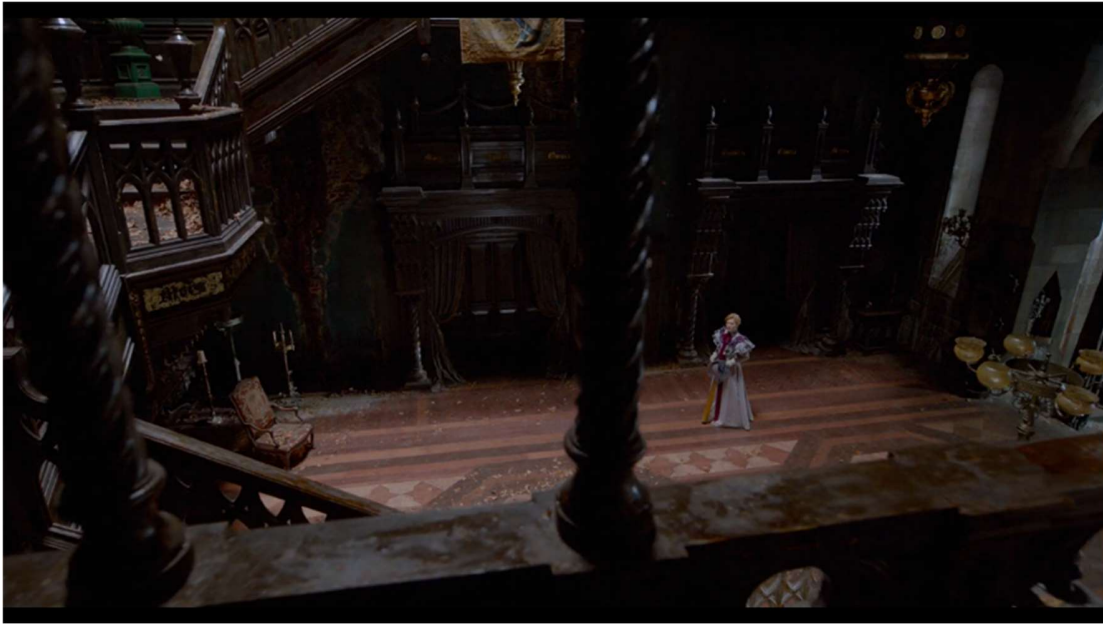
Fig. 1.17: Point-of-view shot of a potential invisible presence from the landing, expanding the space vertically, as Edith stands in the lobby.
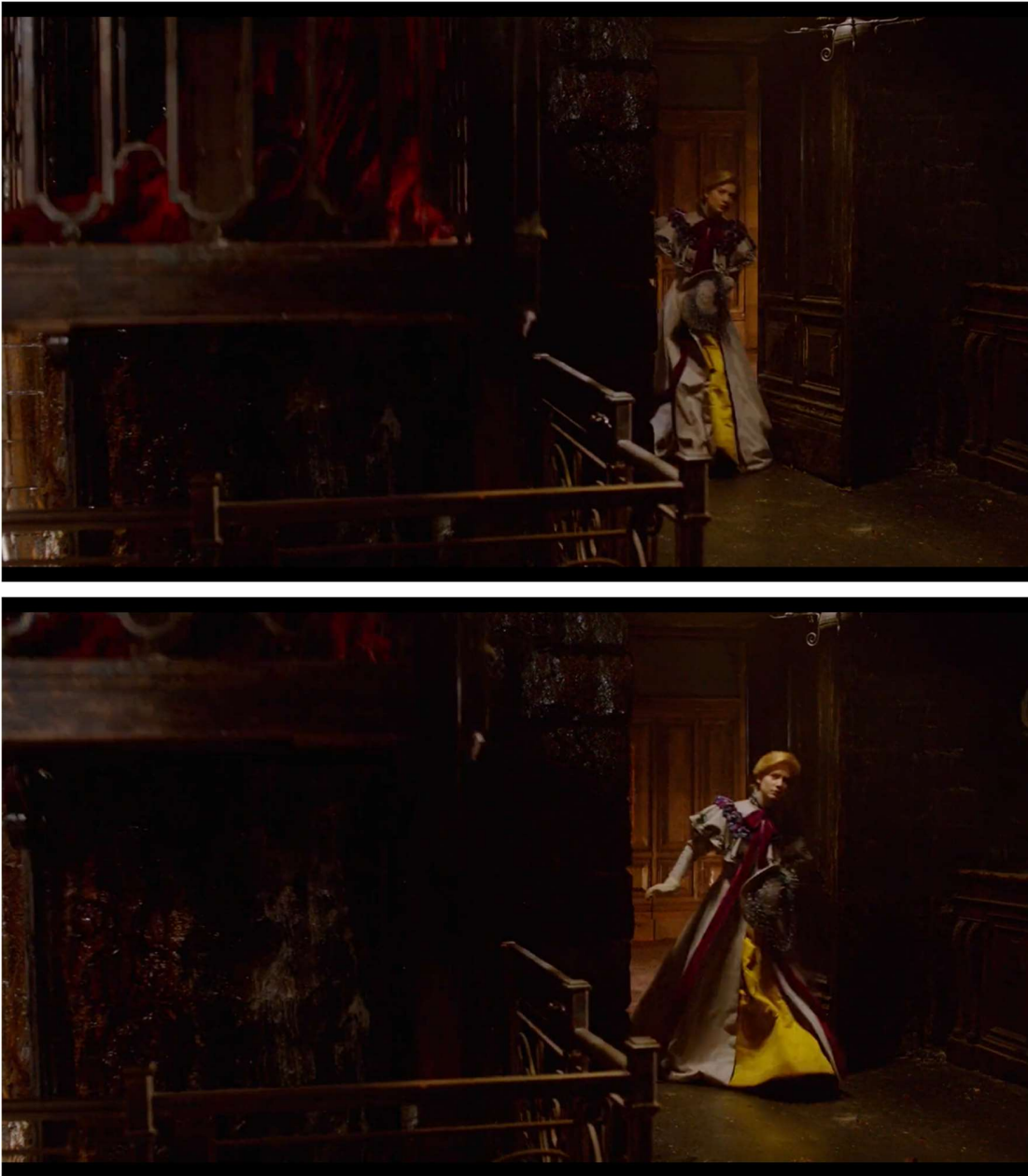
Fig. 1.18: Edith enters the kitchen as the elevator goes up carrying the ghost and expanding the space vertically.

Fig. 1.19: Bird's-eye shot of from the elevator shaft, expanding the space from above the kitchen to the mines below.

Nevertheless, the Gothic house is an ambivalent space, at once large and restrictive, where corridors constitute another means of liquefying the space and spreading liquid fear. Although the corridor is a restrictive space, it is also uniquely a space of flows whose purpose is to get people from one space to the other. No one stops in the corridor. Typically, in the Gothic, it is punctuated with closed doors encouraging forward flows. The corridor also emphasises the *possible* space as it expands to something which has yet to be discovered (a ghost around a sharp corner, horrors behind a closed door). To accentuate the feeling of dread and expectation, static medium-long shots of the long and empty corridor display the distance the character must cover in order to confront the threat. These are often mixed with over-the-shoulder shots of the character slowly advancing towards the threat, such as in *The Woman in Black*, when Arthur follows Nathanael's footsteps to the nursery, and *The Haunting of Hill House*, as Hugh looks for a scattered Liv during the storm in episode 6 ('Two Storms, 2018) (figs. 1.20 and 1.21). This possible space is at its most frightful with the locked or hidden room, expanding the physical space of the house once open or discovered, and, therefore, creating a fluid space. This is even more striking in *The Haunting of Hill House*, where the Red Room actually moves around the house, and the house exists in a state of constant flux. The Gothic house, despite its apparent solidity, is thus a fluid and disorienting space in constant expansion, leaving always more space for liquid threats to appear.

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Fig. 1.20: Over-the-shoulder shot (top) and point-of-view shot (bottom) of the nursery corridor in *The Woman in Black*. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.21: Over-the-shoulder shot (top) and point-of-view shot (bottom) of Hill House's corridor as Hugh looks for Liv.

The fluidity of the space is thus emphasised by a cinematography playing with a porous frame, or what Gilles Deleuze, in his study of cinema and space, calls a frame conceptualised as a 'construction dynamique [dynamic construction]' (1983, p. 24). This frame 'dépend étroitement de la scène, de l'image, des personnages et des objets qui le remplissent [closely depends upon the scene, the images, the characters and the objects which fill it]' (1983, pp. 24-25). The dynamic

frame adapts to the action rather than enclosing it within its boundaries. The 'Two Storms' episode of *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) features the extreme version of a dynamic frame where the frame is not a frame anymore, it is not a rigid structure tracing the limits of the image; it is a porous centre, the focus of the action, but by no means its only space. The episode alternates between two stormy nights, one in the summer of 1992 in Hill House, and one in the present, at the funeral parlour before Nell's funeral, and weaves together space and time by seamlessly transitioning and blurring the lines between the two chronotopes. The constant movement of the camera underlines the quasi-obsolete quality of the frame whose acceptedly solid structure melts to be replaced by an anxious expectation that something might creep into the frame at any moment. The frame highlights its own porousness to create liquid fear. Ironically, this episode only counts two ghostly apparitions, both of Nell. One is in the background of a 30-second still shot at the funeral home. The other is at the end of an arc shot, but her apparition is foreshadowed by her, off-screen, calling her father and her father, on screen, staring at her and whispering 'Oh, Nell' ('Two Storms', 2018). Therefore, the porous frame generates an apprehensive liquid fear with, of course, no actual source, since the materialised ghostly apparitions do not depend on a sudden and unexpected ghostly penetration of the dynamic frame.

This dynamism of the frame uses the out-of-field to suggest the *potential* irruption of what is off-frame into the frame, to paraphrase Bauman's words, to suggest the lurking of the possible always waiting to irrupt (2006, p. 15). Deleuze argues that '[l]e hors-champ renvoie à ce qu'on n'entend ni ne voit, pourtant parfaitement présent [the out-of-field refers to what is neither heard nor seen, although perfectly present]' (1983, p. 28). That is why, according to Deleuze, foreshadowing his aforementioned idea that everything is porous, 'un système clos n'est jamais absolument clos [a closed system is never absolutely closed]' (1983, p. 30), but always works in relation with its outside. The porous frame corresponds to the 'aspect relatif [relative aspect]' of the out-of-field 'par lequel un système clos renvoie dans l'espace à un ensemble qu'on ne voit pas, et qui peut à son tour être vu, quitte à susciter un nouvel ensemble non-vu, à l'infini [through which a closed system refers within the space to a whole which is unseen and which, in turn, can be seen, even if this generates a new whole which is unseen, infinitely]' (1983, p. 30). The porous frame therefore does not completely enclose the components – characters, objects, sounds, etc. It consistently suggests and communicates with what I call a beyond-the-frame, because, unlike the out-of-field, it is not strictly speaking *outside* the frame, the other side of a stark boundary – nor can it ever really be –, but a beyond, the constant expansion of the frame. The porous frame opens

beyond its limitations and suggests that there is more, which, for Kavka, constitutes a key characteristic of the Gothic:

> [I]n Gothic film the dialectic between seeing and not seeing is visualized as a manipulation of space and frames that materializes the impossibility of representation actually grasping the thing 'beyond.' […]. The beyond is thus not strictly a thing but the very permeability of the shadow-thin boundary, an always existing 'in-between state' potentially arousing paranoia. (2002, p. 227)

The constant communication and 'permeability' between the frame and the beyond-the-frame allows the out-of-field to fulfil its primary function: adding space to space (Deleuze, 1983, p. 30). The free-floating menace can move in a beyond space that does not yet exist for the audience. Therefore, Christoph Schubert's analysis on horror cinematography is incomplete when he asserts that

> the cinema of horror and suspense often contains impediments to seeing, which form a precondition for surprising revelations […]. Such obstruction to visual perception can be achieved, for instance, by shots from great distances or restricted angles, by insufficient lighting, by a selective focus on the screen or by accelerated camera movements that result in blurred vision. (2020, p. 187)

Although this might be true of some horror cinema, what Schubert calls 'suspense', i.e., roughly, Gothic, is not dependent on visual obstruction, but, on the contrary, on visual expansion into a potential beyond filled with unknown and unknowable liquid fears.

The beyond-the-frame is overtly addressed in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*. As Flora communicates with the ghosts of Rebecca and Peter, she gazes at the space beyond the frame. In the fourth episode, Dani asks Flora 'What are you looking at? You do that a lot. You look over my shoulder. What are you looking at?' ('The Way It Came', 2020). Here, the child looking over her shoulder signals the presence of a ghost, which is not materialised. The literalisation of the idiom 'to look over one's shoulder' hints at the fact that Dani should indeed look over her shoulder, i.e., be more careful of the threats permeating the house. As Flora looks over Dani's shoulder, she creates a new space beyond the frame. The beyond-the-frame thus becomes a narrative as well as cinematographic device. In the first episode of the series ('The Great Good Place', 2020), as Dani

gives Flora a bath, the child starts staring over her au pair's shoulder at, as is implied, the ghost of her former tutor, Rebecca (fig. 1.22). Flora's gaze sinks directly into the camera, thus breaking the eyeline match with the only other character physically present in the scene, and placing the implied viewer as the unseen, ghostly companion of the child. The counter-shot shows the au pair checking over her shoulder to follow the trajectory of Flora's stare (fig. 1.23). As she looks back at Flora, the shallow-focus shot switches to a split-focus diopter shot, indicating that there is indeed something worth seeing in the background of the frame, although it remains unseen.

Fig. 1.22: Flora stares beyond the frame, at an unseen presence.

Fig. 1.23: Split-focus diopter counter-shot as Dani looks over her shoulder, unable to see Rebecca.

The beyond-the-frame moves from beyond the edges of the frame to its very heart, creating an unsettling sense of imminent danger through the deep focus. The danger lies in the implication that something is staring back at us from over the au pair's shoulder. The counter-shot underlines this absent yet palpable gaze with a point-of-view shot from the invisible ghost. This scene thus echoes Vivian Sobchack's analysis of *Decalogue I* (dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1988) where

> alone in the frame, without eyeline matches that link their gaze from shot to shot to the gaze of another who picks up and returns their look, the characters seem always to be looking past and beyond the space they occupy to a deferred elsewhere, to an unseen and depersonalized presence. This isolation and depersonalization of the gaze thus *expands* the film's field of visuality and signification well beyond both its empirical constriction in space and its epistemological circumscription of a purely – or even primarily – anthropocentric form of sight. (2004, pp. 93-94) [emphasis in the original]

This recurring set-up in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is a literal application of Sobchack's metaphor where the character is indeed looking 'to an unseen and depersonalized presence'. The scene thus embodies what Sobchack calls a heightened instance 'of the irruptive, autonomous, and impersonal presence of things that look back and beyond the human subjectivities that engage them' (2004, p. 93). More precisely perhaps, in this literalisation of the metaphor, the presence is not that of a 'thing' but rather a no-thing looking back. The lack of cinematographic hierarchisation of the

objects in focus behind Dani suggests this nothing staring back (rather than, for instance, the mirror needing to be noticed). The beyond-the-frame therefore allows the invisible yet palpable presence to generate a liquid fear, by challenging the boundaries of the frame and thus preventing the circumscription of the implied threat spreading anywhere in and off screen.

1.3 The Past seeping in the House: Liquids, Mould and Hypertemporality

1.3.1 Fluid Space: Moving Walls and Unhomely Homes

The porosity of the frame reproduces the porosity of the Gothic house itself. The Gothic house is consistently introduced through a long shot highlighting its monumentality, immovable materiality and sharp lines against a wild wetscape (fig. 1.24). Its solidity is particularly emphasized in the very first lines of *The Haunting of Hill House*, where Steve narrates over long shots of the house: 'Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills holding darkness within. It had stood so for a hundred years before my family moved in and might stand a hundred more. Within, walls stood upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm' ('Steven Sees a Ghost', 2018). These lines emphasise the impregnable solidity and durability of the house, suggesting its imperviousness to flows ('holding darkness within', 'upright', 'bricks met neatly, floors were firm'). Nevertheless, in this opening sequence featuring shots of the outside and inside of the house, a high-angle shot from the landing into the foyer hints at a ghostly figure, staring into the camera lens from behind the balustrade (fig. 1.25). This spectral figure suggests that the house is in fact porous, or more accurately perhaps, lets flows (of people, ghosts, liquids, mould, time, etc.) in, but never out, a common quality of haunted houses, tethering the dead to the space. This ghost exposes the Gothic house as a liar. Its promise of home for the Crain family, for Edith moving to Allerdale Hall with her new husband, for Barnabas, returning to what he calls his 'beloved home', is only a promise. The Gothic house is unhomely.

Fig. 1.24: Long shots highlighting the monumentality of, from top to bottom, Collinwood Mansion (*Dark Shadows*), Eel Marsh House (*The Woman in Black*), Allerdale Hall (*Crimson Peak*) and Hill House (*The Haunting of Hill House*).

Fig. 1.25: A spectral figure behind the balustrade suggesting the porousness of Hill House. [Modified brightness]

'Unhomely' is a commonly appearing word in Gothic and Horror studies (see e.g., Botting, 1996), in relation to the Freudian 'unheimlich,' a concept referring to the feeling triggered by that which is at once familiar and unfamiliar, or, more literally translated in keeping with the 'heim' etymon, homely and unhomely (Freud, 2003). The *unheimlich* has been productively applied to the Gothic, a mode often revelling in repetitions, doubles and doubling. 'Unhomely', while cited as the literal English translation of the German word, is not made to work in analyses, which prefer to consider the *unheimlich* through the English 'uncanny', thus overlooking the more obvious and readily material notions of home and homeliness. For instance, Clover links the unheimlich quality of the horror space to its intrauterine characteristics, i.e., darkness and dampness (2015, p. 48), diving into the psychoanalytical and symbolic implications of two highly material notions (dark and damp). As often in psychoanalytical studies, Clover overlooks the material implications of her description as darkness and dampness, in material terms, can contribute to making a conventionally dry space inhospitable, i.e., as I will show, unhomely. Thus, despite the undeniable relevance and lasting impact of Clover's analysis, it leaves out the literal unhomely to focus on the symbolic uncanny, when considering the unhomely in itself, rather than in its relation to the *unheimlich*, opens new, material readings of the Gothic space.

Clover's approach underlines the darkness and resulting dampness of the space as defining traits of horror topoï. Liquids enter the house, and, unable to evaporate or be driven out, create dampness, and, often, mould, a key component of the unhomeliness of the Gothic house. Joseph Rykwert, in his study of the concepts of House and Home, defines home as a 'situation – with its implications of well-being, stability, ownership' (1991, p. 54). In themselves, these three notions constituting the idea of home are not necessarily synonymous with dryness. Personal well-being, for instance, depends greatly on the intake and expulsion of fluids. Stability depends on abundant plant life and water around the individual. Ownership can rely on water and wetness in terms of birth, birth right and inheritance. Nevertheless, a house, in contrast to life forms, depends on dryness to endure. Uncontrolled liquids threaten the integrity of the house and, by extension, of the home within it. Liquids, dampness and mould pervert the home into the unhomely, breaking down the characters' 'well-being, stability and ownership' within and over the house. I will study each quality of the home in turn, starting with stability, as the most obviously threatened element, and detail the ways in which the Gothic house subverts them.

In the Gothic house, liquids create instability by turning walls into moving, i.e., *fluid* threats. George Hersey, in his study of Victorian Gothic architecture, develops the notion of the architectural 'kinetic membrane' (1972, p. 33), which is the potential for change and movement within the fabric of a building. Walls are not as stable as they seem, they can move, crack, sink, etc. In the Gothic, this mobility is reinforced by liquids. Characters might think, as Steve does about Hill House, cited above, that their house is strong, stable, immutable and firmly rooted deep into the ground, while, in actuality, the floors, walls and ceiling are constantly rotting and collapsing, the plumbing is slithering and leaking within the walls, and the house is slowly decaying, all around the characters yet unbeknownst to them. After the leak in Hill House, young Steve notices the walls becoming 'squishy' ('Eulogy', 2028), as he repeatedly pushes against a corridor wall. The leak creates mould that grows and spreads all around the house, once again turning the walls – already mobile, as the Red Room changes shape and place throughout the series – into visibly moving, ever-changing and growing threats. In *Crimson Peak*, the clay thickly oozes from the walls in a slow but constant flow. In *Dark Shadows'* climax, the house walls fracture and start leaking blood, as Angélique reveals that she has cursed the Collins' bloodline. As the walls become fluid, the seemingly solid house reveals itself as a threatening entity on the verge of destruction. The liquids turning the Gothic walls into mouldy and fluid entities threaten the physical

stability of the space, i.e., the Gothic house is unhomely because it is always on the verge of collapsing.

Wellbeing, another key component of the home in Rykwert's framework, is also threatened by liquids and dampness. In episode 7 of *The Haunting of Hill House* ('Eulogy', 2018), after finding the squishy wall on the upper level of Hill House, young Hugh, young Steve, and the house caretaker, follow the leak all the way down to the basement. There, they discover black mould in the wall. As Hugh first smells the mould, he explains to his son that, '[t]hat is the smell of ruin' ('Eulogy', 2018). This ruin is not only that of the house and the family's assets, for a rotting house will not sell, it is also the ruin of the family's well-being. Hugh describes the black mould as 'dangerous to breathe' to his son ('Eulogy', 2018), hinting at its toxicity and the physical danger surrounding them. This is reinforced when, in episode 9, Hugh explains about hurting his hand, 'I don't know if it's the... the mould or the chemicals, the noise down there... I just... I - I spaced' ('Screaming Meemies', 2018). The mould indeed triggered the accident, as Hugh, distracted by the face made of mould staring at him on the wall, carelessly inserted his hand into the fan (fig. 1.26). In the final episode ('Silence Lay Steadily', 2018), when Hugh attempts to open the Red Room digesting his children, mould again threatens his bodily boundaries. As Hugh grabs the Red Door handle, the Room defends itself through mould spreading from the handle to Hugh's hand, arm, torso, and, eventually, entire body as he stumbles back, devoured by the mould, seemingly dead (fig. 1.27). From indirect threat, the mould becomes a direct menace to Hugh's physical wellbeing.

Fig. 1.26: Malevolent silhouette-shaped black mould in *The Haunting of Hill House*. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.27: Mould spreading from the defensive Red Room to Hugh's body. [Modified brightness]

This unhomely black mould is a motif present in another Gothic text, *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House* (Perkins, 2016). The film interweaves the stories of three women living in the same house at different times: Polly in the nineteenth century, young Iris Blum in the mid-twentieth century, and Lily in the present, who steps in as the live-in nurse of an aged Iris Blum. Lily soon starts feeling the presence of Polly, who was murdered by her husband and buried behind

the hallway wall. After months in the house, Lily notices mould spreading on said wall (fig. 1.28). She alerts the estate manager who deems the mould to be only a 'cosmetic' and superficial issue. Lily meekly objects that, 'for Ms Blum's respiratory... For my respiratory... To be breathing mould.' Here too, the toxicity of the mould for the characters' respiratory systems is underlined. Near the film's end, as Lily lies dead in the hallway, killed by a heart attack upon seeing the ghost of Polly, a shot highlights the growth of the mould in the foreground (fig. 1.29). The mould, signalling the rotting of Polly behind the wall, constitutes an extension of her death and ghost, and, as such, both signals and triggers death. The toxicity of the atmosphere is also hinted at in *Crimson Peak* when Edith first arrives in what, as mentioned above, Thomas describes as the 'rotting' mansion. She takes off her hat in front of a dressing table, placed against a wall leaking with clay; the camera cuts to an eerie close-up shot of agonising flies. As Edith looks back into the dressing table's mouldy mirror, she catches a glimpse of her first Allerdale Hall ghost. This juxtaposition of shots (flies/ghost) suggests both the pestilence and the deadliness of the environment, as rot suffocates everything within the house. Mould and rot thus compromise the physical well-being of the characters within their unhomely homes.

Fig. 1.28: First shot of the mould in *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House*. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.29: The spreading of the mould in the top right corner as death spreads into the house. [Modified brightness]

Rot also compromises the psychological wellbeing (or mental stability) of the characters. In her study of the 'mold-centric' space of Hill House, Dawn Keetley details the ways in which the haunting experienced by the Crains could be a direct result from the toxic effects of the black mould (2020). While Keetley's reading into the materialism of the mould is, at times, and, often, in its most materialist sections, tentative, the sensibility in reframing the house as haunted not only by ghosts, but also by mould and matter, neighbours the sensibility of the present thesis. Keetley cites research linking ghost sightings and pollutants present in old houses, such as mould, and concludes that Hugh's spacing or Liv's migraines and confusion, could be symptoms induced by black mould which, in turn, precipitate the sighting of spectral presences (2020, p. 112). While Keetley clarifies that such conclusions are speculative, the series clearly correlates the descent of, in particular, Liv into madness and the visibility of the mould. The apparition of rot and mould crystallises the watershed point of heightened pressure of the supernatural on the characters. This corresponds to Clover's 'penetration scene,' a 'pivotal moment' in the narrative, where the threat is finally overtly signalled (2015, p. 31). For instance, the discovery of the mould in episode 7 ('Eulogy', 2018) features Hugh's realisation that his wife, Liv, is unwell, when she hands him her blueprints of Hill House, which only consist of obsessive tracings of their dream house trapped inside the structure of Hill House. In episode 9 ('Screaming Meemies', 2018), Liv, at the height of her paranoia, tries

to poison her youngest children, Nell and Luke, as well as Luke's friend, Abigail. She wakes the children up in the middle of the night for an impromptu tea party in the Red Room. High-level long shots introduce the room as a threatening bare space with white walls and dark woodwork covered in black mould. Liv, at the centre of the shot, stands as the continuity of the narrow window which, throughout the series, signals the Red Room. Her white gown, dark hair and dark eyes match the colours of the mouldy walls, as if Liv were absorbed into the architecture and the network of mould spreading on the walls.

The toxic mould thus spreads from the house to the characters as emphasised when Hugh states that 'veins of mould […] are spreading from somewhere on the third floor. It... It's all over' ('Eulogy, 2018). The house traps the Crains and there is no escape from it, 'it's all over': all over the house, but also, as the macabre personification 'veins of mould' suggests, all over the family. In episode 8, Steve yells in a fight with his father that his 'genes are rotten' ('Witness Marks', 2018), a remarkable hypallage synthesising the rotting Hill House and the supposed genetic decline of the family. Hence, after their summer in Hill House, the Crain family rots. As Steve explains further, 'Nell was delusional, depressed. Luke's an addict, Shirley is a control freak, and Theo's basically a clenched fist with hair. The whole fucking family is on the brink of a breakdown' ('Witness Marks', 2018). The house's liquid decay has become part of the characters, affecting their physical, including genetic, and, in turn, psychological well-being.

Similarly, in *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House,* after living within the mouldy walls of the house for a while, a medium-long shot shows Lily washing blackberries in a sieve in the sink. She drops the fruit on the floor and a blackberry leaves a black midnight blue stain on her white trainer, underlined by a close up. The camera cuts back to a medium-long shot as she puts the sieve back in the sink. Black marks have appeared on her arms (fig. 1.30). She notices them. Mould is spreading on her skin. A close-up on her face as she looks at her arms is followed by the camera moving from her face to her arms, as mould spreads (fig. 1.31, top). A medium shot shows her arms swell up, like a bloating corpse, as she looks in horror (fig. 31, bottom). Ms Blum calls her, she turns around, and, as she looks back at her arms, they have returned to normal. This episode underlines both the supernatural and the physiological potential of the mould, as the camera never quite settles on the subjectivity of what seems to be – given the sudden clearing of the mould and bloating – a vision. A complete point-of-view shot, showing only Lily's arms, would hint at the subjectivity of the event, i.e., this is what Lily is seeing. However, her face remains in the frame in

every static shot on the arms, and the moving shot from her face to her arms presents both in the same frame halfway through the movement. Now, these shots could simply stand in for point-of-view shots, capturing her vision as well as her reaction. In this case, in line with Keetley's idea, the mould is not really there, it is a vision, a symptom of the mould on the walls. However, the initial shot as she puts the sieve back in the sink challenges this idea and fixes the vision in the realm of the objectively supernatural. The marks on her arms precede Lily noticing them, thus suggesting that they exist beyond her perception of them. The marks are physically real and therefore signal an actual supernatural event. Overall, mould, either directly or correlatively to the haunting, compromises the physical and psychological well-being of the characters in both films.

Fig. 1.30: The mould has appeared on Lily's arms, unbeknownst to her. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 31: Lily stares at her rotting arms, her face always in the shot. [Modified brightness]

As rot insinuates itself inside the characters' body and mind, their ownership of the house is challenged. In *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House*, Lily's opening voice-over highlights the impossibility for characters to own the haunted space: 'a house with a death in it can never be bought or sold by the living. It can only be borrowed from the ghosts that have stayed behind'. The rotted ghost of Polly is the only owner of the house. While the mould on the wall marks her burial site, it also seals her ownership of the space, which extends to the people inhabiting it. Indeed, Ms

Blum's rotted feet and Lily's rotting arms bear the mark of Polly's ownership. Ms Blum, in her constant expectation of the ghost even explains, 'I did nothing but sit and listen. I made no noises. I welcomed no visitors.' Ms Blum is not the owner of her own house; she lives under the rules of Polly's haunting.

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the loss of ownership is marked by the mould turning the protective walls of the home into repressive ones, echoing Clover's famous concept of the 'Terrible Place,' a space which 'may at first seem a safe haven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become, once the killer penetrates them, the walls that hold the victim in' (2015, p. 31). This dialectic is materialised by the story of Mr. Hill bricking himself inside the basement walls, with the mould later indicating the location of his corpse. It is explained that, after fear and guilt pushed him to build 'a wall to keep it all outside', Mr. Hill found himself trapped in with the same fear and guilt: he 'thought his wall would keep them out, but there was just enough room for him... and them. So he was trapped behind that wall' ('Silence Lay Steadily', 2018). The story of Mr. Hill crystallises the movement from protective to threatening wall. Both roles are also delineated in the shift from episode 6, where the house protects the family from the storm (as Liv explains, '[i]t's going to keep us safe' ('Two Storms', 2018)), to episode 7, where mould spreads and Hugh worries, 'I can't flip this house if it's rotting with mould. And if I can't flip it, in a couple months we'll be stuck here' ('Eulogy', 2018). The mould thus threatens to keep the Crains *un*-safe, trapped in the walls and left at the mercy of its liquid threats (the mould itself, insidious ghosts, the fluid architecture, etc.). The leak thus shifts the ownership from the Crains to the house, as the characters lose control over their now possessive house. The leak and mould lock the characters in and turn Hill House into an unhomely home as emancipated and repressive space. To summarise the subversion of Rykwert's triptych, the Gothic house is a toxic, unstable and repressive anti-home.

1.3.2 Rot, Stomachs, Corpses

Hill House as anti-home is characterised through its oozing stomachic centre. Nell explains in her final speech that:

> Mom says that a... that a house is like a body and that every house has eyes and bones and skin and a face. This room is like the heart of the house. No, not a heart, a stomach. […] But it was always the Red Room. It put on different faces so that we'd be still and quiet while it digested. ('Silence Lay Steadily', 2018)

The centre of the home is no longer a heart; it is a stomach. Here the positive notion of heart corresponds to the home-related notion of the hearth. Rykwert makes this the starting point of his study on home and house, arguing that '[h]ome could just be a hearth, a fire on the bare ground by any human lair. That may well be the one thing that nobody can quite do without: a fireplace' (1991, p. 51). Hill House is not only missing a heart/hearth; its centre is also the opposite of the heart. The opposition plays on the fact that both organs are hollow, allowing for the passage of blood and food flows respectively. The key difference, however, is the action of the organ on these flows. A heart receives oxygen-poor blood and releases oxygen-rich blood to the body. A stomach receives complex molecules and breaks them down into simpler ones, such as carbohydrates into sugars. A heart enriches its flows, a stomach breaks them down. The opposition between heart and stomach is thus the opposition between life and death. A 'heart-house' nurtures its inhabitants, while a 'stomach-house' feeds on them. The Crain's heart-house is their 'forever house', the dream house they plan on building after flipping Hill House, while Hill House is the 'stomach-house'. In episode 2, Liv explains about the forever house that the 'dining room is the heart of the house. Everything flows in and out' ('Open Casket', 2018). The forever house has a dining room (a room where the inhabitants acquire nutrients) at its centre, while Hill House has the Red Room (a room that acquires nutrients from the inhabitants) at its centre. The forever house is a space of openness, where '[e]verything flows in and out', while Hill House is repressive and possessive, preventing characters from entering or leaving the Red Room, better to digest them. The only thing that flows is the leaks and mould oozing from the walls (equivalent to the enzymes and gastric juices of the stomach) and digesting the characters. As the Crains think they are renovating the house (i.e., enriching it), the house is actually consuming them (i.e., breaking them down).

Despite the clearly stated nature of the centre of Hill House, Dana Jeanne Keller, in her chapter about grief and trauma in *The Haunting of Hill House*, part of a collection on the series, reads the Red Room as (sick) womb killing children off (2020). Keller starts her analysis by clarifying that heart, stomach and womb are not necessarily exclusive (2020, p. 96), before proceeding to overlook the openly stated stomachic qualities of the house. Another essay from the same collection describes the Red Room as a 'Red Womb' (Carruthers, 2020), again bypassing the content of the text itself. Such readings of evil or disgusting horror spaces as symbolically uterine and feminine – regardless of the presence of fluids – populate Gothic and Horror scholarship since feminist theorists, from the 1980s onwards, have approached the Gothic space as anatomically female because of its grotesque quality (grotto-esque, i.e., hidden, dark, damp, visceral and

cavernous (Russo, 1994, p. 1)). This horror-space-as-womb paradigm is part of the 'monstrous womb' approach developed by Creed in her psychoanalytical study challenging the view of the female-as-victim in horror film. In her chapter on the monstrous womb, Creed demonstrates that '[t]he symbolization of the womb as house/room/cellar or any other enclosed space is central to the iconography of the horror film' (1993, p. 55). As the house affirms itself as a body, it becomes 'the body of horror, the place of the uncanny where desire is always marked by the shadowy presence of the mother' (1993, p. 55) suggested through womb-like symbols in the architecture. Like Clover aforementioned, Creed cites qualities of the house such as darkness, dankness, or sliminess as a source of horror through their associations with the womb. For instance, in *Crimson Peak*, the leaking walls overtly code Allerdale Hall as feminine, as critics read the basement as a womb-like space, dark, wet and leaking blood-like clay (see e.g., Brame, 2017; Musap, 2017). Such readings, nonetheless, can take precedence on what the text actually says, as shown above with the Red Room. Furthermore, they can raise cultural issues. Mary Russo, in the opening of her monograph on the Female Grotesque, explains that, while associations between the dark, damp, hidden, and cavernous, and the feminine body can suggest 'a positive and powerful figuration of culture and womanhood' which 'valorizes traditional images of the earth mother […] and posits a natural connection between the female body […] and the "primal" elements, especially the earth', they can also easily fall into misogynistic perceptions, where the feminine body is regarded as visceral and abject (1994, pp. 1-2). These readings of the horror space as womb can reinforce the stigma of horror, disgust or abject surrounding the feminine body. Undeniably, the horror-space-as-womb paradigm haunts the consciousness of critics and artmakers alike, and, as such, holds value, but, I ask, what more could we make of the wet horror space? What lies beyond the womb imagery? What truly makes the Gothic anti-home?

Through liquefaction and rot, the Gothic anti-home becomes, not just a body, whether gendered or not, but a corpse with potentially working organs, a living-dead thing, more dead than living, rotting and decomposing. Liquid-ridden Gothic houses do not fall to ruin, they do not collapse or tumble down in the way of solid and inorganic things. They rot, decompose and slowly putrefy, like corpses. The fluid bodiliness of the Gothic house thus marks it, not as a female body, a womb, but as a putrefying corpse. As such, the house poses yet another liquid threat. If a house starts collapsing, one knows to leave, but rotting takes time, it does not pose an immediate and circumscribable threat. It also leaves room for hope, as a patch of mould seems easily solvable – Hugh, in *The Haunting of Hill House*, believes he can sort the leak and mould issue himself, and

Lily, in *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House*, is patiently expecting a repairman the following week. Rot is a liquid threat, spreading everywhere within the walls, yet hardly visible, making the characters sense a threat but preventing them from fighting it. In her dream scene, in the final episode of *The Haunting of Hill House*, Shirley attends her own funeral. The undertaker explains to her as they walk to her corpse,

> I fixed her. I ripped out her organs and eyeballs, and I sucked out the blood and the shit, and plugged her holes so she wouldn't leak. And wired her jaw so she couldn't scream. And I painted her face and her hands, and set her eyelids on spikes so they wouldn't stare. And I hung flowers full of smell and posed her like a dreamer, and now, she is fixed and pretty. But underneath, she is a horror. Yeah, we pickle it and paint it, but it's still death. And rot. And ruin. ('Silence Lay Steadily', 2018)

Shirley's corpse synthesises the organic and human-made characteristics of Hill House, the house in which she is dreaming. The corpse of Hill House, despite Hugh's desperate attempts to fix it, to plug it, to paint it, to make it pretty, remains a putrefying and horrific corpse underneath. It is rotting and in ruins. Similarly, at the end of *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House*, the house is invested with new inhabitants, a family with young children, who 'borrow' the space from Lily and Polly's ghosts. Despite the re-boarding of Polly's wall, despite the disposal of Lily and Ms. Blum's corpses, despite the covered furniture, and despite the family's changes to the house, with the mess and colours brought on by children, the house remains a corpse. Lily explains that 'the memory of a death is a thing that stays […]. Even after it has been covered up, with nothing left to see. And still, I think I'll stay […]. This is how I let myself rot. The pretty thing you are looking at is me.' Here, again, corpse and house become intertwined as both the house and Lily are left to rot under pretty but wall- or skin- thin covers. The house remains the extension of Polly's corpse and ghost, covered up, with nothing left to see, but, still, rotting.

Indeed, the ghosts walking in the oozing and leaking corpse-like house rot as well. In *The Haunting of Hill House,* the mould covering the walls of the Red Room and the basement appears on the white skin of the ghosts dwelling in the house. The last episode of the series ('Silence Lay Steadily', 2018) prominently features the rotting ghost of Poppy, the manipulative flapper girl. Close-up shots detail the cracks and mould on her skin (fig. 1.32), mimicking the walls of the Red Room, a rot which also appears on the other ghosts of the house, such as Mr Hill. The decay of the house becomes visible on the ghostly bodies who become as rotted as the space they haunt. The

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seemingly oxymoronic rotted ghost is overtly mentioned in *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House*. The spotty dark mould on the wall is visible on Polly's ghostly body as she whispers in Iris's ear (fig. 1.33). Her hand in particular, cupping her words, displays spots of mould. After her untimely death, Lily dwells in the house, and, as mentioned above, lets herself rot. Rotting ghosts slowly go to waste through neglect, they rot, just like the haunted house. Gothic mould thus spreads through the fluid Gothic space from the house's walls to its inhabitants, both living and dead, highlighting, yet again, the fluid spatiality of the house.

Fig. 1.32: The rotting ghost of Poppy. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.33: The rotting ghost of Polly, hiding her whispers with a mouldy hand. [Modified brightness]

1.3.3 Hypertemporal Space

Nonetheless, the Gothic house is not just a spatial space, it is also a highly temporal space, capturing a complex network of temporal flows. The Gothic house is seemingly frozen in time, whether through its obvious archaic and antiquated qualities, its outdated décor, or its motionless statues and gargoyles. In Bauman's words, in its solidity, the house seems to 'cancel time' (2000, p. 2). However, as with most things Gothic, this is deceiving, and the Gothic house is not only spatially fluid, as I demonstrated above, but also temporally fluid. The haunting characterising the Gothic space means that the house is not centred around a spatial point such as a chandelier, a fireplace or a kitchen as the heart of the house, but by an event, i.e., the haunting. Hence, the fixed architectural qualities of the house (a Victorian manor, a twentieth-century designer home) are trampled by the event; it becomes a haunted house, with the verbal adjective underlining the active and fluid quality of the house. The haunted house is that which, through fluid traces, displays itself as lying at the intersection of times (past, present, and future).

This is particularly visible in *The Woman in Black*, as the marsh surrounding the property, and harbouring the corpse of the Woman's son, Nathaniel, penetrates the house. As Arthur explores the house for the first time, he enters the kitchen. A close up shows his face against the open rooms of the background as he picks up an oil lamp. In the darkness, deep into the background behind

him, a black silhouette stands (fig. 1.34). A faint whisper resonates as the silhouette slowly turns to face Arthur, undisturbed. A counter-point-of-view-tracking indicating the threat getting closer as the whispers get louder, cuts to a shot of Arthur, startled and looking into the background from which the silhouette has disappeared. Arthur is reassured and silence returns until, suddenly, the tap loudly spits dark mud. Both the Woman and the mud signal the haunted porosity of the house. As Arthur explores the house further, he finds mud on the handle of the locked door of Nathaniel's nursery. Later in the film, the liquid penetration becomes undeniably supernatural when Arthur follows eerie sounds around the house. Looking through a bedroom window, he sees a silhouette dragging itself out of a grave in the marsh. Subsequently, Arthur notices muddy footprints starting from the entrance of the house (fig. 1.35). He follows them back to the nursery, now inexplicably unlocked, where the ghost of Nathaniel appears suddenly, covered in mud, his face disfigured in a scream (fig. 1.36). Arthur flees to another room, with, in its middle, a heavy bed from which black, thick mud starts seeping. Suction and bubbling noises precede the emerging of a muddy silhouette from the puddle. Arthur runs away.

Fig. 1.34: Apparition of the Woman in Black in the background. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.35: Muddy footsteps leading to the nursery. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 1.36: Arthur is faced with the muddy screaming ghost of Nathaniel.

These shots and scenes emphasise the porosity of the house, and the blurring of the boundaries between inside and outside. The outside penetrates the inside in the form of the wet ghost[18] and its metonymic fluid, the marsh. The mud in the tap, on the handle, on the floor, or on

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[18] See chapter 2.

the ghost become tangible signifiers of the supernatural. The footprints, for instance, point toward the ghostly presence by being the material sign of the ghost's absence. As French art historian and philosopher George Didi-Huberman explains in his work on imprints, 'l'empreinte est […] quelque chose qui nous dit aussi bien le *contact* (le pied qui s'enfonce dans le sable) que la *perte* (l'absence du pied dans son empreinte) [the footprint is something that speaks of *contact* (the foot sinking in the sand) as much as *loss* (the absence of the foot in its imprint)]' (1997, p. 19) [emphasis in the original]. Here, the footsteps are of the field of *traces* rather than *imprints* (empreintes) as the trace is not *in intaglio* (made by sinking), but in relief (made by adding matter). The footstep is the material trace of the immaterial past penetrating the house. The ghostly footprints on the floor of Eel Marsh House constitute at once proof of presence (of a ghost) and of absence (of a body), of what should not be here, but somehow, is.

In his study of traces, historian Joseph Morsel explains that '[l]a trace est […] un mode de reconnaissance du passé, un mode d'investigation dont la finalité est l'accès à la vérité/véracité/réalité (les trois notions s'entremêlent souvent) du passé [the trace is […] a mode of recognition of the past, a mode of investigation whose finality is the access to truth/veracity/reality (three notions often intertwined) of the past]' (2016, p. 822). Although Morsel focuses on the historical past and its traces (e.g., archival documents), his conceptualisation of the trace works on the restricted scale of the domestic past. In the Gothic, the main character becomes an investigator of the past, following traces and clues pointing towards the hidden story of the haunted space. Liquids and, in particular, footprints, become time-deferring signifiers of the forgotten past as they form a track to the past. As he sees the footprints, Arthur immediately starts following the track. This gives the following of clues a spatial dimension, showing that 'l'idée d' « empreinte » (de pas, etc.) et de « piste » […] inscrivent la trace au croisement du temps (l'empreinte comme reste d'un évènement) et de l'espace (la piste comme direction suivie) [the concept of "imprint" (footprint etc.) and that of "tracks" […] inscribe the trace at the junction of time (the imprint as remains of an event) and space (tracks as followed direction)]' (Morsel, 2016, p. 825). Just like the ghost that leaves it, the trace is the supernatural junction of a past time in the present space, which allows, by following it, the uncovering of the past in the present. Therefore, as Morsel rightly observes,

> la trace fonctionne en théorie *doublement,* en tant que signe présent d'une chose disparue (l'empreinte) et en tant que moyen de rattraper le non-présent (piste en tant qu'ensemble d'empreintes), donc comme un moyen de transformer le passé (au double sens de ce qui est

passé ici et de l'autrefois) en présent (au double sens spatial et temporel) [the trace theoretically functions *in two ways,* as a present sign of a lost thing (the imprint) and as a means to salvage the non-present (tracks as a series of prints), therefore as a means to transform passed/past (in the double sense of what has passed through here and what is gone) into present (in both the spatial and temporal sense]. (2016, p. 846) [emphasis in the original]

In *The Woman in Black*, Nathaniel's footprints are the sign of his absence (and his drowning in the marsh) as well as a means to reach back to him, as Arthur does end up facing his ghost at the end of the tracks. This allows Nathaniel's ghost to evolve from being an entity that is past and has passed to being present in the *hic et nunc*. The liquid trace thus gives access to something that otherwise would have only been a memory, a fantasy or a hypothesis (Morsel, 2016, p. 821). It materialises the presence of the ghost in the house and re-materialises the ghost. The lost body reclaims an unfit and liquid materiality for what was once a solid body, now lost in an unfit and liquid grave.

The material link between the footprint and the unfair burial highlights the function of the trace as a form of liquid return of the past inscribed in the house. Rick Worland explains in his study of horror cinema that '[t]he symbolic importance of architecture in gothic tales cannot be overstated. […] Indeed, the gothic plot is characterized in large part by the violent eruption of an unresolved or irreconcilable past of which the haunted castle is the concrete symbol' (2007, p. 28). Worland sees the antiquated Gothic space as the prime symbol of the grasp of the past on the character. However, the *liquids* leaking from the architecture constitute a more appropriate and insidious return of the past in contemporary Gothic. The 'violent eruptions' of the past mentioned by Worland are not materialised by the architecture anymore. The architecture is the seemingly stable and solid materialisation of the past. The kinetic manifestation of the past, its violent eruption, is materialised by the flowing and oozing of liquids through the architecture. A violent eruption requires force and energy; it requires time. As Bauman explains in his introduction to *Liquid Modernity*, fluids are about time while solids are about space:

[F]luids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy: that space, after all, they fill but 'for a moment'. In a sense, solids cancel time; for liquids, on the contrary, it is mostly time that matters. When describing solids, one may

ignore time altogether; in describing fluids, to leave time out of account would be a grievous mistake. (2000, p. 2)

Therefore, fluids manifest the dynamic return of the past within the seemingly solid space. For instance, the ghostly footprints in the hall are inscribed inside the solid house, but their eeriness emerges from the movement they imply: the active breaching of the house's walls by liquids.

The Gothic house is not only invaded by liquid and temporal flows; it is in itself temporally fluid. Amanda Yates demonstrates, in her essay on oceanic spaces of flow, that 'all things – space, artefacts, individuals, molecules – are subjects to the ceaseless flux of duration: eroding, accreting, deliquescing, everything is in movement, becoming other in the flow of time' (2012, p. 63). Yates focuses particularly on architectural spaces in the Pacific Ocean, explaining that the definition of the space through temporal flows, i.e., as fluid, is marginal in architectural studies, despite its high potential:

> Architecture is always in a condition of flow, channelling people, rainwater, breezes, birdsong, energy, while architectural boundaries or material accumulate or abrade, swell or settle, transforming through time – yet architectural discourse remains inflected by its traditional concerns with spatial stability and temporal stasis. (2012, p. 63)

Yates' house might be geographically alien to the Anglo-Saxon manors of Gothic narratives, but her description of the non-static house as a 'space of flow' is highly relevant to the present study. Indeed, in her view of durational flows as spatial flows, 'architecture becomes event rather than object' (2012, p. 63). The Gothic house is the house-event, centred, as mentioned above, around a haunting. This haunting is directional, as it leads whoever is willing to follow the traces from the outside to the inside, as well as storied in time, as it leads to the past, recounting the tragic life and death of the ghost. In *The Woman in Black*, the footprints tell the story of a son lost in the marsh and lead back to his nursery, which tells us of his young age as well as his mother's suicide in the room. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, the muddy footprints of the Lady of the Lake tell us of the once powerful mother killed in the bed she used to share with her daughter and of her entrapment at the bottom of the dirty lake. As the ghost walks its path, it remaps the house as the footprints lead inside a locked room (the nursery in Eel Marsh House) or a forbidden wing of the house (the master bedroom in Bly Manor). As the footsteps penetrate the closed-off space, they open that space again, thus extending the map of the house. This remapping of the space around a directional

event thus frames the Gothic haunted house as a highly fluid space centred around the unveiling of a past event rather than an object. Conceptualising the house in temporal rather than spatial terms challenges its supposed frozen-in-time-ness.

Therefore, when Barry Curtis, in his monograph on the concept of Dark Place, mentions that haunted houses display a 'resistance to the insecurity of perpetual change' (2008, p. 54), his analysis perhaps derives from a common assumption. Curtis reads the haunted house as a space suspended in time, contrasting it with the 'normal' time and space outside the haunted space. Nonetheless, a closer reading indicates that, rather than suspended in time, the haunted house exists in a hypertemporal space. The house stands at the crossroad of temporalities. Time is not 'immobilized' or 'frozen,' as Curtis insists (2008, p. 61), but intensified as temporal flows multiply in the Gothic space. The haunted house first holds the multiple temporalities of ordinary houses. In Steve Basson's words, 'architecture is still seen to traverse time along a linear course that both guides the orientation and momentum of its history progressively towards the present whilst also, via inverse lines of chronological trajectory, exposing the contents of its past to the comprehension and experiences of the present' (2012, p. 161). The house stands in the present as a signifier of the past, and because it has stood in the past, it will keep standing in the future. The opening of *The Haunting of Hill House* crystallises this hypertemporality, as Steve narrates that Hill House 'had stood for eighty years and might stand for eighty more' ('Steven Sees a Ghost', 2018). Within any house, multiple temporalities also coexist. Traces of former inhabitants of the house (e.g., a broken tile, a stain on the floor, etc.) and even of its future inhabitants (e.g., converting an office space into a nursery) exist in a palimpsest of temporalities.

Beyond these expected temporalities, the Gothic house holds supernatural temporalities within its walls. As ghosts walk the ground, the past walks among the present. This also included different points in the past. In *Crimson Peak*, the ghosts of Thomas' wives haunt the house alongside the siblings' mother and, at the end of the film, the siblings themselves. In *Dark Shadows*, vampire Barnabas brings the 18th century back to the 1970s alongside Josette's doppelganger, Victoria, and the ghost of David's mother, which adds yet another temporality to the manor. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the ghosts of the original owners and of the Crains in the later episodes haunt the house. The staff creates a temporal bridge between the temporalities of the previous and present owners. Later in the series, it is revealed that Nell is also haunted by her future self in the shape of the Bent-Neck Lady (in reference to her snapped neck caused by her hanging herself in

the house). Hauntings from the past and the future thus again add to the hypertemporal quality of the Gothic house.[19]

Temporal flows thus come together in the house. As they come together, they coagulate (from *com-* 'together' and -agere 'set in motion, drive'). De Landa argues that organic bodies are 'nothing but temporary coagulations in [energy and mineral nutrients] flows' (1997, p. 104). De Landa analyses the endless flows that constitute all matter, which we 'borrow' at birth and release when we die. Despite being inorganic, the house also takes part in this exchange. As it rots and crumbles, it transforms into raw material. The house constitutes a coagulation of flows, from its stones and wood to its inhabitants, and, in the case of the Gothic, its supernatural leaks and ghostly presences. The hypertemporality of the space creates a coagulation of all the temporal flows. In consequence, time flows differently, as if slowed down by coagulation, yet always flowing. Again, seeing the house as completely frozen in time is an oversimplification: rather than a-temporal, the Gothic house is a hypertemporal space.

This hypertemporality contributes to the spread of liquid fear in the house. As time does not flow naturally, it blurs the line between the past and the present. The space becomes the harbinger of such disturbed temporal flows. In their attempt to define fear and anxiety, Neil McNaughton and Hélio Zangrossi Jr, while admitting that models remain highly generalising, mention a direction-based distinction:

> The critical factor distinguishing fear and anxiety […] appears to be what can be called 'defensive direction' […]. Fear operates to allow an animal to leave a dangerous situation (active avoidance); anxiety operates to allow an animal to enter a dangerous situation (e.g., cautious 'risk assessment', approach behavior) or withhold entrance (passive avoidance). (2008, p. 14)

In short, fear prompts one to escape, while anxiety determines the level of caution with which one goes in. These examples point to an often found trait of Gothic narratives, as based on unseen liquid threats as opposed to Horror narratives based on a circumscribed threat. In Horror narratives, such as slashers, the characters' main goal is to escape, to leave the inside of the threatening space (the cabin, the woods, the town, whatever space the monster has chosen as hunting ground) and find refuge in the outside. In slasher films from *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (dir. Herschell Gordon Lewis,

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[19] For a study of disjointed temporality and space in *The Haunting of Hill House*, see Daniel, 2020.

1964), to *Friday the* 13th (dir. Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), *Evil Dead* (dir. Sam Raimi, 1983) and, more recently, *The Cabin in the Woods* (dir. Drew Goddard, 2011), the template is the same: the characters get killed off because they fail to escape the monstrous inside. Hence, the image of the last survivor who finally (although often deceptively) moves away from the danger – as is famously the case in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (dir. Tobe Hopper, 1974) as Sally, covered in blood and hysterically laughing, finally escapes the cannibals on the back of a truck.

In the Gothic, however, although there might be an urge to leave, the urge to remain and overcome the threat or solve the mystery is stronger. The characters *could* leave, but often choose to stay inside the Gothic space. A common trope in Gothic films is the return to the house to put an end to the haunting (in *The Haunting of Hill House* or *The Woman in Black*, for instance). Gothic fear is therefore not about escaping ('active avoidance') but about cautiously approaching (since 'passive avoidance', i.e., not entering, is not an option and would indeed make for extremely short and rather dull narratives). The Gothic house thus functions as a centripetal force of fear (literally, one that pushes toward the centre), while fear in horror texts is centrifugal (it forces away from the centre). Often, Gothic characters are attracted to the house and attempt to remain at all costs: Gothic fear is linked to the already-in. The victims are not caught; they are always already in. Their present and their past coagulate through the characters' relation to the space. In *Crimson Peak*, Edith is a double of Thomas' other wives and previous victims, as emphasised when the house caretaker, Finlay, who, upon being introduced to Edith as Thomas' wife, exclaims 'I know. You've been married a while.' Another character's past becomes Edith's present. Newlywed, she has actually been married and living in Allerdale Hall 'a while'. Similarly, in *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House*, Lily merges with Polly, the ghost haunting the house. Lily's insistence on wearing white to reassure her patients echoes the white of Polly's wedding, the only attire Polly ever appears in. Furthermore, Ms Blum refuses to call Lily by her name, calling her Polly instead. After eleven months in the house, when asked by Ms Blum, 'Where did you go, Polly?', Lily replies, without even challenging her new name anymore, 'I didn't go anywhere, Ms. Blum. I'm here with you, same as I have always been.' Lily has *always* been in the house. This is confirmed at the end of the film, when Lily, now a ghost in the house, watches the rotting corpse of Ms. Blum. The sound of a typewriter beckons her to the office, where she finds young Ms. Blum working on a novel. Ms Blum, sensing a presence, turns around and inquires, 'Polly?'. Lily haunts the past as much as the present, coalescing temporally and spatially with the ghost of Polly. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Nell is called back to the house as a child with the writing on the walls 'come home Nell' (, 2018).

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At this point, Nell has not yet left the house. When she comes back as an adult, the writing is revealed as 'welcome home Nell', thus emphasising her state as always-already in the house ('The Bent-Neck Lady', 2018). Thanks to the coagulated temporalities of the Gothic space, as a child, Nell was beckoned to come back while she was already there, as well as being welcomed back home to a home she had not yet left. This always-already-in crystallises the nature of liquid-derived rot and mould existing in the space. In these last two examples, rot and mould within the space, on the ghosts, or reaching the characters signal what Anthony Camara, in his article on the role of fungus in Machen's work, describes as 'the terrifying news that […] life is always already dead' (2014, p. 12). As a toxic product of decay, it functions as a sign that death is present as well as pending. It becomes both a signal and a threat of death, or as Camara puts it, it is 'simultaneously of and for death', as it constitutes 'both a product and agent of decay' (2014, p. 10). Mould marks and materialises the always-already dead state of Lily and Nell as soon as they step into the liquid time of the fluid space.

The contemporary Gothic space is therefore a highly liquid space. The Gothic house lies on a treacherous and abject wetscape waiting to engulf it. As the wetscape penetrates the house, it reinforces and makes painfully visible its spatially and temporally fluid state. The seemingly solid house in fact exists in constant extension and movement of time and space. The Gothic space conceals a fluid, uncertain and rotting nature that can be felt at every step, oozing from floor to walls to ceiling, perceived everywhere as the doomed characters enter the house, yet visible nowhere. The Gothic space is therefore the space of liquid fears and threats, uncircumscribable and ungraspable, maddening in their knowledge that they have already won. The rotting ghosts of the fluid space constitute one of the iterations of the liquid Gothic threat. As we shall now see, the model of the wet ghost lying in the Gothic waters of the wetscape functions as another mode of spreading of liquid fear in contemporary Gothic.

Chapter 2. Liquid Haunting: Gothic Water, Wet Ghosts and Women in the Depths

> Water is patient, Adelaide. Water just waits. Wears down the cliff tops, the mountains. The whole of the world. Water always wins.
>
> The Doctor in 'The Waters of Mars',
> *Doctor Who*, 2009

In a now renowned episode of *Doctor Who* (2005-), entitled 'The Waters of Mars' (2009), the Doctor is confronted by an intelligent alien virus, the Flood, which spreads through water and wreaks havoc on the first human colony on Mars. The episode depicts water as a sentient force by turning characteristics which are natural to water, e.g., water is an eroding force, into personifying characteristics which *seem* supernatural, i.e., water is patient, water waits, and it always wins. Lending sentient qualities to water is not however just a sci-fi fantasy. In her 2022 book, conveniently titled *Water always wins: Thriving in an Age of Drought and Deluge¸* Erica Gies confirms that, in the words of the Doctor, 'water always wins' (2022, p. 6). She explains:

> When our attempts to control water fail, we are reminded that water *has its own agenda*, a life of its own. Water *finds its chosen path* through a landscape, *molding* it and being directed in turn. It has relationships with rocks and soil, plants and animals, from microbes to mammals like beavers and humans. Today, *water is revealing its true nature* increasingly often, as climate change brings more frequent and severe droughts and floods. (2022, p. 3) [my emphasis]

This personification of uncontrolled water as a driving force, choosing its path through landscapes and threatening human settlements as a response to climate change highlights the felt betrayal of water as it 'reveals its true nature'. This nature was never hidden however as water is both synonymous with life (water we drink, water we are) and death (water that poisons, water that drowns). Alok Jha, in *The Water Book* explains, for instance, that water 'a substance of life, is also one of fear. […] Though we need and crave it, water can be a tantalising poison for thirsty sailors. Its paradoxical nature can be nightmarish' (2016, pp. 2-3). Water is therefore now uncovering a well-kept, although always felt, secret about its nature. Human-made climate change is making water's threatening potential a noticeable actuality through extreme lacks or excesses of water.

Therefore, in the twenty-first century, water seemingly purposefully digs its own network of horrors.

This real danger is unsurprisingly reflected in the Gothic, where the threatening nature of water has long been put to work. The seas and oceans analysed in chapter 1, as well as domesticated forms of water, are key components of the Gothic space. Hence, Jason surging out of Crystal Lake, Freddy's scissor hand breaking through the surface of Nancy's bath, Samara clawing her way out of her well, constitute some of the most recognizable images of the horror catalogue. Lakes (*What Lies Beneath* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 2000), *The Lodgers, Bly Manor, A Cure for Wellness*) and ponds (*The Turning* (dir. Floria Sigismondi, 2020)*, The Matriarch* (dir. Ben Steiner, 2022)) hold an essential place as seemingly quiet spaces within which secrets and bodies can easily sink. They also sit comfortably alongside the domesticated castle described in chapter 1, as a sign of aristocratic power over the land. Bathtubs (*The Lodgers, The Grudge* series (2004-2020)*,* 'The Murmuring' from the Netflix series *The Cabinet of Curiosity* (2022)) are another key motif of Gothic hauntings as a space of watery intimacy within a locked space. In the Gothic text, often set in the Victorian or Edwardian period, and therefore before the standardisation of indoor plumbing in the twentieth century (Meehan, et al., 2023, p. 172), bathtubs in fully dedicated bathrooms also connote a form of wealth. Wells (*Bly Manor, The Ring* series), on the other hand, connote a form of outdated water access, with all the dangers that such outdatedness implies in horror texts. Other bodies of water in Gothic and Horror include canals (*The Canal* (dir. Ivan Kavanagh, 2014), *A Haunting in Venice* (dir. Kenneth Branagh, 2023)), vats (*Dark Water* (dir. Walter Salles, 2005)*, Crimson Peak*), and pools (*La Llorona, A Cure for Wellness*).

The importance of bodies of water in Gothic and Horror, in particular the seas and oceans, is often reflected in recent scholarship, with, for instance, an entire special issue of *Gothic Studies* journal focusing on the nautical Gothic.[20] The current interest in Eco-horror studies and, more specifically, in what has been labelled Blue Humanities, allows screen, media and literature scholars to study the unknowable, temperamental and attractive seas and oceans. UK-based scholarship is particularly haunted by a geographical and cultural insularity, and its related seafaring past, which constitute research nodes of Blue Humanities, centred around fear, colonialism, race and imperialism. Oceans and seas thus constitute the starting point of Blue Humanities whose key scholars include Margaret Cohen (*The Novel and the Sea* (2010)), Killian

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[20] *See for instance, Gothic Studies (2017) on Nautical Gothic.*

Quigley, co-editor with Margaret Cohen of *The Aesthetics of the Undersea* (2019) and author of *Reading Underwater Wreckage* (2023), and Steve Mentz, author of *Ocean* (2020), as well as *Introduction to Blue Humanities* (2024).

From studies of the sea, other bodies of water come to be studied. Mentz argues in his introduction to Blue Humanities, that, as the sea levels rise and create an ecocatastrophic interest in the ocean, 'oceanic scholarship spills its bounds' (2024, p. 1) and reaches other forms of water. While this is undeniable, and chapters and articles on glaciers, rivers, lakes, and wells do exist,[21] there is so far little substantial interest in waters beyond the oceanic. After all, no real dangers hide in the bathtub. Wells are mostly out of use. Lakes of calm water do not lead to faraway lands – although lochs sometimes shelter elusive monsters. Such domesticated bodies of water participate in the horror or Gothic landscape and, as such, are often attached to Eco-Horror and Eco-Gothic studies of landscapes,[22] particularly popular in contemporary scholarship. The grave-like spaces of lakes and ponds contribute to the overall uncanniness of the landscape and, as such, remain marginal in studies.

Analysing these bodies of water brings a new material dimension to the longstanding association of the Gothic with the (forgotten) past. The past, as one of the Gothic's most fundamental themes, both in terms of decay and resurfacing of secrets, appears consistently in definitions of the genre (see, e.g., Botting, 2000). Such definitions, as listed in the introduction, focus on elements such as the medievalist/Victorian setting, on decay, and on the return of the past. These are materialised in contemporary Gothic through seeping and eroding water, as studied in chapter 1, as well as through the use of bodies of waters as embodiments of the past as depth/present as surface dichotomy. Key events of the past – broadly, and often, murders, treasons, sin, death – become inscribed in Gothic deep waters where they can wait, decay and rot, and ultimately resurface, more potent and horrific than they were when they went in. Indeed, hidden bodies and secrets easily resurface from these watery grave-like spaces to haunt the inhabitants. These revenants in the post-millennial era form one of the prevalent representational paradigms for hauntings, what I call the wet ghost motif. The wet ghost is a ghost whose materiality is defined through water, flows or fluidity (wet hair, dripping clothes, leaking water, leaving wet footprints

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[21] On the six waterside chronotopes in English and French literary tradition (open sea, river, dangerous water, island, shore, and ship), see Cohen, 2006. On ice and the Gothic, see e.g., Lanone, 2013 and Bowers, 2017. On rivers see e.g., Biro, 2013; on Gothic rivers and swamps in relation to oil, see Deckard, 2019.

[22] See e.g., Hockenhull, 2010 and Gobet-Di Maggio, 2018.

behind, etc.). The superposition of ghosts and water is widely overlooked in studies of Western ghosts, where the focus remains on Victorian or pre-Victorian ghosts which are ethereal or solid rather than liquid (see e.g., Handley, 2007; Smith, 2010). Asian studies offer readings into the motif with traditional ghosts often being linked to water (see e.g., Balmain, 2008; Wee, 2014; Shimazaki, 2016). Robin Roberts builds a rare study of the motif of the crying ghost in a chapter on the maternal ghost in his monograph on female ghosts in popular culture (2018, pp. 41-62). Crying ghosts are one of the modes of the wet ghost, but several modes of the motif coexist, from the eternally wet ghost to the leaky ghost. Most often drowned children or drowned women, wet ghosts can also embody corpses *disposed of* in water. In either case, the ghost's aqueous materiality is an extension of the environment with which they came into contact. As this chapter explores, the wet ghost solidifies itself as a prominent model of haunting in the twenty-first century and becomes yet another embodiment of liquid fear as described in chapter 1. Since the free-floating fear and threat symptomatic of post-millennial times is embodied by liquids on screen, the monster that emerges from these liquids extends this fear as another, more embodied, shape of it.

This chapter primarily investigates and analyses the waters and wet ghosts of Gore Verbinski's *A Cure for Wellness* (2016), Brian O'Malley's *The Lodgers* (2017) and Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020). These Gothic texts revolve around domesticated bodies of water (lakes, wells, bathtubs, etc.) hiding secrets and bodies in their depths. Beyond water itself, this chapter investigates the manifestations, origins and implications of the wet ghost model. To account for a wider trend in post-millennial horror cinema, this chapter also discusses the waters and ghosts from the previously mentioned *Dark Shadows* and *Crimson Peak*, as well as horror- and slasher-inflected Michael Chaves' *The Curse of La Llorona* (2019) and Nicolas Pesce's *The Grudge* (2020), exemplary cases of water-coded, i.e., gothicised horror.

2.1 Gothic Water: Death in the Depths

2.1.1 Deceitful Surface and Unfathomable Depths

The Gothic features bodies of water which all share essential characteristics, despite appearing in a wide range of forms. Lakes, ponds, vats, bathtubs, wells or pools all participate in the same motif: Gothic water. In this section, I use the lake as the prime example of Gothic water, first to simplify an analysis which would otherwise quickly become repetitive – for what applies to the Gothic lake also applies to the Gothic pond, vat, bathtub, well and pool –, and second, to bridge

this chapter back to the analysis of the aristocratic house developed in chapter 1, as the lake constitutes a sign of aristocratic wealth and power over the landscape.

Gothic water is a concept I base on Gaston Bachelard's psychoanalytical definition of anti-water which he describes as 'les eaux mortes [dead waters]' (1942, p. 64) in *L'Eau et les Rêves: Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (1942). In this masterly study of images of water in literature, Bachelard contrasts two types of water. The first type corresponds to pure water, which is clean, clear and running, such as a spring river. This fresh water invigorates, it sings as it flows and laughs as it cascades (1942, p. 47). As such, it comes in opposition with dead water, a dark water heavy with literal and metaphorical reflections and shadows, which evokes the sleep of the dead (1942, p. 90). Gothic waters share most of the characteristics of Bachelard's dead waters. Both are indeed dark, sleeping and heavy waters. However, the change in terminology is not gratuitous, but reflects key differences between Bachelard's framework and my own. The first difference is that dead waters can be flowing waters. Spring rivers can become dead waters as Bachelard insists that death awaits all clear waters. Gothic waters are necessarily still and contained, often not in their natural state (artificial lakes, vats, bathtubs, etc.). The second key difference is that Gothic water does not only *evoke* the dead, but it also *shelters* them in its depths as they wait to return.

Gothic waters thus necessarily assume a dialectic of surface and depths. This dialectic is commonly used in psychoanalysis, where the depth, the *sub*-conscious, the forgotten or repressed land of the past can resurface to the conscious, a recurring motif in the Gothic. Bachelard, for instance, argues that the past cannot really be described without images of depth (1941, p. 74). Hence, Gothic water symbolises a past still threateningly anchored in the characters' present, but so deep that it is not yet known to them. Now, while the psychoanalytical subtext of this dialectic is clear, I focus here on the material aspects and implications of the depths and surface of Gothic water. The past, in the form of corpses or ghosts, hides deep in the Gothic water so much so that the surface appears calm and therefore the water itself appears unthreatening. In *The Lodgers,* when Rachel meets her love interest, Sean, on the lakeside, long shots of the still and quiet water, gently twinkling with sunlight, create a sense of calm and tranquillity. This impression quickly wavers as she recites verses from Poe's poem, 'The Lake. To –': 'Death was in that poisonous wave, and in its gulf a fitting grave.' In this lake's 'gulf,' the bodies and ghosts of the twins' incestuous ancestors lie. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, similar idyllic framings of the lake, when Dani the au-pair first

arrives at Bly, reinforce the illusion of peacefulness, driving Dani to exclaim 'What a gorgeous lake!' ('The Great Good place', 2020) (fig. 2.1). Unbeknownst to her, the ghost of the Lady of the Lake lies alongside the bodies her victims at the bottom of this 'gorgeous lake' (fig. 2.2). This dynamic is also addressed in *A Cure for Wellness,* when Lockhart finds Hannah staring into a body of water and asks, 'Something in the water?' to which she cryptically replies, 'At the bottom'. Lockhart ponders 'I don't see anything'. Lockhart indeed does not yet know that the bodies of former patients of the sanatorium are disposed of in the aquifer whose water is then reused in patient 'care'. Therefore, while death lies at the bottom of Gothic water, it cannot be seen from the deceitfully peaceful surface.

Fig. 2.1: Long shot of the idyllic lake of *Bly Manor* and its tranquil surface as Dani first arrives on the estate.

Fig. 2.2: Peter's body rotting at the bottom of the lake surrounded by skeletons in *Bly Manor*.

Significantly, at the end of *Bly Manor,* Dani explains about sharing her body with the Lady of the Lake: 'it's quiet, but it isn't peaceful' ('The Beast in the Jungle', 2020). This quotation, in itself an expression of the mechanics of liquid fear, highlights the idea developed by Bauman in an extensive analysis of what he describes, building on Timothy Garton Ash's work on Hurricane Katrina, the 'Titanic syndrome', i.e., 'the horror of falling through the "wafer-thin crust" of civilization into that nothingness stripped of the "elementary staples of organized, civilized life" ("civilized" precisely because "organized" – routine, predictable, balancing the signposting with the behavioural repertoire)' (2006, p. 17). The Titanic syndrome is the eviction from a world of certainty, the way the passengers of the Titanic were evicted from the pretend safety and ostentatious luxury of the ship into the freezing depths of the sub-Arctic waters without lifeboats or lifebelts. This syndrome is a constant within a context of liquid fear, where the threat remains 'concealed most of the time (perhaps *all* the time) and so tak[es] its victims by surprise whenever it crawls out of its lair, always catching them unprepared and inept to respond. Concealed? Yes, but never further away than at a skin-deep stretch' (Bauman, 2006, p. 17) [emphasis in the original]. The threat that '*always* lies below' (Bauman, 2006, p.17) the surface of our pretend safety waits, concealed just below the surface, until it comes out and actualises itself, exposing the weak spots of civilisation. In this sense, Gothic waters crystallise the current state of liquid threat. On the

surface, it is quiet. Underneath, however, it is haunted by ghosts waiting to return to seize a new victim.

As such, Gothic waters materialise a cultural understanding of the surface/depth dialectic, in which, historically, the surface of the water is a space of control and safety, while its depths are the space of the unknown. I throw rocks that ricochet on the surface. I reach the other side of the lake or the other side of the globe by floating my boat or ship on their surface. I hunt whales and extract resources from them as they resurface to breathe. I myself breathe on the surface. The surface is a space of agency which brings leisure, safety, as well as economic and political sovereignty to those who exploit it. It is, however, also a space of illusion, as engaging with the surface is forgetting about the depths hiding below. While the depths initially refer to anything below the surface, the deep has sunk since the first explorations of the sea depths in the nineteenth century 'as new technologies enabled people to push perception further below the surface' (Cohen, 2014, p. 105).[23] The deep is therefore not about depth, it is about what we cannot – yet – reach and therefore what we cannot know. In early modern England for instance, '[t]he depths were figured as a site of horror, where corpses and destroyed technology fed alien creatures' (MacLeod, 2013, p. 42). Before the deepening of the surface, knowing the depths necessarily meant death. Nothing but the corpses of drowned sailors knew the depths of the ocean. To this day still, only cadavers, sunken ships, fallen whales and alien creatures know the deepest parts of the ocean. As recently as 18 June 2023, a commercial submersible, the Titan, imploded during a deep-sea touristic expedition to view the Titanic's wreckage underlining that, despite its apparent taming through exploration and exploitation, the depth is still a threatening, unknown and unreachable space to (living) humans. It is still a space of the dead.

To keep the depths hidden, Gothic waters must remain unfathomable. Materially, this is achieved through the murkiness and stillness of the water. The muddiness of lakes, ponds or wells hides the horror in the depths, but domesticated, indoor water is also affected by this darkness. A recurring scene in water-related horror is the turning on of a tap which spits murky water as an early sign of the horror hiding in the space (*Dark Water* (2005), *The Woman in Black, Crimson Peak* for instance). In *A Cure for Wellness*, the sanatorium's pool, supposedly a sanitary space, also appears completely black. As Lockhart tries to convince his boss, Pembrooke to come back to New York, Pembrooke disappears under the surface of the pool. Lockhart loses sight of him in the black

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[23] For a detailed discussion of the evolution of the understanding of the surface, see also Jha, 2016, p. 55.

water and stares, unsure, at his own reflection on the surface. Dark water thus hides whatever dares to dive to its depths and, on the surface, projects an image of the surroundings.

Whether of muddy lakes or dark pools, the water's stillness perfectly reflects the surroundings, reinforcing the invisibility of its depths. The daylight shots of the bodies of water in *The Lodgers, A Cure for Wellness* and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* emphasise the mirroring quality of the dormant and dark water (fig. 2.3). Hence, in *The Lodgers* and *The Haunting of Bly Manor,* the importance of the mirror, as a subtle reinforcer of fluidity in the Gothic, a synecdochic role filled by indoor bodies of water (pools, etc.) in *A Cure for Wellness.* The multiplication of reflecting surfaces echoing the lake at the centre of the narratives participates in its invading and polluting of the supposedly safer inside of the house. In *The Lodgers,* an entire sequence is built around the mirror motif, as Rachel prepares to have a bath facing the bathroom's mirror and Edward stares at himself in his bedroom's mirror. Next to Rachel's uneven reflection in the glass, a lodger suddenly appears, announced by a grunting noise. As she swipes the steam off the mirror, the presence is gone. The sequence concludes when water drips on Edward's bedroom mirror. A focus rack changes the focus from Edward to the drop as he reaches and touches it. This quasi-symmetrical juxtaposition of shots merges the ghost in the bathroom and the drop of water in the bedroom as reflective echoes, since both constitute leaks from the lake and the house's 'below'. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, mirrors and reflective surfaces are key to Dani's characterisation as haunted. First, the image of her dead fiancé, wearing his glasses reflecting the lights of the car that hit him as Dani was breaking off their engagement, haunts her through hard mirroring surfaces. Later, the Lady of the Lake haunts her through mirroring surfaces of water, e.g., a filled bathtub.

Fig. 2.3: The reflection of the landscape and the characters on the lake's surface in *The Lodgers* (top), *A Cure for Wellness* (middle) and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* ('The Two Faces, Part One', 2020) (bottom).

Therefore, in these texts, the mirroring surface of the glass or the water is a key space for ghostly apparitions.[24] Foucault reads the mirror as 'un lieu sans lieu [a placeless place]' in his work on heterotopias (1994, p. 756). Foucault explains:

Dans le miroir, je me vois là où je ne suis pas, dans un espace irréel qui s'ouvre virtuellement derrière la surface, je suis là-bas, là où je ne suis pas, une sorte d'ombre qui me donne à moi-même ma propre visibilité, qui me permet de me regarder là où je suis absent : utopie du miroir. […] [C]'est à partir du miroir que je me découvre absent à la place où je suis puisque je me vois là-bas. [In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal space that virtually opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow which gives me my own visibility, which allows me to see myself there where I am absent: utopia of the mirror. […] [I]t is from the mirror that I discover myself as absent from the place where I am since I see myself over there.] (1994, p. 756)

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[24] Mirrors constitute a horror leitmotiv, where a character catches a glimpse of the supernatural presence around them through a reflective surface, often when closing the door of a mirrored bathroom cabinet (for instance, famously, in *An American Werewolf in London* (dir. John Landis, 1981) or *Candyman* (dir. Bernard Rose, 1992).

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The mirroring surface mimics the ghost's own being. The ghost exists where it is not, outside of its body. The very presence of the ghost also supposes its absence (it is a ghost because it is not actually there). From there, in a Foucauldian manner, the ghost can be thought of as a 'bodiless body', a body which is both there and not there. The reflective surfaces of mirrors and waters/lakes thus constitute ideal ghostly spaces.

Nevertheless, as Bachelard explains in his analysis of the myth of Narcissus, mirror reflections provide an exceedingly stable image (1942, p. 33) as a precise, analytical and luminous reflection (1942, p. 38). Water reflections, in contrast, give a 'reflet un peu vague, un peu pâli [a somewhat vague, somewhat pale reflection]' (Bachelard, 1942, p. 33). This vagueness, paleness and implied lack of stability of the reflection crystallises the ghost's 'not-quite-rightness' as a wavering and unstable body mimicking a formerly living body. The stability of mirror reflections renders a sanitised image which does not translate the in-betweenness and imperfect life of the dead. Bachelard also mentions 'la naturelle profondeur du reflet aquatique [the natural depth of the water reflection]' (1942, p. 32), an oxymoronic deep surface lacking in the mirror. Bachelard builds on Louis Lavelle's study of the myth of Narcissus, in which Lavelle explains that while the solidity of the glass mirror presents an impassable obstacle to Narcissus, the fountain 'est pour lui un chemin ouvert [an open path]' which he must cross to reach his image (Lavelle, 1939, p. 11). Bachelard comments on Lavelle's reading of Narcissus that '[d]evant l'eau qui réfléchit son image, Narcisse sent que sa beauté *continue,* qu'elle n'est pas achevée, qu'il faut l'achever [facing the water that reflects his image, Narcissus feels that his beauty *continues*, that it is not complete, that it must be completed]' (1942, p. 35) [emphasis in the original]. Water, unlike the mirror, is an opening that can, and should, be crossed. It is an invitation for ghosts to resurface. This literal and symbolic resurfacing of the dead from liquids constitutes a recurrent motif in the Gothic. In *Crimson Peak* the skeleton of the matriarch resurfaces from the clay vat as Edith walks away after stirring the red liquid. In *The Woman in Black*, the ghost of Nathanael resurfaces from the marsh to haunt Arthur. In *The Lodgers*, the ancestors resurface from the below every night. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor,* Rebecca sinks to the bottom of the lake before being found floating on its grey surface, her ghost grieving on the bank ('The Two Faces, Part One', 2020). The surface of the water thus materialises the porous boundary between the land of the living and the dead.

While for Narcissus, the reflection hints that his beauty continues behind the opening that is the surface, for Gothic ghosts, the reflection hints at their life continuing when it should have

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stopped. Hannah's reflection in *A Cure for Wellness* hints at her unnaturally long life, while Rebecca's in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* hints at her ghostliness (see fig. 2.3). For living characters, the reflection on the deep surface hints at their death continuing before it has even started. In the final episode of *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, for instance, Dani becomes the vessel of the Lady of the Lake. Her body is still her own, but, as she explains about the Lady of the Lake, 'I know it's there and it's waiting. She's waiting' ('The Beast in the Jungle', 2020). Years after the events at Bly, as Dani looks at what should be her reflection in the water of her sink and, later, her overflowing bathtub, the reflection is that of the Lady of the Lake (fig. 2.4). The reflection on the deep surface is that of Dani's already actualised future, her continued death that must be completed. The Lady of the Lake is waiting for a future she knows has already happened. By the end of the episode, Dani lies at the bottom of the lake, having crossed the deep surface boundary and having become the Lady of the Lake.

Fig. 2.4: Dani's reflection as the Lady of the Lake in the deep surface.

2.1.2 Death Waste and Toxic Water

As more and more bodies and ghosts cross the deep surface boundary, the water becomes polluted and, in turn, toxic, as materialised by the dark colour of the water, as mentioned above. This is shown in *The Grudge 2* (dir. Takashi Shimizu, 2006) when Jake, a victim of the curse spreading from Japan to America, discovers his family dead as he comes back from school. Jake takes his sister out of the bath where she drowned, and an eerie voice calls for him. He looks behind

the curtain of the bathtub, full of clear water. The camera then pans from left to right, starting with the seemingly clear bath-water, passing Jake, and ending with the ghost of his stepmother bathing in dark water. From one shot to the other, the ghost turns the water black. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor,* the foul quality of the water is hinted at throughout the series as characters describe the lake as a 'smelly old pond' ('The Great Good Place', 2020) as well as, later in the series, a 'dirty lake' ('The Two Faces, Part One', 2020). The lake is also often visually framed in a highly negative way with grey skies reflected on its surface, giving the lake a greywater quality, reinforced by the eerie mist over its surface. Flora does warn her new au pair when she says that 'vampire-slugs' and 'the nastiest beetles' live in the lake ('The Great Good Place', 2020). These potentially frightening creepy-crawlies hint at the real dwellers of the lake: corpses and ghosts. In episode 7, when Rebecca – possessed by Peter's ghost – walks into the lake, she/he discovers Peter's corpse rotting in the depths. An underwater medium shot shows Peter surrounded by skeletons (see fig. 2.2). A subsequent close-up shot displays his half-decomposed face with peeled-off slats of skin dancing in the water. The water is no longer purely water, but, as mentioned in chapter 1, water infested with death in the form of corpses, skeletons and ghosts, and the lake indeed becomes a 'dirty lake' of Gothic water. The water is therefore no longer pure liquid, it is an abject liquid polluted by solid death waste, e.g., corpses and ghosts, both human and discarded by humans. This waste, one among many others in a contemporary culture which, as Bauman asserts, is already '*choking on its own waste products*' (2007, p. 29) [emphasis in the original], rapidly accumulates, faster than it can be recycled or detoxified, if such attempts are made at all. This death waste causes the fast-rising toxicity of the water.

Therefore, Gothic water does not wash sins away as hypothesised by Rachel in *The Lodgers*, because this stygian water, rich in death, becomes foul itself. In *A Cure for Wellness*, the baron, about to force water down Lockhart's throat, describes the effects of the water from the aquifer as 'quite toxic' for the human physiology. This is materialised by the dirt flakes and eels swirling in the brownish water, waiting for transfer (fig. 2.5). The eels signal the toxicity of the water, a motif reiterated in *The Lodgers,* where a black eel announces the forthcomings of the ghosts on two occasions, and in two bodies of Gothic water, the lake and Rachel's bathtub. In *A Cure for Wellness,* the eels live in the aquifer and sustain longer lives than anywhere else on earth according to the baron. What is toxic for humans is therefore life-enhancing for eels. An aquatic equivalent of the snake, in all its resonances of lustful sin and evil, eels code the water as toxic as they are solid, moving and therefore threatening elements within the water. More specifically, the toxicity

of the water mimics the toxicity of the incestuous bloodline within each film. In *The Lodgers*, the bloodline is made of twins – a girl and a boy – who succeed each other in spawning new twins and drowning themselves in the lake. In *A Cure for Wellness,* the baron forces his sister and later his daughter into an incestuous relationship to fulfil his obsession with the purity of his bloodline. Symbolically, the water expresses the toxicity of the 'pure' bloodline. Within it, the eel, whose raw blood is toxic to human, is a water-coded solid embodiment of sin and toxicity. The eel is also unable to breed in contained waters, which echoes the female characters' own denied desire to leave the Gothic space in which they reside, as well as highlights the unnaturalness of their apparition in contained waters.

Fig. 2.5: The eels swimming in toxic brown water before transfusion.

The solids within the water thus make it toxic and, in turn, the water contaminates the ghosts coming out of it. The water and the dead are thus intertwined in a polluting dynamic. The first corpse compromised the purity of the lake, and now the toxic water further corrupts the bodies and liquifies the ghosts. This post-millennial liquefaction of the ghost thus points to a topical and postgenomic understanding of the afterlife. Since the early 2000s, this field of science describes how the body is moulded by the environment even on the epigenetic and microbiotic scales. These fields show how the environment (toxins, food, but also socio-economic status) constitute external forces which shape the body at a molecular level. In short, '*the environment gets inside the body*' (Meloni, 2019, p. 2) [emphasis in the original] and the body becomes both permeable and plastic.

There are two strands of thought on this phenomenon. The first one sells a positive – and marketed – message to a global middle class 'of individual control and optimization of function' (Meloni, 2019, p. 9). Training the genes to repair brain damage is one of the popular versions of this narrative. Another strand of the narrative, 'a different, darker and more viscous plasticity' applies to 'vulnerable human groups' who are 'being sculpted by overwhelming social forces *beyond their control*' (Meloni, 2019, p. 9) [emphasis in the original]. These environmental effects such as pollutants but also nutrition – or lack thereof – chisel bodies and brains. Postgenomics provide a useful tool to read Gothic waters. Eroded by the Gothic water in which they rest, the ghostly bodies become part of this environment, to such an extent that the boundaries between the ghost's body and the environment are blurred. Gothic waters not only contain the ghost's body, but they also produce it as much as they are produced by it. To borrow from Astrida Neimanis' framework, herself basing her analysis on Karine Barad's theory of intraaction, water and ghosts perpetually world and materialise each other (2017, p. 183). Death waste makes the lake of Bly Manor a 'dirty pond' and this pond, in turn, erodes them. Death waste turn the lake from *The Lodgers* into a 'poisonous wave' as mentioned above, and the lake turns the ghosts into water-coded corpse-like ghosts. World and dwellers are inexorably intertwined.

Consequently, water remains part of the ghostly body after the ghost emerges. In *The Lodgers*, in the two scenes where the ancestors' ghosts appear above the surface of the dark water, fluids define their bodies. The ghosts echo the corpse resting at the bottom of the lake, not only because of their puffy, marbled skin (typical of bodies retrieved in water), but also because of their hair floating as if in water, and their weightless limbs slowly shackled by the eel-like black water slithering upwards. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor,* this polluting effect of the water is eroding. The penultimate episode of the series reveals that the Lady of the Lake was once Viola, Lady of the Manor. A montage of her nightly walks through the centuries shows her face slowly fading, turning her into a faceless automaton-like silhouette, with no memory of herself or others, only a will to remain and walk the same path every night. The narrator explains about her transformation: 'All things fade. All things. Flesh. Stones. Even stars themselves' ('The Romance of Certain Old Clothes', 2020). A move-in shot of Viola sleeping in the lake seamlessly displays her gradual erosion from fully formed features to smooth porcelain-like skin. The eroding effect crystallises the abstract fading of her memories and consequently – as the self is understood here as the sum of all the memories and experiences lived – of her own self. Viola dissolves into the water moving from Lady of the Manor to Lady of the Lake. To borrow, once again, from Neimanis in her study

of the confluence of bodies of water, water-coded (eroded, wet, floating, etc.) death waste and Gothic water 'flow into one another' (2017, p. 29) giving unnatural and threatening life to each other.

2.1.3 Willed Water: Gothic Water as Agent

This reciprocal worlding of death and water highlights the inherent threatening agency of water as an unescapable liquid threat. Jha explains that '[o]ne of the roots of the word 'water' comes from the Sanskrit 'apah', meaning 'animate', something that gives life' (2016, p. 4). While water indeed is the biological source of all life on the planet, Gothic water often literally gives life to death waste. In *Doctor Who* for instance, two horror-coded episodes feature the liquid threat of water, 'Waters of Mars,' aforementioned, and 'The Pilot' (2017). In both cases, the water-like threat is unstoppable, able to go through sealed doorways, completely mutable and adaptable, and able to animate dead bodies. These threats literally embody the agency of water. While water is too often assumed to be a disposable, malleable and manageable resource, ecological events precipitated by climate change remind us that water has agency (Gies, 2022, p. 4). Therefore, water, and, even more so, the fantastically inflexed Gothic water, blurs the supposed line between what Jane Bennett categorises as 'dull matter (it, things)' and 'vibrant life (us, beings)' (2010, p. vii). Bennett advocates a 'material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things' (2010, p. ix), thus giving power to matter which leads her to ponder, in a, perhaps unconsciously, highly Gothic paragraph:

> Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even 'respect' […]. (2010, p. ix)

These 'material powers' are literalised in the Gothic narrative. Hence, while Bennett convincingly theorises matter as having power, the Gothic gives liquids literal powers, i.e., imbues them with supernatural forces. Hence, in *The Lodgers,* the water escaping from the ground floor's hatch flows upwards. In *A Cure for Wellness*, the water can extent life expectancy to centuries. In *The Haunting*

of Bly Manor, the water of the lake floods the memory space of Rebecca from the ceiling down as she is tucked away.

This agency of the water is further emphasised through cinematography by giving the watery depths an eerie point of view. Point-of-view shots give agency to the unseen body from which the act of viewing originates. This body is often human, and Horror uses point-of-view shots to increase tension, e.g., an unseen Michael Myers stalking his victims in *Halloween* (1978). In water-coded horror, bodies of water take agency with point-of-view shots from the depths, which suggest that an unseen force behind the camera watches from below the surface, and therefore participate in the liquid threat pervading the narrative. As emphasised by the multiplication of point-of-view shots from the depths in *A Cure for Wellness* (fig. 2.6), the depths stalk their victims, but also, ensure that the dwellers of the Gothic space, such as Hannah and Lockhart, respect the rules imposed by the threat such as, often, not crossing the space's boundary. In *The Lodgers*, the lake is always cinematographically framed as agential through similar point of view shots (fig. 2.7). In their dictionary of symbols, Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant read lakes as symbols of 'the Earth's eye, through which the inhabitants of the Underworld are able to gaze upon humans, animals, plants and so on' (1996, p. 585). The worm's eyes shots from the depths of the lake imply the stare of the dead, an idea reinforced by the nursery rhyme sung by the siblings warning them to '[b]e in bed by midnight's bell./ Never let a stranger through your door./ Never leave each other all alone', since, as the ancestors threaten, '[l]ong as your blood be ours alone/ We'll see you ever from below.'

Fig. 2.6: Point-of-view shots of the water depths in *A Cure for Wellness.*
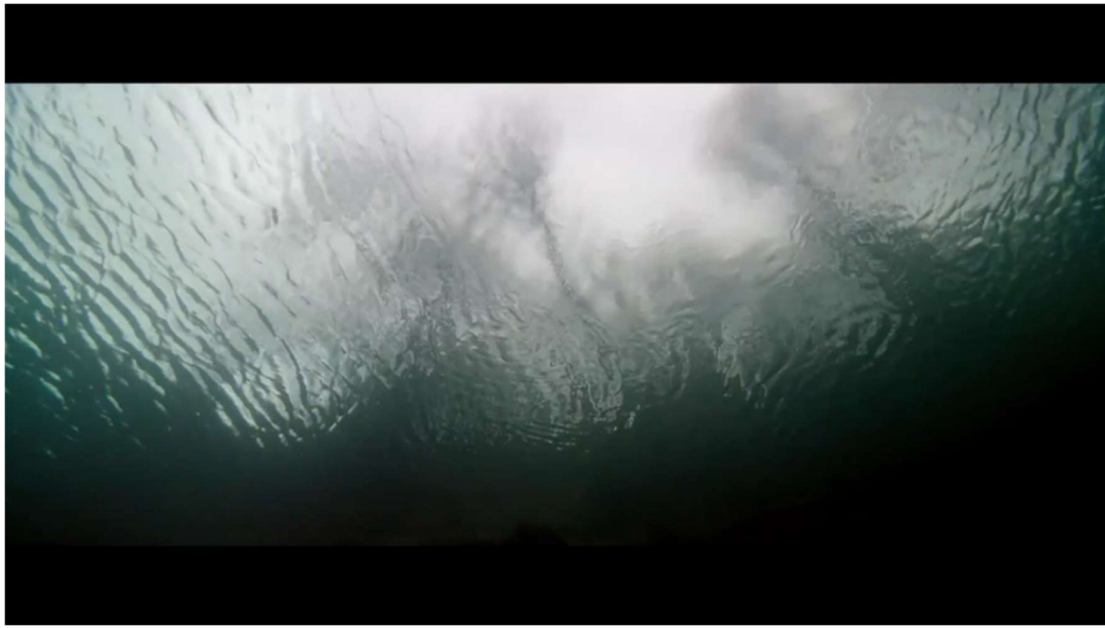
Fig. 2.7: Point-of-view shot from the bottom of the lake in *The Lodgers*.

This constant watching of the pervasive liquid threat participates in what Bauman and Leonidas Donskis describe as 'liquid evil' (2016). While the concept presents itself as a continuation of Bauman's earlier works on fluidity, liquid evil perhaps constitutes the least materially liquid of all these concepts as it corresponds to a grey evil, one which exists more pervasively than the solid, black-and-white evil of Manicheism. Disguised as 'a seemingly neutral and impartial acceleration of life' (Bauman & Donskis, 2016, p. 3), liquid evil stems from neoliberal and fatalist attitudes born of contemporary times. Within this liquid evil, technologies and social networks carry key duties as forms of unprecedented advancements and connections which, in reality, constitute forms of (self-)control and separation (Bauman & Donskis, 2016, p. 8). Technologies are the pervasive eyes that watch, unseen, signalling the end of privacy.[25] Bauman and Donskis write in 2016 and use Facebook as the epitome of such technologies, but the pervasiveness of technology has only become more widespread and less noticeable. Beyond the exhibitionistic practices of photo- and video-sharing, we are also constantly and unknowingly watched, observed, documented. Either literally as we are photographed and filmed by ourselves, others, organisations, corporations and states, but also more pervasively as we all become bodies of liquid data, i.e., unanchored data leaking out of our browsing and purchasing habits,

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[25] The notion of 'liquid surveillance' also exists within Bauman's framework but refers to a specific type of surveillance in the name of security, which triggers more insecurity and, in turn, more surveillance, in a fear-creates-fear pattern (Bauman & Lyon, 2012, pp. 101-120).

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conversations, movements, etc. Just like Gothic characters, we are all being watched, unknowingly, from depths that we cannot quite fathom, by bodies we cannot quite grasp.

As water and death waste flow into each other, the point-of-view shots also suggest the presence of the co-agential solid threat. The water's and ghost's agency seep and leak into each other. Bennett mentions dead matter in the form of a dead rat which, lying among littered objects, demonstrates a form of vitality in itself, as well as in relation to the other objects, by leading her gaze from one to the other. It is therefore not the former life of the rat that gives it vitality, but the rat's call to attention through its out-of-placeness as well as its irreducible singularity (2010, p. 4). The same vitality animates the dead in the Gothic, not so much in their singularity, as Gothic ghosts often have doubles (*The Lodgers, Dark Shadows, The Haunting of Hill House*) or are presented as non-individual with faceless or veiled bodies (*The Woman in Black*, *The Haunting of Bly Manor*), but in their relationship to other forms of matter such as water. The dead and liquid agencies thus meet as if driven by a common will. For instance, in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*'s final episode, when Jamie attempts to get her wife back from the bottom of the lake, despite her extended arms and her screams, her body remains far from that of Dani/the Lady of the Lake. The water acts as a wall against Jamie, preventing her from coming any closer, since, as older Jamie narrates, 'Dani wouldn't. Dani would never' ('The Beast in the Jungle', 2020). The will of Dani thus seeps into the water, becoming the water's will, like Viola's will before her whose 'considerable will' ('The Romance of Certain Old Clothes', 2020), defies illness and death, remaining in Bly Manor 'by stubbornness alone' as she wills her own gravity, binding other souls to the property grounds. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*'s case therefore, the will of the ghost seeps into the water first, before water and ghost become inseparable in their a conscious-like intention. In *The Lodgers,* when the ancestors' ghosts float above the lake surface, medium-close-up and close-up shots show the lake water reaching upwards and lacing around their bodies (fig. 2.8). The dark thickness of the water suggests it purposely slithers on them like the black and shiny eel slithering through the lake. The occasionally hand-like shape of the black streams suggests that the water seizes the ghosts, thus embodying the ancestors' will and agency through water. Later, in a flashback to when Rachel's mother tries to escape her husband's grip as he forces her into the lake, the water violently and actively clings to her body, extending to the surface the will of the ancestors in the depths (fig. 2.9). Rachel's mother fights to remain on the surface of this agitated dark water to no avail as the water itself, the ghosts below and her husband all work as one to drag her down.

Fig. 2.8: Water slithering on the ghosts in *The Lodgers*.

Fig. 2.9: Water clinging to the body of Rachel's mother.

This willed and agitated water corresponds to what Bachelard calls 'l'eau violente [violent water]' (1942, p. 21), a water in fight holding anger within. Bachelard treats the sea as the quintessential violent water, but any water in movement can become violent water, as shown in the case of Rachel's mother drowning. Bachelard argues that violent water, when faced by humans,

fights back, thus creating what he calls 'la revanche du flot [the flow's revenge]' (1942, p. 21). The human fight against violent water is the fight without an opponent, i.e., with a shapeless, flowing opponent – thus mimicking the fight against the ghosts. Building on Georges Lafourcade, Bachelard argues that in a fight against the sea, '*[o]n voit la lutte avant les lutteurs* [*you see the fight before the fighters*]' (1942, p. 225) [emphasis in the original]. This suggests that, against violent Gothic water, one sees the violence of the sounds and movements but cannot distinguish the fighters. In *La Llorona*, when Anna jumps in the pool to save her daughter from the hands of the weeping woman, an underwater confrontation takes place between Anna and la Llorona. The fight happens over five short sequences lasting between 2 and 3 seconds each for a total of 12 seconds. In these 12 seconds, there are 20 shots of the women fighting. The camera is constantly moving creating a disorienting effect underlining the violence of the scene. This is further emphasised with the prominent use of close-up shots preventing spatial orientation and the dizzying flashing of the torchlight in the water. One sees not the fight, but only its violence. A similar approach appears in the climax of the sequel to *The Woman in Black, The Woman in Black: Angel of Death* (dir. Tom Harper, 2014), when Eve tries to save young orphan Edward from drowning in the marsh, compelled by the Woman in Black. As she reaches the child held underwater by ghostly hands, a fight for their survival starts. The 14-second underwater sequence, from her reaching Edward to them giving up fighting, comprises of 12 shots, almost a shot a second, with close-ups of indeterminate bodies and hands, human and ghostly alike, and water sounds and suspenseful music taking over the soundtrack. Again, the soundtrack further underlines the violence emanating from the water. In her study of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, Hurley mentions that the 'gothicity of matter' appears when 'matter is not mute and stolid, but rather clamorous and active' (1996, p. 32), suggesting that matter is Gothic not only when it is agential, but more specifically when it is loud. In this scene, the sound of water in movement (splashes, waves, bubbles) as well as diffused screams take over the soundtrack. The overwhelming presence of water within the soundtrack turns this scene into a fight against water as 'clamourous and active matter' as an extension of the vengeful ghost. Therefore, the dynamics of the water embody the will of the ghost hiding within its depths.

2.2 Liquid Haunting: Wet Ghosts, Materiality and Bodies

2.2.1 Postmillennial Haunting: The Wet Ghost Paradigm

Nevertheless, the ghost always ultimately emerges from the Gothic waters, participating in what I call the wet ghost paradigm. Paradigms for depictions of ghosts have shifted and coexisted[26] over the long century of the motif's cinematic and televisual existence, ranging from the ghost-in-the-sheet motif to the ethereal ghost via the corporeal or zombified ghost born out of the 1980s. Among such prevalent models in the twentieth century, the wet ghost is a rare sight. Nonetheless, instances of wet ghosts do exist before the turn of the millennium. *Carnival of Souls* (dir. Herk Harvey, 1962) constitutes an early example of the motif. In Kansas, Mary dies as her car crashes into a river. Unaware of her death and ghostliness, Mary emerges from the water, noticeably, mostly dry (fig. 2.10), and subsequently experiences strange visions of ghoulish figures, some of which she sees as wet and eerie characters emerging from a body of water (fig. 2.11). The film puts forth the model of the wet ghost, although the spectres are only wet when directly in contact with water, thus contrasting with the permanently wet ghosts of most contemporary iterations of the motif.

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[26] Norman Z. McLeod's *Topper* (1937), a comedy starring Carry Grant and Constance Bennett as a couple who, upon realising that they died, decide to interfere into their friend's life in order to reach Heaven, constitute an example of a single film featuring ethereal, corporeal and imprinted depictions of the ghosts.

Fig. 2. 10: The ghost of Mary emerges (mostly dry) from the water in *Carnival of Souls*.

Fig. 2.11: Mary's vision of wet ghosts, an early iteration of the motif.

Later, the 1980s constitute a turning point for the ghost as a new paradigm emerges, what Steffen Hantke describes as the ghost 'bearing the marks of corporeal abjection' (2015, p. 191)

born out of the slasher and zombie craze. While ghost stories were rarer in the 1980s than in previous – or later – decades due to a pronounced interest in slashers and body horror films (Hantke, 2015, p. 192), the model is hinted at in *The Changeling* (dir. Peter Medak, 1980), where the ghost of Joseph, a child drowned by his father, haunts the spaces of his death and burial. Joseph is negatively imprinted, to borrow Hantke's term (2015, p. 184), throughout the film, i.e., his presence is signified through interactions with the environment. However, in visions, he appears lying dead underwater. Countering this cleaner version of the ghost, the corporeal ghost emerges, to compete with the bodily villains of slasher films. Also in 1980, John Carpenter's *The Fog*, revolves around seamen rising from their watery graves to seek revenge on a small town. The ghosts are zombified rather than wet, associated thematically only with the sea (harpoons as murder weapons, for instance). Again in 1980, the rotten ghost of the woman in room 237 in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* emerges from the bath and pursues Jack in all her abject and rotten wetness (fig. 2.12). The wet ghost therefore undergoes a corporealisation in the 1980s, which attaches the conditions of death and/or burial to the body. In 1992, in Rusty Lemonrande's *The Turn of the Screw*, the motif appears in a key scene of the story, when Jenny, the governess, confronts Flora who refuses to admit to seeing the ghost of Miss Jessel on the lake. In this adaptation of the novella, the wet ghost of Miss Jessel beckons the characters languidly from the lake's surface as lightning and heavy rain dramatise the scene (fig. 2.13). This depiction is an anomaly within the many screen adaptations of Henry James' novella since, even when rain is used to dramatise this narrative node, the ghost remains completely dry as it watches the characters, as in *The Innocents* (dir. Jack Clayton, 1961). This is even the case in post-2010s adaptations (*The Turning* (2020) and *The Haunting of Bly Manor*) where this particular scene features a dry ghost, while wet ghosts appear in other scenes of these post-millennial texts.

Fig. 2.12: The wet ghost in room 237 chasing Jack in *The Shining*.

Fig. 2.13: Miss Jessel's wet ghost in *The Turning of the Screw*.

The wet ghost paradigm is thus experimented with in the twentieth century, but only becomes mainstream from the early 2000s before imposing itself as a prominent paradigm in the years that followed. Because the wet ghost motif does not require specific technological advancements (filming a wet ghost does not require technologies which were unavailable in the early twentieth century), this shift is linked to cultural changes. The motif emerges through the influence and adaptations of J-horror films in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in particular Hideo Nakata's films such as *Ringu* (1998), adapted as *The Ring* (dir. Gore Verbinski, 2002) and *Dark Water* (2002) adapted under the same name (dir. Walter Salles, 2005). Both original films feature variations on the motif of the *onryō*, a vengeful spirit from Japanese folklore. The *onryō* appears as '[a] paranormal, primarily female, entity most frequently depicted through distinct visual markers like funereal white attire, long black hair, and pallid, staring visages' (McRoy, 2015, p. 199). In *Ringu,* when Sadako, a young girl who died trapped in a well, returns to claim her victims, her ghost emerges dry from the well, with an immaculate white dress and long dry hair (fig. 2.14). In the remake, Samara (Sadako) has a water-heavy stained dress, grey skin and damp hair, and water appears on everything she touches (fig. 2.15). The dry ghost of the Japanese version becomes wet in the Western adaptation. This model also features in Nakata's *Dark Water*, where Mitsuko, a little girl who drowned in an apartment complex's water tank, haunts a mother and her daughter. In the film's climax, Mitsuko's ghost appears with wet dark hair and wet grey skin wearing an off-white raincoat (fig. 2.16). In the 2005 adaptation of the film, the girl, renamed Natasha, appears as a wet ghost when her corpse is found floating in the water tank and she opens her eyes. Her other materialisations are water-coded (she leaves watery footsteps in her path for instance), but she remains dry, even when she attacks a little girl in the bath (fig. 2.17). However, other characters such as bad mothers appear as wet with the long dark wet hair sticking to their faces. The deceased child is thus presented as the victim of abusive parents rather than as monster. Beyond the presence of a wet ghost in the American adaptation of *Dark Water*, the subversion of the wet ghost motif onto non-ghostly characters presupposes the solidification of the model started by Samara as the epitome of the vengeful ghost, as subversion implies a familiarity with expectations. With *The Ring* (2002) grossing over five times its budget worldwide, Samara's wet ghost becomes a meme of horror film imagery, imitated to the point of parody (in *Scary Movie 3* (dir. David Zucker, 2003) for instance). The wet quality of the ghosts thus results from a cross-cultural contamination

stemming from *Ringu*,[27] as the image of Samara acquires a widespread cultural resonance and later inspires more wet ghosts such as the ghosts of *The Curse of La Llorona* (see fig. 2.26) and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (fig. 2.18) with stained white dress, pale skin and wet hair.

Fig. 2.14: Sadako's *onryō* ghost in *Ringu*.

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[27] *Ringu* is also, to an extent, influenced by western culture in a circular relationship as suggested by Hideo Nakata's statement about *Ring* series: 'I can also see many influences from Robert Wise's *The Haunting,* or the Henry James novella, *Turn of the Screw*, which was made into a film by a British director [Jack Clayton], so I can say that I've been influenced by many directors outside of Japan' (cited in Totaro, 2000).

Fig. 2.15: Samara's wet ghost in *The Ring*.

Fig. 2.16: Mitsuko's wet ghost as revealed in the climax of *Dark Water* (2002). [Modified brightness]

Fig. 2.17: Natasha's water-coded but dry ghost attacking the living in the bathtub in *Dark Water* (2005).

Fig. 2.18: The impact of Samara's ghost: the ghostly Lady of the Lake in *Bly Manor*. [Modified brightness]

The widespread endorsement of the wet ghost crystallises a shift in perception of the spectre from ethereal to wet. The ghost, a lost soul, is depicted as mostly immaterial through the twentieth

century with paradigms such as the ethereal ghost (created through double exposure for instance) or the imprinted ghost (including the ghost-in-the-sheet model). These models figure the ghost as a soul in the sense of the immaterial or spiritual part of the person as distinct from the body. Nonetheless, the Oxford English Dictionary etymological definition of the word 'soul' also includes the following mention:

> It has been suggested that the word may ultimately show a derivative formation from the same Germanic base as sea n., on the assumption that early Germanic peoples believed that the spirit came from and (after death) returned to water […], but the evidential basis for this is extremely slender. ('Soul, N., Etymology', 2023)

While the evidence is slim, the very existence of the etymological hypothesis suggests a link between spirit and water. The wet ghost embodies a movement towards this possible etymology, a movement away from ethereal understandings of the soul toward aqueous understandings of it, correlating with a context of liquefaction of fear in post-millennial culture. The wet ghost is symptomatic of this liquefaction as described by Bauman, an extension of the liquids oozing into the liquid space.[28] Liquid society in Bauman's understanding is ultimately a society of the transient and the temporary, a society where things melt before they even finish setting. This transience does not exclude death, as efforts to make the implacable permanence of our own demise livable liquefy death itself. Bauman explains that while past stratagems, religious or otherwise, made the knowledge of death bearable, contemporary liquid societies turn to a stratagem he describes as 'the *marginalization* of concerns with finality through the devaluation of anything durable, long-lasting, long term' (2006, p. 39). Bauman explains:

> The stratagem of marginalization consists in a systematic effort to evict the worry about eternity (and, indeed, about duration as such) from human consciousness and strip it of its powers to dominate, shape and streamline the course of individual life. Instead of promising bridges connecting mortal life to eternity, that alternative stratagem openly plays down, degrades or refutes the value of duration, cutting all concerns with immortality at their roots; it transplants the importance once allocated to the 'thereafter' onto the present moment; from the durable to the transient. (2006, p. 39) [emphasis in the original]

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[28] See Chapter 1.

Exhortations to 'seize the moment', to 'focus on the present' are contemporary leitmotivs of this stratagem of marginalisation. In turn, the wet ghost turns the durability of death solidified in the dry (ethereal, solid, imprinted, etc.) ghost into a transient state, a state of movement. Making the ghost wet is embodying (literally, in-body-ing) this state of transience, invalidating permanence altogether. While dry ghosts might be approached as creatures frozen in time, stuck in repetitive patterns, wet ghosts are transient in several ways. First, because, as previously analysed, fluids are understood as things of time rather than space as they do not hold their shape like solids do (Bauman, 2000, p. 2). Dry ghosts are stuck in a space and a bygone time (e.g., wearing their antiquated clothes). Wet ghosts are things of time, dripping, oozing, leaking, ever-changing. Even more so since wet human bodies are necessarily transient bodies, in transition from dry to wet to dry again. Second, because wet ghosts are linked to wet spaces (wells, bathtubs, lakes, vats, etc.) from whence they come and to whither they will go back. 'Fluids travel easily' writes Bauman to describe the intuitive understanding of flows (2000, p. 2). Again, wet ghosts are not dry ghosts, stuck in one (dry) space for years, decades or millennia (see for instance BBC's *Ghosts* (2019-2023)*, American Horror Story* (2011-), *The Haunting of Hill House*). Wet ghosts belong to a liquid space and haunt the dry space only temporarily. The Lady of the Lake in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* walks from the lake to her former bedroom and back to the lake. Samara crawls out of her well and into her victim's space before disappearing (back to her well to emerge again). The ancestors of *The Lodgers* emerge when a fault is committed before returning to the underwater space. The wet ghost thus exists in a state of permanent transience, a fluidity which Bauman, in his study of *Liquid Times* (2007), extensively applies to refugees in a post-9/11 world. While I do not here attempt to identify refugees with fictional ghosts and, by doing so, make light of real-life tragedies, some analogies do emerge within Bauman's analysis. Wet ghosts indeed exist in a paradoxical 'ongoing, lasting state of temporaryness' (2007, p. 46), constantly in transit not between countries, but between the world of the living and the dead, and, more specifically, between the wet and the dry. Wet ghosts also 'are on a journey never completed since its destination […] remains forever unclear, while a place they could call "final" stays forever inaccessible' (Bauman, 2007, p. 38). Wet ghosts indeed rarely 'move on', like most malevolent ghosts of Horror, and instead simply return to their wet space. Wet ghosts thus remain in a constant transitoriness within their own body, leaking and seeping, and within their space, displaced as they are into a liquid environment in which they never belonged, and not belonging to the dry land they used to

know. The wet ghost is therefore symptomatic of a wider cultural trend in Western societies, that of the reliance on transience.

2.2.2 Wet Density and Grasping Materiality

The transience of the wet ghost's body (wet, leaking, seeping, etc.) reaffirms a dense materiality that had disappeared from ghosts in the 1990s and early 2000s following the craze for the ethereal ghost born out of Computer-Generated Images (CGI). Balanzategui explains that the digitisation of media in the 1990s created an 'analogue nostalgia' (2018, p. 274), which corresponds to a desire for the physicality and materiality offered by analogue technologies as opposed to digital ones (2018, p. 275). Balanzategui posits Samara's ghost (*The Ring*, 2002) as the epitome of this return to analogue, explaining that 'Samara expresses a fetishization of the decay of analogue physicality so extreme that it becomes monstrous' (2018, p. 275).[29] Balanzategui reads Samara as an embodiment of corporeal and technological decay. While the author does mention the liquefaction of Samara's flesh and her rotting wet quality, liquids complement flesh in her analysis. While this is a common thread in analysis, this focus on rot and mould for decay might also point to the fact that liquids capture an instinctive idea of lightness because of their high capacity for mobility (Bauman, 2000, p. 2) rather than material physicality.

Nevertheless, this instinct is not always true, as, for instance, there exist liquids which are indeed heavier than many solids (Bauman, 2000, p. 2). Similarly, the wet ghost, while defined by liquids, is highly material, tangible and dense. Liquids *flesh out* the wet ghost. Cinematic bodies have often been described as suspiciously phantomatic through the medium's 'ability to record and replay reality and its presentation of images that resemble the world but as intangible half-presences' (Leeder, 2015, p. 3). Within this already phantomatic frame, to materialise the ghost requires an added material layer – just like, to phantomise the corporeal requires removing a material layer. In Horror, this added layer can be made of wounds and rot, as put forward by Balanzategui. In water-coded Horror, this layer is liquid. The ghost is made material and tangible through liquids. The wet shine on the ghostly skin, the water weighing down and muddying the long black hair and the fabric of the clothes, the drops trickling in veins on the skin, implying a tangible body to trickle on, but also the leaks spilling from the body, all contribute to the fleshing out of the ghost as material presence. In Samara's case, her ghostly body's VHS-like flickering is made material through the water running from her skin – implying a flesh to run on – to the story

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[29] For similar analyses of ghosts, digitalisation and materiality, see Brame, 2017 and Sedgwick, 2020.

space, leaving drops and puddles as yet more hints of her physical presence. Similarly, in *The Lodgers,* the water of the lake slithering on the ghosts' bodies indicates that, despite their semi-transparent aspect, the creatures are indeed tangible, and therefore threatening. Beyond vision, sounds also materialise the ghost. In *Crimson Peak*, when Edith encounters a ghost in a dark corridor of Allerdale Hall, the medium-shot framing and dark colour palette prevent a detailed view of the ghost. However, sounds render it materially perceptible. As the ghost surges from the floor, the wet thumping sound of its hands hitting the creaking wooden floors in the otherwise stretched and blended elements of the soundtrack (the music, the ghost's moans) suggests the unmistakably solid and wet materiality of the ghostly body. Liquid-inflected sounds here shape the wet ghosts' materiality and suggest that the material ghost can touch what surrounds it.

The importance of the touch of the hand both on and from the ghost is reflected in the Gothic tendency to highlight the ghostly hand as they interact with the environment. In *Crimson Peak,* the hands of the ghosts feature predominantly, as their main bodily attribute. In the aforementioned scene, the hand is the first element of the ghost that reaches from the floorboards. In a medium shot where the ghost crawls towards Edith with its hands in the foreground, displaying their wet solidity while the rest of the body flickers (fig. 2.19). In *The Lodgers,* a similar emphasis on hands appears when the ghosts finally emerge. As they crawl from the latch to the first floor, medium shots underline their naked and animalistic bodies crawling across the floor. Interjected between these shots, however, are close-ups on their hands as they hold onto the wooden features of the stairs (fig. 2.20). In these close ups, the liquid quality of the hands is highlighted with the blackened fingertips suggesting both decay and the blackness of the water. In this scene, out of 25 shots of the ghosts, 7 feature their hands. This is roughly 28% of the total of shots of the ghosts. Of these 7 shots, 4 are close-ups of in which the hand is the main object on screen. Now, studies suggest that the surface of the palm of one hand only represents around 1% of the total body surface in adults (Schonfeld, 1990, p. 250). This discrepancy between the actual bodily space occupied by hands within the body and the cinematographic space which they occupy in the scene indicates this intense focus on ghostly hands as grabbing and therefore offensive forces. This is further emphasised by the close-up shots of Sean's bloodied hand nailed to the floor as the ghosts close in on him. Sean's hand posits him as a prey, ready to be seized by the hands of the ghosts. This is precisely what happens to him in the climax of the film where the ghosts' hands synecdochically embody the greater threat (fig. 2.21). 10 shots feature Sean being taken. In these 10 shots, only one shows something other than the ghosts' hands (an overhead shot of Sean framed by two ghosts as

they drag him down.) The other 9 shots only show their hands (with 25 hands in total).[30] The hand therefore detaches itself from the ghost to become a threat in itself.

Fig. 2.19: Thumping material hands in *Crimson Peak.*

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[30] The climax of *The Woman in Black: Angel of Death* comprises a highly similar scene where underwater ghosts are embodied by their hands as they drag the male saviour down to the depths.

Fig. 2.20: Close up on a ghostly hand as the spectres crawl out of their lair in *The Lodgers*. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 2.21: Emphasis on the ghosts' hands as they grab Sean in *The Lodgers*.

This independence of the wet ghost's grasp also appears in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*. The Lady of the Lake's hands are not particularly emphasised in the series, but her grasp dominates as she seizes her victims. In a scene reiterated four times in the course of the series, the Lady of the

Lake grabs her victim by the throat (Peter, a plague doctor, and Dani whose trapping is shown twice). In these scenes, the hand is not visible. However, the grasp is palpable through the soundtrack as her fingers reach her victim's neck: every time the Lady of the Lake grabs the throat of someone standing in her path, the same thunderous, thumping sound effect materialises the physicality and strength of her grasp. Her extended arm poses as the material expression of her will as it extends beyond herself and her somnambulistic body. The ghostly hand disappears to become grasp. The shape disappears under the force, the pure drive of the ghost, disconnected from the object.

This emphasis on the ghosts' grasp leads back to what Clive Bloom, drawing on Lafcadio Hearn's idea, calls the 'fear of touch of the dead' (2007, p. 16) – with, again, an emphasis on the action rather than the thing. Lafcadio Hearn specifically described the 'Nightmare-Touch' in his short and eerie essay of the same name, to speculate on the origin of the fear of ghosts (1907). Through his description of the terrifying and paralysing experiences haunting his childhood dreams, Hearn places the origin of the fear of ghosts in the 'ancestral experience of nightmare' and the 'intuitive terror of supernatural touch' (1907, p. 237), which have haunted living things from their apparition. This fear of being touched is key in the fear of ghosts. As Hearn explains,

> [i]t is not a fear of bodily violence. It is not even a reasoning fear, – not a fear that can readily explain itself, – which would not be the case if it were founded upon definite ideas of physical danger. […] I venture to state boldly that the common fear of ghosts is *the fear of being touched by ghosts*, – or, in other words, that the imagined Supernatural is dreaded mainly because of its imagined power to touch. Only to *touch*, remember! – not to wound or to kill. […] And who can ever have had the sensation of being touched by ghosts? The answer is simple: – *Everybody who has been seized by phantoms in a dream.* (1907, pp. 236-237) [emphasis in the original]

Hearn's idea is simple: living things are scared of ghosts because they have experienced the grasp of the ghost in dreams – strictly, the grasp that cannot be grasped back. Hearn's theory suggests the intuitive idea that ghosts have the power of touch, even though, as he states, 'the common idea of a ghost is certainly that of a being intangible and imponderable' (1907, p. 236). This is precisely where the process of gothicisation thrives. Prominent ghost paradigms of the twentieth century (imprinted or ethereal) present the ghost as 'intangible and imponderable', but the wet ghost is tangible and ponderable. Consequently, Andrew Smith's argument that 'the intangibility of the

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ghost can be read as a counterpoint to more palpable monstrous bodies (demons, vampires, zombies, ghouls and so on)' (2007, p. 147) does not apply to *all* ghosts. The wet ghost is visually and aurally dense and tactile so as to become as threatening as its living-dead cousins the vampire or zombie. In their materiality and tangibility, wet ghosts thus actualise the fearful possibility of their wet and sticky touch.

2.2.3 Leaky and Crying Ghosts: Dirty Haunting

This touch is all the more threatening in that it is stained by bodily fluids. Often, wet ghosts retain functioning bodily functions as a leaking and secreting body. Miriam Haddu observes in her study of Del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) that the ghost of Santi 'appears […] in ghostly form, while also manifesting corporeal secretions; he has a stream of blood exiting the wound on his head' (2014, p. 148). Del Toro reuses this ghost design in *Crimson Peak*, reaffirming the corporeal aspect of wet ghosts. The ghost of the Sharpe mother has a blood leak flowing outwards from her wounded skull, where Lucille struck her with a cleaver (fig. 2.22). The outward leak supernaturally figures the blood flowing from her caved-in skull at the time of her murder. Another, although more subtle, leak shows blood rolling over her sternum. While barely visible, this leak is indicated aurally with a pitter-patter sound in the background layers of the soundtrack. The leak is therefore not just visual but also aural. In a similar fashion, Thomas' blood flows upward as his ghost appears to help Edith. Flowing outward to signify the vaporous liquefaction of the ghost – the synesthetic fusion of spectral and liquid –, these spectral secretions mark the characters' violent deaths and amplify the wet corporeality of their ghostly bodies.

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Fig. 2.22: Leaky ghost of the matriarch in *Crimson Peak*.

Del Toro's ghosts therefore epitomise what David MacDougall describes as the cinematic 'experienced, functioning body [which] is routinely countered and contradicted in films by the sanitized body, the heroic body, and the beautiful body' (2005, p. 19). The desanitisation of the ghostly body is signified by leaks as markers of its body's uncontrollable fluidity and corporeality, which constitutes what Haddu describes as 'a material physicality normally denied to the specter' (2014, p. 148), as she analyses the ghostly body of Santi and his capacity to leave footprints behind. The spectre described by Haddu is the ethereal ghost, the lost soul understood in opposition to the body, in the sense of Jacques Derrida's spectre as a presence which does not exist 'en chair et en os [in flesh and blood]' (1993, p. 166). This understanding of the spectre is reductive however, as corporeal, zombie-like ghosts born out of the 1980s slasher and zombie film craze do rely on such displays of highly material and unsanitised, i.e., decaying, physicality (as shown above with the old woman in room 237). Leaks are not as commonly featured on solid ghosts as rot and open wounds. Wet ghosts, on the other hand, display a body fleshed out by liquids, which can, but do not necessarily, flow from wounds, regardless of the solidity of the body itself. For instance, in the third haunting scene of *Crimson Peak*, a long shot shows a flickering ghost walking towards Edith in a corridor of Allerdale Hall. This shot is followed by an upward tilt medium shot highlighting the leak before the ghost's body as the shot starts on the liquid pools of liquid left behind the ghost (fig. 2.23, top) and ends with the ghost's upper body. A counter shot displays Edith's fear, before

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a concluding move-in close-up shot on the ghost's face prominently features the blood leaking upward from its skull wound. As the ghost's body flickers, the camera places the ghost's uncontrollable fluidity as its primary sign of corporeality and, from there, worryingly material haunting (fig. 2.23, bottom). Inversely, uncontrollable leaks can mark the seemingly human and material body as ghostly. In *The Grudge* (2020)*,* black water inscribes itself on the wet ghost of Melinda, a drowned little girl, leaking black bile as a marker of her contamination with the curse. When the estate agent finds Melinda alone at home, he calls her parents – deceased, unbeknownst to him. The estate agent stands on the left of the shot as, in the background, the little girl stares ahead, motionless. A counter shot places her at the foreground as her nose and mouth abundantly leak black bile, signalling her as a ghostly carrier of the curse (fig. 2.24). Leaks therefore display the wet ghost as fully-functioning, although uncontrollable, material body, and the material body as ghostly.

Fig. 2.23: Leaks as primary marker of ghostly embodiment in *Crimson Peak*.

Fig. 2.24: Leak as primary marker of corporeal ghostliness in _The Grudge_ (2020).

Beyond obviously abject liquids, tears constitute a common feature of the wet ghost. While more readily associated to melodrama than Horror,[31] Gothic tears, i.e., coloured tears, unsanitise the ghost just as effectively. In her _Elemental Passions,_ Luce Irigaray mentions the motif of the black tear stating: 'your tears are black. They lack the cool candour of liquid, the simplicity of drops of water. They are drowned in ink. In the poison of a bitter knowledge' (1992, p. 23). Like Gothic water, the ghost's coloured tears are stained by the 'poison of a bitter knowledge', i.e., secrets and sins of the past. In _Crimson Peak_'s final sequence, Lucille, in a fit of rage, stabs her brother with a silver letter opener, plunging the blade into her brother's teardrop. After Thomas extracts the letter opener, blood flows from the wound and a crimson tear rolls down his cheek as he dies. This red tear becomes key to his later depiction as the only male ghost of Allerdale Hall, standing apart from the other ghosts with its spectral white skin emphasising the rusty-red colour of his bloody tear flowing drifting upward. Thomas' matricide and incestuous relationship hides in his coloured ghostly leaks. This exposing of the ghost's corporeality and evil through tears also features in Michael Chaves' 2019 horror film _The Curse of La Llorona_, which exploits the trope of the weeping female ghost. In the film, the Llorona, or weeping woman, drowns her children to get revenge on their cheating father before guilt and grief push her to drown herself. From her origin story, liquids shape the character, unlike the 1960 cinematic version by René Cardona, where

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[31] See Linda Williams' seminal study of body genres (1991).

the Llorona stabs her children, and liquids are marginal in her characterisation and the overall depiction of horror. Furthermore, in both versions, la Llorona has two faces, her peaceful human face, and her evil ghost face. In the 1960 film, while the evil Llorona is marked by harsher and more masculine traits, both faces are dry (fig. 2.25). In the 2019 version however, la Llorona has a human face, with tears rolling from her eye, and a ghostly face, with wet white skin, a disproportionately big mouth and yellow eyes from which black tears constantly leak (fig. 2.26). The 2019 version presents a gothicised Llorona, with both faces marked by tears and fluids. In contrast, in the original film, La Llorona sheds a tear only once, at her execution, despite close-up shots underlining her dark eyes throughout the film. The colouration of La Llorona's tears in the post-millennial version, just like the colouration of Thomas' tear, echoes the death and secrets held in the Gothic water of the texts, i.e., her infanticides.

Fig. 2.25: Dry faces of the cursed woman in *La Llorona* (1960).

Fig. 2.26: Post-millennial liquefaction of the ghost's faces in *The Curse of La Llorona* (2019).

The leak from the ghost – whether tears or blood – not only points to the secrets and sins of the characters, but also points synecdochically to what the ghost really is. The ghost is at once leaking and a leak in itself. This synecdochic shift from leaking to leak suggests that the materiality of the leaked ghosts mimics the materiality of the leaking fluids. Katy Shaw explains in the introduction to her study of twenty-first-century ghost literature that '[t]he experience of being haunted is one of noticing absences in the present, recognising *fissures*, *gaps* and points of

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crossover' (2018, p. 2) [my emphasis]. This suggests that the ghost emerges from a break in space and time, a breach or gap from which they leak to penetrate and disrupt the time and place of the characters. The leaked ghost is thus the leaked secret from the past which becomes known. This to some extent disputes Julian Wolfreys' idea, developed in his study of Victorian hauntings, that '[t]he haunting process puts into play a disruptive structure, or, to consider this another way, recalling the idea of the phantom or phantasm as "gap", a disruption that is other to the familiarity of particular structures' (2002, p. 6). Wolfreys is right in stating that the ghost is a disruption, an anomaly in time and space, but contemporary wet ghosts constitute not the gap,[32] but the leak flowing from the gap. Because the ghostly leak is liquid and therefore material, the ghost cannot just be a 'gap,' a non-space within the real space. For instance, at the end of the post-millennial version of *La Llorona*, the ghost ultimately becomes her leaks, vanquished only when she is stabbed with a cross in the chest.[33] As black liquid – like that of her tears – leaks from the wound, the Llorona stumbles back and slowly liquefies into the black fluid of her tears, whirling in the air and, ultimately, dropping to the floor, leaving behind the cross, as an echo to the blade of the earlier version. The contemporary Llorona therefore becomes entirely engulfed by her oil-like tears, becoming dark Gothic liquid herself. From wet and leaking ghost, she becomes fluid, before ending up as nothing but a liquid trace of the disruption she caused. This is also addressed, on a symbolic level, in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* where the Lady of the Lake emerges from the property's lake at night and walks to her former bedroom hoping to find her daughter. When she cannot find her, she walks back the same way to the lake. As she walks, she kills whoever stands in her path. In the penultimate episode of the series, the Lady of the Lake reaches the bedroom and remembers as she stares at the bed that she is long dead, and her daughter long gone. Tears roll down her cheek as the narrator explains that '[t]he remembering itself was injury anew' ('The Romance of Certain Old Clothes', 2020), suggesting that the injury (a fissure) triggers the crying of the ghost. The remembering which causes the fissure actualises the ghost, even to herself. Before she remembers, the Lady of the Lake walks the grounds as if she were still Lady of the Manor. The tear thus crystallises her own position as abnormal leak within the walls of what was once her home. Bodily

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[32] Similarly, Balanzategui sees Santi in *The Devil's Backbone* as a 'fissure in the coherence of the film's diegetic world' (2018, p. 136).

[33] In the 1960 film, as the curse breaks and the Llorona does not kill the boy she meant to, she fades away, leaving behind only the blade she was threateningly holding over the child. Despite her solidly human appearance throughout the film, she disappears in the spectral and immaterial way of the ethereal ghost: a slowly fading-out superimposition.

liquids such as blood and tears, and burial liquids such as clay and water create the materiality of the ghost as body but also as presence (leak) rather than absence (gap).

Fig. 2.27: The death of La Llorona in the 1960 version (top) and the 2019 version (bottom).

2.3 Dead Women Flowing: Existing in the Dark Space

2.3.1 Female Ghosts and Water

  The ghost as leak necessarily invokes the notion of femininity, with the wet ghost being unsurprisingly overwhelmingly female. In *Crimson Peak, Dark Shadows, The Lodgers, The Curse*

of La Llorona and *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, there is a total of 21 ghosts.[34] Out of these 21 ghosts, 15 have a physical link to water (they look wet or are leaky). Out of these 15 ghosts, 12 are female. This only leaves the male ancestors and attorney of *The Lodgers* and Thomas Sharpe from *Crimson Peak*. While the male ghosts of *The Lodgers* stand as exceptions in the wet ghost gendering, Thomas Sharpe's tears and bloody leaks reinforce his situating in a feminised role within the film, as he displays 'attributes typically considered to be feminine – submission, compassion and empathy' (Pedro, 2020, p. 88) and, arguably, leakiness. These female or feminised wet ghosts thus embody and reinforce the constructed link between women and water, in particular, in death. Bachelard, studying the link between womanly death and water in his *L'Eau et les rêves*, with the often-used example of *Hamlet*'s Ophelia, argues that '[l]'eau qui est la patrie des nymphes vivantes est aussi la patrie des nymphes mortes. Elle est la vraie matière de la mort bien féminine [Water, which is the homeland of living nymphs, is also that of dead nymphs. It is the true matter of the specifically female death]' (1961, p. 111). Even, and, perhaps, particularly in death, women are associated with water. Klaus Theweleit, in his seminal study of fascist literature, suggests that the association of women and water spreads far and wide as he draws a list of some of the manifestations of this association in world literature:

> Over and over again: the women-in-the-water; woman as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass through, with tributaries, pools, surfs, and deltas; woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep, as a cup of bubbling body fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam, as a dark place ringed with Pacific ridges; love as the foam from the collision of two waves, as a sea voyage, a slow ebbing, a fish-catch, a storm; love as a process that washes people up as flotsam, smoothing the sea again; where we swim in the divine song of the sea knowing no laws, one fish, two fish; where we are part of every ocean, which is part of every vagina. (1987, p. 283)

The mere length of Theweleit's list suggests the constant association between women and water in literature alone, an association which of course spreads through other media (film, television, music, etc.). These occurrences are neither fortuitous nor culturally constructed according to him; they are phylogenetic. Using the work of feminist writer Elaine Morgan, Theweleit explains that '[w]hile searching for the fundamental changes that made apes into humans, Morgan discovered

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[34] As the ancestors of *The Lodgers* die as a pair (one male and one female) and their exact number is unknown, they are counted as an exemplary one female and one male for simplification purposes. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* features the ghost of a child whose gender is unspecified.

that it was "she," the female ape, *and none other,* who had taken that final step. She took it as an escape route that led to the sea' (1987, p. 289). According to Morgan's contested Aquatic Ape Hypothesis, women led the way to evolution. While Morgan's hypothesis does not stand scientifically, its use by Theweleit, to explain the association between women and water and the mythology of the woman in water, hints at the span of this cultural association outside the arts and into scientific and anthropological theory, permeating a collective unconscious.

Not mentioned in Theweleit's list of images of women in or as water is the cultural understanding of women as flowing, which poses that 'supposedly, the female body is intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive' (Price & Shildrick, 2010, p. 2). Leaks such as menses, tears, amniotic fluid, postnatal urine, or milk denote an uncontrollable fluidity which is specifically attributed to women. This leads the rare studies of leakiness in ghosts to read the motif through a gendered spectrum and, as is often the case in horror studies since Creed's *Monstrous Feminine* (1993), through the maternal. Although valid, such readings can be reductive and potentially problematic when encountering a liquid ghost which is not a mother (e.g., Josette from *Dark Shadows,* Rebecca from *Bly Manor,* or three of the ghosts from *Crimson Peak*). For instance, Roberts links the motif of the female leaky ghost to the maternal, attributing the water imagery to a symbolism of the womb (2018). Undeniably, female ghosts are often reduced to the trope of the wronged mother, with cases such as the Llorona andthe Woman in Black (both analysed by Roberts) championing the concept. Thus, Roberts argues that

> [f]emale spirits frequently emerge from water, signifying their rebirth as ghosts. At the same time, the bodies of water represent the female ghost's maternal focus. […] The use of water as a defining characteristic also evokes the last event before birth, the amniotic sac breaking in the womb. (2018, p. 10)

The 'rebirth' and the 'amniotic sac breaking in the womb' underline the intrinsic leakiness of the female body as understood through motherhood. The female ghost's link to water is therefore read in terms of her gender and her traditionally assigned role within said gender. Such a reading suggests that female ghosts can only exist and be understood as mothers.

Reading the wet ghost through a gendered spectrum reinforces the cultural dichotomy between male body as solid and stable, and female body as fluid and leaking, a dichotomy famously underlined by Irigaray in her study of the mechanics of fluids within a phallocentric logic and

language (1985, pp. 106-118). As suggested by the name of Irigaray's chapter, 'The Mechanics of Fluids', the association between women and water in fact extends an association between femininity and a vaguer form of fluidity, which includes, but is in no way limited to, water. Female bodies are uncontestably easily read as more fluid since, with all other forms of fluidity (sweat, urine, saliva, sexual fluids, etc.) accepted as equivalent in male and female bodies, feminine fluids such as menses, lactation, post-partum leaks, constitute a fluidity in excess of the female body in contrast to the male body.

Such dichotomic and gender-binary readings are therefore often transcended in studies of specific fluids, such as in Neimanis' analysis of water. Neimanis demonstrates that this association between the feminine and water is necessarily reductive as, regardless of gender, '*we are all bodies of water*' (2017, p. 66) [emphasis in the original], i.e., bodies born out of water (terrestrial or maternal), evolving in water (evolutionary or atmospheric), and made of water. We are all bodies of water constantly seeping into other bodies of water who, in turn seep into us. As Neimanis explains, '[w]e are created in water, we gestate in water, we are born into an atmosphere of the same water although more diffuse, we take in water, we harbour it, it sustains and protects us, it leaves us … at the same time as we are always, to some extent, in it' (2017, p. 86). We are all bodies of water, with all the leaks and loss and porousness that it involves. Even the often-mentioned association of the feminine with gestational waters remains reductive since, as Neimanis argues, all waters are gestational: 'maternal bodies are just one actualization of a more expansive gestationality as a capacity that all bodies of water share. Gestationality does not begin and end with the human, nor with a (heteronormatively inflected) female one at that. Gestationality is something we learn – something we repeat, differently – from water' (2017, p. 118). This movement away from gender as the core concept and towards water as core concept of analysis allows Neimanis to challenge gendered readings and provide a material and universal reading of gestationality, a movement repeated and applied to ghosts in the present study. The wet ghost does not express the culturally assigned materiality of its gender, but the materiality of water, i.e., the ghost is not leaky or wet because it is female, but because it is a body of water intertwined with the water it emerges from. This focus shifts the approach to the wet ghost and its related waters from abstraction (water primarily understood as symbolic fluidity) to material (the ghost embodies the materiality of the water). From there, the wet/leaky ghost is not an expression of femininity/motherhood as fluid, but a material extension of the water and its qualities. Therefore, Price and Shildrick's aforementioned approach of the ghost as 'unpredictable, leaky and disruptive'

(2010, p. 2) does not relate to its coding as female but to its coding as aqueous. The unpredictability, leakiness and disruptiveness of water displayed by accelerating floods, draughts, swollen rivers, contamination, pollution, rising toxicity, etc., is the real threat.

From there, the wet ghost constitutes an overspill of the threatening waters, crystallising the fixation of the flow and the implacability of the flood. In the case of *The Haunting of Bly Manor,* the Lady of the Lake's stubborn nightly walks, always following the same path, suggest her extending of the lake into a flow and her transcending gender to become unstoppable leak. As Theweleit states, '[f]lows have no *specific* object. The first goal of flowing is simply that it happen (and only later that it seek something out)' (1987, p. 268). Just like a flow, the Lady of the Lake has 'no specific object'; she simply walks. As stated by the narrator, 'one night she found a child in her daughter's old bed, and could not remember who [*sic*] she had been hoping to see. She had only the faint notion that she had walked this far hoping to find a child, and here was a child' ('The Romance of Certain Old Clothes', 2020). Just like a flow, the Lady of the Lake is channelled to walk her path, even after having forgotten why she is walking it. Later in the episode, the Lady is described as 'not a woman at all, not a person at all, not a name or a face. Just need' ('The Romance of Certain Old Clothes', 2020). Not female or even human anymore, the ghost is reduced to a thoughtless force both channelled by and resolutely flowing towards a goal that eludes her. Overall, in a time of liquid threats, the monstrous feminine is not only reinforced but replaced by the monstrous aqueous. These ghosts are not threatening because they are coded as female, they are threatening because they embody water in all its menacing powers as an unpredictable, leaky and disruptive force.

As such, water is, in turn, ghostly. It encapsulates the threatening qualities of the ghostly in its agency, but also, in its very nature. Indeed, water exists in different states and forms which are both, like the ghost, of the past and the present. As Janine MacLeod explains in a chapter on water and the material imagination, water is characterised by its 'capacity to communicate between the living, the dead, and the unborn' (2013, p. 41). Because the quantity of water on Earth remains constant, the glass of water that I drink is as ancient as it is new, as much of the past as it is of the present and future. It was another water, which was also the same water and will be a different water, which will also always be the same, continually reorganising, reordering and relocating itself (Neimanis, 2017, p. 66). Thus, just like ghosts, water is past and present, a different materialisation of the same entity bridging time. Therefore, in the Gothic, watery ghosts and ghostly waters echo,

animate, and materialise each other as the ghost embodies the water and the water fleshes out the ghost, reinforcing and expanding each other's threatening qualities.

2.3.2 The Gothic Substance-Space: Resurfacing and Endless Flowing

As intertwined and synecdochical entities, water, women and ghosts often meet in the narrative's climax. A recurring scene in the Gothic film shows a woman floating deep underwater, in a dark and indeterminate space. In the submerged shot, space and time stretch and narration comes to a halt, until the character comes back to the surface – if they do, as will be addressed. The deep Gothic space is therefore the space of suspension: suspension of the body, floating halfway between surface and depth, but also suspension of space and time, which extend for the duration of the underwater scene. The scene presents the underwater world as deep, slow and boundless, thus correlating with what Bachelard, in his study of space, calls an 'espace-substance, un espace à une dimension [substance-space, a one-dimensional space]' which also 'porte le signe de l'illimité [bears the sign of the limitless]' (1961, p. 186). While Bachelard applies the notion of *espace-substance* to the sea, any deep space of water can become *espace-substance* as water and depth are the essential elements of this one-dimensional and limitless space.

In terms of space, in the deep substance-space, water and the consequential darkness (light does not travel to the overtly hyperbolised depth of the liquid space) erase and replace all markers of space, thus creating a limitless field. Darkness gradually replaces spatial markers, filling the space with shadows of 'death, cold, occlusion, mystery and uncertainty' (Aldana Reyes, 2020, p. 19), and thus, liquid fear. We face what Bachelard calls 'l'absolu de la profondeur [the absolute depth]' (1961, p. 186), a depth which cannot be measured anymore. In the climactic scene of *The Lodgers*, Rachel floats in an underwater void, her white skin covered in a white dress, surrounded by nothing but darkness (fig. 2.28). The light focuses on her, leaving the dark watery space surrounding her completely indeterminable, boundless and unfathomable as emphasised by the long shot minimising the character and expanding the space. Only when Rachel later swims back to the surface, can markers of space such as light, colours and things (trees, the sky etc…) reappear, marking the exit from the substance-space. In *The Curse of La Llorona*, the restricted space of the swimming pool also becomes a dark and limitless space as soon as Anna dives in to retrieve her daughter taken by la Llorona (fig. 2.29). The limited light provided by her flashlight does not pierce the darkness of this manufactured depth. In *Dark Shadows,* the final shot of the film travels through the ocean's floor, hinting at spatial markers such as algae, to reach Julia Hoffman (the family's

psychiatrist), anchored to said floor. The close-up shot on the character's opening eyes (hinting at her newly acquired vampirism) creates this indeterminate space by erasing all visible markers (fig. 2.30). In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, Rebecca enters the lake and the combination of medium close up and dark monochromatic palette create an impression of 'nowhereness' as she drowns (fig. 2.31).

While the liquid space is a space of loss (loss of light, of spatial cognition, etc.), it is only so because it is filled with water, a water which affects bodies to challenge space even further. Up and down, left and right, do not exist anymore especially since the natural laws of physics appear to be suspended as water is not visible on screen, only suggested through movements as, when submerged, 'humans and nonhumans alike can travel horizontally, vertically, diagonally through space' (Past, 2013, p. 60). The disorientation through the loss of space markers is thus reinforced by the altered physical abilities of the protagonist. For instance, in *The Lodgers*, the liquid space lies under the house, filling an environment which is a reversed replica of the family mansion, with the underwater floor at ground level and the ceiling deep within the earth. What was up can be down in the substance-space. Furthermore, in every case, except with the high contrast palette of *The Lodgers*, the very contours of the characters become blurry through darkness, and one cannot be sure where the space ends and the body begins. The substance-space thus seeps into the characters.

Fig. 2.28: Rachel in *The Lodgers*.

Fig. 2.29: Anna in *The Curse of La Llorona*.

Fig. 2.30: Julia Hoffman in *Dark Shadows*.
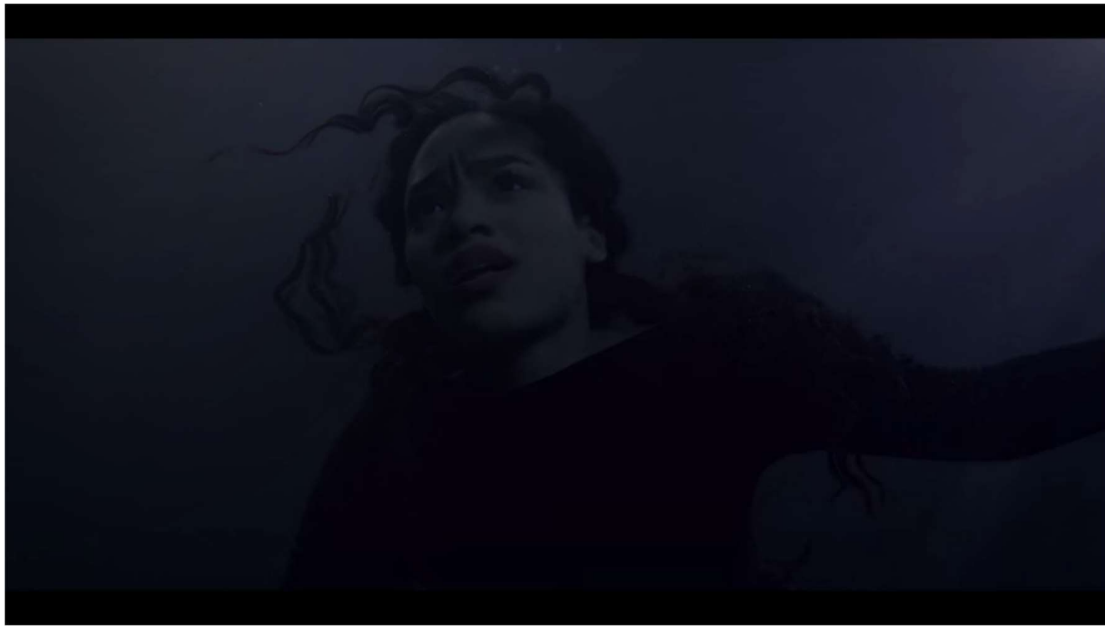
Fig. 2.31: Rebecca in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*.

With this erasing of space comes the erasing of time. The absolute of space necessarily becomes the absolute of time. As Pascal Auger explains about his 'espace quelconque,' an indeterminate locus with the capacity to break down both time and space made famous by Deleuze in his *Cinema 1*,[35]

> Un lieu est aussi du temps, le temps impliqué dans ce lieu. Quand je parle d'un espace, du temps est lié à cet espace. […] Dans un lieu en perspective, très souvent, la profondeur de champ donne aussi la profondeur du temps : le personnage s'enfonce dans l'image et il s'enfonce dans la profondeur du temps. C'est une perspective temporelle. [A space is also time, the time implied in said space. When I speak of a space, time is linked to this space. […] In a space in perspective, often, the depth of field also gives away the depth of time: the character moves deeper in the shot and they move deeper in the time depth. It is a temporal perspective.] (cited in Rousseau, 2011, p. 17)

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[35] Deleuze's obscure mention of the 'espace quelconque' as 'un terme de Pascal Augé [Pascal Augé's term]' (1983, p. 154) created a long line of misattribution of the original concept. Critics such as Réda Bensmaia (1997) and Jeffrey A. Bell (1997) have mistakenly attributed to Marc Augé and his work on the 'non-lieux [non-place]' (1992). However, Augé never mentions the espace quelconque and his notion of 'non-lieux' corresponds to modern spaces with no other function than that of passing through (trains, motorways, stations, etc.). The term actually belongs to Pascal Auger, former student of Deleuze and filmmaker (see Rousseau, 2011).

As a result, the absence of perspective in the substance-space means that time also cannot be discerned. Darkness erases the time of day and, as it erases space, I cannot tell how far or close things are, nor how long they would take to reach. The only visible marker of time left, the body, is also no longer reliable. The buoyancy of the water slows down light and movement, and everything slows down (Past, 2009, p. 57). In a sense, life is suspended as the breathing and moving body evolves in and against the water. As Elena Past explains in a study on Mediterranean cinema, underwater, for the characters of *Respiro* (dir. Emanuele Crialese, 2002), '[l]ife stops temporarily – for since they are not breathing, they are in a sense not quite living' (2009, p. 58). The substance-space suspends life itself. In *The Lodgers*, for instance, when Rachel floats in the void, her eyes are closed and her skin is white, in stark contrast with the liquid space around her. The slow-motion effect also accentuates the stillness of the underwater world. As everything slows down, life stops. Everything lies still in the deep space.

As a watery space, the substance-space is therefore an altered space where, as Past argues about the sea, the 'particular qualities of water', such as 'surface tension, different viscosity, different reflectivity, waves, ripples', transform the environment and its dwellers (2013, p. 60). As the physicality of things changes (weights are lighter, movements elongated, sounds dampened etc.), the substance-space becomes a space where, '[t]he mechanics of existence are altered' (Past, 2009, p. 57). This alteration of the very mechanics of existence allows for this other space to shelter the coexistence of life and death, not only *within* the character (Rachel who is seemingly dead or Julia who is now living-dead), but also *between* the living and the dead. With its own a-spatiality and a-temporality, it becomes the space of the confrontation with the ghostly other. Hence, in *The Lodgers*, the only time the ghosts are seen head-on and dangerous – they take Sean in the depths with them – is in the deep space scene with Rachel (fig. 2.32). In *The Curse of La Llorona*, as Anna tries to save her daughter, the Llorona attacks, trying to drown both (fig. 2. 33). In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, Rebecca, possessed by Peter's ghost, and, in a sense, already living dead, meets her demise.

Fig. 2.32: Sean is taken by the ghosts into the depths in *The Lodgers.*

Fig. 2.33: Attack of the ghost underwater in *The Curse of La Llorona.*

From this confrontation with and within the altered space, the characters transform. Noticeably, the characters immersed in the water – and who resurface – are female. Charles S. Ross, in his study of underwater women in Shakespearian films, calls this particular image the 'trope of the underwater woman' (2009, p. 47), where

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a figure, usually a woman, floats underwater, silently and in slow motion, and then emerges, often as a changed person or in different circumstances. […] [T]he immersion and surfacing of a woman does not express a complaint about a specific man, but a more general grievance about the way women are forced to exist in the world. (2009, p. 36)

In Ross' approach, the oppressed woman is submerged and, as she resurfaces, she gains emancipation. Her victory over the water allows her to be re-born. Ross continues by saying that water or drowning become 'a metaphor for whatever oppresses women' (2009, p. 37). In the western tradition of water as the washing away of sins in baptism, this specifically female 'baptism' becomes a washing away of limitations. This topos is also mentioned in Past's works on Mediterranean cinema, where she explains that immersion becomes a 'symbolic liberation from earthly concerns' (2009, p. 57) as well as a way 'to avoid the fixity that would come with capitulating to the status quo' (2013, p. 59). The climax of *The Lodgers* corresponds exactly to this trope. Rachel first tries to open the main door and escape with her love interest, Sean. When the door will not open, she walks backwards and realises 'It's a trap. They'd never let us', right before falling through the hatch to the underwater world. After her time in the substance-space and the loss of Sean to the ancestors, Rachel re-surfaces in the property lake. She walks into the mansion to say goodbye to her dying brother and explains, 'You'll be free soon. We both will' before leaving the estate. Rachel therefore frees herself of the hold of her ancestors and her family home, as well as the weight of male attraction (her brother's and Sean's) towards her. She emerges independent, and free to leave the mansion behind. In *The Curse of La Llorona*, Anna struggles against la Llorona in the pool and manages to steal the ghost's necklace. Although Anna is not strictly speaking emancipated after the underwater fight, the balance of powers has changed as the necklace gives her an advantage in the fight against the ghost. In the climax, the necklace works as a distraction, giving Anna enough time to save her children. The immersion into the dark and haunted waters and the subsequent return to the surface functions as a cleansing experience, a victory over and an escape from the oppressive body. Dwell in the dark waters and you become part of them. Emerge and you are cleansed, re-born.[36] The substance-space is thus at once a space of struggle (against the depth, the materiality of the water and against the past) and of liberation.

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[36] The idea of a re-birth of the female through a liquid locus invites psychoanalytical considerations of the non-space as motherly space, a return to the womb for a new, liberated life. While valid, such an approach rids the deep space of the consideration of the materiality of the space and its implications.

However, characters do not always resurface. This inability of some female characters to resurface and thus emancipate themselves relates to the substance-space as a space of threatening stagnation. In her study of Japanese films and their remakes, Valerie Wee mentions that the drowning or burial of women in stagnant water constitutes a possible symbol of their surrounding stagnant society or culture (2014, p. 107). Although Wee does not elaborate on this particular idea, the stagnant waters indeed symbolise stagnation, perhaps not of society as a whole in this Western context, but of women. In this sense, the women who do not escape the substance-space participate in the motif of the 'endlessly flowing woman' (Theweleit, 1987, p. 380), which was created, according to Theweleit, during the Enlightenment. Theweleit uses this concept in terms of male oppressive desire upon women as men 'encode their own desire, their own Utopias, their own yearning to be free of boundaries' with this notion (1987, p. 380). This idea of the feminine is not attainable since, '[a]s they continued to measure every woman against an image of 'woman,' every woman ran up against a set of expectations that were not derived from her, but that she was, nonetheless, supposed to fulfill' (Theweleit, 1987, p. 381). This 'endlessly flowing woman' thus becomes a set of expectations which cannot be reached, and, as such, women can either free themselves from them (reach back to the surface) or succumb to them (sink to the depths). In the case of *Dark Shadows*, Julia Hoffman does not escape the substance-space. Although the psychiatrist has indeed transformed from human to vampire, thus surviving while anchored to the ocean floor, she does not reach an emancipated state. The male figures that sent her to the bottom of the sea, Barnabas the vampire and his servant, deny her dreams by attempting to kill her and dumping her into the sea. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, Rebecca has dreams of becoming a barrister. As Peter, her lover, goes missing, taken by the Lady of the Lake,[37] the female gardener urges her to go and pursue her dreams. This potential emancipation is annihilated when Peter tricks Rebecca, possesses her body and walks into the lake. A shot of Rebecca's body floating in the deep space of the lake is quickly followed by her sinking to the bottom, symbolising her aborted dreams.

In a similar way, Hannah, the housekeeper, is pushed by Miles – again, possessed by Peter – into a well where her body remains throughout the series while her soul still walks the grounds. The well, as a water-coded space with a heightened sense of claustrophobic imprisonment and violence, traps Hannah in Bly Manor because of her social class, as often mentioned by Peter, and her unfaithful husband who abandoned her. Therefore, her employer's offer to stay 'forever' if she

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[37] Peter is thus also stopped in his ambitions to climb the social ladder by fleeing to America with Rebecca. However, Peter is never pictured floating in the deep-space, suggesting the different treatment of male and female characters.

needs to becomes a tragic literalisation of the housekeeper's situation. Any possibility of advancement, such as the cook's mention of eloping to Paris with her, is denied. This clear gendering of the space is common in Horror texts where ambitious or threatening women are often pushed into wells, famously in *The Ring* (2002) where a father pushes his talented psychic daughter at the bottom of a well, or more recently in *1922* (dir. Zak Hilditch, 2017), as a husband refusing to let his wife leave for the city kills her and drops her body in their farm's well. The trope is therefore often approached in psychoanalytical terms, where the well is constructed as the opposite of the tower and therefore as an anti-phallic space, the reversed tower (Rachilde, 1918, p. 33).[38] Following this idea, Dúnlaith Bird states in her study of female wartime writing that 'phallic symbolism is swallowed by the dark womblike entrance of the well, its walls dripping, covered in fungus and slime' (2014, p. 25). This psychoanalytical reading of the well stands not only on the phallus/vagina dichotomy but on the grotesque, i.e., cavernous, qualities traditionally associated with the female body (Russo, 1994, p. 2). Oceans, as mentioned by Theweleit above, and lakes can also function as symbolic female bodies, especially if they are constructed in opposition to penetrative weapons wielded by men (vampire fangs in *Dark Shadows*, a knife in *The Lodgers*, possession in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*). In her study of *Peter Pan*, Kirsten Stirling explains the sexual quality of lagoon water as an 'enveloping and suffocating female environment' as opposed to the 'phallic symbolism of the arrow' of the Lost Boys (2012, p. 55). Therefore, by sending women back to the space of their material and abject bodies, male characters fill the anti-phallic hole. As women decompose and rot, they confound themselves with the space, thus comforting the male character's vision of these ambitious women as abject. However, the well or watery space is also a space of social ab-jection. Being thrown down wells and drowned in lakes, women are stopped from any form of advancement. Their very femininity stops them from rising and condemns them to rot at the bottom of the social ladder as men watch from above. These images of female stagnation are therefore embedded in perceptions of female bodiliness. Women are denied social mobility by being sent back to their symbolic bodies. A man throwing a woman in a lake or down a well is reminding her that, on the basis of her body, she is not allowed social mobility. For trying to bypass the patriarchal rules of their class and gender, these defiant women are condemned to stagnate and drown.

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[38] See also Bernheimer (1984) for a similar approach.

2.3.3 Point de Cri and Underwater Scream

As women rise and fall in the deep space, a scream often frames their time in suspension. The deep space exists as a silent space-time before or after the submerged character screams, in both *The Lodgers* and *The Curse of La Llorona* aforementioned, but also in the climax of *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, for instance. The screams in these underwater sequences participate in Michel Chion's concept of 'le point de cri [the screaming point]' (1982, p. 76). A scholar of cinematic music and sounds, Chion defines the *point de cri* as

> quelque chose qui jaillit généralement de la bouche d'une femme, qui n'est d'ailleurs pas forcément entendu, mais qui surtout doit tomber *à point nommé*, exploser à un moment précis, au carrefour de lignes convergentes, […] mais calculé pour donner à ce point son maximum impact [something that generally gushes from a woman's mouth, which is not necessarily heard, but which most importantly must take place at a *specific* time, explode at a precise moment, at the crossroads of converging lines, […] but thought through to give this time its maximum impact] (1982, p. 76).

The *point de cri* is not a specifically underwater motif. Chion indeed cites Sally in *Blow-Out* (dir. Brian de Palma, 1981) or Marion in *Psycho* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)[39] as key examples of the motif. However, the *point de cri* shares certain narrative echoes with what I call the underwater scream, namely its female source and its nodal – often climactic – position in the narrative. Chion underlines the importance of the narrative place of the scream as '[l]'expression de *point de cri* vise à souligner que ce n'est pas seulement la substance, la modulation de ce cri qui est importante, que sa place [the expression *screaming point* underlines that it is not only the substance, the modulation of this scream which matters, but also its place]' (1982, p. 77). *The Curse of La Llorona*, for instance, distinctly features a *point de cri* and an underwater scream. The underwater scream takes place in the family pool, as Anna rescues her drowning daughter from the hands of the crying ghost. In doing so she encounters the evil spirit and they engage in an underwater confrontation with indistinct and mixing screams from both characters. However, the *point de cri* lies in the climax of the film when the Llorona screams as she attacks the family one last time. This constitutes the converging point in the narrative where the mothers confront each other over the children and the Llorona becomes aware of her own monstrosity.

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[39] Although Marion is in the shower, she is not underwater, i.e., her scream is not affected by the water.

Another text which emphasises the dichotomic possibilities of the motifs is *The Haunting of Bly Manor* where, again, there is a 'dry' and a 'wet' climactic scream. The first significant scream emerges from Flora, in the penultimate episode of the series ('The Romance of Certain Old Clothes', 2020). This scream constitutes the *point de cri*, setting the climax in motion. The au-pair, Dani, finally aware of the ghostly presences, decides to run away from the manor with Flora, who ferociously protests as her brother is left behind. As they reach the garden alley, the Lady of the Lake suddenly appears and grabs the au pair by the throat. Flora is left helpless, and a medium shot shows her opening her mouth wide as a shrill scream escapes from her throat (fig. 2.34). This orthodox *point de cri* fulfils all the conditions of the motif. It is uttered by a scared female character, and it is situated at a nodal point in the narrative where all is revealed, leading to the attempted escape and, in turn, to Dani being taken. The nodal position of the scream is even materialised by the au-pair finally standing in the literal path the Lady of the Lake takes every night. Furthermore, it also constitutes an 'absolu sonore [sound absolute]' (1982, p. 78), as a deafening sound saturating the soundtrack. As it carries over from the shot of Flora screaming to the counter shot of Dani being taken, it also displays its own limitlessness.

Fig. 2.34: Flora from *The Haunting of Bly Manor* as the limitless *point de cri.*

Nevertheless, a second scream, an underwater scream, features in the final episode of the series ('The Beast in the Jungle', 2020). Perhaps less climactic than concluding, this scream takes place in the epilogue of the embedded narrative, as Jamie tells the story of what happened after

Dani rescued Flora from the Lady of the Lake by absorbing and imprisoning her ghost. Years later, as the Lady of the Lake starts to take over Dani's mind, the au pair surrenders and goes to rest at the bottom of the lake. As her wife, Jamie, goes looking for her in Bly Manor, she dives into the murky waters of the lake. Finding Dani lying at the bottom of the lake, she screams the incantation 'It's you, it's me, it's us' in an attempt to take her wife's place, in vain (fig. 2.35). Thus, this scream constitutes less an expression of fear than a surrender to the forces of the Lady of the Lake. It seals Dani's fate as the new and harmless Lady of the Lake, bringing the narrative to its conclusion. The underwater scream is thus not necessarily the most prominent nodal scream of the narrative, but still lies in a converging place within the narrative structure.

Fig. 2.35: Jamie's underwater scream.

Nevertheless, there is another key distinction between the underwater scream and the *point de cri* relating to the use of sounds and their symbolisms within the greater narrative. While the *point de cri* has liberating capacities, the underwater scream is confining. The sound in the underwater scream reflects the incapacity of the characters to fight back against evil. When the scream is underwater, it is swallowed by the fluid as the voice's acoustic properties change underwater and sounds scatter. Water hinders the voice as it swallows everything whole. It is silencing not only as it forces its way inside the characters' mouths as they struggle on the surface, but also as they scream underwater. The underwater scream is denied. Taking the example of Jamie's scream in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, in terms of sounds, her scream is almost entirely

muffled, especially when compared to Flora's deafening *cri*. Underwater, the precise words screamed by Jamie are emphasised, but indirectly, through the voice-over (of older Jamie as an intra- and homo-diegetic narrator telling her own story). However, her words as she screams them underwater remain strikingly strangled. The hierarchy of the soundtrack from what is most heard to what is least heard would therefore work as follow: 1) voice-over, 2) music and 3) scream/bubbles. Her words are dampened, mixed with the air bubbles floating back to the surface. The diegetic dialogue (young Jamie begging to take Dani's place) which should occupy the top of the sound hierarchy is defeated by extra-diegetic sounds (the voice-over and the musical score) and competes with other diegetic sounds (the bubbles), which suggests that the watery environment has complete primacy over the protagonists. The bubbles further underline this powerlessness as they constitute the materialisation through emptiness of this muffled voice. Jamie's screams are but beads of nothingness.

However, as soon as Jamie drags herself out of the water, diegetic sounds become clear again. The mere sound of her breathing takes over the soundtrack, thus further underlining the fact that the words she screamed and willed 'with everything she had' ('The Beast in the Jungle', 2020) were left unheard. This change in the hierarchy of the soundtrack echoes the events in which the sounds are anchored. As Dani and the Lady of the Lake have become one, Dani refuses to hear the words and sacrificial pleas of her wife. The environment echoes her stubborn refusal. Dani refuses to listen and thus the water refuses to let the words out, and the soundtrack refuses to let the screams resonate. In *The Woman in Black: Angel of Death*, the climactic scene also revolves around a loss and sacrifice underwater, and the underwater scream is replaced by the high-pitched sound of a flute as a child is dragged underwater by the Woman in Black. This underlines the failure of the voice, replaced by the extra-diegetic score. Perhaps a revelation of expectations, the closed captioning on the streaming platform Netflix captions the musical sounds as '[screaming]'. Gothic water thus renders the scream voiceless. As it takes away the breath, it takes away the scream which could liberate the screamer. While the scream of the *point de cri* is deafening, powerful and absolute, and corresponds to what Chion describes as a 'sortie de l'être [exit from the self]' (1982, p. 78), the underwater scream is muffled, pushed back within the self as it is constricted by the water. The water renders the voice inefficient. It is heard to an extent but rendered useless since, as the breath fails, so does the voice.

Therefore, the underwater scream is a scream of surrender expressing the powerlessness of the human character against the wet ghost. It expresses loss of breath, loss of control, and loss of others as, in most cases, the scream indicates the loss of another character to the evil lurking under the surface. In *The Lodgers,* Sean is dragged down as Rachel screams in vain to get him back. In *The Woman in Black: Angel of Death*, it is Harry, another male love interest, who is taken as *he* screams for Eve and the child to escape. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor,* it is Dani who stubbornly stays at the bottom of the lake as Jamie screams after her. The exception is *The Curse of La Llorona*, where Anna manages to rescue her daughter after her screams and confrontation with the ghost. However, just like in the other cases, the evil spirit is not defeated at the end of the film but merely avoided. The underwater scream is an admission of limitation. Hence, underwater, the voice is given back to the voiceless ghost. In *The Curse of La Llorona*, both the mother and the ghost scream as they fight in the pool, but only the scream of la Llorona is heard clearly, over the scream of the mother, hindered by the water acoustics and the air bubbles sound. This is even clearer in *The Lodgers* where the *point the cri* arises when the ghosts finally surround Rachel and allow her to confront her ancestors before her re-surfacing (fig. 2.36). The ghosts' disharmonious and moan-like screams break through the acousticophobic acoustics of Gothic water without the interference of the air bubbles sounds (fig. 2.37). In both cases, as the screams of the ghostly figures scatter in the water, they engulf and trap the protagonist. Water acoustics do not hinder the ghost; they make it more threatening. What lies under water speaks under water and thus owns the sonorous absolute. As their breathless screams underline, they cannot be completely defeated.

Fig. 2.36: Rachel's *point de cri* as underwater scream, silenced by the water.

Fig. 2.37: *The Lodgers'* underwater scream, the ghosts are unaffected by the environment.

This investigation into the overlooked surfaces and unseen depths of Gothic waters unveiled the wet deaths and ghosts resting within. Wet ghosts, inhabitants as well as material and symbolic extensions of their Gothic waters, always win against the land-dwelling human characters. And through them, to return to the opening of this chapter, Gothic water always wins. The ghosts' bodies

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of water threaten the human characters just like water-related catastrophes threaten our way of life. What the Gothic text hints at through agential waters and wet ghosts is that threatening bodies of water have always already won and that our vulnerable bodies of water are always already theirs. And together, our bodies of water seep from other bodies of water and into others. It is now but a question of time for the salty tears and blood of our bodies of water to return to the salty waters of the rising seas, no matter how hard we cling to the surface and how deep we try to anchor the wet things that haunt us. What the Gothic tells us is that our blood will be seawater again.

Chapter 3. Spectacular Blood: Excess, Bodies and Things

> They sup on the flesh and the blood and the blood and the blood.
>
> Renfield in 'Perpetual Night', *Penny Dreadful*, 2016

Blood-stained gowns. Blood-leaking ghosts. Blood-splattered walls. Blood-sucking vampires. Blood experiments. Blood drops. Blood. The Gothic's overflowing affinity with blood manifests itself in many and widely different forms. Rebecca Munford, in her discussion of vampire narratives, underlines this connection when she explains that '[t]here has always been blood in the Gothic' (2005, p. 259). This chapter sets out to investigate the meanings and roles of Gothic blood, whose poetics remain largely understudied, because the mode's affinity with blood is overshadowed by its association with suggestion and aesthetics in scholarly work. As such, other modes are more promptly read through the prism of blood, such as violent films (see Prince, 2003; Rødje, 2016) and gore cinema (Rouyer, 1997), in both of which the depiction of the hematic liquid also traces a cultural and moral history of cinema. Beyond modes and genres, gender is a favoured spectrum of blood analysis, generating numerous monographic studies of female or menstrual blood, like Munford's study for instance (see also e.g., Rosewarne, 2012; Pisters, 2020), and, more rarely, studies of male blood (see e.g., King, 2012).

This chapter shows that Gothic blood in the chosen examples is spectacular while being divested of its necessary biological or abject properties. The Gothic often privileges complex depictions, use and symbolics of blood. Patricia Pisters explains, in her study of contemporary female horror directors, that blood can appear in dichotomic ways to either express horror 'by [the] spilling gallons of blood' in body horror, slasher and monster films, for instance, or to suggest it 'in much more subdued and restrained forms such as a creeping or eerie menace, a sudden nosebleed, an unexplained scratch' (2020, p. 196). Although useful, this distinction is – arguably like most dichotomic distinctions – a simplification, as it draws a dichotomy between the 'gallons of blood' of the gore genre (in which the vampire film might not be included as it often privileges blood stains and drops, as will be shown) and the 'restrained' blood of the more subtle, anxiety- and terror- inducing genres and modes, such as the Gothic. However, I will demonstrate that contemporary Gothic texts make use of both waves and drops of blood to highlight the liquefaction of fears, threats, and, more widely, modernity.

Contemporary Gothic and Horror texts also make use of different types of blood, from bright blood flowing from objects to dark blood sticking to bodies. Hence, the epitextual quotation opening this chapter, taken from the television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), where Renfield, Dracula's most devoted servant, details about his vampire masters' diet that 'they sup on the flesh and the blood and the blood and the blood' ('Perpetual Night, 2016). This quotation hides a recipe for the tendencies of the Gothic asone quarter flesh, three quarters blood. My argument is therefore not that the Gothic is only blood – especially in the postmodern tendency to mix modes and erase generic boundaries – but, more precisely, that the Gothic is often narratively, symbolically and structurally more centred on blood than on flesh.

Despite the significance of blood in the Gothic, its physicality is rarely discussed by horror scholarship. Pisters' rich enquiry into contemporary feminist horror is one of the rare studies to revolve around both the symbols and the aesthetics of blood. As she aptly explains, her book 'quite literally follows a trail of blood, in all its colours and viscosities, affective qualities and contextual meanings' (2020, p. 3). Nevertheless, Pisters' overtly gendered approach, a widespread tendency in scholarship as mentioned above, necessarily restricts the breadth of analysis. Although illuminating within the parameters of Pisters' study, a gendered approach does not comprehensively grasp the tendencies, motifs and tropes in the depiction of blood in horror film and television as it limits interpretations and heavily relies on the symbolism of blood rather than its actual role and depiction. Patricia MacCormack, in her study of *Cinesexuality* – the non-gendered attraction one feels towards films –, might provide an insight into this stubborn refusal to address bodily and physical aspects of the Gothic in scholarship. In reference to gore films and their treatment as Gothic through a focus on space rather than bodies, she states, '[i]t seems troubling that in order to give these gore films academic value, their 'lower' aspects seem to be repressed in favour of placing them within the more respectable horror genealogy' (2008, p. 100). The Gothic has historically been marginalised as a literary genre and, as a result, excluded from acceptable academic subjects until the 1980s (Botting, 1996, pp. 10-11), when its revaluation through extensive analysis such as David Punter's monograph (1980), caused the Gothic to climb its way up the academic ladder, later trampling other modes such as gore or torture porn. Perhaps this long quest toward 'respectability' means that Gothic scholarship strives to keep its hands clean of lowly bodily fluids and considerations. To get our hands dirty and approach the many facets of Gothic blood, this chapter explores Gothic blood's three distinctive properties as related to the

liquefaction of modernity: its (anti-)narrative role, its non-biological qualities and its beauty. First, in a structuralist optic, I approach Gothic blood as an integrated spectacle in contemporary texts, reading the overwhelming spectacle of blood rain or the restrained spectacle of the blood drop as materialisations of Bauman's liquid fear. I then relate this spectacular quality of Gothic blood to the debiologisation of blood wherein blood embodies the current fluidication of human relationships as objects and things become central to the mode as fluid commodities. From there, I demonstrate that debiologisation exercises a beautiful blood, depicted, not as an abject matter, but as a liquid with a fluid power of attraction over certain characters and facilitating a power of circulation for others. I focus primarily on the films *Byzantium* (2013), *Evil Dead* (2013), and the series of films *It* (2017-2019), as well as the televisual series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), *Dracula* (2020) and *Midnight Mass* (2021), but other echoing or contrasting texts will be put to work as necessary to enrich the analysis.

3.1 The Blood Spectacle: Drops and Torrents

3.1.1 Gothic Blood Spectacle: Between Excess and Integration

With its vibrant colour signaling danger and its unsettling flow, blood calls attention to its own visibility on screen. The few critics of cinematic blood, such as Rouyer and, more recently, Rødje, mark the 1960s as a watershed moment for blood representation. Broadly, until the early 1960s, blood functioned as a narrative element providing information contributing to the advancement of the plot, as Rødje argues in his study of blood in American cinema (2016, p. 1). From the late 1950s, films start to exploit blood images as sensational and the liquid appears for its own sake, in bright red blood inserts in otherwise black and white films such as *The Return of Dracula* (dir. Paul Landres, 1958) and *The Tingler* (dir. William Castle, 1959) (fig. 3.1). These texts thus constitute 'transitional markers in American cinema' (Rødje, 2016, p. 20). Spectacular blood images continue into the 1960s with the early gore films of American director Herschel Gordon Lewis, in which blood begins to operate 'in an exhibitionistic manner' (2016, p. x), i.e., blood is no longer an element integrated to the narrative; it appears as spectacular display. In the UK, Hammer concurrently uses blood as a spectacular display in the late 1950s. With Hammer's Gothic adaptations, the distinctive scarlet blood of the studios first flows in Frankenstein's science equipment in 1957 with *The Curse of Frankenstein* (dir. Terence Fisher) (fig. 3.2). In 1958, in Terence Fisher's *Dracula*, blood features as early as the opening credits with scarlet blood splashing over the engraved name on the Count's coffin. Later, the famous close-up shot on Dracula's blood-shot eyes and blood-covered fangs confirms this use of blood, before a gory use

of the liquid when Van Helsing drives a stake through Lucy's vampiric heart and blood spurts from her white gown in a series of spectacular close-up shots (fig. 3.3).
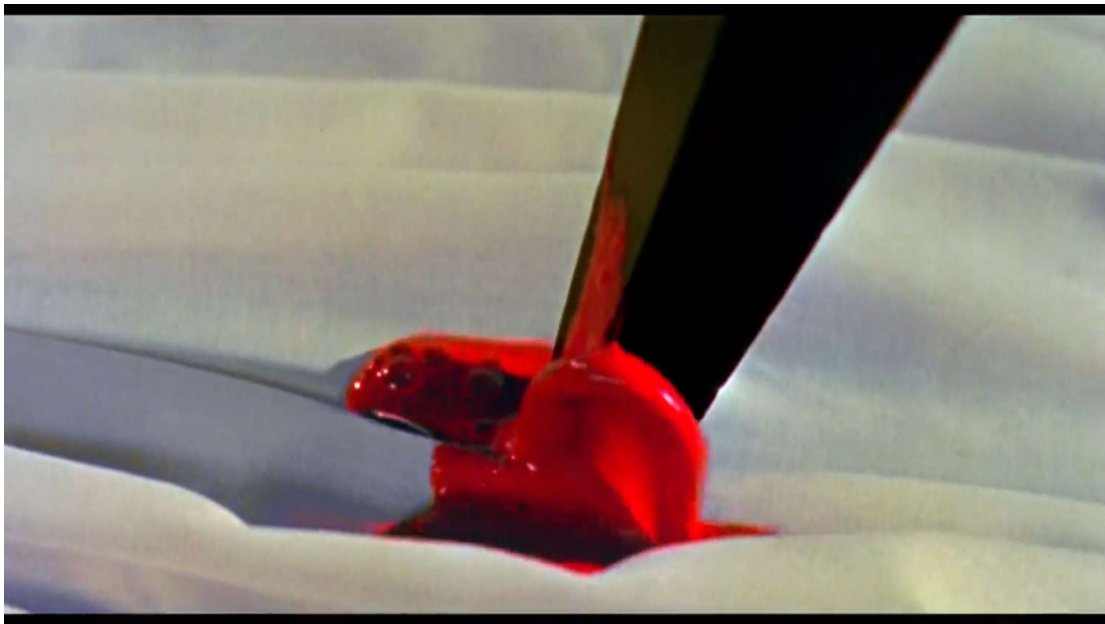
Fig. 3.1: Spectacular red blood insert in otherwise black-and-white films, *The Return of Dracula* **(1958) (top) and** *The Tingler* **(1959) (bottom).**
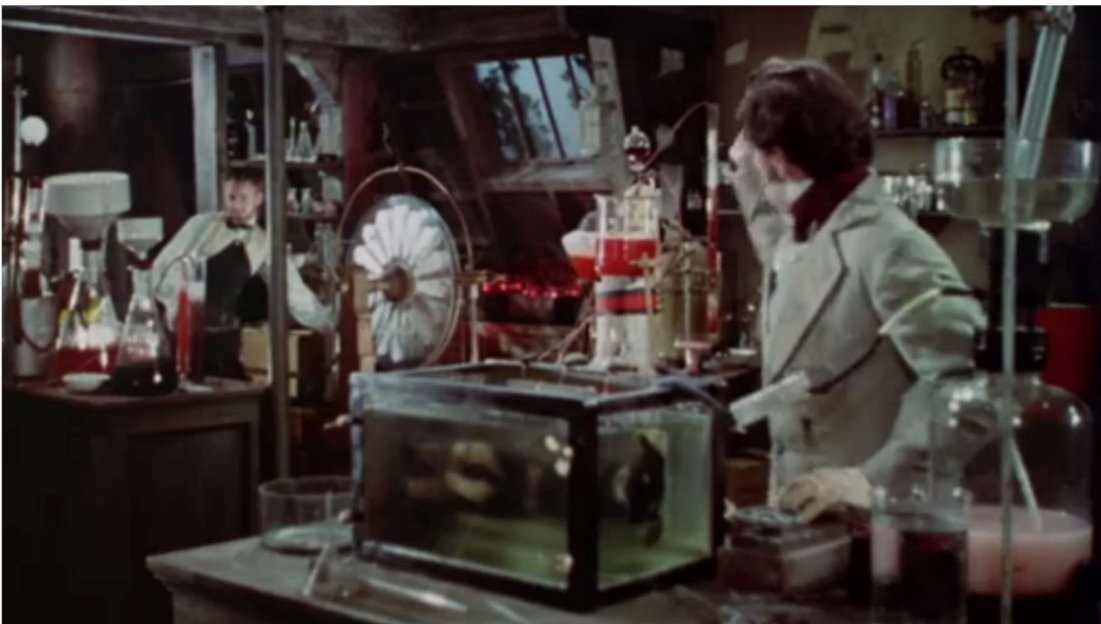
Fig. 3.2: Scarlet blood in *The Curse of Frankenstein* **as spectacular blood.**
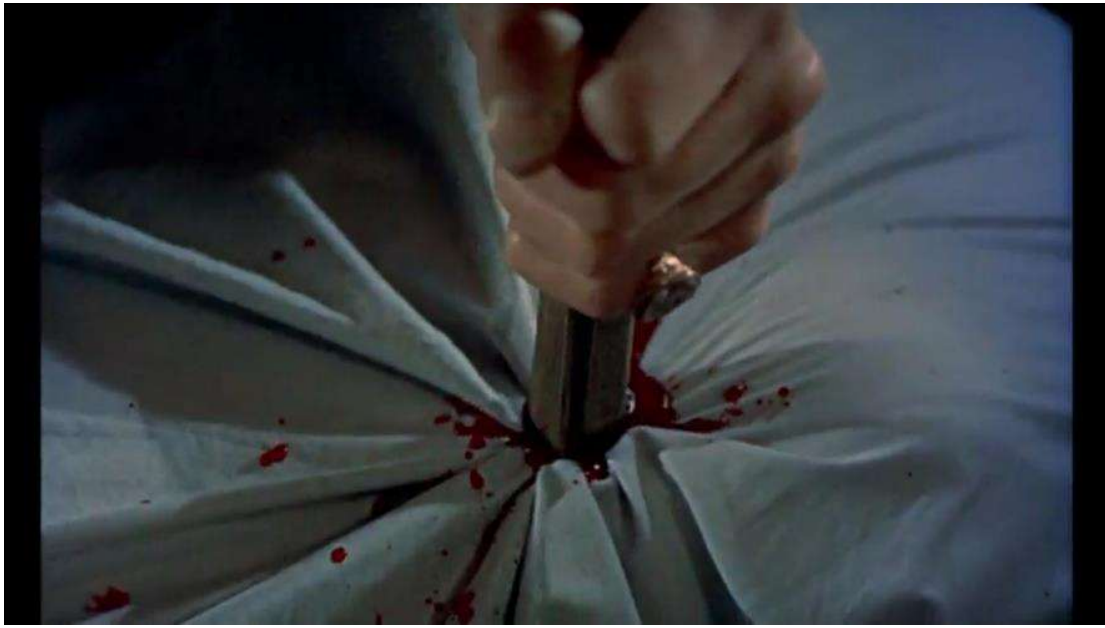
Fig. 3.3: Close-up shot of blood spurting from Lucy's chest as a stake is driven through her heart.

Rødje links this transition in blood depiction in America to the collapse of the studio system and the correlative rise of exploitation films, the rise of a highly censored televisual medium, and the influence of the international cinematic market (including Hammer). Technical advances, such as the perfection of the fake blood formula (Rødje, 2016, pp. 87-89) and the spreading use of squibs to figure bloody bullet strikes on *bodies* – as opposed to objects such as cars or buildings – from the mid-1960s, in particular with *Bonnie and Clyde* (dir. Arthur Penn, 1967) (Prince, 2003, p. 153), also contribute to spreading images of blood on screen. Rødje alludes to the use of bright red blood as defining in the early transition to spectacular blood, since '[w]ith glossy gothic productions in vivid color, Hammer became hugely influential in the horror market, displaying spectacular scenes of blood and gore hitherto unseen in feature productions' (2016, pp. 50-51). This allusion points to the general role and effect of colour, but Rødje fails to study its wider implications. Advancements in colour technologies, such as Technicolor and Eastmancolor in the 1950s, made shooting in colour much more affordable and easily marketable than before, which in turn contributed to the spectacularisation of blood. Kevin Heffernan, in his study of horror films in America between 1953 and 1968, confirms this idea, explaining that colour allows Hammer filmmakers to emphasise innovative displays of blood as the main attraction, such as in *The Curse of Frankenstein* (2004, p. 48). Indeed, the bright Eastmancolor hue used in the film renders blood highly visible, its scarlet colour catching the eye throughout the lab scenes (Heffernan, 2004, p. 50).

In contrast, Hammer black-and-white horror films released in the same year, *The Abominable Snowman* and *Quatermass 2* (both directed by Val Guest and released in 1957), do not display blood as a spectacle. In *The Abominable Snowman*, the expedition crew follows the trail of blood left by a Snowman after it was shot. Despite the close ups on the blood trail on the snow, the lack of colour prevents blood spectacularisation (fig. 3.4). The blood also provides essential narrative information as it leads the expedition crew to their first encounter with a (dead) snowman. In *Quatermass 2*, blood appears twice: first, when Quatermass's assistant is shot by the alien-possessed soldiers as he launches a radioactive rocket to destroy the invaders' spatial base; second, when sceptical members of Quatermass's team turn themselves in and are shoved into pipes to stop Quatermass from sending deadly oxygen to the alien's habitat. Blood starts dipping from the burst pipes and onto the team members (fig. 3.5). Again, the spectacle of blood is neutralised by the black and white shades, and the only indication that the liquid leaking from the pipe is indeed blood is the dialogue. Noticeably, instances of blood in these two films are cinematographically emphasised (through close-ups or extended shot duration) while, for instance, the red blood of *The Curse of Frankenstein* aforementioned exists mostly in the background, and, yet, the background blood exceeds its position in the mise-en-scène and reaches toward the eye of the implied audience much more strikingly (see fig. 3.2).
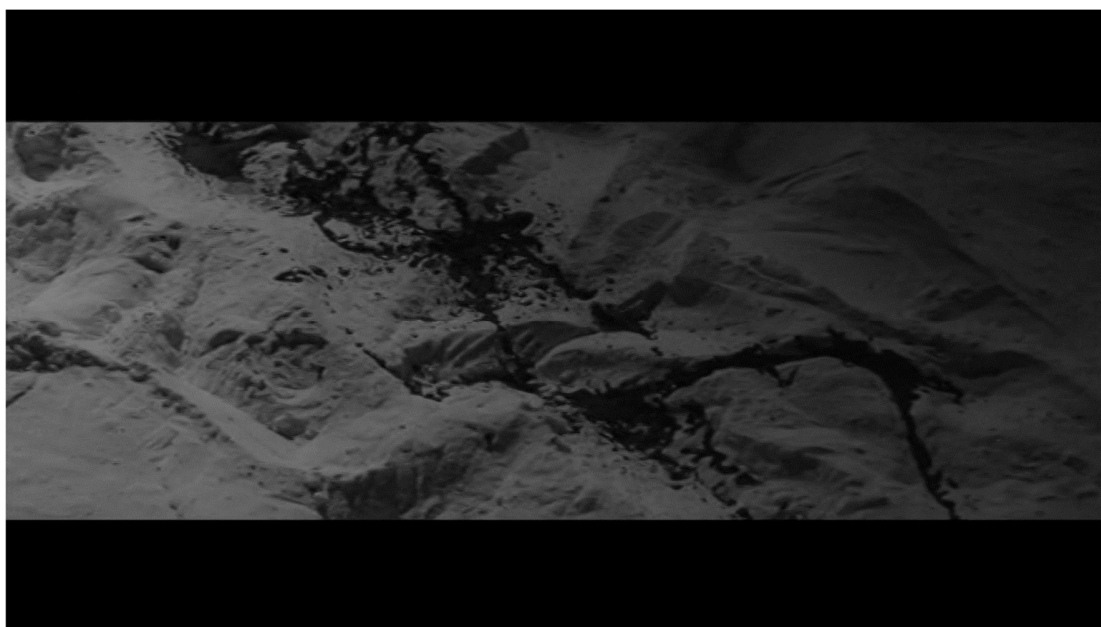
Fig. 3.4: Blood trail in *The Abominable Snowman* where the black and white image neutralises the spectacle of blood.

Fig. 3.5: Blood dripping from a pipe in black and white in *Quatermass 2*.

As an eye-catching spectacle, red blood exists in excess. According to Kristin Thompson in her seminal study, 'The concept of cinematic excess' (2004), excess in film is that which coexists, but does not form a relationship, with the narrative. What exists in excess thus distracts from narrative progression, to require the audience's attention and to require the narration to be put on hold to display the spectacle of excess (2004, p. 518). Since cinema's devices 'exist through time' (2004, p. 518), interruptions in the narrative unfolding of a film constitute one of the key components of cinematic excess. Blood creates such excessive interruptions. Indeed, Rouyer explains, in his study of gore cinema, that gratuitous depictions of blood in gore films all 'participent d'une stratégie de l'excès [take part in a strategy of excess]' (1997, p. 167). Here, Rouyer refers to a visual excess, where blood and guts are profusely spilled on screen, but also to narrative excess, where scenes featuring blood constitute a temporal break in the dramatic unfolding of the films (1997, p. 167), an idea echoed in Rødje's work (2016, p.51). Rouyer explains about such bloody scenes that 'même si elles apparaissent comme le prolongement de l'action, elles infléchissent le rythme du film en lui imposant leur propre tempo [although they appear like the continuation of the action, they change the rhythm of the film by imposing their own tempo]' (1997, p. 167). From the late 1950s, as filmmakers challenge narratively integrated images of blood, the liquid displays its own visibility and spectacularity in excess of narrative coherence.

Comparing the same plot point across adaptations productively illustrates the difference between a use of blood as an integrated part of the narrative and as excess. Focusing on the screen adaptations of Stephen King's novel *It* (1986), a miniseries in 1990, and a cinematic diptych in 2017 and 2019, unveils a clear formal and representational contrast, since both series of adaptation tell the same narrative, an evil being using the sewer system of the small town of Derry to prey on children. The comparison highlights the contrasting approaches to excess in blood depiction, with the most recent adaptations presenting a spectacularisation of blood. In the first section of the story, It manifests itself to young Beverly in an episode which is anchored in blood – in reference to the teenage girl's first menstruation, as is made explicit in the post-millennial version. As she stands in the bathroom, Beverly hears the penetrating voices of the kidnapped children echoing through the sink's pipes. In the 1990s depiction ('Part 1', 1990), as she approaches, a red balloon – signifying It's clown form – grows from the pipe and bursts, splattering the sink, the bathroom mirror, walls and Beverly's virginal pyjamas with bright red blood. This blood constitutes a small spectacle in that it creates a shock effect on the implied viewer with an unexpected and sudden small burst of blood. Nevertheless, the camera does not pause on the aftermath of the event, and the close-up shot on the bloody sink (fig. 3.6) lasts less than a second. The blood also holds narrative weight, as it cannot be seen by adults, such as Beverley's father whom she fetches after the incident. Nevertheless, the blood becomes somewhat spectacular when Bev's father clasps the bloody borders of the sink, unaware of the blood under his fingers (fig. 3.7). The camera lingers on his bloodied fingers and his face, getting dangerously close to the blood, to reflect the horror felt by Beverly. By contrast, in the 2017 adaptation, *It Chapter One,* after Beverly hears the eerie voices and investigates the sink, bloodied hair strands shoot from the pipe and twist around her body, immobilizing her as a blood geyser surges from the conduit. Not only is the blood surge unapologetically prolonged in this version in terms of duration (lasting over 25 seconds), but it is also unapologetically expansive in terms of space, as it reaches the ceiling and covers the entire bathroom and the protagonist with a gruesome coat of crimson liquid (fig. 3.8). Compared to the 1990 version, the shot duration and the drowning of the narrative space emphasise much more strikingly the spectacle of blood. It creates a pause in the narrative where nothing other than blood spurting from the sink happens. This pause is further underlined by the slight slow-motion effect as the blood first starts coming out of the sink. It also creates a spatial 'pause', since the bathroom space becomes flat, homogeneously red. Blood thus disrupts the expected and, as such, solid, in the implied viewer's mind, narrative order. Gothic blood, in its capacity to escape the established

narrative order and to introduce uncertainty, thus materialises fluid uncertainty seeping into the solid order.

Fig. 3.6: The splash of blood on the sink in the 1990 version of *It*.

Fig. 3.7: Blood spectacle: Bev's father clasps the bloody borders of the sink.

Fig. 3.8: Expansive blood spectacle in the 2017 version of *It*.

The scene in the 2017 version is excessive and spectacular. However, the real spectacle is suggested by the cinematography, a key element of the spectacle of blood on screen. Rødje overlooks this formal element, due to his focus on affects, but reading the level of integration of a spectacle, and, particularly, a spectacle as loaded in meaning as the spectacle of blood, can be a speculative enterprise especially when relying on audiences and narrative images. Affective and narrative readings can be volatile. On the other hand, Rouyer refers to cinematography in gore films in his approach to excess as pause, listing the close up and the slow motion as key

cinematographic elements of the splatter film (1997, p. 14).[40] Shot by shot, the 2017 blood spectacle starts with a point-of-view bird's-eye shot of the drain, where the blood reaches and covers the camera lens, i.e., Bev's eyes (fig. 3.9), followed by a slow-motion medium shot from the left as the blood reaches Bev's face (again) (fig. 3.10), and ends with a slow-motion bird's-eye long shot of the explosion of blood reaching Bev's face and expanding (fig. 3.11). Here, not only does the slow motion underline that there is indeed something to see, something to *behold*, to keep in view, the use of overlapping editing to repeat the narrative event – Bev's face gets covered in blood – also creates a further disruption of the story in favour of the discourse. Both the slow motion and the repetition create a pause in the narrative, as mentioned by Rouyer, hence my use of the word blood 'spectacle' (as opposed to 'attraction' or 'number'), which reflects that, in order to see, again, to behold, the cinematography must slow down. Similarly, the quasi-absence of medium shots, in favour of close ups and long shots, emphasises not only the complete engulfing of the space, but also the incitation to behold what is happening. The static nature of the shots throughout the scene highlights this painting-like spectacle: the scene functions as a series of tableaux to behold. Noticeably, in the 1990 version of the scene, the camera is handheld, shaking, moving in, adjusting to keep the actors' faces at the centre of the frame. These movements prevent a spectacle from emerging, as beholding the still image is not possible. The most stable shots are those on the balloon *before* it explodes, with a freeze-frame of the last shot before the burst of blood. There is a spectacle of expectation rather than a spectacle of blood. This contrast highlights that the same narrative event – the father does not see the blood in the bathroom – is triggered by two very different uses of blood, one leaning to the narrative side and the other unequivocally on the spectacular side. If the less spectacular use of blood achieves the same narrative result as the excessively spectacular one, then one can assume that anything beyond the restraint representation exists in excess while, visually, the spectacle is signified by the propensity to behold the image.

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[40] Earlier, in 1982, in a highly detailed reading of *Scarlett Empress,* Lea Jacobs and Richard de Cordova also use theories of story and discourse durations to describe what could be described as micro-spectacle within a scene, arguing that '[t]he spectacle which results is characterized by its deviation from the conventional narrative rendering of duration' (1982, p. 296).

Fig. 3.9: The blood obscures Bev's point of view.

Fig. 3.10: In the next shot, the blood starts to come out of the sink (top) until blood completely covers her face and starts splashing on the walls (bottom).

Fig. 3.11: At the beginning of the next shot, Beverly's face has just been touched by the blood.

Nevertheless, the relationship between narrative and excessive material is always dynamic. As Rødje details, borrowing from Tom Gunning's study of attractions, sensational images can be integrated within the narrative. This is particularly true as Rødje's approach is anchored in the audience's perception. He reads the blood insert in *The Return of Dracula* (1958) described above (see fig. 3.1) as an attraction because it provides a shock to the audience, yet does not challenge the overall narrative since 'it does not provide any tension or disjuncture between the element of attraction and the surrounding narrative' (2016, p. 53). The blood insert is unnecessary (the narrative would remain the same without it), but still links back to the narrative by providing more details regarding the gruesome process of killing a vampire. This form of integrated excess echoes Cynthia A. Freeland's approach in her analysis of violence in the first four films of the *Hellraiser* franchise (1987-1996). She borrows from Linda Williams in her definition of what they refer to as 'numbers':

> Numbers are sequences of heightened spectacle and emotion. They *appear to be* interruptions of plot-scenes that stop the action and introduce another sort of element, capitalizing on the power of the cinema to produce visual and aural spectacles of beauty or stunning power. […] Visions of monsters and their behavior or scenes of exaggerated violence are the numbers in horror: what the audience goes to the films for and expects, what delivers the thrills they want to experience. (2000, p. 256) [my emphasis]

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Freeland's initial definition thus seemingly matches the notion of pure spectacle or pause as used by Rødje and Rouyer. However, as suggested by her phrasing (italicised), numbers are not just visual spectacles pausing the narrative. She argues that '[w]e need to realize that instead of being interruptions as they might seem, the numbers in horror may actually further the plot' (2000, p. 256). For instance, the gory and detailed dismemberment of victims in slasher films gives the audience information on the monster, such as what it wants, how it functions, what it can do, etc. They are therefore not 'sheer pyrotechnical displays of monstrousness that serve only the end of meaningless violence' (2000, p. 266), but link excess and narrative. This analysis might fall under Thompson's unifying fallacy, in which critics desperately force meaning onto excess to avoid facing the disturbing fact that some devices simply have no purpose (2004, p. 216). However, going back to the spectacle of *It,* the excess present in the 2017 version, with the flooding in blood, reflects the mechanisms of the monster as literal and metaphorical floodings are essential to the narrative. Liquid threat is a constant throughout It's attacks on the children through images of floods (Bill and Bev) as well as, more metaphorically, hiding everywhere yet nowhere to be seen (in the background, crossing boundaries of screen and painting, etc.). It is a shape-shifting liquid monster living in the liquids of sewers and restlessly drowning the children in nightmarish scenarios. The engulfment of the room in blood thus materialises this liquid fear.

This excessive use of blood is particularly fitting for the Gothic. Famously, Fred Botting opens his study of the literary genre by stating that 'Gothic signifies a writing of excess' (1996, p. 1). Botting lists locus, passions, the sublime, emotions, uncertainties and disintegration, and filiation as key topoï of excess. All these elements are permeated, in one way or another, by blood. The Gothic space oozes with blood. The blood-red passions and emotions of Gothic characters create bloodshed. Blood challenges boundaries and signifies disintegration of bodies, minds or institutions. Blood makes and undoes bloodlines. Gothic excess, as understood by Botting, is de facto linked to blood. Therefore, when blood appears as excess in the Gothic, it is not gratuitous; it reflects the deeper mechanisms of the mode as a fluid mode of excess, two notions which reiterate each other in their boundary-breaking quality. Furthermore, as suggested by the comparison of the pre- and post-millennial *It* versions, in contemporary Gothic cinema, the depiction of blood is in itself excessive with overwhelming amounts of blood on screen. This use of blood could easily be dismissed as excess. Yet, the excess of blood on screen materialises Bauman's theories of liquid modernity and liquid fear. The obvious excess presented in the most recent version of the sink scene in *It* epitomises the move toward excessive depictions of blood. It indicates that, not only

does blood exist in excess of the narrative, as a spectacle, it also exists as aesthetic excess. A room covered in blood is a stylistic exercise but should not be dismissed as a pure display as it contributes to a wider sense of pervasive fear. Excess and spectacle become integrated and create meaning which participates in the wider structure and semiotics of the narrative and mode.

3.1.2 Gothicisation of Horror: Waves of Liquid Fear

It exemplifies the dramatic transition in blood representation in the post-millennial era. When Rouyer traces the evolution of gore and blood from the Grand-Guignol theatre to the screen, he mentions a constant need for innovation in the depiction of horror (1997, p. 131), marking a cinematic shift from not showing blood (up to the 1960s) to showing blood and flesh in hyperrealist details with gore films. His study was published right before the new millennium, but if one continues tracing this evolution, what Rouyer describes as the hyperreal of gore made way to the inflated artificial, materialised by waves of blood. This tendency emerges as early as the 1990s with the vampire film craze, linked by critics to the AIDS crisis (see for instance Worland, 2007, p. 111; Auerbach, 2012, p. 175). The bleeding cross of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1992) and, perhaps more strikingly, the blood rave in *Blade* (dir. Stephen Norrington, 1998) initiate Gothic images of bleeding objects and blood-soaked spaces, in a pre-millennial context, where artificial images of blood reflect concerns about contamination, desire, and sexuality. For instance, in *Bram Stoker's Dracula,* as the Count preys on Lucy during the night, images of desire and pleasure (Lucy arching her back under Dracula's hand) are juxtaposed with shots of blood at a microscopic level, thus sexualising as well as medicalising the liquid. In *Blade*'s blood rave, blood is linked to underground nightlife, drugs and sex. Vampires dancing in a trance-like, drug-induced state, engaging in sexual activities, bare skin covered in dark blood against the medically white background of the slaughterhouse/club, all create a sexualised and pharmaceutical image of blood.

Similar images of blood have appeared more prominently on post-millennial screens with a highly different meaning. The blood-soaked space reflects the contemporary liquid society. Blood, although in many ways heavier in symbolism than most liquids, is just another way to signify the contemporary drowning in liquid fear. The blood floods on contemporary screens thus materialise the fluidification of contemporary life, threats and fears. Blood has become less brutally gory or biologised than in slasher films, vampire films of the 1990s or torture porn films, but it engulfs the screen, embodying the anxiogenic tendencies triggered by liquid fear. This phenomenon of blood excessively drowning the narrative corresponds to a contemporary

gothicisation of horror through blood, understood here in the strict etymological sense of Gothic as understood by this thesis and detailed in the introduction, i.e., to flow/ to pour. Gothicisation is thus the dramatic increase in representation of flowing liquids, in this case, blood, in terms of both frequency and amounts. As demonstrated by the above analyses of Gothic texts (*The Woman in Black* and the marsh and *Dark Shadows* and the sea in chapter 1) and more slasher or horror-inflected texts (*It* above, but also *The Curse of La Llorona* in chapter 2 with a gothicisation through water across the millennial threshold), gothicisation can readily apply to both Gothic and non-gothic texts, in so far as they display episodes of high material fluidity.

In a Gothic context, *Penny Dreadful*, a series set in Victorian London, which follows famous Gothic characters (Dorian Gray, Frankenstein and Dracula, amongst others) as their paths meet, exemplifies gothicisation with the Blood Ball sequence of series 2 episode 6 ('Glorious Horrors', 2015). At a ball, the protagonist, Vanessa Ives, is unknowingly surrounded by evil witches. As they get close, the music from the string quartet is overtaken by an eerie wind-like sound and becomes distorted. The camera simultaneously becomes erratic. From static shots, the sequence transitions to panning canted shots dragging across the room in a slight slow motion. Over the distorted soundscape, the laugh of the matriarchal witch resonates. The camera alternates between Vanessa's point-of-view shots of the room, to emphasise her dizziness, and panning close-up shots of Vanessa. The plopping sound of a drop landing invades the soundscape. Vanessa looks down and notices a drop of blood on her hand before looking up as blood rains from the ceiling, leaving scratch-like marks on her face (fig. 3.12). A series of medium and close-up shots shows the same phenomenon occurring across the room, on the musicians' instruments and partitions, the guests, in the champagne, or across the portraits on the walls. Vanessa panics while the guests do not notice the torrential blood rain in the room. The editing pace accelerates, the torrents of blood cover the entire room, the floor is flooded, the paintings hang covered in red, the dresses are weighed down by liquid, and even Vanessa's wide-open eyes are splashed with blood. Colours become muted as everything turns wet, dark and red (fig. 3.13). Blood thus takes over the entire space, presenting, in its overwhelming excess, an exemplary case of gothicisation within a Gothic text.

Fig. 3.12: Vanessa looks up as blood starts raining across the room.

Fig. 3.13: The consequences of the blood monsoon on the drenched yet merry partygoers.

In Horror, gothicisation is epitomised by *Evil Dead* (2013), a reboot of Sam Raimi's cult 1981 eponymous film. The film takes place in an isolated cabin in the woods, where Mia gathers her close ones to witness her giving up on her addiction. After the group finds the Book of the Dead – bound in human skin and written in blood –, they awaken a curse and, one by one, they become possessed and killed in the most gruesome ways, in a typical slasher fashion. In the climax, Mia

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confronts the Taker of Souls, whose rising is announced in blood. As she kneels, defeated, in front of the cabin, Mia looks down at her hand, holding a necklace, a momento of her sacrificed brother. A crane-down shot following a drop of blood ends on a close up on the drop as it lands on the necklace's pendant, right in the middle of her palm. A counter-shot shows Mia looking at her bloodied palm, before tilting her head up towards the sky and the high-angle camera (fig. 3.14). Like Vanessa's, her face is quickly covered in crimson drops. A long shot shows the surroundings becoming drenched in blood. As Mia looks around in terror, the camera tilts dramatically to the ground and the hand of the Taker of Souls rises from the depth of the bloody ground to grab her wrist. Mia manages to escape, starting a chase around the cabin as blood floods the space until everything is covered and soaked in blood (fig. 3.15).

Fig. 3.14: Mia looks up at the sky as blood starts to rain.

Fig. 3.15: Blood overflowing the landscape towards the end of the sequence.

Despite striking similarities with the Blood Ball (the red outfit, the bird's-eye shot of the drop, the face splashed in blood), there is a clear distinction between Gothic and gore visible within the *Evil Dead* scene. Although the scene, as a whole, exemplifies a gothicised representation of blood, it remains anchored in the realm of gore because blood is not the essence of horror in the scene. It solely announces the coming of the Taker of Souls and the gory confrontation between the last standing characters. The blood functions as an atmosphere-building feature. Against this background, gory events unfold, such as, in a nod to the first *Evil Dead*, Mia tearing her own hand off because it is trapped under a car and, later, sawing the demon in half lengthwise. In these two hypergore examples, the *flesh* becomes the essence of horror. The blood raining from the sky has almost no horrific weight within the scene; it is strictly stylistic because there is both literally and symbolically too much to absorb, i.e., the ground cannot absorb the blood and the mind cannot seize it all. A small amount of blood might trigger horror, but once this horror is saturated, the remaining blood cannot increase it. Thus, the aesthetic overflow becomes a cognitive overflow. It becomes superfluous in the etymological sense of the word (that which flows over),and materialises the liquid threats flooding the contemporary individual's life. Nevertheless, the Gothic waves of blood always start with a single drop, which triggers liquid fear in the characters by signaling that something is wrong, as shown in the similar initiating shots of the 'Blood Ball' and the 'Taker of Souls' sequences. This thus raises the question: what if all the Gothic needs to inspire horror is a

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single drop of blood? What if a single drop is Horror and the rest only belongs to the excessive nature of Gothic aesthetics which dwell in the superfluous?

3.1.3 A Drop in an Ocean of Liquid Fear

The first drop of blood is indeed given particular emphasis on the Gothic screen, primarily because of the spectacular potential of the shot. The motif of the single drop of blood appears in the earliest Gothic films, such as *Nosferatu* (dir. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922), a loose adaptation of Bram Stoker's seminal *Dracula* (1897). In every subsequent – at least minimally faithful – cinematic and televisual adaptation of this text, the danger emanating from the count is first hinted at with a single drop of blood shed by his lawyer. 'Minimally faithful' here refers to adaptations which correspond to Stoker's original storyline, where a lawyer travels to a Count's faraway castle to help him purchase a property abroad, where he begins feeding off young women while a group of men led by a doctor try to stop him. These adaptations are *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), *Dracula* (dir. Tod Browning & Karl Freund, 1931), *Dracula* (dir. John Badham, 1979), *Nosferatu The Vampyre* (dir. Werner Herzog, 1979), *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and BBC's *Dracula* (2020).[41] In all of these, the scene of the lawyer cutting himself constitutes the watershed moment when blood hints at the Count's true nature by stirring up his vampiric thirst.[42]

A study of the cut scene shows that the drop of blood has acquired a prominent place in the scene between 1922 and 2020. In the 1922 adaptation, a 1-second static close-up shot displays the small wound on the lawyer's thumb, a shot structure reused in the 1979 adaptations by Werner Herzog and John Badham (fig. 3.16). The famous 1931 version, starring Bela Lugosi and directed by Tod Browning and Karl Freund, breaks down the close-up shot by interjecting shots of Dracula threateningly drawn into the drop of blood already formed on Jonathan's thumb (fig. 3.17). In this iteration, the emphasis is placed on both the lawyer's hands, placed in a praying-like position, and the Count's temptation. The accent shifts in Coppola's version, from an indicator of Dracula's predatory nature to a homoerotic demonstration of power dynamics. Following the novel, in this 1992 version, Harker cuts his neck while shaving – foreshadowing the vampire's bite. However, the scene does not contain a close-up on the bleeding wound, emphasising instead the interaction between the two characters around this cut (fig. 3.18).

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[41] This focus on faithful adaptations is for easiness and convenience of comparison and does not exclude that more licentious adaptations follow similar blood dynamics.

[42] The exception here is *Count Dracula* (Franco, 1970), which follows the original plot but does not include the skin cutting scene.
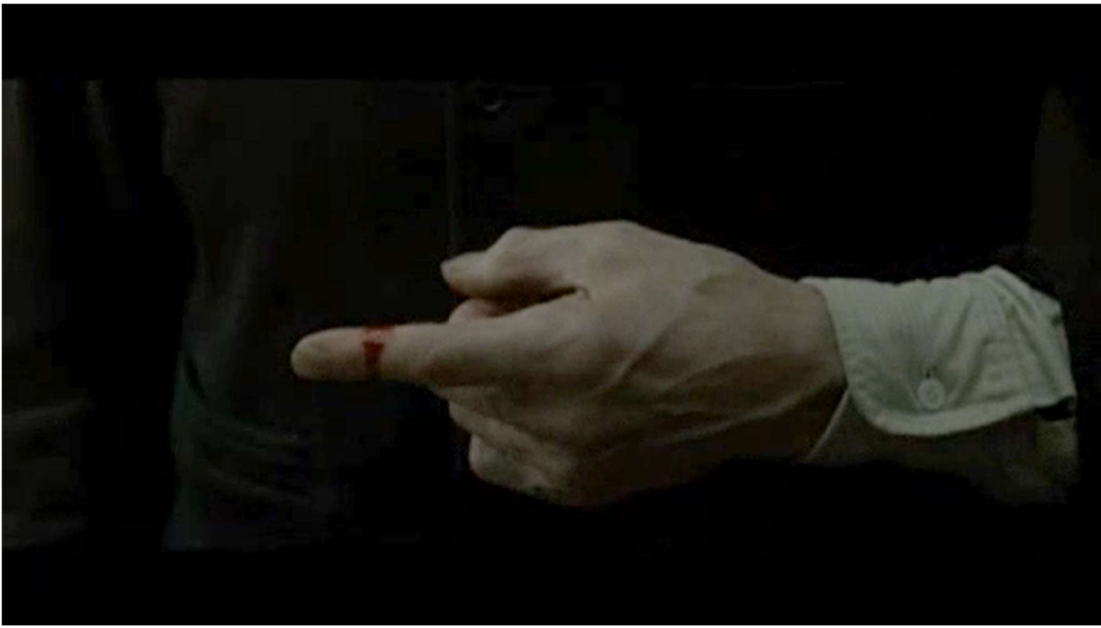
Fig. 3.16: 1-second static close-up shot showing the cut on the lawyer's thumb in *Nosferatu* **(Murnau, 1922) (top),** *Nosferatu* **(Herzog, 1979) (middle) and** *Dracula* **(Badham, 1979) (bottom).**

Fig. 3.17: Shot of Jonathan's cut interjected with images Dracula's thirst in *Dracula* (1931).

Fig. 3.18: Emphasis on the homoerotic relationship over the cut in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). [Modified: brightness]

The 2020 version stands out from all the previous adaptations. As Harker cuts his finger picking up the pieces of his mirror smashed by Dracula, the cinematography highlights the spectacle of the blood *drop*. A slow-motion close-up pedestal shot follows the journey of the drop as it falls from Jonathan's thumb and splatters on the legal contracts he brought (fig. 3.19). This version is the only one of the selected works where the blood is not just a stain signifying the presence of the lesion and provoking Dracula/Orlok's appetite for blood, but an actual drop of blood falling from his finger. The wound in this version is even hidden from the spectator's view by Harker's thumb, and the indicators of the cut wound are all indirect, e.g., the slicing sound of a blade, Harker's pained sound, and, most importantly, the blood dripping. Through time, the drop eventually prevails over the wound. It detaches itself and becomes the spectacle – as underlined by the slow motion – and focus of the scene. The drop thus follows the same trajectory as more sensational blood spectacles. From a textual element which drives the narrative forward (the lawyer cuts himself, thus revealing the vampiric thirst), it becomes an integrated spectacle, which, while displaying its own visibility, provides information relating to the narrative. Like the blood wave, the drop participates in the subtextual meanings (by landing on the legal contracts as a hint of Harker's sealed fate) as well as in contextual meanings (the gothicisation of blood reflecting cultural tendencies towards liquefaction as described by Bauman).

Fig. 3.19: The close-up spectacle of the drop fall, from the hidden wound (top) to landing on the contract (bottom). [Modified: brightness]

This shift toward the liquid signifier of violence corresponds to a micro-gothicisation of blood. This micro-gothicisation through the emphasis on the falling drop is widespread in contemporary Gothic texts. The drop is no longer static and works as the harbinger of horror, in the literal sense of 'forerunner,' the one who runs before, implying the movement of the drop as well as what is to come. In the *Penny Dreadful* and *Evil Dead* sequences, for instance, a single drop announces the blood monsoon that follows. It constitutes a small but enhanced spectacle, often in close-up and in slow motion, with a shift in the soundscape in favour of the drop sound effect. As such, the drop constitutes a promise of horror and creates liquid fear in the implied viewer, a fear of something which is not yet seen could arise from anywhere, including the beyond the frame, i.e., the ceiling or sky. As Bruce F. Kawin asserts, in his analysis of horror film figures, when blood becomes visible, 'its red is the oldest sign of danger and damage' (2012, p. 96). Similarly, Pisters explains, in her study, '[r]ed is a signal colour, it flags something in the image as important: something has happened, something is happening, something will (or might) happen' (2020, p. 191). Noticeably, both quotations insist on colour rather than quantity, indicating that even a single drop can carry the whole weight of meaning associated with bloodbath within itself. If blood functions, as suggested by critics, as a 'sign of danger' and a 'flag' that something will happen, then, what is culturally understood as the smallest unit of blood is enough to trigger an expectation

of horror, and thus a very liquid fear where the drop hints at the wider yet unanchored and still unseen threat.

In the Blood Ball sequence, the crimson monsoon is announced by a single drop of blood. As uneasiness spreads around Vanessa, the plopping sound of liquid catches her attention. A worm's-eye shot of her confused face and her hand foreshadows the disturbing image of the next shot, a close-up of the back of her hand with a single drop of blood (fig. 3.20). The background is blurred and flattened to a homogeneous black with a spot of light. A second drop of blood follows in slow motion, accompanied by a high-pitched slicing sound. Here, the single drop of blood is emphasised not only through the soundscape (a single, still undiscovered, drop of blood makes a louder sound than a filled ballroom) but also visually through the contrast between Vanessa's skin, the dark background and the bright red pellet-like stain. The plopping sound, although instinctually expected, actually underlines the importance of the first drop of blood even further. Indeed, liquids make this distinctive sound only when falling in another liquid (Phillips, et al., 2018). A drop falling on a hard surface makes a dull sound, as shown by the sound produced by the multiple drops falling on Vanessa's face after the initial drop. The manufactured and discordant sound effect thus immediately and without visual proof tells the implied audience what has landed on Vanessa's hand, as well as sets apart the first drop from the rest of the blood-soaked scene.

A similar dynamic can be observed in the case of Mia, right before the rise of the Taker of Souls. From a long bird's-eye view of Mia looking at her hand, right in the centre of the shot, the camera cranes down towards her. During the descent, a drop of blood appears, overtaking the camera as it also falls towards Mia. The camera circles in on the drop of blood as they descend, the liquid replacing Mia as central point of the shot. The drop lands on the necklace, in a plopping sound and, soon after, the camera catches up and the crane shot ends with a close-up on the splash of blood (fig. 3.21). Again, the drop takes over the cinematography; the camera becomes subdued to its movements. The soundscape also changes to mimic the fall of the drop, with a high- to low-pitch missile-like sound effect as the camera descends and a low rumble as the drop appears and falls. As it lands, an almost comically onomatopoeic plopping sound resonates. The drop of blood thus affirms its centrality through cinematography to reflect its narrative, aesthetic and symbolic importance. These similar dynamics overall suggest that the smallest amount of blood functions as the liquid, anxiety-inducing harbinger of horror.

Fig. 3.20: The first drop on Vanessa's hand in _Penny Dreadful._

Fig. 3.21: The first drop on Mia's necklace in _Evil Dead._ [Modified: brightness]

This anxiety is produced because, in Lacanian terms, the drop 'looks back' at the perceiving subject (Vanessa and Mia). This idea derives from Jacques Lacan's example of the sardine can floating in the sea which, as he states, 'was looking at me' (1998, p. 95): the object unexpectedly looks back at the perceiving subject. The object's perspective emerges as it becomes signifier. Using this Lacanian framework, and Norman Bryson's application of it in visual arts, Vivian

Sobchack argues that 'when we visually engage an object that seems to "look back" at us and that momentarily startles, intimidates, and fixes us with its "irrational" autonomy, it seems obdurate and opaque, decentring us and undoing the mastery and privilege of our vision' (2004, p. 93). The object looking back destabilises the role of the subject. Drops of blood thus challenge the subject's supposedly fixed role as the onlooker. Just like blood floods, drops thus escape the subject's control and, as such, reflect the individual's being in liquid life in which fixity is not granted to the individual. The blood drop looks back at the character in what she calls 'heightened instances of the of the irruptive, autonomous, and impersonal presence of things that look back' (2004, p. 93) and which are realised through cinematography.[43] Sobchack explains that close-ups, in their isolating and hyperbolising qualities, help subjectify the framed object. Indeed, in my examples, the blood drop becomes enhanced through highly focused framing. In both Mia and Vanessa's cases, the first drop of blood is framed in close-up, with a focus on the drop, in which the background becomes too out-of-focus to comprehend. The cinematography underlines that the drop is the only focus. To use Lacan's imagery, it floats in a blurry environment. The highly focused soundtrack also participates in this form of aural close-up. In both cases, the caricatural plopping sound effect of the blood drop landing on the hand takes primacy in the soundscape, heightening the impression of extreme proximity to the drop.

Furthermore, Sobchack explains that necessary to the subjectification of the object is the tight framing of the human characters (2004, p. 93), like the low-angle shots of Vanessa and Mia staring in horror at the drop immediately after it lands on them (fig. 3.22). However, Žižek, applying what he describes as the 'impossible gaze of the thing' (1992, p. 249) to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Fred Walton's *When a Stranger calls* (1979), adds another element of film form to his analysis, i.e., editing. Žižek applies the notion of 'thing' to the unknown or hidden human, the 'unfathomable object with whom no identification is possible' (1992, p. 251), e.g., the mother from *Psycho* and the killer from *When a Stranger calls*. He argues about the latter that

> [t]he entire subversive effect hangs upon the rupture, the passage from one perspective to
> the other, the change which confers upon the hitherto impossible/unattainable object a body,

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[43] Although blood, as a liquid, is often not considered as belonging to the realm of objects/things, the landed blood drop, in its sharply outlined visibility and its seeming solidity and stability, can be read as object.

which gives the untouchable Thing a voice and makes it speak – in short, which *subjectivizes* it. (1992, p. 251) [emphasis in the original]

The same becoming-subject appears in *Psycho* but the key difference is that

the Thing, although it 'becomes subject', *does not subjectivize itself,* does not 'open up', does not 'reveal its depth', does not offer itself to our emphatic compassion, does not open a crack which would enable us to take a peep into the wealth of its self-experience. (1992, p. 252) [emphasis in the original]

Although small, the difference is crucial when applied to the drop motif. The drop becomes subject through the shift in perspective (the shot/counter-shot between the drop and the character), and it also subjectivises itself in a more subtle way than when the killer tells his tragic story in *When a Stranger Calls.* The subjectivisation of the drop lies in the slight reframing of the point-of-view shot of the drop. In both cases, the hand of the character on which the drop has landed is visible – although out of focus – in the shot. If the shot were a perfect point-of-view shot, only the face of the character would appear. The hand indicates that the shot is not a literal perspective shot. It offers a view of what the drop 'sees', but also expands this perspective which neutralises any non-fantastic interpretation of the drop's origin. The framing affirms that nothing in the immediate surroundings could have caused the drop to fall naturally. Therefore, although the drop does not radically subjectivise itself, the framing does tell us some of the drop's story; to paraphrase Žižek, it reveals its depth – albeit in an indirect way –, and, quite appropriately, it indeed does 'open a crack' which enables us 'to take a peep into the wealth of its self-experience' precisely by showing the lack of opened crack. In short, through framing, the drop tells us of its fantastic nature by showing us that nothing else could have caused its fall.

Fig. 3.22: Subjectivisation and expansion of the perspective of the drop as Vanessa (top) and Mia (bottom) stare at their stained hands.

Indeed, in both sequences, the expectation-driven liquid fear captured in the first drop relies on the impossibility of linking the blood back to a body. This is a key characteristic of Gothic blood which contradicts the common scholarly emphasis on the construction of blood as horror through its boundary-breaking quality, i.e., blood is horror *because* it is seen breaking the boundaries of the body. Sylvia Chong, for instance, in her study of violence in Sam Peckinpah and Oliver Stone's films, traces a 'visceral link between blood, pain, and bodies. It is not simply that blood appears in

copious amounts, but that the blood is seen to exit the body' (2004, p. 254). This means that the crystalliser of violence, within the frame of Chong's analysis, is the breaching of boundaries, regardless of the amounts. In the Gothic, however, the breaching of bodily boundaries often is irrelevant because, as shown in chapter 1, Gothic/liquid fear is less about showing (the wound/the monster/the flesh) than it is about suggesting (through liquid fear and flows). This is linked to the poetics of the Gothic (as opposed to Chong's framework of violent films), where the threat often emerges from the unseen, the untold, such as an inexplicable rain from the sky, but also to the contemporary Gothic focus on the flow of blood rather than the wound – as shown in the overlooked wound in Dracula's example. The crossing of boundaries becomes secondary as blood erases the wound. In turn, these macro- or micro-gothicisations mean that the wound, and by extension, the body, loses relevance in Gothic poetics.

3.2 The Debiologisation of Blood: Women, Wounds and Bleeding things

3.2.1 Woundless Blood and Symbolic Womb

Both the wave- and the drop-based depictions of blood in contemporary Gothic indicate that Gothic blood does not need to be related to bodies nor extremely violent to effectively spread liquid fear in a scene. This lack of necessary attachment to bodies and reliance on violence shows that the wound in itself is not the only Gothic device in post-millennial cinema. Gothic blood is often characteristically woundless. In these cases, when the skin boundary is violently broken, the penetration or resulting tear is not shown, and the wound remains hidden under blood. While normal experiences of cut or broken flesh do not necessarily result in visible blood (if veins and arteries are missed), the depiction of the wound on the Gothic screen is primarily blood related, as blood signifies the open flesh. This is a recurring motif in *Penny Dreadful*, for instance. Whenever Vanessa cuts her finger to trace magic spells in blood, the wound remains invisible and hidden behind the red fluid. In series 2, episode 3 ('The Nightcomers', 2015), when Vanessa leaves the Cut-wife's cottage, she draws her scorpion on a stone. In the close-up shot on her fingertip as she slashes the skin of her thumb, the broken flesh remains unseen as the blade and the blood hide the flesh (fig. 3.22). A similar approach to broken skin exists in vampire narratives on screen, where the mouth of the vampire is used as a device to hide the wound it creates. Hence, Creed's idea of a 'repeated emphasis on marking the skin, opening up a wound' (1993, p. 71) in vampire films, such as *Vampyres* (dir. José Ramón Larraz, 1974), is not necessarily exact as these films emphasise the visibility of blood over that of wound. In fact, to qualify Creed's argument, *Vampyres* creates a stark contrast between bloodless wound (on Ted's arm for instance) and woundless blood (in the

scene where the two vampires feast on Rupert's blood), the only exception being a scene with Ted's wound bleeding slightly.[44] In *Byzantium*, where Eleanor uses her sharp nail to break the skin of her – consensual – victims, the actual moment of penetration of the flesh is only implied. In the first blood-sucking sequence, as Eleanor softly runs her long sharp nail on her victim's wrist, the camera cuts to the victim's face as he winces. The camera then cuts back to a close-up shot of the nail already in the skin as blood flows from it (fig. 3.24). As the vampire takes her nail out of the flesh, blood, followed closely by her mouth, hinders the sight of the open wound, which remains implied. Similar mechanics of woundless blood appear in another vampiric text, *Midnight Mass*. In episode 3 ('Book III: Proverbs', 2021), when the vampire slashes his own wrist with his sharp nail to feed Father Paul and turn him into a vampire, the wound immediately flows with blood, thus remaining invisible (fig. 3.25).

Fig. 3.23: Vanessa cuts her fingertip to draw in blood in *Penny Dreadful* and the wound is concealed by blood.

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[44] In academic writings of the 1980s and 1990s, this emphasis on the wound is recurring, due to the commonly drawn parallel between pornographic and horror film and their shared emphasis on bodily penetration (see e.g., Williams, 1991; Clover, 2015 [1992]; Pinedo, 1997)

Fig. 3.24: Eleanor's nail penetrates her victim's skin hiding the broken flesh in *Byzantium*.

Fig. 3.25: The vampire opens his wrist and dark blood immediately covering the broken flesh in *Midnight Mass*.

Beyond hiding the wound on screen, the Gothic tends to remove the wound altogether. Rosewarne argues, in her research on menstruation in popular culture, that 'the vast majority of on-screen blood comes from violence' (2012, p. 2). Gothic blood, perhaps belonging to Rosewarne's implied minority of on-screen blood, does not necessarily flow from a violently inflicted wound,

nor does it necessarily flow from bodies in general, as would menstrual blood. When depicted, uterine blood is symbolic rather than literal (as is famously the case in the shower scene in *Carrie* (dir. Brian de Palma, 1976)), thus neutralising the culturally perceived highly biologised nature of menstrual blood. Gothic uterine blood is thus not only non-violent, i.e., not wound-related, it is also not related to a body. This disconnection between the blood and its expected biological origin highlights the absolute loss of solid links in contemporary liquid society. Blood debiologisation becomes a visual metaphor for the loss of the once solid link between blood and body, which echoes the wider dehumanisation of formerly human-based relationships such as affinity and kinship as will be shown.

This detachment from bodies is shown in Bev's bathroom scene analysed above, as well as in the sequel, *It Chapter Two* (2019), and in *Evil Dead Rise* (dir. Lee Cronin, 2023). Both films feature a scene in which female characters find themselves in a closed space which starts filling up with fantastical blood (fig. 3.26). As the woman re-emerges, she defeats said monster.[45] In *It Chapter Two*, Beverley comes back to Derry with the other Losers. In the film's climax, taking place in It's cavernous underground lair, the monster traps Bev in the school bathroom stall, which quickly becomes flooded with fantastical blood, i.e., blood conjured by It and magically flowing into the bathroom stall. As blood levels rise, Bev is submerged before resurfacing and, in a last attempt at survival, kicks the stall door open, thus emptying the stall. *Evil Dead Rise* follows Beth, a carefree guitarist, who, upset after learning she is pregnant, visits her sister Ellie, a mother of three. During her visit, an earthquake unearths a volume of the Book of the Dead, which is quickly found by Ellie's oldest, who, hoping to sell it, inadvertently unleashes demons on his family and his apartment building. After Ellie and her two older children are taken, Beth and her young niece Kassie attempt to escape the building using the elevator. As its doors finally close on the possessed bodies of Beth and Kassie's family, the elevator fills up with blood, seeping from the walls and ceiling. The two characters become trapped until the elevator gives way and crashes down to the lowest level, releasing Beth and Kassie in a blood wave.. In both scenes, blood is therefore de-

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[45] Another example of such a scene appears in *Evil Dead Rise* (dir. Lee Cronin, 2023) as Beth and Kassie take refuge in an elevator which fills with blood, manage to escape and defeat the monster.

biologised, i.e., not directly connected to a living organism.

Fig. 3.26: The woman-submerged-in-blood motif: Bev in *It Chapter Two* (top) and Beth and Kassie in *Evil Dead Rise* (bottom).

Nonetheless, these submerging bloods are also symbolically uterine. While the present thesis guards itself against (anti-)feminist (over-)readings of the horror space as womb and of fluids as necessarily feminine, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, the open emphasis, in both films,

on menstruation and motherhood justifies, in these particular cases, a feminism-inflected reading of the scenes. Bev's nightmare of blood is built in reference to her first menses, featured in *It Chapter One* when Bev's abusive father catches her trying to hide the sanitary pads she purchased. Asserting his possession over her, her father demands, 'Tell me you're still my little girl,' to which Bev replies, 'Yes, daddy.' Later in the film, as she tries to sneak out to join her group of male friends, her father catches her again. He grips her hand as he asks what kind of 'womanly things' she has been up to with her friends, before attempting to sexually assault her. She confronts and incapacitates him using the toilet tank cover. Bev's menstruating body is thus a source of fear in that it pushes her father to tighten his hold over her. Pennywise thus refers to her first menstruation to scare adult Bev. The blood is therefore not only literally debiologised (the blood entering the stall does not flow from a body), but also symbolically woundless (the blood is constructed as menstrual).

In *Evil Dead Rise*, the blood is uterine in relation to motherhood. The film revolves around depictions of motherhood, contrasting the good mother (Ellie, who chooses to be a mother despite hardship) and the bad mother (Beth, who initially refuses to be a mother to keep her unattached lifestyle). Indeed, throughout the film, Beth's decision to abort is presented as her main character flaw, which is eventually overcome as she learns, by protecting her young niece Kassie, the supposed value of motherhood. For instance, as Bridget, Ellie's oldest daughter becomes possessed, Beth finds her eating glass to, as Bridget explains, 'keep the creepy-crawlies that [she] got inside [her] tummy', before adding 'I don't like having things inside my tummy. Do you Auntie Beth?', thus hinting at her aunt's reluctance to become a mother. Later in the film, shortly before Beth manages to escape, Ellie, possessed, incapacitates her and tells her that she will swallow her soul. As she looks over her prey, Ellie soon realises that Beth is pregnant and corrects herself as she grabs her sister's abdomen: 'two souls' will be ripped out – a correction which hints at the potential pro-life sensibility of the film. Beth manages to escape by stabbing Ellie and, when asked by Kassie on their way out if she is going to be a mum, Beth replies with a resounding 'yes'. In both films, the blood is therefore coded as uterine, relating to the womb of the teenager and that of the mother.

As such, blood constitutes a materialisation of liquid fear in a context of liquefaction of relationships. In his monograph *Liquid Love¸* Bauman describes the parameters that direct love and relationships within liquid life. He explains that, in liquid life, the very notions of 'relationship'

and 'partners', with their connotations of enclosure and commitment, are replaced with those of 'connection' and 'network' (2003, p. xi):

> In a network, connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices enjoy the same status and carry the same importance. […] 'Network' suggests moments of 'being in touch' interspersed with periods of free roaming. In a network, connections are entered on demand, and can be broken at will. (2003, p. xii)

Contemporary affinities are characterised by their uncertainty and infinite plasticity. Liquid fear often relies on the fragility of human bonds to spread in Horror as isolating a character makes it easier for the liquid threat to englobe them. Both Bev, as a woman who has just left her abusive husband, and Beth, as an unattached pregnant woman, are free roaming, and, as such, supposedly more vulnerable to the threat. They are also both isolated from their chosen group by the threat as It separates the losers in their individual nightmares and the Deadites target one specific family member at a time. Thus, even when the characters enter a network of relationships (their chosen group), they cannot rely on these relationships for security and safety. This highlights Bauman's idea that relationships constitute a form of stock (2003, p. 14). While relationships are weaved in the hope of ensuring security, there is no guarantee that investing in a relationship will bring dividends to either party (2003, p. 14). As Bauman explains, '[i]n a relationship, you may feel as insecure as without it or worse' (2003, p. 15). In Horror texts, where friends of the protagonist can be killed, can abandon or be abandoned by the protagonist, can betray or be betrayed by them, can use or be used as bait, relationships are necessarily liquid, i.e., fragile and uncertain. For instance, Bev leaves Derry and her abusive father and finds herself in an abusive relationship. While marriage is traditionally an investment in security, she finds herself in just as much danger. In *Evil Dead Rise*, as family members fall prey to demons, they become threats to the survivors. Ellie relentlessly preys on her youngest, Kassie, by pretending that she is still a loving mother and trying to get close enough to her child to possess her. Kassie can no longer rely on the security formerly provided by her mother.

> This shows that, beyond affinities, contemporary Horror and Gothic challenges the notion of kinship, a seemingly unbreakable bond between members of the same bloodline. Bev and Beth's literal blood baths thus embody the liquefaction of kinship in a context of liquid modernity. Indeed, for women in particular, kinship is materialised through uterine blood (menses and childbirth), and a woman's place within the bloodline is therefore defined

through literal blood. Kinship, the link defined by blood and the bloodline, cannot keep its once assumed solidity. While kinship used to be 'indomitably tough, durable, reliable, lasting, unbreakable' (Bauman, 2003, p.29), one cannot rely on kinship any longer. Bauman argues that [w]ith the new frailty of family structures, with many a family's life expectation shorter than the individual life expectation of any of its members, with the membership of a particular family lineage turning fast into one of the 'undecidables' of the liquid modern era, and the allegiance to any one of the several available kinship networks turning for a rising number of individuals into a matter of choice, and a *revocable,* until-further-notice choice […]. (2003, p. 41)

Kinship is no longer stable as family bonds can easily be broken with ever-increasing movement of people and things, as well as heightened digital communications tools being used as primary modes of connections. The events that make and define kinship (birth, marriage, death), all marked to an extent in literal or symbolic blood (blood of birth, blood of consummated marriage, and blood of death) have become liquid both for better and for worst as shown with the current debates around reproductive freedom. As, respectively, an abused daughter and a resistant mother, Bev and Beth's immersions in symbolically uterine blood constitute watershed moments during which the characters reposition themselves within the bloodline by reshaping their relation to their kin.

Through their literal blood bath, the characters' potency changes. As Creed argues, in her analysis of the prom scene in de Palma's *Carrie*, 'the drenching of Carrie's body in pig's blood represents a kind of inversion of a royal coronation. She is crowned Queen and anointed with pig's blood prior to using her demonic powers to wreak devastation on the assembly' (1993, p. 80). Bev follows a similar arc as she moves from shameful horror of her menstruating body, to being empowered, 'anointed,' by it. She defeats her symbolic father trying to penetrate the stall asking her, 'Are you still my little girl?'. As Bev kicks the door open, she screams, 'Not anymore!' and severs his fingers in the process. This severance – while potentially Lacanian – embodies the end of her father's grip on her. This bloody act performed in blood allows Bev to separate herself from her abusive father as she finally accepts her (menstruating) body, unafraid to shed blood – violently or not. Bev, by cutting the ties of her kinship with an abusive father, revokes, to borrow from Bauman, her belonging to the bloodline. Similarly, Beth, after surviving the blood-filled elevator crash, and still covered in blood, rescues her niece from certain death and manages to kill the Marauder by shoving it into a wood-chipper using a chainsaw as a pushing device. This reverse birth, as the monster enters a symbolic womb by means of a device invented for symphysiotomy

in childbirth, symbolises Beth's return to the bloodline. As the Deadite attempts to save itself by begging 'Save me, Bethy-boo', Beth retorts, 'Only my sister gets to call me that' thus reforming the link with her estranged, now deceased, sister.

This type of violence allows the female character, once defined by their corrupt kinship, to destroy the monster. Bauman argues that one of the key underlying concerns of love is 'how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one's own individual life and find "at-onement"' (2003, p. 17). He adds that people who love 'want to smother, extirpate and cleanse the vexing, irritating alterity that separates them from the beloved; separation from the beloved is the lover's most gruesome fear' (2003, p.17). Indeed, in these scenes, the monster is the one who knows true and unalterable kinship. In *It: Chapter 2*, as Bev breaks her family ties, both her father and It become symbols of unity in alterity. Her father represents the stable – if abusive – kinship in that he imprisoned his daughter under his influence, so much so that Bev recreated the abusive relationship she had with her father with an abusive husband. It, as a monster who is at once alien creature, clown, old woman, headless boy, mummy, etc., has overcome separateness. It is many in one. In *Evil Dead Rise,* Beth and Kassie escape while the bodies of Ellie and her children merge into the monstrous Marauder, a Deadite amalgamating limbs and heads, who pursues Beth and Ellie until they family manage to escape by shoving the monster into a woodchipper. In this sequence, Beth is presented as the embodiment of liquid relationships, as the mother who initially revoked her possible kinship with her unborn child, while Ellie is presented as the keeper of the stable and irrevocable kinship, the sacrificial mother who literally merges with her children. Love knows no boundaries and the Deadites embody Bauman's notion of at-onement. Therefore, in these scenes, the monsters know the stability and solidity of kinship while the characters, living in a liquid context, embrace the fluidity and malleability of all relationships, including kinship. Blood thus cannot be counted on anymore as it is not guaranteed to be attached to wounds, bloodlines or even bodies.

3.2.2 Bleeding and Bloody Things

In such scenes, woundless blood, including uterine blood, is therefore symbolic and symptomatic rather than biological. Beyond woundless, Gothic blood is often characteristically detached from bodies. The Gothic does not primarily aim to reveal 'les mystères de l'organisme [the organism's mysteries]' (Rouyer, 1997, p. 175), but to unveil the mysteries of the past, the mind, or the soul. It exists as a preternatural sign, a symptom rather than a biological consequence. As Gothic blood takes its independence from the body, it reattaches itself to objects. Bleeding

objects have a key role in the Gothic as they hold a symbolic and aesthetic weight, i.e., they are not there, for instance, to disgust the audience, but instead to eerily suggest the presence of the real threat. Bleeding objects thus crystallise two branches of Gothic poetics, suggestion and artificiality. A famous example of this debiologisation and attachment to objects is the bleeding elevator in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), a vision signalling the danger held within the space and the upcoming violence. Alongside the blood-filled bathtub of *The Tingler*, aforementioned, and the bleeding walls of *Amityville Horror* (dir. Stuart Rosenberg, 1979), the Overlook Hotel's elevators constitute one of the few available examples of pre-millennial debiologised blood in horror texts.[46] Since the 2000s however, debiologised blood has become increasingly visible as a symptom of the gothicisation of Horror as related to the liquefaction of modernity, as will be shown.

The bleeding of objects occurs in two ways. First, blood is symbolically figured with red images. The representation of blood by analogy, i.e., red liquids and solids, becomes more prominent than its actual presence. Linda Badley comments on this idea, in her treatment of *The Company of Wolves* (dir. Neil Jordan, 1984), when she explains, in relation to the film's devictimisation of women, that, 'no female blood is spilled on screen, the wound is signified, not shown, in lip rouge, a red shawl, a white rose that "bleeds"' (1995, pp. 122-123). Here, as is frequently the case in scholarship, open flesh and blood are conflated into a single concept of the wound. But blood, in the Gothic, is a starkly distinct entity and, consequently, red as analogy signifies the blood, not the wound. This type of analogy is typical of the Gothic – appearing in Hammer productions time and time again – and has become one of Tim Burton's trademarks, with, for example, at the beginning of *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), a testament-sealing, dripping red wax whose Hammer-ish hue mimics the splatters of blood later gushing from the bodies of the signatories. In *Dark Shadows*, signifiers of blood are scattered throughout the film, from the lava lamp, which vampire Barnabas describes as a 'pulsating blood urn' because of its floating red wax (fig. 3.27), to paintings, carpets and even Angélique's underwear as a hint towards Barnabas's vampiric nature. This last example suggests that blood can be signified through analogies with solids (fig. 3.28). In *Penny Dreadful*, a red gown in series 2, episode 8 ('Memento Mori', 2015), signifies the bloodshed of Dorian Gray poisoning his lover, Angélique, after showing her his painting. After Angélique's highly melodramatic slow-motion fall, a tilted bird's-eye shot shows her deep-red gown pooling by her side, as if blood were flowing from her flank. These liquid or

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[46] An example of such debiologisation outside of the Horror genre is Moses turning the water of the Nile into blood in *The Ten Commandments* (dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1956).

solid analogies thus function as debiologised instances of blood, announcing or symbolising bloodshed, concealing horror while at the same time foreshadowing it, in a web of aesthetic blood-related symbolism throughout the texts.

Fig. 3.27: 'Blood urn': The wax lamp as liquid analogy of blood in *Dark Shadows*.

Fig. 3.28: Solid representations of blood in *Dark Shadows* (top) and *Penny Dreadful* (bottom).
[Modified brightness]

Furthermore, debiologised blood also flows from non-bleeding organisms or inanimate objects in a fantastic way with, for instance, bleeding plants (the Tree of the Dead in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), a flower in the opening credits of *Penny Dreadful*) or bleeding pictures (in *Dark Shadows* and in *Midnight Mass*). These unnatural flows of blood function as symptoms of forgotten wrongs marked in blood and resurfacing from the past, similarly to the resurfacing of the aqueous past described in chapters I and II. Bleeding objects thus function as expressions of bloody truth wanting to come out. In her seminal study, Eve Kosofsky Segdwick traces the link between blood and truth, arguing that writing in blood immediately gives an 'authoritative, inalienable, and immediate' quality to the writing (1986, p. 154), e.g., the common image of signing a contract in blood. Segdwick summarises by stating, 'the writing of blood and flesh never lies' (1986, p. 154). Even without the linguistic-semiotic element of writing, the unnatural apparition of blood functions as a revelation of truth. As Bettina Bildhauer, in her study of blood in medieval texts, similarly explains, '[t]he logic goes that if it is blood-related, it must be true' (2009, p. 30). Unnatural blood occurrences, such as bleeding objects, thus indicate a truth marked by blood and needing to be revealed.

In the climax of *Dark Shadows*, the Collins family confront the witch Angélique. As they fight, she exclaims, '[i]f Collins blood built this house, then let us bathe in it' making the portraits

on the walls start bleeding, from the frames, but also the eyes, throats, wrists, etc., of the depicted figures. This blood reveals the cursing of the bloodline operated by Angélique throughout the centuries, as she explains to Barnabas shortly after, 'I cursed your family'. She admits to having turned Carolyn into a werewolf, driven David's mother to jump off Widow's Hill, and killed Barnabas' parents. The symbolic bloodline, the dysfunctional and cursed family, to reuse Bauman's ideas, the revoked kinship, becomes materialised in the literal blood leaking from the paintings. The blood also reveals the nature of the characters' curse as Barnabas' portrait primarily bleeds from the eyes – his vampiric tears are blood – and the throat – again, in a nod to his vampiric state. The portrait of Josette, whom Angélique made jump from Widow's Hill, bleeds from the wrists to convey her death by suicide. Now, the scene of Josette's death is bloodless, despite her plummeting from a cliff to sea-battered rocks (see fig. 1.9). The blood therefore reveals and materialises the violence of Angélique's interventions within the family, despite the absence of blood in the actual deaths. Real and symbolic blood thus merge in the revelatory event of the bleeding thing.

As a spectacular expression of truth, a bleeding object also features in *Midnight Mass*. The series revolves around an isolated community whose lives are changed by the arrival of an enigmatic and miracle-performing young priest. In the third episode of this mini-series ('Book III: Proverbs', 2021), the priest reveals that he is, in fact, the island's former dementia-ridden aged priest, bitten by a vampiric entity, which he describes as an angel. As the young priest recounts his transformation into a vampire, his narration is punctuated by flashbacks of the events before and after the transformation, and shots of non-diegetic woodcarvings representing images from said events, as a reference to the stations of the Cross. In the episode's climax, the vampire cuts open his wrist to let the priest drink his blood. This stigma, as described by the voice-over of the young priest, is materialised by an interjected shot of a woodcarving depicting a bleeding wound on the wrist of a clawed hand (fig. 3.29). The priest is then showed forcefully drinking from the bleeding wrist, before another shot of the woodcarving. As the camera dollies into the picture, shining blood starts to flow from the sculpted wood and the priest, in a voice-over, refers to Matthew 26:27 in the following words, 'Take this, all of you and drink from it. This is my blood. The blood of the new and everlasting covenant shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven' ('Book III: Proverbs', 2021). This displacement of the stigma not only from Christ to vampire (symbolically, good to evil), but from body to object reveals the twisting of the priest's mind, mistaking a vampire for an angel, and a curse for a miracle, thus losing established solid reference points. In turn, this

debiologised flow of blood crystallises the moment the real identity of the priest is unveiled. The real blood of the vampire opening his wrist for the priest becomes revelatory blood as soon as it appears flowing from an object.

Fig. 3.29: Wood carving of the vampire's stigmata before and after blood starts flowing from it. [Modified brightness]

3.2.3 Objects, Subjects, Things

In their revelatory state, bleeding objects, in turn, become agential. In her study of medieval things, Bildhauer explains that objects and subjects (within a Cartesian framework) differ on the

basis that subjects transcend materiality through agency, which, when understood as 'free will and self-propelled movement,' (2020, p. 6) belongs to subjects exclusively. However, when an object bleeds, it transcends its materiality through a newly acquired agency, as it calls to be looked at, to tell its audience a secret. As such, bleeding objects affirm both a form of free will (I, the object, want you, the subject, to look at me) and a form of self-propelled movement (I, the object, am reaching toward you, the subject). They were once objects in the background and suddenly, as they start to bleed, they become noticeable and quasi-agential parts of the narrative (either as metaphors or as plot points). By calling attention to themselves, these items go from *objects* to *things* as argued by Bill Brown. He explains that,

> We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (2001, p. 4)

The bleeding object becomes thing because it does not meet the human expectations of this particular object. It could be said that the drill breaking becomes a thing through failure to meet its expected function. A bleeding painting becomes a thing because it exceeds the expectations. It becomes more than the user ever intended. It becomes vivified. With the bleeding *thing* there is a sense that it is not only because the painting, for instance, becomes covered with thick red liquid (which indeed means that the object can no longer fulfil its function, i.e., display a picture) but because it becomes more than it was. The object becomes more sign than object, and stops functioning as simply object. The neutral object in the background shifts to thing and the object-subject relation is affirmed as a threatening, destabilising one which plunges the narrative into a dark fantasy world. Hence, blood allows objects to move from what Lesley Stern calls the quotidian to the histrionic dimension of films, from 'the rhythms and nuances of everyday life' to 'stylization, by processes of semiotic virtuosity' (2001, pp. 324-325). Blood thus expropriates the everyday object as it adds an unexpected and spectacular layer of meaning onto it. By doing so, blood removes the ordinary object from its ordinary plane of existence.

This representation of objects as fluid things highlights the liquefaction of goods in post-modern society described by Bauman in *Liquid Modernity.* Traditionally, objects were

perceived as stable entities. A painting was a stable object, perhaps inherited from one's parents, hung in one's house and left on the same wall until one's children would, in turn, inherit it. The manufactured object was made to be solid, to last in time and in many cases, to outlast its owner. Nevertheless, Bauman explains that, in contemporary culture, as a culture built around (over-)consumption, things are inherently fluid (2000, p.85). A painting is built cheaply, made to be bought, hung for as long as it is deemed fashionable – or, worse, trendy – and, as quickly as possible, replaced or upgraded by a new painting. Attempts to anchor oneself within a fluid society through objects, as Bauman describes it, to 'exorcize the gruesome apparitions of uncertainty and insecurity which keep haunting the nights' (2000, p.81) through constant shopping – in hopes of solidifying one's identity – is countered by the emphasis on fluid things which have replaced reliable, durable, and, as such, solid objects. As the object becomes thing and gains meaning and visibility, it thus gains purpose within the narrative. This idea of loss of randomness of the thing is key to Elaine Freedgood's approach to the concept of Thing in Victorian texts, where she defines 'thing culture' as 'a more extravagant form of object relations than ours, one in which systems of value were not quarantined from one another and ideas of interest and meaning were perhaps far less restricted than they are for us' (2006, p. 8). Freedgood gives the example of the Victorian era as the quintessential thing culture. However, the author explains that:

> Thing culture survives now in those marginal or debased cultural forms and practices in which apparently mundane or meaningless objects can suddenly take on or be assigned value and meaning: the flea market, the detective story, the lottery, the romantic comedy – in short, in any cultural site in which a found object can be convincingly stripped of randomness. (2006, p. 8)

Stripping the object of randomness, and therefore turning it into a thing through blood, is a key element of the Gothic – which, in its search for the buried truth, has a lot in common with the detective story[47] listed by Freedgood. For instance, in the 2020 version of *Dracula*, the crystal glass with a golden rim, from which Jonathan Harker drinks wine, constitutes a background element signifying Dracula's status and sophisticated taste, as well as the time period. On its own, the glass is thus a contextual element, silently giving background information on both the object owner and the narrative. In the sequence, lasting 3 minutes and 32 seconds, where Jonathan meets Dracula and then eats in front of his host, the glass is featured 38 seconds in total. However, it is never

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[47] See e.g., Hanson, 2007.

highlighted cinematographically, it always sits at the edge of the shot, out of focus, lost among the rest of the props, or too far into the background to notice. Yet, as soon as a similar glass is filled with blood, signifying that Jonathan is now too weak for the Count to worry about hiding his drinking habits, it is no longer silently giving the viewer context. It becomes valuable and meaningful, crystallising the elegant monstrosity of the vampire. Hence, the thing becomes more central in the cinematography, catching focus over the characters. The scene runs 4 minutes and 8 seconds – 36 seconds more than the first scene – and within this timeframe, the glass is featured for 42 seconds – only 4 seconds more. The difference, however, is that the glass becomes a central element of the scene. As the camera hauntingly moves around the two characters, the glass is shown through close-ups, gaining prominence over the rest of the shot, including characters, being placed in the foreground, out of focused yet obstructing the image (fig. 3.30). The object becomes thing through the addition of blood and becomes a narrative and cinematographic node.

Fig. 3.30: Cinematographic prominence of the bloody thing over the character in *Dracula* (2020). From top to bottom: in the foreground and in focus while the character is blurred [modified brightness]; in the foreground and out of focus, obstructing the character's face; as the only focus of the shot; at the centre of the shot.

A similar dynamic appears in *Midnight Mass* episode 5 ('Book V: Gospel', 2021). Riley, after being bitten by the vampire, recovers in the rec centre, under the care of Father Paul and Bev, a devoted follower. To heal Riley's wounds, Father Paul and Bev give him blood willingly shed by another follower into a golden cup. As the blood-filled cup is brought to the protagonist, once

again, Matthew's verse is quoted, but, this time, the cup makes an apparition in the paraphrase: 'This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new, and everlasting covenant, shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven' ('Book V: Gospel', 2021). Significantly, the cup takes over the dialogue as it does over the cinematography. While the cup is empty, it is held by Bev, close to her body, an object, which, although at the centre of the frame, is not given independent power (fig. 3.31). However, as soon as the cup is filled with blood, it takes its own power and becomes a quasi-protagonist. Bev holds it away from herself, arms extended, and most importantly, the framing of the thing becomes independent from its holder. Bev disappears beyond the frame or behind Father Paul's shadow, while the cup remains firmly within the frame (fig. 3.32). This subtle shift from object to independent thing is underlined by the non-diegetic sound of a cello playing a single note each time the cup is extended toward a character (at first the priest and then Riley), thus underlining the movement and the thing's quasi-self-propelling capacity. Each note is the thing addressing its potential new carrier. Although the cup is not moving on its own, the cinematography and soundscape confer upon it a sense of independence as soon as it is filled with blood, to underline Riley's own newfound vampirism and his fetishist thirst.

Fig. 3.31: The empty cup lost in the cinematography (top) and the cup disappearing from the frame as the camera dollies in toward Bev (bottom).

Fig. 3.32: Cinematographic prominence of the blood-filled cup over the character holding it. Top: Bev is hidden behind the priest. Bottom: Bev is cut out of the frame.

3.3 Beautiful Blood: Flowing Commodities

3.3.1 Blood and Things: Fetish and Chic

This suddenly added fetishist thingness of the object through blood in the vampire narrative even surfaces when the object in question holds no intrinsic value. In *Byzantium*, this destabilisation of the object takes shape in the bike accident scene. When Frank hurts himself and blood gushes out of his wrist, he uses a cloth to try and stop the bleeding as Eleanor helps him get to his house.

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Frank discards the bloody piece of cloth before leaving for the hospital with his parents. As soon as the fabric is dropped, a slow-motion effect accompanies a blurring of the soundscape into distant reverberations to signify Eleanor's thirst. Echoes of a beating heart resonate as Eleanor stares at the crimson cloth like it is something precious, with multiple shots/counter-shots emphasising the red shine of the blood-soaked piece of fabric and Eleanor's pull toward it. As she can finally pick it up, perhaps a little too early for safety, a close-up shot shows the young vampire drinking from the piece of fabric. Here, the piece of discarded waste becomes a thing that is fetishised by the vampire girl, as she carefully holds it and almost kisses the shiny blood out of it (fig. 3.33). The *blood* turns the discarded waste object into a precious thing, its shine underlined by its apposition with the dull red of Eleanor's red hood.

Fig. 3.33: Fetishisation of the discarded blood-soaked cloth in _Byzantium_.

On the floor or in her hands, the bloody cloth looks like blood. The cloth disappears as blood takes over the thing and becomes thing itself. Blood, in itself, is often not considered a thing, in that things are commonly defined as solid and – implicitly – non-biological. A heart is not a thing, neither is rain. As explained by Bildhauer,

> liquids as well as gasses do not automatically count as things for everyone, because they are not solid and often transparent. To be considered paradigmatically a thing, an entity

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should in addition ideally be countable, manufactured, and of the right size and weight to be portable, while powders, animals, plants, and buildings, for instance, might not always be considered things. (2020, p. 8)

However, Gothic blood *becomes* thing on screen because it constitutes an object thrown in the path (ob-ject) of the subject to call to its own visibility. Particularly in vampire narratives, blood is a precious object, fetishised by the vampire. Fetishism describes what Hartmut Böhme in his study of postmodern culture and its relationship to things calls a 'corrupt relationship to objects' (2014, p. 4). Böhme clarifies that:

> From an enlightened, secular position, 'fetish' describes a thing that individuals or a collective of individuals ascribe meanings and powers to that have nothing to do with its primary qualities […]. Rather, they are attributed to it in *an act of projection* – and in such a way that the thing both incorporates and *radiates* these meanings and powers for the fetishists. However, this is considered self-deception. For fetishists, as a meaningful and powerful object the fetish-thing becomes an agent to which henceforth the fetishist is bound out of respect, fear or desire. (2014, p. 4) [my emphasis]

The fetishised object thus becomes thing in that it goes beyond its traditional role and binds the fetishist into a relationship where power is assigned to the object rather than the subject. Suggested by Böhme, in this quotation, is the way the thing acquires this power: it reaches towards the fetishist ('an act of projection', 'radiates'). An often mentioned way for the fetishised thing to reach beyond itself is shine. Bildhauer, commenting on Böhme, demonstrates that, '[t]he power wielded by the consumer fetish is due to its glossy surface, which promises to overcome its materiality and madeness' (2020, p. 50). The shiny coat of a car hides the cogs, bolts and leaks of its motor. In all aforementioned instances of vampiric thirst and blood presentation, shine is key to the representation of blood as power-thing. The shine of the blood (and of the object containing it, in the case of the glass and the cup) calls toward the vampire (and the implied audience, attracting the eye) as a way to display the liquid in all its powerful and active beauty, while hiding the horrors it suggests (its biological nature, its potentially morbid origins etc.). The shine of blood turns it into a thing with the 'quasi-human, alive and active' power (Bildhauer, 2020, p. 33) to call for attention and to influence the actions of humans despite themselves. For instance, in both *Midnight Mass* and *Byzantium,* the vampire is initially hesitant to drink the blood. In *Midnight Mass,* the newly turned Riley at first jerks back from the cup. After a close-up shot of the golden cup, where the

dark shine of the blood and the golden shine of the chalice reflect into and reinforce each other (fig. 3.34), Riley greedily grabs the cup and drinks the blood. In *Byzantium,* the slow motion of the scene, juxtaposing shots of Eleonore's hunger and of the bloody cloth, reveals the fetishisation of the shiny thing. Blood thus becomes agent and, therefore, agential thing through its shine.[48]

Fig. 3.34: Shine of the blood and of the cup as fetishisation in *Midnight Mass.*

Through its shine, the agential blood radiates beauty – both in itself and on the thing it is attached to –, which crystallises what I call 'Gothic chic,' a quality that permeates the contemporary Gothic screen. As blood is debiologised, it can be used as a chic prop, endowing the characters with a dark elegance and sophistication, making them, as described in the *OED* definition of 'chic', '[s]tylishly elegant and sophisticated' ('chic', 2023). Sophistication is also essential in the definition of Gothic chic since it denotes two distinct, yet equally important, characteristics of the Gothic. One of the meanings of sophisticated is '[a]ltered from, deprived of, primitive simplicity or naturalness' ('sophisticated', 2023). This relates to the over-construction of the Gothic, the labyrinthine and excessively manufactured nature of the mode, reflected in the complexly manufactured object. A secondary meaning of sophisticated, when applied to a person, is 'free of naïvety, experienced, worldly-wise; subtle, discriminating, refined, cultured' ('sophisticated', 2023). Here, the notions of 'discriminating, refined, cultured' suggest that sophistication is built in

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[48] The subjectivisation of the thing through fetish is different from the subjectivisation of the blood drop aforementioned. The blood in the above examples is at no point fetishised, in that there is no submission of the subject to the thing.

opposition to the ordinary, the ignorant, the uncultured. In French, from which it is borrowed, the adjective *chic* refers to one's elegance and distinction ('chic', no date). The notion of distinction intrinsically marks a separation defined by one's allure, manners and speech showing a proper education ('être distingué', no date). Chic, in the sense of sophisticated and *distingué,* is thus built in opposition to the crude and vulgar. Hence, the final step in the definition of *distingué*, '[a]ppartenir à l'élite ; être hors du commun [to belong to the elite; to be out of the ordinary]' ('être distingué', no date). Gothic chic is, therefore, the elegant and beautifully manufactured thing which, through blood, separates the character from the ordinary, both in class and in fantastic powers, as, for instance, with Dracula's elegant gold-trimmed and blood-filled glass, anchoring the characters firmly within both the aristocratic and vampiric worlds.[49]

Gothic chic is always signified through the sophisticated object, whose madeness distinguishes it from primitive or common items. Therefore, while fetishised blood hides its biology, i.e., what it is made of, to display its shiny surface, the Gothic chic thing unapologetically displays its own craftedness. In this sense, while blood can function as a fetish, the chic thing functions as 'faitish,' a homophonic play on 'fait' (made) and 'fétiche'(fetish), framed by Bruno Latour as a crafted object whose power is not cancelled by, but in fact, reinforced by its own overt craftedness (2010, pp. 1-65). The Gothic chic 'faitish' is highly crafted and sophisticated, and its power radiates from this very craftedness. The shine of the object (through precious metals or stones most often) means that the object can be chic on its own, but only becomes Gothic chic once it merges with blood. Therefore, the Gothic chic faitish is often specifically crafted for blood manipulation (shed, drink, touch, etc.). These beautiful blood crafts synthesise the two facets of their owners: the monstrous one, often marked by violent blood (the vampire ripping out a victim's neck, the witch sacrificing a newborn child), and an elegant, arguably more unsettling one, where brutality meets distinguished control, bloodshed meets sophistication. Crafted vampire claws, for example, are prominent signifiers of Gothic chic. Cinematic vampires as early as Nosferatu, in the eponymous film (1922), and Belà Lugosi's Dracula in 1931, display coarse claw-like nails (fig. 3.35), which are not used

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[49] Historically, vampires have been aristocrats both in literature – Lord Ruthven in John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), Carmilla in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872)*,* Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), of course, but also more recently, Lestat and Louis from Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) – and on screen – the many adaptations of *Dracula*, but also *Dark Shadows,* the *Underworld* series (2003-2016)*,* etc. Non-aristocratic vampires do start appearing on screen around the 1980s (*Salem's Lot* (dir. Tobe Hooper, 1979), *Fright Night* (dir. Josh Holland, 1985), *The Lost Boys* (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1987), as a deliberate deviance from the generic standard. In *Byzantium*, this is underlined by the working-class, female protagonists being hunted down by the original vampiric Brethen, aristocratic men who see female vampires as threatening anomalies.

to draw blood. These claws only signal their animalistic and brutal nature. On the contemporary screen however, these animalistic claws have sometimes transformed into crafted sharp nails, or nail-like tools, used to draw blood with poise, as in *Byzantium,* with Eleanor's only carefully manicured nail, or in *American Horror Story: Hotel* (2015). In the latter, the Countess uses a chic and sophisticated claw-like jewelery to slash or pierce the skin of her victims, either on its own or as part of an ornate glove (fig. 3.36). In fact, the first glimpse of her character, in episode 1 ('Checking In', 2015), is through a jeweled silver glove, extending from outside the shot towards the neck of an unsuspecting victim, a focus which synthesises the vampire's predation and sophistication. This crafted object echoes Evelyn Poole's witch ring in *Penny Dreadful*, a gold signet ring with intricate patterns on the band. Two small sharp blades spring out from the seal, allowing the witch to slash and immediately kill her opponents. After the ring is used by Evelyn to kill her daughter ('Fresh Hell', 2015), it is displayed in close up as the witch closes the spring mechanism, underlining the aesthetic and mechanical craftiness as well as the bloodiness of the ring, as a complete synthesis of Gothic chic (fig. 3.37).

The Gothic chic thus embodies this tendency of consumer society to close the gap between luxury and necessity. In a producer-based society, i.e., in Bauman's terms, a solid society, life is organised around needs and comfort. One can consume within a bottom line (what they need to stay alive) and a top line (what they want to be comfortable), but '[w]hatever rises above that limit is a luxury, and desiring luxury is a sin. The main concern is therefore that of *conformity*: of settling securely between the bottom line and the upper limit' (2000, p. 76) [emphasis in the original]. In a consumer-based society, i.e., liquid society, however, there are no limits nor regulations and, therefore, '[t]he idea of "luxury" makes little sense, as the point is to make today's luxuries into tomorrow's necessities, and to reduce the distance between "today" and "tomorrow" to the minimum' (2000, p. 76). Gothic chic crafts close this gap between need (to feed, to kill, to survive) and luxury. Needs are addressed in style and luxuries become needs.

Fig. 3.35: Nosferatu's un-crafted claws.

Fig. 3.36: Manufactured vampire claw in *American Horror Story: Hotel.*

Fig. 3.37: Evelyn's blood ring in *Penny Dreadful.* [Modified brightness]

Nevertheless, objects which are not specifically crafted for bloodshed can also become Gothic chic through blood contact. Blood thus contaminates and shifts the nature of the object, as well as marks its chic out-of-the-ordinariness more deeply. In *Dracula* (2020), the aforementioned glass constitutes a chic marker of monetary and social distinction. The elite possesses the chic object. However, blood turns the glass into Gothic chic and, consequently, shifts the social distinction to a superhuman one. A similar dynamic can be observed in *Penny Dreadful.* In the last episode of series 2 ('And They Were Enemies', 2015), Dr. Frankenstein attempts to win back his creature, Lily, from Dorian Gray. In desperation, Frankenstein shoots the two lovers in the heart. Unaffected, the immortals waltz around Gray's ballroom as blood slowly starts to spread over their elegant white gowns in symmetrical patterns adding a chilling elegance to both characters. A stroke of blood falls neatly in the middle of Lily's skirt and runs along the edges of her dress, while her lover's dapper white suit becomes covered in stylish crimson stripes on his back and legs (fig, 3.38).[50] Blood carefully adds a layer of eerie sophistication onto the chic garments reflecting and enhancing the elegance of the object.

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[50] A similar motif appears in *Crimson Peak*'s climax where Edith's white nightgown becomes covered in figurative blood (red clay) and, again, the 'blood' enhances the design of the dress.

Fig. 3.38: Dorian's and Lily's Gothic chic attires as created through blood in *Penny Dreadful*. [Modified brightness]

The revelatory and truth-telling quality of blood, mentioned above, soon seeps into the chic object. Without blood, the gold ring is just a gold ring, and the elegant dress is nothing more than an elegant dress. Although it demonstrates the social status of the character, it does not hint at their true nature, which is revealed through blood. In the case of Lily's dress, this revelatory quality invokes Catherine Spooner's analysis of Gothic fashion and bodies, where she mentions the 'dualistic tradition within Western thought, in which clothing as artifice is opposed to the natural

body, a false covering for the authentic self beneath' (2004, p. 2). Clothes function as the concealer of the natural body, and through this, of its biology – in a fetishist manner. However, on Lily's dress, blood reverses the tradition, and the very thing that is supposed to hide the body's biology becomes strikingly marked by that same biology. Therefore, instead of hiding the biology or the 'bodiliness' of the body, the stained dress exposes it – in a faitishist manner. By exposing the biology of the characters' bodies, blood stains, due to the extensive and continuous blood loss, reveal their immortality to Frankenstein. This notion of blood stain as revelatory of what lies under the garment evokes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's study of the veil, where she argues that, not only is the marking in blood indicative of truth, as I have discussed, but the inscription on surfaces – such as blood on a veil – is contagious (1986, p. 142), and, as such, the bloodied veil 'can also be directly referential: it can constitute itself, at least momentarily, as an order of things that is both distinct from and intentionally descriptive of some other order' (1986, p. 149). The blood inscription on the surface, in Lily's case, a dress rather than a veil, in fact refers to another order, the depth of the character. The blood on Lily's white dress does not only refer to her immortality and invulnerability but also to her place in the narrative. Once a protagonist – first a dying prostitute, then a resuscitated and unaware being –, as signified by her white dress, Lily becomes a threatening antagonist, as signified by the blood. The bloody dress is thus both an instance of 'metonymic spread' (Sedgwick, 1986, p. 149), in that it extends, by exteriorisation, Lily's character shift, but it also constitutes a sign in itself as it points to a discontinuity (Sedgwick, 1986, p. 149) between distinct experiences of blood. Lily's past experiences with blood are victimising, as she graphically describes about her life as a prostitute, 'You drag us into the alleys, my lad, and cram yourselves into our mouths for two bobs when you're not beating us senseless, when we're not bloody from the eyes, and the mouth and the ass and the cunt' ('Memento Mori', 2015). The blood flowing on her dress suggests what she calls her 'complete supremacy' ('And They Were Enemies', 2015) over men, and the human race more broadly. Lily tells her story through blood, making it a plasma- rather than anthropo-centric narrative, showing the evolution of blood relations between herself and others. From the blood she shed as a victim of male violence, to the blood she coughs up as she dies of consumption, Lily becomes stained with a power-signaling beautiful blood.

Bauman argues that goods, in a consumer society form the building blocks of our identity as a supposedly stable sense of self. Nevertheless, as objects become fluid things which do not hold their shapes or meanings, our identities cannot solidify. Consequently, identities themselves become fluid. Bauman describes the search for identity in post-modern liquid society as an

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ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless. We struggle to deny or at least to cover up the awesome fluidity just below the thin wrapping of the form; we try to avert our eyes from sights which they cannot pierce or take in. Yet far from slowing the flow, let alone stopping it, identities are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set. So there is need for another trial, and another - and they can be attempted only by clinging desperately to things solid and tangible and thus promising duration, whether or not they fit or belong together and whether or not they give ground for expecting that they will stay together once put together. (2000, pp.82-83)

As the protagonist become antagonist, Lily's dress, in its fluidity, exposes the 'awesome fluidity just below the thin wrapping of the form' and her threatening nature lies precisely in this exhibition of fluidity. Indeed, as Bauman later explains, '[i]n a world in which deliberately unstable things are the raw building material of identities that are by necessity unstable, one needs to be constantly on the alert; but above all one needs to guard one's own flexibility and speed of readjustment to follow swiftly the changing patterns of the world "out there"' (2000, p. 85). Lily's power lies precisely in her refusing to dissimulate the fluidity of her body and her identity.A variation on this motif features in the first episode of the second series of *Penny Dreadful* ('Fresh Hell', 2015), where the matriarchal witch, Evelyn Poole, takes a blood bath. She is smoking in her bath, her raised hand holding a cigarette covered in a glove-shaped layer of blood (fig. 3.39). Here, blood itself becomes Gothic chic thing. In her study of touch and cinema, Jennifer M. Barker delivers a short analysis of gloves. Building on Kristeva and Walter Benjamin in her reading of *Repulsion* (dir. Roman Polanski, 1965) and *Eraserhead* (dir. David Lynch, 1977), she concludes that, '[t]he glove and the muddy sock that Carol and Henry peel from their skins are the tangible figures of this border, or skin, that thinly separates them from the animalistic and carnal stuff of the world and of themselves' (2009, p. 55). The glove thus functions as a clear, physical separation between the self and the biologically abject other ('carnal stuff of the world'), but also works as a concealer of the characters' own physicality ('carnal stuff of […] themselves'). However, in our case, the blood glove functions as a material synthesis of Evelyn and the carnality of the world, which, as the young woman lying dead at the foot of her bathtub indicates, she chose to make visible. Evelyn is the abolisher of boundaries and reverses the meaning of a quotidian object, a glove, into its exact opposite. What once protected the flesh from the other's flesh, now is made of it. Barker later references Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his analysis of gloves in terms of the

reversibility of flesh where the glove, and more specifically, the glove with a finger turned inside out, constitutes an example of chiasmus. Merleau-Ponty argues, '[i]l n'y a pas le Pour Soi et le Pour Autrui. Ils sont l'autre côté l'un de l'autre. C'est pourquoi ils s'incorporent l'un-l'autre [there is no For-Itself and For-the-Other. They are both the other side of the other. This is why they incorporate one another]' (1964, p. 311), before concluding that 'il n'y a pas d'identité, ni non-identité, ou non-coïncidence, il y a dedans et dehors tournant l'un autour de l'autre [there is not identity, nor non-identity, nor non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning around each other]' (1964, p. 312). In a form of liminal abject, inside and outside, self and other, lining and skin, cannot be separated as they are part of each other. This conflation of the inside and the outside is indeed visible with the glove's finger turned inside out, as the outside turns inside, but, in doing so, creates yet more layers of inside and outside. Evelyn's Gothic chic glove expresses what Barker describes as 'the horrifying aspect of such intimate proximity' (2009, p. 56) even more strikingly. The inside (the blood) of the other (the dead girl – other as a person but also as a corpse) becomes the outside (the glove) of the self (Evelyn), and the outside of the self (Evelyn's skin), in turn becomes the inside (of the glove), which, again, always turning in on each other, becomes an outside expression of her inside, i.e., her true identity. Evelyn's fluid identity is powerfully and shamelessly exposed, in all its raw power. Blood on the fashioned body and blood fashioning the body thus challenge and mix boundaries between the inside and the outside, the invisible and the visible, the private and the public, the biological and the manufactured, the abject and the beautiful.

Fig. 3.39: Evelyn's blood glove in *Penny Dreadful*. [Modified brightness]

3.3.2 Beautiful Blood as Anti-Abject

Gothic blood, in its chic and beautifying qualities, does not constitute a Kristevan abject substance. Historically, blood is, in fact, linked to beauty. In her analysis of the experience of beauty in the Middle Ages, Mary Carruthers traces the etymology of Latin words relating to beauty (*pulcher*, *venustus*, *formosus*, etc.), and uses Isidore's – often technically incorrect but culturally relevant – *Etymologies* (c. 615-630) to demonstrate the connection between healthy blood and beauty (a red cheek, i.e., blood filled cheek, for instance) (2013, p. 183).[51] This etymological and cultural understanding of blood loses its grasp in modern culture, where blood is perceived as abject. In her analysis of the semiotics of biblical abomination, Kristeva describes blood as unequivocally abject since '[a]ny secretion or discharge, anything that leaks out of the feminine or masculine body defiles' (1982, p. 102). The breaking of the body boundaries is thus a key element in her approach to blood as abject. However, Kristeva also considers that its synthesising of notions of life and death, fertility and murder, makes blood a 'semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection where *death* and *femininity, murder* and *procreation, cessation of life* and *vitality* all come together' (1982, p. 96) [emphasis in the original]. Blood is thus also abject in its mixing of contradictory symbolisms. Highly influential in Horror scholarship, Kristeva's reading of blood as abject permeates its perception on screen. Creed, in her study of women as vampires, asserts that, '[b]lood, as a bodily emission, is itself an abject substance' (1993, p. 62). Over 25 years later, in her study of women's Horror cinema, Pisters similarly argues that '[b]lood signifies the abject as it defies the border between the inside and the outside of the body' (2020, p. 17). This lack of evolution in the perception of blood, despite the shifts in its representation, creates a gap in scholarship where debiologised, fetishised, or chic blood is not considered. Because Gothic blood is mostly debiologised, the abject breaking of bodily boundaries does not apply to it. Furthermore, scholarship, and especially Feminist Horror scholarship, focuses heavily on menstrual blood, whose material in-betweenness (between liquid and solid) makes it abject. However, again, Gothic blood, including uterine blood, as shown above, can be depicted as liquid to allow for its beauty-imbued and symbolic representation. Since blood is no longer bound to the body, theGothic revalorises it as vital and beautiful force (especially in vampire texts).

This type of blood coexists in Horror with a more evidently abject type of blood. According to Rouyer, 'le gore, refus catégorique de la suggestion, ne se préoccupe guère d'effrayer son public, mais cherche avant tout à le choquer et à l'écœurer [gore, categorically resisting suggestion, is not

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[51] The latin *exsanguis* (bloodless) could refer to someone's pallor (Genescu, 2014, p. 11).

concerned with frightening the audience, but primarily seeks to shock and disgust]' (1997, p. 14). This abject blood, which Rouyer links to gore, does not confer haunting beauty to the aesthetics of fear in the way of beautiful blood. Therefore, when retracing the etymology of the word 'gore' in his introduction, Rouyer lingers on the idea of dirtiness and impurity:

> Le *Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, qui propose comme définition « sang répandu, sang coagulé », situe l'apparition du mot […] aux alentours de 1150. Il en retrouve l'origine dans le vieil anglais *gor* (saleté, excrément), de la même famille que *gyre* et apparenté à *gor* (saleté en vieil allemand), *goor* (minable, miteux en hollandais) et *gor* (substance visqueuse en vieil islandais). C'est dire si, dans ses plus lointaines racines, le *gore* est déjà associé à l'idée de sale et de répugnant. (1997, p. 9) [emphasis in the original]

> [*Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology,* offers as a definition 'shed, coagulated blood' and situates the apparition of the word […] around 1150. It situates the word's origins in old English, *gor* (dirt, excrement), of the same family as *gyre* and related to *gor* (dirt in old German), *goor* (shabby, sleazy in Dutch) and *gor* (viscous substance in old Icelandic). This just shows that, in its most distant roots, *gore* is already associated to the idea of dirt and repugnance.]

Abject blood, in its mix of solid and liquids – Rouyer's often mentioned 'le sang et les tripes [blood and guts]' (e.g., pp. 14 or 19)[52] –, and in its associations with violence, impurity and coagulation, corresponds to *cruor* blood. In the dual Latin understanding of blood, as listed in Ernout and Meillet's *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Latine*, *cruor* corresponds originally to 'raw flesh,' but, as flesh comes to be designated as *caro*, *cruor* takes on the meanings of 'shed or coagulated blood,' or 'blood puddle'. Words related to cruelty (*crudelis* as 'someone who enjoys or sheds blood') derive from the same root, thus capturing the violence implied in *cruor* blood (Ernout & Meillet, 2001, p. 152). On the other hand, *sanguis* covers meanings of 'flowing blood' (within the blood circulation system (Ernout & Meillet, 2001, p. 152)), 'ancestry' and 'symbol of strength' (Ernout & Meillet, 2001, p. 593).[53] The dichotomy is often summarised as *cruor* as

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[52] Rouyer, for instance, refers several times to the use of animal guts in Grand-guignol and early gore films (1997, p. 35) to make the horror more realistic.

[53] It must be noted that a third type of blood exists in Latin, sanies, which is often overlooked in studies for its connection to pus and venom rather than blood. Sanies is the corrupted blood, between blood and pus, oozing from wounds as well as the snake's venom (Ernout & Meillet, 2001, p. 593).

bloodshed as opposed to *sanguis* as life (Bynum, 2002, pp. 705-706).[54] *Cruor* and *sanguis* also differ in their materiality: *cruor* is 'dark red (from female menstruation or in preserved animals or humans, and thought impure)' whereas *sanguis* is 'bright red (from fresh wounds during combat or sacrificial rites, and considered pure)' (Garraud & Lefrère, 2014, p. 15). Textures also change since *cruor* is impure in the sense of 'clotted blood,' a dark and partially solid blood, while *sanguis* is 'the liquid form of blood' (Garraud & Lefrère, 2014, p. 15). *Cruor* thus corresponds to gore blood in all three of its characteristics as described by Rouyer (violence, impurity and coagulation). *Sanguis,* a flowing, bright red, liquid blood, on the contrary, is Gothic blood.

Colour, texture, violence and movement thus show that blood functions not as a stable entity but, following a Deleuzian framework, as an assemblage created through dynamic and unstable relations (Rødje, 2016, pp. 14-15). Rødje uses the term 'blood assemblage' to describe the 'multitude of operating factors which together make the appearance of blood convincing to the viewer' (2016, p. 97). These 'operating factors,' nonetheless, not only define whether blood is depicted convincingly, but also whether blood is beautiful or abject. If blood is associated with death, biology, and/or inbetweenness, it becomes abject. If blood is life-giving, debiologised, and/or bright red, it is beautiful. In *Dracula* (2020), this contrast is clearly articulated (fig. 3.40). In episode 2 ('Blood Vessel', 2020), Agatha's blood, which Dracula drinks out of a glass (life-giving, debiologised, shiny red, perfectly liquid) is beautiful. Although stemming from cruel bloodshed, it is not depicted as a blood of death (Agatha is unaware that this is her blood), but as a blood of life, a 'vintage' to be savoured in Dracula's words. This blood constitutes a commodity in that it has, in Bauman's words, 'pleasure-generating potential' (2000, p. 89) as a vintage wine made to be consumed and, above all, savoured. On the other hand, in episode 3 ('The Dark Compass', 2020), when Dracula drinks Zoe's cancerous blood, which she describes as 'toxic' to vampires, a close-up shot shows Dracula throwing it up. The intrinsic abject qualities of the thick black blood (toxicity, viscosity, boundary-breaking) are reinforced by its analogy with vomit – underlined by the coughing and gargling sounds coming out of Dracula's throat. This is blood associated with biology, impurity, death, and abject inbetweenness. As such, this rotten blood constitutes a waste, a commodity whose usefulness or 'pleasure-generating potential', to reiterate Bauman's idea, has been exhausted.

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[54] Bloodletting in medical practice as well as blood shed on the battlefield in a glorious death can nonetheless be described as *sanguis*.

Fig. 3.40: Contrast between *sanguis*/beautiful blood (top) and *cruor*/abject blood (bottom) in *Dracula* (2020). [Modified brightness]

This distinction appears even more strikingly when beautiful and abject bloods are displayed close to bodies. In *Penny Dreadful*, when Vanessa visits a vampire lair in the first episode ('Night Work', 2014), she walks past a pile of bloodied corpses (fig. 3.41). The pile of half-eaten, half-drained bodies is not biologised, but instead objectified, or rather 'thing-ified.' The bodies become an intricate and marble-like sculpture, with bright red blood and shiny skin giving the bodies a highly manufactured waxy effect, resembling and foregrounding the materiality of the

wax sculptures and porcelain voodoo dolls of the second series. This Gothic blood, despite its proximity to corpses, transcends abjection and becomes not only crafted, but artistic, with an attention to the surface resembling that of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Flemish surfacists. On the other hand, contemporary representations of abject blood mostly revolve around images of the putrefying body (the paramount of abjection in Kristeva's framework). Abject blood is overwhelmingly represented as a marbling of black veins across a bloated and blistery white-ish and green-ish flesh – thus following the early stages of putrefaction. Such images appear in *Dracula* with his bride, a half-burnt corpse featured in episode 3 ('The Dark Compass', 2020) (fig. 3.42). In *The Void* (dir. Steven Kostanski and Jeremy Gillespie, 2016), the tentacled creatures, merging with and bursting out of their human hosts, create the same imagery with black marbling veins on bloated flesh and torn skin, to such an extent that the body is merely recognisable as body (fig. 3.43). This debiologisation of the body through hyper-biologisation is taken even further in the Netflix film *Fear Street 1666* (2021). At the heart of the narrative, the underground beating mass of organs (fig. 3.44) – the source of the town's curse – also presents this hyper-biologisation of the body, which both requires and creates abject blood. Hyper-biologisation leaves the body behind to create a pile of biological matter, both dead and, yet, undeniably living, in a typical abject fashion which exploits what McCormack describes as 'the breakdown of the body into asignifiable flesh' (2008, p. 37). Beautiful blood participates in the de-biologisation of bodies, bodies as desired commodities or pleasure-inducing things, while abject blood participates in the hyper-biologisation of bodies, bodies as waste and useless matter. Blood thus holds the chiasmic potential to turn the object into a quasi-subject (agential thing, as described earlier) and the (former) subject into a thing, an object which captures our attention.

Fig. 3.41: Beautiful blood attached to manufactured corpses in *Penny Dreadful*. [Modified brightness]

Fig. 3.42: Abject blood in *Dracula* (2020). [Modified brightness]

Fig. 3.43: Abject blood in *The Void* (2017). [Modified brightness]

Fig. 3.44: Formless biology in *Fear Street 1666* (2021). [Modified brightness]

3.3.3 Moving Blood and Water: Power Circulation

These types of blood materialise a distinction between blood that stagnates and rots and blood that flows. Gil Anidjar, in his monograph mapping the history of Christianity through blood, describes blood that freely flows as 'the blood that counts' (2014, p. 19). Then, de facto, the blood that stagnates, the blood which does not operate the main function of vivifying blood, does not

count. It does not matter in that it literally does not hold the power to bring life to matter, as shown above. Anidjar's distinction between bloods thus entirely relies on circulation. Blood's capacity to circulate, to flow, determines its value. The Gothic, particularly in vampire narratives, plays extensively on this distinction in relation to the vampiric state by depicting free-floating blood often using images of blood in or as water. Both water and blood crystallise key themes of the Gothic, such as life and death, sickness and health, sin and cleansing, inside and outside, purity and abjection, power and weakness, self and other, enrichment and privation, nature and culture, etc., which become entangled in vampire texts. For instance, in *Byzantium*, blood is intrinsically linked to water to signify vampiric transformations. To transform into vampire, humans must be guided to an isolated mountainous island where a perilous climb leads the characters to a hermit's hut, surrounded by waterfall-covered rocks. As the humans enter the hut, where they will be turned by an ancient creature, bright red blood takes over the cascading water across the island, pouring down the dark rocks and towards the sea (fig. 3.45). The flowing blood signifies the transformation into a vampire of the character within the hut and, by doing so, exposes the two sides of the transformation, from nature (human/water) to supernature (vampire/blood). These two sides merges, and so do the meanings of the liquids. Indeed, as it flows, the blood cleanses the water – a traditional symbol of cleansing in Christian belief. A close-up shot on a muddy puddle as Ruthven and Darvell, still human, climb to the hut underlines the naturalness and resulting dirtiness of the water. Both characters step into the mud, at this point in the narrative, in hopes of cleansing Darvell's illness, and, later, Ruthven returns to the island to cleanse his own. This muddy water is that of humanity, which is cleansed as they turn and blood flows, replacing the mud with clear puddles of blood (fig. 3.47). On this vampiric island, flowing blood is the liquid cleansing dirty water. As blood circulates in/as water so do the meanings of both liquids.

Fig. 3.45: Supernatural blood flowing over the wild landscape of the vampiric island.

Fig. 3.46: Ruthven steps into a muddy puddle as he climbs the rocky island (top) before blood cleanses the mud during the transformation (bottom).

Similarly, in the third episode of *Dracula* ('The Dark Compass', 2020), when the footage of finding Dracula's coffin underwater is shown, the vampire lies dormant. As the researcher explains, Dracula's body is perfectly 'preserved' even after 123 years in the water. The diver checks his mouth and fangs and the teeth close in on her thumb. Blood spreads across the frame in all

directions (fig. 3.49) as the sound of the waves echoes around. Blood circulates freely in volutes, spirals and whirls against its transparent screen as Dracula awakens from his dormant state. The implication, here, is that both blood and seawater can preserve Dracula's life force. Earlier in the series, this conflation is foreshadowed in a highly subtle way. When Jonathan Harker cuts his finger on his broken mirror, the sound that surrounds the drop of blood as it falls from the finger to the contracts is that of a body of water with a hint of crashing waves, similar to the background sounds of the diving scene. The movement of blood is conflated with that of seawater. The mix of seawater and blood appears as the – potentially abject and potentially poetic – mix of a fluid of life, the ocean as the cradle of life, but also fresh water as a positively coded liquid, and a fluid of death, blood as the signal of the end of life. In reality, both liquids overlap and merge in their symbolism – water as heavy with death, as I have shown in the study of the Gothic depths, and blood as fluid of life. Blood and water become one.

Beyond the symbolism of the liquids, materially, blood and water merge. Blood moves in veins through the body, water flows in similar ramified veins on the earth. Blood is over 90% water, and blood and seawater, in particular, are almost minerally identical. In his famous 1904 study, biologist René Quinton, while developing his theory of marine constancy, showed that blood plasma (what he calls 'milieu vital [vital milieu]') and isotonic seawater ('milieu marin [marine milieu']) share an almost identical mineral identity (1904, p. vi). His idea is that the marine milieu, as life develops, became part of the vital milieu of organic life, turning from the outside to the inside. This idea of the primordial milieux of life shifting towards the inside, from the boundless ocean to the closed and channelled coronary system constitutes the starting point of Italo Calvino's 'Blood, Sea' (1967), according to Stefan Helmreich, in a commentary of the short story (2015). The story is told from the point of view of Qfwfq, a non-specified blood entity (a cell, a drop, a measure), as it passes from a body, driving a car along the Italian coast, to the sea, as the car crashes. Qfwfq's primordial memories of marine milieux and vital milieu coalesce as it tells the story. The story illustrates the intrinsic link between blood and (sea)water. When Qfwfq leaves the waves within the body and (re-)joins the waves of the ocean, nothing changes. It was always-already ancient seawater and modern blood at the same time. Helmreich reflects on Calvino's story to build a short socio-historical frame of blood waves inside bodies (such as Mayer waves, pressure waves, etc.) (2015, p. 50). This communion of blood and (sea)water is therefore exploited in the Gothic, albeit instinctually, through the motif of blood circulating in water.

These depictions hint at the power of circulating blood, in vampire narratives in particular. If blood can flow freely, it holds power. This configuration of blood and seawater as power, studied by Anidjar, reflects the current emphasis on flows as power. Anidjar relates this idea to Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*, in which the sociologist configures contemporary power as flow. Bauman argues that, in solid societies, it used to be that (solid) soil defined power over (liquid) blood:

> the practice of feverish nation- and nation-state-building which [...] started in earnest all over Europe put the 'soil' firmly above the 'blood' when laying the foundations of the new legislated order and codifying the citizens' rights and duties. The nomads, who made light of the legislators' territorial concerns and blatantly disregarded their zealous efforts of boundary-drawing, were cast among the main villains in the holy war waged in the name of progress and civilization. (2000, p. 12)

However, in liquid modernity, free circulation is key to power. As Bauman explains, '[i]n the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite' (2000, p. 13). The more freely one moves, beyond the constraint of soil and capital, the more power one holds in a context of ever-increasing circulation of people, information, data, commodities, and, of course, power. Anidjar similarly links free circulation to power, explaining that '[i]n the circulatory logic that emphasizes motion and speed as well as growth and expansion, the freedom of power is the freedom of a world that is vitally free and open to flows' (2014, p. 13). According to Anidjar, this circulation is historically associated with the sea, a space of expansion and acceleration of flows (2014, p.14), in particular in a pre-modern context where maritime spaces were widely marginalised by European nations and their laws, and were consequently spaces of free-flowing power (2014, p.15). This opposition between the solidity of the soil and the fluidity of both the blood and the sea brings Anidjar to configure blood, sea and power as interlinked notions.

This configuration appears frequently in the Gothic through the motif of vampiric circulation via bodies of water, seas in particular, as exemplified by the seminal voyage of Dracula to England onboard the Demeter. Vampires hold their power, both symbolic and literal, through sea travel, as new shores bring them new influence and new blood. The circulation of the vampire is prominent in contemporary texts. While the voyage on the Demeter takes up a single chapter in Stoker's original novel, in the 2020 adaptation, one third of the series takes place on the Demeter as Dracula eats his way to England. More recently a feature film, *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* (2023, dir. André Øvredal), is entirely dedicated to Dracula's deadly crossing of the sea,

highlighting the significance of vampiric circulation in contemporary texts. Conversely, in *Midnight Mass*, Crocket Island becomes a trap to the original vampire and all his worshippers turned vampires as soon as the protagonists set fire to the boats, thus preventing anyone from leaving the island. The end of the flow on water marks the end of the vampires' power more so than the end of the flow of blood. In *Byzantium*, again, circulation is key to the vampiric women's survival as the very lives of Eleanor and her mother depend on their ability to run from the brotherhood, across time and space, free of any material or emotional attachment. This relates to Bauman's argument that, in liquid modernity, '[f]or power to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way' (2000, p.14). Conversely, Anidjar argues that walls, barriers and checkpoints 'have been *circulating*. And growing. Virtual walls and firewalls, but also less abstract, rather concrete walls and, well, concrete walls surrounded by barbed wire and electronic sensors, prison walls and security fences and more—these have been exponentially growing, along with the carceral state' (2014, p.20) [emphasis in the original]. Walls and fences, attempting to keep threats out are indeed multiplying, but only in – vain – response to the multiplication of flows – or at least, the awareness of them. More walls mean more seeping and more ways to avoid them. Dracula's flow of power over the diver, and later, over London, crosses barriers of space, even liveable and, later, carceral space, of time, and of life and death, for instance.

As vampires must circulate and seep through boundaries, they become flows themselves whose power lies in their ability to move freely. Circulation, a property which is closely associated with blood as, in its natural environment, the body, blood must keep moving to serve its function, is further signified through images of blood circulating freely in water, independently from bodies, things, subjects and objects. In *Dracula* (2020), the entire opening credits revolve around a dynamic flow of blood moving as it would in water, diluting and swirling (fig. 3.48). The soundtrack also features echo-y and wave-inflected quality of underwater movement. The credits include key motifs of the show, from the flies as a reference to, as the count puts it, 'man's companions to the end and beyond' ('The Rules of the Beast'), but also a beating heart in reference to Dracula's immortality – and to blood as life and power source through movement. More important here is the fact that this moving blood contains visible red cells encapsulating faces, suggesting Dracula's idea that 'blood is *lives*' (as Dracula drinks blood, he learns the victim's story

and acquires their abilities).[55] The movement of the blood through implied water embodies the spread of contaminated (vampiric) blood between characters by creating an analogy between blood circulation and the movement of the vampire from the East to the West via maritime route, the 'Blood Vessel' as suggested by the second episode's telling title where blood and seawater are once again configured as one through the notion of vessel. Blood therefore circulates alongside/as Dracula's power. Blood in motion is thus signified as the driving and unstoppable force of the Gothic narrative. Indeed, as blood spreads as/in water, it appears independent and self-propelled, a key characteristic of the subject in Bildhauer's framework aforementioned (2020, p. 6). In water in particular, blood billows out, spirals, swirls and extends seemingly independently as the aqueous environment remains invisible, thus infusing the hematic liquid with life, even outside of the body. The image of blood spreading in water is thus that of the blood coming to life and exposing its power. Water gives blood the possibility of motion, a possibility which is often denied to blood in its everyday, visible experience. Even when we see blood moving in our everyday experience (a cut, a nosebleed, menstruation, etc.), gravity chooses its path. In water, blood takes its own shape, decides on its path and shows off its power. In short, blood and water in Gothic texts display the unstoppable powers of flows as well as crystallises all the complexities of Gothic liquids in a highly simple motif, embodying the inherent fluidity of its narratives, meanings, structures, poetics and aesthetics through its two archetypical liquids.

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[55] These opening credits are strikingly close to those of *Hannibal* (2013) with the same white background and dynamic blood flow forming into the main character's faces. This constitutes an exteriorisation of the mind games at play between the characters, but more broadly, it suggests a tendency to perceive blood as a shaping and character-building force.

Fig. 3.47: Blood spreads in water in the opening credits of *Dracula* (2020).

Fig. 3.48: Dracula bites the diver's finger off and blood returns to the sea in *Dracula* (2020).

On the contemporary screen, blood therefore embodies and synthesises the specific poetics of the Gothic mode, mixing excess and restraint, objectivisation of subjects and subjectivisation of things, beauty and horror. Through blood, this chapter has highlighted the specific poetics of blood on the contemporary Gothic and Horror screen. Blood's specific poetics and modes of

representation reflect the parameters of liquid life, in terms of liquid fears and threats, but also in terms of liquid relationships, fluid commodities and power. Perhaps most importantly, blood has chosen its own path, in this chapter as much as in the Gothic, and driven us back to another essential Gothic liquid, water. A liquid, which, we have seen, is just as haunting as blood, and with good reason, since, in a way, water is blood and blood is water. Gothic liquids inform, echo and reinforce each other's aesthetics, symbolics and poetics in a fluid way which permeates the Gothic and Horror.

Conclusion: Hopes in Liquid Death

> Unable to perceive the shape of you, I find you all around me. Your presence fills my eyes with your love. It humbles my heart. For you are everywhere.
>
> Giles in *The Shape of Water* (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2017).

This study primarily aimed at understanding what the representations and meanings of literal liquids and figurative fluidity in post-millennial Gothic cinema and television could tell us about the specificities of the Gothic mode, and, more broadly, about the specificities of contemporary culture and fear, using an original frame of interpretation reaching back to an overlooked etymology of the word 'Gothic'. The thesis, while addressing motifs which have been present since the early days of the cinematic, but also, literary, Gothic, offers new ways of thinking about both liquids and the Gothic mode by focusing on the obvious, the overlooked, the ignored, the visible, the surface, and the material. I have stuck my hands in the muddy wetscapes, the dark waters and the beautiful blood of post-2010 Gothic to show that liquids, flows, and fluidity permeate the settings, characters and motifs, as well as narrative, structural, aesthetic, cinematographic, symbolic and affective parameters of the mode, turning its most essential nodes, i.e., the landscape, the house, the lake, the ghost, the bloodshed, the thing, into embodiments and enablers of an all-encompassing liquid fear. By reading the Gothic through fluids and fluidity and as fluid itself, I have shown its specificities in comparison and opposition to other modes of Horror, such as gore, slasher, or body horror. While this does not constitute a complete and final delineation of the Gothic, it does initiate a new way of thinking about the Gothic as a distinct mode beyond a sole focus on the suggestion of threat.

Using Bauman's rich framework of Liquid Fear, Liquid Threat, Liquid Times, Liquid Modernity and Liquid Evil, as initially developed at the turn of the millennium, I have demonstrated that post-millennial gothicity mirrors a cultural liquefaction of habits, social forms, reference points, things, and, most importantly, fears. Fear liquefies into widespread anxiety, a fluid and unanchored apprehension, felt everywhere yet nowhere to be seen, which has only grown more potent since Bauman's publications. Since the new millennium, in films and television series, the dramatic increase in the visibility of liquids such as water, tears or blood, as well as the

narrative, cinematographic and/or thematic emphasis on fluidity, crystallise a shift for liquids in the Gothic. From discreet but inherent motifs of the mode in pre-millennial texts, liquids and flows now embody concrete contemporary anxieties, including, but not limited to, climate change, surveillance society, overwhelming instability, or female stagnation. The narrative, structural and cinematographic liquid fear found in the Gothic thus draws a portrait of contemporary Western liquid fears.

The chapters of this thesis, while considering distinct motifs, themes and theories, all flow together to create a wider picture of the contemporary Gothic through fluids and fluidity. While the interconnectivity of all the cogs within this research sometimes made the separation into motifs, ideas and chapters challenging, the porousness of the ideas and arguments themselves echoes the fluidity of the chosen texts, resulting in overarching themes permeating every chapter. A key theme permeating all chapters is seeping. Liquids challenge boundaries. They can penetrate and be penetrated, both physically and intrinsically, as their wonderfully wicked tendency to change the inner quality of the things (lands, bodies, objects, etc.) with which they interact shows. Therefore, this research has renewed the approach to seemingly solid motifs, made stiff through neglect and assumption, melted the accepted approach to said motifs and turned them into dynamic fluid ideas. The solid landscape becomes a treacherous wetscape. The Gothic house is no longer frozen in time, a solid space of horror, it is a liquid temporal node. The ghost is no longer dry nor is it simply wet, it is itself a flow. Bloody paintings are no longer objects, but flowing things themselves. Horror is no longer abject, it is beautiful. While some might read this permeability between liquids and their environments as a simple academic pirouette manufactured to create endless hermeneutic ripples, I see the constant interpenetration of liquids as a meaningful representation of the network of permeability we, as bodies of water and bodies in water as Neimanis frames it, are all a part of. As Mentz, cited earlier in this research, simply yet evocatively explains, 'everything seeps' (2017, p. 283), and, as such, these motifs and chapters are no exception.

Another notion seeping throughout this thesis is the pervasive purposefulness and agency of liquids, with motifs such as the swallowing/penetrative abject landscape, willed water or subjectified blood, a quality which is often overlooked in anthropocentric analyses. Shifting the perspective from that of the Human subject to that of liquids, which, as we saw, are not quite subject yet not entirely object, not fully alive yet not wholly lifeless, allowed this argument to dive into the complexity of the liquid matter, displaying its own pragmatic (from the ancient Greek *pragmata*, 'thing') agency, a quality which is fully actualised and utilised in all its fantastic potential in the

Gothic. The fantastic agency of liquids in the mode, be they wetscapes, waters, or blood, underlines the real-life truth that, while we treat liquids as subjected and managed resources, drinking water as an inexhaustible supply, oceans as garbage and oil dumps, blood as a commodity, we are dependent on these flows, subdued to them and their will when their forceful nature emerges. Leaks, floods, storms, droughts, rising sea levels or blood loss remind us of our helplessness against liquids. The mobility, adaptability, boundary-breaking nature and assumed otherness of liquids make them utterly unstoppable forces against an exploitative and often complaisant Human race.

Finally, a sense of what I would call 'liquid death' also seeps throughout these chapters. As mentioned in chapter 2, Bauman analyses the non-finality of death as a contemporary stratagem to devaluate, banalise or deconstruct death by, for instance, focusing intensely on the present, within a context of liquid fear. Bauman thus avoids the expression 'liquid death' as this devaluation of death constitutes a mechanism of the broader liquid fear. In my approach, liquid death is life seeping into death and, as always with seeping, death seeping into life. Liquid death appears when living characters are haunted by a death, when a footprint suggests a moving presence through absence, when rot spreads throughout a space, when waters bring corpses back to the surface, when the wet ghost returns the dead to a semi-living state, or when bright blood animates the lifeless. Liquid death, on the surface, points to the liquid fears defining the modern liquid life: the unfixity of the absolutely fixed, the inalterable altered, and the life in death. In a specifically Gothic manner, which does not feature in less romance-inflected Horror modes (gore, slasher), liquid death guarantees the return of what has been lost. These liquid deaths permeate the main corpus of this thesis, with Josette returning to Barnabas in *Dark Shadows*, Arthur and his son finding their wife/mother again in the hereafter in *The Woman in Black*, Clara challenging her certain death and reuniting with her former lover centuries after their first encounter in *Byzantium*, Edith's mother warning her beloved daughter from beyond the grave in *Crimson Peak*, Hannah retrieving her freedom after two centuries locked in the Gothic space in *A Cure for Wellness*, Rachel seeing her mother again in *The Lodgers*, the Crain siblings saying an unhoped-for goodbye to Nell's ghost in *The Haunting of Hill House*, the Count and Sister Agatha reuniting over 200 years after their first encounter in *Dracula*, Dani's hand landing on Jamie's shoulder decades after her sacrifice in *The Haunting of Bly Manor,* or Monsignor Pruitt cheating death and healing the dying mind of his long-lost love in *Midnight Mass.* The Gothic offers, time and time again, hope that death is fluid and as such, can be undone, challenged, healed, or transcended. Like life, times, modernity, fear or evil in

Bauman's framework, and, in my own, houses, landscapes, ghosts and things, death in the Gothic is liquid, ungraspable, unfixed and uncertain.

Beliefs in the possibilities of life and death seeping into each other, are far from contemporary inventions as the human race has systematically attempted to connect life and after-life. Liquid death, in my approach,[56] is thus less strictly contemporary than other parameters of liquid life, but it is essential to the Gothic mode as the concept points to a specifically Gothic hope. This hope rarely features in Horror, gore or slasher texts, where characters hardly ever survive confronting the horrific threat, or, if they do manage to escape or defeat the monster, their survival is either only a reprieve, as the monster always returns to hunt them down, often in countless sequels, or a pyrrhic victory. As Kevin J. Wetmore, who dedicates a full chapter of his monograph on post-9/11 Horror to bleak endings (2012, pp. 116-136), states, '[e]vil wins, perhaps more often in horror films regardless of period, than in any other genre' (2012, p. 12). In the Gothic, while characters might succumb to the threat, endings tend to be happy ones – a legacy from eighteenth-century medievalist Gothic romances. Therefore, while the extensive series of horror-coded liquid images used in this thesis, point, time and time again, to the horrors of fluids and fluidity, with threatening seas, rising tides, treacherous marshes, engulfing wetlands, oozing walls, rotting bodies, haunting mud, unfathomable lakes, leaking ghosts, silencing depths, blood drops, blood floods, splashed blood, spilled blood, overwhelming fluxes, ungraspable menaces, or liquid fear, I would like to follow the hopeful tendencies of the Gothic texts I have studied and end on a happier note, with two iterations of liquid death.

The first iteration of liquid death features in *The Shape of Water* (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2017), a romance fantasy with Gothic inflections. Elisa Esposito, a mute custodian at a secret government facility in 1960s America, discovers, during a night shift, a water creature captured by the cruel colonel Strickland as an asset in the space race against the Soviets. Saddened by the torments and tortures inflicted upon this amphibian man, whose limitations echo her own, Elisa starts visiting him in secret. After she and the amphibian creature fall in love, the custodian breaks him out of the facility triggering Strickland's ire. In the climax, Elisa attempts to release the creature in a canal, but the colonel finds the couple and shoots them both before the amphibian man can reach the water. As Giles, Elisa's neighbour, holds her lifeless body in the pouring rain, the amphibian man rises from the floor, heals his wounds and, performing the savagery of which

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[56] For Bauman, as mentioned in chapter 2, the devaluation of death to focus on the transient present is a contemporary phenomenon.

he has been accused since his capture, brutally slashes Strickland's throat with his claws. The amphibian man then turns back to Elisa, picks her up and jumps into the canal under the watchful eye of the custodian's friends, Giles and Zelda. Under the water surface, Elisa sinks, breathless and bleeding, as her monster swims gracefully around her. He approaches Elisa, her body still refusing to show any sign of life. With his webbed palms, he lovingly cradles the scars on her neck, the exterior signifiers of her muteness, and kisses her lips. The amphibian man removes his hands. Elisa floats, lifeless still. Suddenly, she jolts back to life as her scars have magically turned into gills. Elisa embraces her strange lover and Giles narrates over this peaceful image of the outcast lovers reunited: 'If I told you about her, what would I say? That they lived happily ever after? I believe they did. That they were in love? That they remained in love? I'm sure that's true. But when I think of her, of Elisa, the only thing that comes to mind is a poem, whispered by someone in love, hundreds of years ago: "Unable to perceive the shape of you, I find you all around me. Your presence fills my eyes with your love, it humbles my heart. For you are everywhere."'

In this scene, the water becomes the embodiment of the all-encompassing love between the two outcasts, surrounding them as they can, at last, truly and safely be together. It also becomes the shape of Giles' love-filled hope that Elisa did survive. Indeed, Giles, in his voice-over, admits that the happy ending of the lovers reunited is a belief, a certainty anchored in hope rather than knowledge. Giles does not know what happened to Elisa, whose lifeless body he held before she and her creature disappeared under the opaque surface of the canal's water. The dark water thus facilitates a disappearance which enables a hopeful potential outcome: Elisa lived happily ever after. Therefore, the film's final underwater scene might very well be an expression of Giles' hope, a subjective imagining rather than objective images. Elisa's death is liquid, unsure, unfixed, unknown. Her happy ending relies on a hope that, dead on land and breathless underwater, Elisa became part of the aqueous environment in which she sank. From there, Elisa herself loses her fixed shape, she becomes a hope-filled memory enveloping her trusted friend like water, nowhere to be seen, yet still, and always, found everywhere around him. While Elisa does not resurface from these potentially transformative waters, her metamorphosis lies in the very absence of reemergence and the potentiality that comes with it. Unable to see her live, unable to pinpoint what happened, and unable to know for sure if she did survive, Giles finds her everywhere, she becomes a liquid, free-floating, unanchored shape of hope all around him.

Liquid death is thus a hope that even death might not be fixed. In another geographical and generic context altogether, Park Chan-Wook's *Decision to Leave* (2022) also exploits this highly

evocative liquid death. The film relates the intertwined stories of Hae-jun, an insomniac detective haunted by his unresolved cases, and Seo-rae, a bewitching Chinese emigrant suspected of murdering her husband. In the final scene, Hae-jun, desperately searching for Seo-rae, tracks her to a beach at sunset. The detective stands, facing the sea, his keen eyes dart in every impossibly empty direction. Hae-jun looks to the right. He looks to the left. He starts walking to the left. But he stops and turns back on himself, decidedly heading towards the right. The detective combs the beach for the woman he loves and lost everything for, his honour, his pride, and his job, fighting against time and the rising tide. Seo-rae is nowhere to be seen, not on the horizon, not in the water, not on the beach. She is in fact, already gone. Seo-rae, upon arriving on this very beach, moments only before Hae-jun, stood facing the sea. She chose to head left. She climbed over a rock formation and found a patch of sand where she started digging deep. Once she was done, she sat in the hole she'd dug and waited for the tide to rise. In the hole, we see the water spilling over the edge as Seo-rae's breathing echoes through the space. She calmly cups some sandy water in her hand as it starts to fill her soon-to-be grave. As Hae Jun keeps searching and finally heads left, the hole is completely covered. He arrives on the sand patch in the misty dusk and cannot see her under his feet, both drowned and buried in the wet sand.

This scene epitomises the two characters' love story through water. As she disappears without a trace under the rising waves, Seo-rae becomes Hae-jun's unresolved and ultimately unresolvable case, the one that will follow him everywhere, yet whose answer will never be found. Her image will stay with him in this literally and symbolically liquid death, facilitated by water and, for Hae-jun, unfixed, uncertain and unresolved. As Hae-jun unknowingly stands on the very spot of Seo-rae's burial, he stops. He recalls his words, as he helped Seo-rae cover the murder of her first husband, '[t]hrow that phone in the sea. Some place deep where no one can find it', an out-of-character injunction which, as Seo-rae explains, is in fact a declaration of love. Gentle music arises. He ponders. A soft smile replaces his panic-stricken expression. He takes the time to undo his tie and tie his shoelace. By disappearing under the sea, Seo-rae, becomes one of the detective's unresolved cases. As she had predicted earlier in the film, he will put her photos on his wall, stay awake at night and think solely of her. The hope that drives the detective to keep looking into his unresolved cases, a hope to, one day, get an answer, constitutes the only possible outlet of an all-consuming yet impossible love between a detective and a murderer. Hae-jun's smile and pause in his desperate search hints at the happy ending of the film, despite Seo-rae's horrific death and Hae-

jun's irreparable loss. Seo-rae will now never leave her lover's side, haunting him, nowhere to ever be found again, yet felt all around him.

These highly poetic, metaphorical and potentially disturbing images draw a highly accurate portrait of liquid death and the hope it stems from. Hope, in French philosopher Gabriel Marcel's framework, constitutes a beacon of light in the darkness for the one who hopes, since, in hope, 'l'âme se tourne vers une lumière qu'elle ne voit pas encore, vers une lumière à naître, dans l'espoir d'être tirée de sa nuit présente, nuit d'attente [the soul turns towards a light it cannot yet see, towards a light yet to be born, in the hope of being freed from its current darkness, a darkness of waiting' (1944, p. 40). Hope is trust in the possibility of a light that we cannot yet see in all the surrounding darkness. This darkness unsurprisingly, perhaps, reads awfully like liquid fear in Bauman's framework, where the dark constitutes the spreading ground for this anxious fear since, 'in the darkness anything may happen, but there is no telling what will. Darkness is not the cause of danger, but it is the natural habitat of uncertainty – and so of fear' (2006, p. 2). Liquid fear and hope are two sides of the same coin as emotions necessarily built in terms of expectations, one a negative expectation and the other a positive one. Drowned in the darkness of liquid fear, the only solace is hope, a light that is not yet seen, but that is trusted to appear.

In a specifically neoliberal context, these scenes relate to Lauren Berlant's examination, in her *Cruel Optimism*, of how individuals attach themselves to modes of life which jeopardise their well-beings by reframing objects of desire into 'cluster[s] of promises' (2011, p.23). In themselves, these clusters make the realisation of the desired perceived object impossible. As Berlant explains, optimism, broadly, the hope that things will improve, 'become[s] cruel when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially' (2011, p.1). Cruel optimism highlights the complexities of hope in a context where promises of stability, fixity and normalcy are often compromised. Hope can feed attachment to objects of desire which will always remain unfulfillable fluid promises in a context where individualism, responsibility and adaptability are promoted. False guarantees of what Berlant describes as a 'good life promised by capitalist culture' (2011, p. 167), e.g., success, stability and happiness, become objects and scenes of desires to which individual become attached. However, as Berlant shows, these promises are too often illusory and can impede their own realisation, and, as such, perpetuate situations of precarity. This notion relies on what Berlant describes as 'misrecognition', a psychic process 'by which fantasy recalibrates what we encounter so that we can imagine that something or someone can fulfil our desire' regardless of whether what we encounter actually can fulfil our wishes (2011, p.122).

Through the hopes of things getting better, one might project positive qualities on an object of desire, e.g., a job, a partner, a car, a perfect body, and maintain one's attachment to this object despite its potentially nefarious qualities, a precarious job, an abusive partner, a broken car, a dangerous diet. In a neo-liberal context, this misrecognition is reinforced by the restless push towards optimism, novelty and betterment. Hope of an imagined and infinitely imaginable better life, detached from any real object, is both sustained and structurally denied by neo-liberal societies, thus contributing to maintaining precarious, i.e., liquid situations as it shadows the cruelty of the object of desire. Hope is therefore highly fluid itself, not just a stiff, reactionary refusal to accept, but a fluid and patient trust in the potential that becomes part of the one that hopes (Marcel, 1944, p. 49). Giles does not refuse to accept Elisa's death, he witnessed it after all, but he believes and trusts that she did get her happily ever after. Even though he cannot himself see her or witness it, this hope has become fully part of him, filling his eyes and heart and surrounding him. Similarly, Hae-jun's does not fully accept or refuses Seo-rae's death but he nourishes the hope to find her again. His smile, his pause, his slow adjusting of his clothes, all manifest his instinctual knowledge of where Seo-rae is, i.e., '[s]ome place deep where no one can find [her]'. However, this knowledge is quickly merged with, not a refusal to accept, but with a fluid hope to find her, as he, eventually, sets off again, looking for her in the fighting waves of the high tide, screaming her name as the water crashes over him, as stopping the search and giving up hope would necessarily mean leaving Seo-rae's haunting memory behind, closing the case and losing the free-floating presence of his lover.

The one who hopes thus becomes, in Marcel's words, a swimmer (1944, p. 49), fluidly moving through this trust in the possibility, serenely embracing the potentiality rather than fully rejecting the logical explanation. Both Elisa and Seo-rae disappear in aquatic spaces, leaving no trace, completely yet peacefully erased by the water, leaving behind an unanchored and all-encompassing hope for those who remain on the surface that they might come back. Yet, for both Giles and Hae-jun, the hope and the happy ending it triggers necessarily rely on never finding out, on remaining in this fluid state. For finding these characters' bodies at the bottom of the water would, of course, solidify a horrific outcome. But finding them both alive and happy, would also solidify a delineable answer, which, in turn, would rid Giles and Hae-jun of the permanent and surrounding presence of their loved ones. These iterations of liquid death therefore participate in this absolute Hope which knows no real object. For Marcel, this is a necessary trait of Hope as it 'tend invinciblement à transcender les objets particuliers auxquels elle paraît d'abord s'attacher

[invincibly tends to transcend the particular objects to which it first seemed to be attached]' (1944, p. 41). Hope is detached from an object. I do not hope that or hope for, I simply hope. Again, hope draws itself as the antidote to liquid fear, a fear itself detached from an object. I do not fear this or that, I fear. Hope, as Marcel explains, is 'un pouvoir de fluidification [a fluidifying power]' (1944, p. 53), it liquefies the initial object of hope and becomes a horizon of floating possibilities (1944, p. 54). Neither Giles nor Hae-jun can hope to see *or* not see their loved ones again. They simply hope. They exist in the unanchored and fluid realm of Hope.

Elisa and Seo-rae's liquid deaths and consequential metaphorical hauntings therefore materialise a hope which easily extends beyond the fictional contexts of the films. While liquefaction in Bauman's framework, time and time again, including in his approach to the dread of death, creates anxiety-inducing uncertainty and precariousness, liquid death generates a hope that ghosts might continue to haunt us, ungraspable, nowhere to be seen yet everywhere to be felt. Perhaps these fictional ghosts and liquid deaths that we surround ourselves with by consuming contemporary Gothic texts delineate this real-life hope, that ghosts do not always haunt to terrorise, but they haunt to remain close to the ones who stayed behind, perceived everywhere yet seen nowhere, forming a comforting potentiality that must remain free-floating. Maybe liquid deaths help us find the ones who leave us, be they long-gone ancestors, estranged siblings, regretted strangers, or lost lovers, all around us. Maybe, and that is a hopeful maybe, liquid death allows a once quietly worried parent to make sure that, over twenty years after her first encounter with *Martine*, the six-year-old girl who was not really reading still likes blood a bit too much.

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