A Teenage Gothic American Dream: A critical exploration of adolescence, time, and nature in post-2010 Gothic-Horror Television series

By

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ABSTRACT:

This Doctor of Philosophy explores adolescence, time, and nature in connection to the construction of identity in American culture in the twenty-first century in three post-2010 Gothic-horror television series, *Riverdale* (2017-), *Teen Wolf* (2011-2017), and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (*2018-2020). The Gothic emerged as a mode of narrative representation in the Eighteenth century and has become omnipresent in a variety of popular culture texts including television. Following the proliferation of cable channels and streaming-video-on-demand services such as Netflix, the presence of Gothic-horror on television has exploded into what is, arguably, a new 'Golden Age'. A number of post-2010 Gothic-horror television series feature ensemble casts of teenage protagonists and explore the trials and tribulations of adolescence. However, there is still limited scholarly attention on the representation of adolescent characters and cultural conceptions of time and nature in these television series.

To critically examine adolescence, time, and nature in the selected television series, the project's research questions are: 1) 'What is the relationship between the representation of adolescent characters, time, and nature in Gothic-horror television series and the ongoing construction of identity in American culture in the twenty-first century?'; 2) 'What do contemporary Gothic-horror television series reveal through their engagement with notions of time and their depiction of dreams, visions, and themes of nature versus urban?' ; and 3) 'What do contemporary Gothic-horror television series reveal through its engagement with notions of time and its depiction of dreams, visions, and themes of nature versus urban'. Thematic analysis and textual analysis are used to discuss adolescence, nature, and time in relation to a range of academic fields including the Gothic and television studies. The project explores how through the adolescent characters in *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* these series disrupt culturally constructed notions of nature and time. Specifically, the study uncovers the ways in which characters often experience distorted realities including dreams/nightmares or temporal interruptions in time. Remarkably, the project also reveals that the chosen series are preoccupied with the EcoGothic and the transformative nature of the forest setting, as well as horror of the decay of the American Dream.

Keywords: Gothic, Gothic television, television, adolescence, time, nature, *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, thematic analysis, textual analysis.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare this submission to be my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Signed on 28/11/2022:

Blair Ian Speakman

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"…you haven't known the triumphs and defeats, the epic highs and lows of high school…"
- Archie Andrews, *Riverdale*.

The purpose of this Doctor of Philosophy is to critically examine the representation of adolescence and the transition to adulthood as an inherently liminal and uncanny period in three American post-2010 Gothic-horror television series: The CW's *Riverdale* (2017-), MTV's *Teen Wolf* (2011-2017), and Netflix's *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020). Specifically, this research will explore adolescent characters, notions of time and nature in connection to the ongoing cultural construction of identity in the United States of America in the twenty-first century. Many of the teenage protagonists in these series appear to be entrapped in urban and domestic settings—the home, the suburbs, and small-town America—which are temporally stagnant, and where they are unable to move forward from the past. Additionally, the selected texts also focus on forests as a site of transformation for the adolescent characters who enter these wooded settings. By analysing the data collected from the selected television series in relation to scholarship on the Gothic, time, adolescence, nature, and television, this thesis aims to provide an insight into how Gothic-horror television represents socio-cultural anxieties around adolescence in an American context. The introductory chapter will outline the background and rationale for this study, the research questions, what this study aims to achieve, and the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Background:

The proliferation of cable channels and streaming-video-on-demand services (SVOD) such as Netflix have allowed for a growth in contemporary Gothic-horror television in the 2000s and 2010s (Abbott, 2017a). Many of these series are set in fictional small-American towns and feature an ensemble cast of predominantly teenage or young adult protagonists who must negotiate the trials and tribulations of adolescence while also having to 'save the day'. Three notable examples of post-2010 Gothic-horror television series are *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. The latter two series were both developed by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, who is the Chief Creative Officer of Archie Comics Publications, Inc., while *Teen Wolf* was developed by Jeff Davis. *Riverdale,* heavily inspired by *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991; 2017), is an

adaptation of *Archie Comics* (1939-) and follows a group of teenagers led by Archibald 'Archie' Andrews (KJ Apa) as they must confront the evils and hidden secrets lurking behind Riverdale's seemingly innocent and idyllic image. In comparison, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* an adaptation of the Archie comic book series of the same name, is a dark coming-of-age story about Sabrina Spellman (Kiernan Shipka) who, after turning sixteen, must reconcile her dual nature as half-witch and half-mortal. Similarly, *Teen Wolf*, a television adaptation of the 1985 film of the same name, follows high school student Scott McCall (Tyler Posey) as he begins his cycle of transformation into a werewolf.

I vividly remember staying up late in my parents' bedroom watching *Charmed* (1998-2006) and being enamoured with the way in which the Halliwell sisters grappled with their self-identity and transition into adulthood, while also fighting demonic creatures every week. This love for Gothic-horror television series continued into my adolescence and now twenties. As I discovered my own sexual and gender identities, I became especially fascinated with how teenage and young adult characters in these series also developed their sexual and gender identities. During this time, I also observed a growing number of American Gothic-horror television series which depicted adolescent and young adult queer characters, including *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments* (2016-2019), *Scream: The TV Series* (2015-2016), and *The Order* (2019-2020), to name a few.

Initially, I wanted to critically examine and investigate the representation of queer characters in contemporary Gothic-horror television series in connection to Westernised notions of cultural heteronormativity. However, during the data collection process I observed that themes of time, nature, and transformation in connection to the adolescent experience were especially apparent in *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf,* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Moreover, I have also been interested in notions of the 'American Dream', and I have long had a penchant for television series and other popular culture texts which 'expose' the American Dream as an illusion and a cultural construction. Consequently, there was a significant shift in this project, as I decided to focus on the representation of time, cycles of transformation and self-discovery, and nature in relation to adolescent characters specifically in American Gothic-horror television series.

1.2 Research Rationale:

The Gothic emerged as a mode of narrative representation in the Eighteenth century and has become omnipresent in a wide variety of popular culture texts including literature, film,

television, comic books, and video games. Piatti-Farnell and Brien (2014) argue that the Gothic is a "malleable notion" that can remould itself into various narrative forms and media (p. 1). Notably, since 2000, the presence of Gothic-horror on television has exploded into what Abbott (2017a; 2017b) proposes is a new 'Golden Age' of television horror. It is important to note that the researcher is following Hogle's (2002) approach in defining Gothic-horror. For Hogle (2002), Gothic-terror tends to hold characters and readers in suspense through psychological hauntings and threats to life, safety, and sanity. In comparison, Gothic-horror is the "physical manifestation" of these hauntings and confronts characters with "something repulsive and horrific" to shatter everyday norms (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, para. 14; Hogle, 2002).

Post-2000 has seen the proliferation of cable and pay-per-view channels and streaming services, as well as the gradual relaxation of television censorship restrictions. This competitive television landscape has allowed for a growth in the number of Gothic-horror television series, which have also become more graphic in its depiction of gore and violence (Abbott, 2017b; Abbott & Jowett, 2021; Hills, 2021). The popularity of Gothic-horror television in recent years has been accompanied by a growth in scholarship on contemporary texts. Some studies have examined fandom, queerbaiting, and masculinity in *Teen Wolf* (Evans & Pettet, 2018; Elliott & Fowler, 2018; Pulliam, 2012), while others critically examined Sabrina from *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* as a liminal figure because of her dual nature as half-witch and half-mortal (Dudek, 2021). Although *Riverdale* has attracted considerable popular attention, especially on YouTube, where there are dozens of videos with over a million views critiquing the series (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 2021; Friendly Space Ninja, 2021; Quinn Curio, 2019), there is extremely limited scholarship on The CW adaptation.

Gothic texts, including popular fiction, film, and television which feature adolescent protagonists have experienced a cultural resurgence in the twenty-first century. These Gothic narratives are often preoccupied with the growth and transformation of the child, the crisis of adolescence, and the transition into adulthood (Smith & Moruzi, 2018; Koehler, 2017). The teen body is constructed as both liminal and sexual, making it an ideal vessel for exploring cultural anxieties around difference, otherness, and the growing pains of social and cultural adjustment (Koehler, 2017). Of fascination to scholars are Gothic Young Adult (YA) fiction and supernatural television dramas, as Gothic figures in these texts give teenagers the fantasy of desire, as well as enabling a transgression of sexual boundaries (Smith & Moruzi, 2018; Koehler, 2017).

Within scholarship on teen identities in contemporary Gothic-horror television, there has also been considerable focus on the connection between psychoanalysis, the Gothic, and adolescence. Numerous scholars have recognised the similarities between the Gothic and psychoanalysis, and there is a wealth of research on the connection between these two academic fields about their shared and central concerns (Gildersleeve, 2013; Hubner, 2018;

Mann, 2020; Punter, 2012; Wallace, 2013). The Gothic can bring to light the sensations that "drive us", the "pull between rational and irrational forces", while also examining "our sense of self and our beliefs" (Hubner, 2018, p. 1). Similarly, psychoanalysis also examines our most strongly held beliefs and perceptions and is concerned with subjects which frighten and disturb us (Hubner, 2018). During the nineteenth century, the human mind was theorised as being "an opposition" between the conscious and the unconscious. These concepts were further developed by Freud's (2019) own research, which has since been extremely influential on the study of modern psychoanalysis as well as Gothic scholarship. As Gildersleeve (2013) reinforces, Freud frequently used "what we can recognise as Gothic…as evidence for his theories" (p. 101). Specifically, this can be seen with Freud's exploration of the ego and repression, as he theorised that the ego denies and represses that which it does not like. Subsequently, we then experience the uncanny if we encounter what we have subconsciously repressed, as it is simultaneously both known and unknown to us. Gothic texts are often interpreted through a psychoanalytical lens to reveal the "repressed secrets of the past" (Wallace, 2013, p. 4).

The connection between the Gothic and Freudian psychoanalysis can be particularly seen with the scholarship on the 'psychoanalysed' werewolf in popular culture. This is because werewolf fiction and cinema have both been highly informed and influenced by burgeoning scholarly interest in Freud's (2019) theories on the unconscious mind and repression. The werewolf is frequently depicted as being a metaphor for the beast lurking within the human psyche and can articulate deep-seated psychological anxieties, especially those pertaining to repressed masculine aggression (Mann, 2020). Much of the academic literature on Gothic-horror television series, as well as film and literature, which feature teenage and young adult characters has explored the supernatural, and shapeshifting figures like werewolves, as a metaphor for adolescence.

While there has been much discussion of adolescence as a liminal, transformative, and uncanny period, discussion on this transition in connection to time—including cycles of transformation, specific hours or durations of time, and the return of the past—has not received as much attention. *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf,* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* address the exploration of sex, sexuality, gender, bodily changes, and the body, and the adolescent characters often challenge the linear movement from childhood to adulthood. Consequently, these series provide a fertile ground to examine how adolescence is a liminal space which can reveal the constructed nature of notions of past, present, and future. By integrating Gothic scholarship with time and environmental studies, this thesis aims to investigate the cultural construction of time and nature in connection to adolescence in post-2010 Gothic-horror television series.

1.3 Research Questions:

A primary research question as well as two sub-questions were developed to guide this study and address areas of scholarship which require further academic attention and debate:

Primary Research Question: What is the relationship between the representation of adolescent characters, time, and nature in Gothic-horror television series and the ongoing construction of identity in American culture in the twenty-first century?

a. **Sub-Question One:** What do contemporary Gothic-horror television series reveal through their engagement with notions of time and their depiction of dreams, visions, and themes of nature versus urban?
b. **Sub-Question Two:** What do contemporary Gothic-horror television series reveal through its engagement with notions of time and its depiction of dreams, visions, and themes of nature versus urban?

The primary research question will serve as an enquiry into the representation of teenage characters in the selected series by examining adolescence, time, and nature in connection to the construction of identity in American culture in the twenty-first century. By American, this thesis is referring to the United States of America. The researcher then developed two sub-questions to explore different aspects of the representation of time and nature. Specifically, sub-question one will serve as an enquiry into how nature can be regarded as a site for cycles of transformation and self-discovery, while the second sub-question will allow for an exploration of how time is depicted through the blurring of reality and fantasy, whether it be dreams or visions. The researcher watched over 200 episodes of the selected series and collected data including dialogue, cinematography, mise-en-scène, plot points, sound, and other cultural iconography with the purpose of answering the three research questions. The collected data will be analysed using thematic analysis and textual analysis as well as existing scholarship on the Gothic to provide a critical discussion of the relationship between adolescence, nature, and time in *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*.

1.4 Thesis Structure:

Firstly, the context chapter will provide an overview of how post-2010 has been a particularly tumultuous and transformative time in the United States of America, seen in shifts in the political landscape, growing public support for LGBTQIA+ rights, the ecological implications of

climate change, and the proliferation of SVOD services like Netflix. Next, the literature review will explore existing academic literature on the Gothic, television studies, time, adolescence, and nature to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding Gothic-horror television. This will be followed by the methodology chapter which will outline the methodology, research methods, and research design of this thesis, as well as an overview of the data findings gathered from the selected television series. Chapters five, six, and seven will analyse the representation of time and nature in connection to adolescent characters in *Riverdale, The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, and *Teen Wolf*.

Chapter five will discuss how these series, especially *Riverdale*, critiques notions of the American Dream and disrupt culturally constructed notions of memory, history, and time. The fifth chapter will examine how the past in *Riverdale* remains open and contested seen through the revelation of hidden mysteries which allows for the series to delve deeper into the history of the town and its residents. Afterwards, chapter six is focused on exploring the relationship between transformation, monsters, and adolescent characters regarding body changes, 'other' nature coming out, binary identities or dichotomies, sexuality, and lust. The seventh chapter will explore how characters often experience distorted realities where they lose a sense of reality and become unable to tell the difference between what is true and what is fiction, whether it be hallucinations, dreams/nightmares, or a 'break' in time. Finally, chapter eight will conclude this body of research, highlighting limitations in the study, key contributions made to contemporary Gothic scholarship, and areas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT CHAPTER

2.0 Introduction:

Post-2010 has been a particularly tumultuous period in the United States of America, seen in significant socio-cultural, political, historical, and technological shifts. Notably, this period has witnessed the emergence and proliferation of streaming-video-on-demand (SVOD) services which have transformed the television landscape, the rise of 'Trumpism', authoritarianism, and political instability, the legalisation of same-sex marriage state-wide, and climate youth strikes. The Gothic often "re-emerges at times of cultural stress" (Hawkes, 2021, p. 114), and it can be considered as a lens to express contemporary terrors, fears, and anxieties (Piatti-Farnell & Beville, 2014). Given the significant changes that have taken place, it is not surprising that post-2010 has also witnessed what many argue is a new golden age of television horror, with the release of numerus Gothic-horror television series on network television, cable channels, and SVOD platforms (Abbott, 2017a; Abbott, 2017b).

This context chapter will explore a number of socio-cultural issues and technological developments which have occurred post-2010, when the selected series, *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* were released. Firstly, the context chapter will explore the introduction and growth of SVOD platforms like Netflix as television content producers alongside Network television. This section will discuss shifts in viewership behaviour, such as the ability for consumers to 'binge-watch' television series. Afterwards, the chapter will then discuss how the increasingly competitive television landscape has allowed for an explosion in the number of Gothic-horror television series being released. Following this, the context chapter will outline how post-2015 has been an especially turbulent time in American politics with Donald Trump becoming the forty-fifth president of the United States. The U.S elections in 2016 and 2020, and Trump's presidency, arguably indicated a significant shift in American culture including growing disillusionment with the status quo in terms of the country's economic and political structures and institutions (Behler, Cairo, Green & Hall, 2021, p. 1). Next, the context chapter will explore several influential socio-cultural changes and social movements over the last decade, including growing public and political support for LGBTQIA+ rights. Finally, growing concern over the future of the environment and the planet will be explored, as the effects of climate change continue to escalate while policy makers and large corporations appear slow to respond to its looming impacts.

Although the aforementioned issues were not explicitly explored in *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, these series do tacitly touch on these

preoccupations. Notably, the time in both *Riverdale* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is left ambiguous, through the use of smartphones and laptops, vintage cars without a scratch, and architecture from the post-World-War II period. While neither series explicitly address Donald Trump or his 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) slogan, it appears that these programs offer a critique the same kind of anxieties behind MAGA, a desire to return to a nostalgic and imaginary past. Moreover, there is a focus on natural environments, especially the forest, as a site of transformation, self-discovery, and the discovery of buried secrets for the adolescent characters in *Teen Wolf*, *Riverdale*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. The association between nature and the liminal nature of adolescence tacitly touches on contemporary preoccupations with fears and anxieties around climate change and the looming environmental crisis.

2.1 Shifts in the Television landscape:

Since its introduction and development in the late 1940s and the 1950s, the television industry in the United States of America has transformed dramatically (Snyman & Gillard, 2019). While there were a few independently licensed television stations, the 'Big Three' networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, dominated U.S. television throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For most of the twentieth century, "media delivery consisted of the analogue transmission of a signal from a broadcasting facility to listeners' and viewers' radio and TV sets" (Chalaby & Plunkett, 2021, p. 3208). Butler and Lotz (2018) argue network television was based on the idea of 'casting' a single program at a time toward their viewers and attempting to entice those viewers to tune in while that broadcasting is happening. This meant that programs were 'pushed' toward viewers, who then decided whether to accept the network's invitations to watch at a particular time. Over time, the number of networks increased, exploding to dozens of channels in the 1980s with the rise of cable and satellite delivery. The television landscape continued to change in the 1990s, with the emergence of remote controls, VCR machines, and subscription channels which expanded viewer control (Butler & Lotz, 2018; Gaynor, 2019).

During the 2000s and 2010s, the television industry in the United States "found itself grappling with…new technologies" (Gaynor, 2019, p. 49). The use of smartphones and tablets as well as a range of other high-speed internet technologies such as 3G, 4G, and now 5G, have allowed media consumers to access a wide variety of video content worldwide. The greater accessibility to data and the Internet through a multitude of digital devices has contributed to the development and proliferation of SVOD services (Straits Research, 2022). Consequently, the television industry has undergone a significant transformation as "a range of aggregators and applications enabled viewers to stream television content over broadband lines" (Lotz, 2018, p.

156). Of note has been the rise of Netflix as a streaming platform. Netflix was founded in 1997 as a DVD subscription service, and in 2007 it pioneered a new experience: the ability to watch television content through "web-based streaming" (Tefertiller, 2019, p. 595). The rise of streaming services has brought Internet-based television into the family room, and streaming distributers are able to "transcend computers and mobile devices" (Sharma, 2016, p. 22). Specifically, one of the defining features of SVOD services is the ability for viewers to select content independent from a schedule dictated by broadcasters and represents a wider transformation "in the logic of television industries from scheduling to curation" (Lobato, 2018, p. 241).

The combination of SVOD services and digital devices have impacted traditional television viewership patterns by causing a significant disruption to "where and when television might be viewed" (Lotz, 2018, p. 156). This shift in viewership behaviour can best be seen with Netflix, which became known for its practice of releasing all episodes of a television series at once and encouraging what is popularly known as 'binge-viewing'. Binge-viewing is considered to be the characteristic mode of consumption for this type of television, and even traditional broadcast television series can be "recontextualised as post-broadcast when they are hosted on platforms" like Netflix (Hills, 2021, p. 126). Moreover, binge-viewing practices are often thought to offer more control over viewing schedules as well as limiting the potential of viewing interruptions. As such, McCormick (2016) and Tyron (2015) argue that it is a transformative mode of viewing which opens up a greater array of experiences and textual relations. Releasing all episodes at once is believed to have enabled more attentive viewing practices because viewers are thought to be more familiar with previous episodes of a show.

Following the release of *House of Cards* (2013-2018), *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-2019) and *Hemlock Grove* (2013-2015) in 2013, Netflix shifted from simply being a distributor of film and television series to a producer of original content. Jenner (2016) argues that while Netflix's direct competition are cable networks like HBO, Showtime, and FX, the streaming giant appears to signal away from the television medium, and its branding strategies, associated viewing patterns, technologies, industry structures, and programming. Although Netflix has over 200 million subscribers in more than 190 countries, making it the largest VOD subscription platform globally, it has recently started to lose subscribers (Wayne, 2022). In April 2022, Netflix announced that it had lost over one million subscribers in the second quarter of the year. Consequently, the platform has started making it harder for users to share Netflix passwords and is planning to implement an ads subscription plan by the end of 2022 (Kafka, 2022). Moreover, Netflix's dominance in the SVOD landscape has become increasingly challenged by a plethora of other platforms, including Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, HBO Max, and Apple TV, which all produce original content. The growth in the number of SVOD services has

contributed to further audience segmentation and fragmentation, as consumers select the platforms which best serve their personal tastes. As such, the landscape of SVOD services is becoming crowded while at the same time traditional cable and network television companies are also investing in their own streaming services (Snyman & Gillard, 2019).

Although the use of SVOD platforms has become ubiquitous in the United States, the distribution of television programs "via television networks is still the engine that powers the television machine" (Butler & Lotz, 2018, p. 257). As of August 2020, over 121 million homes, or 96 percent of all households, in the United States still have a television set, and some of the most popular television series on broadcast networks attract viewership over 10 million (Nielsen, 2020; Butler & Lotz, 2018). It appears television still remains the primary medium through which most people obtain visual entertainment, and through which advertisers reach the largest audiences. However, according to recent data from Nielsen, for the first time ever streaming services have captured more viewers than cable or broadcast television. In the U.S., streaming captured 34.8 percent of television viewership during July 2022, "while cable accounted for 34.4% and broadcast came in third at 21.6%" (Davis, 2022, para. 3). Television networks are facing a challenging set of circumstances, including the migration of audiences away from the traditional television medium as well as the need to adapt to the myriad of changes brought by technological advances (Chalaby & Plunkett, 2021).

Despite distinct differences in viewing practices between SVOD and network television, there is still significant commonality in that a large number of series watched on SVOD platforms were first created for a broadcast network or cable channel (Butler & Lotz, 2018). Network television channels have also allowed SVOD platforms like Hulu, Netflix, Peacock, Stan (in Australia) and Neon (in New Zealand) to offer recent episodes of television series in an effort to make their programs more convenient for viewers to access. Alongside this, networks are also buying back licenses from back catalogue seasons and series to "offer the type of library repository offered by Netflix" and other SVOD providers (Lotz, 2018, p. 156). Notably, the tension between relying on traditional methods of distribution and the significant shifts in viewing behaviour can be seen with The CW. The CW, a broadcast network founded in 2006 following the merger between The WB Television Network (The WB) and the United Paramount Network (UPN), was one of the first television channels to provide their content on digital platforms (Gaynor, 2019). Moreover, the channel frequently uses social media to both reaffirm appointment television for its viewers and "move viewers between its broadcast and digital properties" in an attempt to create an "ecosystem where advertisers can find their audience (Blustein, 2020, para. 1). For instance, The CW now offers two ad-supported streaming services, CW TV and CW Seed, and uploads television series on the two platforms 24 hours after first airing on broadcast (Blustein, 2020).

The 1990s saw a number of successful television series which fuelled a renewed interest in the Gothic-horror genre on television, including *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017), *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *The X-Files*, (1993-2002; 2016-2018), and *American Gothic* (1995-1996). However, as both Abbott (2017a) and Elliott-Smith and Browning (2020) argue, the presence of the horror genre on television since the late 2000s has exploded into what appears to be a new 'Golden Age' of television horror. The rise of SVOD platforms as well as cable and pay-per-view channels has resulted in a competitive television landscape, which has allowed for the horror genre to become commercially lucrative on the small screen. Within this competitive market are streaming services which have made horror a key part of their marketing and business strategies, including Shudder which provides a substantial library of horror films and television shows in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland (Falvey et al., 2020). The commercial and critical success of series such as *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022), *True Blood* (2008-2014), *American Horror Story* (2011-), *Stranger Things* (2016-) as well as *Scream Queens* (2015-2016), *Hannibal* (2013-2015), *Hemlock Grove* (2013-2015), *Teen Wolf* (2011-2017), *Riverdale* (2017-), *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020), *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), *Midnight Mass* (2021), and the recently released *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* (2022-)—a horror-slasher reboot of *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017)—suggests "home-viewing culture" is well-suited to the consumption of horror television series (Falvey et al., 2020, p. 7).

Relaxed censorship regulations as well as advancements in digital technology and special effects have allowed for television horror to become more graphic in its representation of gore and violence (Abbott, 2017a). Additionally, television content has also become "varied in its portrayal of non-normative and marginal characters" and "its presentations of diverse and alternative sexualities" (Elliott-Smith & Browning, 2020, p. 6). As Elliott-Smith and Browning (2020) argue, a number of these series, including *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, appear to depict progressive storylines as well as non-binary and bisexual identifying characters. Moreover, Gothic-horror television series have also developed a large and loyal fan following among young audiences, and there is an unprecedented enthusiasm and taste for horror programming and themes in the twenty-first century (Belau & Jackson, 2018). For instance, based on the popularity of *Riverdale* on Netflix among international audiences, the streaming platform offered Warner Bros. a deal to pick up two 20-episode seasons of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.* Netflix's decision to buy out the production and distribution license for *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* from The CW is indicative of how the streaming platform has recognised audiences' enthusiasm for Gothic-horror television series. Ultimately, the genre's success in recent years "provides an important commentary on the evolution of… Gothic [sic] horror, the nature of the televisual, and the culture of the 21st century" (Abbott, 2017a, p. 1).

2.2 Political shifts in the American Context:

An ephemeral concept, historian James Turner coined the phrase 'American Dream' in 1931 to refer to "a dream of [a] social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable" (as cited in White & Hanson, 2011, p. 3). The American Dream is "deeply embedded in American mythology" and is central to the country's ethos that those who are willing to work hard can achieve a better life than their parents (White & Hanson, 2011, p. 7). Although the middle-class benefited from post-war America's rapid economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, by the start of the twenty-first century, the majority of wealth had become "concentrated among those at the top" (Preiss, 2021, p. 20). In addition to the growing wealth inequality gap, there is also "ongoing race inequality, an expanding poor immigrant population, and continued sexism in all aspects of American life" (Hanson & White, 2011, p. 141). Consequently, for many people, 'achieving' economic prosperity has become increasingly difficult and many have been growing increasingly disillusioned with the American Dream.

The long-term economic and demographic decline of small cities, towns, and rural areas across the United States, especially in the Mid-West region, are often thought to have led to resentment among the "white working class" which "drove Donald Trump into the Presidency" (Hauhart, 2017, p. 16; Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2021). Although it appeared, during Barack Obama's Presidency from 2009-2017, that the United States was progressing to a "gentler" and multicultural country, the rise of Trumpism and Trump appears to suggest a desire to return to the past (Goldstein & Hall, 2017, p. 398). During both the 2016 and 2020 U.S. Presidential elections, a key aspect of Trump's political appeal was of nostalgia and a promise to "a return to times that have been lost" (Behler et al., 2021, p. 1). By employing Ronald Reagan's 1980 'Make America Great Again' slogan (MAGA), Trump claimed that the US had fallen from its former status, while also invoking an imaginary and "inherently conservative past" (Mollan & Geesin, 2020, p. 406). Although Trump never specified when America was 'great', his MAGA slogan reflects an implicit understanding that post-war America was a period of economic prosperity, and that to become great again, the country should try to recover what made "the 1950s exemplary" (Ravizza, 2020, p. 1). Moreover, the use of MAGA and nostalgic rhetoric appealed to many voters' "latent feelings of threat to their economic welfare" and to "the racial or cultural homogeneity of American culture" (Behler et al., 2021, p. 1). The rise of Trump in contemporary America suggests that increasingly we live in a world where there is a "fractious relationship between a mis-remembered past, a nightmarish present, and a seemingly impossible future" (McCollum, 2019, p. 21).

However, it should be noted that the emergence of 'Trumpism' is not a uniquely American phenomenon, and on a global scale, right-wing populism and nationalism have been on the rise, especially in Europe (Behler et al., 2021; Roy, 2019). This right-wing populist movement is characterised as being anti-immigration, associated with neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups, and assumes an authoritarianism and anti-liberal stance towards human rights (Peters, 2017). Rodriguez-Pose et al. (2021) suggest that those who are embracing populism typically feel at unease with what they consider as "a different society from the one they grew up in or with the image of society" passed on to them by their parents and family (p. 460). Increasingly, people in the United States are sceptical of globalisation, migration, and multiculturalism, and believe they are the key reasons for "the rise of economic (but also cultural and identity) insecurities" (Rodriguez-Pose et al., 2021, p. 460).

Notions of the American Dream play a key role in political discourse in the United States, and both the Republican and Democratic parties use "rhetoric about the promise and pursuit of the American Dream" (Wolak & Peterson, 2020, p. 968). However, Trump's use of MAGA is a markedly different narrative of the American Dream with a focus on 'America First'. During his presidency, Trump subverted and disrupted political norms in the United States, seen in his almost-daily scandals, vulgar and inflammatory tweets, race-baiting, and strong association with far-right ideas and populism. Moreover, Trump's presidential administration undermined the role of the government, intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations, multilateral trade agreements including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and appeared resentful towards traditional allies (Peters, 2017; Stiglitz, 2020). As such, the former president's authoritarian populism represents a danger to not only democracy, but to political and economic stability (Wilson et al., 2020).

Alongside the rise of right-wing populism, there has also been an increase in the polarisation and distrust of establishment politicians and parties (Winslow, 2017; Wilson et al., 2020). The "crisis of faith" in American political leaders and institutions has been exacerbated since the start of the twenty-first century and reflects growing frustration with the economic and political status quo (Preiss, 2021, p. 37). Wilson, Parker, and Feinberg (2020) suggest that changes in the political and media landscapes in the last couple of decades have created an illusion of polarisation among many Americans. It appears, increasingly, that politicians have become incentivised to "stoke polarisation" while social media platforms have contributed to a "political landscape that disproportionately reinforces and amplifies…outrage" (Wilson et al., 2020, p. 225). Moreover, there has been a rise of "partisan media" in the United States, including a myriad of "online news sources of varying dubiousness" (Wilson et al., 2020, p. 225). The increase in polarisation, toxic political rhetoric, and distrust in established democratic institutions has seen growing political instability in the United States. While Joe Biden won the

2020 U.S. presidential election, the country continues to grapple with the horrors of polarisation, racism, and misinformation which characterised the Trump administration (Meeuf, 2022).

2.3 Body changes, LGBTQIA+ rights:

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) rights advocates have won a number of significant and influential "legal victories" (Belmonte, 2020, p. 171). During the 2000s and 2010s there was growing pressure on both corporations and politicians to support LGBTQIA+ rights, and LGBTQIA+ people gained greater visibility in state and federal policy, as well as national political discourse (Christensen et al., 2018). Christensen et al. (2018) argues that 2015 was a particularly significant year for queer politics in the United States, seen in the Supreme Court ruling which legalised same-sex marriage state-wide as well as the coming out of Caitlyn Jenner as a transgender woman. Moreover, the Internet and social media have allowed teenagers and young adults from diverse backgrounds to research "complex notions of gender and question whether these…reflect their own experiences" (Diamond, 2020, p. 111). The ability for young people to access information on queerness, sexuality, and gender identity is often suggested as a reason why youth today are more likely to identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

However, as Ball (2019) argues, it is a mistake to believe that the support and legalisation of marriage equality "somehow represents the end of the struggle" for the LGBTQIA+ community in the United States (p. 6). While there were significant victories during Obama's presidency, Trump's administration reversed several of the pro-LGBT executive orders and federal policy changes made by his predecessor. Additionally, in recent years, there have been a growing number of bills introduced in Republican state legislatures which are slowly eroding the rights of LGBTQIA+ people in the United States (Belmonte, 2020; Bult, 2022). Paz (2022) argues that the introduction of these bills suggests, that although more than eight in 10 Americans support anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination laws, "old school" and "20th-century homophobia" appears to have returned (para. 3). Notably, on March 28, 2022, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed the 'Don't Say Gay' bill which limits the kind of discussions that public school teachers can have with their students regarding sexual orientation and gender identity (Paz, 2022). Additionally, a bill proposal in Tennessee seeks to ban books and other material which appear to support or promote the LGBTQIA+ community and civil rights movement. Conservative and Republican supporters of bills like 'Don't Say Gay' continue to attack the LGBTQIA+ community, accusing teachers of "'grooming' school-age kids and queer allies of

enabling paedophilia" (Paz, 2022, para. 2). In recent years, it appears that there is a growing and concentrated effort to roll back legal protections for LGBTQIA+ Americans.

Moreover, a growing number of laws primarily target the rights of transgender individuals, especially children in public schools. This includes bills banning transgender students from using their preferred bathrooms, whether their pronouns and preferred name will be used, and even "whether they can participate in school sports" (Bult, 2022, para. 1). Bathrooms still remain highly "segregated along gender lines" and this space is "replete with disturbing incidents of gender policing (by, for instance, employers, business owners, police officers, and security guards) of bathroom use" (Ball, 2019, p. 174). Alongside these anti-LGBT policies and state bills, people who are LGBTQIA+ continue to face higher levels of violence, harassment, and discrimination in a multitude of places. Denying jobs, housing, and goods and services to LGBTQIA+ individuals still remains legal in the majority of states in the U.S (Ball, 2019). Despite significant legal victories, public support, and increased visibility, the continued discrimination of LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially transgender and gender non-conforming people, reveals that the early twenty-first century is a tumultuous period in regard to gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality in the United States.

2.4 Ecological Implications:

The environmental movement has been often described as one of the most influential and global movements of the twenty-first century (Boulianne et al., 2020). Increasingly, environmental concerns, including climate change and threats to biodiversity have featured prominently in popular culture including the news media, film, and television (Christensen et al., 2018). It appears that the twenty-first century is marked by a cultural preoccupation with the natural environment, protecting biodiversity, and climate change. People have become increasingly familiar with images of "polar ice sheets breaking off, global warming", droughts, wildfires, flash flooding, and intense tropical cyclones (Hillard, 2009, p. 687). Consequently, nature has often been framed as being a "hostile opponent who is responding angrily to our incursions and actions, an opponent to be feared, and with any luck, controlled" (Hillard, 2009, p. 687). During a time when the relationship between humans and the natural world is arguably at crisis point, Parker (2020) suggests that horror has become "the environmental norm" (p. 26). In response to the growing awareness of a looming environmental crisis, Ecocriticism has emerged to explore the anxieties around "humanity's destructive impact on the biosphere" (Marland, 2013, p. 846; dell'Agnese, 2021).

In recent decades, there has been an incredible wealth of research, facts, and figures which document in significant detail the deterioration of the physical environment, whether it

be air or water pollution, the rise in endangered and extinct species, or the growing effects of climate change. This environmental degradation is attributed to widespread industrialisation over the last two centuries and increased material consumption fuelled by rapid world population growth (Pepper, 2019). Of grave concern is the impact of climate change on Earth, as almost no place in the world will be unaffected by the effects of climate change. Earth's climatic and ecological systems are "highly complex and the consequences of climate change will unfold over a long period of time" (Polley et al., 2013, p. 493). Since the Industrial revolution, the Earth has warmed on average 1.1 degrees Celsius which has led to a large spike in extreme temperatures in recent years, as well as more frequent and severe droughts and storms (Irfan, 2022). As Polley et al. (2013) argues, the effects of climate change have become evident, seen in rapid glacial retreat, "accelerated plant phenology, modified precipitation patterns, and increasing wildfires" (p. 493).

Post-2015 has been a particularly turbulent time in terms of political and social action on climate change and addressing a range of environmental issues including pollution. Although the Paris Climate Agreement was a historic moment, with over 190 countries signing to a single agreement on cutting greenhouse gas emissions, on June 1, 2017, former President Trump announced that the US was withdrawing from the agreement (Briggs, 2021). During his presidency, Trump reversed the momentum that was built up during Barack Obama's administration in fighting climate change. As Mehling and Vihma (2017) claim, the Trump administration appeared to have an "uncompromising hostility towards environmental safeguards, and…climate policy" (p. 28). Despite Trump's efforts to undermine political institutions which address climate change, after becoming President, Joe Biden reinstated the U.S. to the Paris Climate Agreement. Additionally, in August 2022, the United States Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act, the most expansive climate legislation ever passed by the nation (Milman, 2021; Friedman & Tankersley, 2022). Alongside the U.S government's renewed political commitment to reduce the country's carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, post-2015 has also seen the rise of the youth climate change strike. In 2018 Greta Thunberg became well-known after protesting outside the Swedish parliament, holding a sign saying 'School Strike for Climate' to pressure the government to meet carbon emissions targets (Kraemer, 2021). Initially, Thunberg's campaign was small, however, it has had a global effect, and on March 15, 2019, over a million protesters worldwide joined the youth strike for climate change (Boulianne, Lalancette & Illkiw, 2020). As Blomqvist (2019) suggests, through an ecocriticism approach, climate change should not be seen as a result of increased CO_2 emissions. Instead, when examining the cause of climate change, we also need to critique the social, political, economic, and technological institutions which "structure the social metabolism of the industrial system which" emits CO_2 into the atmosphere (Blomqvist, 2019, p. 235).

2.5 Conclusion:

Firstly, the context chapter explored the rise and proliferation of SVOD platforms, and how they transformed the television landscape. This included a discussion of the shift in the ability for viewers to access television content from everywhere at any time, as well as the growth in the number of Gothic-horror television series. Following this, the context chapter then discussed how post-2015, with the rise of Trump and Trumpism, marked a significant shift in American culture and indicated growing disillusionment with the country's economic and political status quo. Finally, this chapter highlighted several influential socio-cultural changes and social movements over the last decade, including the rise and growing support of the LGBTQIA+ rights movement as well as growing concerns over the future of the environment. The chapter provided a brief overview of a few socio-cultural issues and technological developments which have occurred post-2010 to provide a socio-cultural, political, and, historical context for when *Riverdale, Teen Wolf,* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* were released.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.0 Introduction:

Since the Gothic's emergence and development over 250 years ago, it has attracted considerable academic attention with many scholars noting that the Gothic has become omnipresent in a large variety of popular culture texts including literature, film, video games, and television. There has been significant debate regarding the Gothic's definition, however, many scholars have recognised that the Gothic is unpredictable and evolves to reflect people's anxieties and fears. Considerable research on the Gothic has specifically focused on Gothic fiction from the 1760s to the 1820s, has meant a dearth of research on other forms of serial media, including Gothic television.

3.1 Approaching the Gothic:

While the Gothic has attracted significant academic attention, scholars struggle to agree on a single or coherent definition, as it "is a highly mobile and fluid…form" (Palmer, 2012, p. 11). This challenge to define the Gothic is, in part, due to being described as an aesthetic, a mode or style, as a set of themes and narrative conventions, or as a sub-genre of fantasy (Wheatley, 2006). Despite the pitfalls in trying to locate a coherent definition of the Gothic, numerous scholars including Punter (2013) and Hogle (2002) have recognised that the term originated in the late eighteenth century in the form of Gothic fiction, with many arguing that the genre started with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). In his seminal text, Punter (2013) examines the history of Gothic fiction and provides a summary of the various meanings and dimensions of the term Gothic as it has been understood. Initially, Punter (2013) avoids providing a strict definition of the Gothic in his summary, however, he eventually argues that in "a literary context, the [sic] 'Gothic' is most usually applied to a group of novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s" (p. 1). Punter (2013; 1986) lists several well-recognised and influential authors within the genre, including Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and Mary Shelley, and argues that their novels are often grouped into a "homogenous body of Gothic [sic] fiction" (p. 1). Moreover, Punter (2013) also provides a comprehensive list of features and characteristics frequently associated with Gothic fiction including:

> An emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant. Used in this sense, 'Gothic' fiction is the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters, and werewolves (p. 1).

Punter's (2013) approach to defining the Gothic novel provides a useful framework for understanding what the Gothic is and identifying the key features often associated with it. However, Punter's (2013) definition is primarily focused on British Gothic novels from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As such, there is limited exploration of the features associated with the Gothic in other geographic contexts, including the American Gothic. Moreover, Punter (2013) does not discuss how features commonly associated with the Gothic novel translate to other mediums including film and television, nor does he consider the ways in which the Gothic has become omnipresent in a multitude of contemporary media forms. Given the growth and popularity of Gothic television throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, further research is needed on how these features have been translated on screen. By critically exploring the ways in which contemporary American Gothic-horror television series employ tropes, plots, and features long associated with the Gothic novel, this study aims to understand how the Gothic continues to evolve and morph.

In a similar fashion to Punter (2013), Hogle (2002) also notes archaic or antiquated settings, hidden secrets that haunt characters either psychologically or physically, and supernatural occurrences as common tropes in Gothic novels. However, unlike Punter (2013) who primarily focuses on the Gothic as a genre of fiction from the 1760s-1820s, Hogle (2002) takes a broader view, and instead, argues that any discussion of Gothic fiction needs to include a wide variety of media texts including plays, operas, short stories, magazine stories, newspapers, poetry, and paintings. Hogle (2002) is particularly critical of definitions which solely focus on the Gothic novel from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as such approaches frequently neglect to discuss how the genre is pervasive in every day-to-day life. This approach in defining the Gothic can account for how it can appear in a myriad of forms including ghost stories, romance novels, films, and television shows. However, Hogle's (2002) definition of the Gothic is still largely rooted in features typically associated with the Gothic novel and offers a limited critique in how the Gothic has taken shape in other media forms including television and other serial media texts. Both Hogle (2002) and Punter (2013) explore haunted and crumbling castles as Gothic landscapes, but there is little discussion of other Gothic spaces, such as natural landscapes. This study will explore the representation of other landscapes including Nature—specifically, the woods—and the suburbs in Gothic-horror television to reveal how the Gothic continues to evolve and appear in a myriad of forms.

Sedgwick (1975) and Ledwon (1993) are critical of attempts to define the Gothic as they argue that an examination of genre conventions could come under scrutiny for leaving something out. Sedgwick (1975) elaborates that genre examinations and analyses tend to be limited in its scope of what it can find, meaning that that even comprehensive and exhaustive lists of generic conventions typically appear incomplete. Sedgwick's (1975) perspective could, in part, account for how scholars have yet to agree upon a definition for the seemingly predictable Gothic novel as any list of fundamental characteristics will be regarded as being incomplete. In a similar fashion, Ledwon (1993) suggests that definitions "of a genre is at best incomplete" as they "often reduce and trivialise a complex subject" (p. 261). Rather than critically examining the Gothic in terms of its 'fundamental' characteristics like Hogle (2002) or Punter (2013), Ledwon (1993) instead argues that the Gothic is defined more by its process than its individual products. This perspective accounts for how despite being relatively easy to recognise, the Gothic is hard to define. Ledwon (1993) posits that rather than trying to define it as one category, we need to see that there many varieties of Gothics. A strength of Ledwon's (1993) approach to the Gothic is the recognition of more than just one category of the Gothic, and therefore can account for the sometimes contradictory and conflicting definitions of the term, and what can and cannot be considered Gothic.

3.2 Critical views of time and temporality:

The literature review will first briefly provide a broad overview of scholarship on time, while the subsequent section will explore and identify gaps in current Gothic scholarship on the narrative representation of time in greater detail. The nature of time has perplexed people for thousands of years, and yet, conceptions of time have a significant impact on how people perceive and understand the world around them. Time has become a topic of critical exploration across several academic disciplines, ranging from history, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, philosophy, biology, and popular culture studies (Torres, 2022). Evans (2003) suggests that on one hand, time is often thought to be objective, real or true, observable, and measurable, often through clocks, calendars, and seasons. However, alongside this commonly held view, time is also thought to be "'elusive'... 'stealthy' and 'imperceptible'" (Evans, 2003, p. 4). Time is frequently considered an ephemeral concept that is challenging to accurately and fully define because "there appears to be nothing tangible in the world which we can actually be pointed to and identified as time (Evans, 2003, p. 4). Although time and temporality—and the differences between them—can be challenging to define, Doy (2012) provides a clear and straightforward definition, noting the distinctions between the two terms. Doy (2012) posits that the term 'time'

is often used to refer to clock time, also known as universal or objective time while in contrast, temporality "is time insofar as it manifests itself in human experience" (p. xiii).

An ambiguous term, temporality often refers to time as being a sequential series of events, and something that can be objectively measured and documented into different parts, including years, hours, minutes, and seconds. Frequently considered as an "apparently…ubiquitous event", time is said to be experienced as a linear line of three key parts: the past, present, and future (Klempe, 2015, p. 6). Scholars such as Klempe (2015), Simão (2015), Evans (2003), and Doy (2012) have recognised that this conception of time as being a linear and fixed series of events is an illusion, and instead, time should be understood as a subjective and human experience, rather than being rooted in an objective reality. Similarly, Evans (2003) also explores time as being constructed and highly subjective, however, the author also considers the impact that language—and talking about time—has on our understanding of the passage of time. Specifically, Evans (2003) critically examines the way we talk and think about time regarding the sequence of events, the flow of time, and "about being 'located in' time" (p. 5).

By considering the ways in which people talk about time can allow for an examination of how people "spatialise time", Evans (2003) argues that we can then gain critical insights into "the conceptualisation of time and the nature and organisation of time" (p. 5). Evans (2003) and Klempe's (2015) conceptualisation of time as being both highly subjective and personal provides a useful foundation for understanding how time is a constructed and mediated phenomenon. This approach allows for a critical examination of how people can experience events and moments in distinct and unique ways. However, Klempe (2015) and Evans (2003) largely explored time as a philosophical concern and scientific inquiry. In these studies, there was a focus on the everyday lived experiences of time, which meant limited discussion on the connection between time and popular culture narratives. By examining the ways in which characters in popular culture texts, including television series, experience, talk, and think about time can offer further insights into the way people understand the nature of time.

Further, Klempe (2015), Evans (2013), and Doy (2012) only briefly consider the tension between the ways in which people 'measure' time and their own lived experience. May and Thrift (2003), in contrast, provides a comprehensive overview of the different ways in which people construct a sense of time. Firstly, the authors discuss the use of a variety of "*instruments and devices",* including clocks, which are either meant to signify the passage of time or "alter our conception" of the "direction of its duration and passing" (May & Thrift, 2003, p. 4). May and Thrift (2003) also suggest that a sense of time is also informed by our own biological clock, including the diurnal cycle as well as "the rhythms of the season, the rhythms of the body to the turning of the tides" (p. 3). The authors' study provides a useful understanding of the standardisation of time, including the use of clocks and calendars, and how this has impacted

people's need and ability to regulate time. Exploring the ways in which people must balance the tension between their experience of time in contrast to the measurement of time can reveal that there are numerous "networks of time stretching in different and divergent directions across an uneven social field" (May & Thrift, 2003, p. 5). However, like Klempe (2015) and Evans (2015), there was limited attention on the representation of how people perceive and understand time in popular culture, including television, in May and Thrift's (2003) work. Critically exploring the ways in which characters in Gothic-horror television series must balance their perception of time and the use of devices can help further expand on our understanding of the different systems of time.

Like May and Thrift (2003), Ricoeur (1984) also investigates how people situate their experience of time in the context of a universal or homogenous time. Ricoeur (1984) posits that people can maintain the bridge between their perception of time and universal time in three ways, including the use of calendars which give the ability to measure time and keep track of events. Secondly, Ricoeur (1984) suggests that the succession of generations provide a form of ancestral memory, and therefore can "'situate our own temporality in the series of generations'" (p. 21). Moreover, Ricoeur (1984) also attempted to theorise the way in which time plays a role in the experience of reading literature, as well as "the fictive experience of time" (p. 100). Narratives can play a "'mediating role'" by reconfiguring the historical past and reinscribing lived time on the time of the world; for Ricoeur (1984), time and narrative work together in a dialectical relationship. However, Ricouer's (1984) theory on the representation of time in narratives is limited to literature and does not offer an insight into the 'fictive' experience of time regarding television series. By drawing on Ricouer's (1984) research on the "temporal aspect of (the) virtual experience of being-in-the-world" will allow for a critical exploration of how time is depicted and constructed in televisual narratives (p. 100).

3.3 Time and the Gothic:

It has been well-documented that the Gothic is preoccupied with the return of the past and offers a critique of notions of time and space (Lloyd-Smith, 2004; Dent, 2016; Beville, 2014; Albright, 2009; Molesworth, 2014; Punter, 2012). Gothic narratives offer a way of negotiating the tensions involving the passing of time, seen in the preoccupation with situating "the past in relation to the present" (Albright, 2009, p. 24). By offering a critique of history, the past, and linear notions of time, the Gothic points to anxieties around people's "ability to, unproblematically, know a past reality, and therefore, to be able to represent it in a narrative" (Dent, 2016, p. 2). Dent (2016) explores the ways in which the Gothic constructs and represents the past, arguing that this preoccupation can be seen through the depiction of "ancient

artefacts, decaying architecture, general conflict" and the "presence of history through supernatural occurrences" (p. 2). Furthermore, temporal interruptions in the narrative are also shown through returns from the dead—whether it be corpses, ghosts, zombies, vampires, or other undead creatures and supernatural occurrences—are key features of Gothic narratives (Dent, 2016). Dent (2016) provides a foundation for understanding the connection between time and the supernatural in the Gothic, however, his account does not consider how time is articulated in the observable level of the narrative, including the use of devices and instruments to measure time. Greater critical attention is needed on the depiction of how characters observe and measure time to reveal how the Gothic can critique our ability to know or learn about the past.

Baldick (1993) explores how characters in the Gothic are often entrapped in both temporal and spatial realms, two dimensions which are regarded as being fundamental aspects of the Gothic. The author elaborates, arguing that Gothic narratives frequently "combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space" (Baldick, 1993, p. xix). The Gothic can be seen in the point of intersection between time and space, seen in the return of the past, often in the form of a family curse, and entrapment in spaces such as dungeons, locked rooms, or the ancestral mansion. Baldick's (1993) approach is useful in understanding the importance of the dialectic relationship between time and space in the Gothic. However, his discussion is largely preoccupied with the haunted castle and ancestral home in British Gothic fiction. There is limited focus on the representation of time and space in other settings—the woods, the suburban home, small towns, and urban environments—as well as in in more contemporary media texts. Exploring the intersection between spatiality and temporality in the suburbs and nature can offer a greater understanding of the different ways in which characters can become entrapped in the temporal and spatial realms.

Much of the scholarship on the representation of time in the Gothic novel suggests that it is not a coincidence that contemporary understandings of time and temporality developed alongside the emergence of the Gothic novel in the late eighteenth century (Albright, 2009; Molesworth, 2014; Punter, 2012). Many scholars including Molesworth (2014), Albright (2009), Mroz (2012), and May and Thrift (2003) explore the socio-cultural and technological factors which took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and how they altered how people perceive time. By the beginning of the twentieth century, "recognisably 'modern' ways of thinking about time and space" had already emerged in the Western world (May & Thrift, 2003, p. 21). During the eighteenth century, there was a significant economic shift, as the preindustrial economy developed to "mature industrial capitalism, which demanded new methods of synchronizing workers' movements" (Molesworth, 2014, p. 41). However, the need for rigorous, precise, and synchronised timetables meant time became seen as something which

is homogenous, uniform, and able to be divided into measurable units (Mroz, 2012). Alongside this economic shift, following Christiaan Huygen's invention of the pendulum clock in 1656, there was also a wave of technological improvements in the production of clocks and pocket watches (Molesworth, 2014). Consequently, "time became accurate, portable, and cheap" and the accessibility of portable watches meant that 'measuring' or 'observing' time was convenient to everyone, rather than simply being a luxury (Molesworth, 2014, p. 41).

To examine how the Gothic can reveal anxieties about the changing perceptions of time, Albright (2009) posits that there also needs to be a consideration of "the discourses of temporality" that are "encoded" in Gothic literature (p. 17). Albright (2009) argues that the belief that time moves in a linear direction is a fundamental characteristic of the eighteenth-century concept of temporality. This conception of temporality had a significant influence on Gothic novels from the eighteenth century, seen in the emphasis on the relationship between past and present. Many Gothic novels during this period were set in the past and "concerned with buried secrets that threaten order and stability in the novel's present" (Albright, 2009, p. 16). Albright (2009) argues that a central theme to Gothic novels during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were issues pertaining to identity, especially regarding identity which is "figured in terms of one's relation to past generations" (p. 15). Settings situated in the past allow for Gothic narratives to comment about "genealogical coherence from a safe distance" and explore themes of "usurpation and inheritance" (Albright, 2009, p. 17). That the themes of usurpation and identity were popular during this period arguably reflects "anxieties about the orderly transmission of property and cultural values across generations, anxieties that may have been exacerbated by the French Revolution" (Albright, 2009, p. 24).

Mroz (2012), Albright (2009), and Molesworth (2014) provide a detailed exploration of the connection between the emergence of the Gothic and contemporary Westernised understanding of time. Further, their studies offer a framework for understanding the different ways in which the Gothic can critique notions of time. However, these studies were largely focused on the relationship between the past and present in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature (Mroz, 2012; Albright, 2009; Molesworth, 2014). Consequently, there is a gap in the scholarship on how since that period, the Gothic has continued to depict socio-cultural anxieties around time and the past in connection with changes in how people understand time. With the rise and proliferation of contemporary Gothic-horror television series in the early twenty-first century, there is ample opportunity to continue to explore the ways in which the Gothic has evolved to critique notions of time, past, and history.

Paulson (2019) claims that much of the scholarly discussion of time in Gothic novels has largely focused on historical time and the relationship between the past and the present. Paulson (2019) argues that much of the scholarly analysis of "this dialectic" has relied on

theoretical models of temporality from psychoanalysis and historiography (p. 596). As such, there is a lack of Gothic scholarship on how time is represented on the "manifest…observable level of the narrative", including "chronological and calendrical forms" such as hours, days, and weeks (Paulson, 2019, p. 596). By moving beyond simply analysing the return of the repressed in the Gothic, and "the functioning of temporality at the 'surface' level of the text", Paulson (2019) posits that we can discuss a more complex picture of how people experience time (p. 596). In contrast to Mroz (2012) and Albright (2009), who primarily explored the relationship between the past and present, a strength of Paulson's (2019) study is a focus on how the Gothic represents the "distinctly modern problem of living with and through multiple forms of time" (p. 596).

Like Paulson (2019), Molesworth (2014) suggests that there has been limited critical attention on the role that clocks, clock time, and the hour as a unit of time play in Gothic fiction. For Molesworth (2014), this is a significant gap in contemporary Gothic scholarship because clocks of some form are commonplace in Gothic fiction, and they function as an important feature of Gothic storytelling. In the Gothic, almost nothing happens without some reference to the hour of its occurrence and "specific times and durations of time are oddly overrepresented, sometimes to the brink of ridiculousness" (Molesworth, 2014, p. 30). Molesworth (2014) examines how both clocks and the single hour as a temporal unit appear to possess some form of "talismanic power to inspire plot" (p. 38). Midnight and the witching hour "see more than their fair share of enchantment" including supernatural occurrences such as the return of ghosts (Molesworth, 2014, p. 38). Moleseworth (2014) provides several examples, including Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), in which the Bleeding Nun appears "on the fifth of May of every fifth year, as soon as the Clock strikes One" (Lewis 1998 [1796]: 141). Molesworth (2014) concludes that time in the Gothic is more than simply 'out of joint', as it is also "aggressively in joint" and "marked by exceptional precision and promptness" (Molesworth, 2014, p. 33). While Molesworth (2014) provides a framework for exploring the relationship between supernatural occurrences and clocks, and Paulson (2019) offers a critique of how the Gothic represents different systems of time, their studies are limited in scope. Specifically, Paulson's (2019) discussion offers a detailed analysis of the depiction of time in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), while Molesworth (2014) examines a broader range of novels, including *The Monk* and *The Castle of Otranto.* Incorporating Molesworth (2014) and Paulson's (2019) approach in critically investigating how contemporary Gothic-horror television series depict multiple forms or systems of time can provide a greater insight into how the Gothic reimagines "the experience of modern, asynchronous time" (p. 612).

3.4 The American and Suburban Gothic:

Exploring the development of the American Gothic novel as distinctive from European Gothic fiction, Fielder (1997) was one of the first scholars to suggest that the "American national narrative is a quintessentially gothic one" (p. 8). Fielder's (1997) study, *Love and Death in the American Novel,* traced the connection between American literature to the country's own sordid history. Since then, many scholars have situated the American Gothic within specific sites of historical haunting, including slavery and the genocide of North American indigenous tribes. Notably, Crow (2012) and Goddu (1997) argue the American Gothic provides a critique of the American Dream and the belief that the United States is a nation of progress, success, and opportunity for individuals. Crow (2012) argues that the American Gothic provides a forum to express and explore long-standing concerns about race as well as a voice for those who might have been "rejected, oppressed, or who have failed" (p. 2). By depicting the repression of centuries of horror, murder, and genocide, the American Gothic can challenge and disrupt the "dream world of national myth with the nightmares of history" (Goddu, 1997, p. 10).

Although Fielder (1997), Crow (2012), and Goddu (1997) offer a detailed account of how the American Gothic is influenced by both the European Gothic and the colonial history of North America, their studies are primarily concerned with literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To examine the ways in which the American Gothic continues to explore anxieties around the nation's brutal and violent history, greater attention on contemporary media texts including television series is needed. This study aims to address this gap in the scholarship by exploring the representation of the past in contemporary Gothic-Horror series such as *Riverdale*, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, and *Teen Wolf*. Examining the representation of time in these series could help provide an insight into how the return of the United States' sordid past continues to evoke fear.

Numerous scholars have noted that the Suburban Gothic emerged following World War II as the "quintessential mode in which American writers" used to express the myriad of sociocultural concerns which arose from the mass suburbanisation of the United States (Madden, 2017, p. 7; see also Murphy, 2009; Dines, 2020). By definition, in both a traditional and literal sense, the term 'sub-urb' "means outside, beyond or below the 'urb'" (Bourne, 1996, p. 164). According to Murphy (2009), while suburbs are typically located beyond the centre of a town or city, they are still "within its urban orbit" meaning they are a "borderland space situated" physically, geographically, and philosophically between urban/city centres and rural areas (p. 4). This geographic position means that suburbs are inherently a liminal space. As the Gothic often arises in liminal spaces or experiences which occur during moments of significant transition, transformation, or disruption, Murphy (2009) argues that it is no coincidence that

since the beginning of mass urbanisation, the suburban milieu has been a fitting venue for Gothic-horror narratives. Bourne (1996) and Murphy's (2009) definition of the suburbs offers a framework for understanding this milieu as an inherently Gothic space because of its liminal location. However, both Bourne (1996) and Murphy (2009) primarily focus on geographic location rather than time and temporality, and therefore, further research is needed on how the suburbs are constructed as liminal spaces through the depiction of time. This study seeks to address this gap in scholarship by examining the suburbs as a Gothic and liminal venue through the representation of atemporality and asynchrony in Gothic-horror television.

Murphy (2009) posits that the Suburban Gothic is primarily preoccupied with the suspicion that the peaceful looking suburban home, family, or neighbourhood has a terrible secret to hide. A trope frequently used in suburban-set Gothic narratives is the:

> firm belief that things like *that* (be that' some kind of supernatural incident, serial murder, family massacre…) simply shouldn't happen in places like *this* ('this' being a specifically suburban neighbourhood) (Murphy, 2009. p. 1).

For Murphy (2009), the Suburban Gothic, reveals that underneath the romanticised image of suburbia as a quiet, pastel-coloured cul-de-sac exists a darker narrative where there is "something dark lurks below suburbia's peaceful façade" (p. 1). Moreover, Murphy (2009) critically examines a wealth of Suburban Gothic novels, films, and television series from the mid-twentieth century to the early 2000s. Specifically, there was considerable discussion of Ira Levin's novel, *The Stepford Wives* (1972), and its 1975 and 2004 film adaptations, David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), and more recent television series, including *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012). While Murphy (2009) argues that the Suburban Gothic is concerned with themes of adolescence, there is limited analysis of teenage characters in the selected texts. Instead, much of Murphy's (2009) discussion is focused on the nuclear family, the revelation of secrets, and the depiction of suburbia as Gothic through the use of mise-en-scène. Since Murphy's (2009) research there has been a growth in Gothic-horror narratives which focus on adolescent characters in suburban environments on network television as well as streaming services such as Netflix. Therefore, it is the aim of this project to address this gap in the scholarship, and critically examine the representation of teenage protagonists in contemporary Gothic-horror television series to reveal the ways in which the Gothic continues to critique the suburban milieu.

Madden (2017) draws on Murphy's (2009) work to explore how the revelation of buried secrets in the Suburban Gothic works to render the suburbs as a disturbing and alien space and evokes a sense of the uncanny. Firstly, the narratives of the Suburban Gothic work to disrupt and challenge the idea of the family home as being safe shelter. Secondly, Madden (2017) argues that because many Americans live in the suburbs, the subgenre also disturbs readers and

viewers on a personal level because "the characters and settings are immediately recognisable and relatable, offering an uncanny reflection of the reader's own life" (p. 8). It is in that conformity and lack of identity that much of the horror of the suburbs lies, and suburbia is repeatedly depicted in the Gothic, and popular culture more generally, as "a repressive, soulless, and dehumanising hellscape" (Madden, 2017, p. 9). Further, Madden (2017) posits that while the Suburban Gothic initially flourished alongside the mass development of suburbs in the mid-twentieth century, it has, since the 2000s, experienced a resurgence. Madden (2017) briefly comments on how there appears to be a revival in Suburban Gothic narratives, however, the author primarily analyses *Carrie* (1974) by Stephen King and offers little discussion on why this resurgence is taking place. While there is a wealth of analysis and discourse on the representation of the suburbs in the post-war period, there continues to be limited discussion on the Suburban Gothic in more contemporary narratives.

Aa Dines (2020) identifies, suburban settings are typically portrayed as being a place outside of history and time—as atemporal venues—because they are devoid of personality and history. This construction of the suburbs as being 'outside' of time can be seen in the representation of suburban landscapes "which have not been allowed to age", and instead, are cast "in the image of 1950s televisual representations" (Dines, 2020, p. 110). Dines (2020) argues that as a result, the suburbs are characterised as being both artificial, as they resemble an idealised image, and oppressive, because "they are defined by conservative 'family values' and the presumption of white privilege" (p. 110). Dines' (2020) approach to the suburbs considers how linear notions of time in these settings is often disrupted, and provides an understanding for how the Suburban Gothic represents time. However, in Dines' (2020) research, as well as scholarship on the Suburban Gothic, there has been limited discussion on decay, as much of the focus has been on the suburbs as being places of conformity or lacking a past. Given the growth and proliferation of television series, especially due to the post-network and video on demand environment, these texts can offer an insight into how the Suburban Gothic continues to provide a useful critique of the American Dream.

3.5 The EcoGothic:

There has been considerable scholarly and critical attention on how the American Gothic is preoccupied with more than just the built environment but also the wider natural ecosystem in which humans live in (Sivils, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Keetley & Sivils, 2018; Parker, 2020). Keetley and Sivils (2018) argue that the American Gothic reveals the darker more hidden aspects of the relationship between people and the natural world in North America. While on the one hand, the natural environment supports and defines the American experience, it also instils fear and

violates the bodily integrity of its human denizens (Keetley & Sivils, 2018). Specifically, the American Gothic frequently features narratives where characters return to the forests that confronted European settlers during colonisation. As Keetley and Sivils (2018) note, the dominant American relationship with nature has always been unsettling and the ghosts born of colonialism and its attendant environmental perversity have grown entrenched into the very soil of North America's contested ground. Keetley and Sivils' (2018) study offers a detailed historical account of the interaction between European settlers and North American forests, as well as a foundation for understanding how the woods are frequently depicted in Gothic narratives. Further, the authors discuss the connection between nature and time through an analysis of the return of the repressed, and the dialectical relationship between the past and the present. However, there is limited discussion on time in terms of bodily transformation as well as how the wooded environment is frequently connected to the monstrous, including werewolves and witches in Gothic narratives. Moreover, because Keetley and Sivils (2018) primarily examine American literature and films from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there is limited critical exploration in how nature is constructed as a Gothic space in post-2010 Gothic-horror television series in their study.

Estok (2009) examines a wealth of scholarship on ecocriticism, noting that as a field of enquiry, it has focused too narrowly on more positive constructions and understandings of Nature. As a result, this meant that ecocriticism lacked "an adequate vocabulary for prejudice and bias against the natural world" and a dearth of critical investigation into more frightening associations with the nonhuman world (Estok, 2009, p. 207). Estok (2009) suggests that to overcome this gap in the scholarship, ecocriticism should also explore and interrogate the representation of ecophobia, or the contempt and fear that humans often have for Nature. By examining the relationship between humans and Nature through an ecophobia approach allows for an understanding that "an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world" is pervasive in the Western world (Estok, 2009, p. 207). Furthermore, Estok (2009) also suggests that such an approach must also be committed in critically examining how ecophobia, speciesism, racism, misogyny, and homophobia are "thoroughly interwoven with each other" (p. 208). While Estok (2009) provides much of the theoretical framework for the emergence of the EcoGothic, the author does not explicitly discuss the representation of nature in popular culture narratives nor does the author discuss the depiction of nature in Gothic. This study aims to address this gap by examining how Gothic-horror television series represent the often contentious relationship between humans and nature.

One of the key approaches to examining the cultural relationship between humans and Nature is the EcoGothic. The EcoGothic is interdisciplinary in nature, as it synthesises scholarship from a range of academic fields, including Gothic, Environmental, Animal, and Posthuman

studies to provide its theoretical and philosophical foundation (Parker, 2020; Del Principe, 2014). The term is, "of course an amalgamation of 'ecology' and 'Gothic'" and is primarily concerned with the idea "that Nature is in *itself* Gothic" (Parker, 2020, p. 16). It is important to note that although the EcoGothic is a burgeoning scholarly field, the ideas behind the term—that Nature scares us—is not new. However, there is still some inconsistency in how the term is currently used in scholarship, as it is described in varying, and sometimes conflicting ways, including "'a genre', 'set of texts', 'mode', 'theory', and 'approach'" (Parker, 2020, p. 16). Parker (2020) attempts to offer a comprehensive and developed definition of the term EcoGothic, as well as how Nature, and in particular the forest, is a Gothic landscape. Despite this, Parker (202) argues that in the EcoGothic are several clear patterns and themes, such as the "desire to understand our more ambivalent, complex, and sometimes nastier conceptions of Nature" (23). Parker's (2020) study offers a rich analysis of numerous films, novels, and fairy tales, and highlights how the EcoGothic is pervasive throughout popular culture narratives. However, there is limited critical exploration of the representation of the forest in contemporary Gothic-horror television series, as Parker (2020) primarily discusses *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991; 2017). As such, this study aims to address this gap in the scholarship by examining the ways in which characters engage with nature in Gothic-horror television series.

An EcoGothic approach is concerned with a familiar Gothic subject, nature, and takes a "nonanthropocentric position" to explore the role that "the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear" (Del Principe, 2014, p. 1). Hillard (2018) discusses anxieties around the body and the environment as being porous and social constructions, arguing that this focus marks a theoretical shift in the EcoGothic which critically examines the "role and agency of the body, materiality, and matter in general" (p. 23). Further, Hillard (2018) takes a 'material ecocritical approach' to the depiction of Nature in the Gothic to reveal the underlying "fragility of long-standing Western world assumptions" about the unique nature of human beings (p. 24). The EcoGothic offers a critique that humans are thought to be supposedly 'superior' to animals and the rest of the natural world. Such an approach considers the predatory ecosystems that humans live in, firstly, by acknowledging humans long evolutionary past and the "shaping force of our animal nature" (Keetley & Sivils, 2018, p. 7). Secondly, the EcoGothic also explores both the realities and dangers of the natural world, including hostile predators (monsters, animals, and other nonhuman entities) as well as the terrain and climate. In this way, humans have long been and continue to be defined by and in relation to the nonhuman (Keetley & Sivils, 2018; Hillard, 2018).

Furthermore, Del Principe (2014) and Parker (2020) posit that to examine the cultural relationship between humans, Nature, and the non-human, an EcoGothic approach must also explore the construction of the Gothic body. As Del Principe (2014) notes, the "monstrous body"

is a fundamental aspect of the Gothic, and the EcoGothic can provide a theoretical and critical framework for how that body "is never strictly 'human' but always a blend of the human and the nonhuman" (p. 1). At its core, the EcoGothic examines “the construction of the Gothic body – unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid – through a more inclusive lens, asking how it can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation for environmental and species identity” (Del Principe, 2014, p. 1). Parker (2020) expands on Del Principe's discussion of the EcoGothic body to discuss how the monsters associated with the woods—in particular, werewolves and witches—are examples of "'Eco-Gothic bodies'" (p. 143). The presence of monsters in the woods quite "literally *embodies* our" fears of Nature, of something lurking within the dark depths of the forest setting. These monsters are often comprised of elements of the human and nonhuman, and as such, their bodies can disrupt and deconstruct "preconceived notions about what qualifies as 'monstrous'" (Parker, 2020, p. 143). By threatening the boundaries of what is considered 'human' and what is 'nonhuman', Nature can be seen as an inherently Gothic space.

Although Parker (2020), Hillard (2018), and Keetley and Sivils (2018) discuss nature as being a space ‘outside’ of time, most of their analysis is on the divide between Nature and the human world. As such, there has been limited attention on the connection between natural landscapes and temporality. Moreover, while there has been a growing body of scholarship on the connection between the Gothic body, the monstrous, and the woods in EcoGothic narratives, there has been little discussion on the representation of adolescent characters in these texts. As both Nature and adolescence are associated with notions of transformation and self-discovery, more research is needed on how the adolescent characters who ‘enter the woods’ are transformed by this environment.

3.6 Gothic Television:

The rise of cable, pay-per-view channels, and streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime have meant that the centralised and mass-disseminated nature of ‘traditional’ television has largely given way to an era marked by individual consumer choice, highly diversified content, reception, and customizable interfaces (Kompare 2005; Lotz, 2014). Lotz (2014) argues that this diversification of viewing platforms has meant that the assumption that television is no longer only viewed on the television set, but a range of devices has become normalised. Unlike Lotz (2014) who primarily focuses on the shift in television distribution, Tyron (2015) critically examines the shift in television watching practices in the on-demand era, as millennial audiences develop new modes of consuming television. According to Tyron (2015), the migration of

television content to online streaming services has meant that watching TV has gradually become reconceptualized as something active. This idea of active viewership is something which Netflix has explicitly evoked in its advertising. Netflix's practice of releasing all episodes of a TV show season at once has become an object of discussion. Netflix and other video-on-demand streaming services have repackaged the television text through streaming archives that encourage users to watch episodes consecutively, especially through sustained periods of watching successive episodes (Tyron, 2015).

Similarly, Laboto (2018) also discusses the shift in viewing practices, arguing users of streaming services have become accustomed to a distinctive way of watching television. This way of viewing television, according to Laboto (2018), is characterized by interactive selection from algorithmically curated catalogs of content. It is Netflix's ability to present and filter content which ultimately distinguishes it from the flow of linear broadcasting, as "television is acquiring… a database form" (Lobato, 2018, p. 241). Furthermore, while Lotz (2014) considers Netflix and other streaming services like Hulu and Amazon prime as a form of television, Tyron (2015) questions this underlying assumption arguing that the redefinition of television takes place as TV itself becomes an increasingly difficult and nebulous term to define. Like Tyron (2015), Jenner (2016) is also concerned with how to conceptualise Netflix, given its shift from a video-on-demand (VOD) and DVD rental service to its role as a producer and distributor of original content. While Netflix's shift to producing a number of original serial dramas puts it in competition with Cable networks like HBO, Showtime, and FX, Jenner (2016) argues that in actuality, Netflix appears to signal away from the television medium, and its branding strategies, associated viewing patterns, technologies, industry structures, and programming. Jenner's (2016) perspective on the role of Netflix as a producer of content acknowledges how the streaming platform problematizes known terminologies about television. Furthermore, unlike Lotz (2014) and Tyron (2014), Jenner (2016) goes on to note content differences between Netflix and cable and network channels, which separate the streaming platform from television. In particular, while Netflix does offer original serialized dramas, it does not offer more 'traditional' television genres such as news, sporting events, or other programmes associated with TV's live aesthetics (Jenner, 2016).

Ames (2012) offers one of the first edited collections on the representation of time in twenty-first century television series. While there has been a wealth of research on the evolving nature of television, Ames (2012) argues few studies have focused on how time is represented in television narratives. Moreover, research on television and time has largely focused on analyses of nonfiction, live television. Ames (2012) posits that this leaves room for a greater focus on the "phenomenon of experimental time" which is a subject that "has yet to be given attention in terms of twenty-first century programming" (p. 12). Increasingly, contemporary

post-2000 television series play with time in a way distinct to television shows in the twentieth century, including the disruption of the chronological flow of time using flashbacks and flashforwards (Ames, 2012). Although Ames' (2012) study provides an overview of the growing importance of time narratives in television, there is limited discussion of the representation of time in Gothic-horror television, as well as a lack of analysis of adolescence as a time of transformation.

Numerous scholars and critics have addressed Gothic elements and themes in literature and film; however, this has arguably been at the expense of television, and consequently, there has been comparatively less research on Gothic television. Despite the challenges in identifying the features that constitute the Gothic television genre, *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017) has been often cited as one of the first distinctly Gothic television series (Ledwon, 1993; Wheatley, 2006; Wright, 2016). Ledwon (1993) is critical of the assumption that television's domestic setting puts it at odds with the Gothic genre, and instead, posits that television's domesticity allows it to be a natural venue for the Gothic. For Ledwon (1993), Gothic television should be understood as a form of genre that is deeply concerned with the domestic and the portrayal of unspeakable family secrets and trauma across the television screen. It is television's ability to deconstruct prevalent and widely held myths about American family life through the Gothic narrative which makes it well suited for the Gothic horror genre. Furthermore, Ledwon (1993) ultimately regards and conceptualises the Gothic as being inherently domestic, and therefore, makes it an ideal medium for the genre. While Ledwon (1993) discusses the representation of the domestic settings in Gothic television, there is limited discussion on suburbia itself nor natural landscapes. The Gothic is preoccupied with exploring anxieties associated with the suburbs and nature, especially the woods, and therefore greater consideration of the Suburban Gothic and EcoGothic are needed in terms of Gothic-horror television series.

Ledwon (1993) identified and critically examined the use of themes, tropes, and narrative devices which are typically associated with Gothic novels in *Twin Peaks,* noting the representation of "incest, the grotesque, repetition, interpolated narration, haunted settings, mirrors, doubles, and supernatural occurrences" in the series (p. 162). Ledwon (1993) focused her definition of Gothic television on what she considered to be three of its most accepted fundamental characteristics including: 1) the use of standard Gothic devices which generally are recognized as capable of producing fear or dread; 2) the central enigma of the family; and 3) a difficult narrative structure that frustrates attempts at understanding. By developing a list of characteristics for Gothic television, Ledwon's (1993) definition arguably provides a useful starting point in locating what shows can and cannot be considered Gothic. However, Ledwon's (1993) study was limited to an analysis of *Twin Peaks* rather than exploring a broader range of Gothic television series. Ledwon (1993) explores the representation of Laura Palmer—a dead

teenage girl—in connection to the uncanny and the double, however there is limited discussion of how adolescence can be regarded as a liminal and Gothic phase in of itself. Since Ledwon's (1993) study, there has been a substantial growth in the number of Gothic-horror television series, especially series which feature adolescent characters. By examining the representation of adolescence as being inherently Gothic in contemporary Gothic-horror television series, this project aims to address this gap.

In her landmark study on Gothic television, Wheatley (2006) critically engages with Ledwon's (1993) suggestion that television's domestic setting lends itself well to the Gothic horror genre. Ledwon (1993) briefly examines the television medium's repetitive structures and built-in systems of recognition as being inherently Gothic, however, Wheatley (2006) expands on this idea and argues that because of television's repetitive nature, it can be identified as uncanny. According to Wheatly (2006), television studies has implicitly taken up terms of the uncanny to describe the nature of broadcast television, and therefore the uncanny provides the initial point of dialogue between Gothic studies and television studies. Wheatley (2006) is critical of Ledwon's (1993) definition of Gothic television, arguing that scholars should look beyond features of Gothic literary texts when exploring Gothic television. When applied to television, Wheatley (2006) suggests that the term Gothic has been used to identify programmes which utilize a Gothic narrative form, or those which deploy a Gothic style, which exploit key elements of the Gothic image repertoire, and which are characterized by a certain darkness or gloominess. Wheatley (2006) offers a broad definition of Gothic television, and the author provides a framework for understanding how the Gothic can be present in a wide variety of television programmes and genres.

Moreover, Wheatley (2006) noted a few Gothic television series which feature ensemble casts of adolescent and young adult characters, including *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel* (1999-2004), *Charmed*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003). Wheatley (2006) argues these series "can be understood as hybrid Gothic texts, fusing the narrative preoccupations of the teen drama with the stock characters and imagery of the Gothic" (p. 160). A strength of this approach is that Wheatley (2006) considers the way in which many television teen drama series often employ Gothic narratives, plots, and tropes. However, Wheatley (2006) only briefly discussed Gothic television programmes which were released in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Additionally, there was limited discussion on the representation of adolescence itself as being Gothic. like Ledwon (1993), there was also little exploration of nature and the suburbs as also being Gothic spaces, as well as the representation of time. By exploring the connections between nature, suburbs, time, and adolescence as a time of transformation, this study aims to build on contemporary scholarship on Gothic television series.

While Wheatley (2006) examines the difficulty in defining and marketing Gothic television from the 1990s to the mid-2000s, SVOD platforms have proliferated and risen in popularity and have marked a shift in how audiences watch television and other serial media content. Therefore, scholars should consider the impact of these streaming services on the production, marketing, and content of Gothic series. Abbott (2017a) uses Wheatley (2006) as a foreground for her own analysis of contemporary Gothic-horror television and agrees with Wheatley's (2006) suggestion that the 1990s were marked by the success of several shows that fuelled a renewed interest in the horror genre on television. However, unlike Wheatley (2006) who primarily concentrated on network and cable television, Abbott (2017a) argues that the proliferation of streaming services and cable/ pay-per-view channels has helped create a competitive broadcast landscape where Gothic-horror television has become "big business on the small screen" (p. 120). Furthermore, Abbott (2017a) argues that this increasingly competitive and profitable market has allowed for the gradual relaxation of censorship restrictions across all media outlets and types of programming over the last fifteen years. Advancements in digital technology and special effects combined with relaxed censorship regulations on streaming platforms has allowed for the proliferation of Gothic-horror television. This has meant that these types of shows have increasingly been marketed to a large and loyal young audience, which Abbott (2017a) argues demonstrates an unprecedented enthusiasm and taste for horror programming and themes in the twenty-first century.

3.7 Adolescence and the Gothic:

Since the turn of the twentieth century, there has been considerable scholarly attention on adolescence, the development of identity, and the physiological changes which take place during puberty (Hall, 1904; Doherty, 2012; Marcia, 1980; Coleman, 2011; Coats, 2004). Although adolescence has often been framed as being a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, in recent years, there has been much scholarly debate on the exact length of this transition (Marcia, 1980; Coleman, 2011; Coats, 2004; Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne, & Patton, 2018). As Sawyer et al. (2018) argues, the definition of adolescence as being the phase of life between childhood and adulthood "has long posed a conundrum" (p. 223). This is because the biological growth and significant social role transitions which take place during adolescence have changed since the start of the twentieth century. On one hand, it appears that children begin puberty earlier, "while understanding of continued growth has lifted its endpoint age well into the 20s" (Sawyer et al., 2018, p. 223). Similarly, Coleman (2011) also explores the challenges in defining this life stage, recognising that increasingly, many young people continue to live at the family home well into their twenties. As a result, it appears that there is no longer a clear

“or well-defined moment when an individual reaches adulthood” (Coleman, 2011, p. 27). A strength of Sawyer et al. (2018) and Coleman’s (2011) approach is the recognition that several socio-cultural factors during the end of the twentieth century and start of the twenty-first century have changed how adolescence should be understood. However, Sawyer et al. (2018) and Coleman (2011) primarily took a sociological approach to understanding adolescence, rather than exploring how adolescents are represented in popular culture narratives.

While there are challenges in providing an exact definition for adolescence, numerous scholars have identified that this life stage is a period of change and development in terms of one’s sense of identity (Coleman, 2011; Marcia, 1980; Coats, 2004). Coleman (2011) argues that adolescence is a unique period where individuals struggle to understand themselves and the world around them, as they attempt to navigate the world in forming their own identity, separate from their parents and “other formative influences” (p. 75). During this period, there is often a shift in orientation from one’s family to “a reliance on peers for providing guidelines for attitudes and behaviour…and the development of interpersonal skills” (Temple-Smith, 2018, p. 4). Coleman (2011) and Temple-Smith (2018) offer a broad overview of the different ways in which teenagers negotiate their sense of self-identity in the twenty-first century. However, both authors offer little discussion of how adolescents make sense of the body changes that occur during puberty, nor do Coleman (2011) and Temple-Smith (2018) discuss how popular culture narratives represent how teenagers go through a process of self-discovery. Further research on how popular culture depict the shifts in identity (body changes, change in social status, sex and sexuality) which take place during adolescence could offer greater insight into how teenagers navigate their sense of identity in the early twenty first century.

Coats (2004) employs Kristeva's work on the abject to critically examine adolescents as being socially abject figures and argues that the concept of abjection is "structurally and logically compatible" with thinking about adolescence (p. 142). Coats (2004) elaborates, arguing that adolescence is thought of in similar terms to abjection: as breaching and challenging boundaries. An in-between time, adolescence is a period where "what we know and believe about children is challenged", as they disrupt the borders of identity in trying to become adults "without becoming adulterated" (Coats, 2004, p. 142). Although Coats (2004) discusses adolescence in the Gothic terms of abjection and liminality, the author does not discuss explicitly discuss the Gothic nor how Gothic narratives frequently depict adolescents as abject figures.

Doherty (2012) offers a detailed exploration of the emergence and development of the term’s adolescence and teenager throughout the early and mid-twentieth century. Firstly, Doherty (2012) recognises the significance of Hall’s (1904) research on adolescence. Hall (1904) was one of the first scholars to popularise the concept of adolescence as “a concept of a developmental phase that began with puberty and ended with mature adulthood” (Doherty,

2012, p. 32). During the early twentieth century, teenagers in the United States considered themselves, and were considered by others, to be young adults and not a distinct group from children and adults. However, following the end of World War II, the term teenager had "entered standard usage" (Doherty, 2012, p. 34). During the post-war period, teenagers in the United States became more self-aware of their status as a "special, like-minded community bound together by age and rank [...] their social position [...] vigorously reinforced by the adult institutions around them" (Doherty, 2012, p. 35). Similarly, Hinton (2016) explores the history of the term 'teenagers', arguing that this "social category…is firmly established in Western English-speaking culture", especially in the United States of America (p. 233). Additionally, Hinton (2016) also considers how teenagers in the mid to late twentieth century were often represented in popular culture as being 'deviant', 'troubled' and "as vulnerable stage of psychological development" (p. 244). Doherty (2012) and Hinton's (2016) studies provide an insight into how the concept of adolescence is a relatively new phenomenon and a Western cultural construction, as well as the socio-cultural factors which lead to the emergence of this group as being distinct from childhood and adulthood. However, Doherty's (2012) research was primarily focused on teenagers, youth culture, and popular culture in the 1950s, while Hinton (2016) examined the representation of adolescence in films from the 1980s and 1990s. There have been significant socio-cultural, economic, technological, and political changes which have had a significant impact on our understanding of teenagers as a phase between childhood and adulthood.

During the end of the twentieth century and start of the twenty-first century, Gothic narratives which primarily focus on teenagers has become a commercially lucrative market. There has been a growing body of scholarship on the representation of teenagers as being liminal figures, especially in YA fiction (Koehler, 2017; Smith & Moruzi, 2018). Georgieva (2013) notes that Gothic is preoccupied with "the growth and transformation of the child, the crisis of adolescence and the sometimes painful transition into adulthood'' (p. 13). The Gothic child of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was often characterised by ''ambiguity, mystery, liminality, violence, and monstrosity'' (Georgieva, 2013, p. 12). Although Georgieva's (2013) study focused on Gothic children, it provides a framework for understanding how adolescences are also Gothic, as they must also take on new responsibilities, becoming an individual, and managing more complex relationships. However, her discussion is largely limited to fiction from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Given the popularity of Gothic-horror television series in recent years, there is room for further research on the teenage body in connection to contemporary socio-cultural anxieties around adolescence. Further, while Georgieva (2013) does acknowledge that adolescence is a liminal phase, she does not explore the adolescent body in connection with notions of time, transformation, and the supernatural.

Koehler (2017) argues that the concept of liminality is often used to analyse how adolescents at "the centre of these narratives resonates with the Gothic imagination" (p. 140). Koehler (2017) employs Victor Turner's (1982) study to expand upon his concept of liminality to "frame the adolescent stage with regard to social life (p. 140). According to Koehler (2017), since the 1980s, there has been a growth in popular culture texts, and especially Gothic narratives, which depict the adolescent body as being "increasingly politicized, stigmatized" and a "conflict zone, a liminal precinct in which sex, illness and death often intersect to…Gothic effect" (p. 137). Similar to Koehler (2017), Smith and Moruzi (2018) also explore adolescence in connection to the concept of liminality. Smith and Moruzi (2018) argue that in YA fiction, the liminality of Gothic figures who transgress boundaries between human and monster is magnified by the transitional space occupied by teen protagonists who are neither children nor adults. Both Koehler (2017) and Smith and Moruzi (2018) offer a framework for understanding how teenagers are inherently Gothic figures. However, the authors' discussion of adolescence in the Gothic is primarily limited to YA fiction and paranormal romance fiction, and why teenage characters in these texts are often drawn to supernatural and shapeshifting characters. As such, Smith and Moruzi (2018) and Koehler (2017) offer little discussion of teenagers in Gothic-horror television, nor do they consider adolescence in connection to notions of time or nature.

In contrast to Georgieva (2013), Koehler (2017), and Smith and Moruzi (2018), McLennan (2012) discusses the concept of adolescence in connection to how the Gothic can reveal the instability of the past, present, and future. McLennan (2012) draws on Bruhm's (2002) work on Gothic time and history to critically examine the representation of adolescence in the contemporary Gothic. Adolescence is frequently understood and conceptualised as a stage of development, and therefore, should follow "the logic of linear progression" (Bruhm, 2002, p. 267). Despite this, McLennan (2012) argues that instead, adolescence reveals the "instability of constructions of past and future" as well as challenging the linear movement from childhood to adulthood, "rendering history's promise impossible …broken, or nonexistent" (p. 86). Examining adolescence in the Gothic reveals a paradox: contemporary narratives of adolescence is defined by a search for a narrative of development, while also acknowledging the impossibility of achieving that promise (McLennan, 2012). As adolescence is a "liminal space between past and future", teenage characters in the Gothic can be used as a vehicle to explore anxieties about the past, as well preoccupations with "excess, limits, and transgression" (McLennan, 2012, p. 86). While McLennan (2012) provides a framework for understanding for how adolescence in the Gothic can reveal the constructed nature of notions of past, present, and future, there is a focus on YA fiction, especially Stephanie Myer's bestselling series *Twilight* (2005-2008; 2020-).

There has been considerable scholarly attention on the figure of the werewolf, including the shapeshifter's folkloric origins and representation in popular culture (Frost, 2003;

Gutenberg, 2007; Gardenour, 2015; Priest, 2015). Specifically, there has been much research on the influence of werewolf cinema from the twentieth century on contemporary understandings of werewolf mythology. Additionally, within Gothic scholarship, there has been much critical discussion on the connection between the supernatural and adolescence as well as how the werewolf body functions as a metaphor for contemporary discourses of adolescence (du Coudray, 2002; Pulliam, 2012; 2014; Evans & Pettet, 2018). While there is scholarship on werewolves on television, there has been limited scholarly attention on *Teen Wolf* and the representation of adolescent characters through the metaphor of the werewolf in the series.

Research specifically on *Teen Wolf* tends to focus on the representation of gender—and masculinity and femininity—as well as queer baiting and fandom. Evans and Pettet (2018) argue that the werewolf body in *Teen Wolf* either disrupts or (re)emphasises the gender performance of masculinity and feminity. The masculine characters in the series are frequently "empowered" by the 'gift' of lycanthropy, which allows protagonist Scott and his male peers to then subvert "hegemonic norms" around masculinity (Evans & Pettet, 2018, p. 68). Evans and Pettet (2018) elaborate, arguing that lycanthropy can allow for the re-imagining of the masculine body and violence outside of hegemonic constraints. In contrast, the supernatural female characters in Teen Wolf are frequently denied the same level of agency and empowerment in ways which "reinforce conservative ideas about the female body, femininity, and female sexuality, rather than embracing them" (Evans & Pettet, 2018, p. 68).

Although *Riverdale* (2017-), a Gothic-horror television series which primarily focuses on an ensemble cast of adolescents and young adults, has attracted significant attention on social media, there has been limited scholarly and critical discussion of the series. Scholarship on *Riverdale* has largely been focused on its adaptation of Archie Comics, fandom, slut shaming and rape culture, nostalgia, and the deconstruction of the American Dream (Brembilla & Checcaglini, 2020; Hanley, 2020; Moore, 2022; Burkhardt, Trott, & Monaghan, 2021). Hanley (2020) primarily discusses Archie Comics, arguing that the comic series offers a sense of nostalgia for "small-town life" and was preoccupied with "white nuclear families as a bastion of wholesome goodness" (p. 149). The author only briefly comments on *Riverdale,* arguing that the television adaptation takes a significantly darker tone, offering a critique of notions of the American Dream. In comparison, Brembilla and Checcaglini (2020) provide a more detailed discussion of the construction of nostalgia in *Riverdale.* The authors argue that the series blends retro atmospheres, settings, outfits, and accessories with more contemporary elements, such as the use of smart devices, which creates an overall sense of timelessness. The use of a contemporary setting with retro elements ultimately works to disrupt the audience's understanding of time, and "instead, fascinate them with retro charm" (Brembilla & Checcagilini, 2020, p. 42). While both Hanley (2020) and Brembilla and Checcagilini (2020) provide a useful starting point in

understanding how *Riverdale* is preoccupied with time, there was little discussion of the Gothic and how the series incorporates a number of Gothic-horror elements to create an atmosphere of decay, artifice, and alienation. More research is needed on how *Riverdale,* as a Suburban Gothic text, can illustrate how underneath its idyllic and innocent image, Riverdale represents anxieties around the disillusionment with the American Dream.

3.8 Conclusion:

This literature review explored scholarship on the Gothic, including American, Suburban, and EcoGothic, as well as time and temporality, nature, television, and adolescence, and highlighted areas which require further critical investigation. Firstly, this chapter considered how despite a large body of work that has attempted to define the Gothic, scholars have been preoccupied with discussing Gothic fiction, and as such there has been a lack of research on how the Gothic has evolved into other media forms. Secondly, the literature review defined time and temporality, and provided an overview of the representation of time in Gothic narratives, noting that there has been significant scholarly attention on the relationship between the past and the present. This was followed by a discussion on Gothic television, and how despite a lack of research on this area, can be defined as programmes which utilise a Gothic narrative form, or those which deploy a Gothic style, which exploit key elements of the Gothic image repertoire, and which are characterized by a certain darkness or gloominess.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

4.0 Introduction:

Firstly, the methodology and results chapter will explore why thematic analysis and textual analysis were the most suitable research methods for this thesis. The chapter will also highlight how the benefits and constraints of thematic analysis and textual analysis will affect the data collection process. Afterwards, the methodology and results chapter will explain the criteria for choosing *Riverdale, Teen Wolf,* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* as this study's key texts for analysis. Next, this chapter will also explain how the data was collected and then organised under three key themes: 'The decay of the American Dream', 'Cycles of Transformation', and 'Dreams, Visions, and Distorted Realities'. Finally, the chapter will briefly discuss an overview of the study's primary findings.

4.1 Methodology:

The research will be based in thematic and textual analysis and will use a meta-critical framework/methodology to synthesise several theoretical perspectives and scholarship, including Gothic studies, television studies, environmental studies, and scholarship on time and adolescence.

4.2 Research Methods:

Research methods refer to a range of tools and techniques used "to collect, sort and analyse" data during the research process (Walliman, 2018, p. 21). This study will employ both thematic and textual analysis when identifying, collecting, and interpreting the data to critically examine the representation of adolescence, nature, and time in post-2010 American Gothic-horror television series. This approach will allow the research to explore the intersections between adolescence, nature, and time in these series. Thematic analysis looks at texts, images and sounds, and focuses' on identifying implicit and explicit themes within textual data (Guest et al, 2012). More than simply counting words and phrases, thematic analysis allows for researchers to find themes or specific patterns found in the data "in order to describe a particular aspect of the world" (Gavin, 2008, p. 280). As this research will critically examine Gothic-horror television, it will employ a thematic analysis to identify key patterns or themes in the data. Similarly, textual analysis involves the interpretation of texts to obtain a sense of the ways in which people make

sense of the world (McKee, 2003). Using textual analysis will allow the researcher to gather and interpret data on the cultural construction of time, nature, and adolescence in an American context, and the potential implications of this representation.

Thematic analysis allows for flexibility regarding theory and the interpretation of data, and develops according to the research question, the needs of the research, and the input of the researcher (Gavin, 2008; Guest et al, 2012). Through a thematic analysis, the researcher will be able to interpret and critically analyse the cultural construction of Western notions of time, adolescence, and nature in relation to several academic approaches, including Gothic, television, environmental, and time studies. According to McKee (2003), textual analysis seeks to understand the ways in which forms of representation take place, the possible assumptions behind them, and the kinds of sense-making about the world that they suggest. McKee (2001) argues that researchers applying textual analysis to a television series are not trying to find a correct interpretation because "*there are large numbers of possible interpretations, some of which will be more likely than others in particular circumstances*" (p. 140). While there are numerous ways in which texts can be accurately described, attempts to make sense of a text need to consider the context. The context includes the rest of the text, the genre of the text, and the "public context in which a text is circulated" (McKee, 2001, p. 145). McKee (2001) suggests that the context influences the interpretations of a text, and as such, if you put a text in a different context, "it will likely be interpreted in a…different way" (p. 145). The ability to critically examine how texts represent the world is crucial to this project, as it will allow the researcher to explore how the chosen Gothic-horror television texts represent the cultural construction of adolescence, time, and nature.

As this researcher will be taking a qualitative approach to analysing Gothic-horror television, the collected data will be expressed through words instead of numbers, and therefore cannot be accurately measured or counted in the same way as quantitative data (Walliman, 2018). Walliman (2018) posits that qualitative research "depends on careful definition of the meaning of words, the development of concepts and variables, and the plotting of interrelationships between these" (p. 84). Although thematic analysis is generally concerned with capturing the experiences of individuals accurately and comprehensively, there are concerns with its reliability. This is because in contrast to other word-based research methods, the researcher organises texts according to their own interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, thematic analysis can capture the "complexities of meaning within a textual data set" which means it is still an extremely useful research method (Guest et al., 2012, p. 14). The researcher acknowledges that he is a fan of Gothic-horror television series which feature adolescent characters, and as such as a subjective point of view on how adolescence, time, and nature are represented in the selected television series. Subjective views will always influence

data collection, coding, and analysis, especially in qualitative analysis. As such, the researcher has a responsibility to identify and manage their bias. The researcher will establish strategies for monitoring reliability throughout the research, data collection, and coding process, such as asking others to analyse the data as an accuracy check as well as re-watching selected data to ensure the researcher is interpreting the data as accurately as possible (Gavin, 2008).

4.3 Research Design:

Initially, the researcher focused on examining the representation of queerness and the cultural construction of heteronormativity in post-2010 American Gothic-horror television series. The researcher selected several Gothic-horror television series based on a number of criteria. This included American texts which were released post-2010, appealed to a teen and young adult audience, had a diversity element, and incorporated elements of the supernatural. This list of criteria meant the researcher selected a broad range of Gothic-horror television series, including *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (*2018-2020), *Riverdale* (2017-), *The Order* (2019-2020), *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments* (2016-2019), *Hemlock Grove* (2013-2015), and *Teen Wolf* (2011-2017). However, during data collection and analysis, the nature and focus of this project changed. During the initial data collection process, the researcher observed how a number of the series were extremely preoccupied with notions of time (whether it be the return of the past, dreams/ visions/ hallucinations, or explicit references to times and dates), nature (natural landscapes and bodily transformation), and the adolescent experience. As such, the researcher changed his criteria to select texts which explicitly explored the connections between adolescence, time, and nature.

The criteria for selecting relevant Gothic-horror television series for analysis includes:

- American Television series released post-2010,
- Gothic – The researcher has developed sub-criteria for deciding what texts can and cannot be considered Gothic including terror, stereotyped characters, the supernatural, and images of the uncanny.
- Feature a cast of predominantly adolescent (or young adult) characters and a focus on the adolescent experience,
- Have a preoccupation with notions of time in its various guises, including return of the past, dreams, ghosts, corpses, and death,
- Have preoccupation with nature, including nature as a setting of self-discovery and bodily transformation, as well as distinctions between nature and the urban,
- Feature suburban settings, including the suburbs and small towns,

- Have elements of the supernatural (whether it be implied or explicit).

Post-2010, there have been several significant changes in the distribution and viewing habits of television and other audio-visual media texts due to the introduction of SVOD services. These changes have allowed for the growth of Gothic-horror television series and have meant that television and SVOD services have become a 'natural' home for these texts. While there has been a rise of Gothic-horror television series worldwide, and especially in the United Kingdom, this project will primarily select American television series to examine the representation of the decay of the 'American Dream'. The American Gothic often offers a critique of the American Dream through characters, especially teenagers and young adults, who become disillusioned after discovering their seemingly innocent and idyllic hometown is an illusion.

It is important to note that by American, this thesis is specifically referring to the United States of America. The American context is important because the United States produces a wealth of media content; as Crothers (2021) notes, popular culture products, including film and television series, remains the country's leading global export. Through distribution deals, American produced television series can reach an international audience through SVOD services like Netflix and Disney+ (Butler & Lotz, 2018). Moreover, the United States has been going through a particularly tumultuous period over the last decade. Whether it be the political landscape—including the rise of Trump and 'Trumpism' and growing distrust in political institutions—people worldwide have been paying close attention to the socio-cultural and political climate of the United States of America.

Secondly, the researcher used Wheatley's (2006) definition of Gothic television when selecting Gothic-horror television series. According to Wheatley (2006), Gothic television narratives typically include: a mood of dread or terror inclined to evoke fear or disgust in the viewer, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and plots, representations of the supernatural, images of the uncanny, and homes and families which are haunted, tortured, or troubled in some way. Alongside this, Gothic television is usually visually dark, with a mise-en-scène dominated by drab and dismal colours, shadows, and closed in spaces (Wheatley, 2006). Additionally, the researcher followed Hogle's (2002) definition of and approach to Gothic-horror when selecting texts for analysis. Specifically, Gothic-horror can be defined as the "physical manifestation" of psychological hauntings and confronts characters with "something repulsive and horrific" to shatter everyday norms (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, para. 14; Hogle, 2002).

The next aspect of the researcher's criteria is choosing shows which primarily feature a cast of adolescent and young adult characters. Further important were series which focused on how teenage characters navigated the trials and tribulations of the adolescent experience,

including themes of transformation and self-discovery in relation to the body. These shows could offer an insight into current cultural anxieties around the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as well as the (dysfunctional) nuclear family.

The fourth criteria are series with a preoccupation with time. The researcher will take a broad view of time to account for the multiple and often conflicting ways in which time is represented in Gothic television series. Specifically, the researcher will select texts where there is a preoccupation with the relationship between the past and the present, including the return of hidden secrets and repressed memories. Additionally, the researcher will select series which depict time in connection to cycles of transformation and discovery, including the changing nature of the adolescent body (puberty), the shape-shifter body (such as werewolves), as well as how both settings and characters remain in circular/ temporal loops, destined to repeat the same actions.

The next criteria used in the selection process were texts which had a preoccupation with nature, and featured natural landscapes as being an integral part of the narrative and setting. This included series which depicted tensions between the urban world and the natural world, as well as being a setting of transformation, where characters are 'free' to find themselves.

The sixth criteria that the researcher will use in his selection of Gothic-horror television series includes the depiction of suburban (and small town) settings. As Murphy (2009) notes, in suburban-set Gothic narratives, there is a significant focus on teenage protagonists and their relationship with their parents, as well as how the suburbs are frequently depicted as being places 'outside' of time, lacking in history and identity. Moreover, American Gothic texts are frequently set in the suburbs or small towns and use the suburban setting to deconstruct notions of the American Dream. Choosing texts which feature suburban settings could offer an insight into how teenagers navigate the people and world around them.

After creating these criteria to select Gothic-horror television series, the researcher ultimately chose to focus his analysis on *Riverdale, The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* and *Teen Wolf*. These series feature adolescent characters as the primary protagonists, were set in small American towns (or suburban settings) and were focused on notions of time and nature. *Riverdale* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* were both written by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, who is also the Chief Creative Officer of Archie Comics Inc. The two series are set in the same universe, feature numerous inter-textual references to each other, as well as a few cross-over episodes. Given this connection, it is not surprising that both *Riverdale* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* are similarly preoccupied with the adolescent experience in terms of nature, time, and liminality, and explore similar themes. While *Teen Wolf* was released a few years prior to the aforementioned series, there is a significant focus on using nature and the

shape-shifting body as a metaphor for anxieties related to the teen body. As Such, *Teen Wolf* was chosen as a comparison to Riverdale and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* to critically explore the connection between time, nature, and adolescence.

4.4 Data Collection:

After selecting *Riverdale*, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, and *Teen Wolf* as the primary texts. The researcher then recorded notes on the representation of time, nature, and the adolescence experience, and looked at both the narrative and visual imagery. During the data collection process and analysis, the researcher catalogued data using cultural iconography such as:

- Adolescent characters,
- Adolescence experience, including notions of self-discovery, transformation, and identity,
- Dreams, visions, hallucinations, or sequences/ scenes which depict the blurring of the past/present and reality/fantasy,
- Bodily transformation,
- EcoGothic narratives featuring anxieties around nature, the divide between nature and the urban,
- Dialogue,
- References to notions of the American Dream,
- Visual images and mise-en-scène dominated by drab and dismal colours, shadows, and closed in spaces, as well as highly idealised and artificial settings.

During the data collection stage, the researcher watched *Riverdale* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* through the streaming service, Netflix, and watched *Teen Wolf* through his own DVD copies. The researcher watched the first three seasons of *Teen Wolf* (48 episodes), all seasons of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (36 episodes), and the first six seasons of *Riverdale* (117 episodes), for a total of 201 episodes.

Initially, the researcher recorded the thoughts that came to mind after watching each episode in a journal. These preliminary notes served as a starting point for collecting further data from the selected texts, including observations, important plot points, character dialogue, music and sound effects, and visual images and mise-en-scène. At first, the researcher wrote lines of dialogue while watching the series, however, this process was time consuming, and as such, the researcher subsequently looked at the episode transcripts for character dialogue that could be used for analysis. This allowed for the researcher to take detailed notes and

observations about other key aspects, including plot points and the use of visual images and mise-en-scène.

During data collection an important step of thematic analysis is familiarisation. Terry et al. (2018) argues that familiarisation is a way of engaging with and gaining insight into "what can…appear to be an overwhelming mass of data" (p. 23). This stage in thematic analysis is about "intimately knowing the dataset" and requires the researcher to actively engage with the data, and starting to notice patterns (Terry et al., 2018, p. 23). After writing notes for each episode, the researcher went through his observations, and identified specific episodes and scenes which appeared to be rich in material for analysis. Following this, the researcher re-watched key episodes numerous times to collect data.

4.5 Results:

According to Terry et al. (2017), after data has been collected, the next step is to start the coding process and build taxonomies and categorise the data into themes. The coding process is analytical and requires the researcher to select and then interpret the information (Walliman, 2018). After codes are used to label "units of meaning to the data" and organise the information, the next step is to start identifying broader patterns and themes (Terry et al., 2017, p. 23). While coding, the researcher developed definitions and criteria for each code or group of codes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). During the coding process, initially, the researcher categorised the data into 18 groups including: suburban decay; artificial/idealised suburbia; disillusionment with the American Dream; dreams, prophecies and visions; hallucinations; shapeshifting teenagers; nature as threatening; urban versus nature; bodily transformation; cycles of transformation; memory and trauma; ghostly possession; haunted homes; the revelation of town secrets; corpses; temporal loops; compulsion to repeat; and blurred realities.

After the coding process was finished, the researcher then placed the codes into context with each other to create themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, themes capture "something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82). The researcher categorised the data into three broad themes which were: 1) The decay of the American Dream; 2) Cycles of transformation; and 3) Dreams, visions, and Distorted Realities, each of which were explored in the three analytical chapters. Moreover, during this process, the researcher created criteria for each theme to categorise the collected data. When creating tables to depict the results, the researcher selected several episodes, scenes, visual imagery, and use of sound—including music, sound effects, and dialogue—within each theme and sub-theme based on key words or phrases. To differentiate the collected data, a row was created for selected episodes, which were

identified by episode title and series. For example, 'S01E12: The Sweet Hereafter', *Riverdale,* refers to season 1, episode 12 of *Riverdale*.

4.6 Theme One – The decay of the American Dream:

The following codes were combined into the first theme, 'The decay of the American Dream': suburban decay, artificial/ idealised suburbia, disillusionment with the American Dream, the revelation of town secrets, and memory and trauma. The data in these categories included dialogue, visual images, and plot points which depicted how behind the 'American dream' exterior, small American towns and suburbs have a dark and twisted underbelly, complete with lies, moral filth, and societal and physical decay. Moreover, data categorised in this theme depicted suburban settings as being places 'outside' of time as well as places of socio-cultural and economic stagnation and decay.

The first analytical chapter was split into three key sections and sub-themes, including the 'The Suburbs as an Artificial and Uncanny Space', 'Something like *that* shouldn't happen *here'* and finally, 'A town in decay'. Data sorted into 'The Suburbs as an Artificial and Uncanny Space' sub-theme included the construction of the suburbs as highly idealised setting using mise-en-scène, including lighting, colour, and props. Depictions of suburbia as highly idealised can be considered artificial and removed from the lived experiences of everyday reality, and therefore, an uncanny space. Moreover, the use of props, costumes, settings/architecture, and dialogue which depicted the suburbs as being set in both mid-twentieth century America and the mid-to-late-2010s were also categorised in this sub-theme. The researcher considered the blend of props, costumes, and architectural styles from a range of time periods to depict the suburban landscape as being atemporal.

In comparison, the second sub-theme explored how the selected texts depicted the Suburban-Gothic trope of 'Something like *that* shouldn't happen *here'*. The inclusion criteria for the second category, included lines of dialogue and plot points which focused on the revelation of buried town secrets, as well as how the suburbs are a setting of traumatic memories. Finally, the third sub-theme, 'A town in decay' explored the representation of the suburban environment as decaying, and as a setting of socio-economic stagnation, where characters become increasingly disillusioned with notions of the 'American Dream'. The use of cinematography and mis-en-scène which depicted buildings and other settings as physically decaying were included in this third category. Additionally, character lines of dialogue which referenced the suburban environment as being 'different', 'weird', or 'unfamiliar' were also included in this sub-theme. While implicit, these key words and phrases illustrate the changing nature of the suburban setting and suggest that the suburbs are decaying.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">The Decay of the American Dream</th></tr>
<tr><th>Key Phrases/words</th><th>Examples from episodes</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">The Suburbs as an Artificial and Uncanny Space</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Use of cinematography (long shots, bird-eye-view shots etc) which depict the setting and environment,
Use of mise-en-scene (colour and lighting) which construct the suburban environment (neighbourhoods and the family suburban home) as highly idealised and/ or artificial,
Dialogue which frames suburban life as being ‘safe’ or ‘innocent’,
Use of props and costumes from mid-twentieth century America,
Building architecture from mid-twentieth century America.</td><td>‘S01E01 The River’s Edge’, Riverdale:
Jughead Jones’ opening monologue: “Our story is about a town, a small town. And the people who live in the town. From the distance it presents itself like so many other small towns...Safe. Decent. Innocent”
Bird-eyes-view shot of the town of Riverdale, depicting key locations including the police station, Riverdale High School, the Riverdale Register (the town newspaper), Pop’s Chock'lit Shoppe (the local retro 1950s diner, complete with neon signs and lights, a jukebox, and checkered tiles), and The Twilight Drive-in (the town’s local drive-in theatre). The architectural style of the buildings appears eerily reminiscent of the architecture from the 1940s and post-war period in the United States of America.</td></tr>
<tr><td>‘S01E02 A Touch of Evil’, Riverdale:
A mid-shot of Betty Cooper and Archie Andrews walking along their neighbourhood, Elm Street, on the way to school.
There are rows of Elm trees on both sides of the road, creating a sense of symmetry. The tree leaves also appear to be a vibrant green,
Long shots of suburban homes with white picket fences and immaculately tidy lawns,
The use of lighting and colour to depict the neighbourhood as unnaturally bright and exaggerated.</td></tr>
<tr><td>‘S01E08: The Outsiders’, Riverdale:
Jughead Jones’ opening monologue: “The Coopers. The Stepfords of Riverdale. High school sweethearts who got married and had two beautiful daughters, Polly and Betty”.
During Jughead’s monologue, the Cooper family—Betty, Polly, Hal, and Alice—are posing and smiling for a family portrait, and appear to be a ‘perfect’ white upper-middle class nuclear family.</td></tr>
</table>

	'S01E01: Orange County', *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina:* • A long shot of the Greendale town centre and the local cinema, which has bright, neon coloured lights. Written on the sign outside the cinema is "*Night of The Living Dead"*. • In the long shot, there are red 1960s convertibles which appear to be in pristine condition.
	'S01E12: The Sweet Hereafter', *Riverdale:* • Betty discussing how her family are still pretending to be the 'Stepfords' of Riverdale: They're acting like the last week and the last few months never happened (There is a close up shot of Betty's fists which shows she has bloody nails) they all keep **smiling** and talking about the jubilee… [it's] horrible, it's exactly the way things were before, **pretending to be normal and perfect**, when really we're like… a Greek **suburban tragedy**.
'Something like *that* shouldn't happen *here*'	
• Dialogue which suggests the revelation of buried secrets, trauma, haunting, • Dialogue which suggests that violent and brutal acts should not happen in a suburban setting, • Use of cinematography which depict the setting as being perverted by trauma, • The use of flashbacks.	**'S01E02 A Touch of Evil', *Riverdale:*** • Jughead's opening monologue: I think many of us…had been **hoping against hope t**hat somehow Jason Blossom **hadn't drowned** on July 4th. **That he'd come to school** Monday morning, and there Jason would be. Or that we'd **see him and Cheryl in a booth at Pop's**. But that was before the **undeniable, irrevocable** fact of his bloated, water-logged body, a **corpse** with a bullet hole in its forehead… • During the monologue, there are a number of shots of Jason in various locations throughout Riverdale, including laughing with his friends in the hallway of Riverdale High, or sharing a milkshake with Cheryl at Pop's Diner. • "…**terrible secrets** that could only be **revealed** by the cold blade or a coroner's autopsy scalpel".
	'S01E01 The River's Edge', *Riverdale*: Jughead's opening monologue: The next thing we know happened for sure is that Dilton Doiley, who was leading Riverdale's Boy Scout Troop on a bird watching expedition, came upon **Cheryl by**

	the river's edge…[…]…So a week later, the Blossom family **buried an empty casket** and **Jason's death** was ruled an accident, as the story that Cheryl told made the rounds. That Cheryl dropped a glove in the water, and Jason reached down to get it, and accidentally tipped the boat, and panicked, and drowned. • As Kevin Keller and Moose Mason make out by the edge of Sweetwater River, they discover Jason's **corpse**. A close-up shot of Jason shows him with his mouth hanging wide open, blue pale skin and lips, and a **bullet wound in his head**. A mid-shot of Kevin and Moose show their **disgust** in reaction to Jason's corpse. • Jughead's closing monologue: "That the town **wouldn't be the same as before.** That it was a town of **secrets** and **shadows** now".
	'S01E12: The Sweet Hereafter', ***Riverdale:*** • Jughead's opening monologue: Jason's murder had revealed some **dark truths none of us were too eager to face**, especially Major McCoy, who wanted every last vestige of corruption crushed like a snake under a boot heel.
Suburban Decay	
• The use of cinematography and mise-en-scène which depict buildings and other settings as physically decaying, • Character lines of dialogue which referenced the suburban environment as being 'different', 'weird', or	**'S05E05 The Homecoming',** ***Riverdale:*** • Sam Pansky telling Jughead to write a novel about 'tragic Americana': "They think it's your next book and a slam dunk. Apparently, there's a **huge market for tragic Americana**, **dying community**, all of the miserable people who live there, you know, we'll call it **Eulogy for a Small Town**".

'unfamiliar' were also included in this sub-theme.	**'S01E04: The Last Picture Show', *Riverdale*:** • Jughead's opening monologue: Jason's **death**… wouldn't be the last **casualty** that the town would **suffer**. The Twilight Drive-In, where I work, my home away from home, **a piece of town history closing down.** • During the monologue, there is a low angle long shot of the Twilight Drive-In sign which shows sign of **aging**. In the long shot, the sky is cloudy, grey, and dark, while the sign says "**Closing soon**".
	'S05E04 Purgatorio', *Riverdale:* • As Archie heads into town, he walks past the Riverdale town sign. The sign appears to have significantly decayed and eroded, with parts either too faded to see and other parts are completely missing. • Archie, reuniting with Toni shortly after returning to Riverdale after seven years abroad: "Toni, the bus ride into town…**I can't explain** it…It.. Everything **felt, feels**… (Toni: **Different**? **Weird**?)…Yeah. I mean, to be honest, **it doesn't even feel like Riverdale anymore**". • During a tour of Riverdale, Toni shows Archie how run-down the town has become in his absence. Archie: "…this place is like a **war zone**". Toni: "The town's entire **funding** has been completely **stripped** by…Hiram Lodge [the mayor of Riverdale]…[People are]..**Fending for themselves**. The **town's lawless now,** Arche". • During the tour, there are long shots of key locations in Riverdale depicted as being **run-down, closed down, or burned** including the Sheriff's station, the fire station, the community gym, and the Riverdale Register. • A mid-shot of a bus-stop along the main highway in Riverdale is shown to be completely burned. "Nowadays, **there's always a fire burning in Riverdale**. Bad things happen here **after dark**. They call this **'The Lonely Highway'**" (Toni Topaz).

4.7 Theme Two – Cycles of Transformation:

The second theme, 'Cycles of Transformation', included the following codes: shapeshifting teenagers, nature as threatening, urban versus nature, bodily transformation, cycles of transformation, nature and rebirth, non-binary and transgender identities. This theme explored the relationship between transformation, monsters, and adolescence characters in regards to body changes, 'other' nature coming out, binary identities or dichotomies, and sexuality/ lust. The second theme was sorted into four sub-themes, including 'Nature as transformative' and 'Non-Binary and TransGothic Identities'. The first sub-theme, 'Nature as transformative', contained data which represented the woods as a site of transformation for adolescent characters, especially in terms of shapeshifting and werewolf characters. The inclusion criteria for this sub-theme primarily included: 1) the depiction of adolescent characters being attacked in the woods by supernatural creatures; 2) characters transforming when entering the woods; 3) characters involuntarily transforming during the full moon; 4) characters unable to transform in urban environments; and 5) the use of dialogue to suggest the transformative power of the full moon.

The second sub-theme was 'Non-Binary and Transgender Identities', which explored the representation of shapeshifting creatures as metaphor for transgender identities. Specifically, scenes which focused on the Kanima shapeshifter from *Teen Wolf* were sorted into this category. The inclusion criteria for this sub-theme included the use of words or phrases which 'othered' the Kanima as different from the werewolves of Beacon Hills. This included words like 'it', 'that thing', I don't have a tail' which suggests that the Kanima is perceived to be markedly different from Scott and the other werewolves of Beacon Hills.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Cycles of Transformation</th></tr>
<tr><th>Key Phrases/words</th><th>Examples from episodes</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">‘Nature as transformative’</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">The depiction of adolescent characters being attacked in the woods by supernatural creatures,
Characters transforming when entering the woods,
Characters involuntarily transforming during the full moon,
Characters unable to transform in urban environments,
The use of dialogue to suggest the transformative power of the full moon.</td><td>‘S01E02: Wolf Moon’, Teen Wolf:
Scott and his best friend Stiles Stilinski investigate the Beacon Hills Preserve the night before start of the school year, after two joggers "only found half" of a dead body in the forest.
After hearing a howling noise, Scott accidentally stumbles across the corpse found by the joggers—the upper torso of a young woman—and is subsequently attacked by a wolf.
A close up shot of Scott’s lower abdomen shows a large and bloody bite mark.
Costume – Scott is wearing a red hoodie in reference to Little Red Riding Hood.
Stiles telling Scott to be careful during the full moon: “The full moon is tonight, don’t you get it?...the moon will cause you to physically transform and change”.
Derek Hale: “You’ve been given something most people would kill for. The bite is a gift”.</td></tr>
<tr><td>'S01E02: Second Chance at First Line', Teen Wolf:
Scott wakes up in the Beacon Hills Preserve in nothing but his underwear, and appears to have no recollection of the night before.
A mid-long shot of the forest setting shows the forest is covered in a light mist. In the distance, Scott can see a large wolf with glowing red eyes.
Scott has his first full transformation as a werewolf during the full moon. A mid-shot of Scott in his bathtub shows that he has started to transform – he is growing canine teeth and claws, and has an increased sense of aggression.
A long shot of the view outside the bathroom window shows the full moon emerging from the clouds, and the moonlight shines directly into Scott’s bathroom,
After jumping outside, when Scott looks up to the moon, he has fully transformed into a werewolf and runs into the woods outside his home.</td></tr>
</table>

	‘**S01E03: Pack Mentality’, *Teen Wolf:*** • Scott, who is increasingly frustrated he cannot control his transformation into a werewolf: “Because during the **full moon he wasn’t changed**, he was in total **control** while I was running in the **middle of the night attacking some guy**”.
	‘S01E08 Lunatic’, *Teen Wolf*: • During the full moon, Stiles chains Scott in his room so he cannot transform or hurt anyone once as a werewolf: “You know I wouldn’t do any of this on purpose. I**t’s not like it’s the first time. It’s the full moon”.** • Once Scott sees the full moon, he starts **involuntarily transforming** and is unbale to control himself. A mid-shot of Scott shows that his eyes have turned a golden yellow, he has grown claws and canine teeth, and **starts howling at the moon**. • After breaking free from the chains, Scott runs **directly into the forest behind his house**, and almost attacks his girlfriend Allison and classmate Jackson.
	‘S03E02 Chaos Rising’, *Teen Wolf:* • Stiles: “Look, you gotta get outta there. Look, the walls of the vault are made from a mineral called hecatolite – it **scatters the moonlight**…Look, it **keeps the moonlight out, okay? They haven’t felt the full moon in months**”. • Peter: “Deucalion has kept them from **shifting for three months**, diminishing their tolerance to it…More savage, more bloodthirsty. Scott, they’re the lions. They’re the **starved lions**, and you and Derek just stepped into the Colosseum”.

	'S03E03 Fireflies, *Teen Wolf:* • Derek warning his pack that Boyd and Cora are extremely dangerous given their increased sense of aggression due to the full moon: "**Don't think they can't reply on that human** side – its suppressed, but it's there, reminding them how to mask their scent, how to cover their tracks, how to survive…The **problem is when they breach the woods and hit the residential area**. Once they're past the high school, **they're right in the middle of Beacon Hills**".
'Non-binary and TransGothic Identities'	
• Notions of otherness, • 'It's not like you', • 'An abomination'.	**'S02E01 Omega', *Teen Wolf*:** • After being bitten, Jackson tells Derek, the Alpha of the Beacon Hills werewolf pack, to leave him alone: "…just because you gave me **'the bite'** doesn't mean I'm part of your **little wolf pack**. Sorry, but to be honest, you don't exactly show outstanding leadership qualities. Look, **I've got my own agenda**, which doesn't involve running around the woods at night, howling at the moon **with you and McCall**, okay?". • During the scene, Jackson then notices in the bathroom mirror that he's bleeding from his ear, and Derek tells him "**Your body's fighting the bite**". • A mid-shot of Jackson naked in his bed reveals that he is coughing up blood, with blood also continuing to run from his nose and ears.
	'S02E04 Abomination', *Teen Wolf*: • At Tucker's car garage, the kanima is shown killing for the first time. The leaves a green-like substance (gew) on a door handle. After touching it Stiles becomes paralysed, unable to move and unable to raise his voice above a whisper. Stiles sees the Kanima, but is unable to warn Tucker about the creature as Tucker becomes trapped under Stiles' car; the Kanima then screams into Stiles' face and disappears. • Afterwards, in the Sheriff's car, Stiles gives Scott information about the monster killing people: "You were right. **It's not like you**. I mean it's eyes were almost, **like reptilian**. But there was something

	about them…You know when you see, like a friend in a Halloween mask but all you can see are their eyes. **And you feel like you know them, but you can't figure out who it is?...I think it knew me**. • After another Kanima attack at Beacon Hills High School, Derek, Scott, and Stiles debrief to talk about the Kanima. Scott: "**It doesn't know what it is…or who**…What else do you know". Derek: "…Just stories. Rumours. A shapeshifter? Yes, **but it's not right, it's like a**-". Stiles: "**An abomination**". • **"…there's something scarier, stronger, and faster than any of us, and it's killing people, and we still don't know anything about it"** (Scott).
	'S02E05 Venomous', *Teen Wolf*: • Derek suspects that Jackson is now the Kanima and confronts him, especially given his lack of transformation into a werewolf after being bitten. "What happened to you on the night of the full moon?" (Derek). • Jackson reveals that he had **filmed himself** on the night of the last **full moon** to **document** his **transformation** into a werewolf: "Nothing. **Nothing happened.** I can prove it. **I taped myself**. Yes it was the full moon. And maybe while you were curled into the corner, having an existential crisis about turning into a monster, **I was preparing for the gift** your so-called Alpha promised me. And what did I get? Nothing". • Derek forces Jackson to drink the Kanima venom, and although it appears the venom poisons Jackson, Derek remarks: "**You're still a snake**". • At the end of the episode, Danny is seen editing Jackson's video footage of himself on the night of the full moon, and the footage shows Jackson getting up from bed in a sort of **trance**, with s**hiny and golden eyes.** As Jackson begins to transform into the Kainima, the footage becomes fuzzy and blurry.

4.8 Theme Three – Dreams, Visions, and Distorted Realities:

Finally, the third theme 'Dreams, visions, and blurred realities', included the following categories: dreams, visions/ premonitions, ghostly possession, corpses, domestic settings, temporal loops, and the Gothic heroine. This theme explored how the lines between reality and fantasy often become blurred in the selected texts. Characters often experience distorted realities where they will often lose sense of reality or reason, and become unable to tell the difference between what is true and what is fiction, whether it be hallucinations, dreams/nightmares, or a 'break' in time. Of particular note, these series often feature dreams and nightmares which are either prophetic in nature or reveal repressed emotions and desires. The final theme was categorised into three sub-themes, including 'The Domestic Uncanny and the Cursed Heroine', 'The Haunted Home and Ghostly Possession', 'Dreams and temporality'.

The first two sub-themes both explore how domestic settings are spaces where the boundaries between the past and present, and reality and fantasy, can be become blurred. In 'The Domestic Uncanny and the Cursed Heroine', 'The Haunted Home and Ghostly Possession' categories, much of the data was on how time is often represented as being 'out of joint' in the domestic sphere. However, the first sub-theme was primarily focused on the presence of corpses, decaying architecture, and paranoia of death. The inclusion criteria for 'The Domestic Uncanny' included: 1) the presence of uncanny phenomena in domestic settings, including corpses and decaying walls; 2) characters who appear paranoid or afraid to leave their home; and 3) the use of, and reference to, literacy Gothic tropes including family curses, hidden passageways and crypts, and the Gothic heroine. In contrast, the second sub-theme was more concerned with depicting the home as being haunted and a site where ghosts can return and possess the bodies of the living. The inclusion criteria for this sub-theme included: 1) the presence of ghosts; 2) characters who become possessed by ghosts; 3) references to hauntings and haunted homes; and 4) the use of rituals or spells to conjure the dead.

The final sub-theme, 'Dreams and Temporality' included data which depicted the use of dreams, dream sequences, visions/premonitions, and prophecies in order to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy. The inclusion criteria for the third sub-theme included 1) depictions of uncanny phenomena, including corpses, doppelgangers and doubles, and temporal loops, and 2) dream sequences.

Dreams, Visions and Distorted Realities	
Key Phrases/words	**Examples from episodes**
The Domestic Uncanny and the Cursed Heroine	
• The presence of uncanny phenomena in domestic settings, including corpses and decaying walls, • Characters who appear paranoid or afraid to leave their home, • The use of, and reference to, literacy Gothic tropes including family curses, hidden passageways and crypts, and the Gothic heroine.	**'S01E05 The Heart of Darkness', *Riverdale:*** • Jughead's monologue: Every town has one – the **spooky house** that all the kids avoid. Ours is Thornhill, the Blossom family mansion with its **very own graveyard**. Entrapped within its walls like some **Gothic heroine**, Cheryl Blossom, still grieving for her beloved brother Jason. • A birds-eye-view shot of Thornhill shows that it is encircled by light fog, and is set on an expansive estate complete with a small graveyard. Long and mid shots of the interior of Thornhill reveal that it has hidden chambers, secret passageways that lead to nowhere, and an ancestral portrait gallery of past and present Blossom family members.
	'S03E22 Survive the Night', *Riverdale*: • When Cheryl walks downstairs, it is revealed that the basement and the Blossom **family crypt**—which also functions as a **chapel**—is **decaying**. A long shot reveals that the paint on the basement walls show considerable signs of **aging**, **peeling** off the walls, while the carpet is littered in **debris**, **paint**, and **dust**. • **As Cheryl walks into the chapel, a long-shot reveals Jason Blossom's corpse placed on a wheelchair.** In the shot, Jason appears dirty, dishevelled, and his mouth is hanging wide open, and **has decomposing and pale blue skin**. • **Cheryl sits next to Jason, and begins talking to him as if he were still alive: "Welcome home, Jay-Jay".**
	'S04E01 Fast Times at Riverdale High', *Riverdale*: • Cheryl begins visiting Jason's corpse multiple times a day, usually before and after school, and engages in what appears to be, to Cheryl, a two way conversation: "Well, Jay-Jay, **which one for the first day of school?** Rebellious white after Labor Day, or my signature red? **I agree 100 percent**". • A mid shot of Jason shows that he is well-groomed, cared for, and preserved. Cheryl frequently combs and styles his hair, and puts him in a fresh set of clothes – every time Jason's corpse appears on screen, he is wearing a different outfit.

	'S04E06 Hereditary', *Riverdale:* • Cheryl's uncle Bedford breaks into the chapel and **discovers Jason's body**. Uncle Bedford looks in disgust at Cheryl, and belittles her, exclaiming: "I always knew there was a **certain sickness in our bloodline**. But this, **this is monstrous**".
Haunted Homes and Ghostly Possession	
• Ghosts, • Ghostly possession, • References to hauntings, haunted homes, • The use of rituals or spells to conjure the dead.	**'S05E19 RIVERDALE: RIP (?)', *Riverdale*:** • Nana Rose narrates the history of Cheryl's ancestor, Abigail Blossom, who was executed in 1892 for being a witch: "They came to Thornhill armed with pitchforks and torches…They accused her of being a witch and they burned her at the stake…**With her dying words, she cursed them…damning them to tragedy**…It's written in Abigail's journal". • Nana Rose provides Cheryl with the journal, telling her to "speak the speech child. **It will be a fitting tribute to our ancestor**". • **A long shot shows Cheryl, Nana Rose, and Britta sitting at a black triangular shaped table, while the rest of the drawing room is covered in lit red and white candles. Cheryl then recites the same spell Abigail had cursed the town with: "In Satan's name, I Curse you…Beware, my revenge will strike down you and your accursed houses…Immortal, I shall return, again and again, to torment and destroy you".**
	'S06E06 Unbelievable', *Riverdale:* • Cheryl attempts to reverse the curse she had placed on Riverdale. Late at night, she lights three red candles on top of a black end table, while the rest of the room is also decorated with red candles. Cheryl tells Britta: The best way to nullify a curse is with reversing candles made from beeswax. As the candles burn down, the curse melts away. So, in less than hours, all of the nastiness I've called down upon Betty, on Archie and Jughead, should be rendered null and void".

	• However, the next morning Cheryl walks down to the chapel to the table where she had lit three candles. There is a voodoo doll of Archie, Jughead, and betty next to their respective candles. **The candles look as if they had barely burned and had been blown out.** • **As an old Victorian clock chimes at 3am**, Britta, dressed in a red silk gown carrying three red candles on a candlestick enters the chapel, where Cheryl has lit her candles to reverse the curse. Cheryl then asks Britta what she's doing who then responds "**I'm not Britta" – in an adult's woman's voice**. • Nana Rose: "I wondered. **Abigail's spirit could have entered the child's body when you invoked her curse**. And now, perchance, **Abigail controls the girl's body at night**…And now we must perform a banishment". • After performing a banishment spell, Abigail's spirit possesses Chery's body. "I am now exactly where I belong, a body befitting of my spirit" (Abigail).
	'S06E07 Death at a Funeral', *Riverdale*: • Nana Rose confesses to Britta: "**I transferred Abigail's soul from your body into my granddaughters via an arcane ritual".** However, because of the spell, Cheryl's soul 'disappeared'. "Oh, once **untethered**, it **dissipated into the ether. Into nothingness**. **There is no more Cheryl Blossom.** There is only…Abigail…we live **in fallen times**. That is why I brought you back, Abigail. To lift us up. To restore the Blossom family to our **former glory**".
	'S06E08 The Town', *Riverdale*: • Again, Nana Rose re-confirms that Cheryl "**is gone, vanished into the void".** • However, Britta reveals that she saw Cheryl's reflection when Abigail when was looking into a mirror. "**I saw her in a mirror that Abigail was looking into. I think she's still in her body".** • There is a long shot of Abigail in her boudoir staring into the **shattered mirror** – s**he can now see her own reflection rather than Cheryl's soul**. It appears as if Abigail can see the dreamscape that Cheryl is now trapped in – she is smiling, happy that Cheryl is being tormented and trapped in the dream.
Dreams and temporality	

	'S01E05 The Heart of Darkness', *Riverdale:* • After descending the long and grand staircase, Cheryl walks to the room where **Jason's coffin**—with Jason's corpse inside—has been placed for the funeral. Cheryl opens her brother's casket, and it is revealed that **Jason's body** has **disappeared**. There is nothing but blood and scratch marks, and it appears as if someone, likely Jason, has tried 'clawing' out of the coffin. When Cheryl turns around, she sees Jason's corpse. Upon seeing his corpse, Cheryl wakes up in Jason's bedroom **screaming as it was a dream**. In season one, Cheryl has this **reoccurring nightmare** of Jason, especially if she sleeps in his bedroom.
	'S01E01: Orange County', *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina:* • A medium close-up shot of Sabrina shows **her falling asleep** while taking a salt bath. A long shot of the bathroom shows a large bathtub in the middle of the room, there are a couple of lanterns hanging from the ceiling; there is a large glass plane window, with several lit candles along the windowsill. • During the dream sequence, there is a sound of a clock ticking. **Sabrina then wakes up, in the bath, in the middle of the** woods and hears a baby crying. A wide angle shot reveals that the bathtub is now in the middle of the woods and is surrounded by dozens of lit candles. • Sabrina then sees her parents, and her father is dressed in a black and white suit with a black tie and top hat from the Victorian era reminiscent of the Victorian period. Sabrina, who is still naked, follows them deeper into the woods until she gets to a clearing – her parents place a newborn baby on a stone tablet next to an identical baby. Sabrina approaches the two babies and lifts the blanket revealing that while one of the baby's has normal/ human feet, the other one has goat legs. • Sabrina then wakes up in her bathroom again. A close-up shot of her face shows that she is **shocked** and trying to get her bearings **again. The sound of a clock ticking can be heard again – there is then a mid shot of a ligh**t green antique **analogue clock ticking**.

	'S01E05 Dreams in a Witch House', ***The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** • Sabrina inadvertently frees a sleep demon, Batibat, from her prison. After being freed, Batibat wants to kill the Spellmans as revenge to get freedom "and fill the world with my **sublime nightmares**". She then puts Sabrina, Ambrose, Hilda, and Zelda in a deep sleep so she can torture and **plague them with "horrific nightmares**" of their worst fears and anxieties. • After being put to sleep, Ambrose dreams that he is in the basement and mortuary with Aunt Hilda, opening a body bag. A mid-shot reveals that the body is **Ambrose's corpse**. **Hilda appears unfazed as she does not recognise the body as being Ambrose: "He's handsome, don't you reckon? Its always sadder when they're handsome".** • A close-up shot of Ambrose in the body bag shows he has two deep wounds in his chest • Ambrose looks horrified and upset. Ambrose then asks Hilda **"does he not remind you of anyone, Auntie?".** • **Ambrose starts to slice into the body and casts a spell to find out how 'he' died. He rips out his own heart and eats it.** Hilda then asks Ambrose "what are you doing…? Now that you've done it, how does your heart taste". • On his way to meet the high priest, Father Blackwood, Ambrose bumps into Ms. Wardwell/ Madam Satan who uses **astral projection to 'enter**' Ambrose's dream. Ms. Wardwell **pretends** to be a part of his dream; there is a cut to a mid-to-long shot of Wardwell in her bedroom **floating and meditating**. • Back in Ambrose's dream, he is freed from his curse. Before he can leave the house, Ambrose murdered by Batibat with a large knife. After Ambrose dies, the episode jumps to a close up shot of Hilda and Ambrose opening the body bag, and there is a **repetition** of the entire scenario of them discovering Ambrose's corpse.
	'S02E01 The Epiphany', ***The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** • Sabrina has a dream that she is in the woods where she had her dark baptism. As she walks through a threshold made of tree branches and leaves to the clearing where she signed her name away, she sees her aunts and parents. • There is a long shot of her mother, bleeding and having just given birth, and Zelda handing a baby over to Edward, who then walks away from his sisters and wife. • A medium-long shot of Sabrina, in a white night gown looking at the scene. Edward Spellman walks past her, and gives the baby to the Dark Lord. When Sabrina tries to run away, three demonic-looking men stop he. • The dream appears to be a premonition of the past, as we know that after her birth, Sabrina's name is signed into the book of the beast.

4.9 Overview of results:

Overview of theme one - 'The decay of the American Dream':

Episodes, scenes, use of cinematography, mise-en-scene, dialogue, and narrative sorted into this first theme represented a focus on a creeping sense of disillusionment with notions of the 'American Dream'. There was a focus on how *Riverdale* is preoccupied with behind highly idealised and romanticised images of the suburbs and small 'All-American' towns lies a dark and twisted underbelly, where past atrocities and hidden secrets repeatedly return. Firstly, *Riverdale* depicted the suburban landscape as being highly idealised, beautiful, and almost like a dollhouse. However, this sense of 'beauty' can be considered uncanny, artificial, alienating, and removed from the everyday realities of the lived world. Moreover, *Riverdale* primarily used character dialogue and mise-en-scène, including props, costume, and setting to depict the town as being a 'safe' and 'innocent' town, as well as a place that is set in both mid-twentieth century America and the mid-to-late-2010s were also categorised in this sub-theme.

Alongside the depiction of a highly idealised backdrop, there also appeared to be a focus on notions of the Suburban-Gothic trope of 'Something like *that* shouldn't happen *here*' in *Riverdale*. Specifically, there was a focus on the depiction of shocking revelations, traumatic events, and hidden secrets which had a significant impact on how characters perceived the town of Riverdale. Finally, the data also showed a preoccupation with representing the suburban environment as decaying, and as a setting of socio-economic stagnation, where characters became increasingly disillusioned with notions of the 'American Dream'. Key locations in Riverdale, including the town sign, the fire department, and the local park were depicted as either physically decaying or run down and covered in litter. The suburban environment in *Riverdale* was often referred to as being 'different', 'weird', or 'unfamiliar' by the series protagonists, as they struggled to make sense of how their home was left in a state of ruin and decay.

Overview of theme two - 'Cycles of Transformation':

Data sorted in the first theme was grouped together due to the representation of the suburban setting as an uncanny, alienating, and decaying space. In comparison, data in the second theme, 'Cycles of

Transformation', showed a connection between the adolescent body, shapeshifting creatures, and natural landscapes. *Teen Wolf* was primarily preoccupied with representing the woods as being a transformative setting, especially for adolescent characters. From the data, it became apparent that many transformations from human to werewolf took place in the woods (or near it) as well as during the full moon. Specifically, during the first season of *Teen Wolf,* the primary protagonist, Scott McCall, typically 'completed' his transformation into a werewolf once he entered the woods during the full moon. It became apparent that transformation was connected to both cycles of the moon and natural landscapes, which allowed for shapeshifting characters to 'unleash' their inner beast. Moreover, from the data it appeared that the figure of the werewolf often functioned as a metaphor for the divide between the urban and nature. Specifically, in season three, a few werewolves were held as prisoners in bank vaults, unable to transform until they were able to return to Beacon Hills Preserve. Additionally, another pattern which emerged in this theme was of the connection between transformation and the adolescent body; the adolescent characters were frequently depicted as feeling socially isolated from their family, friends, and peers, and were frightened of the bodily changes taking place beyond their own control. This can especially be seen with data on the figure of the Kanima, a reptilian shapeshifter who is related to werewolves. It emerged that the Kanima was depicted as being 'other' and 'disgusting' because of its mutation and reptilian appearance, and the creature was rejected by the other werewolves for subverting and disrupting the human-werewolf binary.

Overview of theme three – 'Dreams, Visions, and Distorted Realities':

Finally, data placed in the third theme indicated a pattern of characters experiencing distorted realities where they often lost a sense of reality and reason and were unable to distinguish the differences between what is truth and what is fiction. Of note, there were numerous occasions where adolescent characters experienced dreams, nightmares, hallucinations, or premonitions. While there were some differences in the nature of the dreams and visions, they often represented a 'break' within reality and function as temporal interruptions in the present day. Specifically, while some dreams were premonitions or prophecies of buried and hidden family secrets and legacies, it became apparent that in other dreams, characters were stuck in 'temporal loops' where they had reoccurring nightmares. Another pattern which emerged from the data was the depiction of domestic settings, especially the haunted home, as being a site where there were numerous temporal interruptions of the past into

the present. The appearance of the dead, whether it be corpses, skeletons and bones, or ghosts, often created interruptions of the past into the present.

4.10 Conclusion:

The methodology and results chapter discussed why thematic analysis and textual analysis were the most appropriate research methods for this study, as well as how their benefits and drawbacks affected the process of enquiry when collecting data. Following this, the chapter discussed how the methodology implemented in this research, a meta-critical framework, allowed the researcher to synthesise broad theoretical approaches such as the Gothic and television studies in relation to the data. Afterwards, the methodology and results chapter discussed why *Riverdale*, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, and *Teen Wolf* were selected as the primary three texts of analysis for this thesis. The researcher then discussed how he collected and organised the data under each of the three key themes: 'The decay of the American Dream', 'Cycles of Transformation', and 'Dreams, Visions, and Distorted Realities'. Finally, the chapter provided a brief summary of the study's key findings, noting that there was much focus on the experience of time in connection to adolescence, nature, the domestic, and the suburban environment.

CHAPTER FIVE: AN ELEGY TO SMALL-TOWN AMERICA - Decay in the Suburban Gothic

"Do you think I could use Jason Blossom's death as an excuse to get out of PE?"

- Jughead Jones, *Riverdale*.

5.0 Introduction:

Whether it be the return of the dead from beyond the grave, narrative interruptions of the past into the present, or legacies of the past and its burden on the present, a large wealth of scholarship on the Gothic, especially the Gothic novel, has noted its preoccupation with the representation of time (See Beville, 2014; Wheatley, 2006; Lloyd-Smith, 2004; Punter, 2012). Scholarly discussions of the construction of time in Gothic novels has particularly focused on the relationship between the past and the present, with two key approaches: one focused on how the Gothic "mediates between the past and present of…social, economic, and political life" in the Western world (Paulson, 2019, p. 595). In contrast, the other approach takes a psychoanalytic perspective, influenced by Freud's work on trauma and repression, and explores how the Gothic "dramatizes the relationship between the past and present of the individual subject" (Paulson, 2019, p. 595). However, Paulson (2019) also argues that many scholars, especially David Punter, incorporate these two approaches to explore how characters in the Gothic regularly confront the persistent return of a "violent, disturbing, and irrational past within the context of the supposedly polite, bourgeois-dominated, and enlightened present" (p. 595).

The emergence of supernatural phenomena, the reappearance of the dead—including corpses, ghosts, skeleton bones—as well as the return of repressed memories and long buried secrets are some ways in which the Gothic explores and represents the interruption of time. As Lloyd-Smith (2004) proposes, because the Gothic is about the return of "the repressed and denied", it also has the capacity to give voice to unspeakable past traumas or "whatever the culture does not want to know or admit" (p. 1). The resurgence of past events can often create a sense of unease, obscurity, and uncanniness because the familiar transforms into something "hauntingly unfamiliar: the uncanny, is the unintended repetition" (Keetley & Sivils, 2018, p. 5). This connection between unresolved or repressed traumas, secrets, or injustices and the physical return of the past arguably means that the

Gothic is a particularly apt and suitable mode for exploring the return of the past, as "a site of terror, of an injustice that must be resolved, and evil to be exorcised" (Spooner, 2007, p. 18).

Post-2010 Gothic-horror television series such as *Riverdale* frequently depict the past as being 'inaccessible' and memories as being either unreliable or unstable, and the difficulty in being able to "unproblematically…know a past reality" (Dent, 2016). At first glance, *Riverdale* presents as a drama centred on the lives of a group of teenagers from an 'All-American' town, Riverdale, as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. Whether it be attending prom, playing football, performing in school musicals, or applying for college, *Riverdale* bears many of the hallmarks of teen television dramas, including a young and attractive ensemble cast and a focus on "the experiences of youth and growing up" (Wee, 2008, p. 48). Offering, at times, a dramatic transformation from the origin story seen in the *Archie Comics*, the series' protagonists are, as Drumm (2018) argues, "not the 'good guys' of the conventional teen drama" (para. 2). Notably, Archie forms 'The Red Circle', a student vigilante group; Betty Cooper (Lili Reinheart) is caught in a 'cat and mouse' game with the 'Black Hood', a serial killer in season two; Veronica Lodge (Camila Mendes) establishes La Bonne Nuit, a secret and illegal speakeasy for the teenagers of Riverdale; and Forsythe 'Jughead' Jones (Cole Sprouse) "horribly mutilates" Penny Peabody (Brit Morgan) "by removing her tattoo with a knife" (Drumm, 2018, para. 2).

Whether be it the revelation of traumatic and twisted family and town legacies, including incest, murder, and corruption, or characters coming back from the 'dead'—metaphorically and literally—the past in *Riverdale* is never quite dead. Because of the repeated temporal interruptions of the past, throughout the series the town is depicted as being 'out of time' and a site of distorted time. *Riverdale's* fascination with the past allows for the series to explore the teenage characters as complex individuals who behave, quite often, in morally ambiguous ways, and are then haunted (sometimes literally) by their actions. This chapter will use Walter Benjamin's (1999) work on memory and the past as a theoretical foreground for my discussion on the intersection between the gothic, memory, time, and the decay of the American Dream *Riverdale*. One of the most influential twentieth century philosophers, Walter Benjamin frequently explored the ephemeral relationship between the past, present, and history. Steiner (2010) suggests that in the *Arcades Project* Benjamin attempts:

> to render the nineteenth century as the a priori for all critical insights into the present era, and thus to make this era intellectually perceptible as the prehistory of his own time (p. 2).

In the *Arcades Project,* Benjamin (1999) uses Paris—which he claims to be the capital of the nineteenth century—as an example for critically exploring how the concept of cultural history is often incorrectly assumed to be seen as an "endless series of facts" (p. 14). Benjamin (1999) elaborates, claiming that history should be regarded as a phantasmagoria, something which is created and passed from generation to generation, and is not 'fixed', but subject to change, perception, and distortion. Banowska (2018) argues that while Benjamin did not discuss the Gothic when critically examining the Paris Arcades, he did use several Gothic terms and themes throughout his writing, including "dying and death, disintegration…along with pictures of melancholy" (p. 97). Furthermore, the key themes of *The Arcades Project* include "complex musings on myth and dream, decay and ruin, loss of access to nature and to community, and a history that haunts the present" (Morowitz, 2018 p. 4) can also be seen in *Riverdale* and other Gothic-horror texts.

Through his discussion on the existence of a subterranean underground community underneath the Paris Arcades, Benjamin (1999) argues that Paris as a symbol and "personification of the nascent modern civilisation" is, in fact, a pretence, and "marginality and destitution are pushed beyond the border of consciousness, and – literally – underground". This idea of duality and of two Paris'—one which is idyllic and one which is decaying and underground—is a theme which is central to the series, *Riverdale* which is, arguably, an 'elegy' for small American towns. This chapter will critically examine the tension between the nostalgic remembrance of Riverdale as an idyllic and peaceful town, which is in direct contrast with the reality of it as a "dying community" and "all of the miserable people who live there" (Grassi & Adelson, 2021). This chapter will employ Benjamin's work on the Paris Arcades, in combination with American Gothic scholarship, as a theoretical framework to explore how *Riverdale* is able to critique notions of the American Dream and disrupt culturally constructed notions of memory, history, and time.

This chapter will explore how Riverdale is a town steeped in memory and trauma, and the characters are frequently confronted a repressed past, which often returns in extreme, violent, twisted, and even supernatural ways. Riverdale is a town confronted with the new and the old, because it is a liminal space situated between the past, present, and even future. As will be discussed throughout this chapter, the past in Riverdale remains open and contested seen through the revelation of hidden mysteries which allows for the series to delve deeper into the history of the town and its residents, with each character in the series seeming to carry some tragic legacy. The return of repressed pasts and traumatic memories are all examples of temporal interruptions in the series, and

this chapter will discuss how the present is interrupted by the past and how characters struggle to let go of the past because they remain in a circular loop.

5.1 The Suburbs as an Artificial and Uncanny Space:

Jughead, an acclaimed author, is tasked by his publisher, Sam Pansky (Peter Kelamis), to write a novel about his hometown, Riverdale, as a symbol for 'tragic Americana':

> They think it's your next book and a slam dunk. Apparently, there's a huge market for tragic Americana, dying community, all of the miserable people who live there, you know, we'll call it Eulogy for a Small Town (Grassi & Adelson, 2021).

While Sam's comment is tongue-in-cheek, it does implicitly point to a demand for American Gothic novels and narratives concerned with Post-war suburbs as decaying, and where notions of safety, security, and a sense of home are deconstructed, revealing a darker and more complex underbelly to the wholesome image of small-town America. Many scholars, including Monnet and Briggs (2016), Murphy (2009), Madden (2017), and Fielder (1997), have traced the origins and rise of the American Gothic. As Monnet and Briggs (2016) put forward, since the beginning of American fiction, the Gothic has had an important presence, and “continues to exert a powerful influence on American culture” (p. 1). In their study on the American novel, Fielder (1997) explored the relationship between American literature, the American Gothic, and the country's 'shadowy' history regarding slavery, genocide, and colonisation, and posited that American fiction is a "literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation" (p. 29). Or, in other words, while there exists a national myth of America as being a nation of light, hope, and harmony, there also exists a much darker and repressed history (Fielder, 1997).

One of the key themes present in the American Gothic is a pervasive "atmosphere of decay and despair" (Greenwood, 2009, p. 16) and a focus on the subversion and disruption of notions of the American dream. This sense of decay and perversion of the American dream can particularly be seen in a sub-genre of the American Gothic, the Suburban Gothic, which is particularly suited for the deconstruction of the terrors and horrors hidden beneath the brightly coloured streets of suburbia (Murphy, 2009). The suburbs feature frequently in the American Gothic because superficially they appear to be the perfect picture "'of hope and harmony'", and this makes them the ideal setting to "upend" the American Dream (Madden, 2017, p. 8). American Gothic often explore the suburbs as being decaying and dying communities, focusing on an increasing sense of disillusionment with these spaces as being 'ideal' for achieving the American Dream.

The mid-to-late twentieth century was characterised by economic prosperity and the rise of the middle class, and the suburbs were able to provide an abundance of affordable housing, the promise of economic and social mobility, and the promotion of a sense of community as well as 'traditional' values (Goren & Beail, 2015). During this period of mass suburbanisation many of the stereotypical views of suburbia—including "close-knit families, adherence to traditional gender roles, family cars in the driveway, various consumer gadgets" and a certain level of affluence—were formed (Joo, 2009, p. 65). However, the suburbs have long been the "subject of intense public scrutiny" (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2017, para. 13). In the United States, these neighbourhoods were almost exclusively designed for, through both federal and state level government policies, white, heterosexual, and middle-class families. There was an abundance of opportunities for millions of white Americans, and the suburbs remained largely segregated, further reinforced by images "in the national media of happy, white families celebrating the postwar suburban dream" (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2017, para. 13). There have been considerable socio-cultural, political, and economic changes since the 1950s, such as the civil rights movement, increasing numbers of women entering the workforce, and the decline of manufacturing industries. However, this period established notions of the 'American Dream' which still "resonate in the present" day (Goren & Beail, 2015, p. 4). America in this period is often (mis)remembered, and depicted in popular culture, as having a booming economy, "military strength, domestic stability…and national optimism", and the 1950s arguably connotes a "fantasy ideal of…peace and prosperity" (Dwyer, 2015, p. 1; p. 5).

However, many scholars, including Bourne (1996), Goren and Beail (2015), and Nicolaides and Wiese (2017) claim that the suburbs are often mis-characterised as being a relatively recent phenomenon and geographical setting and are especially associated with the American Post-World-War II period. According to Bourne (1996), the suburban space has a much longer and complex history, and prior to the nineteenth century, many suburbs functioned as centres for large-scale production, distribution, and commercial establishments, especially in European cities. Moreover, while 'modern' suburbanisation is generally regarded as having started on a significant scale throughout the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century, this process did, in fact, 'explode' in significant numbers following the end of World-War II (Bourne, 1996). The substantial shift in population demographics is indicative of the significant socio-economic and political shifts which were taking place throughout the US and the Western world.

Murphy (2009) suggests that the suburbs have long attracted critical attention because since the beginning of mass-suburbanisation, this setting was considered to have an "innate connection

with the very character of the nation itself" (p. 5). During the mid-twentieth century, suburbia was thought to be an ideal and suitable environment for the growing white middle-class. This is because the suburbs were a means of providing well-built but affordable homes as well as greater economic opportunities for, primarily, white middle-class men. In this way, moving to or living in the suburbs was believed to be a "stepping-stone to the middle classes for millions upon millions of upwardly mobile young families" (Murphy, 2009, p. 5). As Madden (2017) notes, superficially, the suburbs are perceived to be a place of "'hope and harmony'" as it is meant to be a safe and secure environment where close-knit neighbours and families live peacefully (p. 8). The suburbs are often framed in opposition to the American urban space, which is frequently 'Gothicised' as crime-ridden, dark, and dangerous.

The Suburban Gothic is adept and well-suited to reveal that romanticised and highly idealised image of the American suburb as being centred on notions of family, community, and harmony never truly existed. By definition—in both a traditional and literal sense—the term 'sub-urb' "means outside, beyond or below the 'urb'" (Bourne, 1996, p. 164). While suburbs are typically located beyond the centre of a town or city, they are still "within its urban orbit" meaning they are a "borderland space situated" physically, geographically, and philosophically between urban/city centres and rural areas (Murphy, 2009). This geographic position means that suburbs are inherently a liminal space; the term liminality refers "to the concept of threshold, the area between two spaces" and is associated with "what lies between the known or unknown, or other" (Messent, p. 23). Given that the Gothic often arises in liminal spaces or experiences which occur during moments of significant transition, transformation, or disruption, it is no coincidence that since the beginning of mass urbanisation, the suburban milieu has been a fitting venue for Gothic-horror texts (Murphy, 2009). The notion of suburbia as an American landscape suggests long-held utopian and dystopian views of suburban life to be really two sides of the same coin, evidence of our culture's uneasy relationship to a landscape that mirrors both the fantasies and the phobias of the culture at large" (Beuka, 2004, p. 7-8).

In the Suburban Gothic, there is often a sense of atemporality as the suburbs are depicted as a space which "stands outside of history" and are depicted as either places for people to escape their past, or as a physical representation of "an idealised past removed from the challenges of the present" (Dines, 2020, p. 25). The suburbs are often characterised as being an "unchanging" and "artificial landscape" (Beuka, p. 12), reflecting the extent to which its residents "remain in suspended animation", as the sense of homogenization and conformity that has become synonymous with suburbia "is symptomatic of its immutability" (Quintieri, 2020, p. 9). Drawing from a number of iconic

American imagery from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, *Riverdale* constructs its eponymous town as a setting outside of history and a physical representation for the idealisation of America's Post-War period. This can be seen through the series' use of mise-en-scène, such as the architecture, costumes, and props, as well as homages to a number of 'classic' Gothic-horror films and television series. *Riverdale* is supposedly set in the present day, the late 2010s and early 2020s. However, it appears little has changed since its founding in 1941, reflected in the architectural style of the buildings which appear eerily reminiscent of the architecture from the 1940s. The series' opening montage in 'Chapter 1: The River's Edge' introduces several key locations including the police station, Riverdale High School, the Riverdale Register, the town newspaper, Pop's Chock'lit Shoppe, the local retro 1950s diner, complete with neon signs and lights, a jukebox, and chequered tiles, and The Twilight Drive-in, the town's local drive-in theatre (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017).

The series repeatedly emphasises the most 'desirable' attributes of living in the allegedly community-oriented and small town of Riverdale. Notably, the desirability of living in Riverdale can best be seen in Jughead's opening monologue, as he notes that the town is "Safe. Decent. Innocent" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017). In this way, *Riverdale* offers an arguably 'perfect'—or close too—model of American small towns, removing the contradictions of the lived experience of living in a small town. In particular, the buildings in this town appear in almost-pristine condition—they have been well-maintained and preserved—which means the town appears as if it has changed little since its founding. The lack of a sense of aging suggests the town is out of time, artificial, and appears almost 'too good' to be true. While the final chapter will explore the blurring of time, space and reality in more detail, it is important to note that the construction of a 'model town' in *Riverdale* evokes post-war America. That the series evokes a sense of nostalgia from 1950s America through the use of architecture and setting in the opening sequence works to establish that the suburban landscape of Riverdale is a place 'out of time' and 'outside of history'. Moreover, the pristine nature of the town creates an eerie and uncanny feeling, and of something not being quite 'right. According to Royle (2003), the uncanny "is concerned with the strange, weird, and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural" (p. 1). From the well-maintained and manicured lawns of the houses on Elm Street, red 1960s convertibles without a single scratch, or the diner which appears straight from the 1950s, Riverdale is constructed as an uncanny space as there is an almost supernatural quality to how well preserved and beautifully presented the town is.

A panoramic shot in the opening sequence of 'Chapter 1: A River's Edge' provides a birds-eye-view of the entire town, depicting Riverdale as having an idealised suburban aesthetic, with well-kept

single-family detached homes surrounded by large freshly mowed lawns and white picket fences "placed along clean, well-maintained, quiet, tree-lined streets" (Dickinson, 2006, p. 219). Riverdale's idealised suburban aesthetic is emphasised repeatedly, especially throughout the first season, as there are a few wide or establishing shots of the upper-middle class and majority-white neighbourhood of Elm Street, an explicit homage to Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). Specifically, in 'Chapter 2: A Touch of Evil', when Betty and Archie, who are next door neighbours, walk along Elm Street to school, a tracking mid-shot of the two teenagers provides a more detailed insight into *Riverdale's* setting as a seemingly pastel and bright-coloured world. In the shot, the sunlight is unnaturally bright and exaggerated, the tree leaves appear especially green and colourful, and there are large family homes in complete with freshly mowed lawns and white picket fences, and pastel-coloured trucks. Although the "dream-like characterisation" of the suburban setting could initially appear "'ungothic'" (Ugelvig, 2014, p. 5), this dreamscape world is, in fact, impossible to ever achieve, and therefore alienating, as it is *too* perfect.

According to Royle (2003), the uncanny can "be a matter of something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy ('too good to be true') …It can involve a feeling of something beautiful but at the same time frightening" (p. 2). The pristine nature of Elm Street in *Riverdale*, while beautiful and idyllic, is arguably alienating because it appears too immaculate and too good to be true, rendering it artificial. This sense of 'pristine artificialness' can be seen in a few ways, most notably, the use of composition in a long shot of Elm Street. According to Brown (2016), shot composition can select and / or emphasise a number of elements including "shape, order...pattern…in ways that give meaning to the things being photographed" (p. 14). In the long shot, there are a row of Elm trees on both sides of the street, which creates a frame for the shot, and consequently, Betty and Archie's neighbourhood appears extremely symmetrical. If the uncanny is, as Royle (2003) argues, a crisis of the proper as it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper", then the use of symmetry in the long shot of Betty and Archie depicts Riverdale as being a setting where everything appears neat, tidy, and in its box. However, this 'perfect' embodiment of a wholesome and idyllic town is alienating; the effect of alienation can be uncanny, as it involves turning an object from something ordinary or familiar into something either peculiar or unexpected (Royle, 2003).

The pristine and well-preserved nature of the town of Riverdale carries out to the family home, which is also similarly depicted as being a heavily sanitised and idealised, but uncanny and strange space. Exploring domestic settings as a Gothic space, Ugelvig (2014) argues that the Gothic operates on two levels of spatiality:

> it physically invades domestic spaces in order to disrupt them, and does so metaphysically through the exploration of the 'unhomeliness' (unheimliche) of the homely (Heimliche) and the personification of the uncanny. The Gothic uses the uncanny to make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar, and invades not only the familiar, physical home, but 'familiar' concepts and structures such as peace, sanity and patriarchy (p. 5).

One of the ways in which the domestic space can be rendered as uncanny, strange, and unhomely in the Suburban Gothic is through narratives of depersonalisation. The suburbs are frequently regarded as being a "physical personification of all that was wrong... [...with...]...American society, a deadening assembly of identikit houses and a breeding ground for discontent and mindless conventionality" (Murphy, 2009, p. 5). This trope is explored in *Riverdale* through Betty, who struggles to conform to the extremely high expectations set by her mother Alice Cooper (Madchen Amick), and consequently struggles with developing her own sense of identity within the constraining confines of American suburbia. Parents Alice and Hal (Lochlyn Munro), and their two daughters, Betty and Polly (Tiera Skovbye), represent a highly idealised image of the nuclear family: two heterosexual and cisgender married parents, with two high-school age daughters, a large white suburban family home, and owners of the town's only newspaper, the Riverdale Register. However, underneath this wholesome image is a family which struggles to conform to the societal norms expected of them, and underneath their highly sanitised image lies family secrets, betrayal, murder, and event incest. It is no surprise, then, that the Coopers are referred to as "The Stepfords of Riverdale" (Cohen & Katzenberg, 2017).

'Chapter 8: The Outsiders' begins with a montage sequence of the Cooper family all posing and smiling for a family portrait, looking like a perfectly ordinary family. However, the scene reveals the artificiality of the image of the nuclear family, as although the Coopers are all smiling, hugging, and laughing throughout the shoot, their poses appear unnatural and staged. For instance, Alice lifts Betty's chin, a subtle clue that she is directing her family—and Betty specifically—in how to behave and pose in front of the camera, making sure the photographer can capture her youngest daughter at her 'best' (Cohen & Katzenberg, 2017). Moreover, this level of 'stagedness' can also be seen with the other members of the family. Notably, Hal has his chest out, while Alice has her hand purposefully placed on her waist, and all four Coopers appear to have impeccable posture, standing up completely straight. This brief interaction is symbolic of the "picture perfectness of the family photographic practice...when everybody was dressed up and... when the house was particularly clean...and have a 'Kodak moment', framing the ordinary at its ideal and aestheticised best" (Quintieri, 2020, p. 166).

However, the Cooper house is *too* homely, too familiar, and too staged. A long shot of the family posing together in their kitchen and dining room reveals a home which is extremely clean and with everything in its 'proper' place. The unique ability of the uncanny is a "disturbing oscillation" between the familiar and the strange and the tendency of which is most familiar to "turn on us, to become suddenly defamiliarised and derealised" (Ugelvig, 2014, p. 68). Although on the surface, the home *appears* ordinary, it has been dehumanised and stripped of any sense of identity and personality. For example, the long shot of the dining room reveals little information about the Cooper family, other than it appears to be a warm and welcoming environment, *seemingly* perfect for family dinners (Cohen & Katzenberg, 2017). What is most familiar to us—the family home—feels defamiliarised and dehumanised throughout the sequence with the Coopers, as it could be any home, anywhere, in any place and any period. There is little in the home to specifically indicate it is the Cooper home, as their own individual identities and personalities have been removed for the photoshoot. Murphy (2009) argues that from its beginning, the suburban home has "been a stage on which a drama of perfect family life should ideally be played out", and that for many people, buying into "the suburban dream" is more than simply purchasing a home, "but hopefully, an entire way of life" (p. 96). *Riverdale* plays into this trope of the suburban home as a stage drama for the 'perfect family life' by depicting the Cooper family posing as their 'best selves' in a photo shoot in their own home. By photographing and aestheticizing the seemingly ordinary and familiar, the suburban home, but making it extremely sanitised and pristine. The Cooper family is 'removed' of their buried secrets and terrible past, whether it be Polly's pregnancy and incestuous relationship with her distant cousin Jason Blossom, Hal coming from a family of serial killers, or Alice's past as part of the local gang, the Southside Serpents.

5.2 'Something like *that* should not happen *here*'

Murphy (2009) argues, is the "firm belief that things like *that* [original emphasis] (be 'that' some kind of supernatural incident, serial murder, family massacre…) simply shouldn't happen in places like *this* [original emphasis] ('this' being a specifically suburban neighbourhood)" (p. 1). Against the "theatrical beauty" of the suburban setting, in Suburban Gothic narratives there is often "a kind of unease" as well as a "sense of something…stirring" underneath this backdrop (Joseph, 2017, p. 267). Specifically, Murphy (2009) discusses the murder of "supposedly clean-cut Homecoming Queen Laura Palmer", as

it "provides the narrative hook for the rest of the series and brings to light all manner of disturbing and fantastical occurrences which would otherwise have remained hidden" (p. 184). Heavily inspired by *Twin Peaks, Riverdale* explores this trope after the disappearance and death of Jason, as the characters come to the slow realisation that their home is "a town of shadows and secrets now" ('Chapter 1: The River Edge'). Of note, is Jughead's first opening monologue in 'Chapter 1: A River's Edge' where he sets the tone and premise of the series as one which is concerned with disrupting notions of home, memory, and safety:

> Our story is about a town, a small town…From the distance it presents itself like so many other small towns all over the world. Safe. Decent. Innocent. Get closer, though, and you start seeing the shadows underneath (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017a).

Jughead's words—safe, innocent, and decent—are evocative, suggesting that like many small towns or suburbs in America, Riverdale appears to be a picturesque and peaceful neighbourhood. Despite this, Jughead comments on the impact that Jason's death had on how Riverdale's residents perceive their town and home, stating that Riverdale was "forever changed by the mysterious death of Jason Blossom on the 4th of July" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017b). Benjamin (1999) explores how historians often attempt to create a link between different moments in history, arguing:

> Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary…Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time (p. 255).

Through an opening and closing monologue voice-over every episode, *Riverdale's* narrator, Jughead, provides a running commentary of the events which have taken place, chronicling Riverdale's past, present, and even future. Jughead is explicit in his view that Riverdale was changed by Jason's death, and throughout the first season, he continues to create a link between the adolescent's death and the various events which have occurred in the town since then. Specifically, this can be seen in 'Chapter 5: Heart of Darkness'. During his closing monologue, Jughead remarks "now that Jason was buried in the earth, it would only be a matter of time until something poisonous bloomed in that long cold shadow cast by his death" (Grassi & Piznarski, 2017).

Benjamin (1999) argues that historical analyses often "remain hermeneutically uncritical", as recalling the past with the aim of "as it really happened" can only result in a history "whose continuity is established by the erasure of anomalies and the elision or ruptures". The attempt at recalling the past as it was, and by creating links between various past events can often result in a history which ignores "historical conflicts", contradictions, and other anomalies (Benjamin, 1999). The "evolutionary implications of recognising the present as the locus of the past's constitution and reconstitution", or in other words, the meaning and significance of past events have become a responsibility of the present (Benjamin, 1999). That Jughead narrates the town's history through monologue voice-overs is indicative of how he attempts to recall the past as it was; throughout the series, it appears that Jughead feels responsible for trying to uncover the 'truth' as it is. In exploring the connections between Benjamin's work and the Gothic, de Leeuw (2018), argues that the Gothic "provides fertile ground for an interpretation of" Benjamin's 'Theses on History' (p. 128). For de Leeuw (2018), history can be understood as a "spectre that persistently haunts the collective unconscious" and it is "the unknown other that collapses the foundations of pre-established knowledge and ethics": the collision of the past and the present together is what can create the image of horror (p. 128). That the past is, as de Leeuw (2018) argues, a haunting spectre, can be seen in Riverdale as Jason is an omnipresent character, haunting the series' protagonists who are unable to escape the realities of his death.

Specifically, that the other characters are haunted by Jason's death can be seen in their actions and how they respond in their grief; Jughead writes a novel chronicling the aftermath of Jason's death on his hometown; Betty's desire to reunite with her sister Polly who was sent away to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy—a home for troubled youths and parentless children—after becoming pregnant with Jason's baby; and Cheryl, who becomes overwhelmed and immobilised with grief and anxiety at Jason's memorial service. Before the memorial service, Cheryl remarks "with Jason so present in our collective consciousness, all eyes will be me. Will this…flower drown under the town's scrutiny…swamped by her emotions?" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017b). Cheryl recognises that because of the recency of Jason's death, and the mysteries surrounding his death, he remains at the forefront of the town's consciousness. Moreover, Cheryl also recognises that Jason is a spectre haunting her, in that she feels a sense of putting on a performance to prove how much she loved her brother and was not responsible for his death.

Despite never been given any lines of dialogue, Jason frequently appears in the memories of other characters, which are often shown to be either brief or incomplete flashbacks. Notably, following the revelation of Jason's death, Jughead comments—through his opening monologue—on

how Riverdale's residents initially struggled with processing the news of his death, and grappling with the ramifications of what it means:

> I think many of us, maybe the entire town, had been hoping against hope that somehow Jason Blossom hadn't drowned on July 4th. That we'd come to school Monday morning, and there Jason would be. Or that we'd see him and Cheryl in a booth at Pop's. But that was before the undeniable, irrevocable fact of his bloated, water-logged body, a corpse with a bullet hole in its forehead… (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017b).

During the monologue, we see a number of shots of Jason in various locations throughout Riverdale, including laughing with his friends in the school hallway, or sharing a milkshake with Cheryl at the local diner. Although Jughead provides a commentary on the town's shared grief, the series does not address whether these flashbacks are of a specific character's memories of Jason, which arguably suggests they are the town's collective memory of the murdered Blossom heir. Within Benjamin's theory of the knowledge of history, a key concept is that of remembrance, or *eingegenken*, which is "a particular form of memory to which Benjamin ascribes distinctive characteristics and significant powers" (Wilding, 1996, p. 6). The process of remembrance occurs "*as the structuring of time*" and "time becomes configured around the significance of a particular memory *for us*" (Wilding, 1996, p. 21). Remembrance "isolates past moments according to their significance, juxtaposing them with scant regard for their logical sequence", and memories often contract the past by "compressing a massive wealth of material into the temporal present" (Wilding, 1996, p.21). The diner and school, associated with Jason, results in a process of remembrance, as for the town's residents, returning to these locations conjure memories of Jason when he was still alive, and act as textual traces that Jason did exist. However, these flashbacks of Jason portray him as being close to his sister, being popular and well-liked and the football star, and these memories omit a large amount of wealth and knowledge about Jason, including a general dislike for the Blossom family, Jason's on-and-off relationship with Polly, and his drug dealing.

The Gothic revels in the past's incompleteness, incoherence, and fragmentation, and heralds a loss of faith in the ability to know a past reality and to be able to represent it in a narrative (Dent, 2016). It initially appears that Jason's disappearance is accidental, as during a boat ride with his sister, he allegedly falls into Sweetwater River. However, Jughead's voice-over during the opening scene of 'Chapter1: The River's Edge' casts doubt on the circumstances involving Jason's disappearance and Cheryl's recollection of the day's events:

> The next thing we know happened for sure is that Dilton Doiley, who was leading Riverdale's Boy Scout Troop on a bird watching expedition, came upon Cheryl by the river's edge… […]…So a week later, the Blossom family buried an empty casket and Jason's death was ruled an accident, as the story that Cheryl told made the rounds. That Cheryl dropped a glove in the water, and Jason reached down to get it, and accidentally tipped the boat, and panicked, and drowned (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017a).

It is through Jughead's voice-over that it is revealed that the police cannot find Jason's body or any other evidence, excluding Cheryl's glove and eyewitness statement. Jason's apparent disappearance arguably highlights the difficult in truly knowing and understanding the past. The Gothic can reveal that our access to the past is mostly "conditioned by textuality" as we are only able to "reconstruct the past from textual traces that have survived" (Dent, 2016). This 'reconstruction' of the past through textual traces can be seen in the recollection of Jason's death. In the scene, there are a combination of mid and wide shots of a dreary and dangerous looking Sweetwater River as a storm approaches seemingly out of the blue, as well as a medium close-up shot of Cheryl sitting alone on the nearby rocks, drenched and appearing visibly distraught. Although Jason's fall into the river is never actually shown, the visual imagery of the storm, the white glove in the water, and Cheryl by the river's edge is meant to imply that he has died, confirming Cheryl's recollection of the day's event.

However, while subtle, Jughead's commentary about Dilton (Daniel Yang) discovering Cheryl by Sweetwater River indicates that there exists a period between the Blossom twins' drive to the river and Jason's death which remains largely unaccounted for. Jughead's commentary combined with the lack of body found indicates that Jason disappeared under suspicious circumstances, with secrets yet to be revealed. Wallace (2013) argues that the past is a "human product constructed out of our own emotional needs, desires and fears", and because it is the "product of a particular viewpoint at a particular time and place…the past is something that has never existed" (p. 4). Contemplating Wallace's (2013) claims, it could be argued that Cheryl constructed a fictional past—that Jason drowned in Sweetwater River—because she was worried about his safety, especially regarding their parents. This 'past' event is revealed to be fake when Kevin and Moose discover Jason's body in Sweetwater River, with a bullet wound in his head, and then re-confirmed after the autopsy report reveals that Jason was murdered a week after his alleged disappearance and drowning.

The use of established Gothic devices and tropes, specifically, incest and "images of the uncanny including doppelganger", throughout this montage further add to the suspicious nature of Jason's death (Wheatley, 2006, p. 3). During this scene, the twins are dressed in eerily similar white outfits, and as they walk towards the river, Cheryl and Jason are shown holding hands. The twins' striking resemblance—their almost unnaturally bright red hair, pale skin, and matching outfits—

creates an uncanny effect, as they look like doubles of each other (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017a). The uncanny is "concerned with the strange, weird, and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural" as well as the familiar becoming unfamiliar (Royle, 2003, p. 1). As argued by Windsor (2019), twins like Cheryl and Jason are uncanny and "creepy because they appear to be the same person…and…trouble our sense of a unique individual as a unique individual" (p. 63-64). By implying the possibility of an unusually close, if not incestuous relationship between Cheryl and Jason, *Riverdale* further suggests Cheryl is withholding knowledge about her brother's disappearance, raising the possibility of her being a murder suspect.

Although Jason and Cheryl are never actually shown as lovers, the series repeatedly hints or suggests that they had an incestuous relationship, which can first be seen during their boat ride. As Cheryl and Jason stop by the riverside, the song *Tell Me* (2015) by Johnny Jewel and Saoirse Ronan plays: "Tell me I'm your baby and you'll never leave me. Tell me that you'll kiss me forever" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017; Jewel & Ronan, 2015). The imagery of Cheryl and Jason in matching attire, holding hands, and going on a secluded boat trip work in tandem with the lyrics of *Tell Me* to imply a romantic but incestuous relationship between the two. Furthermore, the use of soft lighting also enhances the romantic mood/ tension between Cheryl and Jason. Throughout season one, the relationship between Jason and Cheryl is typically only shown through brief flashbacks, nightmares, or hallucinations, with the sequence of shots of the Blossom twins walking through the woods and lakeside being notably repeated numerous times. Further adding to the niggling suspicion that Cheryl and Jason shared an unusual, and even incestuous bond, there are multiple shots of the pair holding hands and sharing milkshakes. As Cheryl herself later claims, "he was and always will be my soulmate" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017).

Although, parental figures and "the domestic space of the home" are "culturally constructed as a haven, a safe and nurturing place" (Bainbridge & Delany, 2012, p. 638), the eventual discovery of Jason's murder at the hands of his own father Clifford Blossom (Barclay Hope) shatters the illusion of the family as a symbol for the domestic and safety. In 'Chapter 12: Anatomy of a Killer', while FP and Jughead visit the Coopers—Betty and her mother Alice—Archie and Veronica break into FJ's trailer only to discover Jason's Bulldog football jersey – and a USB stick (Grassi & Seidenglanz, 2017). After opening the USB stick on Jughead's MacBook, the teenagers find surveillance footage from the White Wyrm—a seedy dive bar located on the south side of Riverdale, and often frequented by members of the Southside Serpents—and after watching the footage, learn Jason was held hostage and then killed by Clifford. The discovery that it was Clifford who killed Jason is unsettling, as he transgresses past the

normal and expected behaviour of a paternal figure, connecting to Botting's (2014) claim that "transgression involves a crossing of limits or breaking of taboos and rules" (p. 9), as that Jason could be killed by his own father is what is truly horrifying.

Upon Clifford's arrest, it is revealed that "maple syrup was a front for his true business, transporting heroin from Montreal on his trucks" (Grassi & Seidenglanz, 2017). Moreover, it is revealed that Jason "discovered his dad's drug running and threatened to expose the truth", and consequently, he was murdered by Clifford (Grassi & Seidenglanz, 2017). That Jason did not act in a way expected of him—inheriting the family business and continuing the Blossom legacy—and instead chose to live on a farm with Polly and their unborn children, indicates he attempted to exercise some degree of self-control and autonomy from his parents. Exploring the relationship between children and their fathers in the Gothic, Wright (2016) argues that "fathers are disciplinary, trying to shape their children in their image and negate their children's autonomy, especially through their desire to fashion their own sense of self" (p. 42). This can be seen with Clifford who, according to his wife Penelope (Nathalie Boltt), "dedicated himself to grooming Jason to take over the family business" (Grassi & Seidenglanz, 2017). Jason is ultimately killed, not because he knows the truth about the Blossom Maple empire, but because he rejected his status and position as the Blossom heir. In a family of where members seem either unfazed or amused by murder, corruption, drug trafficking, emotional abuse and neglect, and incest, the most truly horrifying thing one can do is leave the family and expose the family's secrets. Ultimately, Jason's death suggests that no matter how small or big the 'crime', members of the Blossom family must uphold the image of their family as being the founding family of Riverdale, an emblem of its wholesome façade – and is especially terrifying because no one is safe, not even the children of Riverdale.

Pop's Diner:

As discussed throughout this chapter, *Riverdale* frequently evokes nostalgia for the post-war period, and depicts the highly idealised and idyllic suburban setting as being artificial, alienating, and uncanny. The nostalgia for the mid-twentieth century period is best illustrated by one of the most iconic and integral locations in *Riverdale*: Pop's Chock'lit Shoppe, the town's 1950s styled American diner. Piatti-Farnell (2016) argues that the traditional American diner symbolises the importance of food consumption and food habits in "the construction of both a national and…local idea of community" (p. 94). More than simply a restaurant, Pop's Chock'lit Shoppe, affectionally referred to as Pop's by its customers, is aptly called "the heart of Riverdale" (Grassi & Anders, 2017). The sense of community

associated with Pop's is in large part due to the presence of the diner's former owner, Pop Tate (Alvin Sanders), who is regarded as Riverdale's fatherly figure. Most notably, this can be seen with the relationship between Pop and Jughead. For much of season 1 and 2, Jughead is either homeless or moves from foster home to foster home. His father, Forsythe Pendleton 'FP' Jones (Skeet Ulrich), is unemployed and unable to care for Jughead financially or emotionally, and his mother, Gladys Jones (Gina Gershon), moved to Toledo a year prior to the events of season one. Reinforcing the diner's association with hospitality, comfort, and home, Pop is often shown offering Jughead hamburgers and milkshakes for free of charge.

As Piatti-Farnell (2016) suggests, the American diner can be seen as the epitome of the highly idealised and pristine image of the post-war period. Much like the Double R Diner from *Twin Peaks,* the Chock'lit Shoppe's homage to the 1950s "is not exactly subtle", which can be seen with its vintage jukebox, towering neon sign, chequered black and white tiles, and large booths fitted with red leather (Piatti-Farnell, 2016, p. 94). Pop's diner appears to truly embody the style of diners from the 1950s, and this recollection of the post-war period can be connected to Boym's (2001) concept of restorative nostalgia, which is a type of nostalgia that conveys the desire to rebuild what was once lost. There is often a tendency for people to equate the post-war period with notions of home, sanctuary, wholesomeness, and it appears that a "deep cultural nostalgia" for this idealised past remains strong (Lizardi, 2015, p. 23). While diner's almost perfect embodiment of the 1950s does suggest continued nostalgia for the period, the diner also appears "too familiar, too pristine, too unscathed" (Piatti-Farnell, 2017a, p. 187). Like the neighbourhood of Elm Street, and the Cooper family home, the sense of nostalgia is perverted as the dinner appears "too sterile, too untouched, and not quite 'lived in' enough" (Piatti-Farnell, 2017a, p. 187). In fact, the construction of such a perfect and mythologised image of a diner from the 1950s works to pervert a sense of nostalgia, and arguably renders the diner as an uncanny space, removed of the contradictions of everyday lived reality.

Riverdale's opening montage in 'Chapter 1: The River's Edge' provides a brief glimpse of the diner; a long shot of the diner and its carpark reveals the diner surrounded by mist; the background is of the blueish-grey sky and dark brown trees while the foreground is of the empty car park, covered in rainwater. Later in the episode, when Betty and Archie meet Veronica for the first time, we are properly introduced to the restaurant. In a long-shot of the diner's exterior and car park, it appears to be well-lit—with windows framed by neon red lights and a large 'Pop's CHOCK'LIT SHOPPE: OPEN 24 HRS' sign also in the same neon red—and is painted a bright cyan. However, inside the diner, the colours are mostly dull and muted; the walls are painted a faded grey, the chairs and booths are a dark

red. This is contrasted by the neon red and green lights in the diner which obscure the sense of vision in the space. Examining the use of light and shadow in Gothic texts, Botting argues (2014):

> The use of obscurity, the interplay of light and shadow, and the partial visibility of objects, in semi-darkness, through veils, or behind screens, has a similar effect on the imagination: Denying a clearly visible and safe picture of the world, disorientation elicits anxiety or extends a stimulating or scary sense of mystery and the unknown (p. 6).

Although there are technically a lot of lights inside the diner, the lack of visibility in the restaurant, especially at night, adds to a sense of mystery and the unknown. In 'Chapter 2: A Touch of Evil', when Jughead is at his usual booth writing his novel about Jason's death, a long shot of the reveals that even during the daytime, the diner is still quite dark despite what appears to be a significant amount of sunlight coming through several large glass windows. The intense nature of the sunlight creates sharp and distinct shadows throughout the dinner, creating a sense of disorientation, as the light is doubly obscured by the sunlight, the artificial neon lights, and the shadows.

Piatti-Farnell (2016) argues that although the diner in *Twin Peaks* appeals to a sense of nostalgia, that nostalgia is subverted, as throughout the series, it is often the place where secrets get uncovered, where people conduct affairs, and where shady plots are hatched. Similarly, Riverdale draws on nostalgic imagery from classic 1950s diners to represent Pop's as being a place of sanctuary and comfort, however, this means the restaurant is also an ideal site for the perversion of nostalgia, as well as an exploration of the uncanny. Specifically, the depiction of Pop's diner as being an uncanny and disorientating space can be seen with several brutal acts of violence and murder which take place in the establishment throughout the series. For instance, this can be seen in the season one finale, 'Chapter 13: The Sweet Hereafter', with the shooting of Archie's father, Fred Andrews (Luke Perry). As Fred orders food at Pop's, he is robbed and then shot by the 'Black Hood' — Riverdale's serial killer who stalks the town's streets in season two — transforming the diner into an uncanny space. In his essay on the uncanny, Freud (1955) argues that the term is:

> integrally linked to the paradox of home and 'unhomeliness' — those moments when the familiarity of home (or what *should* be the familiarity of home) is infected by unhomeliness and elicits an 'uncanny' or unsettling experience (1).

While Freud (1955) specifically discusses the home about the uncanny here, the 'familiarity of home' suddenly becoming an uncanny experience can still be seen with the shooting in the diner. Throughout the series, especially in season one, Archie and Fred are shown ordering food from Pop's

numerous times – meeting each other at the diner for breakfast is, or should be, a familiar part of their day-to-day routine. The use of sound—dialogue and music—and cinematography in this scene work to present the transformation of the diner as an uncanny space. Upon entering the diner, Archie is greeted by his father, "Hey Casanova, I've ordered your usual" and then proceeds to the bathroom. A close-up shot of Archie washing his hands illustrates that temporarily in this moment, he is smiling and cheerful (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017c). While brief, Fred's comment – "I've ordered your usual" – explicitly highlights how meeting at the diner is a familiar part of the Andrews' typical routine. This sense of homeliness is accentuated by the close-up shot of Archie, who appears glad to be seeing his father.

However, this 'happy' occasion appears short-lived as while Archie is washing his hands, he hears someone entering the diner and shouting at Pop Tate. Concerned, the teenager walks out of the bathroom, and although the Black Hood is shown initially to be pointing a gun violently at Pop's head, he shoots Fred after noticing Archie's appearance. During this sequence, the dialogue is muffled, as although the Black Hood yells "give your wallet" at Fred, his line of dialogue sounds quiet. The lack of dialogue appears to emphasise that Archie struggles with the realisation that both him and his father are in danger, adding to the sense of uncanny, as an ordinary and every-day routine—going to the diner—has suddenly become a life-threatening situation. In defining the term, Royle (2003) argues that the uncanny:

> is a crisis of the proper as it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper…a disturbance of the very idea of personal and private property including the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' nature, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events. It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature':…the nature of reality and the world (p. 1).

Furthermore, the uncanny can occur when "a sense of homeliness [is] uprooted" through "the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home" (Royle, 2003, p. 1). The familiar (meeting at Pop's for breakfast) suddenly turns into the unfamiliar (Archie watching the Black Hood shoot his father), and the sense of nostalgia, home and comfort are perverted. In a high angle mid shot, Archie is seen covering Fred's abdominal bullet wound, attempting to stop his father from bleeding. Accompanied by this shot is Jughead's closing monologue, who tells the viewer "imagine this instant, frozen in time, people will look back at this as the exact moment that last bit of Riverdale's innocence finally died, and darkness won" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017c). The shooting is framed as something unhomely, as terrifying, as a symbol for the loss of 'innocence', which is further uncanny because it takes place in Pop's diner which is seen as the centre of Riverdale's community.

The shooting has far-reaching repercussions, and following the violent event, the diner is framed in Gothic terms "as a grim and morally corrupt place" (Ugelvig, 2014, p. 3) and is associated with death, crime, sex, and drugs. In 'Chapter 15: Nighthawks', in a wide shot of Pop's exterior, it appears to be a memory of a 'happier' and more wholesome period in the diner's history, as in the shot there are a group of young adults outside the diner; the outfits and cars evoke the 1950s-1960s period. Following this shot, the series transitions to a long shot of the diner in present day with "DEATH DINER" spray painted in black. Differences in camera angles indicate how the space is perceived, as while the shot of the diner from the past is straight-on, the present-day diner is shot from a slight low angle with the sound of crows can be heard. As Jughead walks into the diner, it becomes apparent that there is a fog surrounding the diner as well, further reinforcing that Pop's is now associated with death.

Later in in 'Chapter 15: Nighthawks', when Archie goes to the re-opening of Pop's diner, he suffers from what appears to be a PTSD attack, as he still has repressed trauma from witnessing his dad being shot. Specifically, as Archie watches the school band—Josie and The Pussycats (featuring Cheryl)—perform on the rooftop of the diner, he looks down, visibly upset. The series quickly transitions to a shot of Archie looking down in the diner at this father bleeding on the floor; after this memory involuntarily appears, Archie closes his eyes and appears as though he is trying to forget about the shooting, but the memory keeps coming back. Punter (2007), exploring the relationship between the uncanny, memory and trauma argues:

> …we are composed of the past and that we cannot control the moments at which it signifies its presence in the form of upheavals, transformations or phantoms which cannot be reduced to the order of daylight and which instead suggest to us that the apparent 'present' is in fact a flickering screen on which are, from time to time, writ images from a world which antecedes us and which also constantly threatens us with its unpredictable moments of recapitulation (p. 136).

The uncanny can suggest the uncontrollable nature of both memory and trauma, remining "us that we cannot, at the end of the day – or during the watches of night – exorcise the ghost" (Punter, 2007, p. 136). That Archie is unable to control his memories, which are involuntarily conjured by the sight of the diner, illustrates Punter's (2007) claim that we are unable to control moments of significant trauma.

5.3 A town in Decay:

Since its first issue in 1942, *Archie Comics* has long idealised small-town life, and Riverdale has been frequently portrayed as a wholesome and nostalgic space centred on white nuclear families. While

Riverdale often draws on nostalgic and iconic imagery from the post-war period like *Archie Comics*, rather than presenting the town as being a "bastion of wholesome goodness" (Hanley, 2020, p. 149), Riverdale is instead a place marked by the uncanny, violence and trauma, and decay. The residents of Riverdale are frequently shown to be struggling with contemporary socio-economic issues associated with the late-twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, including a lack of employment opportunities following the decline of the town's main source of income—the maple syrup industry—as well as crippling debt, the rise of gangs, drug trafficking and escalating drug-fuelled violence, and heightened racial tensions. In season five, following a seven-year time jump—and seven years away from Riverdale—Betty, Archie, Jughead, and Veronica return to a town which has arguably become "a post-industrial wasteland" (Fradley & Riley, 2019, p. 20). After years of disinvestment and political corruption, Riverdale has atrophied into a dying community, lacking any long-term socio-economic opportunities.

Although once booming communities which provided an abundance of socio-economic opportunities, by the early twenty-first century, many of the suburbs built in the post-World-War II period had become desolate and isolated places. These communities are often characterised as having "slow population growth, few local resources…declining local economies", 'crumbling' infrastructure, old and decaying schools and houses, and an aging population (Short et al., p. 646). Due to a confluence of factors, including the development of outer-city suburbs and communities, and the gentrification of housing in central cities, increasingly "many postwar suburbs are…losing the battle" for the investment of resources (Short et al., 2007, p. 646). In this final section, the chapter will critically examine how, as an example of the American Gothic, *Riverdale* disrupts the myth of the suburbs as being the ideal setting to achieve the American Dream. The town that Archie and his friends return to in season five has a "pervasive atmosphere of decay and despair" (Greenwood, 2009, p. 16).

Wasson (2013) argues that urban centres have become 'Gothicised', transformed by 'monstrous' industry, economic exploitation, and a sense of isolation as people become increasingly adrift from communities and meaningful human connection. While Wasson (2013) is primarily concerned with 'Gothic cities', a number of these themes can also be seen in *Riverdale*, especially in season five. For example, in 'Chapter 81: Homecoming', the town's residents voted to unincorporate Riverdale and dissolve its local government, stripping it of access to federal, state, and local government funding. Riverdale's infrastructure and roads are crumbling, public transport is almost non-existent, economic and political corruption is rife, and there is a lack of welfare support. Consequently, there is an erosion of a sense of community, and the town's residents must increasingly

fend for themselves. After returning home, Archie, Betty, Jughead, and Veronica journey through a threatening environment "composed of an unholy mixture of social corruption, natural decay, and imagined supernatural power" (Botting, 2014, p. 62). Archie and his friends are faced with "the grimness of urban life" and the brutal socio-economic realities of life in Riverdale, including "the isolation, the poverty" (Goho, 2014, p. 177). Throughout season five, there are a number of uncanny instances where what was once familiar and considered home has now suddenly become strange and alienating to Archie and his friends. This section will explore how the representation of Riverdale both literally and metaphorically decaying reflects contemporary fears and anxieties that the suburbs are no longer a space where achieving the American Dream is possible.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the first season of *Riverdale* establishes the setting as a highly idealised town where residents value safety, security, and a sense of community. However, the use of pastel colours, bright lighting, and highly stylised architecture and costumes, which appear straight from 1940s and 1950s America, presents Riverdale as an uncannily pristine and alienating space. While the setting is meant to evoke nostalgia for mid-twentieth century America and the values associated with the American Dream, Riverdale appears *too* perfect, to the point where it does not reflect contemporary lived realities, creating a sense of alienation. Following the time jump in Season five, Riverdale is still an uncanny, unsettling, and alienating space. However, Riverdale is re-introduced as markedly different from "the town with pep" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Krieger, 2017a), and is now characterised as being like a "war zone" where "there's always a fire burning" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). *Riverdale* has, since its pilot episode, explored complex themes of "decay and ruin" (Morowitz, 2018, p. 4), whether it be the of closure of the much-loved Twilight Drive-In, the financial and socio-political decline of the Blossom family estate, or a creeping disillusionment with the values associated with Riverdale. However, this atmosphere and landscape of decay is especially pronounced in season five. Riverdale has decayed both literally—including dilapidated infrastructure, abandoned buildings including the Sheriff's station, fire station, and youth community centre lay in ruin—and metaphorically, such as the perceived loss of home and childhood memories.

According to Wheatley (2006), the Gothic television narrative typically features a "pervading sense of terror or unease inclined to evoke fear" and "plots derived from Gothic literary fiction such as the hero/heroine being trapped in a menacing situation by an evil villain" (p. 3). One way which *Riverdale* creates a sense of terror and unease is through the construction of Gothic spaces; notably, the 'Lonely Highway' in season 5. Gothic spaces, as Botting (2014) argues, are places of "incarceration and power, they are located in isolated spots, areas beyond reason, law and civilised authority, where

there is no protection from terror or persecution" (p. 4). Furthermore, in these spaces, "violent and pallid characters" are caught in "foreboding settings" where death, or the "prospect of violent death" is a permanent presence (Devetak, 2005, p. 624-625). The Lonely Highway is a setting with little to no protection from terror and persecution. It is a setting where young women are frequently abducted, sexually assaulted and then murdered by a truck driver who pick up hitchhikers; the potential of death is a fixture of this highway location.

The sense of isolation is reflected in the fact that the main highway running through Riverdale and connecting it to New York City, Greendale, and other nearby urban centres has been aptly renamed to "the lonely highway" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). Reinforcing the town's sense of isolation, Toni reveals to Archie that the residents of Riverdale are "fending for themselves" as the town is "lawless now", and "bad things happen here after dark. They call this 'The Lonely Highway'" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). Edensor (2001) discusses decaying and ruined buildings in inner-city suburbs as being Gothic spaces, and argues that because they are gradually falling apart, they are often "the rotten teeth in the new city smile" (p. 42). Moreover, decayed, or ruined buildings tend to be "fenced off and policed" as they are "feared as dangerous locations for illicit behaviour" (Edensor, 2001, p. 42). Although Edensor (2001) specifically examined inner-city suburbs, his ideas can still be applied to the decay of Riverdale. In the fifth season, Major Hiram Lodge's (Mark Consuelos) was planning the up-coming suburban development of SoDale, catered to the wealthy residents of the area who commute to New York City for work. In contrast to SoDale, Riverdale is frequently depicted as being the 'rotten teeth in the new city smile', feared as being a dangerous location for illicit and seedy behaviour. For instance, Riverdale lacks public transport, as dozens of bus stops have been burned, and "buses don't pass here anymore" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). The lack of public infrastructure coupled with Toni's instructions to her truck drivers to never stop on the Lonely Highway unless "absolutely necessary" positions Riverdale as being a dangerous site, and works as a warning for those who dare enter the town (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021).

The first season of *Riverdale* employed the Suburban Gothic trope that something *bad* ('bad' being a serial killer, supernatural incidences, organ harvesting, and drug trafficking...) should not happen in a suburban neighbourhood (Murphy, 2009), seen in how the characters navigate the realities of Jason Blossom's death at the hands of his father, Clifford Blossom. In contrast, Riverdale in season five is no longer positioned as being a place where something terrible *should not* happen, and instead, is framed as place where something terrible *should* happen. While Toni only alludes to Archie that "bad things happen after dark here", we soon learn what 'bad' things happen in Riverdale

(Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). At the end 'Chapter 80: Purgatorio', Lynette 'Squeaky' Fields (Skylar Radzion) hitchhikes a ride from a large and threatening truck, complete with a metal skeleton on the truck's bonnet. While Squeaky moved to Riverdale for a fresh start, less than two years later she decided to move to greener pastures as "maybe things will be different in San Francisco". Unfortunately, Squeaky is never seen again, as "she'll never make it to California", having been murdered by the truck driver (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). Squeaky's decision to move to California, coupled with her eventual death, indicates that Riverdale is no longer the 'safe, innocent, decent' small town from the series' first episode. The decay of the town, from brightly lit, pastel coloured, warm and safe to a destination unsafe to even pass through momentarily is a subversion of the American Dream, as Riverdale is depicted as a place no longer fit or ideal to raise children or move up the socio-economic ladder. Moreover, by depicting Riverdale as a place of desolation, isolation, and murder, the series explores the creeping disillusionment with the American Dream, and the brutal and harsh realities of small towns in America in the twenty-first century.

At the end of 'Chapter 81: Homecoming', a frightened and scared Polly is seen running along the lonely highway at night being chased by a monstrously large truck with glaring headlights, and a large metal skeleton on the front. That the highway is a frightening space where young women like Polly and Squeaky are in apparent danger exemplifies *Riverdale's* use of Gothic tropes - in this case, 'maiden-in-flight', which Becker (2017) contends is "*the* gothic feature" (p. 46). As Prosser et al. (2019) confirm, the Gothic frequently depicts the image of "a desperate heroine, rushing barefoot across dangerous terrain in her wispy gown" (p. ii). It should be noted that the seventh and final analytical chapter will critically explore the Gothic heroine in connection to the domestic setting, hauntings, and dreams/ visions in more detail. However, that Polly is shown running alongside the highway, terrified for her life frames her as a 'maiden-in-flight', who is under threat from a monster-like truck. In a low angle long shot of the truck, it appears almost like a monster. The skeleton on the bonnet of the truck, the glaring and blinding headlights, and the sheer size of the truck means it appears to be animated. Animism, a form of the uncanny, refers to the way in which apparently inanimate objects come to seem to have a life of their own (Punter & Byron, 2005). The uncanny "an effect of crossing and reversals, signals the disturbance and simultaneously marks out limits:...nature, supernature and machines become entangled" (Botting, 2014, p 107). The truck driver during both scenes with Squeaky and then Polly is not shown. The lack of visibility of the driver arguably aids the feeling that the truck is a supernatural like entity driving itself. The boundary between human, truck and monster collapse, and the truck takes on a 'diabolical connotation' of being a symbol for death. That the truck is a

monster, and the only other 'living' entity on the lonely highway adds to the sense of loneliness and isolation from civilisation, as there is no one—at least no one human—for Polly or Squeaky to connect with or ask for help.

Moreover, the use of music and dialogue in this scene creates a heightened sense of isolation and disorientation, as instead of hearing Polly screaming and crying for her life, we instead hear a voicemail Betty leaves Polly: "I wanted to tell you that I love you...Please come home". This adds to the terror of the scene, as there is a distinct contrast between Betty's heartfelt apology to Polly while she is completely alone, unable to contact Betty or anyone else, and is at the hands of the mysterious truck driver. The women who go missing along the lonely highway often do not re-appear, and if they do, their corpse is found months or even years—if found at all—after being reported as missing. Polly is caught in the lonely highway, a foreboding setting where death, or the prospect of death, is a permanent presence, manifesting itself in the form of a monstrous truck driver, facing the prospect of a violent and untimely death. What makes this scene particularly disturbing is that there is this contrast between the horror of seeing Polly being chased and potentially murdered coupled with a warm and heartfelt message from her sister. The use of a visual 'rupture'—Polly terrified for her life—heightens the horror because Betty is 'in the dark', unaware of what is happening to Polly, and Polly appears to have little way of contacting her back.

The use of mise-en-scene, and in particular, the use of lighting, décor, setting, and figure behaviour (acting) in *Riverdale* depicts the town as being an isolated, gloomy, and uninviting space. Notably, in 'Chapter 80: Purgatorio', when Archie returns home, he is shown walking past the town sign welcoming residents and visitors to Riverdale. However, the sign appears to have significantly decayed and eroded in the last seven years, as parts are either too faded to clearly read or are missing entirely from the sign. Further, the sign's wooden frame appears as though it is slowly eroding away, especially evident with the paint which has almost entirely gone and only faintly visible. The signed remains as a "ruined reminder of gothic decay, a 'sinister block' bearing 'marks of prolonged and sordid negligence'...and physiognomic signs of a regressive nature" (Botting, 2014, p. 126). The decaying of the town sign, therefore, can be seen as a symbol for the wider negligence of the town and its residents, acting as a taster for what is to come when the series reintroduces the 'new' Riverdale.

The sign, read as a fossil and relic of the past, can be connected to Benjamin's work on the Paris Arcades, decay, and history:

> But in the image of the fossil, Benjamin captures as well the process of natural decay that marks the survival of past history within the present, expressing with palpable clarity what the discard fetish

> becomes, so hollowed out of life that only the imprint of the material shell remains (Buck-Morss, 1991, p.160).

The idea that the fossil's decay indicates the survival of past history within the present, but hollowed out of life that only the imprint of the shell remains. This fossil metaphor can be applied to the town sign , which has been 'hollowed out of life' given the state of disrepair it remains in. It is no longer a sign which communicates that Riverdale is the 'town with pep' and no longer appears particularly welcoming, given the state of disrepair. According to van Elferen (2007), the "past always lingers in the present, whether as a disturbing shadow, a reverberation in a hollow space, a mental reflection, or a projection of the unconscious" (p. 2). That the sign is shown is important, as it functions as a reminder that Riverdale used to be known as 'the town with pep'. There is then a mid-shot of Archie dressed in what appears to be an American WWII army uniform walking through fog, until a wide shot reveals that he has arrived at Pop's diner. According to Bronfen (2008), limited sight due to darkness or fog can create a sense of disorientation, as our sense of distance and measure changes, and "the world surrounding us is harder to characterize; it shifts between the familiar and unfamiliar" (p. 51). Initially, when Archie is walking through the fog, it is unclear where in Riverdale he is, as other than the town sign, there is little to indicate the geographic location. This creates a sense of disorientation because the town is literally kept out of sight, obscured by an interplay of dim lighting, ominous shadows, and fog. Consequently, Riverdale is depicted as being an isolated destination, far away from other urban centres as it appears that the diner appears almost randomly on the side of an almost deserted highway.

Moreover, this sense of disorientation continues in Pop's diner, where there is a blurring between the familiar and the unfamiliar. When Archie first enters the diner, there is a medium close up shot of him looking around the restaurant, however, the background is blurry with only Archie in focus. Although Archie looks visibly confused, it is not until Pop's granddaughter, Tabitha Tate (Erinn Westbrook), approaches him that the background switches into focus, revealing the rest of the diner. Several aspects of the diner remain familiar to Archie, including the neon sign, the décor inside with the black and white tiles, red booths and bar stool. However, there are also a few significant differences. Specifically, Pop Tate has retired, passing ownership of the establishment to Tabitha, there is a small self-checkout petrol station outside the diner, and many dinner patrons are now motorcyclists and gang members, rather than the local Riverdale High students.

As Royle (2016) argues, the uncanny is often sudden or fleeting in the way it is experienced. For something to be uncanny, it is dependent on a component of a past, something which was familiar

but then subsequently revealed to be strange, unhomely, uncomfortable or unfamiliar (Wawryk, 2008). That the uncanny is often sudden or fleeting in the way it is experienced can be seen with Archie when he walks through the diner, noticing that most of the patrons are no longer Riverdale High students, but Southside Serpents, motorcyclists, truck drivers, and other gang-affiliated members. Archie does not say anything, however his facial expression reveals his confusion and concern about the presence of the gang members in the diner, as he looks quizzically at his surrounds. While Pop's diner was once a place of refuge for Archie as a teenager, the diner has since become almost unrecognisable to him, illustrating how the "unfamiliar…is never fixed, but constantly altering. The uncanny is (the) unsettling (of itself)" (Royle, 2003, p. 5).

This confusion is confirmed when Tabitha asks him "something wrong, soldier boy?" (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). Discussing the importance of the use of dialogue in film and television, Kozloff (2000) argues that "many of the ways in which narrative is communicated, empathy elicited, themes conveyed, ... [and]… visuals interpreted come from the interaction of words with the visual images" (p. 14). How dialogue is integrated with the use of other cinematic techniques is critical to understanding the narrative. That dialogue can communicate important information about the narrative can be seen with Tabitha's comment here, as her asking Archie if something is wrong suggests that she senses Archie's initial apprehension and sense of alienation about returning home, as he looks around the diner observing all the changes made since he left town. Following this brief exchange, Archie makes his way downstairs to the Whyte Worm, the town's seedy bar, where he reunites with his former classmate, Toni Topaz (Vanessa Morgan). During their reunion, Archie struggles to articulate the strangeness and the alienation of being back home:

> **Archie:** Toni, the bus ride into town…I can't explain it…It.. Everything felt, feels…
> **Toni**: Different? Weird?
> **Archie**: …Yeah. I mean, to be honest, it doesn't even feel like Riverdale anymore.

Archie's use of language here implies a sense of uncanniness, especially his initial inability to explain how Riverdale has changed since he left. As Roye (2003) suggests, the uncanny is often "intimately entwined in language, with how we conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to ourselves, to the world, when uncanny strangeness is at issue" (p. 2). In other words, Royle (2003) comments on how the uncanny can also arise in the language we use and how we understand what is happening around ourselves, especially when experiencing a strange, alienating, or uncanny situation. Further, the uncanny also arises when "things are not as they have come to

appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality or logic" (Punter & Byron, 2005, p. 283). Although Archie does not explicitly state that he feels a sense of strangeness, his words do imply this. The fact that he is unable to explain the sensation suggests he is experiencing something inexplicable and unexplainable – almost a supernatural-like sense that something about his hometown has changed. In contrast, Toni is able to articulate how Archie is feeling, and her use of words, different and weird, implies that Riverdale has become an uncanny and strange space. That Archie first returns to Pop's diner, rather than returning to his family home or visiting his former friends, further reiterates that in many ways, the diner is considered the 'heart' of Riverdale's community, and functions to establish that Riverdale has changed dramatically in the seven-year gap between season 4 and 5.

The Gothic 'marks a peculiarly modern preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse' (Halberstam, 1995: 23) conjuring up a landscape of moral, spiritual, and bodily decay, within which 'boundaries between the 'normal' and the pathologized 'other' collapse' (Toth, 1997: 89-8) (p. 45). *Riverdale* has long been preoccupied with depicting its suburban environment as being a landscape of moral, social, and physical decay, and the series frequently associates the town with notions of death, dying, and desolation. This preoccupation with death is especially apparent in '*Chapter 80: Purgatorio'*—and much of season five, in general—where the town is depicted as being in ruins. After reconnecting the night before at the Whyte Worm, Toni gives Archie a tour of Riverdale, revealing how abandoned, isolated and decrepit the town has become since he left. Notably, Toni takes Archie to the former fire station, which has become "a burned-up shell" as parts of the building has been damaged by fire (Aguirre-Sacasa & Adelson, 2021). The fire station's paint is peeling off, the windows have either been smashed or are boarded up with wood, and there is a large amount of rubbish, wooden boards and other debris scattered outside the building.

Although a large majority of Americans live in the suburbs, it is "frequently depicted in popular culture as a repressive, soulless, and dehumanising hellscape (sometimes literally)" (Murphy, 2013, p. 9). In contrast to a number of buildings in Riverdale in the earlier seasons—the sheriff's station, the Riverdale Register—the fire station is grey and dull in tone, in contrast to the bright pastel town first introduced in season one. Furthermore, the town is covered in rubbish and graffiti, and there are several abandoned buildings which, are boarded up and vandalised. After re-visiting a number of locations throughout the town, Archie remarks to Betty, Veronica, and Jughead: "Toni gave me a tour of Riverdale today, and it's a hellscape". This can be seen with *Riverdale*, which literally depicts the town as being a 'hellscape', seen with Archie's explicit referral to hellscape, as well as his tour with Toni, visiting sites which exemplify how Riverdale has become run down, and a place which lacks a

sense of community. According to Edensor (2001), ruins can symbolise the fear that "civilisations eventually crumble, that empires ultimately fall" (p. 44). Contemplating Edensor's (2001) discussion on the symbolism of ruins, it could be argued that this is why the 'ghost' tour of Riverdale is horrifying. The ruined fire station, large piles of rubbish scattered all over town, the lack of public infrastructure indicates that Riverdale as a socio-economic centre is dying. In this way, *Riverdale* explores and exploits the fear that civilisations eventually crumble, and calls into question the very notion of linear progress; progress, even in suburbia, is not guaranteed or assured. But what makes Riverdale's slow death further disturbing is that the entire town is 'falling apart, and there is no 'new city smile', as the entirety of Riverdale lays in ruins like rotten teeth.

5.4 Conclusion:

This chapter has explored how *Riverdale* is a series which has long drawn heavily from Suburban Gothic narratives and tropes to critique notions of the American Dream. In particular, the chapter considered the ways in which the series appeared to be preoccupied with nostalgia for mid-twentieth century America, when small towns were considered prosperous and had an abundance of manufacturing jobs/ industries. Notably, this can be seen through the construction of the urban landscape and the buildings, and whether it be Pop's diner or Elm Street, *Riverdale* explicitly paid homage to post-war America. This chapter examined how depiction of Riverdale as being an uncanny and unsettling space in several ways. Firstly, the series represented Riverdale as being an idealised and beautiful suburban setting to create a sense of artificialness and alienation, suggesting that romanticised images of the suburbs remove the lived contradictions of everyday life.

Riverdale does not explicitly address Donald Trump; however, the series appears to offer a critique of the anxieties behind the former president's MAGA slogan and as well as the desire to return to a comfortable but imaginary past. Trump's MAGA reflects an implicit belief in the contemporary United States that post-war America was a period of socio-economic prosperity. The representation of the suburbs as being highly idealised and romanticised in *Riverdale* highlights how images of mid-twentieth century America continue to dominate American popular culture narratives, as well as the perception of the period as being prosperous for the country. Moreover, *Riverdale's* nostalgic depiction of the town reveals this nostalgic memory of mid-twentieth century America as being constructed and imaginary, and as such, we will never be able to return to it.

Secondly, the chapter explored the decay of Riverdale, as while the town was romanticised in earlier seasons, by season five, it was depicted as being a dying community. In many regards, Riverdale has become temporally stagnant as characters are unwilling to accept the town has changed. The depiction of the town as decaying—run down infrastructure, lack of government funding, and growth in crime—can be seen as an overt metaphor for 'tragic americana' and an elegy for small town America. This chapter critically explored how *Riverdale's* central preoccupation is with the disintegration, decay, and disillusionment with the American Dream in the twenty-first century. The series' focus on mid-twentieth century nostalgia is arguably not surprising, given that *Riverdale* was released during a particularly turbulent time in American life regarding political and socio-economic anxieties. Growing wealth inequality and job insecurity, a lack of welfare state, and a perception of increasing crime and political corruption has led to a sense that the American dream—owning a house, having a good job and a family—is no longer achievable for many in the U.S. The focus on the themes of decay, death, and disillusionment in *Riverdale,* especially in seasons five and six, suggest a realisation that the United States may never 'return' to its former glory.

CHAPTER SIX: ENTERING THE GOTHIC WOODS - Nature and Cycles of Transformation

6.0 Introduction:

The fifth chapter explored how, as an example of the American Gothic, *Riverdale* offers a critique of the American Dream in the twenty-first century. Specifically, the chapter considered how Riverdale is an atemporal setting outside of time and is constructed as an uncanny, artificial, and alienating place because of how 'perfectly' it appears to encapsulate the post-war period in America. *Riverdale,* as a Suburban Gothic narrative, is preoccupied with the inevitability of death and decay, especially regarding anxieties around the future of small-American towns. Moreover, the series depicted the town as being temporally stagnant, which can be seen in the representation in the decay of the social and economic fabric of Riverdale. While chapter five critically explored how the town of Riverdale appeared lost in a cycle of decay and ruin, the sixth chapter will examine another 'cycle of transformation': the shapeshifter body as an analogy for adolescence.

While there are several ways to measure time—including clock time and the linear progression of past, present, and future—Torres (2022) posits that we can also consider time through cycles. Time can be conceived as the production and reproduction of life as well as the portioning of life stages—each age is associated with education, employment, retirement—and works to govern how people structure their lives (Torres, 2022). It can be argued that adolescence is a particularly unique and transformative life stage. This is because, in Western cultures, adolescence is conceptualised as being a period "of reopening and rethinking questions of identity" as teenagers undergo significant and intense physical, mental, and social changes (Coats, 2004, p. 142). During this cycle of transformation, adolescents often challenge the borders of behaviour, "trying to become [an] adult without becoming adulterated" and wanting to find their identity (Coats, 2004, p. 142). Although adolescence is thought to be a 'natural' part of growing up and becoming an adult, it is often framed as a "dangerous and unruly period" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 12).

Furthermore, because they are caught between time frames, adolescents are inherently liminal figures who must exist "uneasily between childhood and maturity" (Richardson, 2003, p. 347). In the Gothic, there is a concern with the "growth and transformation of the child, the crisis of adolescence, and the sometimes painful transition into adulthood" (Georgieva, 2013, p. 13).

Georgieva (2013) explores the figure of the child in Gothic fiction from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing that children were often characterised by "ambiguity, mystery, liminality, violence and monstrosity" (p. 12). Smith and Moruzi (2018) draw on Georgieva's (2013) work on the representation of the Gothic child in their examination of adolescents in contemporary young adult fiction as also being Gothic figures. Specifically, Smith and Moruzi (2018) argue that young adult fiction—such as *Vampire Academy* (2007) by Richelle Mead or Claudia Gray's vampire romance novel, *Evernight* (2008)—explore the emotional challenges of becoming an adult, including taking on new responsibilities, becoming an independent individual, and having to navigate more complex relationships. Moreover, the liminality of Gothic figures who transgress boundaries between human and monster is magnified by the transitional space occupied by teen protagonists who are neither children nor adults (Smith & Moruzi, 2018).

This chapter will explore how adolescent characters in American Gothic-horror narratives, such as Scott in *Teen Wolf* and Sabrina in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, appear innately drawn to the forest as it is a setting where they begin their cycles of transformation. The preoccupation with wooded settings in these series is not surprising nor unique, as Murphy (2013) proposes, the forest is "to the American Gothic what the haunted castle is to the European Gothic" (p.2). In American Gothic-horror narratives, the image of the frightening and foreboding woods has never quite lost its sense of potency, and as Keetley and Sivils (2018) reinforce, American Gothic literature has always been EcoGothic. As such, to critically examine the woods as a frightening and transformative space, this chapter will take an EcoGothic approach when analysing the figure of the werewolf and the witch in *Teen Wolf* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.* A burgeoning field of study, the EcoGothic can be defined as the deep sense of unease, fear, and contempt that people feel when confronted with the natural world. Keetley and Sivils (2018) claim that the EcoGothic represents both the realities and dangers of the natural world including "often indifferent or hostile predators, terrain, and climate", and nature is represented as a terrain where there is a tension between what is and is not considered to be 'properly' human (p. 7). The EcoGothic can be employed as a tool to read culture by focusing "on the themes of time, space, race, and the nonhuman turn" (Parker, 2020, p. 21). Taking an EcoGothic approach will allow for an examination of how the shapeshifter body as an analogy for the adolescent body and cycles of transformation can also be connected to the transformative power of nature.

Through an analysis of the figure of the werewolf in the MTV series *Teen Wolf* (2011-2017)—an adaptation of the 1985 film of the same name—the chapter will also discuss the representation of

the often contentious and complicated relationship humans have with Nature, specifically, the woods. Firstly, this chapter will provide a brief historical overview of the figure of the werewolf in folklore and popular culture narratives, and then discuss the werewolf as a Gothic figure connected to nature. Following this, the chapter will explore, how through the werewolf, nature is depicted as attacking civilisation in the series and consequently, both civilisation and nature are under threat from being 'consumed' by each other. Additionally, the chapter will examine how Jackson Whittemore's (played by Colton Haynes) transformation into a 'Kanima'—a mutation of the werewolf gene—can be seen as a metaphor for transgender Gothic identities and embodiments. Furthermore, the discussion of the body of the werewolf as an apt metaphor for the body changes and transformations associated with the onset of puberty will also be followed by a critical exploration of the female witch body in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*.

6.1 Locating the Figure of the Werewolf in Folklore:

Numerous scholars have attempted to construct a definition for the term folklore which is able to hold together potentially conflicting perspectives and a diverse range of phenomena said to be associated with it. As Ben-Amos (1971) states: "definitions of folklore are as many and varied as the versions of a well-known tale" (p. 3). One view of folklore is that it is the lore shared by an entire group communality, and can be regarded as "'the lore, erudition, knowledge of teaching of a folk'" (Ben-Amos, 1971, p. 6). In this view, folklore can be defined as a set of customary practices and/ or thoughts "fostered in the creative activities, daily life, and economic development" of a particular group of people. It is a cultural, organic, and fluid phenomenon created and passed on by generation to generation, and "its binding force" usually "comes from the power of habits rather than laws" (Xu, Chen & Xu, 2018, p. 163). However, this means that folklore is also an organic and evolving phenomenon, and the socio-cultural and geographical context of a community ultimately produces distinct differences in the structure and text of folklore - it is not an aggregate of things, but a communicative process (Ben-Amos, 1971; Goldstein, Grider & Thomas, 2007).

The use of folklore within popular culture is widespread, and in recent years, there has been a growing body of research focusing on how folklore and folkloric elements and traditions are incorporated into a range of popular culture texts, especially in literature, film, and television. To understand the relationship and interaction between folklore and popular culture, Foster and Tolbert (2015) developed the concept of the 'folkloresque'. The term can be used to describe popular culture

texts which, rather than being based on any single vernacular item or tradition, have been "consciously cobbled together from a range of folkloric elements" mixed with newly created content (Foster & Tolbert, 2015, p. 3). The incorporation of folkloric material into non-folk contexts is "hardly a new process", and folklore is often experienced through some sort of 'recycling' in popular culture texts, including literature, art, television, film, music, or video games (De Caro, 2013, p. 5). This can be seen with one of the most iconic and well-known forms of shapeshifters in popular culture, werewolves, who appear in a multitude of narratives, from antiquity to European folklore, to medieval scientific medical journals, to witchcraft treatises, to nineteenth century Gothic literature, to twentieth century horror films and beyond.

Tales of people transforming into wolves, or 'wolf men', are thousands of years old, and yet, historical summaries continue to struggle to capture the breadth and complexity of this figure in Western folklore. In antiquity, folklore had a significant impact on how people conceived of the figure of the werewolf, and themes and images were "borrowed from this folkloric home and transferred" into literature, myths and legends, and medical journals (Ogden, 2021, p. 9). Notably, the earliest known description of werewolves in some form or guise can be found in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (dating from the early second millennium BC), "in which the goddess Ishtar turns a shepherd into a wolf who is then devoured by his own dogs" (Lawrence, 1996, p. 106). The phenomenon of shapeshifting was well documented by classical authors, and "in ancient Rome the term was commonly used for people who transformed into wolves and other savage animals was *versipellis* (turn-skin)" (Frost, 2003, p. 5); many of these tales frequently portrayed "the werewolf as a savage beast that lurks in the dark and preys on the helpless" (Sconduto, 2014, p. 1).

Despite the presence of an early and persistent belief in werewolves in folklore, literature, and poetry, the first recorded use of the term *werewolf* itself can be found in "the laws of King Cnut, ruler of the Anglo-Scandinavian Empire from 1016 to 1035, in his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances XXVI*" (Leathers, 2016, p. 8). The dual nature of the werewolf—their existence as both human and beast—is signified in the words used to identify this enigmatic creature. The term *werewolf*—alternately spelled *werwolf*—is Anglo-Saxon in origin and "a compound of the Old English word *were* or *wer*, meaning *man*, and *wolf* or *wulf* ('werewolf | werwolf, n.')" (Leathers, 2016, p. 5). However, this initial use of the word *werewolf* differs from more contemporary Western conceptions of werewolves as "men who—by magic, curse, or nature—transform themselves into wolves" (Leathers, 2016, p. 8); specifically, the passage featuring werewolves in King Cnut's Ecclesiastical Ordinances was used as "a synonym for the Devil" (Leathers, 2016, p. 8).

During the Middle Ages, shapeshifting was frequently associated with witchcraft and "often achieved through a pact with the Devil"; voluntary metamorphosis was associated with "the will to do evil and a desire to exert power through fear" (Frost, 2003, p. 7). According to Frost (2003), the "incidence of alleged werewolf activity reached a peak between 1520 and 1630", during which there was an "outbreak of persecution mania, resulting in many hundreds of innocent suspects being burned at the stake" (p. 12-13). During the height of the witch hunts in Sixteenth-century Europe, which resulted in many trials and executions, there was often little distinction between witch and werewolf, as it was believed witches themselves were shapeshifters, able to transform into werewolves (Kachuba, 2009). Throughout the witchcraft trials, one of the main accusations made against witches suspected of being werewolves was that "they possessed a two-sided skin – human on the outside and furry on the inside – the theory being that they turned their skin inside out to become a wolf" (Frost, 2003, p. 13). However, during the Enlightenment period, superstition was rejected in favour of logic and reason, and it was reasoned that literal metamorphosis was impossible - or, at least unproven. It later became accepted that those accused of *werewolfism* during the witch trials had been suffering from 'lycanthropy', a form of psychosis. As Mann (2020) suggests, "that these supposed werewolves suffered from delusions was a far more logical conclusion" (p. 6). However, this also meant that for the most part, the Enlightenment brought an end to the werewolf trials and popular belief in literal wolf-men.

Although by the beginning of the nineteenth century werewolves were primarily associated with "the oral traditions of folklore and the early-modern witchcraft trials", this mutable and shapeshifting creature was revived in the 1800s after becoming a prominent figure in popular literature (du Coudray, 2002, p. 1; Mann, 2020). As du Coudray (2002) notes, following the inclusion of a werewolf in Charles Maturin's "Gothic novel *The Albigenses* (1824), lycanthropy became an increasingly popular theme" in literary texts (p. 1). Frost (2003) explores the relationship between the werewolf of early nineteenth century literature and folklore, arguing that this shape-shifting creature "invariably bears a strong resemblance to his counterpart in folklore" (p. X-xi). During this period, werewolves were frequently depicted as a supernatural creature "in the thrall of a sorcerer's spell" (Frost, 2003, p. Xi). Alongside the increased presence of lycanthropy and werewolves in nineteenth century literature, there was also a "flowering of research" and interest in the "historical, literary, and mythological antecedents of the werewolf image" (du Coudray, 2002, p. 1).

Since the late twentieth century, there has been an explosion of interest in the folklore of supernatural creatures such as vampires, werewolves, and witches as well as a resurgence in

‘Gothicising’ folkloric figures in popular culture narratives, especially regarding cinema (Hart, 2020). While "Mary Shelley’s work established Frankenstein and Bram Stoker’s novel created Dracula", no single classic gave rise to the werewolf image in the same way (Lawrence, 1996, p. 103). Instead, cinematic representations of werewolves, such as An *American Werewolf in London* (1981), *The Wolf Man* (1941), and *The Werewolf of London* (1935), established a number of tropes that have become prevalent in popular culture narratives featuring the shapeshifting figure (Craig, 2005). Such tropes include the association with the full moon, the lycanthropic 'curse' being transmitted by bite, the forest as a habitat for a predatory werewolf, and "the grotesque corporeality of metamorphosis" (Lecouteux, 2021, p. 4). Although relatively new, these films have been extremely influential in forming a number of contemporary preconceptions of werewolves, inspiring "the 'refolklorization' of the werewolf” and keeping the myth of this enigmatic creature alive (Lecouteux, 2021, p. 4).

6.2 The Gothic, Psychoanalysis and Werewolves:

Considered to be a classic landscape of fear, the enchanted, but terrifying and foreboding forest has long captured popular imagination, especially in the Western world, where people are warned, repeatedly, against entering this space (Keetley & Sivils, 2018; Parker, 2020). It should be noted that many of the fears associated with the woods in America were “historically inherited from European anxieties” (Parker, 2020; p. 7). Notably, one reason why the forest is frequently depicted as frightening is because it is perceived to the 'natural' habitat of the monster and the place "where the wild things are" (Parker, 2020, p. 137). Although an assortment of creatures are said to stalk the woods, one of the most famous monsters associated with this space are wolves - and werewolves. Tracing the origins of this classic forest monster, Parker (2020) explores how the connection between wolves and the forest setting lies "in history, myth and fairy tales" (p. 185). Despite humans and wolves not being 'natural' enemies, the wolves who filled the forests in Europe could wipe out entire livestock, and as natural scavengers, were also reported to feed on human remains. Parker (2020) posits that this early fraught relationship had a significant impact on how people perceived both the woods and wolves, and wolves became known as merciless, violent, and prodigious eaters who were representative of "the *consuming* threats of the forest" and "for many, the monstrosity of Nature" (Parker, 2020, p. 187). The dichotomy between the human (civilisation) and Nature (the non-human and the wilderness) is frequently symbolised through the figure of the werewolf, which itself, is associated with the other, the untamed, the uncultured, and the repressed. As such, that the forest is a fitting

setting for the inevitability and horror of transformation into something monstrous. In contemporary werewolf cinema, television, and fiction, this is an area where characters, especially adolescent protagonists, turn into werewolves themselves.

Set in the sleepy fictional California town, Beacon Hills, *Teen Wolf* is centred around Scott McCall and his close group of friends—or his 'pack'—as they navigate the trials and tribulations associated with adolescence, while also battling both supernatural and human villains. *Teen Wolf* draws on the historical and primeval connection between werewolves and the forest as being a frightening and transformative space, as it is Beacon Hills Preserve—the local protected woods—where werewolves are first introduced and then routinely encountered. Murphy (2013) posits that the American Gothic frequently depicts characters who stray from their "rational '*original*' selves" the further they wander towards "the intangible *something* that lurks at the heart of the American forest" (p. 1). In *Teen Wolf's* pilot episode, 'S1E1: Wolf Moon', Scott invariably wanders to the heart of Beacon Hills Preserve, where he is bitten and transformed into a werewolf (Davis et al., 2011). Scott and his best friend Stiles Stilinski (Dylan O'Brien) investigate the preserve after two joggers discover the upper torso of a corpse in the forest. Stiles' father, Noah (Linden Ashby) who is the sheriff of Beacon Hills, finds Stiles in the woods, and takes him home. Scott is left by himself in the rain. After hearing a howling noise, the first suggestion of wolves in the woods, a group of deer run past Scott, knocking him on the forest floor. Scott accidentally stumbles upon the corpse found by the joggers—the upper torso of a young woman—and is frightened, falling down a small cliff. Following this fall, Scott is attacked by a wolf—later revealed to be Peter Hale (Ian Bohen), the Alpha werewolf of Beacon Hills pack—causing a large and bloody bite mark on his lower abdomen (Davis et al., 2011).

According to Turner (1982), liminal rituals are frequently marked by the physical separation of the ritual subjects from the rest of society. The passage from one social status to another, for example, the transition from childhood to adulthood, is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space and a geographical movement from one place to another. A journey into liminality can be transformative, as it is a departure from the known, which means it is also a space which "promotes a radical break with the structures, definitions and hierarchies associated with the dominant order" (Turner, 1982, p. 39). The attack on the 'teen wolf' is a homage to one of the most infamous of werewolf stories, *Little Red Riding Hood*, seen in the series' tongue-in-cheek inclusion of the 'little red hoodie' Scott is wearing at the beginning of 'S1E1: Wolf Moon' (Davis et al., 2011). *Little Red Riding Hood* provides a warning that those who stray from the known path, usually adolescents, and journey into the forest, a liminal zone, are in danger of encountering its lupine monsters (Bellas, 2017).

Like Red, after straying from his home, into the unknown, the forest, Scott is violently bitten by Peter who curses him with werewolfism. The implication of this attack is clear: by leaving civilisation Scott begins his journey into liminality, having transformed into a werewolf. Furthermore, Turner (1982) suggests that the 'escape' into liminality can be seen as a refusal of "the structures, rules and definitions of dominant culture", which then activates "'being born' into a new identity that falls outside the bounds of status quo acceptability" (p. 39). By entering and staying in the woods late at night without his mother's permission, and in the face of potential danger, Scott arguably turned his back on the rules and authority figures of the human-made world. That Scott was bitten and turned into a werewolf highlights the liminal nature of this space by literalising the idea that the forest changes those within it. Scott begins his journey into a new and foreign stage in his life: a werewolf. In contrast Stiles who, although also ventured into the woods with Scott, was not in the woods long enough for him to truly transform in the same way as Scott.

Teen Wolf is highly influenced by tropes associated with the representation of werewolves in popular culture in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, seen in its depiction of werewolf characters as being a metaphor for the beast lurking within the human psyche. For example, Scott is a shapeshifting character who struggles internally with two conflicting identities: the human, which is associated with the conscious mind, and the beast, which is associated with the unconscious mind. After being bitten, Scott is unable to rationally explain the physical, and emotional changes taking place, including enhanced hearing, agility, strength, and increased aggression. Initially, Scott resents his new identity as a werewolf and repeatedly tries to pretend to be a 'normal' teenager. This can be seen in his reluctance to even discuss his transformation with Stiles and in his outright refusal to seek help from the only other werewolf he knows, Derek Hale (Tyler Hoechlin). Scott suppresses the emotions he feels about his transformation—anger and fear—as well as his new but foreign bodily urges. Drawing on Freud's work on repression, Boag (2012) argues that:

> At its simplest, '*the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*' (Freud, 1915d, p. 147, his italics), and for Freud, repression provided insight into the mind's dynamics contributing to dreams and psychopathology (p. xi).

When Stiles implores Scott to research werewolf mythology and lore, Scott replies sarcastically "I'll put it on my 'To Do' list, right underneath 'figuring out how the hell I'm playing this game tonight'" (Davis & Mulcahy, 2011). Rather than admitting to himself that he is a werewolf, Scott would rather focus on training for lacrosse and dating, activities which are usually considered 'normal' for adolescents. By focusing on anything other than his metamorphosis, Scott is actively turning away

a part of his identity and keeping it at a distance from his conscious. Scott's reluctance to embrace his new-found identity as a werewolf is a commonly explored theme and plot point in popular culture texts on werewolves (Pulliam, 2012). Because there are two competing sides of an individual, one rational and civilised while the other is uncontrollable and irrational, the werewolf is often considered to be a "kind of dark double" (Clarke, 2008, p. 50) as well as "the beast within" (Pulliam, 2014, p. 74). In other words, the unconscious is frequently linked "with the bestial, instinctive life of the natural, material world" (du Coudray, as cited in Pulliam, 2014, p. 240). As Pulliam (2012) argues, repression is dangerous because the repressed can return in monstrous form and operate as a warning "about the dangers of disavowing certain knowledge or parts of the self" (p. 240). Exemplifying Pulliam's (2012) claims, Scott's denial manifests itself in a few violent and angry outbursts, including his partial transformation during the first high school lacrosse match of the school season (Davis & Mulcahy, 2011). After accidentally injuring another player, Scott runs to the school bathroom and partially transforms, punching the mirrors in frustration and pain. This scene invokes the figure of the werewolf as a metaphor for the "expression of repressed drives and desires that surge inevitably and unremittingly", as Scott shifts into his wolf form, unable to control his anger (Hubner, 2018, p. 119).

During the first season, Scott is repeatedly shown being unable to control his animal instincts and inner desires and impulses. Another notable example of the unconscious mind at work is one morning, soon after being bitten, Scott wakes up in nothing but his underwear in the Beacon Hills Preserve. It is foggy and he is by himself except for a wolf-like creature which chases after him. Disoriented and confused, it appears that Scott had ventured into Beacon Hills preserve during his sleep, as the last thing he remembers was sleeping in his bed at home. Parker (2020) argues that one of the reasons why the forest is depicted as frightening is because it is a setting associated with the human unconscious, and it functions symbolically as an extension of the darkest elements of the human psyche. Furthermore, the forest as a metaphor for the unconscious suggests that "humans are chained to blind nature and uncontrollable instincts" (Parker, 2020, p. 56). It appears that Scott was compelled by his unconscious mind, and his inner beast, to return to the forest where he was transformed into a werewolf.

Derek uses Scott's outburst at his lacrosse game and his sleep walking as examples of the dangers of shifting in front of his family, friends, and peers and hurting those close to him. However, the teenager does not heed this warning and attends a high school party the night of the full moon (Davis & Mulcahy, 2011). Beginning to feel weird, faint, and feverish, Scott leaves the party to isolate himself at home in the bathroom, so he does not involuntarily transform in front of his high school

peers. When Scott returns home, he sits in the bathtub having a shower; he starts hearing a ringing noise in his ear and begins to panic as he watches in horror as his body involuntarily transforms. The horror Scott experiences while in the bathtub can be connected to Morris' (1985) claim that the uncanny can achieve its "strange and disquieting power" by confronting us with a part of ourselves which we may have denied but cannot ever entirely escape, and the reappearance of our own repressed desire can often evoke a sense of attraction and revulsion (p. 307). Scott can only watch in horror as his body transforms to become foreign and alien to him, as he is forced to confront his repressed desires and need to shift into a werewolf. Scott's sudden growth of canine teeth, claws, body hair and increased aggression similarly mirrors the changes typically associated with male puberty and adolescence, as he finally begins his transition from human to wolf while simultaneously also transitioning from childhood to adulthood.

It should also be noted that Scott begins his first 'full' transformation into a werewolf during the full moon. As Williams (2014) notes, the phases of the moon have been tracked for centuries. Each "lunation (the time between each new Moon)" is used as a unit and measure of time (Williams, 2014, p. 9) and the lunar cycle played an important part in the "evolution of calendars" in most ancient civilisations (Williams, 2014, p. 37). Although time eventually became regulated through the introduction of clocks, the phases of the moon have long been thought to guide people's circadian rhythm, and influence people's physical and mental health (Williams, 2014). Werewolf films in the twentieth century were key in establishing the association between the full moon and lycanthropy and subsequently, werewolves became "subjected to a regular, monthly cycle" (Cininas, 2010, p. 3). *Teen Wolf* similarly explores this trope, as Scott is unable to resist the power of the moon and can no longer repress his bodily urges. The previous chapter discussed how the teen protagonists of *Riverdale* are compelled to witness the inevitable horror and the decay of their all-American town, with little they can do to stop the cycle of transformation. Although transformation in this case is of the adolescent body, and not a setting and town, there is a similar sense of inevitability in Scott's transformation in *Teen Wolf.* As Royle (2003) suggests, the uncanny is also invariably bound with "a sense repetition or 'coming back'…the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat" (p. 2). Shapeshifting during the full moon is an inevitable phase of the cycle of transformation, and there is a sense of repetition, as for the remainder of his life, Scott is compelled to shapeshift at least once a month. Scott has become trapped in a 'cycle of repression', as he can only supress his bestial desires, instincts, and drives for a short period until he is forced to shapeshift and confront his inner beast.

While the process of shifting into a werewolf begins inside the home, Scott only completes his transformation into a werewolf after jumping into the woods behind his bedroom window, right under the direct gaze of the moon. Williams (2014) argues that people are "biologically wedded to a celestial clock synchronized to the solar cycle of day and night, and this cycle can influence our behaviour (p. 89). However, because people are increasingly spending time indoors or in controlled environments, "nature's rhythms are gradually hidden from us" (Williams, 2014, p. 89). For Williams (2014) the human-made world and the domestic sphere can be seen as a controlled space, where the effects of the phases of the moon and the day and night cycle are suppressed or limited. In contrast, in the EcoGothic returns to the forest often also represent a sense of returning to 'nature' and 'natural' human instincts (Keetley & Sivils, 2018; Parker, 2020). The figure of the werewolf is often interpreted as being the "primal self" which has been released "from the constraints of civilization" (Garedenour, 2015, p. 169). By adventuring back into Beacon Hills Preserve, Scott can complete his cycle of transformation, as the woods heightens the influence of the full moon on Scott's rapid and sudden body changes and behaviour, meaning he is free to express his inner beast. By creating a link between the moon, the wooded environment, and transformation, *Teen Wolf* suggests that people are innately compelled to return to nature in some form.

6.3 Nature versus the Urban:

The dual nature of werewolves as being civilised and beast, human and nonhuman, is a theme which is frequently explored in *Teen Wolf*. In season three, there is a battle for control of Beacon Hills between Scott's wolf pack, and Deucalion's (Gideon Emery) invading Alpha pack. Deucalion kidnaps a few of Scott's allies—including Boyd (Sinqua Walls), Erica, and Cora Hale (Adelaide Kane)—and imprison them in a vault at the abandoned Beacon Hills First National Bank. The vault walls are made from a mineral called hecatolite, which scatters the moonlight and consequently prevents the kidnapped werewolves from transforming. This form of torture, Peter explains, means that Cora and Boyd are "savage, more bloodthirsty...They're…starved lions" (Davis & Mulcahy, 2013). As "Deucalion has kept them from shifting for three months", their tolerance to 'fight' the effects of the full moon have been diminished (Davis & Mulcahy, 2013). Again, *Teen Wolf* continues to draw on the trope of shapeshifting during the full moon, as transformation are tied to the cycles of the moon. However, the man-made structure—the bank vault—prevents Boyd, Erica, and Cora from completing their own

cycle of transformation, leaving them in a suspended state between human and werewolf. Moreover, the inability for Boyd, Erica, and Cora to transform in a man-made structure further works to create a distinction between the human world and Nature, as the werewolves are unable to release their inner, primeval selves.

Furthermore, because of Deucalion's form of 'torture', Boyd and Cora appear in a trance of sorts; the kidnapped wolves are largely unaware of their surroundings and do not remember who Derek and Scott are, or even themselves. As the teenagers are prevented from being able to fully embrace their dual nature as both human and wolf, they appear truly monstrous and disturbing because they are not able to complete their transition into werewolves. Because of their "double failure to present either a reliable identity, to be either someone or something", werewolves are often regarded as being abject creatures (Gutenberg, 2007, p. 150). Appearing completely wild, unpredictable, and unable to even hold a simple conversation with their friends, Boyd and Cora are compared to "blood thirsty and starved lions" ready to hunt whatever or whoever they encounter. In this way, the two kidnapped werewolves are left in an "abject state of bodily formlessness or mutilation, deprived of any recognizable human contours" (Gutenberg, 2007, p. 150).

Space can be divided into 'place', which refers to what is known and familiar, as well as 'space' which is "all that lies outside of this", including the unknown, unfamiliar, and the strange (Parker, 2020, p. 30). The terms space and place, according to Parker (2020) can be seen as symbolic of the contentious relationship between the human world and the natural world. The forest, frequently construed as being the antithesis to the human world and "the nasty underbelly of civilisation", means there is a potential analogy between civilisation as 'ego' and the forest as 'id' (Parker, 2020, p. 54). Parker's (2020) claim that the forest is a symbolic of the id can be seen when Boyd and Cora are finally freed from the confines of the bank vault, as they become literal beasts who are unable to be rationed with, as their primal and atavistic instincts have taken control.

Boyd is especially voracious and vicious, chasing an injured Scott and Derek out of the bank, almost killing them both. In the following episode, and after being freed the bank vault, Boyd is on the hunt for prey in the Beacon Hills Preserve and has now been almost entirely taken over by the ancient inner beast lurking within his psyche. Completing his shift into a werewolf with little memory of his human life—and imbued with enhanced strength, aggression—Boyd's transformation in the woods supports Parker's (2020) contention that such transformations typically take place in the forest. The wilderness—Beacon Hills Preserve—can be regarded as a physical analogue to the essentially uncontrollable aspects of the self, as Boyd's inability to stop from transforming in the forest literalises

the idea that the forest *changes* those within it and underscores the psychological implications that the forest continues to have on us (Parker, 2020, p. 195). Furthermore, the implication is clear – that those who leave 'civilisation', or the human-made world, and move into the forest beyond town will inevitably become less civilised because of the transformation into something wholly monstrous (Murphy, 2013, p. 11).

Narratives which feature werewolves often frame the connection between the human world and nature in terms of appetite and consumption. As Frost (2003) argues, werewolves are often depicted as having a "ravenous hunger and are seized periodically by an irresistible desire to feast on...flesh and blood" (p. 3). One of the ways in which Boyd is depicted as unable to repress his own perverse and violent instincts is that he attempts to hunt down two young siblings, Breanne and Billy. Boyd—ravenous for food *and* killing prey—chases the two siblings throughout the woods, until they can hide in a steel shed. That it is the forest where Boyd first attempts to 'eat' speaks to how the forest continues to be a setting where we "fear being eaten", whether it be by literal predators such as wolves and bears, or "by the many monsters we imagine within it" (Parker, 2020, p. 54). Furthermore, the human-made structures which do exist in the expanses of the forest offer little sanctuary to those being hunted by monstrous creatures, losing their 'security' as they rot, disintegrate, or literally blow are away only to be revealed as part of the territory of the monster (Parker, 2020). Boyd, with his enhanced strength and extreme aggression lifts the shed up completely, leaving Billy and Breanne exposed as they have lost the security of the shed.

6.4 Introducing Gender, Queerness, and the TransGothic in *Teen Wolf*:

Because of their movement between the human and the animal, werewolves have often been depicted as being a grotesque hybrid that is a "supernatural fusion" of human and wolf (du Coudray, 2002, p. 13). Many scholars have discussed and explored this idea of werewolves as being a 'monstrous blend' of the human and the animal (See: Priest, 2015; Frost, 2003), and as Bernhardt-House (2016) notes, the figure of the werewolf is a clear example of "hybridity and transgression of species boundaries in a unified" body (p. 159). In their embodiment of the monstrous, the perverse, and the excessive—especially in their wolf form—werewolves often function as a site for exploring complex socio-cultural anxieties, including gender, sexuality, race, identity, and the human relationship to Nature and the animal world (du Coudray; McKay, 2017). By raising unsettling

questions around the natural and supernatural, the human and the animal, werewolves can represent the instability of categories of human identity, especially in relation to gender and sexuality, and reveal their constructed nature.

However, there has been limited scholarly attention on werewolves and queer and transgender identities. As both Haefele-Thomas (2018) and Bernhardt-House (2016) discuss, this is arguably surprising because the werewolf body itself can be read as being inherently queer. Bernhardt-House (2016) defines queerness as "anything which actively disrupts normativity, transgresses the boundaries of propriety, and interferes with the status quo in closed social and sexual systems" (p. 159). Through exploring the figure of the werewolf through a Queer Gothic approach, Bernhardt-House (2016) proposes that this shapeshifter is " a natural signifier for queerness" in its myriad of forms (Bernhardt-House, 2016, p. 159). Because werewolves are hybrid figures who transgress species boundaries and never fully cross between human and animal, they disrupt the human-animal binary. Through this disruption to the boundary between human and animal, werewolves are a “third category outside of the binary”, and therefore, can be considered as a non-binary identity (Haefele-Thomas, 2018, p. 101).

Zigarovich (2018) provides one of the first comprehensive discussions of the intersections between the Gothic and transgender studies—the Transgothic—with their edited collection, building upon several seminal Queer Gothic readings, including work from Eve Sedgwick (2016) and George Haggerty (2006). Additionally, Zigarovich (2018) also builds their framework of Transgothic on Susan Stryker's definition of transgender as "people who cross over the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain" gender (p. 5). The Transgothic is most notably concerned with how transgender bodies disrupt or subvert gender boundary crossings in the Gothic, as well as the ways in which the Gothic offers a "space for transgenre explorations, encounters, and experimentation" (Zigarovich, 2018, p. 4). While there has been a limited focus on transgender bodies in Gothic scholarship, as Zigarovich (2018) notes, transgender studies "has been complicit with Gothic since its origins", arguing that bodies, gender variance, embodiments, and identities--all trans aspects--have "aligned with Gothic elements, tropes, and rhetoric" (p. 2).

Within *Teen Wolf's* diverse cast of supernatural beings is the Kanima, a shapeshifter who, because of a mutation in the werewolf gene, is reptilian in appearance. Through employing a Transgothic approach to the depiction of the Kanima in *Teen Wolf*, this chapter will examine the ways in which the series explores the movement and shifting of genders, bodies, and locales. There will be a critical exploration of how transgender bodies continue to be portrayed as being abject, grotesque,

and disgusting bodies, and how trans individuals are constructed as being 'all' body, and no identity. Specifically, Jackson's intense and obsessive desire to physically change his body into a werewolf, as well as his body changes—enhanced strength and hearing, bloody orifices, reptilian appearance, and metamorphosis—can arguably be read as a metaphor for transgender identities, experiences, and embodiments. By presenting as a transgender identity, the Kanima is ultimately 'othered' by the werewolves of Beacon Hills, who regards him as being an abject and horrifying figure, suggesting that the series presents transgender identities and embodiments as being grotesque because of their disruption of the gender binary.

In contemporary werewolf texts, lycanthropy is typically "inscribed upon the body according to biological sex in the same way gender is", and male and female lycanthropy are rooted in the body and the bodily differences between men and women (Sibielski, 2013, p. 115). As Sibielski (2013) notes, in many werewolf texts, male werewolves are often extremely violent and have a "murderous hunger for flesh and blood", while in contrast, lycanthropy is often a release of "sexual hunger" for female werewolves" (p. 116). By invoking Western discourses that frame violence as a masculine trait and sexual hunger as a feminine trait, werewolf texts frequently associate femininity and masculinity with women and men, respectively, reasserting notions of biological essentialism. Broadly speaking, *Teen Wolf* also represents werewolfism as being highly gendered, which can best be seen by the significant differences in the forms and transformations which the male and female adolescent werewolves take. The second season of the series focuses on Derek, who becomes the new alpha of Beacon Hills, as he 'recruits' isolated and abandoned teenage characters into his pack, offering them the gift to become werewolves and gain the power to potentially escape from their lives. This broader group of adolescent shapeshifter characters includes Jackson, Erica Reyes (Gage Golightly), Isaac Lahey (Daniel Sharman), and Vernon Boyd (Sinqua Walls), and the season explores the range of body changes associated with their transformations. Although the four newly turned adolescent shapeshifters experience several similar changes because of being bitten, including enhanced hearing and strength, increased aggression, and the ability to shapeshift, their lycanthropic transformations are highly gendered.

Prior to her transformation as a werewolf in 'S2E3: Ice Pick', Erica was depicted as being ‘unattractive’ through her frizzy hair, lack of make-up, and over-sized clothing, and because of her epilepsy, she is ostracised by her peers (Sibielski, 2013). After being bitten by Derek, Erica's transformation into a werewolf triggers her own sexual awakening of sorts and she begins to embrace her sexuality, desires, and sexual urges. The following day, during lunch time, Erica walks down the

school cafeteria. A tracking shot reveals that even Erica's human form has been transformed, as she is seen wearing leopard print high heels, a tight mini skirt, and perfect hair and make-up. This sudden change in Erica's appearance causes a significant stir in the school cafeteria as all her high school peers stare at her; Lydia Martin (Holland Roden) is particularly curious, demanding to know "who...the hell...is that?" (Passmore & Andrew, 2012). Unlike her male werewolf peers—Scott and Isaac—who are often prone to seemingly random and violent outbursts, Erica's human form and gender performance undergoes a significant metamorphosis as she is now considered sexually desirable to her classmates. This change in personality and appearance illustrates Sibielski's (2013) claim that in twenty-first century text, becoming a werewolf also results in changes to the characters' human personalities and their human bodies in the time outside the full moon.

In female werewolf narratives, female lycanthropy is often linked to the development of insatiable sexual desires, and 'she-wolves' are often depicted as being a "furry femme fatale" whom men are in danger from (Cininas, 2010, p. 7). Erica develops a ferocious sexual hunger and is aggressive in her sexual pursuit of Scott, threatening both him and his girlfriend, Allison Argent (Crystal Reed). In class, Erica tells Scott "I'm exactly your type", transforming her eyes so that they are golden while bearing her wolf fangs at Scott. The werewolf, famously characterised by Freud (1955) as the 'beast within', often embodying the unconscious suppression of socially unacceptable urges towards sexuality, violence, and death – particularly where women are concerned – is uniquely suited to this representation" (p. 112). By depicting differences in body changes associated with lycanthropy due to the differences of the biological sex of 'male' and 'female' werewolves, *Teen Wolf* appears to presume that there is a gender binary system. In other words, the series appears to depict gender as an "expression of intrinsic biological sex" and therefore, female werewolves will behave and act in accordance with their sex, and likewise for male werewolves (Genovese, 2021, p. 163). "The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, 2006, p. 14). While on one hand *Teen Wolf* reasserts that gender and biological sex are inherently connected, Erica's gender presentation changes post transformation, suggesting that gender is a performance.

6.5 The Kanima as 'Other' among the Queers:

By 'transing' the Gothic, Zigarovich (2018), explores the connections between the Gothic and transgender identities, experiences, and embodiments to reveal the use of transgender plots and characters in the Gothic. This approach allows for interpretations of the Gothic which acknowledge queer and other border-crossing concepts but primarily focus on the transgender-spectrum. Moreover, the TransGothic imagines 'trans' as a space that allows for potentially new ontologies and interpretations (Zigarovich, 2018). Although Jackson is not an explicitly transgender character, his experience as the Kanima can be read as a metaphor for transgender embodiment and experiences. Specifically, this includes being 'othered' and ostracised by the Beacon Hills werewolf pack, bizarre and supernatural bodily changes, and Jackson's subversion of what it means to be human, werewolf, and even shapeshifter. As werewolves are depicted as a blend of both human and lupine features, their form invites us to deconstruct our preconceived notions about what qualifies as 'monstrous'. Several features associated with werewolves, including the physical nature of their metamorphosis, remain salient in popular culture narratives. However, as Gardenour (2015) proposes, the meaning of the creature itself is continually re-written to reflect our contemporary socio-cultural anxieties, especially in relation to the teen body. Disrupting socio-cultural notions of what is a werewolf, the Kanima is depicted as being especially grotesque, abject, and repulsive, and is repeatedly 'othered' by Scott and his pack of allies.

At the start of season two, Scott and his friends investigate a string of murders and violent attacks, and discover the Kanima, who they initially believe to be another werewolf. The protagonists have difficulty in finding consistent and reliable information, exemplified by Stiles who, in 'S2E4: Abomination', could only find "one thing online called a Kanima – it's a Werejaguar from South America that goes after murderers" (Taylor & Andrew, 2012). Because of this lack of reliable information and interaction with the Kanima, Stiles falsely assumes the werewolf is Lydia, who is working alone, terrorising and murdering the residents of Beacon Hills. There are several striking similarities between the Kanima and werewolves, including: 1) a heightened sense of power and aggression during the full-moon; 2) the ability to shape-shift from human to 'animal'; and 3) they can turn into shapeshifters after being bitten by a werewolf. Exploring the cultural history of the monster, Cohen (2007) argues that they are "disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies" typically refuse 'easy' categorisation (p. 6). However, the difficulty in defining and categorising monsters means they also "demand a radical rethinking of boundary and normality" and their very existence "is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure" (Cohen, 2007, p. 6).

The 'radical' rethinking of boundaries and norms can be applied to the Kanima who, initially, refuses easy categorisation by deviating from contemporary socio-cultural understands of what is a 'werewolf'. There are significant and obvious differences between the two creatures, including their physical appearance and the nature—and process—of their transformation. For instance, the werewolves in *Teen Wolf* have large wolf-like fangs, claws, neon-coloured eyes and are covered in hair. While a werewolf mutation, the Kanima form resembles a reptile with its yellow eyes, green scales, sharp black teeth and nails, long tail, and has ability to produce venom to paralyze its victims. The Kanima's deviation from 'conventional' features of werewolves indicates that it is a "liminal challenge to prevailing binarisms", and as Alexander (2018) proposes, this challenge lies at "the heart" of what it means to be a "Gothic monster" (p. 186). The Kanima is neither a male nor a female werewolf, and therefore this creature represents a 'break' in the highly gendered system in the Beacon Hills wolf pack. Unlike the werewolves of Beacon Hills, who even after transforming can be categorised as fitting within the male/female gender binary, the Kanima lacks genitalia and typical gender and sex markers/ characteristics.

Discussing Mystique from the *X-Men* film franchise as transgender and Gothic character, Alexander (2018) explores how Mystique's mutant form challenges the gender binary and can be read as a metaphor for transgender and non-binary identities. Specifically, Alexander (2018) connects the Gothic monster and abjection to X Men's Mystique and transgender embodiment, arguing that Mystique exhibits "trans characteristics" through the depiction of her body—her blue skin and ability to shapeshift—and the disruption of the "notion that gender identity is explicitly tied to morphology and alluding to the possibility of a non-binary psyche" (p. 188). This link between the Gothic monster and the transgender body can similarly be seen with Jackson whose gender, when in the Kanima form, is undecipherable. Unlike his werewolf peers, who even after transforming are still categorised within the male-female gender binary, the Kanima's—who much more closely resembles Mystique in reptilian appearance—morphology refuses strict categorisation. Hurley (1996) explores the sensation of uncanniness as being a symptomatic response to liminal phenomena which disrupt or challenge socio-cultural norms and behaviours. For Hurley (1996) bodies which have "no 'proper' form' and are liminal in nature "confound and exceed the classificatory systems designed to contain matter" (p. 186). This idea of a sense of uncanniness arising from bodies which are regarded as being an anomaly, or unable to be placed into strict categories, is evident with the Kanima, especially when Scott and his pack discover and meet the shapeshifter for the first time.

After his first encounter with the Kanima, Scott refers to the Kanima as "it" or "that thing" - gender neutral terms as they do not know what or who it is or how to even categorise it. The immediate sense of revulsion that Scott experiences after being compared to the Kanima, along with drawing attention to abnormalities with its body—namely, its tail—can be read as an analogy for the gender policing many transgender people experience. As Payne and Smith (2016) posit, gender policing, especially regarding people who are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, draws "attention to the heteronormative social norms that are used to reproduce the lines between normal, different, and unacceptable" (p. 127). Gender policing can especially be seen with transgender people, and phrases or terms such as "'pathological', 'unstable', and 'incompleteness of body' are also frequently used to describe trans people in twenty-first-century American culture" (Alexander, 2018, p. 191). Because of the Kanima's disruption of the 'conventional' werewolf body and form, it is perceived and positioned as being an outcast among the Beacon Hills werewolf pack and is 'othered' for being a voracious and dangerous threat. In this way, Jackson faces an incredible amount of gender—or in this case, werewolf—policing from those who are meant to be his friends and allies.

Moreover, werewolves are often represented as being a threat to "any enduring sense of identity, even for those who might be queer-identified" which means that they can "be queers even amongst the queers" (Bernhardt-House, 2016, p. 165). Bernhardt-House's (2016) claim that werewolves can be considered 'other' in relation to others also considered queer can similarly be seen in how Scott and his friends interact with the Kanima. Through the monster, the Gothic explores the fear that "one of these forms might exist within one's otherwise 'normal' self" as well as the fear that an "abject entity will inflict retribution, driven by jealously of another's normality" (Alexander, 2018, p. 188). After being discovered, the Kanima is immediately positioned and perceived as being an outcast among the supernatural community, and especially the werewolves. Throughout the course of the season, Scott and his friends make multiple comments indicating their perception of the Kanima as 'other'. For instance, in 'S2E03 Ice Pick' Scott remarks to Allison—who had just been teasing him about being the Kanima and having a long tail—that "I don't have a tail. I'm not growing a tail - ever". This sense of otherness is reiterated by Stiles who confirms Scott's suspicions, "You were right. It's not like you. I mean, it's eyes were almost, like...reptilian" (Taylor & Andrew, 2012).

In their discussion of the 'Transgothic', Zigarovich (2018) draws on Gayle Salamon's work on the body and sense of identity and self, arguing:

> Salamon challenges the epistemological certainty of the body and seeks to conceive transsexuality through phenomenological and psychoanalytical interrogation of the relationship between one's felt sense of the body and the body's corporeal contours (p. 182).

In other words, trans identities can be conceived around examining the relationship between one's felt sense of the body and the body's corporeal contours, or the material body. It appears that Jackson has a complicated relationship with his physical body as there is a disconnect between his body and his sense of self and identity. Throughout season one and season two of *Teen Wolf* there are hints and suggestions that Jackson is not entirely comfortable with his body and his identity, and how he views himself in comparison to his peers' perceptions of him. After discovering that Scott is a werewolf, Jackson repeatedly blackmails his classmate into 'turning' him into a werewolf, threatening to reveal Scott's hidden identity to his girlfriend, Allison. Although not explicitly stated, it appears that Jackson's sustained threats of intimidation, violence, and blackmail comes from a place of jealously. Most notably, Jackson is less than empathetic when Scott attempts to explain his own challenges after becoming a werewolf, telling him "You can hear anything you want, and run faster than humanly possible. Sounds like a real hardship, McCall". Halberstam (1995) argues that the Gothic inspires fear of and desire for the other, fear of and desire for the possibly latent perversity lurking within the reader themselves. Jackson has a desire to experience the same bodily changes that Scott has already experienced and does not care about the ramifications of such a transformation. Further confirming Jackson's complicated relationship with his body and the desire to transform, after saving Derek's life, Jackson demands to be bitten as it is "my turn to get what I want" (Davis & Mulcahy, 2011). While these statements from Jackson do not explicitly state he is uncomfortable with his body, his comment of 'getting what I want', coupled with blackmailing his classmates, reveals Jackson's intense desire and willingness to go to extreme and even manipulative lengths to become a werewolf - and therefore, completely transform his body.

Once bitten, Jackson is excited for the next full moon, wanting to document and witness his transformation. In 'S2E02 Shape Shifted', Jackson borrows Matt' Daehler's (Stephen Lunsford)—another student in his biology class—video camera. Although Jackson keeps his (potential) werewolf transformation secret, he does explain to Matt that he wants to document "my history. And I want to be able to see it happening. All of it" (Cochran & Mulcahy, 2012). Although Jackson does film himself, he wakes up the next morning human and in his bed; it appears that he did not transform into a wolf. Jackson's desire to film his first werewolf transformation during a full moon can be compared to another character who has who has been discussed extensively in relation to the Gothic and transgender embodiments - Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine) from *Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

Buffalo Bill is a serial killer who murders and flays women so he can create a 'skin' suit for himself. Throughout the film, Bill films himself, like Jackson, wearing his skin suit to document his

transformation in identity and performance of gender. Notably, Bill tucks his penis and records himself wearing an orange shawl, bright golden eye shadow, pink lipstick, and the scalp of one of his victims, complete with a full head of hair. As Halberstam (1995) argues, Bill does not understand gender as being inherent or innate, and instead, reads it as being "a surface effect, a representation, an external attribute engineered into identity" (p. 177). Buffalo Bill's desire to kill for skin to gain an identity as a woman suggests that in *Silence of the Lambs* skin itself is identity, rather than simply being the surface of an interior identity (Halberstam, 1995). Jackson similarly wants to witness his own bodily transformation; however, the nature of his transformation is vastly different. Instead of having the ability to wear a suit as an external manifestation of how he feels internally about himself like Buffalo Bill, Jackson's transformation is of his own repressed inner beast - the Kanima. Unable to witness the metamorphosis itself, Jackson must film himself. Halmberstam (1995) proposes that Buffalo Bill constructs his own identity, a posthuman gender, whereas in contrast, Jackson does not have the same level of control of his body and transformation. Due to the mutation in the werewolf gene, Jackson loses his sense of identity and memory while as the Kanima, signalling a disruption in his cycle of transformation.

Furthermore, Jackson is extremely distraught and angry when he realises his footage has been edited so he is unable to watch the metamorphosis. However, that his footage was edited, alongside the broken camera lens, suggests *something* happened during the evening. According to Butler (2006), as a cultural sign, the fantasised body can never be understood in relation to the body as real. Rather, the body:

> can only be understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy, one which claims the place of the 'literal' and the 'real'…The limits to the 'real' are produced within the naturalized heterosexualization of bodies in which physical facts serve as causes and desires reflect the inexorable effects of that physicality (Butler, 2006, p. 97).

For Jackson, the fantasied body is the werewolf body. He associates the physical changes and desires happening to him as being an effect of his transformation into a werewolf. For instance, after being bitten by Derek, he imagines himself as being a werewolf and what it would be like. Jackson is shown experiencing body dysmorphia when realising he is not a werewolf and is upset that he is still human, as he feels trapped within a body which does not fit his own sense of self as a werewolf. The representation of the Kanima in *Teen Wolf* as a horrifying and grotesque figure because of its inability to complete the cycle of transformation typical of werewolves can be seen as a reflection of socio-cultural anxieties around the adolescent transgender body and identity in the twenty-first century.

Werewolves, witches, and adolescent rites of passages:

Like *Teen Wolf, The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* also explores the connection between the woods, folklore, and adolescence as a time of transformation through the figure of the werewolf and the witch. Much like how werewolves are frequently associated with anxieties and fears around adolescence and bodily transformation, the witch body is also used in Gothic narratives to explore, mediate, and even challenge the boundaries between child, adolescent, and adult (Punter, 2017). As Punter (2017) suggests, the witch can, at the very least, point out the ways in which "such boundaries are themselves socially constructed" (p. 99). Furthermore, the witch can transgress these boundaries, and often 'patrols' the boundary "where we must pass if we are to come into our promised, yet feared and despised, adulthood" (Punter, 2017, p. 99). The witch's capacity to highlight the constructed and liminal nature of adolescence is exemplified by Sabrina who repeatedly advocates "for power in liminality" as she is critical of why she must choose between the path of light, the human world, and the path of night, the witch world, arguing that she wants to remain in both worlds (Dudek, 2021, p. 111). Initially, Sabrina refused to fully identify and immerse herself in the culture and community of the 'Church of the Night'. Instead, Sabrina frequently challenged centuries-old religious rules, practices, and rituals as well as socio-cultural norms, often causing conflict between her family and their church's High Priest, Father Blackwood. This could be seen especially in Sabrina's desire to retain her humanity and connection with the human world, especially her former boyfriend, Harvey Kinkle (Ross Lynch), and two best mortal friends, Rosalind 'Roz' Walker (Jaz Sinclair), and Theodore 'Theo' Putnam (Lachlan Watson). By disobeying the rules and expectations expected of a coming-of-age female witch—including signing the Book of the Beast—Sabrina can be regarded as a liminal figure who does not fit neatly within the human or the witch world.

While the first season of the series explored Sabrina's liminal position between mortal and witch worlds, the second season shifts to a focus on the "intersection between gender politics and sexuality, challenging a male-female binary in which men have power and privilege and women do not" (Dudek, 2021, p. 117).Dudek (2021) argues that one of the most noteworthy aspects of Sabrina's experience of "witch-becoming" is how it relates to her sexuality, as her choice between witch and human is "underpinned by an ambiguous…and problematic dichotomy about sexuality identity" (p. 114). Sabrina's participation in the rituals associated with the festival of Lupercalia in 'Chapter 14: Lupercalia' marks a significant turning point in the teenager's transition from childhood into

adulthood. After Sabrina has pledged herself to the Dark Lord, and leaves her life in the mortal world behind, she begins to explore her sexuality and sexual desires with her lover, Nicholas 'Nick' Scratch (played by Gavin Leatherman).

When Sabrina's aunts explain the significance of Lupercalia, Zelda claims that the festival is "no better time to start" having sex, as "Lupercalia is a symphony of sensuality and pleasure, not shame and regret as the false god would have you believe". From Zelda's statement, it is evident that not only is Lupercalia is meant to be a time where adolescent witches and warlocks should start having sex, sex should also be celebrated. The representation of Lupercalia is one way in which *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* incorporates folklore in its narrative, as it is one of the oldest and longest lasting Ancient Roman festivals (Vukovic, 2015). According to Vukovic (2015), "one of the most conspicuous and important aspects" of the festival is its "significance as a ritual of fertility" and importance for "women attempting to conceive" (p. 17). Historically, Lupercalia was held in February, which was thought to be a period of purification, and women were often "freed or purified from influences" which could impact their fertility and ability to conceive (Holleman, 1985, p. 302). However, rather than urging the importance of marriage, procreation, or childbearing, in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* the festival appears to be a 'safe' space for adolescent witches and warlocks in Greendale to explore their own sexuality without fear of consequences such as pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.

The forest beyond the town or city has long been an important part of European folklore, and many folk tales start with the "protagonist wandering alone in the forest, having somehow strayed from the beaten track" (Murphy, 2013, p. 20). This depiction of the forest as a frightening and untamed space, home to wild animals and beasts, is no coincidence, as "the Europeans in the 'Old World'" were fearful of the unmapped and unexplored terrain that surrounded "their first cities and towns" (Murphy, 2013, p. 20). Forests were where unsuspecting and unprepared travellers could lose their way or be attacked by wild animals and wild men. Murphy (2013) argues that pre-existing fear and wariness of the forest was "superimposed onto early impressions of the 'New World'" and influenced how the first settlers of North America perceived the forests they encountered (p. 2). Like *Teen Wolf, The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is similarly influenced by this long-held and historical fear of the woods, and depicts the North American forest as being a frightening space because werewolves are 'free' to release their primal selves. For instance, at the beginning of the second night of the festival, Ambrose warns the students they should not stray too far from the path, as "all manner of lust-filled creatures lurk in the woods". Parker (2020) argues that the source of the deep dark forest's terror is

usually mysterious and "just out of sight" (p. 2), and there is a tendency to frame the "Gothic Forest in decidedly *vague* terms" (p. 3). Ambrose's phrase, 'all-manner of lust-filled creatures' is both broad and vague, as rather than simply stating or defining what these creatures are, he instead plays into the teenagers' fears of the forest. Additionally, the warlock's statement here mirrors how young adults and adolescents, especially young women, are told to be careful in the dark when by themselves, as they could find themselves in a dangerous situation. However, in Sabrina's case, Ambrose's warning of lust-filled creatures becomes a reality, as both her and Nick are attacked by Nick's werewolf familiar, Amalia, multiple times throughout the course of Lupercalia.

On the surface Lupercalia appears to be a positive festival which celebrates the development of blossoming adolescent sexuality. However, before Sabrina and Nick can be physically intimate with each other, they are violently attacked by Nick's werewolf familiar, Amalia. Amalia's horrifying appearance and attack reinforces the notion that teenagers who explore their sexuality in the woods are at risk from unknown dangers and terrors. Amalia is represented as being jealous, monstrous, and abject, as she attacks Sabrina and Nick in a violent rage, unable to be reasoned with. Nick reveals that had Amalia "banished…to the dark forest of the base of the mountain" because "when I started going on dates, she got jealous. Scary jealous. This was to the point of obsession; Amalia wouldn't let anyone get close to me". The representation of Amalia as being abject and monstrous because of her apparent anger and jealously that Nick was dating Sabrina is not new nor surprising, given that the figure of the werewolf has often been used as a symbol for the uncontrollable and dangerous nature of female sexuality (Bernhardt-House, 2016). According to Bernhardt-House (2016), "the basic form and function of…werewolf images are often portrayed as ones of horror…and total animality, and thus a sexualised werewolf encounter would be degenerative and atavistic, threatening the most basic sense of humanity" (p. 164-165). As werewolves are often represented as having a beastly, unnatural, and atavistic nature, Bernhardt-House (2016) posits that they can be regarded as queer figures, as these traits are often used to describe queer people. Furthermore, Bernhard-House (2016) also contends that because the figure of the werewolf actively disrupts normativity, transgresses the boundaries of propriety, and interferes with the status quo in closed social and sexual systems, it can be seen as a metaphor and totem for queerness, and for groups of people who are semi-outcasts within their respective societies.

Given that Amalia was banished from the coven because of her obsession with Nick, she is arguably an outcast within the Greendale coven because of her sexual transgression, both in terms of breaking boundaries of propriety regarding the witch-familiar relationship, as well as her incestuous

love of Nick. According to Haggerty (2006), the act of incest is inherently political because it defies the attempt of society to control desire. Haggerty (2006) also argues that in Gothic texts, "love between mothers and daughters, fathers, and sons, again and again challenges the status quo with the taboo around which the patriarchal system is organised" (p. 19). Although Amalia is not blood-related to Nick, given that she raised Nick as a young child, she can arguably be seen as his foster or adoptive mother. In this way, her obsession with Nick and jealously of Sabrina calls into question the boundaries between mother and son relationships, as well as the relationship between witches and their familiars – she is ultimately regarded as being an abject, monstrous, and horrifying figure.

Although Nick does appear to have some sympathy for Amalia, and cries after her death, she is ultimately killed by Sabrina. Amalia is presented from Sabrina's perspective as a jealous outsider, trying to disrupt Sabrina's relationship with Nick; the audience learns little of Amalia's backstory nor does she explain her actions, even when Sabrina and Nick attempt to reason with her. Amalia can be seen as a metaphor for the nature of female sexuality as being abject, uncontrollable, and dangerous, especially female sexuality which does not reinforce heteronormativity or heterosexuality. In this way, Amalia fails to perform gender correctly by performing the most transgressive act of a mother – being sexually attracted to their children. According to Creed, people who fail to 'do' gender correctly are often punished by cultures and laws which have a vested interested in maintaining a stable distinction between masculine and feminine; a vested interested in positioning idealised constructions of woman and man as natural and incontestable. Women who fail to perform femininity within the tight boundaries within which it is prescribed at each stage of the reproductive life cycle are at risk of being positioned as bad and are subjected to discipline and punishment which masquerades as treatment. Creed's claim that those who fail to perform gender correctly are punished can be seen with Amalia, who questions the very nature of sexuality and desire, and therefore is ultimately killed for being too transgressive in breaking the boundary between familiar and warlock/witch.

6.6 Nature, Death, Rebirth, and transformation:

As previously discussed in chapter five, the Gothic has a preoccupation with how the past inhabits the present. The return of the past in the present is often a site of terror, and Gothic texts return obsessively to the personal, the familial, and national pasts to comment on contemporary anxieties (Dent, 2016). Of particular importance to the exploration of the past, and its impact on the present, are Gothic landscapes, which are spaces where political, psychological, social, and cultural ideas are

laid bare, transmitted, and often critiqued. The contemporary Gothic is fascinated by spaces of absence – spaces, including those within easy reach of civilisation, where one could disappear without a trace (Spooner, 2007). Specifically, Gothic narratives are often concerned with the belief that the forest or lake beyond the city or suburb serves as a perfect backdrop for terror, as they are a "place where the representatives of civilisation are pitched against forces that embody savagery and disorder" (Murphy, 2013).

Natural landscapes such as woods, lakes, rivers, or the wilderness, which are often depicted as hostile, malevolent, or haunted spaces in Gothic texts, can be a site for the exploration of the past and its legacy on the present. As Yang and Healey (2016) posit, in American Gothic narratives, nature is often represented as being perverted and haunted by traumatic events or deaths, resulting in the repressed 'attacking' the present through supernatural occurrences. The use of natural landscapes, especially the woods and the lakeside as sites of repressed cultural and historical trauma can be seen in both *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-Present) and *Riverdale* (2017-Present). *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is especially fascinated with legacies of the past and its impact on the present; this includes the familial past of the Spellman family, as well as the collective history of both the Greendale coven and Greendale's mortal residents. It is through supernatural occurrences, such as the return of the dead who were brutally murdered, as well as the repetition of dreams and premonitions of hidden familial secrets which position Greendale's natural landscapes, and especially the woods, as being perverted by past traumatic events and a repressed cultural history.

Although the woods in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina, should* be a safe space, it is often depicted as being inexplicably unsafe, unfamiliar, and uncanny, and is a site where the past quite literally returns to haunt the present. The first indication that the Greendale woods are haunted by the past occurs in the pilot episode, 'October Country', when Mary Wardwell (played by Michelle Gomez) comes across a young woman on her way home. The woman, who unbeknownst to Wardwell is Lilith/ Madam Satan (played by Jenna Berman), appears almost out of nowhere from the woods, bruised, dirtied, and dishevelled. When Wardwell questions Lilith on what happened to her, she replies "the woods attacked me". Although Lilith's claim that the woods attacked her presents the woods as being both threatening and violent, her answer does not appear to shock Wardwell, who instead, offers a supernatural explanation for the apparent violent attack: "Everyone knows about the Salem Witch trials, but they happened right here. 1692, 13 witches were hung in the forest, and their angry spirits have haunted the woods ever since". Following a traumatic event, its memory can often intrude into the present like a ghost, functioning as a "haunting absent presence of another time in

our time" (Westengard, 2019, p. 21). Wardwell's comment implies that although the witch trials in Greendale are a seemingly forgotten part of the town's history, the trauma of this brutal event has manifested itself in the form of angry spirits.

The series alludes to the return of the Greendale 13 as ghosts wanting revenge in the form of premonitions, when a naïve Sabrina has a vision of their return. In 'October Country', Sabrina is unsure of whether to sign her name in the Book of the Beast, and after the advice of her cousin Ambrose, goes apple-fruit picking at a local orchard to find a malum malus, which Ambrose described as being "the fruit of knowledge". While fruit picking at orchards may be a seemingly mundane and everyday activity, it quickly becomes apparent that the orchard is a creepy and isolating setting as Sabrina becomes lost in a disorientating maze. When Sabrina reaches the end of the maze, she discovers a clearing in the woods with an old apple tree. After eating the sole red apple hanging from the tree, Sabrina has a particularly disturbing and horrifying vision, where the woods appear engulfed in a fiery-red mist. Sabrina, who is now drenched in blood, notices the bloody and decomposing corpses of 13 women hanging from the tree above her. The vision has a particularly uncanny effect, as what seemed like a safe space, an apple tree orchard, has suddenly become frightening and disturbing. The premonition blurs the boundary between the past and the future, as while the malum malus was meant to give Sabrina a vision of the future, it instead alludes to how the coven's past actions are connected to events in the future.

Furthermore, before eating the apple, Sabrina initially ponders "how will I know which one is the malum malus", however, with an almost uncanny precision, it appears that Sabrina 'knows' which apple to eat. Royle (2003) argues that "a feeling of uncanniness may come from curious coincidences, a sudden sense that things seem fated or 'meant to happen'" (p. 1). Royle's (2003) claim can be seen in this scene, as after initially getting disorientated in the orchard's maze, Sabrina's almost sudden knowledge of what apple to eat produces an uncanny moment where it appears fated that she was meant to find the location where the Greendale 13 were hung. Furthermore, after biting into the apple, it suddenly turns rotten and crawling with maggots. Piatti-Farnell (2017a) argues that when dimensions of food consumption and horror are connected, the experiences of the senses become entangled with notions of fear and revulsion. This is especially true with the consumption of rotten food – disgust is a visceral reaction found in the psychosocial structures that delineate the boundaries of that which is proper, and that which is not. This can be seen in Sabrina's visual reaction to the rotten apple, as the teenager looks disgusted, and throws the apple on the ground. Sabrina's visit to the orchard to find the malum malus suggests that the woods is a site of knowledge and wisdom, however,

the revelation that the apple is rotten is an obvious allegory for the rotten past that has occurred in the woods, and how it is perverted by this history.

In this instance, Sabrina's vision of the return of Greendale thirteen in the woods where they were hanged in 1692 exemplifies how the American Gothic frequently returns to the forest to the forests that confronted European settlers and explorers in the early colonial period (Murphy 2013; Keetley & Sivils, 2017). The depiction of forests as being perverted by historical forces in Gothic narratives is not surprising, given that the dominant American relationship with nature has always been unsettling. The return of the Greendale 13 can be connected to Monnet's (2013) claim that American Gothic criticism frequently employs the Gothic to "expose the fractures in American history and ideology" (p. 215). Through Sabrina's vision, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* depicts America as a land haunted by the ghosts of colonialism (Keetley & Sivils, 2017). In the finale episode of Part One of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, the Greendale 13 physically return to haunt and kill both the mortal and witch residents of Greendale. Lilith, who posed as Ms Wardwell during Part One and Two of the series, summoned the Greendale 13 by glamouring as a teenage girl and sacrificing a teenage boy from Baxter High in the same woods where they were hung. Later in the episode, Theo wakes up in the middle of night, and looks outside of his window to see the 13 witches in a circle. The ghost of his ancestor, Dorothea appears to Theo, telling him:

> They've come back, the 13 women hung to death as witches…The same women I buried here, on our land. No one else would cut them down from the hanging trees in the woods… They were hunted and betrayed…They come for vengeance.

Through Dorothea's statement, frames the Greendale witch trials as a past injustice that is yet to be resolved, and it is because of that injustice that the 13 witches have returned for revenge. One of the most common manifestations of the terror of death in Gothic texts are the ghosts or spectres that haunt the present, and the supernatural becomes a symbol of our past rising against us, whether it be the psychological past or the historical past (Beville, 2014). Beville's (2014) claim that the supernatural can be seen as a symbol for the past rising against the present, as well as to open discourse around the darker aspects of human nature can be seen through Dorothea's statement. Given that the 13 returned both to the location where they were hung, and later the location where they were buried suggests that their history and fate was tied to the land in Greendale. The ghosts of Greendale's colonial past have quite literally come back to haunt the town – their return to the

locations where they were murdered and buried symbolise how the town's horrific history grew entrenched into the town's very soil.

Furthermore, the haunting of Greendale by the 13 also questions the very nature of Sabrina's coven regarding their response to the traumatic event, as the coven sat silent in fear during the witch trials. According to Beville (2014), "the most dominant feature of the Gothic…is its capacity for managing the unspeakable", especially in regard to the barrier between both humankind's past and present. Gothic texts allow the contemporary reader or viewer to contemplate the uncivilised human instincts that have determined historical events throughout the years. Beville (2014) argues that Gothic texts explores and questions human nature and instincts through the return of ghosts, which can be seen as the manifestation of our subjective desire for its return and for discourse to open unto the darker side of our known realities. As a result of the Greendale Coven's silence, the 13 women were hunted down and hung, and were sacrificed for their greater survival. After Ambrose discovers the Greendale 13 in the woods, and reveals the news to his aunts, Hilda and Zelda give Sabrina a history lesson of the coven. Unlike her family members, Sabrina was unaware of the witch trial in Greendale, however, the return of these women brings forth what was culturally and historically invisible to Sabrina – the trauma of the witch trials and persecution of witches. Beville's (2014) claim that the emergence of hosts represents our desire for discourse on the darker aspects of human nature can be seen with Sabrina learning about her coven's own history. The woods and the wider natural environment and ecosystem of Greendale, as well as the nature of the Greendale coven has been perverted by this event and have become haunted by this repressed/ forgotten legacy.

In both *Riverdale* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, death, or the prospect of death in isolated settings like the woods or by the lakeside works to position nature as being terrifying and a site of danger. Nature, especially woods and lakes, are often represented as being liminal spaces, and a border land between the living and the dead. Specifically, liminality refers to being between two socially recognized states, and it is in this in-between space that sociocultural norms are often suspended, and practices of symbolic inversion proliferate (Turner, 1982). The woods and lakes are frequently depicted as being liminal spaces in both series, as they are sites where the boundary between the living and the dead, and the past and the present, become blurred. It is in the woods where the living are often confronted with the dead, or death in general, though this takes contrasting forms in both series. While the dead physically and explicitly return in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* as either ghosts or zombies, the presence of the living dead are more implied than shown in *Riverdale.*

In 'Chapter Eight: The Burial', Sabrina uses dark magic and necromancy to resurrect Harvey's brother Tommy, after being killed in the Greendale mines due to a spell cast by Agatha and Dorcas. Throughout the episode Sabrina is repeatedly told to not raise Tommy back from the dead by her two aunts, Hilda and Zelda, and Ambrose, and yet, Sabrina ignores their warnings. Instead, Sabrina goes through with the resurrection spell with the help of Prudence, Nicholas, and Dorcas, however the teenager disrupts and disturbs the natural order of the boundary between life and death. Rather than sacrificing another witch to resurrect Tommy, Sabrina attempts to also bring Agatha back to life by burying the latter in the Spellman Graveyard, which is said to have the most fertile soil on earth, able to resurrect witches. By ignoring her family's warnings and failing to perform the necromancy spell as intended, Sabrina has disrupted the natural order between life and death, causing her family to alienate and ignore her. This alienation is most seen with Ambrose, who berates Sabrina for bringing back Tommy:

> You mucked about the most wicked, potent forces that exist…I'm talking about death cousin… You've upset the natural order, you do realise that? There are rules. There's no cheating fate. You've completely erased the line this time.

Ambrose's comment that Sabrina 'upset the natural order' and 'erased the line' positions her as transgressing the boundary between life and death. Botting (2014) defines transgression as involving a "crossing of limits or breaking of taboos and rules" (p. 9). Through transgression, one becomes more aware of boundaries and taboos, including their existence as well as the consequences of breaking them. When discussing transgression in Gothic narratives, Botting (2014) gives the example that telling a gothic heroine not to do something is enough to make her wish to do it, as the prohibition is an incitement to curiosity and desire. Botting's (2014) claim here can be seen with Sabrina, as she is seen to be curious to bring back tommy – every time she is told no, she appears more wanting to bring him back to life from the dead. In this way, Sabrina is being a 'normal' teenager, testing the boundaries and limits of rules – in this case, she is quite literally testing the boundaries between life and death, and because she has transgressed that boundary too far, she has upset the natural order and is seen as being abject by those around her.

As a result of Sabrina's transgression, her spell had disastrous and unintended consequences, including Tommy being reduced to a zombie-like state, and Agatha throwing up soil and gravel from the Spellman's graveyard. In 'Chapter Nine', because Agatha keeps throwing up soil, much to her sisters' horror, Hilda comes to the academy to examine her. Afterwards, Hilda confides in Ambrose in private that "the dirt that she is throwing up is basically gravel, which tells me she shouldn't have been brought back in the first place. The earth owes a soul, so it means to collect". According to Piatti-

Farnell (2017a), "the perception of vomiting as a disturbing and unnatural activity is unarguable; this is probably in view of the discomfort that the process causes, and the fact that, culturally and psychoanalytically speaking, we are witnessing what belongs inside, making us aware of our fragile boundaries" (p. 45). What makes this sequence particularly disgusting is that rather than throwing up food, Agatha is instead is throwing up soil and gravel from the Spellman's graveyard. Agatha's vomit consists of material which are not meant for human consumption, making it quite uncanny in that it is the return of something which should never be witnessed again, although in this case, it is the return of something which should probably have never been consumed. Throwing up soil highlights how bringing back both Agatha and Tommy from death has upset the natural order of life and death, as the earth is owed a soul, highlighting the fragility of the human fragility and human connection to the earth.

Conclusion:

As discussed in this chapter, there was a focus on the American forest as being as a site of transformation, self-discovery, and the discovery of buried secrets for the adolescent characters in *Teen Wolf* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Adolescence in *Teen Wolf* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is depicted as an especially unique and transformative life stage. In contemporary U.S culture, adolescence is typically conceptualised as a period where teenagers undergo significant and intense physical, mental, and social changes. During this cycle of transformation, adolescents often challenge the borders of behaviour, "trying to become [an] adult without becoming adulterated" and wanting to find their identity (Coats, 2004, p. 142). Although adolescence is thought to be a 'natural' part of growing up and becoming an adult, it is often framed as a "dangerous and unruly period" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 12).

Although not explicit, the representation of Jackson as the Kanima can be seen as an allegory for transgender identities and embodiment. The last decade has seen a growing number of laws primarily target the rights of transgender individuals, especially children and teenagers in public schools. Alongside these anti-LGBTQIA+ policies and state bills, people who are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community continue to face higher levels of violence, harassment, and discrimination. The social rejection and stigma that Jackson endured while he was the Kanima arguably speaks to the continued discrimination many transgender individuals face in twenty-first century America. Notably, Jackson is continually othered by his peers, even his fellow werewolf classmates, and his appearance — his tail

and green scales—is perceived to be disgusting and abject. Like many transgender individuals who do not fit within the gender binary of male and female, neither does Jackson fit as being either human or werewolf. In this way, *Teen Wolf's* emphasis on Jackson's Kanima body as being abject for disrupting the accepted conventions of the werewolf body can be interpreted as a metaphor for contemporary fears of transgender identities and bodies. Moreover, that Jackson even faces social rejection from his werewolf peers reflects how many transgender people continue to be discriminated within the LGBTQIA+ community, highlighting need for greater social support for transgender individuals in the contemporary U.S.

In *Teen Wolf,* the shapeshifting characters can be seen as a metaphor for the divide between the urban and the natural world, as well as how those who begin their journey of self-discovery are often rendered monstrous. The focus on wooded settings, especially in *Teen Wolf,* is arguably not surprising given recent decades have been an especially turbulent time in terms of political and social action on climate change and addressing a range of other environmental issues. In *Teen Wolf* the presence of werewolf characters who attack anyone that might accidentally stray into the local forest arguably reflects socio-cultural anxieties around not just the woods, but nature. Specifically, the invasion of the Alpha werewolf pack from Beacon Hills Reserve to the town centre can be read as a metaphor for the ways in which nature is increasingly perceived to be 'fighting' back against people due to the looming climate crisis.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DREAMING HOUR – Distorted Time, Dreams and Visions

7.0 Introduction:

The ability of Gothic narratives to disrupt systems of culture can especially be seen in how the Gothic functions as a lens on the instability and mutability of the past, present, future, and history (Beville, 2014). Albright (2009) suggests that in the Gothic a "shadow of the past…looms across the present" and that Gothic texts are a way of negotiating tensions involving the passing of time, "hence the preoccupation with situating the past in relation to the present" (p. 24). Even in narratives set in the present-day, the past always finds a way to interrupt the progress of time and as a reminder of anxieties related to time and the past. In the Gothic, dreams, hallucinations, the crumbling castle, the haunted family home, and the woods are all spaces where characters, either consciously or unconsciously, return to and remember painful, traumatic, and terrifying moments and memories (Yang & Healey, 2016; Punter, 2012). Furthermore, Gothic narratives often feature two dimensions including a "fearful sense of inheritance in time" as well as a "claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space" (Baldick, 1993, p. Xix). Baldick (1993) elaborates, arguing that Gothic narratives feature the point of intersection between time (temporality)—often in the form of a family curse or the revelation of buried secrets—and space (spatiality) including dungeons, locked rooms, the family home, and other domestic settings.

This point of intersection between time and space can be seen in Gothic narratives which frequently depict domestic spaces as being haunted houses, decaying mansions, crumbling castles, or "permeable family homes under threat…from within and without" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 200). Although not a comprehensive list, conventions and plots frequently associated with the domestic in the Gothic include concerns about family lineage and inheritance, the return of the dead (either through haunting, corpses or other supernatural occurrences), the home as being uncanny (visions and hallucinations) and shifts in the dialectical relationship between the home and its inhabitants—including characters who become entrapped within its walls and are unable to leave (Soon & Ng, 2016). The domestic setting in the Gothic functions as a vehicle to comment on anxieties about being unable to move forward and remaining trapped in the past. More than simply a backdrop for the

action, domestic settings are central to Gothic texts, and can a space for socio-cultural anxieties around the passing of time.

The instability and mutability of the construction of time in the Gothic can especially be seen in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, *Teen Wolf*, and *Riverdale* as these series repeatedly feature narratives about anxieties and fears associated with both the passing of and confusion with time. These series repeatedly question and critique contemporary Western notions about the nature of time and disrupt linear/ chronological notions of the passing of time as well as notions of truth and reality. The first chapter discussed time in Riverdale as being temporally stagnant and decaying, while the chapter two examined cycles of transformation regarding the werewolf and witch bodies. The third and final analytical chapter will examine time in terms of the blurring between reality and fantasy, past and present in the selected series. This chapter will critically examine how the teen protagonists in *Riverdale* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* live in alienating and uncanny spaces which appear to operate in their own reality.

Suburban, domestic, rural, and isolated settings are all constructed, albeit in different ways, as being liminal spaces, which defy linear or logical understandings of time and notions of progress. Characters often experience distorted realities where they often lose a sense of reality or reason and become unable to tell the difference between what is true and what is fiction, whether it be hallucinations, dreams/nightmares, or a 'break' in time. Moreover, the final analytical chapter will discuss how *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* and *Riverdale* often feature dreams and nightmares which are either prophetic in nature or reveal repressed emotions and desires. These imaginative spaces—dreams, nightmares, or hallucinations—are where the teenage protagonists must confront the unfamiliar, the unknown, and the unseen future. The representation of adolescent characters being stuck in time—in a multitude of ways—in these series can be seen as a representation of contemporary fears around time and reality itself.

7.1 The Crumbling Mansion – Time, the Domestic, and Corpses in Thornhill:

Cheryl Blossom is a young heroine who, in many ways, can be seen as living in exile in her family ancestral home, Thornhill. Afraid of leaving her home, Cheryl is terrified and haunted by ghosts and a range of other supernatural and other unexplainable phenomena. It is through the Blossom family, and especially Cheryl, that *Riverdale* plays into the trope of the haunted Gothic castle/ mansion as being a site of timelessness. To critically explore the construction of Thornhill as being a space where

there is a break and blurring between fantasy and reality, it is first important to briefly examine the representation of the castle setting. The haunted castle has long been one of the Gothic's central motifs (Punter, 2012). Since the Gothic's origins with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), there has been a focus on living spaces and a fascination with the "psychological and emotional effects of one's living environment" (Murphy, 2009, p. 26). This setting is frequently constructed as being a space where characters' sense of perception is distorted and the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur. For instance, the castle is usually depicted as a setting where one may witness ghosts walking down dark or abandoned corridors or experience a vision or hallucination of their younger self. It is a space where anxieties which should have long since disappeared re-emerge in terrifying ways (Punter, 2012). Yang and Healey (2016) claim that the Gothic landscapes depicted in British fiction like *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* are often ominous and eerie mansions. Typically settled atop terrifyingly high cliffs, Gothic castles have macabre architectural structures, as well as hidden dungeons, chambers, or secret passageways. Further, these settings are haunted by spirits and function as a site to visualise anxieties around family inheritance, dysfunctional sexual relationships, marital infidelity, murder, supernatural elements, and an entrapped female object of desire (Yang & Healey, 2016; Punter, 2012). Although American Gothic fiction has its roots in British Gothic novels (Monnet & Briggs, 2016), the castle setting has not been "quite as central to the American gothic" (Keetley & Sivils, 2018, p. 6).

Instead of the haunted castle, the American Gothic has "materialized the crimes of family and race in more mundane houses: Poe's crumbling aristocratic mansion, Hawthorne's house built on land stolen from native Americans" (Keetley & Sivils, 2018, p. 6). The first analytical chapter explored the construction of an artificially pristine but uncanny domestic setting: the American suburban home, as exemplified by the Cooper family. In comparison, this chapter will more closely examine another central domestic setting in *Riverdale*: Thornhill. Unlike the highly idealised homes of Elm Street, Thornhill is a crumbling aristocratic mansion built on land stolen from the Uktena tribe. Located on the outskirts of the town, the Blossom estate is frequently described as being "a house of secrets and mysteries" and the "most haunted place in Riverdale"(Anderson & DeWille, 2021). Almost always depicted as being encircled by light fog, Thornhill is set on an expansive estate that also includes the town's largest and oldest maple tree forest. Although it is a crumbling American mansion, many tropes and plots associated with the haunted castle in the literary British Gothic can be seen with this setting. Like the literary Gothic castle, Thornhill also has hidden chambers and secret passageways that appear

to lead to nowhere, macabre architectural structures including large glass-stained windows and grand chandeliers, and an ancestral portrait gallery of past and present Blossom family members.

On the surface, Thornhill appears to be a grand and expansive estate, with a large and well-maintained garden, courtyard, graveyard, and pool. Inside is similarly as luxurious, and the home is decorated with dark wood Victorian-inspired furniture, walls painted a deep red, and hundreds of red and white lit candles. However, in 'Chapter Fifty-Seven: Survive the Night', when Cheryl walks downstairs, it is revealed that the basement and the Blossom family crypt, which also functions as a chapel, is anything but grand or luxurious (Talalay, Aquirre-Sacasa, & Grassi, 2019). The paint—an off-white—on walls of the Thornhill basement show considerable signs of aging, peeling off the walls, while the carpet is littered in debris, paint, and dust. The basement, which appears abandoned and empty, is slowly decaying and disintegrating, showing the unavoidable passing of time. That this area of the Blossom home has been left to waste in ruin highlights how through the "process of corrosion", the walls of Thornhill have "become spectral" (Edensor, 2001, p. 46). Ruins and decaying or crumbling buildings symbolise the intersection between the past and the present. The people who had once inhabited these spaces now exist just as a residue, and left are the "fuzzy memories and dreams and fantasies in the shreds and silent things that remain" (Edensor, 2001, p. 47).

The peeling paint, the debris on the carpet, and the lack of maintenance of the basement crypt in Thornhill function as reminders that the Blossom ancestors who had once walked its walls are now merely a trace and a residue left behind. Toth (1997) suggests that the Gothic is concerned with the collapse of the "boundaries between the 'normal' and the…'other'", seen through the depiction of landscapes of moral, spiritual, and bodily decay (as cited in Edensor, 2001, p. 45). In chapter five, this thesis discussed the economic, social, and physical decay of Riverdale as a symbol for the seemingly slow death of small American towns and suburbs. The depiction of decay as a symbol for the inevitability for death can similarly be seen with the decaying walls of Thornhill. It can be argued that the peeling paint and lack of maintenance work to visualise the decay of the Blossom empire, whether it be the family's financial troubles, maple trees which no longer produce maple sap, or familicide. It is fitting then, that it is in the semi-abandoned crypt of Thornhill where Cheryl hides and regularly visits Jason, after discovering her brother's grave-robbed body on the outskirts of town. The basement is quite literally a setting of bodily decay.

Returns from the dead are staple features of Gothic narratives, where the "returns with sickening force: the dead rise from the grave or lay their cold hands upon the living" (Spooner, 2007, p. 31). Despite his death in *Riverdale's* premiere episode, Jason's decomposing body periodically

returns throughout the series, through either through flashbacks and memories, hallucinations, dreams, or being dug up from the grave. The corpse is an "uncanny…object that often refuses to stay dead" and "has been 'imbued with otherworldly powers'" (Davison, 2017, p. 4). Although Jason is only ever implied to either be a ghost or undead in Cheryl's dreams, his body does appear to return with 'sickening force' as his corpse and the circumstances of his death can never seem to be buried for long. Savoy (2002) posits that American Gothic narratives frequently return to the past, whether it be personal or familial, to "implicate the individual in a deep morass…of desires and deeds that allow no final escape from or transcendence of them" (p. 169). Contemplating Savoy's (2002) ideas, Jason's reappearance suggests that Cheryl is caught in a cycle where she is unable to escape or 'transcend' from her personal and familial past: the tragic and untimely murder of her twin, who appears unable to truly stay dead.

As season four progresses, Cheryl must increasingly lie to those closest to her, especially her then girlfriend Toni, to hide her secret that she has been 'communicating' with Jason. Davison (2017) argues that "death serves as the quintessential emblem of the Freudian uncanny in the Gothic; while being 'of the home' and familiar, it also remains secret, concealed, and unfamiliar, a reality that has become, like mourning, 'obscene and awkward'" (p. 2). Jason's corpse remains secret and concealed from everyone, as Cheryl has locked him in the chapel and covered with a white blanket to avoid being caught. The presence of Jason's corpse is awkward, and a reminder of not only Cheryl's mourning of her twin, but also that death itself is obscene. Death is an inevitable certainty for everyone, however, as Freud suggests, people tend to not believe in their own death and our "unconscious behaves as if it were immortal" (as cited in Bauman, 1992, p. 19). Bauman (1992) discusses how, because of this unconscious belief that we are immortal, death has become:

> a guilty secret; literally, a skeleton in the cupboard left in the neat, orderly, functional and pleasing home modernity promised to build. The most arduous precautions were to be taken to prevent the skeleton from being discovered (p. 137).

Although people tend to 'hide' from the thought of death, separating themselves physically, socially, and emotionally from the dead or dying, Cheryl believes she can still connect with her Jason. That Cheryl hides Jason in the chapel in the basement, locked away shows that she has put a significant number of precautions in making sure her brother's corpse is not discovered by those closest to her. In this way, Jason is, quite literally, Cheryl's guilty secret and a corpse left in a decaying and crumbling basement to a Gothic and haunted mansion. By refusing to bury him again, Cheryl can be seen as

refusing to believe that those closest to her will die. For Cheryl, the thought of either herself or someone she loves being dead is unimaginable.

At the end of 'Chapter Fifty-Seven: Survive the Night', Cheryl walks to the end of the basement to the Blossom family chapel and starts grinning "welcome home Jay-Jay" (Talalay, Aquirre-Sacasa, & Grassi, 2019). A medium close-up shot reveals that Cheryl is indeed talking to Jason's corpse, who is seated on a wheelchair. Jason's wide-open mouth, extremely pale skin, and awkward and unnatural body posture indicate Jason's death state. His corpse is lifeless and dull like an inanimate object. Aries (1997) posits that in the Western world, death is considered "*indecent*…dirty and polluting" and culturally abject (as cited in Bauman, 1992, p. 139). Consequently, corpses, as well as those who are dying, are to be kept hidden and out of sight, and are" the ultimate absence…of 'non-being'" (Bauman, 1992, p. 16). Functioning as a reminder of mortality, the unavoidability of death, and the passing of time, the dead are emblems of "previous generations and the past" (Davison, 2017, p. 5). Despite engaging in conversation with her brother, a moment of silence follows as Jason does not respond to Cheryl, for her cannot ever talk to her again. The horror of the close-up shot of the corpse is not just that Jason has been unearthed and grave robbed, but that he has become a 'void'. In death, his soul, personality, and identity are absent, leaving only his body behind – Jason's body serves as both a reminder of how he is a 'non-being' as well as a symbol of Cheryl's past.

Moreover, there is an incongruence between the 'reality' of the situation—that Jason died years earlier—and Cheryl's desire to reconnect emotionally and physically with her brother. Discussing corpses as being abject, Kristeva (1982) posits that:

> the border has become an object. How can I be without border? That elsewhere that I imagine beyond the present, or that I hallucinate so that I might, in a present time, speak to you, conceive of you—it is now here, jetted, abjected, into 'my' world…I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away (p. 4).

Kristeva (1982) explores how corpses, and its bodily fluids and excrement's, reveal what people must ignore—death—to live. For Kristeva (1982), seeing someone's corpse can collapse the border between life and death, and can break down and disrupt how we communicate to or imagine that person. Cheryl's devotion to and care of Jason's corpse suggests that she imagines a world beyond the present-day, as she believes she is in a space where not only is she able to conceive of Jason as being alive but is also able to directly speak to him. Not only has there been a breaking down of the boundaries of what it means to be alive, but also a breaking down of time. Kristeva (1982) suggests that the corpse is a clear example of the uncanny and is "'something' that I do not recognize as a thing.

A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me" (p. 2). Cheryl visits Jason's corpse multiple times a day, typically before and after school, and engages in what appears to be, to Cheryl, a two-way conversation. For example, in 'Chapter Fifty-Nine: Fast Times at Riverdale High', when she visits Jason, Cheryl is brimming with excitement, and asks Jason what shirt colour to wear at her first day back at school: "Well, Jay-Jay, which one for the first day of school? Rebellious white after Labor Day, or my signature red? I agree 100%" (Grassi, Ewing, & Romanowsky, 2019). In this interaction, Cheryl clearly recognises the decomposing body as being familiar to her. Rather than being simply a void of 'nothingness', Cheryl appears unable to make any clear distinction between her desire to reconnect with her brother and his death.

While in the chapel/crypt, Jason's corpse is well-groomed, cared for, and preserved; Cheryl frequently combs his hair and puts him in a fresh set of clothes. He has been seated perfectly on a wheelchair and his hands have been carefully placed on his knees and he is (mostly) sitting upright. Edwards and Graulund (2013) suggest that grotesque bodies are usually incomplete or deformed and violate "the laws of nature" (p. 4). This is because grotesque bodies undermine or disrupt existing taxonomies, definitions, and classifications, and question what it "means to deviate from the norm" (Edwards & Graulund, 2013, p. 3). Although Graulund and Edwards' (2013) discussion of grotesque bodies is largely focused on decaying corpses and mutilated bodies, it can also be applied to Jason's mostly well-preserved corpse as well. Jason was shot in the head years earlier, however, rather than being a putrefying and rotting corpse, he is perfectly presented and preserved by Cheryl, and therefore, appears more like a 'corpse-doll' than the body of someone who is dead. Moreover, Jason's body appears to be unnatural, "corrupt and grotesque in its patent artificiality" (Joseph, 2017, p. 269). In this way, he remains both incorruptible and identifiable as Jason Blossom even in his post-mortem state. There is something unnerving, unsettling, and even supernatural about a corpse that is not decomposing but instead relatively well-preserved, as there is a flagrant disregard for the biological processes of decomposition.

Furthermore, the 'relationship' Cheryl forms with Jason's corpse is regarded as being abject and 'perverted' by members of her own family. In 'Chapter Sixty-Three: Hereditary' Cheryl's uncle Bedford (Alex Zahara) breaks into the chapel and discovers Jason's body. Uncle Bedford looks in disgust at Cheryl, and belittles her, exclaiming: "I always knew there was a certain sickness in our bloodline. But this, this is monstrous" (DeWille & Correa, 2019). Edwards and Graulund (2013) argue that perversion is what is considered abnormal or deviant in "relation to the standards of normalcy" (p. 87). However, perversion is also connected to notions of desire and pleasure, and consequently,

people who are often considered perverted do not necessarily regard their actions as being "repulsive or grotesque" (Edwards & Graulund, 2013, p. 88). The image of the young heroine sitting next to a dead body appears to be an interruption in time and a refusal to accept the truth about the past. Cheryl deviates from culturally accepted norms when it comes to mourning the dead and forms an unhealthy and unusual attachment with her brother's physical body. It is arguably her inability to separate fiction, her desire to be reunited with Jason, from the reality of his death which is truly abject and horrifying in this scene.

7.2 Cheryl Blossom as the Cursed Heroine:

In Gothic narratives, the family home is often depicted as limiting the freedom and agency of the female subject who is confined to the house. Initially, the Gothic heroine is depicted as enjoying an idyllic and secluded life, however, is later imprisoned or confined to a castle by a powerful male figure. The male antagonist, who is usually the heroine's new husband or an older family relative, hopes to "subordinate her to…dominance and control" (Soon & Ng, 2016, p. 4; Mitchell, 2017; Punter, 2012). Often strictly governed and closely monitored by those around her, including family members, the heroine's identity and gender performance are under constant surveillance. *Riverdale* employs the use of "highly stereotyped characters and plots…often derived from Gothic literary fiction" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 3). Moreover, as Monnet and Briggs (2016) argue, the Gothic "frequently breaks the illusion of realism" to "explore the limits of narrative and stylistic possibilities" (p. 2). Like many Gothic narratives, *Riverdale* can be "playful, experimental, self-consciously artificial" (Monnet & Briggs, 2016, p. 2). Specifically, the series repeatedly tells its viewers—through Jughead's opening and closing monologues, character dialogue, or the use of props (usually books)—that it is employing Gothic tropes, plots, and characters through a tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. A notable example of how *Riverdale* 'playfully' and 'self-consciously' employs Gothic literary tropes can be seen with the representation of Cheryl, who is often referred to as a "Gothic heroine" (Maxwell & Warn, 2017) whose life is "defined by Gothic tropes" (Williams & Goi, 2019).

Other female characters, specifically Polly, and Cheryl's mother, Penelope Blossom (Nathalie Boltt) can also be regarded as Gothic heroines for they too are entrapped in Thornhill, closely monitored by a domineering, suspicious, and cold Clifford Blossom (Barclay Hope). However, it is through Cheryl that the series truly explores the connection between the domestic space, the family home, and the women who inhabit the space. In *Riverdale,* Cheryl's narrative, and sense of identity,

voice, and agency are innately tied to the Blossom family estate, Thornhill. This connection between the domestic setting and the self is frequently explored in Gothic narratives, where the home is often represented as being a metaphor of self for its occupant(s), who is typically a young woman (Junker, 2015). Throughout the series, Cheryl is emotionally abused by her narcissistic parents, who confine her to the walls of Thornhill. However, more terrifying than Penelope and Clifford, Cheryl is haunted by dolls possessed by the spirits of dead relatives, and experiences hallucinations and premonitions of buried family secrets. Eventually, Cheryl descends into paranoia that she is cursed to live a tragic and unhappy existence due to her ancestors' transgressions. Becoming a recluse, Cheryl isolates herself from her former friends, partners, and peers, and exiles herself to Thornhill until she can absolve the sins of the Blossom family.

Soon and Ng (2016) argue that it is important to consider the house as a spatial presence when discussing the complicated relationship between the family home and the female subject in Gothic narratives. The spatial presence of architecture demands "careful interpretive attention" and should be considered as being "an active participant in the development of the narrative" (Soon & Ng, 2016, p. 6). Architecture in film and television is essential to understanding the historical context, and the identities and psychological states of characters. When critically examining the house as a spatial presence in the Gothic, Soon and Ng (2016) draw on Walter Benjamin's concept of the trace, which can be summarised as how a subject and a lived space both inevitably leave impressions on each other in the process of habitation. As Soon and Ng (2016) claim, it is "through the subject's negotiation with interior space that establishes" the occupants imprint on the house and vice versa (p. 6). In this way, both the lived environment and the individual person become one in the same, and therefore, this problematises our understanding of "self and other, male and female, seen and unseen, reality and fraction" (Soon & Ng, 2016, p. 12).

For instance, in *Chapter 80: Purgatorio* Cheryl confides to Toni that the “Blossom curse runs deep. I’m doomed to a life of unhappiness” and it is revealed that her ancestral home has been under constant construction for some time (Aquirre-Sacasa & Adeleson, 2011). Large sections of the mansion have been entirely sealed off due to construction, while there is extensive scaffolding on the exterior walls. In Gothic narratives, the young heroine and the house are depicted as being extremely close, so much so that she becomes "house crazy" and the heroine “refuses to leave it, even though the house is clearly malignant" (Junker, 2015, p. 334). Space can become invested with paranoia, and consequently, the home can become cordoned off by borders, both visible and invisible. These borders, Walker (2002) argues, are meant "to [tell] people where they can and cannot be" (p. 829; as

cited in Soon & Ng, 2016, p. 80). After reuniting with Archie after seven years away at war, Toni remarks that "no one's seen Cheryl in town for years" (Aquirre-Sacasa & Adeleson, 2011). While brief, Toni's comment reinforces the narrative that Cheryl has been living in isolation and has become 'house crazy'. Moreover, Cheryl is paranoid that if she reintegrates herself into the wider Riverdale community it will "start as something good, and end up corrupted, like everything I try to do" (Grassi & Adelson, 2021). Cheryl descends into madness, "triggered by the mechanisms of denial, repression, and lack of conscience" (Monnet, 2019, p. 33). Overcome with paranoia, Cheryl believes she must pay the price for the sins of her ancestors and the role they played in the genocide of the Uktena, the local indigenous tribe. In this way, Thornhill has been cordoned off by invisible walls which appear to prevent Cheryl from leaving, as she believes it to be the only place where she is safe from her family's curse.

Furthermore, Cheryl's self-imposed exile to Thornhill is influenced by the story of Sarah Winchester and the mythology of the Winchester Mystery House. Cheryl compares herself to Winchester and recounts the story to Toni. After being "cursed by the deaths brought on by their family's stock and trade…rifles", Sarah built the Winchester House and "believed that as long as it remained under constant construction, the curse couldn't consume her" (Aquirre-Sacasa & Adeleson, 2021). A real-life historical figure, following the death of her daughter and husband, Sarah Winchester bought a small house in San Jose, California, in 1886, and began remodelling the home (Junker, 2015). Almost immediately, rumours about Sarah started circulating. It was reported that "Winchester's neighbours said that she continued construction of her house because 'the spirit world' told her that only when the house was completed would she die" (Junker, 2015, p. 332). Despite little historical evidence to suggest that these rumours about Sarah are true, the mythology around Winchester House endures and remains a site of cultural fascination because it symbolises America's "complicated relationship with class" as well as the "conflation of the white female body with her domestic space" (Junker, 2015, p. 332).

By commenting on the Winchester House mythology and comparing it to the relationship between herself and Thornhill, Cheryl considers herself destined to follow in the same fate. Bauman (1992) argues that to think about death, people's thoughts about the subject must "already be processed, artificed, tinkered with, interpreted away from their pristine absurdity" (p. 18). Bauman (1992) also suggests that while death cannot ever be escaped or denied, "each *particular*…moment" of death "can be resisted, postponed, or avoided altogether" (p. 140-141). By connecting her life, and therefore, also her death, to Thornhill, it appears that Cheryl has already 'processed' the thought of

death. However, the thought of dying is only imaginable to Cheryl in the context that she can 'cheat' her curse, and therefore avoid her inevitable death – Cheryl is arguably consumed by her own mortality. Cheryl's belief that she can only remain alive if the house under construction suggests that her life is connected to the expansion of Thornhill, and therefore suggests that Thornhill and Cheryl are doubles of each other. The incorporation of the Winchester mythology in Cheryl's narrative arguably taps into desires and fears regarding our own mortality, and "the hope that, somehow, we can transcend our bodies and defeat death" (Junker, 2015, p. 336). The depiction of Thornhill and Cheryl as being innately linked arguably reinforces the cultural belief in Western society that "white, upper-class women can and should be equated with their domestic spaces" (Junker, 2015, p. 333). Thornhill operates simultaneously as a space which reveals Cheryl's unconscious desires and fears, while also as a space where she is subjected to persecution by those closest to her. It is through Cheryl's entrapment that *Riverdale* can explore the power of domestic settings, in this case, a crumbling aristocratic mansion, to unnerve or "even destroy" its inhabitants (Soon & Ng, 2016, p. xiii).

7.3 The Haunted Home:

One of the central concerns in the Gothic is the threat of death, in its multiple manifestations, whether it be corpses, skeletons, crypts or graveyards, the fear of dying, or the return of ghosts which haunt those living in the present. From its opening scene introducing the mysterious circumstances of Jason's death, *Riverdale* has long had a fascination with death as an interruption in time, and a vehicle to comment on anxieties around unresolved injustices and crimes. While chapter five explored the decay and possible death of Riverdale and the American Dream, the series' preoccupation with death can also be seen in the frequent depictions of corpses, skeleton bones, and Cheryl's desire for immortality. Another way in which the terror of death manifests itself in *Riverdale* is through the depiction of ghosts and spirits which haunt the characters, especially the residents of Thornhill. Although the second chapter discussed ghosts, nature, and the American Gothic, this chapter will more closely examine the depiction of the haunted home as well as ghostly possession. As Liggins (2020) notes, haunting can be broadly defined as a sense of being "troubled, discomforted and trapped in the past" and can take many forms (p. 6). However, one of the most common manifestations of this "terror of death" (Beville, 2014, p. 31) are the ghosts or spectres who return to "manifest unresolved crimes or crimes" that are no longer able to be kept hidden (Kindinger, 2017, p. 60). Hauntings, therefore, are inherently connected to both memory and space. This can be especially seen in haunted house narratives, where

the home is constructed as a liminal space where characters are able to access histories and past events, they would not have otherwise been able to experience (Janicker, 2015). The house , no longer a place of comfort, becomes uncanny and terrifying because its occupants unwittingly become acquainted with secret transgression.

Frequently described as being the most haunted home in Riverdale, Thornhill is a space where its occupants, especially Cheryl, are troubled by the past. One notable example can be seen in 'Chapter Ninety-Five: RIVERDALE: RIP (?)'. Cheryl and Brittania 'Britta' Beach (Kyra Leroux), a homeless teenage girl taken in by the Blossoms, unwittingly find a graveyard of skeleton bones in the mines underneath Thornhill. As Armstrong (2016) suggests, skeletons are a "temporal interruption" and an "intrusion of a deeper past from which dead matter/material decomposes" (p. 127). After finding a skull, Cheryl and Britta shriek in horror and shock, as they were not expecting to find human remains in the mines. Skeleton and bones are also "aberrations…which communicate both the localized brutality of their own demise and the human horrors evident in their remains" (Armstrong, 2016, p. 128). Like Jason Blossom's corpse, the discovery of skeletons in the mine underneath Thornhill are an interruption in time, especially as Cheryl herself was looking forward to the future of her family legacy and church. Following the starting discovery, Nana Rose reveals that their ancestor, Abigail Blossom, was executed in 1892 and was burned at the stake for allegedly being a witch. After this revelation, an enraged Cheryl recites a curse from Abigail's journal, unwittingly conjuring her ancestor's spirit who has returned to enact revenge on Riverdale's residents.

Molesworth (2014) suggests that "specific times and durations of time are oddly overrepresented, sometimes to the brink of ridiculousness" (p. 30). It remains unclear what 'present day' *Riverdale* is set in, and yet throughout the series, there is often a connection made between supposedly supernatural phenomena and the time of its occurrence. Throughout the series there are numerous references to days of the week, calendar dates, specific years, past and upcoming events, especially through Jughead's opening and closing monologues. After multiple failed attempts to undo the curse she had put on the town, Cheryl places three poppets—each symbolising Archie, Jughead, and Betty—next to three lit red candles. As a Victorian clock chimes at 3am, Britta' enters Thornhill's chapel to blow out the red candles. Time in the Gothic is more than simply 'out of joint', as it is also "aggressively in joint" and "marked by exceptional precision and promptness" (Molesworth, 2014, p. 33). Molesworth (2014) elaborates on their suggestion that time in the Gothic is also 'in joint', arguing that the clock and the hour each appear to possess "an almost talismanic power to inspire plot" (p. 38), and "almost nothing occurs…without some reference to the hour of its occurrence" (p. 36). The

figuration of the hour and time as capable of action and influence can be seen with the representation of supernatural occurrences—and especially the presence of ghostly figures—in Gothic fiction. Moleseworth (2014) provides several examples, including Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), in which the Bleeding Nun appears "on the fifth of May of every fifth year, as soon as the Clock strikes One" (Lewis 1998 [1796]: 141).

It appears that Britta is compelled to repeat the same cycle every night: sabotaging Cheryl's ritual. As the Kanima, Jackson is in essence possessed by his inner beast, unable to control his actions, witness his metamorphosis, or even remember his actions as the reptilian shapeshifter. Although not possessed by an inner beast like Jackson, in *Riverdale* Britta is possessed by the spirit of Abigail. When Abigail takes control of Britta's body, she is completely unaware of her actions or behaviour. Britta seems to be similarly 'triggered' by the sound of the clock ticking at 3am as she is no longer herself but has 'become' Abigail Blossom. The teenager's exceptional promptness indicates how time in the Gothic is in joint as 3am appears to have some sort of uncanny power to trigger the same behaviour in Britta. Ghosts or spectres only "appear in specific moments, and specific locations" (Del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, 2010, p. 7), which can be seen with Abigail, who is only able to return to the Blossom estate at night, through a young adolescent. The spirit possession of Britta and the compulsion to blow out the candles at the same time each morning exemplifies how one of the hallmarks of "supernaturalism…is that it happens on time" (Molesworth, 2014, p. 35). Freud identified repetition as one of the central characteristics of the uncanny. The uncanny is "not something that is revealed to be uncanny once and for all, it is rather the insistence of the uncanny thing, that it returns again and again and again, which is at the core of its uncanniness" (Lausten & Uglit, 2012, p. 84; as cited in Martin & Riley, 2019). Gothic characters are often shown as struggling in a web of repetition caused by their unawareness of their unconscious drives and motives (Lloyd-Smith, 2004). Britta repeating in the same behaviour each night highlights how she is caught in a 'web' of repetition because of here lack of awareness about Abigail's return and desire for revenge. Britta's successive attempts to interfere with Cheryl's spell at exactly 3am serves as "concrete ticks and tocks" in contrast to the construction of time as otherwise being ambiguous in *Riverdale* (Molesworth, 2014).

The possession of Britta is temporary as it appears that Abigail's spirit can only gain control of Britta's body during the night-time, suggesting a connection between spatiality, the body, haunting, and time. Exploring the relationship between spatiality, the domestic sphere, and time, Soon and Ng (2016) argue that the night can have a profound effect on self because the darkness can impact people's "visual capacity to distinguish self from [the] world" (p. 33). Soon and Ng (2016) elaborate,

arguing that moments of 'darkness' can "instigate the mind" to "entertain the belief that the boundary between our body and its beyond does not exist" (p. 33). Night-time, therefore, is a period where the boundaries between the body and the supernatural—ghosts and spectres—become blurred. It is not surprising that this is also the time when Britta is possessed by Abigail as the blurring of boundaries between the self and 'the beyond' can similarly be seen with spirit possession, which can be defined as being "the hold exerted over a human being by external forces or entities" (Boddy, 1994, p. 407). Possession, then, is a broad term referring to "an integration of spirit and matter, force or power and corporeal reality, in a comos where the boundaries between an individual and her environment are acknowledged to be permeable, flexibly drawn, or at least negotiable" (Boddy, 1994, p. 407). Through Abigail's spirit and possession, the body is suggested to be permeable, able to be taken control over by a spirit.

During a flashback of Abigail's execution at the stake, it is revealed that she is Cheryl's doppelganger (Abigail is also played by Madeleine Petsch), and in many regards, the two can be seen as doubles of each other. Both Blossoms are reclusive and barely leave their ancestral home Thornhill, where they home-school adolescent orphan girls, and are subjected to torment and persecution by male authority figures, albeit in different ways. Webber (1996) argues that the doppelganger is always a figure of displacement, as they appear out of place in the text it visits and work as an interruption to the supposed linear flow of time. Further, Webber (1996) suggests that doppelganger could be considered as being a ghostly presence, because they are return to the present as "a ghost of time past". Abigail is both simultaneously 'Other' and a double, as while she is an intruder from the past, she has also returned from a past where Thornhill was once her home, and she was the Blossom heir. In 'Chapter One Hundred and One: Unbelievable', Nana Rose, unbeknownst to Cheryl, performs "an arcane ritual" to transfer Abigail's soul from Britta's body "into my granddaughter's" (Paterson & Seidenglanz, 2022). Abigail could only make her appearance at night when in Britta's body, however, after inhabiting Cheryl's body, she is able to take complete control over even during the daytime.

Since the publication of Derrida's Spectres of Marx, the ghost or spectre has been seen as a tool helpful for analyses of time and space. This is because ghosts are liminal figures which are positioned "between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality" (Kindinger, 2017, p. 58). Neither dead or alive, and neither corporeal object or absences, the liminal nature of ghosts challenges contemporary understandings of death, and the belief that the two spheres of life and death should be separated (Hakola, 2014; Buse & Stot, 1999). Through the possession of her double, Abigail becomes physically re-animated, and her transgression of the boundary between life

and death questions contemporary understandings of what it means to be dead. By taking control of Cheryl's body as her own, Abigail crosses the boundary from invisibility, death, and immateriality to being visible, alive, and a corporeal being able to fully immerse herself in the world of the living. When Britta asks Nana Rose, "but where did Mistress Cheryl's soul go?, Nana Rose reveals that "once untethered, it dissipated into the ether. Into nothingness. There is no more Cheryl Blossom" (Sullivan & Dafoe, 2022). According to Nana Rose, Cheryl is dead because she no longer has a body and therefore has no soul, which suggests that there is a connection between the body and the soul. It is not enough for Abigail to simply return as a spirit confined to a liminal position between life and death. To be completely alive, Abigail needs to have a physical body of her own. By being reincarnated in Cheryl's body, Abigail can escape the threat of death, and this return marks an ultimate interruption in time as disrupts the idea of death as being finale and unavoidable.

According to Richardson (2003), ghosts are no longer part of the world of the living, however, they refuse to settle into their grave or the afterlife and "instead occupy space where they should not properly be" (p. 347). Abigail refuses to settle in the afterlife, seen in her attempts to stop Cheryl's ritual from reversing her curse which would have also 'returned' her spirit into the afterlife. This refusal to respect the boundaries between life and death can further be seen in how Abigail, through Nana Rose's help, does not stop until she is able to inhabit the 'right' body, her doppelganger. However, the possession of Cheryl can be connected to the uncanny and the "crisis of the proper and natural", as the 'rightful' occupant of the body has been forcefully removed (Royle, 2003, p. 2). According to Royle (2003), the uncanny is concerned a "critical disturbance of what is proper…a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property…ones' so-called 'own' name" (p. 2). The possession of Cheryl, and Abigail's ability to live freely in the world in the living is a disturbance of the very idea of personal autonomy, identity, and that one's body is their own. Furthermore, the replacement of Cheryl's soul for Abigail's can be seen as an example of the horror which can arise when the secure boundaries of inside and outside are disrupted because "there is an emptying out of the object. It is the moment, a horrifying moment of the birth of a new space which ruins habitual space" (Botting, 2008, p. 142). We see this in Britta's horror that Cheryl no longer exists, as is silent and too stunned to speak when she realises that Cheryl is no longer alive, because there was an emptying out of her friend's soul – her body has now become the space of Abigail.

At night, as Abigail is getting ready for sleep in her boudoir, she looks into her dressing table mirror to then see Cheryl's spirit as her reflection. Cheryl is banging on the glass, crying, and screaming "let me out of here". However, her plea for freedom falls on deaf ears as Abigail then smashes the

mirror with a candlestick: "We'll have no more of that, I think" (Sullivan & Dafoe, 2022). As Piatti-Farnell (2017b) suggests, the mirror can be regarded as a Gothic object through "the 'double', the terrifying Other that lingers in the margins of our consciousness" (p. 180). Mirrors are uncanny because they challenge the boundaries of the physical body and our understanding of ourselves, as "what we see in the mirror is 'us', but not quite" (Piatti-Farnell, 2017b, p. 180). The doppelganger is perceived as being both familiar and strange, and "questions the boundary between presence and absence" (Babicka, 2012). Discussing mirrors as being a passageway between the living and spirit world, Piatti-Farnell (2017b) posits that:

> Contemporary horror films of the post-2000 period have not been remiss in constructing a conspicuous presence for mirrors, especially in relation to the duplicitous conceptualization of 'soul'…mirrors are shown as containing the souls of the dead, and are used as passageways once the boundaries between this world and the next are breached (p. 182).

While Cheryl is technically not dead, she has also lost control of her physical body which means that the dressing table mirror functions as a portal for her to interact and engage in the living world. It is a space, however confining, where she temporarily resides. For Abigail, the terrifying Other is Cheryl, who 'rightfully' belongs in the body that Abigail resides in. Abigail does not see herself in the mirror but sees the reflection of her double – the person she sees in the mirror is not quite her, and not quite Cheryl either. The presence of both doubles through the mirror arguably questions the boundary between presence and absence. It is through the mirror we learn Cheryl is still alive, that she is still present somewhere deep in her body, and yet, because her body is possessed, her presence is also absent, being taken over by Abigail. That Abigail looks into the mirror and sees Cheryl, not herself begs the question Piatti-Farnell (2017b) asks: "what if…the mirror carried with it the possibility of Otherness, the unknown, the unfamiliar? What would happen if the 'evil double' in the mirror were to takeover?" (p. 180). After smashing the window with a candlestick, Abigail can only see her reflection. Or in this case, what happens if the 'good' double in the mirror becomes lost, unable to return their rightful body? Cheryl exists in a limbo and a spectre that haunts Abigail, and a reminder that the body she resides in is not her own, but someone else's. Ghosts should be regarded as being neither living or dead, but instead as a "'shadowy third' or trace of an absence that undermines the fixedness of" the dead/alive binary (Weinstock, 2004, p. 4). Although in many ways Cheryl effectively becomes dead to the world, as she is silent, unable to communicate with anyone—including Abigail after she shatters her bedroom mirror—the two have become intertwined and are now mutually dependent on each other for existence.

The first analytical chapter examined how the town of Riverdale was constructed as a place outside of time through the depiction of the decay of the American Dream. Similarly, as a ghost, Abigail can be regarded, as Weinstock (2004) proposes, an "entity out of place in time, as something that emerges into the present, the phantom calls into question the linearity of history" (p. 4). Although the period Abigail has returned too is considered 'present day', it is in fact her future and the future of the people she knew when she was alive. Upon learning that queer people are able to be 'out' and in the open, Abigail is delighted. Her delight serves as a reminder that in the not-so-distant past, in America, homosexuality was criminalised, and many queer people had to live in the closet. Moreover, ghosts operate specific—and strange—kind of social memory, an alternate form of history-making in which things usually forgotten, discarded, or repressed become foregrounded, whether as items of fear, regret, explanation, or desire" (Richardson, 2003, p. 3). Unlike the rest of the town of Riverdale who do not seem to know much about the Pickens family (excluding Alice Cooper), Abigail is able to provide commentary about the Pickens' relationship with the Blossom family and the town.

Interruption of the past into the present, through Britta/ Abigail who recalls the final moments of Abigail. Cheryl then ties Britta/ Abigail to a chair, next to a wooden fire – she is also surrounded by a circle of candles. They start chanting a spell: Spirit, we compel you, leave her…Abigail Blossom, release this child and return to the realm of the dead and take with you your curse". Abigail screams "it burns, it burns, it burns" and recalls a memory of her being burned at the stake. As Lim (2001) argues, the return of ghosts is more than simply an interruption of the past in the present, "rather, it is that 'trace', that impossible 'survival' which 'disjoins the living present'. It is 'what makes the present waver'" (p. 299). Furthermore, the return of "traumatic events…troubles the boundaries of the past, present, and future, and cannot be written back to a complacency of a homogenous, empty time" (Lim, 2001, p. 287). While Britta/Abigail is remembering and re-experiencing something which happened to her in her past—her death—she is experiencing it in the present.

7.4 Dreams in the Domestic Space:

According to Freud (1920), dreams can be seen as a "substitute for something else, unknown to the dreamer" (p. 90). Drawing on Freud's dream theory, Khapaeva and Tweddle (2012) argue that dreams are usually regarded as a "depiction of the subconscious, a screen onto which the subconscious projects its suppressed desires and hallucinations about their fulfilment" (p. 6). It is likely due to these aspects that dreams, and dreaming have become prevalent in contemporary Western literature, film

and television, and an outlet for a greater examination of Freud's work on the origins and nature of these 'desires and hallucinations' (Eberwein, 1984). While considerable discussion exists on the psychoanalytical approach to dreams (Freud, 1920), and the theoretical parallels seen in the mediums of storytelling and film, there has been limited research and representation of dreams in Gothic television. In the Gothic, key conventions include sleep-like and deathlike states, nocturnal landscapes, hallucinations, and dreams and apparitions from the past (Janicker, 2015). Given that in Freudian theory, dreams are generally regarded as a vehicle for the return of suppressed desires and the unconscious, dreams, and nightmares can be seen as inherently Gothic. Dreams and nightmares are often spaces where characters must confront the unfamiliar, the unknown, and the unseen future, and yet, these spaces also seem to contain aspects of the familiar, the known, and the previously seen past (Moore Jr., 2018).

Taking the Gothic nature of dreams and nightmares into account, this section will critically examine the representation of dreams and nightmares in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina, Riverdale*, *and Teen Wolf* as being connected to the domestic sphere and the family home. Whether it be Cheryl's dreams about her brother Jason or the buried secrets of the Blossom family, Sabrina's prophetic dreams about her destiny, or Lydia's hallucinations about Peter Hale, these 'dreams' typically take place at home, late at night. The connection between the home and dream sequences in these Gothic-horror series is not surprising, given dreams themselves often take place at night when people are asleep in their bedrooms. Soon and Ng (2016) posit that Gothic narratives on the home often focus on its "dialectical relationship with the subject as it fluctuates between a protective haven and a hostile space threatening" its inhabitants' existence (p. 2). Both the home and dreams can be considered as liminal spaces, and can shift from being place of familiarity, comfort, and refuge to a terrifying setting where its inhabitants are under threat. In dreams, the home can transform into space where there is a 'break' in reality, as characters must confront the return of repressed emotions, desires, memories, or secrets, often through inexplicable supernatural phenomena. First, this section will discuss Cheryl Blossom's dreams about her brother Jason as a clear example of the uncanny nature of dreams and will then further explore the sense of blurred realities and timelessness in 'Chapter Five: Dreams in a Witch House' in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.*

Following Jason Blossom's death, his twin sister Cheryl begins seeing visions of her brother's ghost throughout Riverdale, including the Thornhill graveyard, Pop's Diner, and the school corridor at Riverdale High School. One notable example includes a nightmare of Jason strangling and murdering Cheryl in the opening scene of 'Chapter 5: The Heart of Darkness'. During a nightmare the night before

Jason's funeral, Cheryl, dressed in a long red gown carrying a Victorian candlelight stick, is shown almost floating down the halls of Thornhill. A long shot of a dark corridor reveals a replica of Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781) hanging on the wall above a fireplace. Fuseli's painting depicts an alone and vulnerable woman with a demonic creature seated on her abdomen; the painting is often regarded as being a symbol of the phenomenon known as sleep paralysis (Schneck, 1969). *The Nightmare* draws on the traditional, or 'classical' view of the nightmare as being an attack on a sleeping victim by a supernatural being. This creature is typically depicted as being a hybrid being with animal extremities, such as teeth, claws, and horns (Stewart, 2002; Milne, 2017; Schneck, 1969). That Cheryl's dream begins with a long shot of a replica of *The Nightmare* immediately suggests that not only is this sequence is a nightmare, and therefore not 'real', but that Cheryl is also is also potentially in danger, being haunted or terrorised in some way. The painting's appearance can be seen as symbolic of Cheryl as a vulnerable young woman and the demonic creature embodies the numerous ways in which her family haunts and persecutes her.

After descending the long and grand staircase, Cheryl walks to the room where Jason's coffin—with Jason's corpse inside—has been placed for the funeral. Cheryl opens her brother's casket, and it is revealed that Jason's body has disappeared. There is nothing but blood and scratch marks, and it appears as if someone, likely Jason, has tried 'clawing' out of the coffin. When Cheryl turns around, she sees Jason's corpse, creating a moment of the uncanny. According to Royle (2003), the uncanny is "concerned with the strange, weird, and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural" (p. 1). The uncanny is a crisis of the proper as it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (including names, places, people), and is concerned with the familiar becoming unfamiliar. Royle (2003) argues that the uncanny is described in terms of making things uncertain and the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, which often challenges rationality or logic. Hakola (2014) argues that the living dead in the Gothic often points to our culturally unnatural relationship to death. The liminal nature of the living dead challenges Western understandings of death which views life and death as being inherently separate and different from each other. The return of Jason as a corpse initially confronts our understanding of what it means to be 'dead', as although his body looks familiar, he is also othered. His skin is a pale blue and decomposing, his lips are chapped, and his eyes are completely white. He is not the Jason who Cheryl knew in life. Stewart (2002) posits that dreams are involuntary events which just occur, and "expose the individual to powerful novelties that must somehow be accommodated in the psyche and personality" (p. 297). Cheryl waking up in her brother's room after dreaming about him illustrates

her mental and emotional frame of mind, as she struggles with her grief. Furthermore, Cheryl's dream could also be seen as reflecting her own anxieties and guilt about the part she played in Jason's kidnapping and then eventual death, as Cheryl blames herself for Jason's murder.

According to Valverde (2007), dreams and nightmares should be considered as a liminal sphere, as the barriers between "everyday reality and the suprasensual become diffused" (p. 67). As liminal spheres, dreams are a passageway between the ordinary world and extraordinary, uncanny, strange, or supernatural experiences. Contemplating Valverde's (2007) claims about dreams, the return of Jason's corpse in Cheryl's dream suggests a shift in the scene from the ordinary world and haven of Thornhill unto an unexplainable, terrifying and threatening experience. Drawing on Freud's essay on The Sandman, Soon and Ng (2016) challenge the traditional view of the home as a place of comfort arguing:

> In his essay, Freud identifies a characteristic of this intimate space that contradicts the traditional view of the house as a place of refuge, comfort, and rest, for corresponding with the familiar (Heimlich, or the homely) that promotes these signifiers of home is also the unfamiliar (unheimlich, or the unhomely) that directly disperses them (p. 2).

In order words, the uncanny can reveal a shift in the relationship between the house and its inhabitants. This shift can either occur through supernatural phenomena, or as the result of more "mundane circumstances such as familial conflict, a crime, or an unwelcomed intrusion" (Soon & Ng, 2016, p. 2). Cheryl's nightmare takes place Thornhill, which should be a place of refuge and comfort for the young heroine, however, through the reanimation of Jason's corpse, it becomes an uncanny and terrifying space. Moore Jr. (2018) posits that nightmares inspire terror because they occur on the fringes between waking and sleeping, and between honest moral awareness and slippery delusion. It is the dreamer's inability to distinguish between dream and reality that makes nightmares so terrifying. The return of Jason as a monster—a corpse/zombie—is explained as being a part of Cheryl's dream, reflecting Botting's (2008) claim that ghosts and monsters can result from the effects of mental processes and disturbances, rather than being a supernatural creature. Although Jason is confirmed to be dead by Riverdale's coroner, in the dream Cheryl is unable to distinguish between nightmare and reality. After seeing Jason's reanimated corpse, Cheryl shrieks in horror as she believes her brother to have returned from the dead. When she wakes up, she is screaming and appears distraught, and it takes her a moment to recollect herself as she is still processing the events of her nightmare.

The shift of Thornhill to a terrifying space then continues, however this is through more 'mundane' circumstances, namely familial conflict. Cheryl's mother, Penelope, berates her for continuing to sleep in Jason's bedroom and cruelly informs Cheryl that she is forbidden from speaking

at her brother's funeral in case she embarrasses the Blossom family. Thornhill is depicted as a frightening place and as being 'unhomely' through Penelope who berates Cheryl for being too 'excessive' in her grief, and her parents attempt to control her grief so she mourns in a way considered to be 'respectable' for a young Blossom woman. Through the representation of Cheryl as a young woman, confined to the halls of Thornhill, *Riverdale* draws on this reoccurring trope of the entrapped Gothic heroine. Since the first season, the series has continued to maintain an extremely close link between Cheryl and Thornhill, and it is through the young heroine that *Riverdale*, arguably, continues to expose the link between women and the home. The series utilises the Gothic narrative of the home as being a space which fluctuates between being a protective haven or a hostile space for Cheryl. Thornhill is home to more than just its living inhabitants as it is a space haunted by traces of the past, whether it be forgotten and repressed memories, lingering familial curses, ghosts that roam its halls, or buried family secrets. Although the dream sequence in 'Chapter 5: The Heart of Darkness' featured supernatural occurrences—namely, Jason's reanimated corpse—these were ultimately 'explained' away as being symbolic of Cheryl's grief and guilt around the circumstances of Jason's death. In *Riverdale,* dreams are often used as a space for the exploration of the uncanny and inexplicable phenomenon, however, when characters wake, they usually return to their ordinary and familiar world.

In contrast, dreams in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* are often depicted as being much more supernatural and prophetic in nature. A notable example of this can be seen in 'Chapter Five: Dreams in a Witch House', when Sabrina Spellman inadvertently frees the sleep demon, Batibat (Megan Leitch), from her prison. Batibat, who is entrapped in the Spellman residence, places Sabrina, Ambrose (Chance Perdomo), Zelda (Miranda Otto), and Hilda (Lucy Davis) into a deep sleep curse where they are tortured in their dream-turned nightmares. Similar to Cheryl's dream sequence, this episode features several Gothic tropes and conventions including the return of the repressed and unconscious, the uncanny, and the blurring of the boundaries between reality and fantasy. This section will primarily discuss Ambrose's dream sequence, which highlights how dreams in Gothic texts are often spaces where the boundaries between everyday reality and fantasy scenarios become blurred, producing uncanny interactions. Notably, this can be seen in Ambrose's experience of a dream loop, where he is compelled to repeat his death over and over again; this repetition produces a blurring of the boundary between the past, present and future. When critically analysing the depiction of nightmares in 'Chapter 5: Dreams in a Witch House', this section will also discuss how the episode employs both the "aesthetics and the politics of horror and the Gothic" (Piatti-Farnell &

Mercer, 2014, p. 1), in order illustrate how the realisation of our deepest fears and anxieties in dreams and nightmares are both terrifying and horrifying.

Ambrose's dream morphs from wish fulfilment to that of fear and dread, as several key features of the uncanny, including repetitions, the double, and severed body parts, are used to evoke the terror of Ambrose's pain and death. According to Wheatley (2006), Gothic television narratives often involve a "proclivity towards the structures and images of the uncanny" including repetitions, déjà vu, doppelgangers, and the double, and severed body parts (p. 3). Wheatley's (2006) claim that Gothic television has a proclivity towards the images of the uncanny can be seen in the dreams of the Spellman family. At the start of Ambrose's dream, he is in the Spellman Mortuary with Hilda opening a body bag – upon opening the bag, the corpse is revealed to be Ambrose's body. This revelation produces an uncanny effect, as the double operates as a figure of displacement in that it characteristically appears out of place to displace its host (Webber, 1996). This displacement of both self and time can be seen with Ambrose's reaction, who struggles to come to terms with seeing his double on the morgue table. According to Babicka (2012), the doppelganger is perceived as both self and other, and the uncanny element is the fact that they are both familiar and strange. The encounter with other selves opens possibilities for the uncanny, as any attempt at "a reflexive grasp of this mutual imbrication of self…involves a potential for precisely those uncanny figurations that people experience from the Gothic" (Bronfen, 2008, p. 6).

The claim that the doppelganger is perceived as both self and other is exemplified when Ambrose questions his aunt Hilda about the corpse, asking "doesn't he remind you of someone, Auntie?" Ambrose's question here indicates that he recognises the corpse as himself but given that the corpse appears to be his double, he also regards it as other. Furthermore, the uncanny resemblance between Ambrose and his corpse evokes a sense of terror and awe in him. Morris (1985) argues that the uncanny derives its terror not from something external, alien, or unknown, but something that is strangely familiar and defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it. Terror has the potential to freeze the mind and body and derives from whatever evokes in us an apprehension of pain or death. This apprehension of pain and death can be seen with Ambrose, as upon seeing the body, a close-up shot of Ambrose reveals his shook and terror of his own mortality.

Moreover, the threat of existential death which the double poses can be connected to a key theme within the Gothic and the uncanny: our compulsion to return to the repressed moment or act. According to Mishra (2012), the double can be regarded as the uncanny harbinger of death, and death is the always recurring or repeating presence that threatens the subject to which it compulsively

returns. In Ambrose's dream, while his double is a direct visualisation of his death, he himself cannot seem to remember or understand how his body came to be on the table, as its presence appears to defy all rational logic. In his discussion of the Gothic and psychoanalysis, Punter (2012) argues that we work continuously to maintain a simulacrum of congruence between fantasy and reality. However, those boundaries frequently blur in the most routine of everyday events, such as daydre ams or dissonance between what other people mean as opposed to what we want to hear. When we can not fill in this gap in knowledge, Punter (2012) argues that this gap can call forth the uncanny which is produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced. This dissonance between reality and fantasy can be seen with Ambrose's reaction, as although his double's corpse is right in front of him, he struggles to understand the gravity of the situation, and how he died. Unlike Ambrose's dream, where the return of the repressed, his corpse, is a symbol of his desire to be free of house arrest, the return of the repressed in Sabrina's dream is more literal as Harvey remembers a memory he had previously forgotten.

Botting (2008) argues that the uncanny is easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced and occurs when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression. The uncanny is the recurrence or return of the repressed – something which is familiar and old established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through processes of repression. The return of repressed memories can be seen in Sabrina's dream, where she reveals to her then-boyfriend, Harvey, her identity as half-witch and half-mortal. This revelation causes a moment of déjà vu for Harvey who, in the dream, remembers when Sabrina had cast a spell causing Harvey to forget about Sabrina's identity. According to Royle (2003), déjà vu can be defined as the peculiar feeling or sensation that we have, in certain moments of situations, of having had the same experience once before, or of having once before been in the same place. However, Royle (2003) argues that despite our best efforts, we never succeed in clearly remembering the previous occasion, and therefore the feeling of déjà vu corresponds to the recollection of an unconscious phantasy. In other words, we can never consciously remember it because it has never been conscious. In response to Sabrina's revelation, Harvey asks "why am I suddenly having a strange sense of déjà vu?" Sabrina answers: "because I told you once, in the woods, and then I made you forget." Harvey reveals that, despite Sabrina's memory spell "a part of me remembers, even when you made me forget." This revelation produces another uncanny moment where a repressed or 'forgotten' memory comes back to haunt the past. In Freud's (1920) understanding of the uncanny, everything that was intended to remain a secret comes into the open, and the uncanny manifests itself when the

repressed aspects buried in our unconscious suddenly return. By revealing her secret, the past event, the memory spell, suddenly returns and this forgotten moment causes Harvey anguish as he struggles to recollect the experience.

The episode is segmented to focus on how the individual characters come to realise they are dreaming before it brings them together. When first centred on Ambrose, we see him performing an autopsy on his double; after performing the operation, Ambrose is paid a visit by his coven's High Priest, Father Blackwood, who informs him that he is no longer under house arrest. Throughout the first season of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, Ambrose's central storyline is his desire to leave the Spellman house and be free of his indefinite imprisonment. In this way, his dream initially appears to mirror the Freudian theory of dreams as simply being wish fulfilment and the expression of unconscious desires (Freud, 1920). However, Freud (1920) also suggests that during the moment when we are about to rejoice in our wish(es) coming true, "a host of problems besets us" (p.). Ambrose's wish is never fully actualised, as he is ultimately murdered by Batibat, and after his death, and the episode jumps to the same close-up shot of Ambrose and Hilda opening the body bag. It appears that Ambrose is stuck in a time loop or a repetition of his own death, unable to leave the house forever. His greatest wish has become his greatest fear. Although Ambrose is fated to die in his dream on a continuous loop, it is never clear when the loop begins, as at the beginning of the dream, we already see Ambrose's corpse. Juranovszky (2014) argues that Gothic temporal loops play a key part in endeavours to establish sites of trauma re-enactment, and the aim of temporal confusion is to "evoke a disturbing sense of backward-pointing progress" which "allows for a reconsideration as well as a resolution of the past" (para 12). The re-enactment of Ambrose's trauma, in this case his death, is seen in his dream, as he is stuck in an endless cycle of discovering his own corpse to only then be killed himself again. The temporality in the dream is non-linear as time flows in a circled repetition where Ambrose is at the morgue, is killed, and then the cycle repeats itself. Given that that dream loop begins at the morgue table, after Ambrose's death, time itself in the dream is unclear as there is a blurring of the past, present, and future.

Furthermore, the sequence highlights how dreams are a space outside of time, where the past and present are blurred. According to Perlmutter (2005), "something happens to the narrative" when dream sequences in film and television begin, as "characters leave behind rational external reality and…cross over into a 'between' world where reality and imagination converge into hypothetical realms that are scrambled" and achronological" (p. 128). Because of this blurring between reality and imagination, dreams in Gothic texts are often spaces where the past and future are highly contested

and are an extreme form of solitude outside of time. Despite his awareness of being stuck in a loop of his own death, Ambrose is compelled to repeat the same action again and again until he relents and frees Batibat from the Spellman residence. This instance of repetition, where characters are compelled to act in a certain way, is a hallmark of the Gothic, and is one of the central characteristics of the uncanny (Lloyd-Smith, 2004). Lloyd-Smith (2004) argues that Gothic characters are often shown struggling in a web of repetitions caused by their unawareness of their unconscious drives and motives. However, in this case, Ambrose is shown struggling with the repetition of his own death and starts crying as he realises the inevitability of his fate. Crippled with the fear of his eventual death, Ambrose appears to be in a "psychological state of darkness" and is lost in a "bottomless pit" where he is stuck in forever solitude with little hope of escape (Edwards & Monnet, 2012, p. 8).

Similarly, the compulsion to repeat certain behaviours again and again can also be seen with Abigail Blossom in *Riverdale*. Unlike Ambrose who is cursed to a dream world, Abigail is cursed in her waking life and remains entrapped in the halls of Thornhill alone, heartbroken by the murder of her lover, Thomisina (Vanessa Morgan). Abigail is cursed to remain in the halls of Thornhill alone, unhappy, and separated from the love of life. Similarly, her 'descendants', Cheryl and Poppy appear destined to meet the same fate and remain exiled to Thornhill for the rest of their lives. In this way, Thornhill has become a cursed space where its inhabitants are caught in a temporal loop of sorts, where they are doomed to meet the same fate as their ancestors.

It is Ambrose's awareness of being trapped in a time loop that results in his own death, and the realisation that he is trapped in existential solitude, as well as his inability to distinguish between nightmare and reality that makes his dream so terrifying. Furthermore, Ambrose's reaction to being stuck in a death loop highlights Piatti-Farnell and Mercer's (2014) claim that "in our contemporary moment", Gothic-horror and terror "tend to merge and intersect, often forming hybrid visions", that shifts between the two modes (para 4). Conventionally, terror has been "linked to fear triggered by indeterminate agents" (Cavallaro, 2002, p. vii), and to hold characters and readers in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity mostly out of sight or suggestions from a hidden past (Hogle, 2002). This definition of terror can be seen with the initial revelation of the double, which put Ambrose in an anxious suspense about threats to his life; unsure of what the double means about Ambrose's own life causes him terror. However, this terror quickly shifts into horror when Ambrose realises that he is doomed to repeat his death in an endless cycle. Horror is usually triggered by "visible fear" (Cavallaro, 2002, p. vii), and confronts characters "with the gross violence of physical or psychological

dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms…of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences" (Hogle, 2002, p.3).

This visualisation of fear and gross violence is explicitly shown when Ambrose performs an autopsy on his double for the second time, as he pleads "no…no…no…Auntie, please don't leave me…no…no...no." Ambrose's fear of death has been realised, as now that he has encountered the danger, his death and entrapment in the Spellman residence, means that nothing remains for his imagination. This scene of Ambrose cutting into his own body can be connected to body horror, which Reyes (2014) argues, occurs when a "text generates fear from abnormal states of corporeality, or from an attack upon the body, we might find ourselves in front of an instance of body horror" (p. 52). The experience of horror is often associated with feelings of "nausea, revulsion, disgust, and visceral abhorrence: the recurring sensations which accompany it include…tension…shuddering, recoiling, tingling, frozenness, momentary arrests, chilling" (Cavallaro, 2002, p. viii). Reyes' (2014) claim that body horror generates fear from an abnormal state of corporeality can be seen with Ambrose, as he is compelled to cut into his own body, knowing regardless of his actions, he will be killed by Batibat continuously, unless he relents and frees the demon from her trap. This compulsion to act creates a sense of horror, dread, and revulsion, which can be seen in a close-up shot of Ambrose's face, where he has an extremely visceral reaction to being stuck in his time loop and being abandoned in solitude with no one to help him. It is the return of the unconscious and the repressed which make dreams so inherently Gothic, as they are spaces where uncanny interactions take place, as what was once familiar and known shifts into the unfamiliar and the unknown. The inherent Gothic nature of dreams means they are highly effective and popularly used in literature, film, and television to evoke a sense of terror and horror because of the visceral reaction the return of the unconscious and repressed produces.

Throughout *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* the titular character has several visions, dreams, and hallucinations which revolve around her decision to follow the path of night—and join the Witch world—or the path of light—remain in the human world. Sabrina is repeatedly shown having either dreams, hallucinations, or other visions about her dark baptism and loyalty to Lucifer, who is referred to as the Dark Lord by members of Sabrina's Coven, 'The Church of Night'. Although Sabrina experiences a few prophetic dreams while asleep in her bathtub, her dreams and other kinds of visions typically take place in the woods outside the Spellman residence. This is the same wooded area where she eventually signs her name into the Book of the Beast in the season one finale, 'Chapter 10: The Witching Hour'). In *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* the dark baptism is a rite of passage for adolescent witches and warlocks to transition from childhood to adulthood. Liminality is defined by

LeMaster (2011) as being in-between two different positions, boundaries, or states, and within this in-between space, sociocultural norms are typically suspended, the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur. LeMaster (2011) elaborates and suggests that liminality allows for a space where once held common knowledges can be challenged or critiqued, and it is a "time...when anything might happen" (p. 103).

In the series' premiere, after spending the evening with her mortal friends, Sabrina has a dream in the woods outside her home and hears two seemingly abandoned infants crying ('Chapter 1: Orange Country'). From the outset, the series creates a connection between dream-like landscapes, the woods, and witches, and dreams in the woods. This link is arguably not surprising, given that they are each all inherently liminal figures themselves. Dreams are inherently liminal because they are uncanny, and a blend of the everyday and familiar with the unknown and unfamiliar and can create a lapse in the boundaries between reality and fantasy (Janicker, 2015; Moore Jr., 2018). The forest is also frequently considered to be a liminal setting for several reasons. Firstly, the forest serves as a geographical boundary between Nature and the human world, and therefore considered to be a liminal setting. Secondly, and like dreams and premonitions, the forest is a liminal setting because "when within its midst, we have no sense of time: we have no evidence of human evolution" (Parker, 2020, p. 49). Much like the werewolf, the witch is also considered to be a classic monster in Western culture as well as also being bound in some way "to the *darker* sides of Nature" (Parker, 2020. p. 164). Purkiss (1996; as cited in Parker, 2020) posits that witch "living projections of feelings that defy easy rationalisation or reconciliation" (p. 164). Because of this, Parker (2020) argues that witches also fit with "our messily mixed feelings about the wilderness" (p. 164). Although this liminal figure might come in a variety of forms, the witch is almost always female, monstrous, and found in the forest or within other natural landscapes. By critically analysing the repetition of Sabrina's dream in forest and her dark baptism, this section will discuss how dreams in the forest are depicted as being a vehicle to express not only Sabrina's unconscious desires and fears, but also aspects of her identity and family history which remains hidden to her.

A Medium-Close-Up (MCU) shot of Sabrina, naked, taking a salt bath to cure a curse that the 'weird sisters' put on her, shows Sabrina falling asleep. A long shot of the bathroom shows a large bathtub in the middle of the room, there are a couple of lanterns hanging from the ceiling; there is a large glass plane window, with several lit candles along the windowsill. During the sequence, there is a sound of a clock ticking. Sabrina then wakes up, in the bath, in the middle of the woods and hears two infants crying. Sabrina then sees her parents. Her father is dressed in a black and white suit with

a black tie and top hat, reminiscent of the Victorian period who walk further into the woods. Sabrina, who is still naked, follows them deeper into the woods until she gets to a clearing, where her parents place the new-born baby on a stone tablet next to an identical baby. She approaches the two babies and lifts the blanket revealing that while one of the baby's has human feet, the other one has goat legs. The forest is often depicted as being a frightening and unsettling space because it is a setting associated with the human unconscious, and as Parker (2020) suggests, "time and time again, we find the forest serves in our fictions, symbolically, as an extension of the darkest elements of our psyches" (p. 55). Parker (2020) draws on Feud's work on the 'ego' and the 'id' when exploring how the Gothic Forest is died to the unconscious. Specifically, Parker (2020) suggests that as the forest is viewed in opposition to the human-made world, there is a potential analogy "between civilisation as 'ego' and the forest as 'id' (p. 54). As such, what Freud calls the 'chaos' of 'the dark and inaccessible part of our personality, the 'id', links in with the wildness of the natural world" (p. 56).

Gildersleeve (2020) posits that Gothic nightmares can bring characters "face-to-face with the unsettling past" which causes them to question their sense of identity and perception of the world around them (p. 97). Sabrina's dream causes her inner turmoil and conflict, as she struggles to negotiate the tension between her dual natures and understand her family history. Gothic dreams are spaces in which the past and future are contested – dreams are an extreme form of solitude, or an attempt to leave the present – dreams are often considered outside of time (Moore, 2018) Further, dreams can reveal "complexities and conflicts unknown to the character, an opportunity to relay an indirect commentary on a character, or have also foreshadowed plot development and provided sources of mystery" (Thomas, 1990, p. 6). Sabrina's dream about her dark baptism serves to reveal her own inner conflict about her sense of identity, and she wrestles with whether she should follow her family's expectations of her or forge a new path. The dream in the woods can also be seen as foreshadowing about Sabrina's true parentage; it is revealed that Sabrina's biological father is not Edward Spellman, but the Dark Lord himself. Not only must Sabrina negotiate between being half mortal, half angel/witch, but in the future, she will eventually defy the expectations of her father.

Conclusion:

Several Gothic scholars, including Punter (2012) and Baldick (1993), have explored how the Gothic can reveal the instability and constructed nature of notions of the past and present. There has been

extensive critical discussion on uncanny phenomena like corpses or ghosts can function as temporal interruptions in the narrative, as they represent the return of the past in the present (Punter, 2012; Baldick, 1993). This chapter examined how time in Gothic-horror television series is often constructed as instable and mutable through the depiction of dreams, visions, or distorted visions. Characters like Cheryl Blossom and Ambrose Spellman often experience distorted realities where they often lose a sense of reality or reason and become unable to tell the difference between what is true and what is fiction, whether it be hallucinations, dreams/nightmares, or a 'break' in time. Of note, these series often feature dreams and nightmares which are either prophetic in nature or reveal repressed emotions and desires. These imaginative spaces—dreams, nightmares, or hallucinations—are where the teenage protagonists must confront the unfamiliar, the unknown, and the unseen future.

The seventh chapter examined how certain supernatural occurrences, including hauntings, would occur at precisely the exact same time and in the same location. Moreover, this chapter explored how contemporary Gothic-horror series continue to draw on tropes, motifs, and plots associated with eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction to depict how the adolescent body is a fitting site to explore anxieties around the return of the dead and return of the past. Specifically, this research explored the return of Abigail's spirit in *Riverdale*, who would return to possess the body of Brita and Cheryl at precisely 3am in the family chapel. The suggestion that Thornhill and Cheryl are inherently linked together reinforces the cultural belief in Western society that white, upper-class women should be equated with their domestic space. Cheryl's persecution throughout *Riverdale* highlights the power and hold that domestic settings can have on its inhabitants, and ultimately reflects our continued anxieties about domestic spaces as a space where the past can always return.

Additionally, this chapter explored dreams as being a Gothic space where the unconscious and the repressed can return. As such, dreams are spaces where uncanny interactions take place, as what was once familiar and known shifts into the unfamiliar and the unknown. Notably, this can be seen in the discussion of Ambrose's dream loop of his own death; Ambrose has an extremely visceral reaction to being stuck in his time loop and being abandoned in solitude with no one to help him. The inherent Gothic nature of dreams means they are highly effective and popularly used in literature, film, and television to evoke a sense of terror and horror because of the visceral reaction the return of the unconscious and repressed produces. Ultimately, the use of dreams or dream worlds in *Riverdale, The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,* and *Teen Wolf,* reflect the belief that dreams can reveal significant and even hidden aspects of ourselves, our history, and the world around us.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Riverdale, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* are all post-2010 television series which primarily focus on teenage protagonists, and through a Gothic-horror framework, are able to explore the anxieties associated with the trials and tribulations of adolescence. This thesis primarily examined the ongoing construction of identity in American culture in the twenty-first century through a critical exploration of adolescence in connection to time and nature in post-2010 Gothic-horror television series. To investigate the how the selected series depicted adolescence as a liminal phase, the researcher gathered data from over 200 episodes and utilised both thematic analysis and textual analysis. During the analysis stage, the data was categorised into three main themes: 'The decay of the American Dream', 'Cycles of Transformation', and 'Dreams, Visions, and Distorted Realities'. The concluding chapter will discuss what the researcher had initially hoped to achieve, this study's key contributions to scholarship on Gothic-horror television series, and the limitations of this thesis and areas for further study.

8.1 What this thesis aimed to achieve:

Initially, the study was focused on analysing the representation of queerness and queer teenage characters in several post-2010 Gothic-horror television series, including *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, *Riverdale*, *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments, Scream Queens*, *Scream: The TV Series*, *Hemlock Grove, The Order,* and *Teen Wolf*. By examining these series through a Queer Gothic approach, this thesis had originally aimed to critically examine how Westernised notions of identity are constructed through perceptions of sexuality, sex, sexual and gender difference, embodiment, and corporeality. In particular, this thesis had aimed to explore whether queer adolescent characters in these series subverted or disrupted the cultural construction of heteronormativity. However, during the data collection process, the researcher identified that themes of time, nature, and transformation in connection to the adolescent experience were especially apparent in *Riverdale, The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, and *Teen Wolf*. From the collected data, it appeared that the liminal nature of adolescence provided a vehicle for these series to depict socio-cultural anxieties around the decay of the American Dream, the blurring of the past and the present, and the transformative power of natural environments like the woods. As such there was a significant shift in this project, with the aim in exploring the construction of identity in American culture in the twenty-first century through an

analysis of adolescence in connection time, cycles of transformation and self-discovery. This thesis aimed to critically investigate how Gothic-horror television series employ adolescence as a way to express socio-cultural contemporary anxieties, such as a nostalgic desire to 'return' to simpler times.

8.2 Contribution to the field:

In recent years there has been considerable research on adolescence in Gothic in eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction, contemporary young adult fiction novels like Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005-2008; 2020-), and late 1990s and early 2000s television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (McKannon, 2012; Koehler, 2017; Smith & Moruzi, 2018). Despite the rise of Gothic-horror television series in the last decade, as detailed in the context chapter and literature review, there is still a gap in Gothic scholarship on the representation of teenage characters in post-2010 Gothic-horror television series. As such, this research aimed to address this lack of academic attention by primarily examining adolescent characters in the three selected post-2010 Gothic-horror television series in connection to the representation of time in a number of guises. Specifically, this thesis contributed to the body of knowledge on the liminality of adolescence—as well as the constructed nature of time—through a critical exploration of suburban decay, dreams, visions and other uncanny moments in time, and nature as a site of transformation.

Within the American Gothic, the Suburban Gothic has attracted considerable scholarly focus, with many academics such as Murphy (2009), Madden (2017), and Dines (2020) noting that the suburbs are frequently constructed as being atemporal settings and devoid of personality. There has been specific focus on disillusionment with the American dream, as well as the construction of the suburbs as an uncanny space through the return of buried or hidden secrets. However, studies on the Suburban Gothic have often been centred around literature and film, especially texts released in the latter half of the twentieth century (Murphy, 2009). Post-2010 Gothic-horror television series are frequently set in suburban areas or small towns. And yet, studies on the Suburban Gothic, and how it represents socio-economic anxieties associated with post-industrialisation in these texts are comparably limited. As outlined in the context chapter, post-2010 has been a particularly turbulent time in American life in regard to politics and socio-economic anxieties stemming from wealth inequality and job insecurity. This thesis has addressed this gap the suburban gothic by examining how not only decay is represented in the selected texts, but how this impacts the characters' perception

of their home and their sense of identity. The researcher found that it was through the point of view of adolescent and young adult characters, specifically, Archie and Toni, that *Riverdale* was able to depict the horror of socio-economic decay facing many small American towns post-industrialisation in the twenty-first century.

While there has been considerable exploration of the Queer Gothic, especially in literature (Haggerty, 2006; Palmer, 2012; Elliott-Smith, 2016), discussion on the representation of transgender identities in the Gothic has not received as much critical investigation. Scholars like Zigarovich (2018), Halberstam (2005; 1995) and Alexander (2018) examined transgender identities and embodiments in Gothic narratives. As Zigarovich (2018) posits, a TransGothic approach explores the ways in which trans bodies migrate between genders, as well as how they undergo other transitions such as "national, cultural, economic, and geographical migrations" (p. 6). However, the field of the 'TransGothic' remains underdeveloped, and as such, there has been limited discussion on the connection between the liminal nature of transgender bodies and the experience of adolescence in Gothic scholarship. To address this gap in the literature, this thesis specifically examined *Teen* Wolf's Kanima—Jackson, a high school student in Beacon Hills—as a metaphor for transgender identities in chapter six. By examining the Kanima through a TransGothic approach, this thesis found that transgender identities and embodiments are considered 'other', 'disgusting', and an 'abomination' even among the other shapeshifting and supernatural creatures. The social rejection Jackson faced as the Kanima, even among his werewolf classmates, arguably speaks to the continued discrimination many transgender people face in twenty-first century America, even among the LGBTQIA+ community. As such, this thesis has addressed the limited critical exploration of the TransGothic by examining how the liminal nature of the adolescent body means it is an apt vehicle for Gothic-horror television series to explore the horrors specifically associated with the trans body.

Within Gothic scholarship, many academics such as Punter (2012) and Baldick (1993) have explored how the Gothic can reveal the instability and constructed nature of notions of the past and present. In particular, there has been significant attention on how uncanny phenomena like corpses or ghosts can function as temporal interruptions in the narrative, as they represent the return of the past in the present (Punter, 2012; Baldick, 1993). However, discussion on the representation of references to specific moments in time, including the representation of clocks and the hour as a single unit of measurement, has not received as much attention. While Paulson (2019) and Molesworth (2014) do examine the role that clock time and the supernatural play in the Gothic, there focus was largely on eighteenth century Gothic fiction. As such, there has been limited scholarly analysis of the

role clock time plays in the narrative of contemporary Gothic-horror television series. To address this gap, the thesis examined how certain supernatural occurrences, including hauntings, would occur at precisely the exact same time and in the same location. Specifically, this research explored the return of Abigail's spirit in *Riverdale*, who would return to possess the body of Brita and Cheryl at precisely 3am in the family chapel. Moreover, by addressing this gap in the scholarship, the thesis observed that contemporary Gothic-horror series continue to draw on tropes, motifs, and plots associated with eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction to depict how the adolescent body is a fitting site to explore anxieties around the return of the dead and return of the past.

8.3 Limitations and areas for future research:

This thesis had several limitations in terms of its scope, as it primarily examined the representation of adolescence, nature, and time in three American Gothic-horror television series, *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Given the sheer number of post-2010 Gothic-horror television series which feature ensemble casts of teenage protagonists, there is further opportunity to discuss the cultural construction of identity regarding adolescence, time, and nature in other series. It should also be noted that as this thesis primarily looked at American-produced television series, it did not discuss Gothic-horror television series from other countries and regions, including British series. With the rise of SVOD services, smartphones and other digital devices, Gothic-horror television series from a range of countries, including the United Kingdom, can be viewed by an international audience. Given teenagers as a social identity are a cultural construction, it could be a rich site of analysis examining the construction of adolescent identity in terms of time and nature in series produced by other countries. As Gothic-Horror television continues to grow and evolve throughout the 2020s and beyond, there is opportunity to look at how these series represent time and nature, and continue to comment on contemporary socio-cultural anxieties and preoccupations.

Another limitation of this research was that it did not discuss the HBO Max reboot/sequel of *Pretty Little Liars*, *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* which was released on July 28, 2022, while the researcher was completing and polishing his final analytical chapters. *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* was written and produced by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, who also produced *Riverdale* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Similar to the aforementioned series, *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* is also set in a small, fictional, post-industrial, and blue-collar town, and follows a group of teenage girls who must write the 'sins' of their mothers. Moreover, Aguirre-Sacasa confirmed that the series is set in the

same television universe as *Riverdale.* The HBO reboot explores many of the same themes as Riverdale and The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina including the decay of small American towns, nature as a site of transformation, and the relationship between the past and present. As such, *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* could offer a rich site of analysis of how the Gothic-horror television genre represents adolescence as a liminal identity. Additionally, the researcher would like to acknowledge that this thesis was submitted prior to the release of the seventh and final season of *Riverdale*. It has been confirmed that in the final season, the main characters—Archie, Betty, Jughead, Cheryl, and Veronica—are transported back in time to 1955. Although Archie and his friends were young adults by the end of the sixth season, it appears that upon travelling to the 1950s they become teenagers again. Therefore, an analysis of the final season of *Riverdale* could offer a robust site of analysis for how adolescence challenges the stability of the past, present, and future, and subverts notions of adolescence as being a stage in a linear progression from childhood to adulthood.

8.4 Final Remarks:

At the beginning of my thesis journey, I was interested in the representation of queer adolescent characters in Gothic-horror television series, and I wanted to examine how Westernised notions of identity are constructed through perceptions of sexuality, sex, sexual and gender difference, embodiment, and corporeality. In particular, I had initially aimed to analyse how teen protagonists in Gothic-horror television series subverted or challenged heteronormative practices such as marriage and monogamy, as well as 'traditional' gender roles. However, the nature of this thesis changed considerably throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in late 2020 after Auckland, New Zealand came out of lockdown. While this thesis did not discuss the COVID-19 pandemic, upon reflecting on the project journey, it impacted my analysis of *Riverdale*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. As for many people, being in lockdown was a time of reflection, looking back to the past, feeling nostalgic for pre-pandemic times, and having a desire to spend time in nature. Although unconscious, this reflective and nostalgic perspective meant I became particularly attuned to the ways in which the selected series depicted time, transformation, and nature through adolescent characters, and subsequently influenced my data collection, interpretation, and analysis.

While collecting data and writing my analytical chapters, I observed that the selected series were preoccupied with critiquing notions of time. Specifically, I discovered that the series frequently

depicted its adolescent protagonists as being haunted, both metaphorically and literally, by the past, as well as being susceptible to the transformative power of the forest setting. I was fascinated by Gothic landscapes, such as the suburbs, castle, the woods, or dream-like worlds, as being apt settings to critique culturally constructed notions of time and the adolescent experience. In particular, I was completely enthralled by the way in which *Riverdale* depicted the social and economic decay of its suburban setting as an elegy for small town America and metaphor for the decay of the American Dream. Delving deeper into the American Gothic and the Suburban Gothic allowed me to engage with how Gothic-horror television series, especially *Riverdale,* critiqued and disrupted the romanticised image of suburban settings. Additionally, when I started this project, I did not expect to discuss the adolescence in connection to the EcoGothic. I observed that forests were integral to the process of transformation for shapeshifting creatures, especially werewolves, as the wooded setting allowed for the adolescent teen protagonists to find their true selves. Through this process, I also became enthralled with how the EcoGothic examines not only the often contentious relationship between humans and nature, but also the boundary of what it means to be human in connection to nature. Through adolescent characters, Gothic-horror television series can continue to explore our deepest and darkest fears, whether it be the monsters lurking in the forest, the decay of the American Dream, or anxieties about the past.

During this journey I felt both metaphorically and literally haunted by the Gothic, whether it be having the same dream for weeks on end, digital devices that appeared 'possessed', or the countless number of times I had a peculiar sense of déjà vu. Experiencing the return of the repressed and the past and finding myself in strange circumstances where the familiar became unfamiliar, at times I felt like I truly embodied the Gothic. The Gothic's ability to evolve and morph to provide a language in which personal anxieties can be represented is what spoke to me most about the Gothic throughout my journey. While writing about the past, time, and dream worlds in their various guises, I learned just as much about myself as I did about the Gothic, and the ways in which it can unsettle us. More than just important, we need—and continue to need—the Gothic because it allows us to examine the deepest and darkest parts of ourselves, even those niggly aspects we would rather remain in the dark about. I feel thankful that the Gothic found me, and I still have more of the Gothic—and of myself—to explore.

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