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# A genealogy of The Addams family: challenging society and gender codes

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Andréa Romani--Parthonnaud**

**sous la direction de  
Jocelyn DUPONT, MCF**

**A GENEALOGY OF *THE ADDAMS FAMILY*:  
CHALLENGING SOCIETY AND GENDER CODES**

Soutenu le 07/06/2021 devant un jury composé de

Jocelyn DUPONT, MCF

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## **Abstract**

This second volume of a master's dissertation in two parts analyses the implicit *critique* and the representation of gender in a genealogy of *The Addams Family*. While volume one focussed on the enjoyable and entertaining intentions of the franchise, this final volume explores the social commentary and the reversal of gender norms hidden behind *The Addams Family*'s apparent innocence and grotesqueness. It reveals how satirical and socially challenging the Addamses actually are.

## Volume 2

### A Genealogy of *The Addams Family*: Challenging Society and Gender Codes



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<sup>1</sup> Dessin réalisé par Elsa Eglin.

## Acknowledgments

As is usual with acknowledgments, there simply are too many people to thank, and I am ~~not very good~~ terrible at keeping things short. Of course, I am incredibly grateful to M. Dupont, who supervised my dissertation. I have learned a lot from him, although the summarising process remains an ongoing skill I hope to one day master.

I also want to thank my friends Charlotte, Ilona, Célia, Valentine, Axelle, and Shirley, who were all the victims of my spam messages and lengthy monologues on *The Addams Family*.

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To look at the appendix please contact me at [andrealromani@gmail.com](mailto:andrealromani@gmail.com)

“Put horror back where it belongs, in the family.”

Alfred Hitchcock

The words “Goth” and “Gothic” have numerous meanings. Roberts explains that “the reputation of the Goths has followed a strange trajectory<sup>2</sup>”. Indeed, from their name an adjective was formed. Nowadays, it has various meanings such as: “a people”; “their language”; “a medieval style of architecture” and its modern revival; an eighteenth and nineteenth-century “mode of novelistic literature”; “a sanserif printing font”; and “a contemporary youth subculture centred on a particular sort of rock music and a penchant for black clothing and make-up”.

Volume 1<sup>3</sup> of this dissertation dived into the details of these many meanings to establish a clear basis for comparing the genre to *The Addams Family*. The malleability and fertility of the Gothic were discussed to justify the proliferation of its aesthetics in “different media and cultural forms for over 200 years<sup>4</sup>”. Charles Addams himself, and his characters, were introduced and described throughout the first volume<sup>5</sup>. Then, the comic aspect of the Addamses was tackled from a humorous and non-critical approach. It served to prove that the Addamses pastiche Gothic tropes and society itself to arouse laughter. However, by the end of the volume it was acknowledged that *The Addams Family* did not partake in comic modalities for purely entertaining purposes – hence the new approach that this second volume intends to adopt.

The Comic Gothic nature of the Addamses having been accounted for, this second volume focuses on the more critical elements which derive from Gothic excess and its proverbial “transgression of boundaries and values<sup>6</sup>”; as well as from the comic which – as volume 1 endeavoured to demonstrate, and volume 2 will build upon – is a two-faced mode. To show this other side of the franchise, this volume will settle on two major themes, society and gender, and show how the Addams family breaks away from their normative constraints. While volume 1 pondered the hows of placing *The Addams Family* in a taxonomy of genres, volume 2 fixates on the reasons behind this taxonomy.

Siegel claims that the Gothic is “intently disruptive<sup>7</sup>”, which is why it remains defiantly subcultural. Round seems to believe that what is most hated is often most popular, which is

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<sup>2</sup> ROBERTS Adam, “Gothic and Horror Fiction”, *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> ROMANI--PARTHONNAUD Andréa, *A Genealogy of The Addams Family: from Gothic to Comic*, Université de Perpignan, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> HANSON Helen, *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film*, I.B. Tauris, 2007, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to the introduction of volume 1 for a quick laps into Charles Addams’ inspirations, how the Addamses came to be, and a list of the Addams characters with their archetypal Comic Gothic traits.

<sup>6</sup> HANSON Helen, *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> ROUND Julia, *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels: a Critical Approach*, McFarland & Company, 2014, p. 139.



why works such as *The Addams Family* are pop-cultural mainstays. *The Addams Family* brings up the following problems: sinful behaviour, class struggle, sexual attraction, gender roles – and seems to target an adult audience. Therefore, children who watch *The Addams Family* series/films, or read the comic strips, will not have the same interpretation as their parents. The fact that *The Addams Family* has been re-adapted in 2019 as a cartoon film shows that nowadays, the franchise is partly intended for a younger audience as well. However, the adult audience, and the way they receive and understand *The Addams Family*, is what the second volume of this dissertation centers on.

According to Haggerty, the Gothic genre is not noxious per se, but rather reveals the poisons which inhabit the “human spirit<sup>8</sup>”. This implies that mankind’s true, and therefore foul, nature is revealed through the Gothic. Horace Walpole, one of the founding fathers of what was to become a hybrid genre, namely the Gothic in all its mutable beauty, was the first to willingly “look at these primal scenes of bourgeois ideology and expose them for what they were<sup>9</sup>”. In other words, Gothic authors used the Gothic as a starting point to implicitly denounce their society, as Charles Addams later did his. In his book *Dear Dead Days*, Addams already made his sarcasm known. For example, he put images which would normally have nothing to do with one another next to each other, to create a bewildering and ironic effect. In one such combination, one can see a photograph showing a social event next to one of animals<sup>10</sup>. This could be a way to criticize and denounce the mores of his society. The fact that this album is a collection of macabre and morbid photos that inspired him to create his comic strips – and that said photos were taken from real journals, and by extension from reality itself – proves somewhat, that the uncanny is a part of everyday life. With his comic strips, Charles Addams constantly tried to encourage society to stop worshipping the idea of the “normal” and constantly rejecting what is “other”.

According to Bird<sup>11</sup>, “readers would normally barely linger on cartoons that cost their authors an incredible amount of work”. However, Charles Addams made what few authors could, he gave his readers pause. Just like the dark Gothic genre from which *The Addams Family* borrows so many tropes, Addams’ comics were massively read. The popularity of the Addamses was “largely due to the generations of readers and collectors who saw the family as

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<sup>8</sup> HAGGERTY George E. “Psychodrama: Hypertheatricality and Sexual Excess on the Gothic Stage”, *Theatre Research International*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2003, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> ADDAMS Charles. *Dear Dead Days: A Family Album*, P. Hamlyn, 1959, pp. 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> BIRD John, “Review of The Comic Worlds of Peter Arno, William Steig, Charles Addams, and Saul Steinberg”, *MELUS*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2007, p. 312.

a refreshing jab at the traditional American family<sup>12</sup>”. Moreover, “children who grew up in New Yorker-reading households gravitated to the cartoons, the Addams ones exerting an extra-strength pull<sup>13</sup>”. In other words, reading *The New Yorker* became a sort of family tradition and Charles Addams’ macabre family benefited from this inherited readership, by having parents – and later their children – look at his comic strips. Art Spiegelman – who is himself known for his political drawings, his cartoon *Maus* is particularly well known – recounts the story of his discovery of Charles Addams and his grotesque family very vividly:

When I was a kid, the Addams panels were among the few run by the magazine that I actually got and laughed at. [...] Addams was an aberration to my unsophisticated eyes, an escapee from the irreverent world of Mad magazine. I had no problem understanding, say, the drawing of his famous family of ghouls about to spill a bubbling caldron of molten lead down from their Victorian roof onto an unsuspecting cluster of Christmas carollers. It took years for me to begin to understand the concept of subtlety. You see, in Mad, the moment shown would be right after the boiling kettle had hit the innocents below. Addams could be subtle, clear and, above all, still funny<sup>14</sup>.

It seems that another factor which contributed to the success of Addams’ comic strips was that they were accessible. Indeed, Spiegelman admits that as a child he did not understand most comic strips, but those made by Charles Addams were easy to interpret. What is more, *The New Yorker* was a very popular magazine which was read by the higher-class in the U.S., and is today read nationwide and worldwide. This facilitated the spread of *The Addams Family*. But the main reason why readers were interested in his comic strips could be Addams’ courage to question, with humour and irony, the traditions of his time. Bird states that Addams used “the contradictory<sup>15</sup>” to explore the history of the “middle-class subject”, rebelliously showcasing the defects of his society. He attacked the notion of family the most, and by extension the American higher and middle-class. Topliss also explains that his cartoons were considered “bad taste<sup>16</sup>” and conveyed “maximum provocation”. To him, *The Addams Family* actually represents our own dark alter egos. He states that “Addams’ work finds its origin in an extremely hostile, aggressive, and anti-social feeling<sup>17</sup>.” Thus, how could his comic strips not be considered satirical? The fact that *The Addams Family* became one of the “enduring popular

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<sup>12</sup> SWANN AUCTION GALLERIES, *Artist Profile: Charles Addams, A Cartoonist of Incongruous Charm*, Swann News, September 4<sup>th</sup> 2019, <https://www.swannalleries.com/news/illustration-art/2019/09/artist-profile-charles-addams/>.

<sup>13</sup> YAGODA Ben, “Laughter in the Dark”, *The New York Times*, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> SPIEGELMAN Art, “When Grisly Horror is a Family Value”, *The New York Times*, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> BIRD John, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-315.

<sup>16</sup> TOPLISS Iain, *The Comic Worlds of Peter Arno, William Steig, Charles Addams, and Saul Steinberg*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, p. 136.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.139.

culture myths of the century<sup>18</sup>” and Addams “one of the best known, most influential, and funniest cartoonists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” proves just how much sway his creation had. His drawings were not only “reality modifying and introduced some kind of illogical modification to the fabric of everyday life”, but also targeted “banality as represented by the ranks of ordinary, decent, law-abiding citizens”. As previously indicated, Addams’ work mainly focussed on children, marriage and family, the three symbols of middle-class life. However, it is in the 1964 sitcom, rather than in the comic strips, that the satire of these themes is blatant.

*The Addams Family* represents unlicensed passions very accurately, for example, with Morticia and Gomez’ openness about their sex life. However, although most Gothic works claimed to use vice and violence as means to denounce society, they were seen as mere promoters of wrongful social behaviour. The main difference between Gothic fiction and *The Addams Family* is that the latter is already disintegrated, already corrupted, and its characters seem to live happily unaware of such a fact. They celebrate criminal behaviour and carnal desire. In classic Gothic novels, the characters which give in to such vices almost always wound up dead or otherwise injured. On the other hand, the Addams family takes on the immoral path and seems to enjoy it without any repercussions. This is one of the main reasons why *The Addams Family* should be considered Comic Gothic rather than merely Gothic. This principle also applies to Addams women.

Women in this world tend to split into two categories: there are those who work on the fringes of the underworld and are defined by the male criminal ambience of the thriller [...] night-club singers, expensive mistresses, femmes fatales [...] and then there are women on the outer margins of this world, wives, long-suffering girl-friends<sup>19</sup>.

*The Addams Family* seems to portray female characters who stand at the crossroad of these two categories. For example, it presents the audience with a *femme fatale* mistress like wife, a criminal daughter, and a ruthless grandmother. This is due to the fact that from the 1940s onwards, female characters undertook new roles in which they were “not solely reducible to their sexuality<sup>20</sup>”. What Hanson calls the “vice or virtue polarity” no longer stands. While Hanson speaks of female roles in noir films, Schaefer does it in regards to burlesque ones. “In their original historical context, burlesque films of the period 1945 to 1960 displayed excess, parody, polymorphous desire, and gender fluidity, qualities that challenged normative gender roles and restrictions on sexual expression<sup>21</sup>.” This dissertation will attempt to show that since

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 148, 149 and 154.

<sup>19</sup> HANSON Helen, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> SCHAEFER Eric, “The Obscene Seen: Spectacle and Transgression in Postwar Burlesque Films”, *Cinema Journal*, University of Texas Press, vol. 36, no. 2, 1997, p. 41.

*The Addams Family* is a Comic Gothic work, it is only natural that its female characters do not fit in early 20<sup>th</sup> century female roles.

This brings about a whole new set of questions. For instance, the 1991 film poster reads “weird is relative”, which inquires after society’s lack of perspectivism<sup>22</sup>. Likewise, the audience may wonder why the Addamses seem so ground-breaking, and why their being conscious of their nature makes them all the more calumniatory, biting and emblematic. This will bring forth notions such as the post-modern<sup>23</sup> and gender normativity. The main question this second volume raises is: To what degree is the Comic Gothic political?

Through a more thematic criticism of *The Addams Family* – all the while sticking to volume 1’s particular genealogy which encompasses the comic strips, the sitcom, the 1973 cartoon, the 1990s films, and the 2019 film – this second volume will show how critical, antisocial, and unconventional the Addamses are.

In order to answer these questions, this dissertation will first provide some basic information regarding American society, its codes and customs. Then, the Addamses’ demystification of these principles will be displayed. Finally, the last part of this dissertation will define and explain the statutes and regulations regarding female roles in Gothic works, to eventually show how both Addams women and men, manage to reverse pre-established roles and implicitly contest patriarchal structures.

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<sup>22</sup> “The philosophical theory, originated by Nietzsche, that states that there are many different world views depending on an individual’s particular perspective.”

COLLINS DICTIONARY, “Perspectivism”, n.d., <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/perspectivism>.

<sup>23</sup> According to Casey, post-modernity is modernity conscious of its true nature.

CASEY Jim, “Modernism and Postmodernism”, *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 116.

## I) The Most Absurd American Family, or the Most Critical?

### A- Society and Suburban Life

#### 1. How to Be a Good Middle-class American Citizen

According to the *Cambridge Online Dictionary*<sup>24</sup>, a middle-class citizen is an ordinary person who is well educated and has a good job, which makes him neither rich, nor very poor. Therefore, one could easily deduce that to comply with society's expectations, one would have to follow his class' rules. The appropriate steps in the proper order would be to be born in a middle-class family, go to university, get a proper job, get married, and start a family. According to Carr, despite globalisation – which extended and encroached upon more territory, that is to say more institutions and more cultures – the American way of life remained based on one key principal: “the most important unit of consumption in many developed economies, i.e., the family<sup>25</sup>”.

A convenient first step in running roughshod over someone is always to label that person or group as a monster. As Cohen observes, any kind of somatic or social difference can be exaggerated into monstrous aberration and the discourse of monstrosity functions politically to facilitate or retard particular cultural agendas<sup>26</sup>. (42)

Weinstock explains that the American middle-class tends to judge that which does not fit into its pre-established mould. For example, the practice of associating “physical difference with monstrosity” stems from its members' racism, their incapacity to admit strange people into their idealised whitewashed suburbs, people who embody non-conformity. Much like the people who deviate from whiteness, the Addamses are looked down upon by their suburban neighbours. Weinstock calls “racial profiling” the tendency that Americans have to judge and separate themselves from individuals who do not share their physical characteristics. Moreover, Weinstock claims that when American monsters, such as the Addams family, become protagonists, it is “society itself with its stultifying insistence on conformity that is portrayed as the antagonist<sup>27</sup>.”

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<sup>24</sup> CAMBRIDGE ONLINE DICTIONARY, “Middle class”, n.d., <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/middle-class>.

<sup>25</sup> CARR Steven Alan, “How Some Things Never Change: Britney, the Joy of Pepsi and the Familial Gaze”, *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*. Murray Pomerance, Wallflower, 2008, p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> WEINSTOCK Jeffrey Andrew, “American Monsters”, *A Companion to American Gothic*, in Charles L. Crow (ed.), John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.

However, it is not only a question of how different looking the Addamses are in their “Gothicness”, but also a question of how they behave. “The American Gothic tradition in both literature and film is packed with monstrous aliens, bizarre but not supernatural, that often end up teaching human beings a lesson on what it means to be ‘human’<sup>28</sup>.” Indeed, very often antagonists of said monsters want to preserve the “American way of life” which reveals Americans’ rejection of individuals who are perceived as different. The Addamses mirror society as to provide their viewers with a distorted example of how being perceived as a monster can have you culturally “othered” and excluded.

Leibman also analyses the American middle-class, but adopting a different approach, by focussing on melodrama. The melodramatic territory precedes Gothic sitcoms such as *The Addams Family*, but it serves as a warning of what was to come up on American television a few years later, since melodrama already focussed on family issues, and concepts such as marriage or American ideology. Unsurprisingly, melodrama has a lot in common with sitcoms. For one, they are both defined as “domestic comedies<sup>29</sup>”; since melodrama often plays out emotions in an exaggerated manner, draws on stereotypes to portray the American family – which makes for very comic scenes – and most of the action takes place inside the home. Indeed, they both focus on the “mundane routine of everyday domestic life”. Yet, the characters’ reactions to the happenings of this mundane life are often disproportionate, exaggerated, or extreme. Thus, a tension between realism and hyperbole appears. This is true for melodrama, but also for sitcoms. Melodrama also involves “the rhetorical breaking through of repression, in which characters express what spectators fear to utter aloud”. In other words, melodrama moves away from the typical American family, and by extension, if not subverts, then upsets the middle-class. As Leibman explains, “traditional melodrama is structured around oxymoronic conflation of grand activities and everyday routine<sup>30</sup>”.

The 1950s’ melodramas were infused with idiosyncratic fifties’ ideological messages. Topical issues were recuperated into family problems, as racism, juvenile delinquency, and mental illness were reconfigured as either father-son conflicts, generational snafus, or gender animosities. [...] In order to fulfill generic constraints, a text had to foreground conflict as a familial disorder and resolve any and all dilemmas via a restitution of some sort of nuclear unit. (26)

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> LEIBMAN Nina C, *Living Room Lectures, the Fifties in Film and Television*, University of Texas Press, 1995, pp. 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

American middle-class customs and institutions seem to revolve around the nuclear family ideal<sup>31</sup>. In order to highlight the perfection of the middle-class family, melodramas adopted a comparative approach. The central idealized family was being compared to, and contrasted with, the “troubled guest-starring family or the marginally dysfunctional supporting family<sup>32</sup>”. On the contrary, *The Addams Family* shows a dysfunctional, even if nuclear, family, as the stars of the series – thus hinting at a distinguished will to dismantle, or at least question, the quality of the nuclear family’s traditional unit. However, the family, although it most certainly is central to the ideals of Americans, could also be seen to serve and promote larger American values. Leibman explains that the family was “the forum for social control and systematic conformity<sup>33</sup>”. Indeed, a successful middle-class family was seen as a unit which comprehended the importance of American standards and prerogatives such as “gender-proscribed behaviors and practices”. Besides, the family promoted “pro-social behaviour” and mirrored “societal norms”, namely the fairness of American capitalism and “the ease with which one could achieve financial success”, arguing that “with hard work, a good education, thrift, and foresight, one can achieve anything in America.”

To better understand American values of the 50s one only needs to take a look at the *Television Code of Good Practices*<sup>34</sup>.

Television and all who participate in it are jointly accountable to the American public for respect for the special needs of children, for community responsibility, for the advancement of education and culture, for the acceptability of the program materials chosen, for decency and decorum in production, and for propriety in advertising<sup>35</sup>. (105)

Leibman shows here that the American home had to respect high standards to bring up children in a well framed environment, which would in turn lead them to embrace the American capitalist society. However, the code underwent changes around the 1960s, with a growing new awareness of minorities and their ensuing portrayal on TV. Whereas Gothic sitcoms are more daring, domestic melodrama from the early 50s functioned as a regulatory ideal: “the family represented the ultimate in rule-making and legitimate expectations of obedience<sup>36</sup>”. The 1960s

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<sup>31</sup> At the time, the need to target the audience was very strong, which is another reason why the family was constantly at the heart of TV series: broadcast stations assumed that the audience was mostly constituted of American families. Leibman explains that TV massively centred around the fictional representation of families so that the audience could view themselves on screen.

<sup>32</sup> LEIBMAN Nina C., *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 93 and 109.

<sup>34</sup> A television code which was adopted in 1951, after the government pressured broadcast stations. It made television more accountable for what they portrayed and how they portrayed it, so that it went along with social propriety and American ideals.

<sup>35</sup> LEIBMAN Nina C., *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

marked the beginning of a slight change in the portrayal of the American family, and a new questioning of its customs and rules.

## 2. More on the Concepts of Marriage and Family

*The Addams Family* represents what Iceland calls the “idealized view of the American family<sup>37</sup>”, meaning a family consisting of a married heteronormative couple with two children. Of course, this includes a “breadwinner male and his wife who did household chores and looked after the children<sup>38</sup>”. The Addamses were born at a time when the notions of family and home were deemed crucial by the US government. Indeed, in reaction to World War 1, and later to World War 2, the 1940s and 50s marked “a swift change to a new type of domesticity”. If one looks at the facts, it becomes obvious that to fight against Depression, Americans were striving to become “ideal families”. After all, “the average age for women to marry was 20, divorce rates stabilized, and the birth-rate doubled”. This “democratization” of the foolproof, splendid and accomplished family was constantly being promoted on television from the 1950s onwards. There are numerous sitcoms which attest to this trend, amongst which *The Addams Family* from the 60s. One must also consider the economic boom that followed WW2. This boom started a whole new chain of manufacturing and building which had many families moving to the suburbs. Thanks to this economic growth, more people could afford a suburban lifestyle. This was life changing for many families which discovered “an alternative world of satisfaction and intimacy”. This very concept of a close-knitted family is embodied by the Addamses.

Families ate meals and went on outings together, and lived in sociable neighborhoods. Parents paid close attention to disciplining their children. [...] Children became emotional rather than economic assets for the first time, close with their parents, and the center of the family. Because of this, parents studied child development and worked to socialize their children so that they would become successful adults<sup>39</sup>.

In other words, childhood became very important, and so did family relations and the feeling of having a safety net, a “secure life”. Besides, this nuclear family unit is also a symbol of the middle-class. Thus, the ideal American family became a model for most Americans, a goal to attain in life. The Addamses suit this ideal family image perfectly. The sitcom shows numerous examples of how supportive and loving they are. For example, in episode 10 Morticia is worried that punishing Wednesday will leave a scar, showing how much she cares about the wellbeing

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<sup>37</sup> ICELAND John, *A Portrait of America: The Demographic Perspective*, University of California Press, 2014, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> CONCORDIA ST. PAUL, *The Evolution of American Family Structure*, Concordia St. Paul Online, June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015, <https://online.csp.edu/blog/family-science/the-evolution-of-american-family-structure/>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



and safe upbringing of her child. She also refuses to hit her as punishment. On the other hand, *The Addams Family* also seems to criticize this family ideal of bliss and happiness. For instance, in episode 17 season 2 Morticia claims that “a happy child is merely an unhappy child who is having fun”. This quote could mean that Morticia views children’s happiness as unattainable in their society, and that ideal families are but a pretence.

To Holmes, this notion goes further: “The increasing autonomy and longevity brought on by capitalism intensified relations between family members, strengthening emotional bonds between husband and wife, and between father, mother and child<sup>40</sup>.” According to him, the suburbs close off families from the rest of society and serve as a boundary against its many dangers, allowing for said families to easily nurture and protect themselves. This social isolation is what permits the “intimate forging of bonds” within the middle-class and the bourgeois family. *The Addams Family* is undoubtedly representative of the idyllic American family image. However, this chapter will endeavour to show the implicit *critique* made by *The Addams Family* regarding this American family ideal, including the negative effects that befall the private suburban sphere, such as discrimination.

Moreover, Andersen<sup>41</sup> wants people to think about females within this idealized portrayal of the family. She focusses on the contributions made by proto-feminist thought to understand the situation of women in American households. She argues that the structural changes that the US underwent following the Second World War, not only spawned economic and demographic changes, but also saw the rise of new forms of “gender relationships”. To her, although women still held a higher position in the household than outside of it, the development of the feminist movement allowed for other changes outside the home. These changes include: “the increased labour force participation of women, declining fertility, and changes in the institution of marriage, all of which also have a major impact on family life.” Still, *The Addams Family*, even in its newest versions, remains faithful to the early 50s “monolithic family type” based on a heterosexual couple with the traditional and assumed family ideal: “wherein women's roles are defined as primarily in the home, men’s in the public world of work”.

Misericchi confirms that the Addamses do behave like any normal middle-class suburban based American family. Gomez for one, behaves “precisely as normal fathers have

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<sup>40</sup> HOLMES Nathan, “Playing House: Screen Teens and the Dream World of Suburbia”, *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*. Murray Pomerance, Wallflower, 2008, p. 251.

<sup>41</sup> ANDERSEN Margaret L., “Feminism and the American Family Ideal”, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1991, pp. 235-236.

historically been characterised, by leaving most of the parenting to the mother<sup>42</sup>”. They represent the nuclear family rather well, raising their children with a love and care that shows how great a parenting couple they make, despite their Gothic nature. However, there is a satiric undertone to *The Addams Family*. For instance, children are leading characters in Chas’ work which shows how central they are to family dynamics. Misericocchi claims that although Addams was accused of hating children, he actually simply portrayed them as they behaved in real life<sup>43</sup>, thus showing his appreciation for their ingenuity and fearlessness. Therefore, he drew Wednesday and Pugsley as he witnessed other children behave. Likewise, the cartoonist endeavoured to reveal adults’ ruthlessness. The fact that the Addamses, and especially the children, love each other all the while sharing mutual joy in private torture, shows an underlying deviance, a potential will to divulge mankind’s cruelty. In the comic strips the family also seems to regard Lurch as a sort of joke, revealing how the wealthy treat those they consider to be beneath them, and Granny Frump is depicted in this first version of *The Addams Family* as a “disrespectful old hag”, which also serves to show the *cliché* that old people are mean. All these elements put together undeniably reveal Charles Addams’ critical views of society.

Landy argues that the family is the ideal battleground for “the hearts and minds of Americans<sup>44</sup>”. To her, the American family presents the viewers with a perfect representation of discipline, with a unit which benefits social and political power. However, it is this very supererogatory idealised version of the family which brings forth doubts and questions. Therefore, the concepts of “childhood, femininity, marriage and sexuality are at stake”. Landy establishes a connection between the American family and its “social milieu”. Actually, according to Benshoff<sup>45</sup>, the term “family values<sup>46</sup>” only serves as a “semantic club” to look down upon all things which do not fit into the realm of morality “allegedly represented by the traditional nuclear family”. Mosher<sup>47</sup> sums up the requirements for the proper working of a middle-class family. To him, the social organisation of the family unit depends on two institutions: “property and the dynastic marriage.” The “fusion” of these two institutions produced the middle-class system. It maintained the functioning of social class by making

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<sup>42</sup> MISEROCCHI Kevin, *Chas Addams: The Addams Family, an Eviltion*, Pomegranate Communications, 2010, p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 81 and 83, and 128.

<sup>44</sup> LANDY Marcia, “Very Far from Heaven: Todd Hayne’s Cinematic Family”, *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*, in Murray Pomerance (ed.), Wallflower, 2008, p. 205.

<sup>45</sup> BENSHOFF Harry M., “Queers and Families in Film: from Problems to Parents”, *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*, in Murray Pomerance (ed.), Wallflower, 2008, p. 223.

<sup>46</sup> To him it is a term most often used by right-wing politicians and religious leaders.

<sup>47</sup> MOSHER Jerry, “Big Daddies and the Hollywood Myth of Family Capitalism”, *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*, in Murray Pomerance (ed.), Wallflower, 2008, p. 266.

people meet “at the same social levels”, by having then “educated in common schools appropriate to their wealth, share the same manners and morals, read the same books and hold similar prejudices<sup>48</sup>”. The fact that middle-class people inhabited the same *milieux* made it possible to establish a “distinctive style of life”. In the following chapters, it will be shown how *The Addams Family*, in its different forms, criticizes these values. For example, in *The Addams Family Values*, marriage seems to be satirized. Indeed, during Fester and Debbie’s<sup>49</sup> wedding, Fester recites his vows beautifully, but Debbie simply says “ditto” when he is finished. She even goes as far as rolling her eyes when she must throw the flower bouquet at the guests. This tradition which is usually welcomed with a positive attitude is here frowned upon by both the spouse and the person who catches said bouquet. Wednesday, when she unwillingly catches it, also shows how little she cares for this tradition when her friend Joel tells her that she will have to marry since she caught it, and she simply replies: “it’s not binding”. This shows Wednesday’s repulsion and disdain for marriage, and highlights how some people might view marriage as an obligation. In the most Addams possible way, all of this is made hilarious by the absurdity of the situation, but the underlying *critique* cannot be overlooked. This is just one of many ways that the Addamses seem to question the traditional American way of life.

### 3. On the Question of Post-modernity

Post-modern thought is very much opposed to the idealisation of society, and its derivative nuclear family model. These post-war values are often said to belong to modernism, which ended around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Harvey explains the differences between these two eras; namely the modern and the post-modern, and how they shaped and developed urban life. In the 1960s, that is to say around the same time the first adaptation from Charles Addams’ comic strips made it to television screens, more and more people were analysing and criticising what it meant to be an American citizen, and how wrongfully shaped society actually was. The thesis was, according to Harvey, that “the city was falling victim to an automated system of mass production and mass consumption of material goods<sup>50</sup>”. By way of explanation, post-modernism debates the validity of the modernist claim that the US is an all-powerful and ever-beautiful land of opportunity. On the contrary, it argues that American citizens are

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<sup>48</sup> Such as the “patriarch figurehead” who controlled the family’s wealth and power, and acted as the representative of said family’s reputation and renown.

<sup>49</sup> Debbie originally was the new nanny of the Addams children.

<sup>50</sup> HARVEY David, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Blackwell Publishers, 1991, p. 3.

becoming more and more self-centred, and that society is becoming more and more money driven. But although post-modernism is set against the pre-established system of values, and condemns social-conditioning, Harvey explains that no one really agrees on what the term “post-modernism” means and all the areas that it encompasses. “Major changes have indeed occurred in the qualities of urban life since 1970 or so. But whether such shifts deserve the appellation of ‘post-modern’ is another question<sup>51</sup>”. To him, the only thing that is sure is that it is a departure from modernism.

Nonetheless, what is going to be of significant consequence to this research is the relation between post-modernism and the Comic Gothic.

The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture. [...] The city may be a theatre, but that meant there were opportunities for villains and fools to strut there and turn social life into tragi-comedy, even violent melodrama. (5-6)

The aforementioned cross-generic nature of *The Addams Family* has a lot to do with post-modernism. Indeed, much like this family fails to fit into its suburban neighbourhood, the post-modern often reveals the flaws of a society, which is so idealised that it excludes those who cannot comply to its perfectionist concept. But what the Addamses do with their exclusion is what the post-modern describes as an opportunity to reveal the reality of social life. Harvey states that there is a consensus on the playfulness of post-modernism, arguing that it is self-ironizing and even schizoid. In that respect, *The Addams Family* perfectly matches the post-modern: “Its stance towards cultural tradition is one of irreverent pastiche, and its contrived depthlessness undermines all metaphysical solemnities, sometimes by a brutal aesthetic of squalor and shock.” Much like the Comic Gothic, post-modernism reacts ironically, and even uses inversions, to criticize the modernist belief in “absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production”. What is more, again like the Comic Gothic, it also breaks away from the previously institutionalized sets of values and traditions of society. In that sense, post-modernism seems to privilege “heterogeneity and difference” and views them as freeing components. The hallmark of post-modernist thought seems to be the same as that of *The Addams Family*.

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world, and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 7-9.

all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. (10-11)

According to Harvey, the problem with modernity is that it cuts across many boundaries, but does not consider its past. Therefore, by being modern, one seems to erase their very identity. The fact that modernity has no respect for how it was born, from what came before it, makes it very dissimilar to *The Addams Family*. In their “Gothicness”, the Addamses often rely on, and refer to, figures of the past. The change brought about by the post-modern is a sensorial and temperamental one: “there is a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations which distinguishes a post-modern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a preceding period<sup>52</sup>”. Thus, the post-modern pays more attention to the past, as well as to the architecture of society. For example, it studies “popular and vernacular landscapes (such as those of suburbs)”.

The closeness between the Addamses and the post-modern is even more apparent when one considers the existential approach of post-modernism. Indeed, Hassan<sup>53</sup> explains that the post-modern focusses on themes such as transformation, irony, depth-less-ness, performance, hybridization, carnivalization, the unrepresentable, fragmentation, decanonization, and indeterminacy. In this sense, one can also recognize *The Addams Family*, and especially relate the post-modern to the Gothic genre. Indeed, the family members bring their own “reality”; where monsters and magic exist, into the suburbs, and they themselves seem to alternate between average humanity and disconcerting otherness. “Postmodernism cultivates a conception of the urban fabric as necessarily fragmented, a ‘palimpsest’ of past forms superimposed upon each other, and a ‘collage’ of current uses, many of which may be ephemeral<sup>54</sup>.” This definition of the post-modern could easily be applied to the Addams family, them who, if not blend, at least interfere with realism, them whose Gothic world overlaps with reality. Therefore, the Gothic and society seem to be able to co-exist in a post-modern space.

Furthermore, post-modernism deals with “perspectivism” and subjectivity. What Harvey calls the “standpoint of the seeing eye”, that is to say, the ability of each individual to see things and interpret them uniquely. In this sense, opinions can be superimposed, unlike general societal knowledge which claims to be universal. Therefore, the post-modernist thought recognises “the multiple forms of otherness as they emerge from differences in subjectivity, gender and sexuality, race and class, temporal (configurations of sensibility) and spatial

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>53</sup> HASSAN Ihab, “Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1986, pp. 504-508.

<sup>54</sup> HARVEY David, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

geographic locations and dislocations<sup>55</sup>". As we will see later on in this dissertation, *The Addams Family* also allows for the depiction of different forms of subjectivity, especially when it comes to women.

In the realm of commodity production, the primary effect has been to emphasize the values and virtues of instantaneity. The dynamics of a 'throwaway' society began to become evident during the 1960s. It meant more than just throwing away produced goods, but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being. (286)

*The Addams Family* is unique insofar as it portrays American values, but in a comic light, thus subverting the American Dream status quo. More than that, the Addamses bring back the perpetual, the ancient, the customary, all the while transgressing and shocking by mixing the past with this new age of fast consumerism. Harvey and Hassan seem to be of the opinion that post-modernism reflects these ideas. But the words of Grellet are the ones which seem to make out *The Addams Family* as a post-modernist work the most. "Old artistic forms have to be subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new lively work<sup>56</sup>." These ideas embody the nature of the Addamses: they subvert societal, but also generic, conventions (since they are Comic Gothic), they undermine and demystify society through the use of irony and satire, and they are anti-heroes rather than heroes.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 113.

<sup>56</sup> GRELLET Françoise, *Literature in English: Anthologie des Littératures du Monde Anglophone*, Hachette, 2002, p. 372.

## **B- Societal Propriety and Expectations Debunked**

### 1. Following the Gothic Example: The Implicit Denunciation of Social Norms and Institutions

#### 1.1. Presenting a United Front: The Family Nucleus

The Addams family are very obvious and open about their “Gothicness”. For example, in *The Addams Family Values*, the film starts with Fester howling like a hound in the middle of the night from the roof of their Gothic mansion, with the moon in the background. This is just one of many times that the Addamses showcase their monstrosity and distinguish themselves from normal people. The Addamses do enjoy family time but not in the same way their American neighbours do<sup>57</sup>. For instance, again in *The Addams Family Values*, Wednesday and Pugsley are shown playing with their grandmother but instead of playing board games, they bury a cat alive. Their version of a family is the same as others, but they twist this ideal around to make it fit their Gothic taste. One last example of this “Family Gothic” characteristic of the Addamses could be Debbie and Fester’s wedding. Indeed, the car decoration is in fact a corpse and some tins which are dragged on the floor behind the automobile. This shows yet again, how they are capable of celebrating a family union but in their own Gothic way.

The Addams family stands up against the conformism of the nuclear family, since as part of a united family themselves, the Addamses confront conformity. Thus, although they put up a united front it is only to counter social rules. Guillot<sup>58</sup> argues that this is because *The Addams Family* is a satire of the ideal American family depicted in previous sitcoms and soap operas, she qualifies this Gothic sitcom as a “comédie noire”. She explains that they are always together and take pains celebrating the morbid and the macabre in a non-favourable environment<sup>59</sup>. She claims that the family members constantly support and help one another, showing that they love each other deeply. They take good care of their children despite their odd Gothic ways, and by doing so, prove that not only the traditional ideal American family

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<sup>57</sup> Refer to the introduction of volume 1 for more examples.

<sup>58</sup> GUILLOT Juliette, *Représentations de La Famille Dans les Séries Télévisées Américaines Contemporaines: “Malcom in the Middle” (2000-2006), “Gilmore Girls” (2000-2006), “Six Feet Under” (2001-2005), “Parenthood” (2010-2015)*, Université Michel de Montaigne, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> American society.

can be happy and successful. As Miserocchi explains, “they do strange things but together” which makes them their neighbour’s “secret envy<sup>60</sup>”.

The Addams family always presents a united front to society, and in *The Addams Family Values* film, as its name indicates, they show that one does not need to be a part of the suburbs, nor to respect American values, to be a loving and nuclear family. By the end of the film, Gomez even makes a toast which he dedicates to “all that binds a family together, to mirth and to manslaughter”, once again linking the reality of the nuclear family with their Gothic counter element. Joel, Wednesday’s summer camp friend, even says that Wednesday’s family is interesting and that her parents seem very involved with one another, hinting at his own’s parents lack of unity. His parents, who represent the perfect middle-class family, are depicted by Joel as dysfunctional and fake, showing that the ideal suburban family is nothing but that: an ideal. Even in death, the Addamses are together, nothing could get more Gothic than that (figure 1).



Figure 1

## 1.2. Home Bitter Home: The Domestic Gothic

Suburban Gothic is a subgenre that exploits the anxiety that beneath the surface of idealized suburban communities, characterized as safe, spacious, family-focused, and removed from the corruption of the city, lie danger and dysfunctionality. The threat, whether it be a ghost, a demon, or a serial killer, is nearly always positioned as internal; the house next door [...] suburban Gothic suggests that there is something

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<sup>60</sup> MISEROCCHI Kevin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.



rotten hidden beneath the surface of these white, middle-class communities<sup>61</sup>. (658)

According to Redford, Suburban Gothic is a category of Gothic which focusses on the familiar, on that which is close to home. Looking at *The Addams Family*, one cannot help but pay attention to the domestic space, the space which usually feels the safest. According to Hartnell-Mottram<sup>62</sup>, the concept of “domesticity” encompasses the notion of household as well. A Gothic work becomes Domestic Gothic when “everyday matters relating to the home become magnified to nightmare proportions, framed by recognizably Gothic tropes and presented in the language of excess”. But Hartnell-Mottram claims that Domestic Gothic is more than this, that it also crosses the threshold of the home to step into the contemporary world. Thus, the Domestic Gothic debates contemporary issues from inside and outside the home.

*The Addams Family Values* portrays these two standpoints of Domestic Gothic. On the one hand, it focusses on the domestic space, and on the other, it tackles wider societal issues. However, the comments that the Addams parents make concerning their home also seem to extend to society in general. For example, when Morticia discovers her new baby’s room in the family manor, she says that “it’s dark, it’s desolate, it’s a dream”. The fact that she uses the word “dream” may seem innocuous, but a well-informed viewer could understand it as a *critique* of the American Dream which favours a clean aesthetic, with white colours and big windows. Another comment which could indeed apply to society itself and not just to the Addamses comes from Wednesday. She explains that “when a new child is born, one of us has to die”. This may seem like a child’s temper tantrum or unfounded worry, but it could also actually underline how parents tend to pick favourites amongst their children or how, even though the ideal American family has to be united, fathers work so much that they do not often have time for their children. Thus, *The Addams Family* seems to criticize the workings of the American home and its counterfeit domestic ideal.

### 1.3. Inspiring and Moralising Monsters: Blue-pencilling Society

“The Gothic, through its relentless questioning, exposes disease and discomfort [...] very often leaving writers and readers more aware and less comfortable<sup>63</sup>.” From its very beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Gothic genre has proven to be an ideal vehicle for the

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<sup>61</sup> REDFORD Catherine, “Suburban Gothic”, *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, in William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith (ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

<sup>62</sup> HARTNELL-MOTTRAM Elaine, “Domestic Gothic”, *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, in William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith (ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, p. 185.

<sup>63</sup> WISKER Gina, *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction: Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

questioning of well-established societal rules, and for speaking out on the real life horrors of relations, be it familial or romantic. The Gothic always seems to afford opportunities to engage with taboo, or otherwise hidden, matters. Zlosnik and Horner even argue that the fact that the Gothic novel came out in the same period as opera, melodrama, and the circus, may not be a coincidence since all these media “evoke highly emotional and complex responses to the modern world<sup>64</sup>”. Wisker states that “Gothic is a cultural connection and critical comment, essentially political and personal”. To her, it is the same with Gothic revivals, which still enable a more modern public to clearly – and she even adds that in more varied ways, owing to their modernity – uncover the “the shortcomings of the orthodoxies and propaganda around us, the dangers of limited worldviews<sup>65</sup>”. In fact, she believes that the Gothic goes above and beyond, challenging most of the constructions humans have assumed as immutable truths. She lists: “time, space, identity, body, family, nation, language, wholeness and progression”. The Gothic shows that these alleged truths are more unstable than one might have thought.

While this is terrifying on the one hand, on the other, if you have been constrained by such constructions, deemed Other in terms of culture, gender, sexuality, bodily form, age, health and so on, when the Gothic is deployed to expose the artifice, and to enact and celebrate alternatives, it can be seen as liberating. It opens minds and can feed into changed behaviour. (237)

Indeed, as Wisker puts it, *The Addams Family* acts as an epitome of otherness – all the while borrowing a number of Gothic tropes – comically challenging the social order, mostly by way of inversion. The Gothic encourages “new understandings” and presents an outlet for escapism from rigid and stringent perspectives. But *The Addams Family* also makes use of metaphors to convey their distaste of social rules and customs. For example, in *The Addams Family Values*, the Gothic trope of supernatural death is used to denounce capitalism. Indeed, the character of Debbie who manipulated Fester into marrying her, represents the capitalist, consumerist, and conformist American. Her only desire is to be rich. Her death only serves to highlight her desperate desire for wealth since all that is left of her after she has been electrocuted are her shoes, her jewellery and her credit cards (figure 2). It could actually be seen as a way to criticize capitalism and American’s desire for riches, which are not in fact necessary to live a happy life.

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<sup>64</sup> ZLOSNIK Sue and HORNER Avril, *Gothic and the Comic Turn*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 122 and 235.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 236-237.



Figure 2

As William Godwin<sup>66</sup> suggests, the Gothic shows “things as they are<sup>67</sup>”. To put it simply, the Gothic possesses a “double-edged” appeal because despite its “formulaic” characteristic it entertains its public and at the same time forces them to look at the truths it reveals. Heiland seems to interpret Godwin’s claim as to mean that the Gothic reveals hidden truths through an alluring and coded aesthetic. To Heiland, Gothic works do not all need to have the same “trappings of castles, ghosts, and so on”, but what they do always need to do is transgress. As this dissertation will later discuss, what is most striking about *The Addams Family* is that since it is a pastiche it uses all these trappings, all the while being satirical. He adds that Gothic works are mostly about fear, fear of the characters represented. In that respect, the Addams family is essentially Gothic since they represent that which is other and therefore feared. Heiland speaks in more detail about the figure of the monster within Gothic fiction<sup>68</sup>. Focussing on the monster emphasizes the horror that certain kinds of people inspire in a normative society. This new fixation with the monstrous began at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and *The Addams Family* is a direct product of this departure from the representation of haunted castles and abbeys from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Gothic has not only remained a popular form, but is probably more popular now than it ever has been. It is constantly being reinvented in ways that address the realities of our current historical moment, and this ongoing reinvention tells us many things, not least of which is that forms of oppression, the essential element for any Gothic tale, persist as well. (156)

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<sup>66</sup> Mary Shelley’s father.

<sup>67</sup> HEILAND Donna, *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction*, Blackwell, 2004, pp. 2, 4 and 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 99.

To Heiland, even though the genre keeps on evolving, the Gothic always focusses on dichotomies, if there are none, the Gothic story cannot exist. The Gothic provides its public with a different outlook on life, one which makes it more difficult to separate good from evil. By suffering their neighbours' prejudice, the Addamses show the realism of injustice. Dalton and Linder explain that in the 1964 sitcom, the "domestic bliss"<sup>69</sup> of the suburban based family is only intruded upon at times by "normal" outsiders who are both spooked and intolerant of them. By being looked down upon for their otherness, the Addams family becomes an allegory of non-white citizens' exclusion<sup>70</sup>. Mentzler also builds on the notion of the monstrous. To her, being a monster is about giving a weird feeling to others, "a sensation of discomfort and abnormality"<sup>71</sup>. Gothic is but a medium to portray the cultural stress resulting from this otherness, "an outlet to manage anxieties"<sup>72</sup>. Actually, in the 1973 cartoon version of *The Addams Family*, the opening sequence shows the statues of past US presidents<sup>73</sup> being scared to death by the Addamses. The statues come alive (figure 3) with this on-screen personification, and since they symbolise the United States, they could be said to embody the entire nation and its institutionalised fear of otherness.



Figure 3

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<sup>69</sup> DALTON Mary M. and LINDER Laura R., *The Sitcom Reader: America Re-viewed, Still Skewed*, State University of New York Press, 2016, p. 82.

<sup>70</sup> Minorities were most often discriminated against in the suburbs, and suburbia itself was very much attached to the notion of "sameness". In other words, most suburban neighbourhoods were white conformist communities with prejudices. The Addams family, in their otherness, seem to challenge suburban "sameness".

<sup>71</sup> MENTZLER Marie. *Polymorphous Representations of Monstrosity in Fin-de-siècle Literary Works*, Université de Perpignan, 2019, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>73</sup> Mount Rushmore.

There is yet another feature of *The Addams Family* which is representative of their condemnation of conformity and their *critique* of the deceptive nature of appearances. The Addamses, with their old unique manor with overstuffed and Gothic interiors, challenge the pristine and commodified suburbs. Hence Topliss' claim that Charles Addams is undeniably a Gothic artist, since he manages to put together "a report on the dark side of the American social imagery"<sup>74</sup>. He thinks that the Gothic emerges as a copy of the everyday "surface life" of the US, a copy which showcases a "humorous haunting of America", at least as far as *The Addams Family* is concerned. Topliss views Chas' work in two different ways: on the one hand, a small revolt against what he calls "the boredom of the suburbs", and on the other, its more critical aspect. For example, his first point of view could be said to focus on lighter subjects such as the "gleeful venom" of the Addams children who are always happy to do bad things. His second however, would be more centred on the Addamses as a quasi-aristocratic middle-class family, and how this high hierarchical standing denounces the non-egalitarianism of the US, or how their misshapeness and monstrosity go against the prescribed and internalised beauty ideals of the US. For example, in one of Addams' cartoons, Fester can be seen laughing in the cinema while others appear afraid. Although this cartoon was previously analysed in its nature as a pastiche<sup>75</sup>, to Topliss, it has a powerful underlying "anti-sentimental" quality. He believes that it lets the viewers acknowledge their own "hostility towards conventional taste and admit their enjoyment of scenes of cruelty and suffering". This element will be discussed more clearly further on. To Gros, the Gothic "permits the viewers to stare intensely at those things hidden by more mainstream, therefore more critically respected, modes of writing"<sup>76</sup>. It is with humour that the Addamses decide to make their public look at these hidden defects of society.

#### 1.4. Fitting in or Standing out?

"Popular fiction of the last fifty years has seen the development of a uniquely American haunted house formula which finds its roots in the Gothic tradition, especially the works of Poe and Hawthorne"<sup>77</sup>." Bailey explains that modern Gothic works such as *The Addams Family* clearly originate from classic American Gothic. He himself actually discovered the Gothic genre through reruns of said Gothic sitcom. Thus, his first experience of the Gothic was already

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<sup>74</sup> TOPLISS Ian, *op. cit.*, pp. 145, 158, 160 and 167.

<sup>75</sup> Refer to part II-B 1. of volume 1 to see this comic strip's previous analysis.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 146.

<sup>77</sup> BAILEY Dale, *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999, pp. 1 and 67.

a diluted neo-form of the genre. And yet, the Addamses still managed to portray the grim realities of American life, showing that the genre, although much changed, has kept its critical essence. Bailey looks back at Charles Addams' comic strips and describes the Addams family as "stereotypically malevolent cartoon refugees". The fact that he defines the Addamses as evil refugees very precisely emphasizes how non-conforming citizens are perceived by average middle-class America.

Besides, De Courville Nicol<sup>78</sup> explains that one tends to define their enemies according to how different they are from them, and not according to their actions. The Addams family members, no matter the version, always seem to work hard to fit into the suburbs, or society in general. Miserochi ironically speaks on the matter and articulates their goal as "the joy of fitting in"<sup>79</sup>. According to him, Charles Addams did not create a perfect middle-class family on purpose, and by not complying with the ideal American family pattern he showed the ways that society considers individuals with dark penchants, although they live the same life as those who embrace the light and hurt no one. Of course, they are paradoxical beings: they are Gothic and yet they have the same preoccupations as any other middle-class citizen: putting their kids through school, keeping their home in order and feeding their pets. Likewise, the 2019 film celebrates the joy of fitting in despite one's differences, whether moral or physical. Indeed, at the beginning of the film, people close their blinds when Morticia walks by them, they even come with pikes and try to kick the Addamses out of the town (figures 4), calling them monsters. But they defend themselves and stay positive in light of such a strong rejection. For example, Morticia speaks up about her discomfort and sadness when faced with the reality of her exclusion as she tells Gomez: "Why do hordes of angry villagers follow us everywhere we go?" This shows that the Addamses, although they often pretend that nothing affects them, are wounded by society's rejection of their differences, and do wish to fit it.

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<sup>78</sup> DE COURVILLE NICOL Valérie, *Le Soupçon Gothique: L'Intériorisation de la Peur en Occident*, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004, p. 93.

<sup>79</sup> MISEROCCHI Kevin, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.



Figure 4

Morticia later says that she wishes her children to live in peace, which is why she desires “a home shrouded from the world”. This need for isolation stems from fear of rejection and people’s reprisal, and the use of the term “shrouded” hints at the Addamses’ dark nature and undead quality – since it reminds the viewers of the word “shroud<sup>80</sup>” – further highlighting their otherness. By the end of the film however, people accept them, and Fester ends up marrying the very woman who despised his family at first. This is the very reason this 21<sup>st</sup> century Addams film could be said to be more moralising, since it ends up showing that people’s fear of otherness can be overcome, and that one should not shun others simply for not fitting into their habitual conformity.

In an interview for the *Chicago Educational Television* in 1981<sup>81</sup>, Charles Addams said that if his characters haunt people they will remember them, and that is all that matters to him. In other words, Addams seemed to want his characters to stand out so that people could reflect on how they treat those who appear different from themselves. In other adaptations of *The Addams Family*, such as the 1993 film, this willingness to make the Addamses stand out to criticize conformity is also very much apparent. For example, when Wednesday and Pugsley are sent to summer camp, it is important to note that Wednesday is the only one with dark hair, underlying how much of an outcast she is. Joel, the other boy who is ostracized at the camp happens to be Jewish, which also serves to highlight that the middle class casts out people who differ from their well-established religious group: Christianity.

Furthermore, later in the film, the children are forced to enact a play at summer camp and the perfect blond middle-class girls play the pilgrims while the outcasts, the coloured

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<sup>80</sup> A cloth which is used to envelop a dead body.

<sup>81</sup> MISEROCCHI Kevin, *loc. cit.*

children, and the Addamses, are left to play the Indians. A black boy is shown rolling his eyes when the female supervisor cannot pronounce his name right, and ends up giving up with a “whatever”, showing how often non-conforming kids are excluded or ignored, and that very little effort is made to actually include them in society. In fact, this film is very satiric, since it manages to show the pretence of white middle-class Americans, who feign inclusivity. Whether to comfort themselves with the idea that they are respectable people, or to convince the world, remains uncertain. For instance, the female supervisor makes a speech where she claims that they are going to make an example out of the Addamses and Joel: “We’re going to show that anyone, no matter how odd, or pale, or chubby, can still have a darn good time. Whether they like it or not.” This shows how little they actually care for inclusion, but rather that middle-class Americans simply force people who they view as different to comply to their way of life without opening their minds to their otherness.

In fact, the Pilgrim/Indian metaphor is very helpful to better understand the film’s satirical standpoint. Indeed, the script of the summer camp’s play has the white little girl playing the Pilgrims’ leader welcoming the children playing the Indians by saying “these savages are our guests”. The fact that she uses the word “savages” already puts up a barrier between the Pilgrims and the Indians. Then the Pilgrims make fun of the Indians by admitting that they are civilised but claiming that they are still different, and beneath them, since they do not wear shoes or have surnames. This actually makes the viewers feel bad for the children playing the Indians, who are mocked and shunned. The film also denounces the US settlers when Wednesday goes of script and says loud and clear: “We cannot break bread with you. You have taken the land which is rightfully ours. My people will have pain and degradation, your people will have stick shifts.” This may only be seen as a “misfits rebel” storyline on a first look basis, but still the comparison of the middle-class with the Pilgrims is apparent, and US history here serves as a way to denounce the still existing prejudice of Americans. This is in fact a Gothic trope, since the film looks back at the American past to tackle the still very actual concern that is exclusion.



## 2. The Comic Contraption: the Bane of Society

### 2.1. From Pastiche to Satire

Topliss believes that “laughter unmasks something deeply irresponsible in us<sup>82</sup>”. To him, seeing one’s fears acknowledged on screen, transformed by pastiche, helps to recognize and accept those feelings. He argues that it is easy to get drawn to the side of evil once one accepts the infantile pleasure that they obtain from coming face to face with their anti-social thoughts. Charles Addams’ work could therefore be said to make readers embrace their darkest nature. This chapter will strive to uncover the comic processes by which anti-social patterns are brought forth in the different versions of *The Addams Family*. To begin with, it is very important to point out the satirical nature of Chas’ creation.

Pollard explains that the best satire is that which is “surest in tone, in its values”. In other words, to him, a satire which allows the viewers to know clearly what it criticizes is best. “Satire is always acutely conscious of the difference between what thing are and what they ought to be. The satirist is often a minority figure; he cannot, however, afford to be declared outcast<sup>83</sup>.” Indeed, satire is born from a dissatisfaction with reality, from a feeling of wanting to change things, or at least to contest the way they are in the present moment. The Addams family are the minority, the odd ones out in their suburban neighbourhood, and being declared outcasts is the very thing they try to avoid, wanting to fit in at all cost, perhaps to keep up the pretence that they are normal middle-class citizens for longer and continue their implicit, yet veritably satirical, *critique*. Pollard adds that subjects such as religion and sex are often the object of satire. He explains that they are perfect satirical targets because they are so taboo, hence the need to tackle them in a way that won’t distress the audience. For example, in *The Addams Family Values*, when Morticia is giving birth and Wednesday and Pugsley are sitting in the hospital waiting room, they come across another little girl who tells them how their parents got their baby, and according to her they just kissed and then God made it happen. On the other hand, Wednesday simply says that her parents had sex, which shows the director’s support of sexual education. Indeed, he seems to believe that children would benefit from it, if they were taught about sex from a fairly young age. It also somewhat criticizes the religious and socially accepted ideal of hiding the truth of sex from children. Later in the film, Wednesday and Pugsley dress their little brother as a girl (Marie Antoinette) further highlighting this moving away from

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 173 and 179.

<sup>83</sup> POLLARD Arthur, *Satire*, in John D. Jump (ed.), Methuen & Co., 1970, pp. 3, 15 and 22.

the preconceived idea that one should not only talk openly about sex, but also challenge the notion of gender.

Pollard argues that there is comic relief in humour, and that it is the very reason so few genres lack satire. According to him, many genres can accommodate satire. He uses the image of the chameleon to show how easily satire adapts itself to numerous environments. Furthermore, Pollard explains that satire has the capacity to remain hidden, often masquerading as parody or pastiche in order to criticize without it being too obvious or deleterious. This is why, at first, *The Addams Family* may simply appear as an amusing pastiche rather than a critical satire.

To Bliss<sup>84</sup> on the other hand, satire is not so easy to define. “No strict definition can encompass the complexity of a word that signifies, on the one hand, a kind of literature... and, on the other, a mocking spirit or tone that manifests itself in many literary genres but can also enter into almost any kind of human communication.” Still, despite the indefinable nature of satire, Bliss does distinguish a few traits and tropes belonging to this comic process. She claims that satire often focusses on “homely taunts” and stereotypes, that is to say the familiar and clichéd. She adds that satire employs ridicule and simple abuse to debunk its target, in the case of *The Addams Family*, the American way of life. However, to her, the complexity of defining satire comes from its duality. In fact, it can either show itself by being loud and outright defiant; which Bliss calls the “venom” of satire, or it can manifest in more subtle and silent ways; which Bliss defines as its “urban attitude”. *The Addams Family* belongs to the latter, to the creative rather than destructive capacity of satire’s strange energy.

Quintero claims that satirists do not “wither in despair but, on the contrary, feel compelled to express their dissent<sup>85</sup>”. This conveys the will of satirists to use satire out of a sense of “moral vocation”, out of concern for the public which deserves to know the truths hiding behind social concepts such as the American family:

The satirist attempts more than visceral laughter or corrosive spite. Surely, a satire may fall dully flat, and the satirist may appear unfairly prejudiced or sanctimonious; or a satire may vacuously humorous, playful, witty, or ridiculous without point. But any satirist deserving the name must be more than a partisan advocate or a clownish entertainer, for a true satirist must be a true believer, a practicing humanitarian, responsible even in his or her own subjective indulgence or personal indignation. The satirist, in short, demands, decisions of his reader, not mere feelings; he wishes to arouse the reader’s energy to action. (3)

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<sup>84</sup> BLISS Jane and GRAY Douglas, “Satire”, *Make We Merry More and Less: An Anthology of Medieval English Popular Literature*, Open Book Publishers, 2020, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> QUINTERO Ruben, *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, in Ruben Quintero (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 1.

Quintero seems to find a middle-ground between Pollard's and Bliss' definitions of satire since he too, states that there is no easy way to define satire, but that some of its traits are still distinguishable in most satirical works. Much like Pollard, Quintero believes that satire functions only if it has a strong subject to base its satire on. "We praise with delight what we admire, enjoy, or profit from, and we censure with indignation the despicable or what causes ill because we have an acquired sense of what the world should or might be." To him, satire works best when the things which are the object of satire are clearly outlined. Therefore, the most important thing in satire is its "comparative sense". For example, *The Addams Family* appears funny in its ridiculousness and monstrosity because it reverses the classic ideal family. The viewers know very well what the traits of the American nuclear family are, which is why the Addamses' feel absurd to them, and they can guess that they hide an implicit *critique*. On the other hand, like Bliss, Quintero argues that there is "no omnibus definition which can pigeonhole all types of satire"<sup>86</sup>. He explains that satire manages to "cuckoo nest" in different media and genres, old and new. "Given the difficulties inherent in defining dramatic satire, it might be more useful to consider satire on the stage as existing along a spectrum rather than as a single specific category"<sup>87</sup>. To Marsden, the spectrum of satire can be divided into two categories; on the one hand, the more "generalized satire of social follies or vices", and on the other a more "specific travesty or lampoon", which stands to ridicule a specific person or literary work. *The Addams Family* stands at one end of this spectrum, since it criticizes a vast quantity of things, amongst which the American society, the family frame, and the role of women. Thus, the Addamses seem to constantly fit into at least one end of a definition of satire; the filmic, televisual, and cartoon formats being ideal outlets for a variety of topics to be encroached upon.

## 2.2. The Goal of Satire: Why and how Is it Used in *The Addams Family*?

To Morris, satire relies upon humour to "expose both human and institutional failures"<sup>88</sup>. This is always done in the hope that exposing society's shortcomings will bring about some sort of change, or at least raise some awareness. She explains that "American satire of the eighteenth, and especially of the nineteenth century, often relies upon the creation of a naïve persona who

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> MARSDEN Jean I., "Dramatic Satire in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century", *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, in Ruben Quintero (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 162.

<sup>88</sup> MORRIS Linda A., "American Satire: Beginnings through Mark Twain", *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, in Ruben Quintero (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 377.

inadvertently, and in an understated manner, reveals social truths”. Although *The Addams Family* was created about two centuries later, it is very interesting to see the link between “classic satire” and a more modern work. Indeed, the Addamses perfectly embody this trait of nineteenth century satire since they constantly say what is on their minds without ever second guessing themselves, or expressing an ounce of remorse for whom they may offend in the process. Their filter-less language represents this goal of satire to unravel hidden truths through an unaware party. Charles Addams himself seems to have wanted his readers to believe he only intended to pastiche the Gothic genre, at least on a first look basis. However, if one takes the time to read between the lines, the Addamses’ idiocy, disrespect of society, and lack of common sense suddenly appears as more poignant and mordant. After all, “no work of fiction is likely to be only Satire<sup>89</sup>”.

There is a satisfying sense of inclusion of anyone perceptive enough to penetrate the secrets and concealed meanings of satiric allusions and ironies. Those who survive the attack find themselves members of a conspiratorial cabal. They experience ‘privity’, or knowledge of secrets shared with others. In this sense, satire is intensely private and even unfathomable except to a select few who share its secret meaning<sup>90</sup>. (580)

Moreover, to Rabb, the fact that satire is not always easy to perceive also has a magical power of sorts, “the modern form of the uncanny knowing of the secrets of others”. This could be seen as a way to link the Gothic and satire, a way to embed satire into the very essence of *The Addams Family*.

Condren<sup>91</sup> gives his readers a simpler definition of satire, one which fits *The Addams Family* accurately. To him, satire encompasses sarcasm, irony and ridicule. It exposes, denounces and derides vice, folly, absence of decorum, abuse or evils of any kind. He believes that satire acts by simply creating an effect that makes a person, institution or situation appear ridiculous. However, this turning of things into ridicule always has a specific goal: censure. To Pavlovskis-Petit, although there seems to be no connection between irony and satire; since irony works through ambiguity, while satire is more crude and clear, satire often makes irony “its instrument or even its substance<sup>92</sup>”. To her, irony is not so much a genre, but more of a characteristic or an attitude: “like malice, it is an intention.” Both the 1964 series and the 1991

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<sup>89</sup> CUNNINGHAM Valentine, “Twentieth-century Fictional Satire”, *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, in Ruben Quintero (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 401.

<sup>90</sup> RABB Melinda Alliker, “The Secret Life of Satire” *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, in Ruben Quintero (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> CONDREN Conal, “Satire and Definition”, *Humor*, De Gruyter Mouton, n. 25, vol. 4, 2012, pp. 377-378.

<sup>92</sup> PAVLOVSKIS-PETIT Zoja, “Irony and Satire”, *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, in Ruben Quintero (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 510.

film of *The Addams Family* make use of irony. For example, in episode 22 (1964 sitcom), Gomez loses his memory and becomes what viewers would see as a normal, caring suburban father, much to his family's horror. In the 1991 film, it is Fester who loses his memory and suddenly starts behaving like a normal human being. However, Fester, before he even recovers his memory, takes a liking to the Addamses and their odd ways. Endowing these characters with amnesia is an opportunity to witness how normal people behave in the presence of the Addamses, but also a way to prove that if one is open to otherness, he or she can enjoy it. It is very ironic that even after losing his memory, Fester ends up returning to his Gothic self naturally. This implicitly denounces a society that does not trust anything that is other to what they already know, a society that is a prisoner in a jail of conventions and which does not take the time to appreciate what is different. In the sitcom there are many more moments of mordant use of sarcasm and irony. For instance, in episode 1 (1964 sitcom) Gomez and Morticia claim "it's ridiculous, why have children just to get rid of them". This declaration denounces parents who only want to be left alone and do not take care of their children appropriately, for example, by having nannies look after them. However, Gomez and Morticia say this when it comes to sending their children to school, an institution. This is why the sentence could also be said to denounce the idealised raising of the children in the suburbs, this new mid-twentieth century trend to put children at the centre of the household<sup>93</sup>. Moreover, it also provides the viewers with a *critique* of the school system. Indeed, later in the episode Gomez claims that "if you want children to be happy, you should keep them home". Morowitz<sup>94</sup> also believes that the Addamses criticize society. She gives a simple example. In the sitcom they often show their Spanish and French aristocratic descent by using a few words in these two foreign languages. She believes that is revealing of the bourgeois pretence of the American middle-class.

Likewise, in other adaptations of *The Addams Family* satire is ever-present. For example, in the 1973 cartoon series (episode 1), the Addams children are surprised at how much garbage there is in Central Park, and at the fact that animals are locked up in cages. Fester in response to their surprise says, "that's human beings for you". This is a way to denounce human's lack of care for the environment. This is especially important considering the socio-political context at the time. Indeed, the suburbs and parks were created to give American middle-class citizens a new sense of safety and comfort, not taking into consideration either the polluting factors or

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<sup>93</sup> Refer to part I-A 2. for a more detailed account of this trend.

<sup>94</sup> MOROWITZ Laura, "The Monster Within: The Munsters, The Addams Family and the American Family in the 1960s", *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 2, no. 1, mars 2007, p. 44.

the social injustice that these exclusive<sup>95</sup> spaces would create. Later in the episode, the Addamses free the animals and try to hide them from the police, thus reinforcing their contestation of such American practices. In episode 3, there is another, perhaps less obvious, satirical *critique*. This one is made against Americans spoiling their children, due to this ideal of the nuclear family, with their perfect households and happy children. Gomez claims that he must get the Boola Boola<sup>96</sup> for his daughter Wednesday, thus denouncing with his smugness and capriciousness how the American middle-class spoils their children.

Satire is also at the heart of *The Addams Family Values*. For example, there is a satirical rendering of the middle-class. Gomez tells his brother “I hope one day you’ll know the incredible joy of having children, and of paying someone else to raise them”, which highlights yet again, this false ideal of the perfect nuclear family, since most middle-class American families have nannies. Moreover, most families also send their children to summer camp to have more free time, and *The Addams Family Values* could be interpreted as a parody of the American summer camp for privileged children. For example, one of the camp’s supervisors claims that the children are here to have fun because “that’s what being privileged is all about.” The way the children are dressed and how they act is enough to symbolise this *cliché* of the Republican middle-class’ wealth (figure 5). The families’ clothes seem expensive and they smile in a fake and self-important way. Later a little girl in the summer camp looks down upon Wednesday and her brother for their uncle’s choice of wife. She says that him “marrying the help” is disgusting. It shows the middle-class’ lack of respect for people who they believe to be beneath them. Thus, this film portrays the middle-class’ wealth as opposed to other social classes, and their disregard for those who do not have the means to reach their social standing.

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<sup>95</sup> Parks were constructed for the enjoyment of high income earning families.

<sup>96</sup> The world’s most adorable monster.

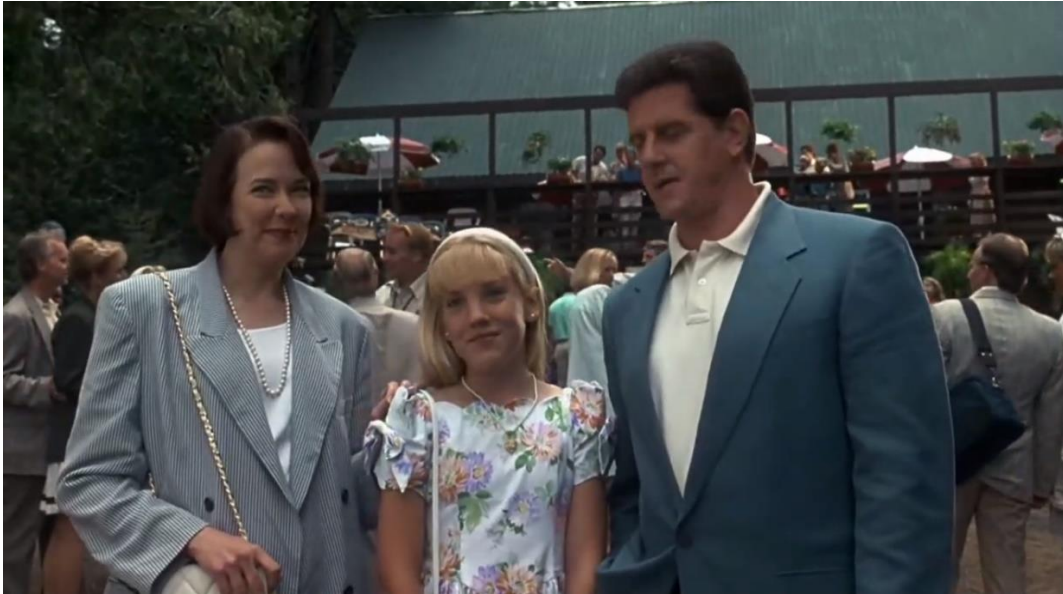


Figure 5

To Badley, it is undeniable that *The Addams Family* is a satire. She considers that the 1991 film is about “death, morbidity, and marginality of every sort<sup>97</sup>”.

The Addams family estate is a marginal space where rules have been suspended. The Addams' world is a seamless projection of desire, as in dream, magic realism, or virtual reality. When Morticia and Gomez want to have a ball, they simply imagine it, and the poetic space of the ballroom accommodates their fantasy. [...] What are the Addamses? The ontological status of the Addamses themselves is indeterminate and irrelevant: are they ghosts or ghouls, monsters or harmless eccentrics? Are they dead? Wednesday has the best answer, ‘Does it matter?’ The Addamses are overt in their virtuality. As Thing's bodiless existence tells us, they are manifestations, horror monster cartoons, collected in one enchanted place. The Addamses are a ‘Gothic’ family. (61)

Badley argues that the Addamses’ Gothic nature itself, embodies their cultural repression. She believes that by living in a liminal space, half at the margins of society, they systematically reveal the flaws of patriarchal norms and “represent to us our ‘real’ desires<sup>98</sup>”. She claims that, through inversion, the Addamses threaten to “explode order altogether”. Indeed, to them meaningless “toys” are expressions of serious emotions: “When Gomez is seriously unhappy, he runs his electric trains at impossible, terrifying speeds, shaking the house”. On the contrary, “sadism, masochism, necrophilia, monstrosity, and transgressive sexuality are presented as harmless sublimations”. This inversion also serves to underline the flaws of a society which does not accept differences, be them ideological, sexual, or economic. The next chapter will expose other inversions and how they play into the critical attitude of *The Addams Family*.

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<sup>97</sup> BADLEY Linda, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic*, Greenwood Press, 1995, pp. 17 and 45.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 62-63.

### 2.3. Antagonizing Society with the Grotesque and Inversion

To describe the modern era as a time of profound change and disorder, and of confused and collapsing values, is to flourish the obvious. That the undermining of established ideas and beliefs has created widespread and sustained anxiety in present generations is also a familiar story. It should not be surprising, then, that this anxiety has been related to the kind of literature twentieth-century writers have created, to the growing wave of Gothic fiction, particularly of the grotesque variety<sup>99</sup>. (49)

Indeed, as Morowitz<sup>100</sup> also explains, *The Addams Family* constantly draws on the grotesque when tackling the notion of “normalcy”. After all, it was the “exploration of the normal in the freakish and the freakish in the normal” which made the Addamses so popular. The grotesque is the perfect tool to “re-enact” the conventions of the 50s’ nuclear family only to subvert them. For example, in *The Addams Family Values*, Fester, arguably the “ugliest” member of the Addamses, appears on the cover of a Forbes magazine as if he were a young and handsome rich entrepreneur, which is how Debbie discovers him and chooses him as her new target. The repulsive physical aspect of Fester, and the fact that despite his ugliness he appears on the cover of such a famous business magazine, is very grotesque. Moreover, it could be seen as a way to denounce the rotten core of businessmen who only care for money.

In this film the *critique* of middle-class America is even more apparent with one of *The Addams Family’s* most emblematic tropes: inversion. Indeed, when Fester leaves the family home, the new baby Addams becomes normal; his black hair turns into blond curls, and he loses his paleness in favour of rosy cheeks, to his parents’ horror and dismay (figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6

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<sup>99</sup> NORTHEY Margot, *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction*, University of Toronto Press, 1976.

<sup>100</sup> MOROWITZ Laura, *op. cit.*, p. 44.





Figure 7

The fact that they view his newfound normalcy as an abomination actually makes the viewers reflect on how middle-class citizens themselves usually detest and look down upon those who do not fit into the model of normalcy they have been accustomed to. For example, immigrants living in the suburbs. The socio-political satire is made even clearer when the Addams grandma claims that the baby could become a president. Indeed, her comment has the Addams parent despair even more, as if his going into politics were the worst possible outcome.

Furthermore, in the 1991 and 1993 films, the Addamses do not live in the suburbs like in the 1964 sitcom, on the contrary, their manor is isolated. However, in *The Addams Family Values*, Fester ends up following his wife to the suburbs. Later, when he comes back to his senses and reunites with his family, he explains that he had been pretending to be someone he was not, and that he is ashamed of having lived in the suburbs. Yet again, here the *critique* of the American suburban life is apparent through an inversion, and later – after the inversion comes to an end – through Fester’s repentance and openness as to his dislike of the suburbs and of suburbanites’ behaviour, dress-code and customs. Therefore, one can now see that *The Addams Family* is very critical of American suburbia, the American family and its customs, as well as of the American Dream, but what about aristocratic America?

#### 2.4. House Addams: Aristocracy and the Upper-Middle-class

There is clearly something aristocratic and decadent about the Addams family, they are not so middle-class as one could believe after observing them live in a suburban neighbourhood in the sitcom. Admittedly, Gomez is a wealthy businessman turned multi-billionaire but despite

this fact, the Addamses still live in a normal middle to higher-middle-class suburban neighbourhood. Moreover, aside from his whimsical purchases the family engages in middle-class occupations and stand out because of their eeriness rather than their fortune. Perhaps the Addamses' wealth could be seen as yet another inversion of the middle-class family since they are richer than most middle-class people. Or perhaps their Gothic nature and their otherness simply outshine their status as wealthy people. In any case, although the 1964 version is very middle-class insofar as the family lives a conventional suburban life, the Addamses also adopt very aristocratic behaviours. Moreover, in the comic strips and the 1990s' films, the Addamses show a more egocentric and wicked side. Actually, the slightly more middle-class status of the Addamses in the sitcom could be due to the fact that the television had a rather "low-brow nature" as opposed to the "high-brow" quality of *The New Yorker*<sup>101</sup>. In other words, the sitcom may have been adapted for a more middle-class audience as opposed to the more sophisticated readership of its magazine predecessor. Charles Addams himself, when asked if *The Addams Family* was a middle-class progeny inspired by his own life answered: "I have always thought of my family as upper-middle-class<sup>102</sup>." Thus, Addams implied that the Addamses were more upper than middle-class since his own family, which allegedly inspired his creation, leaned more towards the upper-class. Rothstein in his article on *The Addams Family*, also claims that the Addamses are more bourgeois than middle-class. "One of the strange characteristics of contemporary bourgeois life is the sheer pleasure that we take in inverting it<sup>103</sup>." Then, although it is the proverbial middle-class family which is inverted in *The Addams Family*, they do have a bourgeois lifestyle and allow for a *critique* of both the middle-class and the upper-class. For example, in the comic strips the Addamses are never seen working, and almost always drawn enjoying leisure time.

Their aristocratic nature is made apparent many times. For example, in a scene from the 1993 film Wednesday and Pugsley debate whether their new baby sibling will be a girl or a boy, and then Gomez arrives and claims "it's an Addams", which could be analysed as a way to emphasize how important the name Addams is, and by extension, that they belong to the "aristocratic breed". Thus the Addams surname encompasses a family heritage as well as an important capital. "House Addams" enjoys wealth and privilege, and this allows for a *critique* directed at the elite, one of social inequalities. Indeed, Geiger explains that "if power and authority are the bricks and mortar of all social structures, an upper-class, based on inherited

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<sup>101</sup> SWANN AUCTION GALLERIES, *loc. cit.*

<sup>102</sup> YAGODA Ben, *loc. cit.*

<sup>103</sup> ROTHSTEIN Edward, "The Perverse Pleasures Underneath the Ordinary", *The New York Times*, 2010.

wealth and position, is but the organic institutionalization of power and authority within a traditional circle of privileged families<sup>104</sup>”. The Addams family’s inherited wealth and status is often hinted at in the comic strips. For example, in one of them Morticia shows a guest their family portraits<sup>105</sup>, which suggests that they come from a long bourgeois line. Likewise, in episode 19 (1964 sitcom), the Addamses talk about all the places they could go to, and also claim that they have been almost everywhere, showcasing their immense amount of wealth, and the fact that they have the means to travel anywhere they want. They suddenly get the urge to go to the moon, and since they are rich they do not mind spending billions to make their wish come true. Morticia even admits that they might be acting “a bit extravagant” to which Gomez answers that they can “do without the limousine” in a very ironic way. This last claim proves that the Addamses are rich, but also shows that they do not seem to realise that they live an exceptionally privileged life, since they disregard the importance of money. In the 1973 cartoon, there are also numerous references to their fortune. Indeed, they seem to put into action their wish to travel. Their RV vehicle looks like their Victorian-style mansion; which must be very expensive, and Gomez produces a deed which allegedly gives him rightful ownership of Central Park through inheritance rights in episode 1; which again proves not only that he has the means to buy land and travel anywhere he likes, but also that there is a sort of pedigree attached to the Addams name.

Herman<sup>106</sup> explains that the identity of wealthy men comprises a mythical place of masculine desire in the social imagination of the American Dream. That is to say, that people (men specially) envy wealthy men who represent the masculine ideal, the epitome of success as embodied by the American Dream. Gomez Addams is such a man. “To say the wealthy enjoy a special degree of empowerment because of their material wealth is to proclaim precisely what seemingly everyone knows.” The fact that wealthy people have privileges is obvious to Herman, but when it comes to the Addamses, their wealth creates a very interesting paradox. Indeed, The Addams family members are empowered by their wealth. For instance, in the 1993 film, and in several comic strips, they are portrayed as very rich since they go to exclusive and expensive restaurants, ride in carriages and; like the sitcom jingle claims, own a mansion full of exotic and ancient artefacts<sup>107</sup> – as well as more modern tools such as a supercomputer. However, they are also disempowered by their otherness. Therefore they stand in the middle of a social binary.

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<sup>104</sup> GEIGER Robert L., *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, Routledge, 2017, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> Appendix.

<sup>106</sup> HERMAN Andrew, *The Better Angels Of Capitalism: Rhetoric, Narrative, And Moral Identity Among Men Of The American Upper Class*, Routledge, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> It goes “Their house is a museum”.

They seem to maintain their equilibrium by showing the flaws of the upper-class they belong to, while incarnating what WASP<sup>108</sup> America hates the most: otherness. They present their audience with a non-realistic upper-class family, a family which does not fit into the aesthetic ideals of aristocratic America.

However, Herman also explains that “wealth provides spatial and temporal empowerment through which wealthy men construct autonomous realms of freedom and sovereign self-mastery, or ‘principalities’, that embody their different goals and desires, or ‘individuality’”. This is exactly what the Addamses do by being Gothic and reigning in their Gothic abode. They are somehow allowed to share the same space as other upper-class Americans because of their wealth. This shows that money can sometimes buy one a place in high-society – while they would have otherwise been shut out – even when they do not respect all its standards.

When I was 10 years old, I thought that the Charles Addams cartoons in *The New Yorker* were the height of sophistication, which meant I somehow assumed that I was the only one who got them. I was raised in the New Jersey suburbs, and the deadpan renderings of Morticia, Gomez and the other assorted ghouls struck me as adult and depraved, qualities I yearned for and linked with words like ‘Manhattan’, ‘cocktail’ and ‘penthouse’<sup>109</sup>.

To Rudnick, although the Addams family members belong to the upper-class, he as a middle-class citizen still understood them; and as Herman explains, he dreamt of having a similar life, as expected of any American wanting to incarnate the American Dream persona.

Recently I wandered through The New York Public Library's retrospective of Addams's work, and I felt wildly cosmopolitan once more. Suddenly my vocabulary again included such phrases as "deliciously macabre" and "fetchingly evil"; only Charles Addams makes a taste for pyromania and premature burial seem like marks of polished nonchalance<sup>110</sup>.

Here Rudnick stresses the inverting quality of *The Addams Family* which dismantles the upper-class' values, although as members of said upper-class, the Addamses are expected to defend it. Moreover, to Geiger, the Addams family is also upper-class because its members enjoy the privilege of doing nothing. “Most writers on the upper class tend to stress the enviable style of life of the leisure classes enjoying their leisure<sup>111</sup>.” The Addamses do not gloat per se, but they do however, enjoy a lot of free time, and unwittingly dangle their wealth in front of everyone. For example, in episode 19 (1964 sitcom), Thing offers a guest their extremely expensive whiskey, and they even attempt to bet a considerable amount of money on a horse race.

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<sup>108</sup> White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant, a term for upper-class, white, American Protestants, usually of British descent.

<sup>109</sup> RUDNICK Paul, “Shades of the Creepy Old Days”, *The New York Times*, 1994.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> GEIGER Robert L., *op. cit.*, pp. XI and XIV.

If one were to listen to Geiger, it would only feel natural for a work such as *The Addams Family* to provoke the American upper-class. “There is a crisis in American leadership in the last half of the twentieth century that is partly due, I think, to the declining authority of an establishment which is now based on an increasingly caste-like WASP upper class.” Geiger believes that Americans were already fed up with an aristocratic system which “carries on the affairs of a country, directs public opinion, gives a tone to literature and the stamp of authority to ideas”, which is why it was to be expected that some media would challenge it. In fact, even the Addamses sometimes also act like condescending aristocrats. For example, in episode 4 season 2 (1964 sitcom), Gomez admits that he considers being broke worse than dying. Similarly, in episode 19 season 1, he claims that errands should not be run by “important men”, which shows that he can be classist like many other upper-class individuals. Moreover, in episode 29, the Addamses are supposed to donate to a charity but Gomez wants to forget about it just because no one has asked them to donate this year. It shows that they are not as selfless and altruistic as one may believe. Morticia even wants to give junk, but then she changes her mind and decides that she should give things of value, proving that at least they have a capacity to question their own decisions and selfishness. However, in the end the fact that they participate in charity seems to only serve to show off their wealth, and could in turn denounce the wealthy who are charitable just to give themselves a semblance of generosity, or appear benevolent to the world.

Another example of the duality of the Addamses when it comes to being selfishly aristocratic can be glimpsed in episode 17 (1964 sitcom). Indeed, in this episode Gomez and Morticia have to pretend they are Lurch’s butler and maid to fool his mother. Their act actually unravels the truth of how unfairly servants are usually treated since Lurch’s mother looks down upon them. On the other hand, the fact that they accept to pretend it is Lurch who owns the mansion as to not disappoint his mother shows their kindness despite their aristocratic status. The fact remains that the Addams couple shows an important amount of pedantry when they claim that Lurch, in his deception, will show his mother that he is “a very important big man and owns this house and everything”. Besides, Geiger<sup>112</sup> adds that in the 1960s, the patriarchal system represented by the upper-class was starting to be put into question, especially “in accord with the emancipation of women”, which is something that *The Addams Family* is known for as a matriarchal household.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

## II) A Comic Transformation Loaded with Feminist Notions

### A- Where Did the Gothic Heroine Go?

#### 1. From Early Gothic to Pop Gothic

##### 1.1. Female Gothic History

Lévy<sup>113</sup> observes that three quarters of Gothic novels were written by women. He adds that at the time it seemed surprising that the “*beau sexe*” would leave behind pink laces in favour of macabre aesthetics. He even claims that Gothic literature was associated by some critics with literary prostitution, a baser genre, mostly by and for women. But De Courville Nicol<sup>114</sup> believes that Gothic novels written by women testify to their sexual oppression. Moreover, authors like Jane Austen managed to change the innocent Gothic heroine type, to portray more empowered female characters, for example, by giving them tomboyish traits. This was to be the beginning of the ‘Female Gothic’. However, what is going to be of particular interest to this research is the development of this sub-genre throughout, and as a consequence of, pop-culture. In order to better understand how the Gothic genre came to portray women so differently from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward, one must first look at Female Gothic history. Then, it will be necessary to define the term and explain how it works within *The Addams Family*.

The common picture we have of women writers in the Romantic period is one of concealment, restraint, fear of criticism, self-censorship. While the male poets issued their manifestos, dabbled in metaphysics, or cut a dash in fashionable drawing rooms, women were, if not invisible, then confined by circumstances, and by the more intangible prison of female propriety<sup>115</sup>. (1)

According to Clery, women’s subordination in society before the 20<sup>th</sup> century explains why women writers, especially women writers of Gothic works, were overlooked for so long in scholar analysis. She also believes that this neglect is the reason why so many Gothic works by female writers focus on the situation of women during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. She adds that nowadays, due to the newfound fascination of the academy for the Gothic genre, there are many more studies on female writers of Gothic. Consequently, the patriarchal aspect of their stories

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<sup>113</sup> LEVY Maurice, *Le Roman « Gothique » Anglais, 1764-1824*, A. Michel, 1995, pp. 443-444.

<sup>114</sup> DE COURVILLE NICOL Valérie, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>115</sup> CLERY E.J., *Women’s Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley*, Liverpool University Press, 2004.

is brought forth, highlighting the fact that Female Gothic works often involve heroines who are subjected to the wrath or disdain of their husbands and fathers, brothers, and male friends. Milbank<sup>116</sup> explains that the Gothic grotesque came to be associated with the female. Thus, showing yet again how often “the monstrous, the hybrid and the disgusting” are linked to women. It emphasizes women’s antagonization. To Clery, the figure of the absent mother is also central to Female Gothic works. “Women writers of Gothic were likewise engaged in polemical revision of literary practice, involving the transgression of gender expectations<sup>117</sup>.” In other words, the Female Gothic not only showcases the situation of women in all different periods, but also allows for the infringement of gender codes. Thus, although Female Gothic could be understood as a branch of the Gothic which focusses on female characters, it is actually quite progressive and socio-politically committed to the interests of women. “The extraordinary transvaluation of the supernatural”, which Clery defines as the unprecedented high interest in the Gothic, allowed for two things. On the one hand, for the Gothic to renew its momentum and move towards more modern media – to promote the “sublime experience of terror”, to assert that the Gothic genre is not to be relegated to the rank of lesser literature (it is a literature that children enjoy and which satisfies female appetites, but it does not make it any less legitimate). And on the other hand, it made for a new review of Female Gothic writers’ standpoint, as well as Gothic female character traits, their construction and relevance. Clery compares Walpole and Lewis’ “superior class of horror Gothic” to Radcliffe’s school of “explained supernatural Gothic<sup>118</sup>”, which is perceived by critics as “more timid”. Then how would more modern Gothic works of the Candy Gothic<sup>119</sup> or Urban Gothic categories compare? This question, as well as the importance of the Female Gothic in *The Addams Family*, is going to be very important to the last chapter of this dissertation.

## 1.2. Female Gothic: A Definition

The term “Female Gothic”, much like Gothic itself, is not easy to define. First coined by Ellen Moers in 1976, it encompasses “the work that women have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic<sup>120</sup>”.

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<sup>116</sup> MILBANK Alison, “Bleeding Nuns: A Genealogy of the Female Gothic Grotesque”, *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, in Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009, p. 76.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>118</sup> In which supernatural phenomena are eventually explained by natural causes.

<sup>119</sup> Refer to part II-A 2.7. of volume 1.

<sup>120</sup> WALLACE Diana and SMITH Andrew, “Introduction”, *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, in Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009, p. 1.

It is usually taken to refer to works in the tradition of Ann Radcliffe's novels, which centralize a heroine who is threatened with imprisonment in a castle or great house by a male tyrant (often a father or father substitute), and who escapes through labyrinthine passages and sublime landscapes to marry the man she loves and, often, find her lost mother. [...] Initial critical accounts of the 'Female Gothic' turned to psychoanalysis, reading these structural conventions in literary and popular texts as a narrative of psychic individuation and the struggle against obliteration (through death or marriage) within patriarchal structures. Critics varied as to whether they saw the genre as a radical expression of subversive protest or as a conservative reinforcement of domestic ideology<sup>121</sup>. (231-233)

Although the term in itself first only referred to the Gothic works of female authors<sup>122</sup>, since there is no other term to speak of the importance of women in the Gothic, in this dissertation "Female Gothic" will be extended to define not only women authors of Gothic, but women in general inside Gothic works – the entire representation of female characters. To Moers<sup>123</sup>, the definition of Gothic is very convoluted, so her own neologism of "Female Gothic" cannot be otherwise. Thus, the condition of women in Gothic works, the Female Gothic nature of *The Addams Family*, will be analysed.

### 1.3. The Female Gothic Gaze: A Warning and an Incentive

"From its point of origin in the late-eighteenth century, the extent to which the Female Gothic mode has foregrounded, and often sharply interrogated, the position of women in relation to patriarchal legal systems could be regarded as one of its structuring thematic principles<sup>124</sup>." Here, the notion of Female Gothic which is explored is "transgression". Indeed, according to Chaplin, even though it seems to remain very much conservative, Female Gothic targets and questions conventions not only of society, but of Gothic fiction itself. As far as society is concerned, Female Gothic fiction challenges customs in that it uses Gothic traditional aesthetics such as the setting of Gothic castles, "in order to articulate the terrors visited upon the female subject through legal practices and institutions that subjected women to a kind of 'civil death'". But when it comes to the transgression of the Gothic genre itself, it is transgressive because it slowly moves away from the classic Gothic of Walpole, to implant itself in a modernised Gothic; that of Shelley and the Brontë's, that of science and the exploration of the human psyche.

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<sup>121</sup> WALLACE Diane, "Female Gothic", *The encyclopedia of the Gothic*, in William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith (ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

<sup>122</sup> Works which were centred around female protagonists and the difficulties they faced.

<sup>123</sup> MOERS Ellen, "Female Gothic", *Literary Women: The Great Writers*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 77.

<sup>124</sup> CHAPLIN Sue, "Female Gothic and the Law", *Women and the Gothic*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp. 135-136.



“Since the early debates about ‘Female Gothic’ in the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by Second-Wave Feminism<sup>125</sup>, the theorisation of gender has become increasingly sophisticated and has resulted in a long interrogation of the category of ‘woman’<sup>126</sup>.” To Horner, although the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen considerable social change in the Western world as far as women are concerned, modern Gothic texts still convey “anxiety and anger about the lot of women”. Many Gothic works still show women’s lack of independence and the continued use of “polarisation of women through patterns of antithesis such as good/bad” as well as stereotypes such as the archetypal housewife. Horner does admit that the degree of women’s constraint varies and diminishes across the centuries, but it is still constant and suggests that “women have been and still feel disadvantaged and disempowered”.

“What is particularly relevant in the context of a discussion of postfeminist Gothic is the link between second-wave feminism [...] and the notion of the Female Gothic<sup>127</sup>.” Indeed, this dissertation will take a look at the women of *The Addams Family*, and the general depiction of female characters in *The Addams Family*’s many versions, to better understand the roles that women are given in more modern Gothic works. For example, Bienstock Anolik<sup>128</sup> explains that “unlike the romance novels of the eighteenth century, which forged conceptual connections between love, sex, and marriage, the new Gothic mode shows its female readers the link between sex and danger, alerting women to the dangerous legal consequences of romance and sex.” But she adds that the Gothic genre focusses less and less on the danger of sex, to instead make a new dilemma central: “the social threat posed by resistance to the codes of society”. Both the notions of sex and the respect of social codes are at the heart of *The Addams Family*, which is why the exploration of Female Gothic is so important to comprehend the implicit social challenge posed by the Addamses.

#### 1.4. The Gothic Genre: The Perfect Medium for Female Progress

“The Gothic’s tendency to interrogate received ideas has resulted in memorable and often disturbing critiques of conventional thinking about gender<sup>129</sup>.” Indeed, Horner believes

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<sup>125</sup> It commonly refers to the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s.

<sup>126</sup> HORNER Avril, and ZLOSNIK Sue, “Introduction”, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>127</sup> BRABON Benjamin A. and GENZ Stéphanie, “Postfeminist Gothic”, *Postfeminist Gothic Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture*, in Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> BIENSTOCK ANOLIK Ruth, “Sex”. *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, in William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith (ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, pp. 614-615.

<sup>129</sup> HORNER Avril and ZLOSNIK Sue, “Gothic Configurations of Gender”, *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic*, in Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 55-57.

that Gothic texts challenge sexual identity and the cultural meaning behind being a woman. She talks about “gynocritics”, a term which voices a new desire to analyse more Female Gothic works and to read Gothic fiction from women’s point of view. Horner claims that the Gothic portrays females’ economic, emotional, and sexual experiences like no other genre, and that it allows for “a strong academic impetus”. *The Addams Family* has already proven to be socially transgressive, so what do these monsters have to say about the depiction of women in literary, or otherwise artistic, works? Some inversions in Addams’ comic strips could be interpreted as being subversive of gender norms. For example, in one such comic strip<sup>130</sup>, the Addamses are shown reading different books. Morticia reads a book about “foodless recipes”; which could hint at society’s body shaming, while Wednesday is reading a book about sex, although she is just a child; which could also hint at society’s sexualisation of young women.

## 2. Gothic Heroines as Opposed to Addams Women

### 2.1. Traditional Female Characters

Wallace explains that Gothic female characters are very coded. They are usually depicted as “ghostly”, and haunting in the sense that they are “disembodied and disempowered through being subjected to men<sup>131</sup>”.

Although the Gothic is a notoriously slippery and diverse genre, its preoccupation with other-ness is foundational. The othering of women and, by extension, the feminine is often explored in Gothic texts; thus, misogyny; the hatred and fear of women endemic to Western culture, is illuminated, reinforced, critiqued, and subverted by and through Gothic literary traditions. Misogyny is often manifested in the Gothic through its violent effects: rape, imprisonment, and femicide. (449)

Indeed, to Meyers<sup>132</sup> classic Gothic heroines suffer from misogyny and their anxiety appears very clearly to the readers because of it. Moreover, she also uses the example of the mother, which she qualifies as the “prototypical female” character, to illustrate another trait of Gothic heroines: the evil woman. She argues that the only “good mothers” in early Gothic works tend to be dead, and that the mothers who are not, are often despicable. It is the same for aunts, whom she views as “surrogate mother figures”. She argues that they are also most often

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<sup>130</sup> Appendix. This was already mentioned in volume 1 of this dissertation, but from a different perspective, refer to p. 74.

<sup>131</sup> WALLACE Diana, “‘The Haunting Idea’: Female Gothic Metaphors and Feminist Theory”, *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, in Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009, p. 26.

<sup>132</sup> MEYERS Helene, “Misogyny”, *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, in William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith (ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, p. 449.

antagonists.

Talairach-Vielmas adds her own ideas to this definition of Gothic heroines, she focusses mainly on the insane female figure. She argues that in Gothic works “spectres are often the product of a nervous young maiden’s inflamed imagination or alarmed fancy<sup>133</sup>.” Thus, the Gothic heroine is often looked down upon for voicing her fear of phantoms, and doctors almost always associate her fears with a defect in her own “spirit”. Talairach-Vielmas sums up Gothic heroines’ journey as an endeavour to learn how to control their ludicrous fear in order to get married: “The Radcliffean heroine, driven by an irrepressible curiosity, is led to unveil the stories of other women, and gradually realises that the passionate female characters who fail to tame their wild nature end up locked up in turrets, convents or prisons of sorts.” She explains that the madwoman character is ever-present in Gothic fiction. Much like Wallace, she believes that women’s confinement is very representative of patriarchal society: “Gothic female characters experience the violence of a male-dominated world.” So according to them, women in Gothic texts were either victims of men, maidens turned madwomen, or evil mothers. The opposition between the “idealised sensitive femininity” and the “evil woman locked away to expiate her crimes” are constantly opposed in early Gothic works.

But to Talairach-Vielmas, although the figure of the madwoman was pushed to extremes in the nineteenth century, the strong will of women also became a major theme, consequently empowering them. Moreover, she uses the example of *Dracula* to show a turn in the genre, by proving that men “were just as likely to suffer from shock and hysteria as women. The attic was, indeed, likely to be inhabited by women and men alike”.

However, *The Addams Family* shows female tropes in a comic light. For example, in order to make compulsory household chores appear laughable, in episode 2 season 2, Morticia and Ophelia’s<sup>134</sup> mother says that “Ophelia cooks all day just so that she can do dishes, she loves dishes.” Moreover, in the same episode, Ophelia fails to show Gomez her artistic talents which could have made her “wife material”, this shows that women somehow had to make themselves likeable in order to find themselves a husband. Likewise, in episode 30 season 2, Ophelia wants to find herself a job. However, to Morticia a career is but a diversion from romance, since her sister is disconsolate over the fact that she cannot find love. She even suggests that she get into science to make herself a man, sort of in the Shelley way. In other words, the Addamses do portray female characters who try to comply with early Gothic

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<sup>133</sup> TALAIRACH-VIELMAS Laurence, “Madwomen and Attics”, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp. 31, 33, 34, 39 and 42.

<sup>134</sup> Morticia’s sister.

tropes<sup>135</sup>, but with these characters' failure, they seem to want to criticize said tropes, as well as the reductive effect they have on female characters. Indeed, the fact that Morticia suggests Ophelia should literally make herself a husband could be seen as an encouragement to find or create what she needs for herself, instead of just waiting for a man.

## 2.2. A Warrant for Change

Diana Wallace<sup>136</sup> argues that even before the Gothic became a transmedial phenomenon, it was already evolving. For example, Clery explains that Radcliffe's Gothic romances were already very different from Walpole's early work. Heroines were already beginning to gain a stronger foothold in the making of their lives. "They are effectively the co-authors of their own stories. Their risky adventures give them every opportunity to display their 'genius', and they are amply rewarded in the end." She also explains that through Radcliffe's novels, female readers could see the mirrored story of their own genius "bounded by the expectation of marriage and domestic bliss". The immersion of Gothic female characters in poetry, and other art forms viewed as recreational pleasures, were a reflection of Gothic readers' own muted creativity. Furthermore, according to Clery, Mary Shelley felt threatened by the comparison of her work with those of Gothic authors' she admired, but also – and most importantly – burdened by "the whole Gothic tradition<sup>137</sup>". This already shows a strong change from classic Gothic towards a more modern form of Gothic, and reveals how burdensome female tropes, and the female realities they represented, were to women.

Even though the Gothic genre had become almost exclusively a female genre by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, encompassing both writers and readers, the image of angel/demon female character was barely explored at the time and one had to wait until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before critics paid attention to it. The supernatural elements, the violence and the spooky architecture had such a tight grip on the Gothic that the representation of the female character was largely overlooked. Still, if one pays attention, it is there, waiting to be acknowledged. Female Gothic writers lived in a misogynistic era and depicted their characters as pure and chaste (like they had to be in their personal lives). Furthermore, even if the intrigue of Gothic romances was almost always set in foreign countries the social *etiquette* still had to be applied

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<sup>135</sup> Stay at home women who need only be pretty and respectable.

<sup>136</sup> WALLACE Diana, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 51 and 62.

<sup>137</sup> ARNAUD Pierre, "Le Roman Gothique et l'Avènement de la Femme Moderne", *XVII-XVIII. Revue de la Société d'Etudes Anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles*, vol. 20, n° 1, 1985, pp. 125, 169, 171 and 172.

to the female characters, a paradox that only surfaced in modern analysis. Despite all this, the Gothic genre at least gave female writers the freedom of opportunity to “get women out of their boudoirs”. The clichéd image of females belonging to the brothel, the church or the boudoir in libertine French novels did not apply to Gothic texts, an exception that allowed female characters to escape the jails of their lives, their female writers travelling in their stead. Moreover, in Gothic fiction women seem to have a different force of character, they are stronger, getting out of situations that libertine female characters were never allowed to. Thus, Gothic female characters were not as passive as it seemed after all. In the wake of the comic turn, characters such as Morticia or Wednesday Addams would take matters into their own hands and finish turning the tables, becoming stronger than their male counterparts.

### 2.3. Neo-Female Gothic

Messenger Davies explains the change in female heroine standards with the following idea. To her, the new forms of the Gothic; such as the Comic Gothic, inherited some “dark” Gothic elements such as the supernatural. Still, the Comic Gothic is a new sub-genre, and Comic Gothic characters should be expected to behave differently from Gothic ones despite residing in similar settings. For example, *The Addams Family* women do not behave like most Gothic heroines, they do whatever they want, they rule over male characters, and they are most definitely not weak.

Besides, while traditional 18th and 19th century Gothic fiction portrays women as vulnerable, putting them in dangerous situations that put both their lives and virtue at risk, the Comic Gothic depicts them as strong characters whose virtue, if they ever had one, is long gone. Danger and pain in *The Addams Family* seems to be a source of enjoyment rather than fear. For example, in the sitcom Morticia and Gomez often talk about their torture room and hint at the fact that they use it for sex. Virtue here is forgotten, and so is the danger and repercussions of losing it. However, one must not forget that Morticia remains a married wife, and is therefore protected by her spouse status. Nonetheless, this torture room proves that pain is a source of entertainment and pleasure for the couple. They do not fear pain despite its life-threatening dangers. They even have nail beds which, according to Fester, are very comfortable. In episode 10 season 2 Gomez is even shown lying on a reclinable chair while Morticia butchers his mouth with a dentist tool to hit a nerve, which to Gomez is very pleasurable. The goal of these inversions could simply be entertaining but it could also hold a more complex meaning, a derogatory intention.

The image that most readers remember from female protagonists and female love interests in Gothic novels is that of a fragile and angelic girl: take Sibyl Vane in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, whose love causes the loss of her acting talent. Furthermore, these ideal women often come to unwittingly replace evil or insane female characters such as Rochester's elusive wife in *Jane Eyre*, or the infamous Rebecca from Daphne du Maurier's eponymous novel<sup>138</sup>. It is as if women characters cannot have it both ways, it is either love or independence. However, according to Kérchy, some Gothic novels also portrayed transgressive female characters with gender issues at their very core: "Early Gothic novels include brave heroines, who, in certain cases, when their safety or their self-identity was at stake, failed to conform to contemporary feminine norms like passivity and obedience<sup>139</sup>." For instance, the Governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is one such character<sup>140</sup>.

Further, the language suggests that these heroines, through responding actively to threatening situations, model a manly sense of agency. They are not 'carried' through a ward of assassins; they 'walk [...] with assassins'. They are not threatened by weapons, but pack their own 'bloody daggers in their pockets'. Cultural commentators expressing concern over Gothic writing's influence on a young female audience is nothing new. One is struck, however, by this author's particular fear that these romances will foster strength and activity in female readers because his notion contradicts contemporary criticism's dominant reading of Gothic settings as places in which female characters generally lack agency<sup>141</sup>. (332)

Malenas Ledoux also believes that the Gothic does not always necessarily represent weak and passive female characters. However, it often does, since it is meant to represent women's real life lack of agency.

Contrarily, Arnaud<sup>142</sup> explains that the image of an extremely sensual female, so sensual she becomes lascivious, represents a true threat to male superiority. Morticia Addams is the very impersonation of this principal. She rules over the household as the perfect housewife as well as over her husband Gomez, commanding him at her will. So, according to Arnaud, Gothic female characters seem to be sometimes angel, sometimes demon. However, Morticia Addams seems to be both as she plays the role of the endearing wife as perfectly as that of the harpy.

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<sup>138</sup> Even though Rebecca is a 20<sup>th</sup> century Gothic novel, it still portrays tropical female characters.

<sup>139</sup> KÉRCHY Anna, "Rejuvenation and Immortality in/of the Female Gothic Genre. The Feminist Potentials of Contemporary Children and Teenage Gothic Fiction", *TNTeF*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2012, p. 99.

<sup>140</sup> Although in Henry's James novella it is not clear whether the governess was delusional or truly saw ghosts, she still took matters into her own hands and tried to protect the children under her care. For example, she was never too afraid to go out in the night to put her worries to rest, and sent Flora away from the manor to prevent her getting into harms' way.

<sup>141</sup> MALENAS LEDOUX Ellen, "Defiant Damsels: Gothic Space and Female Agency in Emmeline, The Mysteries of Udolpho and Secrecy", *Women's Writing*, vol. 18, n°3, 2011, pp. 331 and 347.

<sup>142</sup> ARNAUD Pierre, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

Nevertheless, it seems rather difficult to talk about feminism when it comes to *The Addams Family*. Contrary to 19<sup>th</sup> century female writers who had to abide by a certain number of rules in order to get published<sup>143</sup>, Charles Addams was neither subject to the publishing difficulties of the opposite sex, nor did he express his art in the same way they did. And yet, Morticia, unlike the proverbial Gothic heroine, manages to appear ghastly all the while showcasing a force of character and a dominance over her male partner. While classic Female Gothic narratives thrived to show the injustice women face in society, Addams' women characters appear already empowered. Although in the 2019 Addams family film, Morticia tightens her corset and uses makeup – showing that the Addams women still most often match society's ideals of beauty and femininity – the female Addamses still enjoy more freedom than their Gothic heroine predecessors. Addams women are most definitely portrayed as insane and monstrous, Guiley<sup>144</sup> even defines the matriarch of the family as vampiric, but no-one locks them up for it.

### 3. The Comic, a Tool to Abolish Women Censorship?

It is now clear that Gothic literature not only portrays female characters overcoming difficult situations, but also portrays their harsh realities, for example, their husbands trying to kill them<sup>145</sup>. Gothic has evolved from heroines in distress to heroines saving the men<sup>146</sup>, which Margaret Atwood calls “lion-taming”. The comic turn however, goes much further. It already shows empowered female characters, it highlights the possibilities of a world where women are equal to men. For example, Morticia has already tamed her husband. According to Horner, the Comic Gothic portrays non-realistic stories, in order to let women envision the possibilities of their lives<sup>147</sup>. *The Addams Family* embodies this idea yet again since it shows a unified front and a happy marriage with a wife that holds power in the relationship, something that was highly unlikely during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For critic Robert Garcia<sup>148</sup>, Gomez and Morticia's overt sexuality was the biggest breakthrough on American television at the time, and other critics have “stressed the importance

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<sup>143</sup> For example, their characters had to embody propriety and restraint.

<sup>144</sup> GUILLEY Rosemary Ellen, *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves and other Monsters*, Facts on File Inc., 2005.

<sup>145</sup> HORNER Avril and ZLOSNIK Sue, *Gothic and the Comic Turn*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 129.

<sup>146</sup> For example, in *Jayne Eyre* although the “mad woman in the attic” trope is very reductive, the character of Jayne saves Rochester, which is somewhat empowering and reverses gender roles.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>148</sup> TREDY Dennis, “Light Shadows: Loose Adaptations of Gothic Literature in American TV Series of the 1960s and Early 1970s”, *TV/Series*, no. 12, 2017, p. 12.

of Morticia's open sexual freedom and decisional power within the mock suburban households as a tempered feminist breakthrough on network TV". Tredy claims that this "open mockery may have captured some of the growing spirit of rebellion among children and young people of the 1960s, who would soon come to more violently protest against that same conservative rhetoric throughout the decade, and who would stage a counter cultural revolution of their own". In addition to this "proto-feminist" message, as Tredy calls it, one of the strongest tropes in this monster-coms was "using the normal/different and us/them inversions to tout a thinly veiled message on tolerance and acceptance of otherness." *The Addams Family* stresses this call for "acceptance of diversity, thereby producing comedy out of suburban intolerance".

McDonald talks further about the transposition of Gothic heroines on screen, and what it brings about. To her, the consequences of such an adaptation allows for the mock portrayal of "a myth in a domestic space<sup>149</sup>". In other words, new works such as *The Addams Family* sitcom can pop up and showcase myths such as the ideal family in their perfect suburban home – the epitome of the American Dream – and laugh at its values, amongst which the ideal housewife persona.

Parody allows us to view the world at a remove; thus, in laughing at characters, we are not laughing at individuals, but at humanity, at our own absurdities and follies. In being able to achieve an ironic detachment from the world and ourselves in it, we are better able to expose, examine, and potentially address contemporary anxieties about the realities of female bodies and female sexuality<sup>150</sup>. (132)

Here McDonald goes further in her analysis, and argues that by turning American values into a laughingstock, works such as *The Addams Family* make viewers look inwards without realising it, and question the legitimacy of their values.

In later works, comic is used even more unabashedly. For example, irony seems to be the theme of *The Addams Family Values*. Morticia claims "I'm just like any other modern woman, trying to have it all. A loving husband and a family." This is very ironic because modern women want much more, such as financial independence. In this film it is Wednesday who represents women's independence. Indeed, later in the film, Morticia explains that Wednesday is at that age in life when she has only one thing in her head. To what another middle-class suburban mother asks "Boys?" enthusiastically, only to be rebuffed by Wednesday herself who replies "Homicide."

What is more, puns are also used to criticize society's customs which corner women. For instance, Debbie lies to Fester and says that she has been waiting for her wedding to lose

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<sup>149</sup> McDONALD Tamar Jeffers and KAMM Frances (ed.), *Gothic Heroines on Screen: Representation, Interpretation and Feminist Enquiry*. Routledge, 2019, pp. 1 and 185.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*



her virginity, to make this “ultimate sacrifice” as she calls it. And Fester misunderstands and thinks that she means a goat killing by “sacrifice”, which is a satiric way of criticizing this obsession with virginity, by dismissing its importance entirely. It disregards the tradition of marriage; which forces a couple to be married before engaging in any sort of sexual intercourse, in a very comic way. There are other details which hint at the Addamses’ satirical standpoint. For instance, Debbie claims that she loves Morticia’s dress because of how tightly it fits her. This could again be seen as a satiric hint meant to criticize how people tend to judge the way women dress.

Actually, one would believe that this film ends up conforming to the standards of society since Wednesday and Joel – a friend from summer camp – are shown to somewhat fall in love. However, at the very end of the film, Wednesday tells him that she does not wish to marry, nor have children, and that she views men who become slaves to their wives as pitiful. She even ends up scaring him and goes as far as implying that had she been Debbie – Fester’s treacherous wife – she would not have been so sloppy and would have managed to kill her husband. The whole scene is hilarious and again shows how *The Addams Family* manages to tackle and debunk serious customs such as marriage with humour.

The film also talks openly about sex, breaking the preconception of this subject as taboo, and shows women as initiators rather than bystanders. Indeed, Morticia claims that she respects Debbie for wrapping Fester around her finger by dangling sex as a reward for obeying her – sex being her remote control to order Fester around.

## B- Women in Control

### 1. Morticia Addams, She who Rules the Home

#### 1.1. The Pedestal of the Feminine

“Contemporary women’s Gothic challenges complacencies about domestic norms, identity, and relationships<sup>151</sup>.” According to Wisker, the Gothic is the perfect genre to explore and question societal issues such as the family and suburban values. She believes that Gothic tropes, characters, and imagery have the required “edginess to enable a problematizing of taken-for-granted values and behaviours”. By way of explanation, the Gothic is such an eccentric genre that it does not seem as surprising to witness social *critiques* in such works. Wisker creates the “contemporary women’s Gothic” category to show said *critique* of society in Gothic works, regarding women: “Contemporary women’s Gothic operates in the liminal space between what established and popular beliefs, and culture suggests are norms, and a fundamental questioning of those norms as not merely too simple, clear cut, restrictive, and legislative, but also sometimes dangerously naïve<sup>152</sup>.” Wisker reminds her readers that Gothic has always been a vehicle for social and cultural *critique*, so why not apply it to women alone?

“A major role of the Gothic is to trouble complacencies and offer a more radical, social, and cultural version of what is taken for granted but deeply suspect. In contemporary women’s Gothic this is played out in the scrutiny and dismantling of family, community, domesticity.” This is exactly what the Addams women do. Morticia plays the perfect housewife, offering stability to the household. Wednesday and Pugsley are the representation of what Morticia brings to the family: the possibility of inheritance and the continuation of the family line. Moreover, in the 1993 film, she even has a third child, proving that she is still fertile, and in accordance with conservative beliefs, is capable of accomplishing her marital duties. However, both Morticia and Wednesday are not exactly what one would envision as the ideal, and therefore normative, domestic female archetypes. On the one hand, Morticia often appears independent and in control, and on the other hand, Wednesday is nothing like other middle-class American little girls. Her Gothic traits, the way she dresses (all in black), the way she

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<sup>151</sup> WISKER Gina, “Contemporary Women’s Gothic: From Lost Souls to Twilight”, *A Companion to American Gothic*, in Charles L. Crow (ed.), John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2014, p. 433.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 434, 435 and 444.

speaks (like a cynical adult), and the way she plays with her toys (beheading her dolls and burying her pets alive), make her stand out.

“Much contemporary women’s Gothic troubles investment in community and family, offering instead disrupted, abusive, oppressive family relationships; undependable romantic relationships; and dangerous domesticity.” Addams women do not seem to suffer in their home, nor do they appear unhappy or repressed, but they also do not fit in the genteel and well-behaved female ideals of their time. Therefore, it would be interesting to see how their emancipation plays out – to place them on a pedestal well above Addams men – and what questions it arises. Going forward, this dissertation will contrast and compare more in detail the Addams women and female ideals.

## 1.2. Making Good Use of Female Emblematic Restrictions

“The advance of feminism is precarious, and women continue to be defined and constrained by tenacious models of the maternal. Women’s Gothic demonstrates the maintenance of a hegemonic version of the maternal that offers only compliance or abjection<sup>153</sup>.” To Carpenter, contemporary women’s Gothic usually goes about debunking ideals by way of opposition. Indeed, most contemporary women’s Gothic works paint unsettling images of the feminine body, and depict child delivery and mothering in disturbing ways, in order to question the reality of female identity as showcased in the media. Moreover, she believes that most Gothic works still portray women as essentially “other” by representing the “monstrous feminine”. She argues that the “archaic mother” image and the fact that Gothic female characters remain confined in domestic *mise-en-scènes* reveals the lack of evolution regarding women in society, and denies their empowerment. This idea shows Gothic works, even if modern, as patriarchal. But *The Addams Family*, unlike other Gothic works, is very unique in its cross-generic nature, which is perhaps the reason why it allows for Addams women to appear as very different from society’s ideals and yet, not completely antagonistic.

“If a woman’s place is allegedly in the home, the Gothic has been the mode of writing which has perhaps most brilliantly articulated and symbolised the terrors of that domestic space.”<sup>154</sup> Wallace and Carpenter seem to think alike, since the former also views the domestic

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<sup>153</sup> CARPENTER Ginette, “Mothers and Others”, *Women and the Gothic*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp. 46-47.

<sup>154</sup> WALLACE Diana, “A Woman’s Place”, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp.75-76.

space as the key setting for Gothic intrusion. Morticia, despite her Gothic nature, is still very much house-proud and fits into the “domestic type”. Wallace actually uses the term “feminine mystique” to describe the fact that housewives’ occupations are turned into an almost religious pattern: “certain concrete, finite domestic aspects of feminine existence: cooking, cleaning, washing, bearing children, by which all women must now live or deny their femininity”. In that sense, Morticia seems complicit with, and compliant to, society’s customs and rules, her primary outlet for boredom is tending to her garden, showing that as a woman, she must use her “creative energy” to the perfecting of this “feminine mystique”. Still, her daughter is nothing like her. Wallace argues that in Gothic works, daughters are constantly shown at risk of “repeating such confined lives: a woman is her mother”. However, Wednesday never copies her mother or shows any interest in boys. Every time it seems like she might be about to switch into a feminine girl and become a stereotype, she goes back to her Gothic self. For instance, in the 1993 film, she wears a dress (even if black) and even kisses a boy. But after all, she ends up threatening him and denying any interest in him and the possibility of any future relationship with any man.

Furthermore, the domestic space could also be seen as the perfect location for female empowerment. To Wallace, the domestic Gothic “draws on the imagery of women’s daily lives within the home. It mines the fantasies of the confined inner world, overcomes the ban on aggression and thus releases energies for creative use: it is a style humorous as well as aggressive, and profusely creative.” This shows another side of the “feminine mystique”, a more positive and qualifying capacity. She explains that the Female Gothic is defined by a central image: “woman-plus-habitation”. The evolution of the Gothic from exotic castles to suburban houses underlines the link between women and their houses, making them more homely. She uses the Gothic house as a figure “for the gendered links between property and power<sup>155</sup>”. In other words, she believes that if “domestic commonplaces” can constrain women, they can also empower them. She claims that women’s everyday activities; such as housework, eating, or playing with the children, can be turned to their advantage. For example, the activities of the “feminine mystique” can be associated with the black arts and witchcraft, thus unveiling their potential and aptitudes. “Rituals of cleaning are part of woman’s attempts to protect their domain. Carrying their broom, dustpan and mop, women are like witches walking home.” After all, Soon argues that Gothic narratives “have long privileged the house as one of their principal

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 78, 79 and 83.

tropes<sup>156</sup>”, so how could female characters not have taken advantage of their being confined to it? In Gothic works, the house is often said to reflect its owners, especially women: “the house is the ultimate, albeit figurative, mirror to which she refers in order to coordinate her subjectivity<sup>157</sup>”. What is interesting, is that there have been numerous works on the roles of women inside the home; and their relationship with said home, but very little about female Gothic characters outside the home.

### 1.3. The Addams Family as Matriarchy

“A truism of critical commentary holds that the Gothic emerges in literature during periods of cultural anxiety, brought forth in response to stresses that destabilize the social equilibrium<sup>158</sup>.” Much like literature, Gothic on screen also disrupts the social equilibrium, especially when it comes to women. Murphy talks about Female Gothic differently from her fellow critics. Indeed, she focusses on the modern, independent; and therefore transgressive, women in Gothic works. She coins the phrase “New Woman Gothic”. Still, New Woman Gothic works in much the same way as its predecessors, dividing women into two categories: “the monstrous aggressor” or the “maligned victim”. This dualistic quality of the New Woman Gothic shows how valuable the Gothic genre is to investigate the “new woman” subject, and yet Addams women do not seem to fit clearly in any of the definitions of female characters in Gothic works, be it classic Gothic or Neo-Gothic – and consequently more female-focussed – works. For example, Murphy explains that in Gothic works, “fictional New Women characters who displayed untoward sexual instincts tended to suffer disastrous fates<sup>159</sup>”. However, Morticia is dual in that she is married but still enjoys a sort of sexual freedom and authority. Thus, she manages to evade the scorn of the sexuality independent woman by staying within the safe boundaries of marital life. In other words, neither the common Gothic narrative of the freed New Woman who lives her sexuality outside the boundaries of marriage, nor her married opposite, who is subverted by her marriage in a self-sacrificial way, fit Morticia. She does not suffer a traumatic marriage experience, nor does she fully embody the controversial freedom of the New Woman.

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<sup>156</sup> SOON A., NG HOCK SOON Andrew, *Women and Domestic Space in Contemporary Gothic Narratives: The House as Subject*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>158</sup> MURPHY Patricia, *The New Woman Gothic: Reconfigurations of Distress*, University of Missouri Press, 2017, pp. 1, 2 and 4.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 81 and 223.

As far as her role as mother is concerned, her uniqueness is no less apparent. “Typically, the mother represents an idealized figure, one associated with unfailing love, careful nurturing, and a gentle disposition.” Morticia could be seen as a good mother, she loves her children and cares for them, however, her children’s upbringing lacks stability and security. For example, in the comic strips she buys dangerous pets for her children<sup>160</sup> – thus not seeming to care that much for their safety – and lets them play with weapons. As explained before, in later adaptations, such as the 1993 film, she hires a nanny to take care of them, and then sends them off to summer camp, confirming that she does not always show a sense of responsibility towards them and like many other mothers, leaves others to do the upbringing. In that regard, Morticia would fit into Murphy’s second definition of Gothic mothers: “mothers who reveal themselves too inept to care maturely for their offspring, display coldness or sharpness with their children, show little concern for their charges’ interests, fail to understand a child, or in an extreme case even descend so far as infanticide<sup>161</sup>”. But Morticia is once again paradoxical, for she also often shows great interest for her children. For example, in one comic strip she goes to the restaurant with her daughter alone to have some mother-daughter time<sup>162</sup>. In the 1964 sitcom, she is also often attentive to her children’s needs and listens and supports their ideas. For instance, in episode 26 she says that Wednesday and Pugsley’s idea to sell lemonade to earn money is fantastic. Morticia, in her Comic Gothic nature, embodies the duality of motherhood, for she loves and cares for her children and yet sometimes, cannot help but be irresponsible. Actually, in this regard she could be seen as a realistic representation of mothers, who try their best yet sometimes still make mistakes.

Chollet argues that autonomy is not solely reserved to single women and widows, but can also be found at the heart of the married home. She explains that witches, or women who appear to have magical powers, enjoy the freedom of coming and going as they see fit, not needing their husbands’ permission. Moreover, she claims that such women can also transgress their sex, by acting as men would. To her, the witch is the only feminine archetype which holds power for herself and does not let her husband or father define her: “Spouse, sister, mother, virgin, prostitute: these archetypes are based on their relations to others. The witch, however, is a woman who stands her ground on her own<sup>163</sup>.” Chollet thinks that contemporary women

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<sup>160</sup> Appendix.

<sup>161</sup> MURPHY Patricia, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>162</sup> Appendix.

<sup>163</sup> CHOLLET Mona, *Sorcières, La Puissance Invaincue Des Femmes*, Zones, 2018, pp. 69-72.

“Épouse, sœur, mère, vierge, putain: ces archétypes sont fondés sur les relations avec les autres. La sorcière, elle, est une femme qui tient debout toute seule.”

constantly have to fight in order not to become what she calls a “*femme fondue*” who literally melts into the domestic setting. It is the same for women in fiction, and especially in Gothic fiction. Indeed, much like real-life women, Gothic female characters who are given freedom, or the illusion of freedom, end up sticking close to the men in their lives. For example, although Morticia has power in both the relationship and her life, she still never drifts away from Gomez and respects his decisions. She is the pillar of her marriage and family and as such, she can never leave the home for too long or risk its collapse. Still, in the 1993 film, Morticia explains that she wishes she had more time “to join the dark forces”, implying that she perhaps wishes she had more time for herself, time not dedicated to her family.

Nonetheless, Morticia still has very clichéd housewife worries. For example, in episode 9 (1964 sitcom) she explains that she wants to exchange recipes with her female neighbours, implicitly supporting the claim that women belong in the kitchen and should cook a good meal for their husbands and children. In episode 6 (1973 cartoon series) she is invited to a baking contest and Gomez claims: “If you win, everyone can share my indigestion”, proving that Morticia usually is the one who cooks at home and further enclosing her in this preconceived dutiful housewife role.

Miserocchi<sup>164</sup> also states that *The Addams Family* is a “matriarchy where the mother forms the central anchor of the family.” And yet, Morticia still breaks gender rules of the 1960s’ housewife, since again in episode 26 (1964 sitcom), she is shown seeking employment outside her home. Thus, she turns the tables by becoming the breadwinner of the family<sup>165</sup>. In this sitcom episode, Morticia breaks several gender codes. She talks with Fester about the stock market – a subject supposedly reserved to men. She later explains that she is worried about her husband’s money, showing an economic responsibility which was again, reserved to men. On the other hand, the men in the family are portrayed as very irresponsible money-wise, probably to highlight Morticia’s cutting-edge characteristic. First, Fester says that he, unlike Morticia, a woman, is “too proud to beg and too lazy to work”. Later, Morticia calls Gomez “that poor brave darling man”, emphasizing her dominance as she is the one pitying her husband while his masculine ego is being trampled upon. Gomez himself unwittingly pours salt on his wounded masculinity when he tells his banker that he wants to buy stock not to make money, but because he is bored. This highlights his irresponsibility further, and when compared to Morticia’s hard-working mindset, puts her in a position of superiority. Therefore, Morticia is shown as reliable

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<sup>164</sup> MISEROCCHI Kevin, *loc. cit.*

<sup>165</sup> In the 1991 film Morticia also needs to get a job after the family is banned from their estate. They live in a motel and Morticia tries to be a preschool teacher.

as any man, not only because of her own capacity, but also because of the lack thereof of the Addams males. Fester's claim "I feel so good being my own boss, I think I'll take the rest of the day off", once again underlines the laziness of Addams men and the pro-activeness of Addams women. Furthermore, it is not only Morticia but all the women in the family who work hard. Wednesday wants to open a lemonade joint to make money and Grandmama tries to sell homemade beauty products. The shortcomings of Addams males and the depiction of Wednesday and Grandmama will be discussed more concretely later in this dissertation.

#### 1.4. The Wife Figure: Morticia's Supremacy in the Addams Household

It has been shown that Morticia is a very unique character, sometimes traditional, often ground-breaking, but always Comic Gothic. One thing that becomes clearer and clearer the more one observes the functioning of the Addamses is that although Morticia and her family do try to fit into society and display a willingness to follow societal rules, they also upset expectations with humour and inversions. One of the ways they turn society on its head by giving considerable power and influence to the wife and mother figure, over the male characters. There are many examples of Morticia's authority in the different versions of *The Addams Family*. For example, in episode 1 (1964 sitcom), Morticia tells Gomez that "she knows best" and her husband agrees, showing with simple words her dominance over her husband. In episode 1 (1973 cartoon series), this is made even more apparent when Gomez asks Morticia for permission.

Miserocchi<sup>166</sup> explains that in the original comic strips, Morticia already acts in much the same way. However, he finds Morticia surprising since Charles Addams was known to draw his female characters "on the heavier side", Morticia on the other hand, is "curvaceous". According to Miserocchi, one could have first associated heavy looking women with authoritative women in Charles Addams' work, perhaps due to the Gothic tradition of having corpulent women rule over their husbands, like Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*<sup>167</sup>. However, with Morticia, he broke away from such pre-conceptions, by having Morticia boss Gomez around and giving her full control of the "domestic situation". Miserocchi thus dubs Morticia a "*femme fatale*".

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<sup>166</sup> MISEROCCHI Kevin, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>167</sup> WILLIAMS Anne, "Wicked Women", *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 98.



To Wheatley<sup>168</sup>, Morticia in the 1964 sitcom actually settles into a wider trend of social critique through Gothic family sitcoms. To her, this medium allows for a new representation of gender. “Perhaps what is initially striking about both this witch-like vamp is the sexual jouissance that she represents.” Indeed, Morticia also exerts her superiority by being sexually active and dominant.

In the opening episode of *The Addams Family*, Morticia is depicted as a powerful figure who dominates the Addams family home, takes great pleasure in her husband and her surroundings, and is afforded a kind of magical control over the entertainment in the home. Further evidence of Morticia’s joyful liberation within the domestic space is found in the episode ‘Morticia Joins the Ladies League’ which ironically deals with Morticia’s desire to conform to traditional, suburban-domestic gender roles and join a group of do-gooder housewives. [...] In this episode the role of suburban housewife is simultaneously venerated and derided<sup>169</sup>. (143)

Wheatley here shows that Morticia is not only dominant when it comes to sex, but in many other fields such as the ruling of the home and how the entire family fits into society.

Delamotte quotes Simone de Beauvoir in her work, and the quote corresponds to Morticia’s character: “On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength . . . love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger<sup>170</sup>.” Indeed, in Morticia and Gomez’ relationship they both derive strength from one another, they stand on an almost equal footing on an emotional level. Even so, Morticia still has the upper hand in the relationship. For example, Gomez often praises Morticia, showing that he acknowledges her as superior. In episode 17, Gomez recognises Morticia’s worth and women’s intelligence in general when he claims: “Leave it to you and your feminine intuition to come up with the right answer”. Similarly, in episode 8 season 2, Gomez admits to the children that anything he can handle school wise, Morticia can too, acknowledging her intelligence and culture once again. However, it is not only about how Gomez treats Morticia with respect and deference, but also about how Morticia exerts her power over Gomez. For example, in the sitcom it is Morticia who takes care of the bills, proving that although it is Gomez who owns their wealth, she also partly administers it. In episode 11 season 2, she also shows that she rules over her husband’s actions. Indeed, she tells him that he has had enough fun for one day and asks him for temperance, and he simply obeys her. In episode 18 season 2 she also plays a *corrida* game with Gomez and has him following her gestures, which belittles

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<sup>168</sup> WHEATLEY Helen, *Gothic Television*, Manchester University Press, 2006, pp. 141-142.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> DELAMOTTE Eugenia C., *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 148.

and animalises him. Delamotte<sup>171</sup> explains that American Gothic authors such as Hawthorne or Melville took the vast body of popular Gothic works and selected some “flowers of the tradition” to use in their own work. On this account, Charles Addams could be said to have only picked the stems of said flowers, Morticia purposely cutting the buds off of those which were beginning to bloom into *clichés*.

### 1.5. Morticia’s Aristocratic Side

This dissertation has shown that the Addamses were in fact very wealthy and were part of an aristocratic branch. The question this dissertation would now like to explore regarding Morticia, is how her aristocratic status as a wealthy married woman plays into the exercising of her power within the constraints of patriarchal society. In truth, Morticia never hides her joy of being part of the aristocratic breed. For example, in episode 6, she tells Gomez that being married to him really makes her fortunate, and he answers that she has always been honest. This exchange is cryptic, but one can understand that she is referring to his wealth and not her luck to be with him. She acknowledges that she made a successful match since she obtained financial security; one could even say financial debauchery, with her marriage.

According to Reynolds, aristocratic women during the Victorian period did not normally seek careers of their own but naturally acted as “promoters of the interests of their husbands<sup>172</sup>”. In this sense, Morticia is very much a Victorian aristocratic wife since she is often shown praising her husband and trying to help him however she can. In fact, Shirley Ardener<sup>173</sup> uses the term “incorporated wives” to describe women who played an important role in the success of their husbands, without their having an official role or professional status. Although Morticia is never said to have actively participated in Gomez’s success, her husband often claims that he needs her and depends on her for advice.

Moreover, according to Schneid Lewis, during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the question of domesticity became a higher-class preoccupation, “[...] the development of a ‘cult of domesticity’ that significantly affected the conduct of men and women within the family, the British upper classes leading the way<sup>174</sup>”. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that domesticity

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>172</sup> REYNOLDS K.D., *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain*, Oxford Historical Monographs, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>174</sup> SCHNEID LEWIS Judith. “Maternal Health in the English Aristocracy: Myths and Realities 1790-1840”. *Journal of Social History*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1983, p. 97.

stands at the heart of “House Addams”. In fact, childbearing and rearing are core elements of domesticity, and Reynolds claims that Victorian times women naturally obtained more power after having given birth. “[...] the end of childbearing marked an opening of horizons and a greater importance at home and in public affairs<sup>175</sup>.” It is not clear where exactly, Morticia’s power over Gomez comes from, but this dissertation has shown that part of it comes from her sex appeal, and others from Gomez’ own weaknesses. Yet, being the harbinger of life inside the household could also account for her dominance.

Furthermore, to Reynolds, the difference between aristocratic and non-aristocratic women is that the former hold more power over men. “The aristocratic women made a show of deference to men of her own class, but proceeded to offer her opinion, give her advice, or make her request just the same.” Here, again, Morticia fits into the description of women aristocrats since she too, is given the right to express her opinion. For example, she often chastises Fester in the sitcom. Besides, “aristocratic women were neither expected to, nor did they in fact, confine their entire life’s activities to the care of their husbands and children.” Actually, although Morticia certainly dedicates most of her time to her husband and children, she still occupies her time with other activities such as taking care of her plants or knitting. In episode 9 season 2 she even takes up sculpting. In one scene she orders Gomez around and he gives her the tools she needs one by one without so much as a word of protest. He goes as far as apologising when he inconveniences her during her sculpting. At the beginning of the episode, Morticia admits that she is tired of breeding plants which is why she wants to take up sculpting, it shows that she has the time to be bored with her life. On top of this, it emphasizes how Gomez indulges her and therefore, that she wears the pants in the relationship. Moreover, the fact that she can take up any hobby she likes any time she likes, showcases her wealth and privileged life.

In a more cynical manner, Morticia sometimes also shows the haughtiness and snobbish aspects of the upper-class. For example, in episode 21 Morticia claims that gipsies are unbecoming. This proves that the Addamses sometimes act like conservatives and that they can be very judgmental. Even more controversial is a scene from episode 16 season 2 where Morticia says to her carnivorous plant who refuses to eat “think of all the less fortunate African stranglers”, which is very parodic since it is something many parents say to children who refuse to eat things they dislike in order to make them feel guilty. However, it is also highly condescending and again it exudes, if not wealth, then comfortability, since it hints at the fact

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<sup>175</sup> REYNOLDS K.D., *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 5 and 7.

that that she and her family enjoy an easy life and that she never wants for anything, especially food.

Still, unlike most aristocratic women, she does spend most of her time on the upbringing of her children, which is more middle-class than aristocratic. “The aristocracy is a notoriously difficult group to define. Neither rank nor economic status nor cultural attributes are sufficient to encompass and exclude in a satisfactory fashion<sup>176</sup>.” Although Morticia was not created in the Victorian era, as a Gothic character she still holds some of the era’s traits. She seems to be the middle-ground between middle-class women and aristocratic women, since Reynolds explains that middle-class women dedicated themselves to motherhood entirely while aristocratic women had a lot more leisure time. Conversely, Morticia seems to have a sufficient amount of both. Since Morticia is a Comic Gothic character, perhaps the term “middle-aristocratic” female figure could be coined for her, highlighting her generic and social hybridity.

#### 1.6. The She-monster: Demonising Women

The horror film, like society, is fascinated with the female abject figure and the larger concept of “the monstrous feminine<sup>177</sup>”. Creed lists monsters which to this day still provide “compelling images of horror”: vampires, werewolves, ghouls, zombies and witches. She argues that abjection occurs when so called “abject individuals” fail to respect the law. “Abject things are those which highlight the fragility of the law”. Morticia and Wednesday embody this rejection of that which does not correspond to the laws of nature. For example, when Wednesday drinks poison in the 1993 film, it shows that her body does not abide by the same rules as that of other normal girls. Likewise, her mother dresses very differently from the other mothers of her suburban neighbourhood in the sitcom; making her out as a fashion law-breaker, which is one of the reasons she is disliked by her neighbours.

According to Francke<sup>178</sup>, Creed focuses on the figure of the abject to tackle very important subjects such as maternal identity (the monstrous womb) and the archetypal mother figure in horror fiction<sup>179</sup>. However, there is only one element of Creed’s theory which is of special interest to this research and that is the physical aspect of the feminine abject. “Those

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>177</sup> CREED Barbara, “Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: an Imaginary Abjection”, *Screen*, vol. 27, 1986, pp. 44 and 48.

<sup>178</sup> FRANCKE Lizzie, “Carol J. Clover, Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film; Barbara Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis”, *Screen*, vol. 36, 1995, p. 76.

<sup>179</sup> The Gothic and horror are two different genres but the two do have some tropes in common, amongst which the “monstrous feminine”.

figures who break from their neat and proper, traditional feminine role and instead burst out with femaleness in all its glorious grotesqueness.” In other words, to Creed the grotesque participates in female characters’ breaking away from conventions. This definition of grotesqueness as a tool to disrupt the status quo is extremely Gothic and befits the Addamses perfectly. For example, in the comic strips it is often hinted at that Wednesday has 6 fingers on one foot. This grotesque depiction of Wednesday, both in its extravagant derision and in the hybrid nature of Wednesday as humanly deformed, could be viewed as a *critique* of society’s expectations of women, who must always comply to the standards of beauty of their time.

While Creed focusses on the abject woman, Germanà and Williams focus on other pejorative Gothic female figures, that of the dangerous woman and the wicked woman, which as this dissertation has endeavoured to prove, meet Morticia’s description. Germanà<sup>180</sup> explains that from Greek mythology to science-fiction, dangerous women have played significant roles. She also argues that some of these dangerous women are “archetypal temptresses”. Morticia, in this sense, very much fits into this idea of the dangerous woman, since she is an epitome of temptation. For example, in the 1993 film there is an underground scene which takes place in a cave made restaurant. In this cave, Gomez and Morticia dance a sensual tango and by the end, there is an explosion of champagne. Both Morticia’s looks during the dance, and the memorable ending to this dance, are representative of female sensuality and sexuality. The dance could be a sexual metaphor, and the flow of champagne a second metaphor of the fountain woman. The shots of Morticia’s sensual gaze, and that of other women during the scene, only highlight this representation (figure 8). Moreover, the cave itself has been associated with female fertility and the female sex since the beginning of Greek novels.



Figure 8

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<sup>180</sup> GERMANÀ Monica, *Scottish Women’s Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction since 1978*, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, p. 61.

“Etymology says it all. ‘Wicked’ derives from the Old English *wicce*, a witch. Thus any discussion of Wicked Women in the Gothic demands what Mary Daly has called ‘the process of freeing words from the cages and prisons of patriarchal patterns’<sup>181</sup>.” Williams, much like Germanà and Creed, asks her readers to look at another negative representation of women in their patriarchal context. Whereas the tempting, and therefore dangerous, woman was literally castrating, Williams’ wicked woman image threatens a more symbolic form of castration: “rebellion against their patriarchal roles as dutiful daughters, faithful wives and self-sacrificing mothers.” That is to say, wicked women manage to rebel against such figures because their otherness is brought inside the home. The witch has literally been carried “from the wild woods ‘out there’ to the civilised ‘in here’”. The proximity between the patriarchal **mansion**; where men rule as its name indicates, and the wicked woman, facilitates rebellion and is favourable to the production of the uncanny element. Women are therefore expected to submit to a physical and a moral confinement, they must fit into the narrow range of “acceptable roles” they are given. In the case of Morticia Addams, being a wife and a mother. And indeed, although Morticia is different, more authoritative, and more independent than many of her female counterparts, she still is first and foremost a wife and a mother. However, because she is a Gothic female character, she is more frightening and more empowered, which makes her out as a wicked woman, another representation of the domestic evil woman.

To Munford<sup>182</sup>, Morticia’s, Wednesday’s and Grandmama’s dangerous, wicked and abject allure, mainly comes from their Gothic nature. She focusses on specters, ghosts, phantoms and other apparitions in Gothic works, highlighting yet again the cultural association of femininity with “territories of irrationality and otherness”. She calls these macabre female figures “wraithlike”, proving that women, especially in Gothic works, are constantly associated with frightening monsters. It seems as though women only have authority if they are monstrous.

Women have been identified primarily through the body which, throughout history, has been associated with monstrosity. This representation persists within the Gothic in various forms, from the gorgon to the vampire. [...] The demonisation of woman as succubus, harpy, witch and any number of supernatural beings has located the female outside nature and beyond the natural order of things<sup>183</sup>. (106)

To Mulvey-Roberts, this constant association of women with evil stems from the fallen figure of Eve, as both a temptress and a slithering serpent-like monster. However, Mulvey-Roberts’ analysis is based on the link between evil and women’s body, rather than between evil and their

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<sup>181</sup> WILLIAMS Anne, *op. cit.*, pp. 91, 94 and 95.

<sup>182</sup> MUNFORD Rebecca, “Spectral Femininity”, *Women and the Gothic*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 120.

<sup>183</sup> MULVEY-ROBERTS Marie, “The Female Gothic Body”, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

identity. In any case, this again brings us back to the notion of the grotesque: “Woman the sweet evil, compound of honeycomb and poison’s sensual and deadly metaphors point to female flesh as a corrupting and poisonous influence. The combination of human and animal traits<sup>184</sup>.” Thus, women seem to have no middle-ground definition, they are either pure or devilish. However, from a modern point of view, Morticia could be this middle-ground; as both an erotic, Gothic, and transgressive female figure; as well as a traditional wife/mother figure.

Besides, Hogle<sup>185</sup> argues that the Gothic is multi-layered and “profoundly symbolic”, which helps it deal with notions such as Western culture’s fears and concerns. To him, feminism has shown “how much the Gothic has long been a locus for symbolising the subjugation of women and the male fear of the deepest causality as ultimately feminine”. As Armit<sup>186</sup> explains, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the time which allowed for an important increase in “degrees of freedom” as far as the physical nature of the Gothic girl was concerned, due to the newfound interest in women’s sexual appetites and identities.

Disruptive and troublesome, female vampires are an embodied oxymoron, a thrilling contradiction, fundamentally problematising received notions of women’s passivity, nurturing and social conformity. Female vampires destabilise such comfortable, culturally inflected investments and complacencies and reveal them as aspects of constructed gender identity resulting from social and cultural hierarchies<sup>187</sup>.  
(150)

The limits of social acceptability are definitely breached by Charles Addams. Morticia as a female monster fills in the female vampire role perfectly. In fact, according to K. Halfyard, the Addams couple specifically parodies “the mysterious and glamorous supernatural villains of early horror films such as vampires from Europe<sup>188</sup>”. Accordingly, Morticia is a liberated wife, albeit not a liberated woman, and by extension sexually transgressive. The fact that she wears the pants in her relationship shows that her empowerment undermines “received certainties of identity, family and hierarchies based on gender, sexuality and ethnicity.” Furthermore, Morticia, as both a mother and a vampire/witch-like figure, debunks the precept which states that female characters have to be either evil or good, since she can be both<sup>189</sup>.

Russ’ essay explores the particular pleasures of the popular female Gothic novel for women who ‘have a

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107.

<sup>185</sup> HOGLE Jerrold E. and SMITH Andrew, “Revisiting the Gothic and Theory: An Introduction”, *Gothic Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2009.

<sup>186</sup> ARMITT Lucie, “The Gothic Girl Child”, *Women and the Gothic*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 65.

<sup>187</sup> WISKER Gina, “Female Vampirism”, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

<sup>188</sup> K. HALFYARD Janet, “Mischief Afoot: Supernatural Horror-comedies and the Diabolus in Musica”, *Musing in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, in Neil Lerner (ed.), Routledge, 2010, p. 30.

<sup>189</sup> Refer to part II-A 1.3. for more details on this binary.

keen eye for food, clothes, interior décor, and middle-class hobbies', concluding that these novels are written for women 'who cook, who decorate their own houses, who shop for clothes for themselves and their children, in short, for housewives'<sup>190</sup>. (96)

It is very interesting that Morticia should answer to this definition of the Gothic, as a genre exclusively dedicated to the entertainment of women. But as explained before, the fact that Morticia embodies the wife who takes great care of her house and family is actually extremely ironic, since she is also the very opposite of the higher middle-class woman, with her curious taste for the macabre, and her exceptional freedom.

### 1.7. Allying Femininity and Non-conformity

“As a genre popular with women as readers and writers, the Gothic both implies the horrors of patriarchal control over women’s minds and bodies and at the same time veils a proto-feminist celebration of female survival and even accomplishment<sup>191</sup>.” Following the Gothic way, Addams women both show themselves as embodiments of feminine *clichés* and figures who upset traditional female characterisation. However, there is one notion which is rarely discussed in relation to Female Gothic and women’s empowerment in general, which is femininity. Indeed, one could wonder how femininity aligns with female advocacy. To Genz<sup>192</sup>, the dichotomy between feminism and femininity actually damages feminine agency. To her, femininity has the potential to become one more weapon in the arsenal of anti-patriarchal thought. Genz deplors the fact that femininity “is still tied to a relatively static definition of femininity as passivity, weakness and acquiescence.” On the contrary, she wishes femininity to be “consciously employed to achieve a position of strength and power”. Morticia Addams in that sense, meets Genz’ criteria since she uses her femininity, if not for feminist purposes, then for empowering ones.

While post-feminism<sup>193</sup> is peppered by contradictions, Genz wishes to unite it with femininity in order to hone it into an advantage. Yes, post-modern feminism does want to disrupt “fixed notions of gender”, still assuming that femininity is but another notion to spoil would be counterproductive. To Genz, owning up to one’s femininity possesses its own brand of

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<sup>190</sup> WHEATLEY Helen, *op. cit.*

<sup>191</sup> WILLIAMS Anne, “The Stepford Wives: What’s a Living Doll to Do in a Postfeminist World?”, *Postfeminist Gothic Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture*, in Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p. 88.

<sup>192</sup> GENZ Stéphanie, “(Re)Making the Body Beautiful: Postfeminist Cinderellas and Gothic Tales of Transformation”, *Postfeminist Gothic Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture*, in Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p. 72.

<sup>193</sup> Post-feminism is a branch of feminism which strives to correct contradictions and absences in the movement.



provocation. Instead of letting patriarchy dictate the feminine, Genz encourages women to reclaim femininity<sup>194</sup>. Morticia embodies this redemption of femininity since she manages to be feminine all the while being progressive by positioning herself in a place of power.

But if femininity and feminism are not “mutually exclusive” then how can femininity be used to feminism’s advantage? Well, Genz believes that modern Gothic heroines such as Morticia consciously and purposefully seek a “re-entrapment in feminine materiality<sup>195</sup>”. That is to say, that Morticia; by dressing in tight close and using sex as a power mechanism, manages to use her femininity to her advantage. Genz explains that female figures which manage to “reinhabit” femininity usually are women with stereotypically feminine bodies who attain a position of power through feminine means, just like Morticia.

However, to Whelehan<sup>196</sup>, it all comes back to the “the culture of youthfulness” which pervades the Gothic. In other words, without youth, femininity cannot be exploited in full. For example, Whelehan explains that middle-aged women in Hollywood are often “displayed as objects of humour” rather than “as objects of desire”. She even adds that it is most often slim white age-appropriate female characters in committed relationships who enjoy sex. This is why it is now relevant to explore other female characters which are ranked in different age groups.

## 2. Alternative Female Roles and Weak Male Characters

### 2.1. The Girl Child

“No character has been portrayed quite as differently as the daughter, Wednesday, from a cherubic little girl in the 1960s to a stern and frightening adolescent in the 1990s to a lovesick teenager in the 2010s<sup>197</sup>.” According to Fuller, Wednesday first appeared in the comic strips and sitcom as a melancholy little girl with a darker edge at most. He even qualifies the six year-old child actress Loring as “adorable”. “Even when she talks about chopping off her doll’s head or feeding her pet spider, there’s an inherent sweetness to her.” He goes on to explain that the 1973 cartoon took great liberties since the characters are no longer stagnant but travel in their mansion-automobile. Wednesday in this cartoon looks a lot like her comic strip predecessor,

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<sup>194</sup> She argues that the 1990s phenomenon known as Girl Power also participated in this reclaiming of feminine elements.

<sup>195</sup> GENZ Stéphanie, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>196</sup> WHELEHAN Imelda, “Ageing Appropriately: Postfeminist Discourses of Ageing in Contemporary Hollywood”, *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, in Joel Gwynne and Nadine Muller (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 79-81.

<sup>197</sup> FULLER Devin, “The Many Shades of Wednesday Addams”, *The New York Times*, 2019.

but she wears bright pink clothes and is much more positive. In the comic strips, sitcom and cartoon, Wednesday was always portrayed as a child who took interest in many dreary activities such as crime, but she only became truly edgy from the 1990s films onwards. Therefore, Wednesday's portrayal goes from solemn to almost normal. However, the 1991 and 1993 films are the ones responsible for Wednesday's darker image.

For the first Addams Family feature film, Wednesday received a reinvention that hewed much closer to the dark sense of humor in Charles Addams's cartoons. [...] In both the 1991 film and its sequel, *The Addams Family Values*, Wednesday engages in activities far more unsettling than either of her previous incarnations: She electrocutes Pugsley; drops her baby brother, Pubert, from the roof; buries a cat alive; and takes down the cultural insensitivity of Thanksgiving in a way that ends with a summer camp in flames. The role effectively launched Ricci's career, and this Wednesday would prove to be influential for an entire generation of sullen teenage girls<sup>198</sup>.

In the 2019 film, Wednesday once again looks like Charles Addam's original character, however, she stays true to her early 1990s version with a very ominous presence.

According to Armitt, "critical interest in the Gothic child has been vibrant since the new millennium<sup>199</sup>". She believes that the importance of children in Gothic works is rather recent: "questions of haunted childhood especially, differentiate contemporary Gothic narratives from their antecedents". *The Addams Family* participates in this new trend of putting children at the centre of things, which populates more recent Gothic works.

It is in this paradoxical manner that the Gothic girl child is best understood as an enigma; a cipher for the appealing nature of things not always fully understood; one who is alluring, but potentially dangerous. In essence, one might argue that she, above all characters, best embodies the very attractiveness of Gothic literature itself. (60)

In *The Addams Family*, Wednesday is the embodiment of the "potentially dangerous" child that Armitt describes as one of the most common little girls' descriptions in Gothic works<sup>200</sup>. However, there is a tremendous difference between the early versions of *The Addams Family* (from the comic strips to the sitcom) and the versions from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (namely the 1991 and 1993 film, the 2019 film being more similar to the earlier versions in this regard). Armitt explains that in Gothic works it is difficult to distinguish a young girl from a bride, either infantilising the little girl character or sexualising her. Indeed, in the pre-film versions of the Addamses, Wednesday is always portrayed as a little girl, frightening in her Gothic identity, but a little girl nonetheless. However, in the films, her speech and the way others seem to consider her makes her out to be more a young woman than a child. For instance, she has a love interest

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> ARMITT Lucie, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>200</sup> For example, in *The Turn of The Screw* the dangerous potential of children is exploited.

in the sequel of *The Addams Family* (1991). Thus, girls seem to be one or the other in Gothic works.

“A virgin ceases to be a virgin from the time it becomes possible for her not to be one, that is, when she can be seen by another<sup>201</sup>.” Here Williams explains that girls naturally become women as soon as one remarks that they have attained a certain femininity which comes with age. In the previously mentioned scene from the 1993 Addams film, where Wednesday strongly opposes the idea of her ever being interested in boys, the implied notions of marriage and sex make it seem as though the only possible “happy ending” for women is winding up married. This already hints at female characters’ sexualisation. To O’Meara<sup>202</sup>, Ricci’s impersonation of Wednesday was the start of the sexualisation of the character. Before 1991, Wednesday had only been depicted as a mourn girl child. However, from Ricci’s time as Wednesday onwards, the character adopted a new “symbolic dirtiness”. Her feminine physicality began to be taken into account. According to O’Meara, Ricci’s Wednesday “provides a liminal body in which the marginal figures of society can be explored”. O’Meara goes as far as saying that Wednesday’s paleness in the 1990s film franchise also refers to her “overt sexuality”. However, not only is the sexualisation of Wednesday troublesome in the sense that it brings forth questions of underage sex<sup>203</sup>, but also because it makes Wednesday’s character vulnerable as a virgin<sup>204</sup>, and contrasts with her eerie image as a monstrous child. Still, to O’Meara the two go hand in hand. She argues that Ricci as Wednesday had to perform cannibalism on screen which in essence required her to put “dirty things into her mouth”, and by extension tainted her image both sexually and “Gothically”.

Nevertheless, to Fradley, there is a very strong emphasis on “young women’s everyday gendered discontent<sup>205</sup>” as a result of this sexualisation and “dirty-shaming”. This goes along with Wednesday’s reaction in the 1993 film after a mother assumes that because she’s a teenage girl, she forcibly has to be interested in boys. Fradley argues that women embrace violence as “a refusal of victimhood”, which seems to be exactly the sort of response Wednesday adopts when confronted on the subject of boys.

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<sup>201</sup> WILLIAMS Anne, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. The University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 109 and 138.

<sup>202</sup> O’MEARA Jennifer, ‘Call her Moonchild’: Christina Ricci’s Enduring Embodiment of Impure Youth and Whiteness, *Celebrity Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2019, pp. 1-2.

<sup>203</sup> Ricci was only eleven when she first played Wednesday.

<sup>204</sup> HEATWOLE L.A., *Renegotiating the Heroine: Postfeminism on the Speculative Screen*, University of Sydney, 2015.

<sup>205</sup> FRADLEY Martin, “‘Hell Is a Teenage Girl’?: Postfeminism and Contemporary Teen Horror”, *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, in Joel Gwynne and Nadine Muller (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 209 and 214.

“These films’ compulsive return to key feminist concerns bespeaks unresolved social angst.” Indeed, recent teen horror films are characterized by irresolution and, by extension, a sense of horror at the absence of social and political change vis-à-vis gender relations.” In Fradley’s opinion, the surging of such themes as the sexual identity of girls in Gothic films simply translates the reality of their everyday sexualisation. Wednesday’s intent in acting gloomy and scary could be interpreted as her defence mechanism as not to be viewed in sexual terms.

King also wonders “what makes women scary?”<sup>206</sup> Like Kérchy<sup>207</sup>, he argues that it is a naïve assumption to view Gothic and Horror female characters as “screaming victims”. On the contrary, he believes that female protagonists are “action heroes”, and to emphasize their strength, he dubs them “final girls”. To him, scary young girls in puberty such as Wednesday are “final girls”.

Besides, the sexualisation of Wednesday Addams also breaks away from other gender codes. O’Meara<sup>208</sup> claims that she aligns with two scholarly aspects: the “unruly woman” and the “monstrous little woman<sup>209</sup>”. These labels show how Wednesday eschews “certain social conventions for acceptable gendered behaviour”. This makes Wednesday out as a transgressive female character and as a result, she is considered as “excessive, threatening and grotesque.” Therefore, her Gothic nature could be analysed as a result of her transgressive femininity and refusal to align with gendered labels. O’Meara resolves to call Ricci’s Wednesday a “moonchild<sup>210</sup>” since “her career has been inflected with various shades of darkness, including associations of paedophilia, the Gothic and the grotesque, as well as ‘white trash’.”

In the 2019 film, another aspect of Wednesday is showcased through the portrayal of her attendance at school. Indeed, the fact that other children make her an outcast due to her dark clothes and overall Gothic appearance (figure 9) reveals that schools can be “sites of ridicule, boredom and disgust<sup>211</sup>”. This reveals that moving away from feminine standards, even at a young age, can have negative social consequences. Thus, society is shown to encourage women “stereotypisation”.

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<sup>206</sup> KING Robert, “A Regiment of Monstrous Women: Female Horror Archetypes and Life History Theory”, *Evolutionary Behavioural Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2015, pp. 170 and 174.

<sup>207</sup> Refer to part II-A 2.3.

<sup>208</sup> O’MEARA Jennifer, *loc. cit.*

<sup>209</sup> O’Meara borrows these terms from Kathleen Rowe and Barbara Creed’s terms.

<sup>210</sup> O’MEARA Jennifer, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>211</sup> JARVIS Christine, “School is Hell: Gendered Fears in Teenage Horrors”, *Educational Studies*, Taylor & Francis, vol. 27, no. 3, 2001, p. 257.



Figure 9

To finish, Armitte also notes that children of different genders are often pitted against one another, representing the “imbalance of power between sexes<sup>212</sup>”. However, although Pugsley and Wednesday often fight, it is usually Wednesday who wins. This could be seen as a reversal of the pre-established roles of power, even more so when one considers that Wednesday becomes a lot more threatening in later adaptations, which also comes to testify to the evolution in the portrayal of women as stronger characters by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2.2. The Old Woman

Historically, older women have been underrepresented in the media, often appearing in films and television programs as peripheral characters based on stereotypes. In considering the representation of older women, the construction of age identity is influenced by gender, which too is theorized as a highly socialized identity construction<sup>213</sup>. (47-48)

According to Horner and Zlosnik, whereas the Gothic girl child became more and more important throughout the history of Gothic works, the old woman did not enjoy the same fate. To them, whereas old men are often portrayed as “ill-intentioned patriarchal figures”, the old woman is “entirely dispensable<sup>214</sup>”. Moreover, Armitte claims that “irrespective of age, the Gothic infantilises many of its female protagonists”. Grandmama Addams embodies this female

<sup>212</sup> ARMITTE Lucie, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>213</sup> PARCEI Natasha, “The Representation of Older Women in Twenty-first Century Horror: An Analysis of Characters Played by Jessica Lange in American Horror Story”, *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Television*, in Steven Gerald, Samantha Holland and Robert Shail (ed.), Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019.

<sup>214</sup> HORNER Avril, and ZLOSNIK Sue, “No Country for Old Women: Gender, Age and the Gothic”, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, in Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (ed.), Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 185.

infantilization since she is often portrayed as euphoric and with her head in the clouds, rather than as a poised and responsible grandmother. The fact that she is senile seems to make her regress to her childhood self, and by extension has her acting with a typically child-like spontaneity. For example in episode 21 (1964 sitcom), Morticia explains that if Grandmama is left alone too long she tends to brood, although she has many occupations to make time pass by less dully, which is a child-like behaviour. She does behave responsibly most of the time, by looking after the children, but she also sometimes acts like a child which can be reductive.

It is clear that gender and age are both culturally inflected dimensions of subjectivity. Whereas medical science decrees 65 as the age at which senescence begins for both men and women, patriarchal societies tend to devalue women at a much younger age. Until well into the mid-twentieth century, for example, menopausal women were seen as standing on the brink of old age and degeneration<sup>215</sup>. (185)

Besides, according to Wisker the fact that “a woman’s worth depends on how she looks” also participates to this deletion of old female characters<sup>216</sup>. Remaining young for female characters is such a strong preoccupation that even Grandmama; who is known for her off-handedness, cares about her appearance. For example, in episode 12 (1964 sitcom), Morticia says in reference to Grandmama “the vain old thing takes hours to put herself together”. This shows that even old women need to take care of their appearance to maintain a semblant of legitimacy. In episode 17 season 2 it is said that Grandmama even does push ups, which proves that she still has a lot of vitality, and therefore is still “useful” to the household in the sense that she can help Morticia run the house. Moreover, she fills in the role of the caregiver, since she is often said to spoil the children (like any normal grandmother), which still gives her a purpose.

However, Horner makes an exception in this negative depiction of old woman in Gothic works. She argues that although Gothic fiction seems to “generally reiterate the prejudices of a society which finds the older woman either redundant or threatening”, when it comes to the Comic Gothic, older woman are often portrayed more positively as “energetic, kind and open-minded<sup>217</sup>”. Granny Frump<sup>218</sup> is exactly that, at least in versions pre-dating the 2019 film. Miserocchi<sup>219</sup> defines Granny Frump as both “a wicked witch and a sweet grandma”. Her original name, “frump”, means not well dressed, which only comes to highlight how little she originally cared for her outer appearance and could inspire the readers of Chas’ comic strips to do the same. However, Granny Frump becomes more preoccupied with her outer appearance in the sitcom, and a clichéd mean stepmother to Morticia in the 2019 film. This could make the

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> WISKER Gina, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>218</sup> This is how Grandmama was dubbed in the comic strips.

<sup>219</sup> MISEROCCHI Kevin, *loc. cit.*

audience wonder why there is such a negative change of image, when the character originally was a sweet grandmother. Could this be seen as a regression in the portrayal of female roles in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### 2.3. Gomez: the Subordinate Husband

“The relationship established between the nuclear unit and society is an area in which to assess familial power<sup>220</sup>.” Indeed, it is now clear that the American family, the Addamses’ family included, functions in relation to a wider socio-political context which favours certain domestic customs such as patriarchal and bi-parental family structures. A few years before domestic sitcoms made their way to television screens, domestic melodramas<sup>221</sup> ruled American television. According to Leibman, this genre already foregrounded issues of “matriarchy and patriarchy, of femininity and masculinity, in describing a genre that centers the home and familial issues as its narrative terrain.” This focus on gender was inherited by sitcoms.

Both the film and television representations of family life tend toward producing and maintaining sex stereotyping. On the whole, this means adhering to a strict oppositional construct in which men and boys are associated ideally with strength, intelligence, logic, consistency, and humor, while women and girls are rendered intuitive, dependent, flighty, sentimental, and self-sacrificing. By the same token, characters who shun these traits, or who adopt those belonging to the opposite sex, are deemed dysfunctional (if they are men) or evil (if they are women). Such adopted traits include, for men, domesticity, refinement, and emotionality, and for women, ambition, assertiveness, and independence. (174)

However, while domestic melodramas showcased classic families with dominant husband/father figures – and criticized gender reversals and amalgamations – domestic sitcoms broke away from the stereotypes of the idealised family: “The thematic and structural consistencies with the film and television domestic melodrama emphasized a view that the successful American family was unquestioningly patriarchal, WASP, self-reliant, and conservative<sup>222</sup>.” However, as this dissertation has shown, the Addams family sometimes appears like a middle-class family, and others as more aristocratic, and they are not WASP since – although they are white – they embody the very definition of otherness. Moreover, the household is much more of a matriarchy than a patriarchy. This is made very apparent with Gomez’ character and his overall behaviour in the comic strips and future adaptations, since Gomez is at Morticia’s beck and call. For example, in the 1993 film Morticia tells Gomez not

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<sup>220</sup> LEIBMAN Nina C., *Living Room Lectures, the Fifties in Film and Television*, University of Texas Press, 1995, pp. 150 and 173.

<sup>221</sup> Refer to part I-A 1. for more information on melodramas.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, p. 219.

to torture himself, that it is her job, and in episode 8 (1964 sitcom), Gomez is even willing to give Morticia up, believing she is in love with someone else, showing that he has no hold over her personal freedom.

Accordingly, this dissertation will now explore four different ways in which the husband figure is portrayed in this Comic Gothic franchise. To begin, the notion of the husband as a father needs to be explored. According to Hamad, “cinema is rife with representations of fatherhood since paternalized protagonists have become an increasingly and often overwhelmingly omnipresent feature of popular film in the early twenty-first century<sup>223</sup>”. Hamad explains that to a post-feminist audience, fatherhood has become a true “currency”. That is to say, that father characters are perceived as ideal males and mediators of masculinity. This inclination and favouring of father male characters actually fits into a wider pop cultural trend, that of “chick-flick<sup>224</sup>”.

This second notion is introduced by Burns<sup>225</sup>. She starts off by explaining that chick-flicks usually portray heteronormative couples and centre on a depiction of femininity which often repudiates feminism. However, she also argues that the vast majority of “chick culture” studies only look into the depiction of female characters. Because chick-flick works feature heterosexual romances and male characters with integrity, Burns thinks it is necessary to look into male representation within this questionable genre. Male identity is mainly centered around “nurturing and committed fathers”. It is highly relevant that such characters thrive in post-feminist chick-flicks when one knows that they have the sort of characteristics usually attributed to female characters. However, Burns points out that the epitome of the chick-flick hero is that he is madly in love with the heroine and “wholly devoted to her”. She claims that “declarations of love are common in chick flicks”. Although the genre appeared in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it does depict the type of man that Gomez is and the way he worships Morticia. In a sense, *The Addams Family* could almost be said to portray post-feminist chick-flick males. Although the term “chick-flick” in itself is very much disputed for belittling and degrading women, to Burns the way it inserts itself in post-feminist culture could be seen as progressive. This feels even truer when one takes into consideration that masculine sensitivity was in vogue in the genre. Hamad argues that by the early 2000s, there was a “shift in popular cinematic masculinities”

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<sup>223</sup> HAMAD Hannah, “Hollywood Fatherhood: Paternal Postfeminism in Contemporary Popular Cinema”. *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, in Joel Gwynne and Nadine Muller (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p. 101.

<sup>224</sup> A genre which is designed to appeal to young women and is very controversial, pejorative and reductive.

<sup>225</sup> BURNS Amy, “The Chick’s ‘New Hero’: (Re)Constructing Masculinity in the Postfeminist ‘Chick Flick’”, *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, in Joel Gwynne and Nadine Muller (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 131 and 140.



and that emotionalism was normalised. Gomez is very sensitive, in the 1993 Addams film he is even shown being moved to tears.

Another notion which reverses gender codes is that of infantilisation. This dissertation has mentioned the girl child figure and the sophomoric portrayal of adult women characters, however the “man-child” is also of pertinence. Thompson<sup>226</sup> explains that the domestic space allows for a new representation of men, “a particular imagining of masculinity that is constructed through the private”. She argues that post-feminist culture; chick-flicks included, has produced a new figure, that of the man-child. This character is freed from “traditional hegemonic masculinity”. Here, yet again, Gomez can be recognised. Indeed, he often behaves like a child, delegating responsibilities to his wife or even his children. A simple representation of his child like behaviour is the fact that he plays with toy trains for most of the day almost daily.

The last notion which shows the many changes that the male protagonist has gone through in the last century and a half is that of weakness. Indeed, not only weakness, but also uselessness are traits that have been given to male characters in post-modern works. There are many examples of this gender reversal which places men in a position of inferiority in *The Addams Family* sitcom. For example, in episode 3 season 2, when asked to tell the truth about Gomez, Morticia says that he is “a weak snivelling coward”. What is most striking is not that a female character would dare utter such a critical comment about a male character, but that the male character himself seconds that comment by admitting to his cowardice and fear himself. In episode 21 Gomez’ worthlessness is made apparent when he admits that every business he ever ran went bankrupt<sup>227</sup>. Likewise, in episode 13 season 2, he admits that he does not know how to drive. However, instead of learning how to drive for technical purposes, he wants a licence so that he can be photographed in his automobile, proving that he only intended to learn how to drive for aesthetic and pompous reasons. In the 1991 film he behaves in much the same way. For example, when the family is banned from their estate; while Morticia, Thing, and even the children get a job, he becomes depressed and lethargic – showing his lack of courage when faced with difficult situations and the fact that he relies heavily on Morticia for support. However, Gomez is not the only Addams male to undermine masculine stereotypes.

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<sup>226</sup> THOMPSON Jade, “Mancaves and Cushions: Marking Masculine and Feminine Domestic Space in Postfeminist Romantic Comedy Lauren”, *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, in Joel Gwynne and Nadine Muller (ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p. 151.

<sup>227</sup> A paradoxical claim since he remains wealthy.

## 2.4. Inverting Masculine Tropes

According to Edwards, the Gothic “has often challenged conventional gender performance by resisting normative masculinity and rupturing the foundations of straight masculinity<sup>228</sup>”. However, it is Pop Goth which reverses gender stereotypes even further. “If the Gothic is haunted by the past, then Pop Goth makes the future its particular obsession.” Indeed, the Gothic had to adapt itself to a post-modern, a more liberal, audience. Băniceru focusses on the changes that male characters underwent. She explains that “if hysteria is ‘a female malady’, thus related to femininity, a hysterical man becomes a feminine man<sup>229</sup>”. She adopts the term “female man” to describe male characters who bare characteristics usually associated with female figures such as “moodiness, heightened sensitivity, susceptibility to hysteria”. Several of the Addams characters embody this “female man” persona, and even adopt other typically feminine traits.

For example, Fester plays the role of the enigmatic fool and moves away from gender norms by way of inversion. In episode 24, he claims that he will get a job, hinting at the fact that he has been jobless all this time and has been depending on his relatives. In this version he is not even Fester’s brother but Morticia’s uncle, showing that he even lets the younger generation sustain him. This shows that he is unreliable. Similarly, in episode 16 season 2 Morticia asks Fester if he can support a wife, since men were the ones supposed to be the breadwinners at the time. This could serve to showcase gender stereotypes and what is wrong with them – for instance, by having Fester fail to comply to them. In the 1993 film, Fester is just as naïve and weak, since he is easily manipulated by his wife, who has him at her mercy. He becomes her living puppet, and cooks for her when she gets home, thus reversing classic gender roles.

Furthermore, in episode 3, the delivery boy whistles to Fester and he who was waiting outside for the daily journal, catches it like a dog<sup>230</sup>. It makes him into an animal, rather than a man. Later in the same episode, Morticia explains that the last time she and Gomez scolded Fester he hid in the closet for weeks, like a child. Both scenes are very reductive and infantilise Fester.

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<sup>228</sup> EDWARDS Justin D. and SOLTYSIK MONNET Agnieszka, *The Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture: Pop Goth*, Routledge, 2014, pp. 4 and 12.

<sup>229</sup> BĂNICERU Ana Cristina, “Hysteria as Alternative Masculinity in the Gothic Discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: The case of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant”, *Gender Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2020, p. 35.

<sup>230</sup> In the 2019 film, Pugsley is also seen behaving like a dog, he eats from a dog’s bowl.

In the same episode he is so happy that Morticia has a surprise for him that he is about to cry. He waxes his head to look prettier for his date and asks Morticia and Gomez what is different about him, to what Morticia says “oh you men, you are much classier than women”. Both the scene, and Morticia’s comment, make Fester out as a very feminine character since he borrows common feminine tropes (by crying, and by wanting to appear pretty). Even Wednesday views Fester as feminine. Indeed, a saleswoman comes by the house and when asked what kind of makeup her mother uses, she also tells her what kind Fester uses. Likewise, in episode 18 season 2, Fester wants to look good for a woman and decides to lose weight by exercising early in the morning. On the television training program that he is following, the coach says: “come on ladies hit it”. This shows both that Fester is acting in a clichéd feminine way, and through Fester’s difficulty to lose weight, that it is very hard for women to stick to this ideal body culture to please patriarchal expectations. In short, uncle Fester mooches off of the Addams couple, behaves irresponsibly and childishly, cares about his appearance very much, and is very emotive.

Cousin Itt also plays into this reversal game. First of all, although the noun “cousin” is gender neutral in English, he is known to be a male bachelor from the 1964 sitcom onwards. In episode 13 season 2, he gets a womanly hairdo with hair rollers. Besides, in episode 1 season 2, he admits that he has an inferiority complex and believes that he is a good for nothing. Therefore, Cousin Itt as an Addams male also subverts gender code. In fact, it is the men in the family who most often second-guess themselves.

As for Lurch, he is not feminised physically, but he still participates in the rescinding of *clichés*. For example, in episode 12, Morticia wants to help her cousin Melancholia find a husband and tries to set her up with Lurch. Lurch seems very much against the idea which Morticia cannot understand, thus inverting gender roles since usually it is women who are forced into marriages they do not wish. It is as though Morticia is Melancholia’s father, and acts like a male matchmaker.

Williams<sup>231</sup> argues that like the human race, the Gothic is not one but two, “it has a male and a female genre<sup>232</sup>”. She explains that Gothic conventions from the end of the eighteenth century onward have not only been concerned with questions of patriarchal rules and power dynamics between masculine and feminine identities, but also with the social structure that is the family. *The Addams Family* is no exception. For example, the 1991 film evokes the

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<sup>231</sup> WILLIAMS Anne, *op. cit.*, pp. 1, 35, 87, 99.

<sup>232</sup> In her opinion the Gothic and the Romantic genres are one and the same, with the Romantic representing the female part of this generic binary.

importance of family by showing how united the Addamses are. Williams believes that tensions between the feminine and the masculine in any genre are bound to arise since “one half of the population is born either to rule or to be ruled”. In any case, she claims that the figure of the “‘other’ gendered ‘female’ became newly visible, powerful, and fascinating” thanks to the Gothic.

Of course questions of femininity and masculinity are convoluted since the feminine and the masculine are Western and patriarchal societal constructs. Much like Morticia reclaims femininity as society understands it, Addams men are deprived of what society calls the masculine.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, Harrison describes Charles Addams as a genius of the Gothic. To her, the Addamses are “delightfully creepy characters<sup>233</sup>”. What is interesting about the Addamses is that for them, being Gothic does not mean that they have to be bitter or cynical. On the contrary, they find joy in gloom, their dark aesthetics does not make them unhappy. *The Addams Family* works really well because its members are always healthy and happy together despite, or perhaps because of, their “Gothicness”. They give themselves up to the Gothic aesthetics but never suffer because of it. It is important to note that, although many elements in *The Addams Family* were altered and refashioned throughout the years, the Addams essence remained. Thus, *The Addams Family* sets a precedent for the Comic Gothic. This dissertation has endeavoured to analyse *The Addams Family* in a perspectivist way, by showing that it can be light and amusing, as well as politically incorrect and, ultimately, satirical.

In volume 1, my goal was to show in what way the Addamses were Gothic as well as comic. Indeed, there are numerous examples of their Gothic nature in all their versions. For example, in episode 13 season 2 (1964 sitcom), Gomez hangs from a chandelier like a bat. There are also several allusions to other Gothic works such as those of Edgar Allan Poe<sup>234</sup>. Although these examples may make the franchise sound like a poor Gothic imitation, this dissertation has shown that *The Addams Family* is far from being just a short-hand rendering of Gothic. Charles Addams<sup>235</sup> and his successors, consciously, heuristically, and purposefully recycled certain Gothic tropes to make the Addamses not only into Retro-Gothic characters, but also into transgressive pundits and societal critics. In this sense, *The Addams Family* could be considered a Neo-Gothic slipstream<sup>236</sup> comedy, a full-blown element of the Gothic canon.

To Wheatley, Charles Addams is “arguably one of the key figures in the history of American Gothic art<sup>237</sup>”. R. T. Garcia even claimed that “Addams fathered a revolution in

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<sup>233</sup> HARRISON Helen A., “The Addams Family Haunts the East End”, *The New York Times*, 2002.

<sup>234</sup> In episode 28 season 2 Gomez hears a tapping at the window and asks, “do you suppose it could be the raven?”, thus referencing Poe’s poem *The Raven*.

<sup>235</sup> New Jersey itself is an area populated with Victorian mansions and graveyards which hints at Chas’ obsession with the genre from his early adolescence.

<sup>236</sup> The term “slipstream” usually refers to Fantasy works which blend with Science-Fiction and Fiction. However, since the Addamses also blend genres together to build what Frost calls “a new postmodern extra-genre creation”, and for lack of a better word, *The Addams Family* could be considered slipstream since its many versions slip through the cracks of genres.

FROST Gregory, “Reading the Slipstream”, *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>237</sup> WHEATLEY Helen, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

macabre art, melding the Gothic with modern day terrors<sup>238</sup>.” Harrison explains that “instead of inhabiting some far-off realm of ancient myth” the Addamses “migrated to 20th-century America: They stroll in Central Park, lurk along the highway and live down the block<sup>239</sup>”. These Victorian monsters surging up in modern day suburbs, and the overall blend of dark aesthetics with a modern American setting, made Addams’ ghoulish family unique from the start. Later on, when *The Addams Family* was adapted into a sitcom, it became even more interesting, not only due to what Wheatley calls its “unusual generic hybridity”, but also due to its challenge to family and “normative gender identities”. Rothstein<sup>240</sup> even summarizes Charles Addams’ influence in one sentence: “Addams, in his mischief, makes the illicit and enchanting, almost whimsical aspects of daily life.” Yagoda<sup>241</sup> also describes Addams’ comic techniques: “The first category is the sight gag. The second category is what Davis describes as ‘the switch’, a reversal of a familiar catchphrase or *cliché*. The best vehicle for these was the creepy, kooky, mysterious, spooky and altogether ooky family”. Indeed, this dissertation has determined that *The Addams Family*’s comic nature “rests upon the closeness between the macabre and the everyday<sup>242</sup>”. Both the constant use of “over-familiarity” (which produces laughter in itself), and the fact that the Addamses (who are monsters) worry about normal people’s issues – such as “their weight, the schooling of their children, the love lives of their families and friends, the state of their neighbourhood and how they will pay their bills” – is what makes the Addamses essentially comic. They are irreverent and pleasurable; and since there is no explanation to their eeriness, one may argue that they ultimately are more marvellous than uncanny, Comic Gothic rather than merely Gothic. As Wallace claims, there is “not one Gothic, but many different levels and forms<sup>243</sup>” of Gothic. Thus, according to her, *The Addams Family*’s Comic Gothic should also be recognised as an actual Gothic work.

Mankoff<sup>244</sup> believes that Charles Addams’ influence was due to his “largish” talent and imagination. By “largish” Mankoff seems to mean “great”, since he explains that Addams managed to expose the “duality of human nature” in a smooth way. “But where Gothic literature usually combined these themes with romance, Addams made the horror hilarious”. Indeed, Addams’ Comic Gothic was certainly disturbing, but it also had a familiar, and therefore almost

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> HARRISON Helen A., *loc. cit.*

<sup>240</sup> ROTHSTEIN Edward, “The Perverse Pleasures Underneath the Ordinary”, *The New York Times*, 2010.

<sup>241</sup> YAGODA Ben, *loc. cit.*

<sup>242</sup> WHEATLEY Helen, *op. cit.*, pp. 130 and 134.

<sup>243</sup> WALLACE Diane, “Female Gothic”, *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, in William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith (ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, p. 234.

<sup>244</sup> MANKOFF Robert, “Charles Addams”, *The New Yorker*, 2010.

friendly, approach, which to Mankoff made it more acceptable and likeable. In other words, Addams presented “uncomfortable truths” with a “comforting façade”. This term of “uncomfortable truths” actually brings about another set of notions. Indeed, this dissertation has shown that the Gothic apparatus allows for transgressions, and the comic for critical intimations. There is a consequential societal *critique* within *The Addams Family*, as well as an often provocative, and post-modern, approach to gender the characters adopt. *The Addams Family* seems to be multifaceted since it discusses many subjects and can be very versatile.

For one, as Rudnick<sup>245</sup> puts it, “Addams is the godfather of all political incorrectness. His work calls vivid attention to everything we’re taught to politely ignore.” According to Spiegelman<sup>246</sup>, Addam’s work became very popular, and Addams himself very famous, on account of his creative process. “Addams described his search for ideas as ‘mauling clichés’. In the process, he came up with some rather durable archetypes. Everyone knows what you mean when you refer to an ‘Addams house’, an ‘Addams Family’ or an ‘Addams situation.’” That is to say, that Addams, by recycling Gothic tropes, using comic processes, and challenging realism and decorum with them, managed to construct a new trope in itself, the Addams trope, which associates the loathsome with the familiar, and the perverse with the hilarious. In that sense, *The Addams Family* is not only Comic Gothic, but also “Addamsesque”.

Spiegelman believes that “Addams held a mirror up to his world, and, like all mirrors, it showed everything in reverse<sup>247</sup>”. He uses the metaphor of the mirror to illustrate Addams’ unique method for criticizing his society. He used inversion the most to suffuse his viewers with a familiar feeling which could trigger a response in respect to their own, non-inverted, world. It almost feels as though Addams used metafiction to make his work more critical. In metafictional works, authors usually deliberately allude to the artificiality of their creation by parodying or breaking away from certain literary conventions and techniques. *The Addams Family* seems to partake in metafiction since it is the very product of inversion and the fusion of Gothic and comic. The Addamses do not allude to their artificiality per se, but their existence is metafictional by essence since they are openly and self-consciously unconventional. Moreover, their atypical nature, in turn, reveals the hypocrisy of society which pretends not to share any traits with these monsters, when the viewers who live in this society are forced to acknowledge that they actually do. In fact, Wheatley<sup>248</sup> explains that *The Addams Family*

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<sup>245</sup> RUDNICK Paul. “Shades of the Creepy Old Days”. *The New York Times*, 1994.

<sup>246</sup> SPIEGELMAN Art, *loc. cit.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> WHEATLEY Helen, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

continually offers comic inversions of the intolerance of their neighbours in suburbia. To her, the Addamses embody the “neighbours from hell motif” and with it, they criticize their neighbours for their conformity, their average-ness. The 1973 cartoon is perhaps the most peculiar version of *The Addams Family*, in that it does not portray a static upper-middle-class family profiting from, and criticizing the American system, but a travelling family of nomad monsters who enjoy each other’s company. Nonetheless, it has been demonstrated that the show criticizes American society in large strokes. Robert Mankoff believes that “by making us laugh at, and with, his fiendish protagonists, he makes us temporarily share those values and doubt our own<sup>249</sup>.” In other words, Addams not only criticized society with his creation but also encouraged other fellow Americans to disengage and distance themselves from it, in order to better observe its flaws.

‘If the Addams cartoon characters were decidedly off-center living in a cobweb-strewn house, taking delight in a downpour, reveling in unhappiness, they also displayed a tender love for one another and were never actually shown harming anyone, only wickedly suggesting it’<sup>250</sup>.

Indeed, to Linda H. Davis, Addams also showed that appearances can be deceiving, and that one should not judge people by their aspect, just like books should not be judged by their covers. This could be seen as his way of showing his inclusivity and his disapproval of racism and sexism. According to Beville<sup>251</sup>, Addams was right to use the Gothic to question society. She thinks that using the genre is relevant to address the problems of contemporary society and culture. “[...] the Gothic of our time appeals to the popular imagination due to contextual problems such as ‘millennial anxiety’ and ‘desensitisation’”. To Bailey<sup>252</sup> it is natural that genres should evolve according to their parallel contextual evolution. “In short, genres evolve often through the influence of both aesthetic and economic factors.” *The Addams Family* could then be considered a justified post-modern reaction to the contemplation of the development and progression of the world. Moreover, in the 1991 film adaptation there is a scene where classical books such as *Wuthering Heights* come alive. This could be seen as a wink to parody, a way to show that the Gothic comic turn is a direct line of succession of literary classics. Besides, the fact that the 2019 Addams cartoon film is more children oriented highlights not only the franchise’s popularity, but also its adaptability. Indeed, the cinematic and televisual industries are more and more prone to recycling works which were popular in the past, to in

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<sup>249</sup> HEALY Patrick. “The Old Black Magic, so Hard to Recapture”. *The New York Times*, 2010.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> BEVILLE Maria. *Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*. Rodopi, 2009, p. 52.

<sup>252</sup> BAILEY Dale, *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999, p. 108.



turn, recycle their success. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the Addamses were adapted to the big screen yet in another different way.

This genealogy has proved that both the first incarnation of *The Addams Family* in comic strip format, and its successors, recycled the Gothic, but also passed on their success from version to version. This made it possible to preserve their popularity, all the while bringing about some changes. *The Addams Family* is not only cross-mediatic and cross-generic, but also transmedial, in the sense that it has established a relationship between different media and genres, and at the same time has managed to implement itself in popular culture to the point of developing a transgenerational fandom.

Hanson<sup>253</sup> explains that the Gothic's popularity, when it comes to gender, is due to the fact that it manages to express women's daily anxieties, as well as criticize the source of these anxieties. Moreover, she argues that Neo-Gothic works have made an even greater difference in changing the "narrative trajectories of their heroines" since from the 1940s onwards, they have tended to be "sexually and/or financially empowered". Morticia Addams could be seen as proof of this evolution in the Gothic, and since she also still complies to the ideal wife figure, she seems to clearly expose female roles like early Gothic works. Furthermore, female characters have evolved throughout the years in *The Addams Family*, and they always have been polymorphous. For example, Wednesday is both a filial daughter and a monstrous child, Grandmama both a sweet grandmother and a frightening witch.

Of course, Charles Addam's *The Addams Family* could hardly be called a Gothic revival, let alone a feminist Gothic revival. However, his Gothic recycling has shown to include – in spite of himself or purposely – some if not feminist, at least less androcentric and more inclusive gender ideas in his work. Thus, one question remains, was Addams' accidentally *avant-gardiste* or did he deliberately give more power to his female characters? Moreover, unlike other married couples, the Addamses are in love, they love their children, and their children love them in return. In that sense, aren't the Addamses a functional family?

One thing that is undeniable is that *The Addams Family* has left its mark on several generations, thanks to its playfully transgressive nature. According to Gerald, the 1960s "saw a real upswing in horror on American TV<sup>254</sup>". However, the list of series which remained "immensely popular" decades later is very short. *The Addams Family* sitcom and *Scooby Doo* are two horror comedies which have almost survived a millennia. Recently, Tim Burton has

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<sup>253</sup> HANSON Helen, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>254</sup> GERALD Steven, "Introduction", *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Television*, in Steven Gerald, Samantha Holland and Robert Shail (ed.), Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019, p. 3.

even confirmed that he will be bringing the Addams franchise to Netflix<sup>255</sup>, proving that the Addamses are, if not immortal, then still very much alive and kicking in popular culture.

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<sup>255</sup> GARTENBERG Chaim, “Tim Burton is Making a Live-action Addams Family Spinoff about Wednesday for Netflix”, *The Verge*, 2021.

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