Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

AMERICAN PRIME-TIME MONSTERS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GOTHIC OTHER IN *TRUE DETECTIVE*, *AMERICAN HORROR STORY: COVEN* AND *TRUE BLOOD*

Pembe Gözde Erdoğan

Ph.D. Dissertation

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This dissertation is dedicated to two strong and influential women in my life who have been my teachers, mentors, friends and mothers in more ways than one:

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&

Nur Gökalp; Your spirit and guidance continue to shape me.

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ÖZET

ERDOĞAN, Pembe Gözde. "Prime-Time Amerikan Canavarları: *True Detective*, *American Horror Story: Coven* ve *True Blood* Dizilerindeki Gotik Öteki Kavramının İncelenmesi," Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2014.

Ülkelerinin tarihinin başlangıcından beri Amerikalılar bir Amerikalı olmanın ne anlama geldiği konusunu sürekli irdelemişlerdir. 11 Eylül olaylarının da etkisiyle, günümüzde Amerika'daki sosyo-politik söylemlerde hala bu soru karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Kültür çalışmaları alanında kimlik oluşumu "ötekileştirme" olgusuyla doğrudan bağlantılı olarak görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Amerikalılar da toplumlarındaki çeşitliliğin getirdiği, ülkenin içindeki farklı sınıf, ırk, cinsiyet ve cinsel eğilim kimlikleriyle ilişkili konularda hep bölünmüşlerdir. "Ötekileştirme" olgusunun Amerika'da sosyal yaşamın bir gerçeği olduğu kabul edilirse, canavarlaştırılmış "ötekiler"in betimlendiği Gotik türü günümüz Amerika'sındaki kültürel kaygıları incelemek için uygun bir araç olarak görülmelidir.

Bu noktadan hareketle, bu çalışma, üç güncel Amerikan televizyon dizisini—HBO kanalında yayınlanan *True Detective*, FX kanalında yayınlanan *American Horror Story: Coven* ve yine HBO'da yayınlanan *True Blood*—Amerikan Gotik televizyon dizileri olarak inceleyerek bu metinlerin günümüz Amerika'sındaki ötekileştirme kavramını nasıl ortaya çıkardıklarını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda Gotik kavramı sabit bir tür olarak algılanmamakta, Batı kültüründe eskiden beri bulunan yaygın bir durum olarak görülmektedir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda Amerikan Gotik kavramının özgün niteliklerini belirleyerek bu dizileri, Louisiana bölgesinde geçtiklerinden dolayı, Amerikan Güney Gotiği türünün birer örneği olarak yorumlamaktadır. Son analizde bu diziler Amerikan toplumunun, ayrımcılık ve önyargı problemlerini aşmak bir yana dursun, hala farklılık ve çeşitlilik konularıyla ve ötekileştirme söylemleriyle iştigal ettiğini gözler önüne sermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Gotik, Amerikan Gotiği, Güney Gotiği, Televizyon Çalışmaları, Kimlik, Ötekileştirme, Canavar Teorisi

ABSTRACT

ERDOĞAN, Pembe Gözde. "American Prime-Time Monsters: An Analysis of The Gothic Other in *True Detective*, *American Horror Story: Coven* and *True Blood*," Ph. D. Dissertation, Ankara, 2014.

Throughout the history of their nation, Americans have always been preoccupied with defining what it means to be an American. The contemporary socio-political scene in America is still informed by this question whose urgency was strengthened by 9/11. In cultural studies, identity formation is seen as closely linked to the practice of "othering." Accordingly, Americans have always been conscious of the issues of diversity in their society, which involves anxieties over different class, racial, gender and sexual identities within the nation. As the practice of "othering" is recognized as an ongoing practice in American society, the Gothic mode, with its representations of demonized "others" becomes an apt tool to analyze cultural anxieties in contemporary America.

Within this context, this study analyzes three contemporary television shows in America—HBO's *True Detective*, FX's *American Horror Story: Coven*, and HBO's *True Blood*— as American Gothic television shows and aims to reveal how these texts demonstrate the current practices of "othering" in America through their monsters. In this vein, the Gothic is seen as a pervasive mode within Western culture rather than a fixed genre. The study also establishes the specific qualities of the American Gothic and reads these shows as American Southern Gothic texts as they all use Louisiana as their setting. At the final analysis, these shows reveal that American society, rather than having overcome its problems of discrimination and prejudice, appears as still obsessed with difference and discourses of othering.

Keywords

Gothic, American Gothic, Southern Gothic, Television Studies, Identity, Othering, Monster Theory

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INTRODUCTION:
GOTHIC TELEVISION AND AMERICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

In his book, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture*, David Marc calls American television "the Rorschach test of the American personality" (38). Indeed, especially after the 1970s with the advent of television studies, television gained more legitimacy as a field in cultural studies and started to be seen as a viable tool in understanding and analyzing the cultures that produce it. Contrary to the post-World War II mass culture critique of television as a part of a "dumbing," "low" pop culture that seeks to indoctrinate the masses with the dominant ideology of the rulers,[1] television, now, is seen as a complex cultural field where various meanings are being produced, reproduced, and circulated, by and through a demographically diverse audience. As Fiske and Hartley suggest, "television functions as a social ritual, overriding individual distinctions, in which our culture engages in order to communicate with its collective self" (85).

This study takes this definition of television as "a bearer/provoker of meanings and pleasures" for a culture which functions for "the generation and circulation of this variety of meanings and pleasures within society" (Fiske 1) as a given, and aims at analyzing American Gothic television, one of the most popular trends in American television today, as a reproduction and reevaluation of American identity in the twenty-first century. As such, this study is selective in its subject matter, as any and all modes and genres of television can so be analyzed as fields for the contestation of such an identity. However, it is the emphasis of this study that the Gothic mode in television offers a unique and apt tool to trace the different mechanisms of identity formation in the United States with its focus on the processes of "othering" and their production of demonized monsters within a culture. As such, the television shows analyzed in this project will reveal certain discourses of identity formation used in American society especially in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The study is also selective in its choice of television shows among a great number of Gothic American television series. For the sake of focus and clarity, the three shows

analyzed in this study—HBO's *True Blood* and *True Detective* and FX's *American Horror Story*—serve as case studies for one of American Gothic's most enduring sub-genres: the Southern Gothic. In this vein, the study will try to establish the American South as a perfect field for American society to project (and abject) unwanted or repressed issues and identities that it has struggled with throughout the course of its history.

Before tackling specific issues of the Southern Gothic as dealt with in the shows, however, it is imperative that a framework be set for American identity and American Gothic. Therefore, this introduction will explore some of the issues and arguments that are fundamental to American identity in the twenty-first century, and the first chapter will analyze the historical and theoretical aspects of the Gothic before moving on to the field of the American South.

1. AMERICAN IDENTITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The question of identity is a highly problematical one in the American context. Even though Americans usually feel strong ties to their national identities during times of war and hardship, America, as a "nation of immigrants" has always been a place where various different identities compete and interact with one another, and identity discourses in America are continuously changing. It is important, therefore, to explore how identification and categories of identity work in general.

The concept of identity is indispensable to social life; as Erik Erikson suggests, it is "all-pervasive." It is also a highly unclear concept; it is "vague" and "unfathomable" (9). Broadly defined, however, identity is an individual's or a group's "sense of self" (Huntington 21), created by a categorization and differentiation process by the consciousness in which "I" or "we" possess certain qualities that differentiate "me" from "you" and "us" from "them". As long as people interact with others, they have no choice but to define themselves in relation to those others and identify themselves in their similarities to, and differences from, them. As such, identity formation is a function of societal formations.

The concept of identity emerged as a central theme within cultural studies during the 1990s as a result of the political discourses of feminism, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, which are usually labelled collectively as the "politics of identity." The most important aspect of identity that is now widely accepted is that identity is not a given; it is, overwhelmingly, constructed by the individual or the group. As Huntington suggests, "Identities are imagined selves: they are what we think we are and what we want to be" (22). Similarly, Giddens characterizes "self-identity" as a story, a narrative: "Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (53). The traditional western conception of identity, what Stuart Hall calls "the enlightenment subject," is seen as a fixed, unified, universal, non-changing Cartesian subject. This essentialist view of identity no longer holds in cultural studies and sociology, as subjectivity and identity are now seen as "contingent culturally specific productions" (Barker 220).

The construction process of identity is realized and reproduced within several discourses in social life that are either created by the individual/group or by the society as a function of how it sees that individual/group. Therefore, both individuals and groups have identities. As individuals find and refine their identities in different groups and are able to shift identities from one group to another, group identity "usually involves a primary defining characteristic and is less fungible" (Huntington 22). In group identities, individuals assume identity positions in relation to their similarities with other individuals and submerge other qualities in order to belong to the group. In order to define themselves, people also need "others." Jeffrey Weeks notes that "identity is about sameness and difference, about the personal and the social, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others" (89). On the level of other-oriented identity formation, how others perceive an individual or group affects the self-definition of that individual or group. However, this also means that people also tend to create demonized and stereotyped "others" in order to strengthen their sense of self. Huntington describes the process of creating enemies out of these "others" as follows:

> Identity requires differentiation. Differentiation necessitates comparison, the identification of the ways in which "our" group differs from "their" group.

> Comparison, in turn, generates evaluation: Are the ways of our group better or worse than the ways of their group? Group egotism leads to justification: Our ways are better than their ways. Since the members of the other group are engaged in a similar process, conflicting justifications lead to competition. We have to demonstrate the superiority of our ways to their ways. Competition leads to antagonism and the broadening of what may have started as the perception of narrow differences into more intense and fundamental ones. Stereotypes are created, the opponent is demonized, the other is transmogrified into the enemy. (26)

This aspect of identity formation, especially in a group context, has been indispensable to the formation of an American national and cultural identity ever since colonization. The mechanics of "othering" is also the focus of this study and will be revisited time and time again in order to reveal how the Gothic mode is a perfect tool to expose those mechanics within American society, especially in its late twentieth and twenty-first century contexts.

Another very important notion for this study of American identities is that individuals, and to a lesser extent groups, have multiple identities. Huntington lists the many possible sources of identity as "Ascriptive: age, gender, kin, race, ethnicity," "cultural: clan, tribe, language, nationality, religion, civilization," "territorial: neighborhood, village, town, city, province, state, section, country, geographical area, continent, hemisphere," "political: faction, clique, leader, interest group, movement, cause, party, ideology, state," "economic: job, occupation, profession, work group, employer, industry, economic sector, labor union, class," and "social: friends, club, team, colleagues, leisure group, status" (27). The relative salience of these identities to the individual or group can change from time to time and situation to situation, especially in postmodern societies, where the borders between these categories have become increasingly more fluid and unstable. Indeed, in his "The Question of Cultural Identity," Stuart Hall describes the postmodern subject as decentered, shifting and fragmented, oscillating among several and sometimes contradictory identities.

For a diverse society like American society, any analysis of identity becomes a difficult task. Throughout its history, America has seen various competing identity discourses come to the fore in discussions of American identity. As a nation built on ideals and values by diverse groups of people, rather than being held together by common ancestry and

history, arguments about identity in America have always been between diversity and unity. Although some emphasize the nation as built on shared ideals known as the "American Creed," others tend to emphasize the diversity in American society by focusing on its status as a "nation of immigrants." Both views are indispensable for this study and we need to explore these notions in detail.

If, as Benedict Anderson claims, the nation is an "imagined community" which is created through the construction of a common language, this is truer for America than for any other nation. One often hears that to be American is to believe in a set of shared ideals and values. These values have been collectively named as "the American Creed." "There is no American race," George W. Bush has said, "There's only an American creed" (qtd in Margulies ix). Joseph Margulies lists the elements of the American Creed as "an attachment to liberty, equality, limited government, the rule of law, and the dignity of the individual, all of which are embedded within a commitment to civic virtue" (ix-x). It is important to note, however, that these by now all-too familiar American values are not fixed and unchangeable; they should be seen as powerful symbols that are manipulated and redefined to justify different social arrangements during different times. The concept of nation, as a narrative made up of the many stories, images, symbols and rituals that represent shared meanings, needs to be told and recreated all the time. As Barker suggests, "National identity is a form of imaginative identification with the symbols and discourses of the nation-state" (252).

The American Creed consists of principles and ideals that are seen as determining factors in American national identity. What is significant, however, is the fact that that identity is not bound by race or a common past but by a belief in shared ideals and myths. Historian Richard Hofstadter suggested for the United States that "It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one" (qtd in Marguiles 18). The values that are categorized as the Creed are, ultimately abstract and constructed concepts that people give meaning to with every new age. Margulies notes that "National identity is what we make of it" (x) and during his first inauguration, Bill Clinton suggested that "Every generation of Americans must define what it means to be an American" (Clinton). Americans may broadly agree on the basic values of the Creed, but they have often been deeply divided

over what those values mean at any given time, how they should be prioritized, and what they demand by way of concrete action.

No other country has been this obsessed with defining what it means to belong to a country as the United States, and in the twenty-first century, especially after 9/11, Americans seem to be obsessed with defining and limiting the characteristics of their national identity. As Kobena Mercer suggests, "identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis" (424). In his book, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Samuel Huntington talks about this identity crisis in America in the twenty-first century:

> "We Americans" face a substantive problem of national identity epitomized by the subject of this sentence. Are we a "we," one people or several? If we are a "we," what distinguishes us from the "thems" who are not us? Race, religion, ethnicity, values, culture, wealth, politics, or what? Is the United States, as some have argued, a "universal nation," based on values common to all humanity and in principle embracing all peoples? Or are we a Western nation with our identity defined by our European heritage and institutions? Or are we unique with a distinctive civilization of our own, as the proponents of "American exceptionalism" have argued throughout our history? Are we basically a political community whose identity exists only in social contract embodied in the Declaration of Independence and other founding documents? Are we multicultural, bicultural, or unicultural, a mosaic or a melting pot? Do we have any meaningful identity as a nation that transcends our subnational ethnic, religious, racial identities? These questions remain for Americans in their post-September 11 era. They are in part rhetorical questions, but they are also questions that have profound implications for American society and American policy at home and abroad. (9)

One of the most significant questions that comes out of this debate of American national identity is the question of diversity. As a "nation of immigrants" whose social fabric is made up of various different racial, ethnic and cultural identities, the United States, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, has come to be seen as a "multicultural" nation. As a result, the debate of multiculturalism in America is a very significant part of what kind of a society America is today.

For proponents of the multicultural doctrine, America is a highly stratified society in its hierarchies of identity categories such as gender, class, ethnicity, and maybe most importantly, race. Black scholar, Manning Marable, suggests that "Americans are arguably the most 'race-conscious' people on earth" (185) and that in the USA, "nationality" is closely linked to categories and hierarchies of national racial identity. As

Barker notes, national identity is a crucial category through which racialization operates: "race and ethnicity have been closely allied to forms of nationalism that conceive of the 'nation' as a shared culture requiring that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones (though of course they do)" (252). Supporters of multiculturalism and scholars and politicians associated with diversity issues like Black Studies, feminism, and gay liberation, see the concept of the "melting pot" which has been used to describe American society, as a fictive ideological tool. For Marable, power and privilege and the ownership of resources and property in America have always been unequally allocated in a social hierarchy stratified by class, gender and race, and those who benefit are usually white, upper-class and male. Marable claims that "national identity" is actually located in this structure of power and that the melting pot does not exist. He suggests that

> To be an "all-American" is by definition *not* to be an Asian American, Pacific American, American Indian, Latino, Arab American or African-American. Or viewed another way, the hegemonic ideology of "whiteness" is absolutely central in rationalizing and justifying the gross inequalities of race, gender and class, experienced by millions of Americans relegated to the politically peripheral status of "others." (185)

In arguments such as Marable's, whiteness is seen as the center of national prestige, authority and leadership. Similarly, E. San Juan notes that "whenever the question of the national identity is at stake, boundaries in space and time are drawn. … A decision is made to represent the Others—people of color—as missing, absent, or supplement" (qtd in Marable 185). Significantly, in America, race has been the primary category of differentiation, surpassing all others, like gender, class or ethnicity. This becomes more evident when one considers how, throughout American history, radically different ethnic groups have had the same racial identity imposed on them, making their nationalities, ethnicities or cultures only secondary to how they are perceived within American culture. For example, in 1971, the US Census Bureau invented the "Hispanic" category to be imposed on a population of nearly twenty million people at the time with diverse nationalities, ethnicities and traditions. This is a perfect example to show how categories of identity are always implicated in ideology and power structures and how individuals are sometimes forced to assume identities they did not choose for themselves. Marable suggests that "those who control or dominate hierarchies, whether through their

ownership of the means of production or through their domination of the state, have a vested interest in manufacturing and reproducing categories of difference" (248).

Categories of difference have been central to how American society has constructed and dealt with its "minorities." The whole narrative of American history can be seen as a big struggle between authorities to categorize, assimilate or even eradicate certain groups while those groups have fought for recognition, power and a voice within the nation. One only needs to look at the histories of Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans or Latinos to see the immense struggle those individuals went through in order to create a space for themselves in the United States. Moreover, it is again telling that all these identity categories are overwhelmingly totalizing and homogenizing, assumed to represent different people from different tribes, nations, races, ethnicities and cultures.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the struggles of minority groups in America emerged as part of the larger global human rights movement. The 1960s in the US was the era of Civil Rights movements, not just for African Americans but also for Native Americans and other immigrant groups. Inspired by these revolutions of race and ethnicity, the feminist and gay rights movements also gained momentum, claiming legitimacy for other identity categories within American society. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the 1960s changed the whole national discourse about identity, bringing the term "multiculturalism" to the forefront. Metaphors emphasizing diversity rather than unity started to be used as American society became a "mosaic" or a "salad bowl." Multiculturalist policies like welfare programs (which aim to help the poor), Affirmative Action (which aimed to eliminate discrimination in fields such as education and employment) and minority quota programs were applied everywhere in the United States. In academia, ethnic and minority studies gained legitimacy, together with feminist and queer studies. By the mid-1970s, national discourse about identity had become predominantly about political correctness and a recognition of "difference" and "group-differentiated rights." It seemed as if a nation that came all this way in the recognition of individual human rights could never go back to the totalizing concept of a single national identity.

However, this was not what happened. As evidenced in Huntington's anxieties over the loss of the national identity, Americans today are still debating the politics of diversity. This started even before 9/11 threatened American national identity. With the latter part of the 1970s and 1980s, America saw the emergence of a public discourse of backlash as characterized by the prefix "post." This can be seen as a part of the right-wing, conservative politics that gained power throughout the world. One of the leading scholars of multiculturalism, Will Kymlicka suggests that as a result of the conservative trend in western societies during the 1980s, today, "there is a surprising consensus that we are in a post-multicultural era" (2). This is a direct result of fears among the majority group that diversity has "gone too far" and is threatening their way of life. This fear often expresses itself in the rise of nativist and populist right-wing political movements.

In the United States with the end of the Cold War, American conservatives were denied the threat of communism as a chosen "other" which could unify racism and reaction, and started a discourse of backlash against all civil rights movements. What the prefix of "post" suggests is that minorities, including women and gays, have earned all the rights they could possibly want, have gained equal status with the rest of America and that policies of multiculturalism are now doing more harm than good because programs like Affirmative Action and welfare turned into "reverse discrimination," encroaching on the basic rights of white Americans. Hence, in the national debate, the United States has been portrayed as having entered the post-civil rights, post-racial, post-feminist, post-gay rights, and post-multicultural era.

Probably the most significant evidence for advocates of the post-racial era in America came with the election of Barack Obama as the nation's president in 2008. If an African American, the argument goes, especially with a middle name like Hussein, can be elected to the highest office in the United States, then racism must no longer exist in American society and there is no need for any "group-differentiated rights" anymore. As they contend, America, in the twenty-first century, has entered a "post-racial" phase. What is needed now is not a politics of difference or recognition, but a politics of "color-blindness": policies and laws that will benefit all of society rather than specific identity groups.

Such a blissful picture of American society, however, proved to be another myth. One after another, leftist scholars tried to debunk this myth and prove that America not only did not solve its race and power disparity, but that it has also entered a new era of social control for minorities, hidden under the "post" discourse. In his influential book, *Color-Blind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*, Tim Wise claims that it was Obama's use of "the rhetoric of racial transcendence" that made his victory possible and that his election, far from being evidence that racism was finally defeated, might "signal a mere shape-shifting of racism" for America (15). Wise calls this "Racism 2.0" and defines it as "an insidious upgrade that allows millions of whites to cling to racist stereotypes about people of color generally, while nonetheless carving out exceptions for those who, like Obama, make us comfortable by seeming so 'different' from what we view as a much less desirable norm" (15). For scholars like Wise, the acceptance of "exceptional" figures like Obama into the mainstream political spectrum should not be seen as evidence of the disappearance of racism and discrimination. Rather, it is a result of an ongoing political trend in leftist politics which he calls "post-racial liberalism" which is a combination of "race-neutral rhetoric" and "colorblind public policy" (16). This leftist political trend emerged after the Civil Rights movement had accomplished most of its immediate goals through the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Voting Rights Act (1965) and the Fair Housing Act (1968). After those victories, some of the leftist scholars and intellectuals began to turn against race-specific remedies for racial inequalities. Especially in the late 1970s with sociologist William Julius Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race* and extending through to the Obama campaign, "post-racial liberalism has advocated a de-emphasis of racial discrimination and race-based remedies for inequality, in favor of class-based or 'universal' programs of uplift" (16). In this vein, Obama can be seen as the product of what Marable calls the "bourgeoisification" of African American politicians in the post-civil rights era, which includes hundreds of race-neutral and pragmatic black officials who were disconnected from social protests of any kind and who constantly deemphasized the discourse of race.

Indeed, there is ample evidence that shows that "post-racial" America is a myth, an ideological discourse shift and nothing more. The concept of race still continues to be

central to American politics, but it is radically transformed, as Marable suggests, "within an Aesopian language in which both victims and predators are obscured, half-hidden or inverted" (xvii). The 1991 Crown Heights race riots in New York and the 1992 race riots in Los Angeles reminded the American public that the divisive power of racial discourse was alive and well in the United States. Today, in the twenty-first century, many scholars claim that the American criminal and legal systems work as forms of social control and oppression for minorities, especially African Americans. So much so that the highly acclaimed civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander calls the system of mass incarceration in the U.S. "the New Jim Crow." Alexander describes this new system of oppression as follows:

> In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals … Once you are labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal. (2)

Starting with the Reagan Administration's "War on Drugs" during the 1980s, America entered a phase of what Joseph Marguiles calls "the punitive turn" (106). The impact of the drug war has been shocking. In less than thirty years, the U.S. prison population increased from around 300,000 to more than two million and the country now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world (Alexander 6). As criminal justice laws became more draconian in the U.S., American prisons became more severe places. The most significant side to this mass incarceration is its racial aspect. African Americans are eight times as likely to be incarcerated as whites. In major cities where the drug war is most pronounced, almost eighty percent of young African American men now have criminal records and thus are subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives (Alexander 7).

During the 1980s, Ronald Reagan successfully aligned the conservative understanding of crime and risk with the rhetoric of the American Creed and "post-racial" America: crime had nothing to do with society and everything to do with individual responsibility.

According to this logic, the racial aspect of the criminal justice system is incidental; it is not a system of discrimination and control as scholars like Alexander insist it is. In this context, the mass incarceration trend of the last three decades in America can also be seen as a redefinition of two of the basic concepts of the American Creed: limited government and the rule of law. Margulies describes this transformation in the national discourse as follows:

> What was once imagined as a set of rules that would *restrain* the state to protect the liberty of the entire community has been recast as a set of rules that would *unleash* the state in order to promote the security of some by restricting the liberty of others. The effect has been to fracture the community into "us"—the people who call upon the state for protection—and "them," the people against whom the state directs its power, which has fundamentally altered the meaning of civic virtue and community membership. (109)

As limited government becomes "*expansive* government" and rule of law becomes "rule *by* law" (Margulies 114), the issue, once again, becomes that of discrimination, othering and exclusion: one dimension of Wise's "Racism 2.0." Indeed, the criminal justice system is only one example of ongoing discrimination. In other areas of life, there are still astounding disparities between African Americans and whites in America. African American adults are two and a half times as likely as whites to be unemployed and five times as likely to be underemployed. Young and educated African Americans still earn less than their white counterparts. For every dollar of wealth held by white households, African American households have less than ten cents. These disparities result in poorer living conditions and thus poorer health conditions (Margulies 70-71). Such disparities in the color-blind era tend to be explained by the rhetoric of individualism: "the explanation that has come to dominate, especially among white Americans, is that African Americans have only themselves to blame. Society, so long as it is officially neutral, is blameless" (Margulies 71-72).

Debates over illegal Latino immigrants and stricter immigration laws are other tell-tale signs of "post-racial" rhetoric. The 9/11 attacks also brought to the fore other identity categories for discrimination. 9/11 was rhetorically constructed as an attack on the values and traditions of America—an attack on national identity—and started a debate about the relationship between the Creed and Islam. After a brief period of religious tolerance right

after the attacks, the sentiments in the nation moved steadily towards a negative view of Islam. The religious right denounced Islam in the most incendiary terms and associated it with violence and evil. The indispensability of racial thinking to the American mind once again became evident when a new identity category was invented that overlapped race and religion: "Muslim-looking" (Margulies 172). Even though the category is nonsensical, its acceptance in America today is widespread. During a 2012 Republican presidential primary debate on national security, former Senator Rick Santorum advocated racial profiling of Muslims. Santorum said that the Transportation Security Administration should be allowed to target "folks who are most likely to be committing" acts of terrorism. He added, "Obviously Muslims would be someone you'd look at, absolutely" (Santorum).

Ever since 9/11, American society has been pervaded by a fear of "evil others." The anthrax attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the ongoing torture debate are all part of this world of divisive identity categories. Through the prisoner abuse scandal in Abu Ghraib, "black sites" (secret prisons operated by the CIA outside of the U.S. territory and jurisdiction), and the "enhanced" interrogation program of the CIA, Americans seem to have negotiated and integrated the concept of torture within their national identities. Margulies suggests that

> Advocates of torture insist that the United States, as a mark of its values, had restricted the use of torture in ways that continue to demonstrate American exceptionalism. First, unlike torture as "they" practiced it, the United States tortured only when absolutely necessary. Our motives were as pure as the nation itself. Unlike the barbarians we faced, we tortured only to gather lifesaving intelligence, and not simply to gratify our sadistic nature. While "they" tortured for any reason or no reason—simply because they were savages—"we" tortured only because "they" had forced us into an impossible dilemma: Either torture or allow innocent men, women, and children to be slaughtered. In short, we tortured *because* we were civilized; they because they were not. We were motivated and constrained by our values, which continued to distinguish "us" from "them." (220)

The justification for torture is not that different from the argument given for the overrepresentation of African Americans in the criminal justice system. The torture narrative, it is claimed, rather than targeting an entire community, only targets individuals because of their threatening behavior. Society is actually indifferent to their race and religion and it is purely coincidental that people who have been tortured were all Muslims.

"If a person becomes a target for torture, the argument goes, it is only because of what he *did* (or threatens to do) and not because of his skin color or beliefs" (Margulies 228). This rhetoric hides the fact that another identity category has been created and recognized as the demonized "other."

2. CREATING AND EXORCISING MONSTERS

The history of America as a nation actually is fraught with created and expelled monsters that function to strengthen the discourse of national identity. As Hall claims, "Instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity. They are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and 'unified' only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power" (297). As such, America has created its own "monsters" and "scapegoats" throughout its history to maintain its social order. According to Edward Ingebretsen, a social order reveals its constructedness in two particular ways: first in "the methods of fear by which it constructs the unspeakable (the 'monstrous' or the 'inhuman') as symbolic center of social energy" and second in "the means, legal and extralegal, then used to repudiate and silence that energy" (91). Enunciating and then staking (eliminating) monsters has been instrumental in the maintenance of American national and cultural identity. Examples include Anne Hutchinson in 1635, Salem in 1692, the politics of Reconstruction in 1876, the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890, Japanese internment camps in 1942, the Stonewall Riot in 1969, and the AIDS panic during the 1980s. In each case, the discourse of the monstrous other was at work in a complex process: "a ritual of boundary guarding through which the civic monster is named, repudiated, and, finally, staked" (Ingebretsen 91).

For Ingebretsen, this preoccupation with monsters within American society comes from America's Protestant roots. Indeed, religion is a big part of American national identity even today. As Margulies claims, "Eight in ten Americans are certain there is a God. Forty percent attend religious services once a week or more, nearly three-quarters say they pray at least once a week, and nine in ten say they pray at least occasionally. One-third believes the Scriptures are the actual word of God, and more than two-thirds believe in the

afterlife" (80). During the 1950s, sociologist Will Herberg said that to be other than a Protestant, Catholic, or Jew in the United States was to be un-American. He defined "the American Way of Life" as "the common set of ideas, rituals, and symbols" that give the United States "its overarching sense of unity" (74). Herberg talked about the common religious beliefs of the Judeo-Christian tradition: all believed in the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the virtue of American democracy, and the evil of godless Communism. Although American society right now is a more religiously integrated society, there are still people who define Americanness in tandem with race (whiteness) and Judeo-Christian beliefs, including most of the Republican Party and the religious right. 9/11 and Islamaphobia contributed immensely to the saliency of race the religious identity of Americanness, which can be seen in the "Muslim-looking" category.

As Ingebretsen suggests, religious systems are organized around a consensus of fear and make use of discourses of crisis. American civic discourse is also saturated by rhetorics of crisis and deviance. This is because, during the formative years of nation-building, America's officials were Puritan clergy and religious discourse and civic discourse shaped each other: "idealizing impulses of religion reinforce[d] political imperatives of sociality and nationalism" (Ingebretsen 94). Ingebretsen finds many instances where the rhetoric of religious piety blended with a discourse of powerful central civil authority; for example, John Winthrop's judgments on Anne Hutchinson as the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Cotton Mather's justification of the Salem witch trials in *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) and Jonathan Edwards's vivid use of gothic in pursuit of spiritual ends in "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1742). Ingebretsen further explains how religious and civic identity merged in America:

> In Puritan governance, historically, it has been the case that private experience is given authoritative interpretation (i.e., validated as "American") in the public forum. In terms of the public and political, the American citizen-self-subject is authorized and domesticated—in effect, made polite. Such an elision of the civic and the theological is presumed in the earliest plan of the theological New England society that John Winthrop outlined in "A Model of Christian Charity." (95)

The demonizing tradition in Christianity, as Ingebretsen reminds us, is "ancient." This tradition works so that a series of individuals or groups who are marked as failing in humanity, are cast in the public sphere as witches or monsters and then exploited in a

ritual of civic repudiation. “This cycle of exposure and visibility guarantees their eventual and inevitable civic effacement—and, needless to say, their final invisibility—all in the name of the healthy body politic” (96). Thus, in a “Christian theo-federal state” such as America, organized according to religious authority, the private is continuously collapsed into the public through a Divine scrutiny that equals righteous judgment:

> Public intrusiveness, then, for the civic good has Divine authority to support it. The Moral Majority often invokes as its rationale and authority the love of God (or some other seemingly benign phrase), yet control of persons rather than civic freedom is its object and terror rather than love being its effect. That is, the rhetorics of self-abasement and communal exaltation “normalize” a range of transgressive moments by which the “private” energies of sin are symbolically bound into the public domain. In this way, the witch functions as a public agent, one who enables the assigning of social value to private sin. (Ingebretsen 96-97)

The same fusion of the religious and civic discourses and the same demonizing spirit can be found in the New Right and the new sentimental nationalism advocated by scholars like Huntington. Mike Lofgren, who worked as a Republican staffer before resigning in 2011, said that it was “evident to clear-eyed observers that the Republican Party is becoming less and less like a traditional political party in a representative democracy and … more like an apocalyptic cult, or one of the intensely ideological authoritarian parties of 20th century Europe.” The party, he said, has a bitter hostility toward the “Other,” demonizing “anyone not likely to vote Republican”:

> Racial minorities. Immigrants. Muslims. Gays. Intellectuals. Basically, anyone who doesn’t look, think, or talk like the GOP base. This must account, at least to some degree, for their extraordinarily vitriolic hatred of President Obama. … Among the GOP base, there is constant harping about somebody else, some ‘other,’ who is deliberately, assiduously and with malice aforethought subverting the Good, the True and the Beautiful: Subversives. Commies. Socialists. Ragheads. Secular humanists. Blacks. Fags. Feminazis. The list may change with the political needs of the moment, but they always seem to need a scapegoat to hate and fear. (“Goodbye to All That”)

Thus, the rhetoric of the monstrous, derived from religious discourse, is still very much in use in American civic discourse today. The demonized and monstrified “others” serve as boundary guards that demarcate the limits of socially acceptable identities in the nation. Ingebretsen claims that “Read as an allegory of the civil, then, the monster serves as communal remonstrance and civic exemplum” (97). In this vein, the relevance of the Gothic mode, with its monsters, to any representation of American national and cultural

identity is undeniable. Tom Engelhardt aptly summarizes the situation in America in the twenty-first century when he says, “We now live not just with all the usual fears that life has to offer, but in something like a United States of Fear” (22). Ever since 9/11, Americans have been living in a fearful and vulnerable society in which they look for assuring sentiments in their identities as Americans. Indeed, for more than a decade now, America has been living in a world of terrorism, war and violence. Such vulnerable times, according to Huntington, increase the salience of national identity for people as they look for a sense of security when they feel threatened. This can clearly be seen in the new meanings attributed to the word “homeland” by Americans today. While in the past the word connoted all the different countries that Americans came from in their immigrant roots, today, with the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002, “homeland” becomes the United States itself, in need of protection by its government against violent “others” who seek to destroy it. This is a strong example of how national identity for Americans is a strong force in the twenty-first century.

No amount of real threat can hide the fact that Americans have always been divided on questions of identity. There have always been anxieties over “others” floating around in national and civic discourse at different periods in American history. 9/11 only justified some of the claims about national identity. According to Huntington, the American Creed was a product of the Anglo-Protestant culture of the Founding Fathers in the U.S. and the loss of that culture is detrimental to the future of America as a nation built on these ideals. He lists many different aspects that have played a part in the declining significance of Anglo-Protestant culture:

> Globalization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, immigration, subnationalism, and anti-nationalism had battered American consciousness. Ethnic, racial, and gender identities came to the fore. In contrast to their predecessors, many immigrants were ampersands, maintaining dual loyalties and dual citizenships. A massive Hispanic influx raised questions concerning America’s linguistic and cultural unity. Corporate executives, professionals, and Information Age technocrats espoused cosmopolitan over national identities. The teaching of national history gave way to the teaching of ethnic and racial histories. The celebration of diversity replaced emphasis on what Americans had in common. (4)

As a result, the debate over identity in America today centers on an axis between conservative voices that call for a “unified” national identity and that claim that America

has already entered the era of “posts,” and more liberal voices that insist that discrimination based on different identity categories still exists, in an even more sinister nature. The American national and civic discourse has always made use of practices of demonizing “others” as America was constructed on ideals that needed stabilization through those “others.” This makes the Gothic mode a perfect tool, with its depiction of monstrous others, in an analysis of American identity today. Before going into an analysis of the Gothic, however, it is necessary to explore the significance of television as a cultural medium in the reproduction and circulation of contemporary American identities.

3. AMERICAN TELEVISION TODAY

Ever since its beginnings, American television has been characterized as a “popular” cultural medium, governed by economics and an aim to reach as many audiences as possible. This made American television a highly “conventional” medium (Fiske 38). Traditionally, while British television has been seen as more “serious” because of its public service heritage in the BBC, American television has been viewed as “entertainment” and at its worst, “trash.” British television drama had its roots in theater and had a strong disposition towards privileging the writer as the creator of an authentic vision. American television, in contrast, after a brief period of experimenting with classic drama, settled into a commercial, popular format with a focus on least objectionable programming (LOP), decided primarily by rating numbers. The concept of the least objectionable program was developed in the 1960s and assumed that viewers consume the medium of television rather than television shows: they turn the set on and then zap around until they find something that doesn't offend them enough to make them flip to the next channel. As a result, the programs were not created to please the greatest number of viewers but to offend the fewest. Thus, in LOP strategy, television programs were usually formulaic, cliché, predictable and monotonous. American television also, because the industry mainly developed in Los Angeles, has mostly lived in the shadow of Hollywood film. As a result, there has always been a tendency to view film more highly than television. This view, according to Robin Nelson, was based “partly on the higher production values historically associated with the big-screen cinema image over the poor resolution of the small television monitor; partly on industrial practices in which more

time is taken to produce film on the back of better funding; and partly on the domesticity of television, which militates against scopophilic cinematic pleasures" (38-39).

In the realm of textual production, the critical tradition in America has valued sophisticated texts and "television was typically thought to be incapable of achieving such textual richness" (Nelson 40). The unique vision of a special individual—be it a film auteur or a playwright—is seen in critical discourse as a sign of authenticity and independence. The formulaic nature of American television is seen as a big obstacle in the creation of original, unique texts. The traditional view has been that, when left entirely to the market, television is disposed to mere "entertainment." That is why in 1987, Neil Postman claimed that "American television is devoted entirely to supplying its audience with entertainment … [and] has made entertainment itself the natural format for all experience" (89).

However, something changed radically for American television during the 1990s. For lack of a better term, television studies scholars call this new era of American television "Quality TV." The term was first used by Robert J. Thompson in his 1996 book *Television's Second Golden Age*, where he claimed that "quality TV is best defined by what it is not. It is not 'regular' TV" (13). This change in American television programming was because of several underlying causes and changes in the industry. One of the most important reasons for the appearance of quality television in America was the shift in marketing strategies. The emergence of cable television channels brought about a multi-channel competitive atmosphere and producers shifted their focus from mass to micro-cultures. Instead of the "mass market," American quality television aims for "niche markets." As Robin Nelson suggests:

> In niche markets, television is no longer simply a regular broadcast medium, but offers appointment viewing on a variety of platforms to busy professionals who select the best entertainment for their limited leisure time. Accelerating through the 1980s, demographic targeting of segments of the market, perhaps small in number but great in wealth, has become the dominant approach. Select groups feel themselves to be distinctive in culture and thus choose cultural goods (of all kinds) to affirm their status. Industry economics in a competitive, multi-channel environment happily resonate with a demand for distinctive product by the most desirable demographics, as opposed to LOP for the masses. (44)

Nelson adds that this change in television and its products should be located in broader economic and cultural shifts that have seen a drift towards a consumer individualism in which everybody should be able to claim the satisfaction of their specific wishes. As the marketplace has become increasingly globalized and television companies have become parts of vast corporations, the merchandizing of "ancillary products" has also become a major source of profit more so than, for example, sport advertising. Thus, even though television is still a highly commercial medium, "the framework of its enterprise has changed," and there is a new need for distinctive programming in the competitive environment (45).

Moreover, production values in television have likewise improved significantly. With the allocation of higher budgets to television programming, producers have started to make use of the latest digital technologies. This has produced higher resolution, imagery and surround sound for television, and has offered production techniques approximating those of cinema, resulting in "a better quality of visual imagery, enhanced by the capacity for sharper editing and digital treatment in post-production" (Nelson 43). As the boundary between film and television has blurred, the former denigration of television has itself been revalued, and established film directors who earlier would not have worked in television, now frequently choose to do so. At the reception end, large, widescreen digital monitors are available to carry cinema-quality images into the domestic space. Commentators today broadly agree that improved imagery has fostered an aesthetic dimension in television that approximates the visual aesthetics of cinema. Indeed, the subscription channel HBO (the producer of two of the television shows analyzed in this study), with its tagline, gives voice to this new cinematic view of television: "It is not TV. It's HBO." Its name, Home Box Office, consciously references the cinema box office and draws contrast with network television's LOP strategy. Thus, subscription channels like HBO perhaps take the fullest advantage of their liberation from both advertisers and regulatory constraints to explore new "edgy" approaches in television.

Clearly, American quality television is more cinematic, more experimental, and more "authentic." American freelance writer Ashley Sayeau suggests that quality television is "politically engaged, often independent TV that aims to enlighten, as well as to entertain"

(qtd in Fricker 14). In her article "Is Quality Television Any Good?" Sarah Cardwell lists all the characteristics that make a quality television program better than "entertainment" television. She concludes that American quality television programs exhibit "high production values, naturalistic performance styles, recognized and esteemed actors, a sense of visual style created through careful, even innovative, camerawork and editing, and a sense of aural style created through the judicious use of appropriate, even original music" (26). These shows usually adhere to a stylistic integrity in which themes and style are linked in expressive and impressive ways. Moreover, these shows are more likely to explore "serious" themes and the viewer will be rewarded for seeking out greater symbolic meanings of the program. Thus, American quality television requires a higher level of audience engagement because of its complex narrative structure, its intricate themes, "its use of erudite, technical, oratorical and even poetic language," and its fast-paced style (Cardwell 26).

American quality television is contemporary; it tends to focus on the present and offer reflections on contemporary American society. Cardwell suggests that "the 'everyday incidents' that are the stuff of more straightforward, non-quality soap operas and sit-coms are here transformed by a suggestion that they may be read symbolically, reflexively or obliquely in order that broader truths about life and society might be found" (26). As the former CEO of the Irish Film Board Rod Stoneman notes, American television is one of "the most important sites of contestation in today's world … there is a lot at stake" (qtd in Fricker 14). Hence, American television today is seen as a viable tool in understanding and criticizing ongoing issues in American society. Through its various narratives of Gothic terror and horror, contemporary American television is also a popular and accessible field to locate and analyze the demonized "others" of contemporary national American discourse. Indeed, Ingebretsen recognizes such commodified forms of horror and fantasy in cinema and television as applying the same tropes of scrutiny, judgment and expiation that characterizes the religious and civic discourses of demonization: "Religious anxiety, marketed as commercial horror, is placed in the service of civic definition and conservative social constraint. Consumer fear, then, may be the depository of the last vestiges of a bankrupt religious vision" (93). He claims that perversity and

demonization have not only served as cautionary tales, but have also become forms of twisted entertainment for the general public:

> Intent upon scaring the literal hell out of their hearers, the architects of Puritan interiority found that, as Wigglesworth put it, the detailing of "all filthy facts and secret acts" for the common good had an undeniable cache as entertainment as well. Perversity had more than a little appeal, and so it would continue to be economically profitable. … an extant genre of Christian terroristic literatures—sermons, admonishments, polemics—blended, seemingly without notice, into the commodified genres of moralistic popular terror. (98)

Seen in this light, Gothic television is highly moralistic and serves as a reactionary force in larger American society. The issue is not that simple, however, since Gothic as a mode is characterized by ambivalence in its attitudes towards the world and its monsters. The Gothic television shows analyzed in this study, through their self-reflexivity, intertextuality and generic hybridity, which are inherent characteristics of the Gothic mode, complicate issues of American monsters in the twenty-first century. Seen in this light, Gothic television is never as moralistic or conservative as the religious and civic discourses of othering, but uses and abuses such discourses in complex ways.

Accordingly, Chapter One will analyze the most important characteristics of the Gothic mode in order to establish this hybrid genre as a perfect tool to explore questions of identity in contemporary American television. The chapter takes on a thorough exploration of the genre of Gothic in the English literary tradition and moves on to complicate the Gothic's status as a fixed genre. After that, the unique place of the Gothic mode in America will be established and the mode will be traced in horror film and Gothic television.

In Chapters Two, Three and Four, three different television shows from twenty-first century American television are analyzed as Gothic television narratives that reveal anxieties over questions of identity in America today. Chapter Two reads HBO's *True Detective* (2014-) as a televisual example of the Southern Gothic and analyzes how the show uses its narrative and camera point of view to achieve a demonization of "white trash." Even though *True Detective* is the last of the shows in this study to be aired, it is a more traditional, reactionary and moralistic Gothic narrative and that is why it is being

discussed first. Chapter Three analyzes FX's *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013-2014) as a postfeminist and postracial horror text that appropriates the witch figure in complex ways. Accordingly, the chapter also goes deeper into the cultural phenomenon of postfeminism in America and traces the journey of the witch from monster to feminist icon to a symbol of postfeminist identity. This chapter also locates these issues in the Southern Gothic context through its explorations of how the show makes use of the power structures of the Old South and sins of slavery and racism. Finally, Chapter Four discusses HBO's *True Blood* (2008-) as a subversive Gothic-fantasy narrative where the Gothic form's excess and hybridity reach its full progressive potential. All the shows analyzed in this study take place in Louisiana and they incorporate the Deep South's Gothic environment and issues into their universes. In the end, the aim of this study is to demonstrate that the Gothic mode diffuses itself into different television texts in highly hybridized forms and that this proliferation of the Gothic in American popular culture reveals the fact that Americans are still obsessed with identity categories and discourses of "othering."

ENDNOTES

[1] Important examples of mass culture theory can be found in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception" in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and also in the arguments of Dwight MacDonald in America during late 1950s.

CHAPTER 1: THE GOTHIC

In order to analyze certain twenty-first century television shows as "Gothic," it is necessary to take a look at the historical roots and persistent characteristics of the Gothic narrative. Attempting such a project, however, is not as simple as it seems. The biggest question here becomes the one of genre: do the fictions and narratives we deem to be "Gothic" comprise a unified, harmonious genre with recognizable characteristics? Indeed, scholars tend to disagree on which works should be considered "Gothic:" questions about which historical periods produced "genuine" Gothic narratives and what sort of styles and forms comprise the Gothic abound. Largely seen as a phenomenon of the western world, the genre of Gothic seems to defy its own generic definitions. Before handling the theoretical problematics of the genre of Gothic, it is necessary to explore the Gothic's beginnings and its development in fiction.

1.1 THE GOTHIC: A BRIEF HISTORY

The first aesthetic usage of the term "Gothic" appeared during the early Renaissance in the description of European art and architecture from the middle of the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries by Italian art historians. They called it a "monstrous and barbarous" style of architecture, which ignores "every familiar idea of order" (qtd in Punter and Byron 32). During the Renaissance, the term referred to the medieval period in general and was used in re-establishing the superiority of the values of classical times:

> Where the classical was well ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where the classical was simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a world of clear rules and limits, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilized, a world that constantly tended to overflow cultural boundaries. (Punter and Byron 7)

This early association of a gothic style with "excess and exaggeration," representing a "wild" and "uncivilized" imagination and its breaking of "cultural boundaries" would characterize different gothic forms throughout history. When Renaissance artists and thinkers used the word "Gothic," they had as their reference point a specific group of people who contributed to the end of the influence of the cherished values of Rome in Europe. The Goths were one of the several Germanic tribes instrumental in the fall of the Roman Empire and who settled in much of Europe from the third to the fifth centuries

C.E. Due to the absence of early written records, little can be said about them with certainty. However, various contradictory myths developed around them to serve varying aesthetic and political agendas. As Punter and Byron observe, during the Renaissance, as a result of the lack of knowledge about the medieval world, the "Dark Ages" that followed the fall of Rome was expanded to include the whole medieval period, up to the middle of the seventeenth century and "'Gothic' became a term applied to all things medieval" (3).

Significantly, the word "Gothic" reached the full potential of its historical, political, cultural and aesthetic meanings in eighteenth century Europe, which was preoccupied with questions of rationality and civilization. By then, a Goth had come to be defined in dictionaries as "one not civilized, one deficient in general knowledge, a barbarian" (qtd in Punter and Byron 4). The medieval or Gothic age was also seen as "a cultural wasteland, primitive and superstitious" (Punter and Byron 4). As E.J. Clery also notes, the word also signified "anything obsolete, old-fashioned, or outlandish" (21). The eighteenth-century association of the term "Gothic" with a barbaric medieval past was instrumental in establishing the superiority of not only the classical traditions of Greece and Rome, but also the civilized, ordered and rational present of Enlightenment Europe. However, the term also started to be associated with a set of different values aesthetically and politically. At the time, Britain was preoccupied with a reclamation of a native English past that played a crucial role in the development of the English nationalistic identity of the period. As Punter and Byron point out, since the term "Gothic" had already been expanded to include all of the Germanic tribes, including those who had invaded Britain in the fifth century, it started to be interpreted as offering "an alternative, if mythical, construction of the Gothic past as the site of a true national, democratic, and civilized heritage" (4). The past became idealized to provide not a site of difference, but a site of continuity. This new interest in the Gothic past is also evident in the Gothic Revival movement in architecture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[1]

The myth of the Goths, then, can be seen in various ways to have been, as Mark Madoff notes, "a product of fantasy invented to serve specific political and emotional purposes" (337). As a result, during the eighteenth century the term "Gothic" was mobilized to create a set of polarities revolving around the concepts of the primitive and the civilized,

dark and light, and the irrational and rational. The term's association with both the negative connotations of a primitive past and a nostalgia for the positive values of "civilization" in the eighteenth century was indicative of its long and enduring historical journey. Punter and Byron suggest that this early struggle over the meaning of the word is evidence for one of its basic characteristics: "the Gothic always remains the symbolic site of a culture's discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilized, and to abject, or throw off, what is seen as other to that civilized self" (5). It is precisely through these sets of meanings, and at this historical moment, that the "Gothic" shows its "ugly" head in western philosophy and fiction.

While the eighteenth century saw the emergence of Enlightenment beliefs that extolled the virtues of rationality, it also witnessed an alternative worldview that sought some kind of legitimacy in human feelings. Different philosophers sought to explore the limits of human reason in the comprehension of the external world. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke distinguishes between sublimity and beauty. While beauty is associated with notions of decorum and feelings for society, the sublime, for Burke, is linked to grand feelings of terror; those transgressive, frightening feelings that open up human perception to a level of reality that cannot be obtained by pure reason:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (36)

For Burke, sublimity is experienced through feelings of anxiety created by obscurity, power, privation, vastness and infinity, ultimately creating the perception of a divine presence that makes the human being feel diminished, at the same time creating a sense of awe. Death and the fear of death provide the clearest examples of sublimity. What ultimately comes out of Burke's account on terror is that it is a necessity; it is, after all, "the strongest emotion." For the first time, Burke showed that human subjects are not defined by harmonious and noble feelings, but by "anxious feelings" which ensure their self-preservation: "This version of the subject seems at one level to be manifestly Gothic, whilst its suggestion that the self is defined by moments of trauma anticipates Freud's conception of the subject as shaped by childhood anxieties" (Smith 12).

In the face of values such as humanism and reason, Burke, through his Gothic account of the human subject, advocates the necessity of feelings of terror. Another very important point about Burke's essay is that it exults the "imagination" as a necessary faculty to be practiced for both mental and physiological health. Feelings of terror and anxiety in the human subject need to be experienced and exorcised through encounters with sublimity. As Clery suggests, "the sublime is an apprehension of danger in nature or art without the immediate risk of destruction" (28). Thus, the experience of the sublime in art creates an almost cathartic effect for human beings who can experience "terror" without any immediate danger to their well-being.

The Gothic appears in fiction when eighteenth century rationalism was being questioned and the legitimacy of feelings and the imagination were being discussed. From that point on, Gothic terror would always appear as the ugly twin of human reason throughout western civilization. As Punter and Byron observe,

> The Enlightenment conviction that man can understand his own circumstances has never, indeed, disappeared from the history of ideas; but what the Gothic does is to entertain the fear or rather, to follow Burke, the terror that such an enterprise may not in fact be possible, that there is something inherent in our very mortality that dooms us to a life of incomprehension, a life in which we are forever sunk in mysteries and unable to escape from the deathly consequences of our physical form. (12)

As it was with Enlightenment philosophy, eighteenth century fiction also saw an emphasis on reality and reason. The romance tradition associated with a "barbaric" Gothic, medieval past was discarded in favor of a new form—the novel.[2] The novel in its "realist" form evolved in the first half of the eighteenth century in reaction to the romance tradition through such writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. As Clery notes, the dominant view was, "only if a fiction is true to life can it become the vehicle of useful instruction or moral improvement" (22). Just when the orthodoxy of the novel form had been fully established, the Gothic novel appeared out of the dark, buried legacy of medieval times. The history of Gothic fiction starts in England with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Walpole challenged the domination of the novel form, and in his preface to the second edition of his novel, he accused modern fiction of being too probable: "the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life" (qtd in Clery 23). Influenced by the earlier so-called

"Graveyard Poets,"[3] writers like Walpole, Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee and William Beckford started exploring the dark legacy of aristocracy and Catholicism in Europe in order to highlight certain political issues of late eighteenth century England.

These early examples of Gothic fiction today seem highly formulaic in their reliance on particular settings, such as castles, monasteries and ruins, and with characters, such as aristocrats, monks and nuns who, superficially, appear to be interchangeable from novel to novel. However, what comes out of these novels is an anti-Enlightenment impulse which seeks to come to terms with the legacy of the aristocratic past rather than completely deny it. Through their highly convoluted plots full of strange supernatural events and Gothic villains, these novels explore the monstrous idea of aristocratic inheritance at a time which saw the emergence of a new trading middle-class. They are perfect examples of how the aristocratic past was abjected and repressed as monstrous. Thus, rather than being mindless, escapist fictions of supernatural excess, these novels show what western society had to repress in order to create its perfect society of reason and humanism.

The 1790s in England saw the "effulgence" of Gothic fiction, as Robert Miles labels it. The two important names of the period are Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. During this time, the Gothic novel became more sensational with an added emphasis on issues of gender and sexuality. Radcliffe, as the most successful and influential Gothic writer of the time, combined themes of aristocratic ambition with romance narratives in some of her most famous novels like *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). In her depiction of heroines entrapped in the patriarchal and aristocratic plans, Radcliffe is seen as the most important writers of a tradition of the Female Gothic, a term used by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1976) and referred to writing by women within the Gothic tradition. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) was the most controversial Gothic novel of the times in its sensationalism, pornography, and its universe that is presided over by the Devil and that offers no chance of redemption. The book can be seen as a perfect example of Gothic excess, as it "inverted, parodied, or exaggerated the features it cannibalized" (Miles 53).

The popularity of the form during the 1790s lay in its exploration of Gothic formulas, which had reached a level of maturity. Robert Miles outlines this formula in detail:

> The marketing cues can be broken down into several categories: geographical features (the recess, ruins, the rock, Alps, black valley, black tower, haunted cavern); architectural features (priory, castle, abbey, convent, nunnery, ancient house, cloister); generic pointers (historical romance, legends, tales, memoir, traditions); ghost and its cognates (apparition, specter, phantom, the ghost-seer, sorcerer, magician, necromancer, weird sisters); exotic names (Manfredi, Edward de Courcy, Wolfenbach); and generic or historical figures (the monk, the genius, the minstrel, knights, the royal captives, Duke of Clarence, Lady Jane Grey, John of Gaunt)." (41-42)

Such gothic "markers," as we might call them today, can still be found, though in transformed modes, in most contemporary Gothic production. What is more important than the existence of certain formulas, however, is the question of *how* these formulas are used to explore the cultural anxieties of their times. During the 1790s, the explosion of formulaic Gothic fiction was a legacy of the French and American Revolutions. The Marquis de Sade argued that the Gothic novels of Radcliffe and Lewis were "the necessary fruits of the revolutionary tremors felt by the whole of Europe" (49). The bloody horrors of the revolution, which even ate its own children, pushed novelists to new extremes of imaginary violence, as they tried to compete with the shocking reality of war and the fear of revolutionary conspiracy. Leslie Fiedler sees the invention of the Gothic genre in the western world as a symptom of the democratic chaos and revolutionary anxieties in Europeans' relationship to their ancestral aristocratic past:

> [T]he guilt which underlies [much early, Romantic, and even American] gothic and motivates its plots is the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been trying to destroy; and the fear that possesses the gothic and motivates its tone is the fear that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church and State, the West has opened a way for the inruption of darkness: for [cultural and individual] insanity and the [consequent] disintegration of the self. (129)

Even though the early Gothic of the late eighteenth century is seen as a highly predictable, formulaic form from our contemporary point of view, it is evident that the mode gave voice to very real cultural and political anxieties. The Gothic tradition also appeared in America during the same time frame in the novels of the first American novelist Charles Brockden Brown, who transformed the themes and formulas of the return of the aristocratic past into specifically American locales and themes that explored anxieties about the new democratic society, the American Puritan past and the conflict with Native Americans. As the heyday of the traditional Gothic novel came to an end, the Gothic, as

a persistent instinct and mode in western thought, moved on to diffuse itself into various different forms in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Enlightenment ideals were challenged in Britain by the Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century, who argued that the complexity of human experience could not be explained merely by a detached rationalism. For them the inner worlds of the emotions and the imagination far outweighed the claims of, for example, natural philosophy. The Gothic as a mode, which is at one level closely related to these romantic considerations, repeatedly appeared in the poems of Blake, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Byron at moments of exploration of the role that the irrational could play in critiquing quasi-rationalistic accounts of experience. The relationship of the Gothic and the Romantic poets was a controversial one, however, as most of these poets tried to dissociate themselves from the form because of its low-culture connotations. The main site of Gothic in the nineteenth century was again fiction, as the Gothic mode was used in a variety of different types of novels in order to address the issues and anxieties related to a highly-industrialized, urbanized and scientific society.

In the nineteenth century, forces of industrialization were transforming the very structure of society. England gradually changed from an agricultural into an industrial society and there was a steady movement of the population out of rural areas into the urban-centered industrial world. The new lifestyle of industrialism also gave birth to feelings of isolation and anxiety in human beings who were stripped of their ties with the natural world and also with the products of their labor. As Punter and Byron observe, “The very ideas of what it meant to be human were disturbed in the face of increasing regimentation and mechanistic roles” (20). Thus, due to the dehumanizing effects of industrialism and the changes it brought, the location and subject matter of Victorian Gothic were transformed. In most nineteenth century Gothic, society is no longer the idyllic, rational human civilization at its best, now contemporary industrial England is the site of terror:

> Victorian Gothic is marked primarily by the domestication of Gothic figures, spaces and themes: horrors become explicitly located within the world of the contemporary reader. The romantic Gothic villain is transformed as monks, bandits and threatening aristocratic foreigners give way to criminals, madmen and scientists. The exotic and historical settings that serve to distance the horrors from the world of the reader in earlier Gothic are replaced with something more disturbingly familiar: the bourgeois domestic world or the new urban landscape. (Punter and Byron 26)

Certain writers began to appropriate Gothic elements in the service of the realist agenda. The new site of Gothic horror for these writers was the city with its labyrinthine streets, sinister rookeries, opium dens and the filth and stench of the squalid slums. William Harrison Ainsworth in his *The Tower of London* (1840), G.W.M. Reynolds in his *The Mysteries of London* (1845-1848) and Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Bleak House* (1852-1853) all depicted the urban landscape through a Gothic lens. Some other representations of Gothic in the period appeared in the sensational novel,[4] the ghost story[5] and the Gothic psychological realisms of the Bronte sisters in novels like *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Jane Eyre* (1847).

The gothic novel *par excellence* of the early nineteenth century, though, was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which, through the horror of its creature's artificiality, gave voice to deep-seated anxieties about the secular and materialist scientific explorations of the time. With the advent of industrialism, human sciences also developed and aggravated a sense of alienation, further disturbing notions of human identity. Materialist sciences advocated that life is initiated and maintained simply through material causes, which challenged all traditional beliefs about humanity's unique position within the world as seen by Christianity and humanism. By 1814, a debate over what came to be known as the "life-principle" had caused a rift in the sciences, with certain scientists claiming that human beings were mere living beings, governed by materialist functions which animate them.[6] As science began to challenge the sacred notions of the human, it became a site of interest for the Gothic writer. Punter and Byron see *Frankenstein*'s connection to the "life-principle" debate as the first example of the Gothic's ongoing engagement with both science and industry to this day, especially its basic concern with "the disruption of accepted notions of the human" (21).

The early and mid-nineteenth century also saw the flourishing of Gothic fiction on American soil. Most of the prominent writers of American fiction turned to the Gothic mode in their exploration of specifically American themes. Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820) engaged with anxieties about the new American republic, the exploitation of America's bountiful resources and haunting of the American colonial past. Edgar Alan Poe, perfected the form of Gothic short story and in his "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), appropriated traditional Gothic tropes in his depiction of a diseased, decaying and "falling" quasi-aristocratic American family and their haunted

estate. In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Nathaniel Hawthorne explored themes of ancestral sin and return of the past coming from America's Puritan roots in New England. Hawthorne also engaged with Gothic themes of scientific power in his short stories "The Birthmark" (1843) and "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" (1837). For these so-called American "Dark Romantics," the Gothic mode, which had been an essential part of American fiction from the start, was an apt tool to expose and explore cultural and societal anxieties in the new Republic which struggled with its past violent experience of settlement, its colonial history and also its rapidly changing industrial and scientific society. Indeed, the centrality of the Gothic mode in American fiction, which has been used as a tool to criticize American national identity is an important basis for this study and this fact is explored further in a separate section in this chapter.

One of the major scientific developments in the late nineteenth century that challenged traditional notions about the human subject was the theory of evolution. In his *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin claimed that man was descended from a hairy-tailed quadruped creature which had in turn evolved out of a series of diverse forms, ultimately leading back to a fish-like being. This previously unimaginable theory challenged the integrity and superiority of the human species, dissolving the boundary between the human and the animal. The theory of evolution also led to the conclusion that if something can evolve, it could also devolve or degenerate. As Kelly Hurley suggests, the theory "destroyed a comfortably anthropocentric worldview: human beings were just a species like any other, developed by chance rather than providential design, and given the mutability of species, humans might well devolve or otherwise metamorphose into some repulsive abhuman form" (195). Late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernist Gothic fiction reflected this preoccupation in its creation of monsters and what Hurley calls "abhuman" bodies:

> The abhuman being retains vestiges of its human identity, but has already become, or is in the process of becoming, some half-human other – wolfish, or simian, or tentacle, or fungoid, perhaps simply 'unspeakable' in its gross, changeful corporeality. Or the abhuman being may be some unimaginable 'thing' incorporating, mimicking, or taking on a human form, thereby constituting another kind of threat to the integrity of human identity. (190)

Works like H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1890), William Hope Hodgson's *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig"* (1907), Rudyard Kipling's "The Mark of the Beast," Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), all depict such "liminal bodies" that blur the boundaries of some of the most fundamental oppositions used to organize cultural experiences: "human/beast, male/female, or civilized/primitive" (Hurley 190). These liminal entities therefore hinder one's ability to make sense of the world. Through such narratives, in tune with a new tradition that starts with *Frankenstein*, science itself is depicted as a liminal art, one which, when handled carelessly and irresponsibly, creates monsters. At this point the Gothic is amalgamated with science-fiction to create a hybrid genre.

Other late nineteenth century sciences took evolution's premises and ran with them. As a result, the late nineteenth century and *fin de siècle* England and the Gothic fiction of the times show an obsession with degeneration. As a consequence of industrialization and urbanization and the poor conditions in urban centers, a new Gothic villain emerged—the criminal. At this point in time, the new science of criminal anthropology sought to explain deviance through degeneration. As Punter and Byron observe, sciences like criminal anthropology "Gothicized criminality by linking it to the past" (22) through theories of atavism. Theories on degeneration, which originated with Benedict Augustin Morel's work on "Cretinism" in France in the 1840s, were developed by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso in the 1870s as a means of identifying criminal types. Lombroso suggested that the "criminal is an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals" (Lombroso-Derrero xiv).[7] Later in the 1890s such theories underpinned Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895), which sought to explain cultural decline through an analysis of supposedly degenerate writers such as Oscar Wilde, Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen.

Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) explores the differences between, and the mutual dependency of, the civilized and the primitive. Deviance and evil is written upon Hyde's body through signs of deformity and decay, affirming that the tenets of criminal anthropology is valid, especially those tenets that suggested that "the criminal or the insane could be identified through physical characteristics or behavior," and implied the possibility of containing what was deviant

(Punter and Byron 23). Similarly, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Mina Harker reads the signs of deviance on the Count's body and concludes, "The Count is a criminal … Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him" (342).

In Nordau's work, degeneration also involved sexual degeneracy, spreading the decline of a whole culture. Smith notes that in the late nineteenth century sexual behavior was subject to considerable scrutiny: "Medical developments helped to support and monitor this because sexual behavior became regarded as the site of least resistance through which the spread of all kinds of diseases (moral as well as physical) could be spread" (98). Thus, the monsters of the late nineteenth century such as Hyde and the Count can also be seen as sexually deviant and indeed there is a considerable number of scholars of Queer Studies, such as Jenna Whitnall and Judith Halberstam, who approach them as such.

Moreover, psychiatry began to emerge as a scientific and medical subspecialty during the late nineteenth century, identifying the threat to social and psychic order as internal. Thus, certain examples of Gothic fiction also started to suggest that the chaos and disruption usually located mainly in external forces, such as vampires or monsters, was actually produced within the mind of the human subject. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) can all be seen as manifestations of this psychologically Gothicized human subject.

However, the anxieties about degeneration that characterized the period were not confined to the area of the human subject. The whole fabric of societies and nations were disintegrating as a result of the Industrial Revolution, which brought crime and disease into cities and the emergence of figures like the feminist and the homosexual which challenged traditional values and family structures on which the middle class had based its moral superiority. The Gothic thus rose to the occasion to give voice to all these anxieties. Stoker's *Dracula* can be seen as a perfect depiction of all the anxieties concerning gender, race and nation with its narrative of reverse colonization, its sexually deviant and criminally animalistic monster, and its depictions of the role of women through Mina and Lucy. Nordau's nonfiction book on degeneration also makes use of Gothic elements in order to describe the degenerating times: "Over the earth the shadows creep with deepening gloom, wrapping all objects in a mysterious dimness, in which all

certainty is destroyed and any guess seems plausible. Forms lose their outlines, and are dissolved in floating mist" (5-6). Thus, the primary fear that haunts the *fin de siècle* period was that of devolution and decay, chaos and multiplicity; forms and boundaries dissolving as comforting certainties mutate into questions. Punter and Byron suggest that "The Gothic horror of the Decadence is the horror of dissolution, of the nation, of society and, ultimately, as we move into the Modernist world, of the human subject itself" (43).

When we look at twentieth century Gothic production, it becomes even harder to find the Gothic mode in its traditional manifestations. The reason for this, however, is not because the mode dies, but because it evolves—as it always does—according to the anxieties of the era and is diffused into different forms of fictions. Probably the most unified and recognizable mode of Gothic production in the twentieth century emerged during the Southern Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s in America through the works of writers such as William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell. These writers of "Southern Gothic" explored the burden of Southern history (through slavery, the Civil War defeat and the Reconstruction) and used the Gothic mode in their criticism of the South's conservative culture and racial issues. They deconstructed the "magnolia myth" of the Old South with its "chivalrous planters, demure Southern belles and content slaves" and highlighted "tensions between the Old South and the grotesque realities—the flawed characters, haunted places, racism, sexism, violence, alienation, oppression, corruption and materialism—of the New South" (Tunç 153). These early Southern Gothicists also influenced later writers of the 1940s, 50s and 60s in America such as Tennessee Williams, Reynolds Price, James Dickey, Walker Percy, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers and Harper Lee, who all turned to the Gothic mode in their explorations of the Southern American society. Even though the body of work that is labelled "Southern Gothic" can be seen as a regional literature to some extent, it is important to note that the Gothic in American culture decidedly turns to the South as a mythical and demonized geography in its explorations of the American history full of sins of slavery, discrimination, violence and prejudice. Thus, Southern Gothic is much more than a regional form, it is the quintessential American Gothic form in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As the three television shows analyzed in this study are contemporary manifestations of this genre, this study explores Southern Gothic in greater detail in the

next chapter and uses the themes, issues and tropes of the form in its analysis of the television shows.

The twentieth century also saw the infiltration of the Gothic mode into everyday life, leading Angela Carter to claim, by the 1970s, that "we live in Gothic times" (122). The century was one that saw countless wars on a global scale (including the two world wars), the Holocaust and rapid technologization of everyday life. As a result, the word associated with the century became "trauma." In addition, the century can be seen as the period of the Americanization and globalization and the visualization of the Gothic mode, especially through its manifestations in film and television.

In his article "The Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It," Steven Bruhm lists some of the anxieties of the century that led to the Gothicization of everyday life and also the different hybrid forms of the Gothic mode. The technological explosion in the second half of the century leads to specific Gothic anxieties on the subject of technology: "Advances in weaponry—both military and medical—have rendered our culture vulnerable to almost total destruction or have helped us conceive of superhuman beings unable to be destroyed" (260). These anxieties, especially in the American context, also supports significant political and historical anxieties coming out of the Second World War, the Cold War and the space race, which he summarizes as "the fear of foreign otherness and monstrous invasion" (260). Added to this mix is the continuing secularization and the rise of the Civil Rights movements (the feminist, gay liberation, and the African American movements) in the second half of the century, which assaulted the supremacy of traditional values of white patriarchal societies. As a result, the Gothic mode becomes one of the essential ingredients in which certain hybrid fictions are created, thus reaching its full potential as an already-hybrid mode.

The popular "pulp" fictions of the mid-century (so called because of the poor quality of paper on which they were printed) all carry a vestige of Gothic within them. In these works, the Gothic is hybridized into the genres of science-fiction, detective fiction and horror. Also through its cinematic manifestations, the Gothic mode is best traceable in the genre of horror in the twentieth century. Smith claims that in the contemporary scene, the term "Gothic" tends to be replaced with "Horror." He suggests that "In part such a change in nomenclature is a recognition that the various associations that 'Gothic' has

with formulaic plots involving aristocratic villains amid ruined castles, set within sublime landscapes, are not the stock-in-trade of [these] writers" (140). Some important names that are seen as contributing to Gothic production in the century are Stephen King, James Herbert, John Saul, Dean Koontz, Shaun Hutson, Clive Barker, Robert Bloch, Shirley Jackson and Angela Carter, among many. The popularity of the term "horror" during the century, however, is indicative of a more significant change in the mode of the Gothic, one which involves a debate over the differences between Gothic terror and Gothic horror. This argument will be handled within the scope of this study when the Gothic mode's adaptation to the cinematic screen is discussed.

One recognizable feature of Gothic production is the incorporation of psychoanalytic theories and discourses within the narratives. As Bruhm notes, "what makes the contemporary Gothic contemporary is that the Freudian machinery is more than a tool for discussing narrative; it is in large part the subject matter of the narrative itself" (262). Many famous fictions of the late twentieth century such as Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Robert Bloch's *Psycho* (1959), Steven King's *Carrie* (1974) and *The Shining* (1977), and Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) show the impossibility of family harmony through the creation of monstrous fathers and mothers. For Bruhm, the Gothic subjects of these novels are the psychoanalytic subjects and they become "a/the field on which national, racial, and gender anxieties *configured like Freudian drives* get played out and symbolized over and over again" (262).

Such a use of psychoanalytic theories in the field of Gothic production can also lead us to conclude that the Gothic becomes, in the twentieth century, a narrative for and of trauma. Images of haunting, destruction and death, an obsessive return to the traumatic moment, and a forgetfulness and unwanted epiphany bring the Gothic close to Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):

> There is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event … [T]he event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. (8)

The obsession with Gothic in the contemporary world, then, can be seen as a manifestation of what Freud called the "repetition compulsion;" the urge in the human subject to relive the traumatic experience in order to come to terms with it. Caruth claims that "trauma can make possible survival" by actually capitalizing on the distance one takes from the traumatic experience:

> Trauma is not experienced as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment. The trauma is a repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site … To listen to the crisis of a trauma … is not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it; the challenge of the therapeutic listener, in other words, is *how to listen to departure*. (10)

As a result, our obsession with the Gothic today can be seen as our need to relive, and leave, our traumatic experiences that characterize our world. Thus, Gothic narratives can serve as a site for healing and reinvention in this traumatic postmodern world. Bruhm claims that we *need* the Gothic mode today because the twentieth century took away many of constituents of our identity: "a coherent psyche, a social order to which we can pledge allegiance in good faith, a sense of justice in the universe" and the traumatic experience of the twentieth century is vividly dramatized in the Gothic mode (273). One reason why this reading of the twentieth-century Gothic might sound different than earlier readings is the fact that psychoanalytic theory now provides the scholars with specific terminology, like "trauma." Another factor is that such "traumas," in the twentieth century, were multiplied in number and carried onto the world stage through media representations. One no longer needs to enlist in the army or go to a war site to bear witness to the trauma of war; it will surely be broadcasted for us to watch and experience.

1.2 THE GOTHIC: A PROBLEMATIZATION OF GENRE

Even though there are still scholars who seek to limit the genre of Gothic to eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic novels in Britain, recent academic work on the Gothic which started during the 1970s and 1980s paved the way for a much wider approach to Gothic studies. This wider approach also led to the appreciation of Southern Gothic as a specifically American form of the Gothic mode in its exploration of the dark legacies of American history. Starting with David Punter's influential book *The Literature of Terror* (1980), it becomes evident that "Gothic" as an adjective can be used for various texts in

different media throughout the history of the western world. Punter suggests that we can define Gothic "as a historically delimited genre or as a more wide-ranging and persistent tendency within fiction as a whole" (12). This new fluid view of the Gothic is made possible when we recognize that, from its beginnings, the Gothic has been a hybrid genre. Maggie Kilgour defines the genre as a literary patchwork "assembled out of bits and pieces" to create a unique textual form (1995: 4), which creates a hybridized form between the novel and romance. Moreover, Mary Chapman emphasizes the instability of the Gothic hybrid patchwork; "The gothic is pieced together not altogether seamlessly out of its constituent parts" (30). This loose stitching makes the Gothic adaptable to various forms and styles in different historical contexts. Thus, Gothic is now seen as a transnational and transhistorical genre: "it had been as comfortable in eighteenth-century England as it has been in early twenty-first-century America" (Edwards xx).

In this vein, Mark Edmundson has defined the gothic as simply "the art of haunting" (5). Such a definition helps us liberate the Gothic from a fixed generic status and approach it more as a "mode," or a certain sensibility and worldview. Gothic as a mode, then, becomes "the Gothic," almost like the monsters it has created; fluid, contradictory, excessive, undefinable, uncanny and sneaky; diffusing itself into various cultural sites. As Martin and Savoy suggest, "if the gothic may be said to be everywhere, then it will cohere *nowhere in particular*. This is precisely why an appreciation of the possibilities of 'resonance' is preferable to a totalizing or comprehensive critical enterprise. There are sites, there are moments. There is no All" (ix). Now, as Edwards suggests, it becomes possible to speak of "gothic discourses," enabling us to consider the mode in its many forms and functions without the trappings of a totalizing generic definition (xxi).

However, it is true that scholars tend to agree on certain recognizable characteristics that appear in Gothic narratives repeatedly. In his book, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, Alan Lloyd-Smith lists the now familiar features of early Gothic literature as:

> extreme situations, anxiety, darkness, threat, paranoia; exaggerated villains and innocent victims; subterfuge and plots; ancient houses, castles, monasteries, dungeons, crypts and passages, wild scenery, craggy mountains or winding mazelike tracts; stage machinery, hidden trapdoors, secret passageways; speaking portraits, ghosts, doubles, and other supernatural-seeming beings; monstrous and grotesque creatures; pain, terror, horror, and sadism. (133)

Initially, these conventions were used to explore specific social, cultural and historical anxieties: “the subversion of rightful inheritance, feudal cruelties and persecution, hidden genealogies, Protestant opposition to Catholicism, the oppression of women by the patriarchy, difficulties in perception and understanding due to misleading appearances” (Lloyd-Smith 133). The Gothic of the eighteenth century is seen as the dark twin of Enlightenment thinking and shows the persistence of an excluded occultist tradition in western culture, one which “paradoxically insisted on an acknowledgement of the continuing existence of magic, religious, and demonic forces within a more and more secular society” (Lloyd-Smith 6).

Indeed, from its onset in the eighteenth century, Gothic fictions are seen to address and also disguise some of the most important desires and anxieties, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture. Thus, the genre can be seen as “cyclical,” reemerging in times of cultural stress to negotiate anxieties. Annette Kuhn calls this a genre’s “cultural instrumentality”; how it functions within the culture that produces and consumes it, how it expresses something significant, or negotiates some salient problem for its readership (1-11). The longevity and power of Gothic as a genre can be attributed, in Kelly Hurley’s words, to “a sort of historical or sociological index,” helping us track the social anxieties of a certain geography in a certain time by reading its disguised, deformed, often monstrous forms symbolically (197). This approach to the Gothic as a mode that both explores and disguises cultural anxieties informs this study.

Thus, the immense popularity of Gothic as a genre is probably due to the fact that it lets suppressed desires and anxieties come out and creates a space where those anxieties can be contested and exorcised. In the beginning, the Gothic seemed like a trivial, escapist genre of fiction. It was the breakthrough of psychoanalytic theory that gave the Gothic its proper place in literary criticism. Freud’s theories of repression and the uncanny gave scholars a new lens through which they could analyze the Gothic as the return of the psychologically, socially, historically, culturally and politically repressed:

> [T]he application of psychoanalytic methods to the gothic, beginning early in this century with the surrealists, taught readers to see the gothic not as superficial sensationalism but as the revelation of repressed dark cultural secrets. Freud’s

> theories of repression and the uncanny have been fruitful for reading the gothic, not the least in simply bestowing a greater profundity on a form previously trivialized as superficial. (Kilgour 1998: 41)

For Freud, the effect of the "uncanny" is tied to repression; it is one of the major sites where the repressed returns to haunt the individual or the culture. Freud's definition of the term is, "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (219). Freud states that the original German word for uncanny, "Unheimlich," means the opposite of what is homely and familiar. He concludes that what is "uncanny" is not actually new and unfamiliar, but quite the opposite; "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (240). For Freud, what is quintessentially uncanny is "the deeply and internally familiar (the most infantile of our desires and fears) as it reappears to us in seemingly external, repellant, and *un*familiar forms" (Hogle 6). The effect of uncanny, Freud claims, is created by those images that "ought to have remained hidden but [have] come to light" through repetition in the figures of doubling and animism, creating those Gothic monsters that stand for certain "others" of the self (219).

For Freud, the roots of the double come from our childhood. The subject, when a child, goes through a stage of "primary narcissism" which s/he grows out of once s/he develops an understanding of moral conduct, or a conscience. However, the very presence of this conscience shows a capacity for self-criticism which paradoxically reflects, because it is a process regarding the self, human narcissism. This adult self-reflection becomes a continuation of primary narcissism with an added morbid twist. In primary narcissism, the child experiences the double "as a preservation against extinction" (356). The child, in other words, has no conception of death. In the adult experience of doubling, implied by the presence of a conscience which enforces moral censorship, the relationship to the double changes: "From having been assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (357). Therefore, the uncanny is closely associated with images of death, "many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts" (364). Such images also represent an image of repetition, "the return of the dead," which is a fundamental characteristic of the uncanny. The urge to repeat, or to relive a past experience, suggests

a desire to confront unresolved Oedipal dramas. This can manifest itself as an adult anxiety about death (concerns about the future), or as a neurotic anxiety about the past.

Even though Freud's conception of the uncanny refers to the individual self, it has been used by scholars of Gothic studies to refer to historical, cultural and political anxieties. On a cultural level, this uncanny return of the repressed is seen as the return of the past. As Lloyd-Smith suggests, "the Gothic is about the *return* of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present, whatever the culture does not want to know or admit, will not or dare not tell itself" (1). Thus, the "Gothic" as a term has always contained this preoccupation with a past that needs to be evoked (exorcised) but also demonized (othered). This is indeed the fundamental project of Southern Gothic as a form which invokes the repressed Old plantation South and exposes its uncanny face in its sins of slavery, racism, sexism, violence, abuse and rape.

Another useful term that has been appropriated in Gothic studies for the analysis of the mode is the "abject." In her seminal book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva takes the concept of the "uncanny" one step further. She moves away from the Freudian idea of doubling to argue that a culture needs to represent as abject any experiences which compromise the "norm." Kristeva sees the return of the repressed familiar in "the uncanny" as based on a more fundamental human impulse that also defines the most basic cultural, as well as psychological, impulses in the Gothic. She argues that ghosts and grotesques—explicitly created to embody contradictions—are instances of the "abject," or products of "abjection." Literal meanings of the word "abject" are throwing off, or being thrown under. What we "throw off," Kristeva suggests, is all that is "in-between … ambiguous … composite" in our beings, the fundamental inconsistencies that prevent us from declaring a coherent and independent identity to ourselves and others (4). The most basic version of this "in-between" is the multiplicity we viscerally remember from the moment of birth, at which we were both inside and outside of the mother and thus both alive and not yet in existence (in that sense *dead*). It is this "immemorial violence" that lies at the base of our beings and is one basis of the primal chaos calling us back, from which we always feel we must "become separated in order to be" (10).

Whatever threatens us with this "in-between" situation is, according to Kristeva, what we throw off or "abject" into defamiliarized forms, which we both fear and desire because they threaten to reengulf us and also promise to return us to our origins. Such figures expose to us our familiar foundations while, at the same time, abjecting them under the disguise of an "othered" monster, one that is usually archaic and full of contradictions. This process of abjection also exposes itself to cultural analysis. As Smith notes, "In Kristeva's terms, what a society chooses to abject or jettison tells us a lot about how that society sees itself, and this process can also be read archaeologically to make sense of the historically and culturally specific manifestations of terror that are central to the Gothic" (8). Abjection, for Jerrold Hogle, helps middle-class people in the West

> deal with the tangled contradictions fundamental to their existence by throwing them off onto ghostly or monstrous counterparts that then seem 'uncanny' in their unfamiliar familiarity while also conveying overtones of the archaic and the alien in their grotesque mixture of elements viewed as incompatible by established standards of normality. (7)

The Gothic, then, is marked by an anxious encounter with otherness as expressed in the figures of monsters. What the dominant culture cannot, or will not, incorporate within itself, it abjects onto the hated/desired figure of the monster which, in turn, haunts the culture in its uncanny rejection to be repressed. As a result, the monster, as Jeffrey Cohen insists, should be seen as a "cultural body" which haunts its times by blurring the boundaries between the past and the present:

> The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy, giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns," a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again. (4)

In addition, for Judith Halberstam, the monster is an "economic form" which condenses various social, racial, sexual and national threats to nation, capitalism and the bourgeoisie in one body (3). She says, "monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body" (21-22). Thus, monsters are infinitely

interpretable; they are those "abjected fragment[s]" that serve as "others" to "demonstrate" the artificiality and contiguity of the different identity formations in a society whether they are personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual or psychological:

> By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed. Because it is a body across which difference has been repeatedly written, the monster seeks out its author to demand its raison d'être—and to bear witness to the fact that it could have been constructed Otherwise. (Cohen 12)

As a result, in their artificiality and their excessive meanings, monsters serve to embody those contradictions, the "in-betweenness" we seek to abject. In their blurring of boundaries, their hybridization of seemingly opposite binaries, monsters are signs of a "category crisis." The monster, "resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration" (Cohen 7). A significant part of this study will read the monstrous forms of twenty-first century American television as culturally specific, excessive, and hybrid others which expose the mechanisms of cultural identity formation through its abjections.

Through its monsters, the Gothic mode itself appears to be a transgressive enterprise. Jerrold Hogle suggests,

> Threats of and longings for gender-crossing, homosexuality or bisexuality, racial mixture, class fluidity, the child in the adult, timeless timelines, and simultaneous evolution and devolution: all these motifs, as possibly evil *and* desirable, circulate through Gothic works across the whole history of the form, differing mostly in degree of emphasis from example to example. Social and ideological tensions about all these "deviations" at different times thus find expression in the Gothic mode, which offers hyperbolic temptations toward these possibilities disguised in aberrant and regressive forms but also fashions means of othering them all so that standard, adult, middle-class identities can seem to stand out clearly against them. (12)

The Gothic, thus, demonstrates that oppositions of all kinds cannot maintain their separations; that each "lesser term" is contained in its counterpart and, indeed, that binaries are interdependent. The Gothic form itself can be seen as symbolizing this process of abjection in its cross-generic status and its combination of "high culture" and "low culture."

The Gothic has become the subject of intense debate to this day over its blurring of metaphysical, natural, religious, class, economic, marketing, generic, stylistic, and moral lines. The Gothic exists at the crossroads of such oppositions like life/death, natural/supernatural, modern/ancient, realistic/artificial and conscious/unconscious. The Gothic is still classified as between "serious" and "popular" forms even though the ideologies and ingredients of what constitutes "high" and "low" culture continuously change. Such definitions also tend to blur within the Gothic, making it open to interpretations from both sides of the argument. It will be one of the arguments of this study, however, that the undetermined status of respectability of the Gothic finds itself a warm welcome in a medium like television which has also been the subject of such intense debate.

Through its monsters, its convoluted plots, its symbolic settings and its various flamboyant styles, the Gothic is, like television itself, characterized by an economy of excess; "excessive imagery, excessive rhetoric, excessive narrative, and excessive affect" (Hurley 194). Thus, Gothic is also a highly self-reflexive mode that exaggerates its own fictionality, which is a necessary tool for it to realize its cultural function of exposing culturally and psychologically abjected contradictions.

Maybe the most significant question about the Gothic mode, then, is whether it should be seen as subversive or reactionary. It is true that gothic discourses, through their hybrid and contradictory forms, expose the abjected, the othered and the opposed in a culture, but they also usually arrange for the distancing and the ultimate destruction of such forms within their narratives. The Gothic mode, therefore, should be seen as a highly ambivalent one, a form that delights in transgressions. It is very difficult to find any other form that is this ambivalent in its potentials for revolution and reaction. No matter what its arguments are about—sexuality, gender, race, class, colonization, religion, or psychology—the Gothic mode delights in leaving its extreme oppositions unresolved, even when it destroys its monsters at the end.

Gothic ambivalence reaches its potential at the level of readership. A reactionary reading of the Gothic would focus on its therapeutic and cathartic effects in distancing and destroying Others, while a subversive reading would focus on the monsters and worlds created in the Gothic and see them as exposing the artificiality of a culture's identity

formation. As Jerrold Hogle suggests, a reader/viewer of the Gothic can choose to emphasize surface shock value, exoticism of setting and character and assume a safe middle distance that both admits the attraction of the mode and condemns its excesses under the guise of "entertainment." Or, the reader of the Gothic can choose to read the mode symbolically in its demonstration of "how dominant categorizations of people, things, and events can be blurred together and so threaten our convenient, but repressive thought patterns" (18). Thus, the Gothic has the potential to "show us our cultural and psychological selves and conditions, in their actual multiplicity, in ways that other aesthetic forms cannot manage as forcefully or with such wide public appeal" (18). As a result, as Hogle claims the Gothic presents its readers with a choice:

> We are always poised on the fulcrum of this choice when we read or consider Gothic fictions; do we let them mainly protect and justify us as we are (which most of them can, if we seek that through them) or do we let them arouse us to reconsider and critique the conventional norms of western middle-class culture, which can confront disguised challenges to them in the Gothic (if we let it) more vividly than anywhere else? (19)

In this vein, without denying or erasing the Gothic's reactionary narrative functions, this study will strive to reveal the subversive potential in the Gothic's monsters and the artificiality of our binary thinking. The aim of this study is to read the Gothic fictions of the twenty first century American television from a subversive point of view in order to reveal what they say about American culture today.

1.3 GOTHIC AMERICA: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MODE IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

In her book *Revolution and the Word*, Cathy Davidson asks, "Does America have enough of a history to sustain the Gothic's challenge to history, its rewriting and unwriting of history?" (231). Such a question is the evidence of the traditional conception of America as *history-less*, as ahistorical. Founded as it was, on Enlightenment principles and the exaltation of "the pursuit of happiness," the country's national ethos from the beginning emphasized its lack of an aristocratic past and its status as a democratic nation created on an ideal. This view of the national identity of the United States, however, is a part of the nation's myth. America does have a history and its writers from the beginning used that history to explore the dark side of the American ideal. As Leslie Fiedler asks, "How could

one tell where the American dream ended and the Faustian nightmare began?" (143). This suggests a dialogic relationship between American national symbols and the Gothic. The Gothic mode has sought to subvert the American dream and national myths with nightmares of history, exposing the artificiality of an American national ethos.

The project of recovering the roots of the Gothic in American fiction starts with the historicization of the mode. Teresa Goddu notes that from the beginnings of fictional production in America, critical discourse within American literature repressed the term "gothic" from categorical significations almost fully, and instead opted for the term "romance." An added adjective "dark" was used to modify those romances which showed Gothic sensibilities. In this way, the connotations of the Gothic genre as popular and trivial were dispersed, while "dark" came to mean "profound." As Goddu claims, "while the adjective *dark* conjures the atmospheric associations of the gothic, it does not carry the same generic baggage" (268). On another level, this substitution of terms has an added harmful effect as the term "blackness" is stripped of its racial connotations, which is another ideological tool to repress America's racist past. Hence, a proper analysis of American "dark" romances starts with recovering the term "Gothic" and realizing that Gothic production in America has always been obsessed with questions of race: "the American gothic is haunted by race: resurrecting the term gothic reasserts the racial roots of the romance's blackness. Significantly, when race is restored to the *darkness* of American literature, the gothic reappears as a viable category" (Goddu 269). Before exploring the significance of race for American Gothic, however, we need to explore the very roots of Gothic fiction in America.

America was created with a dream of innocence that brought Europeans on a journey across the ocean to build a new society immune to the evils of the past, a heavy weight they all carried. America was not only a place on a map, but a place of mind; a country founded on an idea. America was "the New World where one is endlessly recreating identity by starting life over without a defined social position" (Gross 15). The national mythology of the country represented America as the New Eden and the American as Adam in this garden. Among the texts perceived as reflections of American identity were the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The idea of America as a place of rebirth and a renewal of personal identity, while embodying a radical political force often reflected in its literature, found its reverse image in the literature of terror. Since America

was already a dream, a myth, a fiction, its myths of national identity were also founded on fiction, on a complete exclusion of the dark realities and anxieties Americans experienced. Not only was America *not* free of the European past, but it was also not free from its own history written on the new continent. The early Gothic manifestations of American fiction were created on the axis between the United States of America as a democratic ideal and the actual experience of American settlement. America's repressed history proved to be laden with Gothic truths hidden in the frontier experience, the systematic erasure and slaughter of Native Americans and the abominations of the slave trade. Since the public discourse of the new republic completely repressed the guilt associated with these experiences, in America it fell to the novelist to expose and rewrite the dark side of American national identity. Thus, when we look at the foundations of American literature, we are confronted with "a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation" (Fiedler 29):

> [O]ur literature as a whole at times seems a chamber of horrors disguised as an amusement park 'fun house,' where we pay to play at terror and are confronted in the innermost chamber with a series of inter-reflecting mirrors which present us with a thousand versions of our own face. (Fiedler 27)

The early writers who comprised the foundations of the national American literature, Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and many more, insistently turned to the Gothic mode. The Gothic narrative of America created an omnipresent sense of personal sin and national retribution in its reworking of American history. As Gross suggests, these narratives "show the land, people, and institutions of this country as participants in the nightmare of history" (89). The Gothic mode in America, when compared to its European counterparts, is very close to home:

> American gothicists do not remove their characters to Italy, Spain, France, or the other centers of English Gothic mystery; they shriek and faint in familiar surroundings and near the readers' own time. Certain periods have a special attraction—the colonial and revolutionary—but the escape to the past has not as far to go; history constrains the American Gothic as much as it feeds it. What this means for American Gothic narrative is that we have a unique ability to review our past within the Gothic mode. Our native literature was formed at the time when the Gothic romance tradition held readers in thrall, and unlike English readers who turned the Gothic vision outward to another people and another age, our Gothic turns inward to illuminate its own people and their age. American Gothic narrative, then, is less romantic and more disturbing than its English models. (Gross 23-24)

It was no coincidence, then, that the first professional writer to write on American soil wrote Gothic novels. Charles Brockden Brown wrote his four most widely known novels within a year's time, between 1798 and 1799: *Wieland, Ormond, Arthur Mervyn,* and *Edgar Huntly*. Even though Brown used conventional plot elements and motifs from British gothic, he also transformed them to give voice to specifically American horrors related to the founding of the nation. His first novel, *Wieland* (1798) exposes the unstable social order of the new American republic through creating a world where the sins of the fathers (in this case the Puritan society of the colonial seventeenth century) are visited upon the children. Teresa Goddu also notes that the novel should be seen within the context of post-revolutionary America: "Father Wieland's death by spontaneous combustion signifies the loss of authority and raises central questions: How can the new nation succeed if its citizens are powder kegs of passion rather than rational beings? How can the nation reinstitute authority in a body that can self-destruct?" (Historicizing: 187). The obsession of the Puritan theology with marks of sin and transgression and its view of history as a dark necessity informs Brown's novel. This preoccupation with the Puritan roots of the country becomes a necessary part of the American Gothic after Brown. In his *Edgar Huntly* (1799), Brown turns to the frontier experience and gothicizes the American wilderness and the figure of the Native American. Fiedler suggests that Brown depicted the Native American as "projection of natural evil and the id; his red men are therefore treated essentially as animals, living extensions of the threat of the wilderness, like the panthers with whom they are associated" (160). Brown thus transforms the tropes of British gothic to fit America: the decaying monuments of aristocracy becomes the heathen, unredeemed wilderness and the aristocratic villain becomes either the Native American or the religious fanatic. Eric Savoy suggests that "Brown's achievement was to resituate 'history' in a pathologized return of the repressed whereby the present witnesses the unfolding and fulfillment of terrible destinies incipient in the American past" (174). Later generations of American writers would transform Brown's historical sense into a rich rewriting of American history.

Gothic fiction after Brown in America completely severed its ties to British gothic fiction. Perhaps the most "Gothic" writer America has ever produced is Edgar Allan Poe, both through his dark stories, lyric poems, and his own life story. An alcoholic and a citizen of

the urban underworld, Poe was definitely not a man of his time. His short stories, which he perfected as a form, reveled in excess and gave voice to a dark melancholic despair towards the death drive with their atmospheres of claustrophobia and their obsessive melancholic characters. Poe is seen as the literary spokesperson of psychoanalysis (even though he probably did not know about the theories that existed at the time) and gave voice to what Freud would call the unconscious. Reading Poe just through psychoanalysis, however, goes against the claim that the Gothic is a cultural mode. In the project of historicizing the American gothic, Poe is also seen as expressing social anxieties about race that will be instrumental in Gothic production in America after him. Toni Morrison suggests that "no early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe" (32). Several of his texts actually explore the cultural significance of "blackness" in the white American mind. Eric Savoy suggests that "A surprising amount of Poe's work may be said to Gothicize the deep oppression and violence inherent in his culture's whiteness and thus to transform America's normative race into the most monstrous of them all" (182). Poe's story "The Black Cat" (1843), for example, can be read as a narrative in which the symbolic weight of "blackness" merges together "the evil perpetrated by the white upon the body of the black, the long and painful memory of the black, and the return of the black as revenant to exact revenge" (Savoy 182). Seen under this lens, Poe's Gothic landscapes are revealed as sites for an interrogation of racism in American society. Indeed, anxieties about slavery and racism in American society would continue to haunt American literature, especially in its Southern Gothic forms. However, it was in the pro-slavery propaganda and the supporting pseudo-scientific discourse of the mid-nineteenth century that the Gothic discourse of race is seen most vividly.

As the nineteenth century reactionary impulses in Europe saw an appropriation of the Gothic mode in narratives of degeneration that sought to demonize criminals, a similar ideological impulse in America used the constructed-yet-naturalized category of race to sustain a unified and "pure" nation. During the nineteenth century, especially around the time of the Civil War, a "true American" identity was constructed through discourses of race, which aimed to abject the non-white (especially black) population as animals and gave way to fears about miscegenation and hybridity. In his book *The Black Image in the White Mind*, George Frederickson sums up the beliefs of slavery and the different ways

that blacks were demonized and abjected as "others." The "historical case" against African Americans was based on the belief that they failed to develop a true civilization in Africa, which was usually depicted in pro-slavery writing as "the scene of unmitigated savagery, cannibalism, devil worship, and licentiousness" (49). Coupled with this historical view was a biological argument that sought to prove the mental and physical inferiority of blacks through real or imagined physiological and anatomical differences. In 1839, Samuel George Morton's book *Crania Americana* deployed scientific racism, specifically as "evidence" for the argument that the races should be kept separate, channeling antebellum fears of miscegenation. Morton believed in the scientific view of "polygenesis," which claimed that blacks and whites, because of the different size of their brains, belonged not to different races but to different species, leading him to label the products of interbreeding between races as "hybrids." For Morton, hybrids were inferior since they lacked fertility and suffered from more sickness and disease than a person of pure racial stock. Morton's theory exposed his anxiety concerning interbreeding as well as his desire to protect white purity. There were many other books and articles in the mid-nineteenth century which supported Morton's notion of polygenesis and which advocated for the separation of the white and colored races.[8] Most of these racist theories were united by defenders of slavery and were used as weapons in a propaganda war with the abolitionists. Much like it was with Native Americans, African people in America have struggled with a long and violent history of "othering," not just in its physical, legal and civic forms, but also, and maybe *especially*, in the field of representation, as they were usually *depicted* as less-than-human, as monstrous. The "race question" in America makes its most powerful appearance in Gothic fiction in the explorations of the Southern Gothic writers who engaged with South's legacy of slavery and discrimination.

The cultural and historical functions of the Gothic mode reached their full potential in American fiction with Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne refined the strategies of the Gothic to give voice to the shadows cast by the past on the present. He avoided the sensationalism of Brown and the excesses of Poe but he continued Brown's project of exploring the haunting of history's sins. He also used the medium of the Gothic to explore the identity and historical possibilities of the American writer. Through his "Puritan allegories," Hawthorne located a distinct national subject in the colonial past. One of the greatest works of American literature, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), deals with the dark

legacy of the American Puritan past and its obsession with notions of sin and damnation. In his preface to the novel, "The Custom House," Hawthorne describes the literary space he creates for the national past to haunt the present, since, "the past was not dead" (Hawthorne 24). Hawthorne seeks to create "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairyland, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (31). As a result, Hawthorne's colonial town becomes a gothic space where "ghosts might enter" (Hawthorne 31). The significance of Hawthorne's gothic symbolism is its referential obscurity and multiplicity. Hawthorne's symbols lead to many different interpretations and reject any fixed meanings. This is a gothic mode of symbolism since all the symbols already contain contradictory meanings within themselves. Hawthorne returns to the subject of America's Puritan ancestors haunting the nation in *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), where the latest scion of the Pyncheon family walks the earth as a Puritan revenant and perpetuates ancestral crimes in the name of authority and legitimacy before meeting a retributive end.

What becomes evident in early American Gothic fictions like *Wieland*, *The House of the Seven Gables* and also Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1834) is that in its American manifestations, the Gothic mode, more insistently, focuses on the family. Richard Davenport-Hines argues that, in comparison to the European gothic, American gothic narratives become more family-centered, which reflects the underside of the nation's idealized depictions of family life: "as Americans adopted a specialized, even extremist veneration of family, some of their writers adapted Gothic imagery to exemplify the destructive power of families. Gothic excess was deployed to represent domesticity's extreme horrors" (267).

The Gothic sensibility in America can be traced to some of its most important mainstream writers like Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Henry James and even Mark Twain. As Eric Savoy suggests, American Gothic is "first and foremost, an innovative and experimental literature" (168). Its power comes from its originality and diversity that situate the perverse—as forms, techniques, and themes—*inside* the national mainstream, thus disrupting the implications of Walt Whitman's claim that "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (5). One very significant strand of gothic production in the United States takes place in the Southern Gothic subgenre created by various important writers and movie makers. All of the television shows that will be

analyzed within the scope of this study are actually the latest manifestations of a Southern Gothic sensibility which has been reworked to fit specific twenty-first century American anxieties. The main theoretical frame, then, will be to approach television Gothic in its manifestations as Southern Gothic texts. The exploration of the significance, the history, and the visual aesthetics of Southern Gothic will be dealt with in the next chapter. Before tackling such a task, however, it is necessary to trace the development of the Gothic mode through the visual media of film and television.

1.4 GOTHIC/HORROR FILM: EXCESSIVE VISIBILITY

The twentieth century, in addition to witnessing the diffusion of the Gothic mode within different genres of fiction, also saw the translation of the "terror" mode into the highly visual medium of horror film. One of the biggest names in Gothic fiction, Ann Radcliffe, distinguished between the feelings of terror and horror in her 1826 essay, "On the Supernatural in Poetry." Radcliffe writes, "Terror and horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (168). Such a view of terror versus horror tends to see the two concepts almost like opposites; the former is seen as creating positive outcomes in the human subject while the latter is seen as harmful and undesirable. In this line of thinking, terror is associated with gesture and implication, and horror is about showing, seeing; an excessive visibility. Jerrold Hogle points out some of the differences between the terror gothic and the horror gothic:

> The first of these holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity kept largely out of sight or in shadows or suggestions from a hidden past, while the latter confronts the principal characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms (including the repressions) of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences. (3)

It is evident that, starting from the fin de siècle monsters in Gothic fiction and continuing into its representations in film and television in the twentieth century, gothic moves towards horror. Certainly some Gothic texts, be it in writing or film, still play on gothic feelings of terror, as in the ghost stories or films of mystery and thrillers. What is more interesting here, though, is how some scholars see horror as a lower form and try to separate it from its associations with the Gothic. Here, once again, we are confronted with

categories of taste and excess that have been initially, ironically, used to separate gothic fiction from "serious" fiction. Beginning with the twentieth century, horror starts to be understood as a less restrained, a more tasteless genre than Gothic, using more graphic imagery and extreme scenarios and soliciting a more visceral response from its audience.

In her book, *Skin Shows*, Halberstam claims that the shift from the literary Gothic to the visual "body horror" of the cinematic medium actually brought about a narrower rather than a broader scope for the gothic feelings. She says "One might expect to find that cinema multiplies the possibilities for monstrosity but in fact, the visual register quickly reaches a limit of visibility" (3). While the written medium challenges our imagination through suspense, in visual culture, according to Halberstam, "the monster must always fail to be monstrous enough" (3). Halberstam associates horror with gruesome spectacles of "embodied deviance," while Gothic is "loosely defined as the rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader" (5, 2). Thus, Gothic is identified with form and horror with content, though her distinctions are not as simple as that, for narrative and rhetorical strategies must shift in order to accommodate shifts in content.

This study, on the other hand, will approach the visual manifestations of horror in the visual medium of television, not as a separate genre, but as another hybrid form that comes out of the Gothic mode. Indeed, the subtitle of Halberstam's book, *Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, also evinces her confusion in trying to separate the two as distinct genres. As gothic has been a hybrid genre from the start, it becomes a futile task to try to separate the visual manifestations from the literary ones. This study will approach the sensibilities of terror and horror as two modes that have always existed within the Gothic and that are used interchangeably, sometimes even together, to explore cultural anxieties and desires.

Horror, as a mode within the Gothic, is associated with excess and lack of restraint, already existent within the gothic genre from the beginning. Lewis's *The Monk* can be seen as the earliest example of a more visible, pornographic and violent manifestation of gothic sensibilities. In his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noel Carroll, through his "entity-based" theory of the horrific, argues that the genre is constituted by the presence of a certain kind of monster—a liminal monster, one that is "categorically interstitial,

categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless," that evokes the very particular response of fear "compounded with revulsion, nausea, disgust" (41, 32, 22). What Carroll dubs as "art horror" (the material of movies) as opposed to "natural horror" (the material of life) seeks to create an "emotional effect," specifically fear, which is generated through an encounter with the monstrous (12, 8, 42). The monstrous in this case refers not only to "categorically impossible beings" but also monstrous humans. As in the gothic monsters of the end of the nineteenth century, reading the monsters of the horror film creates opportunities for scholars to reveal specific cultural anxieties and desires of their times.

In contrast to Halberstam, Louis Gross sees film as the ideal medium for the Gothic. Gross's claim comes from his opinion that the Gothic is eventually more concerned with the emotional effect rather than any other stylistic convention: "Gothic narrative is not profound because of its encyclopedic understanding of human nature; it is, indeed, quite unconcerned with subtleties of any sort. It makes its appeal viscerally, if at all. Whatever niceties of style and form it gives us are secondary to the emotional impact of its images" (75). In this vein, the medium of film suits the Gothic's aims perfectly, as it is "above all an essentially physically involving art" (75). Gross associates film with "the representation of the concrete" and literature with the representation of the abstract and concludes that "the sheer emotional effect of film is often greater than anything else in it, and this effect is the Gothic's primary goal" (75). His argument also emphasizes that film is offered to a vast audience for whom aesthetic education, or any kind of education for that matter, is not a must, which ties in with the Gothic's "anti-intellectual" side and foregrounds the emotional effect. Even though Gross's argument appears to see Gothic film as an anti-intellectual medium focusing just on emotional effect, his point about the accessibility of film is quite compelling. It is possible to see the visual manifestations of the Gothic in popular culture through film and television as reaching more audiences than any novel could, and thus, an argument can be made as to the significance of these images in revealing cultural anxieties to the members of that culture (and to the world) through their popularity.

Manifestations of gothic in film starts with the German expressionists during the 1920s. Films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), *The Golem* (1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922) are seen as forefathers of the horror movie genre with their striking and experimental modernist techniques. Many directors and technical staff from these early German

expressionistic films later worked in America and helped shape a quasi-modern horror aesthetic. For example, Karl Freund who worked in *The Golem*, also worked in Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and Robert Florey's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932). The beginnings of American horror starts with 1930s monster movies produced by Universal Studios. Lead actors like Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi became forever identified with the monsters they portrayed on the screen. David Skal in his *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*, points out the fact that 1931 was a crisis year for America because it was the year in which the impact of the economic depression was being profoundly felt for the first time. Not surprisingly, 1931-1932 saw the production of five seminal horror movies—*Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Mummy* and *Freaks*—leading to Skal's comment, "America's worst year of the century would be its best year ever for monsters" (115).[9] The adaptation of classic gothic narratives into film also continued with British-made monster movies of Hammer Studios during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Following Universal's footsteps, Hammer Studios added color to these period pieces that contained theatrical, middle-aged villains, well-meaning young male heroes and buxom young women waiting to be ravished or rescued. Together with the Universal films of the earlier periods, Hammer films seem to reaffirm normative middle-class values of heterosexuality, gender roles, and family structure, depicting the importance of social stability and traditional sources of authority and wisdom.

What was interesting, however, was that, in spite of the values they seem to uphold, because of their depictions of horror, Hammer movies were subject to a critical outrage. Produced after the Second World War, these movies faced censorship that their earlier counterparts were not subject to. After the war, horror movies were seen to corrupt public taste. Derek Hill, writing in the *Tribune* on Hammer's *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), lamented that the censor had not cut a scene which seemed to echo films of the Nazi death camps which had so shocked post-war audiences: "Now, only thirteen years after Belsen, Hammer feel they need a close-up of a charred, smoldering foot fallen from a human body pushed into a furnace" (qtd in Smith 135). American horror movies of these periods were also struggling with censorship and public outcry. The language of moral revulsion that pervades the debates on horror movies of this period would become an essential discourse in discussions about the genre of horror throughout its history in film and television.

George A. Waller situates the beginnings of the modern horror genre specifically in 1968, another tumultuous and significant year for America that saw the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and John F. Kennedy and horrors of everyday life were once again transferred to the movies. What characterizes the significant cinematic horror productions from this point on would be not their upholding of bourgeois values, but, on the contrary, their questioning of them. The year 1968 saw the production of two iconic horror movies, George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*. According to Waller, Romero and Polanski "redefine the monstrous—thereby redefining the role of the hero and the victim as well—and situate horror in the everyday world of contemporary America" (4). *Rosemary's Baby* incorporates the supernatural within the everyday and suggests that anxiety is the only legitimate response in a world that has become demonic, and thus, has been seen as highly relevant for its times given the anxieties in America during the war in Vietnam. Similarly, Romero depicts the destruction of the American family and middle-class society in the hands of a zombie apocalypse. Of course such movies were possible as a result of earlier probings into family and human psyche, explored by Alfred Hitchcock in movies like *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963).

1968 was also the year of Nixon's election as president and the year of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. As such, the year also saw the institution of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)'s "Industry Code of Self-Regulation," designed as a response to the public concern over the role of censorship in the media. With few exceptions, horror movies after 1968 have been R-rated, which has allowed for and perhaps also legitimized the representations of explicit violence, sex, nudity, profanity, and what are euphemistically called "adult" themes like incest, necrophilia, rape, and cannibalism in these movies. Waller suggests that

> By continually pressing the boundaries of both PG- and R-ratings, the modern horror film has violated taboos with a monsterlike ferocity unprecedented in the contemporary American cinema, and in the process horror has increased freedom of expression and affected the codes of commercial television as well as the motion-picture industry. (5-6)

To this day, the horror film has remained a commercially viable genre and explored the limits of acceptability through experimentation. At the same time, however, because of

the sheer number of horror films produced each year, the genre has become increasingly reflexive and allusive, flaunting its own generic formulations and identity as horror film. One such example would be the *Scream* movies produced during the 90s, which both used, made fun of, and abused the formulaic conventions of the slasher movie (one of the many subgenres of horror film today). Louis Gross talks about this intertextuality of horror movies when he says, "just as earlier Gothic fiction relied on the audience's ability to connect one work to another in a referential chain, the modern horror film creates an intertextual series of lines, titles, and images to aid the viewer in the placement of a given text within the larger mass of Gothic film imagery" (76).

Even though horror movies, like the Gothic itself, is difficult to define as a whole, there is no question now that violence became a significant component of the visual Gothic, its "horrorality" we might say. It is that depiction of raw violence that leads the detractors of the genre to deem horror as dismissible or damn it as dangerous. These debates are also informed by the opinions on what constitutes superior horror, taking us back to the terror versus horror debate explored in the beginning of this section. Extreme scenes of violence are also found in two of the television series that are going to be analyzed in this study—*True Blood* and *American Horror Story*. However, these series in particular and horror films in general, in addition to depicting "pornographic violence," also create, depict and contest different forms of monstrosity within the American culture of today. Focusing on the shocking violence in such productions would lead us to miss the underlying currents of anxiety at work within these texts. As such, this study will attempt to "see beneath" the glossy surface of horrific violence in these visual Gothic narratives and focus on the monstrous worlds and subjects created within them.

Through their monsters, horror movies (and horror television by extension) exploit shifting cultural bases of fear and anxiety. Movies like *The Exorcist* (1973) explore a series of oppositions between ancient and modern, Orient and Occident, physical and spiritual. Moreover, American horror movies have also placed their anxieties within the sacred institution of the family. Starting with Hitchcock's seminal work, *Psycho* (1960) family has been depicted as the breeding ground for monsters in such movies like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1982), *Day of the Dead* (1985) and *The Shining* (1980). Just like most of the horror fiction of the twentieth century, the genre of horror film also seems

to support the Freudian assertion that psychological abnormality is not a matter of kind but of degree in its representations of the conjunction between the monstrous and the normal. This is exactly the reason why Waller sees the horror genre as "ambitious":

> Horror defines and redefines, clarifies and obscures the relationship between the human and the monstrous, the normal and the aberrant, the sane and the mad, the natural and the supernatural, the conscious and the unconscious, the daydream and the nightmare, the civilized and the primitive—slippery categories and tenuous oppositions indeed, but the very oppositions and categories that are so essential to our sense of life. (12)

As a result, the visual Gothic manifestations of the horror genre, much like their earlier counterparts in fiction, show us the monsters that are being abjected by the society that creates them. Thus, instead of focusing on the excessive violence of these visual images, we need to focus on the excessive meanings created by their monsters.

1.5 GOTHIC TELEVISION: AN "UNCANNY" INFILTRATION OF HOME

Surprisingly, very little attention has been paid to what this study calls "Gothic television" among the scholars of the Gothic and very few comprehensive studies exist in the field. "Gothic television" is not a category which is utilized by television industry professionals or one which exists in everyday language. One reason for this lack of attention on the field comes from the traditional view that television, with its family-centered programming, falls short in the depiction of horrors. In his 1981 book *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King notes the impossibility of producing horror on television because of the censorial restraints of commercial television. According to King, restrained, suggestive ghost story, which has been a staple of Gothic television in its early years, fails to compete with the real horrors shown on television news programs:

> Horror has not fared particularly well on TV, if you except something like the 6 o'clock news, where footage of black GIs with their legs blown off, villages and kids on fire, bodies in trenches, and whole swatches of jungle being coated with good old Agent Orange … it is very difficult to write a successful horror story in a world which is so full of real horrors. A ghost in the turret room of a Scottish castle just cannot compete. (212-213)

Another argument, exemplified by Waller, sees television as a technologically inferior medium in the representation of horror. Waller has claimed that "on most television sets, shadows and darkness become murky, textureless areas that lack the ominous blackness

so often favored by horror film directors" (159). When considered from our twenty-first century point of view, both of these arguments seem moot: the advent of digital technologies both in broadcasting and in the display technologies of new television sets (with flat surface displays of LCD and plasma enabling high pixel resolution and high-definition viewing) make television screens even more precise and clear in representation of images than any cinematic projection can strive to be. Also a look at the television shows broadcast towards the end of the twentieth century seems to contradict King's claims about the inability of television to create effective fictions of horror. Before going into the 1990s era of American Gothic television, however, it is essential to briefly trace the Gothic's journey on the television screen.

In her analysis of the television show *Twin Peaks*, Lenora Ledwon suggests that television can be seen as the ideal medium for Gothic inquiry: "It is, after all, a mysterious box simultaneously inhabited by spirit images of ourselves and inhabiting our living rooms" (260). It is this domestic quality of television that brings it closer to the Gothic mode with its obsession with family horrors and secrets. This argument also informs Helen Wheatley's book *Gothic Television*, one of the very few book-length inquiries into the field. Wheatley argues that

> one of the definitive aspects of Gothic television is its awareness of the domestic space as a site loaded with Gothic possibilities. It is television's ontological status as a domestic medium which potentially emphasizes this Gothic rendering of homes and families, drawing parallels between the domestic spaces on screen and those homes in which the dramas are being viewed. (18)

This gothicization of the domestic space, coming from television's own status as a domestic medium, leads Wheatley to suggest that Gothic television itself can be seen as "uncanny." She argues that "The uncanny is … located in the moments in Gothic television in which the familiar traditions and conventions of television are made strange, when television's predominant genres and styles are both referred to and inverted" (7-8). An additional point that makes Gothic television uncanny is the structural organization of the television serial form, characterized by "return:" "The serial drama, in which the narrative returns to the same characters, locations and situations each week, relies precisely on a repetitive structure to re-identify the series and to re-familiarize the viewer with the 'story so far'" (180). Ledwon also points out the preferability of the serial form

in the exploration of Gothic narratives: “Film does not have the same Gothic potential as television precisely because of the finite time period for a film. A film must end, while a television series has a seemingly infinite potential to continue telling the story and to continue multiplying messages” (267). As such, television serial can be seen as the visual counterpart of a dense Gothic novel with its ability to create sub-plots and more in-depth character portrayal, while film may be seen as constrictive in the exploration of the potential of the Gothic mode.

Another important point to be made about Gothic television is its generic hybridity, much like other forms of Gothic narrative, but even more pronounced in the medium of television. Gothic television, as in Wheatley’s suggestion quoted above, most usually “makes strange” television’s other predominant genres, mixing Gothic sensibilities with other genres and styles. In fact, the medium of television itself is characterized by generic hybridity, making it a perfect medium for the Gothic. Graeme Turner suggests that “it is pointless to insist on generic purity in relation to television programs … Television genres are notoriously hybridized and becoming more so” (6). In this vein, it will become evident that all the television series discussed in this study problematize the notion of genre and create their own hybrid Gothic narratives within television’s own hybrid flow.

The Gothic’s journey on television, both in the UK and in the US, started with the anthology series format. This study mainly focuses on the American television, which is more relevant for the arguments it will make. Anthology structure was borrowed from Gothic radio anthology shows which were extremely popular with audiences in the pre-television age.[10] Several shows which first appeared on the radio made a successful transition to television. Two such examples are CBS’s *Suspense* (1949-1964), which broadcast television adaptations of classic supernatural literature and NBC’s *Lights Out* (1949-1952), again adapted from a successful radio series which began in 1934. During the 1950s, non-generic anthology series also often adapted Gothic classics and produced ghost stories: series like NBC’s *Matinee Theater* (1955-1958) and later, science-fiction series as Rod Serling’s *Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-1965) again and again turned to the Gothic mode to create horror on television. The popularity of the anthology format in American television continued well into the 1960s and 1970s with supernatural anthology series such as ABC’s *One Step Beyond* (1959-1961) and Serling’s *Night Gallery* (Universal TV, 1970-1973).

The anthology series format meant that the shows presented a different story and a different set of characters in each episode or season. With their "umbrella titles," anthology shows of early television acted as a kind of transition form between the "single play" form (which was respectable but expensive to make) and the serial drama (which was popular but usually predictable). The anthology format was well suited to the industrial and economic structures of program making in the US during its formative period. This format becomes especially significant for Gothic television when we consider that two of the shows that are analyzed in this study, *American Horror Story: Coven* (FX, 2013-2014) and *True Detective* (HBO, 2014-), return to the Gothic anthology format in the twenty-first century. The reasons and significance of such a move will be explored in the chapters dealing with those shows.

Also during the 1960s, in addition to the anthology series, gothic started to diffuse itself into other genres and created two popular hybrid forms. The first of these was the Gothic family sitcoms; CBS's *The Munsters* (1964-1966) and ABC's *The Addams Family* (1964-1966). The other popular Gothic hybrid of the times was the Gothic soap opera; ABC's *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971). The infusion of the Gothic mode into the familial forms of sitcom and soap opera during the 1960s can be seen as further evidence for the centrality of home and family for the American Gothic. As Wheatley suggests, all of these shows "expose prevalent anxieties in the 1960s around the instability of the familial unit and normative gender identities" (24).

The Gothic family sitcoms of the mid-60s fused situational comedy with horror drama, subverting the traditional family sitcom format of the 1950s, which has long been identified as the start of fiction on American television. Their appearance at the exact same time and the fact that they were cancelled within weeks of each other two years later might suggest that they tapped into the *zeitgeist* of the mid-1960s in a particular way. *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* both "presented staple Gothic characters as 'just plain folks,' taking the American Gothic's family-centric narrative and image repertoire into the suburban world of the white picket fence and the Ladies' League" (Wheatley 126). It is important to note, however, that these shows were not essentially "Gothic" in their effect since the main aim of the shows were to inspire comedy and laughter rather than creating unease and fear. Wheatley calls this "uncanny comedy:"

> In the Gothic family sitcom, comedy rests upon the closeness between the macabre and the everyday: laughter is constantly inspired by the fact that these are monsters that worry about their weight, the schooling of their children, the love lives of their family and friends, the state of their neighborhood and how they will pay their bills. We might therefore argue that this is *uncanny* comedy, in which humor is found in the meeting of the ordinary (heimlich) and the extraordinary (unheimlich). (130)

Dark Shadows, as a Gothic soap opera, aired on ABC from Monday to Friday mid-afternoons, mingled tales of vampires, werewolves, time travel and parallel universes with the more traditional family saga of day-time soap opera narrative. Again in this show, even though certain disturbing Gothic moments exist, the main effect was more melodramatic rather than Gothic. Even though the Gothic sitcoms and soap operas of the 1960s are not dominated by feelings of terror and horror that characterize the mode, they are significant examples for how the Gothic mode "makes strange" prominent television genres and thus suggest certain anxieties hidden in their traditional narratives. This Gothic experimental hybridization continues today, seen in shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Fox, 1997-2003) and *Angel* (Fox, 1999-2004), which fuse the Gothic with teen drama and detective drama, respectively. Indeed all of the shows discussed in this study can be regarded as Gothic hybrids in their own regard, with the most obvious example being *True Blood* (HBO, 2008-).

During the 1990s in America, the Gothic mode, once again flourished, both in television and in American culture in general. Christoph Grunenberg, the curator of a major exhibition entitled *Gothic* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts talks about the effulgence of the Gothic at the end of the twentieth century, which he calls "a true fin de siècle spirit of cultural pessimism and spiritual malaise" (208):

> A predilection for the Gothic has deeply affected all areas of contemporary life—from "high" literature to "schlock" science fiction, mystery, and romance novels; penetrating art, architecture, design, fashion and graphic design; to be found in advertisements and on record covers; present in popular music of today as in the revival of Gregorian chants and medieval hymns; and, most pronounced, making its daily appearance in film and television, where an obsession with sex, crime and the proclivities of twisted yet clever serial killers has developed into one of the most popular categories in mainstream entertainment. (210)

Similarly, Mark Edmundson finds the discourses of Gothic in the media; in O.J. Simpson case, in *Oprah*, in political discourse, in modes of therapy, in discussions of AIDS and

the environment and concludes that "American culture at large has become suffused with Gothic assumptions, with Gothic characters and plots" (xii). American television of the 1990s was also suffused with the Gothic, reaching its full potential in the format of serial drama.

The Gothic trend in American television originated with ABC's *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), which Lenora Ledwon sees as the first series to "tap the full potential" of this genre in the domestic medium (260). The show gothicizes the world of small town America through its horrific families. Randi Davenport argues that

> *Twin Peaks* horrified us because it held a mirror up to the American family and what we saw when we gazed upon it was a brutality that made many of us sick. *Twin Peaks* is thus unsettling because it disruptively implicates its audience in the family violence that it simultaneously suggests as a customary, even banal, feature of the average, middle-class American family. (255-256)

The show, thus, disrupted the very concept of the American Dream through its depiction of the corrupt and evil nature of the all-American family. The show also is seen to have changed the surface of television through its many sub-plots, allusions to other texts and genres and its highly stylized, expressionistic usage of images and colors. The show has marked a move towards stylish, intelligent, "knowing" drama—a move away from "network, catch-all, 'lowest common denominator' programming to niche marketing of specific products to attract different segments of the audience at different times of the day" (Nelson 236). In this show's case, the niche audience was assumed to have a good deal of cultural capital and a high level of media literacy, to make sense of the program's network of allusions and complex plotting—a select but lucrative viewer group.

Also, *Twin Peaks*'s allusionism, intertextuality and hybridity have marked it as "postmodern:"

> Genres as diverse as the detective genre, the forensic/police procedural drama, the soap opera, the sitcom, the horror film, the 'juvenile delinquent' film of the 1950s, the teen melodrama, the TV commercial, the Western and film noir are present within *Twin Peaks*, interwoven to produce a text which, at first glance, defies easy generic categorization. (Wheatley 167)

Reflecting television's inherent intertextual generic hybridity, the show can be seen as a postmodern and polysemic "bricolage" which reveals more than a simply depthless

postmodern commodification. Through this postmodern play with intertextuality and hybridity, *Twin Peaks* creates meaning by highlighting the tension between the surface and the reality of American life. This study will explore HBO's *True Blood* as a descendant of *Twin Peaks* in its excessive, hybrid, intertextual and polysemic structure, which also marks *True Blood* as "postmodern."

After *Twin Peaks*, the Gothic truly flourished in American television. Some Gothic television series of late the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are: *The X-Files* (1993-2002), *American Gothic* (1995-1996) *Poltergeist: The Legacy* (1996-1999), *Millennium* (1996-1999), *Profiler* (1996-2000), *Brimstone* (1998-1999), *The Others* (2000), *Carnivale* (2003-2005), *Kingdom Hospital* (2004). All these shows and many more cemented the Gothic serial form as a high budget and lucrative format for American television, using the latest computer-generated imagery to achieve "believable" depictions of the fantasy and the supernatural.

Indeed, all the Gothic television shows of the late twentieth century can be seen as examples of American television's move towards what John Thornton Caldwell calls a "televisual" style. Caldwell identifies television which exploits a cinematic visual style as "televisual" (so it is not really a medium specific term). This move towards televisuality in American television occurred during a time of intensified broadcasting competition in the US in the 1980s and 1990s. The proliferation of "televisual" shows during the 1980s occurred as a response to the threat posed towards the "big three" (ABC, CBS and NBC) by the nascent Fox network and the encroaching presence of cable channels. Caldwell describes "televisual" television as follows:

> Television has come to flaunt and display style. Programs battle for identifiable style markers and distinct looks in order to gain audience share within the competitive broadcast flow … The stylistic emphasis that emerged during this period resulted from a number of interrelated tendencies and changes: in the industry's mode of production, in programming practice, in the audience and its expectations and in an economic crisis in network television. (5)

In their flaunting of style and usage of new production technologies, all the Gothic television shows of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries (including the ones analyzed in this study) are "televisual," they are self-consciously visual, exhibitionist and

excessive. Conversely, the explicit and excessive depictions of supernatural and horror on television also led to intense debates about censorship.

During late 1990s debates proliferated around the concept of "family viewing," fuelled by the religious right-wing. The establishment of the 1996 Telecommunications Law in the US, outlining plans for a ratings system for television programs and concerns about family viewing and the responsibilities of program makers and television manufacturers, led to the production of various television "nannying" techniques, such as the V-Chip (a chip placed in a television, VCR or satellite box which receives ratings codes broadcast by the networks and which blocks the reception of "inappropriate" broadcasts), TVGuardian (a set-top "profanity filter" which plugs into the television set), and the Weemote (a programmable remote control which only gives access to "suitable" channels), as well as widespread publicity campaigns regarding responsible parenting and television access. Gothic television programs were also seen as disrupting family programming. This led to a move in Gothic television towards premium cable channels which are virtually exempt from regulations and advertising needs. Thus, two of the shows analyzed in this study have been broadcast by HBO, which can only be accessed through subscription. Indeed, HBO's contribution to the production of quality "televisual" shows has already been mentioned in the introduction section of this study.

Even though Gothic television appears to be a highly hybridized genre that is difficult to define (much like other forms of Gothic), there are some recognizable narrative and visual markers that make a television show Gothic. Thus, at the end of this section, it might be useful to quote Helen Wheatley's list of these markers at length:

> The Gothic television narrative is likely to feature many of the following: a mood of dread and/or terror inclined to evoke fear or disgust in the viewer; the presence of highly stereotyped characters and plots, often derived from Gothic literary fiction; representations of the supernatural which are either overt (created through the use of special effects) or implied (suggested rather than fully revealed); a proclivity towards the structures and images of the uncanny (repetitions, returns, déjà vu, premonitions, ghosts, doppelgangers, animated inanimate objects and severed body parts, etc.); and, perhaps most importantly, homes and families which are haunted, tortured or troubled in some way. In addition, these narratives are likely to be organized in a complex way, structured around flashback sequences, memory montages and other narrative interpolations. Gothic television is visually dark, with a mise-en-scene dominated by drab and dismal colors, shadows and closed-in spaces. (3)

In this vein, this study will try to analyze the plots, the characters, the monsters, the families, the landscapes and the stylistic markers of the three television shows in order to recognize them as "Gothic." However, it will also be important to point out different discourses and mechanizations these shows use in their Gothic manifestations. Before going into the shows in detail, though, we need to look at the one specific Gothic mode that ties them all as significantly American: Southern Gothic, which will be discussed in the next chapter as an opening framework for the analysis of HBO's *True Detective*.

ENDNOTES

[1] For more information on Goths and Gothic architecture and art, David Punter and Glennis Byron's *The Gothic* offers two useful fragments; "Civilization and the Goths" (3-6) and "Art and Architecture" (32-38).

[2] A common view of medieval romance can be found in Tobias Smollett's preface to *Roderick Random* (1748): "when the minds of men were debauched by the imposition of priest-craft to the most absurd pitch of credulity, the authors of romance arose, and losing sight of probability, filled their performances with the most monstrous hyperboles" (qtd in Clery 22).

[3] The work of the "Graveyard School" of poetry during 1740s and 50s in England made a significant contribution to developing a Gothic ambiance and provided an investigation into life and death. Poets like Edward Young, Robert Blair, James Hervey, Thomas Warton and Thomas Gray, "all used superstitious suggestion to raise the mind to a pitch sufficient to embrace the idea of mortality, but without representing a 'real' ghost" (Clery 28).

[4] The genre of "sensation fiction" typically relied upon identifiable Gothic themes and characterizations such as ancestral secrets, malevolent plotters and insanity. The most famous examples of the genre are Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) and Mary E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). Alison Milbank suggests that the sensation fiction of the mid-century, "sought in various ways to register the psychic disturbance of the Victorian middle-class wife, who was confined to the domestic realm at the very time in which that locale ceased to be productive or economically active" (155).

[5] Ghost stories typically center on the irruption of the supernatural into the familiar, comfortable and the mundane everyday world. Acclaimed writers like Charles Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*), J. H. Riddell (*The Uninhabited House*) and Henry James (*The Turn of the Screw*) all tried their hands in ghost stories. Punter and Byron attribute the popularity of the genre to "the rise of positivistic science and the decline of religion in the increasingly materialist and secular nineteenth century: ghosts challenge or at least question the authority of science and reason, and … could be seen as an oddly reassuring, if nevertheless disturbing, proof of something beyond" (27). Andrew Smith also sees in them a preoccupation with "class-bound issues" as they usually deal with haunted middle-class houses, "which obliquely touch upon the perils of home ownership" (94).

[6] The "life-principle" debate emerged out of the differing positions of John Abernethy, president of the Royal College of Surgeons, and his pupil William Lawrence, appointed as second professor at the college in 1815. Lawrence advocated a strictly materialist position. Abernethy, wanting to retain some metaphysical elements in common with religious beliefs, argued that such concepts as 'organization,' 'function,' and 'matter' could not entirely explain life: something else was required, "some 'subtile, active vital principle' that might be linked to the concept of the immortal soul" (Punter and Byron 21). The publication of Lawrence's *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology and the Natural History of Man* in 1819 led to a public outcry and he was suspended from the Royal College of Surgeons and forced to withdraw the book.

[7] The moment of revelation for Lombroso came when, conducting a post mortem on a criminal, he opened up the skull to find a distinct depression comparable to that in lower animal forms: a sign of reversion, a vestige of the primitive: "Thus were explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheek-bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped or sessile ears found in criminals, savages, and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh, and drink its blood" (Lombroso-Derrero xxv).

[8] Josiah Nott's "The Mulatto a Hybrid—Probable Extermination of the Two Races if Whites and Blacks Are Allowed to Intermarry" (1843) and John Campbell's 1851 book *Negro-Mania: Being an Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men* were two works that advocated the theory of polygenesis. George Gliddon, in his *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Research, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races* (1854), sought to demonstrate a theory of

polygenesis by proving that the types of men existing in 1850s America also existed in antiquity. Gliddon, a retired Egyptologist, turned to Egyptian cultural artifacts in an attempt to illustrate that blacks and whites developed from distinct species.

[9]For more information on the Universal horror movies of 1930s and 40s, the reader can consult Misha Kavka's article "The Gothic on screen," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, where she outlines in detail the generic markers and the significance of these movies.

[10] Richard J. Hand, in his book, *Terror on the Air! Horror Radio in America, 1931-1952*, explores the popularity of horror on the radio, which provided the major domestic output for horror in the pre-television age. Some of the long running radio series followed by large audiences which is analyzed in the book are: *The Witch's Tale* (1931-1938), *Lights Out* (1934-1947), *The Hermit's Cave* (1940-1943), *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* (1941-1952), *Suspense* (1942-1962), *The Mysterious Traveler* (1943-1952), *The Black Castle* (1943-1944), *Stay Tuned for Terror* (1944-1945), and *Quiet Please* (1947-1948).These broadcasts were usually live, which allowed the scriptwriters considerable freedom in the choice of the subject matter. During the 1940s this golden age of radio horror came to an end with the increasing censorial interference of the National Association of Broadcasters and by the emergence of television. Andrew Smith notes that "Each of these series had its own approach and style and addressed the issues of the time, from the period of economic depression to providing support for the war effort" (132).

CHAPTER 2: SOUTHERN GOTHIC AND HBO'S *TRUE DETECTIVE*

2.1 GOTHIC SOUTH: THE NATION'S "OTHER"

"As the South goes, so goes the nation." W. E. B. DuBois (qtd in Maxwell xii)

All of the television series analyzed in this study use the American South (Louisiana in all cases) as their Gothic territory for their specific monsters. Southern Gothic has always been one of the most recognizable modes of Gothic production in America. As suggested by Teresa Goddu, the South has always served as "the nation's other," and has become identified with "gothic doom and gloom" (265). In a vast land occupied by many different people from many different cultures and in a nation which was founded on Enlightenment ideals, it becomes very difficult to find a single national Gothic landscape. Yet, the South as a region with unifying characteristics and with a tumultuous and terrorized history has been a ready scapegoat for cultural abjection and has become the Gothic marker of America as a nation, representing everything that the nation wants to dissociate itself from. The status of the South as a geography of abjection also comes from its history of intense demonization of chosen "others," especially African Americans through the institution of slavery and Jim Crow. As James Cobb suggests, "the South's experience surely says that any identity—national, regional, cultural, or otherwise—that can be sustained only by demonizing or denigrating other groups exacts a terrible toll, not simply on the demonized and denigrated but ultimately on those who can find self-affirmation only by rejecting others" (336).

First, it is important to establish what the distinct identity of the South entails in relation to the rest of the nation. Indeed, there is still an ongoing debate, ever since after the Civil War and industrialization of the nation, whether the South as a distinct culture still exists. Even though certain lived experiences of the South right now might be undistinguishable from their counterparts in the rest of the nation, there is definitely no doubt that the distinct Southern culture still exists in its mythology, explored by myriad of films, television shows and books, and is most recognizable in its Gothic manifestations.

Louis Rubin, Jr. notes that, "From the time that the states of the early American republic began to identify their concerns along geographical lines, there was a self-conscious South" (3). During the Antebellum period, the nature and well-being of the South were

associated with chattel slavery. Southern economic structure, with its reliance on plantation agriculture and slavery created a distinct Southern social identity for the whites of the region which was almost akin to aristocracy and thus, white supremacy became a very distinguishable characteristic of the region. Thus, according to Rubin, the secession of the southern states in 1860 and 1861, should be seen as "not primarily as a nationalistic endeavor, motivated by the urge to set up a separate republic controlled by slaveholding interests, but as an attempt to preserve Southern sectional identity in the face of what seemed imminent destruction by governmental fiat" (4). Thus, from the beginning, Southerners were the ones who created and sought to protect their distinct identities, which would later itself become terrorized with the weight of history.

The Civil War and Reconstruction added the notions of defeat, devastation, catastrophe and poverty to southern identity. However, instead of disappearing after its defeat, the distinct Southern identity worked that defeat into its own mythology through the ideology of the "lost cause:" "a sense of ancestral pieties and loyalties bequeathed through suffering, and a unity that comes through common deprivation and shared hatred and adversity" (Rubin 5). The Lost Cause ideology and the "magnolia myth" of the Old plantation South reconstructed a memory of the antebellum period which was romanticized and idealized. Thus, in many ways, the Old South, as an idea, was largely constructed by the southerners immediately after the Civil War. The Lost Cause movement,[1] through the writings of southern historians, politicians, poets and novelists, portrayed the Confederacy's cause as noble, Confederate soldiers as heroic and chivalric and condemned Reconstruction as a deliberate attempt by the North to destroy the southern way of life. This antebellum southern way of life was also romanticized through stories that portrayed the "moonlight and magnolia" plantation society as a world controlled by honor, nobility and decorum full of chivalric and gentlemanly plantation owners, devoted southern ladies, and grand balls at large white mansions with faithful and contented servants. The so-called "magnolia myth" was used as a justification for slavery as it depicted the institution as morally acceptable as long as slaves were treated well. According this line of thinking, since blacks were naturally inferior and in need of care and education, benevolent plantation masters actually helped blacks to learn productive labor, took care of them, gave them shelter and food, converted them to Christianity and thus saved their souls, and educated them in white schools. Slaves, in

return, were grateful and contended to be living in such a system. As it goes in Ulrich Bonnell Phillips's 1918 book *American Negro Slavery*, "slavery was a benign institution—benevolent slave owners created a 'plantation school' to educate backward blacks to the virtues of discipline and productivity" (qtd in Clinton 21). This southern plantation legend was constructed by the white Southern elite who was faithful to the Lost Cause. Sarah Huff suggests that it was mostly the elite white women who rewrote the history of the Old South in the magnolia myth in their memoirs, diaries and stories:

> While many planter women complained about their lives during the antebellum period, after the Civil War, their attitudes went through a radical shift as they fashioned and then defended the plantation legend. This reformulation was part of their effort to right the perceived wrongs of wartime, to reconcile their lives with Reconstruction, and to justify to themselves and others the life of the antebellum planter class, and the deaths of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. (2)

As a result, the Old South was mythologized through melancholia and nostalgia and the elite white class resisted and resented the Reconstruction project. As Reconstruction failed, the south was reintegrated into the nation on its own terms. The bitter south, losing its economic privilege, found a scapegoat of its own in the now-free blacks in the region. The postbellum history of the southern states until the Civil Rights Movement was one of discrimination, racism, hatred and violence, with Jim Crow laws, poll taxes, peonage and lynchings. Rubin also suggests that much of this violence was a direct consequence of the problem of poverty in the region which hurt both whites and blacks and calls the South of the time "the nation's economic stepchild" (8). Thus, the distinct southern identity, especially in the eyes of the rest of the nation, became further associated with violence, terror and poverty, which all found depiction in the Gothic form of the important writers of the Southern Renaissance.

The beginnings of the twentieth century saw the industrialization and urbanization of the South, although economic prosperity did not fully arrive until the Second World War. This was a period of immense change for the South and southern attitudes towards economic and intellectual progress were ambiguous. The South seemed to retain a certain anti-intellectual stance evident in its anti-evolution laws. In many southern states, it was forbidden to teach the theory of evolution in schools during 1920s. A significant episode related to this was the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in which a high school science

teacher was convicted of violating a state law by teaching evolution. This anti-intellectual strand in the Southern identity, which is also revealed in its Gothic manifestations, was the result of the still prevalent doctrine of white supremacy, which rejected any discourse that claimed to the contrary. This anti-intellectualism was criticized by the satirist H.L. Mencken in his 1920 essay "The Sahara of the Bozart" (a pun on the Southern pronunciation of "beaux-arts"), which depicted the South as the most intellectually barren region of America.

However, during the 1920s and 30s, there occurred an intellectual flourishing in Southern criticism and literature which is now labeled as the Southern Renaissance. Some of the figures that came out of this movement such as Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate were members of the Agrarian and Fugitive groups and assumed dual roles as author/poets and critics. Even though these groups were advocating for the intellectual betterment of the region, they were reactionary in their politics and they wanted to maintain some of the character of the Old South through a return to simple agrarian economic practices which were anti-accumulative. Christopher Walsh suggests that

> In many ways such groups were reacting to the 'abjecting' of Southern society as it was dismissed culturally and ruptured economically (especially the way in which traditional agricultural practices and centers were rendered obsolete) by the developing trends in what was becoming an increasingly corporate America. (28)

There was another group of writers in the Southern Renaissance movement, however, who chose to engage with a social critique of the South through an appropriation of the Gothic mode. The school of the Southern Gothic starts in the 1920s and 30s with the novels of William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell and continues into the 1940s, 50s and 60s through the works of a diverse group of novelists, short story writers, dramatists and poets such as Tennessee Williams, James Dickey, Walker Percy, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, Harper Lee and Truman Capote. The main purpose of these writers was to expose the Magnolia myth of the Old South as a lie and to reveal the sins of the dark southern past of slavery, economic exploitation, sexism and violence.

The South, from the beginning, has engaged in "its own historical process of mythological construction" and constructed a "vision of a settled, stable and unchanging region based upon agrarian values" (Walsh 20). Southern Gothic writers criticized the Old South as a myth that conceals the social, familial and racial sins of the repressed past and explored

the tensions between the Old aristocratic South and the New South of economic and environmental change and devastation and racial violence through their grotesque characters, haunted Southern geographies and plantations, and their depictions of racism, sexism, violence and alienation in the South of the twentieth century.

First and foremost, Southern Gothic engages with, in Walsh's words, the "dark legacy" of slavery in the Old South and racial segregation and discrimination in the New South (20). As Bridget Marshall suggests, "The horror of the system of slavery is perhaps the most insistent and recurrent theme of Southern Gothic. One way or another, America's history of slavery, racial violence, and racial inequality lie at the heart of Southern Gothic" (11). This fact transforms Southern Gothic from a mere regional form to an important tool of criticism for America as a nation founded on the institution of slavery and economic exploitation. Even though the South was the ardent defender of the institution, especially before and during the Civil War, slavery was practiced all around the country. Moreover, as suggested before, together with the economic exploitation of the slave population, the nation is also tainted with the sin of the systematic genocide of Native Americans and the stealing of their land. Robert Martin emphasizes the importance of Southern Gothic's focus on slavery and race for the exposing of the nation's sins when he analyzes Hawthorne and Faulkner together (as representatives of Northern and Southern American Gothic) and suggests that both writers focus on "stolen land and bartered bodies," a fact that "locate[s] the gothic as a national repressed, a series of crimes that are not incidental to but rather constitutive of the nation" (140). Thus, the terror of Southern Gothic is decidedly racial, echoing Kristeva's description of the abject as that thing which "from its place of banishment … does not stop challenging its master" (2). The shows analyzed in this study, as Southern Gothic texts, also engage with the tensions surrounding the racial identities in America today.

Some of the earlier examples of the Southern Gothic sensibility can be found in Edgar Alan Poe's short stories which engaged with the cultural significance of blackness in white American mind, and in Mark Twain, who, especially in his *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), reflected the South's backwardness, its penchant for romance and theatricality and its racial intolerance. Indeed, the question of race also haunts early Southern gothic works of Charles W. Chestnutt, George Washington Cable and Kate Chopin who mostly wrote short stories in this mode, revealing fears of the racial other

and miscegenation. It was William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell in the 1930s, however, who led to the coinage of the term "Southern Gothic" by Ellen Glasgow. In a 1935 *Saturday Review* article, Glasgow, as a Southerner herself, criticized the writings of the newly emerging writers Faulkner and Caldwell because of their irresponsible, crude and morbid portrayals of Southern poverty and their blending of realism with the excesses of the Gothic mode. Glasgow's was a defense of generic purity, as she claimed: "The Gothic as Gothic, not as pseudo-realism, has an important place in our tradition" (4). Glasgow was also lamenting the negative portrayal of the South by these young writers that contradicted the traditional romanticized view held by the Southerners. Faulkner and Caldwell, through their shocking depictions of sex, violence, religious excess, rural poverty, a degenerate aristocracy and the racial hatred, established now all-too-familiar regional Gothic tropes and stereotypes used by writers and artists working within the Southern Gothic tradition. According to Barbara Ladd, Southern writers like Faulkner, "aware of the implications of defeat in a nationalistic culture, which sees itself as redemptive, as the vanguard of progress," have, time and time again, depicted the South as "dangerous territory—a kind of national 'id.'" For Ladd, the power of the South and the southern author to challenge the ideology of nationalism was undeniable:

> In their work the relationship of the southerner (who is often not only an agent for the defeated South but also an ironically 'representative' American to the extent that all Americans experience identity as divided whatever their ideologies dictate) to the ideal of progressive and redemptive nationalism can range from cynical or self-doubting resistance to unreflective dedication. In any case, the South provides a powerful site for the critique of U.S. nationalism in the work of white southern writers. (xiii)

Thus, the postbellum southern author understood the United States differently—many have said more tragically—than others. This negative view of the pioneering Southern Gothic writers led to some of its later practitioners to try to dissociate themselves from the genre. O'Connor and Welty both in separate occasions, resisted the label of the Southern Gothic as they considered it a reductive label for reviewers.[2] What writers like Faulkner and Caldwell tried to do, however, was to achieve a socio-critical approach to a region which had been so long revered by its inhabitants, at times blindly. All the Southern writers in the Gothic tradition gothicized their Southern landscapes, characters and themes under the weight of history. Probably no other writer did this better than Faulkner, though, who, through his own creation of a mythological Southern county, dealt

with the hauntings of personal and regional history visited upon his characters. Faulkner wrote numerous novels dealing with his Yoknapatawpha county, which he calls “my apocryphal county” (qtd in Simpson 254) and became one of the writers who best depicted how history can haunt a region through gothic forms. As Faulkner himself insisted, “the past is never dead. It isn’t even past” (80).[3] In his novels, Faulkner developed a repository of Gothic geographical and architectural settings such as haunted swamps, lost plantations and defeated southern towns and then traced the progression of these territories from the pre-Civil War, premodern, agrarian South to the post-Civil War, modernized and industrial New South. As Walsh suggests, one of the great “terrors” of Faulkner’s work “is generated by the economic transformation of the South,” which results in his characters being subjected to “alienation, fragmentation and uprootedness” (27). For Walsh, this rupture between the mythologized Southern past and the New South of troubled social, racial and economic transformations represents “an archetypal moment for Southern Gothic where the ‘dark legacy’ of the past clashes with psychological and geographical concerns of the present” (27). In many ways, this rupture still informs Southern Gothic today, as writers, filmmakers and television producers engage with the dark legacies of the Southern past which return to haunt in the newer and further economically and environmentally transformed geographies of the South in the twenty-first century.

Faulkner also appropriated the maze-like narrative structures of traditional Gothic novels through his modernistic use of language. His linguistic innovations, his use of stream of consciousness and his use of multiple narrators made his novels Gothic mysteries where events and themes almost resist to unfold. As Walsh comments, in Faulkner, “chronology, genealogy, focalization and setting seem to be enveloped in their very own Gothic-like maze that is impenetrable and disorienting” (27). This preoccupation with storytelling highlights the constructedness of history itself as all his characters strive to write their own histories of the South.

Faulkner’s social critique of the South which informs Southern Gothic to this day, has started a trend in Southern Gothic towards a blending of Gothic tropes with realism. Marshall lists “a tension between realistic and supernatural elements” as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the early and mid-twentieth century Southern Gothic. The genre frequently uses the realistic mode and moments of the supernatural usually

occur as a result of an overactive imagination, an altered vision through drugs or alcohol or some mental illness. “The realistic tradition of the Southern Gothic,” (424) as Peggy Bailey labels it, continuously transgress the border between the supernatural and the realism of the everyday mundane life. This does not mean that Southern Gothic never turns to the fantastic though. Starting with Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* during the 1970s, there emerged another strand within the genre that employs stories about supernatural creatures living in the South. One of the latest Southern Gothic writers of the supernatural is Karen Russell, who uses different species of supernatural creatures in her allegories about diversity in the South. The television shows analyzed in this study explore all the different modes of Southern Gothic. While *True Detective* is heir to the Faulknerian realistic Southern Gothic, *AHS: Coven* and *True Blood* are examples of the newer supernatural Southern Gothic.

Whether in its more traditional realistic narratives or in its supernatural forms, Southern Gothic employs most of the standard Gothic tropes: haunted buildings and landscapes, extreme weather conditions, alienated, weird or mentally troubled characters, obsessions with the past, revelations of secrets, depictions of violence and death, love triangles and “deviant” sexualities. The quintessential traditional Southern Gothic architecture is the plantation, usually depicted in varying degrees of decay and ruin. In Southern Gothic, the plantation took the place of the ruined castle (which was a symbol for fallen aristocracy) and was used as a metaphor for the history of the planter class and “as a matrix of darkness, death, and decay that shapes the South” (Tunç 153). Marshall suggests that

> The physical space of the plantation (like that of the castle) echoes the fallen nature of the inhabitants with its many rooms, once beautiful but now disintegrating. These buildings hearken back to a lost past; the fact that they will never be restored, but only continue to decay often motivates the offspring of the aristocratic class and serves as a visible punishment to the untamed and ultimately ruinous power of the earlier generation. (7)

The mansions and the grounds of the plantation thus represent the immoral social and economic structures of slavery that have survived over several generations. As such, Southern Gothic also deploys grotesque portrayals of family secrets and sins through its demonization of Southern white aristocracy. Southern Gothic usually transforms the traditional aristocratic Gothic villain into the plantation master through his Southern

aristocratic qualities of power, prestige, wealth and noble lineage. This powerful patriarch most often has enormous pride in his own family line or power or in his ability to manipulate and victimize others. In Southern Gothic, aristocratic families are depicted as monstrous and decaying as a result of their participation in an immoral system that condoned subjugation, violence, rape and murder. The popular Gothic theme of incest, usually as a result of a lack of recognition of one's own family members, is also frequently found in Southern Gothic. Such familial sins have an extra layer of terror in the South where the institution of slavery condoned masters raping their slaves and their offspring from those slaves and their selling those offspring for economic profit. Marshall claims that "[t]he Gothic's obsession with the 'sins of fathers' and with the revelation of unknown or obscured family trees fits well with the severely damaged family situations that resulted from the system of American slavery" (9). The character of Thomas Sutpen from Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* can be seen as a classic Southern Gothic villain, who is obsessed with creating his own dynasty but ends up being the cause of ruin for his estate and his heirs.

The patriarchal Southern planter culture also works well for the traditional Gothic's choice of the victim as maiden in peril. In Southern Gothic, constructions of race and gender are usually the products of this highly paternalistic and patriarchal culture and reveal the anxieties of powerful men in their efforts to establish control over their slaves and women. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin's father describes the South as

> a milieu where the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction—ladies, women, females—the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it doubtless owed the very fact of its virginity. (112)

Thus, Southern Gothic reveals the construction of gender and racial identities to be codependent and also to be decided in relation of the whiteness of the masters and masculinity of the power structure.

However, Southern Gothic's source of terror does not only come from the sins of the planter class in the South. Issues of class and economic difference most definitely haunts Southern Gothic and the genre has managed to stay a vital tool of social critique to this day also through its portrayals of the larger Southern geography devastated by industrial

changes and rural areas and small towns where the economic depravity is felt the most. Starting with the New South after the Civil War, Southern Gothic often turns to depictions of the rural Deep South and the towns where poverty and disenfranchisement is a fact of life for lower class whites and people of different ethnic backgrounds, especially as a result of post-Civil War segregation and Jim Crow. As a result, the grotesqueries and monsters of Southern Gothic do not only belong to the South's upper class but can also be frequently found in lower classes of the society marginalized by poverty and discrimination.

Indeed, Southern Gothic is obsessed with the grotesque. As discussed before, physical disfigurement of the human body has always been one of the concerns of the Gothic mode. Texts like *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jeklly and Mr. Hyde* explore the common assumptions about whether appearances match reality and whether an attractive and beautiful exterior shows moral good while an ugly or different-than-normal appearance is a sign of evil. The Gothic, in some cases—as in the figures of Dracula and Hyde—has embraced this idea while in others like Frankenstein's monster, has questioned it. Similarly, Southern Gothic, as Marshall suggests, "thrives on the theme of deformity" (13) and turns to an exploration of the body as a sociopolitical structure inscribed with social values and mores which can be read from exterior signs. Southern Gothic frequently complicates the biased assumptions about deformity, however, especially in Flannery O'Connor's depictions of grotesque characters. Female writers of Southern Gothic in the mid-twentieth century—Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers—most often than not explored the "mistreatment borne by the disabled characters at the hands of the 'normal' characters" (Marshall 14). In Southern Gothic, the victimization and alienation of the grotesque characters makes them outcasts of the society and their deformities become the signs of the cruel economic and cultural changes in the South. Thus, in most occasions, the grotesque is a sympathetic character in Southern Gothic and reveals the cruelties of the society from his marginalized point of view.

Southern Gothic, especially in its exaggerated forms, also engages with Southern society's dedication to religion, especially Protestant Christianity. Even though the rest of the American nation is also dominantly Protestant, the Southern church is unique in its more orthodox beliefs with its single-minded focus on salvation, its sense of assurance, and its rejection or simple unawareness of other versions of Christian experience. In the

South ninety percent identify themselves as Protestant, nearly four out of every five of these are Baptist, Methodist and Presbytarian (Reed 30). W.J. Cash, in his influential essay (which he later published as a book) "The Mind of the South," talks about the Southern Calvinist theology:

> the mind of the South begins and ends with God, John Calvin's God—the anthropomorphic Jehovah of the Old Testament. It is the a priori mind which reigned everywhere before the advent of Darwin and Wallace. The earth is God's stage. Life is God's drama, with every man cast for his role by the Omnipotent Hand. All exists for a Purpose—that set forth in the Shorter Catechism. … Whatever exists is ordered. Even Satan, who is forever thrusting a spoke into the rhythm of things, is, in reality, ordained for the Purpose. But that in nowise relieves those who accept his counsels or serve his ends; their damnation is also necessary to the greater glory of God. (189)

This fundamental and unshakable belief in God and his powers, together with the conviction that Satan also exists, lends the South as a rife territory for actual demons to emerge from. Indeed, it is the fundamentalist and evangelical South that is mostly gothicized in Southern Gothic narratives. As Flannery O'Connor once suggested, the South is "Christ-haunted:"

> I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who isn't convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows. (44-45)

Churchgoing also gives Southerners a high sense of community. It is not only the church, however, but also the very notion of land and also family that adds to a Southerner's notion of their identities. In the South, one "belongs" to a place and does not merely live there. Coming from their agrarian roots, Southerners seem to have a much more intimate relationship with their environments, and much stronger ties to their family roots. Related to their sense of place, Southerners are also very "localistic," seeing communities as different from each other and preferring their own. John Reed notes that "When asked where they would live if they could live anywhere they wanted, Southerners are more likely—and have been since the question was first asked in 1939—to say 'right here.' When asked to name the 'best American state,' Southerners name their own" (33). This attachment to geographical and family roots also lends itself to Gothic manifestations in

the forms of haunted landscapes and family curses, all tied to the notion of the haunting of Southern history.

Thus, the South has always been a ready source for gothic material in the U.S. because of its long paternalistic history of slavery, discrimination, violence and its distinct characteristics which set it apart from the rest of the nation. Charles Crow states that "The South had a great burden of history and myth, and a treasury of stories to tell, many of them twisted and tragic" (124). If Gothic depicts a repressed history coming back to haunt, nowhere in America did such a history yearn release more than it did in the American South. Southern Gothic is a mode where the sins of the fathers (through the institution of slavery and the planter aristocracy) have a direct influence on the newer Southern geographies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries where perversion, economic and cultural deprivation, racism, sexism, violence and prejudice are facts of everyday life. The close-knit, rural, anti-intellectual and fundamentally religious New South is the perfect territory for the exploration of the place of the poor, women, homosexuals and peoples of color in American society since Southern society, throughout its history, has seen the silencing and oppression of these identities.

Indeed, all of the television shows that are analyzed in this study use the South to reveal the abjections that are necessary to maintain an American identity today. Jay Ellis claims that contemporary Southern Gothic decidedly turns to its "racial, gendered and economic origins in the South" (xxii). As such, all the shows in this study explore the new possibilities of Southern Gothic's focus on race, gender and class while still engaging with the theme of the haunting of the Southern past: *True Detective* engages with the representations of the poor white in the rural South, *American Horror Story: Coven* explores the intersections between gendered and racial identities through the ideas of exclusion and segregation in one of the biggest cities in the South and *True Blood* deals with all sorts of different othered identities in the South and in America through its supernatural town full of monsters. These new manifestations of Southern Gothic prove that "the 'dark legacy' which still informs the Southern Gothic is racial, political, moral, religious, spatial or even environmental in nature" (Walsh 21). The shows also support the claim of Idiart and Schulz that Southern Gothic "is not simply an aesthetic or psychoanalytic category but an unofficial political history and a methodology for hearing the voices of dissent that interrupt narratives of national consciousness" (138).

2.1.1. The Gothic Deep South: The Case of Louisiana

The Gothic themes and tropes Southern Gothic is placed in a historical or contemporary setting that is physically in, or imaginatively linked to (as in Faulkner's Yoknapathawpha region and city of Jefferson) the American South. Links to the American Southern setting in Southern Gothic can be established in different ways. Marshall notes that a text "may detail the geography, climate, history, and culture of that area," or it can also invoke the South through "portrayals of more general Southern cultural anxieties: apprehension about race, denial and recovery of historical horrors and disgrace, and grief over cultural or personal loss" (15-16). No matter what the case, however, Southern Gothic has "a profound tie" to the uncanny geographic and cultural space of the South. Marshall also points out the fact that the South has been going through profound environmental and cultural changes through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and this opens up the possibilities for the contemporary writers of the genre (16). Accordingly, the Southern Gothic settings of the television shows analyzed here can be seen as new manifestations of the Gothic South in popular culture today. *True Detective*'s rural Louisiana, *American Horror Story: Coven*'s contemporary New Orleans and *True Blood*'s fictional small town of Bon Temps all carry vestiges of more traditional Southern Gothic settings but bring those associations to contemporary American South in their environmental, racial and cultural concerns. As Walsh suggests, the region's mythology provided "a palimpsest for Gothic settings" but eventually these locales are depicted as having exhausted themselves "which results in dispossession and alienation" (Walsh 21).

As contemporary Southern Gothic narratives, the three television shows analyzed here choose Louisiana as their Southern Gothic territory. Christopher Walsh points out the fact that Louisiana in general and New Orleans in particular have been the new popular sites for contemporary Southern Gothic. The case of Louisiana can be considered as a double-layered othering. As the South has been perceived as both a part of the nation but also distinct from it, so is Louisiana usually perceived as both part of the South and because of its plural colonial history, distinct from it. Louisiana was declared a French colony in 1698, remained French until 1763, when it was ceded to Spain with the Treaty of Paris, and after having been secretly returned to France in 1800, it was purchased by the United States in 1803. The legacies of French and Spanish colonialist cultures remain strong in Louisiana even today. The region, historically, spoke many different languages including

French, English, Spanish and German and was home to a caste of Creole society (Creole meaning "one born in the colonies") with free people of color, slaves, and many other ethnic mixtures. Racial mixing has always been a fact of life in the region and in many cases it is impossible to label individuals according to their racial origin. The state of Louisiana and the city of New Orleans have come to be known as sites of racial indeterminacy and sexual transgression. As Anne Malena suggests,

> The multiple and heterogeneous identities constituting Louisiana have always interfered with its smooth translation into surrounding entities, whether they be the South, the United States, or the Caribbean, because it both resists them and is appropriated by them; Louisiana claims the right to be interpreted as unique while retaining its opacity. (86)

Thus, as Thadious Davis notes, Louisiana, from the seventeenth century through the twentieth, has represented "the permeable cultural boundaries and melding of the racial, linguistic, culinary and artistic aspects of several cultures: African, Spanish, French, Haitian, Dominican, Cuban, Italian, German and Irish, with a dash of eastern European mixed in" (203). Located in the South, which, as a region, has been obsessed with setting spatial boundaries through its structures of power based on slavery and white racial hegemony, Louisiana, Davis argues, should be seen as a now-lost opportunity for the U.S. to forge a more varied identity; "a potential model for formulating a multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual society" (189). However, during the twentieth century, tensions around separating the races were so intense that Louisiana's history was not enough to reject the dominant racist paradigms.

Even though Louisiana could not change the face of American society, its status as a liminal space of fluidity, mixing and hybridity makes it a rife territory for Southern Gothic which has always been concerned with issues of racial mixing and "perverse" sexualities. Robert Mighall claims that "New Orleans's allegiances make it a temporal and cultural anomaly, a breach in the fabric of time and space" and that, as a result of Anne Rice's vampire novels set in the region, it is "probably the place most readily associated with vampires" coming from its status as a "repository of pastness" (59-60). Through its still extant subcultures like voodoo, New Orleans is still a gothic site for terror and unreason where the imposition of rationality does not hold. The heteroglossic world of Louisiana

is thus a perfect territory for the more supernatural Southern Gothic narratives of monsters, best exemplified in this study by *True Blood*.

Louisiana's status as a borderland and a liminal space in American culture fully entered the consciousness of the nation after the devastation of New Orleans and the surrounding area in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which hit the Gulf Coast on 29 August 2005. The images broadcasted from the region demonstrated the dehumanization of black southerners and since the disaster, Louisiana has become the focus of "discourses on race and poverty, civic responsibility and governmental neglect" (Davis 187). Thus, the region now further bears the marks of devastation, rejection and poverty in the national consciousness. Mighall's claim about New Orleans holds true for the Louisiana region as a whole: "the Gothic is a natural form of reference here, as guilts and fears deeply lodged in the national psyche erupt from this city on the edges of that brave New World and those united states" (62). In this vein, all of the shows discussed here use this inherently-gothic site with its historical traumas, wounds and hybrid and marginalized identities as their chosen Southern Gothic territory. The transformed and gothicized locales of Louisiana appropriated by these shows can be seen as "southscapes," a term coined by Davis, which "references landscape in broad geographical-social contexts and mediated symbolic structures" (2). The "southscapes" of literature, film and television, are usually created to call attention to the South as "a social, political, cultural, and economic construct but one with the geographic 'fact of the land'" (2). As such, the Louisiana geographies, towns and buildings of these contemporary Southern Gothic texts—whether real life or imaginary—are all created as "an effort to think about space, race, and society in the Deep South" (2).

2.2 MONSTROUS "WHITE TRASH": HBO'S *TRUE DETECTIVE*

HBO's latest hit which became an internet sensation overnight, *True Detective* (2014), will be the focus of this second chapter. Even though *True Detective* is the last of the television shows to be broadcasted, its affinities with the Faulknerian Southern Gothic tradition makes it a perfect starting point for the analysis of how Gothic narratives work conservatively to demonize certain identity categories while at the same time revealing the constructedness of such categories. Indeed, *True Detective* can be seen as a contradictory and ambivalent show (much like many Gothic works): created by a Southerner, seemingly perpetuating an intense macho culture and stereotypes of poor

Southern white identity while at the same time opening up a space for the contestation of white supremacy; offering a harsh critique of the fundamentalist religious identities in the Deep South but also concluding with a note of spiritual hope about the triumph of light over dark. The focus of this chapter will be on how the show uses real locations and people but, through its ideological camerawork and narrative, transforms the poor white people of the region into abject "others" and the rural Louisiana into an apocalyptic landscape which shelters and breeds the evil in the monsters of the South. As such, it is the argument of this chapter that *True Detective*—through its appropriation of the tradition of the realistic Southern Gothic—gothicizes the South and the "white trash" stereotype as America's chosen "others" in the post-racial, post-multicultural era.

True Detective can be seen as a televisual manifestation of one of the most popular subgenres of Southern Gothic today. Alternatively called "Grit Lit," "Rural Noir," or "Country Noir," the Southern Noir fiction mixes elements of Southern Gothic with those of the "hardboiled," "noir," tradition of detective fiction which was popular during the Prohibition through writers like Dashiell Hammett. Southern Noir is a flourishing genre within contemporary Southern Gothic through the works of writers like William Gay, Harry Crews, Larry Brown, James Lee Burke, Joe Lansdale, Daniel Woodrell, Peter Farris and Frank Wheeler Jr. The old noir fictions of the late 1920s were mostly published in so-called pulp magazines like *Black Mask*, *Dime Detective* and *Detective Fiction Weekly*. Indeed, *True Detective* takes its name from one of those pulp magazines of the 1920s and 30s. These early noir narratives took the label of "hardboiled" as a result of their open portrayals of violence, their unforgiving attitude towards organized crime and their cynical detective protagonists who are classic anti-heroes disillusioned by the corruption and violence they witness in American society. *True Detective* retains its ties with this noir tradition in the dark vision of Southern society it creates and its detective protagonist Rustin Cohle's cynical and dark vision of the world. The show is actually an example of Southern noir because it engages not only with individual criminals and deviants but rather with bigger structures of power and corruption in the rural South which is transformed and devastated by economic and environmental changes. *True Detective* is a typical Southern Gothic/Noir text as it deals with issues of poverty and sins of the past in the gothicized "southscape" of rural Louisiana.

The show manifests a lot of features that are akin to a lengthy Southern Gothic novel. *True Detective*, as a part of HBO's quality television brand, has been celebrated as both cinematic and literary. Director Cary Fukunaga's use of wide and long aerial shots and continuous editing work gives the show a cinematic feel. Furthermore, the creator of the show Nic Pizzolatto is its only writer, executive producer and show runner, which gives him complete auteuristic control over his material (such a deal is almost unheard of on American television since shows are usually created by various writers and producers). Pizzolatto, with his background as a novelist and a literature professor, creates a tight-knit, eight-episode narrative through his use of the anthology format and makes full use of literary forms and references in his narrative. Longer than a film but shorter than a serial, the anthology format requires a more novelistic approach to storytelling as the show makes use of engaging dialogue, fragmented time periods and unreliable narrators, which can be seen an employment of Faulknerian storytelling. Micah Conkling suggests that the show "goes deep, rather than wide" ("The Literary") and in an interview, Pizzolatto himself mentions that his aim was to tell a complete story with a beginning, middle and end (made possible by the anthology format) with complete control over his material in order to be able to develop his main focus in this show: the characters. He says "Character is everything for me" (Sepinwall, "Interview"). As a result, *True Detective* appears more like a lengthy Southern Noir novel rather than a cop drama.

The show uses an amalgamation of a detective investigation story and a Southern Gothic story of land, history, family ties and poverty in its deep exploration of its two main characters' lives and psychologies. The show focuses on a serial killer investigation run by two Louisiana homicide CIDs (Criminal Investigative Detectives), Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson) and Rustin Cohle (Matthew McConaughey). The story starts in 2012 when Marty and Rust are brought in to revisit a homicide case they worked in 1995. As the past returns to haunt these characters, the inquiry unfolds in the present day through separate interrogations and the two former detectives narrate the story of their investigation to the new detectives Gimbough and Papania, in the meantime reopening unhealed wounds and putting into question their supposed solving of a ritualistic murder in 1995. Until the end of the sixth episode, the storyline alternates between the two timelines of the past and the 2012 investigation room testimonies. At the end of the sixth episode, Marty and Rust reunite in 2012 and they are pulled back into a world they

believed they had left behind to catch the actual killer and conclude the same investigation. Learning about each other and their killer, these men realize that they live in a world where darkness resides on both sides of law. Their investigation of kidnapped and murdered women and children takes these characters through all walks of life in rural Louisiana: some of the many locations of the show include a truck stop bar, sugarcane fields, a burnt church, an African-American gospel church, a Christian revival tent, a bike gang hide-out, an African-American neighborhood, a backwoods brothel, cockroach motels, bleak and poor neighborhoods and a whole Louisianan landscape of desolation and pollution. When we arrive at the end of the tight-knit eight-episode run, we learn that the killer was a member of a pseudo-Satanic cult that practices a mixture of voodoo and occult and that kills women and children in ritualistic murders. The people who are members of this cult are also members of old and strong families that have deep roots in Louisiana and all of the upper-scale members of the cult go unpunished while the three killers caught and murdered by Rust and Marty, who are from the lower classes of the Louisiana society, are depicted as the only perpetrators of these crimes by the media.

In an interview with Alan Sepinwall, Nic Pizzolatto claims that the governing theme in the show is that "everything is a story" ("True Detective"). It is this preoccupation with the difficulty of telling the painful and maze-like story of the South that makes the show Faulknerian. *True Detective* complicates the narrative process through its different layers of accounts given by multiple narrators through different alternating timelines. This way, the show creates different layers of perspectives, postponing the revelation of its monsters and thus creating a perfect effect of Gothic terror. Indeed, storytelling is a central motif of the show. The very act of investigation is seen as trying to put together a story after reading the evidence: storytelling as search for truth. What's more, through its main character Rust, *True Detective* questions metanarratives like religion, claiming they are "cathartic" narratives that serve people's needs to abject their fears: storytelling as an escape from truth. Rust even claims that the notion of self and identity is a story people tell themselves to be able to keep on living; he calls human beings "sentient meat" with illusory identities ("Form and Void"). Thus, on one level the show creates a Gothic discourse that questions the notions like an empirical truth and the integrity of the subject. This also complicates the genre of detective fiction which is supposedly based on a detective's ability to reach truth by a reading of "empirical facts." Louis Gross calls gothic

"a process of epistemological inquiry" which is concerned with "the acquisition and internalizing of kinds of knowledge" (1). Thus, most of the best gothic texts show a preoccupation with storytelling, with knowing and seeing and *True Detective* is a clear heir to that tradition. Matt Brennan notes that the series' using and questioning of the motifs of storytelling is strongly in tune with the best works of the Southern Gothic tradition:

> The real mark of the series is its Faulknerian fascination with the mechanics of storytelling. *True Detective*, marshalling all its intellectual resources to this point, might in fact be seen as a competition among the narratives—supernatural and literary, religious and psychological, philosophical and pragmatic, historical and of-the-moment—from which 'the South' is made. ("In Defense")

The show employs its Faulknerian maze-like structure through the detectives' search for the truth and their trying to put the pieces of evidence into a coherent whole, through its own fragmentary narrative that defies strict chronology, through testimonies in which the detectives constantly hide the facts from the other detectives, and through the difficulty in piecing together the genealogy of the Southern family tree in which the individual murderer, at the end, is revealed as an inevitable end-product of a corrupt Southern family which is extended through inbreeding and incest and which has members both in the upper and lower classes of Southern society. Thus, as a Southern Gothic text, *True Detective* retains the structure of corrupt extended families in which the sins of the fathers haunt and influence the children. The show reveals its horrific depiction of the Southern family and society through its impenetrable and maze-like structure in which chronology and genealogy becomes disorienting.

The show's main monster, the killer Erroll Childress, is a product of a Southern incestuous dynasty where the sins of the patriarchs of this family, who belong to the upper class of Southern society, inform the actions of the members in the lowest places in the South. *True Detective* opts for gothicizing the poor white trash of the rural landscape as the visible end products in the New South of a tradition of violence that comes from the more elite members of the community that has roots in the Old South. Thus, one of the greatest terrors of the show is what it leaves "unseen," the sense that it leaves the viewers with, that the power structures that enable the actions of a psychotic killer remains intact and untouched and will continue to inform the lives of these characters in rural South. In

the show, family becomes synonymous with community and the powerful members get away with the sins since power and ideology always remains hidden. In the show, the rupture between the elite white class associated with the Old South and the white trash of the New South is one of abjection: the higher members of the Childress family tree is content with covering their own tracks and letting Errol to get caught. Thus, murder, deviance and perversion become associated with the poor while in fact it has been a long tradition of the elite cult. Thus, like most of the Southern Gothic texts, *True Detective* shows a preoccupation with the return of a repressed past, creating a sense of curse put upon the land by the evil deeds of its people. Pizzolatto has commented on his interview with Sepinwall that the person the two detectives are chasing in the show is "both the victim of an historical evil and the perpetrator of an historical evil. The killer in that way is a physical articulation of cultural aspects that have sat behind the scenes, even informing that polluted landscape that provides so much of the background." Thus, the show should be read as articulating very specific cultural anxieties about the South and its people. *True Detective* employs a dark vision of the Southern rural world through its use of the dichotomy between light versus dark and about the sinful nature of humankind hidden behind their ignorance and religious zeal. Most Southern Gothic fiction employs such a dark vision about humanity through its critique of the corruption and evil in the South. Scholars have, on the whole, agreed that Southern Gothic aligns itself with a gloomy vision of the world in which the human soul is both aimless and loveless. It is argued that the gothic worlds of Southern literature allegorize the human condition itself as existential alienation and angst. In her 1941 essay, "The Russian Realists and Southern Literature," in which she declared that Southern writers shared with nineteenth-century Russian writers a vision of "the cheapness of human life" and a strikingly similar technique for vividly evoking that vision, Carson McCullers suggests that Southern gothicists create "a bold and outwardly callous juxtaposition of the tragic with the humorous, the immense with the trivial, the sacred with the bawdy, the whole soul of man with a materialistic detail" (21-22). *True Detective*'s gloomy vision of humanity is also evident in its two posters that include the taglines of "Man is the cruelest animal" and "Touch darkness and darkness touches you back" (Figure 1).

The show creates this gloomy vision of humanity through its Southern Noir detective/protagonist, Rustin Cohle. The two main characters of the show are indeed the

show's main focus with their imperfections and personal sins. Martin Hart is a local Louisiana detective who has a wife and two daughters. Marty's main problem is that he is a cheater and a liar who does not know what he exactly wants from life and discovers that he actually valued his family the most all along. It is Rustin Cohle, however, who makes up the moral compass of the whole show. Serving as a mouthpiece for many of Pizzolatto's views, the character of Rust can be seen as a perfect example of the noir tradition's appropriation of the (Byronic) antihero[4] who is an eternal outsider in the society he works in. Rust's nickname is "Tax-man" both because he is from Texas (so nobody knows him) and because he carries around a big ledger with him in which he makes drawings and takes notes, like a tax collector. What makes Rust a real outsider is, however, his outlook on life and the rural people of Louisiana and his extra-sensory experiences of sight and taste (made possible by years of heavy drug use and alcohol intake) which invests him with supernatural Gothic potential. The first one of these qualities, Rust's views on life and humanity, makes up the show's condemning outlook on the lower class people of rural South and the ruined landscape and the second one, his extra-sensory experiences, gives the show an almost supernatural, liminal dimension that hints at another truth beyond the surface reality. As such, *True Detective* is a part of Southern Gothic's realist tradition of Gothic in which the eerie and the supernatural instances are explained through the hero's altered mental state. Rust can even be seen as an amalgamation of Edgar Allan Poe's smart detective characters like Dupin and his half-insane, melancholic characters in his more gothic stories.

Rust is like a Nietzschean philosopher who is definitely out of place in rural southern Louisiana. He claims he is a "realist" and then adds that in philosophical terms he is a "pessimist." His views on human existence proves the constructedness of identities:

> I think human consciousness is a tragic misstep in evolution. We became too self-aware. Nature created an aspect of nature separate from itself; we are creatures that should not exist by natural law. We are things that labor under the illusion of having a self. This secretion of sensory experience and feeling. Programmed with total assurance that we are each some-*body*. When in fact everybody is nobody. … I think the honorable thing for our species to do is deny our programming. Stop reproducing. Walk hand in hand into extinction. One last midnight, brothers and sisters opting out of a raw deal. ("The Long Bright Dark")

Caught in a struggle between the good and the evil and the known and the unknown in the universe, Rust is the Gothic hero par excellence. Exceptionally intelligent and highly cynical, Rust, as a Southern Noir detective, questions authority and criticizes established institutions and social norms of the Deep South. Mysterious and decidedly dark, Rust's character is also haunted by his own past, by sorrow and guilt, as he lost his two-year-old daughter in an accident. After that, Rust became more reclusive and chronically depressed and his thoughts always dwell on the darker aspects of human life. As the Southern Gothic hero, Rust is the possessor of "terrible secrets and horrifying past guilt and memories." Rust serves as the worldview that the viewers are supposed to identify with in the show. As Jaiyant Cavale suggests

> The Gothic Hero did not inspire repugnance or distaste in the reader, and instead he was identified with or even supported for his actions. The Gothic Hero received sympathy for the control that dark and unseen forces possessed over his body, mind and soul. … His popularity stems from the fact that the reader identified with him. He was more real than the idealistic hero who fought demons and made exceptional love to women. ("Gothic Hero")

Rust's vision of human depravity decidedly comes from his experience among the lower class people in the South. As such, Rust is a liminal character who does not only occupy a space between the dark and the light but also frequently transgresses the class distinctions in the new postindustrial Southern society. Rust is a member of the middle class in the South who has worked long years as an undercover cop as a drug dealer among the bike gangs in the South. As such, Rust's critique of the people of the show is also a social one since most of the sins and depravities of the rural class people in Louisiana are results of their poverty and ignorance.

True Detective achieves most of its Gothic sensibility through its exploration of the potential of Gothic vision in its hero. Throughout the show Rust makes claims like he can taste the "aluminum" and "ash" in the "psychosphere" as a sign of the evil in the environment and the people, or he does not sleep but just dreams, or he feels like the universe is talking to him through signs of evil and he is the only one that can read it. Coming from his history of drug abuse and alcoholism, Rust also has visions during which he sees the skies burn or a flock of birds form Satanic signs (Figure 2). Thus, through Rust, the show hints at a supernatural level of reality that is only available to him. The

show, on many occasions, also depicts Rust as a Christ-figure despite his negative view on Christianity. Rust is seen as the only one in tune with the dark truth and the only possible savior in this dark world. As a result, he is constantly shown standing next to crosses and or when pools of light shine just on him almost like a halo. This becomes most evident when Rust enters the monster's den (cave-like ruins in the woods) and the camera catches a shot of his head of long hair under an ivy of thorns and a small pool of light and when he is potentially "sacrificed" for humanity's sins when he is stabbed and lying on the floor of the cave with a pool of light illuminating his body (Figure 3). What is interesting in the supernatural and spiritual level of Rust's character is that it is made possible through intense drug and alcohol use, a staple of realistic Southern Gothic narratives. Lindsey Banco suggests that "As a genre that persistently incorporates altered states and visionary experiences, that revels in excess and transgression, the Gothic is well suited to depicting intoxication and addiction" (63). As such, *True Detective* seems to employ an ambivalent attitude towards intoxication and hint at its visionary potential. John Crowley claims that intoxication makes people permeable to new forms of knowledge, what he calls the "White Logic:" "an ideology of despair" (41), a bleak spiritual malaise produced by alcohol and producing an "agonized sense of life's hopelessness and worthlessness" (20). Intoxication conveys "deadly truths" (34) but is also a "source of the highest philosophical enlightenment" (133). Even though the show depicts a community that is being numbed by drugs and alcohol, it also hints at a gothic visionary potential of intoxication through Rust. This can be seen as one of the many ambivalences in the show, those ambivalences that make it a perfect Gothic text. However, it is important to note that Rust is able to see the darker truths in society as a result of his role as a transgressor of class boundaries within the South. The darkness of humanity in *True Detective* is fundamentally tied to the depravity, ignorance and immorality of the Southern poor.

In *True Detective*, the camera and the narrative decidedly side with Rust's point of view and create a Gothic interpretation of land and the people living on it through its symptomizing gaze of Southern Noir. As Susan Wolstenholme suggests, the gothic has long been characterized as having a decidedly "visual quality" because many scenes in gothic fiction are framed as scenes and because characters often present themselves as scenes in themselves or as spectators of scenes (6). Moreover, as many critics have noted,

reading a gothic novel often takes on strikingly voyeuristic connotations. Michelle Masse calls the gothic novel "a peep show of terror"—one that seems to ensure the distinction between observers and the observed (40). This voyeuristic quality of the Gothic makes the marriage between the detective genre and Southern Gothic a perfect one. It was first during the 1890s that the detective story genre merged with the Gothic mode in the works of writers like Arthur Conan Doyle and in America, Edgar Allan Poe. Detective fiction needed an apt mode in order to express its preoccupation with diagnosing criminal behavior and criminal types. The very science of criminology was making use of Gothic narratives of degeneration and atavism in order to create and brand physically recognizable criminal types (as it was briefly discussed in the previous chapter on Gothic through the works of criminologists like Genovese). Martina Ulrike Jauch emphasizes the importance of the visuality of bodies and physical sites in the marriage of Gothic and detective fiction, which makes such a form perfect for Southern Gothic which has always engaged with grotesque bodies and landscapes: "Concerned with the return of the repressed, the Gothic and the detective novel both represent reality in terms of tainted physical bodies and twisted geographical spaces in order to address the issue of the volatile, transgressive nature of the Gothic by exploring Gothic writings as "a para-site" of perverse and criminal impulses" (*Gothic Villains*). Such narratives derive out of a desire to confront criminality and eventually to impose a sense of order by abjecting crime and the criminal. Indeed, Kristeva suggests that "any crime," because it disturbs "identity, system, order" and does not respect "borders, positions, rules" is abject because it draws attention to the fragility of law (4). The crimes depicted in *True Detective* are even more abject since they are "immoral, sinister," representing "a terror that dissembles" and "a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it" (4). Like many other Southern Noir narratives, *True Detective* makes use of corpses, photographs of corpses and reveals an in-betweenness and a transgression of the boundaries between life and death and between the sanctity of human life and meaninglessness of death.

What makes *True Detective* a perfect Southern Noir/Gothic televisual narrative, however, is its preoccupation with the demonization and gothicization of the lower-class people in the South and the rural landscape of the New South that bears the marks of past sins and present economic and environmental ruin. Even though the show is decidedly realistic (except in the instances where Rust's extrasensory visions are depicted), and is shot at

real-life locations of Southern rural Louisiana, its ideological use of camera and narrative transforms the landscape and people living on that landscape into Southern Gothic monsters. It might be best to start our analysis of *True Detective*'s Gothic South through its representation of the petrochemical landscape and its association of the pollution and degradation of landscape with the evil inherent in people.

2.2.1 The Gothic Landscape of Rural Louisiana

Gothic narratives have always shown a peculiar preoccupation with landscape, architecture and space in order to create mood, atmosphere and effect in tune with sublime terror. Whether they are the ruined castles and abbeys of the late eighteenth century, haunted streets of urban centers of the late nineteenth century or the small towns of America in the twentieth century, Gothic landscapes have always been used symbolically, reflecting the Gothic mindscapes of the characters who inhabit them. In her introduction to the collection of essays, *Dark Cartographies: Exploring Gothic Spaces*, Anya Heise-von der Lippe notes that "As central plot motors, Gothic spaces and places mirror and simultaneously influence the characters' psychological state(s). In consequence, the space/time of the Gothic is often more symbolic than modelled on a particular historical location or epoch" (ix). Lippe calls Gothic spaces "mirror images of society" (ix) and sees them as both reflections of the cultures that create them and also as an evidence for the *need* in a culture to create such dark spaces. Lippe also appropriates Foucault's term of "hetereotopia" for her analysis of Gothic spaces. Foucault defines heterotopias as "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" ("Of Other Spaces" 3). As such, for Foucault, heterotopias, even though they are actually "real" spaces, always contain within themselves a symbolic potential, a level of alienation which makes them reveal the power relations in a society through their constructedness. Indeed, as Lippe suggests, most of the examples that Foucault discusses as heterotopias—the cemetery, the heterotopias of deviation like psychiatric hospitals and prisons, the theater or cinema, the motel room and the garden—have all at one point been represented or read as Gothic spaces (x).

For Foucault, the perfect example of a heterotopia is the mirror. The mirror is a heterotopia because it exists in reality but it also

> exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. ("Of Other Spaces" 4)

Lippe takes this notion of the mirror space and applies it to all Gothic spaces, seen under this light as the "mirror spaces" of a society, a space of discovery, a passage into a different world or a different mental state, which can be entered and explored. Gothic heterotopias in Foucault's words, create "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" ("Of Other Spaces" 4). When we look into the dark mirror of Gothic spaces, we become aware of the uncanny aspect of familiar spaces as this "estrangement of the familiar" is central to the Gothic mode (Lippe xii). Lippe suggests that modern and postmodern Gothic is fascinated with heterotopias, "places which may be firmly rooted in the here and now, but possess the potential to raise critical questions when they are suddenly perceived as 'Other'" (xiii). Gothic spaces help us make sense of the cultural spaces and mindsets they mirror.

True Detective plants its narrative on to the very real place of Southern Louisiana with its desolate settlements, its bayous, swamps and rivers, its oil refineries and factories, its sugarcane fields, its minority neighborhoods, its bike and truck bars, its local churches and revival tents and its backwoods. As such, the show moves away from more traditional Southern Gothic's preoccupation with the Old South's decaying plantations and focuses on the rural landscape that symbolizes the New South's present sins of ignorance, prejudice and violence that is always informed by the dark legacy of Southern history. Davis suggests that, especially with the late twentieth century, "the rural" becomes "the dominant physical expression of the region as a spatial configuration" (10). Even though all the locations in the show exist in real life, the camera and narrative transforms the whole geography into a symbolic Gothic heterotopia on which the notion of evil is imprinted.

The show's symbolic preoccupation with the landscape becomes apparent from its opening credits. Creative director Patrick Clair details the creation of the sequence on the Art of the Title website and suggests that they tried to show how the landscape revealed the characters and reflected their inner struggles. The show uses the strong presence of the petrochemical infrastructure and the pollution of the physical landscape in the 1990s Louisiana (which is a part of the stretch of industrial plants on the Gulf Coast called the "Cancer Alley") to reveal the spiritual and moralistic pollution in the society. The opening credits are comprised of double exposures; "fragmented portraits, created by using human figures as windows into partial landscapes" which is used as a way to "reveal character through location," a major concern of the whole show. This way, characters are represented as "marginalized or internally divided" and the real locations of Louisiana are transformed into "apocalyptic" imagery.[5] The credits superimpose images of factories, refineries, churches, truck stops and wide, horizontal shots of derelict landscape with stills of the characters from the show, ending with a final image of our "true" detectives and their car in front of the horizon of the industrial landscape representing the pollution in the society (Figure 4).

True Detective's Gothic manipulation of Southern landscape is not unique in the history of Southern images. In her article "Promoting the Gothic South," Rebecca McIntyre traces the roots of Gothic images of the South which has been developed in fields other than Southern Gothic fiction. Beginning with the colonization of America by the Europeans, especially the swamps of the Gulf region, because they are unfit for habitation, was seen as ugly, hideous and wicked lands, "far removed from the calm and orderly pastoral scenes prized in England" (35). In addition to being seen as nuisances, however, for the early settlers, swamps were also the hiding places of Native Americans, who, as William Bradford believed, hid "in a horrid and devilish manner" in the "dark and dismal swamp" (qtd in Vileisis 34). Underneath these real threats and struggles, though, lied the Gothic abjection by the Calvinist mind of everything un-Christian. As McIntyre suggests, "in a culture that believed in witches and dark magic, swamps were home to all that was evil in the world, the abode of monstrous beasts, gruesome witches, and pagan idolaters. … A Christian's duty was clear: erase this stain from the land" (35-36). As a result, Americans tried to clear the swamps for centuries with no success.

With the onset of Romanticism and its interest in sublime landscapes, swamps gained a new respectability and became romanticized through the dark and forbidding adventures they offer to their visitors. The true abjection of the Southern swamps, however, starts in the 1840s with the works of abolitionist writers who used the swamp as their chosen symbol for the degradation of slavery. McIntyre notes that "For these writers, the South, like the boggy terrain of its wetlands, was tangled in its morality and confused in its Christian purpose" (40). As such, the haunted weird geography of the South also symbolizes the sins of slavery together with the decaying plantations of Southern aristocracy. In the works of both antebellum and postbellum travel writers and their Southern sketches, this Southern Gothic landscape was promoted to the rest of the country. Especially during the 1870s, as a part the Reconstruction, travel pieces were written to attract northern audience and promote the desirability of a vacation in the former Confederacy. One example of such a promotional piece was Thomas Bangs Thorpe's piece on Florida written in 1870 for the New York magazine *Appleton's Journal*. Thorpe's account reads more like a Gothic novel than a travel piece: "No imagination can conceive the grotesque and weird forms … as the light partially illuminates the limbs of wrecked or half destroyed trees, which, covered with moss, or wrapped in decayed vegetation as a winding sheet, seem huge unburied monsters, which, though dead, still throw their arms in agony" (qtd in McIntyre 33). Travel writers like Thorpe conceived of certain Southern scenes like swamps and ruined plantations as gothic, as the return of a repressed and destroyed past and its dreams of a grand civilization. In this case, the ruined landscapes of the mythic Southern past and the exaggerated strange vegetative growths of the swamps served as gothic tools of abjection for the rest of the nation's need to both praise and marginalize the region.

In the project of promoting the gothic South, ruined plantations were linked to medieval mansions of bygone ages, which served an ideological and moral purpose. These travel writers evoked grandeur and melancholy through the story of the tragic downfall of a once flourishing civilization of the Old South. For the northerners, it was a morality tale in images:

> Like the ruins of ancient Rome, northerners could look upon the destruction of the South with pity rather than contempt or, worse, guilt. Instead of seeing a South in shambles, Yankees could envision the moldy ruins of ancient magnificence and feel in no way responsible for their part in its destruction. Indeed, they could pride

> themselves on being better than the South. Instead of having a civilization in ruins, the North could take comfort in the fact that their way of life, that industrialization and progress, had proved superior. The southern scene was a gothic landscape created to be distinctly southern yet serve northern needs. (McIntyre 34-35)

In addition, the chaotic growths of southern semitropical vegetation helped the marginalization of the region as people contrasted these "aberrations" with the calm, pastoral and "normal" landscapes of the North. Leo Marx, in his seminal work *The Machine in the Garden*, delineates the contours of the idealized landscape in American culture, or "middle landscape." Unlike the "peculiar" southern Gothic scenes, the American pastoral is a "well-ordered green garden … a chaste uncomplicated land of rural virtue" (141). Northerners, thus, could find exoticism and adventure in the South, but at the same time, they could be confident that the South will never match their true "American" landscape. As a result, through the images of its decaying plantations and its excessive and aberrant vegetation, the South was promoted as the exotic "other" to the nation's "normal" northern landscape. McIntyre concludes that "the Spanish moss and fantastically formed trees had evolved into the primary symbol of the gothic character of the Old South in the American psyche. … entering into the nation's mythology that denoted the South as a strange and exotic world so different from the rest of the nation" (59). Thus, the Southern landscape has long been used as a gothic site for the abjection of the region and its practices eve before the resurgence of Southern Gothic in the twentieth century.

True Detective makes use of all the gothic connotations of the Southern landscape mentioned above and mixes it with a Faulknerian sense of economic and environmental ruin of the New South. The show's rural Louisiana landscape is a poisoned and poor wasteland with desolate and forgotten settlements where people live on the edges of society. Images of the swamp, the moss and the dying trees also bring with them their previous gothic meanings of a tragic past as the landscape becomes a heterotopia for the dark sins of the Southern society (Figure 5). Rust puts it very well in the first episode when he says "this place is like somebody's memory of a town. And memory is fading. It's like there wasn't anything here but jungle." In addition, director Cary Fukunaga's long slow shots of the countryside give the viewers a sense of perspective and scale and makes one feel small and lost in the environment. It is no coincidence that in almost all

of those shots, the two detectives are somewhere in the landscape, either in their car or in a boat in the swamp, which gives this wasteland an ominous power to swallow up any attempts to rehabilitate the society which it represents (Figure 6). The Southern Gothic landscape of the show is that of the New South of poverty and violence. Even though the aristocratic Southern past of slavery is not depicted directly, the economic structures of power and privilege that has long informed the South are still in the background and inform the desolate landscape of poverty and pollution which is a symbolic reflection of the gothic monsters that perpetrate the evil crimes in rural South. It is at this point, in the show's depiction of a certain type of monster, that we see a stereotypical identity that serves as a vessel for the abjection of rural Southern identity for America: the white trash.

2.2.2 White Is The New Black: White Trash As The Last Acceptable American "Other"

The analysis of the identity category of white trash is only possible when we accept the category of race as a social construct, not a fact of biology or genetics; a dynamic and constantly renegotiated notion along the boundaries of color. Thus, if blackness is constructed and is always projected as the "negation of whiteness," then whiteness itself is a constructed identity category implicated in economic and cultural power. As Marable notes, "to be white is not a sign of culture, or a statement of biology or genetics: it is essentially a power relationship, a statement of authority, a social construct which is perpetuated by systems of privilege, the consolidation of property and status" (6). In tune with this view, there has been, ever since the 1990s, a growing interest in analyzing the concept of whiteness in race theory and literary criticism.

In her book *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison describes her project as "an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject, from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers" (90) and to "examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability on non-blacks who held, resisted, explored, or altered those notions" (11). Morrison proposes not to treat whiteness in American literature as natural and self-sustaining but rather as "sycophantic" (19), that is, constructed. Similarly, Rebecca Aanerud calls for "the development of a critical reading practice that foregrounds the construction and representation of whiteness and will challenge the way in which many texts by white United States authors are complicit

with the discourses of white supremacy" (38). As whiteness should not be understood as a natural phenomenon, what we need in order to dismantle the white identity as the status quo is "the recognition of whiteness as not a set fact—that is, having white skin—but instead as a product whose meaning and status must be sustained by a process of reproduction along pre-established lines" (43).

One identity category that reveals the constructedness of whiteness, or any identity categories for that matter, is the white trash stereotype. Stereotypes that portray poor rural whites as hyper-violent, virulently racist, uneducated, sexually deviant and dismissive of law can be found everywhere in American popular culture today. To call someone White Trash is, as filmmaker John Waters suggests, "the last racist thing you can say and get away with" (qtd. in Friend "White Trash Nation" 24). In post-racial and post-political-correctness America, the peculiar existence of the white trash stereotype complicates the seemingly separate identity categories of race and class. White trash is also a figure that problematizes the aristocratic caste system of the Old South. In traditional Southern Gothic, white trash characters usually symbolize the New South and are contrasted with the members of the Old South who refuse to modernize and choose instead to perpetuate antebellum structures. Thus, white trash has also been used to highlight the grotesqueries of the Old South and its fragile boundaries. It is the argument of this study that *True Detective*, like many other popular cultural texts today, contributes to the proliferation of this stereotype and the demonization of white trash.

Stereotypes of white trash in American culture is not a new phenomenon, though. For almost two centuries, the poor white people of different regions of the country have been a subject for derision or laughter. The stereotype of white trash (usually associated with the regions of Appalachia and the South) have come out of various accounts written about the poor white people in American history. Even though the first use of the phrase "white trash" is in the early nineteenth century, the origins of white trash can be found in the early eighteenth century, in William Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line* which recounts events and observations from 1728 (the book was not published until 1841). In 1728 Byrd headed a commission to survey the boundary between the colonies of North Carolina and Virginia, during which he encountered a creature he named the "lubber"—the poor white of the swamps and backwoods of North Carolina. Lubbers were escaped debtors and they were not only chronically lazy but dissolute. Their women were dirty and loose and many

poor white couples cohabited without benefit of clergy. Nearly all “lubbers” drank a strong rum distilled in New England and locally called “kill-devil” (Jacobs 217). Lubbers were also a distinct physiological type: they had “yaws” on their bones and skin caused by an exclusive diet on pork and they had the disease of “country distemper” which was probably caused by certain intestinal parasites (Jacobs 216). Lubbers also had “cadaverous complexion,” as a result of malaria and a “lazy creeping habit” that comes with the physical debility of the illness (Jacobs 218). Thus, Byrd’s lubbers were monstrous both in their physiology and in their lifestyles and morals.

Throughout history, the poor white’s diseases, instead of creating compassion, have been seen as an evidence of his degeneracy. As Robert Jacobs suggests, the poor white has always been considered “lazy beyond belief and as amoral as an animal” (218). In the plantation South, the poor white was despised, feared and usually laughed at. In the nineteenth century accounts of the poor white, only the name changes. Depending upon his appearance, his region and his supposed habits, the poor white has been called names such as “clay-eater, tacky, wool hat, sandhiller, hillbilly, mountain grill, and redneck” (Jacobs 218). The attributes associated with all these types, however, are essentially the same. Before and during the Civil War, certain northern writers used the poor Southern whites as a sign for the evils of slaveholding. In 1836, the novelist and historian Richard Hildreth wrote

> They are idle, dissipated, and vicious; with all that vulgar brutality of vice, which poverty and ignorance render so conspicuous and disgusting. Without land, or at best, possessing some little tract of barren and exhausted soil, which they have neither the skill nor the industry to render productive; without any trade or handicraft art, and looking upon manual labor as degrading to the freemen, and fit only for a state of servitude—these poor white men have become the jest of the slaves, and are at once feared and hated by the select aristocracy of rich planters. (qtd in Jacobs 223)

It was not only the laziness of the poor white that was the evidence of the evil in Southern society though. The poor white of the South was also highly immoral. Writing in 1856, the abolitionist James R. Gilmore claims that “They are totally destitute of morals and religion and live in open violation of almost all laws, human and divine. Fathers cohabit with daughters, brothers with sisters, and husbands sell or barter away their wives, just as they would their jack knives or their rusty rifles” (qtd in Jacobs 224). As a result, inbreeding and incest become one of the poor white’s many sins. Ignorant and uneducated

beyond belief, amoral and lawless, lacking any proper skill to cultivate the land, thinking labor beneath the dignity of a free man, the poor white of the Antebellum South was seen as an evidence of what the mentality of a slave-holding society could do to people.

Racism which is often associated with the white trash stereotype also comes from the peculiar position the poor white people held within Southern society. When he lived on the edges of the wide plantations in the South, the poor white became an object of derision even for the blacks who called him "po Buckra or po white trash" (Jacobs 215). Some slaves from large and wealthy plantations even thought they were superior to the poor white by virtue of their owner's power. Marginalized by the white elite because of his class position and looked down on by the blacks because of his laziness and immorality, the Southern poor white passionately embraced his "whiteness" to have a sense of identity and superiority over the blacks. In *The Mind of the South*, Cash describes what he calls the "common white:" "If he had no worth-while interest at stake in slavery, if his real interest ran the other way about, he did nevertheless have that, to him, dear treasure of his superiority as a white man, which had been conferred on him by slavery; and so was as determined to keep the black man in chains … as the angriest planter" (68-69). As the poor white in the Antebellum period was subservient to and domesticated by the planter elite, and thus were gendered feminine, he projected this class shame and inferiority to his black neighbor: "all of their rage against the white trash epithet concentrated itself on [the Negro] rather than on the planters" (Cash 83). The poor white's constant need to reassert their bonds with whiteness and codify themselves as white comes from their classification as "trash," as the white Other.

After the Civil War and Reconstruction, this constructed racial difference between the poor white and the blacks continued. David Roediger suggests that "whiteness provided compensation for exploitative and alienating class relationships" for the nineteenth century white workers and instead of joining with black workers with whom they shared common interests, they adopted a white supremacist vision (190). Indeed, the white trash stereotype did not die with the institution of slavery. According to Dina Smith, the Fordist category of white trash referred to any depressed or unskilled labor which was out of place in the new economy of mass production because it was "defiantly immobile or illegally mobile:" some examples she gives are "the initiate city factory worker who had recently left his/her tenancy. Or … the defiant relic farmer who refused to leave his land

in the wake of large-scale incorporation" (370). Thus, the term came to be associated with a "racialized economic and occupational class status:" "the white trash sharecropper, the white trash migrant worker, the white trash miner, the white trash mill worker, all of whom are stuck in place" (Smith 370). At once white and trash, a term associated with blackness, the term historically designated "*a border position* between white privilege and black disenfranchisement" (Smith 370).

The category of white trash thus demonstrates the constructedness of "race" perfectly. Manning Marable reminds us that the construction of "blackness" in America has always been a product of class domination: "Race, in the last analysis, is neither biologically nor genetically derived. It is a structure rooted in white supremacy, economic exploitation and social privilege. It evolved in the process of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade" (217). Similarly, the stereotypes of white trash assures the maintenance of economic class. In their influential article "What is White Trash?", Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray note that "the term *white trash* reminds us that one of the worst crimes of which one can accuse a person is poverty. If you are white, calling someone 'white' is hardly an insult. But calling someone 'white trash' is both a racist and a classist insult" (170). Through the stereotype of white trash, social problems like "dangerous and excessive sexuality" in the forms of rape and incest, are attached to poverty, which serve as the justification for the marginalization of poor people: "As long as the poor are said to possess such traits, people can convince themselves that the poor should be cast out of mainstream society, that they deserve what they get" (171).

This notion that the poor keep themselves poor also have political implications as lawmakers and civilians often deploy the rhetoric of white trash. One such example was when, in July 1995, Rep. Mark Souder (Republican, Indiana), while discussing the Waco Incident with his hometown newspaper, the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, declared that "The only law that [the FBI] clearly established [David Koresh] broke that I can see so far is he had sex with consenting minors. Do you send tanks and government troops into the large sections of Kentucky and Tennessee and other places where such things occur?" ("Congressman"). The stereotype of white trash is also strengthened by popular culture. Appearing in various popular cultural texts ranging from cartoons like Cartoon Network's *Squidbillies* to television shows like *My Name is Earl*, *30 Rock* and *The Simpsons*, from movies like *Forrest Gump, Dumb and Dumber*, *Wild at Heart*, *True Romance, Kalifornia*,

Pulp Fiction, *Natural Born Killers* to reality television shows like *Duck Dynasty*, *Gator Boys*, *Cajun Pawn Stars* and *Swamp People*, the white trash has become a part of the American cultural lexicon.

These images of white trash created as either sources for laughter or disgust always portray the white trash as a product of inherited or innate inferiority, in Gael Sweeney's terms as "a kind of Natural Born White Trash" (143). This assumption that "trashiness" is not just a class position or a cultural situation but an inherited attribute that is inborn and natural obscures any real struggles these poor people might have and gets in the way of constructive social critique. Even though real poor whites actually exist in American society, the popular culture images and representations of those people which are being sold to American public can only be seen as distorted and gothicized stereotypes. As Newitz and Wray suggest, these images are used as "as repositories for displaced middle-class rage, excess and fear" (183). White trash as a gothic monster, is probably the scariest of all monsters for the white middle-class American mind because of its proximity and familiarity: white trash is the uncanny whiteness: Sweeney claims that "White Trash are our own. No matter how far to the margins of society or the imagination we push them, White Trash is not Dark or Foreign or any other demonized group, but our own pale and scary soul" (146-147).

True Detective is another popular cultural text that adds to the demonization of white trash. The show can be seen as an example of what Louis Palmer calls "white trash gothic," (122) denigrating the later novels of William Faulkner like *As I Lay Dying* (1930). For Palmer, this new phase in the larger Southern Gothic discourse reflects a cultural shift to "a positive, pejorative whiteness:"

> positive in the sense of visible and obvious rather than invisible, and pejorative in the sense of taking on some of the negative characteristics of the raced Other. Such a view assumes that class and race often intertwine in structures of oppression, and that white privilege can be problematic and is not equally granted to all. (120)

According to Palmer, in this "more class-centered but race-obscured" subgenre of Southern Gothic, issues of class become entangled with issues of race, making this form a "liminal discourse" (137). In this view, Faulkner's white trash novels start out as a resistant discourse, a "voice" for the white trash party but ends up becoming another

mechanism for what Stuart Hall would label as the "racialization" of white trash. In his "The Spectacle of the Other," Hall claims that "the representation of difference through the body" is the discursive site for racialization (244). Similarly, Palmer sees white trash gothic as "a way of 'racing,' marking and pathologizing the Southern poor white" (126). The "racing" of white trash means that, once again, "trashiness" is depicted as a natural, innate and unchangeable feature—much like "race" is claimed to be—and characters who should be seen as products of their region and economics become "tainted whites, racialized Others" (Palmer 138).

True Detective, as white trash gothic, racializes the white trash through its association of crime with these people and through the way it encourages viewers to "read" white trash bodies and environment as signs of evil. In this vein, the show shares Southern Gothic's preoccupation with "the body as a grotesque signifier for material conditions" (Palmer 137). Apart from the main characters of the show, all the victims, witnesses and affirmed killers of this rural Louisiana society can be denigrated as "white trash." Our detectives visit decrepit houses and settlements to question prostitutes, overweight or not-so-bright people; in their investigation, they encounter bike-gang members and revival tent priests which helps us associate this society with criminality and fundamentalist religion; the two actual monsters of the show are the epitomes of white trash criminality and immorality: Reginald Ledoux is a meth cooker and dealer and the scariest monster, Errol Childress is a psychopathic murderer who lives in a decaying house full of trash and cohabits with his half-sister (Figure 7). The visibility of the white trash bodies in contrast with the relative absence of the white elite in this Southern rural community (who are nevertheless implicated in the ritual murders) is an evidence for the obsession with the poor white physiognomy which is a staple of white trash gothic. This fixation on the bodily image of white trash and projecting immoral characteristics onto this unhealthy and decaying body image is an evidence of how white trash is turned into a cultural commodity for middle-class people, a monster for the abjection of whiteness's other self. In this context, *True Detective* uses Southern Gothic's preoccupation with the grotesque but deviates from the tradition of O'Connor and McCullers since it uses the grotesque in a reactionary way where physical deformity indicate evil.

The marriage of crime and white trash creates the ultimate monster. The narrative tells us that the ritualistic murders were committed by members of some of the oldest and

strongest families living in the region and creates a gothic portrayal of family in pure Southern sense. “My family has been here a long long time” says the killer Errol Childress (“After You’ve Gone”). The Tuttle family which represents the white elite in Louisiana (with a reverend and a governor—and later Senator) is part of the same family tree with the Childress family (which our main monster belongs to): these have always been extended families where relatives married each other, illegitimate children ran about and fathers abused their daughters. Indeed, one strong Southern Gothic theme of the show is the fact that the sins of the fathers leave their mark on the children. Even though the show implicates the white elite and white trash in the same crimes of incest, rape and murder, it nevertheless chooses to render visible and gothicize the most grotesque, psychopathic and trashy member of this family tree that goes deep into every corner of the Southern society. The revelation of the main monster in the show uses classic tropes of suggestion and an eerie invisibility of the monster until the end of the seventh episode. When the serial killer is revealed to us, we discover that Rust has talked to him before during the investigation; he has been doing maintenance jobs at local buildings, including the schools where he got to be close to children. Errol Childress is the uncanny white trash coming back to prey on his own community. Until the end of the seventh episode, the show creates a gothic narrative of terror, delaying the moment the viewers encounter the killer through its convoluted narratives and fragmented time periods, all the time using the ominous depiction of the landscape and the crimes in order to imply that a monster remains hidden in this landscape of pollution and poverty. With the start of the last episode, the show’s narrative moves on to a narrative of gothic horror when the point of view shifts to the killer.

Camera work during this scene creates the sense that the monster’s den is buried deep in the backwoods of Southern Louisiana. The camera moves in on a shack in the woods with drawings on it and then enters the shack, the inside of which is also covered with writings in what looks like blood. We find the killer talking to his father lying in the room and the camera zooms in on the killer’s back on which we see a wound in the shape of the Satanic symbol he leaves on his victims. The killer has literally been branded by his father’s sins and he also has scars and burn marks on his face as a result of his father’s torture. Now, he is keeping the corpse of his father in the shack *Psycho*-style and the corpse’s mouth is sawn together. The father can no longer hurt or insult his son but his legacy certainly lives

on through Errol. When the camera moves into the actual house with Errol, we witness a white trash palace which looks like a hoarder's house with garbage everywhere. The camera zooms in on creepy broken dolls and also gives us wide shots of the rooms so that we can see the "trash." In the house, we meet Betty, Errol's life partner who is a half-witted child-like woman who has been raped by their grandfather and is also Errol's half-sister. Betty asks Errol to "make flowers" on her, which is her code for sex. As the siblings start to have sex, the camera leaves the house, retreats through the backwoods and reaches a road and a sign which says "Creole Nature Trail." Thus, the effect is created that our monster lives in the deep backwoods of our gothic South (Figure 8). Thus, in this scene, the show uses a lot of Southern Gothic tropes such as "sins of the fathers," incest, mental degeneracy, a decaying house.

A similar effect of gothic terror is created at the end of the third episode when the camera reveals the hiding place of one of the other killers of the cult, the meth cook Reginald Ledoux. Coupled with shots of the photographs of dead women, the camera moves in on Ledoux's hiding place and lab next to a bayou. Then, we see Ledoux leave his lab in his underwear with a gas mask on, which adds to his monstrosity and renders him grotesque. In the last shot of the sequence (and the episode) Ledoux pauses, turns and looks at the camera. The effect is that the viewers are coming face to face with the monster first the first time. This effect of gothic horror is strengthened though the voice over of Rust, who is talking to the other two detectives in 2012: "To realize that all your life, all your love, all your hate, all your memory, all your pain, it was all the same thing. It was all the same dream. A dream that you had inside a locked room. A dream about being a person. And like a lot of dreams, there is a monster at the end of it" ("The Locked Room" Figure 9). Thus, the show uses two grotesque bodies of white trash as its monsters, white trash who is nurtured and sheltered by the grotesque land and the society living on it.

Reginald Ledoux is also the representative of another stereotype associated with white trash. In their article "This is Your Face on Meth," Linnemann and Wall explore the phenomenon of "meth panic" in rural places in America and how the drug is associated with the stereotypes of white trash. Described as "white man's crack" or "redneck coke," the epidemic of meth creates "meth zombies:" people with damaged bodies, rotting teeth and mutilated flesh. For Linnemann and Wall, the "Faces of Meth" campaign, in which law enforcers use the mug-shots of meth users on billboards and signs in order to retain

the public from meth use, actually serves as another physiognomic narrative that demonizes white trash. Writing the corporeal effects of crime on white trash bodies, projects like FOM "allow citizens distanced from the material experiences of crime and punishment to participate in punitive spectacles and engage in moral judgment from afar" (320). The white trash, in their transformation to zombies and monsters, feed the voyeuristic sensibilities of middle-class Americans and are cast as "others" that need to be abjected from the society in order to maintain order. Even though projects like FOM are real-life campaigns, for Linnemann and Wall, they are more like tales of "Gothic degeneration" (323). Through criminal narratives like Faces of Meth and criminal shows like *True Detective*, white trash becomes the hegemonic whiteness' pale specter, polluting and defiling it:

> Just as constructed anxieties surrounding "black" criminality renders whiteness largely invisible, notions of "white trash" criminality advanced by projects like Faces of Meth reaffirm and obscure the boundaries of white privilege. A powerful form of fear-induced name-calling expressed by middle and upper class whites, 'white trash' objectifies and stigmatizes whites living in poverty and lacking proper decorum—carving a raced and classed hierarchy from relative homogeneity. (324)

The criminal behavior depicted in *True Detective*—murder, rape, incest, drug use, solicitation—is always coupled with the white trash bodies in the show. Even though the white upper-class of the show is also implicated in this environment of degeneration, they are never rendered "visible." As Southern Gothic engages with social decay in Southern society, "white trash" becomes America's new monster of choice.

The normalization of the values of the middle-class through the spectacle of white trash is not just limited to the criminality of these people. For the hegemonic whiteness, the whole lifestyle and practices associated with white trash are monstrous. As Jock Young suggests, "the stereotype of the underclass with its idleness, dependency, hedonism and institutionalized irresponsibility, with its drug use, teenage pregnancies and fecklessness, represents all the traits which the respectable citizen has to suppress in order to maintain his or her lifestyle" (42). Through the victims of the show, the monstrous white trash is depicted as preying on its own people. This is a community where poor local whites cannot protect their own children, especially their daughters. In one particular scene, the camera assumes the point of view of the two detectives in their car and shows us the

people outside as the car passes by. As mothers and grandmothers wander about in front of derelict settlements, the camera shows us scantily-dressed young girls either alone or smoking in groups, representing a vulnerable demographic of this society where people do not believe in school and girls usually grow up to become prostitutes. When these shots are juxtaposed with an earlier shot from the same episode of a road sign saying "Do You Know Who Killed Me?" with a face of a fourteen year old girl, the unsaid becomes evident. The show and the diagnostic camera work encourage the viewers to blame these people for their own losses; they should have brought up and educated their daughters appropriately, it is indeed the white trash who killed the girl on the road sign (Figure 10).

Another scene which parades for the viewers the many sins and monstrosities of white trash is when Rust and Marty visit the first victim Dora Lange's mother at her house in the second episode. When Rust asks about Dora's "relationship with her father," the woman responds, "Why, what have you heard?" When the detectives ask if the father and the daughter were close, Dora's mum says, "Why wouldn't a father bathe his own child?" With these implications of incest inside the house, Rust starts looking around the room and the camera follows his gaze. The camera captures images from the house that serves as identity markers for the white trash stereotype: a statue of Virgin Mary, which represents white trash's association with fundamentalist Christianity, a bowl of medicine bottles which hints at physical debility and addiction, a picture of Dora when she was a kid, which represents the loss of innocence and a picture of Dora as a kid standing in front of five men on horses wearing Ku Klux Klan-like hoods, which represents the racism and threatening masculinity of white trash. After these shots Dora's mother cringes with the debilitating headaches she has been having, a result of long years of work at a dry cleaner's where the chemicals destroyed her whole body. As the last shot of the scene, the woman shows her deformed and tainted hands as evidence to the detectives and to the extreme close up of the camera (Figure 11). Thus, in a very brief scene, the show manages to offer the viewers another physical evidence for the backwardness, the immorality and the ignorance of the white trash. Indeed, the visit provokes a conversation between the two detectives about their own families. We learn that Marty's mom was a full-on "Donna Reed type" with her "packed lunches and bed-time stories."

The horror of incest and violence that lies in the white trash community and home informs all of the family structures in the South. In this society, women are used as properties of

their fathers/husbands or are raped and murdered. As such, the show appropriates Southern Gothic's preoccupation with the victimization of women in Southern society. The upper class members of the community frequently have sex with their offspring, echoing the sexual economy of the Old South. The middle class characters also show a problematic relationship among fathers and daughters. Marty struggles to discipline and control his daughters who are influenced by the violent society in which they live in. Rust also comments that his daughter, through her death, spared him "the sin of being a father" ("Seeing Things"). Furthermore, in the white trash society, young women are frequently kidnapped, murdered and raped. Some other incidences that are mentioned in the show include a meth addict injecting his nine year old daughter with crystal meth in order to purify her and another addict putting his baby in the microwave to keep her warm. Thus, in the larger context, *True Detective,* as a Southern Gothic text, is informed by the theme of patriarchal sin, especially in the context of controlling and abusing women.

True Detective also demonizes what Sweeney calls "White Trash spirituality" with a scene that establishes "the tent-show preacher as the embodiment of hypocrisy or pure evil" (150). Southern Gothic, especially in its more contemporary texts, explores the theme of hypocrisy and grotesqueness of rural Evangelicalism. Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People" and John Kennedy Toole's *The Neon Bible* are some famous examples. In *True Detective,* the investigation of the murder of Dora Lange takes the two detectives to a revival church tent and while the detectives and the camera canvas the white trash crowd of the meeting in their religious reverie, the Gothic hero Rust's comments reveal the hypocrisy of institutionalized religion which has such a significant place in the lives of rural Louisianans. In a geography where what Marty calls "old time religion" prevails, Rust's voice sticks out like a sore thumb. As Marty comments, "Every person within a thousand miles here is religious in some kind of way. Except you" ("Seeing Things"). During the tent revival scene in the third episode, the following conversation between the two detectives is juxtaposed with shots of people from the revival meeting:

> R: What do you think the average IQ of this group is?
>
> M: Can you see Texas up there on your high horse? What do you know about these people?

> R: Just observation and deduction. I see a propensity for obesity, poverty and for fairytales. Folks putting what few bucks they do have in a wicker basket being passed around. I think it's safe to say that nobody here is gonna be splitting the atom Marty.
>
> M: You see that. Your fucking attitude! Not everybody wants to sit alone at an empty room beating off to murder manuals. Some folks enjoy community. The common good.
>
> R: Yeah but if the common good has got to do with make-up fairy tales then it's not good for anybody.
>
> M: I mean can you imagine, if people didn't believe, all the things they'd get up to.
>
> R: Exact same thing they do now. Just out in the open.
>
> M: Bullshit! It'd be a fucking freak show of murder and debauchery and you know it.
>
> R: If the only thing keeping a person decent is the expectation of divine reward, then, brother, that person is a piece of shit. And I'd like to get as many of them out in the open as possible. (Figure 12)

For Rust, religion is a cathartic narrative that makes possible the "transference of fear and self-loathing to an authoritarian vessel." He also calls religion "a language virus that rewrites pathways in the brain" and that "dulls critical thinking" ("The Locked Room"). Rust's critique of institutionalized religion as nothing but a redemptive narrative which is associated with ignorance is nothing new. What is interesting here, however, is Rust's association of this ignorance and hypocrisy with a certain type of people who have low IQs, and "a propensity for obesity, poverty and fairytales"—the white trash. Even though Rust retains from using any specific epithet in this scene, the images of the people in the meeting mark them as white trash. This is actually indicative of another pattern in the show in which the narrative tries its best to stay away from any name-calling. The only two instances when the white trash stereotype is vocalized in the show is when Rust calls the backwoods trailer brothel they visit a "hillbilly bunny ranch" ("Seeing Things") and when a distant relative of Reginald Ledoux says about him "there is not enough white in that trash" ("After You've Gone"). This also strengthens this study's point that white trash-as-gothic-sign works best through its visible images to which value judgments are attached. Shows like *True Detective* can be seen as symptoms of a post-political-correctness America still creating visible and consumable stereotypes without the need to utter any racial epithets.

The show associates institutionalized religion with fairytales and hints at the corruption lying in the heart of church in two other short scenes. When the two detectives visit an African American church, Rust shows pictures of the wooden triangular mini-sculptures the killer left at the murder scene to the black priest. The priest recognizes the forms from his childhood and calls them "Devil Nets" associated with voodoo. He says it was something his grandma used to make with them, "something for children to do, keep them busy, tell them stories while they are tying sticks together." At that instance, Rust stares at the wall and the camera reveals a simple cross made of two pieces of wooden sticks tied together with a rope (Figure 13). Thus, the show helps us associate Christianity with stories for children, something to keep people busy. In another scene in the second episode, the detectives look for a revival church Dora Lange used to go. With almost no dialogue, this scene is a narrative in images revealing Christianity in ruins. Hidden from their view by gothic overgrown vegetation, the church is revealed to our detectives, contrasted with the petrochemical factories in the horizon. The church is half burnt and in ruins. The camera, when it gets to Rust's point of view, reveals the door to the church and inside is nothing but ruins. When the two detectives enter the church, they find a painting of the murder scene on one of the intact walls, which is covered by vines (Figure 14). This whole sequence is another affirmation for the show's opinion about institutionalized religion. The church in the South is decaying and it is sheltering evil deeds like murder and rape. This view is also apparent in the fact that one of the white elite members of the murder cult is Reverend Tuttle, the supreme religious authority in the region.

As a result, *True Detective* adheres to what Sweeney calls the "White Trash Aesthetic" (143) in its gothicization of rural Louisiana and the poor white of the region. White trash aesthetic is a sign for American culture where the politics of identity and race is repressed and often politically and culturally "incorrect." In such a culture, white trash defines "what is backward or excessive to the norm, from the darker aspects of racial politics and the Ku Klux Klan, feuding, incest, and the cult of the Rebel, to country music, faith-healing and snake-handling, and the phenomenon of Elvis veneration" (Sweeney 144). White trash, even though it can be found everywhere in America, is associated with the backwoods, mountains and bayous of the South. Sweeney claims that the white trash aesthetic nowadays, is "a submerged thread in American culture: it is everywhere and

nowhere, seen but not disclosed, like a guilty secret. White Trash is our repressed Other, carrying no cache of oppressed race or ethnic identity, but only an aggressive materiality and an aesthetic that, perhaps of all that claim that status, is truly postmodern. White Trash is an aesthetic of ultimate marginalization" (144). Thus, it can be said that the stereotyping and demonization of white trash replaced the sins of slavery for America in general and the South in particular.

White trash aesthetic as "ultimate marginalization" finds its home in the location of "ultimate marginalization:" the South. As Sweeney notes

> The South, especially the rural, backwoods South, is one of those liminal places where mainstream culture locates the marginal elements of society: where people are strange or in-bred or homicidal maniacs, where the veils between reality and the Other are thin, where laws are arbitrary, and the uncanny is commonplace. These are the places of our American darknesses, where our fears about ourselves emerge. (146)

As if agreeing with these comments, the actual closing shots of *True Detective* returns to the land (This is right before the epilogue part of the show where the narrative takes on the classic light versus dark gothic story). After the two detectives face the monster and retain fatal injuries, they survive to tell the tale. Referring to the rest of the murderous cult which were comprised of white elite, Rust complains to Marty that they "didn't get them all." Marty's response is in tune with the show's dark and gothic view on humanity: "And we ain't gonna get them all. That ain't what kind of world it is." After this dialogue Rust is left alone in his hospital bed and the camera pans out of the hospital and revisits the show's sites of horror. We see Errol's shack in the woods and then the camera moves over the swamp to revisit Reggy's hide-out. After that the camera moves along the river that bears the signs of Katrina, reaches the cane fields and visits the tree where the first crime scene was set. The last shot of the camera is from ground level towards the tree in the sunset. The camera is suggesting that these sites are a part of this land and the tree at the end is evocative of the family tree of Errol Childress, whose roots go deep into Southern society. Thus, the show leaves the viewer with a sense of hopeless anguish in the face of the fact that evil in this land is not going to stop with the show's monsters' destruction (Figure 15).

Douglas Snauffer suggests that "in many ways, crime dramas … have more closely mirrored actual society than any other genre" (1). For a show like *True Detective*, this statement is both true and false. The fact that *True Detective* uses the excesses and exaggerations of the gothic mode makes it different than other seemingly realistic police procedural. On the other hand, it is *because* the show appropriates the gothic mode, however, that it tells something more "real" about the society it strives to portray. *True Detective* might work well as a social critique not in its level of dedication to outside reality but in its depictions of mechanisms of othering that is current in American society, revealed on the level of viewership.

The gothic monster of white trash, made visible, diagnosed and pathologized by texts like *True Detective*, is used as a cultural commodity in American status quo and strengthens the stereotypes of the poor whites in American society. Joseph Marguiles reminds us that stereotypes are an indispensable part of identity formation:

> They serve the not altogether salutary purpose of imposing order on what could otherwise be chaos. The judgment that members of a particular community, as a group, share characteristics that make them more (or less) friendly to me and my community not only helps me plan my affairs in a way likely to increase my sense of well-being, it also helps give my community structure and identity. 'We' are the people who are not like 'them,' or so we like to believe. The creation of stereotypes is thus inevitable, as anthropologists and social psychologists have long pointed out. (79)[6]

Reading *True Detective*'s white trash monstrosity subversively, though, reveals the hidden mechanisms of othering. Texts like *True Detective* in particular and the white trash stereotype in general, hints at the fact that the gothic mode and its monsters reveal themselves when power and privilege is at stake. The reason for the white trash to be racialized and monstrified is because it helps maintain the middle-class status quo through abjection. Through its liminal gothic position and its liminal monster of white trash, *True Detective* proves that, as Jerrold Hogle suggests, gothic is decidedly about class privilege:

> the Gothic has also come to deal, as one of its principal subjects, with how the middle class dissociates from itself, and then fears, the extremes of what surrounds it: the very high or the decadently aristocratic and the very low or the animalistic, working class, underfinanced, sexually deviant, childish, or carnivalesque, all sides of which have been abjected at once into figures. (9)

When viewed from this perspective, *True Detective*, as one of the latest representations of a Southern Gothic sensibility, contributes to the reproduction and circulation of the cultural commodity of white trash which is a stereotype created as a "racialization" of poor white people through a marking of white trash bodies as diseased and immoral. Even though the two main characters of the show (both members of the middle-class) can be said to have their own personal sins and issues, and even though the white upper-class members of the community are also implicated in the show's crimes, ultimately, the show chooses to demonize the poor white through its chosen narrative and camera point of view. As the viewers are encouraged to identify with the detectives and as the camera also creates another more omniscient diagnostic gaze, the white trash is properly diagnosed as lazy, unintellectual, immoral and eventually evil in this twenty-first century Southern Noir/Gothic.

ENDNOTES

[1] The term first appeared in the 1866 book *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, written by historian Edward A. Pollard. Jefferson Davis's *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (1881) added much to the mythology of the movement. In literature, some Lost Cause writers include poets Henry Timrod, Daniel B. Lucas, and Abram Joseph Ryan and novelist Thomas Nelson Page.

[2] In her, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction," O'Connor calls the genre "The School of Southern Degeneracy" (45). She saw her own use of grotesques as more directly linked to her theological vision than with social critique. Similarly, in an interview with Alice Walker, Welty exclaimed, "They better not call me that!"(152).

[3]Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels are: *Flags in the Dust* (1927), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *Go Down, Moses* (1942), *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), *Requiem for a Nun* (1950), *The Town* (1957), *The Mansion* (1959) and *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* (1962).

[4] Towards the end of the 18th century, as a result of the anxieties against authority made possible by the American and French Revolutions, critics and readers began to sympathize with the character of Satan created by John Milton in his *Paradise Lost* in 1667, seeing him as the arch rebel who had taken on the God as his antagonist. Lecturing in 1818 on the history of English poetry, William Hazlitt implied that Satan's Heaven-defying resistance was the mirror image of Milton's own rebellion against political tyranny. A year later, Percy Shelley agreed that Satan is the moral superior to Milton's tyrannical God, but he admitted that Satan's greatness of character is flawed by vengefulness and pride. It was precisely this aspect of flawed grandeur that made Satan so attractive a model for Shelley's friend Byron in his projects of personal myth-making. The more immediate precedents of the Byronic hero—a figure that Byron uses for purposes both of self-revelation and of self-concealment—were the protagonists of some of the Gothic novels of the later eighteenth century. Examples are Manfred, the ominous hero-villain of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and the brooding, guilt-haunted monk Schedoni of Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*(1797), who each embody traits of Milton's Satan. Immediately affecting the life, art, and even philosophy of the nineteenth century, the Byronic hero took on a life of his own. He became the model for the behavior of avant-garde young men and gave focus to the yearnings of emancipated young women. In the nineteenth century, the Byronic hero would be absorbed back into the Gothic tradition. These works and the novels, plays, and even operas they spawned granted Byron an eerie afterlife, as the Gothic tradition's romanticized vampire.

[5] For the full interview, see www.artofthetitle/title/true-detective/.

[6] In his book *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon W. Allport explains stereotypes in this manner: "A certain man happened to know three Englishmen personally and proceeded to declare that the whole English race had the common attributes that he observed in these three. There is a natural basis for this tendency. Life is so short, and the demands upon us for practical adjustments so great, that we cannot let our ignorance detain us in our daily transactions. We have to decide whether objects are good or bad by classes. We cannot weigh each object in the world by itself. Rough and ready rubrics, however coarse, have to suffice" (9).

CHAPTER 3: POSTFEMINIST/POSTRACIAL WITCHES: FX'S *AMERICAN HORROR STORY: COVEN*

This chapter will analyze FX network channel's anthology series *American Horror Story* (*AHS*) by focusing on the third season of the show, *Coven* which was broadcast from October 2013 till January 2014.[1] The season was the most successful of the show with its pilot episode attracting 5.54 million viewers with a 44% increase from the previous season. This third season of *AHS* was also one of the most watched shows in FX network's history.[2] Compared to *True Detective*, *AHS Coven* employs a totally different diegesis (universe). Instead of the realistic detective story plot, we are now confronted with a supernatural story of a coven of witches; instead of the rural Louisiana of white trash, our new site of horror is the heteroglossic city of New Orleans; instead of a novelistic/cinematic style of gothic terror, this show, as evident from its title, flaunts a style of horrorality (which will be explained below) and extreme visibility in its depictions of violence and the supernatural; if *True Detective* sides with the point of view of the anti-hero who is responsible to catch the monster, *AHS Coven* is totally about the monsters' (the witches') world and explores their problems; and from a conventional Southern world where men rule and women are either murder victims or prostitutes, we are now transported into a world (and cast) populated and dominated by women. This twist for Southern Gothic creates a world where an alternative space is created for gender identities to be liberated in the South. However, *AHS: Coven*'s engagement with Southern Gothic is problematic since the show, in addition to exploring the sins of slavery and racism in the South, depicts its female characters as perpetuating a similar system of power and privilege, both in the antebellum New Orleans and in its postracial contemporary timeline. An analysis of *AHS Coven* also requires the exploration of the issues of postfeminism, of the representations of women as witches and of the mode of horror within the Gothic tradition and an examination of the significance of these issues for Southern Gothic.

The main storyline of the show revolves around a modern-day coven of witches in New Orleans, living at Miss Robichaux's Academy for Exceptional Young Ladies, a boarding school that acts as a front for their coven. The students and the administration of the school are the descendants of the Salem witches who, according to the show's narrative,

were “cunning and careful not to be caught” and escaped New England after the trials. According to the story, in 1868, a prominent society matron, suffragette and children’s books author, Maryanne Wharton, bought the school to establish “a safe haven for young witches to gather to learn.” Thus, the community of witches underwent its own “reconstruction” during Reconstruction in the South. Even though the school saw large numbers of students during its heyday, we are informed that, over the years, witches’ numbers have dwindled and that they are now “a dying breed” since many of the families who knew they carried the bloodline “made the choice not to reproduce” (“Bitchcraft”). The academy is now led by the headmistress Cordelia Foxx (Sarah Paulson) who has lived most of her life under the shadow of her mother Fiona Goode (Jessica Lange) who returns to the academy in the first episode after a long period of absence to ensure the safety of the students and to help them embrace their powers. Fiona is the coven’s leader and “Supreme,” a witch born every generation who embodies all the “Seven Wonders of Witchcraft” with her immense powers. The entire coven is assessed and evaluated by the Council of Witchcraft, which includes Fiona's old rival and Cordelia's mother figure, Myrtle Snow (Frances Conroy).

The viewers are introduced to the academy through the character of Zoe Benson (Taissa Farmiga), a teenage witch who is sent to the academy after she accidentally gives her boyfriend a brain hemorrhage during intercourse as she had been kept in the dark by her parents about her magical abilities up to that point. In the academy Zoe meets other young witches; namely, Madison Montgomery (Emma Roberts), once a child movie star and now a recovering drug abuser who can move objects with her mind, Queenie (Gabourey Sidibe), a “human voodoo doll,” one of the few African American descendants of Tituba from Salem, who has the power to inflict wounds on others by harming herself and the clairvoyant Nan (Jamie Brewer), a girl with Down’s Syndrome who can hear the thoughts of others. In a parallel storyline, we meet Misty Day (Lily Rabe), a girl living in rural Louisiana whose ability to revive a dead bird at an actual revival meeting causes her to be accused of necromancy and, as punishment, is burned at the stake. Misty, then, resurrects herself and later joins the group of witches at the coven. While the younger generation of the witches struggle with their problems about love, insecurities and competition, they take a quite proactive and violent stance towards their problems. The older generation, namely Cordelia and Fiona, struggle with their own problems as

Cordelia is battling infertility and Fiona feels the weight of her old age and the cancer spreading in her body, slowly killing her. It is through Fiona's obsession with attaining youth and immortality that the viewers are introduced to the next set of characters in the show.

Fiona's curse of an untreatable cancer is explained as a result of a new Supreme rising to power within the Coven. She tries to cure herself and regain her youth at all costs. A famed voodoo priestess and rival of the Salem witches named Marie Laveau (Angela Bassett), has regained her youth and immortality by bargaining with the voodoo devil, Papa Legba (Lance Reddick). Marie and her voodoo priestesses run a weave-and-braids hair salon in the poor, black ghetto of New Orleans called the Ninth Ward. The tribe of voodoo witches are pitched as antagonists to the white coven of witches living in a big and luxurious white mansion in the privileged world of the French Quarter of New Orleans. To taunt Marie, Fiona frees the immortal and buried alive Madame Delphine LaLaurie (Kathy Bates), an infamous real-life nineteenth-century aristocratic slave owner who tormented her slaves in her hidden torture chamber in her attic and who also mutilated Marie's lover by transforming him into a Minotaur. Delphine had been cursed with immortality by Marie and buried alive and she becomes a maid at the academy. Delphine struggles with adjusting to the modern world due to her history as a racist and through her growing friendship with Queenie, she gains some recognition of the immorality of her past actions, only to turn back to them at the end and ends up being killed by her friend Queenie. While Fiona and Marie spend most of their time trying to destroy each other, towards the end of the series, they unite their powers against the male witch-hunters and destroy their cooperation and kill them savagely.

AHS Coven depicts and problematizes many issues associated with gender identity in the South and depictions of women in the media, namely, mother-daughter rivalry, the problem of aging and reproduction, female sisterhood and competition, and most significantly the question of female power embodied in the figure of the witch. Moreover, through its storylines of black characters as voodoo witches, Delphine as the return of the racist past and Queenie as a modern young black woman struggling to fit in and find her identity, the show complicates the twentieth-century gender identity in the South with racial identities. As such, this chapter aims to establish the show as a representation of postfeminist and postracial gender identities in the South through an analysis of the race

question that haunts the show and an exploration of the figure of the witch as a metaphor which has been historically both used by mainstream ideology to demonize powerful women and appropriated by women and feminists to depict female agency and power.

3.1 THE HORRORALITY OF THE SHOW

Before going into the analysis of the themes and characters of the show, it is necessary to establish the specific gothic stylistics *AHS* makes use of. Radically different from *True Detective*'s aspirations for higher arts of novel and cinema, *AHS*, from the beginning, stood out as a series that revels in postmodern performativity, excess and an overuse of horror tropes. The show, long before *True Detective* was broadcast, was the show that brought back the anthology series format of the 1950s and 60s with its first season *Murder House* in 2011. *AHS* also set the new trend for shows like *True Detective* with its choice of anthologizing seasons rather than single episodes, which was mostly the case with the classic anthology dramas. Unlike *True Detective*, however, which used the anthology format to create a space akin to a lengthy novel, *AHS* and its creator Ryan Murphy used the anthology format to create a space for excessive horror on television while at the same time avoiding the risk of repeating itself thanks to the limitations of the format. *AHS*, mostly labelled as unashamed and excessive entertainment by the critics, has no aspirations to literariness. On the contrary, the show revels in its own exaggerated performativity in its depictions of violence and excessive use of horror tropes. Phillip Maciak of *LA Review of Books* describes the show in this manner:

> *AHS* mines the gory and disturbing outer possibilities of cable television's subject matter, emphasizes performance and perspective over long-form plotting, and is built in such a way that its very structure flouts the conventions of prestige and value that have enshrined HBO, AMC, and their peer networks at the Emmy's. ("Is American Horror")

If *True Detective*'s creator Nic Pizzolatto can be seen as a literary and serious auteur, Ryan Murphy of *AHS* has been labeled a "maximalist auteur" in his overuse of horror tropes (Maciak). The first season of the show, *Murder House*, was about a dysfunctional family moving into a haunted mansion in Los Angeles. Through the house's past, the season featured rape, suicide, murder, psychotic serial killers, sexual predators, the Antichrist, a back-alley abortionist, monsters and a myriad of angry and vengeful ghosts. The second season, *Asylum*, took place in an asylum for the criminally insane and added

to this plethora of violence, alien abductions and a sadistic former-Nazi scientist who did experiments on female patients. The show has always been very open in its depictions of violence and created this weird, abject universe where all of the characters got abused, killed and came back as ghosts who got stuck in the same universe of chaos and violence. Seen in this light, it becomes clear why the show has so often been labeled as pure entertainment, or guilty pleasure and has not been seen as worthy of serious study as a result of its stance "advocating melodrama over studied observation, inspirational musical numbers and pockets of shriek-inducing violence over meandering narrative, and broad social statements over minute ethnography" (Maciak). It is important to note at this point, however, that it is with its third season that the show started to own up to its name and became a truly "American" horror story, exploring the true horrors that comes from the South's racist and sexist past.

In this vein, *AHS* can be seen as a televisual manifestation of what Philip Brophy labels "horrorality." In his 1986 article in the *Screen* magazine, Brophy coined the term in order to discuss the features of the horror movies of late 1970s like *Halloween* (1978), *Alien* (1979), *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), and *The Brood* (1979). He stated that the two major areas that affected the horror movies of those times were the growth of special effects and "an historical over-exposure of the genre's iconography, mechanics and effects" (279). Brophy sees in the "modern" horror films of the times a self-awareness and overuse of by now all-too-familiar horror tropes. He writes:

> The modern horror film is a strange animal. A camouflaged creature, it has generally been accorded a less than prominent place in the institution of the Cinema, due mainly to the level at which its difference (its specificity, its textuality) is articulated. It is a genre which mimics itself mercilessly – because its statement is coded within its very mimicry. (277)

For Brophy, "horrorality" is a perfect term for these movies as it combines horror, textuality, morality and hilarity, which sums up the qualities of modern horror which embodies "a genre about genre; a displaced audience; a short-circuiting entertainment" (277). In its "violent awareness" of itself as "a saturated genre" and in the fact that it is "qualified by *how* it states itself as a genre"—evident even in its title—*AHS* is heir to modern horror film's horrorality (Brophy 278-279). *AHS* never denies the clichés of the horror genre but instead embraces them wholeheartedly and creates a textuality of horror

by overplaying these tropes. As such, the show manifests a postmodern self-reflexive, intertextual and excessive sensibility. Brophy sums it up perfectly:

> "Horrorality" involves the construction, employment and manipulation of horror—in all its various guises—as a textual mode. The effect of its fiction is not unlike a death-defying carnival ride: the subject is a willing target that both constructs the terror and is terrorized by its construction. "Horrorality" is too blunt to bother with psychology—traditionally the voice of articulation behind horror—because what is of prime importance is the textual effect, the game that one plays *with* the text, a game that is impervious to any knowledge of its workings. The contemporary Horror film *knows* that you've seen it before; it *knows* that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know. And none of it means a thing, as the cheapest trick in the book will still tense your muscles, quicken your heart and jangle your nerves. It is the *present*—the precise point of speech, of utterance, of plot, of event—that is ever of any value. (279)

In its play over the textuality of horror, *AHS* gives importance to "the act of showing over the act of telling" and "the photographic image" over "the realistic scene" (276). In its open depictions of violence, the show also takes as its point of interest the destruction of the family and the body, which makes it again a part of modern horror. Brophy suggests that "the contemporary horror film tends to play not so much on the broad fear of Death, but more precisely on the fear of one's own body, of how one controls and relates to it" (280). In the show, the viewers are confronted with various images of bodily harm from tortured bodies, skinned faces, crushed in skulls, burnt bodies, plucked eyes and dismembered bodies (Figure 16). As with most horror movies, the show seems to defy the sanctity of the human body and creates a truly abject view of the human body as disposable, as waste.

Another level of horrorality in the show comes from its generic play with horror motifs: its perverse sense of humor, which Brophy sees as a fundamental feature of modern horror: "the humor in a gory scene is the result of the contemporary horror film's saturation of all its codes and conventions—a punchline that can only be got when one fully acknowledges this saturation as the departure point for viewing pleasure" (284). *AHS*'s postmodern, playful and perverse sense of humor can be seen in the names of individual episodes and in various scenes within the show: In the first episode, "Bitchcraft," Fiona refers to the academy as "Hogwarts," and then forces the young witches to all wear black and walk around the town with her in a straight line, flaunting their "witchiness;" in "Boy Parts," Madison and Zoe revive Kyle (Zoe's love interest) by

reassembling him using different body parts from his killed fraternity brothers (it is later revealed that Kyle gets all the tattooed extremities of his friends and he actually used to hate tattoos); in "The Replacements," Delphine screams in agony when she discovers on television that America now has a black president; in "The Dead," the two resurrected "zombies" Kyle and Madison bond and hug; in "The Sacred Taking," Myrtle claims that Misty Day should be their new Supreme because she brought back more people than Jesus Christ; in "Head," Delphine is beheaded but since she is immortal, her living and talking head travels from one place to another with the witches and she is given a "sensitivity training" by Queenie who forces the head to watch *Roots* and footage of the Civil Rights movement; in "The Seven Wonders," the witches in the academy sit down for a Last Supper before the Supreme competition (Figure 17). In all these instances and many more, humor comes out of the show's knowing play with gothic and horror conventions, whether it be the image of witches, zombies, or Frankenstein monsters, the anachronistic consequences of magic and immortality or the witches' status as monsters in Christianity. In the postmodern space of *AHS Coven*, all the accumulated meanings and symbols associated with the witch and the horror genre are in a free-floating referential field, ready to be used and abused at any point. The show's perverse humor also comes from its generic play with specific Southern Gothic tropes and issues, especially the ironic humor that is created by Delphine whose reactions to the postracial America as the Old South's aristocratic lady coming back to haunt the present. In these instances, *Coven* seems to be exploring the theme of the repressed Southern past in a horrific way.

3.2 NEW GENDER REGIME IN THE SOUTH: *COVEN* AS SOUTHERN GOTHIC

AHS: Coven explores the potential of the heteroglossic world of New Orleans in creating an alternative space to give voice to silenced identities in the history of the South: the women. The show includes many flashbacks where different instances from the city's past is explored. As the show creates a world where women rule, however, it becomes evident that race remains the biggest issue in this geography as women perpetuate the power structures coming from slavery and Jim Crow.The show's preoccupation with race becomes evident from an exploration of its different locations, especially the aristocratic white mansion of the coven and the hairdresser salon of the black voodoo witches.

The horrific cinematography of the show, with its use of negative space, dutch angles (tilted shots) and the 6 mm lens which allows for wide shots to create a horror dimension, aims to create a weird and uncanny sensibility that is akin to the horrific universe of the show. One of the instances this camera-work is most apparent in the third season is in the first episode, "Bitchcraft," when Zoe enters the academy for the first time and is taunted by the girls in the school who wear masks and attack her. The viewers are introduced to the academy with this scene and through Zoe's perception of the school as an uncanny space. As such, the camera shots during the scene help to establish the tone of horror and an eschewed perspective required to inhabit Miss Robichaux's academy (Figure 18). The mansion is indeed an uncanny space full of ghosts, a perverse butler living in the attic and an underground herb garden which is reminiscent of Hawthorne's "Rappacini's Daughter." The most uncanny aspect of the mansion is its expressionistic color scheme. The mansion, which can be seen as a contemporary rendition of haunted plantation mansions of the South, is not decaying—as in most Southern Gothic—but in pristine condition, symbolizing the fact that the caste system of the Old South is intact even today. The mansion is decidedly white, both in its exterior and interior, highlighted with black contours. The color white can be seen as an expression of the cruel sterility if the witches' world, but in *Coven*'s Southern setting, it takes on decidedly racial connotations. The coven in the show is also dominantly "white" except for Queenie, who can be seen as the show's postracial token black among the white witches. The white mansion is an enormous structure symbolizing the history of white power and privilege in the South. When it is remembered that the head of the witches' coven is called the "Supreme," the coven and their academy can be seen as representatives of white supremacy. In contrast, the hairdresser salon of the black witches, located in the black ghetto of New Orleans, highlights the fact that segregation is still a fact of life in contemporary South (Figure 19). Davis suggests that segregation is "a powerful epistemological and ontological system dependent on the markings of spaces and the mapping of races" (6). Within the system of segregation, place becomes a "spatial marker," "a powerful signifier of identity" (6). *AHS: Coven*, even though it is a supernatural horror text, recreates the Southern regime of segregation and highlights the fact that, years after the Civil Rights, de facto segregation is still a fact of life in the South. The show's explanation for this segregation is that, during the 1960s—the period of the Civil Rights movement—white and black

witches signed a truce ending their conflict, which was in tune with the political developments of the time. However, this truce, for the two covens, entailed the distinct separation of their territories. As a result, ironically, during a time in the South when integration of the two races was the goal, the witches decided that the only way they can live together in the same city was through drawing boundaries between their worlds. As such, the strict boundaries between the two races that marked the antebellum and Jim Crow South still informs *Coven*'s spatial economy of Gothic New Orleans. The show thus rejects the potential hybridity and mixing that is inherent in New Orleans's history for a distinct separation between the colors white and black, which also informs the show's color scheme.

The show's preoccupation with the gothic potential of racism and racial identities in the South also becomes evident in its opening credits. The credits use a color scheme which alternates between sepia tones and black and white shots. As many gothic tropes associated with witches are used in the horrorality of the credits—the woods, the goat, the witch burnings—in the instances of black and white shots, the credits brings the violent and racist past of the South into play together with these tropes. Images of people in black hooded outfits reminds the viewers of Ku Klux Klan and black bodies are frequently gothicized through the images of a monstrous black creature and a psychotic black woman reveling in her voodoo magic. Thus, the show brings together the repository of images associated with witches and the specifically Southern world of racial violence and depiction of blacks as beasts and as exotic creatures (Figure 20). It is this racial dimension that makes the show a truly Southern Gothic narrative.

AHS: Coven establishes a direct link between the violent racist past of the Old South and the postracial New South which is still informed by segregation through the character of Delphine LaLaurie, the real life society matron of the nineteenth century. The very first sequence of the show demonstrates its preoccupation with the racist past of the South. The scene takes the viewers to 1834 in New Orleans, to one of Delphine's parties. After the party, Delphine is seen smearing blood on her face, which she extracted from the slaves she tortured. Delphine learns that one of her daughters had intercourse with the black houseman and says, "We are going to say he took you by force, like the savage he is!" Delphine then orders her servants to take the man to her attic where she keeps her "pets" (the slaves she tortures). When the camera enters the attic, we see one slave with

eyes and mouth sewn, one slave with skin ripped off and others in cages. When one of the slaves asks Delphine why she is doing this to them, she answers "because I can." Her punishment for the houseman who slept with her daughter is transforming him into a minotaur by putting a bull's severed head on his head. This minotaur later haunts the rest of the show as he is kept alive by Marie. The horror effect in this first sequence is created when camera canvasses the cages and as the tortured slaves look directly into the camera, when we see a shot of Delphine's psychotic and happy face through the eye sockets of the bull's head and when finally, the minotaur "beast" is revealed to us in its full form. In one short scene, *AHS Coven* achieves a quite controversial depiction of America's racist past through channeling images of tortured black bodies, images of the stereotypes of black people as "beasts," and past anxieties about miscegenation. Indeed, the images that come out of this first scene is quite shocking for a postracial America of political correctness. This can be seen as an instance of the return of the monstrous racist past of the South in particular and America in general, coming back to haunt the nation through the television screen (Figure 21).

This scene can be seen as another rendering of Southern Gothic's depiction of plantations and mansions full of secret rooms and torture chambers which hide the dark history in these buildings associated with sins of slavery. Marshall suggests that

> Gothic tales typically include a backstory that reveals the true history of such buildings, including the torture, rape, and other crimes committed against black slaves by their white masters. Actual slave plantations, as well as their renderings in Gothic fiction, frequently featured secret rooms and even spaces specifically used for the punishment of slaves. Secret rooms that hide evidence of criminal acts (frequently dead bodies) are the stock in trade of the Gothic. (7)

Therefore, Madame LaLaurie's secret torture chamber is a conventional Southern Gothic trope. *AHS: Coven* also plays with the Gothic metaphor of the "below" seen in Southern Gothic's depiction of swamps and basements as liminal spaces that hide grotesqueries and violent acts. The show's choice of the secret room is the attic, both in the case of Delphine's torture chamber and in the academy's attic room inhabited by the perverse butler who likes playing with dolls and who keeps corpses in his room. Jay Ellis points out the fact that, in Southern Gothic, metaphor of "below" can be employed through a move towards above—the attics—and also beyond—out there in the woods. For Ellis, all these locations are actually "places of figurative descent" that contain a move below:

"below the normative, below consciousness, below social control" (xxxi). Thus, the show continues Southern Gothic's exploration of gothic spaces of the underbelly of American culture through its employment of attics.

What is interesting in Delphine's case is the fact that, in the antebellum world of the show, it is the white aristocratic lady who is rendered monstrous, taking the place of the sadistic plantation master. Indeed, Delphine is not a victim of the plantation system, but its strongest enforcer. In another flashback, Delphine's husband sleeps with a slave girl who then gives birth to a light-skinned baby. Delphine, as retribution, kills the baby and uses his blood for her beauty treatments, which leads the slave girl to commit suicide by throwing herself off the balcony (Figure 22). Instead of punishing her husband, Delphine, in truly sadistic manner, destroys the slave girl and her offspring. Thus, the show highlights the fact that black women were the ultimate victims of the system of slavery, abused and tortured by both the male and female members of the aristocratic class.

Delphine also acts like the ultimate paternalistic patriarch in her relationship with her three daughters. Obsessed with protecting their maidenhead and finding the appropriate elite white suitors for her daughters, Delphine was a monstrous matriarch to her daughters. She even tortured her own daughters when she learned that they were plotting to kill her to be free of her extreme control. As such, Delphine takes the place of the patriarchal regime of the Old South which was obsessed with the control of slaves and women. The problematics of the sins of the fathers upon their children in Southern Gothic is transformed in *Coven* into a world full of monstrous mothers abusing and controlling their children. As such, the show's new gender regime in the South represents a simple role reversal where victimization and violence continues. These points will be discussed further below.

Delphine's arch enemy and the show's strongest black figure is the voodoo priestess Marie Laveau. Marie takes revenge from Delphine by immortalizing her and burying her alive after Delphine turns her lover into a minotaur. Marie herself is also immortal, as she sold her soul to Papa Legba for immortality. Marie is also a problematic figure because she sacrificed her baby for power and she needs to sacrifice one innocent soul for Papa Legba every year. Adamant to protect her black community at all costs and having worked for the survival of her black community during slavery and Jim Crow, Marie, however,

is also another monstrous mother figure. The show brings the Old South of Delphine and Marie into contemporary New Orleans when Delphine is dug out of her grave by Fiona and when Fiona transgresses the boundaries between the territories of black and white witches, bringing Marie into the world of white witches.

Marie is strong, powerful and full of hate for the white witches and with good reason. Marie is a black woman who witnessed the entire racist history of the South, from slavery in the Old South to Jim Crow, discrimination and violence in the New South. She is also highly aware of the fact that even the "postracial" contemporary South of the twenty-first century does not bring any substantial change for the status of blacks in Southern society. The show brings back another episode from the South's past, this time from 1961, in another flashback about Marie. As the episode "Fearful Pranks Ensue" starts in 1961, some white men follow a black boy on a bike with their truck and they catch him in an alley. At that moment, narrative shifts to Marie's hairdresser salon where one of the black women working at the salon is excited for her son's first day at the newly-integrated white school. Marie says, "You are taking a big chance I fear" but the woman is hopeful about the future: "Times are changing Marie! Kennedy is in the White House." When the camera shifts to the hanged body of the boy on a tree, the color scheme once again turns to black and white. As the mother of the boy holds him in her arms and cries helplessly, camera shows Marie, dressed in whites, with a determined and hateful look on her face. It is also significant that in this shot, Marie is surrounded with black men who are looking to the ground and who seem helpless in the face of this white supremacist violence. Thus, it falls to Marie to take revenge. In the evening of the same day, the killers are hiding in a barn and Marie, through her voodoo magic, raises the dead from their graves and sends them to kill the murderers of the black boy (Figure 23). Another important aspect of this sequence is that the dead raised by Marie are made up of the identity categories that have been oppressed in American and Southern past. These zombies include a Confederate soldier, a poor white man in overalls, a Native American and a black woman wearing a flapper dress from the 1920s. Thus, in this short scene, America's marginalized identities return to take revenge from its white supremacists. On the bigger level, through this scene, the racist past of the South comes back once again to haunt the viewers from the television screen. The scene can be seen as a perfect revenge fantasy, especially for the black women of the South, who have been the most oppressed group of people in the region's history

and who have lost many children to white supremacy. This scene also creates a vision of the black community where men are powerless and women assume the role of protector and avenger, a role facilitated by their ties to dark voodoo magic.

In an important move for its Southern Gothic sensibility, *AHS: Coven* depicts a dialogue between the racist South of the past and the post-racial South of the twenty-first century through the characters of Delphine and Queenie, the only black member of the coven of white witches. After Delphine is released by Fiona from her grave and is forced to live in an America with a black president, Fiona makes her a personal "slave" for the young black witch Queenie. The role reversal for Delphine is quite ironic. From being the ultimate victimizer, she is transformed into one of those slaves she tortured. Delphine's status also changes economically as she is transformed from being a master to being a maid at the Academy. In "Replacements," we see Delphine and Queenie in the kitchen as Delphine is cooking food for Queenie. Queenie knowingly comments about how she uses food as a coping mechanism for the love she never felt at home (Queenie is overweight). Surprisingly, the two seem to be bonding, and Delphine gives Queenie some conventional female advice: "You ain't never gonna catch a man that way. At least one that loves you." Queenie offers a pseudo-psychoanalytic reason for her overeating: "Dr. Phil says kids from broken homes replace food for love because it is comforting." As something catches Delphine's eye outside and she stops cooking, Queenie shouts, "Nothing is out there. Get back to work before I smack you slave!" As Delphine is cast as "slave" for Queenie by both the Supreme and Queenie herself, the power structure of race and slavery seems to be reversed, not eliminated. The figure outside is actually the "beast" minotaur Delphine has created and he comes back to haunt her. As Queenie shouts "You deserve it," the show's aim appears to be the punishment of the South's racist past. The show, proceeds to complicate this stance, however, and hints at the possibility of redemption and healing.

In another scene from the episode "Head," Queenie takes it upon herself to educate Delphine's severed head about the painful struggle of African Americans in America. Marie has severed Delphine's head and since she is immortal, all her body parts are still animated. Delphine is later sewn back together by Queenie. The symbolic significance of Delphine's head being carried around by the witches is, in addition to creating perverse humor, it also hints at the fact that the racist and paternalistic "mindset" of the Old South still informs the lives of these women in contemporary South. In this scene, what Queenie

calls “sensitivity training” entails a screening of *Roots* and Civil Rights footage. As she starts the film and African tribal music begins to play, Delphine shouts “Oh no! Turn that jungle music off!” As the scene progresses, however, Delphine is shown as shedding tears, having come to some sort of realization about her immoral actions (Figure 24). Delphine’s friendship with Queenie thus complicates her identity as the return of the racist past and hints at the possibility of the elimination of racism in post-racial America. This view, however, is problematized in another scene. Another instance where the two characters bond is in the episode “The Dead” where the two are eating burgers and fries at a drive-thru. Queenie talks about how she is struggling to find her place in life: “You think I am any less perplexed? I dragged my ass all the way here from Detroit to be with my quote ‘sister witches’ and instead I’m sitting in the fast food parking lot at 3 a.m. with an immortal racist. How did that happen?” Delphine says that the other girls will never be Queenie’s sisters. As a post-racial young women who is out of touch with America’s racist past, Queenie assumes it is because she is overweight. At this point Delphine’s is the voice (made possible because she is the embodiment of that past) that puts the lie into the myth of post-racial America: she says others will exclude Queenie because she is “black as coal.” As Queenie struggles to accept the fact that exclusion on the basis of race still exists in America, we see her face through the windshield, blurred by the rain falling on the glass (Figure 25). Thus, her friendship with Delphine also complicates Queenie’s sense of identity, acting as a reminder that her life will never be free of discrimination or exclusion based on her skin color. It is also remarkable that Delphine’s anachronistic status makes her free to claim the ongoing existence of racism in America. Thus, the show’s Southern Gothic once again emphasizes the fact that divisions based on race is still a fact of life in the South.

The show also hints at the fact that America might not have entered a “postracial” phase and shows the ongoing segregation in the South in its depiction of the rivalry between white witches and black witches in general and between Fiona and Marie in particular. Fiona, as the all-powerful Supreme, embodies white supremacy with a gender twist. Marie, on the other hand, as mentioned before, although she is very powerful and immortal, lives at a black ghetto, working as a hairdresser and sells spells and potions on the side. The conflict that divides the two groups, is not explained by any specific event in the show and seems to be purely based on race. When Fiona visits Marie in her hair

salon in the episode "Boy Parts," this racial divide becomes more apparent. From the moment she sits in the hairdresser's chair, Fiona shows her distaste about the salon, the women in it and even the music they play. When Marie comes out to meet her, Fiona quickly gets to the point and asks Marie her secret for youth: "I think when they say good black don't crack, they are not wrong. What's your secret?" Fiona's unapologetic racist remark is met with Marie's comments that Fiona's "manicure costs more than my rent" and that a "woman like you wipes her ass with diamonds," pointing out Fiona's hegemonic white privilege. After this, Marie claims that the Salem witches learned everything from Tituba, the black slave: "everything you ever got you got from us." This also, of course, refers to how white society in the South gained all its wealth and status from slavery. Fiona is not admitting this and says: "You wanna say some illiterate slave girl gave me my crown!" Marie points out that it was the Salem witches that made Tituba a slave, before that "she came from a great tribe, the Arawak, where she learned the secrets of the other side from a 2000 year old line of shamans" (Figure 26). Here, Marie creates a discourse about Africa as a civilized continent that would contradict the long-held belief in America about Africa as savage and uncivilized. She adds, "we more than just pins and dolls and seeing the future in chicken parts." Thus, Marie challenges the very discourse of the construction of blackness in America through the depiction of blacks and Africa as savage, barbaric and animalistic.

Even though this view might seem as redemptive and progressive at first, the portrayal of Marie's character throughout the show complicates the issue. Any representation of black women in the media in America would appear as loaded with ideological implications. The history of the images of black women in American culture is full of stereotypes. Kimberly Springer lists some of the stereotypes black women have been subjected to in America in popular culture and social policy: "the iconography of the mammy, the jezebel, the sapphire, the matriarch, the welfare queen, and the crack-addicted mother." Springer also claims that even though these stereotypes still exist in America today, as a result of postracial discourses, they have also morphed into new forms more appropriate after political-correctness. Springer asks, "If we are beyond discriminatory behavior, how do we account for the diva, black lady, and angry black woman images that populate the current cultural landscape?" (254). Indeed, the character of Marie in *AHS Coven* can be seen as another stereotypical representation of black women in popular culture: a mixture

of "angry black woman" and voodoo priestess who cannot see past the racism of the past and who is turned monstrous herself in her lust for revenge.

First of all, it should be noted that Marie herself perpetuates an essentialist view of racial identities. According to her, black women have no place among white women. In the seventh episode, in search for her true identity and a community where she would be accepted, Queenie visits Marie in her salon. Upon her entrance, Marie calls Queenie by her name. When Queenie asks how she knows her name, Marie answers: "Black witch comes to town, I'm gonna hear about it. Surprised it took you this long to come to see me." Queenie's distance from her racial identity is underlined when she mistakenly assumes that Marie is going to make voodoo magic with the fish heads she is collecting. When Marie says she is just going to make gumbo, Queenie reveals she never had gumbo. Marie says she is not surprised and says in the house of the white witches, they are probably feeding Queenie "Shake N Bake" and "watermelon," stereotypical African-American food. The conversation goes on:

> Q: They don't care that I'm black. I just think that they just don't like me.
>
> M: Oooh, they care plenty! Their power is built on the sweat of our backs. The only reason that you and I are in this country is because our great great grandfathers couldn't run fast enough. We'll never be welcome here. And those witches are the worst.
>
> Q: They're not so bad. …
>
> M: Voodoo doll belong in the house of voodoo. And I know you didn't cross the line and break the truce for no bowl of gumbo. Every man, woman and child in this house know what it feel like to have to live second best to some pretty little white girl. ("The Dead") (Figure 27)

On one level, Marie's comments about slavery is age-old truism. It is also significant that in her comment about having to live under the shadow of "some pretty little white girl" Marie chooses to highlight the role of white and privileged women in condoning and enabling the oppression of an entire race. In *Coven*'s universe, the patriarchs of the South—the white male characters of the show—is rendered quite powerless and women take their place in perpetuating the power structures that inform Southern society. On another level, in the scene, in contrast to the younger Queenie, Marie is depicted as stuck in the racist past of America and perpetuating a reverse hate discourse against whites. The same problematic identity can be seen in Queenie from a different angle. As a younger

member of postracial America, Queenie is able to form bonds with white people, even with an immortal racist. At the end of the show, she is standing next to Zoe and Cordelia as one of the most important members of the coven. However, Queenie is also distanced from her racial past and lacks any sense of identification with the black people around her. This hinders her ability to read the hidden undercurrents of racism still at work in America today.

The show depicts Marie as hateful and angry in other instances. She refuses to help Cordelia with her infertility just because she is Fiona's daughter; she also refuses to help Fiona when she asks Marie's help against the witch hunters (in fact, we learn that Marie sent the witch hunters to kill the white witches). Only when the witch hunters attack her salon and kill many of her priestesses does Marie accept to work with Fiona. As the show seems to go towards a narrative of reconciliation, Delphine returns back to her murderous ways, destroys Marie, and she herself is destroyed by Queenie. Thus, as the show demonstrates that racial divides still exist in the South, it refuses to create sympathetic black characters and depicts them as one of the guilty parties for the ongoing existence of racial animosities.

Marie's depiction as a voodoo queen also seems quite stereotypical. As the white witches in the show can cast spells with a mere flick of their hand, Marie is often depicted in her elaborate rituals of voodoo with bones and potions and chants (Figure 28). Such images can be seen as perpetuating the view of blacks as the exotic other, a frequent cultural trope in America. bell hooks claims that certain forms of cultural products just amount to "eating the other": a "commodification of otherness" in which "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (21). Marie's difference in the show is thus commodified for the viewers and offered as "spice." The show even pokes fun at the commodification of the voodoo scene in an instance when Marie is seen as playing solitaire on her I-Pad while she is talking to Cordelia. As Marie is sitting on her makeshift throne surrounded by voodoo artifacts, her use of technology at that instance hints at the fact that voodoo is a performance for her, something she offers her customers as "spice" (Figure 29). Thus, in its usual ambiguous and playful stance, the show both hints at the constructedness of the voodoo scene as commodity and offers such scenes to its viewers to consume.

AHS: Coven's New Orleans is thus both haunted and informed by the South's racist and sexist past. In the field of race, the show highlights the contradictions between the strict racist past and the postracial present, at the same time hinting at the fact that postracial America is just a myth through its depictions of the ongoing divisions and exclusions based on race. Such divisions in the show are perpetrated by the fantastical new gender regime envisioned by the show, in which women assume the power that has been the characteristic of white men in the South and when they do, they create merely another form of an oppressive system. As such, the show's depiction of women in the South, rather than offering redemptive and liberated images, veers toward monstrous and unsympathetic portrayals. As such, *Coven* should be seen as a perfect postfeminist Southern Gothic text in its problematic depictions of gender identities in the New South.

3.3 ANALYZING THE "GENDER" IN THE REGIME: POSTFEMINIST WITCHES OF CONTEMPORARY SOUTH

In a panel about the show, one of the executive producers of *AHS*, before the third season started, claimed that the third season of the show would revolve around a "feminist theme."[3]This was a welcome change for the show, which, in its first season, featured women who were terrorized, murdered, stalked, raped, impregnated with devil babies, tortured by a killer abortionist and imprisoned for life in a haunted mansion and in its second season, abducted by aliens and tortured by nuns and a sadistic scientist. It was not a surprise when the show turned to the image of the witch in order to explore its new supposedly "feminist" leanings. The depictions of the powerful witches in the show's third season, however, cannot be labeled as "feminist": the characters in *Coven*, in addition to using their magical powers for agency, also use them to eliminate competition, to exude revenge or for less-than-innocent ends. As such, the show explores Southern Gothic's preoccupation with victimized gender identities through a mere role reversal in which women—instead of white men—are depicted as monstrous in their racism and their hunger for power.

From its very beginnings, gothic, as a mode, has been preoccupied with gender identities. Jerrold Hogle claims that "the Gothic has long confronted the cultural problem of gender distinctions, including what they mean for western structures of power and how boundaries between the genders might be questioned to undermine or reorient those

structures" (9). Historically, negative portrayals of women in the genre defined them by their biological roles and cast them as objects of desire, as maternal figures or supernatural beings. In this formulation, types of female characters can be gathered under two categories: women as helpless victims trapped in patriarchal structures and domestic spaces and women as monsters, as shameless and dangerous predators with too much power. Woman-as-victim stereotype within the Gothic tradition can be found in various novels such as Lewis's *The Monk*, Stoker's depiction of Mina in *Dracula*, the character of Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*, or the character of Fay Wray in *King Kong*. Victimized women in the gothic are usually frail and passive, fleeing a predatory male figure and trapped within patriarchal structures and used for gothic effect as fear and terror is usually portrayed through their exaggerated reactions. Southern Gothic has also engaged with the depiction of female characters trapped and controlled by the patriarchal system of the Old South. Also newer Southern Gothic texts like *True Detective* hint at the fact that women in rural Southern society are victimized by their economic status and abused by men. This fact becomes apparent when we remember that women in *True Detective* are either wives or prostitutes, they are the chosen victims of rape and murder in the evil Southern society. Woman-as-monster types came out especially with the nineteenth century, as sexual and feminist revolutions led women to aspire to new types of power and agency. Seen from this view, gothic serves as a tool for containment for the New Woman, as it demonizes powerful women as destructive. These characters were portrayed as nefarious seductresses, demons or villains who were punished at the end or made to see the error of their ways. Dracula's brides in Stoker's novel are perfect examples of such monstrous females. This type has been so widespread that it can be found in most of Walt Disney's animations in the form of witches or in its parodied form in Morticia Addams from *The Addams Family*. Seen in this light, the gothic mode serves as a reactionary tool used for the validation of patriarchal institutions like marriage and to keep women in their place. In Southern Gothic, when women become monstrous, as in the case of "A Rose for Emily," it is because their characters are informed by and stuck in the oppressive system the plantation culture of the Old South and they try to perpetuate the same structures of power in the New South. *AHS: Coven* can be seen as a contemporary rendition of monstrous females in Southern Gothic coming from this tradition.

The relationship of the gothic to the question of gender identity, however, has always been more ambiguous than this more formulaic view. From the start, the oppression and othering of the female, *seen from her point of view*, has been a principal Gothic subject. In her seminal article in the *Literary Women* magazine in 1976, Ellen Moers coined the term "Female Gothic" to talk about "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called 'the Gothic'" (90). In her influential article, Moers analyzed female gothic texts as expressions of women's fears of entrapment within the domestic space and within the female body. Thus, the Gothic was placed at the center of the female tradition. One of the most important writers in the female gothic tradition was Ann Radcliffe, the most popular English woman novelist of the 1790s. As the female readership was increasing in the middle class, Radcliffe and her imitators developed the primal Gothic scene of a woman confined and turned it into a journey of women coming into some power and property by their own and other feminine agency, albeit within a still-antiquated and male-dominated world full of terrors for every female. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the even more increasing numbers of female readership, feminine Gothic romances constituted a big market. Critics and scholars influenced by Moers have claimed that the genre allowed women readers to enjoy independence vicariously through the actions of the female characters. In another work of feminist literary criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read certain nineteenth-century female writers' works through the symbol of the mad woman Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and explored the monstrous female figures created by those writers. In the field of Gothic feminism, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) is seen as a perfect example of how female writers often used horror and gothic to convey the desperation experienced by women who are imprisoned and trapped both physically and intellectually. Similarly in Southern Gothic tradition, the body of work created by the female writers—O'Connor, Welty, McCullers and many more—uses Southern Gothic's grotesqueries in liberating ways in order to create an alternative space for the marginalized identities in the South to be heard.

As a result, gothic's place in the depiction and construction of gender identity has always been ambiguous and a question of authorship and readership. At the hands of most male writers, the gothic has been a potent weapon to keep women in their place. Appropriated

by female writers and appreciated by a female readership, the gothic appears as a perfect vehicle to depict patriarchal horrors and to create a space for female agency and independence. The same ambiguous issue of gender can also be found in the horror film's depictions of women.

Feminist film criticism, mostly influenced by psychoanalysis, has seen narrative cinema in general and horror film in particular as sexist and misogynistic. In one of the most influential and by now all-too-familiar criticisms of narrative cinema, Laura Mulvey ("Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" – 1975) has contended that narrative film of Hollywood, since the camera and auteurship has been mostly in the hands of heterosexual men, has objectified women through its appropriation of "the male gaze." An indicator of gender power asymmetry in film, male gaze, through the camera work, leads to audience identification with the point of view of heterosexual men while female characters in movies are depicted as passive, erotic objects for both the other characters and the viewers. In this formula, camera works in models of voyeurism and scopophilia and even female viewers are somewhat conditioned to look at women through the eyes of men. As Ann Kaplan sums it up, "within the film text itself, men gaze at women, who become objects of the gaze; the spectator, in turn, is made to identify with this male gaze, and to objectify the woman on the screen; and the camera's original 'gaze' comes into play in the very act of filming" (15). Moreover, horror film is seen as a typically sexist and misogynistic medium as it plays mostly on the objectification, victimization, torture and destruction of female characters. Horror director Dario Argento once put it, in a Poe-esque way: "I like women, especially beautiful ones. If they have a good face and figure, I would much prefer to watch them being murdered than an ugly girl or man" (qtd in Schoell 54). Or Hitchcock, during the filming of *The Birds* (1963), said: "I always believe in following the advice of the playwright Sardou. He said, 'Torture the women!' The trouble today is that we don't torture women enough" (qtd in Spoto 483). It has often been pointed out by feminist film scholars that in horror movies, killers are mostly male, their fury is usually sexual in its roots and expression and that the victims are more often than not women who are sexually free, young and beautiful. This pattern can also be found in the first two seasons of *AHS*, as stated before.

Historically, the horror film has also, more often than not, demonized powerful women. At this point, it is useful to explore Barbara Creed's discussion of "the monstrous-

feminine" as it will be instrumental for the analysis of the new gender regime of witches in *AHS: Coven*. Using Kristeva's theory of abjection as her theoretical frame, Creed analyzes the different figures of monstrous females in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993). Creed starts her book by reminding her readers that "All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (1). Some of the examples from ancient Greece are the Sirens who seduced and destroyed sailors or Medusa and her two sisters who turned men into stone. One archaic image that appears in some primitive mythologies is "the toothed vagina—the vagina that castrates" (1). The myth of the "*vagina dentata*" states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas and they must be tamed or the teeth must be removed or softened (by a hero figure) in order for intercourse to take place. Another figure that appears frequently in different societies if the figure of the witch represented as "an old, ugly crone who is capable of monstrous acts" (2). Yet another figure that is encountered often is the image of the female vampire sucking the life source out of men or babies.

Creed suggests that "the concept of the monstrous-feminine, as constructed within/by a patriarchal and phallocentric ideology, is related intimately to the problem of sexual difference and castration" (2). In his theory, Freud associated man's fear of woman with his infantile belief that the mother is castrated. For Creed, however, it is not only the figure of women-as-castrated that scares men but also this early model leads men to construct another monstrous fantasy: "woman as castrator" (7). Here woman's monstrosity is linked to sexual desire and this model takes at least three forms for Creed: "woman as the deadly *femme castratrice*, the castrating mother and the *vagina dentata*" (7). However, it is important to note that, as Creed suggests, "when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions. These faces are: the archaic mother; the monstrous womb; the witch; the vampire; and the possessed woman" (7). Hence, monstrosity in woman is always constructed based on her difference in sexuality, biology and reproduction. This leads Creed to choose the term "monstrous-feminine" instead of "female monster" because her term of choice emphasizes "the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity:" female monsters throughout history are not just simple reversals of male monsters, they are

almost always defined by their sexual and biological gender identities (3). As a result, Creed makes a list of the various figures of the monstrous feminine in horror movies:

> the amoral primeval mother, vampire, witch, woman as monstrous womb, woman as bleeding wound, woman as possessed body, the castrating mother, woman as beautiful but deadly killer, aged psychopath, the monstrous girl-boy, woman as non-human animal, woman as life-in-death, woman as the deadly *femme castratrice*. (1)

Creed makes use of Kristeva's theory of abjection as border, ambiguity, perpetual danger and her notions of the mother-child relationship and the feminine body in her exploration of the monstrous feminine in the horror genre. For Creed, depictions of the monstrous that are constructed in the modern horror text are actually based on the ancient religious and historical notions of abjection, especially on certain religious "abominations" like "sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest" (9). Indeed, Kristeva argues that, historically, it has been the function of religion to purify the abject, but with the disintegration of these "historical forms" of religion, the work of purification now rests solely with "that catharsis *par excellence* called art" (17). Hence, the central ideological project of the horror film, according to Creed, is the purification of the abject: "As a form of modern defilement rite, the horror film attempts to separate out the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability, particularly the mother and all that her universe signifies" (14). As Kristeva sees it, the site of the abject is "the place where meaning collapses," the place where "I" am not: since the abject threatens life, it must be "radically excluded" (2). This exclusion is necessary for the subject to find his/her proper place in the symbolic order. However, the abject should also be tolerated since what threatens to destroy life also helps to define it. As Creed puts it:

> abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free – it is always there, beckoning the self to take up the place of abjection, the place where meaning collapses. The subject, constructed in/through language, through a desire for meaning, is also spoken by the abject, the place of meaninglessness – thus, the subject is constantly beset by abjection which fascinates desire but which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation. A crucial point is that abjection is always ambiguous. Kristeva emphasizes the attraction, as well as the horror, of the undifferentiated. (10)

The status of the horror film as "an illustration of the work of abjection" becomes most evident when, after viewing a horror film, audience members claim that the movie "made them sick" or "scared the shit out of them." As such, watching horror signifies "a desire not only for perverse pleasure but also a desire, once having been filled with perversity, taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject" (Creed 10). It is no coincidence that horror movies usually depict several sites of abjection as defined by Kristeva: the corpse as the ultimate site of abject but also bodily wastes like excrement, blood, urine and pus:

> Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel. 'I' is expelled. (Kristeva 3-4)

Thus, most horror films in general, and *AHS: Coven* in particular (as mentioned earlier), transgress the border between what Kristeva refers to as "the clean and proper body" and the abject body; the body which has lost its form and integrity. According to Kristeva, the fully symbolic body should not bear any signs of its debt to nature. It is at this point that the monstrous-feminine appears as an abject site. The image of woman's body, because of its maternal functions, almost always acknowledges its "debt to nature" and consequently is more likely to signify the abject (102). As such, Creed claims that "the notion of the material female body is central to the construction of the border in the horror film" (11). Indeed, for Kristeva, the first site of the abject is the mother, when all individuals experience abjection during their earliest attempts to break away from the mother. She claims that the mother-child relationship is marked by conflict: the child struggles to break free but the mother is reluctant to release it. As a result of the "instability of the symbolic function" during this crucial phase and "the prohibition placed on the maternal body (as a defense against autoeroticism and incest taboo)," Kristeva argues that the maternal body becomes a site of conflicting desires. "Here, drives hold sway and constitute a strange space that I shall name, after Plato, a *chora*, a receptacle" (14). As the child struggles to break away from the mother, the mother seeks to retain a close hold over the child as he/she usually serves as an authentication of the mother's existence, which needs such authentication because the mother's relation to the symbolic

realm is already problematic. Thus, Creed discusses that "in the child's attempts to break away, the mother becomes an 'abject'; thus, in this context, where the child struggles to become a separate subject, abjection becomes '*a precondition of narcissism*'" (12). As a result, in many horror movies (the prototype here is *Psycho*) we encounter an archaic maternal figure refusing to relinquish the hold on the child, preventing it from taking its proper place in the symbolic. These children eventually succumb to a dyadic relationship with the mother and grow up to be psychotic murderers. In many horror movies, the monster's (or the killer's) psychotic behavior is explained by his/her mother who is either absent (which hinders the subject's formation during primary narcissism) or overbearingly present (which rejects the possibility of healthy individualization for the subject). As such, the depiction of the monstrous-feminine usually involve a problematics of the maternal functions, a point also explored by *AHS: Coven* and will be discussed momentarily. This is also quite significant for the show's Southern Gothic sensibility in which the individual monstrous mothers in the show makes up a monstrous "matriarchy" for the larger Southern society where the new gender regime takes the place of the old patriarchal plantation culture.

Even though the concept of the monstrous-feminine takes its roots from psychoanalysis, the myriad of ways the civilizations have demonized female figures throughout history leads to the conclusion that the monstrous-feminine is a cultural and ideological construct and reading such figures symbolically will help us to explore how women are demonized in a given culture. For our analysis of *AHS Coven*, we need to dive deeper into the depictions of witches in American culture as an ideological and political tool in women's struggles for power and agency.

In western world, the figure of the witch appears as the one monster that comes with the most material costs in the very real lives of people, especially women. During the heyday of the witchcraft persecutions on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, hundreds of thousands of women were accused, tortured and executed. Labeled by the historian William Monter as a time of "lethal misogyny," the witchcraft trials saw 100,000 women (deemed "the most conservative estimate" by Anderson and Zinsser) strangled, drowned, burned and beheaded (Anderson and Zinsser 167). As Anderson and Zinsser detail it in their book, *A History of Their Own*, even though by the 1550s the Church and the local governments had more or less established their authority in Europe, there was

still a widespread belief among the common folk in the more pagan belief systems and superstitions and it was almost always women who were seen as having ties to the extraordinary world of the supernatural. As some women were thought to use "white magic" to heal, to rescue people or to make them meet their loved ones, some other women were seen as appropriating "black magic;" "witches who would eat Hansel and Gretel, who could turn their stepchildren into lamb or fish, who tried to kill their husbands' offspring, who could strip a young man of his strength and potency" (Anderson and Zinsser 163). All over Europe, this force for evil was always associated with women, whose gift of reproduction made them potentially dangerous. Women's menstrual blood was seen as a harmful substance. In fact, everything about the phenomenon of birth was seen as magical and the figure of the midwife, who knew the mysteries of birth, was thought to possess special powers.

Then, something sinister happened in the sixteenth century. The Christian church who, up to that point, had denied the existence of these ancient beliefs, always saw the figure of the Devil as the harbinger of evil and claimed that there was no need to fear the Devil as a result of Jesus's death on the cross. However, in the uncertain atmosphere of the sixteenth century, European churches started to doubt Christianity's victory over Satan. In this environment of fear, the religious and secular elite decided to cast the actions of the wisewomen of the villages as the actions of Satan. These women had made a pact with the Devil, worshipped at his altar and had become his agents. As Satan was being resurrected to control people through fear, the witches became the henchwomen of the dark lord. John Calvin, whose religious philosophy shaped the Puritans of New England, described the Devil in his *Institutes*: "We have been forewarned that an enemy relentlessly threatens us, an enemy who is the very embodiment of rash boldness, of military prowess, of crafty wiles, of untiring zeal and haste, of every conceivable weapon and of skill in the science of warfare" (qtd in Kors and Peters 203). The founder of Protestantism, Martin Luther warned "Let every man think that he himself might have been, and yet may be bewitched by him. There is none of us so strong that he is able to resist him" (qtd in Kors and Peters 198). Catholic church was also in panic and the Pope sent two Dominican priests into German villages to inquire into the practice of witchcraft. The result was a treatise written by these men, Henry Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, which served as the

ruling document on how to deal with the witches: *Malleus Malifacrum (Hammer of the Witches)* (1486).

The pages of *Malleus* is full of conventional condemnations of women and the document ties all women to witchcraft and sorcery. According to Kramer and Sprenger, witches existed as a matter of faith; not to believe in them was itself an act of heresy. Witches were self-evidently female: "where there are many women there are many witches." Men, like Jesus himself, were protected from the temptations of the Devil, but women, since they were "feebler both in mind and body," were seen as easy prey, just like Eve (qtd in Kors and Peters 120). The writers assumed that women hated their weakness, hated that they were not able to rule and dominate and became "a wheedling and secret enemy," a vengeful creature who "always deceives" and who found "an easy and secret manner of vindicating themselves by witchcraft" (qtd in Kors and Peters 127, 121, 120). According to *Malleus*, the Devil transformed women to his worshippers through another defect in the female. As the woman was "more carnal than a man" and as she was "insatiable," they started their work for Satan by having intercourse with him (qtd in Kors and Peters 121, 127). After uniting with the Devil in such a manner, these women were able to call up his demons, learn the potions and formulas that gave them their supernatural powers and strengthened their bonds with him in rituals. By the mid-1500s, no one doubted the existence of devil worship and everyone agreed that the only way to get rid of the Devil and his witches was to eliminate them completely. Hundreds of thousands of women in Europe were executed. The accused witches were usually the women who were outspoken, they were "ready to speak back, to quarrel, to curse those who angered or frightened them" (Anderson and Zinsser 168). Midwives were under special threat; their involvement in the birth process was transformed into a means of access to infants for the Black Mass and wisewomen who were known for their cures and curses were mostly accused of witchcraft.

The belief in the supernatural and in the existence of the Devil and of witchcraft were transported to the New World with the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As a result, in total twenty people, most of them women, were executed in the Salem witch trials of 1692-1693. The trials were a perfect example of the demonizing tradition in Christianity and how the establishment of authority in a community is based on fear and on the construction and then the elimination of its monsters. Thus, from the beginnings

of the United States, the witch has been a highly visible and familiar demon. The witch has also undergone a transformation in the twentieth century in America through its positive representations as an icon for powerful women.

In this context, Rachel Moseley sees the witch figure as "a discursive site in which the relationship between feminism (as female power), and femininity has been negotiated in historically specific ways" (403). The appropriation of the witch as feminist icon started with the second-wave of feminism. In 1968, the WITCH movement (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) led by Robin Morgan, claimed solidarity and identity with the persecuted witches of history and hailed them as the first resistance fighters against the oppression of women. In its first manifesto, the group claimed: "Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, non-conformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary" (qtd in Adler 179). This political movement used the stereotype of the witch for shock value and for its performativity and also emphasized the notion of sisterhood. Moseley notes that

> this critical position understood the witch as a metaphor for female resistance, witches as representative of women who lead unconventional lives—outside that which patriarchal society deemed acceptable in relation, for instance, to female-centered communities or sisterhoods, personal and sexual freedom and political resistance—and who were punished for this. (410)

This political movement in turn sparked an interest in actual witchcraft and a goddess-centered religion based on a feminine principle that looked back to pre-Christian matriarchy as example and that sought to establish a similarly woman-centered future. In her *Beyond God the Father* (1985), Mary Daly concluded that feminism and Christianity would never be reconciled. The witch came to be seen as the priestess of the Goddess and eventually as her third aspect, the crone. In another book, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1979), Daly reclaimed the figure of the "hag" as a powerful and liberated women, which led her to coin the term "hag-iography" to describe her feminist revisionist reading of "herstory." Daly wrote, "Self-loathing ladies titter. Hags and Harpies roar" (17). Similarly, in their revisionist feminist study of women as health workers, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English argued that witches were usually "wise women" and autonomous healers working with herbal medicines and claimed that the

witch hunts were "a ruling class of terror directed against the female peasant population" as they constituted a political, religious and sexual threat to the church and state (23).

As Sanders points out, the second-wave's embrace of the witch was also about sisterhood: "there is a considerable weight of cultural connotation behind the depiction of female witches together, defined as sisters through a shared biological heritage and a shared status as 'other'" (79). Second wave feminism's encouragement of female consciousness-raising through group activity, activism, study, and endeavor was one of the key ways in which feminist debate was constructed and as a result, sisterhood emerged as a political term that encapsulated the collective struggle of women. Erica Jong, in her introduction to *Witches*, links feminist sisterhood to witches' covens: "I imagine a coven of proto-feminist witches who attempt to compensate for the female's lack of power by making spells and riding through the air" (6). Likewise, in *Beyond God the Father*, Daly claims that sisterhood posits a potent threat to the hegemony of patriarchy and the church:

> Sisterhood, then, by being the unique bonding of women against our reduction to low caste is Antichurch. … The development of sisterhood is a unique threat, for it is directed against the basic social and psychic model of hierarchy and domination upon which authoritarian religion as authoritarian depends for survival. This conflict arises directly from the fact that women are beginning to overcome the divided self and divisions from each other. (133)

As a result, in the second-wave of feminism, the witch as monster was transformed into a positive and powerful role-model for feminists and was the gateway to the discovery of alternative faith systems and an empowering political discourse with an emphasis on female community and sharing. The depiction of the new gender regime in *AHS: Coven*, especially through its depiction of witches protected and educated within their coven, is heir to the second wave's sister witches. The show's exploration of female power in its Southern Gothic setting, however, renders most of its witches monstrous and problematizes the question of the oppression of women in America and in the South. As such, the show is informed by postfeminist culture's ambiguous stance toward feminist goals in America. With the conservative turn of the 1980s, America moved towards a more "postfeminist" cultural moment, and the figure of the witch and what it represented for an empowered gender identity was complicated by the popular-cultural products that featured witches.

During the 1980s, as a result of the rise to power of the Republican Right, much like the backlash against multicultural doctrines and affirmative action programs, there occurred a backlash against feminism and its goals in America. The Equal Rights Amendment was tied up in state legislatures and conservatives looked for new ways to curtail the right to abortion. Meanwhile, a public media discourse was created that heralded the "post-ness" of the feminist movement. One side of the argument was about the fact that feminism, by then, had become common knowledge and practice. The new generation of younger women who grew up in the wake of the Second Wave, influenced by the negative media representations of the feminist movement, felt ambivalent about feminism. These women took the feminist gains for granted and tried to "have it all" (sexual freedom, career, marriage and motherhood) without realizing that feminism was not about having it all, but about having the ability to *choose* between these. Even though they embraced many of the goals of the movement, these women were reluctant to call themselves "feminists." By the early 1980s, the media labeled them the "Post-Feminist Generation." The feminist label, by then, had turned into a dirty "f-word" as the second-wave's activist feminists were transformed into a stereotype of "images of exhausted superwomen, or unkempt, hairy, man-hating lesbians" (Rosen 275). Thus, feminism was cast by the media as unwelcome, and feminist concerns were silenced. The reference to "the F-word" reveals the status of feminism as unspeakable in postfeminist culture.

For scholars of the field, feminism of the 1960s and 1970s and the postfeminism of 1980s and onwards are two entirely different entities. With the 1980s, there occurred a transition from "feminist politics" to a "postfeminist culture." For Tasker and Negra, as "a dominating discursive system" (2-3), postfeminism encompasses "a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated" (1). In Angela McRobbie's famous definition of postfeminism, this cultural discourse means that feminism now is overtly "taken into account" but in order "to emphasize that it is no longer needed" (28). For Mc Robbie, this "taken-into-accountness," this transformation of feminism almost into a form of Gramscian common sense is very dangerous since it "permits an all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal" (28). Even though in postfeminist media texts women are more centralized as aspects of feminism is incorporated into popular

culture, at the same time there occurs an "othering of feminism" (Tasker and Negra 4). Thus, postfeminist culture is inherently contradictory: characterized by "a double discourse" that constructs feminism as a phenomenon of the past while, at the same time, incorporating and sometimes even valuing many tenets of feminism in its discourse. As such, "postfeminism suggests that it is the very success of feminism that produces its irrelevance for contemporary culture" (Tasker and Negra 8).

The most significant characteristics of postfeminist culture are its promotion of consumption as female agency and power and its insistence on individual empowerment over group politics, what Mc Robbie calls its "anti-feminist endorsement of female individualization" (31). Postfeminism assumes that, rather than coalition politics or structural change, what women need is individual empowerment through consumption. Especially during the 1990s, popular culture in America was, and still mostly is, characterized by a heightened address to women consumers. Postfeminist culture thus also "commodifies" feminism in its figure of woman as empowered consumer. It emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women, freedom of choice in relation to work, domesticity and parenting, and physical and sexual empowerment, assuming that all these things are now readily available for all women. Postfeminist culture also insistently depicts the possibility that women might choose to retreat from the public sphere of work now that they have already gained full economic freedom. As such, postfeminist discourse is exclusionary, disregarding the many women with economic problems who approach labor as a necessity rather than a choice. As a result, postfeminist culture is "white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self" (Tasker and Negra 2). In postfeminist texts, all kinds of social difference are glossed over as a white, middle-class capitalistic story of individual empowerment is played out for the consumption of the viewer. One perfect example of postfeminist media product is *Sex and the City*. This exclusionary tendency of postfeminist texts can be seen as the reason why *AHS: Coven*, as Southern Gothic, creates a witch narrative based on white supremacy in the South.

Postfeminist culture is also obsessed with age and temporality. One point this preoccupation with age is revealed is in the way that feminism is historicized and generationalized and thus rendered out of date. McRobbie claims that "feminism is decisively 'aged' and made to seem redundant. Feminism is cast into the shadows, where

at best it can expect to have some afterlife, where it might be regarded ambivalently by those young women who must in more public venues stake a distance from it, for the sake of social and sexual recognition" (27-28). In this vein, in postfeminism, feminism itself is cast as "generation gap" and usually depicted in problematic mother-daughter relationships. As Tasker and Negra note, "the generational construction of girls and young women as enjoying the freedoms secured by the activism of their mothers and grandmothers is a repeated trope of postfeminist culture" (18). Mother-daughter relations in the postfeminist text of *AHS: Coven*, as mentioned before, also lends itself to the depiction of a new "matriarchal" regime in the South, a regime where racial divisions are kept intact and where older women continue to control younger women.

Postfeminism's depictions of women are also highly age-conscious: "Women's lives are regularly conceived as time starved; women themselves are overworked, rushed, harassed, subject to their 'biological clocks,' and so on to such a degree that female adulthood is defined as a state of chronic temporal crisis" (Tasker and Negra 10). Femininity itself is usually "girled" in postfeminist culture, evident in the celebration of the young woman as a sign of postfeminist liberation and also in the tendency to treat women of all ages as girls. According to Tasker and Negra, "to some extent, girlhood is imagined within postfeminist culture as being for everyone; that is, girlhood offers a fantasy of transcendence and evasion, a respite from other areas of experience" (18). In this vein, postfeminist culture is youth-obsessed. Thus, in *Coven*, the possibility of liberation and equality in the South is placed on the younger generation who strive to get rid of the controlling grip of their matriarchs and who, at the end, create a new coven of young witches once the racism and control of the past is eliminated.

The limited vision of gender equality in postfeminist culture with its class, age and racial exclusions is also highly evident in its depictions of witches. During the 1990s, in film and teen television, the figure of the witch was appropriated for postfeminist ends. According to Linda Badley, postfeminist witchcraft of the 1990s was mostly "airbrushed, domesticated, and self-congratulatory than genuinely subversive or even exploratory, reflecting feminism's current incorporation within the canon and containment within patriarchy." Films like *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Practical Magic*, and *The Craft* featured famous actresses such as Michelle Pfeiffer, Susan Sarandon, Nicole Kidman, Sandra Bullock, and Neve Campbell as witches. Television also contributed to this commodified

version of witchcraft with shows like *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and *Charmed* (1998-2006), all of which featured young, pretty and white females with magical powers. In such media texts, the witch protagonists represented the special sensitivities and desires of young women and their discovery and development of their craft stood for "the modern young woman learning and growing in her postfeminist sense of entitlement" (Badley). The power of witchcraft in these texts is inherited matrilineally and is handed down from mother to daughter, or aunt to niece. As such, postfeminist representations of the witch incorporated the feminist notions of female empowerment and sisterhood within themselves.

However, as Badley suggests, the sisterhoods depicted in these narratives were non-threatening because they were also "domesticated within patriarchy." For example, *Practical Magic* (1996) depicted its witches as sympathetic misfits and their matriarchy was a curse put on them: if they got married, their husbands died (and they wanted a patriarchal family more than anything else). Also in *The Craft* (1996), the coven of high school witches sacrificed their powers in order to contain the threat represented by Nancy, who as an angry Goth (and the feminist "other'), jeopardized the place these women have made for themselves within patriarchy. Similarly, the teen witches of *Sabrina* or *Charmed* seemed to reinforce women's glamorous respectability rather than questioning the status quo. Rachel Moseley claims that teen witch texts of the 1990s were examples of "the postfeminist conjunction of female power and conventional, hegemonic ideals of white femininity" (416). Mostly concerned with the production and management of feminine identities, these narratives usually depicted the containment of excessive power, danger and difference:

> The power of contemporary young film and television witches is glamorous, not excessive and bodily; it is respectable (they are sexy but their bodies are under control and their powers in check), and it is domesticated. In this move, the contemporary teen witch is returned to the realm of the glamorous housewife texts from *Cinderella* to *Bewitched*, in which magic is harnessed to the production of a clean and orderly (ladylike) self, domestic space and romance. (Moseley 422)

As a result, Moseley concludes that the glamour of the teen witch was "both a sequined corset and a glittering prison" (422). As the witch was integrated into mainstream popular culture by way of feminism's "taken-into-accountness," she appeared as the perfect

postfeminist icon, representing a contained and domesticated feminism. In her 1996 book *The Witch in History*, Diane Purkiss claimed that the witch was "no longer" frightening; she was depicted as "clean, pretty, an herbalist with a … career in midwifery, a feminist, sexy but nothing too kinky" (282). The witch-craze in popular culture during the 1990s was definitely a product of postfeminism. Now, once again, witches invade American popular culture in 2010s. However, this time, curiously, they return to the more monstrous depictions of witches.

AHS: Coven should be seen as a media-text that is heir to all three versions of the witch explored so far: the witch as the monstrous-feminine other, the witch as an icon of feminist power and the witch as a product of a white, middle-class postfeminist sense of entitlement. *Coven* came out at another popular cultural moment when the figure of the witch started to, once again, invade television. The show can be seen as occupying an ambivalent middle-ground in relation to two other shows currently on air in American television. WGN's serial drama *Salem* (2014-) tells the tale of the witches of the Salem trials of 1692. According to this show's narrative, the executed witches were actually innocent (no news there) but they were all victims of the *actual* witches within the community, sacrificed for the Devil. As such, the show seems to represent an antifeminist turn on television, in which, once again, witches are depicted as the bidders of Satan and are representatives of the monstrous feminine. Another show currently on air is Lifetime's *Witches of East End* (2013-), which narrates a more postfeminist story of a family of witches with a mother, an aunt and two young daughters. With its storylines of younger witches discovering their powers, of love interests and of family legacies, this show appears to be a more direct heir of the postfeminist witches. When we get back to *AHS: Coven*, however, it becomes much more difficult to label the show anti-feminist, feminist or postfeminist as a result of its appropriation and play with all the different associations of the witch. In its Southern Gothic world, the show creates an antifeminist view of witches as perpetrators of a matriarchal power structure of oppression in the South, but through its postfeminist and postracial younger generation of witches, the show creates a hopeful future for witches in the South, embodied in the postfeminist and postracial demographics of the academy at the end. While the show gets rid of the matriarchal power structure and its racist leanings, thus locating racism in the "past," its postracial future becomes somewhat ironically exclusionary again: the community of witches envisioned

for the future of the South is once again predominantly white, with a couple of different ethnicities thrown in for the sake of diversity.

First of all, it must be pointed out that *AHS: Coven* is in tune with both the postmodern preoccupation with the monster's point of view (first appearing during the 1970s with products like Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*) and the feminist and postfeminist stance of depicting the world of the witch from their point of view. As the show features an ensemble cast and a narrative in which none of the characters outshine the others, the point of identification for the viewer is not individual characters but the world they inhabit, and this world is a decidedly female world. The witches of *AHS Coven*, unlike their postfeminist counterparts, show no desire to be integrated in patriarchy. Rather, they reenact patriarchal power structures and perpetuate a reverse sexism against white men. From this point of view, the show can be seen as a Southern Gothic revenge narrative in which oppressed gender identities in the South come back to oppress their previous oppressors. In the show, men are either decidedly excluded, turned into servants or watchdogs for women or destroyed as punishment for their misogynistic acts by the powerful women in the show. One of the main male characters of the show, Kyle (Evan Peters) is a promising college student and fraternity member. In the show, Kyle is first killed by Madison by accident (he was in the bus with the other fraternity members who gang-raped Madison), then put back together and resurrected, which turns him into something between a mindless zombie and a Frankenstein monster. After this, Kyle becomes a sex-toy for Madison and Zoe for a brief period in which they share him. Then, he is educated to some state of normalcy by Zoe, becomes her love interest but serves more like a watchdog for Zoe and the coven. At the end of the show, Kyle becomes the coven's new butler (Figure 30). Another male character is Spalding (Dennis O'Hare), who is the coven's original butler. Spalding is in love with Fiona and does her every bidding. He even cuts off his own tongue in order not to betray Fiona. He is depicted as a disturbed individual who lives in the attic where he keeps many dolls, dresses up as a woman and plays with his dolls. Spalding is killed by Zoe and from that point on becomes a ghost that haunts the mansion (Figure 31). The show also features a local New Orleans myth in the figure of the Axeman, a psychopathic killer who killed women in New Orleans during 1918-1919 and then disappeared. In the show, the suffragette witches of the coven kill the Axeman together, from which point on he also becomes a ghost and

haunts the white mansion. Axeman also falls in love with Fiona and the two have a brief relationship. Fiona uses the Axeman in the killing of the witch-hunters and then leaves him for her higher goals of retaining her powers of Supremity (Figure 32). The show also depicts Cordelia's husband, Hank, as a cheater, murderer and under-cover witch hunter. In the narrative, the witch hunters are depicted as corporate figures whose power comes from money and their company acts as a front for their witch hunting. All the witch hunters are men and their occupation comes from a patrilineal line: Hank's father runs the company. Thus, the group of witch hunters is the closest group to the patriarchal rule of the South (Figure 33). The witch hunters do not posit a substantial threat in the narrative, however: after Hank kills some voodoo witches, Fiona and Marie join powers and use the ghost of the Axeman to kill all of the hunters. The body count of men in the show is indeed high, Madison kills a director who patronizes her and also flips a bus to take revenge from the fraternity boys who raped her; Zoe accidently kills her first boyfriend but moves on to finish off one of Madison's rapists and then kills Spalding. Similarly, Misty Day kills two alligator hunters in rural Louisiana as a punishment for their torture of animals and their violent approach towards her.

Thus, in *Coven*, violent, sexist, misogynistic men who rape and murder women are duly punished. In this vein, the show can be seen as a return of the oppressed female in Southern Gothic and in horror genre: whatever the South and the horror film up to this point have done to women, the witches do the same to men as payback. Seen from this angle, the show can almost be labeled as "radical feminist." However, the lack of positive male figures in the show can also lead to a conclusion that the show itself perpetuates the sexist leanings of Southern Gothic. If they are not destroyed, men are usually stripped off their intelligence (Kyle) and used by the witches as sex-toys or become their servants (Kyle and Spalding). The only man who is allowed to enter into the witches' community as their equal is the character of Quentin, who is a member of the Council of Witchcraft. However, it is hinted that Quentin got to where he is with Fiona's help and more problematically, the visual markers of his image depict him as a possible homosexual. Quentin's image is also very reminiscent of one of Southern Gothic's eccentric writers, Truman Capote. Quentin's sexuality is depicted as non-threatening to the women around him and he wears flamboyant suits and hats. Also in his speech and gestures, Quentin displays "feminine" qualities. On the one hand, it is dangerous to make an essentialist

reading of these markers and label this character as homosexual, but, on the other, it is important to note that he does not contain a threatening, masculine sexuality (Figure 34). As a result, it can be suggested that *Coven*, as a self-celebratory horror narrative, perpetuates the sexism in Southern Gothic with a simple reversal. It is difficult to find any fully-developed male characters in the show and they serve as mere props or as subjects to be marginalized, destroyed and discarded (whether they are innocent or not). One different aspect of such sexism is, though, even though the male characters are used sexually by the women in the show, they are never objectified by the camera for the viewers. One possible reason for this might be the fact that the objectifying gaze of the horror camera has always been the "male gaze" and objectification is essentially a function of a patriarchal point of view.

The depiction of the show's witches complicates the issue further. *Coven* does not represent a universe where a simple formula of "them versus us" works smoothly. If the show's male figures are shallow and evil, the women are also not that innocent. On one level, the show portrays powerful and pro-active women who are not afraid to go to extremes to help themselves and each other. In this vein, *Coven* appropriates the radical feminist discourse of the witch and the coven as sisterhood. The show's narrative even directly ties the witches to the first-wave suffragettes, evident in one of the posters of the show featuring women in Victorian-era dresses with brooms (Figure 35). Also in one of the flashbacks, the show depicts how the coven's witches in 1919 (who are all politically-minded suffragettes) work together to eliminate the misogynistic serial killer Axeman who is terrorizing their community (Figure 36). In the present timeline of the narrative, this notion of feminist sisterhood is somewhat repeated but also complicated through Southern Gothic and the effects of postfeminism. The young members of the coven is seen as protecting themselves and their sisters in times of need. Madison and Zoe eliminate the boys who rape Madison in a party, they also resurrect Kyle to help Zoe get back to her love interest. Nan risks her life to save the boy next door from a zombie attack; Misty Day resurrects herself from death, kills alligator hunters and also resurrects some other members of the coven; Zoe kills Spalding for revenge and also the girls, once again, come together to eliminate the Axeman from their midst. However, this idea of the coven as feminist sisterhood is complicated through the postfeminist notions of female competition for power and of generational conflict. Another way the show problematizes

the concept of sisterhood is through the character of Queenie and through the revelations of postfeminism's exclusion of racial identities. The generational conflict in the show lends itself to a Southern Gothic matriarchal system of power in which the older generation upholds the oppressive power structures in the New South.

At this point, Fiona's depiction as the older witch who is losing her vitality and the mother-daughter conflict between Fiona and Cordelia need to be explored. Fiona is depicted as a monstrous feminine figure who is corrupted by her love of power. Fiona murdered the Supreme before her (her own quasi-mother figure) when she learned she was next in line and does not hesitate to murder Madison and Myrtle as they stand between her and her powers. She also does not think twice before murdering Nan as a sacrifice for Papa Legba's spirit. Her ulterior motive in most of these murders of other witches is to eliminate the possible next Supreme (according to the narrative, the older Supreme loses her powers as a new one begins to rise). Fiona also uses the Axeman for her aims to eliminate the witch hunters and digs up Delphine and uses her as leverage against Marie, who has the power of immortality which Fiona desperately wants. In all these instances and many more, the character of Fiona is marked as monstrous, a woman who has gone power-mad. As such, Fiona is a contemporary female rendition of Southern Gothic's aristocratic villain, committing many sins in order to protect her white supremacy and her dynasty. It is through Fiona's character also that the show depicts the anxieties of aging in postfeminist culture.

As most of the postfeminist popular cultural products, *AHS Coven* also deals with questions of age and generation. Simone de Beauvoir claimed that age entails a threat to identity for women: "in the old person that we must become, we refuse to recognize ourselves" (4). This alienation from one's body is written over Fiona's character: we often see her in front of mirrors, obsessed with her youth and in many instances she is sad and melancholic for the loss of her youth. Sadie Wearing suggests that anxieties over aging is specifically a problem for white women in America: "Aging for women, particularly white women, in Western culture has been understood as 'trauma'" as age is usually depicted in terms of "decline and disintegration" instead of "accumulation and growth" (280). Accordingly, Fiona's image in the mirrors is usually fragmented and distorted by the camera and we watch her gradual physical decline throughout the show. At the end,

the inevitable happens and Fiona dies and is eliminated from the coven. Hence, in the show, the metaphor of the witch's "supreme" power is linked to youth (Figure 37).

Patricia Mellencamp suggests that in American culture, "youth is imagined or represented as a lost object rather than as a process or passage through time. … Age is portrayed as series of losses rather than achievements, gains or successes for women" (314). Similarly, Kathleen Woodward claims that "youth" becomes a performance and performing "youth" becomes a psychological attempt to forge links to "past selves," a spectacle that reveals not the wished for continuity with the former body but rather "the desire for youth and the unimpeachability of death" (122). In her article, "Subjects of Rejuvenation," Sadie Wearing links youth-as-performance to a view of the feminine gender identity as performance. In her *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler emphasizes the importance of temporality to the production of gender identity: "If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a 'ground' will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration, indeed, a gendered corporealization of time" (179). This necessity of repetition for the performance of gender identity is usually played out in the representations which tie the older body as problematic in terms that are gendered, that is, when older women are depicted as "losing their femininities." Thus, Weaving concludes that "like aging, gender can be understood as a process; furthermore, the process of aging draw attention to the complexity of the achievement of a stable and coherent gendered identity over time" (286). The performativity of gender as revealed through the complications of the aging process can also be seen in Fiona's character. Fiona is depicted as obsessed with her feminine and sexy image and in many instances, the viewers watch Fiona pick up her pieces, put her make-up on and go out to the world and perform her gender identity. Fiona feels a semblance of happiness when she wears her tight black dresses, her stilettos, her fur coats. Also her relationship with the Axeman keeps her happy for some time as her femininity is acknowledged and she is adored by a man. Her obsession as her feminine image as a marker for her vitality is also evident in her insistence that her portrait be painted by the best of the painters and hanged on the best place in the academy's walls (Figure 38). As such, youth-as-performance is tied to femininity-as-performance in Fiona's character. It is important to note at this point that the show's depiction of the aging problem is also not free of its racial connotations. In the show's Southern Gothic

sensibility, Fiona's youth and power are inextricably linked to her "white" supremacy. Indeed the two people who are depicted as obsessed with youth in the show—Fiona and Delphine—are also the Old South and the New South's matriarchs.

The show also combines the familiar postfeminist generation-gap trope and the new Southern matriarchal regime throughout its narrative. In *Coven*, however, the mothers, instead of representing the second-wave feminist view of powerful women who leave a legacy to their daughters, are depicted as monstrous. Probably *Coven*'s most sympathetic character is Fiona's daughter Cordelia, who is revealed to be the next Supreme at the end and who reveals the coven to the world on television to recruit young witches in America. Cordelia's character starts out as a wallflower, who is timid and resentful against her mother. Cordelia, in the beginning, also is married to Hank and is struggling to conceive a child. As she fails in her attempts to have a baby, this turns out to be a blessing as Hank is revealed as a witch-hunter. Cordelia is later blinded by a mysterious attacker and gains a new power of seeing the truth when she touches people. Through her surrogate mother Myrtle's help, Cordelia unlocks all her powers and becomes the reigning Supreme at the end as her mother dies. Fiona as monstrous mother, has abandoned Cordelia while she was growing up, sending her to the academy while she was exploiting her powers as the Supreme. The reason Cordelia has not for so long been able to discover her true powers is also explained as a result of her mother's emotional abuse over her as Fiona has always treated Cordelia as weak and probably resented having her in her life. As the preferred image of the Supreme witch at the end of the show, Cordelia also represents a different female figure of power. Her femininity is understated and her clothes, hair and mannerism represent a more lady-like stance. Right before Cordelia opens the doors of the academy to welcome the new recruits at the end of the show, Fiona, very sick and dying, comes back for one last confrontation with her daughter. As the two reconcile their differences and reach forgiveness, Fiona dies in Cordelia's arms. Thus, the show eliminates the Southern monstrous matriarch with too much power and femininity, who abused her power over men and the younger generation, and opts for a surrogate mother in the image of Cordelia, who will protect and teach the young women in her academy. It is important to emphasize that this new preferred image of the witch is also safe in her sexuality and mannerisms (Figure 39). As the bad matriarch/power-mad women is eliminated, the show opts for a more postfeminist depiction of the witch in Cordelia.

In fact, *AHS Coven* creates a vision of biological motherhood as monstrous through its other characters as well. The older women in the show are depicted as set in their ways, as racists, as violent and as bad mothers—thus, the new face of the white male aristocratic villains of Southern Gothic. In addition to Fiona, we learn that Marie has sacrificed her own baby to attain immortality from Papa Legba and also has to sacrifice new babies for him every year. Similarly, Delphine, even though she claims to have loved her three daughters, has tortured her own daughters to punish them for plotting to kill her. In one episode, Delphine's three daughters return as zombies to take revenge from their mother. The next door neighbor to the coven is depicted as a conservative, fundamentalist church woman who strives to control her son at all costs. Probably one of the most shocking of bad mothers is Kyle's mom, who is revealed to have sexually abused Kyle ever since he was a kid. Thus, this new Southern Gothic's mothers perpetrate the crimes of oppression, incest, violence and murder that have heretofore been the "sins of the fathers" within the genre. Accordingly, all the bad mothers are destroyed by the show's end: Fiona dies of cancer; Marie is chopped into pieces, with her pieces scattered around the city; Delphine is murdered by Queenie; the next door neighbor gets shot and Kyle bashes his mother's head in a fit of rage (Figure 40). The show's only positive portrayals of motherhood is reserved for surrogate mother figures like Myrtle (who is even willing to sacrifice herself to protect Cordelia's good image) and Cordelia (who appears as the proper mother figure for all witches at the end). As such, *AHS Coven*, can be seen as perpetuating monstrous feminine stereotypes of bad mothers in its portrayal and elimination of biological mothers as monstrous in all its possible manifestations: the absent mother, the overbearing mother, the mother as psychologically abusive, the mother as sexual abuser, the mother as torturer and the mother as murderer. The world of this older generation of bad mothers, as stated before, echoes the world of the patriarchal Old South and its many sins on its children. As such, *Coven* brings together the concept of the monstrous feminine and Southern Gothic's damaged systems of family in the creation of its new matriarchal gender regime in the South.

The matriarchs of the New South is further punished in the show in their own personal hells after their deaths. Fiona gets trapped in her personal hell, in a small, old and poor house with the Axeman forever and is taunted by Papa Legba (Figure 41). The too-powerful and too-feminine witch is aptly punished, having to become a mere housewife

for the man she used for her evil deeds. Her sins of sexism and bad motherhood will haunt her forever. Delphine and Marie are also stuck in hell together, this time in Delphine's torture chamber, where Marie is forced by Papa Legba to torture Delphine and her daughters over and over again for eternity. As Papa says "No one gets away with sin. Everybody pays, everybody suffers" ("Go To Hell"). Delphine will pay for her racism and evil deeds by being tortured and by watching her daughters get tortured. Marie will pay for her obsessive lust for revenge and her evil deeds by having to torture the women in the attic forever (Figure 42). Thus, in this Southern Gothic show, the sins of racism and violence that inform these two characters will haunt them for eternity. It is also significant that all three Southern matriarchs of the show are punished not by a white Christian spirit but by Papa Legba, the Haitian voodoo spirit. As such, the soul of black people come back to punish not just the racist whites (Fiona and Delphine) but also Marie, who can be seen as perpetrating a reverse racism. The show punishes the three older women at the end not only because they were monstrous mothers and monstrous women but also they were stuck in the racist ways of the past and they could not conform to the present reality of the so-called postracial new South. By killing off the three racist characters in the show and condemning them to hell, the show situates racism in the South as "past." Also by eliminating the older generation of monstrous matriarchs, the show looks towards a future with the younger generation of witches in the academy and celebrates the postfeminist and postracial academy. In the last shots of the show, Cordelia welcomes the new recruits with Zoe and Queenie by her side. The academy as it stands at the end appears to be a representative space for postfeminist (young and harmless) and postracial (with Queenie and some other ethnic identities in the mix acting as "tokens") identities (Figure 43). This new academy, however, also makes evident the hidden contradictions within the postracial discourse in America and in the South. Even though the show locates the hardboiled racism of the past as "post," the demographics of the younger generation of the future makes it evident that exclusions and segregation also informs the politically-correct postracial America.

In conclusion, *AHS Coven*, as a horror text, like horrorality itself, is "a strange animal" (Brophy 277). The show employs a playful stance in its knowing play with the horror tropes, with the myriad accumulated images of women as witches, of monstrous mothers, of feminist and postfeminist depictions of witches and themes and tropes of Southern

Gothic. The show employs the monstrous feminine mother figure as the Southern mistress gone bad and shows a reactionary and conservative stance toward the all-female Southern universe it creates. In its more positive postfeminist and postracial new generation in the South, the show also reveals the exclusions of the twenty-first century discourses of "post" in terms of racial identities. As such, as a Southern Gothic text, *Coven* is haunted by questions of race and gender but ultimately fails to create a liberating view of these two identities within Southern Gothic. *Coven* is an ambiguous Southern Gothic postfeminist and postracial witch-horror text which plays with the conventions of its own genre, which criticizes the South's racist and sexist past but recreates a similar racial and sexual economy in its depictions of monstrous matriarchs and which ends with a hopeful note in regards to the future gender identities in America, albeit still informed by exclusions based on race.

ENDNOTES

[1] It is important note at this point that although FX is a network channel, its aspirations are in lieu with premium cable channels like HBO and Showtime. FX stands for "Fox extended", also suggesting "effects" and is owned by the Fox Entertainment Group division of 21st Century Fox. FX's programming primarily features original drama and comedy series (which aspire to the standards of premium-cable channels like HBO and Showtime, in regard to adult themes and more unique, higher-quality writing/directing/acting) and reruns of theatrically released feature films and "broadcast network" sitcoms. As of August 2013, approximately 97 million American households (85% of households with television) receive FX.

[2] See “TV Ratings: American Horror Story Scares Up More Records” on *The Hollywood Reporter* website. http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/american-horror-story-coven-scares-647166.

[3] See the post on *Bitchmagazine* at http://bitchmagazine.org/post/just-how-witch-tastic-is-american-horror-story-coven-a-pointcounterpoint.

CHAPTER 4: MONSTROUS AMERICA IN HBO'S *TRUE BLOOD*

This last chapter focuses on writer-producer Alan Ball's latest hit on American television, HBO's horror-romance *True Blood*. Highly esteemed in entertainment business after his previous work on the film *American Beauty* and HBO series *Six Feet Under*, Ball decided to move into the now very popular genre of vampire stories. *True Blood* premiered on HBO in 2008 and has had six successful consecutive seasons. The seventh and last season of the show will be aired during summer 2014. The show does not only pull very high and steady ratings among American audiences and have a large fan base all over the world but it has also proved to be very profitable for HBO.[1] It is important to note at this point, however, that the show is quite different from *True Detective* and *AHS* in that it is a long-form serial drama. As a consequence, it would be impossible to achieve an in-depth analysis of the show's characters or events since there are so many. The serial form also means that the show's universe appears as excessive and ambiguous in its stance towards the issues it explores; as a result, *True Blood* should be seen as polysemic. As Milly Williamson suggests, "serialization as a narrative form is unable to sustain the clear categorization of the moral universe through the unambiguous depiction of good and evil. Serialized narrative produces shifting perspectives and extended middles that contribute to the moral complications that surround characters" (48). Thus, this chapter will focus on some of the most important issues, tropes and discourses that comes out of *True Blood*, with some analysis of certain main characters.

Alan Ball's *True Blood* is a television adaptation of Charlaine Harris's popular Southern Vampire Mystery Series, depicting the adventures of her titular character Sookie Stackhouse. In 2001, Harris's *Dead Until Dark* launched the series of critically acclaimed, best-selling supernatural mystery novels which are the products of the twenty-first century resurgence of the vampire and paranormal romance genres. However, there is a striking difference between Harris's books and Ball's televised adaptation of them. As Brigid Cherry suggests;

> One notable point is that the novels are narrated from Sookie's perspective, lending them a clear focus for readers, allowing them to engage strongly with the heroine. The paranormal romance genre has a predominantly female readership and is largely written by female authors, as is the romance genre from which it stems. (10)

This first-person romance narrative is transformed in the hands of Ball by his widening of the text to encompass the multiple points of view of a range of characters. Thus, on screen, *True Blood* appears as a polyphonic, carnivalesque visual narrative of fear (of difference) and desire (for the other) written across the visually-recognizable geography of American Deep South. In and around the fictional small town of Bon Temps, located in Louisiana, a horror-house of different characters interact and strive to carve a space for themselves in the social, political, cultural and sexual life in America. With the Great Revelation, vampires all over the world announced their existence to human beings. What made this possible was the discovery of synthetic blood (TruBlood) by a Japanese corporation. As small town waitress Sookie Stackhouse meets her first vampire, the people around her embark on their own adventures among all kind of supernatural creatures like werewolves, shapeshifters and witches.

The significance of the show for this study lies in the issues it tackles in a post-multicultural America and the South and the hybridized Gothic mode through which it explores those issues. Much more than the books, Alan Ball uses the show to explore the questions the Great Revelation raises regarding equality, justice, and civil rights in a democratic society; in this case, the United States of America. Thus, the show is not just a vampire romance like most of the other vampire shows on air (like *The Vampire Diaries*) but also a visual space where many important questions about what it means to be a member of a democratic society are being explored. As Joseph J. Foy suggests, "Tapping into contemporary debates about diversity, gender, identity politics, and immigration, *True Blood* offers important philosophical insights about justice and the proper role of the state in establishing and protecting rights" (51-52). *True Blood*, although mostly labeled as a vampire show, says a lot about what it means to be an American in the twenty-first century. The show's overarching discourse makes use of among other things; the discourse of American liberal politics, discourses of multiculturalism, discourses of religious right and discourses of Civil Rights Movement, which also makes it a Southern Gothic text. Underneath its sexy and romantic stories of love and desire, *True Blood* is ultimately a show about a community of individuals who strive for happiness and liberty, and ultimately, power. Contrary to Alan Ball's claim that the show is pure entertainment,[2] the show actually depicts a different kind of American

national narrative through its wild mixture of gothic/fantastic characters. In the multispecies America of *True Blood*, different monsters strive to "coexist;" these monsters include vampires, werewolves, faeries, shapeshifters, ghosts, maenads, witches, and ultimately, human beings. Added to these identity markers, different professions give the characters different agendas: we have politicians, reverends, lobbyists, spokespeople, policemen, bar owners, waitresses, cooks, drug dealers and serial killers. As a result, consciously or not, *True Blood* gives us a different kind of Gothic allegory for the post-racial, post-feminist, multicultural America of diversity in the twenty-first century.

What makes it possible for a show like *True Blood* to explore serious contemporary issues of identity is its hybridity. The show does not easily fit into one specific genre category but is mostly labeled as telefantasy (Cherry 13). As such, this study approaches the show as a postmodern (hybrid) Gothic-fantasy and explores how it creates a contested space for difficult social issues to be explored. In this vein, Rosemary Jackson's influential book, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), gives us some insights into the larger term "fantasy" and will be used throughout the chapter. Jackson associates fantasy with "imagination and desire" (1) and, although she includes the genre of Gothic within the fantasy tradition, she associates it with "unreason and terror" (96). For her, traditional gothic texts reinforce middle-class ideology (as can be said for *True Detective*) and do not have the subversive potential fantasy has. Jackson's approach to gothic should be seen as the conventional, generic approach and it should be noted that most of her claims for fantasy also hold true for this study's understanding of gothic as a hybrid mode. Moreover, if Freud contended that the death principle cannot be separated from the life principle, the other face of fear is desire. As bell hooks points out in "Eating the Other," the Western imagination does not only project its fears onto the other but also creates "fantasies about the Other" and carries a "desire for contact with the Other" (22) which comes from "the seduction of difference" (23). The desire for the other in American culture can most clearly be seen in romanticized depictions of Native Americans as "noble savages" or in the exoticization and thus eroticization of African American women. Therefore, the gothic and the fantastic are parts of the same mechanism of "othering" which writes fear and desire onto the body of the other. That is why, in *True Blood*'s world, moments of intense horror blend with moments of intense desire. The attraction of

the monsters is usually played out for female audiences, which is not a new phenomenon if we remember the sexual power of Dracula or the attraction of the vampire figure as anti-hero in general. At this point, it might also be useful to point out that the gothic mode in history has also been used to explore some of the most pornographic masculine desires, the earliest example being Lewis's *The Monk*.

As a liminal narrative located between Gothic horror and romance, *True Blood* uses both modes to its advantage. As Gothic horror, the show creates a violent and sexually charged world through the adventures of Sookie as she is forced to deal with various supernatural and undead creatures, especially vampires, as well as kidnapping and attempts on her life from serial killers and militant, anti-vampire, evangelical Christians. As romance, *True Blood* revolves around Sookie's relationships with a number of anti-hero types, namely the vampires Bill and Eric, the werewolf Alcide and the shapeshifter Sam. Similarly, the main character of the show, Sookie Stackhouse, can be seen as a hybrid between a proactive and feisty contemporary Gothic heroine and a romance heroine: Sookie is, as Cherry notes, "a strategic negotiator who can draw on her telepathic abilities, stand up to and negotiate with vampires, cut the heads off serial killers and zap monsters with her awesome fairy light" (14) but she also acts like a more passive romance heroine in her relations with men. However, as noted before, *True Blood* is not only about Sookie's world; through the show's serial format multiple characters and plot threads are woven into the narrative and the end result is a carnivalesque world excessive in its monsters and in its meanings.

The fact that a prime-time television show like *True Blood* can appropriate Gothic conventions and monsters in excess and with significant ease and the fact that the audience of the show can easily recognize the monstrous intertextuality within the show without needing references point to the fact that the Gothic is very much in tune with our postmodern times. In the cultural production of "late" capitalism, if, as Frederic Jameson argues, the past has become a museum, a storage of images to be recycled at will, the union of the hybrid mode of Gothic and postmodern form of "pastiche" becomes inevitable. Jerrold Hogle points out the fact that the Gothic, from its beginnings, has made use of "signs only of older signs" which were themselves broken off from many of their

past meanings and existed more as "mere signifiers" (15). One example Hogle gives for this phenomenon is that by the time of the Gothic revival in architecture of the eighteenth century, there had already been "Gothic" revivals, even in the Middle Ages. For Hogle, even the Gothic label, which has no connection to the actual Goths, has been "counterfeit all along" (16). In this view, the Gothic mode is seen as a repository of past images, figures, narratives and tropes available for usage anytime to "symbolize and disguise present concerns, including prejudices" (16). Alan Lloyd-Smith labels this repository of gothic discourses "Heritage Gothic:"

> the Gothic heritage becomes *Heritage Gothic*, a use of now conventional tropes that is legitimated simply through previous practice … But one advantage of this cultural revolving door is that the audience no longer needs persuasion of the authenticity of Gothic entertainments: absurdity or even incoherence are not problems, and the author or film maker is freed to play with the form; even to be straightforward in accepting its strangeness as if it were plausible. (126)

Hence, popular television audience of *True Blood* does not even question the implausibility of having all kinds of monsters created throughout history in the same show. After all, in a Gothic world, the question is not plausibility but the celebration of excess and hybridity. And the Gothic mode is omnipresent in its hybridity:

> With such dispersions, attenuations, name-checking, and stylized imitations, does it any longer make sense to speak of the Gothic as a genre, or American Gothic as a distinct strand within it? … The death sentence may be tempting, but in fact the Gothic seems to be so recognizable, even when fragmented and circulating within other forms, that it stubbornly resists its own obsolescence, and invites us instead to recognize its continuing existence, through *hybridity*, as one of the most powerful genres, one which speaks of the depths as well as the surfaces of western culture. (Lloyd-Smith 127)

For some scholars, like Alan Lloyd-Smith, the Gothic excess of shows like *True Blood* serves a corrective, restorative function. In exploring taboo desires and perverse drives, in breaking the boundaries of what is possible and permissible, the Gothic lets those desires to be practiced vicariously and thus, becomes cathartic for the reader/viewer: "the Gothic is in essence a reactionary form … one that explores chaos and wrongdoing in a movement toward the ultimate restitution of order and convention" (5). The insistence of Alan Ball to view the show as "entertainment," the commentaries of the show's fans on numerous internet blogs on the fact that the show is their "guilty pleasure," and the way certain storylines on the show provide closure and return to order prove the fact that *True Blood*, no matter how perverse and open in its depictions of desire and violence, can be

seen as serving a "reactionary" purpose of the exorcism of forbidden drives. One such storyline appeared in the show's second season when a maenad takes over the population of Bon Temps through her rituals of excess and desire.[3] Maryann Forrester is a maenad who worships Dionysus (the God Who Comes) as her lord and husband and uses the gullible townspeople of Bon Temps in her rituals of excess and frenzy to call her God for their union. We see the townspeople swept up in a wave of pandemonium, letting the good times roll, indulging every passion, acting on every dark desire (ecstatic orgies that sought climax in human sacrifice); they become uninhibited devotees of Dionysus, god of wine, revelry, madness and dismemberment. In contemporary celebrations of Mardi Gras, which is just a different expression of the same carnivalistic spirit of Dionysian rituals, people are known to shout out "Let the good times roll!", which in French translates as, "Laissez les bons temps rouler!" Thus, the name of the fictional town in *True Blood*—Bon Temps—is indicative of the carnivalesque, hybrid, liminal nature of the Gothic space created in the show, not just for the second season, but for the exploration of all of the issues. As the people in the town lose themselves like mindless zombies in their acts of desire, violence and vandalism, the whole town goes to ruins; it visually reads like a post-apocalyptic zombie town with the Sheriff's office and the prison covered in graffiti, all public facilities broken down and a neon sign on the road reads: "FETISH RUL S & PRODUC FLESH" ("New World In My View") (Figure 44).

These events is evocative of Friedrich Nietzsche's famous analysis of the cult of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In his book, Nietzsche compares this god of intoxication and revelry to Apollo, the god of reason, daylight, and decorum. Apollo is associated with the *principium individuationis*, or principle of individuation. This principle, which has a long history in philosophy, boils down to the fairly simple idea that our world consists of distinct individuals with more or less definite boundaries marking them off from one another. The nocturnal revelries of Dionysus, on the other hand, told a different story. As Maryann suggests, "Why be embarrassed about pleasure and laughter? Why be ashamed of letting go? … Control is just a cage that stupid culture uses to lock up who we really are. We need to be out of control! We crave it!" ("I Will Rise Up"). In the course of the god's orgiastic rites, his devotees would lose all sense of existing as separate and distinct individuals, as they were filled with "the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost

depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*." As the revelers surrender to what they experience as the undifferentiated ground of their being, blissful "Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness" (36).

This losing of self (and order) in the contagious, fanatical energy of the crowd can be seen as a ready analogy for the Gothic audience's participation in forbidden, excessive, and taboo acts of desire and violence. Significantly, in the last episode of the season "Beyond Here Lies Nothin," after the maenad is killed and order is restored, the townspeople gather for their daily social routine at Merlotte's (the bar where most action takes place in the show) and try to come up with explanations about the events that unfolded: Was it a gas leak that led them not to remember anything? Was Maryann an alien, or "an agent of the pharmaceutical companies and the liberal media" who "poisoned our water supply with LSD as a mind control experiment?" As no one is willing to acknowledge the fact that Maryann was just tapping into their innermost desires, chaos and perverse sexuality is eliminated as the order sets in. The pack mentality that lets the people of Bon Temps act on their every wild instinct resembles the vicarious pleasure a show like *True Blood* offers its viewers. It is true that the show has been criticized by some of the more conservative viewers for its open portrayal of perverse sexuality and excessive bloodshed,[4] however, millions of viewers who actually prefer the show for the same reasons are witness to the fact that it offers vicarious satisfaction. The very term "guilty pleasure" that is used by many in describing the show indicates the audience's participation (hence the guilt) in viewing those acts of violence.

True Blood might be perceived as "escapist," or "reactionary" in this sense of Gothic excess, however, this study is more interested in the potential postmodern space opened up by Gothic excess and hybridity for certain discourses of power to flow into. For scholars like Judith Halberstam, Gothic excess, in creating hybridity and crisis, creates room for multiple interpretations and paradoxical outcomes. As "multiple interpretations are embedded in the text" of a show like *True Blood*, this creates a polysemic field where "meaning itself runs riot" (2). In using the monstrosities of Gothic heritage for its own excessive, postmodern usage, *True Blood* also allows for different interpretations beyond

the purely escapist ones. In its disguise of pure entertainment, a show like *True Blood* also creates a gothic, grotesque space for American history and national character to be contested.

As all sorts of monsters haunt the America of *True Blood* and reveal the terror at the heart of American institutions of family, church and state, the show situates this liminal visual Gothic landscape in the Deep South and exploits a Southern Gothic sensibility. Locating itself in and around the deep southern states of Louisiana and Mississippi, the show, in its first episode, reminds the viewers that New Orleans is "a Mecca for the vampire." The South of *True Blood* shows poverty and backwardness at the heart of the region as legacies of its past and presents us with the twentieth century issues such as the legacy of the civil rights movement, new immigrant groups, and drugs such as methamphetamine.

The Gothic "space" of South is made more prominent in the show through its use of Southern music and its Emmy nominated title sequence. The music supervisor of the show, Gary Calamar, handpicks the music for each episode to create a "swampy, bluesy and spooky" feel for the show.[5] The songs are selected from the works of local Louisiana musicians and each episode is named after the title of the song played during the closing credits. Thus, soundtrack plays a huge role in the gothic stylization of the show. The show's famous opening credits, accompanied by Jace Everett's song "Bad Things," set the tone for the rest of the show. The sequence was constructed by Digital Kitchen, which is a creative agency that focuses on film production and experiential design. Starting with the idea of "the whore in the house of prayer," the team wanted to blend contradictory images of sex, violence and religion in Deep South. The scene opens beneath murky swamp water, establishing the point of view of "a supernatural, predatory creature." Rising above the surface and backed by a bluesy guitar, the camera moves through the bayou and transitions to a dryland highway and the small town South, where the environment and buildings grow more human, but the primeval sense remains. Thus there is a narrative flow from the swamps and bayous of the landscape into the hearts and minds of the inhabitants. All through the sequence, the camera is used to suggest that this creature is observing human beings from the shadows in their acts of violence, frenzy and sex. Ideas of sin and redemption are explored in the sequence, as the time moves from

morning to night and culminates in a baptism. Images of death and rebirth, with rotting carcasses, road kills and animal fossils, abound in the sequence. The real Gothic suggestion made by the title sequence is not that monsters dwell in Deep South but that human beings seem more monstrous even through a monster's eyes. The creative team responsible for the creation of the sequence made extra effort to make the Southern atmosphere authentic during the shooting and editing process.[6] The blood and membrane shots for the title card were shot using a rostrum camera (as opposed to computer-generated or digital effects) to capture a biological feel. The creative team wanted to capture a sense of timelessness, creating a sequence that could have been made decades ago, which is intended to suggest the timelessness and longevity of the vampire (Figure 45).

The show also uses the Gothic image of the lush vegetation and humid wetlands of the Deep South. Climate and landscape work together to create an oppressive and claustrophobic gothic space for the show. In the humid, subtropical climate, the "weird" vegetation, swamps and bayous surround and cover the buildings and habitations depicted in the show. Action frequently takes place outside and during night, the woods are the places where monsters, both human and supernatural, usually hide: a human couple attacks Bill, the maenad attacks Sookie, a witch puts a decaying spell on a vampire and Jason meets his first werepanther in the woods (Figure 46). *True Blood* also plays with the binary opposition between day and night and light and darkness. Even though most monsters reveal themselves through the Southern Gothic landscape at night, the characters also feel the weight of oppressive heat during the day. This is indicative of the characters' repressed desires, passions and perversities which simmer beneath the surface but also often erupts.

True Blood, in its Deep South atmosphere, also makes occasional comments about the white trash stereotype. In fact, most of the residents in Bon Temps can be seen as white trash. When Tara, a young African-American woman who is Sookie's best friend and who works at Merlotte's bar, claims that she only acts out against "stupid people," the owner of the bar, Sam, says, "Most of my customers are stupid people" ("Strange Love"). Some other depictions of the white trash stereotype in the show are: the Rattrays (called

by the rest of the town as Rats), a violent couple who deal drugs and drain vampires for their blood; the incestuous clan of werepanthers who run a meth lab in their tin huts and who is labelled in the show as "a whole new dimension of trash" ("I Smell A Rat"); and Sam's biological parents who force their younger son to fight in dog fights to earn money. Maxine Fortenberry, as her son Hoyt claims, hates everyone: "Methodists, Catholics, African Americans, people who don't take care of their gardens, people who park their trucks up on their lawn and ladies who wear red shoes, families with lots of kids, checkered curtains and cats and dogs and fate, every girl that I ever liked. FULL OF HATE!" ("I Will Rise Up"). Her defense is that it is not her fault, she was raised up that way. Indeed, most people in the town of Bon Temps are full of hate and prejudice and are depicted as violent and anti-intellectual, as having a propensity for excessive food and alcohol, as promiscuous and as stuck in their ways (Figure 47).

True Blood's actual incorporation of white trash is not so much in its demonized characters (as it was in *True Detective*) though, but in its usage of what Gael Sweeney labels a "white trash aesthetic" in the construction of its microcosm of Bon Temps. Sweeney suggests that

> the iconography of White Trash is of the carnivalesque: fantasies of the grotesque, of violence and excess, of hysterical gorging and indulging in food, drink, and drugs, and of living life large and in mythic terms in a Southern culture rife with cults and worship of the dead and the lost, from fundamentalist Christian sects to the adoration of the Confederate cause. (144)

In *True Blood*'s diegesis, the iconography of white trash saturate the show: murders, dismemberings, excessive sex, alcohol consumption, drug use and trade, anti-supe (anti-supernatural beings) hate groups, historical societies like "The Descendants of the Glorious Dead," wiccan tribes, bike gangs-as-werewolf packs and fundamentalist groups like "The Fellowship of the Sun" are some of the white trash tropes the show uses. Sweeney also claims that, in its excesses, the white trash aesthetic is "postmodern" (145).

Even though *True Blood* makes use of Southern Gothic and white trash tropes, the world it creates is actually representative of the larger world of America. In this vein, the show can be seen as an "allegorical" American Gothic as Eric Savoy defines the term. For Savoy, gothic is most American when it gestures towards allegory. The "allegory" in

Savoy's analysis, however, is a fluid tendency rather than a figure, "an impulse rather than a literary artifact" ("The Face" 6). In the American Gothic allegory, there is a level of "translucency," it is not a formulaic, total narrative that stands for another whole experience in reality. In this case, allegory creates a certain "temporality" in which otherness can return and can be expressed. This temporality, this space created by such an allegory makes American Gothic a temporal frontier for an alternative history to be created.

Through its inscription of the twentieth century socio-political discourses of multiculturalism and American national identity, *True Blood* also strives to recreate a different fragmented history of (in)tolerance for America through its marriage of the monstrous and official discourse in its allegorical frontiers of the real and the imagined. Savoy calls this frontier "an epistemological frontier in which the spatial division between the known and the unknown, the self and the Other, assumes temporal dimensions" ("The Face" 6). In *True Blood*, allegory does not mean that vampires stand for one class of individuals in the American society while werewolves stand for another race etc.; it rather means an opportunity to create a temporal space in which different discourses of power (whether of the marginalized, of politicians, of religious authorities, of media, or of the poor and the rich) can all come back and face one another among the bodies of monsters:

> The gothic cannot function without a proximity of Otherness imagined as its imminent return; consequently, allegory's rhetoric of temporality—its gesturing toward what cannot be explicitly recovered—aspires to a narrative of the return of the Other's plenitude on a frontier in which 'geography' supplements the impossibilities of language, of both national and personal historiography. (Savoy "The Face" 6-7)

This figuration of allegory in American Gothic as a temporal space in which past repressions of history can be contested informs *True Blood*. From its first moments on the show reveals itself to be an allegory of contemporary America. Carefully looking at the first sequence of the first episode ("Strange Love"), one can see most of the issues that are at the forefront of the show's Gothic heterotopia. The opening shot is taken from inside a moving car and shows us a dark road in a swampy Southern geography covered with the South's "weird" trees such as the Southern oak. The bluesy soundtrack of this first minute helps to create the Southern Gothic mood. The camera cuts into the car where

a young boy gets a hand-job from his girlfriend. Thus, the first act the viewers witness is a sexual act and the camera cutting into the rearview mirror reminds us of our own voyeuristic participation in such acts in the show. Next we see a neon sign, a familiar symbol of contemporary postmodern commodity culture, which says "We Have Tru Blood." As the camera moves into the supermarket with the two teenagers, we are again reminded of our position as viewers through shots from the market's security mirror. This preoccupation with mirrors is also in tune with Lippe's analysis of Gothic spaces as "mirror images of society" (ix) and as heterotopias, which was explored in the second chapter. The mirror also has an added significance in a show about vampires. In vampire folklore, mirrors retain an important place because of their association with the other realm, the reversed world of the dead. Even though *True Blood*'s vampires do cast mirror reflections, the use of mirrors in the show signals at our own vampirism as voyeurs. As Veronica Hollinger reminds us; "We look into the mirror it [the vampire] provides and we see a version of ourselves. Or, more accurately, keeping in mind the orthodoxy that vampires cast no mirror reflections, we look into the mirror and see nothing *but* ourselves" (201).

In the store, the clerk is watching *Real Time With Bill Maher* (an actual talk show airing on HBO) on television and the issue being discussed is race, in a quite different context but with uncannily familiar words. The spokesperson of AVL (American Vampires League) Nan Flanagan talks about how vampires are "citizens" since they pay their taxes and deserve basic civil rights like everyone else. When asked about the violence vampires have exercised on humans, Nan points out there is no documentation and lashes back with; "Doesn't your race have a history of violence and exploitation? We've never owned slaves Bill, or detonated nuclear weapons." The plea for civil rights and the pointing of fingers over the discourse of race on who is more violent have special connotations in the Southern Gothic space of the show. What is more, this is the first incidence of many others when characters in *True Blood* learn about the bigger world of America through their television screens. This television show is actually full of people watching television. Media's role in disseminating discourses of power is one of the issues that is constantly being emphasized in the show. This creates a layer of self-referentiality that is typical of the postmodern, which will be discussed later.

The camera cuts down to the store clerk watching television, stylized in a truly Gothic fashion with leather, chains, a bracelet made out of bullets and long dark hair. Our eyes also catch the name of a brand of a product on the counter: "Red Man." As the clerk pretends to be a vampire to impress the teenagers, they ask if they can "score some V" from the clerk. When the potbellied, flannel-wearing customer in the store reveals himself as the true vampire, the teenagers run away from the real thing. The scene mocks the idea that one can spot a vampire from his mannerisms and clothes and shows us how vampirism also came to be associated with a style. The actual vampire of the scene puts a six-pack of TruBlood on the counter and the camera cuts into a low-angle shot of the bottles reminiscent of product commercials. The vampire threatens to kill the store clerk if he pretends to be "one of them" again and leaves the store (Figure 48).

Thus, in less than five minutes, *True Blood*'s America is revealed to the viewers: In the obsession of the young generation with vampires we can see a culture itself obsessed with youth, sex and violence. After all, what is a vampire if not eternally young. We see a culture obsessed with difference (whether it be race, sexuality, or species) and which loves to talk about it every chance it gets. We see a culture hooked on drugs; literal ones like V and methamphetamines or more cultural ones like television. We see a totally commodified, consumer culture in which even a life-giving substance like blood can become commodified and sold as a product. All these issues that surface during the first sequence of the show permeate the world of *True Blood* as more issues are added to the mix.

Accordingly, the Deep South small town of Bon Temps in the show can be seen as a microcosm for *True Blood*'s allegorical American Gothic project. For a small Louisiana town, Bon Temps has a vibrantly diverse population, made up from religious and secular communities, public employees, business owners, different individuals who represent different elements of American life. Some of the main characters from the show's first season include Sookie (telepathic, waitress, detective), Adele (Sookie's Gran, local history buff), Jason (Sookie's brother, handsome, womanizing, blue-collar), Sam Merlotte (Sookie's boss, small business owner), Tara Thornton (Sookie's best fried, strong-willed African-American, confrontational), Lafayette Reynolds (openly-gay,

short-order cook), Arlene Fowler (waitress, single mother) and Bill Compton (Bon Temps's first vampire). Foy calls Bon Temps's community "typically American": "a community of individuals all trying to carve out a space for themselves in which to pursue the things that make them happy" (54). In their "pursuit of happiness" in this American community, the characters, from day to day, see that America does not always live up to its promises of tolerance and individual rights. In its exposing of the intolerance and discrimination within the heart of the nation, *True Blood* can thus be read, as Ruddell and Cherry suggest, "as a critique of the American Dream" (50).

The show's critique of American Dream starts with the American family. It has been noted before that, in its American manifestations, the Gothic mode tends to depict the family as monstrous and the domestic spaces as sites of terror. Similarly, Gothic television in America has had a propensity (ever since *Twin Peaks*) to focus on small town America to depict the underside of the American Dream. To remember Wheatley's argument, Gothic television is "understood as a domestic form of a genre that is deeply concerned with the domestic, writing stories of unspeakable family secrets and homely trauma large across the television screen" (1). Similarly, *True Blood* also presents the domestic space, normally the site of security, as under threat. One way the show achieves this is its depiction of the sacred notion of American family as monstrous. In the show, there is a clear contradiction between the human families, which are depicted as dysfunctional, dispersed, dead or inefficient and the familial relationships among the supernaturals which are depicted as tender and loyal. Sookie's parents are dead, her brother Jason is a no-good womanizer who does not hesitate to slap her when he gets mad, her uncle used to sexually abuse her when she was a kid and in the sixth season it is revealed that her parents even tried to kill her to save her from a life of marginalization. Sam's parents abandoned him when he was a baby and later they turn out to be cruel and materialistic people. In the African American characters in the show, we see the problem of single black motherhood: Tara's father is absent and her mother is an alcoholic; Lafayette's father is also absent and his mother is in a psychiatric hospital. In contrast to these portrayals of traumatic families, Sookie's home and her relationship with her grandmother seem to offer a unique positive depiction of American family, which the show quickly moves on to dismantle with its sixth episode.

In the first few episodes of the show, Sookie's house is shown to be full of sunlight and the kitchen is emphasized as a domestic safe haven for Sookie as she sits down with her grandmother who feeds her and gives her advice on life. From the sixth episode on, however, throughout the rest of the show, Sookie's house is depicted as constantly under attack by human and supernatural monsters. When Sookie comes home after work one night, she finds her grandmother brutally murdered, lying in a pool of blood on the kitchen floor. The use of extreme close-ups during this scene creates a horrific form of spectacle and emphasizes the unhomeliness, thus uncanniness of the home. Thus, her home becomes a site for trauma for Sookie from then on. In the second season, when Sookie goes out of town, the maenad Maryann and the people whom she took under her control invade Sookie's house and transform it into a space of chaos, death, sexual excess and dismemberment. The house becomes covered in vines and weird vegetation and people assemble a huge statue out of animal carcasses in the front garden. Seeing her house upon her return, Sookie exclaims, "My Gran lived and died in that house and now it's like people who are the exact opposite of everything she was are defiling her. I almost got raped in Dallas but this is so much worse!" ("Frenzy"). Sookie's experience in this scene is a pure representation of the uncanny as she realizes the familiarity of her home in its new unfamiliarity. Throughout the show, then, Sookie's house is transformed from homely to horrific and then to uncanny (Figure 49). Thus, *True Blood*, on one level, represents the notions of home and family in small town America as under threat.

However, the show also opens up its small town setting to the larger discourses within the nation through emphasizing the role of the media in disseminating the discourses of diversity and discrimination. The power of television is omnipresent in the show as most of the main characters watch television news and talk shows to get informed about the larger American socio-political developments. From a tabloid newspaper on a coffee table, we learn that Angelina Jolie has adopted a vampire baby and from the television, we learn that Vermont has legalized vampire marriage. Jason (Sookie's brother) keeps two televisions in his house; one of them was inherited from his parents, and he is constantly depicted while watching documentaries about vampire bats, talk shows and news about "violence in the Middle East." The other characters also constantly watch political, religious and civic figures discuss about evil, morality, violence and vampire

rights (Figure 50). This omnipresence of television within a television show serves two ends. First of all, through the metaphor of vampires and their newly-gained extreme visibility within the nation, *True Blood* creates a world saturated in violence (also with occasional references to the war in the Middle East), discrimination and debates about "human rights." As such, the show seeks to incorporate the current real-life discourses in America today. On a second level, *True Blood*, through its constant depictions of people watching television in a television serial, creates a double-layered, self-referential discourse about its own status as a television show. The show's play with television-within-television can also be seen as postmodern. One instance this self-referentiality comes out is when Arlene (a waitress), talking to her kids on the phone, says, "If Rene tells you, you are too young to watch a scary movie on HBO, I side with him" ("Strange Love"). This instance is a typical example of how HBO is playing with postmodern knowingness; as a scary show on HBO, *True Blood* is warning its younger viewers against watching scary shows on HBO.

However, *True Blood*'s postmodern play does not end on the level of self-referentiality. The show, in addition to opening up its microcosmic world to the larger nation, also, in its use of trans-media storytelling, blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction and incorporates elements of its universe into the real world. In his 2006 book, *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins defined the term "convergence" as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviors of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (2). *True Blood* should be seen as a perfect example of the convergence culture with its use of trans-media storytelling and creative marketing strategies. This was most visible when HBO started promoting *True Blood* in an unconventional way. The show's creator, Alan Ball wrote about his excitement in the playful way the *True Blood* world was revealed to the nation:

> Many writers are only bound by the limits of their imaginations, but television and film writers are bound by the limits of production. Logistics, money, time, and technology all need to be taken into account when breaking story. But the world of *True Blood*, I am happy to say, has a brand-new medium to play in, one that is both exciting and liberating. It is a road that leads to unknown possibilities and endless potential—and I, for one, cannot wait to see where it takes us. (Introduction)

In May 2008, two months before the show's premiere, a few select online bloggers and science fiction fans received a mysterious black envelope containing a single sheet of card covered in an indecipherable hieroglyphic message. There was no advertising slogan or a return address to ruin the sense of mystery. Simultaneously, various members of the media were sent some packages with "a vile of what looked like Marciano cherry syrup and a small card with Japanese writing on it with the url www.trublood.jp" (Dowdell). During the months of May and June, on the billboards across America, certain ads advertising the new "TruBlood," a synthetic blood drink, started to appear (Figure 51). None of these promotion strategies focused on the characters or the story but instead was the building blocks of a new world layered on top of our own, a world where vampires "came out of the coffin" with the "Great Revelation." When the "invitations" featuring the hieroglyphic message were sent out and printed in newspapers in 2008, the marketing campaign followed the typical pattern for an alternate reality game where players have to find and follow clues. As contents and clues were shared and discussed online, the message was deciphered. Written in Ugaritic language, the message read: "Thank you for answering the call and joining us. But what it means to us is almost beyond words. Tru Blood can sustain us. The bonds of blood will no longer hold us hostage." The participants in this game were led to a website, RevenantOnes.com, where a mysterious vampire, the Gatekeeper, tried to keep out curious humans. When the participants were able to break the code and get past the Gatekeeper, they were introduced to a world peopled by vampires. In the final week of June two videos appeared, first on the website BloodCopy.com (the vampire's hub), and then on YouTube. The first depicted an interrupted local newscast in Baltimore and a pretty woman with extremely pale skin reading a carefully prepared statement:

> There's no cause for alarm. We've lived among you for thousands of years without your knowledge. And we now come out into the open with the hope to finally become part of society fully, once again. Even now representatives from my kind are meeting with your government to assure them that we reveal ourselves in the spirit of peace and friendship and this is now possible because of the invention of a synthetic called Tru Blood, which allows us to exist without the use of um … other means. Nothing will change. Nothing has changed. We have lived among you and we hope to live among you still. ("Breaking—Vampires Announce Themselves")[7]

The following day, the second video, "White House Briefing on Vampires," appeared which featured a spokesperson, Todd Phillips, assuring the public that the Government

was fully aware of the breaking situation and they had everything under control.[8] As such, in its promotion of the show, HBO tried to locate the coming-out of the vampires in the real world. The verisimilitude of the campaign materials was also helped by its global nature. If vampires were real, they would not only be American and they would not speak only English. Accordingly, viral videos in Spanish, Russian and Cantonese were released. Video blogs from vampires across the globe and footage of vampires revealing themselves accidentally were uploaded.

This blurring of fact and fiction continued with HBO's fifteen-minute mockumentary entitled "In Focus: Vampires in America" (which was also included in the season one DVD set).[9] Mockumentary is designed like a prime-time news coverage with an anchorwoman reporting the events of the Great Revelation coupled with the media images of the event and a reporter conducting interviews with individuals from different sides of the vampire rights debate such as the American Vampire League (AVL) spokesperson Nan Flanagan, the Fellowship of the Sun leader Rev Theodore Newlin, a cultural studies professor at Johnson University in Louisiana, Dr. Robert Hill, the scientist working at the Yakonomo Corporation, Dr. Kenji Igawa, who invented the synthetic blood, a teenager who discovered the existence of vampires before the Revelation, a woman dating a vampire and people from the streets (Figure 52). As the show proceeded, HBO created real websites for certain groups in the show like the AVL, the Fellowship of the Sun and the anti-supe hate group Keep America Human, and kept these sites independent from the show's official website (Figure 53). HBO also followed this real-life narrative in its marketing strategies related to the products sold for the show. The beverage TruBlood is still being marketed worldwide and has a website for orders. Also, HBO, early on has hired Digital Kitchen to create an interesting ad campaign. Digital Kitchen enlisted the help of major brands, from Harley Davidson to Gilette, to create mock-brand ads targeted to vampires (Figure 54). Thus, in its promotion of the show and its marketing strategies, HBO used trans-media promotion and storytelling and commercial intertextuality.

As a result, HBO has used every possible and creative avenue in "the art of world-making" for *True Blood*. In this trans-media format, the content of the show flows into real life across multiple platforms and the audience is encouraged to actively participate

in the creation and revelation of the content. Jenkins states that trans-media storytelling "unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (97-98), adding depth to the source world and transforming the show's fan from passive consumers to active participants whose desires change the narrative in real ways. In its multi-layered narrative, HBO has not just promoted a television show but created an experience indicative of the real world of its audience. As such the show's conventional diegesis (world) is transformed into an extending hyper-diegesis into the real world. As Melissa Anyiwo suggests:

> The *True Blood* narrative appears to be only about the lives of the Bon Temps residents who just happen to live in a world where vampires are real. The narrative actually extends way beyond the small town to encompass the entire world. The story is that of the Great Revelation and all those it impacts, from vampires to humans. (170)

In its hyper-diegetic allegorical critique of America, *True Blood* uses supernatural monsters, especially vampires, as fluid and polysemic metaphors and incorporates different forms of discrimination that permeate American society in its discourse of speciesism. Televised narratives of vampires have been around ever since *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971)[10] and vampire narratives have run across a different range of genres from teen comedy/drama and gangster drama to detective story and soap opera. Whereas vampires were used as metaphors for political, social and psychological anxieties in Gothic literature since the eighteenth century, most televised vampires, following Anne Rice's sympathetic first-person protagonists, have been depicted as reluctant, existentially suffering, sympathetic anti-heroes and the vampire has lost its connection to absolute evil. *True Blood* changes this formula of the reluctant blood-suckers and creates a world where vampires no longer *need* to drink human blood because a synthetic substitute has been developed. As such, the show's vampires appear both sympathetic and scary, depending on individual characters. When vampires become sympathetic in the show, it is not because they are struggling against their nature and resisting the thirst but because they become "victims of prejudice" (Abbott 34). The show, even though it also depicts individual vampires' stories, in its larger narrative, also focuses on the vampire *community* and its interaction with the human community in America. In this vein, it might be useful to first explore how the two communities interact on the public

and national level before going deeper into the different ways the show explores the vampire metaphor.

One way the show creates this larger-world vampire-human interaction is through its depictions of television talk shows within its narrative, where the contemporary political and religious discourse in America is constantly being invoked through the discussion of vampire rights. As such, *True Blood* also frequently refers to the increasing cultural polarization between Right Wing Christian fundamentalism and progressive liberalism in America. It is no coincidence that the first vampire we see on the show, albeit on another television screen, is the spokesperson for the American Vampire League (AVL), Nan Flanagan, who has dedicated her life to attaining equal rights for vampires and passing the Vampire Rights Amendment (VRA) which would provide constitutional recognition of vampires, allowing them to file suit against public acts of discrimination and protecting them from attempts to infringe on their social, political, and economic rights (a play on feminist movement's ERA and the Civil Rights Act). In her television debates and elsewhere in the political arena, Nan is usually pitched against different Republican politicians or the representatives of the Fellowship of the Sun, a fundamentalist Christian group run by "pro-living" crusaders like Rev. Steve Newlin. The television appearances of these public figures constantly invade the show's narrative of the everyday life of its characters.

In one of his television appearances, Steve Newlin calls vampires immoral and says: "I am more concerned with basic human rights, the right for our sons and daughters to go to school without fear of molestation by blood-thirsty predators on the playground or in the classroom" ("The Fourth Man In the Fire"). Combining the familiar fear discourses about homosexuals and sexual predators in America with his speciesism, Newlin is able to call for "human rights" because, in his worldview, vampires are not humans. In this formulation, vampires are evil and immoral because they feed on people whom they, with justification, see as their inferiors. Such a view is quite familiar when we remember that Aristotle, Aquinas and Kant have all pointed out that *human beings* are entitled to use the other lesser beings in the food chain (animals) to their advantage. Thus, the play over the term "human rights" in the show creates a critique of western humanism and its long

history of "othering." Throughout western history, one of the main justifications offered for depriving certain groups, such as women or racial minorities, of their civil rights has been that they are somehow less than human (e.g. women as weaker sex, or Africans as animalistic savages). Aristotle saw human beings as "rational animals" and saw them as having the right to exploit all the other creatures on earth, who "exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of various instruments" (21). To Aristotle's justification of rationality, Kant added the criteria of "morality." Because of their moral autonomy, according to Kant, human beings are not subject to those basic instincts which enslave other creatures and thus transcend other beings. This gives humans a right to exploit non-human creatures: "morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity" (42). Anything that is not human is seen as mere things and exist only to be used by human beings as a means to an end. Lacking in dignity, these things possess a different kind of value that's conditional on the uses we make of them, a value that Kant calls their "price." The horrible extension of this logic in the western mind has been that the western civilization are also entitled to hunt and enslave other human beings such as the "barbarians" and women can also be exploited because they are wanting in reason, deficient in humanity and naturally subordinate to men. Thus, speciesism can be seen as the first step (or the justification point) of sexism and racism.

In more traditional vampire narratives, it was only the vampires that fed on humans. *True Blood* complicates this formula by depicting a universe where humans exploit vampires as well. The "V juice," the blood of the vampires in the show, is a powerful drug for humans. Hence, a lot of humans hunt and drain vampires for their blood (like the fur trade) and vampires become valuable commodities. On the other hand, the classic predator story continues on the vampires' side and a lot of the vampires in the show regard human beings as lower forms of life ripe for exploitation, not much different from the way Aristotle and others regarded nonhuman species. As such, *True Blood*, in its conflict between vampires and humans, creates a complicated moralistic universe where speciesism runs both ways: vampires are frequently called "fangers" but human beings are also "breathers" and "bloodbags." The western assumption that human beings are the top of the food chain is thus challenged in the world of the show as vampires are superior

to human beings in physicality, strength and vision. As the anchorwoman from HBO's mockumentary claims, the Great Revelation forced humanity to "reexamine every notion we've ever had about life, the natural world, and even our own existence." The "evil" deeds of the vampires in the show do not differ much from what human beings have been doing to their fellow creatures for millions of years. As such, *True Blood*, both in its vampires who see humans as inferior and in its humans who cannot deal with such a view when they are on the lower step of the food chain, hints at the hypocrisy and violence at the heart of speciesism. As Blayde and Dunn suggest:

> *True Blood* reveals how self-serving and questionable those arguments really are when it shows vampires reasoning along the same lines to justify the slaughter and exploitation of the species *they* regard as inferior—us. *True Blood* lets us see what it would be like to be a member of an exploited species. In so doing, it asks us to reexamine our prejudices about what constitutes the value of a living creature and perhaps reconsider whether our "civic duties" might reach beyond the boundaries of our own species. (46)

For the religious right, this speciesism (supposedly perpetrated by vampires) gives the right to human beings to protect their communities at all costs. In another instance, Newlin defends the validity of hate for higher aims: "He is the force of love. But how do we respond to forces that block, undermine and destroy love. Well, you cannot love evil. You have to hate it. So, hating evil is really, loving good" ("Scratches"). Newlin claims that in the war between the darkness and light, people have to pick sides and that they need hate to survive. The Fellowship of the Sun's fear-mongering discourse and demonization of vampires as evil and immoral (which, ironically, characterizes the more traditional vampires like Dracula) are very familiar discourses for America where marginalized figures have been cast as evil monsters throughout the nation's history. Jackson suggests that

> The concept of evil, which is usually attached to the other, is relative, transforming with shifts in cultural fears and values. Any social structure tends to exclude as "evil" anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction, and this conceptualization, this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture. (52)

Similarly, Frederic Jameson sees the concept of evil as "at one with the category of otherness itself: evil characterizes whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a very real and urgent threat to my

existence" (140). As such, vampires are "evil" because they are different and as an identity category, the vampire has the power to subvert the familiar and the known.

In the second season of the show, the Fellowship organizes a leadership conference at their "the Light of Day Institute," to train people to spread their army for a fee of one thousand two hundred dollars. When Jason decides to join the conference, he sees that behind the façade of the conference, the Fellowship is actually training a para-militia army of spiritual soldiers whom they call "Soldiers of the Sun." Thus, the religious group is preparing for a war against vampires. The discourse for the justification of violence for higher moralistic and religious aims has a familiar ring for the twenty-first century America fighting a spiritual war against Islam. At the institute, Steve uses a familiar sentence from George W. Bush's rhetoric: "The line has been drawn. You are either with us or against us" ("Timebomb"). In a symbolically charged scene, during a role-play activity at the camp, Jason, as a Soldier of the Sun, has to deal with Sarah (Steve's wife), who is pretending to be a vampire. When Sarah does not listen to reason and threatens to eat Jason's loved ones, Jason has no choice but to turn to violent action. In quite a resourceful way, Jason grabs the flag of the United States in the room, breaks the pole on his leg and uses that as a stake to stab Sarah in the heart (Figure 55). The scene is quite symbolic in the usage of the American flag as a weapon to destroy the "other." *True Blood* openly criticizes the nation's use of power and violence against its chosen others, which has an added weight in the post 9/11 era. Another symbolically charged scene is when one of the soldiers from the Institute, in a fit of rage, enters a house full of vampires as a suicide bomber and explodes himself ("Timebomb") (Figure 56). After the suicide attack, on television, Sarah and Steve talk about the events. Sarah says, "We are fighting for God's green earth, and daytime, and Christmas, and Easter eggs and all that is sacred and good. We are fighting for…" And Steve finishes her sentence: "Human rights. HUMAN rights!" ("I Will Rise Up"). The depiction of a fundamentalist Christian as a suicide bomber and the condoning of violence as a necessary fight for "human rights" thus creates a liberal counter-narrative against the fundamentalist right-wing tendencies in post 9/11 America. Dennis Rothermel suggests that the discourse used by the Fellowship of the Sun

> incorporates the deliberate selective violence of anti-abortion extremists, the sanctimoniousness of the anti-gay marriage movements, the xenophobia of the anti-illegal immigrant movements, the para-military zealotry of American football culture

> and the resentfulness underlying the Tea Party's fanatical opposition to health care insurance being extended to all. (96)

Thus, fundamentalist Christian "human beings" are depicted as some of the true monsters in America today. As opposed to this public image of the Fellowship, the public discourse appropriated by the vampires echoes the previous fights for equality from American history and adds a discourse against speciesism. On the AVL website, we find a letter from Nan addressed to the supporters of vampire equality, in which she signs off by explicitly evoking the memory of the civil rights movement with a quote from the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.: "The arc of the universe is long. But it bends toward justice." In the letter, Flanagan states that they are working for "the passage of landmark legislation guaranteeing a basic set of rights for all sentient beings." In her interview on *Real Time with Bill Maher*, Nan says, "We're citizens. We pay taxes. We deserve basic civil rights just like everyone else" and in her *In Focus* interview, she questions the discourses of othering: "Who's to say what's natural? Who's to say that what my body can do is any less natural than what yours can do?" The arguments made by Nan is possible only because most of the vampires, now, in the public sphere at least, have chosen "mainstreaming," a replacement for the word "assimilation." The problem about mainstreaming, however, is that it is essentially a performance—vampires acting like humans. In order to be fully incorporated into the society, vampires *chose* to not to drink human blood. This also entails vampires hiding certain more disturbing facts about themselves from the public eye. In order to be able to integrate into the human society, vampires also perpetuated certain myths about themselves such as their adverse reactions to crucifixes and their inability to be photographed, in order to appear weaker than they really are. This performative and constructed nature of mainstreaming is also emphasized in the show through the fact that, in contrast to everyday vampires, Nan's is a carefully constructed public image that is supposed to be attractive and non-threatening to humans and she carefully sidesteps all the questions that would lead to a threatening portrayal of vampires. In contrast, in her private time, we constantly see Nan in more "Gothic" clothes and also witness her feeding on humans. In the repeated appearances of Nan on television where she carefully tries to maintain the public image and in continuously depicting vampires drinking blood from humans, the show highlights the constructedness of the "official" face of the vampire community.

Furthermore, not all vampires agree with the mainstreaming policy. In the third season, the vampire king of Mississippi, Russell Edgington shatters this benign public image of vampires when he breaks into the studio of a news broadcast and rips off the spine of the anchor on live television. Russell, then, sits in the anchor's chair and delivers his own message to the nation:

> The American Vampire League wishes to perpetrate the notion that we are just like you. And I suppose, in a few small ways, we are. We're narcissists, we care only about getting what we want no matter what the cost, just like you. Global warming, perpetual war, toxic waste, child labor, torture, genocide. That's a small prize to pay for your SUVs and your flat screen TVs, your blood diamonds, your designer jeans, your absurd, garish Mcmansions. Futile symbols of permanence to quail your quivering, spineless souls. But no, in the end, we are NOTHING like you. We are immortal because we drink the true blood. Blood that is living, organic and human. That is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you because, let's face it, eating people is a tough sell these days. So they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA but make no mistake—mine is the true face of vampires! Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals. We will eat you after we eat your children. ("Everything Is Broken") (Figure 57)

Russell's view of human beings as lesser creatures is actually shared by many vampires, just as the Fellowship's views are shared by many human beings. This shattering of the public image of vampires, in the seasons five and six, escalates into a full-blown human-vampire war, which need to be briefly discussed here as it depicts the extreme consequences of a world-view based on "othering."

In season five, the storyline takes us to the vampire Authority headquarters (some sort of vampire government) run by the chancellors and the Guardian (some sort of vampire president). The Authority has been struggling to make coexistence with humans a lasting reality: the Guardian even associates himself with JFK and Martin Luther King Jr. in their efforts for the Civil Rights. However, we learn that there is a faction among vampires, Sanguinistas, whose aim is to stop integration. According to the show's narrative, Sanguinistas believe in "the Original Testament," or the "vampire Bible," which predates both the old and new testaments. According to this original document, before Adam and Eve, God created Lilith, who, like God, was a vampire, leading the Sanguinistas to claim that vampires were created in God's image, not humans. Adam and Eve's true purpose was to create a race that would feed vampires: "And their flesh shall nourish yours, their blood shall flow within you for as the beetle nourishes the lark, so shall human nourish

vampire" ("Authority Always Wins"). This is also evocative of the images of Eve and Ham in the Bible, who have been seen as justifications for the marginalization of women and blacks. We learn that, after his murderous act on television, Russell became a hero for Sanguinistas, the "poster boy with the anti-mainstream movement, their Osama Bin Laden" ("Whatever I Am, You Made Me"). Even though these "terrorist" extremists who believe that humans are just food for vampires are pitched against the Authority and the mainstreamers, it is obvious that the Authority's position is not as clear cut as it seems. To maintain their power over the unruly vampires, the Authority has developed new torture techniques such as exposing the prisoners to UV light and injecting silver into their veins (sunlight kills vampires and silver weakens them). Thus, the indication is that authority figures do not hesitate in hurting "their own kind" when it comes to maintaining the status quo. Moreover, even though the Authority, in the public arena, works for mainstreaming, they also believe in the vampire Bible and Lilith. Early on in the season, in their council meetings, we see the members of the Authority go through an elaborate ritual during which each member tastes a drop of Lilith's blood from a vile which they keep in a glass shelf and to which they bow down to.

In a twist of fate, Steve Newlin, transformed early on to a vampire, becomes the new face of the AVL after Nan Flanagan has been killed. The Authority has hired him because of his connections to the religious right. Steve, as a perfect discourse manipulator, claims that it does not matter if he was a vampire-hater before, all that matters is how one exploits the public discourse to create fear in people:

> People will believe anything they wanna believe. Humans are not rational. They are 100 % motivated by fear. All they want is to feel safe, to know that they're good and right and they're gonna end up in a heaven full of puffy clouds and everybody they ever loved wearing angel wings. So, you tell me what you want them to believe and I'll sell it to them. ("Whatever I Am, You Made Me")

As the season moves on, the Authority changes its face completely. As the chancellors drink Lilith's blood, they start to get high and slaughter humans in their intoxication and religious frenzy since they all see Lilith appearing to them and believe that their actions are sanctioned by God. The Authority, then, starts secretly attacking and destroying the TruBlood factories across the nation in order to force other vampires to feed on humans as well. Steve as the AVL spokesperson, in a television appearance says, "We at the AVL

are working closely with our friends at Homeland Security to find the terrorists who cut off our food supply. But people should not have any fear of leaving their house tonight" ("Gone, Gone, Gone"). This appropriation of the familiar American national discourse suggests that the clear-cut opposition between "us" and "them," between the righteous American and the evil "terrorist" may not be as clear cut as it seems.

Thus, most vampires in *True Blood* are not innocent. In the larger political, public level, the vampire community can be seen as serving a metaphor for the danger of too much power. The actions of the Authority—their trying to keep a benign public face while retaining their belief in a separatist religion, their torturing their own "citizens" to keep the order, their final yielding to the violent ways endorsed by a fundamental religion and their creating a public discourse about some "terrorists" which actually serves to hide their own actions—works as a perfect allegory for an America who has been fighting a "spiritual" war against "terror" in the Middle East and an America who is not afraid to encroach on its citizens' rights in order to keep the nation safe. However, *True Blood* complicates these issues further in its sixth season as the humans organize and retaliate against the vampires.

In the first episode of the sixth season, Louisiana governor Truman organizes an urgent press conference and addresses his citizens:

> I swore an oath. To serve and protect the people of this state. People. Not vampires! I've nothing against vampires as a species. When they made themselves known to us, this office, my family, good people of Louisiana, we welcomed them with all the generosity, acceptance and the Southern hospitality this great state has long been known for. That's why our vampire population is the largest in the country. That's also why this TruBlood shortage has hit us so very hard. Since the terrorist attacks on TruBlood factories last week, 246 human Louisianans lost their lives. When human, tax-paying citizens can no longer walk on their streets at night without fearing for their lives, then we have to take our streets back. As of this moment, I'm instituting a state-wide vampire curfew. All vampires ought to remain indoors or underground after sundown. Furthermore, I'm enforcing executive order 846 of the Louisiana state constitution; we are closing down all vampire-run businesses. … Buy a gun! Buy as many as you can. Stock up on wooden bullets. This is still America, you have the right to defend yourselves and the people you love! ("Who Are You, Really?")

After a vampire among the crowd throws blood on him in protest, the governor adds, "As Andrew Jackson once said, peace, above all things, must be desired. But blood sometimes

be shed to obtain it on equitable and lasting terms." Once again, the national discourse—with reference to one of its greatest presidents—is manipulated and used to create fear among people and make them organize against a common enemy. By now, human beings have manufactured silver bullets that emit UV light and contact lenses that will protect them against the glamoring of vampires and they use them in their war against vampires. The governor also uses a more sinister weapon against vampires; however, as he has become partners with Yakonomo corporation and he lets them use his factory for the manufacturing of TruBlood. He contaminates the synthetic blood with the new disease of HepV that kills vampires. In this world of advanced military and biological weaponry, the culmination point is the governor's vampire prison which also acts as a cover for the research facility that makes all sorts of experiments on vampires (observing their intercourse, making them run in hamster wheels, torturing them, etc) in order to come up with a formula that would "eradicate the vampire race" ("You're No Good") (Figure 58).

As *True Blood*'s larger public narrative gets more and more violent, from the accumulation of images and discourses of othering, the viewers are left with a vision that casts the power discourse itself as monstrous. The roles of the religious and national discourses in creating hate for the sake of maintaining status quo is omnipresent. As things escalate between the two opposite groups, none of the sides are innocent. As such, in its larger narrative, *True Blood* depicts a world where othering and demonizing leads to hate, to violence, to "terrorist" acts and then to more systematic violence through advanced weaponry, through "Nazi" concentration camps and through war. The show, borrowing real life instances from human history and American history, creates an allegorical world in which America, as a nation, ends up fighting a war against a group of people (vampires) who believes in a different prophet. As such, *True Blood*, in its counter-historical allegory, depicts America as monstrous on a larger national level through its depictions of the abuse of power by the authority figures.

True Blood is indeed a crucible in which various discourses of power intermingle and return in monstrous form. The whole diegesis of the show created by a web of images and words gives us a discursive-web of American national identity, in a monstrous form. Television, as in all media, is one of the sites where power produces its very real effects.

Even a show aimed for entertainment like *True Blood*, or *because* it is aimed for entertainment, is a vehicle for discourses of power to circulate in society. Up to this point, the analysis focused on how both human beings and the vampires in the show, through their views and actions against each other, have been used as metaphors in a fluid American Gothic allegory to criticize western humanistic tradition of othering and the contemporary American nationalistic discourse used for the justification of torture and war. From this point on, the analysis will focus on how the show explores the monstrous metaphor of the vampire in fluid ways to expose other discourses of marginalization within American society.

Foucault suggests that, rather than being mere subjects of power, individuals are vehicles of power:

> Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (98)

As such, *True Blood* creates a world in which individual members of American society use, abuse and are subjected to different power discourses of hate and intolerance. Thus, the show uses American history and borrows from different discourses of othering that has been used for different minority groups and blend them into its crucible of monstrous America.

The figure of the vampire can be said to be as old as human civilization itself. However, the figure of vampire-as-monster definitely achieved its full potential with Stoker's Count Dracula, whom Franco Moretti calls the "totalizing monster" (1). Dracula is seen, by numerous scholars, as a sign of multiple figures of others all embodied in one body: he has been said as representing the foreign other (the East European or Jew), the European legacy of aristocracy (as a Count), the monopoly capital (as he hoards his gold rather than spend it), the archaic father (whom the other men in the plot need to kill), perverse

sexuality (both through his femininity, his masculinity and his perverse sexual acts), and animal (as he changes into bats, wolfs). Halberstam also notes that

> Dracula is otherness itself, a distilled version of all others produced by and within fictional texts, sexual science, and psychopathology. He is monster and man, feminine and powerful, parasitical and wealthy; he is repulsive and fascinating, he exerts the consummate gaze but is scrutinized in all things, he lives forever but can be killed. Dracula is indeed not simply a monster but a technology of monstrosity. (88)

However, according to Halberstam, Dracula's otherness is not universal, it is historical and cultural: "The others that Dracula has absorbed and who live on in him take on the historically specific contours of race, class, gender, and sexuality. They are the other side of a national identity that, in the 1890s, coincided with a hegemonic ideal of bourgeois Victorian womanhood" (89). Nina Auerbach similarly suggests that Dracula is obsessed with hierarchies: "*Dracula* is in love less with death or sexuality than with hierarchies, erecting barriers hitherto foreign to vampire literature; the gulf between male and female, antiquity and newness, class and class, England and non-England, vampire and mortal, homoerotic and heterosexual love, infuses its genre with a new fear: fear of the hated unknown" (66-67).

Moreover, for Auerbach Dracula's monstrous nature, especially in the American context, comes from his association with "an evil antiquity" (65). She claims that "In the United States especially, Dracula has been one constant in the volatile twentieth century. … Dracula stands apart, an alternative to mass society, a cultivated remnant of a stately past our country never had, a forbidden lover in times that claim to forbid nothing, the king Americans are not supposed to want" (67). It has been noted before that in the twentieth century, vampires in fiction, in film and in television, have been continuously depicted from a more sympathetic point of view. Stripped from their association with evil, vampires have mostly become gothic anti-heroes who are struggling existentially and who are attractive and seductive for women. It is true that *True Blood* also exploits this vampire-as-dark-hero trope in its narrative but the show also plays with the monstrous others incorporated within Dracula and adds a few American-specific othering categories to the mix in its depiction of vampires as marginalized creatures.

On one level, *True Blood* uses the associations of vampires with a feudal and aristocratic past and combines it with a Southern Gothic white supremacist past of the Old South's plantation culture in its depictions of the hierarchies within the vampire society and of certain vampires. In the show, the vampire political system is feudal in nature. Every state has a king or queen who rules with absolute authority on the state's vampire population. States are also divided into areas, once called fiefdoms, which are ruled by sheriffs who have to pay allegiance to their vampire monarchs. Sheriffs, kings and queens rule over certain territories with clear boundaries and they can be very territorial. They also expect to be informed of all vampire activity in the area. Another important official is the magister, a judge who presides over a vampire tribunal that tries vampires and decides on their punishment for breaking "ancient vampire laws." Vampire culture revolves around "courtesy and custom," according to Bill, even when vampires are the only ones present. His invokes the decorum of chivalry and courtship that characterized the Old South. Because they "have to live together for centuries," the rules and traditions help maintain a sense of structure, keeping the vampire world secure and familiar even as the outside world changes. All this hierarchical feudal structure is, of course, kept secret from humans, especially in America where "democracy" is valued above all else. Thus, AVL serves as the "official" public face of vampires in America, created by the Authority, which is also a uniquely American government created for vampires in order to make integration possible. As such, the kings and queens and sheriffs in the show usually resent having to play by the Authority's rules. This can be seen as invoking the resentment and hatred felt by the Old South's plantation aristocrats against the Union.

The queen of Louisiana, Sophie Anne, who can also be seen as a grotesque symbol of the plantation mistress, lives in a big mansion in which she has created her own "day room" with a pool in the middle and big windows creating the illusion that it is daytime outside (vampires cannot go out in the sun) (Figure 59). Sophie Anne's wealth is dwindling, however, and she secretly deals vampire blood to earn more money. The king of Mississippi, the plantation master, Russell Edgington (who kills the anchorman on television), wants to add Louisiana into his kingdom and forces Sophie Anne to marry him, blackmailing her with reporting her to the Magister. As the two kingdoms unite through marriage (which was quite common during feudal past), the viewers get a chance

to see Russell's Mississippi mansion which is a portrayal of enormous wealth and aristocratic culture. In the episode "Beautifully Broken," Bill is a guest in the mansion and during dinner, the hosts of the house serve a special kind of blood: "Chilled, carbonated blood. It's cruelty free. All willingly donated. Note the citrusy finish. This one ate only tangerines for weeks." This is a house where people wear tuxedos for dinner and where the master quotes Shakespeare, plays a gramophone and smokes cigars (Figure 60). Along with the visual markers of wealth, aristocracy and high culture in the South goes Russell's views about lesser humans and the Authority. Russell says "If all the supernaturals would stop squabbling among themselves and unite, we would conquer humans in matter of days." He has actually been destroying humans in power for centuries, "hoping to make a dent in mankind's race oblivion." Russell sees humans as lesser creatures because they are destroying their own habitat, something no other creature on earth has done. Finally, he adds, "Pretty little fool he was, Adolf was right about one thing. There is a master race. It's just not the human race" ("I Got A Right To Sing The Blues"). Thus, Russell's wealth and status and his racist views mark him as a Southern aristocrat who claims to belong to a "higher culture" in contrast to the lower culture of the baser beings like humans—that is, slaves. Russell also despises the Authority: in the episode "Hitting the Ground" he murders the Magister, who is secretly doing the bidding of the Authority: "The Authority? Are you serious? Who are the Authority? What gave them the authority? Nothing! No one! They took it. As I am taking it today. I no longer recognize the Authority!" As he puts the Magister in chains, he adds, "You pathetic fool! Blindly doing the bidding of others. Just like humans! It's vampires like you who've been holding the rest of us back for centuries!" In Russell's resistance to let go of his own authority to a structure working for mainstreaming, we can actually see the old aristocratic Southern past resisting Reconstruction and the new tenets of multicultural democracies.

In addition to doing the Authority's bidding, however, the Magister and his court, as stated before, also uphold and protect ancient vampire laws. In the episode "I Don't Wanna Know" the viewers get a chance to see the Magister's court. The secret vampire court takes place in the urban decay environment of a dumpster with the Magister ruling from his "throne" on an old car. Bill is brought in front of the Magister because he killed a vampire in order to protect Sookie (a human) and the Magister says: "You murdered a

higher life form for the sake of your pet." The Magister uses humanism's vision of animals for human beings as he claims that "humans exist to serve us" and that "humans are quite primitive. They are incapable of feeling pain as we do." As punishment, Bill is forced to turn a human being, Jessica, who is a scared and innocent teenage girl, into a vampire in front of a cheering group of vampires (Figure 61). Through this scene, the show blends the world of the Inquisition courts (with their witch burnings) with the twentieth-century Goth scene of more urban vampires like the ones depicted in movies like *Lost Boys* (1987).

The play with the "Goth" style also serves as a gateway for the show's association of the vampires with homosexuals in America. Much has been said about the role of the vampire's deviant sexuality in its status as "other." Halberstam suggests that "Parasitism, especially with regards to the vampire, represents a bad or pathological sexuality, non-reproductive sexuality, a sexuality that exhausts and wastes and exists prior to and outside of the marriage contract" (16-17). Ellis Hanson also points to the fact that throughout western history, gay men have always been stigmatized as vampiric; "as sexually exotic, alien, unnatural, oral, anal, compulsive, violent, protean, polymorphic, polyvocal, polysemous, invisible, soulless, transient, superhumanly mobile, infectious, murderous, suicidal, and a threat to wife, children, home and phallus" (325). This association of homosexuality and the vampire especially acquired an additional special meaning during the 1980s with the AIDS epidemic through the metaphors of blood, sex and death and through the false association of AIDS as a "gay disease."

True Blood also makes use of the gay rights movement's discourse, the discourse of the demonization of homosexuals in America and the South and the gay jargon in its exploration of the vampire metaphor. The show's creator Alan Ball, who is a gay Southerner, claimed that "Vampires are total sexual metaphors, there's just no way around that. And the fact that it all takes place in this wet, humid, swampy, primeval madness, of course you're going to go there" (Itzkoff). The opening titles of the show includes a visual reference to a neon church billboard with the slogan "God hates fangs" emblazoned upon in, which echoes the slogan "God hates fags" of the bigot Baptist pastor Fred Phelps used in his anti-gay propaganda.[11] This pun in the title sequence seems to be

a critique of the tensions surrounding the assimilation of gay men and lesbians into the heteronormative culture of America. Indeed, many references in the show associate the experience of vampires with gays. As vampires "come out of the coffin," they have to hide their true identity (mainstreaming) in order to live alongside humans. Also in the show, it is hinted that the way vampires have sex is "not natural." In the show's metaphorical playing field, the metaphor of bloodsucking and the vampire's unnatural sexuality are played together to represent homosexuality. Vampires are encouraged to mainstream, to conform, deny drinking of human blood in favor of TruBlood. Thus, the assimilation of the homosexual (vampire) into mainstream culture demands abstinence from transgressive sexuality.

Another way the show plays with these associations is through its depiction of the commodified Goth vampire style as a performative identity for the vampires. Much like the performative stylizations of homosexuals, vampires are now thought of in certain costumes, in certain houses and places and under certain names. That is why Sookie Stackhouse cannot help but laugh out loud when she learns that the name of the vampire she saves in the first episode is "Bill:" "I thought it might be Antoine or Basel or like Langford maybe but Bill? Vampire Bill!" This comes out most significantly through the urban-Goth space of the vampire bar in Shreveport, Fangtasia. The reference to gay bars is obvious, strengthened with the use of the word "fang" and the word "fantasia." Fangtasia is a theme party venue that attracts human customers who wish to experience the thrill of vampire culture, which echoes the appeal of the gay nightclubs to straight clients. As Goths come to interact with Gothic looking vampires, the show tells us that in American culture, difference is either discriminated against or commodified through style and fashion. With its hot pink and black color scheme and its clients dressed up in goth-style, Fangtasia refers to the fact that the vampire image is also a consumable identity, offered up to human clients as performance so that they can, to quote hooks again, "eat up the other." The commodification of the other becomes more visible when we see that the bar's owner, Eric, who is also the sheriff of area five, sits in a throne in the middle of the bar to exhibit his exotic vampire identity for his clients. Fangtasia even has a gift shop where humans can buy t-shirts and mugs and other merchandise related to the bar. As the human tourists and "fangbangers" (people who actually participate in vampire sex

without becoming vampires themselves) come to Fangtasia for the vampire experience, this can be seen as the heteronormative culture's fascination with the homosexual sex and style: these people only play at being vampires for a limited period of time before they go back to their "normal" lives. When Sookie first enters the bar and hears people's thoughts, she says "All anyone's thinking here is sex, sex, sex" ("Escape From Dragon House"). At the end of the episode, Fangtasia is raided by the police, which is meant to resemble similar raids on gay bars in the 1960s. Another humorous instance occurs when the camera shows us the bartender and we see a painting in the background depicting George W. Bush as a vampire, sucking blood out of the neck of the Statue of Liberty (Figure 62). Thus, the show, in its association with the vampire's style and the camp style of homosexuality, points to the performative nature of the vampire's "queerness."

If Eric can be seen as one of the metaphors for the queer vampire identity, his foil, in this sense is the African American short order cook Lafayette, who works at Merlotte's. Lafayette is a flamboyant gay man who likes to wear make-up and flashy clothes. While Eric owns a bar, Lafayette cooks at a bar and while Eric displays himself in his bar, Lafayette displays himself on the internet (to earn money). Lafayette is a character that complicates the issues of sexuality and race in *True Blood*. It is quite remarkable that an individual like Lafayette can survive in the prejudiced environment of Bon Temps. Lafayette can be said to be one of the most positive and in-depth portrayals of African Americans in an American television show (ironically in a "fantastical" show). As a big presence from the beginning, Lafayette is a "dealer" in every sense of the term: he works in road crew, as a short order cook, and deals drugs alongside many other side jobs. However, Lafayette is quite different from other African American drug dealers on television. From the beginning, his economic status is emphasized and we understand that he is doing all these jobs to survive. He claims: "I've got three part-time jobs and I still can't get health insurance!" ("Nothing But The Blood"). Lafayette constantly characterizes himself as a survivor. In "Keep This Party Going," he says, "I'm a survivor first, a capitalist second and a whole bunch of other shit after that but a hooker, dead last!" As an individual marked by two distinct identity categories of marginalization, Lafayette is also very strong and stands up for himself: in "Sparks Fly Out," when three redneck customers refuse to eat the burgers Lafayette cooks at the bar because they are "AIDS

burgers," Lafayette goes up to the front, confronts the rednecks and kicks them out of the bar. Lafayette also has a healthy and intimate relationship with another gay Hispanic man, Jesus, and it is revealed that the two characters are also brujos (witches), which creates, once again, a couple marked by multiple signs of difference as gays, as a mixed couple and as supernaturals (Figure 63). It is not so surprising that, as a gay liberal, one of the most sympathetic and complex characters created by Alan Ball is Lafayette. Indeed, in the books, the character of Lafayette dies at the end of the first book, but Ball extends his storyline into the rest of the show and makes him one of the main characters.

Ball does not only use Lafayette's character to celebrate difference, however, but also explores the indications of such an African American character located in the Deep South. One symbolically charged scene occurs in the beginning of the second season, in the episode "Nothing But The Blood," when Lafayette is kidnapped by Eric because he was dealing vampire blood. Lafayette is kept in Eric's basement with other prisoners who are all chained to a big wheel on the ceiling and the characters are seen to turn the wheel to change their positions in order to reach the bucket that serves as their toilet. During this scene, the extreme close-ups Lafayette in chains, forced to turn the wheel with a desperate look in his face clearly echoes the experience of the slave ships and refers to the experience of African American bodies who led their lives in bondage in the South. As such, Ball explores the issue of race in the American South through the dark body of Lafayette (Figure 64).

Another important African American character in the show is Tara, a young woman who is also Sookie's best friend and foil. Tara is a perfect example for the place of African Americans in postracial America. She can be seen as Sookie's foil because as Sookie defends tolerance and understanding of difference—because she is different herself—Tara is cautious about vampires, is prejudiced against them and advises Sookie to stay away. It is quite ironic that, as a marginalized individual herself, Tara struggles to find tolerance in her heart for others. When she warns Sookie and says "You know they can hypnotize you!" Sookie reveals Tara's hypocritical prejudice: "Yeah. Black people are lazy and Jews have horns" ("The First Taste"). Tara is actually a sign of postracial America in her paradoxical status. Ironically named after the plantation in *Gone With the*

Wind, Tara often uses the race card, as a reminder of Southern racism, sarcastically and to get what she wants from other people. She is usually aggressive, confrontational, and rebellious in her dealings with people (can be seen another articulation of the angry black woman stereotype), which leads her boss Sam to ask her to remind him why he hired her in the first place. Tara answers, "You hired me because of affirmative action" ("The First Taste"). In another instance, when she lies for Jason to save him from prison, she says that they are a couple and they have been keeping it a secret. When the Sheriff asks why they did that, Tara, once again uses the race card: "People think just cause we got vampires out in the open now race ain't an issue no more. But have you seen how white folks look at mixed couples in this town? Race may not be the hot button issue it once was but it's still a button you can push on people" ("Escape From Dragon House"). Tara is both a sign and a critique of postracial America in her simultaneous exploitation and criticism of racism in the South. Tara's seemingly out-of-place reference to the fear of miscegenation is completed further in the show through the depiction of vampire-human couples.

As almost a natural consequence of the show's Deep South setting, the discourse of speciesism in the show is constantly collapsed into the familiar discourses of racism in the South. Especially in the first season of the show, human characters are shown to be both disgusted and amazed by the idea of vampire-human sex. From the first episode, the anxieties over vampire sex is revealed when Jason talks to a woman he is having sex with and learns that she regularly has sex with vampires. Jason is both disturbed and fascinated by the idea and he says he read in Hustler that everybody should have sex with a vampire at least once. Throughout the season, the white woman characters who have sex with vampires are killed one by one, which increases the anxieties in the society about white women having sex with "monsters." At the end of the season, it is revealed that the murders were committed by a human who hates vampires (and women for that matter). This discourse of repulsion and fear of forbidden sex with monsters and the simultaneous hypersexualization of the vampire figure echoes the past fears of miscegenation with its discourse of African American "beasts" threatening white womanhood and the accompanying hypersexualization of African American men. It is no coincidence,

therefore, that in the first season, all the murdered victims who previously had sex with vampires are white women.

The show also invokes the fear of miscegenation in the Deep South setting in its first episode when Bill comes to Merlotte's to visit Sookie. The two are irresistibly drawn to each other and as Sookie walks toward Bill's table and meets him, the camera changes its position and starts to canvas the bar from where Bill and Sookie are sitting. As the camera does a full circle, it is revealed that every single individual in the bar—who are all recognizably lower-class whites, except, ironically, Tara—is staring at the mixed couple with disapproval and disdain (Figure 65). When the show's Deep South setting is taken into account, the scene invokes the tensions around "mixed couples," which was, and maybe still is, prominent in the region.

In fact, an argument can be made that the show's whole discourse about speciesism, hate and intolerance evokes most strongly the discourse surrounding "race" in America in general and in the South in particular. It has been suggested before in this study that, especially in America, the discourse of "othering" have been most prominent in constructing racial categories and also in demonizing those racial identities as monstrous. In a show like *True Blood*, where there are frequent references to the Civil Rights Movement's discourse and leaders, it comes with the territory (literally) that the discourse of speciesism almost always echoes or blends into the discourse of racism. *True Blood*'s small Louisiana town is a place where hate crimes are a fact of everyday life. Moreover, in season five, we witness an anti-supe gang of masked thugs who model themselves after Ku Klux Klan and whose leader goes by the name Dragon. This group, Keep America Human, also has a website (in actual world) where they have their "Human Patriot Manifesto," in which they claim: "Vampires and other covert mutants are stealing our jobs, buying our politicians, controlling the media, and seducing our children. If we have any chance of keeping America human, brave citizens like us have got to stand up and fight back."[12] Thus, the group uses anti-immigration, anti-homosexual and racist discourses from the history of America in order to legitimate the eradication of the vampire "race." Most ironically, this hate group includes an African American member and in their attacks, instead of Klan-like hoods, these thugs wear Obama masks (Figure

66). The choice of Obama masks is quite provocative for the show; even though Obama *is* the President of U.S., he is, after all, black. Thus in typical *True Blood* fashion, the discourse of hate and racism is projected unto the "supposedly" postracial America of tolerance and diversity.

There are many other instances in the show when we witness the blending of the speciesism discourse with race. As humans, especially fundamentalist Christians fear and other the vampire "race," so do vampires usually see humans as the inferior "race." In "Escape From Dragon House," Sam claims that, "Humans shouldn't go to vampire bars" and Sookie asks him, "You want to return to the days of separate but equal?" Sam's answer is quite matter-of-fact: "We cannot be equal. We need to be separate." In probably the most sarcastic and humorous instance where speciesism and racism collide, Arlene's son, upon seeing Bill, turns to his mother and says, "Momma, he is so white!" Arlene's answer is: "No darling. We are white. He is dead" ("Sparks Fly Out"). This two-sentence dialogue sums up the show's double discourse; while speciesism invokes racism, racism is also still very much in existence in America.

As a result, what sets apart *True Blood* from any other "vampire show" on television is its intentional incorporation of the political and cultural issues of American past and present while, at the same time, retaining a distanced humorous perspective. *True Blood* displaces the issues of racial and sexual difference in America and discourses surrounding these issues onto its vampires (and sometimes onto other supernaturals). This makes the show a more subversive text than most of the seemingly "realistic" shows on American television today. The fact that a show like *True Blood* can so easily invoke and explore the discourses of difference is evidence for the subversive potential of fantasy and the Gothic.

According to Jackson, modern fantasy is not about inventing a totally strange non-human world but about "inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* 'new,' absolutely 'other' and different" (8). As fantasy transforms this world into something "strange," it represents our own world back to us as "re-placed and dis-located" (19). This

dislocation, which can also be found in *True Blood*'s "strange" universe of the Deep South, defies unity and closure, and opens up a space for silenced "other" meanings to be explored. Fantasy "introduces multiple, contradictory 'truths': it becomes polysemic" (23). According to Jackson, in this polysemy and in its bringing back the silenced "others," fantasy is opposed to institutional order and throws back on to the dominant culture what it seeks to abject: "Un-doing those unifying structures and significations upon which social order depends, fantasy functions to subvert and undermine cultural stability" (69). *True Blood*, in its fantastical "transformation" of discourses centering on difference from American national, political and cultural life into a discourse of species difference, reveals how despising the Other is actually a function of building identity. Whether it is homosexuals, blacks, Muslims or vampires, the American identity needs its "others."

In the polysemic, postmodern hyperdiegesis of *True Blood*, simple formulas do not work. In the show's allegorical American Gothic landscape, it is difficult to pinpoint which identity category is actually being demonized. What the show does, rather, is, in tune with its creator Ball's liberal tendencies, to use its monstrous creatures and humans to *expose how othering, demonization and fear works* by exploring its mechanisms as manifested in different discourses and instances in American history. The argument of this study is, regardless of Ball's insistence on the show being about "entertainment," *True Blood* is the most subversive show analyzed in the scope of this study in its often humorous and sometimes monstrous play with the subversive potential of the gothic/fantasy mode. As a result, what is revealed as monstrous in the show is "othering" itself and America's obsession with that practice.

ENDNOTES

[1] A total of 6.3 million viewers watched the fifth season premiere of *True Blood*. According to Nielsen ratings, the show attracts a steady average of 5 million viewers per episode. In addition to viewer ratings, HBO earns a considerable amount of money from the show's DVD and Blu-Ray sales. Season 1 DVD sold a total of $26 million in its first 2 weeks. Moreover, HBO syndicates the show to other networks around the world and is said to earn $800,000 out of the syndication of one single episode. *True* Blood turned out to be HBO's most lucrative show after *The Sopranos.* More information on the show's ratings can be obtained from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/True_Blood#U.S._Nielsen_ratings. To learn about the show's sales numbers, read Jacob Klein's article "Why True Blood Won't Be Canceled Anytime Soon" http://hbowatch.com/why-true-blood-wont-be-canceled-any-time-soon/.

[2] In a 2011 interview with Matt Barone on the Complex Pop Culture website, Alan Ball stated that, "You can say that *True Blood* is a metaphor for this, or it's a metaphor for that, but ultimately the show is just entertainment." For the full interview: http://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2011/06/interview-alan-ball-true-blood.

[3] In Greek mythology, **maenads** were the female followers of Dionysus (Bacchus in the Roman pantheon), the most significant members of the Thiasus, the god's retinue. Their name literally translates as "raving ones". Often the maenads were portrayed as inspired by him into a state of ecstatic frenzy, through a combination of dancing and drunken intoxication. In this state, they would lose all self-control, begin shouting excitedly, engage in uncontrolled sexual behavior, and ritualistically hunt down and tear to pieces animals—and, at least in myth, sometimes men and children—devouring the raw flesh.

[4] On several occasions, the show has been labeled as "the sexiest" or "the most violent" by its viewers on the internet. While the conservative audience prefers not to view the show because of this, the more young audience of the show celebrate this open portrayal of taboo acts. One example of the show's more controversial scenes is the vampire sex scene between Bill and Lorena in Season 3, Episode 3 "It Hurts Me Too." Some examples of the different views on the sexuality and violence in the show:
http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/ustv/s59/true-blood/tubetalk/a352072/true-blood-named-sexiest-tv-show-ever-top-10-poll-results-in-full.html
http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/130459-vampire-misogyny-violence-in-true-blood/.

[5] Quoted in; http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003690493.

[6] Most of the footage was shot on location. In editing, individual frames were splattered with drops of blood. Transitions were created through a Polaroid transfer technique to create different effects. Eight different typefaces were used in the credits, most of them inspired by Southern road signage. For more information on the title sequence, http://www.redorbit.com/news/entertainment/1550089/doing_baptisms_bars_and_bloodlust/.

[7] Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEiSK-ILwxk.

[8] Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVCoKJ4mkeQ.

[9] Also available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSBCViiyy1I.

[10] Some vampire shows in the history of American television are; *Forever Knight, Kindred: The Embraced, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Moonlight, Blood Ties, Being Human, Vampire Diaries,* and *The Gates.*

[11] Gay rights supporters have denounced Phelps as a producer of anti-gay propaganda and violence-inspiring hate speech. Phelps's church, the Westboro Baptist Church, is considered a hate group and monitored by the Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center.

[12] Can be reached on www.keepamericahuman.com

CONCLUSION

This study, in its introduction, has explored the current cultural/national discourse in America regarding the claims that America has entered an era of "posts": Especially perpetuated by the media and the right-wing conservative political scene, the discourse of "posts" claim that, beginning with the late 1980s, America has entered a postfeminist, post-gay rights, postracial and post-multicultural phase. Seen from the more liberal perspective, however, this claim seems like a mere backlash against the gains for diversity and equal rights achieved through the Civil Rights struggles during the 1960s and 1970s. According to most liberal scholars, these claims cannot be further from the truth and the tensions surrounding the notion of difference in America are still very much in place today. Coupled with the anxiety over the definition of American national identity, especially after 9/11, these discourses can be seen as evidence for the fact that any identity discourse works on an axis of sameness and difference. Thus, the question of diversity in American society, just by the pure fact that it has created so much tension and debate, proves that, like individual identities, cultural and national identities also strengthen themselves through a process of "othering": through locating and demonizing difference in order to strengthen unity. As such, the cultural identity discourse in America can be seen as akin to the Gothic mode's narratives of monstrified "others" who need to be constructed and then abjected in order to maintain order.

The argument of this study is that one of the best ways to locate and analyze a culture's chosen marginalized identities at a specific point of history is to look at the Gothic representations of that time. However, as the Gothic, as a mode, can be said to have infiltrated into every field of cultural production, for a focused and in-depth analysis, the scope of any study of the Gothic must be clearly delineated. This study has focused on three television shows from the twenty first century American television in its analysis of contemporary American Southern Gothic. There are two basic reasons for this choice: Firstly, as cultural meanings travel in a complex web of relations, the more popular the medium the more impact it will have on the culture (and also the most the culture would have influenced the medium). Secondly, the choice of the most contemporary television shows will hopefully, in the future, help to paint a picture of America of the historical moment, which is also contemporary with the writing of this dissertation.

According to Mary Kilgour, the Gothic should be seen as a viable form of cultural analysis because it provides a strong model for criticism in its explorations of the relationship between literature and life. Her analogy between criticism and the Gothic is what this study aims to achieve:

> Critics are like gothic detectives as we try to free ourselves from the mysteries of ideology through reading, which enables us to criticize cultural motives and impulses. Like the gothic and psychoanalysis, criticism today is conceived of as a way of revealing the hidden, making the uncanny canny, freeing ourselves from the past through detachment and objectivity. The analogy also feeds into contemporary criticism's concern with its social relevance and political engagement. (50)

Views like Kilgour's inform the current analysis of the Gothic as a mode within literature and culture. This more contemporary appreciation of the Gothic as a viable tool for cultural and literary analysis is in stark contrast with the views about the Gothic in the past, which have usually denigrated the Gothic as an escapist genre which is out of touch with "real" life because of its excesses and monstrous forms. Currently, those excesses and monsters are seen as the *reason* the Gothic can be so relevant for a critique of culture and ideology since they actually express and reveal the basic mechanisms of othering that ideologically strive to maintain the order and status quo within a society, more than any other "realistic" mode. Louis Gross suggests that "[w]hile the more culturally 'safe' genres could restrict authentic minority discourse, a view of American society that confronts life as based on fear and repression finds room for elaboration in the Gothic genre" (65). One reason the Gothic mode can probe into real anxieties is its non-realistic nature. The Gothic, with its fascination with the points of transition between daily life and its nightmarish reflection, permits the writer and the reader to see the things hidden by more mainstream and more critically respected modes of writing like realism. As such, it is the fantastical, the supernatural, the horrific and the monstrous that give the Gothic its subversive potential.

In order to reveal that potential, the Gothic should be read symbolically, and as Fiedler claims, its machinery and landscape should be "translated into metaphors for a terror psychological, social and metaphysical" (28). However, such a reading of the Gothic as symbolic should never rely on easy and fixed formulas. Symbolism in Gothic is always fluid and polysemic; rather than employing fixed symbols, the Gothic creates a symbolic

territory and space for a culture's abjected fears and anxieties to flow into. This is what Eric Savoy also means when he claims that the American Gothic strains toward "allegorical translucency" where "the actual is imbued with the darkly hypothetical, a discursive field of return and reiteration." For Savoy, allegory and its "refusal of transparency" creates an ambiguous and polysemic space for American Gothic's narrativization of otherness (6). The Gothic monsters, symbolically read, become displaced and distorted versions of cultural and social anxieties and should be seen as coded expressions of those anxieties. In their excessive narratives and monsters, the Gothic hints at the "other" stories that can be told about national and cultural histories.

The "other" stories about America have most often been told through the lens of Southern Gothic. First appearing in the works of southern writers during the 1920s and 30s, Southern Gothic has flourished over the years and has become the dominant form of Gothic production in America. As Crow suggests, the term "Southern Gothic" became so common in the twentieth century that "each word came to evoke the other" (134). The television shows discussed in this study are informed by the tropes and themes of traditional Southern Gothic but also transform those tropes to fit the specific anxieties and categories of othering in the South and in America today. Southern Gothic has always been much more than a regional form. In its focus on sins of slavery and the patriarchal plantation culture of the South, Southern Gothic has served as a larger allegory for the sins of the nation based on economic exploitation, racism and sexism. The South as a society that is obsessed with drawing boundaries and with practices of "othering" based on race, gender and sexuality, has always been a ready Gothic territory for the criticism of the exclusions in America. Southern Gothic has mostly veered toward realism in order to achieve its social critique of the Old South and its depictions of economic and cultural devastation of the New South. This economic and cultural rupture that transformed the South and that has been the starting point of Southern Gothic still informs its contemporary texts. Southern Gothic, especially in its female writers, has also seen a more liberating exploration of the grotesque as a figure of difference and marginalization, from whose point of view it achieves a critique of mainstream society in the South.

The television shows discussed in this study, through the different monsters they portray and the different ranges of "genres" they bring into a hybridization with Southern Gothic, prove this study's claims made about the Gothic mode so far. If the monster, like Cohen

suggests, is an "abjected fragment" that enables "the formation of all kinds of identities" (19), the monsters that have been analyzed so far reveal the current identity discourse in America. As such, in *True Detective*, in the monstrified stereotype of white trash, it is revealed that America is a capitalistic and middle-class culture which needs to abject the poor to strengthen the status quo. Furthermore, the way that the white trash is depicted as tainted and the way that the condition of being white trash is usually portrayed as an innate quality, it becomes obvious that this class-based identity is collapsed into a discourse of racialization and naturalization, which gets in the way of any real social critique and solution that would help change the life conditions of the poor in America. *True Detective*, as a more traditional Southern Noir/Gothic text, is informed by writers like Faulkner and Caldwell and continues to explore the intricate relationship between the sins of the Old South and the grotesqueries of contemporary South. In *AHS: Coven*, Southern Gothic blends with horror in the exploration of gender and racial oppressions in the South. In the show's new fantasy gender regime, the structures of power that were characteristic of the Old Southern patriarchal culture are perpetrated by the show's matriarchs. The show employs the horror trope of the monstrous feminine in its depictions of witches and creates a clear generation gap among women in America and the South where the "sins of the mothers" haunt and destroy the younger generation. In its younger generation of witches, the show is informed by postfeminist and postracial discourses in America and creates another exclusionary society mostly based on youth and whiteness. As such, *Coven* casts older women associated with the sinful Southern past as its chosen "others" while at the same time revealing the ongoing sins in postracial South which work through exclusion. As such, *AHS Coven* is a perfect postfeminist and postracial Southern Gothic text in its preoccupations with gender and racial identities in the South and in its ambivalent approach to such issues which combines feminism and sexism and racism and postracial discourse. In *True Blood*, the excessive monstrosities create a polysemic playground which reveals the identity discourses in America themselves as monstrous. The show, rather than creating singular monstrified identities through individual monsters, constructs a universe where monstrosity is the norm and disperses the discourse and images of difference onto its various monsters, including the human beings. Therefore, *True Blood* debunks the myths of "posts" in its revelation that American society is obsessed with locating and demonizing difference in "others." The show's

Southern Gothic sensibility works perfectly with its hybridity through fantasy in exploring desire and fear for the other. As a result, all the shows in this study reveal, as Cohen suggests, the "partiality" and "contiguity" of American identity through their monsters (20) in their different manifestations of Southern Gothic's underscoring of "others."

As contemporary Southern Gothic texts, these shows demonstrate all the different types of Southern Gothic production in America today. *True Detective* chooses a traditional realistic Southern Gothic narrative necessary for its detective story which is aimed at singling out and punishing the evil in Southern society. The show's middle class sensibility should also be seen as a reason for its tendencies toward realism. *AHS: Coven* and *True Blood* are examples of more recent supernatural Southern Gothic. As *Coven* blends the figure of the witch with the mode, *True Blood* reaches the utmost potential of supernatural Southern Gothic through its multiple monstrosities.

The Gothic, as a popular mode, is also a boundary breaker which transgresses the borders between distinct genres, formats and modes. Kilgour calls this "the promiscuous generic cross-breeding" of the Gothic, and sees this postmodern quality as a source of the Gothic's subversion of stable norms and its deconstruction of binary oppositions (41). The Gothic has shown a preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse from its beginnings and has been seen as an already hybridized mode. The generically impure, mutable and pliable Gothic is seen today more as a mode rather than a fixed genre. The notion that the Gothic, as a mode, infiltrates various other discourses and genres also becomes evident in this study. As such, the three shows explored all bring Southern Gothic into different hybridizations. *True Detective* mixes the Gothic with the detective story and employs a more traditional Gothic terror narrative through which monsters are diagnosed and pathologized as monstrous. *AHS Coven* is a representative of the horror mode within the Gothic through its open portrayals of violence and bodily harm. Finally, *True Blood*, probably the most hybridized of all three, marries the Gothic with fantasy and also carries within its narrative the tenets of the paranormal romance, the detective story, the soap opera and many other genres in television. As a result, these shows demonstrate the infinite possibilities of Gothic hybridization.

One of the biggest questions within Gothic Studies today is whether the Gothic form serves a reactionary or a subversive purpose. Some scholars of the Gothic point to its "cathartic" function on the readers/viewers as the mode helps people to vicariously experience the repressed and the abjected only to, in the end, kill the monster and return to order. In its revealing of the monsters constructed by a society, however, the Gothic mode also reveals the mechanisms of othering in that society and contains a subversive potential. As a result of the analysis of the three television shows here, it would not be wrong to claim that the question of subversion within Southern Gothic seems to be related to the issues of supernaturalism and hybridity. Seen from this light, it appears that the more the narrative retains a proximity to the realistic mode, the more it appears as a moralistic and reactionary tale. *True Detective*, in its employment of the more traditional realistic Southern Gothic, in its combination of Southern Gothic discourse and the more "realistic" detective story, appears as the most conventionally reactionary Gothic tale of all. In order to reveal the subversive potential within *True Detective*, it becomes necessary to read the story "against its grain" and deconstruct the ideological perspective of the camera and the narrative. Thus, *True Detective* seems to advocate for a redefinition of boundaries; not only the boundaries between the underclass and the middle class in the South, but also those between the higher literary Southern Gothic and the lower horror. *AHS Coven*, in its appropriation of horror (and the mode's excessive transgressions of boundaries) and in its supernatural figures, seems to occupy an ambiguous middle ground. While there are many subversive moments within the show that force us to question the claims of postfeminism and the postracial era, and while the show constantly criticizes the South's racist and sexist past, the narrative also makes many reactionary moves in its demonization of older women and in its association of excessive sexual and social power with the monstrous. Finally, *True Blood* is the most subversive of the three shows because it is the most excessive and the most polysemic; being the most fantastical and the most monstrous. The show constructs its own liberal critique of America but never in a formulaic manner. In order to recognize the subversive discourse within the show, the viewer needs to see beneath the "entertainment" and the romance and recognize the discourses and images of difference and diversity floating in the polysemic Southern Gothic space. Therefore, it can be suggested that the intensions of the Southern Gothic narrative can be reactionary, subversive, or both and that the more subversive the

intensions, the more the text makes use of the symbolic supernatural. However, as stated before, if the critic's job is to "reveal" and "deconstruct" a text to unearth the ideological work within that text, the question of intention on the production end does not make any difference. *True Detective* reveals as much about American culture as does *True Blood*. It is the *reading* of the Gothic that makes it subversive in the end.

An additional point that needs to be made at this point is that, in its Southern manifestations, the Gothic mode, as Edwards suggests, is "intimately tied to the history of racial conflict in the United States" (xvii). America, ever since its phase of nation-building, has used the category of "race" as a mechanism of othering and through the discourses of degeneration and atavism, constructed its racial others as inferiors, as monsters. Moreover, Southern Gothic, as the dominant mode of Gothic in America, has always dealt with issues of racism, slavery, discrimination and segregation coming from the region's "dark" history. This obsession with race can also be seen in all three television shows analyzed in this study. In *True Detective*, this becomes apparent through the mechanics of racialization and naturalization used to create the white trash stereotype. Such racialized others, as Eugenia DeLamotte claims, is a necessary part of the construction of the identity of whiteness in America and through their racialization, such figures also reveal the other side of this discourse: "the fear that there is no such thing as whiteness, or even race" (17). In exploring Southern Gothic's preoccupation with dark others, *True Detective* demonstrates how the identity category of white trash takes the place of uncivilized black in the South. In *AHS Coven*, the horrors of America's and the South's racist past return to haunt the nation through the television screen as a return of the repressed. The show also, in its depictions of black women, explores the ideologically charged field of the representations of the doubly othered racialized gender identities. Finally, *True Blood*, through its usage of the Civil Rights discourse and the discourse of racism and miscegenation in the American South, creates a debate around the question of species difference which serves as an allegory for all the discourses that hinges on difference in America. As a result, the analysis of these three shows makes it apparent that the race question survives in America today by revealing how any narrative of othering is intricately tied to that question, especially when explored in a Southern Gothic setting.

The Gothic landscapes of the three shows also confirm the argument that, in American Gothic, the South serves as the chosen territory of the "Other." Susan Castillo argues that the South, as a region obsessed with boundaries, is the perfect location for the mode of Gothic which is itself obsessed with boundaries and their transgression:

> The South is a region that has always been obsessed with boundaries, whether territorial (the Mason-Dixon line), or those related to gender, social class, and particularly race. It is my contention that the grotesques, monsters, freaks, and collapsing mansions that populate the Southern Gothic are directly linked to repressed anxieties and fears about violated boundaries related to the region's violent past, particularly to slavery and racial indeterminacy. (50)

As such, the television shows in this study locate the origins of their "others" in the swamps, the bayous, the woodlands, the small towns and the heteroglossic city of New Orleans in the Deep South of Louisiana. As Gael Sweeney suggests, the South is "America's territory of the Other, the grotesque and gothic, the tacky and trashy" (146). In their employment of the Deep South as Gothic landscape, the three shows also make it evident that the South exists "both as a material territory and as a region of the imagination" (145-146). As such all the shows use the real settings of Louisiana but also transform those locations into Gothic heterotopias. In *True Detective*, even though the show does not contain any supernatural elements, this transformation is achieved through an ideological use of camera and narrative in which the landscape is depicted as evil and polluted, as a liminal space where monsters breed. The show's Southern Gothic setting is established through a cinematic field of "wide" shots of landscape which is uncharacteristic for television. As such, the whole territory of rural Louisiana is rendered monstrous in the show, which also coincides with its dark vision for the community living on that landscape. *AHS: Coven* transforms New Orleans into a horrific freak show through its open depictions of violence and its "weird" camera shots and angles that create a vision of horrorality. The show also appropriates an expressionistic color scheme of black and white in its exploration of the white mansion as a symbol for the Old South's power structures. These antiquated buildings in the show also include secret rooms, especially their attics, which is another conventional Southern Gothic trope, which are used to explore the sins and perversities coming from the South's past. In *True Blood*, the rural landscape and the small town appear as another carnivalistic space where individuals struggle to repress their desires and fears and where all sorts of monsters roam both

secretly in the rural landscape and also openly, among human beings, in the society. Hence, all the shows discussed here use the Gothic potential of the South already inherent in the region, and add new transformations of the region to the catalogue of the visual Southern Gothic.

In his "Monster Culture," Cohen asks a question and then answers it: "Do monsters really exist? Surely they must, for if they did not, how could we?" (20). If monsters of a culture reveal the identity of a culture in abjected form, the three shows discussed in this study reveal that American culture is still obsessed with its monsters. In the twenty first century Southern Gothic production on television—exemplified by the three shows in this study—viewers are presented with a group of monsters made up of different class, gender and race based identities that return to haunt contemporary America. This makes it clear that the discourse of "posts" is pure myth. Not only does America retain its societal divisions, but it is still obsessed with them. The proliferation of Southern Gothic and its monsters in contemporary America makes it evident that America has not actually achieved a post-multicultural society of diversity; on the contrary, America is still a culture that defines itself through it "others," hence, through its "monsters."

Figure 1 *True Detective* posters

Figure 2 Rust's extra-sensory visions

Figure 3 Gothic hero as savior

Figure 4 Shots from the opening credits of *True Detective* merging the characters and the landscape

Figure 5 Some shots of rural derelict settlements, weird vegetation of the region and environmental ruin

Figure 6 Aerial shots of the landscape of despair that swallows the two detectives

Figure 7 *True Detective*'s faces of white trash

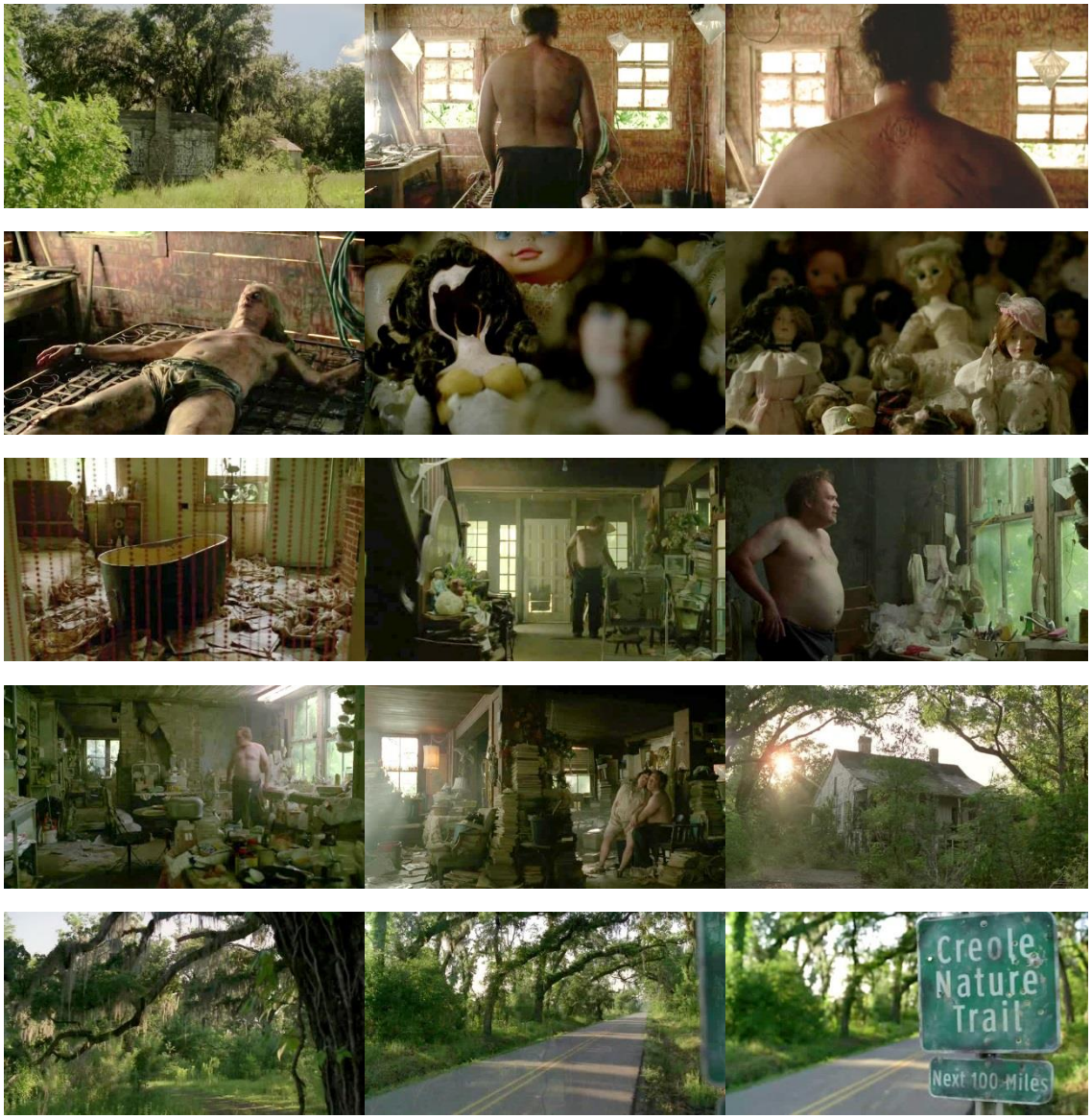

Figure 8 The white trash monster of murder, incest and decay

Figure 9 Coming face to face with the white trash monster for the first time

Figure 10 Diagnosing the white trash community

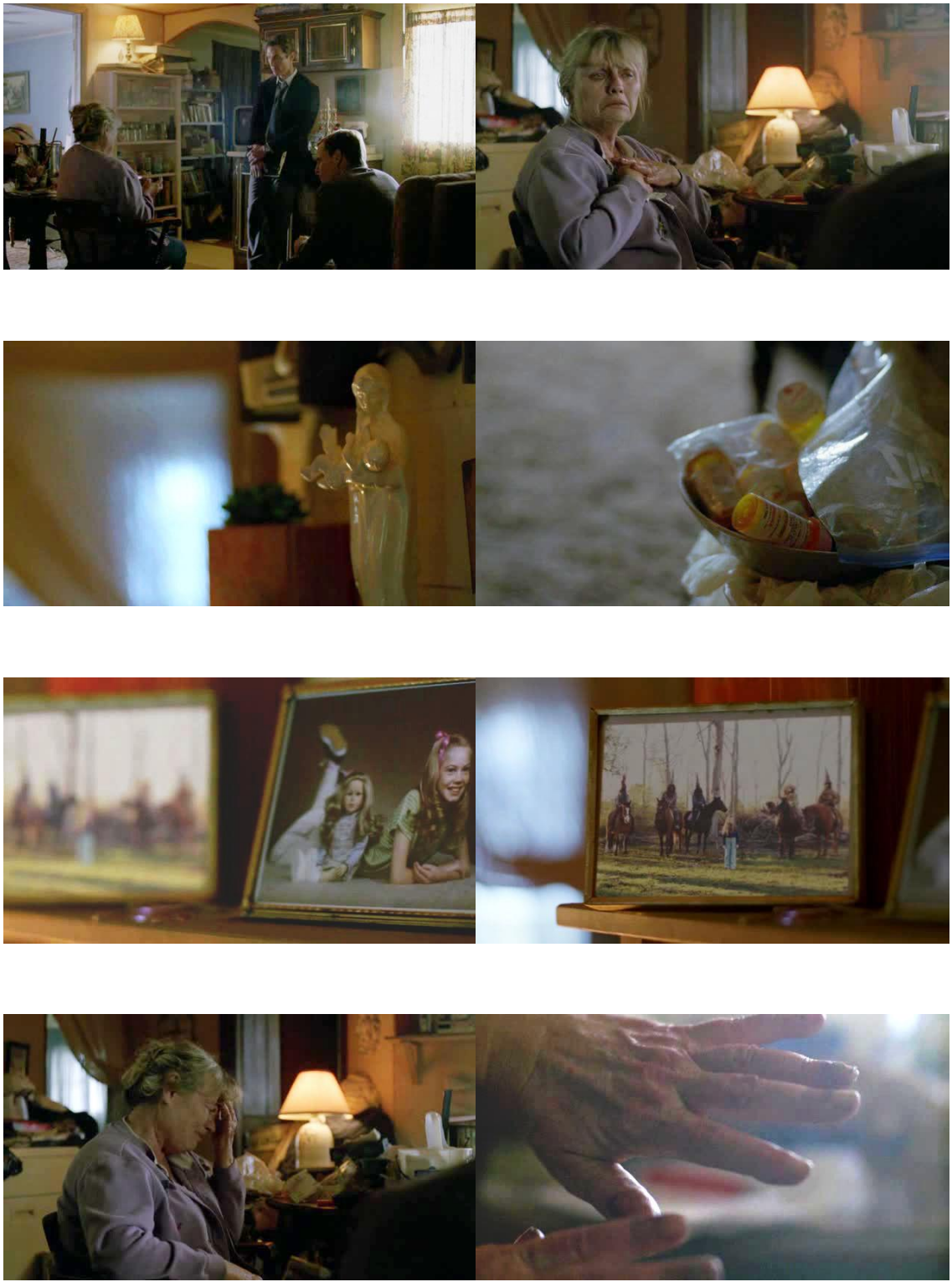

Figure 11 Diagnosing the white trash household

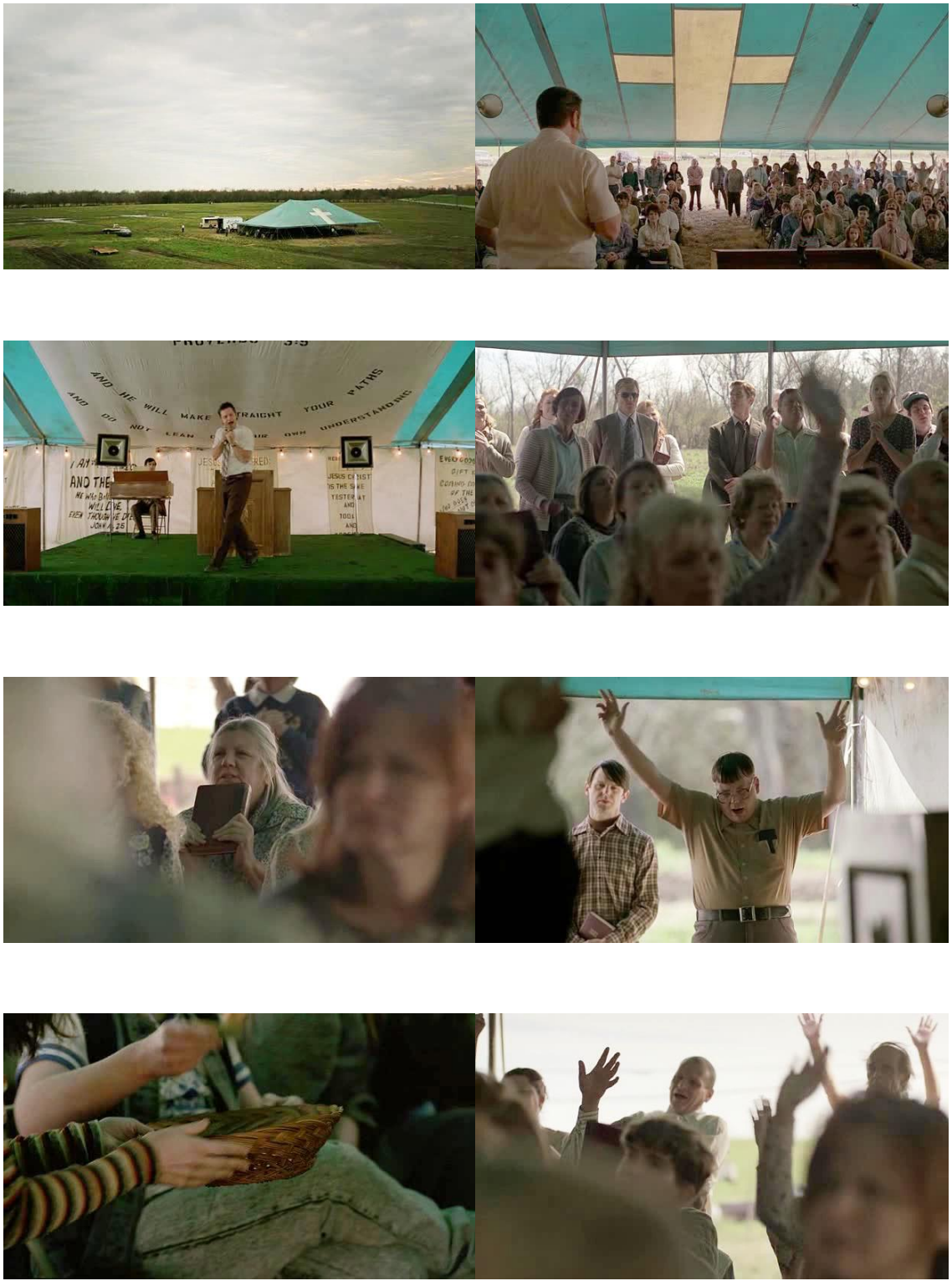

Figure 12 White trash spirituality

Figure 13 “Tying sticks together” – religion as stories for children

Figure 14 Religion in ruins – church as the breeding ground of sin

Figure 15 Closing shots of “evil” landscape

Figure 16 Some images of bodily harm and dismemberment from *AHS Coven*

Figure 17 Perverse humor of horrorality

Figure 18 Entering Miss Robichaux's Academy

Figure 19 The white mansion vs. the black hairdresser

Figure 20 Some shots from the opening credits of *Coven*

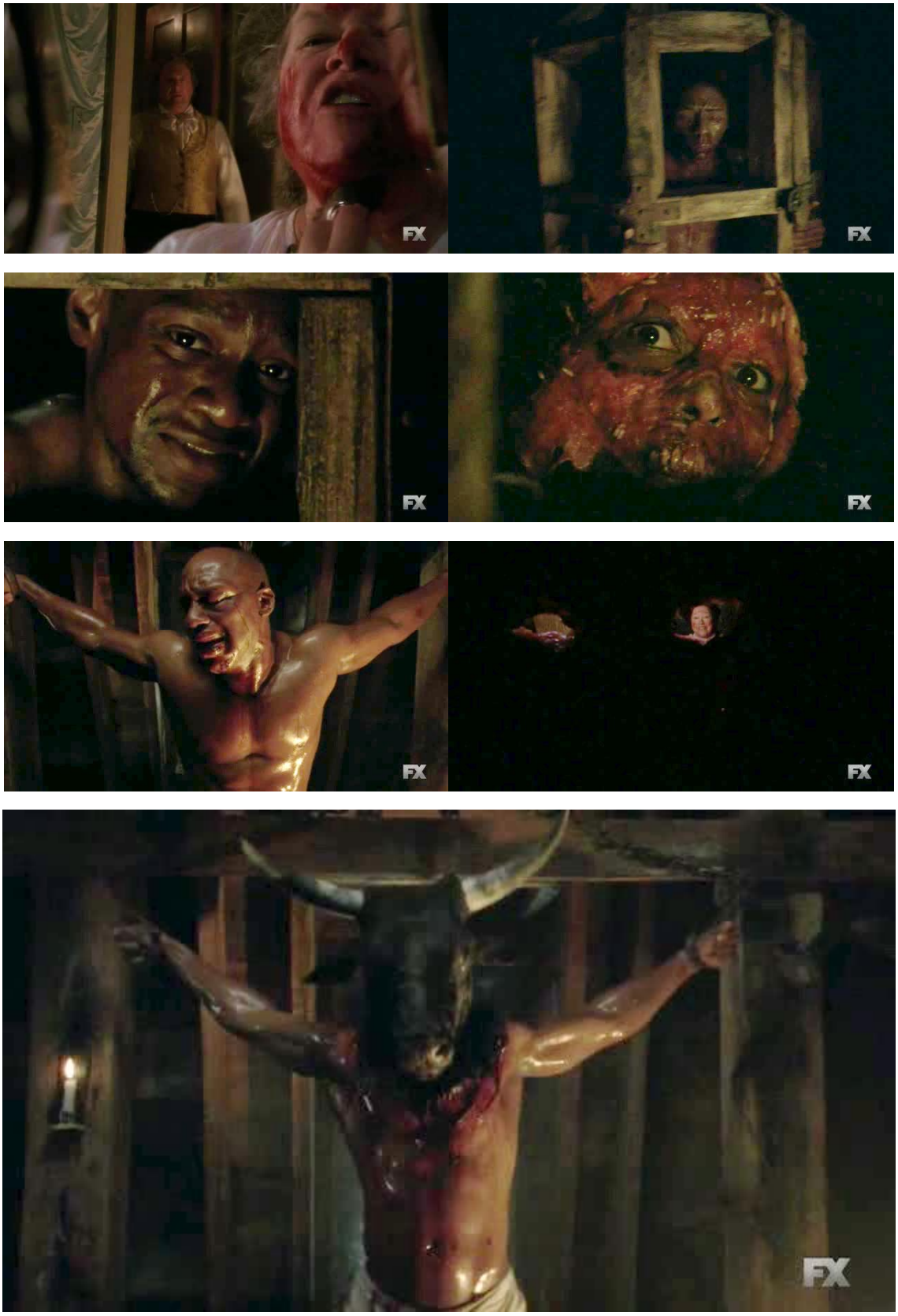

Figure 21 The torture chamber of Mdm. LaLaurie

Figure 22 White lady as victimizer of black women in the Old South

Figure 23 Lynching in Jim Crow South and Marie's revenge

Figure 24 Sensitivity training

Figure 25 Bonding with an “immortal racist”

Figure 26 White vs. black

Figure 27 “Voodoo doll belong in the house of voodoo”

Figure 28 Voodoo offered as spice

Figure 29 The show referring to voodoo-as-spice

Figure 30 Kyle – man as plaything

Figure 31 Spalding – man as disturbed/man as servant

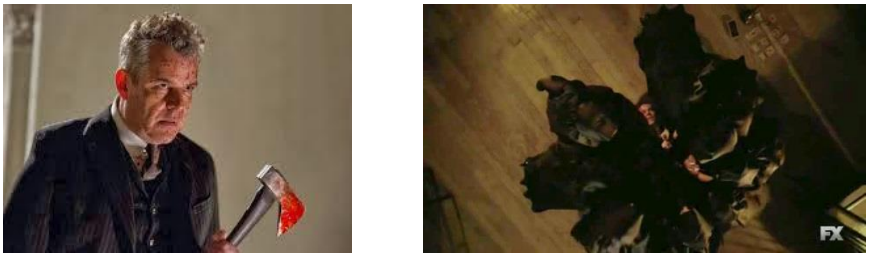

Figure 32 The Axeman – man as psychotic killer

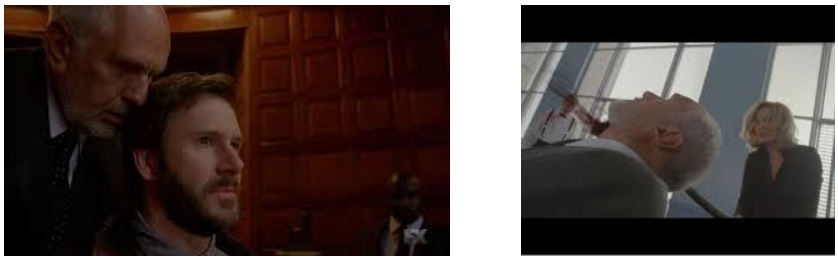

Figure 33 The witch hunters – men as misogynistic corporate figures

Figure 34 Quentin – man as unthreatening sexuality

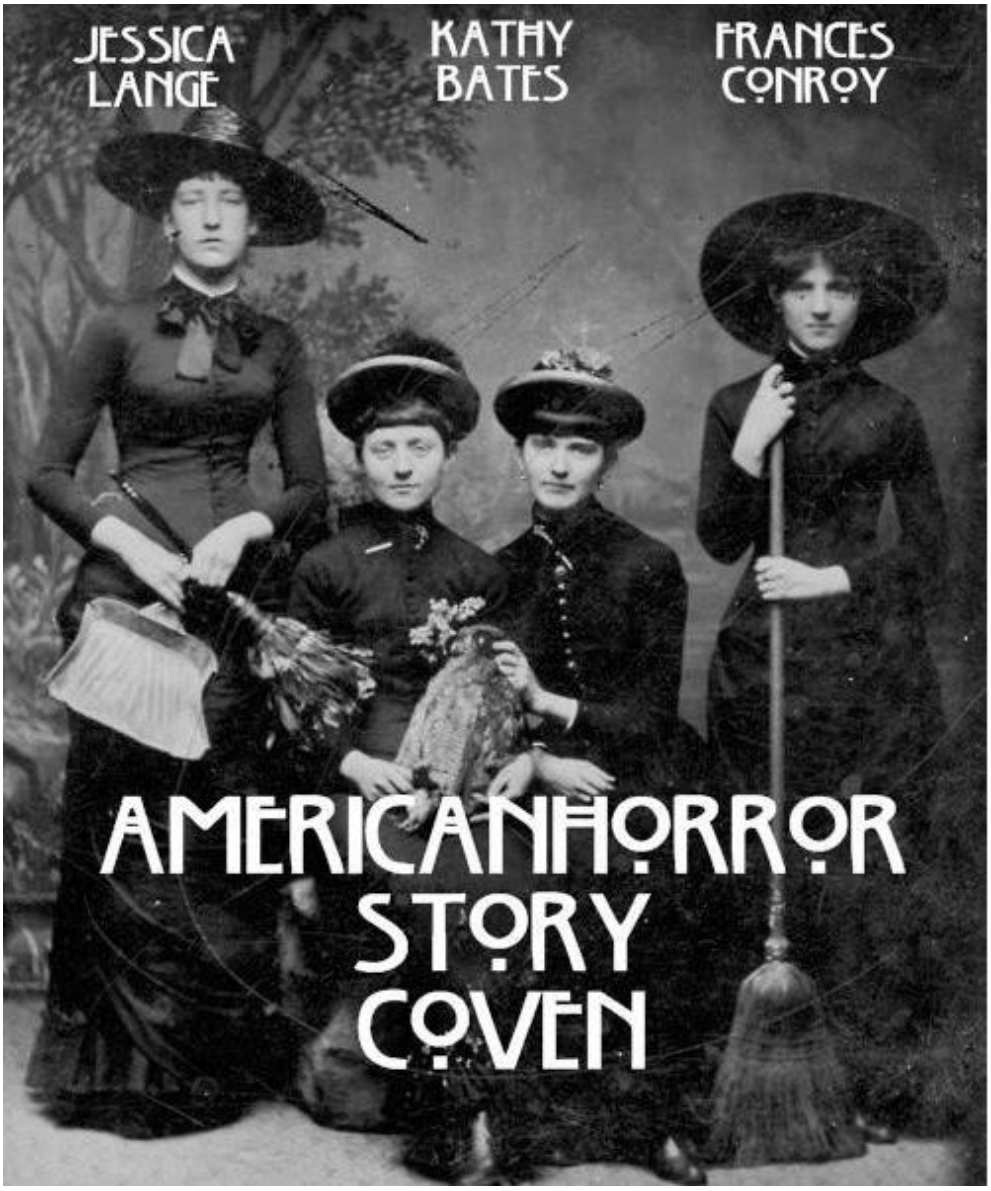

Figure 35 The poster

Figure 36 Coven's suffragette sisters

Figure 37 Fiona's obsession with youth and her decline

Figure 38 Attaining vitality (youth) through gender performance

Figure 39 The new “safe” face of witches and the elimination of the “bad mother”

Figure 40 The monstrous mothers, Southern matriarchs

Figure 41 Fiona's hell

Figure 42 Delphine and Marie's hell

Figure 43 The postfeminist academy at the end

Figure 44 Bon Temps residents letting “the good times roll”

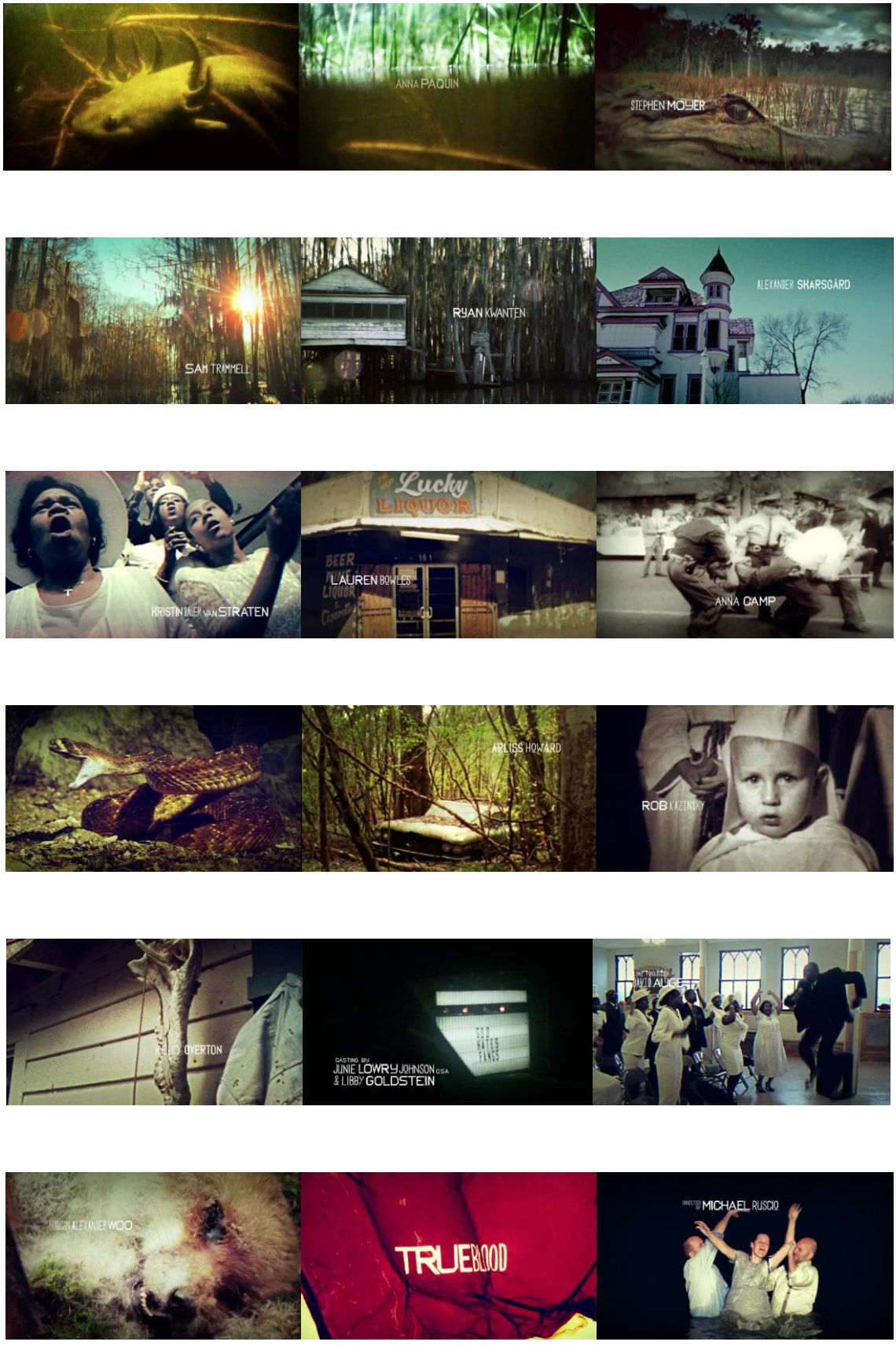

Figure 45 *True Blood* title sequence

Figure 46 Monsters hiding in the woods at night

Figure 47 Faces of “white trash” from Bon Temps

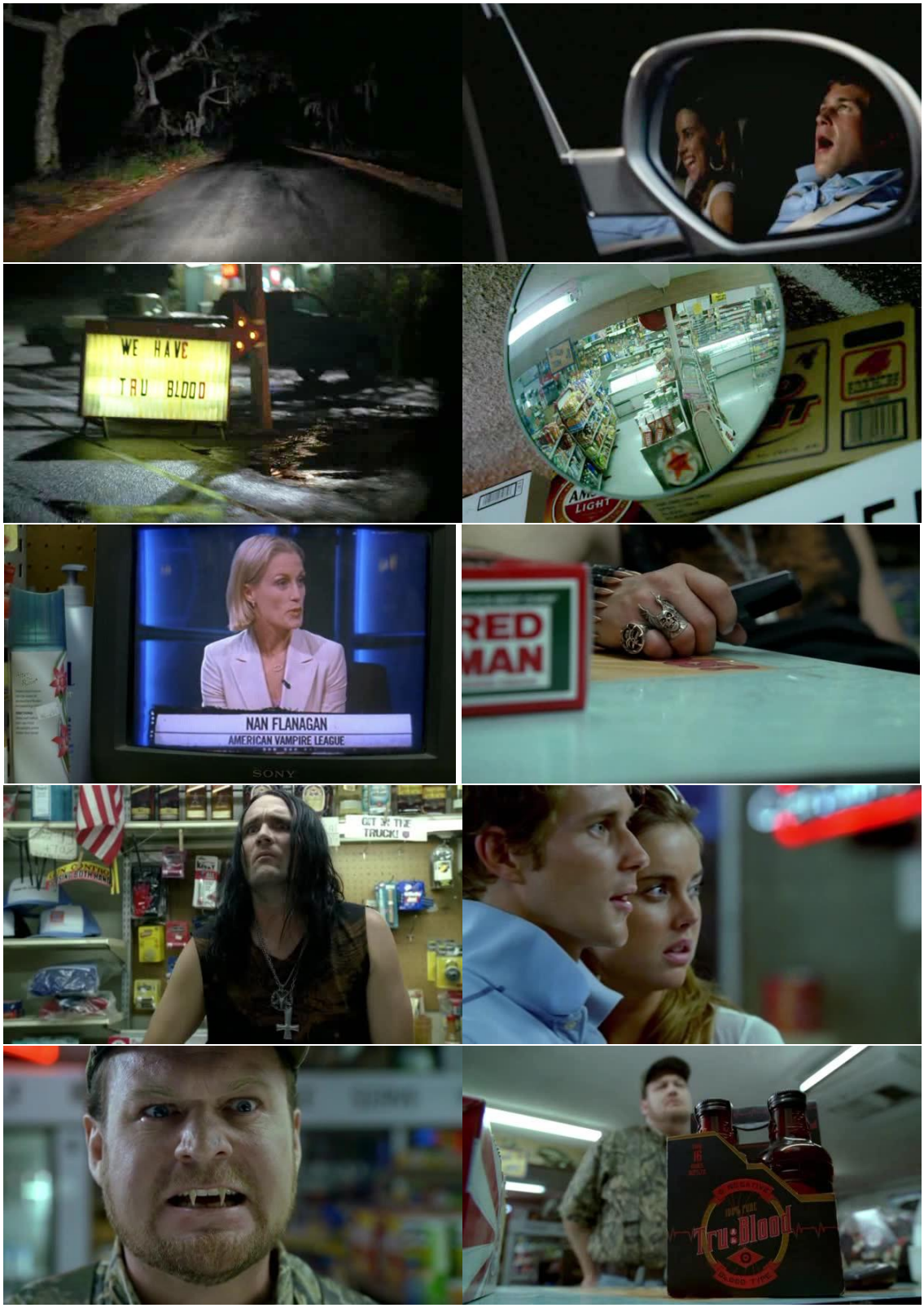

Figure 48 The first sequence of the show

Figure 49 Transformation of home from homely to horrific to uncanny

Figure 50 Television on television – the power of media

Figure 51 Some "real life" Tru Blood beverage ads

Figure 52 HBO's mockumentary "In Focus: Vampires in America"

Figure 53 Websites of different groups within the show

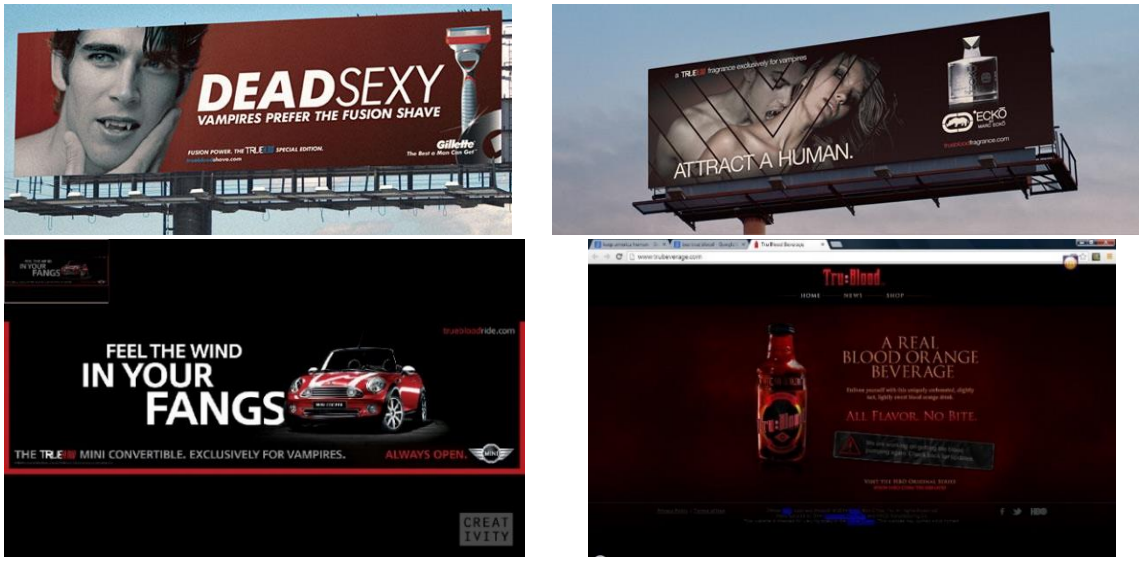

Figure 54 Products for vampires

Figure 55 Murder in the name of America

Figure 56 Fundamentalist Christian suicide-bomber

Figure 57 Russell Edgington – the monstrous face of vampires

Figure 58 The vampire prison

Figure 59 Queen Sophie Anne's "day room"

Figure 60 King Russell Edgington's Mississippi mansion

Figure 61 The Magister's court

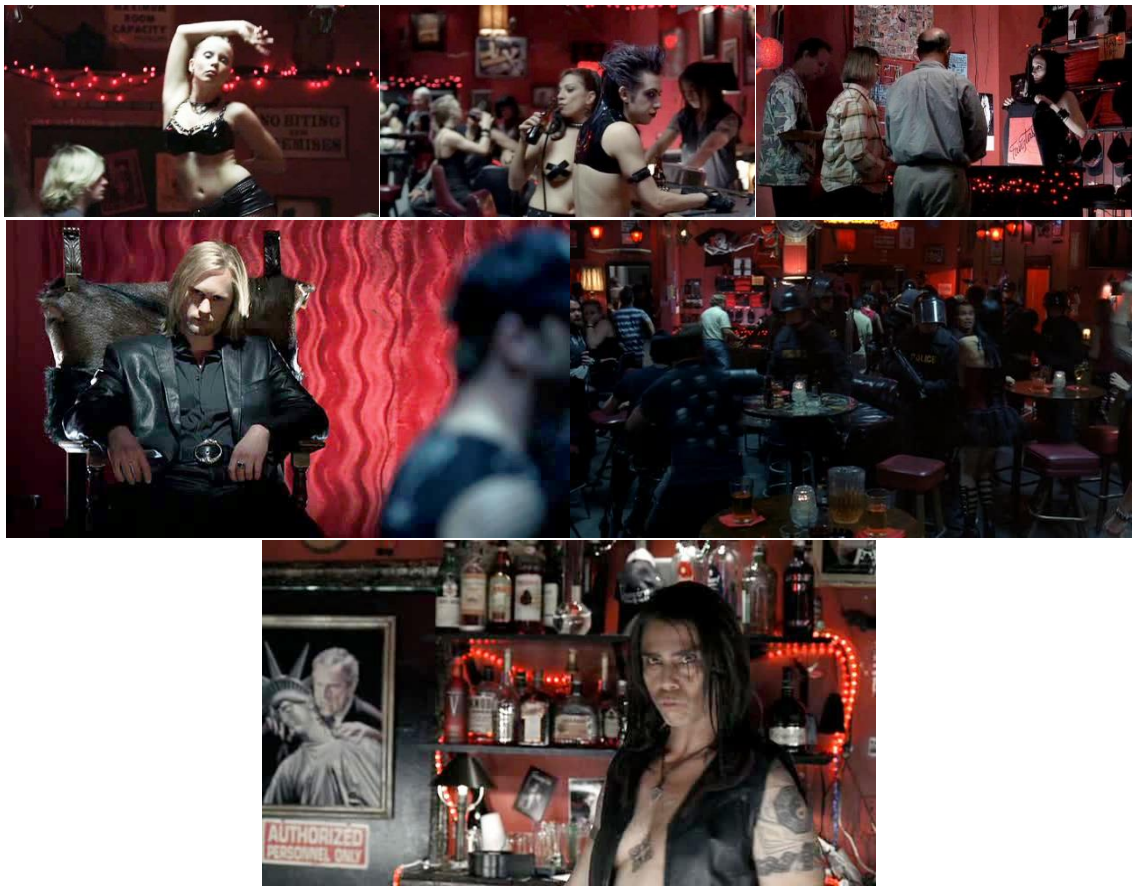

Figure 62 Fangtasia, Eric, the police raid and vampiric government

Figure 63 Lafayette

Figure 64 Eric's basement

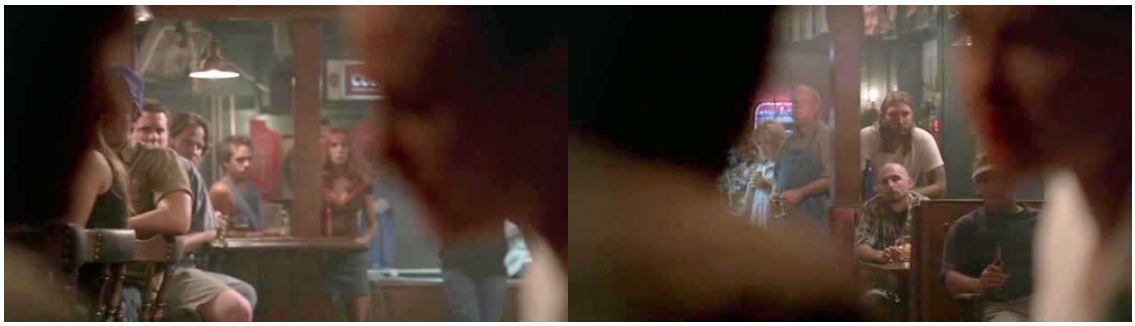

Figure 65 Disapproving the “mixed” couple

Figure 66 The anti-supe gang in Obama masks

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