Honours Project

Gothicism in Children's Media: A Psychoanalytical Reading of *Over the Garden Wall*

Name of Student (SID): Cham Lok Hei ( )

Programme: BA(LS) & BEd(EL)

Name of Instructor: Professor Eric Yu

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Introduction

Throughout our childhood, children's media [1] has been a significant part. I realized that children's media often contains Gothic elements that my younger self would overlook in my adult years. Modern stories by Ronald Dahl and Neil Gaiman are examples of children's literature with a Gothic undertone. The term the Gothic emerged in the 18th century, and it is drawn from mediaeval buildings and ruins such as castles and dark battlements (Britannica). It has also been associated with a rebellion against the neoclassical aesthetic ideal of order and unity (Kilgour 3). The Gothic, as a genre, is actually adapted from a wide range of literary sources. Examples include British folklore, renaissance ideas of melancholy and German traditions (Kilgour 4). Therefore, it is difficult to get an official definition of what exactly is Gothic. It is necessary here to clarify what exactly is meant by Gothicism in this research, which refers to the artistic elements or motifs of or derived from Gothic fiction. For instance, dark forest, Gothic characters or the supernatural. It can also refer to the psychological aspect and emotion in response to the form of Gothic, such as fear, guilt and shame, which are associated with the psychosocial theory of development.

After watching Patrick McHale's animated miniseries *Over the Garden Wall* (*OGW*), created for the cable television channel Cartoon Network, I was intrigued by the Gothic elements inside this kids' cartoon show and how they may contribute to children's psychosocial development. The miniseries tells the story of the half-brothers Wirt and

[1] Children's media can be divided into old and new media, with the first referring to print media, radio and the latter referring to television and the internet (Montgomery 148). The three critical elements of the new media include interactivity, convergence and ubiquity, which offers new ways for children to communicate with each other. Most importantly, it allows children to interact and participate in new media more than old ones (Montgomery 147).

Greg getting lost in a forest, “the Unknown”. The protagonists thus embark on a journey to find their way home, where they meet different characters along the way. It is revealed in the end that the Unknown is actually a purgatory between life and death. Unlike the typical joyful tone of children’s cartoons, *OGW*’s gothic imagery seems to challenge any parent’s willingness to expose their children to such terrifying mental images. Some of the scenes are so shocking that I wonder if it is worth it to push the audience’s boundaries. It ultimately raises my interest in the reasoning behind such a combination: Gothic and children’s media.

This research is also inspired by Michael Howarth’s *Under the bed, creeping: Psychoanalysing the Gothic in Children’s Literature*. In which he uses Erik Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development theory to conduct research on Gothicism in children’s literature. His work is one of the first pieces of research that focuses on the usage of Gothic and its effects on children’s identity development. Therefore, Howarth’s work shows that the connection and usage of Gothic motifs in children’s media can be significant in terms of psychosocial development. However, Howarth’s research also has a few limitations, namely on how he fails to define what is Gothicism in his research and that he only focuses on children’s literature. Moreover, most studies of *OGW* tended to focus on the show’s representation of Gothic elements. Finally, there is also a lack of research on the cinematography of audio-visual texts. Instead, they usually focus their analysis on the literary skills in Gothic literature. As a result, the above reasons prompted this research to conduct a psychological and cinematography analysis of how Gothicism can contribute to children viewers’ development in *OGW*.

This research thus set out to answer the following questions: why does *OGW*, a cartoon

show targeted at young children, choose to use Gothic elements and motifs in the story? Furthermore, how does *OGW* use cinematography skills to present Gothic motifs and contribute to the psychosocial development of viewers? In the following, relevant literature is reviewed, followed by the methodology and research design integrating Erikson's theory on Stages of Psychosocial Development. Finally, this research presents three analyses in terms of "Initiative vs. Guilt", "Industry vs. Inferiority" and "Identity vs. Confusion".

Literature Review

From the early 18th century, Gothic narratives started to emerge in writings. Suggestive figures and landscapes like monsters, demons, castles and graveyards are some of the most popular characteristics of Gothic (Botting 2). The genre is fascinated with objects and practices that are often portrayed as negative, irrational, and fantastic (Botting 1). We can often find magical worlds, ghosts, and extravagant adventures in Gothic tales from references like myths, legends, and folklore of mediaeval romances. Even though they may be labelled as dark and horrifying, the Gothic style is characterized by an overwhelming sense of imaginative fantasy, uncontrolled by reason and unrestrained by expectations of simplicity, realism, and probability (Botting 2). Gothicism can also be traced in children's literature from centuries ago. Dale Townshend argues that the beginning of children's interest in the Gothic originated from the horror tales told by their nursemaids. They are drawn to Gothic elements such as ghosts, goblins and fear (28). Even though there is no direct connection between Gothic and children's literature, it is worth noting that many of the Gothic tales talk about mysterious incidents, cautionary fables or somewhat horrifying images that serve to admonish children against dangers. In Gothic, readers were also satisfied with the superstitious fantasies and strange events. Perhaps, Gothic provides a refreshing change from the moral lessons that children have grown tired of. That is why it appeals to children's emotional and underdeveloped minds. When children interact with various media, they gain something in return that aids their emotional development.

Concerning psychoanalysis and Gothic, Michael Howarth examined five famous texts using Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development theory in his book *Under the bed, creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children's Literature*. In his research,

Howarth decided to adopt Erikson's theory due to his belief that both sexual and social factors are essential to developing identity and personality (13). Michael Howarth's research on Gothicism in children's literature is one of the first pieces of research that focuses on the usage of Gothic and its effects on children's identity development. Psychologically speaking, both adults and children develop fear towards aggression, death and abandonment. Therefore, the introduction of fear is necessary to provide children with the preparation for dealing with interpersonal conflicts, such as puberty, sex, relationships, and peer pressure (Howarth 8). Gothic stories, according to Howarth, serve as an unconscious outlet for readers' pain rather than forcing them to face their deepest emotions (6). In a way, Gothic stories and children's media also share the similarity of dealing with trauma, maturity and punishment (Howarth 5). Moreover, aside from being a source of entertainment, Gothic in children's literature is suggested to serve a didactic purpose by providing an emotional training wheel that helps one to mature (Howarth 8). It was traditionally believed that there was a moral purpose for Gothicism. Gothic authors sought to raise readers' emotions until they identified with them. In other words, their work is used to educate audience members' emotions (Kilgour 7). Anna Jackson, who shares a similar point of view, also argues that Gothic elements are suitable for exploring adolescents' shifting identities through a metaphorical lens (4). Her arguments thus provide yet another input on the Gothic's role in psychosocial development. Howarth concludes that the Gothic literature essentially analyses the meaning of being a human being and helps facilitate the readers' individuality (22), which aligns with children's literature because children are trying to rediscover their identities at that age.

After its release in 2014, *Over the Garden Wall* gained a number of fans that adore the

show. However, even with two Emmy awards and an out of the ordinary story plot, *OGW* did not gain the same popularity as other similar cartoon shows like *Adventure Time* or *Steven Universe*. As a result, there are relatively few studies on the show, with existing literature primarily focusing on the show's motifs and portrayal. In the paper "'All That Was Lost Is Revealed': Motifs and Moral Ambiguity in *Over the Garden Wall*", Kristiana Willsey suggests that the show responds to contemporary fairy tale adaptations with its vintage aesthetic while stripping away pop culture association with the use of motifs (39). Additionally, she compliments the morally ambiguous approach that *OGW* adopts, which has become relatively rare in children's media (39). It may seem difficult to pinpoint a message to take away from the show due to the mysterious setting of *OGW*, but Willsey argues that it is the point. She suggests that the moral ambiguity in *OGW* allows viewers to understand the fairy tale on their own terms, which in turn provides an opportunity for developing individuality. However, the show still spells out some noticeable yet important Gothic messages to child viewers through the dialogue from the child character Greg (45). Understandably, the show wants the viewers to understand the significance of such plot-driven devices through an innocent character's mouth, which can help the child viewers resonate with the character. Another scholar Kelsey DuQuaine further supports this argument, suggesting the show's ambiguous moral framework allows viewers to better understand the character's emotional development, especially regarding guilt and anxiety (20). In her research, DuQuaine focuses on the portrayal of guilt and anxiety in the protagonist from *OGW*. Her findings centre around the psychological development of the protagonist Wirt and its uniqueness in children's media.

In addition, there are many similarities between *OGW* and Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, which describes Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. It is one of the most famous fantasy poems, with a few noticeable Gothic elements in this piece of literature. Karissa Doughty analyses the parallels of *OGW* to Dante's *Divine Comedy*; her analysis focuses on textual appropriation, such as the representation of the characters and the conceptual appropriation (7). For instance, the main protagonist Wirt in *OGW* shares many similarities with *Divine Comedy's* Dante. Whereas the talking bluebird, Beatrice, refers to the girl, Beatrice, in Dante's poem. In comparison to other adaptations of *Divine Comedy*, *OGW* explores Dante's poem instead of relying on it as the foundation of its story, thus building upon and challenging Dante's original interpretation.

In short, past literature focused on the show's representation of Gothic elements but lacked the psychological analysis on how they can contribute to children viewers' development. Although Michael Howarth's research on psychoanalysis and Gothicism shed light on this topic, it put its attention solely on children's literature. There has also been little attention paid to the format of audio-visual texts when most research focuses on the form of written texts. In the current world, children's media take many forms; for this reason, it is important to examine how other forms of children's media might contribute to children's psychosocial development.

Methodology

This paper will follow the research approach proposed by Howarth in his book and argue that Gothic elements and motifs in the show *OGW*, especially the portrayal of Gothic characters[2] and other Gothic motifs, can contribute to children's psychosocial development and viewers' maturity. When children are immersing themselves in a story with Gothic elements, they can subconsciously relate to the fictional characters and overcome similar issues that they also need to deal with during the maturation process. This research will apply Erik Erikson's theory on Stages of Psychosocial Development to analyse how the Gothic elements in *OGW* can contribute to children viewers' identity development and coming of age. Sigmund Freud's work is usually the most widely used when it comes to psychoanalysis. However, Freud centred his theories around sexuality. He suggests that a child's personality develops along five psychosexual stages, which does not match this research on Gothic's psychosocial effects on children. On the other hand, Erik Erikson rejects the sole approach of psychosexual development and proposes the importance of both social and sexual factors during a person's growth. His theory divides the human life span into eight stages; each stage consists of a set of crises that one must solve in order to move on to the next stage of growth (see Figure 1). In *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erikson describes the crisis here as "a turning point" for people to increase vulnerability or potential (96), which refers to the identity crisis when facing conflicts and attaining a certain psychological quality during maturation. It is important to note that Erikson also mentions that identity formation is "a process of simultaneous reflection and observation" (22). Since each stage is presented with an inner conflict,

[2] The main character, Wirt, can be classified as the Byronic hero in Gothic stories, while Greg can be identified as the character of innocence, Beatrice, the supernatural in Gothic, and the vicious monster the Beast is the classic Gothic villain.

when children read Gothic stories, they can relate their conflict with what the fictional characters are facing through observation and thus reflect and learn from the character's development. Thus, Erikson's theory is consistent with the Gothic's role in terms of exploring identities and emotions. This research will focus on the analysis through play stage, school age and adolescence (See Figure 1). The reason for choosing these three stages out of Erikson's eight stages is because of their close relations with children and young teenagers, who are essentially the primary target audience of this show.

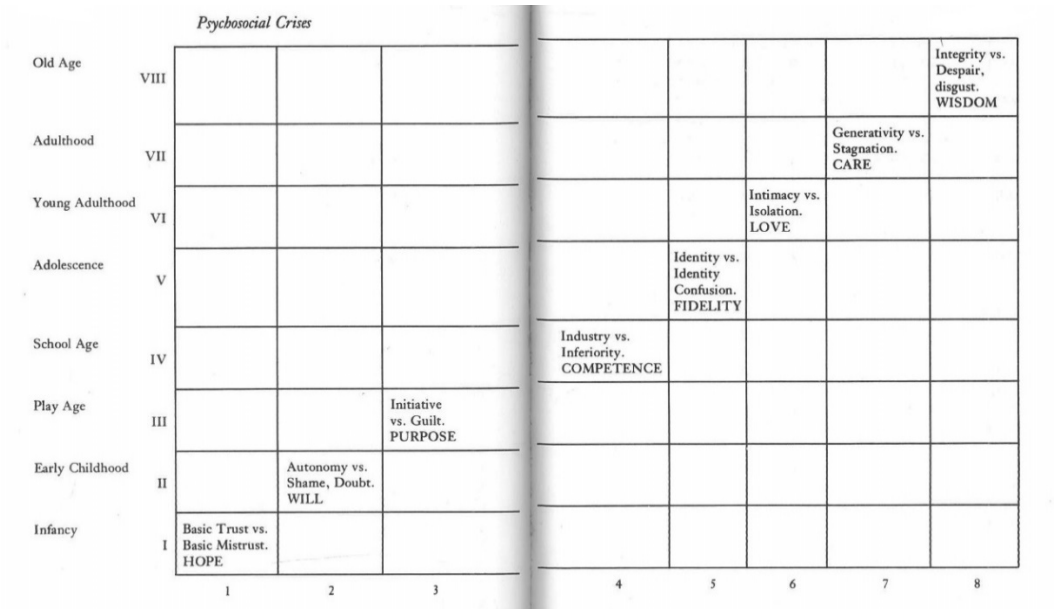

Figure 1. Erikson's eight stages on psychosocial development (Erikson 56)

Greg and Beatrice: Initiative vs. Guilt

When children grow into play age, they are now capable of exploring the world after learning to walk and talk. As a result, they start to assert their power through social interaction in order to build their personality (Erikson 116). In *OGW*, the main protagonist Greg is around five years old according to the setting of the show. This means Greg is around the same age group that starts to experience the conflict of initiative versus guilt. Early on from episode one, we can see that the two brothers Wirt and Greg are different in terms of personality: Wirt, the elder brother, is timid and sceptical, whereas Greg trusts others easily and is always optimistic even in a hopeless situation. In Gothic fiction, it is common to find a character that is innocent, usually being young women or children.

Along with the episodes, it is shown that Greg always chooses to believe and take action when his brother is hesitating and doubtful about everything. Incidents like trusting the woodsman ("The Old Grist Mill"), helping the animal students to raise money for their schools ("Schooltown Follies") or giving Wirt's love confession tape to Sara's friends ("Into the Unknown"), they all help portray that Greg is the one who always volunteered to help others in need and being helpful. The character description of Greg is not a surprising choice here, as children at this age are often playful and friendly. Children will be able to explore their interpersonal skills by initiating activities, which is important for guiding children to acquire a sense of initiative and confidence in their capacity to lead others. Moreover, young viewers that share the same age group as Greg can also relate to his action. The familiar feeling thus can bring viewers to connect with the character. Greg fits the description of a character of innocence in Gothic stories, or so we thought. Until in a later episode, the Gothic imagery of Greg dying in dark woods

(See Figure 2) while confessing that he actually stole a rock from Mrs Daniel's garden shows us that Greg may not be as one-dimensional as we thought ("The Unknown" 5:05).

Figure 2: Greg dying in the dark woods ("The Unknown" 3:23).

The scene mainly uses black and white to contrast the fading colour of Greg, which seems to suggest his dying state (slowly fading to greyish colour) and as a symbol of the black and white truth that Greg is finally speaking out. The low-key lighting that creates a strong contrast between light and darkness portrays a shocking scene where a young child is dying in front of us. Nevertheless, the fact that he is dying is not important to Greg himself. The last thing he wants to do is confess his sins to his brother. From their conversation:

> Greg: "I…I stole it, Wirt. I stole it from Mrs Daniel's garden. I'm a stealer. And that's a rock fact."
>
> Wirt: "What? No, Greg, that doesn't matter."
>
> Greg: "It does matter. You have to return it for me, okay?"
>
> ("The Unknown" 5:09)

We can find a huge contrast in terms of how the two are dealing with this matter. From Wirt's point of view, despite being wrong to steal, Greg is still a child, and Wirt does not understand why he would prioritise a confession over survival. Greg, however, has carried the rock as his deepest secret through this journey. Guilt is a common theme among Gothic fiction: the dark secrets hiding deep inside oneself, which has driven and haunted the main characters throughout their journey. In *OGW*, Greg also shows signs of guilt, such as when Mr Endicott, a wealthy old man they met on their journey, praises him as "a sweet boy with good sense" and gives them two pennies for their generous help ("Mad Love" 10:13). Greg knows his act of stealing does not deserve such compliments. That is why he throws away the two pennies from Mr Endicott as an act of remorse. What fuels Greg's act of kindness has been his internalised guilt of stealing, and in the end, he decides to reveal the secret he held on to for too long. According to Erikson, a healthy balance between initiatives and guilt is the key to acquiring virtue in this stage (Erikson 122). Therefore, by showing Greg's sense of guilt and his active initiatives of interaction and kind acts, children viewers would see themselves in Greg and strengthen their sense of purpose.

Another character that illustrates the conflicts of initiative versus guilt is the talking bluebird, Beatrice. She introduces herself to the brothers as a helpful guide who only wishes to lead the boys out of the dark woods. Although she appears trustworthy on the outside, she ultimately deceives the two brothers to lessen her own guilt. After Beatrice ignored her parents' warning and threw rocks at a bluebird, she and the rest of her family were cursed as bluebirds. Her wrongdoing is what causes her to seek help from the witch Adelaide. In exchange for a pair of scissors that can undo the curse placed upon Beatrice's family, Beatrice agrees to bring lost souls in the forest to Adelaide as

her slaves (“Lullaby in Frogland”). Erikson suggests that it is crucial for parents to guide children in play age, as their influence can prevent guilt from developing. In Beatrice’s case, she did not listen to her parents’ warning, thus leading to the curse and her conflicts. In the episode “Lullaby in Frogland”, we learned more about Beatrice’s guilt that leads to her betrayal of the brothers. When viewers are introduced to “The Good Woman of the Woods”, Adelaide seems like a nice old lady that’s ill in bed (See Figure 3). It is then revealed that she is actually a cruel person that only wishes to enslave the boys. The scene is neatly divided into two parts: Adelaide’s side and Beatrice’s side. Above Adelaide is a web of yarn, which symbolises her web of lies. In contrast, Beatrice’s side contains an oddly large amount of empty space, which may suggest her decision to face her guilt and empty her inner conflicts. With contrast of the usually cheerful orange colour theme, Adelaide’s horrifying threats only intensify the creepiness of the scene.

Figure 3: Adelaide and Beatrice’s standoff (“Lullaby in Frogland” 9:09).

After capturing the boys, Beatrice only feels worse and adds more stress to her internal guilt. Eventually, she decides to help the boys escape by killing the witch. The shocking

scene of Adelaide melting to death is indeed a quite heavy image to bear (See Figure 4). However, it surely achieves the purpose of leaving an impactful message to the audience.

Figure 4: Adelaide ‘s death (“Lullaby in Frogland” 10:27).

With Beatrice’s story of turning into a bluebird and Adelaide’s death, the Gothic imagery shows abundant imagination and untamed creativity. Even though the action of causing Adelaide’s eventual demise can be regarded as cruel, it is by no means a fixed reading on the action. In fact, the moral ambiguity of *OGW* allows viewers to decide the social message on their own. It is the way how the moral message is presented that is important: through Gothic motifs such as guilt and death (Willsey 51).

The Byronic Hero: Industry vs. Inferiority

At around school age, self-esteem significantly influences children's growth. According to Erikson, a child's peers will become increasingly important in this stage and become the most important source of self-esteem (109). Children want to seek praise and acknowledgement from others. Through these approvals, children can develop perseverance and step closer to maturity (Erikson 124). In *OGW*, Wirt is portrayed as the Byronic hero in Gothic literature: he is intelligent, skilful and talented yet also bears the personality of pessimistic, selfish and low self-esteem. Before entering the Unknown, we can find that Wirt is not a particularly sociable person. He does not seem to have friends due to his introverted tendencies. During Halloween night, Wirt and Greg follow Sara to a house party. However, Wirt refuses to go inside and claims not to be invited to the party. However, when the others see him, they do not act surprised or repulsed by his appearance at all. They simply say their greetings to him upon his arrival ("Into the Unknown"). Wirt, then, is the one who distances himself from his peers, which ultimately leads to his inferiority. At the beginning of their journey, Wirt is the person who worries about every action and every step. After knowing the brothers for a few days, Beatrice describes Wirt as a "pathetic pushover who relies on others to make all his decisions" ("Schooltown Follies" 1:14). Nevertheless, Wirt's journey in the Unknown forces him to step outside of his comfort zone in order to find a way home. Throughout his journey, he faces different conflicts between taking action and his low esteem. His first step at trying something new is when he is forced to sing a song in the tavern in exchange for directions to Adelaide. This action earns him his first title as the pilgrim. From the conversation exchanged by the tavern's people:

The Butcher: “You’re a pilgrim!”

Wirt: “A pilgrim?”

The Butcher: “You're a traveller on a sacred journey.”

The Master: “You're the master of your own destiny.”

The Baker: “The hero of your own story!”

(“Songs of the Dark Lantern” 7:08)

Wirt’s confidence is therefore boosted through the acceptance and compliments by others. Thus, powering him to ride on a horse to save Beatrice (See Figure 5). Surrounded by the dark forest, Wirt rides on a horse while holding a lantern that lights up the path he passes by. As if the lantern in his hand is a metaphor for his heroic action, becoming the “guiding light” that comes to the rescue inside a labyrinth of darkness.

Figure 5: Wirt riding on a horse to save Beatrice (“Songs of the Dark Lantern” 9:25).

Later in the episode “Lullaby in Frogland”, the gang dresses in disguise to avoid being caught by the frog officers on a ferry. In order to blend in with the ferry’s band, Beatrice and Greg encourage Wirt to take up the position as the bassoon player. At first, Wirt doubts his ability to play the instruments, insisting that no one wants to hear him play.

However, after listening to Beatrice and Greg's supporting words, he decides to give it a try. The bassoon performance ultimately earns everyone's attention and helps them stay on the ferry. Even though it may seem like a trivia moment, playing the bassoon in front of a huge crowd is definitely something out of Wirt's comfort zone. As someone who could not play the clarinet or join the marching band when he was in school, Wirt's performance on the ferry shows a giant leap in confidence for him. At the end of their journey, Wirt gains the confidence he needs to stand up against the Beast through his experience in the Unknown. After he finds out the truth about the Beast, he tells the Woodsman, "I've got my own problems to take care of." ("The Unknown" 7:18). This line suggests that Wirt finally gains the self-esteem he needs to embrace his own issues, eventually leading him out of the woods and back to his world. Without the journey in the Unknown, Wirt would not be able to grow as a person, admit his own flaws and gain the confidence he needs to feel competent in his own life. The ten episodes alongside Wirt is like a journey of growing up together. Looking back at the beginning, we can observe how Wirt's reaction to Sara has changed since he entered the Unknown. Wirt's efforts and payoffs evoke a familiar feeling for viewers since most people have also been through a transformation journey. Thus, on a subconscious level, the viewers can relate to Wirt's willingness to try new things and learn from his journey towards self-discovery.

The Unknown: Identity vs. Confusion

The transition from childhood to adulthood is one of the most important aspects to the age group of adolescence. During this period, adolescents are tasked with exploring their personal values, beliefs, and goals. They experience a dilemma between their own identity and the identity that others think they have (Erikson 166). It is about dealing with challenges and confronting self, and the transition of childhood to adulthood. In *OGW*, the viewers are introduced to the dark woods "the Unknown" and the horrifying villain "the Beast" during episode one. On the surface, it seems the Unknown is just a forest that the main characters get lost in. However, the mystery of the Unknown slowly unveils as the journey goes on. After the Woodsman tells the two brothers at the beginning that they are more lost than they realize, the scene pans toward a terrifying-looking tree (See Figure 6). The tree shares a close resemblance of a person's face in pain, with the branches looking like human hands. Overall, the creepiness of this scene sets the mood for the dark forest. As the tree's image fades to black, it seems to suggest how the boys' destiny and their entering into the Unknown is just a transition into true darkness, not knowing what is ahead of their journey.

Figure 6: A tree in the Unknown ("The Old Grist Mill" 3:26).

There are more clues on the Unknown's truth as the story unfolds. After trespassing the annual harvest festival of a strange town filled with pumpkin people (who turns out to be all skeletons), one of the town people said to Wirt "Aren't you a little too... early? it doesn't seem like you're ready to join us just yet." ("Hard Times at the Huskin' Bee" 5:00), insinuating that Wirt is still too young to be dead yet. Later, the pumpkin king tells Wirt that he will join the town someday. Implying the narrative that the town is a place for afterlives. It is also important to note that the people they met in the forest seem to come from a different time than Wirt and Greg. They can communicate with these people, yet Wirt and Greg look like outsiders who are also different from this era. At last, it is revealed that the two boys fell down a river and drowned, which eventually bring them to the Unknown: a purgatory between life and death, a place that's familiar and unfamiliar. Therefore, the Unknown is not just a place between life and death for Wirt. The Unknown also signifies coming of age for him. From a psychosocial perspective, entering the woods is a metaphor for the challenges and unknown that most adolescents face in the process of finding their own identity (Howarth 119). Before entering the Unknown, Wirt holds many grudges against Greg, who is his half-brother. From his conversation with Greg:

Wirt: "Once again, you ruin my life."

Greg: "Who? Me?"

Wirt: "Ugh! You and your stupid dad! You're always prodding me, trying to get me to join marching band."

Greg: "Oh, yeah! If you join the marching band, you could hang out with Sara more!"

Wirt: "That ship has sailed, Greg, thanks to you messing that up, too."

("Into The Unknown" 9:10)

We learn that Wirt and Greg are only half related due to his mother's remarriage, and Wirt seems to blame Greg for the problems that appear in his life. He puts the blame of

getting lost in the woods on Greg, claiming it is due to Greg goofing around that led to this situation ("Babes in the Wood" 2:07). However, deep down, Wirt knows that it is not entirely Greg's fault. In reality, he is just tired and afraid of carrying the responsibility of being a brother and dealing with troubles. Therefore, when Wirt tells Greg that it is not his job to get them home ("Babes in the Wood" 2:15), it is his way of giving up on being responsible and hiding from the fact that Wirt fails to be the big brother he should have been. After he surrenders to his fear, Wirt essentially submits himself to the Unknown, who later appears surrounded by edelwood as if the forest has claimed Wirt as a lost soul (See Figure 7). It is a symbol of how Wirt gets lost in coming to terms with his identity and responsibility.

Figure 7: Edelwood grows around Wirt's body ("Babes in the Wood" 8:58).

Apart from the dark forest, the Unknown, another important figure in Wirt's journey must be the villain, the Beast. The Woodsman describes it as "He stalks like the night! He sings like the four winds! He's the death of hope! He steals the children!" ("The Old Grist Mill" 9:28). The Beast is the monster that looms in the shadow of the dark forest, the embodiment of fear itself. The portrayal of the Beast has always been mysterious

as well (See Figure 8). Most of the time, it uses backlighting to create only a silhouette of its shadow. Therefore, the imagery of the Beast is mysterious and horrifying at the same time. We do not know its true form, similar to our fear of the unknown.

Figure 8: The Beast ("The Unknown" 6:09).

Another description of the Beast comes from the tavern keeper in episode 4 through a chilling ballad:

"He lurks out there in the Unknown, seeking those who are far from home, hoping never to let you return. Ooh-ooh, better beware. Ooh-ooh, the beast is out there. Ooh-ooh, better be wise and don't believe his lies. For once your will begins to spoil, he'll turn you to a tree of oil. And use you in his lantern for to burn."

("Songs of the Dark Lantern" 7:49)

This is the first time we find out the Beast is connected with the dark woods, revealing the fact that the Beast turns lost souls into edelwoods and uses it to keep the lantern burnt. Psychosocially speaking, we can interpret the Unknown as a metaphor for the process of coming of age (Jackson 4), just as the connection between the Unknown and the Beast is about discovering your own identity and fear of it, respectively. If adolescents submit to the fear and insecurity of growing up (i.e. the Beast), they fail to

find their own identity (i.e. escape the Unknown). Any lost souls in *OGW* that submit to the Beast, they fail to escape from the Unknown and become fuel to his lantern.

After Wirt nearly gives up on everything, he wakes up at the sound of Greg leaving his side. When he realises his little brother is gone, he finally admits to himself that "I was never any good to him." ("Into the Unknown" 10:50) and decides to find him and bring him home. Eventually, Wirt reunites with Greg, only to find him on the verge of losing to the Unknown. As mentioned previously, Wirt finds out the truth about the Beast's identity and the connection between the Beast's life with the lantern. By accepting the truth of the Beast, who turns out to be a fragile monster whose life depends on the burning of a lantern. It can be seen as Wirt accepting his long-term fear of family, friends and relationships. After revealing the truth of the Beast, we can finally catch a glimpse of the Beast's true form in the last episode (See Figure 9). It is a creature made of human fear and insecurity, as seen from the twisted faces on its body. This shot consists of only a mere second. However, this 1-second shot already makes the viewers feel the impact of this horrifying beast.

Figure 9: the true form of the Beast ("The Unknown" 8:13)

At last, the scene in which Wirt picks up the axe to save Greg ends the journey on a powerful note for the viewers (See Figure 10). It shows Wirt's determination in ending everything and go back home. The scene focuses on Wirt's action of picking up the axe. Even though we cannot see his facial expression, the scene is chilling enough with his own shadow looming on the ground due to the lantern's light. The axe symbolises the end that finally, Wirt can cut off the branches that have been holding them back from finding their way out of the dark forest, and maybe, his true self as well.

Figure 10: Wirt picks up the axe ("The Unknown" 7:24)

The Gothic imagery, such as the Beast and the dark woods, allow viewers to reflect on their own insecurities and confusion toward identity and recognize the similarities between the protagonist and themselves. Wirt is just like any typical teenager, who is lost in the journey of finding themselves. By accepting his responsibility and fear of the unknown, Wirt can come out of the woods stronger than before. Similarly, the 10-episode series also allows viewers to stand by his side figuratively as he comes of age.

Conclusion

Whether written or audio-visual, children's media rarely include Gothic elements since the horror and fear it conveys can be frightening to younger audiences. However, we can always find the similarities between two things that seem far-fetched to each other. In the same way, Gothicism has its significance in terms of psychosocial development. Although Howarth's original research already used a similar approach to analyse the relationship between Gothicism and children's literature, it fails to provide a comprehensive definition for Gothicism, and its focus is put solely on written text. Therefore, this research goes beyond Howarth's original framework by providing a definition of Gothicism and focusing on an audio-visual text instead. It reveals that Gothicism in children's media is not just something to terrify young viewers. Gothicism in *OGW* is able to evoke the emotion of fear and a sense of familiarity, which in turn reminds viewers of themself and is able to relate to the character's development. In light of this, combining gothic elements with a children's cartoon is of importance. It also discovers that *OGW*'s Gothicism contributes to the viewers' psychosocial growth in terms of overcoming different psychological conflicts through experiencing the gothic elements when watching the show.

Finally, it is hoped that the insight gained from this research can provide new discoveries in terms of the relationship between Gothicism and children's psychosocial development in another form of children's media. The dialectic between Gothicism and children's media may not seem like a logical pairing, but it certainly has a profound impact on its audiences. *OGW* is only the beginning of the combination of children's media and Gothicism. In the process of growing up and trying to find themselves,

viewers may feel lost and confused. Through the gothic and by entering a world of unknowns with *OGW*'s characters, viewers may eventually find a possible answer for their confusion.

(6051 words)

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