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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The phrase "capture a feeling of the old" is used by Guillermo Del Toro, "The Influences of *Crimson Peak*", IGN, Youtube, 16/10/2015, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghLINZ-wolY>, last accessed 12 March 2020.

- ¹ Released in November 2015, *Crimson Peak* is a movie written and directed by visionary Mexican filmmaker Guillermo Del Toro, who achieved worldwide fame when he received (among others) the 2018 Academy Award for Best Picture for *The Shape of Water*.
- ² Despite what the first trailers might have suggested, *Crimson Peak* was never conceived as a horrific ghost story and is a far cry from its contemporary horror films substantially relying on jump scares. Instead, Del Toro relentlessly emphasized during the promotion of the film how he had willingly codified his work to fit the gothic romance mode. Thus, however frightening the numerous ghosts of the castle might appear, the movie is first and foremost a tragic love story between its American heroine Edith Cushing and the mysterious English Baronet Thomas Sharpe. When taken to the isolated family mansion of her husband, Allerdale Hall, the aspiring writer soon realizes that the true source of evil forces of the place does not lie in its haunted recesses, but is rather encapsulated in the character of the austere Lucille Sharpe,

Thomas's sister and secret lover, who will try to poison Edith and drain her of her strength, resilience and money.

- 3 As Del Toro's enthusiastic listing of the gothic sources and references which helped him design the aesthetic identity of his movie suggests (Del Toro 2015b), *Crimson Peak* is constantly on the verge of favouring the thematic to the detriment of the narrative. The Mexican director's painstaking effort to endow his movies with a strong aesthetic identity has always been one of his trademarks—from *Pan's Labyrinth* to the aborted trilogy *Hellboy*—and it remains the movie's greatest asset, as CGI-enhanced settings or elaborately designed costumes all contribute to the creation of a deeply gothic atmosphere.
- 4 So far, the gothic has come to embrace multidisciplinary and multifaceted realities in the arts. Originally tinged with derogatory connotations when referring to eighteenth-century architecture and culture in England, it was then famously used by Horace Walpole in his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* (subtitled "a gothic story" in the second edition) whose publication is considered as a landmark in the history of gothic fiction. Many academics agree on the label "gothic genre" to define the heyday of the gothic novel in England, between the mid-eighteenth-century to the late 1820s. A great number of male and female writers is thus associated with the popularization of a fiction characterized by supernatural elements, oppressed female heroines and patriarchal arch-villains.
- 5 In the course of the nineteenth-century, the gothic progressively contaminated other geographical areas and generic categories, securing its timelessness thanks to its capacity to morph and evolve. Nowadays, some would lament that the gothic has lost its essence, as it is unrelentingly used in gender or post-colonial studies, the visual arts, short fiction, drama and poetry, but also fashion, music and video games. It is however the semiotic porousness of the gothic mode which allows this paper to analyze a twenty-first century Mexican-American film in the light of literary concepts and tropes which originated in eighteenth-century English fiction.
- 6 As previously mentioned, the English gothic genre was already on the wane when Victoria came to the throne of England. As a mode, it was however mutating and adapting to the emergence of new canons of British fiction, such as the realist novel in Great Britain or the national tale in Ireland. So much so that the gothic as the epitome of anxieties surrounding the crisis of representation managed to conquer the domestic space, as Jarlath Killeen contends in 2009 (Killeen 12). This domestication of the gothic is precisely what contributed to the unrivaled popularity of ghost stories in the 1850s in the United Kingdom with writers such as Charlotte Riddell, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, not to mention Charles Dickens or Henry James. The geographical and temporal displacement of the gothic in the Victorian era—oppression was no longer confined to the damp dungeons of a medieval castle but had invaded contemporary houses and urban spaces—also allowed for a relentless questioning of the domestic space and the family unit, in their social, religious but also sexual dimensions (Yiannitsaros 41).
- 7 Interestingly, Del Toro's *Crimson Peak* also stages the crisis of the heteronormative family unit within a typically gothic mansion in a *fin-de-siècle* England whose bleak plains are evocative of the haunted moors of Victorian fiction. Overall, the very tone, setting, aesthetic and canonical influences of the movie are blatantly Victorian (or heavily draw on the cultural codes of the Victorian era). For instance, Bernice Murphy lists the different tropes of the modern gothic romance compiled in Joanna Russ's 1973

essay, "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband" and which are to be found in Del Toro's film (Murphy 160). Somehow, the filmmaker seems to playfully toy with identifiable conventions when it comes to reinterpreting the canonical gothic in a modern way.

- 8 This paper thus aims to highlight the ways in which the gothic becomes itself the main topic of the movie, evolving from aesthetic backdrop to malleable fabric. Through the study of space, characterization and narrative devices, with heavy emphasis on the feminine, we will assess Del Toro's tentative deconstruction and rewriting of the Victorian gothic, drawing on a theoretical framework which conflates French and English psychoanalytic theory (from Julia Kristeva to Melanie Klein), but also literary scholarship on the gothic in the English-speaking world.

Space and its unstable boundaries

The traditional gothic castle

- 9 The main locale of the movie, one of the key elements of the title, posters, and plot of Del Toro's work, is an old family castle situated in Cumberland, Great Britain, a half-day's walk from the nearest town. Its evocative nickname "Crimson Peak" is scientifically explained by the crimson clay which soaks through the ground around it, weakens its foundations and tinges the landscape with a symbolically powerful shade of red. Such spatial instability is furthermore bolstered by temporal in-betweenness, as the ancient and derelict manor is surrounded with clay excavators and their complex machinery—Thomas Sharpe's failed attempt at entering the age of modernity at the turn of the century. Somehow, the Sharpes' estate stands within a heterotopic (and heterochronic) dimension¹ where the supernatural is given free rein and where dichotomies are confronted—ancient and modern, masculine and feminine, American and English.
- 10 The liminality of the main setting is another trait of its gothic identity: *Crimson Peak* is a huge, but empty, cold and damp, and of course dark castle. While its colour grading—saturating the movie with greys, ochres, dark blues and greens—is willingly evocative of Victorian painter John Atkinson Grimshaw's moonlit cityscapes,² its confusing geography made of vertical lines is reminiscent of the Piranesian "dynamic prison" of traditional gothic mansions in eighteenth and nineteenth-century English fiction (Lévy 1995, 634). Del Toro's manor is thus evocative of Radcliffe's *Udolpho* (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794), Reeve's *Lovel castle* (*The Old English Baron*, 1778) or Regina Maria Roche's numerous haunted abbeys,³ but also of Edgar Allan Poe's house of Usher, which lets its spectres uncannily resurface while crumbling into the ground.⁴ As a matter of fact, the house does sink into the red clay because of the mines beneath the surface,⁵ actualizing one of the most representative gothic tropes of the Victorian era, namely the conflict between an ancient and dysfunctional order (that of the aristocracy—embodied by the family castle) and an industrial present governed by a new social order (whose figurehead would be Edith's father as the American wealthy businessman).
- 11 Any parallelism with Poe's short story suggests envisioning the house as an organic entity, irremediably connected with its inhabitants. In Del Toro's movie, the gothic castle is staged as a conscious being that breathes, bleeds and hurts. Interestingly, it is

first shown as a decaying entity being penetrated by a foreign female body destined to regenerate it, when Thomas and Edith are seen crossing the threshold of the main hall, with the camera shooting from the inside.

- 12 Moreover, the house is breathing, due to the howling sound made by the wind blowing through the chimneys. In the last part of the movie, the castle is mostly filmed from the outside, in long shots, where it is shown as snow-covered, gothic and crimson, like a threatening, palpitating mass. Such visceral embodiment of the house⁶ seems at odds with the psychological dimension often ascribed to the gothic ruins of a derelict castle;⁷ yet, in *Crimson Peak* both paradigms are put into perspective, which allows for a new reading of the Victorian gothic castle.
- 13 Edith's descent into the basement is indeed a major development in the plot, as she was first forbidden to enter those premises by both her husband and sister-in-law. Beside the blatant reference to the tale of Bluebeard (and one of its most famous gothic rewriting, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*), Edith's vertical move leads her to an important epiphany—the basement is filled with clay vats where some of Thomas's former brides were killed and buried (if such a term may apply). In *Poétique de l'Espace* (*The Poetics of Space*), French philosopher Gaston Bachelard parallels the structure of a house and that of a mind, where the roof aligns with rationality, while the cellar is reminiscent of irrationality, darkness and boundless depths. While many gothic scholars might use Bachelardian theory to study the structuring of the gothic house, in *Crimson Peak* the basement is unexpectedly a symmetrical place of clear-cut revelations, where Edith understands her role and the fate of those before her.
- 14 What's more, unlike the birth house in Bachelard's theory ("la maison natale", which he endows with positive notions of power and stability), home in the gothic in general,⁸ and in *Crimson Peak* in particular, is a place of tyranny, oppression and persecution, a "repository of memories and spectres, both spiritual and mechanical, represented by Thomas's mechanical toys" (Musap 5). Edith's discovery of the Sharpes' birth house enables her to "descend into a past" (Lévy 1995, 642) which is not hers, but which eventually helps her achieve emancipation.
- 15 In most Victorian gothic tales, the crumbling castle is associated with the decaying family line embodied by an ill-intentioned patriarchal villain who delights in preying upon the virginal and innocent young woman. However, *Crimson Peak* quickly unveils the real villainous character of its plot, and constantly reminds the viewer of the male protagonists' helplessness, which sheds new light on the "characterization" of the castle.

The semiotic castle

- 16 Edith's coming of age story displaces her fragile body from the vibrant city of Buffalo where she hopes to become a professional writer, to the dark and gloomy estate of the Sharpes in Great Britain. Del Toro's thorough use of colour codes and *palette* allows for a very didactic introduction of the opposition between America and England, modernity and decay, light and darkness. On the one hand, Edith's American (birth) home seems to embody the rational and stable pattern of patriarchy (she is sheltered in her father's house, social classes are upheld, even though gender limits are potentially transcended). On the other hand, Allerdale Hall embodies the aristocratic castle that

witnesses its own downfall, overwhelmed by natural and supernatural forces which disrupt its stability and jeopardize its claim for a rationalized future.

- 17 To borrow from Kristevan lexicon, the American city of Buffalo, its masculine places (either Carter Cushing's office or the public baths) and Edith's birth house are all controlled by the laws of the Symbolic, namely the normalized rules of language and of patriarchal law which organizes social relations (Kristeva 1984, 27). Conversely, England's microcosmic double, Allerdale Hall, is governed by ruptures, drives, and playfulness, which are recognizable traits of the Semiotic, another way of expression that predates language, finds its roots in maternal desire and bodily impulses: "Drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother" (Kristeva 1984, 27). In her convincing article of 2011, Nicole Diederich aligns the supernatural with semiotic omens and analyses preternatural events as marks of a lost maternal territory (Diederich 30), which appears as a relevant premise for the examination of *Crimson Peak*'s female-centered spectrality and monstrosity.
- 18 As previously mentioned, the Sharpes' castle is endowed with anthropomorphic traits which are unexpectedly presented as feminine. The two siblings are indeed tied to this castle, their sole legacy and the epitome of their family name. However, it is Lucille who is introduced as the owner of the estate, and it soon appears that she cannot stay away from that place for too long—she is the first to return to England and is then never seen outside of the gloomy walls, except when she dies.⁹ Clad in black, she unites in a way with the walls when she spies on Edith—on several occasions, Del Toro shoots Edith beneath a circle window (like the one in the bathroom) while alternating the shots with close-ups on Lucille's profile peeking through the key-hole. Just like the eye-like window in Poe's house of Usher, Lucille's overseeing eye hauntingly follows Edith until the sister is deprived of eyesight (and power) during Thomas and Edith's carnal embrace at the post office. Unlike many Victorian gothic tales, the scopic violence of voyeurism does not involve any masculine authority, but is actually prevented by one, when Thomas eventually manages to wound his sister in an attempt to protect Edith before dying himself.
- 19 In a way, Lucille's body is subsumed into the castle, both being monstrous entities uniting in a disturbing chimera. Such process, it goes without saying, owes much to Daphné du Maurier's ghostly possession of the house by the spirit of its former mistress, Rebecca, and even to Brontë's Bertha Mason who at times seems to unite with the walls of Rochester's Thornfield Hall. What's more, the elaborate patterns on Lucille's black dresses echo the tapestries on the walls, while the slow downfall and crumbling of the floor/ceiling match her progressive loss of control on the situation.
- 20 All in all, Lucille is cast as the keeper of the keys, managing the exits and the entrances of all the characters on the stage of the castle, until Thomas and Edith break the dramatic rules by spending one night outside. In perfect control of her identity and secrets, she is not revealed as Edith's father's murderer until she decides to tell the truth, implying that Del Toro's camera is at her mercy, overusing close-ups of her hands holding her keys or on the contrary leaving her face/identity off screen. The cinematic language of the director speaks of Lucille's angry unconscious by translating it onto the castle, aligning the revengeful daughter's drives, impulses and deadly playfulness with the semiotic nature of the animated house.

Characterization: dualities and the disturbed family unit

Two female doppelgängers

- 21 The most famous poster used for the promotion of the movie enables the viewer to posit the triangular structure that underlies the main plot. Tom Hiddleston's Thomas Sharpe is indeed surrounded by two female figures, as opposed in colours as they are in their characters. Mia Wasikowska's virginal and naïve Edith Cushing attracts the viewer's gaze with her silvery white Victorian high-collar dress. Meanwhile, the dark-haired, crimson-clad Lucille (Jessica Chastain) already seems to embody the lurking threat, surreptitiously allowing the red stain of her wrath to invade Edith's dress and pervade the whole picture. These two lonely, parentless female figures are obviously staged as antinomies, even mirrored reflections or doubles; they invade each other's private space (Edith's American city of Buffalo, Lucille's English manor of Allerdale Hall) and most of all, they compete for the love and possession of the male body of Thomas Sharpe.
- 22 Throughout the movie, this doppelgänger relationship develops into that of a distorted mother/daughter bond, where Edith is infantilized by both Thomas and Lucille, being forbidden to penetrate certain rooms, or to own the keys. Furthermore, Lucille pretends to nurse Edith back to health with her poisonous tea, before endorsing the patriarchal discourse of the time to subdue the young woman—after treating her like a deluded, diseased child prone to nightmares, she seeks to contain Edith's potential hysterical agency by asserting "you have nowhere else to go" (Del Toro 2015c). The two women's conflictual relationship is regularly translated on screen by technical renditions of power play—using at times close-ups or low-angle shots (when Lucille nurses Edith, when she pushes her over the balustrade and breaks her leg), Del Toro films Edith's character's coming of age as she progressively turns the tables and eventually gets the upper hand over her rival.
- 23 As the literary trope of the doppelgänger suggests, one is bound to be absorbed by the other. Unsurprisingly then, the movie's climax stages the physical confrontation between Edith and her arch-enemy, where the latter is unveiled and exposed as the real gothic villain. Unlike most of the scenes, this struggle takes place outside the castle, in the Sharpes' snow-covered clay mines, where Edith takes on the white and crimson colours of the setting, before killing Lucille with a shovel, and bringing forward her ghosting process. Lucille conventionally displays all the topic features of the Other in Victorian gothic fiction, as she embodies the threateningly seductive New Woman whose mere presence potentially jeopardizes the heteronormative family unit of the Victorian home. Just like Le Fanu's unruly governesses or Stoker's sexually active female vampires, Lucille's decadent nature voices Victorian anxieties around female sexuality and native degeneracy. As Carole Margaret Davison argues, Victorian gothic fiction displaces familiar threats into foreign and invasive dreads (Davison 126, 138), a pattern which Del Toro acknowledges and disrupts when he stages the victim as the unwilling invader and her nemesis as the uncannily native threat.
- 24 As many critics would contend, the true (anti)heroine of *Crimson Peak* is Lucille Sharpe, as her characterization conflates many gothic tropes and interesting perspectives on

femininity. Incestuous sister, manipulative lover, she also stands, as previously argued, as the conventional gothic inverted mother.

Motherhood and abjection

- 25 Traditionally, the gothic locates the maternal as a space of aggressiveness, fears and even death. It is the locus of the desire for the Semiotic, and the recognition of the Symbolic, but most of all, it is the place of abjection (Diederich 23). Originally theorized by Julia Kristeva, the abject actualizes a person's troublesome relationship with their own bodily boundaries, the mapping of which Kristeva ascribes to the mother's authority:

The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal. [...] The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity. (Kristeva 1982, 12-13)

- 26 While in many gothic texts of the late 1800s and early 1900s it is homosexuality that is figured in terms of abjection (Yiannitsaros 44), here the filmmaker stages liquids and bodily fluids evocative of the Kristevan abject body to illustrate the morally condemnable incestuous relationship between Lucille and Thomas. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva reminds us of the two major polluting elements that regularly confront the human body: faeces and menstrual blood. Unlike tears and sperm which she connects to life and birth, faeces and their equivalents, namely rot, infectious diseases and corpses constitute a threat from the outside. Conversely, menstrual blood menaces bodily integrity from the inside (Kristeva 1982, 71). In *Crimson Peak*, the colour red obviously pervades the lens—the red clay beneath the castle, the red stains of blood that tinge Edith's dress and Lucille's face—all metaphors of (menstrual) blood that speaks of wounded female bodies. Throughout the movie the red clay is an element always in motion, always threatening to transgress boundaries, especially those of the supposedly secure space of the castle. As the blood of both the earth and the Sharpes' mansion, it speaks of the soil being raped by Thomas's patriarchal machines (the clay excavators), the latter symbolizing (and failing) capitalism and allowing the filmmaker to toy with yet another gothic trope.
- 27 Besides, the scene where Lucille is shown grasping spilled food in her bare hands is the epitome of the abject moment that could foretell the primal scene of the incest between her and Thomas. What appear to be scrambled eggs conjure up images of half-digested food, filth and vomit. It is in-between, in and out, raw and cooked. For Kristeva, food is abject if it lies on the border of two territories: "When food appears as a polluting object, it does so as oral object only to the extent that orality signifies a boundary of the self's clean and proper body. Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories" (Kristeva 1982, 75). That handful of half-cooked eggs that Lucille is so desperate to grasp makes the viewer connect her physicality and interiority to Edith and Thomas, all the more so in the incest scene that is forced onto the viewer's and Edith's eyes a few scenes later. Thomas becomes that in-between which Lucille cannot abject from her body: "It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva 1982, 4).

- 28 Lucille doesn't accept to let go of Thomas, to let him out of her maternal body (the castle) and out of her sexualised female body (as her brother/lover). Such are the many roles Del Toro's villain takes on throughout the movie. I would nevertheless contend that in her own discourse Lucille first and foremost writes herself as daughter, especially when she confesses to a bed-ridden Edith that she and her brother used to be abused by their own mother and how she would try and protect her helpless sibling in those unhappy childhood days.

The psychotic daughter

- 29 We have already mentioned the numerous similarities between the two main female protagonists, including the fact they were both deprived of a mother figure at an early age, and consequently remain haunted by her. As regards their own strategies of coping with such a loss (be it desired or lamented), it could be said that these two women are constructed as splitting images of the daughter figure. If we follow psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's views we might see in the duo Edith/Lucille a gothic and cinematic interpretation of the infant's splitting. Klein, whose work is a milestone in the history of Anglo-Saxon object-relations theory, famously coined the two positions of the new born, namely the paranoid-schizoid position—the infant feels the anxiety of his self-destruction by bad objects, of invasive malevolence—and the depressive position—the mother is identified as a total object, while the infant fears destructive drives which might destroy others (potentially the object of love, the mother).¹⁰ While Edith is staged as the typical gothic heroine who undergoes the assault of oppressive forces upon her body, Lucille tends to embody the second position's death drives, targeting female others, before eventually destroying her Other, her brother.
- 30 Drawing on Julia Kristeva's own theorization of the mother/child relationship, we might also suggest that the absence of a paternal function within the castle and the presence of an abusive mother, combined with the uncertainty of spatial boundaries, lead the children to perversion and psychosis (Kristeva 1982, 63). Lucille represents the little (psychotic) girl who could not separate from her mother through the paternal image (whom she probably murdered as well). She incarnates the forsaken daughter, fragile and animal, who never quite got out of the haunting maternal entity.
- 31 What's more, Edith manages to enter the Symbolic (the structured world of social regulations and language) thanks to the Law, language and presence of her father. Carter Cushing is shown offering her a pen as a birthday gift at the beginning of the movie, both upholding his social and linguistic role as guiding presence in his daughter's life, but also showing her his support in her career choices. Conversely, Lucille appears to have remained stuck in the Semiotic, subsumed within the castle, connected to its supernatural nature, incarnated in that crimson liquid body that disturbs patriarchy.
- 32 The movie's ending is thus equivocal in many ways—the viewer first sees Edith leaving the premises of the Sharpes' estate with Alan, her helpless friend whose romantic role of knight in shining armour is gleefully disrupted by Del Toro's narrative choices. She has just managed to free herself from her destructive love for Thomas and from the relentless fury of his sister, as both are left trapped within the castle in the forms of ghosts. Somehow, Edith has failed in reinstating the laws of patriarchy as she did not save her husband from Lucille's untamed folly nor did she bear him a child.

Crimson Peak is left to its ghosts and semiotic rule, just like Edith is left with the haunting ghosts of her life.

- 33 However, Del Toro's heroine succeeds in narrating her own story, as the extended metaphor of the pen suggests. As the movie ends, a book entitled *Crimson Peak* is closed, prompting in the viewer's mind an analeptic jump to the very beginning of the film where Edith asserts her own belief in ghosts, her face pale and bleeding from her (what will be the) final confrontation with Lucille.

Narrating and unfolding the plot

Ghosts

- 34 It is unnecessary to remind the reader of the prominence of hauntings and ghosts in the gothic mode—the Victorians, as already mentioned, were particularly keen on horrific ghost stories which enabled them to face the anxieties of death but also of an ever-transforming world in the secure space of the text.¹¹ Right from the beginning of the movie, ghosts are said to belong to Edith's sphere (her first words being "Ghosts are real"), and could be seen as its main conventions, the lens through which we should apprehend its reality.
- 35 All ghosts (except Thomas's) are female, all frightening when they try to communicate with Edith, and all intending on warning her against the dangers of *Crimson Peak*. In that respect, they uphold the Victorian conventions of staging spectralized women to expose the societal and patriarchal "burying alive" which they are the victims of.¹² Jean-Michel Rabaté reminds us that ghosts are nodal figures, linking locations to the subjective (Rabaté 51-52). Here the ghosts specifically incarnate the unhealthy desire of the Sharpes to remain within the premises of Allerdale Hall and the deadly pattern they have designed to do so¹³—their mother, the murdered brides (Pamela Upton, Margaret McDermott and Enola Sciotti) and even Lucille's new-born all testify to the siblings' unresolved relationship with their own family (name), sterility and mortality. Interestingly, the phantoms appear as more and more humanised as the movie goes on, evolving from evanescent figures of dark fumes (Edith's mother) to bleeding corpses, first sticking to thresholds (doorways, closets, corridors, floors), before trespassing them.
- 36 Despite the aesthetic value of Del Toro's ghosts, I would contend that the notions of haunting and spectrality—just like the gothic as mode—lie at the core of the movie and challenge contemporary renditions of ghost stories. The very belief in ghosts seems to embody the fracture between ancient and modern, between two nations and two visions of the world—Edith's American friend Alan (Dr Alan McMichael) for instance dismisses them as tricks in photographs, while Edith herself first discards them as "metaphors of the past" before realizing that "ghosts are real [and that] they never go away" (Del Toro 2015c). It is somehow confusing to witness the heroine fall prey to the very superstitions she used to deride. The movie constantly unsettles its viewer in its treatment of ghosts—at first they might stick to conventional Victorian rules and serve the only purpose of terrifying the audience.¹⁴ However, more than mere cinematic props, the ghosts of Allerdale Hall eventually help Edith understand the Sharpes' scheme, defeat Lucille and come to terms with the initial traumatic loss of her mother (whose funeral opens the film).

- 37 Similarly to the duo Edith/Lucille, the two mother figures echo each other in their spectrality and gothic nature. Edith's mother is present-absent—after she dies, she keeps haunting her child, warning her against the dangers of some place called "Crimson Peak". In a strikingly nerve-racking scene, the dark silhouette clad in the rags of some Victorian dress transforms cuddling into a deadly embrace when her bony fingers delicately squeezes the shoulder of her petrified ten-year-old daughter. Conversely, the Sharpes' mother is absent-present (she is not mentioned until late, but her role turns out to be paramount in Edith's understanding of Lucille's true intentions). Metonymically reduced to an overseeing phantom (that surpasses her daughter), she turns mothering into violence and abuse. Kristeva insists on the need for a maternal authority to delineate the topography of the clean body (Kristeva 72). In the film, the viewer quickly understands that Lucille's mother abused her children, turning their clean bodies into hysterical ones that need to shed the blood of virginal and naive fiancées in order to maintain their economic integrity. When Lucille killed her mother, she unconsciously rejected her own maternity and maternal potentiality, a pattern which was repeated when she couldn't save the infant she had with her own brother, and whose birth defect transcribed his parents' moral decay.
- 38 These mothers are abject doppelgängers, symbols of the original matricide¹⁵ French feminist Luce Irigaray identifies as the functioning principle of our society when she refers to Clytemnestra's murder in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (fifth century BC) (Irigaray 15-17). In that respect, the Sharpe siblings are sentenced to hysteria just like Orestes and Electra were. While the outcome of the Greek tragedy releases Orestes from the hold of madness—Irigaray deems him the necessary holder of patriarchal regulations—it condemns Electra and prevents her from recovering sanity. In the same way, Lucille bears the sole responsibility of her mother's murder as she is the only body shedding others' blood, including her own brother's.
- 39 All in all, Del Toro's movie takes an interesting stance on femininity, depicting numerous variations of powerful, weakened, decadent and traumatized women. It even goes as far as erasing the male presence of its director with numerous meta-references to creating/narrating as a female process.

Writing oneself

- 40 The positioning of Edith Cushing as "final girl" has been tackled several times in articles interested in *gothic feminism* or *horror feminism*.¹⁶ Her professional prospects, unexpectedly violent response to Lucille's threat and final revelation as the writer of the story clearly testify to her being portrayed as a strong woman. Zooming in on the evolution of her role, actions and decision-making however tends to query such assumption. Overall, her characterization hovers between the fragile child who submits to the desires of her father and husband, and the dynamic young woman longing for a writer's career despite social pressures and obstacles.
- 41 On the one hand, Edith is subjected to victimization both in the plot and the framing, as in the first two thirds of the movie she is mostly shown as a feeble childish woman, manipulated by her lover, deprived of her father, and terrified by what she cannot control. Del Toro cunningly translates her vulnerability when he films her being pushed away from the frame by Thomas's threatening black mass.¹⁷ On the other hand, she becomes more active in the last part of the film after the discovery of the cylinders

revealing the fate of one of Thomas's previous bride, Enola. From then on, Edith progressively reverses the ratio of power by outwitting Lucille first (she robs her keys and uses the elevator to visit the forbidden clay vats), before physically dominating her. This is manifest when Edith manages to wound Lucille with a (metaphorical) pen, before eventually killing her with a shovel.

- 42 So far, we have portrayed Lucille as Edith's doppelgänger and nemesis, thus following traditional gothic interpretations exemplified in Nicole Diederich's essay: "part of the terror attendant on gothic conventions is the dissonance between the heroine and the Other – whether spectral or human" (Diederich 22). Such dissonance is actualized in the never-ending tension between the two which ends up in the unavoidable killing of one by the other. However, the Manichean use of antinomic features to portray Edith and Lucille (colours, personal traits, physical position in the frame...) could prompt the viewer to identify the latter as the evil twin of the former. Presumably, Lucille may represent the young heroine's repressed urges for power and domination. Her sexual drives, transgressive identity and manipulation of Thomas are indeed a far cry from Edith's meek character. She embodies the emancipated daughter who killed her mother and almost wed her brother, in a distorted rewriting of the Electra complex; she is the incarnation of the angel in the house that went wrong, that actually merged with this crumbling castle.
- 43 Somehow, Lucille could be seen as a literary creation of Edith's fertile mind, a blank canvas onto which Edith projected her fantasies before stabbing her/it with the symbolic pen her father gave her. While one could object to that interpretation arguing that Lucille's backstory is given too much attention, I believe that Lucille's persistence as a ghost parallels Edith's final words ("they never go away") and aligns Del Toro's ambiguous ending with (female) narrative unreliability, a cornerstone of the Victorian gothic.¹⁸
- 44 The whole movie thus tackles the very processes of writing and emancipation. Edith takes on the masculine social role of the writer, after the symbolical death of her parents and the killing of that uncontrollable projection of herself. At the end of the film, she has grown into an emotionally and financially independent woman that manages an androgynous victory with the help of female and male ghosts,¹⁹ and a weapon (the shovel) combining masculine and feminine symbolism.²⁰ She is the one closing the book of her life, and thus reminds the viewer of the social obstacles which female writers had to face in *fin-de-siècle* England (but also in the United States). It is indeed widely acknowledged that many female writers reached fame by publishing gothic tales in the wake of Ann Radcliffe, during and after the heyday of the genre. The Victorian period saw many female writers of ghost stories (Charlotte Riddell, Elizabeth Gaskell) and Del Toro aptly pays tribute to those female pioneers when, at the beginning of the movie, several members of the bourgeoisie crack a joke at Edith's unsuccessful attempt at publishing her ghost story. Not only is her writing deemed "too feminine", but she is also compared to Jane Austen who died an old maid, to which she wittily replies that she would rather be like Mary Shelley, who died a widow (Del Toro 2015c).
- 45 Overall, Edith's emancipation echoes Del Toro's in many ways: she manages to free herself from the threatening physicality of the castle and its inhabitants and writes her own story. She is nevertheless shot in the last scene with her friend Alan accompanying her, a helpless yet influential masculine figure who might become her husband/lover

and thus re-instate her into the heteronormative structure of (American) society. Likewise, Del Toro is haunted by his influences, the conventions and the traditions of the gothic romance, but also by his patriarchal figures, namely those canonical works he so regularly quotes: Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*, Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Dicken's *Great Expectations*, and Hitchcock's adaptation of Du Maurier's *Rebecca* among others.

- 46 What's more, it seems that in terms of tropes and motifs, the movie precisely fits within a specific category of the Victorian gothic, namely what Patrick Brantlinger among others called the "imperial gothic". In his compelling analysis of Victorian novels, including *Dracula*, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or *Heart of Darkness*, Brantlinger identifies the fragility of civilization and progress and lays the emphasis on how those texts testify to the white race's potential tendency to degeneration, sexual anarchy and gender inversion (Brantlinger 204, 214). Besides its resorting to fragmented narratives, ghostly apparitions and doppelgängers, *Crimson Peak* elicits the same anxieties through its staging of the former colony's successful embracing of technological and social modernity, as opposed to the English lineage's progressive decadence. Even if Del Toro's specific inscription of his film into the gothic mode has always been grounded by his alleged wish to direct a gothic romance, the specific use of the imperial gothic by a Mexican artist would require further analysis as regards societal, political and historical contextualization.

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NOTES

1. See Foucault 46-49. A heterotopia is a counter-site which Foucault situates outside of all places. Similarly, he defines the heterochrony as an out-of-time zone, for instance a graveyard.

2. Del Toro acknowledges the painter as one of his main sources in terms of visual identity. See Del Toro 2015a.
3. Roche was an Irish writer who had achieved national and international fame with her numerous gothic publications in the style of Radcliffean "terror gothic".
4. "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Poe is famously associated with the popularisation of the American gothic (in the wake of Charles Brockden Brown's 1798 *Wieland*) which paralleled that of the Victorian gothic.
5. After the couple has moved into the castle, Thomas explains to his spouse "with the cold and the rain it is impossible to stop the damp and erosion, and with the mines down below, well, the wood is rotting, and the house is sinking". *Crimson Peak*. Directed by Guillermo Del Toro (Burbank: Legendary Pictures, 2015).
6. Christopher Yiannitaros considers such visceral embodiment of the house as fundamental to the gothic tradition, see Yiannitsaros 42.
7. In *Le Lierre et la chauve-souris*, Elizabeth Durot-Boucé reminds us that the geography of ruins is akin to that of the character's unconscious (Durot-Boucé 57).
8. See for instance Milbank or Ferguson Ellis.
9. Even then, she is last seen as a ghost playing the piano in the main hall of the mansion, forever trapped within its (un)homely walls.
10. These concepts are respectively developed and detailed in Klein 1986a, 162 and Klein 1986b, 183.
11. Carol Margaret Davison sees the gothic as a socially symbolic site of mourning or *memento mori* (Davison 7, 14).
12. Diane Wallace, as many scholars before and after her reads the presence of female ghosts as the translation of women being socially buried alive in the nineteenth-century (Wallace 26).
13. Even the ghost of Edith's mother, despite being tied to the American city of Buffalo, appears to warn her daughter against the dangers of *Crimson Peak*, and so right before Thomas rings her doorbell to invite her to a reception.
14. According to Nick Freeman, the ghost in gothic fiction is made to terrify rather than teach a moral lesson. Its presence is often explained and, in the wake of Radcliffean gothic, usually rationalised (Freeman 94).
15. Even though Edith did not kill her mother, she bears the pain (and responsibility?) of her death.
16. See Lukancic, Kindinger, A conference was also held at Kent University (UK) in May 2017 whose topic 'Gothic Feminism: The Representation Of The Gothic Heroine In Cinema' inspired many talks on Del Toro's movie.
17. Two different scenes use that type of framing: when Carter Cushing is murdered, his daughter identifies the corpse before bursting into tears in Thomas's arms; the second scene being when Edith has just seen her first ghost and is sitting on her armchair, also crying.
18. See Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864) or "Carmilla" (1872); Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), for instance.
19. Thomas's spectre distracts Lucille so that Edith should kill her.
20. Bernice Murphy also connects the shovel with Edith's father and the 'hard graft' that made him a wealthy man. (Murphy 162).

ABSTRACTS

Released in October 2015, *Crimson Peak* is a movie written and directed by visionary Mexican filmmaker Guillermo Del Toro, who codified his work to fit the gothic romance mode. Right from the powerful evocative capacity of its title to its decaying walls and vaulted corridors, the film clearly relies on a self-proclaimed gothic backdrop. As a matter of fact, Del Toro willingly attests that he was heavily influenced by many Victorian artists, among whom Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, the Brontë sisters or Charles Dickens. The point of this discussion will be to cover the movie's main gothic motifs (from characters to settings, plots and conventions) and to highlight the ambivalent dynamics of the filmmaker, whose work constantly hovers between an undisguised homage to the Victorian gothic and a challenging rewriting of its traits. First, the gothic *mise-en-scène* (Lévy 1994, 1) of the movie testifies to Del Toro's conscious use of colour coding and design as "story-telling tools" (Del Toro, "The Influences"), which enables him to conflate anthropomorphism and femininity through the staging of a feminized and semiotic space. Moreover, the interplay between the two main female characters allows for a questioning of the doppelgänger figure, and for a rewriting of the traditional patrilineage scenario that is typical of the gothic. Finally, this paper will discuss Del Toro's toying with gothic motifs such as the ghost and the supernatural in general, which may suggest new gender politics and a reflection on female empowerment.

Crimson Peak (2015) est un film que son réalisateur, le Mexicain Guillermo Del Toro, a volontairement rattaché à la tradition de la *gothic romance*. La capacité évocatrice de son titre, les murs décrépis de son décor principal tout comme ses couloirs sombres sont autant d'éléments qui confirment l'identité gothique autoproclamée de l'œuvre. Il est vrai que Del Toro n'a eu de cesse de revendiquer l'héritage d'artistes victoriens, parmi lesquels Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, les sœurs Brontë ou encore Charles Dickens. L'objectif du présent article est l'étude des principaux motifs gothiques du film (des personnages aux lieux, éléments de l'intrigue et conventions) mais également celle des dynamiques ambivalentes utilisées par Del Toro, dont le travail oscille constamment entre hommage appuyé au gothique victorien et réécriture transgressive de ses traits. D'une part, la mise en scène gothique du film traduit l'utilisation consciente de la photographie et des décors en tant qu'outils narratifs qui permettent à Del Toro de mêler anthropomorphisme et féminité lorsqu'il filme l'espace du manoir sémiotique. De plus, les jeux de pouvoir entre les deux personnages féminins principaux incitent à une relecture du motif du *doppelgänger* et à la remise en cause du scénario patrilinéaire (constante de la fiction gothique). Enfin, le jeu cinématographique sur le motif du fantôme nous apparaît comme révélateur de nouvelles dynamiques genrées, voire d'une réflexion sur l'émancipation féminine.

INDEX

Mots-clés: gothique, cinéma, doppelgänger, sémiotique, féminité, genre, spectralité

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