Linnæus University
Sweden

Master's Thesis

Ghostly Bells and Monstrous Drumming

An Exploration of Intermediality and Supernatural Strangeness in "Especially Heinous"

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Term: VT21
Subject: English Literature
Level: Advanced, 30 credits
Course code: 5EN30E

Abstract

Various contemporary female authors deploy supernatural motifs portrayed through or alongside diverse forms of intermediality in texts which thematise the patriarchal oppression of women. In order to throw light on this phenomenon, this thesis investigates the intermedial relations and supernatural motifs of Carmen Maria Machado's novella "Especially Heinous: 272 Views of *Law & Order: SVU*", and their relation to the political themes of the text. The analysis is based on the method of intermediality, primarily on Lars Elleström's and Irina O. Rajewsky's categorisations of intermedial relations. The supernatural motifs are situated within the hybrid context of the gothic and magical realism, and understood as an expression of strangeness.

The analysis of this thesis finds that media transformation in combination with supernatural motifs serve to visualise oppressive and violent structures that are typically obscured. What is more, the similarities and tensions between intermediality and supernatural strangeness emphasise the dread and confusion produced in the encounter with uncanny or eerie societal forces. Finally, the tension and the resistance that arise where supernatural strangeness and intermediality meet illustrate a fundamental dilemma of communication: that it is always mediated, and thus, always incomplete.

Key words

gothic, magical realism, intermediality, Carmen Maria Machado, supernatural, strange

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1 Introduction

It is difficult not to notice a certain trend that has emerged within contemporary women's writing where texts simultaneously reach beyond the confines of the written word to evoke other kinds of media, and beyond the realm of realism to conjure the supernatural into their stories. Poet Warsan Shire makes such leaps in her poem "Mermaids" (*Her Blue Body*, 2015), which expresses the horror of female genital mutilation by combining references to a creature of fairy tales and folklore with references to the reality television show *America's Next Top Model* and to a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. Other poems by Shire have been modified and transported into the hourlong music video that accompanied Beyoncé's album *Lemonade* (2016) where supernatural motifs in the verses are emphasised through dreamlike settings and visual references to hoodoo and American Southern gothic. In literary prose, Chesya Burke's collection of short stories *Let's Play White* (2011) features witchcraft, ghosts and talking animals, as well as sparse illustrations very loosely connected to the text. The strategy is not restricted to the works of anglophone, black, female authors, as it can also be observed in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) and Ariana Harwicz's *Matate Amor* (2012, *Die, My Love*). Some of these texts emphasise the connection to other media, and others the supernatural motifs, yet they all feature both elements and share similar thematic concerns.

A central theme in many texts of this kind is the suffering of women due to patriarchal and/or racial oppression in intimate and familial relationships or in society at large. Such a political undercurrent informs, and is simultaneously shaped by, the supernatural motifs that are portrayed through, or alongside, connections to media beyond written

literature. Understanding the relation between the supernatural and the connections to other media, might help explain why this has become a recurrent device employed by female authors (often from a postcolonial or transcultural context) to explore the various plights of women.

"Especially Heinous: 272 Views of *Law & Order: SVU*" by Cuban American author Carmen Maria Machado, published in her collection of short stories *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017), is a particularly striking example of this trend in contemporary literature. The story is narrated as a series of synopses for the police procedural *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (1999-). While the titles of the episodes of the novella match the titles of the television series, the stories they tell soon veer off from the realism of procedurals and dive into an exploration of the uncanny, the eerie and the magical. The main characters of the novella, detectives Benson and Stabler, become besieged by the supernatural both through repeated hauntings of various kinds and through sporadic encounters and events. Significantly, many of these experiences are closely associated with sound, taste and smell, sensations that cannot be fully conveyed in writing. "Especially Heinous" is thus not only rife with references to other media products, such as Dalí's surrealist clocks (72) or the police procedural it pretends to adapt, but is also a text that continuously tries to push beyond the specific sensorial modes that mark one of the borders of the medium of written literature. This play with media borders is essential to the representation of supernatural motifs in the novella.

Because supernatural motifs are incorporated into diverse literary traditions and genres, in which they often fulfil different and specific roles, it is necessary to situate these elements within a relevant context in order to analyse them. Such efforts have been made in previous research of the work of Machado. In "Desire and Knowledge: Feminist

Epistemology in Carmen María Machado's 'The Husband Stitch'" Mary Angeline Hood points out that Machado shares the tendency with other Latina writers to incorporate oral traditions into her narratives (990). In the article, Hood discusses the role of urban legends and myths in the first short story featured in *Her Body and Other Parties*, arguing that Machado's rewriting of these stories warns women against their pernicious, heterosexist lies (994-995) while also providing them with the "keys to maneuver the difficulties and banal violence that women face in contemporary society" (996). Hood finally notes, that despite the knowledge of experience that can be passed down through legends, "a woman's best attempt at avoiding violence is frequently thwarted" (1001) as the protagonist of "The Husband Stitch" ends up being killed by her husband. In a somewhat similar vein, Jessica Campbell's article "Real Women Have Skins: The Enchanted Bride Tale in *Her Body and Other Parties*" analyses Machado's short story "Real Women Have Bodies" in relation to animal brides of folktales and fairy tales, such as the tale of the swan maiden and H.C. Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (302). These articles suggest that a fruitful way of understanding Machado's incorporation of supernatural motifs is to place them in relation to folklore, fairy tales and urban legends. These connections can be observed in "Especially Heinous", but they do not present themselves as the most relevant genres to which one might relate the magical phenomena in this text.

"Especially Heinous" exhibits what I will call *supernatural strangeness*, that is, supernatural motifs that cannot be easily situated and decoded following familiar protocols. This strangeness might impel one to connect the novella to the recently emerging genre of new weird, which tends to be concerned with "encounters with monstrous, impossible events that violently encroach upon reality" (Ulstein 51). However, the weird is defined by an often

overwhelming "presence of *that which does not belong*" that inspires a "sense of *wrongness*" and "exceeds our capacity to represent it" (Fisher NP). This is not a general characteristic of the hauntings of "Especially Heinous", as they are more closely associated with the uncanny and the eerie. Considering the tone and the tropes of "Especially Heinous", and also those of the works of Shire, Burke, Silko, Harwicz and others, I believe the supernatural strangeness in Machado's novella can be fruitfully analysed within the hybrid context of supernatural gothic and magical realism. These genres are usually treated as separate and works such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) tend to be placed either within the gothic or within magical realism – but are rarely analysed as belonging to both genres at the same time. This is unfortunate because, as Lucie Armitt points out, gothic and magical realist writing share certain similarities and are connected to each other where the dark edge of magical realism meets the gothic (512). Both genres also have a history of serving as literary sites to stage political subversion. It is necessary to note, that I am not interested here in conclusively situating "Especially Heinous" within any genre, hybrid or otherwise. Rather, I intend to use these two narrative traditions as reference points to better understand the spectres and other magical phenomena that haunt this novella. In particular, there exists a tension within "Especially Heinous" between a gothic and a magical realist understanding of the strange and the supernatural. This tension might escape analytical notice if the text were only observed through the lens of one of these two genres, or through the panoramic lens of the fantastic.

The supernatural strangeness discussed above is, of course, only half of the equation. The other half is the intermedial aspect of the text, that is, the relations between "Especially Heinous" and other media. I will focus on two kinds of intermedial relations in this text. The first is the media transformation that takes place in the adaptation of (very limited) elements

from *Law & Order: SVU* through the episode synopses. The second is the play with media borders that occurs through the intermedial references that accompany the supernatural phenomena that haunt Benson and Stabler. The analysis of this thesis endeavours to discover how strange supernatural motifs relate to and interact with such intermedial writing in "Especially Heinous". This might in turn bring clarity into the trend of blending complex and intentional intermedial configurations with various types of magical and mystical phenomena in contemporary women's writing.

In order to achieve the aim of my thesis I will conduct my analysis of "Especially Heinous" employing the method of intermediality, which helps visualise and understand the connections and boundaries between media. In particular, much of the terminology in my intermedial analysis stems from Lars Elleström's model of media modalities and intermedial relations, which provides a well-defined and versatile base for studying diverse media configurations. However, while intermediality, as a method, can reveal how various intermedial relations play a part in the representation of supernatural strangeness in "Especially Heinous", on its own it achieves little more than a descriptive study of the text. I am convinced that, as Jørgen Bruhn writes, "*the particular constellation of mixed media in a text often expresses a tension which in a more or less opaque way relates to the historical context of the text in question*" ("Heteromediality" 232). This means that the manner in which intermedial references are woven into the narrative can be highly significant for our interpretation of the themes in a text. For this potential to be realised, an intermedial analysis needs to be informed by critical theory. Hence the combination of the genre perspective and intermediality in this thesis. Because the gothic is a genre that is thoroughly transmedial – which means it is not restricted to the medium of literature, but finds expression in music,

film and other media as well (Rajewsky, “Intermediality” 46) – there are various intermedial analyses of gothic works. Yet these analyses seldom focus on gothic literature on its own, and research focused on intermedial relations in magical realist texts seems to be even more scarce.

The aim of this thesis motivates me to lay out my argument as follows. The second section deals with the gothic and magical realism, it creates a basic outline of the genres and discusses some relevant differences and similarities. It is crucial at this point to note that the section is not meant to be an in-depth exploration of either genre, but to present and explain concepts and ideas pertaining specifically to the expression of supernatural strangeness in the gothic and magical realism. This theory section focuses thus on key elements for the analysis of this thesis, such as the two modes of the eerie and the uncanny, the significance of ghosts in gothic and magical realist literature, and on the tradition of political subversion of these genres. The third section is dedicated to the method of intermediality, it introduces necessary terminology and discusses the ways in which intermedial relations can affect a text. This section is presented just before the analytical part of this thesis begins, in order that the terms and model might be more readily understood through their immediate practical application. The analysis of this thesis is divided into four parts, beginning with section four. This section focuses on how the media transformation from television series to novella allows “Especially Heinous” to contest the narrative of the police procedural and infuse it with supernatural strangeness. The fifth section discusses how two of the central hauntings in the novella use intermediality and supernatural strangeness to represent violence and societal forces that are difficult to grasp. The sixth section explores another side to these intermedial and supernatural relations, namely the gaps and ambiguity that can arise from them. Finally, the seventh

section discusses a fundamental discordance between mediated communication and supernatural strangeness that has political ramifications. My findings will be summarised and presented together with some propositions for further research in the final section of this thesis.

2 The Gothic and Magical Realism

The gothic and magical realism are two genres which are often perceived to be in opposition to the realist novel, as they provide drastically different perspectives on reality and on our experience of it. Their characteristic supernatural motifs unsettle ideas about what is knowable, and question assumptions about a progressive, linear history associated with Western modernity. Because of this, the genres share various central traits, still, they also diverge significantly from one another in terms of general tone and in their treatment of the supernatural.

Gothic literature is fundamentally characterised by its expression of repressed desires, taboos and deep-rooted fears (Crow 1) and typically intertwines the anxieties of the present with "terrors of the past" (Botting 14). Charles L. Crow, who has written extensively on the gothic, states that the genre "records our disgust or rejection of a fallen, haunted, cursed or diseased world that we know should be something else" (9). The gothic arose as a genre in English literature in the late eighteenth century with works such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe. Although often maligned by critics for its portrayals of violent excess and perversion, the genre became popular and found a particularly devoted readership among young women (Corstorphine 3). The wary stance adopted against gothic fiction may be related to the term

"gothic" itself – initially applied to architecture, it "implied a barbarous lack of taste" and the destruction of "civilised values" as it made reference to the ancient Germanic tribes that had sacked Rome (Corstorphine 3). The gothic was thus understood as counter to neoclassical ideals and "signified a lack of reason, morality, and beauty" (Botting 13). This ability to unnerve and elicit repudiation and dread is a central aspect of the gothic (Bacon 1), and it is often deployed through the various tropes that characterise the genre, many of which conjure supernatural motifs: haunted houses, decay, vampires, gloomy landscapes and madness, among others. Despite its typical reliance on trope and formula, or perhaps, because of it, the gothic is defined by generic impurity (Goddu 5; Bacon 1) and often seeps into or merges with other genres.

Similar to the term 'gothic', 'magical realism' did not at first designate a literary genre, but was used in Germany to describe a return to realism in post-expressionist art (Guenther 33-35). In sharp contrast, literary magical realism does not imply such a return to realism, but a move beyond it. As a genre of literature, magical realism has its roots in Latin America and in Alejo Carpentier's concept of 'lo real maravilloso americano', that is, "the marvelous real" that is "the heritage of all of America" (87). According to Carpentier, magical realism, unlike surrealism or other modes and genres which deal with supernatural motifs, does not invoke the marvellous "in disbelief" (86). Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, two prominent scholars in the field of magical realist literature, argue that magical realism is concerned with the nature of reality and its representation, and with the marvellous or magic as an inextricable part of it (3, 6). In a similar vein, Luis Leal explains magical realism as an attitude toward reality (121) which impels the author to heighten their senses and reach "an extreme state" in order to "seize the mystery that breathes behind things" (123).

Magical realist narratives are thus characterised by what Wendy B. Faris calls "the irreducible element of magic", which means that the magical realist text includes some extraordinary event that cannot be explained by the empirical, Western laws of the universe (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 7). This indicates a significant difference between the gothic and magical realism, as the gothic does not necessitate the undeniable presence of the supernatural or magical.

Another defining aspect of magical realism can be gleaned from the term itself: it merges two different realms (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 7). Indeed, magical realist texts are often placed in a liminal territory that foments transformations and dissolutions (Faris and Zamora 6). In this territory, magical realism stages the juxtaposition of apparently contradictory pairings (Benito et al. 164) which renders disjunctions and gaps in each of those systems that collide and merge (Slemon 409). This creates a space of hybridity and ambiguity in the text which lends itself to the questioning of ideas about time and identity in magical realist fiction (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 7). A similar sort of liminality is also typical of the gothic, as narratives touched by this genre often find themselves in the border zone between opposites such as "waking and dreams" or "living and dead" (Crow 2).

The treatment of opposing realms typically differs between magical realism and the gothic. Magical realism tends to favour a sense of transparency and perceive these pairings in terms of difference, which might, ultimately, be overcome. In contrast, the dread and horror of the gothic is usually predicated on otherness – something beyond the reach of the self, beyond comprehension (Khair 436). Such distinctions in the treatment of similar supernatural and/or strange motifs need to be kept in mind when analysing a text that is influenced by both

genres. Some central concepts and ideas associated with these motifs in the gothic and in magical realism are discussed in the sections below.

2.1 The Strange, the Uncanny and the Eerie

The strange is that which "lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience" and elicits feelings of apprehension or dread (Fisher). Thus, what I have termed supernatural strangeness are supernatural motifs (e.g., ghosts, monsters, visions) that evoke this sense of the strange. Following the argument above, the gothic and magical realism can be understood as two alternative perspectives on strangeness, supernatural or otherwise. The gothic, while fascinated by strangeness as otherness, also repudiates it because of this otherness. This makes the gothic a genre of closed doors, either literal or metaphorical, which leads to what Armitt calls the claustrophobic nature of the gothic (513). Magical realism, instead, shows a greater acceptance of the strange; rather than isolating, its haunted homes are open to the world and to cosmic forces (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 182), that is, they are open to difference.

A concept closely related to the expression of difference and otherness is 'the uncanny', which was introduced by Freud in his essay "Das Unheimliche" in 1919. The uncanny is a mode, a transgeneric form of expression, described as "the strange *within* the familiar" (Fisher) or as the process whereby the familiar becomes strange (Crow 7). It is the dread of discovering something hidden or ominous in the familiar (Bacon 2) and of revealing that which should remain hidden (Crow 7). As such, the uncanny is central to the gothic (Bacon 2) and is expressed through many of the most pervasive tropes of the genre: haunted houses, repetition and doubling (Crow 7). Many of these motifs can also be found in magical

realism and, indeed, this genre also has an affinity with the uncanny, as suggested by David Mikics (372).

The uncanny has an overall destabilising effect on elements within the text and on their interpretation, often revealing "alternative versions" of the self and its relationships to others (Wisker 15). The uncanny can also characterise transgressive elements in a society, or those marked as different, "queer", or "other", particularly if the transgression cannot be perceived at first glance (Bacon 3). As Simon Bacon points out, the uncanny expresses repressed desires in cultural as well as individual contexts (3). This means that the uncanny, which often takes form within the domestic and the private in magical realist and gothic texts, moves beyond such restricted spheres and becomes an inextricable aspect of our interactions with society and culture. A similar conclusion is reached in the context of magical realism, as Mikics writes that the uncanny in magical realist texts exposes itself "as a historical and cultural phenomenon" (373).

In dealing with the strange in the familiar, the uncanny represents a way of processing strangeness, the outside, through the inside (Fisher). While this has proven to be a popular and effective approach, it is far from the only one. Another possibility for exploring the strange, is to do the opposite and observe the inside from the outside. According to Mark Fisher, this is the perspective of the eerie, which is a mode concerned with strangeness as failure of absence or failure of presence. That is, the eerie denotes such instances when something is present where nothing is expected, or nothing is present where there should be something (Fisher). Because of this, the eerie is associated with "questions of agency" (Fisher) – who or what is responsible for this presence or lack of presence? The eerie is thus fundamentally linked to the unknown, it depends on mystery and dissipates if the unknown

becomes revealed in some way (Fisher). This indicates an interesting relation between the eerie and the uncanny: while the eerie is eradicated by revelation, the uncanny can be generated through it.

The uncanny and the eerie thus represent two different ways of processing the strange and portraying encounters with supernatural strangeness. While neither mode is tethered to a specific genre, the opacity and mystery required by the eerie makes it a mode more readily associated with the gothic than with the transparency of magical realism. Because of this, dissolution of the eerie in favour of the uncanny can signal a shift in genre perspective within a text.

2.2 Gothic and Magical Realist Ghosts

Ghosts are a motif, ubiquitous in magical realism and in the gothic, that has a strong connection both to the uncanny and to the eerie. Because ghosts inhabit an ambiguous space between life and death, one of their primary characteristics, in the words of Zamora, is that they "make absence present" (498). They appear where there should be nothing, usually carrying with them secrets and anxieties that have been repressed and banished from society and externalise such "internalized terrors" (Zamora 497). This partial presence and the externalisation of the internal mean that literary ghosts are a distinctly eerie phenomenon. The in-betweenness of ghosts also makes them "double" (Zamora 497) and Gina Wisker, who specialises in postcolonial and women's writing as well as the gothic, remarks that they often evoke a sense of familiarity that is unsettling (Wisker 207). Furthermore, ghosts seldom keep their secrets to themselves, on the contrary, they reveal what has been hidden away (Wisker 207) and reintroduce what is perceived as "dangerously marginal" (Briggs 176). These characteristics of ghosts – the doubleness, the unsettling familiarity and the disturbing

revelations – link the ghosts to the uncanny. The variety of facets exhibited by literary spectres means that their strangeness can be understood through either mode, the uncanny or the eerie, depending on what aspects are emphasised by the text. The role of ghosts as a motif also depends on the generic context in which they appear. Gothic ghosts tend to drive mystery and fear within the narrative, whereas magical realist ghosts are simply "there", usually offering some kind of testimony (Armitt 519).

In either case, literary ghosts are deeply metaphoric, serving as "carriers of transcendental truths" and of collective memory – even ghosts that have a primarily aesthetic function in a text are often "bearers of cultural and historical burdens" (Zamora 497). From beyond the grave, the ghosts remind the living of problems, either personal or cultural, which remain unsolved and need to be dealt with in order to move on (Wisker 233). The way in which ghostly apparitions link people to one another through space and time challenges the boundaries of Western modernity (Zamora 498), the lines between the self and the other, between present and past.

2.3 The Subversive Potential

As the discussion above indicates, literary ghosts are often used to give voice to the silenced or marginalised and highlight that which has been forgotten or obscured. A typical motif in gothic texts authored by women is the ghost of a "deviant or victimized" female relative (Hudson 132). Wisker explains that in women's contemporary ghost stories, the spectral appearances often constitute a strategy to express injustices, portray cultural hierarchies and expose social constraints on women (233). In general, this is a central theme of women's gothic writing, which tends to deal with the domestic, with sex and sexuality and with the female body as a site of terror, reproduction and power relations (Wisker 7). Whereas much

traditional gothic literature written by men has centred fears regarding purity and female sexuality, contemporary women writers are more likely to express the terrors of patriarchy (Wisker 9). Specifically, Carol Margaret Davison argues that the supernatural motifs of the female gothic work to communicate such political ideas (206).

Such contemporary tendencies are connected to a long history of women authors who have employed gothic aesthetics to express both frustration and dread. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar explore the recurring motif in nineteenth-century female literature of "claustrophobic rage" that climaxes in rebellious and violent escapes carried out by the "mad double" of the author and/or protagonist (85-86). Gilbert and Gubar understand these fictional escapes as an expression of the author's own repressed "desire to escape male houses and male texts" (86), that is, to escape the constraints of patriarchy. Their analysis is not restricted to the gothic genre, but still very relevant to it, as sensations of entrapment, madness and uncanny doubling are typically gothic motifs.

Magical realism has also been lauded as a genre that lends itself to a feminist perspective, while not being necessarily feminist per se (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 172). In magical realist texts, women often constitute a site of history (Foreman 286), being connected with storytelling and bringing knowledge of and from the past into the present. Overall, magical realism as a genre is perceived as being "politically and historically 'conscious'" (Benito et. al. 58), largely due to its origins and its prevalence among postcolonial and transcultural narratives. In the view of Faris and Zamora, the ontological disruption that is typical of magical realist writing suggests and promotes political and cultural disruption (3). This makes magical realism a particularly effective genre for exploring and transgressing boundaries (Faris and Zamora 5-6). Similarly, the gothic is regularly

conceived as a genre which has, as Maria Beville puts it, a "propensity to challenge dominant narratives and to undermine hegemonic discourses" (145). It is a literary genre that has proved useful to authors endeavouring to express the unsettling and insidious nature not only of patriarchy, but also of imperialism and other oppressive power structures and discourses in society. Indeed, Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet argues that a central preoccupation of the gothic is "the exposure of violence and corruption underneath deceptive facades of privilege" (50). A recent development in this aspect is the emergence of neoliberal gothic, which explores and indicts "the inequalities of the contemporary world and the economic base on which they rest", and reveals how we "have been made monstrous from the workings of capital" (Blake 61).

In the United States, Machado's home country, gothic literature has often criticised national myths of purity and equality by emphasising the "historical horrors" that created a national identity – and that must be forgotten in order to sustain it (Goddu 10). The disruption caused by this intrusion from the "nightmares of history" reveals an incoherence, an instability at the core of American self-representation (Goddu 10). Furthermore, the gothic often opposes the belief in progress that is at the core of American identity (Crow 2). This indicates that American gothic has long been attuned to politics, yet that does not necessarily mean it has always worked against the established order. On the contrary, much of American gothic literature has served to reinforce official narratives of the other, typically with sexist and racist underpinnings (Goddu 2).

In general, one should be careful not to assume all gothic or magical realist texts are situated against imperial or patriarchal discourses, despite the potential presented by the genres. Teresa A. Goddu notes that in many instances, even as gothic texts appear to

contradict the hegemonic discourse, they can still perpetuate it (2). In the realm of magical realism, Cristina Ruiz Serrano criticises how certain novels have been ascribed a feminist perspective almost by default. She argues that despite the potential for subversion of the genre, many magical realist texts reproduce patriarchal narratives (Ruiz Serrano 864-865). However, the tradition of feminist and other forms of political critique within the gothic and magical realism is a necessary component in understanding the supernatural strangeness within a text influenced by either genre. In particular, this is crucial context for the analysis of a text that centres sexual and lethal violence suffered by women and girls, such as "Especially Heinous". Furthermore, political subversion constitutes one of the facets of the preoccupation with boundaries – ontological, spatiotemporal, social, etc. – that are played with, pushed, transcended or transgressed in magical realist and gothic texts.

3 Intermediality

Intermediality is, much like the gothic and magical realism, concerned on a fundamental level with boundaries and border zones. The term 'intermediality' has been given various definitions, sometimes being conceived as the inherent quality that any media is related to other media, and other times as a narrower category of phenomena taking place between media. Furthermore, intermediality is interchangeably employed to refer to these relations between media, to a method of studying them, and to a theory about them (Bruhn, "Intermediality" 14). As a method, intermediality is related to a long tradition of interarts studies, but it approaches problems in a new way, with "a heightened awareness of the materiality and mediality of artistic practices and of cultural practices in general" (Rajewsky, "Intermediality" 44). This implies that intermediality can be applied to a wider variety of

media configurations than previous frameworks used for analysing similar phenomena. Because of this, many critics, such as Irina O. Rajewsky (“Intermediality” 45, 51) and Bruhn (“Intermediality” 16-17), stress the importance of defining and employing terms specifically to suit the particular kind of intermedial analysis one is interested in.

Overall, I ascribe to Elleström’s notion that intermediality is a universal quality of media, in the sense that it is only possible to form a comprehensive understanding of any media through its relation to other types of media which are dissimilar in some respects, yet similar in others (*Modalities* 4). All communication is thus intermedial, and intermediality becomes a lens through which one might analyse any media type or product. Before delving into intermedial relations, one should consider the central concept of ‘media’ in itself – which is at least as nebulous as ‘intermediality’.

3.1 Media and its Modalities

Elleström defines media as “communicative tools constituted by interrelated features” (“Modalities” 4). Media is thus anything that allows for communication of any kind and is neither confined to the traditional arts and other highly codified forms of cultural production (such as journalism), nor to certain technological devices (such as televisions). Elleström further argues that the reason for the vagueness of media as a term is that it is often used to refer to three different, yet related, concepts: media products, technical media of display, and media types (“Modalities” 8-9). According to Elleström, a media product is “a single physical entity or phenomenon that enables interhuman communication” (“Modalities” 8). I find this definition strangely limiting on account of the word “interhuman”, which makes it unnecessarily anthropocentric. In that sense, I favour Bruhn’s definition of media product as “structured constellations of meaningful signs” (“Intermediality” 16). Yet this second

definition does not explicitly mention communication, instead employing the slightly ambiguous term ‘meaningful’. For these reasons, I choose to synthesise both definitions as follows: a media product is a single physical entity or phenomenon that is composed of structured constellations of signs and enables communication.

From this wide concept of media and media product, follows the realisation that all communication necessarily occurs through media. Elleström’s medium-centred model of communication illustrates how an idea, or “cognitive import”, is transferred by two mirroring acts: an act of production that generates a media product, and an act of perception wherein the perceiver interacts with said media product (“Modalities” 17). Thus, the minds of the producer and the perceiver do not interact directly with each other, but only with the media product, which is a “crucial stage of transition, not only transmission” (Elleström, “Modalities” 19). The process of communication is further described by Elleström as “a mental transfer aided by materiality” (“Modalities” 19). This material aspect means that, in order to take shape, all media products require the “physical entities” that are the technical media of display (Elleström, “Modalities” 9).

To better understand the myriad media products that are used in communication, they can be categorised into groups according to both material and cultural factors, these groups are the media types mentioned above (Elleström, “Modalities” 9). The widest notions of media types distinguish media products on the basis of fundamental traits (for instance, writing as one media type and static images as another), whereas more elaborate descriptions of media types begin to resemble genre categorisations (scientific articles and short stories as two different media types). The delimitations of media types will depend on the aim of the

classification – on which differences or similarities between media products it is intended to highlight.

While differences between media products or types can be of a purely conventional nature, there are often differences on a physical level that affect how the media is perceived. In order to analyse such variations in communication, Elleström's model of media modalities proves a useful tool. According to this model, all media products and types can be described through their media modalities, that is, four categories of comparable traits or modes inherent to media: the material modality, the spatiotemporal modality, the sensorial modality, and the semiotic modality (Elleström, "Modalities" 8). These categories describe different aspects of a media product or type, yet they are all interrelated. The modes of each modality conditions the modes available to the others, and the perception of a media product is influenced by all four. The material modality comprises the traits pertaining to the actual material qualities of a media product, while the spatiotemporal modality describes how the media product extends through space and/or time (Elleström, "Modalities" 20). These modalities must apply to all media products, as that which has no material form, and neither takes up space nor transpires in time does not have any physical existence. The sensorial modality and the semiotic modality convey, respectively, how a media product is perceived through our senses and how it is interpreted, two necessary elements for communication (Elleström, "Modalities" 20-21). The modes available to the semiotic modality adhere to Charles Sanders Peirce's categorisation of signs: iconicity, meaning representation based on similarity; indexicality, representation based on contiguity; and symbolicity, representation based on conventions (Elleström, "Modalities" 21). Using my copy of "Especially Heinous" as an example to illustrate these concepts, one could describe it as a media product that is made up of paper and

ink (material modality), the printed signs on the page extend in two dimensions and are static (spatiotemporal modality), furthermore, these signs are perceived visually (sensorial modality) and interpreted as symbols (semiotic modality).

It is important to note that the traits ascribed to a media product under each modality may shift depending on the analytical focus. For instance, traits that could belong in the material modality of a book would also be "solid" or "primarily composed of organic molecules", or one might argue that because a reader can hear the words inside their mind when reading the book to themselves its sensorial modality would not only be visual but also auditory. Furthermore, a written text was described as static above, but the reading of it certainly transpires in time and (typically) in a predetermined order, which gives the text a chronological temporality. Considering this, the model should not be taken as some sort of definitive taxonomy of media, but rather as a tool to uncover similarities and differences between media when conducting intermedial analyses.

3.2 Intermediality and Intermedial References

Studies on intermediality can be categorised as falling under either one of two general perspectives: the synchronic perspective or the diachronic perspective (Elleström, *Media* 3). The synchronic perspective on intermediality focuses on "an understanding of media as coexisting media products, media types and media traits" (Elleström, *Media* 3) and is concerned with "*combination and integration*" (Elleström, "Modalities" 74). The diachronic perspective, on the other hand, deals with the "*transfer and transformation*" of media products and types (Elleström, "Modalities" 74), and studies intermedial relations that are characterised by a temporal gap either between the moments of creation or in the mind of the perceiver (Elleström, *Media* 3). Elleström calls this perspective "transmediality"

("Modalities" 74), but I have employed this term to denote "the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media" in accordance with Rajewsky's use of it ("Intermediality" 46). Thus, I will refer to this second type of intermediality simply as media transformation to avoid any confusion between the different, yet related, definitions of transmediality.

Bruhn remarks that the division between synchronic media combination and diachronic media transformation is dependent upon analytical interest, which makes it "pragmatic rather than essential" ("Intermediality" 26-27). The inherent mixedness of all media means that any media product is an example of synchronous combination, yet as all texts are necessarily related to other, earlier texts, any media product is also an example of temporal transformation (Bruhn, "Intermediality" 26). This thesis is concerned with media transformation rather than media combination, and is thus focused on intermedial relations that imply "actual or potential transfers" (Elleström, *Media* 3). Because of the contextual, functional and modal differences between various types of media, these transfers of information are necessarily characterised by transformation (Elleström, "Modalities" 75). It is important to note that the transformation of media is not always the result of the limits set by diverging conventions or different technical media of display, it can also occur through intentional creative or communicative choices (Elleström, "Modalities" 82).

Elleström further identifies two kinds of media transformation: transmediation, which involves the transfer of "media traits", such as a narrative or a character, from one media product or type to another (*Media* 12), and media representation, which encompasses the cases of a medium representing another medium (*Media* 15). While it may be important to differentiate between these types of media transformation in theory, in practice, the distinction

is seldom clear. As Elleström himself indicates, many instances of media transformation involve both the representation of another medium and the transmediation of its content (*Media* 15).

Because a separation between transmediation and media representation is not central to my intermedial analysis, I prefer to employ Rajewsky's terms, medial transposition and intermedial reference, to distinguish between two kinds of media transformation. Medial transposition is a form of "production-oriented" intermediality concerned with how a media product is created when it is perceived as based on a previously existing source media product (Rajewsky, "Intermediality" 51). Intermedial references, in turn, encompass those instances when a media product, using "its own media-specific means" (Rajewsky, "Intermediality" 52) makes a reference to media beyond its own media type – that is, either to another media type as such or to a media product belonging to a different media type (Rajewsky, "Border Talks" 55). These references need to be distinguished from intramedial references (references belonging to the same media type), as intermedial references imply a medial difference which is not only conventional in nature (such as genre differences) but also material and operational (Rajewsky, "Border Talks" 63). The inability of a media product to reproduce elements belonging to a different media type signals the limits of its medial configuration and reveals an intermedial gap (Rajewsky, "Intermediality" 55). It is this difference which has the potential to generate what Rajewsky denotes the "as if" character of intermedial references ("Intermediality" 54), that is, the illusion of another medium being present and the conjuring of different medial frames despite the fact that only one media type is present (Rajewsky, "Border Talks" 58). For instance, the verbal description of a painting can bring forth an image in the mind of the reader and a set of medially bound expectations and interpretation strategies

associated with paintings in general - it is "as if" a painting were present when, in fact, there is only writing. For this reason, Rajewsky describes intermedial references as a "playing around" with media borders, rather than an actual crossing of them ("Border Talks" 58).

3.3 Dealing with Media Borders and Intermedial Configurations

How can we then analyse and interpret these intermedial connections and gaps? Previous subsections have been concerned with defining terminology and intermedial phenomena, this subsection discusses the role of such intermedial elements in a text. Crucial to this discussion is, as Rajewsky notes, "the dynamic and creative potential" of border zones between media ("Border Talks" 64-65). Through intermedial references, for instance, a media product is constituted to some extent in relation to conventions and modalities beyond its own, and this relation can generate further layers of meaning in the media product (Rajewsky, "Intermediality" 53). Overall, intermedial references draw attention to the limitations of a certain media type, but also to its abilities and to the traits that it shares with different types of media (Bruhn et al. NP).

Another aspect of intermedial configurations is that they can draw attention to the constructedness of media borders, yet, despite this, they also suggest the ideas of individual media types (Rajewsky "Border Talks" 60). It would thus seem that they can serve to highlight both the arbitrariness and the significance of social constructs and conventions. Indeed, in *Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature* Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl argue that the "transgressions and fusions" that characterise intermedial phenomena invite the questioning of borders in general and the cultural and historical contexts in which they have arisen (16). Being primarily concerned with the use of ekphrasis in postcolonial literature, Neumann and Rippl emphasize that the representation of "vision and

visuality" in literary texts can reveal much about a culture, both in terms of its aesthetics and concerning the power relations that pervade it (2). Because of this, intermedial verbal-visual configurations can become a powerful way of contesting hegemonic modes of seeing. This can take shape both in practices of "staring back" from the margins to reveal the injustice and corruption of the imperial centre (Neumann and Rippl 13), and in efforts to "claim the presence" of marginalised "histories, peoples and geographies" (Neumann and Rippl 18).

The transfer of information (evocation of interpretive frames, conventions and sensory perceptions) that characterises media transformation is not simply harmonious. The transformation that an intermedial reference implies signals that there is also a somewhat conflictual relation in place. According to Neumann and Rippl, these conflicts and frictions that are observed between media can serve as parallels to conflicts and frictions in society (22). Furthermore, as intermedial references signal the existence of an unbridgeable gap between media, these configurations may also be used to emphasise "the irreducibility of – semiotic, material and social – otherness" (Neumann and Rippl 26). It is also through these gaps and uneasy transformations that "alternative knowledges", that is, marginalised experiences and perspectives, can seep into and assert themselves against hegemonic interpretive frames (Neumann and Rippl 26).

The gaps and conflicts between media become perhaps especially apparent in medial transpositions, where certain losses are inevitable. Mary Simonson argues that regardless of whether loss of information is the result of necessary changes due to diverging modalities or conventions, or of intentional artistic choices, these losses are always "meaningful and productive" (4). The conflictual relations between media can place obstacles in the way of communication, impeding the easy immersion of the reader into a story (Simonson 5).

Instead, these complications draw attention to the text as a media product and to its relations to other media types. Because of this, the gaps and frictions between media can purposefully be employed to "other" the reader and confront them with the unfamiliar and seemingly unintelligible (Simonson 18). This suggests that such intermedial gaps and frictions might prove useful in the portrayal of supernatural strangeness.

Overall, there appear to be various interesting touching points between gothic or magical realist motifs and intermediality. They share a fundamental preoccupation with boundaries and with difference and otherness. Furthermore, intermedial references and medial transpositions, as well as the gothic and magical realism, have proven to be useful devices for portraying social and political conflict and expressing dissent from a subaltern perspective. These connections between intermediality and the supernatural strangeness of gothic and magical realist writing are further explored in the analysis that follows of "Especially Heinous".

4 Medial Transposition of the Police Procedural

The title and structure of "Especially Heinous: 272 Views of Law & Order: SVU" invite the reader to perceive the novella as an adaptation of the American television series *Law & Order: SVU*. This long-running police procedural features episodic investigations carried out by Olivia Benson and Elliot Stabler, two detectives of the New York Police Department that primarily handle cases of sexual violence. As an example of medial transposition, "Especially Heinous" becomes a palimpsestuous work (Hutcheon 6) that is perceived in relation to the source text, *Law & Order: SVU*. This means a reading of the novella is informed by certain expectations set by the prior text (Hutcheon 121); however, the reader need not have watched

this particular television series in order for such expectations to be in place. The ubiquitous presence of the *Law & Order* franchise on television means that even those who are not directly familiar with the series will know to place it within the widely recognised genre of the police procedural. In this sense, "Especially Heinous" is not only the result of a media transformation of *Law & Order: SVU*, but also of the television police procedural as a media type.

A television series typically conveys its story through moving images, dialogue, various ambient sounds and a musical soundtrack – it is visual and auditory, and uses a combination of symbolic and iconic signs. In contrast, a novella mediates its content through written verbal language, which is primarily visual and symbolic. This difference places limitations on which aspects of the police procedural that "Especially Heinous" can reproduce. One might expect the text to attempt to bridge this gap through the use of cinematic writing, a combination of techniques that try to mimic the experience of watching a film or television series, such as emphasising audio-visual sensations and adopting an objective or detached narrative point of view (Bruhn et al.). While the novella certainly presents an intriguing preoccupation with sound that will be discussed in later sections, its descriptions tend to ignore the visual in favour of other senses. Overall, "Especially Heinous" is a text that pushes the borders of writing as a media type, but it is not necessarily pushing them towards the television series.

The media transformation from television series to novella has also produced a change in genre, from the realism of the police procedural to the supernatural dread of the gothic. The first "episode" of the novella initially matches the corresponding television episode, "Payback", with the case of a murdered and castrated cab driver. Throughout the

length of a paragraph, the story becomes increasingly strange, and it ends up slipping into the uncanny and eerie gothic tone that characterises much of the text when Stabler chases after a mysterious drumming in his house (65). A similar spiral into the strange can be observed in the episode "Or Just Look Like One": "Two underage models are attacked while walking home from a club. They are raped and murdered. To add insult to injury, they are confused with two other raped and murdered underage models, who coincidentally are their respective twins, and both pairs are buried beneath the wrong tombstones" (65). In this case, the two initial lines resemble the storyline of *Law & Order: SVU*, but the uncanny doubling and confusion are an addition by Machado. As are the gothic motifs of tombstones and erroneous burials. Many later episodes depart completely from the television series with a multitude of supernatural phenomena irrupting into the police procedural. There are ghosts, monstrous heartbeats, doppelgängers, demons, witchcraft and prophetic visions, along with singular events that result in mass memory confusion and the disappearance of various species of animals. It becomes, in short, a world inundated with supernatural strangeness.

Significantly, both the gothic and the police procedural share a preoccupation with brutal and often sexual violence which has its early roots in a fascination with crimes that developed in response to "the shift in moral paradigm" accompanying the modern world view of the late eighteenth century (Monnet 48). However, they represent drastically different ways of engaging with said violence. While commercial television police procedurals tend to have a strong focus on rationally and empirically solving the crime, the gothic emphasises feelings of terror and dread. By referring to these genres and media types simultaneously, the text generates a medial heterogeneity which, as Maia Gil'Adí writes, forces the readers to "infuse the text with different bodies of knowledge" (29). Because of this, the intermedial relation

between “Especially Heinous” and *Law & Order: SVU* serves to cast the crimes of the police procedural as the source of gothic terror and encourages the reader to see familiar stories in a new light.

The media and genre transformation results in a stark difference between how the same reality is portrayed in “Especially Heinous” and in *Law & Order: SVU*. By employing typically gothic tropes such as the uncanny spectral repetition and the ominous sounds that will be explored in sections 5.1 and 5.2, respectively, the novella centres the trauma and terror of misogynist violence. Instead of implicitly lauding the perspicacity or intrepidity of police officers, the text expresses the gothic rejection of a jarring and cursed reality (see section 2). This shift in perspective is underlined by the title of the novella: “272 views” indicates that the text is the result of repeated acts of viewing. It implies that the author has watched the television series and then summarised what she has seen in it, which radically diverges from the typical (and presumably intended) way of interpreting the story of a police procedural. The right to look and to represent claimed through the title and the text is itself a significant commentary on power relations. In Western culture, women have traditionally been assigned the role of passive objects, whereas men held the power to observe and to represent (Neumann and Rippl 22-23). The author of “Especially Heinous” refuses to adhere to such norms and becomes an active viewer who transforms one media product into another, conjuring into the realist fiction a whole host of supernatural phenomena. The text thus engages in a practice termed “countervisuality” that can produce a “kaleidoscopic drama of looks” that subverts hegemonic visual regimes (Neumann and Rippl 31). “Especially Heinous” merges the realms of police procedural and supernatural gothic through medial transposition, and the shards of this clash create a hall of mirrors that allows the reader to

inspect angles of the police procedural that usually remain unseen. Furthermore, as discussed in section 3.3, media transformation allows the insertion of new knowledge coming from an alternative point of view. According to Hood, Machado takes advantage of such possibilities in "The Husband Stitch" by "retelling classic urban legends to get closer to the truth of women's lived experience" (1002). The opportunity is similarly exploited in "Especially Heinous" to represent the rape and murder of women and girls as part of patriarchal and misogynist structures, rather than as a consequence of individual moral failures or singular circumstances.

Law & Order: SVU does not centre (and barely touches upon) any such exploration of overarching structures related to sexual crimes. The police procedural of commercial television is restricted by strategies of risk avoidance that result in formulaic stories, each contained in one episode (Mittell 79). This typical format of the police procedural can bring to mind associations with the gothic. Any resolution is temporary, and the horrific violence will be repeated again in the next episode, which suggests a sense of uncanny gothic dread emphasised further by the fact that there is no end in sight. While this gothic aspect of the police procedural commonly slips by unnoticed, it suggests another point of connection between the media types of television police procedural and gothic literature. This kind of uncanny repetition is central to the gothic terror expressed in "Especially Heinous".

5 Intermedial and Strange Representations of Structures

In the previous section I suggested that the medial transposition of the police procedural into a gothic and magical realist novella allowed the text to visualise aspects of sexual crimes that are typically hidden from view in the televised narrative – namely, that such violence is part

of larger structures. In this section I explore how such structures are portrayed in "Especially Heinous" through two of its central hauntings and their intermedial references. The ghosts called the girls-with-bells-for-eyes create connections through uncanny and intermedial repetition, while the monstrous drumming confuses the inside and the outside by playing with media differences and similarities. As such, the two hauntings serve to highlight relations in society and both are also strongly associated with sound. Still, they take rather different shapes within the narrative, and thus I will discuss them separately in this section.

5.1 Repetitive Hauntings, Sound, and Violence

"Especially Heinous" continuously refers to the repetitiveness that characterises the format of the police procedural. It is almost comically emphasised in the titles of the two episodes "Closure" and "Closure: Part 2". While these episodes of *Law & Order: SVU* are concerned with two similar cases of sexual assault, in the novella, they are transformed into a few lines in which a woman describes her trauma and fear of men (67, 70). The connection between the titles and the reflections of the unnamed woman serves to highlight the continuous and unending terror and pain that is generated by misogynist violence, as there is no possibility for a satisfactory closure.

Repetition is not only generated by the manner in which the novella mimics television storytelling, but is also crucially inscribed into its highly intermedial hauntings. Towards the end of the first season of the novella, in the episode called "Nocturne", Benson experiences her first encounter with one of the ghosts that will haunt her throughout the story:

> The ghost of one of the murdered, misburied underage models begins to haunt Benson. She has bells for eyes, tiny brass ones dangling from the top of each socket, the hammers not quite touching her cheekbones. The ghost does not know her own name.

> She stands over Benson's bed, the right bell tinkling faintly, and then the left, and then the right again. This happens four nights in a row, at 2:07 a.m. (68-69)

This passage displays an intense focus on repetition. The repetitiveness of the haunting is explicitly stated, as it "happens four nights in a row" at the exact same time. The ghost is also identified as one of the victims from the episode "Or Just Look Like One" which, as mentioned previously, is characterised by doubling (a form of repetition). Moreover, this connection to a previous episode, emphasises that the figure of the ghost is a return of the past. For Benson it is the double of a victim she encountered some time ago, and for the reader the repetition of a story they read only a few pages earlier.

Throughout the story the ghosts multiply, each case that has gone unsolved or in some way been mishandled, results in a new girl-with-bells-for-eyes – all of them victims of rape and murder. In time, Benson's apartment becomes so "crowded with ghosts" (72) that she is compelled to sleep in other places, which makes the haunting evoke the claustrophobia of the gothic genre. This crowding, the sheer number of victims and the incessant repetition of violence work to illustrate the enormity of the problem of misogyny. The repetitions inspire dread, but also a sense of weariness and desensitisation caused by the prevalence of such abuse. In particular, these sensations are emphasised in the sequence of episodes "Ghost", "Rage" and "Pure". Each episode consists of two sentences, and the first episode tells us: "A prostitute is murdered. She is too tired to become a spirit" (95). The following episodes are almost identical, only the word "tired" is replaced first by "angry" (95) and then by "sad" (96). This kind of repetition fits into what Gil'Adí calls "narrative 'failures'", which are certain characteristics of a text that counter "linearity and wholeness" (5). Such forms of writing are often used in Latinx fiction (fiction by authors of Latin American heritage in the

United States) to illustrate the impossibility of containing the experience of violence within typical narrative structures (5).

Repetition is also a feature of the peculiar manner in which the ghosts communicate with Benson, that is, through the pealing of the bells that hang in their eye sockets. The choice of media is somewhat enigmatic, considering that only one of the ghosts is singled out as having "her lips stitched shut" (71). Still, the ghosts either refuse to or are unable to speak, which results in repeated intermedial references to the sounds of the bells. The introductory episode portrays this auditory repetition by describing how they tinkle one at a time, and then the first one "again". It should be noted as well, that the sound of a bell on its own is typically rather repetitive, as each peal sounds much like the next.

In their intermedial analysis of Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Bruhn et al. highlight the connection in the text between repetition and intermedial references to music. Repetitive structures are an element which tends to be more prevalent in music than in narration, but that nonetheless can be achieved in a written text (Bruhn et al.). Through this similarity – the ability to be repetitive – the text can invoke difference, that is, interpretive frames beyond the written narrative. In the case of *The Tin Drum*, the repetition undermines the causality that is inherent to narration and allows events that are not causally linked to be contemplated in relation to one another (Bruhn et al.). This repetitiveness seems particularly suited to portray experiences of violence and trauma, which can often be resistant to narrative explanations (Bruhn et al.). The narrative failure of repetition can thus be a kind of intermedial reference that allows the text to defy the confines of verbal narratives and offer a differing way of structuring and understanding the world and our experiences in it. The repetition that characterises the girls-with-bells-for-eyes and links them both to musical sound and to the

structure of commercial television series fills such a function in “Especially Heinous”. It connects the girls to each other, instead of narrating their individual tragic fates in isolation. The singular becomes part of a web and thus illustrates typically invisible structures of violence.

Significantly, the unsettling bells are almost the only aspect of the physical appearance of the ghosts that is described in the text. Their spectral bodies are otherwise simply described as intangible and tasting of mildew, characteristics which Benson experiences when she goes through them “as if they were nothing” (71). The partial presence and distinct taste of the girls-with-bells-for-eyes suggest their invisibility in a society that either abandons or ignores them. Moreover, the fact that their body is barely there and rarely described combined with the fact that they do not speak, means that the ghosts are primarily represented through the non-verbal sound of the bells. This sound is at times described as “tinkling”, but also as furious, rapturous and repeated ringing (79, 83, 84). It is a high pitch sound which is described in emotional rather than material terms. Through the figure of the bells, it is related to church and spirituality. The character of the intermedial reference to sound, and the associations brought on by it, thus correspond to the ethereal quality of the ghosts that produce it. The sound of bells is also associated with warnings and urgency, and soon Benson realises that the ghostly bells are a form of Morse code (70), another type of media often employed for urgent messages. The qualities and connotations of the media for this spectral communication thus highlight the gravity of the ghosts and of the knowledge they are attempting to impart.

In time, Benson learns to “translate the bells so well” that there “is no delay between their chiming and her understanding” (78). The girls-with-bells-for-eyes have then established

a form of interaction in which the supernatural and complexly intermedial aspects of the haunting work together to allow communication across time and space. The more Benson interacts with the girls-with-bells-for-eyes and accepts their presence the less frightening they become. They can turn into a source of memory and knowledge, rather than remaining a source of terror. Benson's first translation of the chiming bells is presented to the reader as: "*Give us voices. Give us voices. Give us voices. Tell him. Tell him. Tell him. Find us. Find us. Find us. Please. Please. Please.*" (78). This plea expresses the urge to be heard and to be acknowledged of those who have long been abandoned under patriarchal structures, and it exposes the ghosts, in a rather explicit fashion, as figures representing a return of the tormented, silenced and forgotten.

The repetitiveness of the message emulates the repeated ringing of the bells and the repetition inherent in the haunting by the girls-with-bells-for-eyes. Many of Benson's subsequent translations of the Morse code of the bells also feature repetition either in their structure, "*Faster, faster, go faster*" (81), or in their meaning, "*The first of many times*" (91). According to Faris, repetition and mirroring are often employed as narrative principles within magical realism – either through the repetition of intratextual or intertextual (perhaps even intermedial) elements, or through the structure of the plot (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 127, 131). Such patterns establish a sense of lack of human control (Faris, "Scheherazade's Children 178). Through this combination of supernatural haunting and intermedial references to sound and to episodic television structure, "Especially Heinous" can express the insidious repetitiveness of violence directed at women and girls, and the pervasive sense of dread that accompanies it. This close connection between sound and the supernatural is not restricted to the girls-with-bells-for-eyes, but is also a central feature of another kind of haunting that

affects both Benson and Stabler throughout the novella, namely that of the monstrous heartbeat.

5.2 The Tangible and Confusing Sound of Monstrous Drumming

As previously mentioned, the episode "Payback" ends with Stabler hearing, for the first time, "a strange noise" described as a "deep drumming, two beats" (65). The drumming is the heartbeat of a monster, but its origin eludes Stabler every time he hears it, which makes it an acousmatic sound. According to Fisher, this kind of sound that is "detached from a visible source" has an "intrinsically eerie dimension" (Fisher). What is more, the eerie , as a mode that inspires dread through partial presences and unknown agents, is particularly suited for representing forces in society that we cannot fully grasp (Fisher). Fisher gives the example of capitalism as a force that might be portrayed as eerie, but the themes of "Especially Heinous" suggest that the eerie drumming is more so associated with patriarchy or misogyny. This interpretation of the sound is strengthened by the fact that Stabler hears it on repeated occasions when he is interrogating his wife about her supposed alien encounter (71, 72). This strange event turns out to be one of the few that has no connection to the supernatural – it is a story that masks the far more mundane trauma Stabler's wife has experienced, rape. The mystery of the alien encounter thus becomes paralleled by the mystery of the drumming.

Just like the ringing of the bells, the monstrous drumming is an entity that the written text, due to its specific media affordances, cannot reproduce. But, unlike the bells, the drumming cannot be translated into words – it is altogether a non-symbolic sound. The fact that the drumming is untranslatable aligns it further with the unknown and the eerie and gives it a rather different position within the narrative. While written text is connected to sound through its use of language (the text acquires sound if read out loud), the expression of non-

verbal sounds of non-human nature is beyond the reach of this type of media. Typically, such sounds might be represented through onomatopoeia and, indeed, the drumming sometimes takes shape as the onomatopoetic "*Dum-dum*" (87, 104-05, 114). More often, Machado resorts to describing those aspects of sound that are not only connected to hearing, but also to other forms of sensory perception. For instance, rhythm becomes emphasised in the following lines: "Every time Benson flips her bedroom light on and off, she hears the sound. *Dum-dum*." (114). The beats of the onomatopoeia are associated with the rhythmic switch between light and darkness.

In particular, the sound becomes connected to its vibrations, as it is so loud that it shakes the water in a glass (71) and makes wood chips lying on the floor "tremble" (81). Furthermore, through the vibrations, the sound turns distinctly tactile, as is conveyed when Benson touches the pavement and the vibrations of the drumming propagate to her clavicle (76) or when she "feels it in her teeth" (114). This association is also present in the words "banging" (72) and "drumming", as they imply the physical touch of something (a hand, a drumstick) beating against a surface. These intermedial references make the sound remarkably tangible and far less ethereal than the tinkling of the ghostly bells. Despite its invisibility, the monster is thus very much present in the text. Its material existence becomes confirmed and emphasised through the tactile quality of the intermedial references as the eerie drumming and its thematic connotations reverberate palpably through the narrative.

These various intermedial references that seem to blend text, sound, light and touch have yet another effect on the presence of the drumming in "Especially Heinous". It evokes a sense of synaesthesia that highlights the inherent mixedness of media through their shared characteristics across modalities. Such similarities and connections situate the drumming

within the mode of the uncanny as well. The uncanny quality of the sound becomes manifest when Benson first experiences it and reveals its enigmatic source: “She reaches down and touches the pavement. It is breathing. Its two-toned heartbeat makes her clavicle vibrate. She can feel it. She is suddenly, irrevocably certain that the earth is breathing. She knows that New York is riding the back of a giant monster” (76). The terrifying source of the sound forms part of the city, and Benson “can hear it everywhere” (78) – the strange heartbeat is both monster and home.

Following the argument, made by Neumann and Ripple, that the relations between media in a text can serve to illustrate social relations and irreducible otherness (see section 3.3), the intensely intermedial representation of the monster becomes relevant to understanding its position within the narrative. In “Especially Heinous”, the emphasis on intermedial relations between seemingly separate forms of expression and perception in the portrayal of the monster, serves as a parallel to Stabler’s and Benson’s experience of the drumming. In Stabler’s case, the fact that he chases the drumming and tries to “lure it to him” (74) indicates that he conceives the source of the sound as external to himself. However, he also repeatedly believes the sound is coming from inside his own house (65, 72) and at times Stabler “considers that it’s his conscience making that horrible, horrible sound” (93).[1] In such passages, Stabler brings the sound closer to himself, and even contemplates the possibility that its source lies inside him. As the sound flickers between the internal and the external, it connects the character to the monster.

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[1] Stabler’s thought that his conscience is producing the “horrible sound” creates a reference to the gothic story “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe in which the protagonist is perturbed by the beating of his (dead) victim’s “hideous heart” (Poe 121). In both cases, the sound that haunts the characters takes the shape of a heartbeat buried below them. The important difference is that Stabler is internalising an actual sound, imagining that it is his conscience, whereas the protagonist of Poe’s story is externalising his own anxious conscience, imagining that it is a real sound.

The monstrous sound can also become confused with the characters' own heartbeats, as occurs when Stabler and Benson are searching for their doppelgängers: "she can feel her heart knocking loudly in her chest. *Dum-dum*. *Dum-dum*. *Dum-dum*. She realizes that the sound is bigger than she is, that it is coming from outside her, around her" (104-05). The way this auditory haunting confuses the boundary between the inside and the outside, reflects the uncanny nature of its source: a monster, yet also the foundations of the city the protagonists call home. What is seemingly outside the self or separate from it is shown to be intimately related through the uncanny haunting as well as through the complex intermedial configurations that represent it. Just as there can be no definitive separation between different media, there can be no definite separation between the characters and the monster. At the same time, the monster and its sound must be accepted as something external and strange, they cannot be fully subsumed into the self. These kinds of relations and confusions are typical of both the gothic and magical realism. However, where the dread and terror of the gothic can stem from the denial and fear of these connections because they are seen as a connection to the other, the magical realist narrative shows more acceptance because there they are instead seen as a connection to difference. The acknowledgement of the familiarity inherent in this monster which, remarkably, "can only eat what we give it" (123), is thus part of what shifts the text gradually into magical realism. Although this shift is never linear, and the text returns repeatedly to the gothic, the home and the self become more open to a connection with supernatural strangeness. In turn, this leads to connection with other people and to a sense of community.

The shift from eerie to uncanny, from gothic to magical realism in the characters' experience of the sound is predicated on communication and understanding. The eeriness of

the acousmatic drumming the first times it appears in the narrative suggests that the forces and structures it symbolises (misogyny and/or patriarchy) are seen as entirely other and external by the characters. The move into the uncanny signals that Benson and Stabler have an awareness of their own contributions to such forces and structures. This awareness at times elicits typically gothic repudiation and disgust – there is a lack of understanding, perhaps an excessive internalisation of the drumming and the pervasive violence it is a reminder of. The intermedial references employed in the representation of the drumming heartbeat show that media are both similar and different, mixed and distinct. In a similar way, the sound is internal and external, and so are the insidious forces that it hints at.

Overall, the powerful intermedial representations of supernatural phenomena in the hauntings by the girls-with-bells-for-eyes, as well as by the monstrous drumming, give intangible experiences and realities a clear presence in the text. They illustrate how patriarchal structures permeate society through repeated ringing and drumming.

6 Limitations of Intermedial Communication

I have thus far argued that intermedial references in conjunction with supernatural hauntings facilitate the portrayal of typically abstract, obscure or slippery forces and realities. Recalling the arguments of Rajewsky and Simonson presented in section 3.2 and 3.3, these intermedial constellations also emphasise the borders of specific media types and the gaps that emerge between them. As Simonson writes, intricate media constellations tend to complicate the transmission of ideas (4). This is explored through the miscommunication that arises in various forms throughout the narrative due to the curious medial qualities of the hauntings. Indeed, losses and gaps in communication are recurring motifs throughout “Especially

Heinous," which are strongly connected to both the girls-with-bells-for-eyes and to the monstrous drumming. In addition, the novella showcases the resistance that contemporary media and culture exhibit in relation to the strange. These diverse instances of frustrated communication or mediation in the novella generate a sense of chaos and lack of understanding.

6.1 Strange Miscommunication

The complications that arise from intermedial communication are explored in Benson's interactions with the girls-with-bells-for-eyes. As she learns to interpret the ringing and tinkling of their bells using Morse code, their conversations result in complex layers of media being referenced by the text. For instance, the words "*I was a virgin. When he took me, I popped*" (73) are introduced as one of the ghosts trying "to tell Benson a story." There is no reference to the ringing of bells, or to Morse code, yet knowledge of how the girls-with-bells-for-eyes communicate with Benson imbue these written words with intermedial meaning. The verbal message implies the sound of bells and the signs of Morse code – despite neither media being present or even mentioned in the text. The continuous play with various layers of mediality in the text is further emphasised a few episodes later with the following sentence: "The thumbtack pops into the cork and Benson jumps in her chair" (74). The text plays with two different meanings of the word 'pop', one that is more symbolic, and another that is more iconic. The onomatopoetic word 'pops' is in this case making a reference to sound, no character is actually saying it. Yet Benson is startled by the noise because of its link to the story that was previously told by the ghost. This story did not feature any popping sound, only the ringing of bells, but the translation of these bells included the word 'popped' in a symbolic sense that referred to rape. Such complex translations and relations between various media

due to their modality traits are a central characteristic of Benson's interactions with the girls-with-bells-for-eyes and this play with media borders generates various gaps in the text.

The gaps that emerge in Benson's communication with the ghosts are of two different kinds. On the one hand, there are the intermedial gaps that are put on display by intermedial references. They are caused by unbridgeable intermedial difference – the chiming of bells is not the same as language (even if Benson can translate it), and written language cannot fully represent the sound of the bells. As mentioned in section 3.2, this kind of gap is what gives intermedial references their "as if" character. On the other hand, the text is also riddled with cognitive gaps, that is, instances where the narrative leaves things unsaid. Such gaps necessarily appear in all narratives, yet in "Especially Heinous" these gaps often become more noticeable, particularly due to their connection to supernatural strangeness. Because the hauntings are distinctly intermedial, the intermedial and cognitive gaps parallel each other, and reinforce the sense of missing or lost information.

Despite Benson's ability to translate the peals of the ghostly bells, the conversations between her and the spectres that haunt her are often enigmatic, either to the character or to the reader. When the ghosts press Benson to work faster, we are presented with a rather cryptic exchange: "'Don't you remember needing sleep?' Benson asks wearily from her unwashed sheets. 'You were human, once.' *No no no no no no no no*" (81). It is unclear what the negation is responding to – do they not remember needing sleep? Were they never human? Are they simply opposed to Benson resting? Even after the translation into words, there is still a gap in the communication for the reader, and perhaps for Benson as well, as her interpretation of the reply is never stated in the text.

The episode “Tortured” presents another example of ambiguity in Benson’s communication with the ghosts: “*You are the only one we trust*, the girls-with-bells-for-eyes say to Benson. *Not that other one*. Benson assumes they mean Stabler” (83). Benson’s assumption is most likely wrong; she does not know it yet, but the reader is already aware of the fact that Benson and Stabler have doppelgängers, Henson and Abler. This information enables the reader to correctly decipher the meaning of what the ghosts are saying – that is, that they do not trust Henson – while Benson comes to a mistaken conclusion. A later episode represents the opposite situation. Benson presumably understands the ghosts when their “bells ring and ring and ring” (84), yet the reader is kept in the dark as no translation is provided.

The complex communication represented in the novel, and the gaps (both intermedial and cognitive) that arise from it, are an example of how intermediality can confront the reader with otherness, as suggested by Simonson (see section 3.3). Any media product is necessarily riddled with gaps in meaning, gaps that multiply when the medial transpositions of Benson’s translations impose new limits, as each transformation causes a new loss. The perceiver will attempt to fill such gaps in a text by using the information provided and knowledge of conventions in order to reconstruct the cognitive import that is transmitted. Such attempts are often thwarted by “Especially Heinous”, as there is rarely enough knowledge available to fill in the blanks. The intermedial translation that characterises Benson’s communication with the ghosts illustrates a pattern in the text, wherein comprehension repeatedly slips through cracks split open by intermedial difference. This might also be termed a form of narrative failure, in likeness with the repetition discussed in section 5.1. In this case, the failure of understanding created by intermedial references strengthens the sense of strangeness and of gothic dread of the unknown or unknowable in the text.

Stabler's attempt to interact with the eerie drumming in the episode "Scourge" exemplifies another kind of misunderstanding or confusion in communication that fuses intermedial reference to the gothic. In a passage that is plagued by the uncanny repetition that characterises "Especially Heinous", Stabler chases the sound and then, "[i]nside the interrogation room he hears it again. He bangs his hands of the two-way mirror, imitating the sound, hoping to lure it to him, but all is quiet" (74). At this point in the narrative, neither the reader nor Stabler are aware of the monstrous nature of the sound, which leads to a wholly misguided interpretation of it. In trying to "lure" the sound (or its source) to him through imitation, Stabler is assuming that the sound is some form of communication. He believes that there is some producer intentionally emitting the sound, and capable of perceiving and interpreting similar signs in turn. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the drumming, as the text later reveals that it is a heartbeat. It is an unintentionally produced sound that is not trying to convey any message and simply signals presence. The sound is, of course, loaded with meaning in the text (as argued in section 5.2), but on a diegetic level it is not truly a media product, but at most an indexical sign akin to the sound of footsteps.

Stabler's misunderstanding and consequent failure at communicating with the source of the drumming, portray another aspect of the fragility of communication. The complications that arise in Benson's interactions with the girls-with-bells-for-eyes stem from the losses inherent to intermedial references and (diegetic) medial transposition, but Stabler's problems with the monstrous heartbeat have a different origin. They are caused by the opacity of media: because the minds of the producer and perceiver are not in direct contact, the perception of a potential media product does not guarantee that there is, in fact, an attempt to communicate anything. Stabler is, in a sense, reading too much into the sound and his mistakes could be a

warning to the analytical reader not to delve too much into the supernatural strangeness of this novella – it will remain strange and unreachable.

The confusion that accompanies the interactions with the girls-with-bells-for-eyes and the monstrous drumming also becomes linked to the forces and systems they represent. Stabler's and Benson's disconcerting confrontations with the strange mirror their confrontations with the recently discovered reality of patriarchy and misogyny. These forces and structures seem just as strange as ghosts and monsters, as they are also imbued with the unknown.

6.2 Contemporary Media and Supernatural Strangeness

The gaps and confusions in the text demonstrate the general difficulty in attempting to grasp strangeness. Yet the text also draws attention specifically to the complicated and somewhat disturbing relation between supernatural strangeness and contemporary popular or digital media. These aspects of mediation become apparent in Benson's experiences with the girls-with-bells-for-eyes. Their peculiarities make it difficult for Benson to understand this haunting, and she struggles to place the apparitions in a familiar context. The (partial) presence of these ghosts is deeply unsettling as they do not fit within Benson's frames of reference and she has no guidance in how to interpret these spirits or interact with them. After her first encounter with the ghosts, "Benson starts sleeping with a crucifix and pungent ropes of garlic, because she does not understand the difference between vampires and murdered teenagers. Not yet" (69). The ubiquity of vampires in literature and popular culture ensures that we have protocols in place for interpreting them, which means that the typical vampire that is repelled by crucifixes and garlic is no longer truly strange (Fisher). Benson's erroneous identification of these unconventional ghosts as vampires thus implies that Benson is not

ready to handle a confrontation with strangeness. Instead, she tries to press it into the mould of supernatural figures that she knows how to decipher.

Because gaps and misunderstandings persist even after Benson has learned to decode the ghostly messages, the girls-with-bells-for-eyes continue to be an exhausting and disturbing presence in her life. This motivates Benson to turn to popular culture a second time in her efforts to stop the haunting. From the television, she gets the idea to spread "a line of salt along her threshold, on the windowsills" (82). This method of hindering the passage of ghosts suggests an intermedial reference to the television series *Supernatural* (2005-2020), in which two brothers fight all kinds of supernatural entities (hence the title). In the series, any such potentially strange entity is summarily handled by the brothers as they find out what kind of monster or spirit it is and then neutralise it by exploiting its special weakness. This type of storytelling is standard procedure among similar series or other kinds of pop culture media, and presents yet another attempt to fit the strange within the comfort zone of recognised protocols for interpretation.

Remarkably, this time Benson's tactic has the desired effect and she is left unbothered by the ghosts. However, in taking cues from *Supernatural* and trying to rid herself of the ghosts, Benson has failed to be a genre-savvy protagonist. The narrative has at this point, through Benson's own engagement with the monstrous sound and the girls-with-bells-for-eyes, moved increasingly into the realm of magical realism. The ghosts are no longer supposed to be feared, avoided or fought as in narratives of gothic terror. They have become entwined with ideas of community and a sense of relation which are typical of magical realist texts (Zamora 501), as indicated some episodes later when "Benson is lonely without the bells" (83). Unable to stand the quiet of her apartment, Benson pretends to accidentally break

the salt line in her doorway "and says, 'Oops' but doesn't really mean it" (83). As a result, the ghosts "come rushing at her" ringing their bells and Benson "has never felt so loved" (83). While the knowledge Benson acquired from the television seemed helpful at first, it turns out to be completely inadequate for dealing with this haunting. Thus, the intermedial reference becomes a critique of commercial horror/fantasy media like *Supernatural* for not allowing the strange to be strange and usually only engaging with it in conflict.

Popular (commercial) culture and modern media are repeatedly shown to fail at providing an understanding of the strange in "Especially Heinous." This ties into a typical magical realist perspective on technology. In their analysis of the magical realist novel *Tropic of Orange* by Karen Tei Yamashita, Benito et al. argue that technology "is diametrically opposed to magic" in the sense that technology can neither create nor convey the magical (90). In particular, digital technology has failed to live up to its "potential for imagining new worlds" and is instead reduced to reproducing and reinforcing the status quo (Benito et al. 90). Such shortcomings of technology are portrayed through intermedial references in "Especially Heinous". When Benson tries to investigate the sudden silence of the girls-with-bells-for-eyes, whose hammers have been unhooked, she looks to the internet for answers:

> Benson googles. «dead girls bells eyes missing hammers» «girls bells eyes» «girl ghost bells eyes» «ghosts broken» «what happens if I see a ghost? » «what makes a ghost? » «ghost fixing» For months, the ads in her browser try to sell her: brass bell sets, ghost-hunting equipment, video cameras, CDs of bell choirs, dolls, shovels. (102)

The internet, which is commonly considered the ultimate treasure trove in this age of information, proves to be useless when dealing with something beyond the confines of the

modern ontology that structures our everyday reality. Instead of finding answers or assistance, Benson is barraged with strange constellations of ads, which indicates that capitalist digital media is highly resistant to supernatural strangeness.

The ads also put an uncanny and insidious aspect of the internet on display – how it imperceptibly siphons off information about the user. Benson uses Google to get information, but the result is that she has provided information about herself to companies that intend to profit from it. This dynamic of being controlled by what you thought you were in control of is described by Faris as a form of the uncanny present in magical realist texts ("Scheherazade's Children" 178). But the opacity of this process elicits a sense of the eerie as well. The resistance the internet presents toward mediating the strange, despite Benson's efforts, suggests a hidden agency. In refusing strangeness, contemporary media becomes itself strange. In addition, the inscrutable inner workings of modern technology, such as televisions or the internet, can exhibit a "hint of the supernatural" (Peaty 301). Because of this, such technologies can be turned into fruitful devices to disrupt the boundaries between life and death or human and nonhuman in gothic and horror fiction (Peaty 303).

The potential horrors of digital media are portrayed in the episode "Chat Room" when a father breaks and burns the family computer to save his daughter from cyberpredators. His actions have a frightening result: "His daughter complains of a light head, a burning in her chest. She calls him 'Mom' with tears in her voice. She dies on a Saturday" (68). It casts contemporary reliance on such technologies in a gothic light, and suggests the unsettling possibility of media, a tool for communication, having agency. This possibility is contemplated by Benson as she becomes upset by the idea that "her smartphone is smarter than she is" (103). Still, the situation is not completely sinister. Benson's response to the

smartphone exudes childish defiance: “she puts it close to her face, says, ‘NO,’ and does the opposite” (103). Again, contemporary technology is shown to be of little help in Benson’s strangely haunted life. Through such representations, media is once more attributed a certain opacity, as the text emphasises the ways in which it hinders communication rather than only the aspects that facilitate it.

Ultimately, this image of the internet, and of technology associated with it, hearkens to the magical realist ideas of electronic media as imposing an “all-at-onceness” that “abolishes distance and time but also obliterates the link with the past and the loving connection between people” (Delbaere-Garant 259). The girls-with-bells-for-eyes are a kind of haunting that brings back past events and links them to each other, emphasising the connection between victims, but also their connection to other people (in particular to Benson, as a police officer and as a woman). Because of this, they cannot be mediated by or understood through an electronic media that erases such connections. This critique is also aimed at contemporary television, at police procedurals like *Law & Order: SVU* that never link the dots between cases and episodes and thus present horrific misogynist crimes as unrelated to one another.

While section 5 argued that intermedial transformation and references can work together with supernatural motifs to represent systems and forces that are usually invisible, the examples discussed above point to a different aspect of the supernatural-intermedial relation. All media is bound by material and conventional limits in a way that supernatural strangeness is not. The fundamental limitlessness of such supernatural phenomena makes it difficult to fit into any kind of media, be it musical sound, Morse code, television series or the supposedly all-encompassing internet. Even complex intermedial configurations cannot

bridge the chasms of meaning that stretch between these forms of perceiving and interpreting information. These complications result in mistakes, confusions and gaps in the interaction between the characters and that which haunts them, but also between the reader and the text. In this way the novella, as a media type, is also presented as a limited form of expression.

7 Impossibility and Solution

All the confusions and gaps in "Especially Heinous" compound to indicate an inescapable problem of communication: it is always mediated (as discussed in section 3.1), and thus also always incomplete. The full understanding of the other or expression of the self become impossible as any remediation of reality or lived experience is necessarily partial. It is bound and influenced by both the physical and the conventional limitations of media. This aspect of communication is explored in "Especially Heinous" as the supernatural phenomena and their portrayal in the text continuously try to convey that which is conventionally or physically inexpressible. The supernatural strangeness that permeates the narrative helps to illustrate this fundamental issue at the core of communication, but also manifests the hope of transcending such barriers, as will be discussed in section 7.2.

7.1 The Inexpressible

The analyses of Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* build on a "palimpsestic" interpretation of the primary texts, which means that their "surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (73). This is connected to a recurring question within literary studies, particularly within the fields of postcolonial and feminist theory, which concerns the difficulty of articulation beyond the

confines of hegemonic discourses. Such confines dictate the conventions for producing and interpreting any form of media – what can be expressed and how, as well as our process for decoding signs. Gilbert and Gubar's use of the word 'palimpsestic' to describe text with less accessible layers of meaning brings to mind Hutcheon's "palimpsestuous" adaptations (6). There appears to exist an intriguing parallel between the layered intermediality of "Especially Heinous" and potentially disguised layers of meaning.

The way in which conventional constraints affect communication is grotesquely depicted in "Escape" when a girl that has been kidnapped manages to get to the precinct. After drinking a glass of water, the girl vomits up various odd items, among them "a laminated slip of paper with a code on the side that seems to indicate it came from a library book" (88). The line suggests that the girl, later revealed to have been held in the basement of a library, has literally been devouring books. She has physically internalised the works of Western canon. Literature has also affected her communication in a rather strange way: "The things she says are disjointed, but familiar; Benson recognizes a quote from *Moby Dick,* and another from *The Price of Salt*. They put the girl in a foster home, where she continues to express her grief and lamentations through everyone else's words" (88). This means that the girl is constantly making intermedial references, as she (on a diegetic level) employs lines of written literature in her talk, while her story is making use of intramedial (intertextual) references in order to imply her intermediality. The girl and her story represent the layered intermediality that is emblematic of this text.

The figure of the girl who speaks in literary quotes can be understood as a metaphor for "Especially Heinous", as the novella is a work that heavily references other media products and types, becoming a literary intermedial collage. In this sense, Machado's text is

also an example of expressing something “through everyone else’s words”. Still, the thematic focus on misogynist violence and on problems with communication (discussed above) signals that this problem goes beyond the pages of this particular novella. The library girl and Machado, like other women, must express their experiences of violence through the conventions of whichever media type they have chosen; conventions that, in turn, have been shaped by societal power structures and their accompanying discourses, such as patriarchy.

In addition, the way in which the speech of the library girl is described, “disjointed but familiar”, makes it remarkably uncanny, hearkening to one of the dominant modes of expression throughout the novella. Just as the girl’s speech is made up of sentences belonging to various books throughout history, Machado’s work brings together references to disparate media products and types to the reader. Yet these intermedial references, like the girl’s literary quotes, become disjointed due to the context they are placed within. Furthermore, in being recited, and re-sited within this new context, the familiar itself becomes slightly shifted and altered (Benito et al. 149). The repetition makes it the same but different, turns the comfortably familiar into the uncanny. While these complex intermedial constellations provide an escape from the limitations of one type of media or text, they also give rise to gaps and confusions, as argued in the previous section. This type of communication thus emphasises the crevasses of the unknown that lie open right next to the familiar.

Speaking the experience of misogynist oppression or feminist resistance through the language of patriarchy becomes an exercise in expressing the strange through the familiarity of hegemonic discourse. It results in a fractured, uncanny and incomplete communication, the kind that is evoked by Stabler’s and Benson’s encounters with the supernaturally strange in “Especially Heinous”. The complex layers of intermedial translation that characterises

Benson's interactions with the girls-with-bells-for-eyes are, in this light, an attempt to circumvent the limits of speech. In life, the ghosts were unable to make themselves heard through the typical use of language and they have thus in death turned to other forms of communication. Yet they too have been unable to escape the restrictions of mediation, which causes the gaps and confusions that plague their message, as well as its overall uncanny quality.

Convention is only one of the factors that limit the possibilities of expression – such possibilities are perhaps more unambiguously tethered to the physical characteristics of a media product, that is, to its material, spatiotemporal and sensorial modalities. The impossibility of transgressing or disregarding such physical borders is illustrated when Benson endeavours to fix the bells of the ghosts after her double, Henson, has broken them. At first, she "buys a thousand bells and removes their hammers" and tries to use them to replace the lost ones, but they "don't take" (106). The fact that the spectral bells cannot be repaired using the hammers of regular bells emphasises the divide between the material reality and the supernaturally ethereal realm of the ghosts. After this failure, Benson "tries drawing them [the hammers] on a piece of paper, but the ink runs when pressed into their faces" (106). Once again Benson is unable to restore communication with the ghosts, yet this attempt has an interesting intermedial twist, as she wishes to fix the broken bell with a drawing. Once more, supernatural strangeness and intermedial constellations are linked: it appears as absurd to repair a broken ghost with regular material objects as it is to repair a broken instrument of sound with a drawing. Both solutions fail to take into account fundamental physical differences between the ghostly bells and material bells or drawings of bells.

The physical limitations of mediation have also been explored in the analysis of the difficulties in representing sound (especially non-symbolic sound) in the written, verbal language of "Especially Heinous". In the end, Machado cannot reproduce the sound in her text, its media modalities restrict it to the "as if" effect discussed by Rajewsky. Through the text we can only experience certain aspects of the sound, its repetition and rhythm, for instance, but not the full sound. The attempts to represent sound through references to tactile phenomena further marks the border of written literature as a media type, as it is also impossible to replicate the sensation of touch through writing. No patchwork of intermedial references can pierce through the boundaries of media, through the static visuality of the book page which is the reader's interface with the story.

Just as the sound can only be partially represented on the written page, Benson and Stabler can only perceive some aspects of the monster: the sound and vibrations of its heartbeat. The supernatural strangeness of this monster can never be fully grasped by readers and characters or even fully portrayed by the text. Again, the narrative creates a parallel between the difficulties in conveying and understanding supernatural strangeness and the limitations imposed by media. By extension, this points to the fundamental restriction and partial character of any kind of communication. It emphasises the distance between the self and the other, a distance that communication, which by necessity is also mediation, can never completely cover.

7.2 Supernatural Strangeness that Alters and Transcends Mediation

Mediated communication (that is, in actuality, all communication) is riddled with gaps, which means that there are always parts of the cognitive import which can't be transmitted due to conventional and physical constraints. As I have argued, this problem of communication is

exemplified in “Especially Heinous” by various intermedial phenomena which also emphasise the dread inspired by supernatural strangeness. However, the text simultaneously suggests that acceptance of this strangeness might be the key to bridging such communicational gaps. For instance, the girls-with-bells-for-eyes can be understood as female characters acting through magic when all other options are closed to them, a magical realist motif identified by Faris (*Ordinary Enchantments* 178). Such narratives convey the powerlessness to which women, as subalterns, are subjected in society, but also present the possibility of agency. In the case of the ghosts, the possibility of communication comes both from their supernatural return from the dead and from their strange anatomic transformation. The presence of the bells imbues the figures of the ghosts with a peculiar mixture of media and senses. An organ for seeing has been transformed into an instrument for making sound: the organic receptor has become a synthetic emitter. This supernatural metamorphosis of media gives the victims a new chance to express their subaltern perspectives.

The supernaturally mediated interactions between Benson and the ghosts, while distorted and incomplete, still constitute a defiance of regimes of the sayable. To end the threat of this ontological and potentially political disruption, the line of communication needs to be shut down. That is, the media that is allowing the communication needs to be destroyed. Indeed, Henson, the doppelgänger, steals the hammers of the spectral bells, making the ghosts mute. Her deed is revealed in a remarkably gothic scene: “Benson wakes up to see Henson standing over her bed. She is holding a garbage bag, and she is grinning. She dumps the contents over Benson’s bed, and they tumble out like ghostly river shrimp. The stolen hammers from the girls’ bells” (117). This presents a reversal of the motif of the mad double, where the socially acceptable personality of the protagonist is juxtaposed with the angry and

uninhibited double (Gilbert and Gubar 360). While Henson does appear as a terrifying doppelgänger in the middle of the night, the rest of "Especially Heinous" does not portray Henson as the unhinged or socially unacceptable double.[2] Henson "sleeps through every night" (80), has success with lovers (81) and with work (82). In contrast, Benson suffers from restless nights due to sleepwalking and hauntings, has innumerable bad experiences on dates with men, and is confronted over and over with her professional failures. In short, Henson is "better at everything" and "prettier" than Benson (84). Benson's inadequacy in comparison to Henson reaches a peak when she stalks and kidnaps her double. Henson calls her a "lunatic" before being saved by her partner, Abler, while Stabler ignores Benson's calls for assistance (84). Thus, the text does not suggest that Henson is the mad double of Benson, but the opposite: Benson is the mad and transgressive double. She is the one who threatens ontological and societal structures through her interactions with supernatural strangeness. The fact that the more successful and rational Henson attempts to ruin such interactions indicates the danger they might represent to the status quo.

In the end, Henson's actions backfire and push Benson's communication with the ghosts beyond the barriers of media. After Benson's repeated unsuccessful and highly intermedial attempts to find answers and fix the broken bells of the ghosts she allows them to possess her:

> 'All right,' she says. 'Come in.' And they do. They walk into her, one at a time, and once they are inside she can feel them, hear them. They take turns with her vocal cords. 'Hello,' Benson says. 'Hello!' Benson says. 'This feels really good,' Benson

[2] This nocturnal appearance of Henson might link her to Bertha Mason, Jane Eyre's mad and angry double according to one of the most often cited analyses by Gilbert and Gubar (359). Yet, as my analysis in this section shows, the text implies instead that Benson is the Bertha Mason to Henson's Jane Eyre.

> says. ‘What should we do first?’ Benson says. ‘Now wait,’ Benson says. ‘I’m still me.’ ‘Yes,’ Benson says, ‘but you are legion, too.’ (106)

Through this possession, Benson is finally able to hear the girls-with-bells-for-eyes again as her vocal cords have become the technical media they required in order to express themselves. This emphasises the connection (beyond linguistic roots) between the concept of media in, for instance, intermedial studies, and the spiritual medium – both serve as conduits for messages and enable communication.

Goddu describes the popular phenomenon of the medium that emerged in antebellum America as a markedly feminine and gothic figure (98). The medium insisted on her role as a passive instrument and embodied “the typical feminine characteristics of sensitivity, suffering and sympathy”, thus presenting the image of “ideal womanhood” (98). Simultaneously, mediums became associated with promiscuity and prostitution because they “were taken over by spirits and male mesmerists and voyeuristically consumed by their audience” (98). Benson’s possession by the ghosts constitutes a significant deviation from this tradition. Most notably, Benson is not acting as a mere conduit in this communication – she is the intended audience as well. She has offered her body to the girls-with-bells-for-eyes so that they may communicate with her – she is in this sense neither passive, nor simply consumed by an audience.

Another significant departure from the typically gothic figure of the medium is indicated by the changes to Benson’s sense of self. Zamora writes that magical realist ghosts are often associated with alienation and community, and thus they usually represent a collective model of the self, a subjectivity that is “not singular but several” (497-98). The statement that Benson is still herself, but now “legion, too” signals such a shift from

individual to collective self. Benson is thus not only sharing her body with these ghosts, but also merging with them, to the point that she "finds scrawling her own name to be almost impossible" (110). Benson's new collective self means that she can not only talk to the ghosts, but also relives their horrifying deaths in her dreams (113). The dreams that give Benson the ability to experience the memories of the girls-with-bells-for-eyes imply a radically different kind of communication. The supernatural synthesis allows unmediated communication between these characters within the narrative. Benson's acceptance of the supernatural and engagement with its strangeness has allowed her and the ghosts to transcend the limitations of media. Communication between them is no longer partial and constrained, but is instead characterised by full understanding.

Once Benson has agreed to her possession, the narrative moves toward its resolution. Benson speaks openly of her experiences with Stabler, and with his help she discovers the bodies of the girls-with-bells-for-eyes and finds justice for each one of them. Benson also kills their evil doppelgängers (something she had previously been unable to do) and abandons her pursuit of heterosexual romance to initiate a lesbian relationship with the DA. At the same time, Stabler fixes his previously rocky relationship with his wife and they move away from the city with their children. It is, overall, a surprisingly happy ending to a story otherwise characterised by repetitive dread. Because the shift is so abrupt, one must assume it is contingent upon Benson's possession by the ghosts and the unmediated communication that stems thereof. Such a definitive and unambiguously good ending creates a stark contrast from the typical endless format of television series. This is to be expected, as the resolution of "Especially Heinous" is dependent on the supernatural transcendence beyond media

boundaries – in a reality without magic (for instance, the reality of the police procedural) this type of resolution is not possible.

The end of uncanny and eerie dread and repetition is marked, as so much else in this novella, by sound. The last girl-with-bells-for-eyes "clings to the inside of Benson's skull" and once her story is heard she "smiles and doesn't" as she and Benson share a bittersweet farewell (122). Finally, "[t]here is a sound – a new sound. A sigh. And then, she is gone" (122). The fact that this sigh is described as something new marks a break with previous sounds and terrors. The alarming bells and chatter of the ghosts turn into a sigh of relief and then to silence. The last reference to the monster that is part of New York city has a similar tone. In the final episode of the novella, as Benson and the DA roast vegetables: "The city smells it. The city takes a breath" (123). The previously ominous and aggressive sounds have turned placid, and the supernatural strangeness, while not vanished, has withdrawn to the margins once more.

8 Final Thoughts

The analysis of this thesis has explored various ways in which intermediality and the supernatural strangeness of the gothic and magical realism can interact with each other in a text. In "Especially Heinous" medial transposition is deployed in order to subvert power relations that determine what is seen and what is not. The changes to the narrative of *Law & Order: SVU* are deliberate, and not merely the effect of transferring the content of one media product into a drastically different media type. In fact, very little of the television series is directly transferred. It serves mainly as a backdrop against which to contrast the narrative of the novella and to facilitate a critique of the commercial police procedural as a media type.

The cracks opened by intermedial relations allow the police procedural to be infused with a supernatural strangeness that casts the sexual crimes of *Law & Order: SVU* in a gothic light. Because society in many ways seems to have become desensitised to such crimes, this new way of portraying familiar violence can help convey the true terror of it.

The gothic dread of the hauntings stems, in large part, from the intermedial references that represent them. The repetition that characterises the girls-with-bells-for-eyes connects them and the violence they were subjected to in life to the repetitive and unending format of commercial television. It paints a picture of continuous dread caused by the prevalence of the horrific violence, but in time that dread turns partially to weariness – fear and anger are tiresome emotions. This kind of repetition can be interpreted as a sort of narrative failure that serves to portray violence and trauma that cannot be contained by typical causal narration. Repetitive structures are also common in music, and this intermedial association becomes emphasised by the ghosts' communication via the musical sound of ringing bells. As it undermines causality, repetition can illustrate other types of relations. In the case of the ghosts, the repetition links the individual cases of the girls together and thus makes the systematic problem of misogynist violence visible.

Intermedial repetition is also what makes the ghosts remarkably uncanny. Each of their tragic fates is similar to that of the others, all have been raped and murdered. In this way the ghosts become uncanny copies of one another: identical in crucial aspects within the narrative yet, of course, not quite the same. In addition, their cases are familiar to the reader – from police procedurals or sensationalist news – but they are placed in a radically different and strange context, suggesting again the mode of the uncanny.

Another aspect of intermediality that can invoke the strange is the inherent mixedness and simultaneous separation of media. The monstrous heartbeat, because it is represented through onomatopoeia and through references to vibrations, other tactile sensations and rhythmic switching of light, draws attention to both similarities and differences between media types. The complex border zones that characterise intermedial relations are a parallel to the often blurry boundary between the self and the other. The insecurity of such borders is further portrayed in the narrative through the confusion of Benson and Stabler, as they hesitate about the origin of the drumming sound – does it come from themselves or is it produced by another? Given that the creature that is identified as the source of the sound is the foundation of the city, the sound connects the strange and monstrous to the home, which makes it uncanny. At the same time, because the monster remains obscured and is mainly rendered as a sound, the heartbeat becomes an acousmatic and thus also eerie drumming.

The play with media difference and similarity, external or internal sources of sound, the eerie and the uncanny represents in “Especially Heinous” different ways of perceiving forces and power structures within society. These forces and structures can be interpreted either as something fully external and beyond comprehension or control, that is, aligned with the eerie and the gothic. Or one might understand how the self is in some ways inextricably and uncannily linked to them. Once such an uncanny realisation is reached, supernatural strangeness becomes a source of agency within this narrative, an agency that is exploited by the characters, principally by Benson. This possibility to effect change through supernatural communication moves the story into the realm of magical realism, as it relies on an openness to the strange.

The dread evoked by the uncanny and eerie hauntings of “Especially Heinous” is further emphasised by the gaps created through supernatural strangeness and the intermedial patchwork used to represent it. The intermedial gaps are rendered by the irreducible differences that exist between media and serve as a parallel to the cognitive gaps that plague the hauntings. As the gaps in the text are too many and too wide for the reader to fill, they generate a sense of the unknown. Such disorientation and lack of understanding echoes the characters’ bewilderment when they are confronted with the strange supernatural hauntings. In this way, intermediality and supernatural strangeness represent the confusing and unsettling confrontation with the previously unseen or hidden forces of patriarchy and misogyny.

The inevitable gaps of intermediality and supernatural strangeness are not the only obstacle to smooth communication produced by the interaction between the two. The use of intermedial references in the text, particularly as it portrays characters’ interactions with contemporary media such as television series, the internet or smartphones, also suggests that those kinds of media are resistant to mediating the strange. None of the media to which Benson resorts can help her understand or handle the ghosts that haunt her. Instead, these media try to guide her back to consumption and ignorance. Their refusal to mediate the strange turn the digital media themselves into eerie and uncanny phenomena and devices. It also highlights the limits of media, digital or otherwise. Because what can be expressed is constrained by cultural convention, media will filter out that which convention dictates cannot be articulated. Such restrictions become more pronounced when what requires transfer through media lies beyond the ontology of modernity, that is, when it is strange. As any media is bound by some form of limitations, either by convention or due to its material qualities, it can never fully convey the limitlessness of the strange. “Especially Heinous” is itself an

example of this impossibility, as its representations of strangeness are limited to a few specific aspects of it, and even that which becomes represented is characterised by confusion, misunderstandings and gaps.

The complications that arise when attempting mediation of the strange indicates a fundamental problem in communication, namely that all of it is incomplete. It is not only the strange that cannot be fully mediated; any cognitive import is in some way reduced, expanded or distorted in its passage through media. Sometimes conventions that guide the manner in which we interpret a media product hinder us from perceiving that which the producer wishes to convey. The novella portrays how this aspect of media makes communicating women's experience of misogyny difficult, as needs to pass the conventional filters imposed by the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy. At other times, the material limitations of media create an impassable barrier, such as when the written text of "Especially Heinous" fails to reproduce sound. Whether due to culture or to sheer physics, media is inherently somewhat opaque and thus also a bit strange.

In the novella, supernatural strangeness tries to challenge the limits of mediation. The girls-with-bells-for-eyes are an example of this defiance, as they return from the grave after having exchanged their eyes and their voices for ringing bells, which drastically alters the media through which they can communicate. When even these new methods fail, the solution becomes to bypass opaque media through Benson's possession by the ghosts. The possession invokes the connection between the supernatural medium and media as a conduit for communication. However, Benson is also markedly different from the traditional figure of the medium because she does not only transmit the message, she is the intended audience too. Benson then becomes herself producer, technical media of display and perceiver – which

makes communication far more transparent. This transparency and the collective self constructed inside Benson are what set in motion the resolution of the story. Intermediality and supernatural strangeness thus present an odd and complex relationship in the text. The strange resists being fully represented by media because it cannot be bound by its confines. Media, in turn, resists representing the strange and attempts to steer away from it. At the same time, the resistance and opacity of media gives it its own hint of strangeness. Finally, supernatural strangeness attempts to assert itself against the limits of media by circumventing mediation altogether. There is thus a tension between mediation and supernatural strangeness that cannot be fully resolved, at least not in "Especially Heinous."

To conclude this thesis, I would like to remark that because my analysis explores how supernatural strangeness and intermedial relations interact in "Especially Heinous", a text which features myriad examples of both elements, it has found many different ways in which they relate to each other. All these aspects of supernatural-intermedial relations will not necessarily be portrayed in texts which exhibit less prominent supernatural motifs or intermediality. However, it is my hope that this analysis might bring some clarity to the combined use of supernatural strangeness and intermediality that I have observed in many texts by women authors. I believe that comparative studies of literary works that in some way form part of the tendency to blend the supernatural and the intermedial could throw further light on how these two elements affect each other and the text as a whole. Thus far, my research indicates that the similarities and tensions between intermediality and supernatural strangeness make this combination an effective one for expressing political dissent and subversion.

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