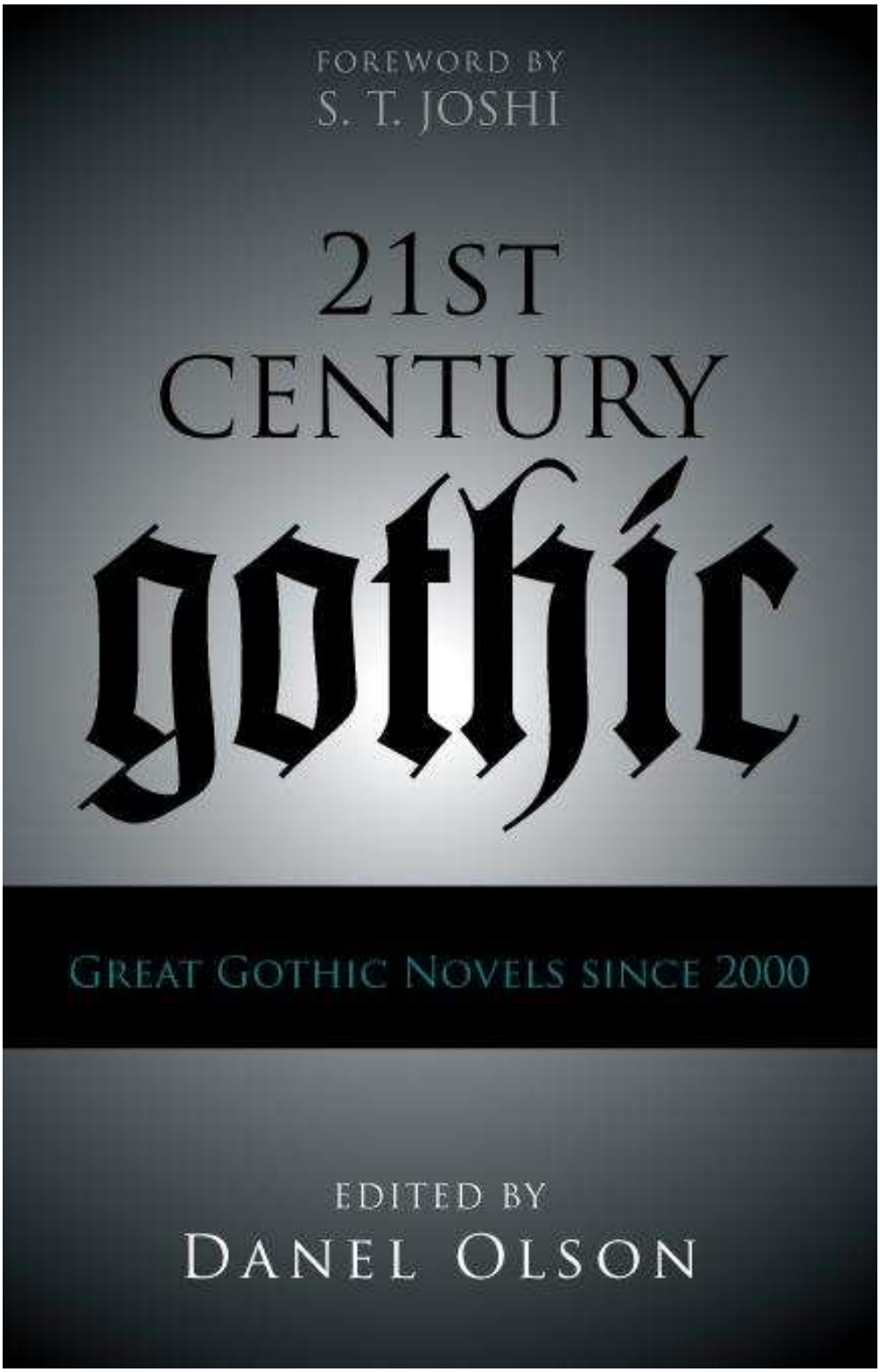

FOREWORD BY
S. T. JOSHI
21ST
CENTURY
gothic
GREAT GOTHIC NOVELS SINCE 2000
EDITED BY
DANEL OLSON

# 21st-Century Gothic

## *Great Gothic Novels since 2000*

EDITED BY DANEL OLSON

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To my Belgrade friend
MILORAD PAVIC´ (1929–2009)

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# Introduction

Danel Olson

## The New Dusk

Are you like me, ready for the new dusk?
—Ingrid Pitt, legendary Hammer Films vamp[1]

Welcome to hell. You get the full tour.
—Mark Z. Danielewski in interview[2]

We should never have come in.
—Jennifer Egan, The Keep[3]

As you are already holding this volume, you must be ready for the new dusk. Let this brief introduction to this reference book's mission and method serve as a torch to guide your way through these new literary catacombs. I envy you, as you are about to wind your way through fifty-three startlingly different ways to recount—and react to—a Gothic novel. More than that you will discover a new dark library for your bookshelves, and will from this moment unbury all their hidden pasts and relations.

## Why Study the Gothic Novel?

## Why Not Just Read It?

For my part, I understand a reader's or student's desire to simply experience the terror, untameable superstition, occasional sadism, and constant suspense of these books. Dry academic dissection implies that these works are mostly intellectual puzzles, or some chaos to put to order. I sense they are more. They intend to chill and astonish, and they mean to be felt. They come upon us in their madness and hunger as would a wolf pack, and awe should be our first response. But I promise that the unfolding of these pages will only increase the reader's astonishment, dark pleasure, and discovery. In fact, this whole book owes its existence to a student in my "Horror, Ghost, and Gothic Fiction" course who thoughtfully asked, "But what about any good Gothic novels after Y2K?" It is a grand question, and although she has had a rather long wait for an answer,

here it is. For underneath the Gothic's corseted bodices, spikes, frilly Victorian dresses, black eye makeup, gray lipstick, piercings, spandex, wigs, and lacedup boots or patterned knee-highs, what exactly is there? Behind its monsters, ghouls, ghosts, serial killers, zombies, and vampires, what thing of any meaning lurks? Within this reference guide, each of the novel's authors and critics may have a different answer as to why the Gothic is worth an academic view. My belief is that Gothdom and Gothic literature, though separate entities, have so closely crept up to the mainstream that a basic interest in the world around us demands that they be examined. Certainly when the Spanish prime minister shows up at the White House with his Goth daughters in tow, with even their mother clad in all black, and then the U.S. State Department proudly uploads the pictures to Flickr,[4] we have a phenomenon on our hands. In literary terms, this trend is just as substantial. Tracking each week of the last two months, I am staggered that Gothic-themed novels have consistently appeared in four to seven of the fifteen to sixteen slots on the New York Times best-sellers list (with those most favored Gothic situations appearing in the Times's capsule descriptions: "a letter from his dead wife," "a family secret," "girl goes missing," "a ruthless foe," "fallen prey to an ancestral curse," "woman's body found in London cemetery," and "slave flees with her master to New Orleans"). Untold millions are reading them. It seems, however, that library shelves have a hole in them with regard to interpretations of the latest Gothic fictions. I expect the users of this book to be not only patrons of public, college, and university libraries, but also classes on contemporary novels and pop culture, postmodern seminars, Gothic Studies programs, reading-group leaders, genre publishers (some genre presses from Canada and Britain have asked for a copy already), and both university and independent scholars. Many junior high school and high school library collections will find this guidebook essential for their hooked-on-Gothic students, who stand as a major market (and I'm afraid to admit that my daughters—who have fallen deeply for both Edward Cullen and Jacob Black—would probably be the first to crack it open).

When an author wins the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature in part for her powerful and popular Pulitzer Prize–winning novel of a visitant daughter come back to the mother who killed her to save her—Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987)—we again must give the Gothic narrative its due. A thorough investigation, but also a salute and celebration, is what this study intends. If, like salt, the Gothic has been much abused for its deleterious effects on our health, still

the Gothic is so much a part of our fashion, culture, and entertainment that it is as unimaginable to go without it as it is to forsake salt. There is some strange affinity between our lives and these works; surely to ask what allures and what terrifies us is to penetrate our minds with the most primal questions. What better kind of character self-analysis do we know than pondering our own unseemly attractions and ungodly fears? What compels one of our essay contributors, the highly regarded novelist Lisa Tuttle, is "that ambiguous, murky, and dangerous region where the very things we fear most are also those we secretly desire."[5] Is then our terror of the uncanny actually our shock over witnessing the distorted image of our own desire in these unnatural storyworlds, these zones of dark potentiality, these bizarre and opaque minds?

It's undebatable that there has been a boom in Gothic studies since 1980 to satisfy our hunger for context and meaning in these novels that challenge or enlarge our knowledge of the world and the mind, offering us narrators unreliable, psychotic, or even dead.[6] What's more, as University Distinguished Professor and former International Gothic Association President Jerrold E. Hogle muses,

> Now people realize that there's a lot of symbolic dimension to Gothic fictions. They have deep symbolic significance that extends to the use of the Gothic in film, in video games, in graphic novels. All of those, including Gothic novels, are now the subject of a lot of intense academic analysis to figure out these questions: Why do we need this kind of phenomenon in our culture and why does it keep reproducing itself?[7]

Considering how prevalent the Gothic is in our culture, the timing for this guide is right. We need an understanding of how and why the alien will within the neo-Gothic has cast such a spell on us and to show how the Gothic is evolving. Perhaps the ways we read it should evolve as well. This luminous study of macabre fiction and the death myths underneath it aims to provide these answers.

Another justification for serious study is that Gothic postmodernism is revising our notions of the sublime and its inherent terror; in the elegant words of David B. Morris, "The gothic takes us deep within rather than far beyond the human sphere."[8] Isaac Bashevis Singer put it in another, droller, matter-of-fact way to his editor on a spring day in 1978, when Kirby McCauley asked him why he spent so much time writing away on demons, dybbuks, resurrected Nazis, and supernatural happenings. Singer's arresting answer: "It brings me into contact with reality."[9] Thus from this Nobel prize winner's view, the weirdest, most

estranging fiction about these others—that fiction where there is no textual evidence that the others were some narrator's unfortunate nightmare, fantasy, illusion, or hallucination—is still about human concerns, or our unreal reality. Perhaps the greatest reason why we can't quit the Gothic and why we must press deeper to disclose its secrets is because we are ensorcelled by death, haunted by the day or night of our own death, wondering if death is the definite end of our existence. More than that, will we see the dead somehow again? "The Gothic genre," as our critic contributor Judith Wilt captured it elsewhere, "always blurs the boundary between life and death."[10] This grey blur is the most stilling and captivating one of all. No doubt the Gothic saturates our culture because we crave the most intense mystery. So much is explained to us in the information overload heaped upon our heads every day from all corners that we want enigma, we want questions forever without answer, we want the riddles of Thanatos and Eros that the Gothic summons. We may believe that we would be better off not knowing our weakness for the torturous in the Gothic, what has been called its "dark other," the stuff of "slasher videos, snuff films, and violent pornography,"[11] but the novels featured in this volume (especially those from Chuck Palahniuk and Andrew Davidson) will not let us off so easily. What do we really know about our furtive longings, then, the Gothic asks, and what do we know about people? Do we actually believe that they are either simply good or simply bad, when as a dark film of the 1950s wisely put it, "good and evil can change places like light and shadow. How can we be sure where one ends and the other begins, of which side we are on at a given moment?"[12] It is our interest, our complicity, our shadow side that the Gothic lets us peer into, possibly giving us a warning, a release, but perhaps an encouragement toward viciousness. As one former American vice president eerily intoned to the world listening, "We also have to work, through, sort of the dark side, if you will. We've got to spend time in the shadows. . ."[13] (To think I once invited this spooky politician to a book launch of mine.) The point is that the ever-watchful Gothic keeps asking us, who or what is out there? And do I recognize myself in it?

## Scope, Focus, Methodology, and Inclusion Criteria

The crossover appeal is that this volume offers guideposts for high school and college students, general readers, and seasoned scholars to fifty-three of the most

intriguingly foreboding novels and novellas, as well as nonsupernatural Gothic narratives, appearing in their original languages between the years 2000 and 2010. Over 180 consultants and contributors were sought for cross-disciplinary conversations (see appendix A) and polled (by e-mail, phone, or in-person conversation at conventions) to nominate the post-2000 novels they considered the most stylistically artistic, experimentally successful, apt at genre bending and blending, influential on other writers and the market, original and emotive, metaphysically/culturally/historically significant, or authentically scary/disturbing/transgressive/shocking, all with that strange alchemy of literary elements that make them come back to us in dreams. If "myth is truth" and literature simply "words that provoke response," as the Cheshire novelist Alan Garner claims,[14] then which is truest, most provocative? Which is the one with more mystery and secrets, melodrama and murder, than you could reasonably hope for? Which innovative storytellers went beyond the conventional and best redefined the Gothic? You may be surprised by the choices, as I was by a few.

The goal was then for the fifty works with the most nominations to be meticulously described, analyzed, and evaluated in essays that average over five thousand words each (a few novels tied, so we ended up at fifty-three works). I asked the greatest lovers of the Gothic to observe how the Gothic slithers, coils, and strikes throughout these novels. These authorities are a varied lot, including mainstream and genre novelists, members of Gothic Studies departments and associations, World Fantasy Convention panelists, academics of Gothic note, esteemed independent scholars, online horror/ghost/Gothic newsgroup and literary archive founders, long-active horror and fantasy editors, publishers, humanities librarians, speculative-fiction-award board members, horror film experts and directors, true crime writers, literary biographers, editors and authors of dark erotica/noirotica, a couple of Goth girls turned academics, reference guide compilers, and a forensic psychologist whose specialty is serial killers. To widen the range of Gothic authors discussed, I suggested that we only write on a particular author once, so some prolific fictionists with fresh and arresting premises in several of their novels during this fertile decade, despite getting a large number of nods, are represented only once. My apologies to them and their readers (though their nominated works are listed in appendix B, which lists all the works that received votes). From American-born authors came twenty-six of the novels featured in 21st Century Gothic, from England thirteen, from Australia five, from Canada, Spain, and Japan came two each, and from

Scotland, Wales, Belgium, and the Netherlands came one each. It is hoped that when such a study is launched again—possibly on the Gothic novels from years 2010 through 2020—we will see more novelists out of South America and Africa getting an essay.

Naturally each land, through its art, culture, technology, and history, either disinters or births a Gothic creature substantially its own. Compounding that, ambiguity, hybridization, and shape-shifting seem to be the Gothic's foggy, killing strength and nature. Thus, consensus for what the Gothic means now is not universal. Nevertheless, in a post-2000 survey that went out to a hundred Gothic scholars from Europe and North America (for the MLA volume Approaches to Teaching Gothic Novels for which some of our contributors wrote), editors Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller found that scholars tended to agree on many of the Gothic's traits and tones, all of which were shared with our contributors. Their survey respondents mentioned that often the Gothic explores fantasies, hidden and forbidden desires (murder, incest, and worse), damnation, physical and emotional disease and aberration, revenge, curses, family lineage, estate battles, horror, terror, falls, the sublime, superstition, reanimation, entrapment and confinement (especially of women), the supernatural, the past, and haunted and decayed structures (castles, mansions, abbeys, or modern houses of spirits).[15] Moreover, the Gothic supplies us with unreliable or compulsive narrators, the anxiety of the displaced, bad parenting or none at all, inverted domesticity, nightmares, embedded tests and frame narratives, and a fascination with thresholds and the transgression of boundaries.[16] The Gothic involves confrontations between us and the uncanny, between us and the other.[17] Other damaging encounters include those of the politically or financially weak in conflict with the elites, reason with irrationality, science with religion, and the individual with the social order (e.g., the subaltern versus the dominant, the child versus the parent, woman versus patriarchy). All literature may ultimately be about defeat, but few genres stress it as the Gothic does, so often dwelling on our grand strivings and hopes all wickedly moving in reverse.

As the managing editor, reading or rereading a Gothic novel (or a series of them) each week for the last year has not made me completely insane, but I cannot truthfully say it has helped my mental health. It was spiky Gothic pages before breakfast, lunch, and supper, and after my midnight snack. Everything I touched seemed cut from shadows. So, the effects of this Gothic immersion have not been altogether salubrious. The books are draining; they entertain evil. They

tend to make one wary, questioning the everyday simple answers people give, and absurdly looking for the dark and shaggy roots of conspiracy behind them. And if sometimes the novels' philosophizing seemed low-grade and their melancholy relentless, the recompense came in plots grandly salacious, complicated, and irresistibly manic, as I read sometimes until breaking dawn, surrounded by a cast of shambling characters spreading terror, and sometimes receiving it. I expect I will miss this year as a feral child, once acclimatized to "civilization," misses the wolf pack. The books, like the wolves, ran wild and hungry and free, and they made me feel more. They exist in a marvellous antiparadise.

There are so many other graceful and illuminating guides to the Gothic that I barely know where to begin naming them, and one could wonder, why one more? An answer is that Gothic Studies often seems fondly retrospective, as if the best were behind us, as if groping among "the dry bones of the past," as Emerson put it, were somehow preferable to fingering the fresh kills. A large number of Gothic anthologies and reference books represent, describe, or deconstruct the eighteenth-century Gothic, and a huge number are under the thrall of the nineteenth-century Gothic, all understandably so. And many studies are besotted by the aberrant charms of the twentieth-century Gothic. But what about our Gothic of the new millennium? This book is a kickoff to the Gothic of our time, with radiant critical minds from Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia lighting the shadowy corners of each novel or novella. At these new literary frontiers, the contributors chart the ever-vacillating moods and actions of the neo-Gothic. In this work, we see how the new Gothic ranges from gallows humor (especially in Lauren Groff's The Monsters of Templeton and Neil Gaiman's book for all ages, The Graveyard Book, both from 2008) to outright horror (of the stalk-drop-and-chop Grand Guignol kind, all given free range in Chuck Palahniuk's Lullaby), from young adult angst, mixed feelings, and tender holdings (see all of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight and part of Elizabeth Kostova's The Historian) to highly metatextual experimentation that miraculously still manages to be affecting (in Jennifer Egan's The Keep and Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves).

The neo-Gothic's macabre emotional territory has expanded as never before, and this collection maps the range. Until now, no one else has made a systematic investigation of the genius of expression within this new millennium's Gothic. For as far as we can see, very few of the novels investigated here have much criticism of a developed kind anywhere (only reviews of slight size and

sometimes idiosyncratic or capricious judgment). No one has pondered at length how these novels fit and fight the Gothic tradition that spans the last 250 years. It is hoped that this dark treasure-box of lucid and penetrating criticism may launch a Gothic discourse that enlarges the Gothic canon, just as Morrison's Beloved expanded the American literary canon over twenty years ago. The Gothic has been reconceived, and these essays help readers appreciate the movements, motifs, and motives within the harrowing new fictions, informing the largest possible audience, while still stimulating and challenging even the most devoted Gothic fan/writer/editor/critic.

# Questions Raised

One question curiously underasked in Gothic Studies is how and why much of the neo-Gothic in the twenty-first century differs from its ancestors, and what that difference puts at risk: what does the new Gothic mock, flaunt, or falsify? The old Gothic frame was well drawn by Jennifer Egan (The Keep, 2007) after an appearance in my city. On that evening, she shared her love of the "fantastic (and totally insane) Gothic novels I had a ball reading: Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho, Matthew Lewis's The Monk—those are all 18th century books—and then from the 19th century, Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White, which is an absolutely drop-dead great thriller."[18] Then came her memorable brief of the fundamental movements in the traditional Gothic plot: vulnerable strangers come to a new place, stay around long enough to seem participants in their own victimization, compromise themselves, face the uncanny, and then "leave us wondering whether it was really the paranormal or just their brains on broil."[19] Now, beyond these salient features that she limned, we also remember that the traditional Gothic manifestations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries broke all taboos while revealing simultaneous love-hate for the object of desire, whether that object was a man (Catherine Earnshaw's Heathcliff), a process (Dr. Victor Frankenstein wanting the worship of future generations, but still rejecting the reanimated creature from his filthy workshop of creation, which he thought would bring the fame), a parent (the creature's driving Dr. Frankenstein to his Arctic death, and yet regarding him as the only father he had, all confirming the Gothic's obsession of the terrified child and the tyrannical, unstable parental order), or a power (the Capuchin monk Ambrosio adoring eminence and honor, but despising how self-controlled you have to stay to keep such

approval). And we should always keep in our hearts what was the old Gothic's predominant feeling—hopelessness. As evidence of this dismal emotion, or what Coleridge called "the grief without a pang," I recall my rereading of four Gothic classics that were separated by over fifty years (The Castle of Otranto, Vathek, The Monk, and Frankenstein), undertaken before I was to moderate a World Fantasy Convention panel on the Gothic. I was struck by seeing the same word repeated over and over again in the last five pages of each of these novels: despair. But the Gothic world is not what it was. We have all grown a little Gothic now and joined the movement. More of who we are now seems to reside inside the neo-Gothic "villain." As Fred Botting persuasively contends, vampires are now "mirrors of contemporary identity and sympathetic identifications." With their lives of luxurious consumption and wasted desires, they are the "normative image of the latter-day consumer."[20] More worrisome than that, he finds that in our real life, as in our neo-Gothic fictional lives, there are equal amounts of possibility and unease: "anxiety floats freely, reflecting and thus ghosting the high-speed circulation of information and commodities . . . [the c]omputer and genetic codes [that] allow everything from identity to bodies to be rewritten."[21] My own concern is that if the überfigure of the Gothic—the vampire—has changed from the articulate and merciless count of Bram Stoker's Dracula, one obsessed with hierarchy and battle and little prone to love in the way we understand devotion and protection, to a softhearted and mumbling boy, less a fiend than a friend, and quite capable of love, maybe even a purer love than our mortal one (enter Edward Cullen), then we have no great monster story but a little romance. What is to dread in that? If we suck dry the mad blood from the revenant account, where has the wildness gone and the terror vanished to? And if what was fearsome and loathly is now embraced, how can we be reminded of its unpredictable animal power, its essential and awful strangeness and apartness? Has the vampire novel moved from being a great shaggy gray Carpathian wolf of violent instability in Bram Stoker's time to a trimmed and absurd black French lap poodle in ours? Doesn't the Gothic need to stay a bête noir that pounces, tears, devours, and dashes away, rather than a tame little thing that sits and broods?

All of this change from the old ways of Gothika to this softer thing of caring vampires who resemble sparkly therapists causes understandable outrage for traditionalists, and some nostalgia, even among the very characters of its novels. Our longing for the darker protagonists is best mirrored by this exchange from the most popular vampire novel of the past decade, during Bella Swan's first visit

to her beau vampire's house in Twilight (2005), where she may have secretly hoped for something a little more dangerous and forbidden, a bit more sexually frenzied, and a lot more shadowy:

> He [Edward Cullen] followed my gaze. "Not what you expected, is it?" he asked, his voice smug.
>
> "No," I admitted.
>
> "No coffins, no piled skulls in the corners; I don't even think we have cobwebs . . . what a disappointment this must be for you," he continued slyly.
>
> I ignored his teasing. "It's so light . . . so open."[22]

In the 2008 film version, again this surprise and possible disappointment of hers is too vital to pass up, though it was shortened:

> EDWARD CULLEN: What did you expect? Coffins and dungeons and moats?
>
> ISABELLA SWANN: No, not the moats.[23]

What unearthly good is a vampire who sits at the edge of your bed at night and just looks at you? Where's the bite? Despite what my daughters tell me, it seems the great vampire story is under threat, and a dramatic corrective is needed. However, this is a question best left for our contributors to answer.

If the most popular vampire novel in this period seems underfearful and anemic, what is the health of the undead others? Perhaps the fate of all these dark fictions hinges on their ability to adapt. 21st Century Gothic evidences that the Gothic was not so much a literary movement long past as an impulse in art that won't stay buried. The Gothic invites us deep within its cave, which may be a reflection of our own grave. In this maw of possibilities before death, we become, through the strong and vicarious power of reader identification, part of the scariest nightmare we've never dreamed. What sexual possibilities and transgressions, violent destruction and new creation can happen in each of the novels lives for as long as we speak the book's name. To have that dreadful shivery pleasure all for yourself may well be the reason we put up with what Stephen King recently called neo-Gothic's endless queue of "monsters, murders, bastards, and ne'erdo-wells."[24] Perhaps the reason the Gothic can't stay dead for good is that it suddenly wriggles, disguises, and disappears just before its execution, avoiding extinction by constantly changing (just as literally happens in Richard Flanagan's novel of penal Tasmania featured here, *Gould's Book of Fish*). Slipping from the gibbet is the Gothic way, and its detractors will always find killing its ghost a maddening process. This guide's critics inquire where and how the neo-Gothic

is twisting away from our grasp and old definitions, and remaking itself. The contributors will signal how successful the slipstream bending and merging has been. We will watch how cunningly the Gothic descends the winding staircase into the gloom, only to insert itself into memoir, comics, crime and detection novels, travel narratives, erotica, history, science fiction, and fantasy.

Specifically, the contributors to this volume were asked to meditate on eight clusters of questions in forming the dark heart of their all-original essays:

• Why is this one of the most creative or influential modern Gothic novels of the last decade? How does it have a remarkable fullness of characterization, intricacy of plot, cumulatively unbearable power of suspense, a vital symbolic or allegorical system, and the bloodred wine of astonishment—the bizarre, the sublime, the horrific, or the paranormal?

• How does this novel embody the traditional impulse of the Gothic and yet expand, explode, or revolutionize the definition of Gothicism? Does it add humor, a likable villain, some new Gothic mise-en-scène (instead of the usual castle, keep, dungeon, moat, ladies in white, and ominous men in hooded inquisition garb)? How is this novel successfully evolving the Gothic, showing it to be a genre in progress, gifting new life to an old form, dreaming freshly startling visions to the genre's moonless night?

• To where is the dark path of the new Gothic winding? How is the latest Gothic merging with the young adult novel, the metafictional experiment, fantastica, the magical realist narrative, and others?

• How does the novel stir and satisfy readers? How does the neo-Gothic project our current anxieties, dangerous fantasies, and contradictions? Where does it present cultural metaphors? How does the novel's telepathy for our own states, wishes, and dreads explain this particular book's immediately popular reception?

• What are this novel's subtexts and major themes, its perceptions of the natural and the supernatural world?

• Where are the narrative's conflicts?

• What fictional elements beyond symbol and theme have a peculiar power in the narrative, undraping a new generation's awareness of transgression and taboo, of power and its limits, of awe toward love and death? Or, how is the writer ably experimenting with Gothic characters, settings and atmosphere, dialogue, point of view, structure and suspense, style and spontaneous associations, and tone and mood (e.g., is it bitter, ironic, campy, parodic, romantic,

satiric, sardonic, or something else)? What intriguing critical concerns does the novel raise independent from the above questions?

• Has Gothicism recently been defanged? Does its survivor instinct make the Gothic return to some of its old trends? What recent studies illuminate best where the Gothic is going and what the novel is doing?

Answers to these queries illustrate how the Gothic has come in from the cold, no longer languishing in the critical margins, but now demanding the most serious questioning and exploration, and even storming the castle of the established literary canon. Together these essays direct us to novels half in love with death and madness, ones that release the shades in the most unforgettable ways. There is, of course, one dark truth to all Gothic texts, despite all their transformations from the time of Horace Walpole's generative novel The Castle of Otranto until now, namely that not all who venture inside do get out alive. But now that you are in, and the exits seem missing or blacked out, you might as well relish the Gothic ambience. Run through these new mansions panting and adrenaline addled with our critics, take that offered hand that guides you down the silvered twirling staircase, into the maze of earth-cool torchlit passages, and finally to their terrible secrets below. Everyone may discover something different down there; from your findings, may this book raise a thousand questions. As Mark Z. Danielewski, author of one of my favorite neo-Gothic novels, House of Leaves, insightfully said in an interview,

> Smart horror . . . goes after the deeper origins of fear. It usually relies on specters, religion, unanticipated violence, and all of it handled with enough uncertainty it doesn't just provoke an adrenaline rush but thought. . . . What are [you] afraid of? And why? And how should [you] respond? After all, maybe what we're so frightened of will turn out to be nothing more than a dark, empty room. Then again, maybe it won't.[25]

The secrets I found were that the new Gothic, despite its fresh masquerade, still takes us back to the haunting themes of the old Gothic: the bondage of the body, the bondage of the soul. The Gothic genre has many incarnations—this is merely the latest, but not the last. Enjoy it before it changes into something else.

# Notes

1. Ingrid Pitt, "Introduction: My Life Among the Undead," in The Mammoth Book of Vampire Stories by Women, ed. Stephen Jones (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001), 1–6. Sadly, Hammer Films's leading glamour-puss (and toothsome star of The Vampire Lovers, Countess Dracula, and Beyond the Rave) was not a stranger to real-life horrors. Ingrid was born Kasha Kotuzova on November 21, 1937, on a train carrying her mother to a Nazi concentration camp. "They did horrific things to us," she remembers. "My mother told me, 'Never be a victim' and I've never again been a victim in my life." See "Ingrid Pitt," in Hammer Glamour: Classic Images from the Archive of Hammer Films, ed. Marcus Hearn (London: Titan, 2009), 120.
2. Mark Z. Danielewski, interview by Sophie Cottrell, "Bold Type: A Conversation with Mark Danielewski," Random House, www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0400/danielewski/interview.html (accessed April 1, 2010).
3. Jennifer Egan, The Keep (Knopf, 2006), 201.
4. "Spain's Goth First Daughters Embarrass, Embarrassed by Dad," Gawker, September 25, 2009, http://gawker.com/5368039/spains-goth-first-daughters-embarrass-embarrassed-by-dad (accessed June 9, 2010).
5. Lisa Tuttle, commentary on her portrait, in The Faces of Fantasy: Photographs by Patti Perret (New York: Tor, 1996), 142.
6. One of our own contributors lit the Gothic fuse. According to Jerrold E. Hogle, "Gothic studies as an enterprise has become a big international phenomenon. I would say it was 1980 when we had our first major scholarly study of Gothic that a lot of people responded to. It was a book called The Literature of Terror, by David Punter in England, and a lot of people wrote books and articles in response to it and that sort of set off a three-decades-long proliferation of studies in the Gothic. And so now there's a whole international community of scholars who go to Gothic conferences. We have an International Gothic Association of international scholars, . . . [a]nd we organize conferences every other year and we have a journal." See Jerrold E. Hogle, interview, "Employee Q & A: Gothic Expert Jerry Hogle," University of Arizona News, October 28, 2009, http://uanews.org/node/28183 (accessed March 28, 2010).
7. Hogle, interview.
8. David B. Morris, "The Sublime and the Beautiful: Reconsiderations," New Literary History 16, no. 2 (Winter 1985): 306.
9. Isaac Singer to Kirby McCauley, introduction to Dark Forces: New Stories of Suspense and Supernatural Horror (New York: Viking, 1980), xiv.
10. Judith Wilt, "And Still He Sees the Ghosts," in Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: MLA, 2003), 41.
11. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller, introduction to Approaches to Teaching

Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: MLA, 2003), 36.

12. The 13th Letter (a remake of Georges Clouzot's Le Courbeau), director Otto Preminger, screenwriter Howard Koch, performers Linda Darnell, Charles Boyer, and Michael Rennie (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1951).

13. Dick Cheney, transcript for Meet the Press, September 14, 2003, Tim Russert moderator, NBC News, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3080244/ (accessed April 2, 2010).

14. Alan Garner, commentary on his portrait, in The Faces of Fantasy: Photographs by Patti Perret (New York: Tor, 1996), 38.

15. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller, "Some Results of the Survey," in Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: MLA, 2003), 4.

16. Hoeveler and Heller, "Some Results of the Survey," 4.

17. Hoeveler and Heller, "Some Results of the Survey," 4.

18. Jennifer Egan, a reading of The Keep with questions and answers, Inprint Margaret Root Brown Reading Series, October 15, 2007, Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas.

19. Egan, a reading of The Keep.

20. Fred Botting, "Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black Holes," in The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 287.

21. Botting, "Aftergothic," 287–288.

22. Stephenie Meyer, Twilight (Little, Brown, 2005), 329.

23. Twilight, director Catherine Hardwicke, screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg, performers Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, and Billy Burke (Universal City, CA: Summit, 2008).

24. Stephen King, "Critical Praise for The Monsters of Templeton," HarperCollins Canada, www.harpercollins.ca/book/index.aspx?isbn=9781401322250 (accessed April 1, 2010).

25. Mark Z. Danielewski, interview by Sophie Cottrell.

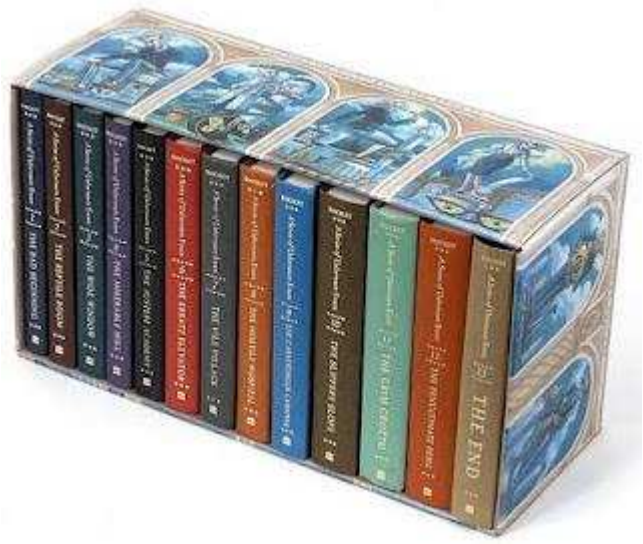
CHAPTER 47

# The Longest Gothic Goodbye in the World

## LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

**Danel Olson**

I cherished, you perished,
The world's been nightmarished.
—Lemony Snicket, A Series of Unfortunate Events: The End, Book the Thirteenth[1]




If there has been a saga that most successfully and profitably appropriated the love and loss of the traditional Gothic and revisioned it for the twenty-first century, it must surely be Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events. Among recent series that have collectively sold hundreds of millions of copies, Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials omnibus (consisting of The Golden Compass, The Subtle Knife, and The Amber Spyglass, from 1995 to 2000) may have astonishing Gothic flashes, and the much straighter-faced seven books of the Harry Potter series (from 1997 to 2007) may have tingling moments of peril and fantasy (with its castles, supernatural visitations, magic, endless conflicts and melodrama, questions of lineage, and assumptions of wizardly power), but it is A Series of Unfortunate Events that has all the Gothic rites. As Son of a Witch author Gregory Maguire imaginatively and accurately opines, "Had the gloom-haunted Edward Gorey found a way to have a love child with Dorothy Parker, their issue might well have been Lemony Snicket."[2] These dire, inventive, and outlandishly witty books, now translated into forty-one languages and having sold sixty million

copies as of November 2009[3] (and The Bad Beginning, Book the First has recently been offered for free download to an audience of untold size), offer all the iconic features of the old Gothic, but with a new-millennium twist. We rattle along for thirteen dangerously addictive volumes that unveil resourceful orphans of unstoppable curiosity, shabbily Byronic heroes, secret societies, abduction, large contested estates, grotesqueries, cruel authorities and heartless institutions, sexual threats, murder most foul (offering 1,001 fiendishly clever ways to die over 170 chapters), frequent conflagrations, imprisoned victims, an ignorant public that ranges from passive to mobbish, myopic guardians and slain rescuers, ghastly and consuming lake-, sea-, and landscapes, and, the most moving motif of all, an irrecoverable past. Running through these fifteen classic features of Gothic misery, betrayal, and forlorn hope are also abundant humor and aggressive wit, acidic word play and metaphors, absurdly morose asides and warnings, outlandishly funny deliverances, some hard-earned wisdom, and, occasionally, a baby biting a blackguard's fingers. With both a Romantic-era melancholy and a fin de siècle decadence all merging with the comic, San Francisco–born Daniel Handler (writing as the narrator/character Lemony Snicket) manages to revitalize and revamp the hoariest Gothic truths, characters, troubles, and sensibilities in every volume—keeping the Gothic true, but making the Gothic anew. Composing these books at the turn of the century, just when such uneasy and ominous books about the past and the future tend to bloom, he has created a series that continues to surprise us, to stay unclassifiable (Is this for adults? Is it for kids?), to evenly split critics on its literary value, to astound all with adrenaline-addled adventures in alliteration, to offer satirical commentary on innumerable follies, and to make us shudder as we laugh.

For readers not yet aware, the novels concern the three Baudelaire children—oldest sister Violet, middle brother Klaus, and baby Sunny—who are orphaned by page eight in the series' starting point, The Bad Beginning. Entrusted to the care of a chronically coughing Mr. Poe, of Mulctuary Money Management, they are then placed in the homes of various incompetent or inappropriate guardians who, despite the repeated protests of the Baudelaires, singularly fail to recognize the controlling villain of the series, their distant relative and first guardian, Count Olaf. It is Olaf whose lousy disguises and scheming presence haunt each fresh start the orphans make. His declared motive, consistently held even by the final volume when he is lost at sea, is to swindle the orphans so that

"the Baudelaire fortune is mine. Finally, I [will be] a wealthy man, so everyone must do what I say."[4]

Though talentless in countless ways, Olaf has the uncanny ability to divine what people want and then promise to get it for them. Doing what the count wants without him actually acquiring the fortune, some of the guardians become his lady friends (possibly victims of his unctuous charm, money promises, and empty flattery) before being tossed, sometimes literally, just as lonely heart Aunt Josephine Anwhistle is unceremoniously thrown to Lake Lachrymose's devouring, aerial leeches in The Wide Window, Book the Third, creatures that would best be at home in a Hieronymus Bosch painting. Another enamored one and Baudelaire guardian is fashion-conscious girlfriend Esmé Gigi Genevieve Squalor, she of the stiletto heels, from The Ersatz Elevator, Book the Sixth and following. She gets her rough Olaf treatment later by being fired Donald Trump style. Like the classic case of the confidence man/pedophile who wishes proximity to the children through their mother, Count Olaf ingratiates his way in with guardians and squeezes menacingly close to the orphans, who can sniff his neverwashed theatrical costumes and stale breath of egg sandwiches from thirty feet away. A predictable, but no less gasp-worthy, pattern ensues then in each volume of capture, some form of imprisonment, hard or tedious labor, disclosure, highenergy and inventive close escapes, and a few unfortunate deaths.

By The Hostile Hospital, Book the Eighth, a turnabout occurs that will shape the rest of the series and haunt the Baudelaire orphans evermore. When Violet escapes a suspicious operation at the hospital, which was to be executed by Olaf and his henchpeople, she and her siblings end up fleeing the burning hospital and hiding in the truck of Olaf's car as he speeds off to the Caligari Carnival. In fact, because the orphans were accused of murdering Jacques Snicket in the previous volume (The Vile Village, Book the Seventh) they are technically fugitives until the end of the series. With a bold and impressive logic, absent from many Gothic victims, they decide to limit their open exposure and vulnerability by shadowing Olaf himself (akin to hiding on a dragon's back), so that he cannot find them yet again in the foreground and dash whatever adjustment and small happiness is theirs. From now on, rather than Olaf routinely tracking them and donning disguise (and a poor one at that, as it is hard to kid a kid), they appear incognito behind the charlatan until The Penultimate Peril, Book the Twelfth. A crucial switch is activated, one that disqualifies criticism that the series is mere "kid noir" and that the three lead characters display no roundness and the narrative

no depth. Their proximity to Olaf will lead the Baudelaire orphans to commit a crime that makes them question who they are—they will, in order to effect escape, light afire a hotel and continue the intergenerational curse of fire starting that plagues many of the characters in these books, including our narrator Lemony. The narrator meditates on a serious Gothic fear in the final volume, namely, that

> although each scheme had failed, it appeared as if some of the villain's wickedness had rubbed off on the children, and now Olaf and the Baudelaires were all in the same boat [just as physically they happen to be in the same boat]. Both the children and the count were responsible for a number of treacherous crimes, although at least the Baudelaire orphans had the decency to feel terrible about this, whereas all Count Olaf had been doing for the past few days was bragging about it.
>
> "I've triumphed!" Count Olaf reiterated.[5]

In this series of parody, mockery, and what critic Do Rozario calls "cheerful nihilism,"[6] one heartrending Gothic truth has been whispered, the most shattering one that creeps through Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Frankenstein, Dracula, and all their ilk: We are the beast. Symbolically, we have drunk the elixir; embraced the undead one, been thrice bitten, and returned to him; abandoned our hideous offspring and then tried to kill him; and worse. This identification—or this becoming the monster—is what helps form the last volumes into a Gothically involving, potent, guilt-ridden experience. The villain is shown to have something of the hero in him, and the heroes are shown to have something of the villain in them.

Though space limits make it impossible to discuss the ramifications of each delectably dismal plot movement in the series' 170 chapters, it is possible to anatomize this mammoth work's Gothic body parts. Thus we can gain appreciation for how this comic yet bitter series superbly maintains its satisfyingly Gothic mood where tragedy and absurdity pal around for thousands of pages. More crucially, we can trace the imaginative way it reimagines Gothic possibilities for twenty-first-century fiction. The vital organs in the whole work are artifacts, time, sublime nature, and lost symbols; villains, heroes, and those in between; sexual threats; morality, mortality, and fate; and memory, hope, and despair.

## Artifacts, Time, Sublime Nature, and Lost Symbols

To quote the perceptive children's literature scholar Bruce Butt, "Each of the [Snicket] novels possesses the same curiously timeless mood, despite the incidental references to cars, telephones, faxes, and even computers."[7] The novel's mansions and decor could arise from the cartoon, TV, and movie versions of The Addams Family, as do its deadpan humor and eccentricity, moribund taste, and precocious outsider children (repeatedly called "orphan brats" by Olaf and "cakesniffers" by their little-girl nemesis, Carmelita Spats). As Butt puts it, "There appears a mixture of not-quite-contemporary modernity and a heavily stylized choice of characters and settings that seems curiously familiar and yet unplaceable at the same time: buildings are improbably located and architecturally implausible, as if taken from the pages of a Dr. Seuss story."[8] It is true that the antagonists and their oddly Edwardian wardrobes—often adorned by a forbidding eye image—are right out of Edward Gorey's cartoons.

If the manmade objects in the books are grim, those that nature made are even blacker. Perceptions of the natural world are rarely appreciative in these books, and understandably so. More often than not, nature offers additional obstacles rather than any temporary relief from the trials of the plot. Nature is Gothically sublime and coldly indifferent. Closely following Edmund Burke's design for making readers tremble in his famous A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), Snicket puts before the orphans towering cliffs, deep waters, great winds, uncontainable fire, and sudden death—sometimes all in the same book. The children often find themselves in open and barren landscapes, symbolic shorthand to show that these orphans on the run have nowhere to hide, and to keep their melodrama burning.

But the thirteen novels actually teem with more dread than brilliant Burke dreamt. Treacheries for the children include being entrapped by a giant pincher machine in The Miserable Mill, Book the Fourth; dropped to the bottom of an elevator shaft in The Ersatz Elevator, Book the Sixth; hanging from a hot-air balloon/ Airstream trailer in Book the Seventh, The Vile Village; at the edge of a lion pit in The Carnivorous Carnival, Book the Ninth; and never far from a killer fungi called the Medusoid Mycelium for the last three novels.

How do they survive? is one great question of the series. What got them into this? is another. Improbably enough, a stolen sugar bowl is the lost symbol of this series. It is of momentous value to members on both sides of a schism that has developed in a secret society, a vortex that pulled in Olaf, the orphans' parents, and apparently all of the orphans' other relatives. While its significance

is never fully revealed, its secret code never cracked, and the bowl itself never recovered, the damning fact is that it was purloined. The sugar bowl is known to have belonged to Esmé Squalor, who supposes Beatrice stole it. However, Lemony finally admits to taking it (at least to the readers) and to his sorrow for how one act of grabbing a pretty bowl (and whatever was inside it) has led to a catastrophe of fighting, separation, arson, and murder. This trivial theft and its massive human injury can explain where some of Lemony's regretful, plaintive, and weary tone comes from, as in this meditation that opens The Penultimate Peril, Book the Twelfth:

> Certain people have said that the world is like a calm pond, and that anytime a person does even the smallest thing, it is as if a stone has dropped into the pond, spreading circles of ripples further and further out, until the entire world has been changed by one tiny action.
> If this is true, then the book you are holding is the perfect thing to drop into a pond. The ripples will spread across the surface of the pond and the world will change for the better, with one less dreadful story to read.[9]

These lines shed much sad light on why Lemony has given us this grim story over such a vast canvas. I suggest these volumes are not just a meditation on Beatrice, the woman whom he lost to another man, and the recorded destiny of her children, the Baudelaires. These books are his mea culpa, Lemony's way of facing the endless tragedy, recrimination, and villainy that his small mistake unleashes.

## Betrayal, Peril, and Melodrama

The single greatest thing that distinguishes the brutal nature, constant horror, disappearance, and threatened death here from most other shudder novels and series is that the menace is directed constantly at children. While children have traditionally appeared in Gothic novels (suffering exploitation, abandonment, and disinheritance), they will suffer it here repeatedly and with no surcease of sorrow for thirteen vile volumes.

In truth, some book critics have sincerely worried about children's reactions to the images, pessimistic tones, and violence in these books. Cynical themes, as well as the psychological and physical torture, have made for blistering reviews. Beyond complaints about the woeful fates and recurring endangerment of the youngsters, detractors detect a note of nihilism in the series, suggesting to young readers that any meaning and purpose and wider trust in life are all out of reach. Children reading the series are relentlessly reminded, too, that they will die.

If they chance to forget, this motto will appear emblazoned as memento mori for the kiddos above an archway at the Austere Academy in Book the Fifth. As reviewer-bookseller Christine Heppermann puts it, "A condensed analysis of the distinction between Angelwings [by Donno Jo Napoli] and Unfortunate Events could be that one series promotes good, old-fashioned 'values,' and the other series . . . doesn't."[10] Heppermann claims that Snicket never allows that "a positive attitude and a little moral backbone could make everything right for his characters. . . . No guardian angels swoop in, . . . and no one believes them, . . . [so, as the narrator says,] 'sometimes not only is it good to lie, it is necessary to lie.'"[11] She ventures, with a dubious quotation from former American drug czar, secretary of education, and moralist William J. Bennett (who was also a Las Vegas high-stakes gambler), that this series is "vapid or even corrosive to the spirit."[12]

Among nonprofessional critics who would normally be the closest allies to fiction—say, librarians who would order, catalog, and champion the books, and the teachers who would assign them—the objections are even fiercer. One teacher blasted the series thus:

> I fail to see any productive purpose in scaring children with the idea of both their parents dying in a fire and then having those children ending up with a distant relative who emotionally and physically abuses them, with strong hints of adults wanting to inflict sexual abuse on the children, and the kids being threatened with murder to top it off. The sickness of the content by far overpowers the author's evident talent.[13]

A Series of Unfortunate Events finds itself in the crosshairs from the very people who would request the books for their collection and direct readers to them, possibly because the moral battle between good and evil is not so clear cut, everyone is compromised, and young victimhood in Gothic texts is a dire thing indeed. Hence a children's collection librarian shrilly complained,

> This series is being pitched to Harry Potter readers, but it lacks the adventure and the aesthetic and moral appeal of J. K. Rowling's books. The creepy freak-show characters and situations were nauseating. The scene where a baby girl tied in ropes is imprisoned in a cage with her mouth taped shut while the cage dangles high above the ground is not the sort of thing I would promote for 10 year olds to read. While the children do manage to overcome their situation, it seems almost by accident. In the Harry Potter books (and Aiken's fine books), the characters have some character. They reach heroic

> stature because they possess compassion, intelligence, bravery, loyalty, moral principles.[14]

Abandoned by some librarians for their absent "moral principles," baby Sunny, Klaus, and Violet seem orphaned twice.

School boards have weighed in negatively, too. As Daniel Handler puts it in an interview,

> We were banned in one school district in Decatur, Georgia. I'll always have that. . . . I hate to get too catty about Decatur, Georgia, but they were very concerned in The Bad Beginning that Count Olaf wants to marry Violet, who is a distant relative. And this strikes me as something that, without being too stereotypical about the South, but perhaps Decatur, Georgia, has heard of before, let's just say. And also, I'm at a loss for how to construct a villain who isn't doing villainous things. If Count Olaf were only doing things that no one would object to, then he really wouldn't be much of a villain.[15]

Handily defending his work from obscenity charges through accusatory wit, Handler flips the Gothic taboo of incest onto the back of the Decatur School District, which understandably had no comment.

The harshest trashing probably comes from parents themselves, calling the series "Horrible," "Awful," and "Sadistic." One quipped at Handler, "You, sir, are no Roald Dahl." Another parent's review showed how far A Series detractors and fans will always be from each other, and ultimately how one person's droll satire or mock Gothic is another person's torture porn:

> If you're a good parent you won't want your kids to read these books. I heard good things about them, so I read the first two books myself. These are sick books. There is little character development and the plot is ridiculously repetitive and redundant. Worse, the books contain graphic, gory details about murder, dead bodies, the color of dead bodies, using a syringe to poke a hole in someone and kill them, breaking glass to slit someone, kidnapping, polygamy (yes the actual word is even defined in this series). . . . Please do not buy these. Our children need good examples of moral behavior in their reading. They don't need gruesome specifics about . . . how to kill people, and all other sorts of evil and darkness.[16]

One wag—perhaps Count Olaf himself?—shot back to the above parent in a sarcastic blaze: "I agree with this reviewer—these are depraved books that NO child should be reading! . . . For some books that praise the word of God, teach universal lessons, inspire the whole family, and give real examples of social and

moral behavior that Mr. Snicket should be writing about (and with more fun!), I recommend unreservedly: 120 Days of Sodom, Maldoror, Last Exit to Brooklyn, . . . [and] Our Lady of the Flowers."[17] One young fan backed the wag, suggesting how reading does not blindly cause acting out: "Parents are just trying to protect their kids from everything under the sun, including the sun itself, (SPF 70 sunscreen? are you kidding?). . . . I personally enjoyed these books when I was a child, and I am 16 now. . . . I have not done anything remotely evil after reading these books. If your kids are evil, blame yourselves!"[18] It is no surprise that many young readers would reject parental fears of The Complete Wreck (as the whole series is boxed and sold by HarperCollins) when they realize that any wrong click on the Internet would deliver them depravity worlds beyond the Baudelaires' worst misfortunes. Indeed, the complaint seems quaint. It is an antiquated view to think that little nippers could be much harmed by the Snicket books in an age when anyone can log on to something unspeakable and innocence robbing—from mind-boggling sexual acts to a flood of war porn, like Iraqi inmates forming naked pyramids, images of the headless corpses and body parts of both civilians and enemy combatants, and streaming video of insurgents in the cross hairs and blown apart three seconds later.

## Sexual Threats

Though the peril and images may seem old fashioned by comparison to the Web, still the distressing fact is that Violet Baudelaire, who turns fifteen by The Grim Grotto, Book the Eleventh and is most likely sixteen years old by the series' end, is under immanent sexual threat throughout the volumes. The first obvious use of this standard Gothic trope of the chased maiden comes in the first volume, when Count Olaf arranges to marry her, during a shamelessly wooden performance of The Marvelous Marriage, with his malignant troupe. The marriage scene in the play is even conducted by an actual judge, the kind but unwitting neighbor, Justice Strauss. Though the orphan trio manages to dig into the law books of their neighbor and take a momentary victory—as Violet is only fourteen, she is not of legal age to marry—one sinister fact is unfurled by Olaf: Violet's guardian may give her hand in marriage before the legal age, and the Count is her guardian. Moreover, she will act in this play, or someone will get hurt: in a traditional Gothic trope with a modern twist, Violet's baby sister will fall from an iron cage suspended from a tower at the count's walkie-talkie signal. A crooked, toothy, and unnecessarily yellow smile spreads on Olaf's face, and the

old goat we love to hate is in butting against us, and Violet, again.

Thankfully the marriage is foiled—along with the acquisition of their estate, which is the official reason Olaf gives for marrying her. But the sadistic attempts on Violet's virginity continue, and neither adult men nor women seem able to protect her, or even to be aware of the crime. By the next volume, Olaf has slimed himself into the orphan's next new world, one that they will eventually call the happiest they knew, at herpetologist Uncle Montgomery's home. Monty's assistant has disappeared (most probably bumped off by Olaf), and a new one appears, Stephano, a man with Olaf's unibrow and unsettling manner and banter (played with nasally, gloating perfection by Jim Carrey in the 2004 film version). The orphans are on to him, but Monty senses that Stephano's snake ignorance merely suggests that he is a plant, an eavesdropping pawn of the reptile society he has fallen out with. The series will now take a growing interest in phallic substitutes that point and eventually touch Violet's skin, often overtly but sometimes covertly, and in that hidden way make us all the more squeamish. One of the most piercing images happens at the supper table in The Reptile Room, Book the Third, when the newcomer is at his jolliest, and Violet despairs:

> Stephano told funny stories and praised Monty's scientific work, and Uncle Monty was so flattered he didn't even think to guess that Stephano was holding a knife under the table, rubbing the blade gently against Violet's knee for the entire meal. And when Uncle Monty announced that he would spend the evening showing his new assistant around. . . . He was too eager to realize that the Baudelaires simply went up to bed without a word.[19]

Rubbing a knife—under the noses of all—on the innocent girl's knee makes the dark Gothic promise of a hundred novels before this one: Stephano/Olaf can rape and kill her at any time if she violates any wish, so she must obey. Much later in the series (especially in the final two books), Olaf keeps his hand on this spectral phallus as it metamorphoses: the knives that point and touch Violet will be replaced as she grows a little older. A harpoon gun will be pointed at her midsection instead, with Olaf "happier than a pig eating bacon!"[20] and her constantly talking him out of using it.

One of the creepier ways that older, grotesque men get at Violet is by medical means. "She's a pretty one even when she's unconscious," croaks Olaf's hook-handed man as he hovers and leers over Violet while she is anesthetized, her hair tangled and her gown stained, stretched out on the operating table for

an involuntary "cranioectomy" procedure by the count's goons (where the head is removed to save the patient!), performed before an uncommonly gullible and bloodthirsty surgical theater. Curiously, in The Carnivorous Carnival, Book the Ninth, not long after Violet escapes this operation which would render her mindless, she discovers that the three orphans are troublingly like Olaf. "We fooled them. We're as good at tricking people as Olaf is. . . . And lying to people. . . . Maybe we're becoming villains after all. . . . Olaf has to do tricky things to save his life."[21] These are staggering admissions not heard before in any of the volumes. It is the first identification (perhaps a kind of Stockholm syndrome[22]) with the very man thought to have burned their parents to death. The comment only registers shudders and disbelief from the other Baudelaires, but it is telling, and it wears on them. This indicates character change and recognition in a series lambasted for featuring none. Violet before has seen the lies, frauds, arson, and prison escape as necessary for life (a case of understandable situational ethics), but now she is saying that the count sees lies, thievery, escapes, and bloodshed as necessary for leading the only kind of life he knows. Superbly placed, her confession, which horrifies Klaus, precedes one of the longest sections where Count Olaf speaks privately to his confederates of his motivations and goals, all overheard by the orphans who secret themselves in the rattling car's trunk. This is also one of the rare, almost surreal sections where the pursued and the pursuers decide to use the same getaway car. The children simply have no one to save them this time—Mr. Poe hasn't been spotted in at least two volumes—and they must hide away among those who would murder them to escape the Heimlich Hospital where they are hunted for arson, for the murder of Count Omar (a misspelling of Olaf courtesy of the dependably sloppy Daily Punctilio), and, worst of all in the Hostile Hospital administration's mind, for a rampant disregard of paperwork.

Regardless of what Violet's identification with the count means, she understands the continued threat to her maidenhead. As the Baudelaires bump down the road stowed in the hatch, they eavesdrop on an awful conversation about which of the orphans will live the longest. Olaf is overheard to say, "We only need one of them alive to get the fortune. . . . I myself hope it's Violet. She's the prettiest."[23] The series' "pretty girl" may be saved, but for what worse-than-death fate? Snicket's narrative queasily combines a melodramatic escapism with the adult menace of rape by her one-time guardian.

# Villains, Heroes, and Those in Between

Traditionally the Gothic features the fantastic and an interest in destruction, a wandering evil force (perhaps the Devil himself) beyond human understanding, and an irresistible terror, fascinating, in the Latin origin of the word, meaning to charm or use witchcraft. A sign of this force—like the enchanting Fascinum, the phallic amulet worn in Roman times, often by children—had a talismanic power: it could ward off other evils. In A Series of Unfortunate Events, the mysterious ankle tattoo of an eye functions like a twisted Fascinum, inspiring dread and, for a while, depicting evil. Later, the orphan trio realizes this tattoo was worn by their own parents too, not just by Count Olaf and his dark accomplices. The tattoo is a sign of membership in the ultra-ambiguous VFD, first mentioned in The Austere Academy, Book the Fifth, which stands for many things, often absurd, throughout the books (Vernacular Fastening Device, Village of Fowl Devotees, Verdant Flammable Device, Volunteers Fighting Disease, Very Fancy Doilies, etc.), but it most commonly stands for Volunteer Fire Department. There is duality again, just as with the tattoo. For some, the VFD is a way of volunteering to start fires, and for others it is volunteering to put them out.

The duality of human nature, a motif especially developed in the Victorian Gothic (say, Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, The Moonstone, Dracula, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde), runs through the series as well. Indeed, the latter of the thirteen volumes announce this duality much more strongly, showing how easily the moral compass faults, and how no villain starts out to be evil. Perhaps since the Baudelaire siblings spend so much time imprisoned, they start to see the world as one of the most famous prisoners of the twentieth century did. Their maturing thought is like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's in the Gulag Archipelago: "If only there were evil people somewhere committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"[24] In the end, the trio discovers that they are more like Count Olaf than they ever imagined—after all, they did turn Hotel Denouement to ash in The Penultimate Peril, Book the Twelfth (it was Sunny's bright idea), and not all the lodgers may have gotten out in time.

In constructing the perfect villain to forever disturb the peace of the Baudelaires and cause them no end of harm, Handler adroitly infuses Olaf with every one of formalist Vladimir Propp's signature descriptions of how the villain enters

and disturbs in folktales. Many a folktale informs the Gothic genre ("Bluebeard" is only one notorious example). Through Propp's analysis, we readily see what a traditionally structured evildoer the count is. Indeed Olaf's lurking presence walks all the paths a villain takes to execute his schemes. First, as Propp diagnosed in a multitude of tales, there is "reconnaissance," with "the aim of finding out the location of the children, or sometimes of precious objects."[25] Throughout these novels, we find very late that Olaf has used his neighbor Justice Strauss, along with an accurate psychic named Madame Lulu, to watch the movements of the Baudelaires. Second comes "trickery." According to Propp, "The villain attempts to deceive the victim to take possession of him or his belongings. The villain, first of all, assumes a disguise . . . [and then] employs other means of deception or coercion."[26] Olaf dons innumerable costumes and applies loads of makeup, morphing into an interior designer, a snake man, a pregnant woman, a Sikh gym coach, and an old salty dog, Captain Sham. When the disguise is inevitably revealed, he threatens to kill one or more of the orphans if he doesn't get his wishes.

Following many of Propp's sightings of intimidation and violence in dark tales to an eerie degree, the fiend Olaf "causes bodily injury . . . [and] a sudden disappearance, . . . entices his victim, . . . expels someone, . . . orders someone to be thrown into the sea, . . . effects a substitution, . . . orders a murder to be committed, . . . commits murder, imprisons, . . . threatens forced matrimony, makes a threat of cannibalism, . . . [and] torments at night."[27] Propp has uncannily anticipated by seventy years every wrong the count commits, save for the malefactor's joy in setting fires and dangling babies over heights. Tracing every Proppian nuance of the archetypal wicked one, Handler forms his Olaf into what one eloquent character analyst calls "the Ultimate Villainous Character."[28]

Olaf does so many of these prescribed dastardly deeds—and will seem so much a folktale stereotype or an 1880s black-hatted stage heavy—that it stuns us to find that he is more, that he is a round character of sorts. The count's Snidely Whiplash persona starts eroding in the last four novels. Intriguingly, it comes at the hands of a little vain girl we first met tormenting the Baudelaires at the Austere Academy in Book the Fifth, nasty Carmelita Spats. Little Carmelita, in league with Olaf's mistress Esmé, through wheedling and cunning begins to dominate the archfiend by the very end of The Slippery Slope, Book the Tenth. By the start of The End, Olaf is reduced to sheepishly following the orders of another young girl, asking twice, "'What about me?' . . . His voice was a little squeaky, and it reminded the Baudelaires of . . . people who were [once] frightened of Olaf

himself."[29] By the end of The End, he is begging for the trio's help to unlock him from the golden cage where Ish, the leader of the island (one who knows much about their parents and Olaf, but tells so precious little) has trapped him, as the waves rise on the coastal shelf.

Olaf's accomplices, and there were once many, grow in character as well. The two "white-faced ladies" in his gang openly question him, complaining that it may be difficult for a baby to light a fire and cook meals for the company of rogues, and they absolutely balk at tossing Sunny Baudelaire down the mountain at the end of The Slippery Slope, Book the Tenth. This refusal causes their expulsion from the group, and possibly their deaths. Their fate remains unknown. Madame Lulu plans to stop helping Olaf and join the twins but is thrown to hungry lions before she can do much good. Another minion, the man with hooks for hands, is found out to be the brother of an ally of the Baudelaires; he leaves crime for a while, and though he will ultimately deceive the trio (and his long-lost sister Fiona regretfully joins him), the hooked one does for a time provide the Baudelaires reconnaissance. Four other villains show no change at all—the bald man, the one who was neither man nor woman, the man with beard but no hair, and the woman with hair but no beard—but neither are they much remembered. They are essentially stock characters, making their entrances and final exit, dwarfed by bigger and more rounded characters that create greater unpredictability, action, and ambiguity.

One of the great tensions of the series is the desire to be noble, despite all the treachery one does. Something that makes this series remarkable is how Olaf steps out of his bossing mentality and sheds some character armor to show vulnerability, speechlessness, a longing for his lost parents (he is, after all, an orphan too), genuine shock at the orphan's long-held secret (that they think he killed their parents), and, at the orphans' request, a genuinely heroic act. In a jawdropping scene reminiscent of Gothic romances, Olaf rescues Lemony Snicket's pregnant sister Kit from the top of a raft on the waves and carries her safely to shore, before delivering a momentous kiss. With no financial gain to be had, this act of our guardian-killer seems impossible, but perhaps we have known all along that buried somewhere in the dark chambers of Olaf's heart was the intimation that what he wanted was not money but the acceptance that money could bring. "A lot of life," horror director and villain specialist Wes Craven observes, "is dealing with your curse, dealing with the cards you were given that aren't so nice. Does it make you into a monster, or can you temper it in some way, or accept it

and go in some other direction?"[30] At the very end, Olaf does temper it in some way. Another film expert, screenwriter David Lubar, advances Craven's view, and we can use it to suggest what makes Olaf an enemy that we never stop wanting to understand: "The bad guy isn't doing bad stuff so he can rub his hands together and snarl. He may be driven by greed, neuroses, or the conviction that his cause is just, but he's driven by something not unlike the things that drive a hero."[31] Accepted as he is in this moment, Olaf saves a woman who will successfully deliver her baby girl, Beatrice, named after the mother of the orphans (and like Dante Alighieri's, the narrator's one true but lost love). And then Olaf dies.

Olaf was largely a destroyer, but he was the one figure that, after their parents' death, would pay the orphans the most attention, though admittedly of a mendacious kind. Still, like so many other hunted figures in great Gothic literature (like Frankenstein's creature lingering with his creator's body after Dr. Frankenstein's death), the Baudelaire siblings are haunted by him: they never can let him go. This contradiction of returning to the one whom they tried to escape and who relentlessly tried to ruin them is the eternal Gothic paradox. On the abandoned island where the orphans, now four, live, "Sometimes they would visit . . . the grave of Count Olaf, where they would merely stand silent for a few moments."[32] Why come back to the one who did them ill? Why even properly bury him rather than simply toss him to the surf and the sharks? Is it to prove that their souls were better than his? Or, oppositely, is it a helpless attraction back to what is also in them? Whatever Olaf was and discovered, he was a constant presence, albeit a hellish one, in their lives. He was their immoral guardian, this one-eyebrowed lunatic, and he has helped shape the only perspective of reality they have, a view of good and evil all clouded together.

## Morality, Mortality, and Fate

Much is scripted already in a reader's mind after reading the first two novels in the series. We appreciate this dramatic irony: that the Baudelaires will suffer, be taken in, have their guardian duped by wily Olaf, and will soon be on the run for their lives. Benighted Mr. Poe, who knows their past, will always be too slow to detect anything, too late coming in an emergency, unable to apprehend Olaf, and incapable of listening carefully to the children. With so much that is predictable, there is a strong suggestion that these are books where fates are merely played out and free will is a fanciful notion. One of the serious questions of these often cheeky books is whether we are in control of what we are doing, or if we

are somnambulists. Nothing comes to a sleeper but dreams. Divining this, "Life is but a dream" is the one lyric Violet could never stand to hear.

Lemony himself likes to brood on the topic of fate as the books play out, never with a conclusive answer, but certainly with a compelling question that connects his musing to literature and opera, to the orphans, and to us:

> Some people think destiny is something you cannot escape, such as death or a cheesecake that has curdled, both of which always turn up sooner or later. Other people think destiny is a time in one's life, such as the moment one becomes an adult. . . . And still other people think that destiny is an invisible force, like gravity, . . . that guides everyone throughout their lives. . . . In the opera La Forza del Destino, various characters argue, fall in love, get married in secret, run away to monasteries, go to war, announce . . . revenge, engage in duels and drop a gun on the floor, where it goes off accidentally and kills someone . . . [just like what] happens in chapter nine of this very book.
> They wonder and wonder at all the perils in their lives, and when the final curtain is brought down even the audience cannot be sure what all these unfortunate events may mean.[33]

A harder question presents itself to Sunny, Klaus, and Violet: "They wondered . . . if it was the force of destiny that was guiding their story, or something even more mysterious, more dangerous, and even more unfortunate."[34] Many a Gothic figure has wondered the same: Am I under a curse, that thing "more unfortunate"? For instance, the Baudelaire orphans may be under an intergenerational curse, and it is Olaf who suggests why, all in front of witnesses who do not deny the charge—that the orphans' parents may have killed people in a theater with poison darts, perhaps the "wrong" people. Another question may swell in the orphans' minds: if their lives are run by fate, are they liable for what they do? Are their character traits essentially locked in place, not growing in personality, insight, and behavior after each trauma and crime? The most memorable Gothic novels do have round characters—Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights both have figures that, despite all their melodrama, quicken with life, depth, and changeability. But does A Series have them? Hundreds of Gothic novels do not have such multidimensional personalities and are still entertaining. What can be said for certain is that the three children go from utter innocence to becoming liars, thieves, and arsonists (probably killing some of the Hotel Denouement guests in a horrible way). Will they continue now as if in a somnambulistic trance to kill someone they do know well?

Gregory Maguire, an interviewer of Daniel Handler and a fan of his work raises this question: Are the books formulaic? He answered that they are: "Selfconsciously, generously, joyously so. The fun derives from watching the formula at work. . . . He has taken a small handful of storytelling tricks . . . and he has made them convulse in convincing sequence, so that despite the contrivances there is something vivid and even urgent about these tales."[35] Maguire's point is well taken, and yet the orphans do grow—they may have sported "the slimmest of personalities"[36] from the start through the fifth book (which Maguire reviewed), but by the end they move from innocence to experience. They know this world, and most sadly, they recognize how it has changed them.

In The End, unknowing Olaf almost reaches his own end a little early, and it would have come at the hands of three juvenile killers. In the first pages, altogether in a boat, the three orphans study Olaf leaning over the side, and all feel a powerful attraction to murder. Littlest Sunny breathes it first: "'Push Olaf overboard,' she whispered."[37] Again we get a pondering about human nature, how much of it is instinctive and how much is learned. As the three debate on whether to kill, Lemony has a moral-development rumination:

> Some believe that everyone is born with a moral compass already inside them. . . . Others believe that a moral compass develops over time, as a person learns about the decisions of others by observing the world and reading books. In any case, a moral compass appears to be a delicate device. . . . The Baudelaire orphans were not sure what they should do with this villain who was leaning so far over the boat that one small push would have sent him to his watery grave.[38]

Spinning in the Baudelaires' minds is the murderer's dream from time immemorial: "Imagine how simple it would be to push him, just hard enough." This pause before murder helps dismiss critics' views that the series has essentially a cast of static characters in revolving situations. Fated or not, Olaf straightens and grins, and the three did not have to make the decision. For whatever perverse reason, Snicket will not show us what the three would have done. But if Olaf had stared one more minute at sea, I believe—from the short but mighty arguments made by the orphans for drowning him—the count would be undersea now.

## Memory, Hope, and Despair

Despair is Gothic DNA. The last few chapters of four of the most famous novels in the genre close repeatedly with the words despair, despaired, and despairing (namely, The Castle of Otranto, Vathek, The Monk, and Frankenstein). Likewise,

The Bad Beginning opens early with the worst despair, the death of parents. And The End closes with the death of another's parent. Snicket erects a marvellous frame to makes readers feel more. Our introduction to these children is when they are playing on Briny Beach and out comes Mr. Poe (the estate executor) with the sad news, "Your parents have perished in a terrible fire."[39] This scene of brutal desolation echoes the children's loss sublimely. An empty beach and a sea with nothing on it, which now Violet stares at, uses limited yet bold and vast elements—a dramatic perspective—to emphasize the imposing aloneness of their lives. The unrelenting landscape helps dramatize the grisly news more than tears could, though tears still will come. One thing to count on, besides bad luck and Count Olaf's nonstop scheming, is that at least two times in each volume the trio of siblings will sob in each other's arms, crying into their Nazi-like gruel or actually weeping themselves to sleep. In the last volume, the trio is still by the water, actually not so far from Briny Beach where misfortune first befell them, and the memory of happiness (their family's once safe and cool-marbled mansion, and the love and security it gave) must be the most unfortunate event of all. Though a plethora of literary references are made in the series, largely decadent and Gothic, two world authors stand out—Tolstoy and Proust. Tolstoy's famous first line to Anna Karenina is reworked many times in the novels, perhaps as some solace for the parentless trio, and the spirit of Proust's seven-volume À la recherche du temps perdu broods over this long chronicle of these desperate children. Memory—or tasting Proust's madeleine and receiving the flood of memory that washes over him—is a constant in the books, because memory is the inheritance of these children. There is no evidence that they ever receive their earthly one.

Now at closing they sail out from an island where they have lived for over a year, with a new orphan under their care—little Beatrice, daughter of another vanquished VFD member. In the midst of so many narrative high jinks and so much lampooning of mordant literature, some wisdom manages to bob up. In the play of shadow and light that fills these thirteen books, each of thirteen unlucky chapters, there is this happy anomaly: the last book includes a fourteenth chapter, and a tantalizing suggestion that the unfortunate cycle may yet be broken. For the Baudelaire orphans, and for us, there is the grounded hope in that final chapter that "the world, no matter how monstrously it may be threatened, has never been known to succumb entirely."[40] We leave the Baudelaires as castaways on a boat in search of all the people they hoped to see again; it might

seem unlikely, but “not impossible,” for the Baudelaires to find again some of the people who loved them.[41]

# The Last Good-bye

In the follow-up treatment to A Series entitled The Beatrice Letters, little Beatrice (Lemony’s niece) has become separated from Klaus, Violet, and Sunny. The letters and notes are a mixed file (some from Beatrice Baudelaire, the mother of the three orphans, some from Lemony, but most from little Beatrice, who is searching for the orphans, but also for Lemony). She movingly mentions what happens after A Series cuts off, that “Violet told me once that I saved her life, and Klaus claimed that without me he would have died in despair not long after the destruction of the Hotel Denouement. Even Sunny said that she could not have survived without me.”[42] As mentioned, the three orphans understand how the coldness of human nature has changed them, but they are apparently saved from utter despondency by little Beatrice. By their self-sacrifice and caring for a helpless one, their world must have been born anew. Beatrice wanders toward and narrows on Lemony several times, and can even hear him breathing on the other side of his office door. One of the last mysteries is why Lemony doesn’t open the door and present himself to little Beatrice after all her pleading. Why doesn’t he let her innocence heal him? How can a narrator with seemingly boundless sympathy of the most profound kind for the orphans—and himself an orphan—not reveal himself? Is the pain of facing someone young who has lost so much too painful? Does he fear that if he gets attached to his darling niece and takes her in he will only get hurt later when she is abducted by an Olaf replacement? After recording all this tragedy and villainy over thirteen books of misery, does he simply not want to be hurt by anyone or anything anymore? An answer would mean closure, a forgetting, and a heart that stops sobbing. I choose to let the mystery be.

# Books in the Series

Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events includes thirteen novels as follows:

Hardback American publications from HarperCollins:

1. The Bad Beginning (1999)
2. The Reptile Room (1999)
3. The Wide Window (2000)
4. The Miserable Mill (2000)
5. The Austere Academy (2000)
6. The Ersatz Elevator (2001)
7. The Vile Village (2001)
8. The Hostile Hospital (2001)
9. The Carnivorous Carnival (2002)
10. The Slippery Slope (2003)
11. The Grim Grotto (2004)
12. The Penultimate Peril (2005)
13. The End (2006)

American paperbacks mostly from Scholastic, except where otherwise noted:

1. The Bad Beginning (2000; HarperCollins, 2007)
2. The Reptile Room (2000)
3. The Wide Window (HarperCollins, 2007)
4. The Miserable Mill (2001)
5. The Austere Academy (2000)
6. The Ersatz Elevator (HarperCollins, 2001)
7. The Vile Village (2001)
8. The Hostile Hospital (2001)
9. The Carnivorous Carnival (2002)
10. The Slippery Slope (2003)

UK hardback volumes from Egmont Publications (Egmont published the UK paperback issue of these thirteen volumes in 2010):

1. The Bad Beginning (2003)
2. The Reptile Room (1999)
3. The Wide Window (2003)
4. The Miserable Mill (2001)
5. The Austere Academy (2003)
6. The Ersatz Elevator (2003)

7. The Vile Village (2003)

8. The Hostile Hospital (2003)

9. The Carnivorous Carnival (2003)

10. The Slippery Slope (2004)

11. The Grim Grotto (2004)

12. The Penultimate Peril (2005)

13. The End (2006)

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11. Christine Heppermann, "Angel Wings and Hard Knocks," 239.

12. Christine Heppermann, "Angel Wings and Hard Knocks," 239.

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20. Lemony Snicket, A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Grim Grotto, Book the Eleventh (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 277.

21. Lemony Snicket, A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Hostile Hospital, Book the Eighth (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 241–242.

22. Though Sunny gets the idea for burning down Hotel Denouement, and Olaf fully helps her, she never considers him to be any part of her—there is no Stockholm syndrome. In The Slippery Slope, Book the Tenth, where Sunny utters her first whole sentence ("I am not a baby," 306), we see how different the sisters can be. Sunny, who has been alone on a mountaintop and cooking over a frozen waterfall with Olaf, Squalor, and assorted fiends, has the opposite appraisal of Violet's, not seeing any of Olaf in herself. She has become an independent little person, a cunningly resourceful cook, and no longer merely a sharp-toothed baby with one-word retorts. And she loathes Olaf: "There is another expression . . . when a prisoner does not become friends with such people [criminals and abductors], but instead . . . despises them more and more with each passing moment. . . . The expression is 'Mount Fraught Syndrome,' and Sunny Baudelaire was experiencing it" (258).

23. Lemony Snicket, A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Carnivorous Carnival, Book the Ninth (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 10.

24. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 168.

25. Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, ed. Louis A. Wagner, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 27.
26. Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, 29.
27. Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, 33–34.
28. "Villains Don't Always Wear Black," Fiction Notes, January 28, 2008, www.darcypattison.com/characters/villains-dont-always-wear-black (accessed April 1, 2010).
29. Snicket, The End, 42.
30. Robert Mancini, "Return of the Mack, Horror Kingpin Wes Craven is Back, with Bite," Movies on MTV.com, www.mtv.com/shared/movies/features/c/craven_wes_050225 (accessed April 1, 2010).
31. "Villains Don't Always Wear Black."
32. Snicket, The End, 323–324.
33. Snicket, The Penultimate Peril, 17–18.
34. Snicket, The Penultimate Peril, 18.
35. Maguire, "Review of The Austere Academy."
36. Maguire, "Review of The Austere Academy."
37. Snicket, The End, 16.
38. Snicket, The End, 19.
39. Lemony Snicket, A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning, Book the First (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 8.
40. Snicket, The End, 6 (in supplemental chapter 14).
41. Snicket, The End, 6 (chapter 14).
42. Lemony Snicket, "BB to LS #5," The Beatrice Letters (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

# About the Editor

**DANEL OLSON** at a young age fell for the insane passions, accursed lands, frothy plots, and violent femmes of the Gothic. Having taught "Horror, Ghost and Gothic Fiction" at Lone Star College in Texas since 2000, he has taken sabbaticals and international exploration grants to roam and rest in the deserted graveyards, ruined abbeys, and collapsed castles of Ireland, the UK, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania. Meetings with writers in these lands have enriched the trademark fiction series he compiled and named Exotic Gothic. A literary venue for new Gothic fiction set outside of its traditional homelands, the sequence which he teaches includes Exotic Gothic: Forbidden Tales from Our Gothic World (2007), and the Shirley Jackson Award finalists Exotic Gothic 2: New Tales of Taboo (2008) and Exotic Gothic 3: Strange Visitations (2009), which was short-listed for the World Fantasy Award. They are all published by the World Fantasy Award–winning Ash-Tree Press. A new guide to Gothdom, Exotic Gothic 4, appears in 2011. A recent Faculty Excellence Award winner, Danel's articles and interviews have been featured in Commonwealth, the New York Review of Science Fiction, and Cemetery Dance.