'I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT IF I'M CRAZY OR NOT': MENTAL ILLNESS AND GOTHIC PARODY IN THE DOMESTIC NOIR MINISERIES *THE WOMAN IN THE HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE GIRL IN THE WINDOW*

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the domestic noir miniseries *The Woman In The House Across The Street From The Girl In The Window* (2022), in which Anna is struggling to cope after her daughter's murder. She turns to alcohol and medication, often mixing the two, to help her through PTSD, hallucinations and ombrophobia (an intense fear of rain). However, it is the investigation of a woman's murder she observes from her window that catapults Anna out of her self-destructive routine and into action, not only investigating what happened across the road but also in her own life. The show expressively evokes many popular domestic noir narratives, and their tropes, most notably representations of women's mental illness. This article will outline how mental illness is used to construct the mystery plot through incomplete or missing memories, proximity to the main character's unreliable narration and the character's potential culpability for the crimes they investigate. I will focus on how *TWITHATSFTGITW* incorporates Gothic imagery and strategies to represent mental illness, focusing specifically on female anxieties and madness. Through genre recognition and parody of popular domestic noir narratives, tropes and storylines, this article argues that the miniseries interrogates the representation of genre conventions, stereotyped representations of mental illness and coping mechanisms. This allows audiences to gain insight into the heroine's perspective and trauma, while at the same time creates distance to her.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the 2022 domestic noir miniseries *The Woman in the House Across the Street from the Girl in the Window* (*TWITHATSFTGITW*), produced by Netflix and released on 28 January 2022. The show centres on artist Anna (Kristen Bell), who is struggling to cope after losing her daughter, Elizabeth (Appy Pratt), and the following divorce from her husband, Douglas (Michael Ealy). The show introduces Anna living in her suburban home and dealing with her grief and isolation, when she witnesses the murder of her neighbour's girlfriend from across the street. After calling the police and not being believed about her observations, Anna starts her own investigation into the murder, which also leads to an investigation of her own world and relationship with grief and alcohol. Drawing obvious parallels to other domestic noir narratives including *The Girl on The Train* (2015) and *The Woman in the Window* (2018), this miniseries parodies tropes and stereotypes of the subgenre of domestic noir, which came to popularity with the novel *Gone Girl* (2012) and its subsequent film adaptation in 2014. Domestic noir, named by author of the genre, Julia Crouch (2013), centres around the female experience of the domestic sphere, intimate relationships, gendered violence and misogyny. It is "a capacious, flexible category that encompasses realist writing about domestic violence, intersectional feminism, religion, mental illness, and women's rights but that can also include fantastic and even supernatural storylines" (Joyce 2018, 3). Domestic noir is often discussed as a subgenre of crime fiction that has strong Gothic influences, especially around the isolated, haunted and "Gothicised home that is central to domestic noir" (Waters and Worthington in Joyce and Sutton 2018, 206), the secretive husband and the female Gothic investigator (Paszkiewicz 2019), and its examination of women's unbelievability due to perceived madness (Joyce and Sutton 2018). The "Gothic-becoming-domestic-noir genre" (Johnsen in Joyce and Sutton 228) builds on the female Gothic cycle of the 1940s with films such as *Gaslight* (1944) and *Rebecca* (1940), updating this for the twenty-first century. Domestic noir is then a new cycle of Gothic women's narratives, which focuses on the femme fatale, "the naïve, but eventually homicidal, housewife, who takes vengeance on her husband because of his continuous abuse or infidelity" and the female Gothic investigator (Paszkiewicz 26). In *TWITHATSFTGITW* Anna closely represents the female Gothic investigator, who investigates the crimes of a secretive partner and her own madness and potential involvement in the crime. Influenced by her isolated life, the Gothicised house that seemingly haunts her and the perceptions of her neighbours and the police, constructs and categorises Anna as an unreliable witness. Domestic noir narratives are commonly narrated by the 'madwoman' herself, who has experienced traumatic events and is often struggling with mental illness, substance abuse and loss or gaps in memory.

This means domestic noir gives audiences an intimate look into the life of trauma survivors, often making different kinds of trauma more accessible for audiences. Due to the fragmented and inconsistent narration of the heroine, the narration brings the audience both closer to the experience of the protagonist and her subjective view of the world, while simultaneously alienating the audience, as events do not consistently line up with reality in the narrative. This therefore invites audiences to pay close attention to the ways in which the heroine is constructed as an unreliable narrator in the narrative, and the portrayal of mental illness, substance abuse and hallucinations. Given domestic noir's close relationship to the female Gothic, this article examines this domestic noir series through a Gothic lens, aiming to understand the portrayal of mental illness and madness as well as unreliable narration. As this series strongly employs parodic elements to engage with these representations, this article further employs the lens of Gothic parody to fully understand the ways in which the series criticises domestic noir's saturation with tropes of women's madness, how these are employed and affect audiences' understanding of mental illness, substance abuse and women's unreliability. I argue that the miniseries allows for genre recognition as well as genre parody to critical examine domestic noir's portrayal of mental illness, trauma, and coping strategies. This shows that the popular subgenre is at a point of saturation, parodying conventions that have been repeatedly used in domestic noir narratives across the last decade and a half.

2. DOMESTIC NOIR, THE GOTHIC AND MENTAL ILLNESS

The Gothic has a long history of representing and engaging with mental illness, often expressed as madness and insanity, which drives protagonists' minds to a breaking point. Punter and Byron (2004) in their work on Southern Gothic have argued that Gothic literature is "characterised by an emphasis on the grotesque, the macabre and, very often, the violent, investigating madness, decay and despair, and the continuing

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pressures of the past upon the present" (116-17). This madness is often represented as individual as well as generational, haunting both the present and the past experiences of the protagonist. Similarly to the slippery nature of the Gothic, representations of mental illness have varied greatly in their depictions over time, both reinforcing stereotypes built on fear and the grotesque (such as the mad scientist) as well as highlight themes such as isolation and mistreatment of people with mental illness. This makes the Gothic a powerful and compelling mode of representations for mental illness and explores wider cultural anxieties (Botting, 2002). As Picart and Greek explore in their book *Monsters Amongst us: Towards a Gothic Criminology* (2007) the "instability of the deranged mind in the Gothic novel corresponds with the instability of the world outside the self... the lines between the health, normality, and the "real" versus the sick, abnormal, and "imagined" becomes less fixed" (Picart and Greek 2007, 24). This means that Gothic portrayals of mental illness connect these to wider cultural anxieties, starting to collapse the binary construction of mental health and normality versus illness and otherness.

Representations of mental illness are also represented through "hyperbole and excess" (Becker 1999, 121), creating distinct and vivid images of mental illness, psychiatrists and their institutions. Another key element of Gothic representation of mental illness is that of isolation and alienation, which brings a "sense of abjection, the suspension between connectedness and separation" (Becker 1999, 12). These become evident also in the female Gothic narratives of the 19th century, in which the heroine is in a state of continued anxiety and fear, mistrusting the man she lives with and the secrets he has hidden from her. This is especially done through isolation of the heroine from family and friends as well as seemingly supernatural hauntings, which usually are later rationally explained but construct her as 'mad'. Gothic imagery of mental illness has also directly influenced the descendant of the female Gothic, domestic noir. Many of the subgenre's representations of mental illness are clearly inspired and mirrored from the Gothic. Of course, domestic noir has expanded mental illness to beyond categorisations of madness and insanity and engages in a variety of portrayals of mental illness including PTSD (*The Girl on the Train*, 2015), OCD (*Into the Darkest Corner,* 2011) and agoraphobia (*The Women in the Window*, 2018) to name only a few. What is important to note, is that domestic noir as a genre places women's experiences at its core, including women's trauma, mental illness and coping mechanism. *TWITHATSFTGITW* also engages specifically with

FIG 1. (1.01)

FIG 2. (1.01)

the trauma of losing a child, the breakdown of a marriage and the resulting coping mechanisms.

In the opening episode we are introduced to the main protagonist and narrator of the story, Anna, an artist who has lost her daughter three years ago. She experiences hallucinations and ombrophobia, an intense fear of rain, as it was raining on the day her daughter was murdered. The hallucinations she experiences are mostly of her daughter, which, at points, Anna imagines, is still alive. Anna, for example, walks Elizabeth to school and chats with her while getting ready for a date another mom from school has set her up with. Here, Anna says to Elizabeth 'I know. I wish I was in my pyjamas staying home with you tonight too. I love you. Can you at least give me a kiss before I go?' To which Elizabeth replies 'I can't.' 'Why not?' 'Because I'm dead'. Anna then says to herself 'How do I keep forgetting that?' (see figures 1 and 2). The hallucinations haunt Anna and, in typical Gothic fashion, force the overlap of past upon the present (Punter and Byron 2004). They also keep Anna isolated in her house and show the deep pain that the trauma of losing her child in such a violent manner has left her with. This is not the only time that

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we see Anna have significant lapses in memory. Notably in the show, Anna keeps forgetting that she needs oven mitts when picking up her baked chicken casserole from the oven. Burning her hands shocks Anna back into reality and she realises that she has forgotten the mitts and has been imagining her daughter. This is a symptom of her post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as often traumatic events have a significant impact on memories. Symptoms of PTSD have three "symptom clusters: re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal" (Golier et al. 1997, 226). This experience of PTSD oftentimes leads to dissociation and dissociative amnesia, which influences the way in which a person experiencing PTSD can access and remember events. This often means that memories are stored in fragmented and incomplete ways, which Anna's confusion shows in the first few episodes.

We also are introduced to her coping mechanisms, which include copious amounts of wine, various medications often taken alongside drinking a large glass of wine and making chicken casseroles, Elizabeth's favourite meal. From the beginning on, this slowly constructs Anna as an unreliable narrator who does not remember and hallucinates people and events, which implies to the audience that they need to question the information and representation of events given by Anna. Audiences are slowly introduced to Anna's grief and incomplete narration, painting her in a similar way to the stereotypical hysterical madwoman of the 19th century Gothic tale. Parallels to this become especially evident when Anna starts hearing suspicious noises from her attic. Part of this is the construction of the attic as a space of fear and uncertainty. In episode one, Anna hears noises coming from the attic and goes to investigate. Before she opens the attic's trapdoor and goes up, she shakes herself, saying 'I need a fucking drink'. She later goes back to the attic encouraged by her neighbour to start painting again. Anna gets spooked by a bird, triggering her to run down from the attic and to the kitchen to take her medication. She becomes increasingly more afraid of this space and the continuous footsteps and noises that seem to happen when she is home alone. The audience cannot be sure if these hauntings are imagined or real, collapsing the binary between Anna's imagined and real perceptions. To Anna herself it becomes clear that the hauntings in the attic represent her own construction around her isolation and madness, which is influenced by her overconsumption of alcohol.

Women's madness is a prominent theme in Gothic fiction and the attic often symbolises this madness and women's confinement causing this (Talairach-Vielmas 2016). While Anna is not confined to the attic, she is often unable to leave her house due to her ombrophobia and her desire to stay home with her daughter, as she expresses in episode one. The woman in the attic is also explored in relation to this figure "uncannily hovering between the Good and Evil woman, the literal and figurative, and vigorously participating in the construction of fear" (Talairach-Vielmas 2016, 32). The construction of Anna's mental state is to instil doubt and distrust in the viewers. As the audience is slowly understanding that not everything that is shown is reality or factual, as Anna hallucinates, misremembers and forgets stretches of time. This invites audiences to question Anna's narration and motives, when she observes Lisa's murder from her seat by the window one evening. Not only does she call the police who tell her that she must have imagined the murder, as Lisa was in Seattle working as a flight attendant, no one else witnessed anything and there is no physical evidence in her neighbour's house. The unreliability of Anna is further reinforced by the police and her neighbours, who quickly point to Anna's alcohol consumption, reading of domestic noir fiction and previous traumatic experiences of her daughter's murder to construct a picture of the unbelievable and hysterical mad-

FIG 3. (1.06)

FIG 4. (1.06)

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woman. Similarly to how the audience is introduced to Anna's life, the police quickly deducts that she is not trustworthy as a witness, implying to the audience that she therefore also cannot be a trustworthy narrator. Anna herself starts to question herself because of the way in which the police and neighbours react to her witness statement and her coping strategies. Audiences are also given conflicting information that further puts Anna's version of events in question. This also paints Anna not just as an unreliable narrator but also as potentially fearsome, evil and violent.

This is further intensified by Anna's at times violent and angry outbursts. As Anna roams the house and the close neighbourhood, viewers also get introduced to some of Anna's daydreams about running over her neighbour Neil's girlfriend, Lisa (Shelley Henning), with her car. This scene is shown after a brief confrontation with Lisa on their driveway. In the show it is constructed as an actual event and is presented as part of the narrative without any indication that this is indeed only a daydream. Only later, we see that Anna jolts back in her seat, shaking off the daydream. This adds to the construction of Anna as a 'madwoman', who is not only battling with grief and a phobia, but with a desire for violent retribution. This further constructs Anna as both the potentially good or evil woman, instilling uncertainty and fear due to her dual nature and her forgetting long stretches of time. A motif both in Gothic and noir fiction, this duality in Anna is a symbol of the "return of past upon present" (Spooner 2010, 250), dealing with individual and cultural trauma. Alongside Anna, the audience then suspects that Anna might be the one to have potentially committed the murder.

Towards the end of the miniseries, Anna becomes the main suspect of the police, as one of her palette knives is found near Lisa's body, which the police are convinced was the murder weapon. When searching Anna's house, they find a similar palette knife as well as a painting titled 'the perfect family' picturing Neil, Emma and Anna, not Lisa (see figure 3). The police argue this to be Anna's motive driven by grief and madness, that Anna wants to replace the perfect family that she once had. They also assume that she has gaps in her memories and cannot give a clear account of her own actions (see figure 4). This directly criticises the portrayal of women's mental illness, demonstrating how women are often shown as hysterical and willing to go to extremes for the suburban home, lifestyle and family. Part of the narrative's development of Anna's potential involvement in the crime is a generic trope. As part of her investigations, she needs to consider her own involvement beyond witnessing the crime and address her destructive coping mechanisms. In this way, the Gothic investigator considers her own life in relation to the other woman and understanding her own victimisation (Doane 1987). Anna is constructed as a "psychotic monster" who has been "symbolically castrated, that is, she feels she has been robbed unjustly of her rightful destiny" of being a mother, a wife and having a suburban lifestyle (Creed 1993, 120), which she observes in Neil's family across the road. Similarly, to how Creed argues this is represented in *Fatal Attraction* (1987), women have been portrayed as psychotic monsters who are willing to kill to "possess what has been denied her: family, husband, lover, child" (120). Anna is similarly constructed as an obsessive, violent and mentally unstable protagonist due to the loss of her child and husband. The narrative construction of this through gaps in memory, hallucinations and inconsistencies in recalling events, further portrays Anna as monstrous due to her unreliability.

3. **UNRELIABLE NARRATION**

The madwoman in the attic traditionally is not allowed to voice her story herself. She is often a haunting presence in female Gothic stories and acts as a mirror or double to the heroine herself, such as Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* (1847). Bertha, Rochester's first wife, was locked in the attic, after diagnosed to be mentally insane. Audiences know her story only through Rochester's account of their marriage and her mental illness, as she is not given the chance to talk directly, she is only talked about. The madwoman is then constructed through the account of others, labelling her as insane and ill. *TWITHATSFTGITW* like most domestic noir, however, centres on the 'madwoman', giving audiences direct access to Anna's thoughts and perspective and gaining insight into how her 'madness' has developed, often by the doing and narrative of her husband. In a similar way to female Gothic novels, Gothic romance films and previous domestic noir books, *TWITHATSFTGITW* is a narrative that centres around the heroine's investigations to understand if she is indeed misremembering and imagining events, or if she is not being believed as a narrator and witness because of her struggles with mental illness and alcoholism. At the beginning of domestic noir narratives such as *The Girl on the Train* (2015) the heroine is typically portrayed as the stereotypical hysterical woman. This is emphasised in the show, as Anna, after observing the murder across the street, call the police in panic and rushes outside into the rain and dramatically fainting in the

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middle of the road due to her ombrophobia. Domestic noir narratives with a 'madwoman' as the narrator are then often set up through the lens of a first-person, seemingly unreliable narrator. In domestic noir the madwoman herself talks to us but is painted as an unreliable narrator, which means that the audiences cannot fully discern if they can believe and support the narrator or if the heroine is misleading us.

Wayne Booth (1961) famously defined the narrator as reliable "when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (158-59). While this unreliability is presented in different ways including deliberate and accidental misleading of the audiences, the madwoman often falls within the category of the accidental unreliable narrator. This is to say that she is unaware of or disagrees with her own unreliability and believes in how and what she narrates to be true. Anna is convinced that she has seen the murder of her neighbour, Lisa, starting her investigations of not only her murder but also her perceived madness. Riggan (1981) further classifies the unreliable narrator into multiple categorise such as the clown, the naif, the picaro and the 'madman', who is living with mental illness and is unable to tell the story accurately. According to Riggan, the madman is perceived as the least reliable narrator out of the four categories. Audiences are

> 'far more prepared at the outset to take the text as anything from incoherent ravings to rambling absurdities to clear but twisted logical musings—at any rate, not to accept it as authoritative in any sense. One is predisposed, rather, merely to listen to the madman talk, to watch him move, to study him as a case—he is called simply "a madman" after all' (Riggan 1981, 111).

Often the madman is so fully absorbed by "despair, self-effacement, world-weariness, coldness to religion estrangement, and anguish" (Riggan 1981: 139) that he becomes estranged to the audience, leading to a greater sense of unreliability. This happens through the narrator's "pronounced inability to distinguish reality from imagination, mark him as a patently unreliable guide to his past experiences and present circumstances" (139). There are moments of clarity and trustworthiness in Anna's narration, such as her decision to join a therapy group to deal with her grief. However, these are combined with obvious times of hallucinations and memory gaps, showing "the narrator's efforts at speaking to his shadow and gaining some understanding of himself and of his ordeal [which] result only in continued confusion and darkness—even blindness in that darkness" (Riggan, 1981, 140-141). However, fighting the perceptions of the police addressing her as an unreliable witness, it becomes clear that Anna is set on continuing her investigations into the murder, even when at multiple points, she is wrong in her theories, having no proof for her accusations. The investigation helps Anna to stop using alcohol to cope with her trauma, seeing herself and her life more clearly.

This back and forth between moments of the narrator's clarity and confusion is evident in *TWITHATSFTGITW* when, at the end of episode five, it is revealed that Lisa is indeed dead, and her body is shown buried in the woods. It supports Anna's observation that Lisa was murdered but starts to throw suspicion on different people including Neil, as her partner, and finally, Anna herself. Firstly, her suspicions of Neil as Lisa's murderer are further fuelled by the stereotypical Gothic women's film plotline. Anna discovers that Neil's wife also died under strange circumstances, drowned in the lake near their house. Furthermore, she finds out that Neil likely had an affair with a teacher at his daughter's school, who also died in a tragic accident during a school trip. All of this evidence compels Anna to suspect Neil of murdering Lisa as well as his wife and Elizabeth's teacher. The Gothic women's film plotline that most domestic noir narratives also follow looks at the husband or partner as the main suspect, such as in *The Girl on the Train*. In these narratives, the 'Gothic investigator' as termed by Doane (1987) discovers her own victimisation by what Russ (in Fleenor, 1983) has termed the 'super-male'. The Gothic investigator is often the trapped woman who examines her own life and relationship by investigating the man's previous relationships. This echoes Bluebeard's tale and often also specifically evokes the unstable and mad woman, who is constructed by the people (often her own husband or other male figures in power) around her as imagining behaviours and events. This is caused by the abuse and manipulation of the 'super-male' who is in control of the narrative. Similarly, this is also how psychiatrists and other mental health professionals are typically constructed in Gothic narratives. They are the ones who are in control of diagnosis and treatment plan of their often female patients, painting a picture of female hysteria and madness, as with the example of the famous case of Freud and his patient, Dora (Showalter, 1993).

Domestic noir stories have exploited this generic expectation with the husband being suspicious but ultimately, he is not involved (for example in *Gone Girl* and *The Woman in*

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the Window). Rather the madwoman investigates her own perceptions of reality and the possibility that in fact she is the perpetrator. Mental disorders and alcoholism are at the forefront of the narrative tension that domestic noir novels play on, constructing a suspenseful storyline through gaps, imperfect and imagined memories and observations. Until the end we are not sure if it was Neil or maybe Anna herself who has committed the murder. Importantly, Anna's struggles with grief and mental illness push her towards investigating the murder and addressing her own life. When talking to Rex (Benjamin Levy Aguilar), who works with Lisa on elaborate scams (and is another potential suspect in her murder), Anna explains 'I'm trying to figure out if I'm crazy or not'. This is a pivotal point in the narrative, as she recognises that she is perceived by society as an unreliable witness, which she pushes back on. This is also further reinforced by how her neighbours and the police have created the image of her madness and unreliability based on her mental illness and substance abuse. This of course also has a gendered component, invoking again the perception of the monstrous feminine and the unbelievability of women as well as how mental illness is culturally and socially perceived as unreliable (Scutt, 1997). Here, the Gothic mode allows for this to be explored alongside wider cultural anxieties about women not being believed by law enforcement and about their own victimisation, historically constructing women as already unreliable and hysterical (Scutt, 1997; Higgins and Banet-Weiser, 2023). Believability, as argued by Higgins and Banet-Weiser (2023), has always been political and "marginalised groups, such as women, queer people, and people of color of all genders, have historically been routinely positioned as unbelievable, untrustworthy, doubtful subjects —as subjective subjects par excellence whose truths will always remain not just unconfirmed, but unconfirmable" (8). Inconsistencies in women's narratives are then directly seen as mental instability, unreliability or dishonesty.

Anna's narration, which mixes both real and fictional narrative phases (daydreams and hallucinations) places the audience in a similar position to Anna, investigating alongside her and trying to figure out the mystery. Through the changes in narration, the audience then follows along how Anna experiences the fragmentation of her life, and how she tries to make sense of her loss and trauma. We get an insight into her life and trauma through the "rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experiences" (Vickroy 2015, 3) creating a certain intimacy between narrator and audience, but at the same time, this alienates the viewers because of this insecure and opposing narration. This then reveals the obstacles in communicating traumatic experiences, as argued by trauma theorists such as Elaine Scarry (1985). As Scarry has discussed, it is difficult to adequately put pain and its effects on emotions into words. Scarry states that it is "an interior and unsharabale experience" (16) and that talking about pain is different to when someone experiences this pain themselves. The question is then how to represent pain - physical, psychological and emotional - in ways that allows audiences to start to understand this. The unreliable narrator is one such structural way that has been employed to give the audience some insight into the world of people who have experienced traumatic events. Audiences are asked to be further involved in the narrative, as they need to distinguish between reality and fabrications by the narrator. Through this involvement the audience also comes to understand that the unreliable narration is due to the trauma that Anna experienced, as "unreliable narration... is a mode of indirect communication" (Phelan 2007, 224). Similarly, Caruth (1995) examines the narration of trauma as incomprehensible and unrepresentable, always already distorting the truth and the effect of the traumatic experience. This means that the narrative representation "textually performs trauma and its "incomprehensibility" through, for instance, gaps, silences, the repeated breakdown of language, and the collapse of understanding" (Caruth 1995, 121). This is Anna's way to express her traumatic experiences and life to the audience and how she copes with the loss of her daughter, including her hallucinations and the hauntings in the attic. Caruth further explains that "trauma is best conveyed 'directly' —since attempts to thematize and make it comprehensible betray its essence as unassimilable shock— then the best kind of text is one that actually induces trauma" in its audiences (Forter 2007, 262). This trauma is induced in the audience by way of mistrusting the narration of Anna while at the same time believing her observations, which makes the audience suspicious of all other characters, especially those they are familiar with from the engaging with the genre such as the husband or partner. This places the audience in a similar place to Anna, who does not know who she can trust and what is real or imagined. As the audience investigate alongside the heroine, her unreliable narration "colours our perceptions" with the heroine's perceptions, which "makes us doubt ourselves the same way we doubt her" (Thielman 2021). Anna's hallucinations and emotional outburst throughout the miniseries frame her narration of events and make the audience doubt her perceptions as well as their own, closely focusing on Anna's narration from the beginning. Le Rossignol and Harris (2022) define domestic noir as trauma survival fiction, which

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FIG 5. (1.05)

FIG 6. (1.05)

allows for authors as well as audiences to explore gendered trauma and its consequences. The themes in combination with the structure of the mystery and the unreliable narrator in domestic noir is "a deliberately chosen strategy, as it mimics the unreliability of the traumatised mind —where clear thinking, blackouts, flashbacks and panic attacks are common" (Le Rossignol and Harris 2022,11). This is also evident throughout *TWITHATSFTGITW* but especially towards the end when Anna starts to doubt her own clarity and truly suspects her potential involvement. However, having someone that listens to her and believes her, as Rex does, Anna is able to see in what ways her madness and unbelievability has been constructed by others. Talking openly to Rex (see figures 5 and 6) helps Anna realise that this investigation is more about her own mental state, alcoholism and believability than solving the murder. Anna, like other Gothic heroines, understands her own victimisation in relation to the events of the murder and her 'unbelievability'. Systems such as the police that are meant to support her, contribute to her feeling 'crazy' and unbelievable, dismissing her witness account and only seeing her as an unbelievable woman.

4. GOTHIC PARODY IN *TWITHATSFTGITW*

The above scene with Anna and Rex is also one that especially clearly highlights the aspect of parody in the series. Here, the show parodies the trope of the madwoman, exaggerating her alcohol consumption by showing her expertly pouring two full bottles into two glasses. The parodic aspects of this series are a crucial part to invite further reflection on the representation and construction of the madwoman in domestic noir narratives. This points towards popular narratives such as *The Girl on the Train*, and how these representations stereotype trauma and mental illness, especially by repeatedly using the same generic tropes around alcohol use and trauma. The title of the series itself strongly hints at a parody and points towards its relationship to narratives such as *The Woman in the Window* and *The Girl on the Train*, taking elements from both to construct an overly long title including common words of domestic noir titles such as 'girl', 'woman' and 'house'. It released in January 2022 just a year after Netflix produced the 2021 adaptation of *The Woman in the Window* (2018), based on the novel by A.J. Flynn. This comes after Netflix's renewal of domestic noir TV show *You* (2018-present) and adaptation of *Behind Her Eyes* (2017) as a TV series of the same name in 2021.

In an interview, one of the showrunners of *TWITHATSFTGITW*, Rachel Ramras, mentioned that "if I see a book or movie with 'girl' or 'woman' in the title, I'm buying it. I know what I'm getting. They're always satisfying" (Feldman 2022). This shows that with *TWITHATSFTGITW* Netflix showrunners are strongly aware that domestic noir's generic history is at a point of saturation, at which audiences are familiar and trained to expect and read certain tropes. Anja Münderlein argues in her book *Genre and Reception in the Gothic Parody: Framing the Subversive Heroine* (2021) that "many of the traits of the Gothic novel or of earlier romances are ridiculed, yet the parody only works because the reader recognises the generic traits of the Gothic novel" (30). *TWITHATSFTGITW* operates in a similar way allowing viewers to recognise important elements of the popular subgenre domestic noir, as mentioned above. Not only does the title itself indicate a parody of popular domestic noir narratives but, similarly to Laurence Raw's (2020) analysis of Gothic parody, I have argued that *TWITHATSFTGITW* invokes many genre conventions of domestic noir (and with that directly of course Gothic codes of representation). Importantly however, it also critically reflects on the construction of domestic noir narratives and its tropes of mental illness and unreliable narration. The miniseries is

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therefore not a straightforward generic production but employs parody to self-consciously expose, perform and exaggerate what is understood to be the core generic elements of domestic noir.

Within the first episode audiences' attention is drawn to its generic predecessors. Like other Gothic parodies, the miniseries aims to "copy and overdo" the application of generic knowledge (Münderlein 2021, 30). As Beer and Horner (2003) argue, generic parodies "exhibit... a keen sense of the comic, an acute awareness of intertextuality and an engagement with the idea of metafiction" (270). This acute awareness of domestic noir's generic characteristics is especially noticeable in Anna's unreliable, first-person narration of events. The miniseries not only draws attention to Anna's inner monologue from the beginning on, mentioning that "sometimes I like to speak with a British accent, even though I'm not British" but also parodies the heroine's narration and unreliability. Anna's inner monologue is also parodying that of other domestic noir heroines who begin their investigations into other people's lives but end up investigating their own lives, victimisation and perceived madness. In the third episode Anna muses,

> 'To get to the bottom of something, sometimes you have to remind yourself, that if you don't risk anything, you risk everything. And the biggest risk you can take is to risk nothing. And if you risk nothing what you're really doing is risking not getting to the bottom of something. And if you don't get to the bottom of something, you risk everything.'

This narration parodies the idea of the Gothic investigator and her exploration of the crime that she observed. Anna's narration here is repetitive while she delivers this in a way to encourage herself to start her investigation into Neil. What is also parodied are two generic tropes: that of the suspicious 'super-male' and the investigation into the heroine's self and her own involvement in the crime. The stereotypical investigation into Neil as the current partner of Lisa, who Anna also starts to be romantically involved with, is an important element of the parody. Here, Anna investigates Neil's background, and we see scenes that show Neil killing his first wife and the teacher, which we later find out are just creations of Anna's imagination. During her investigation, Anna also catches Neil with a large bag late at night, which she suspects contains Lisa's body. However, when confronting Neil about the bag, he reveals that he has indeed a body in his bag —that of his ventriloquist's dummy— and he is on the way to a performance.

FIG 7. (1.06)

FIG 8. (1.06)

This goes hand in hand with Münderlein's argument, that "the central points of criticism expressed through parody revolve around the accusation of "conventionality" and the lack of originality" (95). These parodic elements then exaggerate generic conventions and push them to the comedic, exposing and criticising the repetition and predictability of the tropes. This is especially important, as domestic noir narratives directly engage with representations of mental illness and substance abuse. The repetitive nature of these representations then does not allow for exploration of individual trauma but are often dealt with as a plot device to drive the plot and formulaic conventions and tropes. The use of mental illness as a plot device becomes apparent when Anna talks to her therapist, who is also, unknown to the audience, her ex-husband. She tells him after being asked how she is doing, that she feels "crazy", mostly because police, neighbours and even the audience do not believe her. Her therapist warns her that taking the medication together with alcohol can cause hallucinations and even lead to a psychotic episode, setting Anna as well as the audience up to suspect Anna to be the murderer. Towards the end of the series, Anna starts to be-

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lieve that she might be involved in the murder, after having disorienting flashbacks of her angerly stabbing (see figure 7). Her fear becomes especially heightened, when she sees blood dripping out of the attic hatch. In panic she calls her therapist about this, thinking she is going 'crazy', as this must be Lisa's blood, and she did indeed kill her. Douglas then asks 'Anna, are you in the attic now?', combining the physical space with her mental state and drawing on the Gothic imagery of the madwoman in the attic (see figure 8). Anna only gains clarity that she was not involved in Lisa's murder when she confronts her madness and enters the attic, finding that the blood was red paint, and that Buell, her handyman, was secretly living upstairs, which also explains the noises she heard from the attic. As with other female Gothic narratives, all potentially supernatural occurrences such as hauntings are rationally explained. As Mitchell and Snyder (2001) argue, that disability is often used as "'crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight" (49). Giving an abundance of examples, they argue that it is an exploitative way to engage with disability as a narrative obstacle rather than exploring the cultural significance of this. The continuous use of the unreliable female narrator in domestic noir, is parodied in this show because of its reliance on mental illness and the construction of the madwoman.

FIG 9. (1.01)

FIG 10. (1.02)

This is also evident in how Anna copes with her grief and the resulting hallucinations and ombrophobia. For example, *TWITHATSFTGITW* depicts Anna's coping mechanism like Rachel's from *The Girl on the Train*, through the use of alcohol, specifically wine. While Rachel drinks to forget, especially to and from her journey to London, Anna drinks at home watching the neighbouring house. The drinking, however, is exaggerated for comedic effect with Anna filling a full bottle into a wine glass in the morning (see figures 9 and 10). The ombrophobia that keeps Anna often locked in at home, mirror's Dr Anna Fox from *The Woman in The Window*. She has agoraphobia, a type of anxiety disorder that can include a fear of crowds, enclosed or open spaces and leaving the home. It often makes it difficult for people with this disorder to leave their safe space and is linked to the need to feel safe and be able to escape from a situation or place (Capps and Ochs 1995). Anna Fox also takes her medication with wine, leading to a dangerous mix of the two. In comparison to agoraphobia, Anna is able to leave the house on sunny days and is mostly mobile to conduct her life and investigations. The fear of rain, while a very real and immobilising anxiety disorder, has been a point of confusion amongst audiences (Michèle 2022; Matadeen 2022). It is also a parodic element, as in the final episode Anna can move quickly past her fear to go to Neil's house, similarly Anna Fox's miraculous recovery from her agoraphobia at the end of *The Woman in the Window*. The parody then highlights the limits of the genre's representations of mental illness. Towards the end of the narrative, mental illness is no longer useful to the plot and needs to be resolved quickly, which of course does not reflect reality. By imitating the genre conventions and "contrasting it with the 'real' world, parodists can reveal moral-ideological problems inherent in the hypogenre" (Münderlein 2021, 105) and instances, in which they are uncritical of these problems. This allows for further reflections on how mental illness is used as a 'narrative prothesis' (Mitchell and Snyder 2001) and is represented in domestic noir. Any narrative, especially those in popular culture, influence the way mental illness is understood by the public. A long history of misrepresentation of mental illness has influenced diagnosis and created stigma and misinformation, which some domestic noir narratives feed into as well. Gothic parody then imitates and transforms generic works and markers, and use especially,

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"fundamentally Gothic elements, often overdrawing them or juxtaposing them with probability and reality" (Münderlein 2021, 73), which in this case is directly criticising the portrayal of mental illness and unreliable narration in domestic noir narratives. *TWITHATSFTGITW* directly draws attention to this amongst other generic elements through hyperbole and excess. Examining modern Gothic parody texts, Spooner (2006) explains that this is "part of its Gothicity. It's knowingness, its signalling of its place within a particular tradition, permits it to combine humour with horror" (Spooner 2006, 36). By drawing on Gothic tropes *TWITHATSFTGITW* is able to balance both humour and horror, exploring the effects of mental illness but also critically pointing towards the generic and exploitative tropes around representations of mental illness.

Münderlein (2021) divides this criticism of Gothic parodies into two main categories: literary-aesthetic and moral-ideological criticism, which often go hand in hand. While the first category is about exposing a genre's 'bad writing' in its predictable and formulaic style, the second category focuses on the detrimental effect on audiences consuming generic fiction. *TWITHATSFTGITW* also asks the knowing audiences directly to reflect on their engagement with the subgenre and the expectations they have of domestic noir tropes. This is further highlighted by Anna's reading habits, as she is represented as a reader of domestic noir fiction. In the first episode, Anna is pictured reading the fictional book *The Woman Across the Lake* and in the final episode she reads *The Girl on the Cruise*. Anna reading these books echoes previous Gothic parody novels that aim to tell a moral tale and remind readers how to conduct themselves. These novels, as explained by Münderlein (2021) warn readers "against flights of fancy induced by an overconsumption of (inadequate) literature" (75). It also directly hints at the popular consumption of these books by women and the perceived hysterical reactions as well as the notion of escapism that are often attributed to women readers in relation to genre fiction. Botting and Townshend (2004) further elaborate on this saying that "the heroine is a hysteric and the Female Gothic text is a hysterical narrative" (262). Consuming these excessive texts then would lead to a similar hysteria in the female audience and create a similarly "ill-balanced" woman who cannot control her emotions to the text (Withington 1890, 195). In this example Anna learns from the books how to act when witnessing a murder, taking the investigations into her own hands like other domestic noir heroines. Anna being a consumer of domestic noir fiction also feeds into the narrative of her own involvement in Lisa's murder. When Anna first calls the police, they dismiss her not only because of her mixing alcohol with medication but also pointedly, ask her about reading domestic noir material with prominent generic markers such as 'girl' in the title. However, both times Anna is pictured reading domestic noir novels, she shortly after witnesses a murder, and it is suggested that her observations prove accurate, making her more observant in her investigations because of reading domestic noir books. This again counters the narrative of the unreliable and hysterical madwoman, and also directly addresses the audience and their engagement with these texts and tropes.

The show ends with Anna travelling by plane to visit her best friend, Sloane, in New York. During her flight, she meets a woman sitting next to her, asking if she would like a glass of wine. Anna answers in true parodic fashion that "I don't drink wine anymore" but then orders three small bottles of vodka, taking this with her Valium and falling asleep. When Anna discovers the woman's murdered body and is once again told she is imagining this, she finds the woman's handheld mirror and therefore, once again validating the account of the female narrator and investigator of domestic noir. This leaves the series, with a final "Bingo" from Anna, on a cliffhanger, inviting further seasons of this Gothic parody of domestic noir.

5. **CONCLUSION**

In this article I have looked at how generic tropes of domestic noir are integrated and parodied in the miniseries *TWITHATSFTGITW* with a specific focus on the portrayal of mental illness through the Gothic mode. Here, the tropes of the madwoman in the attic, the unreliable first-person narrator and the heroine's investigation of the crime and her own involvement were especially important to consider and how these were used to represent the protagonist, Anna. As with most domestic noir narratives, *TWITHATSFTGITW* asks the audience to investigate alongside the heroine, leading to an investigation of her perceived madness. This is further emphasised by the gaps in her memory and misremembered events, which constructs Anna as an unreliable narrator. The construction of the unreliable narrative both allows the audience to build an understanding of the heroine's experience and trauma and introduces doubts about the credibility of her account, further asking the audience to engage with the series and the reasons for her narration. This also introduces suspicion about the heroine's involvement in the crime, playing on the stereotypes of the violent and jealous monstrous

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feminine. At its core, domestic noir explores traumatic experiences that are complex and therefore can only be told by the narrators in disjointed, fragmented and non-linear ways. As *TWITHATSFTGITW* is not a generic production of the domestic noir genre, it introduces parody to pinpointed common generic tropes and conventions of domestic noir. This heightens and exposes how the genre has represented mental illness and the unreliable narrator repetitively as a crutch for the narrative. In this parody of domestic noir "the genre and its socio-political frames are being renegotiated and both affirmed and subverted through the reception process, thus paradoxically becoming stable through their constant instability" (Münderlein 2021, 58). As I have argued, the miniseries clearly lays bare and pokes fun at domestic noir's generic tropes and characteristics, affirming them in the process. Those who are familiar with reading and engaging with the subgenre of domestic noir, easily identify these parodic elements and their criticisms. Gothic parody is then "not laughing at what is copied, however, but with it —it is a joke that we all are in on" as the audience (Spooner 2006, 37). The parody only functions to its full potential with a knowing audience who are able to laugh with the jokes, excess and exaggerations playing on the popularity of the 'girl genre'. In this way the audience is able to understand this parody as an expansion of the generic frame, modifying this to include parody as part of the Gothic framework of domestic noir while at the same time criticising its representation of mental illness.

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TV shows

Behind Her Eyes (2021)

The Woman in the House across the Street from the Girl in the Window (2022)

You (2018- present)

Films

Rebecca (1940)

Gaslight (1944)

Fatal Attraction (1987)

The Woman in the Window (2021)

Books

Gone Girl (2012)

Into the Darkest Corner (2011)

Jane Eyre (1847)

The Girl on the Train (2015)

The Woman in the Window (2018)

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